

# One Thousand Words

By Benjamin Glatt

This is a story about a picture.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words but clearly that's ridiculous. Some pictures are worth only a few. The stylized silhouettes of a person in a dress and a person in pants simply means bathrooms can be found here. Now that's a bit of a cheat to make a point, they aren't really pictures, they're more pictographs, but the point stands. If you'd prefer to take for example the pictures on a menu, they're worth a few sentences of description, hardly a full thousand words. Many pictures aren't worth that many words.

The picture in question is taken in the late afternoon on March the 21<sup>st</sup> 2079. The photographer is Louis Mayland, a university student taking a photography class. He would continue to shoot photography for the rest of his life but he would never again equal his shot that day.

The picture is of a little girl perhaps 6 or 7. She is wearing overalls that at the beginning of the day were likely bright yellow but are now stained with grass, gray dust, brown sand, and red mud. She has so embraced all the park has to offer that it has reciprocated by marking her as one of its own. Her pink tee-shirt is similarly decorated by her adventures. She wears a wide brimmed red sunhat on her back, it was supposed to be on her head but she keeps letting it slip off and dangle by the string around her neck as she runs. She has long blond hair that is either part brown or has also fallen victim to the wilderness of the playground. Her hands are clean though. Because, when the picture is taken she is playing in the fountain and in the process of splashing she has inadvertently cleaned them. In the picture she is caught at the end of one of her splashes. She is looking a little past the camera, her face alight with the sheer joy of moving water, both hands raised up. She is in a little half crouch, her overalls soaked past her knees, her long hair flying about her from the force of her splash. The little girl and the fountain dominate the bottom two fifths of the image; the top is squarely owned by the statute.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words but clearly that's ridiculous. The two aren't interchangeable. You can spend a year describing a scene and never capture all the detail of a picture. You can show a dozen pictures and they won't capture the narrative subtlety or internal monologue that one can convey with even sparse words. But more than that they can add to each other. How much clearer is a technical article when you can see infographics that illustrate the ideas? How much more meaningful is the picture of an old man on a bench if you know that he and his comrades in the war have returned there every year to take a picture and now he is the only one left. Pictures and words are different.

The statue is of a woman. She is dressed in a uniform as tattered as the little girl's overalls. One of her legs is up on a plinth the other planted firmly in the water of the fountain. Her right arm is stretched out as if to grasp something unattainable in the distance her left hangs by her side clearly broken. Her stone face is beautiful and bears an expression of triumph, nobility, and perhaps just a touch of sadness. In the picture the light is falling perfectly on her face and somehow that seems to exaggerate the sadness just a little. She is standing in the middle of the fountain behind the little girl. There is a message on the Plinth. It is carved in large easily read letters and the light in the picture falls on them in such a way that even when the image is small the words are still legible. They say "This statue dedicated to Angus Olive, the savior of time-travel Born April 12<sup>th</sup> 2073 Died unknown. This statue was dedicated on May the 9<sup>th</sup> 2022." People come from all over to see the statue. Most just stand awhile and contemplate what it means. Some bring little gifts. The most common offerings are white flowers, and wooden toys. There are some floating in the fountain when the picture is taken. The little girl has been playing with them and of course no one has stopped her.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words but clearly that's ridiculous. There are some pictures that say more than all the words you can throw at them. Pictures that change us, pictures that capture something profound about a moment in history, pictures that change how we see the world. In 1968 the Apollo eight astronauts took such a picture. It was of the planet earth rising over the moon, for the first time it really showed how small it was, how fragile, it changed the way we saw the whole world. It made many of those who saw it consider for the first time how ridiculous it was to fight our fellow inhabitants of this tiny sliver in the night. More than any book of scripture it made men brothers, well at least a few of them. Some pictures are worth uncountable hundreds of thousands of words.

Some people say the picture of the girl in the fountain was one of these consciousness changing images. That it did for the late 21<sup>st</sup> century what earthrise had done for the late twentieth. They tried to name the picture. Some called it "the ouroboros in the park", some thought of crude funny titles but were gently pushed into the margins. In the end the picture was just called Angus Olive. After the little girl playing in the fountain and the statue of the woman she would one day become.