

JOE HILL

A STORY



TWITTERING FROM
THE
CIRCUS OF
THE DEAD

Twittering from the Circus of the Dead

A Story

Joe Hill



WILLIAM MORROW

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What is Twitter?

“Twitter is a service for friends, family, and co-workers to communicate and stay connected through the exchange of quick, frequent answers to one simple question: What are you doing? . . . Answers must be under 140 characters in length and can be sent

via mobile texting, instant message, or the Web.”

—from twitter.com

TYME2WASTE I'm only trying this because I'm so bored I wish I was dead. Hi Twitter. Want to know what I'm doing? Screaming inside.

8:17 PM – 28 Feb from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE My, didn't that sound melodramatic.

8:19 PM – 28 Feb from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Lets try this again.
Hello Twitterverse. I am Blake and
Blake is me. What am I doing? Counting
seconds.

8:23 PM – 28 Feb from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Only about 50,000
more until we pack up and finish what is
hopefully the last family trip of my life.

8:25 PM – 28 Feb from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE It's been all downhill
since we got to Colorado. And I don't
mean on my snowboard.

8:27 PM – 28 Feb from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE We were supposed to
spend the break boarding and skiing but

it's too cold and won't stop snowing so we had to go to plan B.

8:29 PM – 28 Feb from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Plan B is Mom and I face off in a contest to see who can make the other cry hot tears of rage and hate first.

8:33 PM – 28 Feb from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE I'm winning. All I have to do to make Mom leave the room at this point is walk into it. Wait, I'm walking into the room where she is now . . .

8:35 PM – 28 Feb from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE She's such a mean bitch.

10:11 PM – 28 Feb from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE @caseinSD, @bevsez, @harmlesspervo yay my real friends! I miss San Diego. Home soon.

10:41 PM – 28 Feb from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE @caseinSD Hell no I'm not afraid Mom is going to read any of this. She's never going to know about it.

10:46 PM – 28 Feb from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE After she made me take down my blog, it's not like I'm ever going to tell her.

10:48 PM – 28 Feb from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE You know what bitchy

thing she said to me a couple hours ago?
She said the reason I don't like
Colorado is because I can't blog about
it.

10:53 PM – 28 Feb from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE She's always saying
the Net is more real for me and my
friends than the world. For us nothing
really happens till someone blogs about
it.

10:55 PM – 28 Feb from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Or writes about it on
their Facebook page. Or at least sends
an instant message about it. She says the
internet is "life validation."

10:55 PM – 28 Feb from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Oh and we don't go online because it's fun. She has this attitude that people socially network 'cause they're scared to die. It's deep.
10:58 PM – 28 Feb from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE She sez no one ever blogs their own death. No one instant-messages about it. No one's Facebook status ever says "dead."
10:59 PM – 28 Feb from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE So for online people, death doesn't happen. People go online to hide from death and wind up hiding from life. Words right from her lips.
11:01 PM – 28 Feb from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Shit like that, she ought to write fortune cookies for a living. You see why I want to strangle her. With an ethernet cable.

11:02 PM – 28 Feb from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Little bro asked if I could blog about him having sex with a certain goth girl from school to make it real, but no one laughed.

11:06 PM – 28 Feb from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE I told Mom, no, the reason I hate Colorado is 'cause I'm stuck with her and it's all waaaaay too real.

11:09 PM – 28 Feb from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE And she said that was progress and got this smug bitch look on her face and then Dad threw down his book & left the room.

11:11 PM – 28 Feb from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE I feel worst for him. A few more months and I'm gone forever, but he's stuck with her for life and all her anger and the rest of it.

11:13 PM – 28 Feb from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE I'm sure he wishes he just got us plane tickets now. Suddenly our van is looking like the setting for a cage-match duel to the death.

11:15 PM – 28 Feb from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE All of us jammed in together for 3 days. Who will emerge alive? Place your bets, ladies and germs. Personally I predict no survivors.

11:19 PM – 28 Feb from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Arrr. Fuck. Shit. It was dark when I went to bed and it is dark now and Dad says it's time to leave. This is so terribly wrong.

6:21 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE We're going. Mom gave the condo a careful search to make sure nothing got left behind, which is how she found me.

