

**THE STEPS OF DAELYIN'S DECISION TO COMMIT SUICIDE AS AN  
ESCAPE WAY IN JULIE ANNE PETERS' BY THE TIME YOU READ  
THIS, I'LL BE DEAD**

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**Abstract**

This study analyzes the steps of Daelyn's decision to commit suicide as an escape way in Julia Anne Peters' By The Time You Read This I'll Be Dead. The objective of this study is to find out the steps of Daelyn's decision to commit suicide as an escape way. To answer the problem, the writers apply a psychoanalytic theory from Roy Baumeister named escape theory. The writers use library research as the method to collect the data. The result of the study reveals that Daelyn gets through six steps until she decides to commit suicide as an escape way. Those six steps are Daelyn experiences bad conditions in her current life as the result of her painful experiences, Daelyn makes negative assumptions about herself, Daelyn realizes that her life is worse than other people as the result of comparing herself with others' standards, Daelyn experiences the negative effect as the result of self-comparison, Daelyn is in a mental stage where she does not feel any emotions and senses in her life, and finally, Daelyn decides to commit suicide.

**Keywords:** suicide, escape, pain, step

**Introduction**

A novel is a work of literature that always has messages of life to learn. Usually, the story of a novel is a reflection of what happens in the real world. A lot of novels talk about big issues in the world that gives the readers an experience to see other perspectives of an issue apart from the news's perspective. Even though it is fiction, the readers can really feel what the author thinks about a certain issue and they can certainly take many lessons from a novel.

By The Time You Read This, I'll Be Dead is a novel that talks about serious issues in the world, and one of them is bullying that leads to suicide. The main character in the novel is Daelyn Rice, a teenage girl that has experienced many horrible bullying. She has done several suicide attempts, but she fails and then she tries to do it again in a more organized way to escape from the pain of being bullied. Daelyn Rice is in a recovery stage after her suicide attempts. Her parents watch her all the



time, but she keeps a little secret that no one knows. She has planned another suicide attempt through [Through-the-Light.com](http://Through-the-Light.com), a suicide website that can help her successfully execute her suicide attempt. The website tells her that she has 23 days to do suicide. She feels that it is too long, but she still does it. During 23 days of waiting, she tells about her past experiences about bullying, a weird boy that always appears on a bench near the school, and how her parents treat her and many more.

By The Time You Read This, I'll Be Dead is written by Julie Anne Peters who was born in Jamestown, New York on January 1, 1952. In her early career life, before she becomes an author, she worked in many other fields. She became a teacher, a programmer, and a research assistant. Peters' writing career began with her first two publications of her books, The Stinky Sneakers Contest, illustrated by Cat Bowman Smith, in 1992, and Risky Friends in 1993. Peters is an author of young adult fiction, she has written 20 books by now. Many of her books feature LGBT characters. During her writing career, she has won many awards; one of them is for By The Time You Read This, I'll Be Dead, which won ALA best fiction for young adults nomination in 2011.

The novel By The Time You Read This, I'll Be Dead mostly deals with the issues of bullying and suicide. People that are mostly struggling with these issues are teenagers. Suicide and bullying always appear in the news all the time and they are serious issues that need to be discussed more. World Health Organization estimates that at least one million people die each year because of suicide. In the last 45 years, suicide is one of the three leading causes of death among those aged 15 until 44. By studying suicide in the novel through the main character, the writers reveal the steps of someone who decides to commit suicide because that person wants to escape from his/her pain in life.

The topic of this study is quite interesting to be studied. By studying it, the writers can understand the steps of someone's decision to commit suicide as an escape way. In Julie Anne Peters' By The Time You Read This, I'll Be Dead, Daelyn has experienced many painful experiences since she was a kid. For example, when she was a little kid in kindergarten, no one wanted to be her friend because she was a fat kid and people always made fun of her. Those painful experiences have made Daelyn want to commit suicide so she can escape from the pain.

The writers use psychoanalytic criticism as the approach to conduct this research. By using escape theory from Roy Baumeister(1990), the writers try to reveal the steps of Daelyn's decision to commit suicide as an escape way.

