**Vision**

Gary was working in his dark room when the stroke took place. There was nobody with him but he knew enough to know that something was terribly wrong as his balance felt suddenly off and his left arm had become uncomfortably numb. He made his way into the living room and dialled 111. The ambulance arrived shortly afterwards and he was taken to A&E and triaged. The doctor, who looked half Gary’s age, diagnosed a stroke and Gary was kept in for observation as his blood pressure was 200 over 90, no doubt a contributing factor to what he had suffered. They gave him medication for the blood pressure and let him go home after three days. He no longer saw colour; his world had become black and white. The doctor told him that the stroke had done damage to his occipital lobe.

Gary lived alone in Point Chev. His wife had committed suicide a year earlier and he had fallen into a deep depression. He had no interest in other women. Gary didn’t know why his wife had suicided, but he knew she had always complained that he was too wrapped up in his work and never seemed to have any time for her, so he felt a requisite amount of guilt. Following the death of his wife, Gary managed to continue with his photography but it was an effort, like wading through glue. He was well respected in his profession and had held a number of successful exhibitions. He knew he was one of the lucky ones; he made a living from his art, a rare and difficult feat in small, isolated New Zealand. People called him egotistical but it was just a defence mechanism, a way of keeping his psyche intact when he was picked at and criticised. He didn’t have too many friends. People said he was ‘difficult’. He spent most of his time holed up in his dark room, fiddling with chemicals, watching photographs appear in the developing solution.

He joined the stroke foundation because he thought that he should. They offered him little in the way of comfort – just an online support group and a monthly newsletter. He always read the newsletter. He found his new existence rather restricted. He could no longer develop colour photographs and so was forced to do black and white pictures only. Managing around the house became more of a struggle. The stroke had rendered his left arm partially paralysed and finding the right words to say often took longer than it used to. Matching thoughts to words was difficult. Everything seemed a strain. Making a cup of tea was as hard as climbing Everest.

When the stroke foundation contacted him to do a colour brochure for them his initial impulse was to say no. How could he possibly work in colour now? It was Gary’s neighbour who suggested hiring an apprentice – somebody to help out, somebody whose vision was completely intact. Gary advertised in the local rag.

*WANTED*

*Apprentice photographer to work in colour.*

*Must have meticulous attention to detail.*

And beneath that his phone number. He wasn’t exactly inundated with calls, but three days after Gary had placed the ad Philip rang and expressed his interest in the position. Gary invited him to the house for an interview. He seemed personable enough and brought with him an impressive portfolio of work. Gary told him about the brochure he had been asked to produce and Philip showed an appropriate amount of interest. Gary felt strongly about doing the brochure that had been requested. After all, was it not a cause close to his heart? After the interview, Gary rang Philip’s referees and they spoke very highly of him. One was an established photographer that Gary knew of, the other was a gallery owner who ran a large gallery in downtown Auckland.

Gary phoned Philip and asked him to come over on Monday. Philip did as he was asked. The older man had been out over the weekend photographing healthy looking people doing healthy activities which was what the Stroke Foundation had asked for.

“I’ve been to Photograph School at the New York Film Academy you know”, boasted Philip as he removed one of the photos from the fixer.

“Well la di bloody da”, said Gary. “There was no fancy schmancy Photoshop when I learned the tricks of my trade. Still, do well on this project and there could well be other work in the pipeline for you.”

“Photoshop’s old hat now. You should get with the program buddy.”

*Buddy*, Gary cringed when he heard the word.

Philip pulled his MacBook Pro from his backpack.

“You need to learn to master a photo editing suite.”

*I’m not your bloody buddy*, he thought. *I’ve only known you five minutes, furthermore I’m your employer not your friend. And what was a suite anyway?*

The only suites that Gary knew were lounge suites.

Philip was a fast worker and the job was finished in no time at all. Philip had to do most of his work with Gary hovering behind him, nit-picking.

“Why are you making that lady’s nose smaller? Why don’t you give that man rosier looking cheeks? These are meant to be fit looking people you know. People who *haven’t* had nor are ever likely to have a stroke. These are the people to aspire to.”

Philip ignored most of what Gary said. After all, what formal education had Gary ever had? Everybody who was anybody knew that he was self taught, one of the Established most definitely with a capital ‘E’. Gary liked to boast in public that he had come up the hard way, via the school of hard knocks and had disdained any photographic training.

When the work was done Gary emailed the stroke foundation taking full credit for the work, stating that he didn’t want any payment and not mentioning Philip’s name. Philip read the email in Gary’s Sent Mail when Gary wasn’t looking. He was furious. He confronted Gary the next morning over the phone.

“How come *I* don’t get any of the credit?”

“How do you know whether or not you got credit? Been reading my emails have you? Nosy parker. You should learn to mind your own business. Snooping will only bring you trouble. I’m the one that did the bulk of the work, the hard graft. All you did was fart arse about on your computer. It’s *my* name and my name only that should be printed in the brochure.”

“Right”, thought Philip. “I’ll teach you what’s what.”

He turned all the work purple in Photoshop and sent it in to the Stroke Foundation who loved the new changes. He also sent in his name as Chief Assistant. The photos were published in the new purple shade with the credits and people loved it.

“So fresh, original and modern”, they cooed.

Philip lapped up the praise and now it was Gary’s turn for fury.

“I wish I’d never hired a bloody assistant”, he bellowed when Philip showed up at his house with his bank account details. “Why did *I* have to have a stroke – why me?”

It was a plaintiff question for which there was no answer. Only God if there was one knew the reason and he was keeping mum.

“You’re fired” he said. “I knew it was a mistake to stop working solo. It could only lead to trouble.”

“Fine”, said Philip. “I’ll leave as soon as I’ve got my money.”

Gary took fifty dollars from his wallet and put it down upon the table.

“Fifty bucks! Fifty measly bucks! That’s not what we agreed.”

“Well, what did we agree?”

“Five hundred.”

“Five bloody hundred! Get off the grass. You’ve got to be joking. Do you think I’m stupid as well as old and lame! Think the stroke’s damaged my cognition do you? Well I’ve still got my wits about me. We don’t even have a contract so you don’t have a leg to stand on. Sixty’s my highest offer, take it or leave it.”

He slammed another ten dollars down upon the table.

“Stingy miser, aren’t you?” asked Philip rhetorically, snatching up the money. “Sixty bucks is an insult, I wish I’d never answered your stupid ad, I wish I’d never even met you.”

“The feeling’s mutual *buddy*, believe me, the feeling’s mutual.”

Philip exited the room, slamming the door behind him and the two men never spoke nor met again.

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