

A person in a dark uniform stands on a wooden walkway in a prison setting. The walkway is made of wooden planks and leads towards a building in the background. The scene is lit from above, creating long shadows on the ground.

Volume 4 of  
**THE GREEN MILE**

**STEPHEN  
KING**

**THE BAD DEATH** of  
**EDUARD DELACROIX**

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VOLUME IV

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THE BAD DEATH  
OF EDUARD DELACROIX



# 1

ALL THIS OTHER WRITING ASIDE, I've kept a little diary since I took up residence at Georgia Pines—no big deal, just a couple of paragraphs a day, mostly about the weather—and I looked back through it last evening. I wanted to see just how long it has been since my grandchildren Christopher and Danielle more or less forced me into Georgia Pines. “For your own good, Gramps,” they said. Of course they did. Isn't that what people mostly say when they have finally figured out how to get rid of a problem that walks and talks?

It's been a little over two years. The eerie thing is that I don't know if it *feels* like two years, or longer than that, or shorter. My sense of time seems to be *melting*, like a kid's snowman in a January thaw. It's as if time as it always was—Eastern Standard Time, Daylight Saving Time, Working-Man Time—doesn't exist anymore. Here there is only Georgia Pines Time, which is Old Man Time, Old Lady Time, and Piss the Bed Time. The rest . . . all gone.

This is a dangerous damned place. You don't realize it at first, at first you think it's only a boring place, about as dangerous as a nursery school at nap-time, but it's dangerous, all right. I've seen a lot of people slide into senility since I came here, and sometimes they do more than slide—sometimes they go down with the speed of a crash-diving submarine. They come here mostly all right—dim-eyed and welded to the cane, maybe a little loose in the bladder, but otherwise okay—and then something happens to them. A month later they're just sitting in the TV room, staring up at Oprah Winfrey on the TV with dull eyes, a slack jaw, and a forgotten glass of orange juice tilted and dribbling in one hand. A month after that, you have to tell them their kids' names when the kids come to visit. And a month after that, it's their own damned names you have to refresh them on. Something happens to them, all

right: Georgia Pines Time happens to them. Time here is like a weak acid that erases first memory and then the desire to go on living.

You have to fight it. That's what I tell Elaine Connelly, my special friend. It's gotten better for me since I started writing about what happened to me in 1932, the year John Coffey came on the Green Mile. Some of the memories are awful, but I can feel them sharpening my mind and my awareness the way a knife sharpens a pencil, and that makes the pain worthwhile. Writing and memory alone aren't enough, though. I also have a body, wasted and grotesque, though it may now be, and I exercise it as much as I can. It was hard at first—old fogies like me aren't much shakes when it comes to exercise just for the sake of exercise—but it's easier now that there's a purpose to my walks.

I go out before breakfast—as soon as it's light, most days—for my first stroll. It was raining this morning, and the damp makes my joints ache, but I hooked a poncho from the rack by the kitchen door and went out, anyway. When a man has a chore, he has to do it, and if it hurts, too bad. Besides, there are compensations. The chief one is keeping that sense of Real Time, as opposed to Georgia Pines Time. And I like the rain, aches or no aches. Especially in the early morning, when the day is young and seems full of possibilities, even to a washed-up old boy like me.

I went through the kitchen, stopping to beg two slices of toast from one of the sleepy-eyed cooks, and then went out. I crossed the croquet course, then the weedy little putting green. Beyond that is a small stand of woods, with a narrow path winding through it and a couple of sheds, no longer used and mouldering away quietly, along the way. I walked down this path slowly, listening to the sleek and secret patter of the rain in the pines, chewing away at a piece of toast with my few remaining teeth. My legs ached, but it was a low ache, manageable. Mostly I felt pretty well. I drew the moist gray air as deep as I could, taking it in like food.

And when I got to the second of those old sheds, I went in for awhile, and I took care of my business there.

When I walked back up the path twenty minutes later, I could feel a worm of hunger stirring in my belly, and thought I could eat something a little more substantial than toast. A dish of oatmeal, perhaps even a scrambled egg with a sausage on the side. I love sausage, always have, but if I eat more than one

these days, I'm apt to get the squitters. One would be safe enough, though. Then, with my belly full and with the damp air still perking up my brain (or so I hoped), I would go up to the solarium and write about the execution of Eduard Delacroix. I would do it as fast as I could, so as not to lose my courage.

