

Essays About Caleb: Analysis of the Caleb Morley character from ABC-TV's daytime drama *Port Charles*

Caleb Morley, Dangerous and Seductive Stranger (c) Alison Armstrong

As we dance in the clawing embrace of the vampire Caleb Morley, his voice whispers in our ears, trickles into our dreams. He is the demon shaman hitchhiking his way into our yielding soul. He is the mysterious, seductive stranger who appears at our door, offering tantalizing gifts that come at an undisclosed price. Will he ravish the body or gnaw away at sanity? Does he lead us into damning temptation or release us into the limitless depths of imagination?

From the time Caleb first appears in Port Charles until his last appearance on the final episode of the series, Caleb is a stranger, unknown, unpredictable, dangerous yet enticing. Existing as the shadow side of Father Michael, Caleb lurks in the dark basement of a monastery, a dream of sin in a sanctuary of virtue. He is sensed by the flakey yet psychic Lucy Coe as an ominous force, appearing to her as the Stranger card, cloaked and sinister, in her Tarot deck. Like the Wolf in the "Little Red Riding Hood" fairy tale, he can assume a friendly, non-threatening guise (his Father Michael aspect) and lure victims into a false sense of security. Or, for those who unknowingly thirst for excitement, such as Gabby, he can tempt with forbidden pleasures. For some, however, such as Livvie, he offers both danger and security, promising an eternal unconditional love beyond limitations that is attainable only by sacrificing one's human existence and all mortal ties.

During their first conversation (by the river, a symbol of transformation), Caleb tells Livvie that he is her "future," the one who can take away her grief and loneliness; all she has to do, he murmurs, is "surrender," and her emptiness will disappear forever. He invades her dreams, becoming her secret lover, the erotic phantom who knows what she desires and is the only one who can satisfy her, the only one who can love the darkness and torment harbored within her lost-little-girl soul.

Caleb's ominous allure and ability to peer inside one's psyche is like that of A. Friend in Joyce Carol Oates' short story "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been," a mysterious character who appears to a teenaged girl (Connie) and proceeds, by sweet talk and threats, to seduce her into going for a ride with him in his flashy gold car. One of the most intriguing aspects of this tale is that, as with Caleb, A. Friend seems to exist as a fantasy lover, evoked by the unconscious libido, a demon who knows one's deepest needs and darkest secrets. Like the girl in the story, Livvie is at the beginning of "Tainted Love," a young woman with two sides to her, an innocent, childlike, "good girl" side and a more rebellious, thrill-seeking, defiant side. After Livvie meets Caleb, she, like Connie, is forced to choose between two worlds--the world of her family, the illusion of safety she once had with Jack vs. the world of dangerous passions and forbidden knowledge represented by Caleb. By choosing Caleb, Livvie forsakes human notions of love and security for the fierce, transfiguring, soul-scarring love binding immortals throughout eternity.

Even after Caleb returns in "Naked Eyes," after being killed by Livvie in "Tempted," he is, in a sense, a stranger. Despite his rock star identity as Stephen Clay, he remains a mystery, an enigma, not appearing to the public until after his songs have become hits. Our first glimpse of him in this arc is as a man in the shadows of a limousine. He smiles cryptically and somewhat lewdly at the young female songwriter Marissa, sitting beside him in the limousine, and claims to know her soul. "Take a little ride with me, I'll prove to you who I really am," he urges. "I know you better than you know yourself. I think like you, I feel like you. We both have this . . . this need, this drive to have our voices heard. Some may think that they know the truth but illusion is all they see. . . . Who am I, I don't know. . . . You tell me. Am I an imposter or the real deal? Someone destined to pass through your life or change it? Am I a player or a poet? A saint or a sinner? The voice in a crowd or maybe a whisper in the dark? Who am I and what do I bring to the party? I'm the dream you keep reliving that I'm slipping and it's taking its toll. I'm the gift that keeps on giving, my fires' in your soul." Later, after Marissa is dropped off at her destination, "Stephen" sees the innocent, virtuous Tess wandering aimlessly in the park and offers her a ride. "All you have to do is get in the car," he tells her, warning her of the dangers she may face by herself in the park. Although Tess declines his offer and begins leading a life of bland domesticity with Jack, she later is drawn towards the dark, fiery intensity and passion she perceives in Caleb.

As in "Tainted Love," Caleb is a stranger and yet an intimate, a potential threat or a possible savior, one who, knowing your most private hopes and fears, offers escape from boredom, loneliness, stagnation, or despair.

Taking a "ride" with this stranger can bring death, transformation, or shattering self-knowledge.

Caleb remains a paradox and enigma until the last episode of Port Charles. Just as we think we know him, he reveals yet another conflicting facet of his personality. Is he evil or merely misunderstood, monstrous or tragic, heartless or romantic, cruel or tender? He fluctuates between extremes, transcending human limitations and expectations. At times he even seems a mystery to himself as he continually battles his vulnerability and need for Livvie while seeking vengeance on all who betrayed him.

Dream demon, seducer, taker of souls and giver of visions, Caleb is the stranger we know from somewhere deep within ourselves. He offers those of us willing to surrender a thrilling "ride" from which we may never return, a journey into our primal selves. The wildness and darkness Caleb releases in those he has touched is as ancient and potent as the first blood-stained, fire-lit gods scrawled on cave walls. He lurks within our consciousness, taking many forms, many guises as he is summoned from his slumber by our dreams and invocations.