

[Back to Article](#)

Truth Be Told

by Tom Ellis Richmond

This short story is the first chapter of a novel I am currently working on. Though it will be a collection of short stories that will (ideally) stand alone, I hope to form a cohesive bond between each story to create a novel of which the sum of the parts is greater than the whole...or in short, meta-fiction.

The novel, as a whole, will focus upon narrative structure and perspective, most namely the narrators all being inanimate objects. With this said, I hope you enjoy this short beginning.

i once knew a boy who picked up the phone knowing the message to be conveyed. the messenger in tears, boy dazed, the words stale at this point.

he had just stopped by to check in, walked in on red lines slung floor to ceiling...pollock was nearby, or so it seemed.

lead sinks to the bottom of every cup. brad was worthless, a burden on the family, blah blah blah, we'd be better off without you, or so his father told him. the man enforced the laws in this small town, taking pleasure in the harassment and power. he lusted with the best. brad's dad went to go drinking at the bars the way he always did...worthless, a burden on his wife and kid, an asshole. taking the words to heart he used father's work tool to empty his thoughts all over the room. had anyone been there seconds before, they could attest to the sound of metal slapping air, a brief clap, and silence.

the boy saw, left, and told no one.

when laura called in tears he wasn't surprised to hear about the burial plans erected on brad's behalf. funny how easily a funeral cleanses the minds of those seeking absolution.

the boy and brad had agreed upon sticking things out. brad

surrendered. he was deserted.

i sat here and listened, what could i do? i sat here and listened while he failed to tell the story. failed to tell the truth, always afraid of catharsis...it would lead to abandonment and isolation.

the boy knew too little, too well, to ever pinpoint solitude accurately on any map...

i can't remember anymore what he had to say about so many other things; it doesn't matter, they're just vague tidbits of life, and love, and loss.

he always liked the licorice jellybeans. with a glass of cold water you could set your tongue ablaze with the squeezing sensation of the aftertaste, turning your mouth into an igloo housing a thousand penguins. i can't remember the last time the boy took the time to indulge, to seek out those things that made him so happy in his childhood...honestly, i can't remember when he stopped being happy. sometimes we think he never was.

my friend told me he used to listen to old jazz, vinyl on the turntable, reading, reading, reading. he said the boy would talk to him about life, clumsily, slowly...but no matter, it was honest. the boy was never honest with me. he doesn't listen to anything from a needle anymore, the ice queen burned the player along with the black frisbee disks encoded with musical ridges.

this same friend was the only one to ever see him cry. like everyone else he was selfish with his emotions; the boy abided by the rule of emotions being meant for experience and not display, otherwise he felt inadequate. he reserved sharing for church where he could watch others share their false impressions, conversions exacted in a moment of despair. the boy knew it meant nothing.

sometimes flowers assault in droves. uncle ellis died leaving in his wake a few dozen death ceremonies all of them the same. preacher said uncle was much like the burning bush. it made no sense, and the

boy forgot about how preacher said uncle was probably in hell because he never went to church. my friend said the boy was running physics equations through his mind, a train, a tower, a bomb, a falling, an explosion...all timed. it worked, and he escaped crying...until chuck waved goodbye, walking out, never to see his best friend again.

chuck used to fly model airplanes with uncle ellis, chuck used to fly replicas with uncle ellis, chuck used to fly real planes with uncle ellis. they skimmed the sky and drank the milk, but not at night, uncle was blinded by darkness.

-the boy cried later that day and his aunt from the other side caught him. she asked why...and he lied. he spun a story of time lost, experiences unrealized. i doubt she ever figured out he was sad, she always thought (like everyone else on that side) that feelings were backed by reason, and not emotion. naturally, the boy was ashamed to be sad at such a tender age. youth is intended to callous the pads of fingers...later in life we'll never be burned as a result.

he cried in response to the photography. the family in its entirety present, why not take a pictures? the misery would last longer, after all... the cousins rejoiced, the men slapped the card to the table, the women orchestrated the finest of photographic events in recent history. the boy recognized the problem. he understood why a funeral appeased both sides, why it might enforce treaties drafted years before (but never honored), why they thought to take pictures.

the boy saw, left, and told no one.

my friend told me that long before uncle died, the boy was melancholy. i think it had something to do with clovers...i'm not sure he ever found the four cleft variety to save himself from hell. either way, my friend said he used to listen to music at night to make himself cry...

the boy and uncle ellis had agreed upon sticking things out. uncle ellis was translocated. the boy was passed up.

but he couldn't. he was lonely, and longing (like we all are) and homely, and withdrawn. it's true, he didn't belong there, unfit, unathletic...but he did fit in well enough, and people touched his face far too often, the wrong ones...it's always the wrong ones...

the boy knew too little, too well, to ever pinpoint solitude accurately on a map...

my older brother once recounted a tale of the boy: the boy fell in love, but in a very strange way. my brother was there, you see, he noticed everything!

