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Division 4 Humanities

Short Stories

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Story 1:

To Aisha, pancakes smelled differently in the morning – like innocence and nostalgia and the dust floating in the air that you can only see when sunlight comes through a window. It’s what you think of when you think of what mornings smell like. That, combined with yesterday’s perfume that was drifting off of Margot’s sweater around Aisha’s shoulders – that’s what you think of when you think of what home smells like. And when Margot rolls out of bed and shuffles into the kitchen to wrap her arms around you and whisper an apology in your ear while she still smells like sleep and pressed linen pillow-cases – that’s what you think of when you think of what love smells like.

It was early January. Warmth from the stove held back the cold from outside as Aisha laddled batter onto the pan. Margot dozed silently in the next room. Sometimes quiet is off-putting. Sometimes it hangs heavy in the air like fog and feels like it’s crawling under your skin. But the quiet in their apartment that morning felt precious – safe, but at the same time so fragile and breakable. And in the moments before Margot began to wake up, Aisha let the quiet steal away the memory of last night’s drama from her mind. And now the quiet sounds like Margot, rolling out of bed, still half asleep,

and wandering into the kitchen and into her wife's arms. And they sit together. They share breakfast and conversation and when the conversation runs out they share silence. And when silence seems to have run its course, Aisha stands up and retrieves the dusty film camera from their bedroom that they'd gotten at a yard sale when they first started dating. Each photo of the two of them was an entry in a journal of all of the times something could have gone wrong but didn't. It was a reminder of how lucky they had been and the things they had overcome. And on that morning, while Margot sat at the table eating pancakes, Aisha made another entry.

Click.

Story 2:

The sunny day felt inappropriate to say the least. Aisha and Margot got ready to leave in silence. They both agreed it would be best for them to get outside, but neither of them truly believed that. The past few days had taught them everything they needed to know about grief including that, more than anything, it would always try its best to drive itself between you and the ones you love. But you can't let it even if you want to, because it's easier to cope when you have someone to share it with. Still, it was hard not to hate the world for not waiting longer. Blue skies seemed undeserved and the warm breeze somehow felt like pity in the late absence of their friend.

Click.

Their bedroom with the windows shut seemed like a fitting place for this photograph. The small sound of the shutter opening and closing for that brief second seemed to echo around the room until it settled back into its place among the quiet. The camera had grown dusty since the last time they used it, but the feeling it brought remained the same. Aisha wondered if that feeling of bitter accomplishment was worth the effort of reliving past hardship every time they felt the need to take a picture. It had started as a way to document their lives and what they'd overcome but as time went on it began to feel like tragedy's auto-reply – like slapping a bandaid on your leg after falling off of a building or loading up a gun and shooting at your own shadow.

Aisha rose from the bed and moved towards the door, partly to see if Margot would follow, knowing that if they didn't get up now they might stay there for hours.

"You ready?" she asked, gently.

"I guess," Margot replied.

The two left their apartment, neither of them in any rush. They tried to appreciate the blue skies and the breeze and look at the day in a way that didn't make them feel betrayed by the universe. They tried to look up at the world, instead of down at their feet, and put grief on hold for a while. But that was easier said than done.

Story 3:

It's becoming increasingly apparent to me that ours is a love story, not a life story. The camera in my hands that holds so much of you and so much of me and so

much of the things we've been through together still seems to belong only to one of us. I don't understand. We took photo after photo, year after year, to freeze our luck in a moment just in case it didn't live forever. *Click*. You're clearing a space on the floor for us to dance after your mother called to say she wasn't coming to the wedding because she still didn't accept any of it. *Click*. I'm forgetting that it's almost too late for the moon to be out because you look so goddamn beautiful after just about everything went wrong on the most special day of our lives. *Click*. It's the first time we left the apartment after he died and you can see that we're not done loving him yet but our friends insisted on taking us out. *Click*. You're smiling at me as you exit the gate at JFK after we went two months without seeing each other.

These are just memories of memories of times we felt we'd fallen a little deeper in love. They're an epitaph — a sentence at most. I don't know if you ever understood that these photos aren't us, Aisha. They just aren't, and they can never be.

Click. John and Paul are singing about love on the bedroom stereo. I know you turned it on, because you were afraid of the gaps in our words. I know you took that photo, because you didn't know what else to do after what had just happened. I know it was your way of saying we could get through it. It was your way of saying you still loved me.

And now I'm in line, waiting to get them developed. I know you want to remember. I know it's important to you. That's why I do it, you know. It's because I love you. And as time goes on I'm learning how love and adoration can coexist with the resentment I feel. Not occupying two equal halves of my mind, but muddled and

confused and dancing with each other. The anger I feel towards you for never quite saying what was true builds up in my mind. And then it starts to circle around and around the real admiration for you that I hold in my heart, and the two become twisted in a knot until I can no longer distinguish between them.

But it's because I love you that I feel this way. It's because I love you that I stayed with you and took care of you and kissed you goodnight. Because I love you, I kept each and every ticket stub and saved every flower you gave me. Because I love you, I asked you to marry me. Because I love you I tried so hard to make you feel as though you hadn't made a mistake when you said yes, and because I love you I chose to keep the truth locked in a home-shaped box when I started to feel things go sour. Because I love you, I made these choices, and because I love you, I had to take your life.

Click. We're sitting in front of the open window. You look at me and tell me you're not sorry. You tell me you feel worn out. You're not feeling sentimental. It used to be that I could read your eyes like words in an epic poem, but for the life of me I can't tell what you're thinking in this picture you took. This is the last photo on the roll of film that I had to stop myself from unspooling in the sunlight to rid myself of any semblance of hope that things could have gone differently. It was the last photo you could take of us, Aisha. It was your last entry in your diary of things you were scared to regret. Fitting, I guess. It was your last day on earth.