The writers find one researcher who analyzes the same novel. The novel By The Time You Read This, I'll Be Dead has been analysed by another researcher from Universitas Sumatera Utara named Julia Ningsih

Samosir with the title An Analysis of Daelyn Rice's Inferiority in Julie Anne Peters' *By The Time You Read this, I'll be Dead*". In that research, Julia analyzes Daelyn's inferiority that is described in the novel and the effects of inferiority for Daelyn using sociology of literature by Welck and Warren. Thus, the research that has been conducted by Julia Ningsih Samosir is different from this research. The difference is, this research focuses more on the steps of Daelyn's decision to commit suicide as an escape way.

The writers also find another researcher that uses escape theory from Baumeister. The escape theory has been used by Danielle Williams from Bridgewater State College to conduct a research entitled Hurting to Cope: Self-Injurious Behavior as an Escape from Self-Focus. In her research, Danielle focuses on the humans' behavior of self-injurious to escape from self-focus which is different from this research because this research focuses on the steps of someone who decides to commit suicide as an escape way.

## **METHOD**

The writers implement library research to collect the data. It means that the writers collect the data by reading books, articles, journals, etc. It includes primary source and secondary source. The writers use the novel By The Time You Read This, I'll Be Dead which was published in 2010 by Hyperion DBG, an imprint of Disney Book Group in New York, USA as the primary source to collect the data. Then, as the secondary sources, the writers use articles, journal, electronic sources, and other sources related to the topic.

At first, the writers read By The Time You Read This, I'll Be Dead by Julie Anne Peters, and then highlight passages which are direct sentences and narration that can be used as proofs in analyzing the topic. Then, the writers will quote the passages into the research paper with proper quotation rules. The writers use other sources such as articles as the reference to analyze the topic. Afterward, the writers collect data as proofs of the analysis about the steps of Daelyn's decision to commit suicide as an escape way. Articles which review By The Time You Read This, I'll Be Dead by Julie Anne Peters become references for the writers to see other perspectives of the topic as a consideration while she is analyzing the topic.

## **DISCUSSION:**

### **SIX STEPS OF DAELYN'S DECISION TO COMMIT SUICIDE AS AN ESCAPE WAY**



Daelyn experiences six steps during her waiting for her last suicide attempt. Those six steps are as follows:

### **First Step: Daelyn's Bad Current Conditions as the Result of Her Painful Experiences**

Daelyn experiences bad conditions because of her painful experiences which are bullying. Daelyn has experienced bullying since she was a kid. Most of her bullying experiences are body shaming. She experienced body shaming at the actors audition, at girl scout event, in the first grade, in the middle school, and at the fat camp. Besides body shaming, Daelyn also experienced physical bullying in the middle school and she also experienced sexual harassment.

Those bullying experiences cause Daelyn to have so much pain that makes her want to commit suicide to escape the pain. Those bullying experiences also cause Daelyn to experience bad current conditions.

#### **1. Daelyn Does Not Have Friends**

Daelyn experiences body shaming very often. People say that Daelyn is fat. People also consider Daelyn as a loser because she gets bullied all the time. Because of that, no one wants to be her friends. Daelyn writes her story on [throughthelight.com](http://throughthelight.com) by saying, "No one wanted to sit by me. They said I smelled. This kid plugged his nose every time he passed by. He'd say real loud, 'did you fart?' I wanted to fart in his face" (Peters 47). It can be seen from the quotation that Daelyn explains no one wanted to sit with her because they thought Daelyn smelled and assumed that she always farted. Because Daelyn was fat, people assumed that she always farted, and it caused nobody wanted to sit beside her in school which means she did not have any friends at school.

On [throughthelight.com](http://throughthelight.com), Daelyn also shares her story that she was approached by a girl in the middle school. She tells the story to the website by saying,

The closes I came to having a real friend was this one time in middle school. She was new, this girl, so was I. I never learned her name. I'd know her face if I saw her again, and I still hear her voice. She plunked down at my lunch table, said hi, and just started talking and eating a cold, fried, white cheese sandwich and checking out all the cute guys, and always stunned and shocked because no one, not one person ever sat with me or talked to me at lunch, and finally she said in the strange accent, 'wat wid you? Why you look like dat'. She meant dumbfounded. Or ugly. I couldn't speak. I mean, I could've back then. I had functional vocal cords. She shrugged. She ate her whole lunch there, grabbing away at me, not even caring I was this close to tears for sharing her company (Peters 40).

From the quotation, it can be seen that Daelyn really wanted to be friend with the new girl. She was happy and was not expecting that the new girl would say hi and sit with her at lunch because no one ever did that. However, the new girl finally left Daelyn because she thought Daelyn was ugly. The new girl had no idea how happy Daelyn to share her company, but she was just the same like everybody else. The new girl said that Daelyn was ugly which means that Daelyn had an ugly body. Thus, Daelyn never has a friend.

## **2. Daelyn's Mom Forces Her to Do Many Diets**

Daelyn experiences many body shaming in her life because she is fat. Because of that, her mom forces her to do diets. It shows that her mom never accepts Daelyn's fat body. One time when scrolling throughthelight.com, she tells the story about her mom forcing her to do a diet by saying, "Kim's never said anything like that to me; I'd rather kill you than have you be fat. But she never just accepted me for the way I was. She was always "Let's try this new diet. We'll do it together. I could always lose ten pounds. She was thinking, and you could lose a hundred. Of course I'd cheat. Or cry at the table" (Peters 56-57). From the quotation, Daelyn explains that her mom never says anything mean about her body. However, Daelyn knows that her mom is embarrassed for having a fat kid like her. It shows that instead of supporting and encouraging Daelyn to love her body, she forces Daelyn to do a diet. Daelyn clearly does not want to do the diet because she says that she would cheat or cry at the table. She is sad that her mom does not accept her body.

Another type of diet that Daelyn's mom chooses for Daelyn is the fat camp. Her mom forces Daelyn to go to a fat camp one summer. Daelyn tells the story on the throughthelight.com by saying,

Fat camp was this place in Arizona, in the desert. It might've been an old military base. There were supposed to be fun activities like horseback riding and swimming and crafts. That was in the brochure mom gave me. Dad looked at it with me and said it looked great; mom said she loved going to girl scout camp. That should've tripped me off. She said "it'll be fantastic, you'll come back slim and healthy" (Peters 94).

In the quotation, Daelyn explains that her mom tells her to go to the fat camp. From the brochure, it looks like a nice place to spend the summer time. Her mom has the expectation that after Daelyn comes back from the fat camp, she will be slim and healthy. It shows that her mom does not like the fact that Daelyn is fat and being bullied because of that. She wants Daelyn to be slim that is why she sends Daelyn to the fat camp.

However, the actual fat camp does not look like in the brochure. Daelyn continues her story by saying, "The whole time I was there, I never



saw a horse. The pool was this dried-up sinkhole, and the counselors were college students or dropouts. They'd major in sadism" (Peters 94). The quotation explains that the fat camp does not have a horse or a pool. The counselors who run the place are a bunch of college students or dropouts which Daelyn describes that they would major in sadism. The fat camp is more like a torture place to force people to be slim in an extreme way. Daelyn is being tortured in that place because her mom does not want Daelyn to get bullied all the time because of her fat body.

### **Second Step: Daelyn's Negative Internal Attributions to Herself**

Daelyn has been through so much pain in her life. However, she never really blames anyone but herself. She feels everything that has happened to her is her own fault. In the novel, it shows that Daelyn often blames herself and makes attributions to herself. It causes her to have very low self-esteem.

#### **1. Daelyn Feels She is not Worth to be Liked**

When Daelyn meets Santana for the first time, Santana has already shown his interest to Daelyn. He watches Daelyn all the time on a bench in front of the school while she is waiting for her mom to pick her up. However, Daelyn does not feel that she is worth to be liked. When her mom asked, "was he talking to you? Do you know him?" Daelyn replies to herself, "He likes ugly sick girl who have to wear neck braces" (Peters 7). The quotation shows that she values herself as an unattractive girl. She feels she is ugly and sick, so she is not worth to be liked. The word "He likes ugly sick girl..." means that Daelyn is being sarcastic towards herself that she believes no one will ever like her because she is unattractive.

#### **2. Daelyn Blames Herself for Her Failed Suicide Attempt**

People always remind others not to do suicide. They always say that suicide is not the answer and Daelyn thinks they do not know anything since they are not in her position which means they do not get bully all the time. One time Daelyn remembers what people used to say about suicide, "Suicide is the easy way", then Daelyn answers it in her mind by saying, "If it's so easy, why am I still here" (Peters 15). The quotation means that Daelyn has tried to commit suicide before and it was not easy at all like what people say. Daelyn's last suicidal attempt failed, and Daelyn feels that it is also her fault. It can be seen in the novel when Daelyn says, "A year has passed since my last failure. Not attempt. Failure" (Peters 12). It shows that Daelyn sees her last suicidal attempt as her failure and she blames herself. She even says that it is not even an attempt, but it is a failure.

