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Ralph the duck summary pdf printable free



Interesting guy in one of my classes, he must've told some terrific woman at an overpriced meal: I just know the guy was a rub out specialist in the Nam, he had to have said. Maybe it was a story he told her when she got scared in the hospital. (And as long as we're in full disclosure mode, I was a judge for that prize a few years back.) Patterson's stories show us Newport Beach from the perspective of characters who live in its margins, people we might otherwise miss, blinded by the glare of Southern California's coastal mystique. "You are not an unintelligent driver," the narrator says later, out of earshot, after fixing his car for him. "Ralph the Duck" is told through the first person voice of Jack, a 42-year old security guard at a private Northeastern college, taking advantage of the free classes offered to employees there, married to Fanny, an emergency room nurse, both of them mourning the death of their infant daughter. Maybe it was the story he told her the night she died. You are not an unintelligent writer, the professor tells him. Later, I read that Antonya Nelson called it "a short story masterpiece." "I woke up at 5:25 because the dog was vomiting." So begins Jack's narration. I was only forty-two, and I hardly qualified as a student.... In the end, it's a story that leaves a lot of questions. Jogen Chowdhury: "Man in Grief" (2006) My assignment was to write something to influence somebody. I'm cold, Ralph said. I can see this. I can see a father racing to the hospital with his daughter, only to find out he's too late - so when he brings in the teenager, he says, "She better not die this time." So what does this have to do with the Ralph the Duck essay? I don't know. 20 January 2010 | selling shorts | The professor tries to convince him he can't say "fuck" in a college essay. But that's just the surface. That would've been fitting, because it's one helluva story. He'd been banking on my having been a murderer. Not that it's an easy story; it requires close attention, as it's all carried in a word here, a sentence there. For me, it formed the turning point of the story - not the essay, but the aftermath. So when the cold wind blew, Ralph said, Brr, and shivered and shook. "It isn't unappealing," the professor tells him; but, of course, it isn't appropriate for the course. There were always ancient women with parchment for skin who graduated at seventy-nine from places like Barnard and the University of Georgia. If he feels so responsible for her death it's his own personal Vietnam? I figured I should come to work wearing my fatigue jacket and a red bandanna tied around my head. Even if it is quiet as a whisper. I'll keep you warm. It must've been one helluvan imaginary conversation. That said, every now and then there's going to be an HMH title that I can't help but write about, and today it's Drift, one of three short story collections nominated for this year's Story Prize. So what's the story behind the Ralph story? Even the title poked fun at academic posturing, and declared itself as heartfelt, taken from an essay that Jack writes on Persuasion and Rhetoric for a professor who wears ironed dungarees and tells Jack, "You are not an unintelligent writer." Written with Jack's dead daughter fully in his mind, "Ralph the Duck" gets a D, but the essay and title provide an undercurrent of dignity and nobility to the story, to the characters, and a mysterious childlike pulsing of sadness and meaning. Here, Fanny said, "Shit! you're never that laconic unless you feel crazy. Maybe it was his daughter's favorite story. I had become so absorbed by his work, I didn't know how to be properly demonstrative regarding it: too respectful to importune with my personal feelings. He doesn't want to hear about the guy's military service spent in Baltimore railroad yards; he wants Vietnam combat, damn it, and he badgers him until he gets it, in a scene that reeks of testosterone - cigars, his own military service, the loose women he's known, language, this guy is out to prove he's as much man as his student even if he can't fix his own car. Tender and full of loss, moving through the murky region of despair, and imbued with a sense of high stakes, here was a story that played it straight, laid back the skin and cut to the bone. We never learn the details about the girl - what her name was, how old she was or how long ago it was when she died. He was a professor at Colgate University, and while trying to find his contact information, I discovered that he had died three days before. When he sets out to save a local teenaged girl, he conflates it with the loss of his own child ("She better not die this time"). How to express that what he wrote was so valuable to a silent reader? Ralph's mommy asked. The great problem is to face the fullest implications of one's insights and fears—and to sustain the energy to make a usable shape from them. ... I could see how disappointed he was. The narrator is one sharp cookie, but the professor can't quite handle a middle-aged blue-collar part-time undergrad who can fix cars and get to the heart of "A Rose for Emily." But by using the indirect structure - "not an unintelligent writer" - instead of containing the student's ability, he's exaggerating it, misusing a tool from his own workshop. A few weeks ago, Celeste Ng wrote a post about it for the "Stories We Love" column at FWW. No: the great problem is to sit and write something worthy of the people on the page, and the good reader." I worried that ultimately my truest appreciation was in the reading, and how could I express that to his family? In February 2006, I read Frederick Busch's "Ralph the Duck" for the first time. Who'd you punch out at the playground?" "We had to write a composition," I said. "Did he like it?" "He gave me a D." "Well, you're familiar enough with D's. But most importantly: Ralph the Duck has an ineffable significance, a significance shared with his wife. The story starts with dog vomit and his wife sleeping on the couch, apparently a - forgive me - not uncommon event in the household. I became somewhat fanatical about "Ralph