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FOREWORD

Je t'aime moi non plus by Leïla Slimani

As a child, I used to look at my parents, my sisters, the living room sofas, the long hallway carpet and think, “What the hell am I doing here?” I was infuriated by the fact that my parents had authority over me. Like all ungrateful teenagers, I would throw cruel phrases in their faces : “I never asked to be alive!” I would watch them eat, talk, drink, fall asleep in front of the television. My father always sat in the same spot and this endless routine made me sick. I swore to myself that I would leave as soon as possible and never start a family. The family unit? Not for me! Habits? The five of us on Sundays, bored and yelling at each other? I’d rather die!

And then tragedy struck.

Some friends disappeared. Acquaintances pretended not to know us anymore. We were the only ones left. The clan, as we called ourselves. Indestructible, bound by an unshakeable love. There were my mother’s eyes. Her hand that she passed over my back, her tender words when life scared me. There was my sisters’ laughter, my grandmothers’ silly jokes, the dinners at my aunt’s house when she forgot to cook. I was twenty years old and I promised myself that I would start a family too. A family like a clan, like a pack of wolves, a family in which the word *ami* (friend) would also be included. It would be the core and the foundation of my life.

When asked why he always wrote about the family, the Israeli author Amos Oz replied that, for him, it remained the most mysterious phenomenon of all. What binds us to other beings for life? What is the meaning of these blood ties that can trigger the most beautiful sacrifices as well as the coldest indifference? Family is a complex, ambiguous reality, which provokes contradictory feelings and which cannot be summed up in the idyllic image of the protective home. In my novels, women are mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters. They do their best to play the role expected of them and they suffer, in the secret of their soul, for not succeeding. They love—yes, they love madly—but they watch themselves disappear in this family that they have founded and that expects so much from them. How can one remain free within one’s family? How do you reconcile self-sacrifice with individual aspirations? Sometimes I think that a family is like a country. It has its own language, its own singular expressions that no one else can understand. My grandmother used to make up words, and when I used them later in front of my schoolmates, I was surprised that they didn’t understand them. Every family has its founding myths, its shameful episodes, its glorious facts. It has borders and a capital. It is a country with its heroes, its unseen, its privileged, and its excluded.

I come from Morocco, a country where family is sacred and where solidarity, especially between generations, is very strong. Family is there, everywhere, all the time, and you are raised with the idea that the group always comes before the individual. Beyond the family, there is no salvation. In societies like these, those who love in secret, those who love outside the law, single women, divorced women are all considered outcasts. They are distrusted, avoided, and asked to stay out of sight. I wanted a family where we could be free. A family where we choose each other, where it’s not about DNA or genetics, but about the law of the heart and eternal loyalty. A family like a country of refuge, which grants asylum to every suffering soul.

Leïla Slimani
Writer

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INTRODUCTION

The Magnum Family by Olivia Arthur

Magnum photographers have always gone out into the world to document and share stories about people and things that they have encountered. Some have spent time in conflict areas, working to make sense of complex situations, while others have worked to capture different aspects of life or to comment on society. But we all share one thing: we have all worked hard to get close to a situation, whether physically, emotionally, or intellectually. And after coming back home from our trips, most of us have photographed closer to home too, whether something of our own worlds, or things happening locally. Maybe we hope to get to know or understand ourselves better by using the camera in this way.

Photographs can do many things and be used in so many ways. As documentary photographers, we use the camera as a key to other people's worlds, a pass to follow our curiosity and help to make people's stories heard. But it is also a tool of memories, a way to record and hold on to the things we already know, and perhaps to see them in different ways. I myself had hardly photographed at home until the births of my two children. I had been out looking for stories, life that was somewhere else. And then life was there at home with me and I found a way to see it afresh with the camera, through "outside" eyes, beyond the emotions and exhaustion of being in it.

When we talk about family, it isn't always about next of kin. Family is what we love and are close to, but also and perhaps because of that, it is what frustrates us, what we have expectations for, what we want more from. Magnum as a collective has always considered itself as a family too. Love and frustration and conflict are all part of it. We are tough on each other, we are critical, we want the family to help us, to be better itself and to support us. And when we manage to gather and share time together, the emotions always run high but the community comes together again. All relationships take time, they have to be worked on and molded, shaped and reshaped. Those within Magnum are no different. I sometimes think of us as a piece of clay that is passed around from hand to hand to be worked on, improved, refined, have pieces broken off, and new ones attached back on again. We all take turns at the table to work at the sculpture and make it fresh and interesting while keeping its core shape intact.

Sometimes we are very close to the group and sometimes we have to take a break and get some distance to find a path of our own. Some have left the group and some have even come back again. The door has been left ajar.

Families are also burdens in a way, and we make sacrifices to keep them together. As Magnum reaches seventy-five years of age and the family's elders and its youngest members are all jostling for space, I find myself responsible for keeping us together. It is not always an easy task as we span so many worlds, ideas, and needs. Balancing the time I have for my "real" family and my extended Magnum one has been a challenge in the past two years. Then of course there is my photography that I try to weave in between both of these things. Even passively, I have learnt to understand my own photography better by being the one responsible for representing the many varied voices inside our collective.

The kinds of photographs made by Magnum photographers have grown and expanded and keep doing so year on year. There is a spectrum of different voices and works that can seem vastly different from one another. But I have spent this time looking for the connections and hoping that the points where we all meet remain on the table in the middle of us. We share some mutual understandings and we care for each other. In a family, the emotions between its members shape the way that they go out and see the world and how they talk about it... and in the case of photographers, how we document it.

In the same way, Magnum is the glue which keeps us all close in different ways and makes us better at what we do. Without it, we would all be more independent but also maybe more lost. It is a community, a reason for our photography, a closeness and a complexity. But even as we grow, I hope that we can remain, in whatever unusual way, a family too.

Olivia Arthur
Photographer and president of Magnum Photos

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FAMILY

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**ALEC SOTH
& CARMEN SOTH**

United States

My daughter Carmen has always been surrounded by cameras. As an infant, she saw me photograph the city of her adoption for my book *Dog Days Bogotá*. When she was seven, she used one of my digital cameras for our collaborative project, *Brighton Picture Hunt*. More recently, Carmen assisted me on the road for my project, *A Pound of Pictures*.

Now nineteen, Carmen is about to venture out on her own road. She has no intention of being a professional photographer, but I nonetheless wanted to give her an old 35 mm just like my father gave me. We took a trip with the premise that I'd teach her about f-stops and shutter speeds. But my real purpose was to travel beside her with my camera one last time.