7:01 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Damn, knew I needed a better hiding place.

7:02 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Dad just said the whole trip ought to take between 35 and 40 hours. I offer this as conclusive proof there is no God.

7:11 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Tweeting just to piss Mom off. She knows if I'm typing something on my phone, I'm obviously engaged in sin.

7:23 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE I'm expressing myself and staying in touch with my friends, and

she hates it. Whereas if I was knitting and unpopular . . .

7:25 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE . . . then I'd be just like her when she was 17. And I'd also marry the first guy who came along and get knocked up by 19.

7:25 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Coming down the mountain in the snow. Coming down the mountain in the snow. 1 more hairpin turn and my stomach's gonna blow . . .

7:30 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE My contribution to this glorious family moment is going to come when I barf on my little brother's head.

7:49 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE If we wind up in a snowbank and have a Donner Party, I know whose ass they'll be chewing on first. Mine.

7:52 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Of course my survival skillz would amount to Twittering madly for someone to rescue us.

7:54 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Mom would make a slingshot out of rubber from the tires, kill squirrels with it, make a fur bikini out of 'em, and be sad when we were rescued.

7:56 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Dad would go out of his mind because we'd have to burn his books to stay warm.

8:00 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Eric would put on a pair of my pantyhose. Not to stay warm. Just 'cause my little brother wants to wear my pantyhose.

8:00 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE I wrote that last bit 'cause Eric was looking over my shoulder.

8:02 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE But the sick bastard

said wearing my pantyhose is the closest he'll probably come to getting laid in high school.

8:06 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE He's completely gross but I love him.

8:06 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Mom taught him to knit while we were snowed in here in happy CO and he knitted himself a cocksock, and then she was sorry.

8:11 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE I miss my blog, which she had no right to make me take down.

8:13 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE But Twittering is better than blogging because my blog always made me feel like I should have interesting ideas to blog about.

8:14 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE But on Twitter every post can only be 140 letters long. Which is enough room to cover every interesting thing to ever happen to me.

8:15 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE True. Check it out.

8:15 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Born. School. Mall. Cell phone. Driver's permit. Broke my nose playing trapeze at 8—there goes the

modeling career. Need to lose 10 lbs.

8:19 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Think that covers it.

8:20 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE It's snowing in the mountains but not down here, snow falling in the sunlight in a storm of gold. Good-bye beautiful mountains.

9:17 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Hello not so beautiful Utah desert. Utah is brown and puckered like Judy Kennedy's weird nipples.

9:51 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE @caseinSD Yes she does have weird nipples. And it doesn't

make me a lesbo for noticing. Everyone notices.

10:02 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Sagebrush!!!!!! W00T!

11:09 AM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Now Eric is trying on my pantyhose. He's bored. Mom thinks it's funny, but Dad is stressed.

12:20 PM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Dared Eric to wear a skirt in the diner to get our takeout. Dad says no. Mom is still laughing.

12:36 PM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE I promised him if he does it I'll invite a certain hot goth to the

pool party in April so he can see her in her tacky bikini.

12:39 PM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE There's no way he'll do it.

12:42 PM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE ZOMG hes doing it. Dad is going into the diner with him to make sure he isn't killed by offended Mormons.

12:44 PM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Eric came back alive. Eric saves the day. I'm actually glad to be in the van right now.

12:59 PM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Dad says Eric sat at the bar and talked football with this big trucker guy. Trucker guy was fine with the skirt and pantyhose.

1:03 PM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE He's still wearing it. The skirt. He's probably a total closet tranny. Sicko. Course that would be fun. We could shop together.

1:45 PM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE @caseinSD Yes we do have to invite a certain goth to the pool party now. She probably won't even come. I think sunlight burns her.

2:09 PM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Every time I start to fall asleep, the van hits a bump and my head falls off the seat.

11:01 PM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Trying to sleep.

11:31 PM – 1 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE I give up trying to sleep.

1:01 AM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Oh fuck Eric. He's asleep and he looks like he's having a wet dream about a certain goth chick.

1:07 AM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Meanwhile I'd have a better chance of sleeping if there were

only steel pins inserted under my eyelids.

1:09 AM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE I'm so happy right now. I just want to hold this moment for as long as I can.

