

# GAYS OF OUR LIVES

## Death of Life of Ryan

Episode IX

by Scott Swentek

From behind the heavy curtains, silence squeezes into the room. You pull tight the last buckle of your pack and cross to the window, drawing a careful pleat of its dust breathing fabric to your cheek. A bar of light colors your hip with morning. The parking lot is empty. You look at the warm basking gold curled on your thigh. Drop the curtain to move naked through silence. You enter the bathroom, lean into the shower and twist out a rain of innumerable echoes.

You wash for sacrifice. A long benediction of skin, hair and turn of muscle. You bend and run your hand behind. The soap bites acid into the ring of new sores. You press forehead to tile, eyes tight, water foaming your hair.

*No dignity*

You turn. Rinse pain with the water streaming down your back. Finger the raw nodules.

*Life ends in a bleeding asshole*

You brace fists against the gleaming tile and scream till bowels clench empty — draw air, shuddering, back in. Water pings. Serpents pulse liquid down your face.

*And it can't be stopped because 'it' is me*

You consider your hands, now flat against the tile. Cup them gently to feel the slight suction of water and air struggling to fill your palm.

*I'm killing myself*

You shut down the water. Step to the rug and lift a thick towel. Your reflection moves behind the mist on the mirror above the sink.

*Step through it with style*

You drape Mark's towel on the wall bar. Open his bathroom door. Cheryl sits on the bed next to your leaning backpack. Her purse is in her lap.

"Mark called me from New York. You weren't answering the phone. He told me where the key is." She looks at the pack. "You're not coming to work." Looks at you.

You shrug. Walk to the window and draw back the curtains to finally admit morning. Light falls on the chair where your traveling clothes hang.

*"Where are you going?"*

*"Wherever I want." You pick up your brief*



underwear, stretch them to step into.

"Why, David? You have no symptoms. There's no reason to."

"How about this?" You bend abruptly, thighs bound by underwear, and spread your cheeks with your hands. "How's that for a reasonable symptom?"

"What?" The bed creaks. "Let me see."

"Why." You straighten, pulling up your underwear. "You going to kiss it and make it better." You pick up your jeans.

"David, you've got to see a doctor."

"A doctor gave it to me." You button your fly, reach for your work shirt. "He's got tubes of every fluid I can come up with. Let him look at those." You tuck in your shirt.

"But you don't know if you have anything!"

You pick up your denim jacket. "Oh, I've got something, alright." You turn to face her. "I'll put on my boots in the car."

Her face sets. "I'm not taking you anywhere."

You shrug. Sit down in the chair. Pull on your socks.

"Where will you go?"

You haven't worn your boots for awhile. They're tight going on.

"You can't run away!"

"I'm not running away." If I were going to I'd still be in the bathroom getting cold with the shower. That would have been a friendly little surprise when your patience in polite bedroom waiting wore out. You stand. "Give me a ride to the freeway."

"No."

You meet her eyes. Shrug. Move past her to the backpack and shoulder it. "You know where the key is. Lock the door when you go." You leave.

Outside the sky is so clear the sun spreads its blindness in a smear bigger than your lifted hand.

"David, wait." She steps up beside you. "I'll give you a ride."

"Thanks. It would've been a hot walk."

The radio comes on as she starts the car. She reaches to turn it off. You stop her hand.

"Leave it on. It's the last time I get a choice for awhile." The car moves off. "You wouldn't believe what some people drive to."

The drive is silent.

"Karl still living with you?"

Cheryl sighs. "I can't seem to throw him out. And Brian likes having his father around."

"He'll find a way to screw you over again."

"I know." Her fingers tighten on the wheel.

"I'm going to tell them you're on sick leave, David. I'm not going to say you've quit."

"S OK." You tap the dashboard. "Drop me here."

She pulls the car to the shoulder past the freeway entrance. Stays unrelaxed at the wheel. "Will you be back?"

You put one foot out the open door. "I don't know." Step out. Reach back for your pack.

She leans towards you. "Then call."

You consider her face. "OK." Heft your pack. "Thanks, Cheryl."

"What do you want me to say to Mark?"

"Tell him I hope I didn't give him anything." You shut the door, shoulder your pack and begin the climb to the freeway.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Glare shimmers off the cars shrieking by. Dust rises. Wavering out from the boiling heat mirage of silvery water, a car angles towards you. You drop your thumb.*

end episode IX

end Life of Ryan. Part I

*Author's note: Though I may presume to do more than simply ask the ongoing unanswered question of life, each triumphant, unequivocal answer must falter... fuddling — along with the scene — into life's next negligently designed disaster. Though they will never replace answers, humor and love keep a number of us from getting cold in the shower. If the Life of Ryan appeals to you and you would like to keep him breathing, let me know. Otherwise he will exist as he entered... mostly unanswered.*

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