#### **3. Daelyn Thinks She is not Worth to be a Friend**



Daelyn feels that she is not worth to be a friend. Emily, one of the girls in her school approaches her every time she sees Daelyn. She talks a lot but she is nice to Daelyn. However, Daelyn does not feel she will be a good friend to her and it shows in the passage below,

When you showed up for chorus, I knew right away you were different." Then Daelyn says to herself, "What did she see in me?" Emily smiles again and Daelyn continues with "No, Emily. Don't choose me. I'm not worth your time. This is my fault. Mine. Making her think I'd be here for her (Peters 125).

From the quotation, it can be concluded that Daelyn is confused that Emily chooses to be her friend because she does not feel she is worth her time. Daelyn realizes that she will eventually commit suicide, so if Emily chooses her to be her friend then Emily will be disappointed because she will not be around very soon. It can be seen when Daelyn says in the quotation that she makes Emily think she will be here for her, so when Daelyn commits suicide, Emily will be disappointed because she thinks Daelyn will be her friend.

#### **4. Daelyn Assumes Everybody Looks Down on Her**

Daelyn has some questions repeated in her mind. One of them is how she will be remembered in this world when she is dead. She instantly answers that question with a loner and a loser (Peters 126). It means that Daelyn assumes that she will be remembered as a loner and loser when she is dead. It shows that Daelyn feels she is always alone because she does not have any friends in this world and now she does not even speak to avoid interaction in her life. Then, she is a loser which means she never wins or achieves anything in her life. Thus, she thinks everybody looks down on her as a loner and a loser.

Daelyn loves her parents but she hates the world they brought her into. Daelyn feels that when she is gone, her parents are the ones who will remember her for very long. Daelyn also feels her parents have done what they could to raise her in the best way possible. She loves her parents. However, Daelyn thinks that she will be remembered in a bad way by many people. It shows when Daelyn states, "I do love them. I just hate the world they brought me into. I'll be remembered as a fat kid, frightened, weak, stupid kid. Too scared to stand up for me" (Peters 126-127). This passage shows that Daelyn thinks everybody sees her as a fat, frightened, weak, stupid, and defenseless kid. Then, when she is dead, those labels will stick on her name forever.

### **Third Step: Daelyn's High Self-Awareness as the Result of Comparing Herself with Others' Standards**

Daelyn experiences high self-awareness that is caused by comparing herself with others' standards. High self-awareness means that Daelyn awares of her flaws and she also realizes that her life is not like anybody else.

#### **1. Daelyn Feels She Does Not Have Future Like Everybody Else**

One time when she is visiting the suicide website [throughthelight.com](http://throughthelight.com), she reads a random rants on the website's categories. The rants say, "The future holds no hope or meaning to me. I know that by killing myself other people will suffer, but why go through this interminable hell? What's the point of being here if you feel unloved and abandoned by those you used to trust and count on? What's the point of living if you don't belong anywhere?" (Peters 16). The person who writes the rants believes that he/she does not have a bright future like everyone else. He/she describes life as an interminable hell which means it is better to escape from it by killing him/herself.

Daelyn agrees with the rants, she says, "so true" after reading the rants which means that Daelyn also believes that she does not have a future like everyone else. Agreeing with the statement "the future holds no hope or meaning for me" means that she feels she does not have future like everybody else. Everybody which means people in general sees future as a hope for the better life. According to Woodman in his article entitled Young People and the Future, "Most young people do plan for the future" (8). It means that young people in general have plan for their future because they have hopes for their future to have a better life and chance. Daelyn does not see that in her future. She has decided to commit suicide, so she realizes that she will never have future. She chooses to be dead instead because her pain inside her is too much after her bullying experiences than her hope for the future to be better.