It was Mr. Jingles I was thinking about as I crossed the croquet course to the kitchen door—how Percy Wetmore had stamped on him and broken his back, and how Delacroix had screamed when he realized what his enemy had done—and I didn't see Brad Dolan standing there, half-hidden by the Dumpster, until he reached out and grabbed my wrist.

"Out for a little stroll, Paulie?" he asked.

I jerked back from him, yanking my wrist out of his hand. Some of it was just being startled—anyone will jerk when they're startled—but that wasn't all of it. I'd been thinking about Percy Wetmore, remember, and it's Percy that Brad always reminds me of. Some of it's how Brad always goes around with a paperback stuffed into his pocket (with Percy it was always a men's adventure magazine; with Brad it's books of jokes that are only funny if you're stupid and mean-hearted), some of it's how he acts like he's King Shit of Turd Mountain, but mostly it's that he's sneaky, and he likes to hurt.

He'd just gotten to work, I saw, hadn't even changed into his orderly's whites yet. He was wearing jeans and a cheesy-looking Western-style shirt. In one hand was the remains of a Danish he'd hooked out of the kitchen. He'd been standing under the eave, eating it where he wouldn't get wet. And where he could watch for me, I'm pretty sure of that now. I'm pretty sure of something else, as well: I'll have to watch out for Mr. Brad Dolan. He doesn't like me much. I don't know why, but I never knew why Percy Wetmore didn't like Delacroix, either. And *dislike* is really too weak a word. Percy hated Del's guts from the very first moment the little Frenchman came onto the Green Mile.

"What's with this poncho you got on, Paulie?" he asked, flicking the collar. "This isn't yours."

"I got it in the hall outside the kitchen," I said. I hate it when he calls me Paulie, and I think he knows it, but I was damned if I'd give him the satisfaction of seeing it. "There's a whole row of them. I'm not hurting it any, would you say? Rain's what it's made for, after all."

“But it wasn’t made for *you*, Paulie,” he said, giving it another little flick. “That’s the thing. Those slickers’re for the employees, not the residents.”

“I still don’t see what harm it does.”

He gave me a thin little smile. “It’s not about *harm*, it’s about the *rules*. What would life be without rules? Paulie, Paulie, Paulie.” He shook his head, as if just looking at me made him feel sorry to be alive. “You probably think an old fart like you doesn’t have to mind about the rules anymore, but that’s just not true. *Paulie*.”

Smiling at me. Disliking me. Maybe even hating me. And why? I don’t know. Sometimes there *is* no why. That’s the scary part.

“Well, I’m sorry if I broke the rules,” I said. It came out sounding whiney, a little shrill, and I hated myself for sounding that way, but I’m old, and old people whine easily. Old people *scare* easily.

Brad nodded. “Apology accepted. Now go hang that back up. You got no business out walking in the rain, anyway. Specially not in those woods. What if you were to slip and fall and break your damned hip? Huh? Who do you think’d have to hoss your elderly freight back up the hill?”

“I don’t know,” I said. I just wanted to get away from him. The more I listened to him, the more he sounded like Percy. William Wharton, the crazyman who came to the Green Mile in the fall of ’32, once grabbed Percy and scared him so bad that Percy squirted in his pants. *You talk about this to anyone*, Percy told the rest of us afterward, *and you’ll all be on the breadlines in a week*. Now, these many years later, I could almost hear Brad Dolan saying those same words, in that same tone of voice. It’s as if, by writing about those old times, I have unlocked some unspeakable door that connects the past to the present—Percy Wetmore to Brad Dolan, Janice Edgecombe to Elaine Connelly, Cold Mountain Penitentiary to the Georgia Pines old folks’ home. And if that thought doesn’t keep me awake tonight, I guess nothing will.

I made as if to go in through the kitchen door and Brad grabbed me by the wrist again. I don’t know about the first one, but this time he was doing it on purpose, squeezing to hurt. His eyes shifting back and forth, making sure no one was around in the early-morning wet, no one to see he was abusing one of the old folks he was supposed to be taking care of.

