

Waiting For Ray

# Waiting For Ray

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A failing high school student yearns for excitement in his life, but when it comes in college, he finds it undesirable.

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"Did you like it?" Ray asked.

"I loved it!" Bill proclaimed.

"That's what you always say."

"It's just because I love to read your stories! They're always so full of excitement and wonder. It's just mind-boggling."

"You always say that too."

"So what? When are you going to write your next one?"

"I'm not sure yet, but if I make another story, it'll be on my website. Listen, I've got to go now, so I'll talk to you later, OK? Bye." Ray hung up the phone before Bill had a chance to answer.

"Bill!" his mother screamed, "Get down here! Now!" Bill scurried down the stairs and into the presence of his seething mother. "What is the meaning of this?!" she asked emphatically, pointing to the seven Fs on Bill report card.

"Mom, relax. It's only a quarter grade. All I have to do is get an A or a B next quarter and I'll be passing all of my classes."

"Well until that happens, I don't want to see you using your cell phone!" she snatched the phone from Bill's hand.

"But mom, it'll be easy, I promise."

"If it were so easy then why didn't you get As or Bs this quarter?! Now go back to your room and start studying for school!" Bill marched upstairs enraged, at his mom, at the school, and at himself.

With a groan, Bill went to his school's website and studied for his English test. There he stayed for many months, confined to the school's website and his own room. With every privilege and, according to Bill, a few rights denied in rapid succession after his father saw Bill's grades, there was nothing to do but schoolwork. From time to time Bill snuck a look at Ray's website, but it always said, "No new releases as of yet." When Bill saw Ray in school, Ray would always say, "Don't worry about it, I'll start writing again soon." Over the years Bill's grades gradually improved. Once again, Bill was allowed to play video games, talk on the phone, and hang out with his friends, but Bill never had the time. He knew that if he let his grades slip, the cycle would start over. "After I finish college," Bill thought, "I'll have the time to myself again."

One day, on campus, Bill woke to a fright. There was a loud ringing in his ear. The air was unusually hot and smelled of sulfur. Bill dashed out of bed and frantically attempted to wake his roommates, Fred and Ray, shaking their bodies wildly. Ray had asthma, and was coughing violently. After a brief search, Bill located Ray's inhaler and gave it to him. Ray inhaled the medicine deeply and headed for the fire escape with Fred and Bill. Bill was the first to arrive at the fire escape, but flames instantaneously singed his face. He drew his head back in agony.

"We can't go that way." Bill informed his roommates.

"That's pretty obvious," Ray said, feeling the room's door with the back of his hand.

"It's cool." He announced. Taking his inhaler out of his pocket, Ray inhaled one last shot of medicine before opening the door. Bill, however, was blinded by his burns. Fred escorted Bill out of the door. Meanwhile, Ray's eyes searched for the emergency stairwell and found a column of erupting flames in its place. They had to go down the stairwell on the other side of the dormitory. Fred was a freshman and always took the elevator. He had no idea where the stairs were or how many were there. Lugging Bill around his shoulder, Fred followed Ray to the opposite side of the dormitory and down the stairs. From there, Fred lost sight of Ray. Burning ashes fell from a hole in the ceiling, a pile of debris under it. The faint sound of coughing came from within the depths of the building. Eyes flailing, Fred discovered that he was standing in front of the elevator near one of the dormitory's entrances. As he would any other school day, perhaps with a backpack weighing less than a man's weight, Fred proceeded to walk to the corner of the building and took a left turn, a shortcut that barely anybody knew about. Behind an open, but usually closed, wooden door

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lay an exit. Making haste, Fred put as much distance as possible between Bill and himself and the burning dormitory. A choir of sirens awaited them. EMTs immediately took both Fred and Bill to Kyteville county hospital. Fred was released the following day after a brief check up. Bill was treated for third degree burns to the head and had surgery to treat the burns in Bill's lungs, but in surgery, the surgeon inadvertently clipped a main artery to Bill's lungs, the pulmonary artery. Nobody noticed the error until Bill began to cough blood. By this time, The damage was irreversible. As a part of his last requests, Bill wished to see Ray's website. Bill was ecstatic to hear that there was one new release, but his mood darkened once he heard the title of the article, "The Obituary of Ray Thompson." The stress that this tragic news brought to Bill was so intense that he immediately suffered a stroke. Though still in frail health, the medics were baffled by the fact that neither the stroke nor internal bleeding brought about Bill's demise. Finally, after many scans and probings, Bill's doctor devised a solution.

"How did this happen?" asked Bill's nurse.

"It appears that Bill has experienced a blood clot in his lungs that clotted the blood flow from the broken artery," Bill's doctor explained. "The clot slowed the blood flow and the artery repaired itself enough in that extra time for him to survive his blood loss."

"That's amazing! Bill will certainly be ecstatic when he hears this!"

"There is one problem, however. The artery that was cut carries blood out of the lungs and into the aorta. The aorta is the most important artery in the body because it carries blood to every organ and extremity, with a few branching arteries and veins. The clot, by slowing down the blood going to the aorta, has deprived Bill's body of some blood flow. We cannot unblock the artery because it is still healing and, if blood flow and blood pressure increased, would break. Because of this, Bill will experience some minor weakness and random hallucinations."

"That's a bit of bad news, but it can't trump the news of the escape of Bill's imminent death. Nevertheless, we should inform Bill of his condition." Bill's doctor pulled back the curtains surrounding Bill's bed, but found only some ruffled bed sheets and an open first story window.

"Everyone, start your engines!" the announcer roared as the drivers prepared to race. Bill looked confidentially into his mirror, straightened his racing cap, and turned on the ignition. The traffic light showed red then quickly turned yellow. The flags came down with Bill's pedal. He zoomed out of the starting gate with a slim lead.

"Sir, what are you doing?" asked Ericka, a member of Bill's search party. She stared at Bill as he made car noises and ran around a tree in front of his school.

"Sir. Sir? Sir?" she called.

"Bill! Bill! Bill! Bill!" the crowd cheered. Jimmy Johnson had taken Bill's lead, but Bill was hurling his car forward. The millions of fans watching Bill's dashboard camera could see the intensity in his eyes, the will to win. He almost looked like he was a Flintstone trying to make leg holes for his car as he pulled along Jimmy Johnson, tied for the lead, but someone was advancing from behind them. Ray Thompson passed Bill and Johnson, giving them his salutations. A loud popping sound suddenly filled the air. Bill's tire disintegrated onto the tarmac. With a grunt, Bill pulled over for a pit stop.

Bill ran past the tree and sprinted towards Ericka. She cringed as Bill halted just inches from her face.

"You!" Bill yelled, pointing to Ericka. "Change my tire! You over there!" Bill exclaimed, pointing at a nearby bush, "Refill my fuel tank! Come on! Move it, we've got a race to win!"

"What race?" Ericka asked flabbergasted.

"What do you mean? What race?" "The race that's happening right in front of you! I don't have time to argue with delusional people right now. You, refilling my fuel tank! Are you finished yet?! Put that fuel can down already and get me a new set of tires, pronto!"

"Who are you calling delusional?! Wait, is your name Bill? The nurses said that you might be hallucinating when we found you."

"Yes, crazy, my name is Bill. Once you get those exhaust fumes out of your brain, come join me in the winner's circle, Okay?"

"Fine! Do whatever you want with your rude self. See if I care." Ericka stormed out of the campus. Bill shrugged, dashed back to the tree, and continued to circle it.

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After what may have been one of the longest pit stops in the history of the Indy 500, Bill is back on the track. The announcer reported. The crowd expressed sheer bliss as Bill ascended up the leader board, settling in at his former spot next to Jimmy Johnson. Ray was only a few meters ahead.

One more lap to go! the announcer warned. Bill put his engine on full power and smashed his foot onto the accelerator. He passed Jimmy Johnson and crept up on Ray. Soon, they were close enough to see the fire in each other's eyes. But Ray spotted another fire, this one not of resilience, but of heat and melting metal. Feeling an odd sensation on his back, Bill looked into his rear view mirror. The confidence that was reflected into the mirror faded and was replaced by horror. He looked at his fuel tank to see if he had enough gasoline to make it to the finish line before jumping out of the vehicle. He decided to take the risk.

Bill's car is on fire! the broadcaster bawled. Yet no caution flags have been raised since Bill and Ray are on the final stretch of the race! They're neck and neck! Bill screamed as he and Ray crossed the finish line, the checkered flag going up in flames. A flash of light filled the anticipation of all of racing's fans.

It's a photo finish! the announcer shrieked. Every eye, every camera, even every flame on Bill's car looked to the big screen monitor. The picture appeared. It looked more like a battle from the American Revolution than a NASCAR event.

Sorry fans, the announcer reported dimly, but it appears that this race has gone up in smoke!

Bill looked in bewilderment as he attempted to take in his surroundings. He saw a circular indentation in the snow around a tree behind him. He saw footprints leading from the tree to the highway. He felt tree sap flowing down his back. He saw a truck barreling towards him. Bill tried to run off of the highway, but he felt too weak to move. Summoning all of his strength, he dove to his right. The truck flew past Bill. Bill gave a sigh of relief. He attempted to stand but found it easier to lie on the ground. He laid there listening to the bustling of the highway. His favorite sound was the sound of a Kyteville county ambulance's brakes, screeching towards his body. Bill saw red fluid on a black surface. Then, there was silence. The picture that Bill received from his eyes blurred until the black of the tarmac filled his vision. Bill thought he saw his nurses rushing towards him, but they vanished quickly, as if they had gone up in smoke.

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