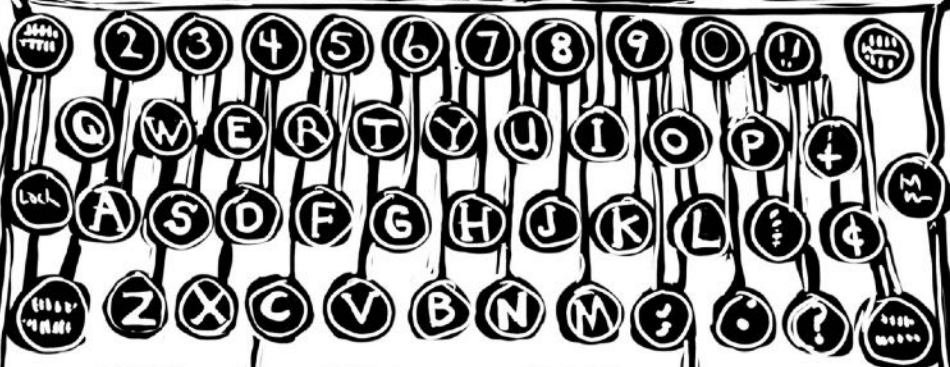


THE DEADLINE

by Randall Colley © 2020

A Zine Short Story

BRADBURY 451



The Deadline

By Randall Colley c 2020

Charles Hemingway was an aspiring writer no relation to Ernest. Charles lived with his wife Alma in a dingy one bedroom three flight walk up apartment in New York City. Charles called himself a writer although he had never had anything published, not a novel, not a short-story not even a poem.

He was always looking for the shortcut that would help him with his writing, anything that would do the writing for him.

He was always reading the obscure ads in the back of writing magazines, when he found another company that guarantees he would be a published writer in six weeks or his money back, guaranteed.

"Alma look what I found they guarantee that I will have something published in six weeks."

"How much does this one cost Charles?"

It's only \$40 they guarantee it or I get my money back.

They always guarantee it Charles and you never get your money back and you never get anything published.

Come on Alma it's only \$40 and it's money back guaranteed. I can't lose.

Do you know how many tables I have to wait on to make \$40.

Come on Alma if you love me and support me it's only \$40.

OK Charles get the \$40 out of my purse and only take \$40.00 no more.

Two weeks later Charles received a packet with a book of instructions on how to become a better writer. It was the usual how to be a creative writer, full of the standard motivational tips that he has tried 100 times before.

Things like write 500 words about your cat playing with a mouse or 500 words about a dripping faucet to help your creativity.

Charles followed some of the instructions for a few days until he became bored with it. He sent a letter to the company asking for a refund. He never heard back from the company. And they never sent him his \$40 refund.

Then one day he was reading the in back of True Writers magazine and found an advertisement for a Writers Boot Camp program, that guaranteed he would be published in one year. This gave him an idea.

It had been six months since his last writing scam project and he figured Alma had forgotten all about the \$40.

LATER THAT WEEK

When Alma came home from work, Charles was waiting for her with a large box wrapped in brown paper addressed to him from Writers Boot Camp.

What's in the box Charles?

It's from Boot Camp for Writers, Alma this is the best program in the business. He opened the package and was telling her all about how going to boot camp in the army as a young man, had turned his life around. This is just what he needed to kick him in the ass and get his writing career started.

I think I've heard all that before Charles. I'm exhausted my feet hurt, my back hurts I worked two shifts and I just want to sit down and drink a glass of tea.

Charles knew that this was the best time to spring something on her when she was tired, worn out and not thinking clearly.

Charles open the box on his desk. Alma look at this, it's a Bradbury 451 Type-Writer. There was also a small box that he gave to Alma to open.

"Charles we don't have enough money to buy a new typewriter what are you doing?"

Alma it's a money back guarantee, they guarantee that I will be published in one year. This is a special program. It was not easy to find.

"How much does this one cost, Charles?"

Alma was standing next to his desk, she sat her glass of tea down and opened the small box. Inside was a gold colored bracelet.

Charles was reading the letter that came with the packet out loud to Alma. This is a tried and true program. It is guaranteed to make you a published writer within one year or a full refund of all your money.

There are some requirements for this program that must be followed absolutely without fail.

If you accept this program that means you accept all of the rules and the consequences of what will happen if you do not follow this program to the letter completely. The program requires that you to type 2000 words per day, seven days a week, 52 weeks of the year.

You have a deadline everyday at 12 o'clock midnight. You must have typed 2000 words on the Bradbury 451 Type-Writer that is provided for you.

This is a special typewriter, and it can only be used by the person who has agreed to complete this program, no one can type for you.

Alma, these guys sound serious. I think this is the program for me. This is what I need.

Well, I do like this gold bracelet.

Charles continued reading, do not turn on the Type-Writer until you have completely read all of the instructions, and you agree to the consequences of this program. Once you put on the bracelet and turn on the Bradbury 451 Type-Writer, you are fully committed to this program. You will become a published writer within one year. Guaranteed.
Please read the following carefully.

Alma put the gold bracelet around her wrist.

Charles continued reading, once you accept the program and fasten the bracelet around your wrist. The bracelet contains....

Alma put the bracelet on her wrist and snapped the clasp.

Charles continued reading, the bracelet contains cyanide poison. The bracelet is linked to the Bradbury 451 Type-Writer. At the end of each day at 12 o'clock midnight, if you have not typed 2000 words the cyanide will be released from the bracelet. You must type 2000 words every single day until the end of the contract.

Charles screamed at Alma, "What did you do what did you do... take that off."

"I can't get it off Charles it won't come off, there's no way to undo it. Get something to cut it off Charles."

Charles read on if you damage the bracelet or try to remove it by any mechanical means it will release the cyanide automatically. At the end of one year if you have complied with the contract the bracelet will release itself.

"Charles where did you get this package, where did this come from? We have to go to the store, to the company that sent this, where did it come from?"

"It came from the dark web." I used the computer at the library to order it. Alma, there's no physical address for the company."

Charles continued to read the instructions.

You will also be required to send \$100 in cash each month to P.O. Box 716 New York. If the money is not received by first of each month the cyanide will be released from the bracelet at the midnight deadline.

Don't turn on that typewriter Charles. "I already did.", He shouted.

In the weeks and months that followed Charles was typing like a madman and he was typing well over the required 2000 words each day.

He was excited to be writing so much and being so creative. He would never let Alma read what he wrote, but he would show her the word count on the typewriter, 3057 Word count, 2940 Word count, 4121 Word count each day when she came home from work.

As the months went by, Alma was vigilant about making sure that she gave Charles the \$100.00 each month to send to the company.

She was becoming more and more stressed. She was always aware of the bracelet on her wrist always fearful that it would inject the poison into her skin.

As the time went by, Charles was spending more time during the day with his friends drinking and less time at his typewriter.

Some evenings she would come home from work and find him passed out on the sofa. She would have to wake him and make him type the remaining words to reach the 2000 word count.

She questioned him about how he was getting the money to buy beer and he said that he did some odd jobs for the maintenance man and he was paying him in beer.

She reminded him that money was tight and it was all she could do to make the additional \$100 a month for the Boot Camp payment and still pay the bills.

She was coming to the end of her wits.

She was not sleeping at night and she was having to work double shifts. She told him she felt like she was having a nervous breakdown.

She wanted this damn bracelet off her wrist.

Charles assured her that it would be ok, that he would finish the 2000 words every day and not to worry. It would only be a few more months, then it would all be over and he would be a published writer.

Then she could then quit her waitress job and he would support her.

Alma was exhausted and she became crazed with anger when she came home from the late shift just before midnight and found Charles passed out on the sofa. She screamed at Charles wanting to know if he had finished the 2000 words for the midnight deadline.

