

Realizations [The Run Series, #7: Alternate Ending]

by Adeline Williams

This is the winning student entry from ReadWorks' 2019 #HowTheRunShouldEnd Writing Contest.

Dennis awoke with a pounding headache. He felt a hand on his shoulder, though he wasn't quite sure whose it was. He struggled to lift his head as his vision cleared. He saw Mac and Jeremiah beside him.

"What happened?" Dennis mumbled. His voice quivered and pain throbbed behind his eyes. "Where's Anna?"

Mac turned bright red and pointed to a limp figure, splayed out across the trunk of the truck. Anna. Her leg wasn't anything more than a giant, dark purple log.

"I knocked her out," Mac admitted. He trembled and Dennis saw tears sparkling in his eyes. "I've never done anything like that before, but she hurt you. I know she's still in there somewhere, but we also have to protect ourselves," Mac stated. The last two words came out in a whisper. They were barely audible to Dennis' adjusting ears.

"Anyway. Maybe I should drive," Mac suggested before Dennis could reply.

When they arrived at the radio station, the area looked deserted. The eerie silence seemed to be holding its breath, waiting for something to happen.

"This looks risky," Jeremiah breathed, staring out the window and into the ominous fog outside.

"There's no way to deny that," Mac sighed. He slumped in his seat. "But I don't think we really have any other choice."

"We don't," Jeremiah stated. He took one last look at Anna and shoved himself out of the truck.

They approached a thick metal door. "You think a zombie's in there?" Mac whispered. His posture tensed when Dennis reached for the door handle. It opened effortlessly, but creaked in protest. Inside was only dark. The inky blackness seemed to pour out of the entrance and slither into the sky.

"Who's there?" They heard a man cry. They all jumped. "Don't come near me. I've been through enough."

"Don't worry," Dennis stuttered. "We're not infected."

The man slowly strode into the light. He had messy, dirty blonde hair and piercing blue eyes. A crease between his brows indicated his stress. They all knew who this was, even without proper introduction: *Petey Coltrain*.

"Get inside, *now*," he demanded. He examined each of the boys as he flicked a switch on a wall, illuminating the room. "I have some explaining to do."

The light in the radio station was so bright it temporarily blinded them. As soon as the room came into focus, the boys' eyes widened to the size of saucers. Every wall was draped with colorful wires and intricate sketches. The same theory came up in each of their minds: were those drawings... sound waves?

"Well, you better sit down," Petey sighed. "You kids aren't going to understand this, but the world is falling apart," he began. "It needs a push. A push in the right direction. *That* is my mission."

Dennis and Jeremiah looked completely clueless, but Mac had a disturbing theory of where Petey was going. Petey leaned on one of his many machines as he said, "You see, I discovered a way to mix up people's brain signals, using sound."

Before he even finished saying the last word, his audience erupted into chaos. They screamed and yelled at him, but Petey twisted a knob on one of his machines, grabbed some strange, deformed looking headphones and put them on his ears right as a slight beeping sound echoed through the radio station. Instantly, they all went silent.



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"There we go. Sound is so incredible," Petey murmured as he took off his headphones. "Look, I need you kids to help me. After everyone's gone, we're going to spark a new beginning!" He said it with so

much enthusiasm, and it made the boys want to start a whole other screaming match. But they remained silent, their brains not letting them talk. "My sound is inevitable," Petey assured them.

"Well, maybe I could just press this," Anna said. Every head whipped around to see her waving her hand over a button. She looked weary and stressed. Her body twitched and her limbs thrashed, but she forced them still. "If this sound is what is messing people up, then maybe I can just turn it off." Anna smiled at the boys, and they signaled for her to press it. She lifted her hand up in the air.

"NO!" Petey hollered, but it was too late. SLAM!

Anna stopped twitching and collapsed in relief. Jeremiah raced toward her and helped her up. She whispered, "Thank you." Her grin was so wide, it might've been permanently stuck on her face.

Mac ran to restrain Petey as Dennis went to re-twist the knob he used to silence them. They all glanced at one another and shared a look as the gravity of the situation dawned on them. They had just saved the world.

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The End.