6:11 AM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE I just want to be home. I hate Mom. I hate everyone in the van. Including myself.

8:13 AM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Okay. This is why I was happy earlier. It was 4 in the morning and Mom pulled into a rest area and then she came and got me.

10:21 AM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE She said it was my turn to drive. I said my permit is only for driving in Cali, and she said just get behind the wheel.

10:22 AM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE She told me if I got pulled over to wake her up and we'd switch and everything would be all right.

10:23 AM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE So she went to sleep in the passenger seat and I drove. We were down in the desert and the sun came up behind me.

10:25 AM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE And then there were

coyotes in the road. In the red sunlight. They were all over the interstate, and I stopped so I wouldn't hit them.

10:26 AM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Their eyes were gold and the sun was in their fur and there were so many, this huge pack. Just standing there like they were waiting for me.

10:28 AM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE I wanted to take a picture with my cell phone, but I couldn't figure out where I left it. While I was looking for it, they disappeared.

10:31 AM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE When Mom woke up, I

told her all about them. And then I thought she'd be mad I didn't shake her awake to see them, so I said I was sorry.

10:34 AM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE And she said she was glad I didn't wake her up, because that moment was just for me. And for maybe three seconds I liked her again.

10:35 AM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE But then in the place we ate breakfast I was looking at my e-mail for a sec. & I heard Mom saying to the waitress, We apologize for her.

10:37 AM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE I guess the waitress

was standing there waiting for my order and I didn't notice.

10:40 AM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE But I didn't sleep all night and I was tired and zoned out and that's why I didn't notice, not 'cause I was looking at my phone.

10:42 AM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE And Mom had to trot out her stories about being a waitress herself and that it was demeaning not to be acknowledged.

10:45 AM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Just to rub it in. And she can be completely right and I can still hate the way she makes me feel like

shit at every opportunity.

10:46 AM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE I napped, but I don't feel better.

4:55 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Dad of course has to go the slowest possible route by way of every back road. Mom says he missed a turn and added 100 miles to the trip.

6:30 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Now they're fighting. OMG I want out of this van.

6:37 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Eric, I am psychically willing you to find some reason for us to

get off the road. Put on the pantyhose again. Say you have to pee.

6:49 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Anything. Please.

6:49 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE No no NO Eric, no. I wanted you to think up a GOOD reason not to get off the road but not this . . . this is going to be bad.

6:57 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Mom doesn't want to pull over either. Write it down, kids, first time in two years we've agreed on anything.

7:00 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Oh Dad is being a prick now. He says there was no point in taking back roads if we weren't going to find some culture.

7:02 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE We are driving up to something called the Circus of the Dead. The ticket guy looks really REALLY sick. Not funny-sick. SICK-sick.

7:06 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Sores around his mouth and few teeth and I can smell him. He's got a pet rat. His pet rat dived in his pocket and came out with the tickets.

7:08 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE No it wasn't cute.
None of us want to touch the tickets.
7:10 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Boy, they're really packing them in. Show starts in 15 min., but the parking lot is ½ empty. The big top is a black tent with holes in it.
7:13 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Mom says to be sure to keep doing whatever I'm doing on my phone. She wouldn't want me to look up and see something happening.
7:17 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Oh that was shitty. She just said to Dad that I'll love the circus

because it'll be just like the internet.

7:18 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE YouTube is full of clowns, message boards are full of fire-breathers, and blogs are for people who can't live without a spotlight on them.

7:20 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE I'm going to tweet like 5 times a minute and make her insane.

7:21 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE The usher is a funny old Mickey Rooney type with a bowler and a cigar. He also has on a hazmat suit. He says so he can't get bitten.

7:25 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE I almost fell twice on the walk to our seats. Guess they're saving \$ on lights. I'm using my iPhone as a flashlight. Hope there isn't a fire.

7:28 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE God this is the stinkiest circus ever. I don't know what I'm smelling. Are those the animals? Call PETA.

7:30 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE I can't believe how many people there are. Every seat is taken. Don't know where this crowd came from.

7:31 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE They must've had us park in a secondary parking lot. Oh wait, they just flipped on a spotlight. Showtime. Beating heart, restrain yourself.

