Dead Folks Talkin’

Imani Wagner

My life was a mess, but my death is just falling apart, literally. Just as that short thought passed my ear began to slowly depart from the rest of my face. I lifted my hand to grab it before it could fall to the ground. I raised my hand closer to my face so that I could examine the dead ear. The one eye hanging from my face rolled around to take a look at the ear itself. The vein keeping it connected to my face finally snapped and the poor eyeball fell to the ground, making a splattering sound. I don’t think it’s possible to express how annoyed I am by this. I don’t think I should actually express, at least physically, how I feel, for another body part may give way.

 In the distance, the rest of the Dead Ones huddle together. They aren’t doing anything, but standing and staring at each other. We do that often, us dead folks. We just stand around and wait for our flesh to transform into this dying-decaying thing. If not that, then we turn living folks into Dead Ones, or just eat them all together. There isn’t much excitement to this type of death.

 As I make my way down the dark hall I discover we’re in a school, a high school, I think. Everything is broken, dirty, or stained by mysterious fluids. To my left and right are classroom doors, with large wide windows set in between each door. In one classroom there are rows of tan desks with ugly green chairs attached to them. I hate the color green, which is ironic, since that’s the color that my skin is currently turning.

At the front of the classroom is a teacher’s desk. It’s very large and tan like the desks meant for the students. Behind the teacher's desk is a black leather chair. There’s a huge white board on the wall behind it with the words, “GOD HAVE MERCY ON OUR SOULS,” written in black marker. There are more large windows opposite the ones connected to the hallway, which look out onto the baseball field. Someone I know is standing at one of the windows, staring at all the walking dead folks in the field. Luca.

 I turn the doorknob of the classroom and walk inside, to meet my friend at the window. He’s wearing a tattered red hoodie. His blue jeans only have one full leg, and the other has been torn off right below the knee. There is dried blood and dirt on his pants leg. The blood on his hoodie almost blends in with the redness of it. I walk up close to him and put my shoulder up against his. Immediately, I can hear what he’s thinking about...food, always. “Why are you standing here,” I asked him through my thoughts.

 “There is literally nothing else for me to do.” We both laugh a little. It is a throaty, deep sounding, and heavy chuckle. It is the only laugh any of us have, and it is ugly as fuck.

 I look up at him, as he towers over me. Even when we were alive, he was tall. We’ve both shrunk just a little since death, but he remains the taller one. “When was the last time you’ve eaten?”

 He looks down at me, and closes his eyes to recall the last moment he fed. In his mind, I can see his last kill. He’s playing it out for me in his head like a movie. His visions after death have this yellow hue to them. Everything dead folks see has that yellow hue. All the visions we share from before have color. He shows me a woman with bright hair and skin, dark and hollow looking eyes, surely from the stress of trying to outlive the dead for the past decade. I can see his face getting closer to her and eventually there's blood all over her and a chunk of her left shoulder missing. She’s stopped screaming and begins to doze off until she’s completely blacked out. We like to call it the death wish, because it's what anyone would wish for if they were being eaten alive, to pass out in hopes of not feeling the rest of you get eaten. It’s what each one of us wished for when we were being killed.

 He opens his eyes, “She wasn’t that good, pretty sure she turned into one of us, because I didn’t finish her,” he thinks. “That was about three days ago.”

 “It’s been almost a week for me, so I need to eat again.” I turn around to the door, and make my way into the hall. Luca follows behind me, dragging his feet along the ground. We walk through to the end of the hall and open a heavy black door, which leads us to a stairwell with windows along the walls. The sunlight shines through, lighting up the deep brown steps. We walk two flights down and are met with another black door, but this one has a long window along the door's hinges. Through the window I can see the parking lot of the school.

 Luca walks up close next to me and puts his shoulder up against mine, letting me into his head again, “let me walk in front, I still have both eyes.”

 I huff with as much air as I can muster in these dried out lungs, pretend to flip my hair over my shoulder, and push the door open. We walk out onto the hot pavement of the parking lot. The sun is bright and burning the damn flesh right off of my bones, or at least that’s what I think it feels like. It should be uncomfortable, but things like this make me feel alive. My decaying nerves still allow me to feel, but just not how things used to feel. No pain, no pleasure, just an awareness over the surface of my skin.

We head towards the opening of the parking lot, which takes us onto the sidewalk and the street. We walk shoulder to shoulder, so that we can still communicate on our hunt. “Some have come with us,” Luca thinks. I turn my head to look behind me, slowly, to see that there are about ten to fifteen other dead ones following us. Neither me nor Luca complain. The more of us the better. It’s always easier to get a kill when the humans have to fight off more of us. With almost fifteen dead folks, we would need at least three humans to keep the hunger away for the next week.

We walk for a long while, but time doesn’t really mean much to us. That’s the most boring part of death. There is no understanding about how time flows. There is no one to keep track of time, and no one cares, because this is what has become of us. When we were all human, time was important. Everyone was constantly checking their watches, because we had places to be and deadlines to meet. In death, there are no deadlines. There is no place to go, no one we need to see. There are no office meetings, or play dates, or events to attend. We have one goal everyday, and that is to exist as these walking decaying things.

Eventually, we come across a large grocery store. “Even if they aren’t looking for food, there has to be a small group living there,” I lean into Luca’s side. In his thoughts, he shows me a vision of all of us walking in together and splitting up to search the grocery store. I stop inside the parking lot of the store. Luca and I remain shoulder to shoulder. The others gather closer to us in a huddle, every one of us touching bodies with another. Luca shows them the same vision he showed me, and then we disperse through the grocery store doors.

Luca, me, and six others walk toward the left side of the store, near the canned goods. Everyone else makes their way toward the section of the store where the dried and boxed foods are. Luca tells me that he hears someone in the distance, maybe hiding in the corner. We begin to quicken our pace down the center aisle, so that we can see down the intersecting aisles on either side of us. We pick up the pace, Luca and I with the backs of our hands touching, always communicating. “Slow down,” he tells me. The others behind me begin to slow too. I can finally hear the heavy breathing of our hunt. There’s two people, and one is breathing heavier than the other.

We walk into the aisle and are met by two older white guys. One has long blonde hair, and is wearing a black baseball cap on his head. The white sox logo is no longer white, but now a dirty tan color. He’s kind of scrawny, not much to eat. He’ll only be enough for about three of us. The other man is built much bigger than him. I can see the rolls of white flesh around his neck and on his arms. He wears a navy blue t-shirt that is too small for him. And ripped denim jeans that can fit five of me inside. He’ll be able to feed the rest of us. I won’t need to eat for an entire week for sure.

Fear washes over both of the men’s faces. They stand up in the middle of the aisle, back to back. The rest of our hunting party appears at the other end of the aisle. We close in on the two men. They begin to cry and scream, surely hoping to scare us off. Maybe they hope we’ll spare them. Luca charges at the fat man who tries to tackle him. I charge at the man too, and then there are five of us on top of this fat guy trying to pin him down. Others grab his feet, and everyone else goes to take down White Sox Guy. He’s dead within seconds.

Eventually, I end up on top of the big guy and I wrap my hands around his neck. He looks into my one good eye and in it I can see my reflection. What once was a beautiful and fluffy brown afro was now dirty and matted with dried blood. Still pretty for a dead girl, though.

I tighten my hold of the man’s neck and slam his head into the floor. They’re always easier to eat when they’re dead. I think a part of me also wants to make it a little easier on them. I remember when I got bit. It was the worst pain I had ever felt. It was even more disturbing to see my creator chewing on my flesh, as I crawled away. This man won’t have that same experience. There won’t be enough of him left over to become one of us. Trust me when I say I’m doing him a favor.