

Burying Straw

Tara Van De Mark

Daddy is tucked in tight. He hated small spaces almost as much as he hated the people that showed up today for his funeral. Momma is here, holding my hand like I'm her baby and crying like she's a widow. She forgets that just last night she was bitching, "...the worthless bastard left me nothing but his own bastard son."

He looks like a TV version of himself laying there. Daddy was usually a scarecrow, covered in straw, plaid shirt unbuttoned, constantly moving with the wind, and scaring people away. I wasn't scared though and would stick on him like straw. Now he's the cleanest I've ever seen, not a piece of farm anywhere, wearing a donated shirt and Grandpa's gold cross. The funeral guy's gonna give me the cross before they bury him, 'cause we can't afford to bury gold.

But Daddy's fake. Makeup is covering his skin making his face blurry. He is smiling too, which isn't normal, even my funniest jokes would only get a snort like a horse shooing a fly. The older folk won't tell me what the funeral guy did to make him look like that. Ricky from next door says they took out his insides, filled him with goo then superglue him back up, even his mouth and eyes.

It isn't right that they won't say. If nine is old enough to lose a father then it's old enough to understand this stuff. I've field dressed deer, killed chickens, and helped Daddy putdown dying farm animals. Two winters ago we lost four ewes during lambing season and the ground was too frozen to bury'em so we composted them in straw. I watched them rot to nothing. I know death.

Plus, I saw Daddy die. He went from humming in the rafters to hitting the barn floor like wet hay. I jumped down to him and held his hand. "Daddy, I'm here" I said, and his eyes looked into mine as I joked that he couldn't be an asshole to the doctors this time. Then his eyes were done lookin'. That is when I said my goodbye and asked him to tell Granny and Grandpa about me.

Momma puts her hand on my shoulder like she gives a shit about me and she's still sniffing like she cared about him. I'm with my TV Daddy now so I put on a show. Leaning in I give him a kiss on his cheek and hope none of that gross makeup rubs off on my nose. He smells like mothballs, probably from the pressed shirt the church ladies gave us. I turn my back on Daddy and face everyone. Even hard old Mr. Morris is wiping his eyes. "Ya'll gotta be joking me, tears, we weren't even friends!" I imagine Daddy hollering. I rub my eyes and tell him in my head, "Don't worry, I'm just pretend crying." But I'm not, that part is real.

Tara Van De Mark is a recovering attorney now writer based in Washington, DC. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Hobart*, *Cabinet of Heed*, *Tiny Molecules*, *CP Quarterly*, and *On*

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