

THE DEBT

By Bradley Walton

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THE DEBT

A Ten Minute Dramatic Monologue

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SYNOPSIS: As if high school isn't hard enough. Try adding a boy who's clingy and annoying. To make matters even worse he's asked you on a date! While agonizing over what to do and how he'll handle rejection, life changing circumstances take place. What will happen when he saves your life? Will you be able to repay *The Debt*?

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 either; gender flexible)

NARRATOR (m/f) A high school student.

SETTING: Bare stage.

COSTUMES: School clothing.

PRODUCTION NOTES

If Narrator is male, the names Caleb, Angie, and Janet should be changed to Cathy, Andrew, and Jack in the script.

NARRATOR: I wake up with a lump of dread knotted in my stomach. My alarm clock isn't set to go off for another twenty minutes, but I get up anyway, hoping the impossible hope that getting ready for school will take my mind off of the choice I have to make today. I shower. I brush my teeth. I dress. None of it helps. I go to the kitchen and pour myself some cereal. I sit down to eat, but I just stare into the bowl with the spoon in my hand. I want to cry. I have no right to feel like this. My problems are nothing compared to the kids waking up knowing they have friends who are gone forever. To the parents walking past empty bedrooms. To the ones who are still in the hospital. To the ones who are dead. I should be grateful. And I am. But more than that, I feel obligated, ashamed, and guilty. I owe someone my life, but I don't want to pay the debt.

His name is Caleb. He's annoying...and needy. His mom walked out on his family when he was four. His dad works two jobs and isn't home a lot, and his brother mostly ignores him. He doesn't have a computer, or even a cell phone. He used to sit next to me in first period, and he'd talk. About the snakes on his uncle's farm. About the car that his brother was restoring. About a deer he saw on a camping trip. Things that didn't interest me in the slightest. And then he'd turn his statements into questions, prodding me for affirmation. Like telling me that one kind of engine was better than another, and then adding the words, "Don't you think?" This would force me to say something like, "Uh huh," or, "I guess," which made him think that I was engaged in the conversation and he should keep talking. Most days, the teacher would give us time at the end of class to start on our homework. Caleb ran his mouth and made it impossible for me to get anything done. I complained to the teacher, so she created a new seating plan and moved us apart. That stopped him from bothering me during class, but not before and after.

I liked to be early so I could talk to my friends Angie and Janet, but Caleb would walk up to us and stand there. Around a group, Caleb wouldn't say anything unless someone acknowledged him. Then he'd start running his mouth and not shut up. If we ignored him, he'd lurk on the sidelines, following the conversation, nodding his head, and not going away. We knew Caleb was fragile. We were too polite to tell him to bug off, and we didn't want to hurt his feelings. The teacher was oblivious to our discomfort. We had to start hiding in the bathroom before school so we wouldn't have to deal with him. During class, he'd stare at me. Every time I glanced in his direction, he was looking at me. Every time. When class was over, he'd follow me to my locker. I started taking my second period books to first period so I wouldn't have to stop between classes. I got a break between second and third periods because he was on the opposite side of the building, but then we had the same lunch shift, along with Angie and Janet. He sat by himself, one table over, where he could see me. And he stared. It was awkward and uncomfortable. Then, about two weeks ago, Caleb sat down with our group, right next to me. We tried to ignore him as politely as possible, but he kept coming back, day after day, eating beside me, following our conversation and nodding his head, not saying anything. Until a week ago... when he asked me out. I just sat there, wide-eyed, mouth open. Angie and Janet were looking at me with pretty much the exact same expression on their faces. I didn't know what to say. I didn't want to go out with him, that much was for sure. But he was so awkward and so fragile...if I said no, it wasn't a stretch to imagine him running off in tears and killing himself. I was frozen, speechless, with Caleb looking at me expectantly, when I heard a sharp, loud noise. Then another.

People screamed and started running and diving under tables, and I saw some kid I vaguely recognized but didn't know—I found out later that his name was Joshua—and he was walking through the cafeteria shooting at people with two handguns. He looked...lost and distant. Like what he was doing didn't make him feel like he'd expected, but he kept doing it anyway, because he didn't know what else to do. He pointed one of the guns at me. Right at me. He pulled the trigger. And Caleb—weird, awkward Caleb who I couldn't stand—Caleb dove in front of me and the bullet hit him instead. He knocked me to the floor and crawled on top of me, shielding me. I laid there, face down with my eyes closed, trying to will myself to be as small as possible. There were more gunshots. More screams. And then it was over. Joshua had shot himself, although I didn't know that at the time. I just knew that the shooting had stopped. People were crying. I was crying. After a minute, Caleb rolled off of me. I sat up. He laid there, looking at me, and he asked, "Are you okay?" He'd been shot—a bullet had ripped into the back of his shoulder, and he was asking me if I was all right. I couldn't speak, but I nodded and mouthed the words, "I'm okay." Caleb smiled and said, "Good." And then he closed his eyes. I sat with Caleb until they carried him off on a stretcher.

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