

TEARS OF TRANQUILITY

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CHARACTERS

DOUG

A generally concerned, sympathetic stranger.

STEVEN

A man who has recently come to peace with himself.

SETTING

A quiet graveyard.

TIME

Modern day.

*(Steven is sitting next to a grave. He is, or at least recently has been, silently crying. Doug walks past, then turns around to look at Steven. Out of sympathy, he walks back to talk to him.)*

DOUG

You okay?

STEVEN

Me? I'm... uh... Yeah, I'm okay. Thanks.

DOUG

You don't look okay.

STEVEN

Yeah. I suppose I wouldn't.

DOUG

Usually that means a person isn't okay.

STEVEN

Yeah. I suppose it would. But looks can be deceiving.

DOUG

You *look* like a guy in front of a grave whose been crying.

STEVEN

See what I mean?

DOUG

You weren't crying?

STEVEN

No, that part was accurate.

DOUG

Then what was the deceiving part?

STEVEN

*(Indicating the grave.)*

Not a grave.

It isn't? DOUG

Not yet. Right now it's just a plot. STEVEN

No one's buried there? DOUG

Not yet. STEVEN

But there's a headstone. DOUG

Yeah. STEVEN

So who is... *(he examines the stone...)* Steven Rigby? DOUG

*(Steven makes a hand wave gesture.)*

You're Steven?

Steve. At your service. STEVEN

Why...? DOUG

I reserved the plot about twelve years ago. Figured it would be better to do it while I wasn't preoccupied... with, you know, dying. STEVEN

And are you... umm... DOUG

Dying? No. Not yet. STEVEN

So why are you sitting here crying? DOUG

STEVEN

I think I will be soon. Dying.

*(Doug takes a seat next to Steven.)*

DOUG

Do you mind?

STEVEN

Why would I mind?

DOUG

In case you wanted to be alone.

STEVEN

That's not possible anymore.

DOUG

Not possible to be alone? I can leave if...

STEVEN

It's not you.

DOUG

But there isn't anyone else around.

STEVEN

Not for you.

DOUG

Not following.

STEVEN

There isn't anyone else around as far as you're concerned.

DOUG

What, do you see dead people or something?

STEVEN

No such thing.

DOUG

As dead people?

STEVEN

Right. If you're dead, you're not a person. Just a bunch of chemicals. You can only be a person if you're alive.

DOUG

That's a pretty fine line of distinction.

STEVEN

Between being alive and dead? Seems like a pretty clear distinction to me.

DOUG

Right. So why do you think you're gonna die?

STEVEN

Because I'm done here. No more unfinished business.

DOUG

I'm not following.

STEVEN

Yeah. I know. You can't follow a person into completion.

DOUG

No, I mean I don't understand what you're saying.

STEVEN

I knew what you meant.

DOUG

If you don't want to talk—

STEVEN

No. I love talking.

DOUG

So what did you mean about not having unfinished business.

STEVEN

Just what it sounds like.

DOUG

Nothing pending? Nothing else on your bucket list, so you're just going to kill yourself?! So find something else to—

STEVEN

Whoa! Who said anything about killing themselves?

DOUG

Then are you sick or something?

STEVEN

Never felt better.

DOUG

Then what makes you think you're gonna die soon?

STEVEN

It just seems logical.

DOUG

Not to contradict the guy crying over his own grave, but that sounds about as far from logical as you can get.

STEVEN

Fair point. I'll rephrase. It seems... in line with the nature of the universe.

DOUG

And what nature is that?

STEVEN

Irony.

DOUG

Irony.

STEVEN

Yep. Fundamental principle of the universe, irony.

DOUG

So you're worried that you are gonna die of irony.

STEVEN

Something like that. Once you're finally good with where you are, time to get booted.

DOUG

You really know how to make pessimism seem like an art form.



STEVEN

Look at it this way. You struggle for years... decades... to be at peace with yourself. With the world around you. You try to find your place in the world. To make a difference. You give to charity... you meditate. Try to find your inner peace. Balance and all that. You do all these things, but they don't really make a difference. Oh sure, you find some happiness for a few days, or even a few weeks. You climb to the pinnacle of yourself and cling desperately to the top until your soul gets too tired to hold on any longer, and then you slide back down.

DOUG

I'm sorry. Still not really following.

STEVEN

That's okay. You'll get it at some point. So anyway, you slide back down. And then you climb again. And again. Then one day, you turn to yourself and say, "You're okay, you know that?" And you answer, "Yeah, I know." And suddenly it kind of frees you up.

DOUG

Frees you up to do what?