#### **2. Daelyn Does Not Have Normal School Life Like Everybody Else**

When Daelyn moves to the new school, she does not experience many bullying anymore. However, everyone avoids her every day and she does not have any friends. It shows when Daelyn says,

No one tries to engage me all morning, which isn't unusual. My econ teacher smiles, but she has to. She's a nun. It's obvious by the way my teachers avoid me or look at me like I'm a freak that they know my history. Thanks, mom and dad. No doubt they told the principal who talked to all my teachers, who now condemn and pity me (Peters 16).



The quotation shows that in school, everybody avoids her. Daelynn feels that people in her school see her as a freak kid because her mom and dad tell the principal about Daelynn's bullying history in her previous school. Then, the principal tells all of her teachers about it. Even she feels her teacher's smile is not genuine. She has to smile to Daelynn because she is a nun and a nun has to be nice to anyone. Daelynn feels her teachers only pity her because they know Daelynn's bad history in her previous school. Everybody which means people in general has friends at school and they have genuine interaction with their teachers, it is not because the teachers pity the students. According to Willms in his article entitled Student Engagement at School: A Sense of Belonging and Participation, "School is central to the daily life of many youths. They view schooling as essential to their long-term wellbeing. Students tend to have good relations with school staff and with other students – they feel that they belong at school" (4). It means most of students in general view school as the central of their life and they usually have good relationship with students and teachers. Good relationship at school means that students have genuine interaction with the teachers and they have friends at school. Daelynn does not have normal school life and normal interaction at school like that. It means Daelynn does not have a normal school life like others. She always feels lonely in school.

#### **Fourth Step: The Negative Affect that Daelynn Experiences as the Result of Self-Comparison**

Self-comparison that Daelynn carries out from the third step causes negative affect. These negative affect can be anxiety, depression, self-blame, and low self-esteem.

##### **1. Daelynn Has Insomnia and Nightmare as Signs of Anxiety**

One time Daelynn explains that she actually has sleeping problem. It can be seen in this passage, "I don't sleep. All night long I'm wide awake, thinking, secrets, secrets, secrets. There are secrets in my past no one needs to know. Secrets in my present that might kill Kim and Chip. I don't want to take my secrets with me when I go. When I pass through the light, I want to be free of everything and everyone" (Peters 49). The passage explains that Daelynn does not sleep at night because she thinks about her past and present secrets. Her past secrets are about her bullying experiences. She does not tell her parents or anyone about her bullying experiences until now. Her present secrets that might kill her mom and dad are her plan to commit suicide, the suicide website, and other things that are related to her suicide plan. Those secrets give her anxiety and keep her awake through the night.

One night when Daelynn is visiting the suicide website Throughthelight.com, her mom suddenly comes to her room and asks if she is okay. Obviously Daelynn does not talk. Then, her mom continues to

ask if she has a rough night. The Daelyn says to herself, "I don't sleep well. I have nightmare" (Peters 26). That passage shows that Daelyn never sleeps well. She has nightmare because of her bullying experiences from the past and her suicide plan. Daelyn's nightmare is caused by her past and present secrets. Those secrets make her feel worry and fear because she still thinks about the fear of being bullied from her past bullying experiences. Daelyn also feels worry that her plan to commit suicide will not go as her plan. Worry and fear are signs of anxiety.

## **2. Daelyn's Unhappiness as a Sign of Depression**

Daelyn always feels unhappy. She never states in the novel that she remembers or has a happy moment in her life. In her appointment with her doctor, the doctor asks "How would you rate your happiness quotient, Daelyn?" then Daelyn answers to herself, "Oh, off the scale"(Peters 27). Off the scale means that her happiness cannot be measured with anything because people will never understand how unhappy she is. It shows that even with the help of a doctor, Daelyn never feels better about her life. She always feels unhappy which indicates depression.

Daelyn also does not feel happy at her school. It shows when she says, "School is school. I dreamwalk down the halls. I pass the time wishing I was gone" (Peters 50). The impression "school is school" means that there is nothing interesting and exciting about school for Daelyn. Then, Daelyn dreamwalks down the halls means that she does not even live in the moment in the school. She also wishes that if only her last suicide attempt worked, she would be gone now and she does not have to go to school anymore. Those impressions show that Daelyn is not happy in school.

Daelyn says that she is unhappy which means she loses interest and pleasure in her life. Daelyn also states that there is nothing interesting and exciting about school. Loss of interest or pleasure in life are signs that Daelyn is depressed.

