



D09

AFTERLIFE

ETHAN VONDAY

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DO9: AFTERLIFE

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Internal Artwork: Michael Reber

Editor: Nicolette Beebe

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FOREWORD

Above is a mist protecting the secrets beyond.
For each day passes with souls unraveling mysteries.
If the sky opens, the world we know would cease to exist.
So play, for the days are numbered.
Laugh, for the joy has limits.
Care, for love is feeble without heart.
And take flight of your own destiny.
For death is only the beginning.

Sincerely,
Afterlife

DEDICATION

To the friend who stood by and watched imagination unfold with a smile bright enough to spark a dream. Our bond may have faded over the years, but the impact never will. We are the greatest version of ourselves as children: honest, humble, and happy. I'm glad to remember you for all the good years, and I hope you don't pull a Ralphy.

Rest in Peace

Emilio Morel
October 19, 2020



INTRODUCTION

ENTER AT YOUR OWN RISK

Welcome to the world of D09. These stories break from the norm and depict the afterlife with a new perspective. In five short stories, readers will dive deep into the psychological aspects of life and their meaning. Most stories will contain disclaimers for anyone suffering from depression, insomnia, anxiety, drug addiction, or suicidal thoughts. If you or anyone you know is suffering from any of these disorders, please seek help at:

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
Suicidepreventionlifeline.org
1-800-273-8255 (TALK)

D09 is a fictional book with fictional resolutions dealing with traumatic issues. The works are intended to inspire and motivate readers to live life to their fullest. Though reading depictions of such trauma may have the opposite effect, so disclaimer warnings have been added to help prevent certain triggers. The stories are written to remind readers facing such traumas, that you are not alone and there is always help.

ENTER AT YOUR OWN RISK

The following short story contains verbal imagery of acts of violence and dives into the psychological drainage of insomnia and psychosis. The content's graphic verbal imagery is intended to simulate how the reader comprehends what the fictional character is feeling, and is not intended to offend or promote such tragedies.

Psychosis

One sees a world
Through the mind
Whether beautiful or rancid
It's the one they defined
Keep close to the soul
Lost in time
One forgotten
Never meant to find
A hand can save
The broken kind
While a wave
Can be detrimental
To the psycho inside

D09



D09

I had escaped from my existence and couldn't breathe past this point. I was still human, just like all the rest, but descended far away from everyone who had loved me. My conscience prevented me from ignoring the past because it was in my blood. The thoughts cycled through my mind and unleashed the images of unacceptable darkness. Though I waited patiently through my insomnia, I strove for answers.



It has been twenty-two years now, and I still seek guidance. The red fluorescent light in the corner of my room shines, reminding me of a new day's awakening. I close my eyes, hoping to get some rest. Light vanishes, but I remain awake. If I continue to force myself asleep, I will gag on my mucus. Tears slide down the side of my face, my nose bleeds without contact, my arm becomes numb as I lay on it, and my ability to breathe depletes.

An alarm rings and I rise off the dry blood and tear stained mattress. I smear my damp palm across my face and scrap the crust, sealing my eyes shut. The ash falls to the cold gray surface. As I remember, I sigh with relief. Today I have an appointment with Dr. Lawffer.

He is the only person who can help me because he doesn't just pity me, he listens. His methods intend to guide me through my anxiety, but it never erases the agony that I fear. Nothing can cure the fear.

My room is empty, just like always, with a blinding red light haunting my every move. All I have is a worn out mattress on a metal bed frame, a wooden chair in the center of the room, and a chalkboard hung up on the wall that allows me to leave. I grab a fine piece of chalk placed on the ledge of the chalkboard and scribble the letter B. A bright light moves across the gap at the bottom of my door. I hear the doorknob unlocking and place the chalk back on its ledge.

I enter my bathroom, ignoring the brown stained tiles and walls growing black scattered mold. One look at myself through the cabinet mirror, and I see jaundice colorizing my flesh. My cheeks hollow with divots large enough to fit my fingers. I am a walking skeleton refusing to fade away.

Happy thoughts, where are you?

Dr. Lawffer always says, “You’re only as happy as you choose to be.”

Am I not happy? What don’t I have to be happy about? The eczema inflaming the back of my hands, how about the blemishes scaling up my arms, and zits bulging up with pus calling me to pop them? So much to be happy for...

