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Sometimes Flowers Assault In Drones

by Tom Ellis Richmond

pop. clup. click. advance. advance. advance. advance. advance ...
focus...

shfta!

a few rows. most everyone smiling. content. comfortable. unaffected.
a single frown. a single grimace. a single glare of loathing and
remorse. all the same person..

this is the difference between you and me. you have no idea what i'm
talking about. even if i were to show you the picture, you'd be
clueless as to what it all meant, who the people were, why they were
lined up, why they were all smiling in the same insincere way. it's
what separates us.

advance...focus...

sflit!

a few rows. different arrangement. same circumstances. more
extreme.

so here's how it is. i sit in darkness, stuffed in a camera bag the same
way people hide their crumby poetry in the bottom left drawer; only
to be seen when needed or desired. all the while, i'm listening,
hearing the story, creating it in my mind, unbiased, to be recorded at
a later time (no one knows when, or even if), only to be experienced
for now.

you don't know what that's like, you can't. it is simply what makes
me a camera, and you a human being...

oh, and before you try and correct me, i'll have you know that
cameras and guns and computers and things like that, we don't read

books. we don't read anything the way you do. we read everything instead of some things. you'd read the same way if mother nature didn't see fit to give you a neck. nothing but seven joints waiting to break-down and be repaired by a man who claims to know how to twist it just the right way.

so back to the story...you don't know what it's like, to hold a story in for months, years, lifetimes, eternities. human beings, you all just tell it to the next person you see, tell it to everyone at the bar, the deaf guy at the bus stop that doesn't have the heart to tell you he hears the same way Kubrick filmed explosions in space. that's the funny thing about you: you honestly aren't patient enough to ever get the whole story.

what's worse, is you rarely manage to tell stories well. stories need ins and outs, twists, turns, detours. human beings are so full of stress and angst they can never slow down enough to do a story justice. to you it's about the climax.

but it's not!

the hardest part of telling a story to a human is knowing where to start. knowing just how much history the story needs before the subtleties really set in, the emotions become vivid, the pain becomes raw. this is quite a feat, not just anyone can do it. no, it's not about the climax at all. why do you think i'm waiting so long to tell you the story? i'm teaching you a lesson. the story is about the little pieces, the tiny, bulbous ends to your puzzle pieces that make them lock in to create some god awful picture of the grand canyon.

it's not a picture, that puzzle...it's a bunch of tiny pictures that make sense on a large scale. it's a photo album, a type of story. everything matters, down to the faint trace of a tear as a boy's eyes well up, ready to brim over because everyone is reacting in the same preferred way...except uncle ellis' best friend, chuck, and his nephew, north. and this is where we'll begin.

advance...focus...focus...

i can tell he's guessing. he's holding me so that he can stare into my lens, trying to guess when he's in focus. his hands are sweaty. he doesn't understand that the focus is not the key, but the subject.

snitter!

an angry father. the son being elbowed. mom telling him not to play with the camera during the funeral.

sure, north's mom didn't have time to tell him to stop messing with me during that short exposure. but she was about to, and the picture keeps the core of that message intact. that's something you'll just have to learn. remember that the time-line, the focus, is all perception. what's important is the subject.

north had been doing this for at least five minutes. his left eye twitched just a little every time he was about to press the shutter release button. finally someone noticed. the five minutes had been a test to see if anyone was still alive. it seemed to me, and to north, that a funeral stopped time, like a picture, or destroyed time, killing everyone. for a moment north and i thought that this brief pause in every day life was good...but it was just way too creepy and upsetting to enjoy.

aperture adjust...aperture adjust...lens removed...

i knew north from his birth. i took the first picture of him. he was always very tender, very quiet, and very reclusive. he kept to himself until he had something to show everyone. he even refused to crawl in front of friends and family. i only got to take pictures of him sitting for the longest time...but i was left out in preparation of documenting, and celebrating north's first locomotion.

he was always sitting. then he would crawl to another room while no one was watching...and taught himself to walk. one day he just gets up and walks into the living room where i was sitting, and i was violently jerked up...and there it was...

focus.

sclik!

pudgy legs. red overalls. a blue and white striped shirt. curly brown baby hair. a defiant grin. north.

north removed my lens to look at my mirror. he did this all the time because he loved seeing the insides of any machine or gadget. he stared blankly, and muttered a simple physics equation under his breath. it was about a fox trying to drop a bomb on a moving train from a tower. all to kill a rabbit. it had been on a show geared towards kids, trying to teach them physics, or how to become a terrorist.

over and over he repeated the equation. changed the variables. even though north looked like he was shuddering, he was really pretending to feel the fox's bomb explode his imagination. and it was obvious why; the preacher was giving what was supposed to be a eulogy. instead, it came out of his mouth with the inspiration and grace of a three legged dog.

advance...focus...

sclop!

a preacher. red faced. pointing. poised as if to strike. leaning slightly towards his audience. insecure.

at this second everything stopped just long enough to give everyone an opportunity to look at north.

the preacher had been talking about how unfaithful ellis was to jesus and god and the holy spirit...this was why ellis was in hell right now. he didn't say it outright. instead, he compared him to the burning bush, but told the congregation that tom would burn forever. who knows, maybe he just didn't have a strong command over language

and his tongue...how pious of him!

the people, they had all been sitting and watching, dumb-faced, dumb-founded. the women looking at their pretty new shoes, ashamed of using such an occasion for vanity. the men pretending they didn't know what crying was. the children fidgeting in their seats, waiting to go home and play.

then everyone stopped, and looked at north, and wondered why he was so weird.

things went back to normal, it only lasted a split second, but it was long enough for north. it meant something to him.

pinkish skin. grins. eighties hair. a happy family.

you see, north was very close to his uncle ellis before he died. he adored the man, his stories, the way he understood how people worked. the mans fearless adventuring. one time uncle ellis started building a sail boat in his back yard so that he could sail off into nowhere, maybe never return if he so chose. north loved this about the man.

the only thing north didn't know, was why ellis was so free...

it turns out ellis used to be married. he had two kids, both a little older than north, a dog, a beautiful wife, a house. everything a man needs to pretend he's complete. it all seemed so perfect, but ellis feared confrontation, and as a result, he could never get to the point required to ever really get to know anyone truly, and well. instead, ellis did as he pleased, and tried to make people happy the few ways he knew how.

what changed this picture, was an air plane. ellis started building one with his son in the living room. parts everywhere! every spare second devoted to building an air plane that could take ellis anywhere but here.

his wife didn't find this as exciting. a fight was starting. ellis walked away; he didn't argue. and a few months later he was divorced, living on his own, building a sail boat to take him anywhere but here. and here is where the plot thickens...

north watched chuck, his uncle's best friend salute, and walk out. north couldn't take it anymore, and decided to stop being a man, and cry as much as he could. he clinched my body, walked up to the casket, and looked at ellis for the last time.

he didn't look right, it upset north, he looked so artificial. so it goes with death, it seems.

the limo pulled up and north joined his family for the ride to the cemetery where he would watch a strange man flip a lever lowering ellis into the ground. no grave stone, only a temporary marker that would remain for years until north's dad bought one. incidentally he was buying one for his parents as well.

it turns out ellis always caused quite a stir. he was controversial in that everyone wanted control over him. because the rest of the family couldn't decide on who would pay for the grave stone, couldn't compromise, the grave remained incomplete. control...it was all about control, and north could see it happening. he was furious that anyone would deprive such a wonderful man of the customary carved rock.

an access road. a motorcycle turned contortionist. debris.

ellis' death would not have affected north so deeply were it not to have come so suddenly. riding his motorcycle one night with a friend (which was odd because ellis had terrible night vision) ellis finds himself in a culvert, propelled through the air like the air plane that was never finished, the one that never took him anywhere but here.

in the hospital ellis made fun of the pins in his legs, and made light of the accident. six of his vertebrae were fused together, and his leg almost met fates with humpty dumpty. most importantly, he was

alive, and as he pointed out, got to ride in a helicopter, finally.

his wife was there, and north watched he beam and bend under the weight of a stressful past, and a hopeful future. north could tell she was going to marry him again, they all could, and they were happy. after all, they made such a good couple, how could they deprive the family of that joy?

it didn't work out, though. the day before ellis was set to leave, a blood clot loosened in his leg, and crashed the party in his healthy, still alive, heart.

advance...focus...

stlah!

rows of tables. chairs. food. people waiting in line. styrofoam. plastic silverware.

this was the part that bothered north the most. he couldn't understand why everyone could be so happy at a reception commemorating the sudden death of such an amazing person. people acted as if they were at a wedding reception!

north reluctantly grabbed a plate, and ate a mixture of cold and warm foods...he hated every second of it. he took the time to stare down every smiling face in the room, and try to force it into a frown with his mind...it didn't work.

then suddenly the air filled with a buzz. there was talk of a family picture. after all, this did bring the whole family together. how lovely it would be!

i agreed with north; it was sick. everyone started milling about, making a bee-line for the door, lining up, every aunt trying to direct everyone where to go.

silence.

stillness.

1...

2...

3...

so yeah, i tried to over-expose that frame. it was a travesty, something i'm ashamed to have been a part of, even if i was forced. and even though the picture came out fine, there was a hole forever burning in the center....

it was north. trying to fill the parking lot with hate. enraged that ellis would be forgotten so easily for a picture of a family that got along for a few hours so they could all pretend to care that ellis was dead. really, they were just upset he was out of reach, and lived a life they wouldn't.

he never finished the sail boat or the air plane. he didn't need to...he already had plenty of planes that belonged to friends he could fly. and as for sailing, he took care of that with day dreams working at a printing press, living in a tiny house, and loving it.

maybe ellis wasn't a great man. maybe he really "wasn't worth a damn," the way north's cantankerous grandfather always said about everyone that wasn't him. still it doesn't matter...

you see? it's the story. it's the little things. i'm a camera. i see things the way they are, the way you can't, in reverse order, complete, perfect, encapsulated by a history with the subject. this is why you fill me with cellulose acetate or polyester coated with light sensitive minerals, waiting for light to strike the frame. it's why you get a professional to develop your film. it's precious to you.

it's me telling you why north was so upset by the slew of funerals that followed...all of them the same as ellis'. it's the storyteller taking

you on a journey you'd never been on before. it's understanding someone else just a little bit more. it's not the time-line...it's the subject.

advance...fuck focus...

sfhtah!

a few rows. most everyone smiling. content. comfortable. unaffected. a single frown. a single grimace. a single glare of loathing and remorse. all the same person..

About The Author

Tom Ellis Richmond is a writer in the Dallas area.

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