

Flash Fiction Forward Book Review

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Weekly Contributor: Writing Scene

Stories that you see when you blink. Flash Fiction Forward by Thomas & Robert Shapard is a book filled with different stories made by various authors. In this article, I'll be discussing two of those stories.

What is Flash Fiction?

Flash fiction is a fictional story that happens in a *flash*. Writing one means you have almost one shot at everything. One shot at short expedition, short rising action, and short climax. Each has to be effective.

The reason I leave out falling action and resolution is because those aren't that important. In fact, several stories end off with just the climax. In my own flash fiction, I've ended with a mini climax. If you aren't into creative writing, then you're probably unfamiliar with the *true* plot diagram which is much more complex than you think. Zoom in and you'll notice that there can be multiple climaxes, multiple conflicts, it's amazing.

Test

On pages 189-192 is the story *Test* by G.A Ingersoll. This story is an odd one for sure. It is formatted like an exam with four parts.

Part one is word problems in which each question involves a sort of miserable and sad reality the person in the problem is living. The last question talks about a woman's anxiety and fear of death and how that contributes to heart disease. The question we're supposed to answer is "By how many years will Margaret's life be shortened by her fear?" (Ingersoll, 3).

Part two involves matching. This part of the story was confusing to me and I think it was meant to be that way. It says to match words to others, some being repeated, others not being used at all. There were existential words, fearful ones, and some normal ones like "Television" and "Routine."

Part three is a short answer. This was where we had to fill in the blanks. I'm sure some had to enhance some negative thoughts the reader might have. A truth they won't say. One of the statements was: "It is () fault" (Ingersoll, 4).

Part four is an essay section where there are four questions. One of them is asking for the definition of a pathology. Then another was “Why do you belong here?” (Ingersoll, 4).

There is an extra credit section that asks “Fully explain the ways in which you are wrong” (Ingersoll, 5). This question could reel out some emotions and negative answers from a reader, which seemed to be the whole point of this story.

There are moments of rising action and climaxes and it comes in a test form. It’s so robotic and solemn... kind of uncomfortable, and that’s what makes this story good.

Three Soldiers

On pages 210-211 is a story by Bruce Holland Rogers called *Three Soldiers*. It follows the main character, the Sergeant, through images of war and finally home. It is supposed to show the effects of PTSD, but there could be more.

The first part of this story is called “The Hardest Questions” (Rogers, 1). He tells us what his soldiers ask him. Questions about their guns, how to say “good afternoon”, or when they can shower. The character tells us he always has an answer, except for one time.

“But when Anaya was shot and bleeding out, he grabbed my arm and said, ‘Sergeant? Sergeant?’ I understood the question, but damn. I didn’t have an answer” (Rogers, 1).

The second part of this story is called “Foreign Wars” which describes a scene where the Sergeant and a soldier, Calder, looked at the pieces of a body. Calder talks about being far from home which the Sergeant disapproves of. The next sentence states, “But a year later I stood on the tarmac hugging my child, thinking of that kid in pieces, and I wasn’t home” (Rogers, 2).

The last part is called “Decisions, Decisions”. Here, the Sergeant is sitting at the dinner table with his family, recalling the moments and traumas of war. He was unable to truly enjoy the holidays.

You can see how the climax changes every second. Each part of this story has its own plot diagram. Even the ending doesn’t truly have a resolution.

Final Note

Flash Fiction isn't easy to write. It took me months to get the final touches of my first flash fiction. It does get easier, but when you are limited to only a maximum of 1,500 words, it is stressful. *Flash Fiction Forward* is a thin book I’d recommend.

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