

story waves

with Kelly E. Keough

My Narrative Opening of HARPER (280-word count)

Newman, as Lew Harper, wakes up in a cheap studio, stares at the ceiling, contemplates his life in his drab white T-shirt, grabs the alarm clock, bangs on it to shut it off, throws back the covers, swings his legs over the bed, stretches out his back, adjusts his underwear, and turns off the TV that was on all night.

He opens the window shade and jumps backward as the stark sunlight hits him in the face. To reduce the swelling of last night's drink, he cracks a tray of ice cubes into the bathroom sink, fills the sink with cold water, and his face does a cold-water plunge.

Dressed and ready to make his coffee, he discovers no more fresh ground coffee is left in the can. Pissed that he forgot to buy more, he flips the lid on the garbage can and contemplates reusing yesterday's used coffee grounds.

He gags and heads out, but not before he respectfully nods to his mother's photo on the bureau. He straps on a gun, kills a fly, and walks into the hallway. A sign reads: Lew Harper, Private Investigator. He unwraps a piece of gum.

A short analysis of HARPER'S opening scene as secret sauce

- All of the above scene details are ingredients of Goldman's secret sauce, and they are all paid off with brief gestures and a few lines of dialogue later. Yesterday's coffee grounds represent how Harper's been forced to stoop low to do the dirty work of justice.
- We can relate to his aloneness, struggle, and inability to have fresh coffee in his pantry. He stoops low. Would we? Either way, we're on Harper's side. We can relate to his underdog character, especially when he stoops low and reuses yesterday's coffee grinds from the garbage can.