

Ego Death

written by

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INT. WILL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

In the corner of the otherwise clean bedroom is a chaos-ridden desk covered in novels, notebooks, and scrap paper.

WILL (60s), pale and withering, is fast asleep in bed, as his DAUGHTER (25) monitors him gloomily.

Will's daughter holds his hand, struggling to keep her composure and fight back tears. She finally pecks his forehead and leaves.

As the bedroom door closes, a KNIGHT (Sir Rowan March, 30s), a FRAT DUDE (18), an AUTHOR (30s), a DOCTOR (unnamed, 30s), and an ASSHOLE (25) appear beside the bed.

FRAT DUDE

Damn. So this is it, huh? Old Billy is finally kicking the bucket.

KNIGHT

It appears so.

The Asshole skeptically eyes the Knight's armor, which is closer to a Halloween costume than anything else.

DOCTOR

I don't believe he'll wake up from this disease. He's nearly rotting.

AUTHOR

Are you certain?

DOCTOR

No, I'm a doctor.

The Frat Dude claps the Doctor on the back.

FRAT DUDE

Ha! Just like *Airplane!*, right Doc?

DOCTOR

Airplanes?

FRAT DUDE

Hey, when's the next time we're all gonna be together? We should have a drink. I bet Sir Rowan over here could throw down some beers.

KNIGHT

I have been known to hold my own after a few hefty ales.

AUTHOR

I don't believe we'll be together again. In fact, I think this is it for all of us.

KNIGHT

What do you mean?

AUTHOR

Our stories haven't been written. When Will dies, where would we go?

The other characters fearfully murmur and curse under their breath, except for--

ASSHOLE

Thank god.

AUTHOR

Excuse me?

ASSHOLE

Did I stutter? Thank. God. Fuck this guy and his stories.

KNIGHT

How dare you?!

AUTHOR

That's incredibly rude. You wouldn't exist without him.

ASSHOLE

Good. I wish I didn't. You guys all get fun stories, like drinking with your friends the whole time or slaying evil in a fantasy world. You guys get happy endings. You know who I am? I'm the asshole in the horror story that gets everyone killed, only to have the most brutal and painful death.

FRAT DUDE

Have you tried not being a dick?

ASSHOLE

You know that's out of my control.

AUTHOR

Is it a bad story?

ASSHOLE

If he wrote, it would be fantastic,
but why would I want to live in it?

DOCTOR

So you'd be willing to sacrifice
our existence? How cold.

ASSHOLE

Look, there's no guarantee anybody
would read his shit anyway. For you
guys, a one and done is fine. But
once he writes my story, there's no
escaping it. I'll be slaughtered.

AUTHOR

I understand that. I'm a writer
myself. A fictional one, sure, and
maybe a reflection of Will's
ambition. But I don't think I could
shut my eyes for the last time and
be happy if I knew nobody would
ever know about the existence of
the characters I wrote. They might
only be concepts of a concept, but
they're still mine. I think.

ASSHOLE

Let me guess, you have a story
about a writer? Gee, and then I
wonder who he wrote about...

The Knight hovers about Will, eyeing him closely.

KNIGHT

Is there any way to wake him? Is
this illness that deadly?

DOCTOR

It's hard to say for sure. I don't
have the necessary equipment.

AUTHOR

Maybe it's a willpower type of
thing. We're his creations. In one
way or another, we've been
motivation for him, even if it
didn't pan out.

FRAT DUDE

Man, I don't wanna disappear.
Nobody ever wrote my arc.

ASSHOLE

I thought you were just another
douche in Will's attempt at a
hangout movie?

FRAT DUDE

That's exactly what I am. A douche
that cares more about hooking up
with girls and drinking beer than
spending quality time with my
friends because I haven't matured.
By the end, I'm supposed to be what
Will wishes he knew when he was
younger. If I'm not written, how
can I change?

ASSHOLE

It sounds like the depth of your
character is ankle deep, anyway.

FRAT DUDE

At least I'm real, man. I'm
literally him.

The Frat Dude points at Will.

FRAT DUDE (CONT'D)

I'm HIM!

AUTHOR

We all have a piece of him in us.
Don't be so self-centered.

FRAT DUDE

Maybe I wouldn't be if he finished
my goddamn story!

ASSHOLE

You're telling me that this nerd
who wasted away in an office his
whole life was once a frat douche?

FRAT DUDE

People change, man. Not me, of
course. The whole "arc" thing.

KNIGHT

Friends, let us not forget the
greater villain here. We must find
a way to wake our creator.

The Asshole SCOFFS.

ASSHOLE

Do we though? And what's with this getup?

KNIGHT

You refer to my armor?

ASSHOLE

You're wearing a Party City costume. That's plastic and rubber.

KNIGHT

I have not heard of this "Party City."

AUTHOR

Obviously Will never studied real medieval armor, so this is what he pictured. Let it go, Asshole.

ASSHOLE

Why should I let it go? Does a half-baked, unresearched idea even deserve to be written?

