

Short Story Winner



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Single Lens Reflex

by Geoffrey Jackson

Through the viewfinder Jerry could see about a hundred yards of gravel road that ran past the campsite. Then a battered blue Toyota appeared at the far left. Film whirled in his camera as he panned from left to right, following the car until it slowed to turn into the campsite. He zoomed back a bit to keep the grill in focus as it came towards him. The whirling stopped.

His wife, Susan, stuck her head out of the car window. "Did you get it that time?" she asked in a peevish voice. He had to be careful not to irritate her any further.

"Yes, thanks a lot, Susie. I'm sorry it took so long but the first two set ups just weren't right." The car engine stopped and she got out. Her yellow terrycloth shorts made her look bloated and tired. Perhaps a tan would make her look happier. Her face was lovely though, moody and evocative; her eyes often seemed to watch things no one else could see. Compulsively, Jerry raised his Pentax up from his chest. Susan frowned at him and then turned away.

"Where are Dale and Colin?" she asked.

"Swimming."

"By themselves?"

"No, there's a whole beachload of people."

Susan sighed and rolled her eyes, her way of scolding him.

"They're okay you know," he insisted, "They're not toddlers anymore and there is a lifeguard."

"It's okay Jerry," She was already walking away from him. "Where's the beach?"

"I said they're okay, Susan." She grabbed a towel and her walkman from the car.

"I know, Jerry. I just want to swim, it's hot."

"It's just five minutes down the road."

"Thanks." She opened the trunk and searched until she found some suntan lotion. "Are you coming?" she asked slamming down the trunk lid.

"No, I'll get the camp set up. I'll see you when you get back." She shrugged and turned away. With a lazy flip of her wrist she waved goodbye. He watched her carefully as she trudged towards the lake. Then he lept to his movie camera and set the zoom lens at full extension. A nice longshot. She had such a loose jointed stride; her frizzy blonde hair was swaying across her shoulders. Heat waves

blurred the image and the flattened perspective made it seem as though she was walking and walking away, but never really getting anywhere. More film whirled inside the camera.

When she finally disappeared from the shot Jerry turned back to the campsite. He wanted to do some location shots while he had decent light. The tall pines were a great excuse for low angle work and he began to circle the site, looking upwards. He made a rectangle with his two hands and composed his shots. This framing was important to camera-work, the shot had to emphasize the vital and cut out the irrelevant.

It took over an hour to shoot the footage he needed and the light was beginning to fail. He was taking readings with his light meter when the kids burst into camp.

Colin, the eldest at ten, ran up and slid to a stop, spraying dirt into his camera case. "Hey Dad, why isn't the tent set up? We want to get changed!" Jerry gritted his teeth.

"Because I thought you guys would like to help set it up." This was not true but it was an easy explanation. He began to clean the dirt off his camera equipment. Colin spun on his heels and was away. As he ran he shook his blonde hair from his eyes with an easy flick of his head. Susan, who was coming up the road, did not respond to his cries until he was nearly upon her. Then she simply handed the keys to him and continued her slow walk.

Their younger son Dale, eight years old, was quieter than Colin most of the time and he could never resist an opportunity to play with Jerry's expensive gear. He was now studiously fiddling with the camera tripod.

"Dale!" Jerry shouted. "Leave that alone! I've told you never to do that." Dale dropped a guilty hand from the tripod.

"I'm sorry Dad, I was just looking," he said softly. Jerry frowned at him but his heart was not in it.

"Go help your brother get the tent out of the car," he said quietly. He returned to cleaning out his camera case and Dale began to run off. But he stopped and turned back.

"Hey Dad?"

"Yes?"

"This neat man at the beach bought me and Colin a coke. He had the neatest radio. It was this big!" Dale spread his

arms to an expressive width. "He said..."

"Leave your father alone, Dale. Go help your brother." Susan dropped her towel and other gear on the picnic table and pointed at Colin, who was struggling to get the massive canvas tent out of the car trunk. Dale shot off and the two of them were soon dragging the tent from the car.

Susan sat at the picnic table.

"I thought you were going to set up camp," she said calmly, as though she merely wanted to clarify the point. Jerry felt awkward and began to fiddle with the lens in his hand.

"I'm sorry. Lost track of the time. Got some great shots though. I'll get out the stove, okay?" He, at least, was feeling hungry. She looked at him hard for a long moment.

"Sure," she said finally, with the air of someone who cannot be bothered to fight anymore.

An hour later the family was eating a dinner of franks and beans. Colin chattered and Dale ate. Susan watched them and poked at her food.

"Hey Dad?" Dale had broken off from his fast and voracious eating to ask his question.

"Yes, Dale."

"Why don't you come to the beach tomorrow. You could take a picture of me diving off the dock."

"More like bellyflopping off the dock, you klutz!" Colin teased.

"I ain't a klutz! You're just too chicken to even try, chicken!" Dale was puffing up with indignation. Colin just sneered and punched him on the arm. They began to wrestle at the table. Jerry looked at Susan.

"Boys!" she said sharply. Both of them stopped fighting and returned to their dinners with sulky faces. After a moment's silence she went to get the ice cream from the cooler.

Dale entered the top of the frame. His flaying arms, the blue lakewater, the black dock, all were caught with a squeeze of the camera trigger and a whirl of film. Jerry smiled. Dale would now always be diving, frozen on three feet of celluloid. Jerry swung the camera around on its