

The sausage link oozed with grease as Sam penetrated the casing with her fork. The puddle turned into a long trail—as more grease dripped—when she lifted it to her mouth to take a bite. Sam was too preoccupied enjoying her breakfast to notice that some of the grease had fallen onto her red flannel shirt, only to blend in with the various other stains.

Sam rose from the breakfast table and cleaned her plate under the tap. There wasn't a trace of the three sausages which had occupied the platter, but a large portion of her scrambled eggs were left untouched.

Once her plate was—mostly—clean she turned to the other end of the room and thrust open the house's back door. The sun was rising over the horizon as Sam stepped outside. She slammed the stout hardwood door behind her and ran past her mother's—now blooming—flower garden. A few patches of morel mushrooms had started popping up again near the cow pasture, and she intently headed in that direction.

The area surrounding the mushrooms was permeated by the smell of manure. Leaning against one of the sturdy, chest-high posts that supported the cattle fencing, she plugged her nostrils between her forefinger and thumb. Sam took a deep breath followed by a sharp exhale, then leaned over to start picking the mushrooms. She grasped each mushroom firmly around the erect stipe and bulbous cap and pulled one morel after another. Once all the mushrooms in sight had been picked, she gathered them all in her ragged flannel shirt and hurried back to the house.

In her haste, Sam tripped in an animal hole and fell to the ground. The mushrooms she had diligently plucked were scattered about on the ground in front of her. Her body hurt from the

fall, and it took a few moments for her to pick herself up off the ground. Finally regaining her composure, she took her time slumping to gather her mushrooms.

On her way back into the house in a sulk, Sam inadvertently stomped one of her mother's flowers. Oblivious to the damaged flower, she continued into the house, cast the mushrooms about the table, and stormed back out.

After fetching a tamping iron and a sack of dirt, Sam returned to the hole she had tripped over. She filled the hole with dirt and angrily thrust the tamping iron into the soft earth. It was cathartic, filling the space she had tripped in and compressing it with the rigid metal rod in her hands. The forceful pounding at the ground—until it became stiff—made her feel powerful.

Enjoying her accomplishments of the morning, Sam replaced the tamping iron where she found it with the other tools and sat underneath a nearby sapling. She was surprised, when she leaned against the young tree, that it was sturdier than she expected. The trunk was more stout than most trees of that height. Resting against the hard, young oak was comfortable.

“Ah, there you are!”

Sam bolted up—and realized she had nodded off—when she saw her dad standing in front of her, speaking in his deep, gruff voice. “It looks like you’re ready to get started on that flagpole,” he said and chuckled.

“Oh, that’s right! I forgot we planned to do that today.” Sam said, rising to her feet from the bosom of her napping place.

“I’ve already got the hole dug, so all I need is for you to help me stand the pole,” he said as they began walking.

“How long had the last flagpole been there?” she asked “You said you put it up shortly after buying the property, right?”

“No, actually. I think it was that week the hens stopped laying. It was weird, they just quit for a week out of nowhere, then started up again like nothing happened. I had a couple extra hours free, so I thought it would be fun to erect a flagpole. I guess that would have been pretty shortly after you were born, then.” He paused, looked up at the sky and counted with a few of his fingers “Yep, right around sixteen years ago.”

“Some dads plant trees when their kids are born, I guess mine erected a flagpole,” She joked.

He laughed and responded “Yeah, I guess it is funny how that timing worked out.” They stopped walking as he finished his sentence, and both looked down into the hole he had dug. “But man, I wish I had been looking out the window when that bolt of lightning hit! That would have been awesome to watch!” he said excitedly, looking straight at Sam.

“Yeah, I bet it would have been!” she said and looked back at her dad “Now, are we going to stand this flagpole, or sit here chatting?”

“Right! Do you want the truck or the cleat?” he asked, handing her a screwdriver.

“Um, I guess I’ll take the truck.” She said, taking the unnecessarily long screwdriver from him. “Don’t you think this one’s a bit large for a small pulley?”

