

# The briefcase essay



"The briefcase" is a short story by Rebecca Makal. The setting of this story is unknown as are the names of the characters. After escaping from prison the protagonist of the story sees another man being taken prisoner in his place. The protagonist finds the man's briefcase and in desperation decides to adopt the man's identity by using the content of the briefcase to learn more about him. Ultimately this story is about desperation and guilt. The story begins with the protagonist who was a prisoner at the time escaping from prison because his wrist had gotten too skinny for his cuffs.

The protagonist it seems used to be a chef who was arrested because of his political beliefs who was arrested after his night restaurant got raided and burned down. After finally escaping his cuffs the chef watched as soldiers arrested a man on the street making him strip and drop his briefcase. After the soldiers left with the man the chef takes the man's things and decided to adopt a new identity by using the information in the briefcase to learn more about him. After searching through the briefcase the chef finds a business card and an ID. From this he found out that the man was a physics professor.

The chef then moved cities away and was now using the professor's name and also grew his beard out to look more like the professor. He then used the professor's address book to write a letter to all the professor's friends and students informing them that the professor was alright but he needed some money. After a year money came less often, and even old friends who used to write monthly now sent only rare, apologetic notes and a few small bills. In the end of the story the chef goes to the post office as usual to check the mail but there was no mail only the professor's wife who then began questioning him.

The chef couldn't bring himself to answer the questions he only wrapped his arms around the crying wife whispering " Let me go home with you. I'll be a father to your son, and I'll warm your bed, and I'll keep you safe. " She pushes away and shouts for the post master to call the police but the chef wouldn't move he was desperate but willing to stay to try to convince the police he was the professor and if that didn't work he would convince the judge he feels certain that somewhere down the line, someone would believe him.

The theme of " the briefcase" is the desperation can lead people to extremes. This is shown in the story when the protagonist's desperation leads him to steal the imprisoned professor's briefcase and ultimately adopt the professor's identity as his own. The chef was so desperate for freedom that he killed off his own identity to fully become the professor, so much so that every time he referred to his life as a chef he says in " in another life time. In the end of the story when the protagonist meets the professor's wife he wanted her to believe he was the professor no matter the cost saying " The woman does not see how she is murdering her husband, right here in the post office lobby. " He desperately wanted the wife to believe he was the professor because he felt that if the professor's own wife didn't believe he was the professor she would be murdering her own husband by denying the identity he had taken on and there would no longer be a place in the world for him. Another theme in this story is the burden of guilt.

I think guilt is a theme because after adopting the persona of the professor the chef felt guilty. He felt guilty because the soldiers took the professor in his place but he desperately wanted freedom so he couldn't go back.

Because of this guilt the chef felt responsible for everyone in the professor's address book. He even wrote a letter to all the professor's friends and students saying " Am in trouble and have fled the city . . . Tell my dear wife I am safe, but for her safety do not tell her where I am . . . If you are able to help a poor old man, send money to the following post box . . I hope to remain your friend, Professor T——. " With this the chef knew he could get money and keep the professor's wife happy for a few more months. In the end when the professor's wife came to find the chef he felt so guilty and desperately tried to replace the imprisoned professor saying " Let me go home with you. I'll be a father to your son, and I'll warm your bed, and I'll keep you safe. " He felt as though if the professor's wife believed he was the professor then it would serve as a proper apology for getting the professor stealing his identity.

This story is about desperation and guilt. Desperation leads the chef to escape from jail; it also leads him to steal the professor's identity. But the chef felt guilty and this made him write to all the friends and students of the professor to ensure then that he was alright. Both desperation and guilt come together when the chef is caught by the professor's wife in desperation he claimed he was the professor and begged her to let him go home with her. He felt as though if she did this would absolve him of his guilt and put the world back in balance.