

PAINLESS

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Ralph was sick of being such a wimp. It was the easiest thing in the world to make him cry. No one seemed to understand how much it hurt when someone hit him or when he fell or jammed his finger. Most of the boys and even some of the girls seemed to derive the greatest pleasure in making him cry, which was quite an easy thing to do.

The summer after Ralph turned 9 he went to the doctor. "Everything hurts me so much. I hate it. There must be some way you can stop my pains."

The doctor said, "Let's see!" He poked Ralph rather gently in three places.

"Ow, ow, ow" screamed Ralph. The doctor was surprised at Ralph's extreme sensitivity. "You see" said Ralph, "Everything really hurts me - even the lightest poke."

The doctor told Ralph that some children were born without any sensitivity to pain. "But that is not good at all. People who don't feel pain will keep their hands on a burning stove and get severely burned. Believe it or not, pain actually saves our lives."

"But can you get rid of my pain?" "Yes, it is possible. All we have to do is pinch the right nerves in the right parts of the brain and you will not feel any pain."

Ralph assured the doctor that he was mature enough to know when to move his hand off a fire and that he would be very careful. Ralph's parents agreed and gave the doctor permission for the operation.

The operation was a success. Ralph poked himself and didn't feel a thing. A big smile crossed his face.

When he returned to school the kids started in right where they had left off. One of the boys slapped him on the back. Ralph cringed when he saw the slap coming but this time he didn't cry because it didn't hurt. He didn't even feel it. And because he didn't like that boy he hit him back. The boy hit Ralph harder but it didn't hurt at all. Ralph hit the boy back even harder.

This exchange went on for several rounds until the boy began to cry and gave up. Ralph felt as victorious as he was.

By the time he had reached high school Ralph had become a champion runner. Other boys slowed down much sooner than Ralph because their lungs or legs hurt. Not Ralph. He would pant as hard as they but it didn't hurt a bit. He loved being a champion. First of all, no one could even think of him as a wimp, and second, he got a lot of attention. All the boys admired him and the girls sort of swooned over him.

Ralph really liked one of those girls - Theresa. One day they were alone together outside the high school building. Theresa kissed Ralph. He didn't feel a thing. You could see that Theresa was hurt and insulted. After that she wouldn't talk to Ralph or even look at him.

That made Ralph feel terrible. He felt an emotional pain that was worse than most physical pains. The more that he thought about it, the more he realized it would be a good thing to have some pain because if you can't feel pain you can't feel pleasure either.

So Ralph went back to the doctor. "Can you restore some of my feelings? I can't even feel a thing when a girl kisses me." "Wow", said the doctor, "I hadn't thought about that. But restoring feelings may be much more difficult than removing them. It's like breaking something is easier than putting it together. But our techniques have improved. Come back in a month and I'll let you know what I can do"

When the physically painless but emotionally painful month had passed Ralph returned to the doctor. "Yes, we have figured out how to restore some of your feelings so that you are not so sensitive to pain but at least you'll feel something."

It was a difficult operation, but the doctor thought it was a success. "Only time will tell."

Ralph waited a few days and then got up all his courage and approached Theresa. "Kiss me!" he almost demanded. Theresa was still brooding over how he had humiliated her. This was simply too much. Before she quite realized it, she smacked Ralph right on the cheek, real hard.

Ralph almost screamed, "Ow, that hurt!" Then, realizing that he could feel again a big smile crossed his face. "How wonderful!" he blurted out.

(Theresa was confused.)