

Always a motive



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

When Dan Ross wrote the story *Always A Motive*, he developed the character of Joe Manetti to fit the profile of "a hopeless victim". The word hopeless literally means "one without hope"(86), one whose present situation is so bleak that he has no emotions regarding his future, and the definition of victim is "One hurt or adversely affected by an action beyond his control"(219). The author has accomplished an amazing feat, because when we examine Joe Manetti more closely we see that everything about him, from his physical actions and appearance, to the emotions that he displays to the events that have orchestrated his life exemplify these characteristics.

Physically, Joe Manetti is a man who elicits sympathy from the readers. His outward appearance, his voice and most of all his eyes display some degree of the pain and hopelessness he is suffering from. Dan Ross introduces us to a man who is "young and shabbily dressed"(107), and when we observe his face we see that it is "pale" and "wears a haunted look"(107). We wonder what this man has suffered to allow these emotions to so obviously appear on his sad face. When we hear him speak we hear a voice that is "flat and hopeless"(108), "weary and agonized"(110). These are all indications of a troubled soul, but it is when we look into Joe's eyes that we begin to comprehend the depth of his despair. When the young man with the "tormented eyes"(110) bestows upon a child "a glance of infinite sadness"(107), that sadness, that hopeless feeling are instantly conveyed to us.

The feelings and emotions that Joe Manetti experiences also provide and

insight into the bleakness and lack of hope in his life. Joe begins the story " in a confused state of emotions"(107), which is witnessed by the toll booth operator who observed that the young man " seemed to be in some sort of daze"(111). Joe seems to have no desire or motivation to sort out these emotions, rather he has grown so accustomed to them that he just accepts them as his way of life. Joe also states that " I get spells where I can't stand it in my place. I like to get away from my apartment"(110). This shows us that Joe is so unhappy that he feels the need to escape from his reality, as he holds no hope for its improvement. A person who held hope for himself and for his future would take any measures necessary to change those things which caused his unhappiness, but for reasons as of yet beyond our knowledge Joe is unable to do so.

We have seen that Joe Manetti is indeed hopeless, but sad as these characteristics do not make him a victim. What makes poor Joe a victim, an innocent victim, are several sets of circumstances completely beyond his control. Joe states that he is a " Musician. But not working at it now"(108). When asked if he is married Joe replies " Yes, but my wife left me"(108). We know that being alone and unemployed would make life difficult for anyone, but most obviously the most painful event of his life is the loss of his young son. When Joe is questioned about this, we see how painful it is for him to relive the events: Joe Manetti reacted strangely to the question. His face became even more pale and he sat up very straight, and there was no revealing expression on his face. He answered in a monotone. " He was killed by a truck. A street accident when I was out of town on a job."(109). Perhaps the most key element of the story is the fact that the baby is placed randomly in

Joe's car. He didn't kidnap the baby, and although he didn't return it right away this was not out of anger or malice. He does so simply, he states, because " I wanted to see the face of a father who has lost his kid and then got it back"(112), something Joe himself has no hope of doing.

All of the events Joe has suffered and all of the characteristics he displays can only lead to one forgone conclusion. Joe Manetti is indeed a helpless victim, in every sense of the word.