

Suicide Draft

by Nathaniel Tower

“Excuse me, Professor Robbins, can you look this over for me?” Randy Timmons spoke rather timidly, clearing his wavering throat twice and keeping his soft brown eyes aimed at the hideous orange rug covering the professor's office floor.

“Sure thing...” Professor Robbins said, also avoiding eye contact as he trailed off in a way that would have made it clear to Randy that the wise, old man didn't know his name, that is, if Randy hadn't had much bigger things on his mind.

Randy eagerly shoved the single sheet of thin, white paper into the professor's uneager hand.

Without looking at what the student had proffered him, Professor Robbins was suddenly overcome with surprise that bordered upon curiosity. The man had been expecting the boy to hand him a thick stack of papers, jabbed through carelessly by a staple whose binding powers were far exceeded, a staple that hung on for dear life knowing it either must continue to perform the Sisyphean task or forever be lost in the messy tangles of carpet hair. As an esteemed professor of English Literature, Robbins knew all too well the mammoth reading load of boring and dull drivel of never-blossoming literary scholars that was required of him. Had this young man really brought the professor just a single sheet, possibly some free verse poem about the struggles of mankind or beauty of an apple seed?

“I'll get right to this,” the suddenly interested professor said, and for once in his life, the man didn't immediately drop the student work into a pile on his cherry desk.

Randy stood awkwardly, hoping the man would offer him a seat in

the black leather chair pushed inconveniently in the corner on the other side of a tall waste basket, a chair obviously meant for no one.

“Have a seat,” the professor mumbled to Randy, gesturing calmly in an almost kingly fashion with his free hand.

Randy dropped his soft briefcase to the floor and slunk into the chair, his eyes fixating on a particularly interesting groove in the wood of the desk. Randy wondered how such a groove could come to be, and he postulated how that groove felt about itself and how the other grooves felt about it. It seemed to flow in a pattern contrary to the rest of the markings, somehow defying the natural current of the world. Secretly, Randy hoped that Professor Robbins would approve of his work.

“Huh,” the professor emitted after enough time had seemingly passed for a man of his reading expertise to have read the single sheet a dozen times.

Randy wondered what exactly the man's “huh” meant. He continued to sit in an awed silence, hoping the man would elaborate in an uncruel way.

“Well, son,” Professor Robbins began in a very unfatherly voice, “I must say, I've never seen a work quite like this one.”

The cryptic comment did not resonate at all with the young student who braved a quick glance at the professor.

Professor Robbins exchanged the glance, took a long drink from his coffee mug, leaned back deeply in his chair, and exhaled. “Yes, I think this has lots of potential. Lots of potential. The length is surprisingly appropriate and the message is very clear. However, it doesn't quite have the punch or originality that I would like to see in this type of writing. Is this your first attempt?”

“Yes sir,” Randy said hurriedly, “at least at the letter.” There was something of a triumphant smile on the boy's face, but it was hidden by a much deeper and more prevalent emotion that couldn't quite be pinpointed.

“I've never attempted such a piece myself. Thought about it a few times, but who hasn't,” he chuckled.

Randy chuckled back.

“Do you mind if I read this out loud, or will that make you uncomfortable?”

“No, not at all sir. Sometimes it's good to hear your own work.”

Professor Robbins paused for a second, staring intently at the student, impressed with such a deep insight. After a brief moment, Robbins assumed that comment was simply inspired by something he himself had once revealed in class, and with this pride guiding his brain, he cleared his throat and began to read with a passion Randy had never before heard.

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“To whom it may concern:

I know there is supposed to be a lot of beauty and opportunity in the world but I just can't see past all the bad. And I am simply an insignificant dust mite, lost amidst the billions of larger particles floating around me, trying to suffocate me with their every movement. If the world is my oyster, then I am a drowning fisherman, unable to recover the riches that lie within. This is no one's fault. Rather, it is everyone's. And yet I blame none of you. I hope that my exit from the world will have as little impact as my entry. I would hate to think that I was wrong all these years about my own meaninglessness. Deep within I know some of you will be

upset, at least for a moment. But even deeper, I know that the world will still turn, and that its rotation might even be a little smoother for it. So, dear world, whose dearness I have never truly known, I bid you adieu."

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The final syllable barely audible, Professor Robbins let the paper slip out of his hand, no dramatic effect intended, his soul completely drained from the brutal honesty of the page. Randy and Professor Robbins sat quietly for several minutes, engaging in a chess match of inarticulation.

"Now tell me, son, which classes of mine have you taken?" Professor Robbins studied the young man in all of his pimpled glory, sizing him up as a freshman, possibly a sophomore, but certainly no older. Except maybe for the lines around his eyes. Had Robbins just seen these tributaries of wrinkles, he might have pegged the lad for a soul who had lived a troubled eternity.

"None, sir."

"None?"

"That's correct. I've wanted to, but I've never been able to get in to one of them. They always fill up so quickly."

Professor Robbins smiled at his popularity. This he had already known.

"Then why did you come to me with this?"

"Because I respect you. And you're my academic advisor." The second part Randy said in a near whisper.

"Is that a fact? Ah yes, of course. Of course I am, Randall," the professor said with a sudden realization that was helped by the fact

that he had only three advisees, one of which was a student from India and a second that was a young woman. The odds were very much in his favor with this guess.

"It's just Randy."

"Of course it is. I usually go by transcript names though."

"My transcript just says Randy. It's my birth name."

"Well, that's not really the issue here, is it? The issue is what we're going to do about this letter." Professor Robbins picked it up off the desk and studied it again.

"What should I do?" Randy asked with more than a hint of desperation.

"Well, the good news is that it's not too late. It might take a few drafts, but I think we can nail this down and make it into a brilliant piece of literature. The ideas are certainly here, and the prose is strong, but I can't help but think there's something cliché about it. You want to make people really feel for you, right Randy?" The professor suddenly seemed interested in a close personal connection with the student, his dark eyes locked in on the young man in the black leather chair.

"Well, I suppose I do. But that's not how I feel. I don't feel like I really make anyone feel."

"Then that is exactly what you need to do. What's your timeline here?"

"Excuse me?"

"How much time would you say we have until you want this to be,

um, complete?"

Randy averted his glance to the orange carpet, debating whether or not he should tell the professor how he really felt. The truth was that Randy didn't quite know how he felt. Why had he come to the professor in the first place? Weren't there plenty of other people he could have talked to about this? He must have wanted the man's help in the writing process. If everything does indeed happen for a reason, as they say, then the reason why Randy had been gifted with such a talented advisor was quite clear at the moment. This was his chance to make a mark.

"I'd like to have it wrapped up by next Friday," he finally said with a boldness that stunned Professor Robbins.

"You mean right before spring break?"

"Yup, that's right. I want to finalize this the day everyone is set to leave for their wonderful and warm vacations."

"Well, that's more than ironic," the professor laughed.

"What?"

"Don't you think the letter will just get lost in the hubbub of everything? I think you need to pick a different date."

Randy stared at him confusedly, wondering how anyone could speak so reasonably and nonchalantly about a thing such as this.

As Randy stared, the professor began to ramble on and on about the power of language and how he could make the words more meaningful.

Randy, tuning out the professor, wondered for a moment if perhaps

the man should be trying to talk him out of it, or at least probing into the whys and hows rather than simply talking about allusions, modifier placement, and extended but not dead metaphors.

After a few minutes, Randy realized that Professor Robbins had stopped speaking and was now just staring at him. Randy broke the long silence.

“Aren't you going to try to talk me out of it?”

“Look, son, to be quite frank, we've never spoken much before. I don't know you and you don't know me. You obviously didn't come here hoping to be talked out of anything. You came here for revision advice. And I'm more than happy to give it to you, but you've got to cooperate a little more. This can't be a one man show.”

“But—”

“Hey, my job is to advise,” he continued, “and I'm giving you the advice that you need. You don't need me to tell you whether or not to kill yourself. That you'll decide on your own. You simply need me to help you make this into a masterpiece.” He slapped the single sheet as he spoke, a delicate almost tearing sound emanating from the paper.

Randy sighed. Something about that sound and gesture made him realize the inevitability of his fate. Defeated, he succumbed to Professor Robbins' desire to make the greatest suicide note of all time. They spent hours drafting and redrafting, filling the trashcan to the brim with crumbled wads of mediocrity and inefficiency. They slaved away until the coffee was gone, the custodians had vacuumed, and the sun had long ago disappeared. Their eyes both became heavy, but they fought through it until, finally, it was finished. The perfect suicide note.

When Randy read it over one final time before leaving the office, chills went down his spine and tears filled his eyes. There was so much power in the words that he couldn't wait to share it with the world. It was the kind of note that had the power to really change people. There was so much power on that piece of paper that Randy forgot to thank the professor for all his help. Professor Robbins didn't mind though. Had Randy thanked him, he would have said that the pleasure was all his.

After the trek across campus, Randy carefully locked the door, glad that his roommate had yet to come home. He looked at the note one more time, proud that he had come up with something so beautiful. He imagined the waterfalls of tears that would follow, possibly enough to drown all the problems of the world. He placed the letter on the desk, propped up between the keys of his keyboard. He took a necktie, blue with diagonal red stripes and maybe a hint of brown, and tied it tightly around the hook on the door, creating a loose knot on the other end. It was a fine silk tie, one that his grandmother had purchased in Italy several years ago. It was his only tie.

He stared at the tie for a moment, then heard the fluttering of a sheet of paper. Glancing over, he watched the suicide note crash to the floor, creating an eerie hollow thunder that echoed through the room. Again the chills came. He went over to read it once more. It was, after all, the most brilliant thing he had ever read.

Again, his eyes filled with tears, this time escaping from the lids and staining his cheeks. He wondered what time his roommate would return. He wondered when they would find his body. He wondered if they would call his mom or the ambulance first. He wondered if perhaps some girl on the floor would be devastated because of a secret crush she had harbored since day one. He wondered how many people would attend the funeral. He wondered...

And then he tore the note in half, then in fourths, then eighths, and

then just haphazardly, watching the scraps fall like confetti to the floor. The note had taken things too far. He hadn't meant to leave such a mark.

Leaving the torn remnants of brilliance on the floor, he returned to check the strength of the knot on the tie. It was secure and sturdy. He wondered if someone would try to piece together the scraps on the floor. He wondered if the necktie could really support his weight for long enough. There were so many things to wonder, but he didn't have time to wonder them all. He had already made up his mind. Now it was time to act.

When his roommate found him early the next morning, Randy was sound asleep in his bed, clutching the tie tightly in his arms. The roommate quietly stepped over the scraps of paper and climbed into his own bed in an attempt to ward off a hangover.

