

Service

By

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FADE IN ON:

INT. KEYHOLE - DAY

An eye widens, pressed against the glass. From curiosity or fear, who knows... yet?

INT. KEYHOLE - VIEW INTO DORM HALLWAY

Distorted by the fisheye lens, a YOUNG SOLDIER in camo lingers on the other side. A rifle dangles casually off his back...

His name patch reads: "B. Spelling". He fidgets with a RED ENVELOPE, bored.

Without warning, his free hand shoots out and reaches for the keyhole. Which blocks out the eye's view - finger and palm envelope all.

INT. DORM ROOM

KYLE (17) - the owner of that eye - stumbles back.

And smacks into roommate DERRICK (17). Clearly a mismatched pair, Derrick's designer khakis clash with Kyle's "Question Authority" tee - big time.

DERRICK
(hisses under his breath)
Ow!

The doorbell RINGS, jarring both. A strangely out of place pop-music tune.

Derrick shoots a super-annoyed look at Kyle.

DERRICK
He's not going anywhere. You gonna get that?

KYLE
(panicked)
Shhhh!

DERRICK
Our keycards are trackable. Hiding just makes us both look like pussies. Sergeant Pimples may look dumb, but he sure as shit knows where we are.

Another blast from the doorbell.

Derrick winces, grabs a Heat-It-Yourself HOT-POCKET off a dresser. And presses a circled section on the wrapper.

The snack glows intensely for a mili-second. Derrick takes a whiff. Smiles. Chows down.

KYLE

You're eating at a time like this?

DERRICK

(mouth full, chewing)

If anyone's justified to bust chops now, it's me. You programmed Billie Ellish for the doorbell. Without consulting me. What gives?

KYLE

It was my turn. You got a problem with that, Mr. Broadway Tunes?

DERRICK

(mutters)

God-dammit. It never ends. Whoever Catch-22's out there for, I'm writing a stern letter to the Dorm Authority tomorrow morning. Cause whoever ran the Roommate Compatibility Algorithm when they hooked us up, they screwed the pooch. Big time!

Another chime. Derrick reaches for the door.

KYLE

Derrick, don't. Please... stop!

DERRICK

Plug your panic, bro. I got this.

Derrick flings the door open. Reactions snowball fast.

The soldier's head snaps up. Slouch gone. His attention laser focused on the boys.

Kyle cringes, tries to duck behind Derrick. Fails.

Derrick flashes a smooth smile at the soldier. Wiggles free fingers at him.

DERRICK

Hey.

SOLDIER

...hey. Good afternoon, Mr. -

DERRICK
Derrick Anderson, at your service.

KYLE
(stammers)
Like you're at ours, of course...

DERRICK
(to the soldier)
And you are?

SOLDIER
Corporal Spelling of the 53rd -

DERRICK
Wait! You're Brian Spelling from my Diffi-
Q calculus class. Didn't know you were
ROTC!!

SOLDIER
Well...
(points down at his camo)
It's not like I wear these ALL the time.

DERRICK
You sit behind Rachel, right? That hottie
who transferred from West Virginia last
month?

The soldier blushes; a subtle reveal that underneath his
uniform, he's as young and awkward as they are.

SOLDIER
Really? I never noticed.

DERRICK
That she's smokin'? Who could miss that?
C'mon!

Grabbing a second wrapped Hot Pocket, Derrick extends it
to the soldier.

DERRICK
School and service? How you juggle that
schedule's beyond me. Do you even get
time to eat? Wanna bite? It's hot right
from the wrapper: auto-warm!

The soldier shuffles, shakes his head 'no'.

He thrusts the Red Envelope out at Derrick. The hope on
his face makes it clear: the counter-move's designed to
nip more small talk in the bud.

SOLDIER

No time. I'm here on business, to deliver... this.

Derrick stares at the envelope. Makes a point not to touch it, though.

DERRICK

To me? You sure you've got the right address?

SOLDIER

It's for a Mr. Kyle Burgis.

He whips out a cell phone, scrolls through pictures. A STUDENT MUG SHOT of Kyle glows on-screen.

The soldier cranes his head past Derrick, locks eyes onto Kyle. Cringing behind him, Kyle's not camouflaged at all.