Dr. Lawffer’s self-help advice is impossible to decipher, like a code he knew I’d never crack, masked by his black and white sense of humor that always made me ponder. I wish to know if he really cared or if I’m just wasting my time. Regardless, to his call I beckon.

Back in my room, I draw an X on the chalkboard. The light roams once again underneath the door and it unlocks. I walk into Dr. Lawffer’s office, getting a whiff of that fresh doctor presence, eucalyptus meshing with leather.

“Hello, Ralph, how are we feeling today?” His voice, soothing as always, greets me before the door shuts behind me.

I avoid eye contact, sidestepping in front of his pristine leather couch, hoping he didn’t ask such a grueling question. I have no positive response coming to mind, so I decide to sit down. The room’s silence makes my anxious heartbeat thump louder.

I choose to ignore it by focusing on a green turtle plush doll with a blue hachimaki bandana placed in the center of a glass shelf. The turtle’s skin is a faded green with dark brown splotches over it and a pasted smile on its face.

In my peripheral vision, I see Dr. Lawffer squint, judging me with a probing scan, over-analyzing how worn out I appear. The dark crescents under my eyes were a dead giveaway. Plus, my skin is now pale like an albino with fleeting signs of jaundice. It’s as if my flesh alters throughout the day and never normalizes to its original ivory. Even my veins were visible, but other than my exhaustion, I still feel human.

“Not feeling any better... Well, have you gotten any sleep lately?”

I jerk my head right to left. My exhaustion repels me from verbalizing.

I’m too tired to speak... Is that even possible?

“Try lying down on the couch and tell me how this week stood out from your last.” He interlaces his fingers and focuses on me, repositioning myself.

He’s old like a grandfather with mottled hands but confident, bespectacled, and well-shaven with a distinctive trace of logic in his facial appearance. His neatly pressed, button-down shirt covers his saggy flesh while he gazes at me like he’s ready to have the ultimate chess match.

His accolades portray him as a professional. Bachelors, Masters, Humanitarian, a never ending list of superiority that doesn’t make a lick of sense to me. All it ever does is remind me I’m a pathetic failure. A thirty-one-year-old nobody with no career. I just survived day by day. Thinking about it makes me believe there isn’t even a point in tomorrow, but Dr. Lawffer refuses to sit there and watch me die.

I lie down facing the bland, white ceiling. The sound of Dr. Lawffer’s spherical silver ball pendulum clicks back and forth in a soothing rhythm. The eucalyptus opens my airway, making shutting my eyes euphoric.

Dr. Lawffer called this meditation. He believed it could relieve me of the anxiety, so I trusted him. Soon after, it became so common that lying down instantly soothed me. The second my eyes shut, I entered a new dimension. One where the sky was blue with puffy white clouds, and the aroma of freshly cut grass seeped into my nostrils. Kids laughed while sprinting across a field of grass. A bright yellow slide stood over a playground box filled with wood chips, and I stood on top of it next to a steering wheel resembling a pirate ship.

I reached to grab hold of the steering wheel, but my hands traveled through it as if I was a ghost.

A mother warned her child with an echoed voice. “Be careful, sweetie.”

The voice triggered a sharp, pulsating pain in my chest. She was not my mother. Her voice was unrecognizable since she passed away during my birth. So for nine years I lived with my unfaithful father, bringing home a new mistress every night. Soon after, my father abandoned me and the rest of my story just went blank. I woke up in a small room with a beaming red light, few friends, and insomnia consuming my livelihood.

The mother continued echoing, “Kids, always—” A deafening horn blared, cutting her off and shutting me out.

I open my eyes with a gasp. Hands press up against my chest and my body arches forward.

“Is everything alright, Ralph?” Dr. Lawffer notices my peculiar state and uncrosses his legs to stroll toward me on the chair. He releases his grip from the leather arm bars and extends his mottle hands toward me.

I jerk my body away from them and gesture for him to stay back. I press my hands onto my head and put force against my skull to relieve my stress. It’s the only solution to restrain myself somehow. I squeeze tighter, pressing my palms up against my temples and hoping to wake up from this reverie of continued conversation.

What if I yell and break nearby objects?

No! That’s stupid Ralph. Don’t think like that.

Maybe I should be asking myself, *why does he care so much?*

Dr. Lawffer probably goes home every day to his wife and kids and smokes a cigar, living the American dream.

What concern does he really have for me?

No, stop it. Just stop it, Ralph. Be strong.

I can’t let him realize how weak and unfaithful I am.

