

One Thousand Words for Gloria

Golden rays of sunlight fell upon the Earth and carried forward a colorful display of the world to the people who lived there. Gloria was having a picnic with her family. They sat on the soft, golf-course-like grass, with a checkered red and white blanket spread beneath them. They ate ground bologna sandwiches and drank cranberry juice which lingered on her tongue. Not far from her was a playground, where her two young boys ran over the rubberized metal grates and plastic structures.

Gloria was thirty-eight. She was a conglomeration of her parents' genes. Her hair was black and wavy and it parted on the right side with a white hair clip. The beams of light that raced down to Earth just to meet her eyes and then expire seemed to her like holy messengers of truth. They rebounded off the surfaces of everything just to rendezvous with her and reveal small, simple facts of life. "Your dress," they said, "having been bleached and ironed, is so pure and niveous in its shade, that it is dazzling. Especially in contrast with the sky," they told her, "which is a deeper and darker blue than any ocean on the planet. And of the Earth herself," they whispered in her ear, "It could be said that her grass is so rich and green, that if it's vibrancy was correlated with life, then surely no grass has lived before."

The whole world seemed like a complex set of machinery that revolved around days like this. Somewhere out there right now an old man was dying by the baleful light of his television screen. Somewhere out there right now a school girl looked wistfully out of a classroom window into the summer day that lay beyond. Her husband Hank was there, leaning on the checkered blanket with his Polaroid camera in hand. All morning long he had been trying to sneak a picture of his wife, just for her to inadvertently avoid the camera's eye. The photographs he took would

sit in boxes for years, only to be taken out occasionally and looked at. Their entire existence was justified by those few, precious moments found in between dusting off the boxes and putting them away again.

Gloria's eyes drifted towards her children. They were a reiteration of what she herself was, a conglomeration of their parents' genes. But their skin was young and pink. They had no lines in their faces, no calluses. They were smiling and smeared with dirt. When she looked at them, love rose in her heart like the steam in an old teapot, until it was boiling over. Only now it was tinged with a strange sense of unfamiliarity. As she stared at her kids she felt it was not who they were that she was seeing, but rather a fraction of the people they were going to be. She felt as if time was a cruel magician who deceived children into thinking they were young and happy, only for most of them to realize that they are actually quite old and cynical. It was a neat trick.

Her children continued to play completely unaware of the system established around them. The world was like a Rube Goldberg machine, but who was it that knocked down the first domino and set the machine in motion? Was it God? Science? Maybe nothing at all? Mankind had to choose. Every day of your life you had to choose.

All of these thoughts cascaded down upon Gloria, although not in the articulated, vocable form that I have presented here, but rather in a wash of feelings and emotions, much like how you can know the rain by its coldness, and not be familiar with each and every drop that falls. Her gaze fell to her own hands. They were red and frumpy. They resembled her grandmother's hands. She tried to imagine every time she plunged them into the waiting hot water, every cut they had received, all the door handles they had twisted. Gloria heard the sound of a camera shutter and looked away again.

“You know what they say,” Hank was saying, shaking out the image on a Polaroid,

disappointed with the results. Gloria didn't listen. She was lost in thought, her eyes trained on her kids again. She was quite young once too, but the world was constantly spinning, and all of that spinning had made her older. "A picture is worth a thousand words, right?"

All that was left now was the denouement. When Gloria got up in the mornings, her bones were tired, her flesh loose. She could feel death creeping in slowly. Gathering in the corners, like dust.

"*Gloria.*" Hank said. His words sunk in slowly, like roots pushing through the cold earth.

"Yes?" She looked up at him with her jaw slack as if she was about to say something, but forgot what it was. There was a second's pause during which Hank studied her face intently before asking, with affection in his voice, "What's wrong?"

"I... I don't know." She said, casting about for the most accurate depiction of her plight. Very slowly, the world returned to her. She could hear the cicada's chirping, feel the warmth of the sun on her back. "Nothing." She said finally. "Nothing is wrong." She was relieved to find that this was quite true.

"Well, then, smile." Hank said. "It's a beautiful day and I've been trying to get a good picture of you all morning." And then everything seemed to resume its natural pace. The world kept spinning. Someone jogged by on the sidewalk, huffing wildly, and somewhere beyond the fence line a dog barked. Her kids were a short twenty yards away, yelling and laughing. She saw the smile on her husband's face and realized she felt like smiling too, but as her cheek muscles rose and the corners of her eyes began to contract, the tears that she didn't know were forming there began to fall. She almost started laughing as the tears were streaming down her face. But the picture was as good as ruined. She begged Hank for a retake, but he didn't care. He said it was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen.