Death of a Poet

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As he drew near the twenty-third straight hour of sitting at his desk, in the quiet of the early morning, he finally saw the world for what it was. And as this poet struck his tired pen upon his notebook, the words that had evaded him for so long flooded from the ink. There was no cliché in his prose. He spoke vividly. He crammed more truth into those dozen lines than most men might hope to speak in all of their years. This was his greatest work. He sat back so as to admire that poem, but this moment passed him swiftly. The sound of his neighbor's alarm pulled him back from that clarity, back to sobriety. Content and thoughtless, he closed his notebook, placed his pen back into the pocket of his coat, and turned down his light.

He woke the following day without the memory of a single dream. He sat up and gazed around his humble apartment for some sign of the time, but he was resolved to getting up and checking his wristwatch. Little light made it through his thick, dusty curtains. On the desk, next to his watch, his notebook lay in hopes that it might be picked up once more. But the poet had no interest. He put on his cap and coat, and methodically made his way out the door.

When he stepped out onto W Street, he was greeted by the familiar smell of the bakery two buildings over, at the corner of Main St and W Street. It was the time of day when they were preparing for the after-lunch sugar cravers, and that always meant baking a fresh batch of cinnamon rolls. For some reason, that sugary scent stood out to the poet more than most days. It hadn't smelled so appealing since the day he moved to town. He had just begun to visualize the soft, flaky texture when the cold

wind rushed down the street in its characteristic fashion, jolting him back into focus and throwing a leaf into his hair. Had that gust waited another moment, he might have given in to the temptation. Instead, he walked steadily by the door and on towards the university.

Standing somewhat sleepily as he waited for his chance to cross the street, he was startled by the ringing bell of the trolley as it clanked and shimmied along the tracks towards the city. It made its way over the crosswalk and carried along its way. When the back of the trolley cleared the crosswalk, like the curtain of a play, it revealed a young woman waiting to cross on the other side. She was a lovely, dark haired girl, rather tall, with a black coat and red hat. The poet could feel the lump in his throat pop, and he caught her eye from across the street.

He had never believed in love at first sight, but this moment brought his doubts into question. The walk signal flashed, and the girl began to step. The nervous poet stepped down from the curb. He could feel his body growing warm – something quite nice given the weather. He felt as if this was one of those pivotal moments that are often spoken of in stories. He felt the entire reality he had known begin to crumble. He then did the only thing that he could manage to do in such a situation. He put his head down and walked past her, never taking a glance – he didn't look back. It was all he could manage to appear calm.

Across the street, the desire to write overcame him. The contentment with his poetry dissolved. The image of that woman

was frozen in his mind. He knew that all of her perfection existed only in his mind, but he did not care. Despite having never known her, he genuinely felt as though he had lost someone dear. Such is the curse of the poet who sees the world romanticized. That pain became intense inspiration. There was something about life's injustice, something about the tragedy of the little moments, that appealed to him. He saw the endless details of reality disappear over the horizon. It was clear to him now that he would never truly be content in his work until he had uncovered every truth. Reaching in his pocket and finding only his pen, panic settled in. He searched his pockets twice each for his notebook, but then remembered where he had left it on his desk.

He couldn't turn back for it; he feared passing her again and could not be late. Desperate, he ripped a poster from the lamp post on Augustine Avenue. Nervously, the poet scribbled and walked. The poem he crafted would have resonated with any anxious, heartbroken soul.

He paused for a moment to commit his work to memory, not the words; he only kept the feeling. Happiness had overtaken him once more, a joy so uplifting that he dropped his pen, folded the poem-backed poster, and placed it in a student mailbox at the entrance to campus. He walked away from the pen without the slightest hesitation. The poet, tortured and set free, wrote no more.