KNIGHT

If I am not written, thousands of fictional lives will perish.

ASSHOLE

Good riddance. We don't need another fantasy world. Let. William. Die.

DOCTOR

I would never let a patient die.

ASSHOLE

Oh, perfect. I've been itching for you to speak up. Did Will even give you a name?

DOCTOR

Well, no. He's mainly just outlined. For now, I've been referred to in his notes as "UPS", or "Unnamed Procedural Surgeon".

FRAT DUDE

Doc, you're a mailman?

DOCTOR

I am a surgeon!

FRAT DUDE

Ha! Like the meme.
 (to the Knight)
 I'm written to be tuned in to the
 memes of my era.

KNIGHT

Intriguing.

ASSHOLE

If you're a doctor, how would you
 save Will's life right now?

DOCTOR

Again, I don't have the proper
 equipment, or his medical history--

ASSHOLE

Name a disease.

The Doctor stutters.

DOCTOR

I, uh... Surgery?

ASSHOLE

Right. That's what I thought.

DOCTOR

You can't speak to me like that! I
 received my doctorate from an
 unnamed Ivy League school!

ASSHOLE

Shocking. You're the least fleshed
 out of all of us. A nothing-burger
 character leading a shitty, half-
 baked procedural show.

DOCTOR

He was going to finish my story...

ASSHOLE

You never had a story. Will dropped
 the idea years ago when he realized
 television wasn't his thing, and he
 didn't want to do the research to
 write a realistic hospital.

The Doctor looks at the others for support.

DOCTOR

That can't be true.

AUTHOR

He's just trying to get in your head.

FRAT DUDE

Yeah, don't listen to him, mailman.

ASSHOLE

When's the last time he came up with a new idea for you?

DOCTOR

About, uh...

ASSHOLE

You might as well not exist. Let me guess, an unnamed love interest nurse? A failed surgery from the past? Inexplicable medical scenarios magically solved through the power of sexual tension? No depth. No story. No character.

The Doctor steps away from the bed.

AUTHOR

Doc?

The Doctor walks to the door.

DOCTOR

I need to process this...

He leaves.

The other characters wait for him to return. Nothing.

The Asshole smiles.

AUTHOR

Is that it? Is he gone?

ASSHOLE

Gone? He was barely here in the first place.

KNIGHT

You wretched thing. How foul must you be to vie for this?

FRAT DUDE

Yeah, you really are an asshole.

ASSHOLE

Don't think you're innocent, kid.
The Doctor was a weak character,
but at least he had motivation.
What do you do?

FRAT DUDE

You're barking up the wrong tree,
man. I'm literally designed to be a
passive main character. It's
supposed to be a coming-of-age high
school slash college hangout, like
Dazed and Confused.

AUTHOR

The movie? No way you've seen that.

FRAT DUDE

Of course I have. At least I was
conceived to. My friends and I
quote favorite movies all
throughout our script. You don't
have that?

KNIGHT

What's a movie?

AUTHOR

I believe the Asshole, the Knight,
and I are all meant to be in
novels. But I'm written to have
read a lot and seen a lot, I'm just
shocked you have too.

FRAT DUDE

Huh. Say what you will about me,
Asshole. I might be the most
developed character here.

The Asshole scoffs.

ASSHOLE

Only because you're basically the
writer.

FRAT DUDE

Which means I'm not going anywhere.
It's only a matter of time before
I'm officially written.

AUTHOR

Is there a title?

FRAT DUDE

Class Of.

KNIGHT

Class of what?

FRAT DUDE

He didn't make it that far. The original title was eventually taken cause he took too long.

KNIGHT

Ah. I understand. He can't decide between *Two Knights* and *The Sun's Tirade* for mine.

AUTHOR

The Redeemed Author.

ASSHOLE

Sounds like some fun stories. My title would've been *Ego Death*.

KNIGHT

Fitting.

ASSHOLE

Do you know how many deaths he's workshopped for me? How many times he's researched "most painful ways to die" online to try out for me? If that story gets written, it's permanent. Every time someone reads it, I die all over again.

KNIGHT

A fictional death.

ASSHOLE

Don't be a hypocrite. Who was talking about saving lives before?

The Knight shrugs.

AUTHOR

Still, writing was Will's dream. To let his dream die with him is a tragedy, truly. It's selfish.

ASSHOLE

Hypocrites after hypocrites. You don't want to die either! You're just as selfish as I am!

AUTHOR

I'm allowed to believe two things at once. I want this good man to achieve his goals, and I want to live to achieve my own.

The Asshole LAUGHS.

ASSHOLE

Good man, huh? I've seen parts of his mind that would make your imaginary blood boil.

AUTHOR

So any horror writer is a bad person now?

ASSHOLE

At the very least, they're questionable. Why are they thinking those thoughts?

FRAT DUDE

Holy shit, he's right. Cancel them!

KNIGHT

We don't respect horror writers?

