

In Due Time: Due to Time

Short Story: First Place 2014

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He crumbled yet another sheet of paper. The words were there, right there, just between his mind and the tip of the pen, but he couldn't get them down. He had to tell his story. He had to make them see; to let them know. If he could say it beautifully, eloquently, clearly then they would understand. They could forgive him. He placed the pen on the first line of a fresh page and began to write.

It was a Saturday. A clear Saturday much like today. I woke up extra early that morning, for no reason except to take in a few extra breaths of the fresh Spring air. It was going to be a great day, a memorable day. I could feel it. I just didn't expect the memories that came with it. I had no way of knowing that, on that morning, everything would change.

I sipped my black coffee out of my favorite mug. It is a short mug, which made me enjoy each warm sip more. I never liked large coffee mugs. People tend to gulp out of large mugs. Coffee isn't meant to gulp. It is meant to sip. People try to rush for the effect and they forget to enjoy the flavor and warmth of things. Coffee is one of those things.

He could hear them out there. He knew they would come in soon. You can't rush words like this though. Words had to come naturally, smoothly. They could wait. They would understand. If he could only get the story to the paper, then they would see his side and know the answer to the question that they keep screaming through the door. "Why?"

Coffee should be enjoyed like a well earned Saturday morning. The mail runs early on Saturdays. I never understood that one. People work all week long to sleep late on Saturday and yet the mail runs early. I was glad that Saturday though. For the mail, I mean. The letter I had waited on for years finally arrived. I could feel the words through the envelope. I was so much closer than before.

I walked back up the driveway from the mailbox and I resumed sitting on the porch and sipping my black coffee. I took a moment to just look at the envelope and enjoy its arrival. People forget to enjoy little things like that sometimes. I carefully opened the envelope and took out its contents. Unfolding the letter slowly, I could feel my heart racing.

As expected, written clearly in black in white were the words I had been longing for. "I have found them. 804 West Jefferson Street Apartment 4A Newark, NJ. Good luck, my friend." I held the letter close to my heart and took in a deep breath.

The racket just outside of the door was making him anxious. So many voices making so many demands. He just wanted to write. He knew they wouldn't wait forever, so he tuned them out yet again and continued writing. He wasn't certain how it sounded now, but there was no time to begin again.

My bag was already packed and placed in the trunk of my car. It had always been packed since the day I was able to start searching. I washed my red mug and placed it in the drainer. I would have to drink from paper cups on the road. They made it harder to sip, but I would manage. I locked the house up tight and positioned myself for the long drive.

I could have flown. Most people would have. It is faster. Perhaps I should have flown, but I drove. I drove all day stopping only for fuel or coffee, both of which lasted about the same amount of time. Along the road I thought. Perhaps I should have flown. There is less time to think when you fly.

I thought about the last time I saw them. They were so small. They knew someone was not being truthful. I could see it in their eyes, just behind the tears. They just didn't know it was them. When you are told what to say, you don't know that it's a lie, at least not when you are so small.

I drove until the fuel outlasted the coffee and then I pulled into a roadside inn. I knew I would need my rest for what I would find. I was not sure what that would be, but I knew I would need to be rested. I did not rest, however. I continued to think. I really should have flown. Some things you just don't want to remember.

I was the one who found her that morning. She was so small and crying. Then the crying stopped. She was breathing so shallow. I ran with her from our backyard and through our home. I saw the face of a man speaking with my wife but I did not focus. She looked at me and we ran to the car taking our daughter to the hospital.

I needed to rest. Just like I needed to that night in the hospital room. I remember drifting off and hearing them ask her who she saw. I remember hearing her say "I saw daddy." I remember the man asking her a lot of questions and she was so small. I remember her brother saying that daddy was playing with him. I remember the man saying "you must be mistaking." I remember their eyes, their tears. I remember slowly walking out of that room, assisted.

I didn't want to remember any more. I closed my eyes. I had closed them for the five years that it had taken the justice system to understand that "I saw daddy" meant just

before she had passed out that morning. I closed my eyes the four years since then in prayer awaiting this journey. I closed my eyes that night just long enough to find energy to drive, the strength to continue.

Everything had to be handled perfectly. I had to make sure that I had every fact that I would need in order to undo the lies. The truth doesn't always do that. People tend to enjoy holding on to lies far more than hearing the truth. It took some time, but only a few weeks. Weeks are not relevant when you have waited years. The building across from 804 had a vacancy. I paid the lease and I purchased a chair and a coffee cup. I sat by the window and I watched. I regretted not bringing my red mug. It was always my favorite.

They were not so small any more. I could still see their eyes though. I saw something in them that seemed off. Even from the window across the street, I could still see the tears in their eyes. Especially in hers. I could see them leave their building each morning and return each afternoon. The blinds were always pulled tight in the evening. So that's when I would close my eyes.

The screams outside were being echoed by pounding at the door. He stood from his paper and shoved the dresser against the doorknob. Just in case. He went back to his seat, careful not to glance across the room. He didn't need to think right now. He needed to write.

One morning, I saw my son walk out of the building alone. Perhaps she was ill that day. I watched extra careful that morning. I saw the woman who was once my wife come down to the street. I saw a man meet her and walk inside with her. I watched the window and I saw his face. Only now I could focus. I saw her leave. He stayed. The next morning I saw my daughter leave the building. She looked so small again.

"Wait a damn minute," he screamed back at the voices outside the room. The memories were too hard. The noise was too loud. He could not finish the story before it was finished if they didn't give him a few more minutes.

Yesterday morning, I approached my daughter. She was frightened at first. She had been trained that way. We talked. I told her I had focused and she told me I was right. Not in so many words, but in the way a daughter tells her father things. I told her to tell her mother that evening "I saw daddy." I made her repeat it so that she would say it just the same way she had when she was so small.

This morning, this beautiful Saturday morning, I saw the children leave. I saw their mother meet the man on the street, frantically waving her hands. They didn't notice me following them up the stairs. People don't notice other people very often. They really should. I stood outside of apartment 4A for what seemed like hours, though I am certain that it was not.

When I was about to knock on the door, it swung open and the man was trying to leave. I pushed him back in, and in a scuffle secured both of them into the chairs they now sit in across the room. That brings us to this moment. There are so many ways I could end this story. But by the time you read my words, you all will know the ending better than I do. So here is how I see the next few moments of my story.

When I finish writing, I will place my pen down on the table. I will then finally look across the room. Focusing carefully on the face of the man who I saw the two times I know for certain that my daughter was assaulted. Then I will take his life. Their mother, who allowed this transgression for so many years, will meet the same fate. Then, before you all can push through the door, for taking so many years to focus, I will join them.

THE END