Our Reflections

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She looked at me as if she could see all that I was under the spring moon. She was beneath me on a pink blanket checkered with black that faded to gray. The cloth, thinning and frayed from the countless high school football games where she had gone to watch me play, did little to pad our naked bodies against the aged concrete of the bridge. The bridge was lost and forgotten, above the miles of fertile crop ground surrounding us. We hardly feared that the delicate light would expose us. Our pale skin was cloaked by the darkness. It was as if we had entrusted it and it alone to hide our secrets.

My father had shown me this place on one of our walks to check the pasture fence. The bridge itself was a memory lost. Now the memory was reborn in the bonded souls of a father and son, a world unto itself where men could speak to each other. We never talked of much; it was only a father listening to his son talk about football and high school, things. Things that did not matter much outside of Durant, Iowa, but they provided insight to the life of his son. Things my father cared about far more than the real going ons of the world. Things that made him a good father who was doing his best to raise a good son. It was a farmer’s country, and other men’s troubles were alien to it.

Earlier that night she called and said she needed to see me. The call did not surprise me in its abruptness or its timing. I do not know what gave me the courage to invite her over. Three months previous, an angry phone call ended a relationship that we had shared since our first junior high dance in seventh grade. That next morning, when I woke, there was nothing I could think about, nothing I could do, nothing I could see, smell, or hear except the short glimpses of what I hoped was a dream. A dream of which I wished I would never have again. And still there we were, now six years senior of that first junior high experience, we could hardly believe how quickly we had fallen and how increasingly difficult it was to not catch each other’s eyes staring across the classroom.

I felt no different after the first move was made. Confidence came in the form of her call; there was no need for me to open myself up to pain. Someone had already beaten me to it. Maybe the person who did the damage should chance the new pain first. I sat in my living room, in my house that had no formal boundary and waited. The walls may as well have
been torn down continuing out across the lawn, down the hill, through the cornfields, and beyond the pasture, all the way to old Highway 6. It was all my home.

It was after dark when she pulled up to my house. She parked in her normal spot--an old concrete foundation, that was slightly elevated. It used to support an old two-car garage, and as far as as long as I can remember it was home to several raccoons that would scare the piss out of you if you ventured out after dark. It had cracks running though it like the veins of an old woman’s leg--dark and distinct. That spot was hers and was filled frequently during those eight months that she turned sixteen before me.

I circled around our two grain bins, away from the green and white Morton building at the back of our farm. I slid in beside her with our new-to-us six wheeler. The old red six wheeler, used well past its prime, was rescued by my father from the dust and the nesting rats out of the back of one of my grandfather’s old Morton buildings. The machine took on the form of a battle-tested and scarred arachnid, with my modest addition of legs, and every support seemed to take its own course while still somehow cooperating with the group as it crawled over the potholes which formed a type of obstacle course in the gravel driveway that snaked through our homestead.

We said nothing. Maybe our smiles said enough. The locking of our lips spoke all that needed mentioning. It seemed to melt the last three months into a trivial sludge. It was something we both wanted to bury deep in the earth.

She slid in behind me onto the black leather, dented and cracked by years of Wrangler, Arizona and Lee friction and weight. Some hours afterwards I realized her boldness. She had never been on my newfound toy before and readily climbed onboard at my invitation. With the twist of my thin wrist, the same as my father’s thin wrist, against the subtle resistance of the throttle, we rumbled away wildly through the dark to an unknown place. The shaky and undersized headlight that had lit up her blue eyes earlier cast a dim glow over the two story white farmhouse where my father and I both spent our childhoods.

As we turned the corner from my driveway onto 30th Avenue, my mind was still reeling from our kiss and how the security light on the telephone pole next to our house illuminated her face and that Camry that she always drove. The security light presented itself as such an oddity. The way it seemed to epitomize the contrary defiance that quiet and peaceful farm living seems to promote, shedding light on all that we wish to hide.
How the new bulb, surrounded by a dusted cover, blocked out the stars and in that place where its light bled over their shine, disguised the heavens with darkness.

I could feel her breasts against my back. Her blonde hair swirled around and stuck to my face as we moved down the gravel road. Her warmth was something I missed during the past few months, but maybe there was more than just that. I knew she felt and needed more than me, but there was nothing I could do. I was who I was. The rocks flew behind us and with it the dust of the earth.

We rode past the fields where my father rode tractors round after round, overturning the soil every spring, bringing new life to old dirt. The earth, from where we come and where we return, always giving and always taking.

The scene in the fields is the same every year. My dad, out there on his 4840 Deere, worn tennis shoes, jean shorts, some five dollar Old Navy sleeveless t-shirt. The glasses with transition lenses that turned dark in the light and always seemed to stay dimmed long after the light left and the curly brown hair that my mother swears magnetically attracts dirt.

You can see the history of farming in the fields. All of the generations that have gone before and all of those to come; each holding one main goal: break your back so that you may make enough to support your family and keep the business running for the next generations to carry on the family legacy. Blood, soil, rain and sweat, collected and connected, in the soil; the earth never missing an opportunity to drink up the forfeit payments so that we may carry on our traditions.

We rode into the pasture where cattle stood cropping grass and chewing their cud. They equated to the only proper wealth a man could have and still held the distinctions of a religious experience. The hours my dad and I spent just watching them would stagger those who would not understand, who could not understand. We knew of the solemn experience that was their dry and musty smell, the dirt in their winter coats and the bald patches of skin where their hair was subsequently rubbed off in the springtime. If there were ever pure souls, cattle must surely possess them, for nothing ever seemed to spur them into cowardly acts of betrayal. Their blood spilled and mingled with ours into the dirt of our land. We always wondered what cattle see when they looked across into nothing. What were they staring at?

We rode through the pasture as far as we could. The fence told us when our ride was over. We would have to walk. As we crossed over the
fence, we found what the latest flood had left behind. An apocalyptic field of jagged cornstalks and razor-sharp clumps; dried mud covered up where supple grass once grew. The sandals we wore were not made for this, and the mangled cornstalks that could have belonged to a field ten miles upstream punished everything from our shins down.

After a quarter mile of this marathon zigzagging obstacle course, we finally arrived at our destination. Illuminated only by the spring moon, the bridge’s rock face cast a welcoming glance, offering a place of refuge away from the carnage left by the water it had managed to escape. I raced to the top, already knowing where the holes to which there was no bottom other than the creek water were. She waited for me to lay down the blanket and set the keys somewhere would they would not be lost or kicked off. I waded back through the grass that bordered the bridge on either side, the slight elevated position escaping the reach of the yellow bristly terrors.

When we were both on the bridge and the newness and familiarity of it all seemed to strike her, she looked at me and smiled. We shared a smile of understanding. As if we knew a secret just between us, something of our lives past and future. Our common passing’s showing us deep in our cores that splendor and failure are one in the same. She lay down on the blanket as I caught one last quick look at the stars above and kicked into the water below a loose concrete chip.

The question hit me as I positioned myself, beside her at first. Why would she want all of this? She was not born into this and it was certainly not her legacy to carry on the family farm, she was a city girl after all. So why was she with me? It certainly was not for my admirably good looks or my calm and collective demeanor. I can assure you I possess none of these qualities. I was not born of the color purple and would certainly never be a wealthy man. It could have been my callused hands and finger tips, tracing out her figure in the darkness, which she craved. Or maybe it was my truck, still showing the signs of feed or seed bags hauled, with corn, beans, and hay half filling the grooves of my bed liner. But in the end, long after all of this was done and over, I realized what it was that she loved so much about me. She loved to look into the mirror of my eyes and see what she had been missing. She knew she would always love the way she looked in my eyes. Farmer born, farmer raised. That’s what I think she loved so much about me.

When we were walking back, hands together, fingers alternating, my sandal broke. The sandal was of no great value, and I doubt very much that it would have mattered to me if they were worth a king’s ransom at that time.
One of those little bastard cornstalks that was no more than a nub with supporting roots clinging on to the last particles of dirt that it once perched upon last fall, cut me across the sole of my foot. The blood dripped from my foot into the ground and the earth drank it up in its entirety, depositing it beside all of those that worked and lived on the land before me; a down payment for all of the time that I will spend reaping the benefits of its produce. I gladly left the drops, knowing that the sum of my tribute will be far greater in the end.

We are all one blood, those who work and live off the land. All it takes is to realize that we are not made of glass. Then, life suddenly becomes worth living. My father may not have said this, but he taught me this, and so did his father before him.

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