FRAT DUDE

Nah, I'm being sarcastic. This guy sucks mega ass.

KNIGHT

Indeed.

Frat Dude goes to dap up the Knight. The Knight pauses, unsure, then goes in for a firm forearm handshake.

FRAT DUDE

Damn. That was sick.

The Asshole rolls his eyes.

ASSHOLE

Are you even listening? This man is sick.

KNIGHT

Yes, he is quite ill.

ASSHOLE

No, he's sick as in twisted. Evil.

AUTHOR

What kind of horror is it?

ASSHOLE

Slasher.

FRAT DUDE

Psh. That's light work. Slashers aren't scary if you kill the villain. It's just a guy.

ASSHOLE

I'm not written to do that, and slashers are the scariest genre because it could actually happen. Why would I ever be scared of, I don't know, aliens or vampires?

AUTHOR

The universe is infinite and you don't believe in aliens?

ASSHOLE

For one, how can the universe be infinite if it's expanding? What is it expanding into? And two, of course I believe in aliens, but the chances they would ever reach Earth are slim to none, and slim just left town.

KNIGHT

Who is slim?

FRAT DUDE

Figure of speech, brodie.

ASSHOLE

We're getting off topic! Think of it like this--

The characters FREEZE as Will briefly stirs. He returns to his slumber.

The Author, Knight, and Frat Dude smile.

AUTHOR

Hey! Movement!

KNIGHT

We must be doing something right.

ASSHOLE

Something right? We've done nothing but argue.

AUTHOR

Whatever works.

FRAT DUDE

As long as you don't come after my boy, Sir Rowan.

ASSHOLE

No... I know his story. He's unwavering. But I don't need to delete you all from his mind to survive. I just need Will to die, so *Ego Death* is never written.

FRAT DUDE

Man, you have such a bleak worldview. Let us live a little.

AUTHOR

You don't find it sad that we'll never have a chance to exist if we're not written?

ASSHOLE

Not really.

KNIGHT

They say you die twice. First, when you physically die, then again when nobody recalls your existence. For us, it would be simultaneous.

FRAT DUDE

That went hard. You are on fire today, man.

KNIGHT

I appreciate you.

The Frat Dude and Knight do the forearm handshake again.

ASSHOLE

(to the Knight)

Speak for yourself. I die brutally and repeatedly every time I'm written and read. At least being deleted from existence is painless.

KNIGHT

Sir Asshole, have you considered it possible that William might change the outcome of your story?

ASSHOLE

Have you considered that he might change yours? What if he decides there's not enough conflict in your hangout movie, and suddenly your drunk friend falls down a flight of stairs? Or you're betrayed and killed by an ally knight in your book? Or your writing career crumbles and you lose everything?

AUTHOR

Sure, it's all possible, but he could still do the reverse for you.

ASSHOLE

I'd like to believe you, but there are some foundational pieces of stories that can't change once the idea is had. Me being the asshole that gets everyone killed is the crux of everything. There's no way around it. But think of what you could lose.

The Author thinks hard.

AUTHOR

I lose my brother in my story.

ASSHOLE

Perfect. You shouldn't want to be written and suffer through that.

AUTHOR

No... Because I haven't lived at all. There's an outline for me. A loose idea of a failed love interest I learn from, a plan for some great success as an author, but the one thing that's definite is my relationship with my brother. Even though I know our time together is meant to be short, and his existence is a means to an end for my arc, I want to meet him.

ASSHOLE

Just to watch him die?

AUTHOR

I'm meant to love him and be proud of him. I'm meant to be inspired by him, whoever he is.

FRAT DUDE

Damn. That's hard to beat.

The Asshole GRUNTS in rebuttal.

AUTHOR

I pity you, Asshole.

ASSHOLE

You pity me? I'm not the one hanging onto the failed dream of a sixty-year old office drone.

FRAT DUDE

He still has time, bro. Life expectancy in the States is what, another twenty years for him?

ASSHOLE

Not when you're sick like this.

KNIGHT

He has the creativity. He has the skill. He only needs the motivation.

ASSHOLE

I say it's too late for that. He's never writing your stories, and he's for sure never writing *Ego Death*. Not if I have anything to say about it.

FRAT DUDE

You know what? I pity you too, man. You're the piece of shit that makes the audience root for the monster.

KNIGHT

Precisely. I say, let William wake.

AUTHOR

Wake up and write, Will.

ASSHOLE

He's a corpse. He had his chance, and he failed. Give it up.

FRAT DUDE
Come on, Old Billy. Let's fucking
get up and go.

AUTHOR/KNIGHT/FRAT DUDE (CONT'D)
WAKE UP!

Will JOLTS awake, gasping for air. He wipes his brow and looks around frantically.

He's alone.

Will swivels around and sits on the edge of his bed, contemplating his next move. He looks over at the chaos on his desk.

It takes great effort, but he rises to his feet and shuffles over to the desk. He flips open a fresh, leather-bound notebook, and he writes at the top of the first page:

Ego Death

THE END.