

L A Z A R U S P H E N O M E N O N

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BLACKNESS

DALE WENTZWORTH, 34, violently awakens. He frantically scratches around in a black abyss.

WENTZWORTH (V.O.)

At this point I think I'm awake,
the cold chokes my throat. I try to
get up, but fail every time. Then I
pull an old lighter from my pocket.

Flick of a lighter, ambient embers flood a cramped wooden box. Wentzworth thrashes, he frantically strikes the pine barrier.

WENTZWORTH (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I panic when I realize it's a
coffin, that I'm buried alive.

INT. PSYCHOLOGIST'S OFFICE - DAY

Wentzworth is sprawled on a chaise lounge, he picks at his gray unkempt hair. PSYCHOLOGIST MURPHY, 62, corpulent, balding, glasses, is seated next to him.

MURPHY

Interesting...

Wentzworth rolls over, makes eye contact with Murphy.

Murphy scrunches his face in distaste.

WENTZWORTH

What now?

Murphy feeble points to Wentzworth's nose.

MURPHY

Are you still obsessively picking
at your nose?

Wentzworth touches his nostril then looks to his fingertip, a bit of crimson stares back.

WENTZWORTH

Of course not, no. The only reason
I did that was because of my sinus
infection.

MURPHY

We both know you're being
untruthful. It started that way but
then it became a part of your OCD.

Wentzworth sits up, plucks a tissue from a nearby box.

He dabs the blood off his nose.

WENTZWORTH

They're just nosebleeds. Probably from stress, probably because of these night terrors that you're supposed to be curing.

MURPHY

Probably, but if it continues--

WENTZWORTH

--Don't plant that in my head, I've enough things to worry about.

MURPHY

What I'm planting in your head is a fair level of concern. It's your duty to not build it into anything more.

Murphy looks to a clock.

MURPHY (CONT'D)

Finish telling me about your dream.

DREAM - COFFIN

Wentzworth pans the flame around.

A rope catches his eye, it leads through a hole in the coffin.

WENTZWORTH (V.O.)

After I realize it's a coffin I look to my left and see a dirty rope tucked in the corner.

Wentzworth grabs the rope and yanks.

WENTZWORTH (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I take hold and pull as hard as I can. A bell rings six times.

INT. PSYCHOLOGIST'S OFFICE - DAY

Wentzworth lays his head back, gazes to the ceiling.

WENTZWORTH

When I was younger I came across this book about the cholera epidemic of the eighteen-hundreds. The book mentioned premature burials. They were so common back then that they'd bury you with a rope strung to a bell. That way if you weren't really dead, just incapacitated, you could alert the watchmen when you awakened.

MURPHY

Do you have any idea why the bell rings six times in the dream?

WENTZWORTH

Penny Lane.

MURPHY

What?

WENTZWORTH

The Beatles' Penny Lane. That's how many times the bell rings after Paul sings "he likes to keep his fire engine clean, it's a clean machine".

EXT. CITY STREET - RAIN - DAY

SUPER: ONE WEEK LATER

A woman, TELLY, 32, huddles in a phone booth canopied from an autumn downpour. Her raincoat covers nurse's scrubs.

Wentzworth runs to the booth, his umbrella shields the rain.

Serpentine spirals of rain swathe the phone booth concealing Telly's silhouette.

Wentzworth, unbeknownst to her presence, folds the booth's accordion-esque door open.

TELLY

Oh my.

WENTZWORTH

Oh sorry, I'm sorry. I didn't know you were in here.

TELLY

Don't be. My fault, I was using it for extraneous purposes. Forgot my umbrella.

WENTZWORTH

Ah, extraneous purposes?

TELLY

Yeah... I have this weird thing where I feel obligated to incorporate the word-of-the-day into at least one of my conversations. I saw the chance and took it.

WENTZWORTH

Extraneous is a bit of a challenge.

TELLY

Do you need to use the phone?

WENTZWORTH

Yes, but I don't want to put you out in the rain.

Telly glances past Wentzworth at the torrential downpour.

TELLY

That wouldn't be too good, would it?

WENTZWORTH

(jokingly)
Not for you.

Wentzworth taps his finger against the umbrella's handle.

