

The Dying Man

by [David Wiener](#) (July 2024)



The Artist's Father on his Sick Bed, Franz Marc (1906-07)

I was visiting a man in the hospital who was circling the drain. His leg had to be amputated (it was gangrene) and he was restrained in bed so he wouldn't try to get up and walk on his one good leg and the missing leg.

In the bed next to him was another dying man who looked like Wallace Wimpole sounds. (Wallace Wimpole was the henpecked husband character who showed up in radio shows and Bugs Bunny cartoons, saying things like "Yes, dear," "Yes, honeybunch," and "Yes, sweetie-pie.") I never found out this man's name;

I'll just call him Wallace.

Wallace still had both his legs but he was somewhere else, and it wasn't so nice.

He was muttering softly, but clearly. He looked out from under knitted brows, concentrating on something in front of him off in the distance. He had the "Thousand-Yard Stare."

"...we'll ship that Thursday," he was saying, "I guess Friday, latest. Monday, if there's trouble."

The man with gangrene was always silent, never said a word, so I turned to Wallace and listened.

"Don't know how that went s'far off destination. Check it out, sure. Well, it's somewhere ... there..." he was saying.

One corner of his mouth was turned up, squeezing an eye halfway shut. It wasn't a stroke, he was just trying to figure out how everything had gotten so screwed up.

"Find that over there," he said, "we'll get that moved over ... call and let 'em know..."

And he went on like this. I wondered if he slept at night and, if he did, was he still pulling forms, checking shipment dates, following up with phone calls to customers?

"That's okay, it's all taken care of," I said, keeping my voice low.

And he heard me.

"Well, dunno," he said, with a little shrug. "See how far—and if it's over on the—"

I filled in the silence with, "No need to worry about that. Really. It's fine, it all got taken care of. It's okay. All settled."

“Well,” he said after a little pause, nodding his head. “Because there’s a full ... see about that other ... line...”

And he trailed off. After a few seconds, he started muttering again, a little slower.

He was a little quieter but confused and still annoyed. How did all these get so messed up? What happened to that stuff? Where’d it go? Okay, so maybe things had been taken care of, well, but—he just didn’t see how—how could those shipments—the tracking just didn’t—okay, so, I don’t know—must have turned up ... I guess...

I don’t know how much longer Wallace lasted. It couldn’t have been very long. And who visited him? Who were his doctors? Did he fade quickly or have a long haul? That, too, I also don’t know.

I would like to think that Wallace went out like so many other people—visited by pals and loved ones he really wanted to see again and slobbered over by a dog he had when he was a kid. And a great reunion or cast party, or whatever they call it over there somewhere.

I’d like to think Wallace finally punched out for the last time and never had to rush to punch in again, never fearing another Monday morning, another time clock, more lost sleep, another slipped schedule. Just Wallace and his dog jumping around, yipping and panting and all ready to go get a snack. No more shipments or ledger entries that don’t make sense or frustrated customers or late supplies and bills that just can’t be paid. I don’t even know who Wallace was—but whoever he was, that’s where I want him to be.

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David Wiener has written cover, feature, and interview articles for various performing arts magazines including *American Cinematographer*, *Producers Guild Journal*, *Cahiers du Cinema*, and *The Journal of the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain*. His plays have been produced in London, India, Canada, Australia, Mexico, and the U.S. and have been published three times in the Smith & Kraus “Best Plays” one-act anthology series. He In 2007, he completed a Literary Internship with La Jolla Playhouse and went on to work as that theatre’s Dramaturgy Associate during the 07-08 season.

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