SOLDIER

I guess your roommate. That's you, right?

Kyle face-palms. Steps forward, groans.

KYLE

Yeah. I admit to being Kyle. Here in the flesh, bro.

Kyle takes the envelope gingerly. Winces, as if it's likely to bite.

KYLE

This what I think it is?

SOLDIER

I'm no psychic, Mr. Burgis. Whatever you're assuming now is on you.

KYLE

I *assume* it's a draft notice. Is that a fair description, or no?

The soldier shrugs, relieved he's not the one to deliver bad news.

SOLDIER

Yeah. But routine stuff. I wouldn't sweat it, if I were you. Now that delivery's confirmed....

He holds out his cell phone and a style.

SOLDIER
Sign here, please.

Kyle signs, rolls his eyes at Derrick. Finishing with a flourish, he returns the cell and gear.

SOLDIER
Any last questions, Mr. Burgis?

KYLE
Yeah. Shitloads.

The two exchange awkward looks.

KYLE
I mean, what happens next?

SOLDIER
The directions are on the letter, no big. Check yourself into the student rec center for processing. A service draft counselor can walk you through the process... and choices... from there.

The soldier turns to leave. Derrick flashes a grin, waves.

DERRICK
Safe travels, Spelling! Tell Rachel we both said hi!

The soldier slumps. Eyes down, he walks on. Derrick swings towards Kyle with a disapproving frown.

DERRICK
Cowardly dipshit.

KYLE
(sulks)
Insult on top of injury? That's harsh.

DERRICK
I saw the look on your face. You *knew* that was for you all along!

Kyle slouches. Busted.

KYLE
Yeah. The email notifications with return receipts were a clue....

EXT. COLLEGE NATURE TRAIL - LATER

A winding path. Kyle and Derrick trudge through deep fall leaves.

In the distance, a gaggle of COLLEGE STUDENTS play virtual reality lacrosse, with a holo ball.

Beyond that, dignified halls of academia loom. All in all, a very collegial, idyllic view.

Derrick waves to CUTE GIRLS, a spring in his step.

Kyle walks slowly. Every inch of his body screams he'd rather stay home. Derrick shoots him a dirty look.

DERRICK

You sure you're really seventeen? You're walking like you're sixty.

KYLE

(grumbles)

You're the outdoors buff. Why rush?

DERRICK

Don't you want to get this over with?

KYLE

That's easy for you to say. You didn't just get drafted, dude.

DERRICK

The student rec center closes at 5PM sharp! Either you rip that bandaid off now, or Monday. Which would make both our weekends suck!

Kyle's face darkens. He trudges reluctantly along, kicks leaves.

KYLE

Waiting at least gives me time to think.

DERRICK

Think about what? Service is a no-brainer, just like homework. A fact of life!

Kyle stops, gazes across the campus. Quite the panoramic view. Tons of people having fun. Most, it seems, unlike him without a care in the world.

KYLE

It's not a fact like physics. Just an artificial construct... a rule.

DERRICK

Homework's a rule, too. A pain in the ass sometimes, but that doesn't mean it's not good.

KYLE

But is the draft? Why do we need something like that at all?

Derrick drops back to Kyle's side. Breathes in fresh air - sighs.

DERRICK

You're the poly-sci major.

KYLE

Yeah. What's your point, Astronomy-Math Dude?

DERRICK

You think societies build themselves organically? All of this - everything you see - has a price. Either you pay your fair share for it... or you don't.

KYLE

But this price *isn't* fair. It's... too much!

Suddenly impatient, Derrick grabs Kyle's sleeve, drags him forward.

DERRICK

C'mon, Random-Roomate-O-Mine. *Your questions* are too much. And it's 4:20. We're running out of time!

INT. STUDENT REC CENTER - LATE AFTERNOON

A small bureaucratic cubicle, equally decorated with inspirational poster and casually high tech gear.

A projection monitor covers half the wall.

Derrick and Kyle sit obediently at the "visitors" side of a desk, while...

DRAFT SERVICE COUNSELLOR ALYSSA (bespectacled 30s, going on 200) scrolls through a tablet. Hums.

She points a stylus at Kyle, blinks.

