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English 288

Prof. Zepper

30 January 2015

Short Story One

1:30 – 2:45 M/W

Franklin: If He Only Knew

As another rough day at school came to a hellish close, Franklin, a geeky-nosed, four-eyed, fourteen-year-old ginger, collected his things and left the decrepit brick building in the quickest way possible to avoid getting anymore afterschool beatings. Through the dusty, weed-filled baseball field, down the road, and into the house, Franklin made no hesitation getting home, but once he was there, he wanted to leave again. Franklin didn’t feel accepted, even in his own house.

Once at home, Franklin went to the kitchen, but he never had the desire to eat. He headed to his room, locked the door behind him, and shut out the world for the rest of the night. By himself, being alone in his room, was the safest unsafe spot that he could find. Alone with his emotions, the thoughts of hell at school, the loneliness he felt, made everything impossible to Franklin. The night would pass, and he would lie awake thinking and struggling, not even worried about the time and the sleep he was losing. Every beat of the second hand of the clock felt like a shred of an eternity for Franklin. Every minute, another reason for him to toss in his bed.

The dawn, with black streaks lining a soft rose sky, began as Franklin sat up in his bed. With only an hour or so of sleep, he slumped and dragged himself to his dresser and picked up some clothes to put on for his day at school. Getting to school was easy, but for Franklin, it meant same shit, different day. As normal, he arrived relatively early. He approached his locker, got his things, and prepared for his first period chemistry class. Staring at the ground, thinking about how to make this day better than the last, Franklin stumbled right into Butch, which meant he had to prepare for whatever was to become of the situation.

Big, burly, and as smart as a sack of dirty socks and jock straps, Butch was like a moose with clown feet. Immediately after the encounter, Butch grabbed Franklin by the edge of his collar. Franklin dropped all his books in a heap onto the floor and was pulled into Butch’s gnarly garlic breath. Butch spat straight into his eye, pitched Franklin to the floor, resulting in him banging the back of his head on the hard tiles. Butch sneered and walked off. Franklin laid there for a moment; no one around to aid him. Coolness grew slowly on the back of his head. Lightheaded and faint, Franklin stood up. He touched the back of his head. Blood. Not an epic amount, but enough to creep out of a small gash. Scuttling to the bathroom, he quickly grabbed a pile of paper towels and hid into the stall. Franklin forced pressure on the wound to stop the bleeding. After about fifteen minutes, the bleeding stopped. Franklin stood up slowly and checked the mirror. His red hair, a little more red today than usual, concealed the morning’s skirmish well. Chemistry class was his favorite, but today he only feared someone seeing his fresh battle scar.

Minutes felt like decades. Lectures felt like sermons at a Catholic church. Notes felt like the reading the Old Testament. The nasty wound stung, grew crusty, and occasionally oozed blood. Franklin hid the whole incident quite well until Mr. Connors took notice. Sixth period math, nearly the end of the day, and Franklin was almost free of school and could go home. The bell rang and the students started to leave, and for once Franklin tried to blend into the crowd in fear of being noticed with blood creeping through his hair. Mr. Connors announced, “Franklin, can we talk for a second.”

“*Shit!*” Franklin thought nervously. Sauntering back, he approached Mr. Connors with his mind racing and his heart off-beat.

“Franklin,” Mr. Connors firmly stated, “What’s going on with you?”

“Nothing. I’m fine.” Franklin said, quick to answer for himself.

“You are *not* fine. Let’s look at this.” Connors pulled out a manila folder and pulled out some old quizzes. “Look at this. This is the second exam from first semester. You got a hundred percent plus the extra credit. And this quiz we took two months ago, you got a ninety-four.” Franklin became unsteady as he knew what was to become of this conversation. “And now, Franklin, you took this quiz last week and got a seventy-three.”

Franklin intervened, “You got it all wrong! I just slipped up; I just didn’t study that hard this time. It’ll be better. I’m just fine.”

With a twitch of skepticism Mr. Connors said, “You are going to be late for class if you don’t hurry. Be safe Franklin.”

Franklin nodded and said, “Don’t worry, I’m just fine,” then nearly sprinted out of the classroom.

Keeping his damaged head low and out of sight, Franklin suffered with angst and uneasiness though the last couple hours of school, fearing what may come up at any time. Ready to escape, Franklin was intent on going straight home after school, but those intentions proved worthless. Butch headed straight towards him, a blockade in Franklin’s path. Tears rolled in his eyes as his gullet filled with dread. Shaking like a cat in cold weather, Franklin stood still, not moving an inch closer to Butch who was now only feet away. Butch started to hassle and torment him. Franklin feared what was to become of this, but the only thing to do, in his mind, was to turn and walk away from the situation. He began to walk away, but Butch started to grow closer. By the time Franklin was at the opposite end of the schoolyard they were both running with Butch only inches from catching him. Immediately, as though struck with intense fear, Franklin stopped absolutely still and turned towards Butch with his eyes clenched shut. He didn’t want to run from his problems anymore. There was no more Franklin could conceive of doing but taking whatever Butch had to give him. But to his amazement, Butch was gone. Maybe someone saw him and told him to stop. Still shaken and anxious that Butch may be lurking, he continued striding, but this time, he wasn’t heading home.

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Alone, in an almost empty church, quiet and still, with God maybe tuning in, Franklin sat quiet and still. Not much thought went through him, only soaking up and inhaling the silence. Taking a deep breath, collected and relaxed, disregarding the pain and disconcert from earlier, the boy folded his pudgy, paper-white fingers and prayed within his mind, “*God?*” he paused, reconsidering even coming in the church, “*I know; I’m the last person you want to hear from. I just wanted to know: Why did you put me here?*” Franklin’s eyes began to develop bitter tears and his freckled cheeks turned rosy, “*I mean, I have no friends, no one really likes me. I don’t even like me.*” His breath became irregular and shaky and the tears began to cascade over his angel kisses, “*God. What is my purpose for being here? To be everyone’s punching bag? To have a worthless life so everyone else can have a good laugh? You made me ugly! A total retard! I’m stupid! Why should I even ask why I am here? Because that’s just it...*” he opened his eyes, propped his head up, and stood up and with a shaky breath he vocalized, “it doesn’t matter. There is no point!”

Barely able to see from the cloudy bubbles of sorrow, Franklin shuffled out of the wooden pew and dragged his ashamed, depressed, sorry self out of the church and began to trudge his way home. Franklin hit his all-time low. “*If God had no purpose of having me, then my life is just a mistake…”* he paused, *“A stupid, unnecessary mistake.”*

Making no strong effort, Franklin returned home. Franklin, hardly up to the task of conversing with his somewhat worried mother, headed straight to his room. Staring at his possessions, his music collections, his clothes, his bed, Franklin wondered what was to become of himself. All he could stutter to himself were the words he told Mr. Connors, “I’m fine.”

In a strong huff, Franklin threw his things into corner and sat on the bed. The madness ran in his head, the interrogation of self and body, the ongoing battle of vulgar thoughts of hatred and despair. A flick of sliver and a deep breath was all it took. A jagged line, another battle wound forever existing. An oozing of pain, a gush of fear and hopelessness through a strip engraved into his arm. Upset and discouragement leaked through sorrow from his eyes as the pain started, or at least attempted, to disperse from his self-infliction. To push all the poison, of hate, fear, and loneliness, this was the way of which to do it. He sat, staring at the redness, the depression that lay upon his ghostly-white skin. He couldn’t deal with much more than this. What was the point of trying to be himself when that only caused more pain? There wasn’t much he could do, but lie down and just close his eyes and wish for better.

Franklin slept in not thinking much of it. He got dressed and headed to school. Pounding, his head hurt from yesterday’s incident. Third period psychology, there was little motivation to be had. Head down, pencil at rest, and little cognitive activity, Franklin was not engaged. Fourth period lunch was anything but. He went to his stall and tried to get somewhat of a grip on his life, but there weren’t any handles for him to grab. Another slash, another burn, the walls were coming down in Franklin’s mind. “*Why is nobody helping me? My mom just works all the time and never bothers to check on me in my room. And Mr. Connors is just a dick; trying to interrogate me and get on my case. If he really wanted to help me, he would corner me every chance he got!*” Franklin debated within his cubical.

He didn’t get up until sixth period. Franklin made no eye contact and kept his mouth shut in fear of Mr. Connors noticing him. Class, unexpectedly, went by fast, and Franklin, deep in his emotional state of mind, didn’t notice, until the bell alarmed him, his shirt was growing a red stain on the cuff of the sleeve. Hiding it behind his books, Franklin started to leave class when Mr. Connors called to him. “Franklin, sit down.” Connors wrote a quick note on a sheet of paper and stuck it to the outside of the door, then shut and locked it behind him. “How are you doing Franklin?” he asked with an exhorting tone of voice.

A lump of disgust grew in Franklin’s throat. All he managed to sputter was, “I’m fine.”

Mr. Connors took a deep breath and lightly took hold of Franklin’s arm and lifted it up, the stain obvious as a drop of blood dripped onto the back of his math book. He carefully pulled the sleeve up Franklin’s arm, gently revealing the source of the blood. “Really? Just Fine?”

A tear ran hot down Franklin’s ice cold skin. “Yes, I’m just fine.” Anger started to fume in his heart. Franklin yelled louder than he realized, “I’m just fucking fine! Can you just lay off! I didn’t ask for your help! I didn’t ask to be here!” He got up, stormed out of the room and out of the school. Mr. Connors grabbed his note off the door and allowed his waiting and puzzled students in for seventh period.

Tears steamed as Franklin stood outside against the brick wall. Furious, terrified, upset, a cocktail of emotion shook within his conscious mind. There wasn’t anything worse than that feeling to him. Dropkicking his things, upset and uncontrolled, Franklin ran home, giving up on the world.