WENTZWORTH (CONT'D)

How about this? We trade. You borrow the umbrella, I'll borrow the phone booth. Deal?

TELLY

Deal.

Wentzworth hands Telly the umbrella, they exchange places.

WENTZWORTH

My name's Dale by the way.

TELLY

Hi Mr. 'Dale by-the-way'. I'm Telly, nice to meet you.

They shake hands.

WENTZWORTH

It's Wentzworth, Dale Wentzworth.
Interesting meeting someone named
Telly in a phone booth.

TELLY

Trust me, you're not the first to
make the 'Telly phone' connection.

Wentzworth takes the phone's receiver, reaches in his pocket for change. As he fumbles around, a tissue ensanguined from nosebleeds falls from his pocket.

Telly bends down, picks it up.

TELLY (CONT'D)

Oh, you dropped something.

She examines it.

TELLY (CONT'D)

Are you all right, Dale?

She hands the tissue to Dale, he puts it in his pocket.

WENTZWORTH

That's actually why I'm making a
phone call, I'm setting up a
doctor's appointment.

Telly notices a faint stream of blood trickle down his nose.

TELLY

Is it from nosebleeds?

WENTZWORTH

Yeah, how did you know?

TELLY

I'm psychic.

Telly pulls a tissue from her pocket and dabs Dale's nose.

She shows the blood clad tissue to him.

TELLY (CONT'D)

How long?

WENTZWORTH

I'd say six... Inches.

TELLY

How long have you had the nosebleeds?

WENTZWORTH

Oh, that. Four weeks, maybe seven.

TELLY

The hospital is right across the way. Why not just do a walk-in and be done with it?

WENTZWORTH

I figure by setting an appointment I can buy an extra couple of days before I have to face the music. I like to procrastinate.

TELLY

Not on things like this you shouldn't.

WENTZWORTH

(sarcastically)
Sorry, doctor Telly.

TELLY

Nurse Telly, actually. Come on, I'll take you.

Telly points in the hospital's direction. Wentzworth reluctantly follows her trail.

INT. HOSPITAL VENDING ROOM - LATER - DAY

Final drops of coffee seep into a cup, Telly picks it up off the machine with her free hand. Her other hand already holds another cup of coffee.

Telly walks into

WAITING ROOM

Wentzworth sits uncomfortably in a corner chair, he pinches a tissue around his nose, head tilted back.

Telly walks over to him.

TELLY

Here you go.

She extends a cup of coffee. Wentzworth leans forward.

WENTZWORTH

Oh, good. Thanks.

He takes the cup with one hand, removes the tissue with the other.

WENTZWORTH (CONT'D)

I think I got it to stop.

Telly sits next to him, pulls some packets of artificial sweeteners from her pocket.

TELLY

Do you want any sweetener?

WENTZWORTH

No thanks. I don't use any of that since Aspartame has been shown to cause cancer.

He sips his black coffee.

WENTZWORTH (CONT'D)

Though I'm sure you already know that.

She opens a packet and pours the sweetener in her coffee.

TELLY

Lot of things been shown to cause cancer. Is that also why you don't have a cell phone? Fear of radiation?

WENTZWORTH

I watched my father die from lung cancer two years ago. Back then I used to smoke like a chimney, after I buried him I decided to cut everything from my life that could result in the same fate.

Wentzworth pulls a lighter from his pocket, the same one from the dream.

WENTZWORTH (CONT'D)

I still keep this with me as a reminder.

TELLY

Isn't it a bit of a temptation?

WENTZWORTH

Nah.

Wentzworth flicks the lighter, it fails to light.

WENTZWORTH (CONT'D)

It's dead.

TELLY

Dale, I watch people pass away all the time. And while every single loss is a tragedy, there is one thing you learn. It's to enjoy and respect life, not shut it out. Not to waste it fearing death.

A NURSE shouts from the help desk.

NURSE

Wentzworth. Dale Wentzworth, the doctor is ready to examine you.

Wentzworth frantically hands Telly both his coffee and the lighter. He stands up.

WENTZWORTH

I really appreciate everything you've done for me, Telly. But you don't have to wait.

TELLY

I know.

Wentzworth turns, takes a couple steps.

