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The Resting Place

This once tall and proud barn was someone's legacy, the heart of a family, but it has sunken into a pile of dirt and rubble, forced to withstand the elements and time. Boards that are no longer supported lean on each other in a colossal, heaping pile of debris. Only scattered nails, rotting wood, and other useless habiliments remain, but when looking more closely, a story unfolds.

I spent almost ninety percent of my childhood in this barn. I woke up every morning to see it standing tall and crimson against the cerulean sky. The cows had to be milked twice a day, and I remember my dad walking me down to the barn. I also remember that he was working a Fu Manchu mustache and a mullet at the time. I wore his boots so I didn't ruin my shoes. The suction in the mud would always pull them off, and I would find myself bare-foot. After we finally got to the barn, my dad set me in the bulk tank room where a screen door barely hung on its hinges. I can still feel my stomach churning and then rising to my throat with fear as the cows ran up to the barn. This is my first memory.

After the cows were rounded up, my dad hooked them in their stanchions, got them some grain, and led me into the barn. He set me on the old concrete countertop next to the ancient radio where I sang along to country tunes. I sang (or screamed) at the top of my lungs with everything I had. Dad was always kind of annoyed by it, but he smiled and kept up with his work anyway. After all the cows were milked, he sprayed the floor of the barn with the garden hose.

We made our way, passing by the "James Hickson and Sons" sign, back up to the house, where my grandma and my cousin,

Caitie were waiting for me. I had no interest in breakfast or even the books my grandma wanted to read to us. We played a couple of rounds of hide-and-seek, and then made our way to the barn. We stayed on the upper level this time, not where the cows were milked. You had to climb a short rock wall to get up to the door that was held shut by a bent nail. Every time we made that climb, we opened the door to find a new adventure.

The ceiling was high in the barn, and rafters ran from the ground up. A ladder was nailed to one rafter, up to the crossbeam. We searched through the huge mass of things on the floor. Among a gun, unopened coke bottles, a weight set, baseball cards, and a million old books, we found some ropes. We tied them to the rafters and tried to swing from them like Tarzan. After failing the attempt to swing from the ropes, we settled on the baseball cards which were very old and belonged to my older cousin, Stevie, but we were not worried enough about how much trouble we were about to cause. We took each one out of its slot in the book and slid them through the cracks in the floor. The floor of this room is the ceiling of the milking room, and when my dad found the cards, I thought his head would explode!

We got bored with this, so we moved to the corncrib, which was just south of the big milking barn. The boards on this barn were about two inches wide and placed about two inches apart. We had never been on the second story, and it was screaming with new adventures. The only problem was that the stairs had begun to fall and were only attached on one side. We knew better than to climb the dangerous stairs, so we climbed the wall. When I reached the floor, as if that wasn't stupid enough, I held the stairs up while Caitie climbed them. We were busy playing when my aunt pulled up the driveway, caught sight of us, and scolded us for our stupidity.

We returned to the ground level, promising to never do it again. This level of the barn had a little section in the wall where there was a rectangular hole, and that day, the hole was a drive-thru window. We prepared salads from the leaves of underdeveloped cocklebur plants, and we made pies out of cow manure with red mineral sprinkles. Our only customers were the horses, who never really cared for dessert.

The next day, the process would repeat, but instead of the baseball cards, we'd dig up an old bike, a dresser full of pictures, or maybe just a bag of rain-hardened cement. The corncrib was a grocery store or a house. The possibilities were endless. But today, everything has changed.

The greatness and pride of the barn is long gone, and now that I have had a taste of how easy it is to lose your roots, I know

how sad that really is. There is no room for miniscule dairy farms anymore. The dampness invading the wood can be felt, just by glancing at it. A long metal pole distends out across the barn like a sword, its final deterrence against the cruel world. Behind the blade, two of the sun-bleached walls have caved in, broken off at the point where the stone foundation begins. One, to the north, still stands, but the fourth has crumbled to the ground. The bottom fourth of the walls, wearing the colors of burnt orange and pink from years and years of rain, make up the limestone foundation. They tumble away from the building like crumbs from bread, leaving rocks, nails and soggy, decaying drywall all over the ground. Newspapers and wallpaper cover each of the windows lining the wall. One window in particular steals the show because of its teal, floral print, and another because of the ad from a time when flour only cost thirty-five cents. It all looks so decrepit. Weeds and trees penetrate the foundation, floors, and walls, and green appears to force its way into the faded red barn like a long, fierce battle. The barn's defense grows tired and weak. The foliage takes over.