7:34 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Well, that got Eric and Dad's attention. The ringmistress came out on stilts and she's practically naked. Fishnets and top hat.

7:38 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE She's weird. She talks like she's stoned. Did I mention there are zombies in clown outfits chasing her around?

7:40 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE The zombies are waaay gross. They have on big clown shoes and polka dot outfits and clown makeup.

7:43 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE But the makeup is flaking off, and beneath it they're all rotted and black. Yow! They almost grabbed her. She's quick.

7:44 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE She says she's been a prisoner of the circus for 6 weeks and that she survived because she learned the stilts fast.

7:47 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE She said her boyfriend couldn't walk on them and fell down and was eaten his first night. She said her best friend was eaten the 2nd night.

7:49 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE She walked right up to the wall under us and begged someone to pull her over and rescue her, but the guy in the front row just laughed.

7:50 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Then she had to run away in a hurry before Zippo the Zombie knocked her off her stilts. It's all very well choreographed.

7:50 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE You can totally believe they're trying to get her.

7:51 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE They rolled a cannon out. She said, Here at the Circus of the Dead we always begin things with a bang. She read it off a card.

7:54 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE She walked up to a tall door and rapped on it, and for a minute I didn't think they were going to let her out of the ring, but then they did.

7:55 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Two men in hazmat suits just led a zombie out. He's got a

metal collar around his neck with a black stick attached.

7:56 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE They're using the stick to hold him at a distance so he can't grab them.

7:57 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Eric says he has fantasies about a certain goth girl putting him in a rig like that.

7:58 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE This show would be a great date for the two of them. It's got a hint of sex, a whiff of bondage, and it's really really morbid.

7:59 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE They put the zombie in the cannon.

8:00 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Auuuughhh! They pointed the cannon at the crowd and fired it and fucking pieces of zombie went everywhere.

8:03 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE The guy in the row in front of us got smashed in the mouth with a flying shoe. He's bleeding and everything.

8:05 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Fucking yuck! There's still a foot inside the shoe! It's totally

realistic looking.

8:08 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE The guy sitting in front of us just walked off w/his wife to complain. Same dude who laffed at the ringmistress when she asked for help.

8:11 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Dad had a zombie lip in his hair. I am so glad I didn't eat lunch. Looks like a gummy worm and it smells like ass.

8:13 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Naturally Eric wants to keep it.

8:13 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Here comes the ringmistress again. She says the next act is the cat's meo

8:14 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE OMG OMGthat was not funny. She almost fell down and the way they were snarling

8:16 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE The men in hazmat suits just wheeled in a lion in a cage. Yay, a lion! I am still girl enough to like a big cat.

8:17 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Oh that's a really sad, sick-looking lion. Not fun. They're

opening the cage and sending in zombies and he's hissing like a housecat.

8:19 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Roawwwwr! Lion power. He's swatting them down and shredding them apart. He's got an arm in his mouth. Everyone cheering.

8:21 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Eeeuuuw. Not so much cheering now. He's got one and he's tugging out its guts like he's pulling on one end of a tug rope.

8:22 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE They're sending in more zombies. No one laughing or cheering now. It's really crowded in

there.

8:24 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE I can't even see the lion anymore. Lots of angry snarling and flying fur and walking corpses getting knocked around.

8:24 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE OH GROSS. The lion made a sound, like this scared whine, and now the zombies are passing around organ meat and hunks of fur.

8:25 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE They're eating. That's awful. I feel sick.

8:26 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Dad saw I was getting upset and told me how they did it. The cage has a false bottom. They pulled the lion out through the floor.

8:30 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE You really get swept up in this thing.

8:30 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE The Mickey Rooney guy who led us back to the seats just showed up with a flashlight. He says we left the headlights on in the van.

8:31 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Eric went to turn them off. He said he has to pee anyway.

8:32 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE The fireswallower just came out. He has no eyes, and there's some kind of steel contraption forcing his head back and his mouth open.

8:34 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE One of the men in the hazmat suits isFUCK ME.

8:35 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE They shoved a torch down his throat, and now he's burning! He's running around with smoke coming out of his mouth and

8:36 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE fire in his head coming

out his eyes like a jack o lante
8:36 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE They just let him burn to death from the inside out. Realest thing I've ever seen.