a slender waist isn't always enough. madelaine told him she loved him, and the boy couldn't refuse. he sat with sinking desperation, knowing that he would at least have to endure this for a short while in order to justify giving up. over the months the boy reciprocated, the boy was possessed, the boy was reckless in his endeavors. it was a sort of agape he couldn't wrest himself of.

time went by, and the boy questioned...he felt guilty for doing so. madelaine had been so sweet, and so loving. yet, the boy repaid her with doubt and uneasy submission. something happened that afternoon, and boy's feet sprang into the air, his head against the floor, and he was lost.

he went to go see madelaine a few days later, but she failed to notice the flowers he brought until her mother pointed the out. he wrote her a poem, she blushed as she read it. it was near winter, the perfect backdrop for her mother's favorite movie: bing crosby crooned, and lulled them into a stupor. madelaine and boy began to discuss kissing...he asked permission, she obliged, he felt sick afterwards. my friend, and my older brother, both assured me boy always felt sick after kissing.

the grass turned brown, covered in white, and the boy went to see madelaine, again. this time with more flowers, larger, but less modest than roses. lovely bright winter colors, so large boy could barely fit

them onto the bench seat! they spilled cold water on his pants, but boy would eventually get used to that feeling...it happened every time.

madelaine seemed embarrassed by his gesture, and they ate in silence at a tex-mex restaurant in town, in front of cowboys. he wanted a kiss, convinced he wouldn't be sick, she wanted the boy to touch her breasts. he wasn't entirely sure what they were supposed to look or feel like, but it only half mattered, she wouldn't show him, she was saving sight for marriage. so the boy ran his hands over her padded brazier, and was reminded of marshmallows. madelaine was boy-chested, and so...well...it really didn't matter what breasts felt like, he could only touch padded lumps covering flat skin. the boy never told anyone about this. they were in a park, it was dark, she drove a cavalier...but it was a lovely blue! how strange the car must have looked parking in the lot of a public park!

the boy felt something was amiss, and madelaine couldn't make it through

one of the boy's favorite movies. my friend told me it was about a princess buttercup. madelaine found it boring. the boy found this upsetting. they slept across the hall from one another, her father asleep on the recliner in the living room, keeping vigil. the boy awoke in a cold sweat listening to birds scream wildly at the window. he didn't fit in the bed, it was madelaine's little sister's. brit said she would marry the boy if madelaine didn't. madelaine told the boy that brit would never change her sheets after boy slept there...he found that disgusting...he sweat entirely too much that night.

earlier that morning, while the birds screamed wildly the boy allowed madelaine to sleep while he went into the kitchen for a glass of milk. madelaine was lactose intolerant she wouldn't miss it. outside, on the lawn, boy saw a deer trespassing the way animals do, only...it isn't trespassing because they're all roughly the same color. the boy sipped. the deer ate snow. he noticed the sun painting everything red and orange on white, yellows in his eyes...he smiled! the deer leaped away, and the boy couldn't understand. so on and so

on madelaine returned to wakefulness. he went home.

the boy returned a number of times after that, but always without flowers...flowers seemed to be bad luck

best kept to himself. madelaine always lay listlessly, indifferently in his lap while he tried to play with her hair...but she was a drill team kind of girl, and after every game the styling-product-saturated hair would never separate without her irritation tagging neatly behind.

after the drive home that night, he told her on her grandmother's porch of how he strongly disliked his mother. madelaine cried, she didn't understand. she thought it was abuse, and he corrected her. she was the superstitious type, the kind that believed in cyclical curses manifested in concentric circles around the family tree.

the boy thought reading would help her understand

he lent a number of his favorite books to madelaine (most importantly his copy of a book about an orphaned boy running through a fifties period ghetto). madelaine never read it, and he sheepishly asked for it back...after the end. i'm not sure if he boy ever got it back, and i'm not sure he knows, either. my brother and i both think he forgets about the book on purpose...even if he did read it time after time on his front porch, bundled in a jacket waiting for mom to come home...he forgot his keys inside. the same author wrote a book about Eskimos, and the boy read it under the same circumstances on his front porch one afternoon. he loved it.

and their end was near. apocalyptic signs marked its approach: any good christian knows that the end is always brought by signs and symbols...not time. and madelaine lay more indifferently while he met her entire family. that night on his bench seat she kissed him and said goodbye. but there was nothing good about it...only concise. and he didn't understand until he opened his christmas present, a letter, multi-purpose, breaking things off. how odd...

we were always there, one of us. we listened, we watched, we never

asked him to do anything save telling us how he felt, what he thought, where things went.

one time, my older brother tells me, he sat through the boy begging madelaine to come back. madelaine did, boy rejoiced, and set course for a visit. madelaine despised his childhood favorite, a cartoon (about a fox thieving from the rich). it turns out madelaine was interested in little more than elisabeth elliot...blah blah blah

it was st. valentine's morning, and the boy emptied another glass of milk, watched another deer on the lawn...this deer bled from the legs, scratches and scrapes from thorn and thistle. the boy understood. madelaine came in to leave him once again, to let him drive home in anguish listening to song about amy, a fighter who fought like caciuz clay. he drew parallels, but only of loss. that was all he identified with those days...and so he misinterpreted a number of songs. he declared them anthems, and one time smiled while crying, somehow happy to be so sad, and sad to be so happy. he still tries to reproduce this feeling...sometimes.

the boy saw, left, and told no one.

outside, he recognized defeat, and that's why he cried. it was st. valentine's afternoon, and he left after embracing madelaine, bidding farewell knowing this would be his last good-bye. there was nothing good about it...only brutal. that night madelaine ended it, he stopped talking to her, and glassy eyed went from moment to moment.

the boy and madelaine had agreed upon sticking things through. madelaine tired. the boy was discarded.

he didn't play his first big show in his new band; he thought that it might have ben hur. gregory and david (like the saints) came to pray for him. the boy felt prey to a number of religious powers, but found comfort in knowing people cared about his happiness and well-being.

the boy knew too little, too well, to ever pinpoint solitude accurately

on any map...

the ice queen drove a sinister green cavalier, and it was here that the boy was imprisoned...circumvented and subjugated. every time he tried to go she wept and mourned, the faux-teared harlot, and he condemned himself for wanting to leave. this all happened while parked at a public park.

kathleen was working at the coffee shop where the show took place, but he wasn't there...he was home in bed (reading about a great divorce, much like blake himself had written years before). who knows what would have happened were boy to have been there, maybe kathleen would never have noticed him.

he was vulnerable and lonely, and kathleen rejected him initially unlike madelaine. as a result, he clamored for this polar opposite and fell from the face of the earth for three years. while there he met the man who, dying in vain, erected the capital of the north pole. it was built from blood and polar bear claws.

kathleen was different. she hated all cinema; bored her, soothed her to sleeping. watching a movie would allow him to stop looking at her the way she always demanded, allowing him to pretend she wasn't there. maybe she noticed...

kathleen was different. she would demand flowers and love tokens, she would wait for no one to point, greedy to accept any trinket, pending it was of material value. he once gave her a glass angel, but it was of no use, she wasn't an angel, and found no worth in their image...

kathleen was different. she hated all literature. useless, trivial, silly things to occupy your mind. the boy noticed, however, that she religiously bought bridal magazines. she wanted a wedding, a baby, a family, a means of keeping him within her grasp forever. on time, while hiding in the bathroom, faking bodily functions, he avoided the penetrating stare of that woman. he sat upon her throne, picking up the collection of cream pictures, noticed, amazed. there stood two

smiling models, neither of them caring for the other, giving the impression of jubilation. he wanted that (at least the semblance), he didn't have it. he was terrified by a stranger's ability to look more interested in an acquaintance than he was in the ice queen.

my other friend of a distance said the boy used to lay on a red couch in kathleen's apartment, staring at the ceiling, listening to songs of loss. he remained in bed rubbing the bitch's back, thinking of how much he missed madelaine. strangely, he had convinced himself he didn't miss madelaine for the longest time. he was good with illusions, enough so to fool himself. he often tried to leave before she was asleep, tired of being enslaved...kathleen always noticed and always reprimanded. she understood the reins were in the hands of madelaine, and hated her for it, and despised boy the more for not confessing. i suppose that was the only right the ice queen ever experienced...

my other friend of a distance said kathleen was addicted to images of people creating friction with their genitals, the sounds of sweaty flesh slapping against moistened flesh, the most perverse kind, and this bothered the boy. the ice queen grew colder and colder as she used the boy and took what she could. he was exhausted and tossed in the towel. kathleen, in turn, tossed his possessions onto a pyre. he slapped her, the first he ever hit a girl. forever the last.

time passed and the boy celebrated, measuring his freedom in pints. he chased, and chased, and every girl withdrew and eluded. it turns out the boy was still homely.

my older brother said he used to lay the same way (as he did on the ice queen's couch) back at home after he stopped talking to madelaine. for three years he missed her, and with his pint-sized freedoms he could talk to her once more. he wrote letters, but Kathleen intercepted with a key forged before boy vanquished her. eventually madelaine responded (my older brother had the honor of bearing the message). joyous, happy, ecstatic he was to regain a friend once lost. however, he didn't know why he was happy; madelaine was never what he wanted...if you ask me, he just wanted to end the cycle of abandonment that began when his mom turned

his dad into a vegetable.

the boy and madelaine talked. madelaine still loved him in the boy's mind...but she was with another. time passed. madelaine said she never ventured pas the boy, that rejecting him was the hardest thing she had ever done. the boy bought it, and never told her she broke his heart in way he knew he would never recover from.

it's funny how the boy could never separate eros from agape...

he typed his whole life in tidbits onto page after imaginary page, but it was always transparent and extended...nothing more than two sentences buried in paragraphs, masked as idea, rather than experience. we were there for him, hard plastic, keyboard and monitor, connected by invisible strings. my older brother nearly resigned a number of times, as did i. we never thought the whole story would come through...and maybe it still hasn't...

but at least now we're close enough to identify the continents on his map of experience...

About The Author

Tom Ellis Richmond is a writer in the Dallas area.

© 2007 ouragora. All rights reserved.