the Duck"—about Frederick Busch—enough so that my husband encouraged me to write him a fan letter. It's usually referred to as a story about a Vietnam vet, but I wonder if maybe the Baltimore story was the accurate one. "Honey." This scene accomplishes a lot for me. Sure, it's funny, a way to poke the overblown academic in the eye, but both instances have great significance because he's stumbled onto a truth he can't consciously admit. First, we find out he has a history of "punching out at the playground," which is what he's been doing with the professor in a passive-aggressive way. I decided to read this story, which is from 1999 (it was in BASS) on an impulse. The dog, we learn, "loved what made him sick." Jack swears he can hear his wife blink because of "the damp slash of lash after I have made her weep." Their marriage is suffering—faltering—from grief. The professor's also addicted to his own version of truth. He comes very close when he rescues the student suicide, and we get a glimpse into what he faces daily, the heartbreak and guilt he carries around in quiet despair, as his daughter's death, Vietnam, and the teenager merge into one. He called it Rhetoric and Persuasion.... His dungarees were ironed. I noticed. I never saw you get this low over a grade." "I wrote about Ralph the Duck." She said, "You did?" She said, "Honey." She came over and stood beside the rocker and leaned into me and hugged my head and neck. What's the matter? So she spread her big, feathery wings, and hugged Ralph tight, and when the cold wind blew, Ralph was warm and snuggly, and fell fast asleep. I was getting educated, in a kind of slow-motion way - it would have taken me something like fifteen or sixteen years to graduate... The professor's addiction to litotes is loaded with meaning. That imagined conversation was so intriguing, though (even though I don't remember anything about the contents), I went to my library and checked out Frederick Busch's collection Absent Friends just so I could read it. It really hit me, and I ended up mourning him, reading everything of his—everything about him—that I could find. What's wrong? But of course I wasn't. It seemed to me that the obituaries weren't doing him justice, that his writing wasn't being properly recognized, even though he had said, "I'd like to be remembered as a really honest, minor writer of the 20th century." And of his work: "I write about characters I want to matter more than my own theories and more than my own delights. Even if his dungarees are ironed. I thought of writing his family, letting them know. Then we find out he's a bit wounded over the grade, perhaps angry. Oh, the mommy said. I've been reading a lot of complex symphonies lately; it was nice to be reminded of the power of simplicity. If he told the professor what he wanted to hear, he knew how happy that made him, that it conformed to his preconceived notions, so he tried the same story on the suicidal teenager. She's already made some appearances in the literary blog world, including a guest essay at The Millions an an interview at The Elegant Variation, and in this essay she tells us about learning everything she could about one story's author—having just missed the opportunity to tell him how much that story had meant to her. The narrator has some fun with this, putting forth a convincing argument, like a child would, until the professor in frustration falls back on the academic version of "Because I said so!" When the narrator turns in the story of Ralph the Duck for the Rhetoric and Persuasion part of the course, the professor gives him a D. What if the Vietnam dreams he told the teenager were actually the dreams he has of his daughter? It's only when that didn't work too well that he brought out the truth about his daughter. I could swear I saw a twitter conversation about it, but it's not there anymore, so maybe I imagined it. Then there's the narrator's daughter. "Honey," she said. It's strongly implied, and how else would she be gone, but the loss of his child is one of those things the narrator just can't face head-on; he in fact exaggerates the importance by not facing it, in a kind of psychological version of litotes. He's up against an English professor who never quite realizes that, despite his degrees, he's no match for this guy by any measure. They go to the movies and Jack "fell asleep, and I'm afraid I snored." Jack's voice is sad and funny, wise and knowing, aware of his shortcomings. I appreciated the story's seeming simplicity, and the way that Busch went to the core, not straying from emotional subject matter, as a lesser writer might, in fear of being considered overly sentimental or unsophisticated. Hoisting himself on his own petard, in fact. For that matter - and this matters - no one ever says directly that she died. When I started working for Houghton Mifflin Harcourt a few weeks ago, I reaffirmed my commitment to introducing you to books from other publishers; I didn't want (and I'm sure you don't want) Beatrice to become simply an extension of my day job. Whatever it is, it now becomes a story to comfort him, as his wife spreads her feathered wings around his naked, shivering heart. Simple, right? Say "Man" to him a couple of times, hang a fist in the air for grief and solidarity, and look terribly worn, exhausted by experiences he was fairly certain that he envied me. I was the oldest college student in America, I thought. The narrator turns around and shows him just how talented he is at Rhetoric and Persuasion by rescuing a student - a student the professor had an affair with, in fact, how's that for symmetry and unity - from a suicide attempt. Maybe it's the story his wife told her. I wrote "Ralph the Duck." Once upon a time, there was a duck named Ralph who didn't have any feathers on either wing. Sometimes a whisper can speak as loudly as a scream, and a mother's lullaby can outperform a 104-piece orchestra. The narrator is a college security guard who takes a free class every semester. Things improve domestically over the course of a few days, but there's a special poignancy when he tells his wife what's going on in the class.

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