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The Blue Book Value of Small Things

by Craig Kenworthy

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

DRAKE; *an army recruiter, age 40 to 50*

MIKE; *the father of a soldier, a used car salesman age 50 to 60*

TRISH; *a high school senior army recruit age 17*

SETTING

An army recruiter's office.

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(AT RISE: DRAKE is seated behind the desk; MIKE in one of two visitor's chairs in the office. There is a pen in a wooden holder at the center of the desk.)

Drake

So, you don't have any prior military experience, sir?

Mike

No.

Drake

We don't take someone over 42 years of age, sir, unless they are re-upping after a break in service.

Mike

I'm only 46. You can't make an exception?

Drake

For some skills we do. Doctors, lawyers – that kind of thing.

Mike

I sell cars.

Drake

I can't say we are full up there but that is not a skill set we need to have.

Mike

Couldn't hurt.

Drake

Listen, Mike, I want to tell you how much I appreciate your interest in serving your country, but I have an appointment now.

Mike

I really want to make this work. What if I knew someone who had served, knew them well?

Drake

That is not how this works, sir.

Mike

Well, what would it take to get you—

(TRISHA enters. SHE is 17 years old, heavy and wearing casual clothes.)

Drake

Trisha, glad you made it. Did you get those forms I emailed?

Trisha

Yeah.

(TRISHA sits. SHE looks at Mike.)

Drake

Do you two know each other?

Mike

No.

Trisha

I've seen him. He sold my auntie a car. It don't run very well.

Drake

Mike, Trisha and I have a number of things to cover. Thank you again for...

Mike

Do her parents know she's here?

Drake

Sir, that's really not your...

Trisha

Excuse me. I am right here. Why don't you ask me the question?

Mike

Do your parents know you are here?

Trisha

Hell, no.

(TRISHA turns back to DRAKE and pulls out some papers.)

Drake

Again, thanks for your interest, Mr. Walker.

(MIKE , concerned, exits.)

Drake

You know we are going to need your mom's signature.

Trisha

I was just messing with him. She signed, but she wants to make sure I get the med tech course.

You will. Drake

Where do I sign? Trisha

Not yet. I need to go over a couple of things first. Drake

(MIKE enters.)

I'm sorry, but I just have to ask if this is the kind of person you are getting now? Mike

Excuse me? Trisha

Someone like this? Mike

Mr. Walker, I am going to insist you to leave now. Drake

You used to take football players, student council. My wife... my ex-wife called them young adult patriots. Mike

Trisha is a fine young woman. Drake

Trisha is right here. And I am a fine young woman. Trisha

Kids who were going off to college if they got to. Are you off to, what, Harvard, when you get through? If you get... Mike

I am going to be a medical technician. Help people, not sell them used cars. Trisha

Do I have to call someone, sir? Drake

They give you a flag. Mike

I know. One of them little shoulder patches. Trisha

Mike

No, it's full sized. Except they fold it up in a little triangle.

Drake

Shit. Trisha, can you give us a few minutes?

Mike

They fold it so neatly, much more neatly than you think that much cloth can fold.

Drake

Mr. Walker, I am so sorry.

Trisha

What are you sorry for? He's just some guy trying to scare me, right?

Mike

They come to your house. Unless you are separated. Then they find someone who calls you, hoping they can lie well enough about needing to come over for some other reason, like wanting to borrow golf clubs. I don't even know where those are. When I said, "How badly is he hurt?" they said, "He's gone." Like he left work early or something.

Drake

Where was your son?

Mike

Afghanistan. Helmand.

Drake

Again, I am very sorry for your family's loss. Trisha, how about if I come out to your apartment later today?

Trisha

No, I want to do this now.

Drake

Now is not the best time.

Mike

Afraid of what she'll hear me say next?

Drake

No.

Trisha

(To DRAKE) Why did he come here?

Drake

He wanted to enlist.

Trisha

(*Laughing nervously*) And he was flipping me shit? I could probably carry him further than he could carry me.

Drake

Trisha, please.

Mike

It's amazing what doctors can do. Half your brain can spill out, half of what makes you only you laying there in the dirt. Did you ever see that kind of thing?

Drake

Bits and pieces of things you aren't supposed to ever see. Like Halloween without any candy. That's what we used to say over there.

Trisha

I'll get to help people who are hurt like that and I am going to sign my papers today.

Drake

Mike, if you want to talk about this, there are people I can call. Or you can talk to me.

Mike

No. No. My boy, they got him a plane to Germany. Six hours. They kept him going for six hours.

Trisha

Did he sign up your kid?

Drake

No, I didn't. I know who I signed up. There are two who... I know who I signed up.

Mike

I was just walking by here and saw the sign. I told myself I am going to walk right in and ask them to make a trade, (*Breaking down*), a trade in. This piece of shit with a lot of miles for a brand new just off the truck 19 year old who wanted better than community college.

Trisha

My mom can't even afford community college. Or a car.

Mike

I could get you a car. If you leave here right now, I'll get you a free car.

Trisha

(*To DRAKE*) Aren't you going to say anything?

Drake

No.

Trisha

Because you feel bad for him?

Drake

No, because if a car is enough to change your mind, well...

Mike

I have some money, from the death benefit. Money for school later? I could help with that.

Trisha

How much?

Drake

Okay, now I am going to say something. She can't take your money, sir.

Trisha

I don't want it anyway. Can I use this pen when I sign? (*Picks up holder*)

Drake

No.

Mike

Is it some kind of commemorative award? Your first or your one thousandth sent to fight?

(DRAKED reaches across to take it from her. MIKE grabs it first.)

Trisha

I probably have one in my bag.

(TRISH starts looking through her purse. SHE does this through the following action: DRAKE rises and crosses to MIKE. HE puts his hand out for the pen holder. MIKE looks at it then smashes it to the floor. DRAKE looks down on the pieces. TRISH looks up at them. MIKE, flushed, glares at DRAKE. [Beat] DRAKE looks at the pieces again, then hugs MIKE and holds him gently. MIKE begins weeping. TRISHA gets up and picks up the pen holder and reads the plaque on it.)

Trisha

It says specialist Thomas Maxwell Reed. 11/23/2006.

(DRAKE takes MIKE to a chair and sits him down. HE then takes the pen and pieces from TRISHA.)

Mike

Who is he?

Drake

I bought this pen myself, a fifty dollar one. I thought, "Who should sign up to serve your country with a plastic Bic?" So, I used this for everyone.

Make it more of an event.
Mike

Right.
Drake

So, Thomas died?
Trisha

Drake
Engineer's assistant. Checking structures after bomb damage, that kind of thing. When they found his right hand it still had three fingers on it.

Mike
My son was in a convoy.

Drake
There was a bit of cloth clutched in Thomas' fingers. Part of someone else's uniform.

Trisha
Like he tried to pull someone away? Right?

Mike
Or grabbed them in fear.

Trisha
Was it an IED?

Drake
It was just a bomb. Improvised device? They make it sound like some guy with a cooking show.

Mike
Was Thomas trying to save someone or not?

Drake
The day before it happened he wrote his girlfriend that, "No, it was not okay for her to go to the prom with someone else as 'just friends.'" She was still a junior in high school.

Mike
Which was it? You don't know what happened to Thomas, do you?

Drake
There isn't always some kind of CSI bullcrap that tells why someone did something when they were getting blown up.

Mike
What did they tell his parents?

Drake

(*Low*) We told them the whole truth. That we didn't know the whole truth.

(*DRAKE looks at the pen.*)

Mike

I have a pen, too. I thought, "Hey, it's a big purchase." A big deal for some people.

Drake

Make it an occasion. Maybe we could use a few car salesmen on our side.

Mike

Let her go home, Drake. Make her go home.

Drake

I can't do that. You know that.

Mike

You gonna tell me there will just be another one tomorrow and ask me am I gonna save that one or the next or the next after that?

Trisha

You are not saving me. (*Looks at DRAKE*) He is not saving me.

Mike

I could call your mother. Tell her you are here.

Trisha

Is that what you did before?

Mike

What?

Trisha

Did you find out your boy wanted to enlist and you ran home to find his mom?

Mike

No. If he... if we had known. I just want you to think this over.

Trisha

(*Looks at MIKE*) What do I look like to you?

Mike

A seventeen year old.

Trisha

A seventeen year old Chevy? You think I am one of your deals? Want to go talk this over with your manager and see what you can do about the price of rust proofing me?

Drake

Trisha.

(MIKE slumps in his chair.)

Drake

Mike, I'll tell you what. I'll tell the next one and the one after that. About Thomas.

Mike

Tell them that their parents or their girlfriend may never know if they were a hero or just some kid riding in a convoy on the wrong road on the wrong day?

Drake

Or just some kid who grabbed their buddy's arm as he died. Yes. Before they sign up, they'll all hear it. I promise you that.

Mike

(Looks at Trisha) You heard all this and you still want to sign up? Want your mom or your boyfriend to maybe never know for sure?

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