Under years of an accumulation of hay and grains lie many objects that meant the world to someone. A tiny, pink shoe rests where a door once stood. A bike retires under the dirt and dust, just barely visible. Glass bottles, a weight set, coolers, books (so many books) and a million other things camp inside this dilapidated building. Rats and mice chewed the books to pieces. The weight set has no weights. The coolers can't keep things cool, and the glass bottles are shattered all around. The roof fell in; the shingles melted off onto the ground. Only one wall remains in its post, exposing all of the contents to the elements. It shows. Not a thing here can be salvaged, except for maybe the collection of baseball cards stuffed in an old dresser.

The floor decays more every day. Holes all around lie in wait to swallow whoever or whatever dares to come by. Bright sunlight passes through where the roof should be and down into the holes, revealing the lower level.

The main room of the lower section of the barn lies in ruins where an old milking apparatus remains, untouched for years. Inside, the stanchions rusted themselves shut, and manure fills the gutter all the way to the top. An ancient radio sits on a makeshift concrete countertop near the door. It is torn into a million pieces like some crazy, mechanical puzzle. That was my radio. Faint musty smells waft from the huge silver bulk tank but become almost completely overpowered by the stench of dust. No word can describe the smell, and I wouldn't have taken it for granted had I known this would be the last time I would ever smell it.

As the sun fades, so does the unique aroma it magnified. Everything darkens slowly like a dying flame. The figures and shadows in the barn morph into creatures of the night, reaching out for prey. All the colors fade into a million shades of grey, almost as if everything is beginning to disappear.

The boards and beams of the barn begin to mesh into one solid heap of black and grey. Dew starts to shimmer on the long grass as well as on the stone foundation of the barn. The wetness changes the discolored stones to a brilliant, dark pink, and seeps into the drywall, making it swell. A gust of wind causes everything to groan in pain.

A final sliver of light shines on the lonely, pink shoe, adding to the pathetic appearance of this place. The objects in the barn disappear into the night as if hiding will take away the pain of being forgotten by the world.

To the east of the barn grows a huge patch of thick, dense grass. Nibbling on the blades is a small, shiny, brown horse. Her jet-black mane and tail flow gracefully in the wind like a proud flag perched high on a pole. She appears as though she eats out of boredom rather than hunger. A sudden BANG! frightens the horse. A burst of wind breaks a board, sending it crashing to the ground right at the horse's hooves. She darts off like an animal one-tenth her size trying to find safety.

Clouds start moving in as the winds begin to pick up speed. The barn moans in agony at this unwanted guest. The serenity of the night disappears, as do the stars, which are now hidden by thick, angry storm clouds. A loud crack of thunder makes the whole barn tremble in fear of being destroyed. The final remaining wall catches the wind, protecting everything left inside. Minutes go by, the wall still waves in the wind, fighting harder than ever to stay up. It has grown weary, and the wind has only grown stronger. The wall gives in. CRRRACK! The wood breaks in the middle, and the top half of the remaining wall crashes into the floor. Dust puffs out from under the wall like smoke from a rocket. The wind swoops through the dust and whips it in circles around the barn, taunting it with its victory. The cruel world has finally won.

The wind begins to calm as a steady rain sets in on the farm. The dust settles onto the soaking grass as the barn begins to settle in on itself. For the first time, the barn rests. Exhaustion sets in, and the strong walls begin to bow, letting gravity do its worst. Defeat.

The sun returns the next morning, as it always does, oblivious to the battlefield it is about to shine upon. Nothing but the silo remains standing, and part of the barn leans into it, almost

thanking it for its protection over the years. Everything lies in ruins. Everything fell into the lower section of the barn, which sits partially underground like a basement, like a grave. This is it. This is how it all ends.

Men come to clean up the mess, and they begin to inundate the barn with dirt, burying it, laying it to rest. Although this is the end, the barn no longer looks sad or decrepit. It looks almost artistic. Peaceful. The process takes days, but after it's all over, the silo stands like a tombstone at the end of a freshly dug grave. A little white and orange sign marks who lies at rest under the dirt. Not only did the barn cease to exist that night, but so did the birthright of a family. The tombstone is marked "James Hickson and Sons." After the grass grows back, no one will have any inkling of what used to stand next to the silo. People cannot see that someone's soul was laid to rest right under their feet. They'll see the sign, the tombstone, and wonder what it means, but no one will ever understand.

FAITH BRITT



Paper Protein Model
photographed paper sculpture with digital manipulation