ALYSSA

Let me get the data straight. You're the student who received the draft notice?

KYLE

Um, yeah. I'm Kyle Burgis. Class of '34, hopefully?

(leans forward, points)

My name's right there. On line 5B?

He places his palm on a SENSOR, which BEEPS.

Alyssa blinks at her tablet.

ALYSSA

Ah, it's all in the system, synced. Good to see.

She lifts a quizzical eyebrow at Derrick next.

ALYSSA

And your role in today's meeting, Young Sir?

DERRICK

Derrick Anderson. Class of... well, same.

ALYSSA

And your purpose here today?

Derrick spreads his arms, a bemused grin on his face.

DERRICK

Long term? My purpose is to explore eternal truths of the universe. To crack the quantum code, making Einstein and Heisenberg proud -

ALYSSA

(snaps)

I mean, what's your purpose - here and now?

Derrick drops the act, shrugs.

DERRICK

Just what any good roommate does. Provide moral support for my bud?

ALYSSA

I see. And your current draft status?

Derrick's eyes flicker for a second. Perhaps... in fear?

DERRICK

No big. I got a heritage deferment just last year. My dad had chicken pox. Thus, family time served.

Alyssa sighs. Pushes tablet and paperwork towards Kyle.

ALYSSA

Enough small talk. You... choose.

Kyle picks up the material, reads from the screen.

KYLE

"Preferred mortality rate?"
 "Incapacitation preferences"? What in Mengele's name IS this stuff?

Alyssa tabs a recessed button on her desk. The projection monitor flares bright - displays multiple choice options:

Mortality Rate: 90%, 60%, 40%, 20% 1%

Kyle reads again, stares.

KYLE

What exactly do you want me to do here?

ALYSSA

Rank the risks and affected bodily systems you prefer. Service is better when it's voluntarily chosen, of course.

Kyle slides a shaking finger towards the 90% range... then down towards 1%. Lingers there.

KYLE

Service for medical experimentation. Do I have a choice to NOT sign up at all?

ALYSSA

Of course not! Society has to test new vaccine and medicines. Rolling them without clinical trials or rushing them in a pandemic just wouldn't be safe.

(bemused)

Clearly, you're not a med student, Mr. Burgis.

KYLE

Nope. Mom wanted me to be a doctor, but I choose Poly sci. With a minor in philosophy. That field's more my style.

ALYSSA

Well, *philosophically*, I would assume you understand the concept of "Public good". Sacrificing a little is the responsibility of all good citizens...

KYLE

Yeah, sure. But health's more than just a "little" - it's everything we've got. What if I'm the one who dies from a side effect?

ALYSSA

Don't be so doom and gloom! You're a philosophy major, so surely you'll understand: all life is risk. If you want to partake in all the opportunity our wonderful college provides, paying necessary dues is the minimum you can do...

Alyssa reaches across the desk. Taps the tablet, carefully penciled eyebrow raised.

ALYSSA

So choose. So the process can be finalized, and we can ALL move on with our lives. And whatever exciting experiences it has in store!

Kyle crosses his arms, pouts. Unconvinced.

KYLE

"We"? What service did you complete, Ms. Kravitz?

ALYSSA

(terse)

We're all friends here.

DERRICK

Well, roommates actually.

ALYSSA

Call me "Alyssa". Please.

KYLE

OK, Alyssa. Where'd YOU serve?

ALYSSA

In the '24 Alzheimer vaccine trials.

KYLE

And how'd that all "experience" go?

ALYSSA

It... was a personal, intense time. I'd rather not discuss that now.

Derrick raises a hand, confused.

DERRICK

Math guy here. But I'm a bit confused. What's the trade off on these menu choices? Why wouldn't everyone choose the 1% category?

KYLE

I was gonna ask that. Alyssa, help us out.

ALYSSA

(as if speaking to a child)

At least for Mr. Anderson, it should be obvious. The more risk one undertakes, the shorter the enlistment duration which must be fulfilled.

Derrick nods at Kyle. That makes sense.

DERRICK

Ok, so if my bud here signs up for a trial with the new Ebola vaccine...

KYLE

(panics)

Don't put words in my mouth!