8:39 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE What's even realer is the corpse after the hazmat guys sprayed it down with the fire extinguishers. It looks so sad and shriveled and black.

8:39 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE The ringmistress is back. She's really weaving around. I think something is wrong with her ankle.

8:40 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE She says someone from the audience has agreed to be tonight's sacrifice. She says he will be the lucky one.

8:41 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE He? I thought the sacrifice was usually a girl in this sort of situation.

8:41 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Oh no he did not. They just wheeled Eric out, cuffed to a big wooden wheel. He winked on the way past. Psycho. Go, Eric!

8:42 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE They hauled out a

zombie and chained him to a stake in the dirt. There's a box in front of him full of hatchets. Don't like where this is going.

8:43 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Everyone's laughing now. The lion scene was a little grim, but we're back to funny again. The zombie threw the first hatchet in the crowd.

8:45 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE There was a thunk, and someone screamed like they got it in the head. Obvious plant.

8:45 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Eric is spinning around and around on the wheel. He's

telling the zombie to kill him before he throws up.

8:46 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Eeeks! I'm not as brave as Eric. A knife just banged into the wheel next to his head. Like: INCHES. Eric screamed too. Bet he wishes now

8:47 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE OMGOMGO

8:47 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Okay. He must be okay. He was still smiling when they wheeled him out of the ring. The hatchet went right in the side of his neck.

8:50 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Dad says it's a trick. Dad says he's fine. He says later Eric will come out as a zombie. That it's part of the show.

8:51 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Yep, looks like Dad's right. They've promised Eric will reemerge shortly.

8:53 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Mom is wiggling. She wants Dad to check on Eric.

8:54 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE She's being kind of crazy. She's talking about how the guy

who sat in front of us never came back after he got hit by the shoe.

8:55 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE I don't really see what that has to do with Eric. And besides, if I got hit by a flying shoe . . .

8:55 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Okay, Dad is going to check on Eric. Sanity restored.

8:56 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Here comes the ringmistress again. This is why Eric agreed to go backstage. With the fishnets and black panties, she's very goth-hot.

8:56 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE She's being weird.
She isn't saying anything about the next
act. She says if she goes off script they
don't let her out of the ring.

8:57 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE But she doesn't care.
She says she twisted her ankle and she
knows tonight is her last night.

8:58 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE She says her name is
Gail Ross and she went to high school in
Plano.

8:59 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE She says she was
going to marry her boyfriend after

college. She says his name was Craig and he wanted to teach.

9:00 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE She says she's sorry for all of us. She says they take our cars and dispose of them while we're in the tent.

9:01 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE She says 12,000 people vanish every year on the roads with no explanation, their cars turn up empty or not at all and no one will miss us.

9:02 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Creepy stuff. Here's Eric. His zombie makeup is really good.

Most of the zombies are black and rotted, but he looks like fresh kill.

9:03 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Still got the hatchet in the neck. That looks totally fake.

9:03 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE He's not very good at being a zombie. He isn't even trying to walk slow. He's really going after the ringmistress.

9:04 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE oh shit I hope that's part of the show. He just knocked her down. Oh Eric Eric Eric. She hit the dirt really really hard.

9:05 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE They're eating her like they ate the lion. Eric is playing with guts. He's so gross. He's going totally Method.

9:07 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Gymnastics now. They're making a human pyramid. Or maybe I should say an INhuman pyramid. They're surprisingly good at it. For zombies.

9:10 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Eric is climbing the pyramid like he knows what he's doing. I wonder if they gave him backstage training or

9:11 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE He's up high enough to grab the wall around the ring. He's snarling at someone in the front row, just a couple feet from here. Wait

9:13 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE no lights fuck thta was stupid whyd they put out the

9:14 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE someones screaming

9:15 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE this is really dangerous its so dark and lots of people are screaming and getting up. im mad now you don't do this to people you

don't

9:18 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE we need help we
areacv

9:32 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE

gttttgggtttgggttttttgggbbbnnnfrfffgt

9:32 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE I cant say anything
theyll hear. were beinb ver y quiet
wevegot a plas

10:17 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE were off i70 mom says
it was exit 331 but we drove a long way
the last town we saw was called ucmba

10:19 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE cumba

10:19 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE the people in the stands were all dead except for us and a few others and they were roped together tethered

10:20 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE please someone send help call UT state police not making this up

10:22 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE @caseinSD lease help you know me you know I wouldnt isnta joke

10:23 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE have to be quiet so I
can't call got the ringer is turned off

10:24 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE AZ state police mom
says its arizona not UT our van is a
white econlein

10:27 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE its quiet less
screaming now less growling

10:50 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE theyre dragging people
into piles

10:56 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE eating theyre eating them

11:09 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE the man who got hit by the shoe earlier walked by but he isn't like he was he hes dead now

11:11 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE just mom and me i love my mom shes so brave i love her so much so much i never ment it none of the bad things not one i am with her i am

11:37 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE imso csared

11:39 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE theyresearching to see

if anyone is left with flashlights the men
in hazmat soups i say go out mom says
no

11:41 PM – 2 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE were here were
waiting for help please forward this to
everyone on twitter this is true not an
internet prank believe believe believe
pleves

12:03 AM – 3 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE ohgod it was dad went
by mom sat up and said his name and
mom and dad and mom and dad

12:09 AM – 3 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE notdad oh my oh bnb
nnnb ;:/’/././;’././

12:13 AM – 3 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE /'/.
/

12:13 AM – 3 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Were you SCARED
by this TWITTER FEED????!?!?

9:17 AM – 3 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE The FEAR—and THE
FUN—is only just BEGINNING!

9:20 AM – 3 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE “THE CIRCUS OF
THE DEAD” featuring our newest
RINGMISTRESS the SEXY &
DARING BLAKE THE
BLACKHEARTED.

9:22AM – 3 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Watch as our newest
QUEEN OF THE TRAPEEZE
introduces our **PERVERSE &**
PERNICIOUS performers . . .

9:23 AM – 3 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE . . . while **DANGLING**
FROM A ROPE ABOVE THE
RAVENOUS DEAD!

9:23 AM – 3 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE A **CIRCUS** so
SHOCKING it makes **THE JIM ROSE**
CIRCUS look like **THE MUPPET**
SHOW!

9:25 AM – 3 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Now touring with

stops in ALL CORNERS OF THE
COUNTRY!

9:26 AM – 3 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE Visit our Facebook
page and join our E-MAIL LIST to find
out when we'll be in YOUR AREA.

9:28 AM – 3 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE STAY CONNECTED
OR YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT
YOU'LL MISS!

9:30 AM – 3 Mar from Tweetie

TYME2WASTE “THE CIRCUS OF
THE DEAD” . . . Where YOU are the
concessions! Other circuses promise
DEATH-DEFYING THRILLS!

9:31 AM – 3 Mar from Tweetie

**TYME2WASTE BUT ONLY WE
DELIVER!** (Tix to be purchased at box
office day of show. No refunds. Cash
only. Minors must be accompanied by
adult.)

9:31 AM – 3 Mar from Tweetie

An Excerpt from *NOS4A2*

Nurse Thornton dropped into the long-term-care ward a little before eight with a hot bag of blood for Charlie Manx.

She was coasting on autopilot, her thoughts not on her work. She had finally made up her mind to buy her son, Josiah, the Nintendo DS he wanted, and was calculating whether she could get to Toys “R” Us after her shift, before they

closed.

She had been resisting the impulse for a few weeks, on philosophical grounds. She didn't really care if all his friends had one. She just didn't like the idea of those handheld video-game systems that the kids carried with them everywhere. Ellen Thornton resented the way little boys disappeared into the glowing screen, ditching the real world for some province of the imagination where fun replaced thought and inventing creative new kills was an art form. She had fantasized having a child who would love books and play Scrabble and want to go on snowshoeing expeditions with her. What a laugh.

Ellen had held out as long as she

could, and then, yesterday afternoon, she had come across Josiah sitting on his bed pretending an old wallet was a Nintendo DS. He had cut out a picture of Donkey Kong and slipped it into the clear plastic sleeve for displaying photographs. He pressed imaginary buttons and made explosion sounds, and her heart had hurt a little, watching him make believe he already had something he was certain he would get on the Big Day. Ellen could have her theories about what was healthy for boys and what wasn't. That didn't mean Santa had to share them.

Because she was preoccupied, she didn't notice what was different about Charlie Manx until she was easing

around his cot to reach the IV rack. He happened to sigh heavily just then, as if bored, and she looked down and saw him staring up at her, and she was so startled to see him with his eyes open that she bobbled the sack of blood and almost dumped it on her feet.

He was hideous-old, not to mention hideous. His great bald skull was a globe mapping an alien moon, continents marked by liver spots and bruise-colored sarcomas. Of all the men in the long-term-care ward—a.k.a. the Vegetable Patch—there was something particularly awful about Charlie Manx with his eyes open at *this* time of year. Manx liked children. He'd made dozens of them disappear back in the nineties.

He had a house below the Flatirons where he did what he liked with them and killed them and hung Christmas ornaments in their memory. The papers called the place the Sleigh House. Ho, ho, ho.

For the most part, Ellen could shut off the mother side of her brain while she was at work, could keep her mind away from thoughts of what Charlie Manx had probably done with the little girls and boys who had crossed his path, little girls and boys no older than her Josiah. Ellen didn't muse on what *any* of her charges had done, if she could help it. The patient on the other side of the room had tied up his girlfriend and her two children, set fire to their house, and left

them to burn. He was arrested in a bar down the street, drinking Bushmills and watching the White Sox play the Rangers. Ellen didn't see how dwelling on it was ever going to do her any favors, and so she had taught herself to think of her patients as extensions of the machines and drip bags they were hooked up to: meat peripherals.

In all the time she'd been working at FCI Englewood, in the Supermax prison infirmary, she had never seen Charlie Manx with his eyes open. She'd been on staff for three years, and he had been comatose all that time. He was the frailest of her patients, a fragile coat of skin with bones inside. His heart monitor blipped like a metronome set to

the slowest possible speed. The doc said he had as much brain activity as a can of creamed corn. No one had ever determined his age, but he looked older than Keith Richards. He even looked a little *like* Keith Richards—a bald Keith with a mouthful of sharp little brown teeth.

There were three other coma patients in the ward, what the staff called “gorks.” When you were around them long enough, you learned that all the gorks had their quirks. Don Henry, the man who burned his girl and her kids to death, went for “walks” sometimes. He didn’t get up, of course, but his feet pedaled weakly under the sheets. There was a guy named Leonard Potts who’d

been in a coma for five years and was never going to wake up—another prisoner had jammed a screwdriver through his skull and into his brain. But sometimes he cleared his throat and would shout “I know!” as if he were a small child who wanted to answer the teacher’s question. Maybe opening his eyes was Manx’s quirk and she’d just never caught him doing it before.

“Hello, Mr. Manx,” Ellen said automatically. “How are you feeling today?”

She smiled a meaningless smile and hesitated, still holding the sack of body-temperature blood. She didn’t expect a reply but thought it would be considerate to give him a moment to collect his

nonexistent thoughts. When he didn't say anything, she reached forward with one hand to slide his eyelids closed.

He caught her wrist. She screamed—couldn't help it—and dropped the bag of blood. It hit the floor and exploded in a crimson gush, the hot spray drenching her feet.

“Ugh!” she cried. “Ugh! Ugh! Oh, God!”

It smelled like fresh-poured iron.

“Your boy, Josiah,” Charlie Manx said to her, his voice grating and harsh. “There’s a place for him in Christmasland, with the other children. I could give him a new life. I could give him a nice new smile. I could give him nice new teeth.”

Hearing him say her son's name was worse than having Manx's hand on her wrist or blood on her feet. (*Clean blood*, she told herself, *clean*.) Hearing this man, convicted murderer and child molester, speak of her son made her dizzy, genuinely dizzy, as if she were in a glass elevator rushing quickly into the sky, the world dropping away beneath her.

“Let go,” she whispered.

“There's a place for Josiah John Thornton in Christmasland, and there's a place for you in the House of Sleep,” Charlie Manx said. “The Gasmask Man would know just what to do with you. Give you the gingerbread smoke and teach you to love him. Can't bring you

with us to Christmasland. Or I *could*, but the Gasmask Man is better. The Gasmask Man is a mercy.”

