

The Lumiere Review

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CEREAL MILK . COLOR . 35MM

That barn isn't a barn at all but a shed dressed up like a barn and yet, a barn they call it. Pathetic. There's something very sad and stupid about a wannabe barn.

This thought Gerald as he stood on his daughter's back deck, the thin rain stringing off the hood of his parka. Nothing was what it used to be in this country. People used to have actual barns, now they just had shoddy sheds they painted to look the part.

Gerald had done everything in his power to prevent living with his daughter and grandson, but his sudden, almost frantic reversal on the subject of looking after his health was not enough to turn the ship around. He would have preferred to be in a home but finances wouldn't allow for it. He didn't like being a burden, that was the obvious concern, but more than that, he disliked being so deep inside their world. Diane and her boy lived in a roar of screens, hormones, and backward thinking. She was a pushover. Jackson did whatever he damn well pleased. The way he talked to her had no place, and worse, she had somehow been infected by him. By this idea that parents are just the shit on the bottom of your shoe.

This was never clearer than the day Gerald arrived, when Diane said she couldn't believe this was happening. That he was way too young to need this much help already, that she had things she wanted to do with herself, and she was already taking care of one kid, did he think she needed another. She was olympic in her tirade, which she'd obviously been rehearsing for weeks. It closed with: I thought the whole idea of raising me right was so I could have a better life than you did, not so I would spend the second half of it wiping your ass. All great points but if he'd ever talked to his dad like this he would have been ground into the carpet.

Gerald watched a rabbit move across the lawn, lurching toward the shed-barn. It stopped and sat, its rounded back a perfect curve. So calm, he thought. But they're actually quite nervous, aren't they. Well, they should be. There are a lot of predators out there for a rabbit, best to know your place.

He went back inside, the screen door slamming hard behind him. He couldn't seem to remember to adjust the hydraulic hinge, nor much of anything else these days. He hung his parka and angrily muted the blaring morning show. Jackson was eating a bowl of cereal at the table, his face enshrouded in a pile of hair. Diane was in the shower. This would give Gerald time to sneak an orange juice.

Jackson hid from the silence by focusing on the sound of mashing cereal in his head. Gerald sat down with his juice and stared at his grandson.

It's not polite to stare, even if it's your family, Jackson said without looking up.

I'm tryna figger out what this pink nail thing is all about.

Good luck with that.

Gerald took a drink and let the glass hit the table a little too hard.

Help me out here. Are you a boy or a girl?

Are those my only two options?

Yes. That's how he made it.

He.

That's right. He made you one way, and now you wanna take the other way out for a spin? Sorry, but it don't work like that.

My mom made me, actually. Maybe she's God.

If she is, you sure got a funny way of talkin' to her, boy.

Gerald turned to stare out the window. Even he wished he hadn't started this.

Look out there. Now, is that a barn or a shed?

Jackson replied without looking up, Looks like a shed to me.

Me too. So why'd they paint it like that, all distressed, like an old barn?

The boy looked Gerald dead in the eyes for the first time since he'd arrived.

Maybe it feels like a barn on the inside.

Jackson got up and walked to the sink to drink in the speckled pastel blue milk the cereal left behind. It was so pretty. Tomorrow, he would take a picture of it for class. If he did so now, he'd have to answer why. He was tired of answering why. Why did everyone always have to know why? He dropped the bowl from his mouth to the bottom of the sink where it shattered spectacularly.

Diane arrived in her towel and felt the tension.

What's going on?

Grandpa thinks sheds can't be barns but that he can be a wise old man and a stupid little baby at the same time. But if you're asking why I shattered the bowl, I'm sorry, I don't have a reason why.

They all waited for someone to say something. Jackson stared out the kitchen window at the barn, his mom stared at her dad, and her dad turned up the volume of the morning show as the hosts laughed their heads off behind the glass of the TV.

Standish Adair

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