

~~Stewart Clark~~

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The present

“Stabilize his head, check his vitals, and let’s go we’ve got to hurry.” I do not remember much after the accident, but these phrases stuck with me. That day I learned that the term, “present,” also has a relevant literal meaning. Each day is a gift and should be treated like one.

My face rose from the ground covered in dirt, and the light started to return. My eyes attempted to focus on a single point, but failed. I tried to stand up, but collapsed back down to the spinning earth below. Just as my equilibrium began to return, I started my full body check: legs, check, head, check, arms. My check ceased at the arms. My right arm checked out ok, but its twin was not so lucky. My left arm was contorted in a way that no human arm could naturally bend, and was surrounded by a sea of its own secretions. The sight of my arm caused my mind to wander into foreign places. I began to think of the people I took for granted, my mom in particular, and that she would never hear me express my gratitude for her selflessness.

“Stewart, wake up!” Mom yelled, as she did every morning, words erupted from her like lava from a volcano; however I was no peaceful mountain myself. This fight began in the morning, as all the others did, and my mom and I only stopped to sleep.

“Stewart, I told you to take out the trash. I need some help around here,” she yelled.

“I know I forgot, I have better things to do than the stupid trash,” I snapped back in return.

This fight rapidly escalated past either of our control, and lasted hours. Finally, my mom had had enough, and I found myself in a car headed as far away from her, with a sore throat, a bloody hand, and no remorse. My mother was then left alone to stare at the walls of the house, which now resembled the moon's surface.

As my alternate reality faded, I began to focus on getting help for myself. I then grasped my left arm and pulled it to my chest. The valley echoed with my cries as I restored my arm to its humane position. I tried once more to rise and was successful. I then looked behind me to find my gallant steed of an automobile crumpled, like an empty beer can; at that point I cared about its well being more than my own. It was my prized position, but I did not go to it; I instead began the treasure hunt for my phone. First, I checked my pockets, then the ground, but it was nowhere in sight. In this failure my mind began to wander once again.

Balloons filled the air, and I was so full of cake I felt as if I could burst at any second. My mom then attracted everyone's attention and yelled, "Present time." My guests and I flocked to the living room as if being timed. After we had all arrived my mom handed me my first present. The paper covering my prize was no match for my eager hands, as I tore through it with excitement. My excitement was subsequently overshadowed by disappointment as I realized what I had opened. It was a cell phone, the only thing I wanted, but the color wasn't satisfying. After analyzing the gift, I stood up and threw it back at her while chanting, "You ruined my birthday." As I left, my mother had a look of confusion on her face, and did not say a word. She did not have to, her face said it all. What did I do wrong?

After a vigorous search for my phone, I concluded that it, and the key to my salvation, was in my truck. I looked up, into the distance in the direction to which I had parked my truck

earlier in the day; the open land seemed to stretch for miles. My truck looked like a snowflake at the end of the fields. "Don't look up, just one step at a time, I can make it," I told myself. I began to walk, and my dangling, lifeless, limb followed. The search for my phone had forced me to drop my injured limb, so I once again brought it to my chest, in screaming agony. My arm now pulsated to the rhythm of my heartbeat; I painted the ground with every step. I pushed on, for what seemed like days wondering in a desert. It took a salty water droplet landing in my eye to notice the heat, but once I did it did not leave my mind. Things began to get dimmer, with each step my eyelids got heavier. I collapsed.

Once my mom and I's fight subsided I had nowhere to go. I had left my truck at my grandmother's ranch, so my mother had my father come and relieve her stress. He arrived without words; he just looked at me in disappointment. The silent ride back to his house was agonizing. We finally arrived, and worn out from my brawl I quickly went to sleep. I awoke the next morning to my dad sitting on my bed telling me he had a surprise for us. Confused and still half asleep, I got up and followed him. We proceeded to; once again, take a silent ride, but this time to a place I had never seen before. Once we got close to our destination, I was blindfolded and told not to peak. I followed his directions, and the sound of his voice, to my impending present. "Keep them closed," he said as I listened intently to what he was doing, searching for clues to my treasure's identity. Ope... I threw my eyelids open before he could finish his sentence, and there it was. My gallant steed was a 2008, 400cc, Yamaha dune buggy; I instantly fell in love, although our love was short-lived. I wanted to express my gratitude, but I could not seem to get my mouth to form words, so I just sat there staring.

Without hesitation, we loaded the buggy up and were on our way home. The drive was like pulling teeth. It was almost overbearing to not be cliché, and ask if we were there yet. My

gaze was fixed upon the buggy; even with my dad's constant talking my eyes never wondered. The passing motorists followed my trend. The fact that they would risk their safety to stare at my prize made me even more proud than I already was. As we got closer to home I started to sweat, and get nervous, as I anxiously anticipated touching my treasure again. As we pulled into my grandmother's ranch, the animals ran in terror. We stopped in a pasture. It was a blank canvas and the buggy would be my paintbrush. After we unloaded it, my dad sensed our need for alone time and left. I climbed in, shivering, despite the heat, and turned the key. The roar of the engine engulfed the prairie. The animals had calmed since our arrival, but this mighty roar stirred them yet again. With a quick shift in gears I was off. The sun glistened off my present as the wind raced around its aerodynamic body. As I approached a turn I was feeling invincible. I pushed the buggy to its limits, and it pushed back. During a turn I put the pedal to the floor; I do not remember what happened next.

I awoke again, with my arm in an even more contorted position than the first. I once again brought my arm to my chest and stood up. My clothes were now dyed red. I looked at my truck and it seemed reachable now. I again began to walk, with my head down; concentrating on putting one foot in front of the other. I periodically looked up, and my snowflake now began to take its true shape. The sense of accomplishment was overwhelming, and I felt that my walk in the woods was over.

I could feel my heart sink as I pulled on the door handle and nothing happened. I took to my pockets yet again, but my jingling saviors were nowhere to be found. In disbelief that all my work had gone to waste I looked down, and found a rock. I threw it with all my remaining strength, but was no match for the seemingly unbreakable glass. I stood there staring at an almost unrecognizable version of myself in the reflection of the unbreakable window. I was already a

ghost, and blended in well with my snowflake. The heat had now gone unnoticed. My once overwhelming sense of accomplishment was replaced with the sense of failure. I then resorted to god, another person I had always taken for granted, to provide me with some sort of mercy. I began to weep in the midst of our conversation, and accepted my demise. Next, I shifted to a lying position, as I did so, I saw a glare. There above my tire was my savior; I had left it there earlier after a conversation with one of my friends telling them about my new toy. With all of the strength that I still possessed I reached up and grabbed my phone. I knew I needed an ambulance, but there was only one voice I wanted to hear. It was a voice that I had often taken for granted, and a voice that I should have been listening to instead of yelling back at. Despite all of the arguments, her voice comforts me the most, and that's what I wanted then, was comfort. I proceeded to call my mother. I wanted to say so much, but between my attempted apologies my mom made out the words hurt and ambulance. She hung up on me and called the ambulance, but she beat it there. She then ran to me and said, "Everything is going to be alright." These words were different than the ones we had exchanged the day before; they were not like erupting lava, but quite the opposite. My only response before they took me away was, "Thank you, and I'm sorry for everything."

What I thought about during and after my experience surprised me. All of the things that I acted like I cared about did not cross my mind. All I did think about were the things and people I loved and took for granted, especially the people that truly love me who I neglect. Looking back now, what I am most upset about is not wrecking my new toy, but that it took a traumatic experience for me to figure out what really matters. Now that I see how fragile my present is I treat it like a gift, and handle it with care.