Approaching his front door, he stopped. Looking at the beautiful glass placed elegantly in an oval surrounded by white stained wood, he wanted to smash it so bad. Entering the house, all was still; mom wasn’t supposed to be home for another hour or two. Franklin kicked his shoes off, slamming them against the closet door. He wanted the pain to vanish. Something had to do the trick. Opening the freezer, he grabbed his mother’s bottle of UV that she kept for when her “jewelry club” came over on Fridays. Impulsive and fed up, he was ready for all his pain and emotion to numb and fade away. With the bottle half full, he took a few big gulps. The drink burned as the potent liquid harshly tricked down his throat. He returned it to its previous spot and took a breath to collect himself for a brief moment waiting for the pain to dissolve. Slowly, the liquor began to kick his thoughts around like fireflies in a pickle jar. Stumbling over himself, he tumbled to the bathroom and grabbed a bottle of his mom’s depression medication and dumped a small handful into the palm of his hand. Swallowing them all hastily with a large gulp of water, he fumbled into the living room couch. Sitting, watching the room spin, his eyesight started to narrow as worry and butterflies built up in his gut. Suddenly he was tripping to the bathroom. The walls spun, the floor flowed fluidly up and down, and the tunnel grew shaky and dark. He hugged the chilly, white bowl and, with the little strength he had, supported himself up convulsing as he threw up violently. The last thought that went through his head as the alcohol and pills fell out of his mouth and he passed out was, “*I’m fine*.”

He woke up dazed, but with a start. An on-time beat beeped behind him and a plainness surrounded him. Shaking the groggy feeling, Franklin slowly sat up smelling the strong odor of sanitation and overpowering cleanliness. The hospital was neutral colored like most hospitals. A splash of soft blues, tans, and grays accompanied the cold, mechanical machines. Like before this, Franklin sat alone. He paged the nurse and almost immediately a tall, blonde young woman rushed in. He looked at her with puzzlement, “Where is my mom?”

The nurse replied, “She is at work. It’s four in the afternoon.”

“When do I get to go home?”

“Tonight,” she assured him.

Franklin felt safer here, but really didn’t feel comfortable. The nurse brought him a hamburger and a pile of French fries. Not to raise any suspicion, he ate some of it, but just enough to keep the nurse from asking questions. These few bites of bland hospital food were some of the only food he had eaten in a few days. Soon after his mother came and took him home.

The car ride was silent; the only sound audible was the whirring of tires on the road and the quick whoosh of the parked cars as they passed. All was calm and undisturbed until Franklin’s mother started to cry. “Mom,” Franklin spoke holding back tears of his own, “What’s wrong?”

“I don’t want to lose you. I’m so sorry I’m never there for you. I don’t want to lose you. You are all I have left. I am a horrible mother.”

“Mom, I’m fine. I’ll be okay. You will be okay. You are a perfect mother.” He assured her. They pulled up to the house and got out of the car. He approached her and gave her a long-lasting hug that felt endless, but it felt warming for the both of them. Although Franklin felt that his mother didn’t love him most of the time, he believed that his suicidal attempt could have been the spark that may possibly change things for the better between him and his mother and between him and himself. Franklin entered the house, went to his room, and went straight to sleep.

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The school was bleak and silent. News had spread fast. All the teachers announced it to each individual class room during third period; the statement that his mother had sent to the school to read to the students. It said:

*It is with a sad heart to announce that Franklin Jacobs died last night. Franklin took his life over the interstate bridge at ten o’clock last night. Franklin was a junior at Jefferson High School. For most of his life he tried to stay out of the way, but truly shined more than he believed. Franklin had left a note the night he took his life. It reads, “I wanted to let anyone who cares enough to read this or to even notice that I am gone that I had no purpose to carry on with the mess of feelings I had. No one really took notice of me. I don’t appreciate who I am and neither does anyone else. I just wanted to say, I’m sorry Mr. Connors. I wish I would have accepted your help, but there was no helping out this no-good kid anyway. To everyone else, like anyone would care anyway, I just wish there was a way for me to be accepted, to be happy, and to be noticed, but I wasn’t given the chance whether I prevented it, God prevented it, or something else entirely. I just wanted to be accepted but I wasn’t made to be accepted, I was a mistake.” Franklin’s funeral will be Saturday at six pm and all is invited.*

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In the small church, not a seat was vacant. The family surrounded the front and students and teachers filled the rest. Right behind the small family was Mr. Connors and Butch sitting next to each other. The room was warm and the moisture spun in a humid heat wave. Tissues became damp as people lined to view Franklin for the last time. His angel-kissed cheeks, soft and plump, his glasses sat gently on his face, and his hair was curly and sat calm. His hands folded neatly, his body motionless and without disruption. Franklin’s slight smile captured him completely: calm and at peace. With that, Franklin was ready to move on and be happy.