

“Time To Tell” by Jessica Jasinski – Awarded Honorable Mention

Photo – Cowboy

Cool breezes raced across the fields, whizzing through the cornstalks and tickling my ankles. The wind was excited. . .why? For the coming of night? The sun was descending his throne in the sky and was surrendering his glory to the moon. “C’mon, Eddy. ..Time ta..” I immediately swallowed the rest of my words. A rush of aching regret, anger and confusion seized me, and I dropped to my knees. Pressing my forehead to the cold, damp dirt, I inhaled the fresh, ‘rooty’ scent of the soil.

Why did you leave me, Eddy!” I screamed, throwing my head back. Overbearing confusion flooded my veins as I clawed at the black dirt. I tore at the prickly weeds calling, “Eddy! Why? Whyyyy?” My eyes boiled with tears; my breathing became heavy. It had been five months since my 17-year-old son, Eddy, ran away from the only home he knew, our home. I witnessed him leave. His eyes that day were permanently burned into my brain. They were searching for something in me. They were so afflicted, so hurt. I tried to read the message he wore on his face, but I could not understand! He never said a word but turned his back to me and walked away, as if he preferred the empty darkness over me, his dad.

I rose off my knees and saw the pink sky melt into purple and intensify into a royal, starry blue. I attempted to swallow the knot tied in my throat. Navigating my way through the sea of stalks, I gradually came to a stop and unconsciously began to grind the soil underneath my heel. Glancing around, I rested my eyes on the warm, buttery glow shining from the windows of my farmhouse, and a symphony of sheep bleats and crickets tickled my ears. My mind, however, was far from what I saw and heard.

I began to organize my doubts and confusions by speaking to myself aloud. “I was rough on Ed about his chores at home and on the farm, but--” Suddenly I was mysteriously interrupted.

“I’m sorry,” a confident voice rang from a few yards away. The voice was so familiar. it was probably my neighbor’s nineteen-year-old son, Mark. However, because night had fallen, I was unable to see his face.

Blushed by humiliation, I muttered to the young man,

“So ya heard me bellowin’ all o’ my problems on the top o’ my lungs, huh?”

He breathed a laugh through his nose admitting, “Yea,”.

I kicked the dirt and attempted to explain my circumstance, “Eddy, he just, he looked so hurt... by me...I don’t know, he never said a word, he just walked away,”

“He never had the courage to love you,” the voice boomed causing the breeze to tremble.

My eyebrows immediately pinched together and lowered. This didn’t make any sense... wasn’t it the other way around? This young neighbor was wrong. He obviously didn’t understand. Eddy ran away from home because I didn’t love him the way I should have.

“ What?” I snapped.

I could hear the breathing of this boy, but all I could see was an outline of a figure with a cowboy hat, appearing black against the agate sky. Suddenly, I heard his footsteps quickening toward me. I, panicked slightly, was moved by instinct to flee to the woods. “What is he chasing me for? Who in the world is that? This can’t be Mark! Got a problem with me, boy? What is his problem?” My mind swarmed a tornado of questions. The fury of footsteps abruptly stopped. The young man was now nearly visible. He was standing firm with knees bent and apart, holding his fists at his chest. His hat cast a black shadow over his face, concealing the boy’s identity.

Silence.

“Dad you hurt me! I was a coward! I never told you when you were wrong! I thought that by telling

you the truth, I would be hurting you! But really, I was protecting myself from this very moment! I wasn't brave enough to love you the way you deserved to be loved! To love you is to save you from believing you were right to hurt me! Because I care about you, I'm not going to let you destroy yourself!" It was my son screaming those words to me. The mysterious young man had been my son all along.

My soul stung. My heart and mind pounded. Words never ripped at my heart the way those did in that moment. Screams had never moved me to blubbing tears as they did that night. Have you ever physically felt your heart break within you? I did. Have you ever been slapped in the face with truth after so many lies, after so much confusion? I have. Love is truth, and truth stings, like alcohol on a wound, but you know it's healing you. My mind screamed within me, "My son, my boy! What have I done?!" yet my mouth remained speechless.

The boy seized a stick and swung it like a bat, striking the trunk of a tall evergreen, yelling with tears streaming down his cheeks, "I worked hard on the farm, Dad! I planted 30 rows of corn, but it wasn't 'good enough'. I could've 'done it this way' or 'finished it faster' if I did whatever." SNAP! He struck the trunk a second time with even more passion. He choked, "I picked the weeds, I cleaned the barn, I tried so hard to make you proud! But it was never good enough for you! There was never, 'Wow, Eddy! That's awesome!' There was always something wrong you just had to point out." CRACK! The stick pounded the bark one last time, then Ed tossed it aside and stared at me in a way I've never seen him look at me before. "But, I forgive you, Daddy." He smiled through his tears. "It is so difficult to have to tell your dad that he hurt you, that he was wrong...but I wouldn't be doing it if I didn't love you! You're my dad, and I wanna have a great relationship with you! I love you! I'm sorry I never told you the truth like this before, 'cause that's how I hurt you."

I hastened toward my son and caught him up in my arms. "I was wrong," I whispered into his ear. "And I am sorry with my whole heart and soul. You are and were always more than good enough. I was just too selfish, ignorant, and stupid to acknowledge it." I held his shoulders in my hands and looked straight into his searching eyes. "What I said to you was absolutely wrong! I promise to never say those words again, I have no reason to. I love you, Eddy!!"

His eyes finally found what they had been searching for and, looking directly into my soul, the boy laughed sincerely, "I love you too, Dad!

The hurt built up in Ed's eyes all spilled out onto my shoulder, and my own tears soaked my boy's shoulder. Now, our salty tears of hurt had turned to fresh drops of joy. We walked back to the farmhouse in the windy night with arms wrapped 'round each other. I glanced back at the gashes bashed into the trunk of the evergreen. A knife of sorrow cut me deeply as I realized that the torn-away bark resembled my son's heart, ripped apart by my own words. My eyes blurred with tears of repentance as I prayed, "How could God bless a terrible father like me with a magnificent son like Eddy?"