

EXIT EXAM

By Amrita Bhasin

Doctor Meyers stared at the man sitting in front of him. Dawson Redrick wasn't a particular skinny or attractive man. Years of prison and drawn-out trials would do that to someone. He had a big nose, a beard and beady eyes. But, on this sunny afternoon in May, Dawson Redrick felt like it was the happiest day of his life. It was the day he was to walk free after finally being acquitted of his brother's murder. But, he had one more test left. Exit Exam, they called it. A simple exam to test blood pressure and heartbeat, among other things.

"Mr. Redrick, how are you feeling today?" Doctor Meyers asked, writing something down on his clipboard that Dawson couldn't see.

"Today is the best day of my life. I am finally going to join my wife and family again." Redrick replied. Doctor Meyers nodded politely, gazing around the room. It was a standard size room with a cream colored ceiling containing a single table and two metal chairs. Doctor Meyers had sat in this exact chair hundreds of times, administering the same test and holding the same clipboard. Today's test was no different.

"How old is your son?" Doctor Myers questioned.

"He will be thirteen next month. I'm hoping to plan a party for him." Dawson continued excitedly. "I can't believe it is finally happening." A single tear rolled down Dawson's cheek. Doctor Meyers could feel his eyes becoming wet too.

Doctor Meyers had been working at the Norfolk County Prison for years. The court system wasn't always just, and the Doctor never knew if his patients had committed the crime. He never asked, and he told himself that it didn't matter. He assured himself that it was the

system, and the system had to be obeyed. But, he wasn't the only person who felt that the justice system had more to do with which lawyer could twist the truth than righteousness.

"Mr. Redrick, I am going to administer a simple test. We want to make sure you are healthy before we turn you lose." Doctor Meyers explained. The door opened and a blonde nurse walked in, wheeling a machine attached to a few wires.

"Please sit still while the nurse wires you up." Dawson obediently sat straight while the nurse attached wires to his arm.

"What's going to happen?" Dawson asked. He wasn't trying to cause any trouble; he was merely curious. But, Doctor Meyers took it as an insult.

"Please just sit still." The doctor ordered harshly. Dawson looked down at the wires attached to his body. There were four wires connected to a large machine that resembled an oversized radio. A circle in the middle of the machine appeared to resemble a button. Dawson had never seen anything like it before, but he didn't think much of it. He had been in jail for almost a decade. Technology and machinery had changed since then.

The nurse finished wiring the man up and exited the room. The door shut loudly behind her, and the room was quiet. The doctor wiped away the tears that were threatening to burst. Dawson didn't seem to notice.

This was it, Doctor Meyers thought.

"Hold still." The doctor demanded one last time. "This is the last test, and then you will be free." With a reluctant sigh, Doctor Meyers pushed the large button on the top of the machine.

There was a moment of silence, and then Dawson's eyes widened in shock. His veins bulged in his arm, and he tried desperately to speak. But when he opened his mouth, nothing came out.

Doctor Meyers watched him sadly. "I'm sorry," He whispered.

A look of surprise appears on Dawson Redrick's face, and then the man slumped over dead. The doctor gazed at his clipboard and read the words on the paper.

Dawson Redrick- Convicted, death penalty by lethal injection on May 17, 2048

Quickly, Doctor Meyers checked off a box next to the man's name.

The blonde nurse came back in and sighed.

"He was so happy," She murmured, as she bent down to clean up the mess.

Doctor Meyers swallowed hard and gripped the table to stop from passing out. He thought of all the trophies and certificates that sat on a shelf in his office. He was one of the most esteemed doctors in all of Norfolk county. Yet, he couldn't stop the tears rolling down his cheeks.

"It's better this way," He said, although he wasn't sure if he was talking to the nurse or merely reassuring himself. The practice had occurred for decades. Although it was necessary to execute criminals, they could at least be spared the detrimental horror of knowing they were about to be executed.

Doctor Meyers scanned his clipboard. He only had a few more patients left until he could go back to his own wife and thirteen year old son.

He wandered out to the waiting room. A girl, no more than 16 years old, sat in a chair calmly smoothing her hair. The doctor recalled that she had been convicted of killing her best friend. Next to her, a little boy licked a lollipop and watched TV on the big screen hanging on

the wall. He had been convicted for killing his parents in cold blood. The boy turned to Doctor Meyers and grinned happily. A man walked by drinking a cup of coffee. The doctor had read about his case in the newspaper. He was one of the biggest drug dealers in Mexico and had tortured and killed dozens of innocent people. He had been on the FBI's Most Wanted List for more than seventeen years.

The doctor scoured the room- a room full of people who thought they were all going home. The irony was painful, but it was what had to be done.

With a heavy sigh, Doctor Meyers searched the room for his next patient.

“Quinn Abbott?”

The little boy with the lollipop jumped up, dropped his candy in the trash and followed Doctor Meyers into the exam room.