STEVEN

To stop climbing. To live for the moment. To enjoy what's in front of you instead of clawing for what's in front of someone else.

DOUG

Sounds pretty nice.

STEVEN

It is. Great stuff. And you know what happens then?

DOUG

What?

STEVEN

Your friends try to "help" you back to where you used to be. You know, back to the struggle. A constant barrage of "are you alright?" and "what's the matter? You look so different." Not all of them, though. Some don't notice anything. Actually, most don't.

DOUG

Why not?

STEVEN

Because they never really knew who you were in the first place. They could never look past the reflections of themselves that they see in your eyes. Those friends wouldn't know something was different if you shaved your head and grew antlers.

DOUG

At least they aren't asking you to change back.

STEVEN

Oh, but they are. They're the worst. They're the ones who try to box you into the image they have of you. You can apply a lot of social pressure with a few expectations, you know.

DOUG

I see.

STEVEN

*(Staring at Doug for a moment...)*

No, you don't, but it's nice of you to say.

DOUG

You're right. I have no idea what you're talking about.

STEVEN

It comes down to this. Humanity doesn't want to see content people. Nobody wants someone like that around.

DOUG

That's insane.

STEVEN

Is it? Do you want to be around people who are content?

DOUG

Of course I do.

STEVEN

Why?

DOUG

I guess that it's because I expect a content person wouldn't put any pressure on me.

Right! That's exactly why!

STEVEN

What?

DOUG

A content person doesn't levy expectations on you. They just let you be who you are, and then you have to look at yourself and decide "am I content with myself?" And are you?

STEVEN

Are you asking me?

DOUG

Yes. Are you content with yourself?

STEVEN

Yeah, I guess.

DOUG

No you're not.

STEVEN

Why do you say that?

DOUG

If you were content with yourself, you wouldn't have to guess.

STEVEN

Well, maybe I'm not completely content, but I don't hate myself or anything like that.

DOUG

And do you want to feel content with yourself.

STEVEN

Yeah. Of course I do.

DOUG

Then why don't you?

STEVEN

I guess because I think that I can be better than what I am?

DOUG

STEVEN

And why aren't you better already?

DOUG

It's hard to do.

STEVEN

Bull. It's not hard to improve yourself. It's just a matter of practice. But we humans, we're lazy. Or insecure. We want to lean on other people to make us better. We try to live up to their expectations because we think "surely all these other folks can't be as lost and clueless as me". So we try to decipher what's right, what's success, from the hints they give us, never realizing that they have absolutely no idea either, and they're looking to you to provide the same answers. To provide the same authority.

DOUG

Okaaayy...

STEVEN

In the end, people want someone else to push them to be better. Or to tell them that they're worthwhile. A content person just let's others be what they are, so they're no use. At least to most people.

DOUG

Steve, I gotta tell you, I'm not sure where you are going—

STEVEN

Sorry. I got sidetracked. The point is that humanity doesn't want content people. And once you're content, the first thing that happens is that all your friends try to drag you back to where you were before. To be the person they knew before.

DOUG

I see.

STEVEN

But apparently seeing is not believing, huh?

DOUG

*(After a moment to realize what Steven meant...)*

I'm not saying you're wrong...

STEVEN

No, but... Well, anyway, that's the next challenge. You finally find peace with yourself, you learn to hold firm against the assholes of the world, and now you have to face the challenge of your friends.

DOUG

And did you?

STEVEN

Yep. I lost a few times. More than a few times, really. But this time I think I survived.

DOUG

And now you're content and at peace.

STEVEN

Right.

DOUG

Which is why you're crying over your own grave.

STEVEN

Right. Although I think the word "crying" might be a bit misleading.

DOUG

It's the standard term to use when tears are falling...

STEVEN

Yeah, yeah. But not all tears come from sadness.

DOUG

So these are tears of joy? Joy at anticipating death by irony?

STEVEN

Oh, not really joy either, although if joy and sadness are my only options, joy would be closer.

DOUG

Then why the tears.

STEVEN

Loss of self.

DOUG

Loss of self.

STEVEN

Right. There are times when the boundaries break down. The world comes flooding in on you, and it kind of washes you away. It's hard to tell the difference between yourself and everything else, and... well... it's a rather emotional experience.

DOUG

Sounds like what some people describe as Nirvana.

STEVEN

Maybe. But there's a lot of pain out there.

DOUG

Hence the tears?

STEVEN

In part. Tears of sympathy, tears of tranquility. It's hard to tell the difference once they've fallen to the ground.

DOUG

Or maybe you're just crazy.

STEVEN

*(Lets the words sink in, and then with a smile...)*

Yeah. That's a possibility too.

*(Lights out)*