“Help,” Ellen screamed, except it didn’t come out as a scream. It came out as a whisper. “Help me.” She couldn’t find her voice.

“I’ve seen Josiah in the Graveyard of What Might Be. Josiah should come for a ride in the Wraith. He’d be happy forever in Christmasland. The world can’t ruin him there, because it isn’t *in* the world. It’s in my *head*. They’re all safe in my head. I’ve been dreaming about it, you know. Christmasland. I’ve been dreaming about it, but I walk and walk and I can’t get to the end of the tunnel. I hear the children singing, but I

can't get to them. I hear them shouting for me, but the tunnel doesn't end. I need the Wraith. Need my ride."

His tongue slipped out of his mouth, brown and glistening and obscene, and wet his dry lips, and he let her go.

"Help," she whispered. "Help. Help. Help." She had to say it another time or two before she could say it loud enough for anyone to hear her. Then she was batting through the doors into the hall, running in her soft flat shoes, screaming for all she was worth. Leaving bright red footprints behind her.

Ten minutes later a pair of officers in riot gear had strapped Manx down to his cot, just in case he opened his eyes and tried to get up. But the doctor who

eventually arrived to examine him said to unleash him.

“This guy has been in a bed since 2001. He has to be turned four times a day to keep from getting sores. Even if he wasn’t a gork, he’s too weak to go anywhere. After seven years of muscle atrophy, I doubt he could sit up on his own.”

Ellen was listening from over next to the doors—if Manx opened his eyes again, she planned to be the first one out of the room—but when the doctor said that, she walked across the floor on stiff legs and pulled her sleeve back from her right wrist to show the bruises where Manx had grabbed her.

“Does that look like something done

by a guy too weak to sit up? I thought he was going to yank my arm out of the socket.” Her feet stung almost as badly as her bruised wrist. She had stripped off her blood-soaked pantyhose and gone at her feet with scalding water and antibiotic soap until they were raw. She was in her gym sneakers now. The other shoes were in the garbage. Even if they could be saved, she didn’t think she’d ever be able to put them on again.

The doctor, a young Indian named Patel, gave her an abashed, apologetic look and bent to shine a flashlight in Manx’s eyes. His pupils did not dilate. Patel moved the flashlight back and forth, but Manx’s eyes remained fixed on a point just beyond Patel’s left ear. The

doctor clapped his hands an inch from Manx's nose. Manx did not blink. Patel gently closed Manx's eyes and examined the reading from the EKG they were running.

"There's nothing here that's any different from any of the last dozen EKG readings," Patel said. "Patient scores a nine on the Glasgow scale, shows slow alpha-wave activity consistent with alpha coma. I think he was just talking in his sleep, Nurse. It even happens to gorks like this guy."

"His eyes were *open*," she said. "He looked right at me. He knew my name. He knew my son's name."

Patel said, "Ever had a conversation around him with one of the other nurses?"

No telling what the guy might've unconsciously picked up. You tell another nurse, 'Oh, hey, my son just won the spelling bee.' Manx hears it and regurgitates it mid-dream."

She nodded, but a part of her was thinking, *He knew Josiah's middle name*, something she was sure she had never mentioned to anyone here in the hospital. *There's a place for Josiah John Thornton in Christmasland*, Charlie Manx had said to her, *and there's a place for you in the House of Sleep*.

"I never got his blood in," she said. "He's been anemic for a couple weeks. Picked up a urinary-tract infection from his catheter. I'll go get a fresh pack."

“Never mind that. I’ll get the old vampire his blood. Look. You’ve had a nasty little scare. Put it behind you. Go home. You only have, what? An hour left on your shift? Take it. Take tomorrow, too. Got some last-minute shopping to finish? Go do it. Stop thinking about this and relax. It’s Christmas, Nurse Thornton,” the doctor said, and winked at her. “Don’t you know it’s the most wonderful time of the year?”

About the Author

JOE HILL is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the novels *NOS4A2*, *Horns*, and *Heart-Shaped Box*, and the prizewinning story collection *20th Century Ghosts*. He is also the Eisner Award–winning writer of an ongoing comic book series, *Locke & Key*. You can learn more at www.joehillfiction.com, or follow Joe

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