

5" X 6" In A Sturdy Frame

by Caleb J. Ross

It's a three-photo walk to the coffee counter; the fifth morning I've met with the lady. She carries a handful of spare change for coffee with strangers, plans each day to use her pocketed camera for fixed moments of spontaneity. Just two people laughing. Just two people living. Then flash...the moment caught. Her life justified. The walk back from the counter is a five-photo event, *because*, she writes, *a child on a bicycle rode by*.

I sit next to her with our drinks. She doesn't sip right away. She holds her hand out and points to the receipt. I hand it to her. She presses the archive flat and sets it on the table, protects it from unpredictable winds with a heavy notebook.

The first morning we met—I remember the rain, soft the way I like it—was a series she later attributed as a fourteen-frame sunrise. Three film rolls worth of dogs skipped by, towing owners disturbed by the camera. The lady wasn't interested in smiles anyway. She was interested in experience.

I have a disease, she writes on the drink receipt.

We've shared enough coffee for me to be surprised that I didn't already know this. I flex my brow, twist my face to offense.

I don't really, she writes. *Not yet. But I could someday.*

I open my mouth to speak but stop, can see the panic in her eyes. She grabs her pen, flips to a new page in her notebook and instructs me to write it down. I do. She returns: *Don't you remember the first day we met?*

I nod, shrug.

Come to my house, she writes.

It was an uneventful, four-photo walk to the lady's house. She chose this spot because of its monotony. One scene is every other scene. *I save a lot of film living where I do*, she writes.

At home, what she can't understand is her dog barking, stopping, then minutes later barking again like the first never existed, like the dog is doomed to repetition. She smiles pity. *Perpetual memory loss*, she would write as a caption, could this feeling ever be truly captured. And she has tried, for pages.

Her walls are photo albums. Her floors, too, and windows. Shelves lined, bent with books of memories catalogued by emotion, perhaps, or rendered emotion. Or by year. She does love chronology. Her windows, she keeps dark with aluminum foil, keeps the scenery outside. To block all sound she stuffs ear plugs tight into her head. She lives without speaking, doesn't have time to document speech.

I write, *Why?* pointing to her walls.

She writes back: *Because life is...*

Flash. My eyes burn.

...fleeting.

Outside I hear a car collide hard into another. The woman, she hears nothing, has no idea what escapes her lens. She shows me the bound and framed fourteen-frame sunrise, the dogs and the confused owners. The reflected flash makes seeing the rain difficult.