## **Fifth Step: Daelyn's Cognitive Deconstruction Stage**

Cognitive deconstruction is a mental stage where someone does not feel any emotions and senses in life. One time Daelyn's mom tells her that she has a plan to drive at summer to see Aunt Beth and the other family members. Then, at the end of the conversation her mom says that she loves Daelyn so much while squeezing Daelyn's shoulders. Daelyn answers that by talking to herself, "I know. I know they do, in their own helpless way. At times like this, I'm thankful I don't feel love" (Peters 84). The quotation shows that in Daelyn's opinion, her parents actually love her but they cannot really do much to help her to get away from her pain of being bullied. Helpless way means that her parents never take a real action to defend Daelyn everytime she gets bullied, instead, most of the

time they tells Daelyn to forget about the bullying. Daelyn is also grateful that she does not feel love in her life anymore. It will be easier for Daelyn to commit suicide if she does not feel love because if she does, and she loves her parents, she will probably consider not to do her plan to commit suicide for the sake of her parents. Daelyn does not feel any senses in life such as love, so the love of those around her does not stop her from her plan to commit suicide.

Daelyn wants to end her pain that is caused by her bullying experiences. Her main goal is not the death but to be free from the pain. She has felt too much psychological pain until she cannot handle it. She begins to feel that her life does not matter. It appears in the novel when she says, "I have no intent. I have no reason to live, that's all. When I'm gone I don't want to be remembered" (Peters 57). In the quotation, Daelyn explains that she does not have any intention and reason to be alive. Then when she is dead, she does not want to be remembered. That means Daelyn does not feel any happiness in her life and she just want to die.

One time when Daelyn is visiting the website, she explains that the reason she commits suicide is to end the pain and not to hurt anyone. The reason she does that because she wants to escape from the pain. It shows when she says in the novel, "I just want the pain to end" (Peters 56). It means that Daelyn has felt unbearable pain and she needs to escape from that.

Daelyn has experienced the cognitive deconstruction stage because she has refused to feel things in her life as it is a way to escape from her pain.

### **Sixth Step: Daelyn's Increased Suicidal Ideation**

Daelyn joins the suicidal website [throughthelight.com](http://throughthelight.com) because she has planned to commit suicide again. By joining the website, it shows that Daelyn's suicidal ideation has increased because the website is for those who want to make a successful suicide plan.

Daelyn also has imagined her death experience when she is answering questions on [Throughthelight.com](http://Throughthelight.com) by saying, "Here's what I picture: This plume of warm air sweeps me up and drops me at the gate. Not a pearly gate, or an ornamental gate. A metaphoric gate. My spirit, or soul, or consciousness enters a spectra area and I see the light. It's an orb in the distance, like a shiny dime" (Peters 82).

Daelyn imagines when she is dying, a wave of warm air will bring her to a metaphoric gate which means it is not an actual gate but it is like a spectra area with a ball of light just like a shiny dime. By imagining it, Daelyn's intention to commit suicide is getting clearer and stronger because she is not scared about the idea of dying.

Daelyn has decided the way she commits suicide by drowning. She says it when she is fulfilling the form of the website, "I key in, Drowning" (Peters 77). She chooses this method because this is the only possible way. She has read other methods of suicide such as gun shot and freezing to death, then drowning is the perfect choice because she has the access to do it.

In the end, Daelyn commits suicide. On the determination day, she logs in the website and finally confirms to delete her account which means she will commit suicide as her plan. Daelyn says on the last day of her life that there is no more Daelyn Rice (Peters 131) which means she will be dead that day.

### Conclusion

Daelyn's experiences of bullying help the writers to reveal Daelyn's decision to commit suicide as an escape way. Daelyn experiences six steps of someone who decides to suicide as an escape way. First, Daelyn experiences bad current conditions as the result of her failure suicidal attempt. Second, Daelyn makes attributions to herself. Third, she experiences high self-awareness as the result of comparing herself with others' standards. Fourth, Daelyn feels the negative effects as the result of self-comparison. Fifth, Daelyn experiences the cognitive destruction stage. Sixth, Daelyn's suicidal ideation. Daelyn has experienced those steps which means she commits suicide as an escape way. Daelyn commits suicide as an escape way from pain and Daelyn has experienced 6 steps to decide to commit suicide as she perceives it in a way to escape from her problems.

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