

PREVIEW

Written by

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FADE IN

INT HOSPICE ROOM - DAY

MADELINE, old, face covered with oxygen mask, lies in a hospital bed. A morphine drip feeds an arm little more than skin and bones. The monitor's BEEPS are almost too soft to hear. Death waits patiently, not far away.

In a chair beside the bed, RICKERT, 50, a man in search of answers. He reaches out to take the Old Woman's hand, offering a bit of comfort.

RICKERT  
It's OK, Madeline. I'm here. You  
can let go. It's time. You can  
let go. Don is waiting, Don is  
waiting.

Madeline manages a wee smile. Rickert leans forward, watching.

RICKERT (CONT'D)  
You've done enough. Peace,  
Madeline, peace. Let go.

The monitor flatlines in a long, soft WHINE. Rickert bows his head a moment before he rises and shuts off the monitor and the drip. It's over.

INT HOSPICE OFFICE - DAY

Rickert sits with the hospice MANAGER, 40, a dowdy woman filling out a form on her laptop. Small office dressed with second-hand furniture.

MANAGER  
Time?

RICKERT  
Twelve thirteen.

MANAGER  
Any last words?

RICKERT  
None.

MANAGER  
Anything I should know?

RICKERT  
No, she passed peacefully.

MANAGER  
How do you do it?

RICKERT  
Do what?

MANAGER  
Get them to go so peacefully.

RICKERT  
I try to remain calm. I think the calmness bleeds over somehow. Can I ask you a question?

MANAGER  
Sure.

RICKERT  
Have any of the other volunteers experienced an out of body episode?

MANAGER  
Out of body? Are you talking a near death experience?

RICKERT  
Sort of. What I mean, what I mean is that sometimes people sitting with a dying person experience a shared out of body event. The dying person takes the watcher with them for a few moments.

MANAGER  
For what purpose?

RICKERT  
To show that there really is a place after death. To make the watcher less afraid.

MANAGER  
No volunteer has ever mentioned anything like that. No family member either. Did...did you just...

RICKERT  
No, no, nothing like that. I was reading about it online, and I just wondered.

MANAGER

Well, just between you and me, I don't believe in that sort of thing. I mean, there may be a heaven, but I don't think anyone gets a sneak preview.

RICKERT

I suppose you're right. Any other patients need a sitter?

MANAGER

Haven't had enough? Go home, Rickert. All our guests have family with them.

RICKERT

Call me?

MANAGER

You're first on the list.

INT RICKERT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rickert, in pajamas, stares at two photos on his dresser—a pretty woman, TINA, and a small child, BECKY. He picks up both photos, presses them to his chest, and closes his eyes.

INT HOSPICE BEDROOM - DAY

Rickert sits beside the bed of an OLD MAN who wheezes with every breath. Rickert eyes the morphine drip and then looks at the camera in the upper corner of the room. Someone may be watching.

He pats the Old Man's arm and waits.

INT HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM - NIGHT

Rickert wanders through the room, looking at the menagerie of sick PEOPLE. While the People sport injuries and illnesses they are not about to die.

EXT HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM - NIGHT

An ambulance, lights pulsating, arrives at the door. As hospital personnel emerge, and EMTs spill out of the ambulance, Rickert watches from the shadows. He stares at the patient wheeled into the building.

He starts to follow when a Security Guard appears. Rickert turns and walks away.

INT HOSPICE ROOM - NIGHT

A middle-aged WOMAN lies in the bed. Rickert rises from his chair, moves to where his back is to the camera. He pats the Woman's arm with one hand while his other hand edges toward the morphine drip. Yet, he can't bring himself to touch it.

He moves around the bed and sits.

INT HOSPICE HALL - NIGHT

Rickert moves to the side as the Manager pushes a wheelchair holding an emaciated WILLIAM in an oxygen mask. Tattoos cover the William's arms. He might be forty or seventy.

MANAGER

Help me?

RICKERT

Sure.

INT HOSPICE HALL - LATER

Rickert pushes the empty wheelchair, the Manager walking along.

MANAGER

It's generous of you to sit with him. I'm afraid he has no one else. The prison released him only because he's about to die.

RICKERT

What did he do?

MANAGER

Murder, I think. No, no, it was manslaughter.

RICKERT

Isn't that the same thing?

MANAGER

Not according to the law.

RICKERT

I'll be happy to sit with him.

INT HOSPICE ROOM - NIGHT

Rickert stands beside the bed that holds a quiet William. He takes William's hand.

RICKERT

Don't be afraid. You're going to a better place. No bars, no guards, no walls. I don't know exactly what you're going to find once you're gone, but I'm sure it's better than prison.

As he talks, Rickert opens the morphine drip.

RICKERT (CONT'D)

I don't know, but I think those who loved you will meet you and lead you to a place more beautiful than anything you can possibly imagine.

William's breathing and heart rate slow. The monitor BEEPS are slower.

RICKERT (CONT'D)

If I could go with you, if I could see... I...I lost the most special people in my life. I think...I know they deserve heaven, that place I was telling you about. They were so...innocent. If I could see...

William's breathing stops. The monitor flatlines.

And Rickert is no longer at the bedside. He, or his spirit, floats in the air above the bed, looking down at his body leaning over the dead William. Rickert turns and finds William floating with him.

For a moment, Rickert is disoriented. Then, he realizes he's left his body. He turns to William's spirit.

RICKERT (CONT'D)

Thank you, thank you.

He shakes William's hand before he turns toward a bright light.

RICKERT (CONT'D)

Tina? Becky?

He grins at the light even as William's hand grabs his shoulder and turns him.

RICKERT (CONT'D)  
Are they over there, are they?

William tugs him away from the light...and toward a black abyss.

RICKERT (CONT'D)  
What? What?

Rickert tries to free himself, but William's ironlike grip won't budge. Rickert sees his body collapse next to the bed.

RICKERT (CONT'D)  
No, no, not me. I'm not dead!

William speeds up, dragging Rickert into the abyss.

RICKERT (CONT'D)  
I'm not DEAD!!

They disappear into the abyss.

INT HOSPICE ROOM - LATER

The Manager looks at Rickert's body sprawled on the floor and pulls out her phone.

FADE OUT