ALYSSA

Then his service would be short, and secure him citizen benefits for twenty years! That's if...

KYLE

I survive. I may not be a math guy, but from here, those odds suck.

(beat)

What if I just sign up for a booster trial for Zika Flu?

Alyssa beams. That's an answer she's proud to supply.

ALYSSA

In return, we grant you six whole months of tuition. If you sign the standard liability waiver for side effects, of course!

Kyle's face darkens. He shoves the paperwork and tablet back across the desk.

KYLE
I'll pass on both, thank you very much.

ALYSSA
You can't do that!

KYLE
Why the heck not?!?

DERRICK
'Cause that'd make you a selfish dickwad.

KYLE
Says you, Mr. Dad-Got-Chicken-Pox-And-I'm-Stupid-Rich-So-It's-All-Good!

ALYSSA
What that would *mean*, young man, is you'd no longer be available for enrollment at this fine institution. Or public medical insurance. As for outside employment opportunities...

KYLE
Lemme guess. Except for \$2 an hour at Starbucks, my options would be screwed.

ALYSSA
(sighs)
Ultimately, it's your life.

KYLE
You'd think, but now I'm not so sure.

ALYSSA
But whatever you ultimately decide, you should accept the consequences like an adult.

Kyle leaps to his feet. Points at the paperwork, scowls.

KYLE
Wanna explain this section labeled "venereal"?

ALYSSA
(shrugs)
Another trial option. Isn't choice good?

KYLE

So, if I keep my lungs from COVID, but my dick drops off from Neo-Syphilis, in the name of "public service", that's cool?!? Don't I have a right to decide to not get sick at all?

ALYSSA

Living in society has its costs. There's no such thing as a free lunch, Mr. Burgis.

KYLE

Free lunch, no. But other fundamental stuff - why not?!?

DERRICK

You mean like Netflix?

KYLE

No! I'm talking basics. Like... like food. Housing. Education. Stuff we need to live and get by. And what good any "society", if risking my health's the price?!?

Derrick stares up at his roommate, stunned.

DERRICK

Kyle, man - chill out. Don't you think you're taking this "Question Authority" bit too far?

Kyle groans - throws the tablet down.

KYLE

Citizenship can fuck itself. Screw it - THIS "Public Good"... is not!

He storms from the office, SLAMS the door.

Leaving Alyssa and Derrick alone. They share a look.

ALYSSA

Your friend -

DERRICK

Correction, Assigned Roommate. Though at times, he was kinda cool.

ALYSSA

Well, it appears your "Roommate" has rejected his civic duties.

DERRICK

(shrugs)

Yeah. I'm disappointed. You too?

Alyssa stabs a button on the desk.

On the monitor: Kyle's file flashes a huge red "X".
Student status DEACTIVATED.

Derrick face palms, groans. Accidentally rests his hand on the scanner. As a result, his student record pops up next.

Reflexively, Alyssa squints, reads.

ALYSSA

"Admirable record, Mr. Anderson.
Sophomore Class. Legacy Student. Your
father graduated Pi Kappa Phil Fraternity
in '12.

A bit more reading - then she frowns.

ALYSSA

Which would make an inherited family
service expired now.

(beat)

And you - draft eligible, too?

Derrick pales - alarmed, and at a loss for words.

DERRICK

I... I can't! I mean, I've got mid-terms.
Interviews for a semester internship.
Service is important, I know. But I can't
risk getting sick now!

ALYSSA

(perky)

It doesn't have to be a contagious trial.
How's about we hook you up with a little
cancer study? And just to keep you on
your feet, limit the affected cells to
non-vital organs, too!

DERRICK

(chokes)

Hell no! Listen, my Dad's on the Academic
Board. There's got to be some mistake.
I'll call him up to clear the problem
now...

He whips out his cell, poised to dial.

Alyssa instantly rethinks. Closes Derrick's record, CLICK. She and he share an awkward look.

ALYSSA

Why don't we just schedule you for a new roommate, then?

DERRICK

(beat)

Works for me. But...

ALYSSA

Yes? And...?

DERRICK

Billie Ellish is too retro. Can we program a music-compatible roomie this time?

FINAL FADE OUT: