

The Photograph

By Jack Griffin

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I love looking at your photograph, you know the one I always carry with me. It was taken on your birthday, and I don't think I've ever seen you happier. You're absolutely beaming. As I gaze lovingly at your image, it seems transcendent. I can *feel* your warmth; your presence. The laws of time and space seem to pass away, and your aura completely envelops me. There's a lump in my throat, and I don't even try to choke back the tears. They run warm down my cheek, tasting of salt as they traverse my lips. The photo captures everything I love about you, your strength - your independence. I remember when I asked you what you wanted for your birthday that year, I laughed when you said a chainsaw. You said you wanted to be able to trim the tree branches in your yard yourself, because they grew like wildfire. I knew better than to argue, so I got you a chainsaw. But I stuck something extra in the box; you found the necklace and said "You just might get lucky tonight Mister". We laughed, and I snapped the picture.

As I gaze upon your face, the essence of your beauty is like a warm blanket. You hated when I called you beautiful, you would say "don't expect a gushed response, like one of Pavlov's dogs to a bell". Such sentiments were like a "turd to the flush", you would say with a laugh. You absolutely hated how culture instilled prejudices, based on physical appearance. You felt true beauty came from within, and operant conditioning to the contrary did a disservice to mankind. You looked at me and smiled and said "that you didn't want to accept any degree of personal

vanity, to satisfy society's expectations". You said time looking upon yourself, was time lost - time that we should be looking out at the world together. You had funny ideas, and even though I never really got it...it only made me love you more.

But my love, you *are* beautiful. Not for the reasons that you despise, you're beautiful because you are kind, generous, warm and loving. Forced to fumble with words that are often awkward and inadequate, I can scarcely explain the concept of your beauty. Suffice to say, it is far beyond the ability of mere words to convey. You're a world away from me now, but I can still feel the warmth of our last embrace; your soft lips pressed against mine.

Whoever said war is hell, certainly didn't understate the barbaric practice. But as I lay here in the mud, mortally wounded; your photograph brings me great comfort my love. And as I stand on the precipice of the great divide, I think my dad would be proud to know I gave full measure. I pray my mom is there to greet me on the other side, and I pray that I will be there for you my love - when your time comes. I can feel myself slipping away, as the Earth runs red with my blood. The waterworks are full on now, as I feel death begin to wash over me. Like a rogue wave desperately seeking the shore, it demands my surrender. As I'm swallowed by the void of the eternal sea, the DMT floods my system; I ascend towards the light. I gaze one last time upon your face in the photograph, your image fires into my forebrain. And with it an epiphany; I get to take your love with me. Please forgive me darling, but I simply must tell you, you're beautiful. You are so very, *very* beautiful.