

The Place Beyond

By Degen Hill

“There’s gotta be something else, you know, like something after we die.”

“Dave, not this again...”

“You can’t tell me you haven’t thought about it. Life after death. Everyone does at some point.”

“Can we just drop this?”

“What if we get reincarnated? Come back as something else? I’d love to come back as a dog.”

“Even if that were true, you’d have no memory of your past life. So this version of you who thinks it’s exciting wouldn’t even know it was happening.”

“Maybe. But the idea of it is pretty wild.”

“I have nothing further to add to this conversation,” said Frank, turning to look out the window.

“Or maybe our physical bodies die but the soul lives on. Do you think there’s a heaven or hell?”

“It doesn’t matter to me either way.”

“You’re not concerned about eternal damnation? Or heaven — everything you ever wanted, reunited with everyone you loved, no pain or loss?”

“When I die, I die. That’s it.”

“So in this whole world, with all its intricacies and miracles, when we die — nothing? We’re just gone?”

“That’s it.”

“No place beyond? No great beyond?”

“None.”

“Well jeez, Frank, what’s the point of even living if there’s nothing to look forward to after?”

“I didn’t ask to come into this world,” said Frank, turning to look at Dave.

“I wonder who decides if I’ve lived a good life. Like, is there a checklist? Are certain things worth more points? I wonder what my score is...”

“No one is keeping track of your score.”

“That’s sad, Frank. You’ve got to believe in something. What about everyone who came before you? Are they just gone, no chance of ever seeing them again?”

“That about sums it up.”

“No way. I refuse to accept there isn’t something after we die. Maybe we come back as ghosts. Or maybe we get a second chance at whatever we didn’t finish the first time around.”

“Heck, maybe we’ll come back as zombies...”

“Yes, Frank! Now you’re thinking! Can you imagine being a zombie? Hungry for brains, roaming the earth, somehow alive but with no thoughts of your own.”

“I was joking.”

“It’s still possible. And that’s what makes life so fascinating — no one actually knows what happens when you die. It’s not like someone crossed over and came back to tell us about it. It’s a mystery. Personally, I think what happens is...”

The buzzing in the kitchen had reached a dull roar, so much so that Mrs. Peterson had reached for her pink fly swatter and brought it crashing down onto the counter. Frank flew to the top edge of the dusty refrigerator and watched as Dave hit the linoleum. Mrs. Peterson, in her pink curlers and floral bathrobe, took another puff of

her cigarette, did a slow scan of the kitchen, and then gave up and retired to the living room. Frank looked down at Dave and hoped that wherever he'd gone, he finally had his answer.

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