

That Inevitable Fall

During the summer of 2009, my family and I had to bail, load, and unload large trailers of hay across southern Minnesota. Most of it would just end up in the musty and decrepit barns owned by either my parents or my aunt, waiting to be sold to farmers and horse owners. Bailing hay consists of driving a tractor with a bailer and trailer across rows of cut plants that livestock enjoy devouring. The bailer transforms these plants into forty to sixty pound packages that the people standing on the trailer stack while on the move, like three-dimensional Tetris with only one piece shape. My father parked the dust-covered, dull-red van in front of a derelict garage built right in front of the open field. I slowly clambered out into the loud wind of that warm summer afternoon, preparing myself for the droning and plodding work of the rest of the day.

Making our way around to the field where the last trailer was parked, my mother, sister, and I waited for my father to get into the rusty black truck that we had left there the day we baled the hay. When we had finally made certain that the truck was attached to the trailer, my father got out to double-check the ropes that had been holding the bales on top of the wagon for the better part of two days. The bales were piled up to about one-story, or so. Lounging around, waiting for my father to finish up, I lazily looked up into the slightly cloudy day, listening to the wind and the light sound of my sister's complaints mixing together to form the calming nothingness of so much white noise. Shattering the sphere of complacency, I heard a sickening and heavy thud from near the trailer. A short groan of pain and confusion trailed the thud, like a grotesque blood trail following after a wounded animal attempting to escape the wicked pursuit of a hunter. This sound came from the connection between the truck and trailer, where a metal hitch stuck up like a stalagmite on the floor of a cave. After that groan, a silence that spread out over the course of an infinite moment took the place of every other sound. I came to see the groaning mass of my father in the dirt, his head inches away from the ball-shaped hitch. I was deathly afraid of

seeing blood on the hitch or the ground around my father. Thankfully, none was present, and as I helped him pick himself off the ground, the whole family hurriedly expressed our concern.

“Are you okay?” my sister asks,

“Do you need me to drive us to the hospital?” my mom almost shrieks.

“Relax, relax” he replies offhandedly, like he had simply stubbed a toe or gotten a papercut. He staggered a bit, my mother warning him of a possible concussion. He insisted on continuing work, despite continued protests and the occasional moment of foggiess that would cross over my father’s face. We drove back to our own house with the hay in tow, without incident.

Throughout the rest of the day, we would ask him questions about his probable injury.

“Are you really fine?” my mother inquires, “you know that Liam Neeson’s wife died from not going to the hospital after getting a concussion.”

“No. I don’t need any doctor to tell me not to strain myself” would always be his irritated retort.

He never brought up the fall he took after that. I would always play a little less intensely with my father, always watch him from the corner of my eye when we worked on anything particularly taxing, always remembering the day he fell. I still fear a fall, a fall that we all will take, but one we never could expect our invincible guardians to suffer. A shock to the system that defines how we view the world around us. I fear that inevitable fall.