“What do you do down that path?” he asked. “I know you don’t go down there and jerk off, those days are long behind you, so what do you do?”

“Nothing,” I said, telling myself to be calm, not to show him how bad he was hurting me and to be calm, to remember he’d only mentioned the path, he didn’t know about the shed. “I just walk. To clear my mind.”

“Too late for that, Paulie, your mind’s never gonna be clear again.” He squeezed my thin old man’s wrist again, grinding the brittle bones, eyes continually shifting from side to side, wanting to make sure he was safe. Brad wasn’t afraid of breaking the rules; he was only afraid of being *caught* breaking them. And in that, too, he was like Percy Wetmore, who would never let you forget he was the governor’s nephew. “Old as you are, it’s a miracle you can remember *who* you are. You’re *too* goddam old. Even for a museum like this. You give me the fucking creeps, Paulie.”

“Let go of me,” I said, trying to keep the whine out of my voice. It wasn’t just pride, either. I thought if he heard it, it might inflame him, the way the smell of sweat can sometimes inflame a bad-tempered dog—one which would otherwise only growl—to bite. That made me think of a reporter who’d covered John Coffey’s trial. The reporter was a terrible man named Hammersmith, and the most terrible thing about him was that he hadn’t known he was terrible.

Instead of letting go, Dolan squeezed my wrist again. I groaned. I didn’t want to, but I couldn’t help it. It hurt all the way down to my ankles.

“What do you do down there, Paulie? Tell me.”

“Nothing!” I said. I wasn’t crying, not yet, but I was afraid I’d start soon if he kept bearing down like that. “Nothing, I just walk, I like to walk, let go of me!”

He did, but only long enough so he could grab my other hand. That one was rolled closed. “Open up,” he said. “Let Poppa see.”

I did, and he grunted with disgust. It was nothing but the remains of my second piece of toast. I’d clenched it in my right hand when he started squeezing my left wrist, and there was butter—well, oleo, they don’t have real butter here, of course—on my fingers.

“Go on inside and wash your damned hands,” he said, stepping back and taking another bite of his Danish. “Jesus Christ.”

I went up the steps. My legs were shaking, my heart pounding like an engine with leaky valves and shaky old pistons. As I grasped the knob that would let me into the kitchen—and safety—Dolan said: “If you tell anyone I squeezed your po’ old wrist, Paulie, I’ll tell them you’re having delusions. Onset of senile dementia, likely. And you know they’ll believe me. If there are bruises, they’ll think you made them yourself.”

Yes. Those things were true. And once again, it could have been Percy Wetmore saying them, a Percy that had somehow stayed young and mean while I’d grown old and brittle.

“I’m not going to say anything to anyone,” I muttered. “Got nothing to say.”

“That’s right, you old sweetie.” His voice light and mocking, the voice of a lugoon (to use Percy’s word) who thought he was going to be young forever. “And I’m going to find out what you’re up to. I’m going to make it my business. You hear?”

I heard, all right, but wouldn’t give him the satisfaction of saying so. I went in, passed through the kitchen (I could now smell eggs and sausage cooking, but no longer wanted any), and hung the poncho back up on its hook. Then I went upstairs to my room—resting at every step, giving my heart time to slow—and gathered my writing materials together.

I went down to the solarium and was just sitting at the little table by the windows when my friend Elaine poked her head in. She looked tired, and, I thought, unwell. She’d combed her hair out but was still in her robe. We old sweeties don’t stand much on ceremony; for the most part, we can’t afford to.

“I won’t disturb you,” she said, “I see you’re getting set to write—”

“Don’t be silly,” I said. “I’ve got more time than Carter’s got liver pills. Come on in.”

She did, but stood by the door. “It’s just that I couldn’t sleep—again—and happened to be looking out my window a little earlier . . . and . . .”

“And you saw Mr. Dolan and me having our pleasant little chat,” I said. I hoped seeing was all she’d done; that her window had been closed and she hadn’t heard me whining to be let go.

“It didn’t look pleasant and it didn’t look friendly,” she said. “Paul, that Mr. Dolan’s been asking around about you. He asked *me* about you—last week,