He’s looking right at me. His judgmental eyes leering. He thinks he has me figured out, like I’m some sort of puzzle he can solve. I want to lunge at him and smack the conceitedness from his scrutiny.

But now, I can’t move. I’m too weak to even get my thoughts out. My lips feel zipped shut. This damage seems fatal, and it brings back the inclination I had once... to kill myself.

“Ralph?” he calls with concern in his dejected eyes.

It’s amazing that my vision remains intact through my paralysis. Perhaps my brain is detaching itself from my body.

No! That’s stupid Ralph.

“Wake up... Wake up!” I shout in desperation, smacking the side of my head.

Dr. Lawffer gazes at me with fear in his eyes, yet he seems relieved to hear my voice.

Suddenly, I’m wide awake. My strength comes back to me, and I stand up from the couch. A smile graces my face as I step across the room.

Dr. Lawffer rolls his chair in reverse with eyes tracking my every movement.

I turn away and face up at the shelf above the couch with several picture frames. The images have a younger depiction of Dr. Lawffer before age absorbed his youth. He still has the thick frames shielding his eyes, complimenting a confident smile of a successful doctor in the making.

I chuckle without warning or context.

Dr. Lawffer leans back in his chair, re-crossing his legs with an unflappable stare. He raises his elbows to the arm bars and interlocks his fingers, waiting patiently.

I swallow the lump in my throat and tell him. “I had the dream twice this week.”

“About the man?” he responds immediately.

“Yes, he stood there staring at me from the window. I was warped into my nine-year-old body, and I was with Leo. We were both in a lifeless street chatting about whatever came to mind.” My head leans downward, returning to the couch. My tainted yellow hands run through my disheveled hair.

I turn to face Dr. Lawffer and continue, “Leo stood by me, sporting that ridiculous blue headband wrapped around his eyes. I remember the time was four in the afternoon. Pointing at the man in the window, I shouted out,” altering my voice to sound like a child, “Hey look, Leo, it’s that man again.” Reverting to my normal monotone voice. “Leo then asked,” I alter my voice to sound deep and masculine like a superhero, “What do you think he does up there?”

I stick my index finger out and point to Dr. Lawffer. My voice reverts to normal and I say, “The man reacted by pointing at me, and at first he had no expression, so I continued to look at him entranced. His lips slowly extended upward, forming the letter U.”

I stretch the corners of my cheeks with my fingers, attempting to mimic his demonic smile and mumble, “No teeth were present, and his eyes became purple, bright as amethyst, the rock.” I let go of my face and continue, “Once that happened, we both yelled from the top of our lungs and sprinted out of there.”

Dr. Lawffer’s face still unflappable, but he opens his mouth briefly to speak, then shuts it. His eyes remain studying me as if I was some unearthly specimen. With intrigue he verbalizes, “Your voices are much improved.”

I smile, unsure if that was a compliment or not.

Dr. Lawffer smiles back at me then asks, “Have you ever encountered this man’s smile before?”

“Yes, several times. Leo and I went by his apartment every day, but the eyes... well, that was a first.” I avoid eye contact, staring at the wooden tile floor.

“By Leo, you mean, the superhero. Right?” he says condescendingly.

My brow furrows as I answer, “Yes, who else?”

Dr. Lawffer’s fingers separate as he nods his head several times and nibbles on his lower lip. After the silence makes my stomach churn, he asks, “Why do you think you keep revisiting this man’s apartment?”

“If I knew, then maybe I wouldn’t be here, Doc.” The words slip out of my mouth and I counter with, “I mean, maybe it’s because we were curious. That man was a freak, yet so interesting.”

Dr. Lawffer uncrosses his legs and leans toward me. He then says, “Curiosity killed the cat.”

I purse my lips in confusion. “What’s that supposed to mean, Doc? I’m not a cat?”

Dr. Lawffer sniggers, breaking from character, then tries to lessen the insult. “That’s not what I meant, Ralph.”

He knows I won’t crack his riddles. It’s frustrating because they always make me feel so stupid. So I frown, crossing arms over my chest.

“How about you tell me more about these dreams, so we can figure this out together?” He holds an innocent stare begging for answers.

I calm my nerves and release the tension in my shoulders, unlocking my arms. “Well, one time Leo and I walked to the man’s front door. We snuck into the building and memorized his apartment letter and number. We then focused on the front door. Leo asked in fear,” mimicking Leo’s voice, “Do you think anyone is home?”

Dr. Lawffer’s brow shot up the moment I imitate Leo.

His amazement makes me uncomfortable and I stop.

He nods and gestures for me to continue.

I take a deep breath, recollecting my thoughts and continue, “So, I didn’t know if anyone was home or not. I just suggested we go find out, then he grabbed my shoulder and whispered with a stutter,” mimicking Leo’s voice, “Let’s go to... gether... at the same... time.”

Dr. Lawffer’s amazement sprung back to life, but I ignore it.

“I have to say, for a hero wearing a mask, he was shaking from head to toe. Regardless, we approached the door, D09. That was the apartment number, I never forgot it.”

Dr. Lawffer reaches over to his burgundy desk and grabs a notepad and pen.

I pause once again and he blurts, “D09?”

I reply in frustration, “Yes, D09. Can I finish my story now?”

Dr. Lawffer’s hand trembles as he writes and apologizes, “Sorry, please continue.”

“So yeah, once we reached the door, we were both terrified. We kept asking ourselves stupid questions like,” I alternate voices between my child-self and Leo, ““What was behind it? Who will answer? What will happen?”” My voice reverts to normal, “My heart was racing for the marathon of a lifetime. Once I knocked on the door, my hands became numb. Leo was like,” mimicking Leo’s voice, ““Maybe no one’s home?”” I normalize my voice. “He even insisted we leave right there after we had gotten so far. So instead of just knocking, I tried opening the door. And guess what, it was unlocked!” My eyes bulge out, and Dr. Lawffer falls back in his chair.

I rise from the couch and hear his hesitant breaths. His body trembles as I approach him and continue my story. “So... I slowly opened it and noticed a bright light illuminating the hallway from inside the apartment.”

I shield my eyes with my arm. “I felt blinded by the glow. It had tried to take my eyes away from me by forcing them shut, but I fought it as hard as I could.” I whip my arm inches away from Dr. Lawffer’s face as he flinches, blinking rapidly. “The illumination burned my eyes. My vision blurred, and tears swarmed down my cheeks.” I press my palms against my eyes and rub them.

Dr. Lawffer shoves his chair back a few inches away from me.

I lean in closer to the side of his face and stretch my right arm out, waving my palm in a circular motion. “Once I opened the door, I saw nothing inside the apartment but shiny polished white tiles surrounding the entire space. The tiles were on the walls, the ceiling, and the floor. I called out,” mimicking my child-self, ““Hello? Is anybody home?””

I center myself in front of Dr. Lawffer.

He cowers in fear, raising his arms to his midsection.

I back away a few inches.

He readjusts his position as he shakes. He appears like the old feeble man he was, powerless and afraid. Once he gets back up from his slouch he asks, “May you please continue your story from the couch, Ralph.”

Fear masks his eyes, and his trembles remain. The longer I analyze, the more I regret.

I never wanted to make Dr. Lawffer afraid. He’s my friend... My only friend.

I obey his command and sit back down on the couch. I face the floor once again with the weight of anxiety brewing inside me.

Dr. Lawffer attempts to calm me down. “I apologize, Ralph. You just seemed very excited, and I thought it would be best.” His trembling calms.

I run my hands through my hair and lean back onto the couch. Facing the ceiling, I continue, “Once I opened the door, Leo went missing. So, I searched for him, looking up and down the flight of stairs, but he was gone. I went back to the apartment floor, and suddenly, there was a lady on the opposite side of the hallway. She was a brunette with a gashing wound in the back of her head. All the blood was dry, possibly stitched, but I couldn’t tell. I looked away and entered the apartment.

“Inside, I encountered the man towering approximately three feet above me. He stared at me as if he was there all along, waiting for me to tell him why I came to visit. My body shivered as my heart reached my throat. His skin was pasty white, and he had absolutely no facial hair. He wore a white trench coat and blended in with the bright light that glowed behind him. His gray hair was long and wavy. The man’s eyes were as blue as the sky, but they changed color as he raised his pale left hand and attempted to touch my face.

“I maneuvered around it and avoided the ambitious hand. His face altered, creating that outrageous smile. I screamed as loud as I could, sprinting down the steps and escaped the building through the back exit.” My arms spread across the couch as I imagine the man’s smile forming above me on the ceiling.

The lips stretch wide with a dark aura cast around them. Eyes open and close just above it, first blue, as clear as the sky, then purple, as bright as amethyst. I shut my eyes.

A faint cry for help echoed from the distance, calling for my attention. **Ralphy... I’m sorry.**

“That was quite descriptive.” Dr. Lawffer breaks me out of my trance.

I jerk my head from side to side and take quick breaths.

He's watching me, judging me, and placing me in some psychological category. I ignore him and face down. The mirage of blood spreads on the floor from opposite sides and merges at the center of my feet. I fight the urge to jump.

Relax, Ralph, it's not real.

"So the man almost touched you?" he asks, expecting a logical reply but only receives silence. He then rephrases the question, "How did that make you feel?"

I raise my head with a soft sigh of relief. The words slip peacefully from my lips, "Enlightening. He seemed like a possessed dog, lonely but yet clueless. Maybe even, senseless and confused, as if he had never seen a child in his life. Almost as if I was a newborn baby."

"If it was enlightening, then why did you run?"

"I ran because..." I bite down on my tongue with hazy eyes, focusing on the dry bloodless floor by my feet. "Because I wasn't ready."

Dr. Lawffer responds with a deep breath, breaking the silence. He leans back as the leather chair squeaks.

I'm sure his eyes still leer at me, but he remains mute long enough for me to run my hands through my hair, brushing the dandruff off my scalp.

In his calm demeanor he says, "Maybe he is lonely, and was drawn to you as a companion, someone he could care for. Perhaps you gave him hope."

"What if he was just one of those sadistic bastards waiting for the right opportunity to snatch a missing child?" I stand from the couch and pace around the office. My fists close and reopen to keep my hands active.

I approach him and explain, "The man seemed normal, just like you and me, Doc. But, he also created this thought of death." I press my hands to my chest, admitting, "I don't want to die."

"Just calm down Ralph and take a seat. Let's dissect this together," he insists, gesturing toward the couch.

"You don't trust me, do you, Doc? You don't even believe me, do you? I pause, my harsh gaze intensifying. "Do you!" Blood rushes through me, heating my core.

He rises from his chair without hesitation and places a hand on my shoulder. His words soothing like breaths, "Calm down, Ralph, just calm down."

I refuse to tell him the truth, because the dream is a lie. He knows that. He knows everything. Why did I think I could fool the creator?

My eyes fill up with unshed tears, fighting the paralysis once again. Right until my feeble legs give out, Dr. Lawffer catches me from falling. His strength unreal.

I whisper into his ear, "I've killed a man."

His head jerks and nostrils flare.

My legs limp as he releases me onto the couch. The impact sucks the wind out of me and I gasp for air.

"Relax, Ralph," he answers, pretending to ignore my guilt while staring into my eyes with heavy breaths. Inhale, exhale, each breath audible with his chest rising and lowering.

I repeat after him rhythmically. His cheeks scrunch and I laugh, mimicking my child-self's voice. My body is weak but flexible now, as if I were a nine-year-old all over again.

He speaks over my chuckles, "Okay, Ralphy, tell me more about this man you killed." Dr. Lawffer's aged face stretches behind his head and his youth rejuvenates before my eyes. The mottled hands and saggy flesh dissipate. His gray hair morphs to a healthy brown combed to one side.

My eyes widen, making the laughter come to a halt. I whisper, hoping to avoid eavesdroppers, "He was outside of the apartment." My smile spreads wide, and the laughter continues.

"You killed the man?" Curiosity shifts his brow.

Laughter stops, and I lean closer, whispering, "No... The wife beater." I jerk my head from side to side then erupt in laughter once again.

His youthful face with brilliant, peach complexion scrunches up in befuddlement. "I wasn't aware he was part of your dream. Why have you never mentioned him before, Ralphy?"

My laughter stops. I stare at Dr. Lawffer, tilting my head to shift my perspective. My lower lip droops down as I fight the impending tears. "Because I was ashamed." My child-self remains speaking, "Daddy wouldn't have been proud. I did something bad, and he doesn't like when I do bad things."

My lips quiver and mucus coats the insides of my nostrils. I smear the boogers on my sleeve and sniffle.

Dr. Lawffer bends down to my level and places a hand on my shoulder. His youth now defines him and his strength eminent by the touch of his calloused grip. Looking up at me, he questions, “Have you been lying to me, Ralphy?”

I shake my head from side to side. The snot swings from my face down to the couch and I cry, “No. Daddy doesn’t like when I lie. He says,” I mimic my father’s hoarse voice, ““Lies only prolong the truth, Boy.”” My index finger instinctively points at Dr. Lawffer, much like my father used to do to me.

Dr. Lawffer engulfs my hand with his, pressing my finger into a fist.

My mouth agape, staring unconsciously.

With his other hand, he cups my chin, directing my eyes onto him. “Please, tell me the truth about this man.” Dr. Lawffer’s eyes moist and gentle with a sense of comfort.

My lips part, but I remain speechless.

“Ralphy, the truth.”

I gather my thoughts, fighting an aching feeling in the pit of my stomach. I admit, “He... hurts the woman down the hall, and I yell to make him stop, but he never does. He just keeps hitting her with a pipe. I watch the blood and the bits of her brain spray across the floor. He doesn’t stop. He never stops!”

I fall onto Dr. Lawffer’s shoulder as his arms wrap around me. My height alters back to its youth. I realize he’s on his knees and I’m no taller than his torso. The skin on the back of my hands remains yellowish, but the further I look up my arm the more it seems to dissipate.

Dr. Lawffer whispers, “I got you, Ralphy. You’re safe now. Please continue the story.”

A tear falls onto Dr. Lawffer’s suit jacket and I sniffle. Shaking and stuttering, I speak, “It always starts with me standing outside the door, D09. I try entering, but it’s always locked. The man comes out of nowhere and starts waving his finger from side to side as if telling me I can’t enter D09. He then points down the hallway and forces me to watch the wife beater assault this woman.”

Tears and snot rain down from my face as Dr. Lawffer softly pats me on the back. “You’re doing great, Ralphy, keep going. What did this wife beater look like?”

I sob with quick breaths. “I can barely see him through the darkness. All I notice is a shadow with a long pipe in his hands. I yell for him to stop, but he just ignores me until a red light turns on down the hallway.

“His body freezes and Leo shows up, winks at me, then unsheathes his swords. Leo slices the wife beater across his chest. He then smashes the butt of his blade into the beater’s face. The wife beater spits blood and teeth onto the floor, but Leo doesn’t stop unleashing blow after blow until he collapses.

“That’s when the man taps me on the back. He hands me a metal bat and nudges me to step towards the collapsed wife beater.” I try to steady my breaths, but I continue to sob while my body shakes.

Dr. Lawffer rubs my back in a circular motion. “You’ve got this, Ralphy, keep going.”

I take a deep breath, hoping to combat the shivering. “The first time I was nervous and Leo kept rooting for me to get closer and closer, but after so many repetitive dreams the nerves disappeared and it felt natural.

“Every time I reached the wife beater, his body was splayed face down on the hallway floor. All I could tell was he had dark skin, but I never cared to turn his body. I just raised the bat and plunged it down into his skull.

“After every blow, I would turn back to face the man and watched his smile grow wider and wider. Leo clapped, and I felt relieved, like it had lifted a burden off my shoulders. I didn’t want to stop, not even after his body went limp. I just kept swinging at the body oozing blood and guts all over the floor... and I loved it.”

My skin morphs back to its warm ivory, and I am back in my nine-year-old body. My breathing is clear with a waft of eucalyptus enlightening me. I brush my cheek on Dr. Lawffer’s moist, soft wool suit jacket and smile gracefully.

Dr. Lawffer pulls my head back and gazes into my eyes with tears forming. His hand cups my nape, sobbing, “I think it’s time, Ralph.” He snuffles while rubbing my neck and presses his forehead into mine.

A waterfall of tears escapes my eyes, drenching my face, “I don’t want to die.” My heart sinks to the floor, hearing his unsteady breaths.

He tries to encourage me, “Ralph... you’re ready.” His palm presses up against my chest, “You’ve always been ready.”

A bell chimes to my right and the word “EXIT” appears over the office door. Dr. Lawffer taps me on the back and nods.

“Go, Ralphy.”

I hesitantly make my way to the door, but my body trembles with every step. I look back at Dr. Lawffer. “What if it’s scary?”

He rises from his knees and encourages me once more. “You have to be strong. Let the curiosity set you free.”

I wipe yet another endless tear. “But it killed the cat.”

His smirk brings a smile to my face. “You’re not a cat.”

I want to go in for one last hug, but the chime calls to my attention once again. I head to the door as it unlocks itself. The moment the knob turns, I’m blinded by a light forcing me to shield myself with my arm. A forceful wind wraps around my waist and pulls me toward the light.



Read the full story May 28th, 2021

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