TELLY (CONT'D)

But I want to.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

A funneled light glares into Wentzworth's eyes. DOCTOR FREDRICKSON slowly drags his ophthalmoscope in front of Wentzworth's face.

FREDRICKSON

Interesting...

INT. WAITING ROOM - LATER

Wentzworth slowly walks into the waiting room.

Telly looks up at him.

TELLY

How did it go?

WENTZWORTH
I feel like a pin cushion.

Telly gets up, walks with him to the door.

TELLY
Do you want to talk about it?

INT. RESTAURANT - LATER - NIGHT

Candle delicately flickers atop Wentzworth and Telly's table.

Telly sips a glass of wine.

TELLY
This Beaujolais is fantastic, you
have to try it.

WENTZWORTH
I don't really care for wine.

Wentzworth scratches his brow.

WENTZWORTH (CONT'D)
But after today, I think I should
start caring more.

Telly smiles.

TELLY
That's what life is all about.

She slides the glass over to him. He drinks.

WENTZWORTH
That is good. Not what I expected.

TELLY
(jokingly)
You expected it to be bad?

Wentzworth chuckles a bit.

WENTZWORTH
I have to ask you something.

TELLY
Oh, sounds good.

WENTZWORTH
Why did you hang around waiting for
me?

TELLY

Honestly?

WENTZWORTH

No, lie to me.

TELLY

Dale... I knew your father. I was his nurse when he was in hospice care.

WENTZWORTH

What?

TELLY

He used to tell me all about you. How proud he was of you, your music. He would show me photos and even play your old recordings. He always wished you didn't stop playing. When I saw you in that phone booth everything just clicked.

WENTZWORTH

I don't understand how this...

TELLY

Your letters... I read them to him, I made sure he knew you still loved him. That the only reason you stayed away was because you were afraid to be around while he was dying.

WENTZWORTH

I'm sorry Telly this is too much.

Wentzworth pulls out his wallet, sets some cash on the table.

He puts his hand on top of Telly's. Looks into her eyes.

WENTZWORTH (CONT'D)

Thank you. Thank you for doing what I couldn't.

He walks away. Telly gets up, she sees the restaurant's door close. She runs after him, out onto

EXT. SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT

Wentzworth stands at street corner, waits to cross street.

Telly runs as fast as she can.

TELLY
Dale! Dale, wait.

She catches up, notices tears in his eyes.

TELLY (CONT'D)
Dale, why keep running?

WENTZWORTH
Do you think I'm stupid, Telly? I know that I'm dying. Nose bleeds, pupils abnormally dilate. The doctor told me it's more than likely a brain tumor. And being a nurse, it's obvious you know too.

TELLY
Okay! Okay, that may be true. And what if it is Dale? It was true yesterday, a week ago, a year. Don't you understand?

WENTZWORTH
No, no I don't.

TELLY
We're all dying, nothing is ever going to change that. So how do you want to live?

INT. HOUSE - DAY

SUPER: TWO MONTHS LATER

Large arched window, a piano beneath. A music sheet rests beside a blank sheet of paper.

Wentzworth, his head shaved bare, plays a few bars.

Wentzworth sits for a moment in silence, picks up a pen from the piano.

He writes on the paper. Tucks it with the music into the envelope. Wentzworth seals the envelope.

Wentzworth wearily walks into

BEDROOM

Telly is asleep, he shuffles to her side places the envelope beside her. Kisses her forehead.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY - DRIZZLE

SUPER: ONE YEAR LATER

A light drizzle, Telly clutches the same umbrella from when they first met. In her other hand she holds a CD player.

She walks to a headstone, it reads, "DALE WENTZWORTH".

Telly kneels down in the muddy grass, tears in her eyes. She plucks a few weeds.

With the push of a button, music cascades through the cemetery's hills. Her voice recorded on the track sings with his music.

TELLY

(singing via CD player)

I've come across
Touched the brooks
Felt the water
Read your books
Before this hour
I'd been long astray, always afraid
But now even in the darkest of time
I simply hope to stay, another day
What would be better than to stay?
A little longer
In this hour

Beside the headstone is a small bell, she reaches over and flicks it with her finger.

It rings.

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