Charles seem to be having a little fun teasing and taunting her. No, I haven't finished it yet.

"For god sake's Charles this is the last day it has to be done by midnight or I die. Not you, but me... I die."

Charles was sitting at his desk with a smile.

He showed Alma a letter from a publishing company. They informed him that they would be publishing his manuscript. I already sent my manuscript to a real publisher and they liked it.

Alma looked at the acceptance letter and noticed the letter was dated two months ago. "Why didn't you tell me?"

See Alma.... I told you this thing would work now, I'm going to be published.

"What about the bracelet, what happens with this Boot Camp thing?" "Did you finish your 2000 words today it has to be done by midnight." I want this damn bracelet off my wrist."

Charles explained, "Oh yeah... about that bracelet... push the side and the middle of the bracelet at the same time." Alma did as instructed and the bracelet popped open and fell off.

"I don't understand, Charles, did you finish the 2000 words, it's almost midnight?"

"Well... that's what I need to explain. There really never was a Boot Camp for Writers, I kind of... made that up."

Alma was puzzled, "But the bracelet and the typewriter?"

The bracelet was from the magic shop, it's a trick bracelet. The maintenance man gave me the typewriter. Someone died and left it in their apartment.

Alma, was ready to explode, "I wore that bracelet for a year of my life, thinking that I could die at any time, do you know what that did to my mind?"

"What did you do with the \$100 that I gave you every month?"

"Sorry about that too... I spent it on beer and stuff."

Hey... I wrote my story and it will be published."

"Not that I really care, but what's the story about Charles?"

"It's about a writer that told his wife he would die if he not type 2000 words every day for a year."

"So let me guess... the wife supported him, gave him money and took care of him for the whole year. Did she work 2 jobs standing on her feet 12 hours a day waiting tables for a whole year?" "So, Charles... how many words did you type tonight?"

I don't know, it doesn't matter, it's not real....

Alma was crazed with madness.

"How many words have you typed tonight?" she demanded.

Charles looked at the word count, it's 1010 words.

Alma went into the bedroom and came out with a pistol in her hand.

"Alma, put down that gun. That gun is loaded, this is not funny. What are you doing?"

"It's 15 minutes until the deadline, you have 15 minutes to type 990 words give or take, you better start typing or someone is going to die at midnight."

"Alma... it's not real, no one is going to die if I don't type 2000 words by midnight. I made it all up there is no dark web no Boot Camp company."

Alma fired the gun into the floor.
"Charles, you don't understand, someone is going to die if you don't have 2000 words typed on that typewriter in the next 14 minutes."

Charles started typing as fast as he could. He tried to reason with Alma to stop this insanity. He was starting to sweat profusely as he typed.

"How many words now... Charles, you have 13 minutes?"

Charles yelled out, "1227." "Alma, please stop," he begged. Alma had completely snapped and Charles knew it. He started to get up from the desk.

She cocked the pistol and put the barrel at the back of his head. With gritted teeth, she told him to type or die, that he had 10 minutes left.

"Make no mistake, Charles, at midnight if you do not have 2000 words typed you will die."

She was counting down the minutes until midnight as he typed. She would ask how many words now Charles, and he would call out the number.

"Seven minutes Charles.... how many words?" 1390. "Five minutes Charles how many words?" 1575. "You are not going to make it Charles." Charles was red faced and having trouble breathing. "Don't stop Charles two minutes left." "Charles, how many words?"

"1991 please Alma I don't feel very good." Charles grabbed for his heart and fell on the floor holding his chest gasping for air.

Alma leaned over the desk and looked at the typewriter, "Yep, one thousand nine hundred and ninety one words". "Get up Charles, you only need one more line."

"Oops." "Charles.... it's midnight and it looks like you have missed your Dead-Line."

The End.

1991 WORD COUNT

MAKE A POEM
WRITE A STORY
MAKE A DRAWING
MAKE A ZINE
EVERYDAY