“Sorry bud, it was the first one I grabbed,” he responded, tossing the pulley at her.

Sam caught the pulley and lazily walked to the end of the flagpole. “The ball at the top is a lot larger than the last one,” she pointed out to her dad.

“It’s called a finial,” he responded “And it’s bigger because I stored a razor, match, and bullet in this one, like you’re supposed to.”

She rolled her eyes and sat down on the ground. Once she had started screwing the parts together, she almost didn’t notice her dad standing over her once he had finished screwing on the cleat.

“When you’re done with that, we’re going to tie on the halyard,” he said.

“Then give me a chance to finish,” she retorted “this piece has more than just two screws on it.”

Her dad stood silent, tapping his foot and looking up at the sky.

“Someone’s getting antsy,” she mumbled. “There, it’s done. Let’s get the halyard on,” she said as she put the screwdriver on the ground.

Her dad leaned over and threaded the inch-diameter rope through the pulley that Sam had finished securing, and tied a square knot. He removed a role of electrical tape from his pocket and wrapped each end of the rope around the piece parallel to it. “Alright, let’s lift this baby!” he shouted, clapping his hands together.

“I guess I’ll grab the bottom end,” Sam said, grabbing the base of the pole.

Her dad grabbed the shaft of the flagpole about halfway up and said “that works for me.”

They both lifted the pole, Sam directed the base into the hole her father had dug, and her dad walked the shaft up, hand-over-hand until it was vertical and had sunk down into the hole.

“Looks great! Now let’s grab some concrete to keep this sucker from falling over.” He said, swiping his hands against one another.

“Way ahead of you.” Sam said dully. She retrieved a small bag of concrete from the barn and filled the hole surrounding the flagpole.

“This looks like a job very well done,” her father boasted “Would you mind gathering the eggs in the chicken coup for me?” he asked politely.

“Yeah, sure dad,” sam responded nervously, grabbing her arm. She turned and walked away, head tilted downward.

When she arrived at the coup, egg basket in hand, she suddenly felt a knot forming in her stomach. She hesitantly ducked into the hut to retrieve the eggs.

Sam was overwhelmed by the volume of clucking permeating the room from the myriad chickens. She tried her hardest to ignore them, and was able to walk around and collect a few eggs in her basket.

Unfortunately, all of her focus wasn’t enough to tune out the mind-numbing ruckus of the hens around her. Sam began to shout in a rough, guttural tone. As she shouted, she grabbed eggs out of her basket and began throwing them, one at a time, against the walls of the coup. The shells broke on impact and the yolk ran slowly down the walls.

The longer she shouted, the quicker her shouts became and the harder she threw the eggs. The shouts became abrupt and brief, resembling an emergency siren by the time she stopped. Once her basket of eggs was empty she began thrashing about, smashing whatever was in her way—especially the chicken eggs.

Not long after she began thrashing about, the chickens began pecking at her. They quickly ran her back out of the coup. Once she had fallen through the entrance and down the

ramp, she curled up and began to cry. Her crying slowly intensified until she was violently sobbing.

When she had finally calmed down, she stood up, rubbed her eyes with her sleeves, and blew a snot rocket onto the ground. Sam started walking to the grain silo to find her dad.

It always amazed Sam, just how tall the silo was. A lot of modern farms had started switching to horizontal trench silos. But even for farms still using towers, theirs was still larger than most others she had seen.

Her dad was standing nearby, operating the elevator to load grain into the silo. He was too focused on operating the equipment to notice Sam hesitantly approaching behind him, and the machinery was too loud for him to have heard her.

“Dad.” she said and paused “Dad!” she shouted, trying to get his attention.

He jumped at the second call, turned off the machinery and turned to face her. “Yeah, what is it?”

“Dad I- I need to talk to you about something,” she mumbled nervously.

“You’re having sex! No, you’re pregnant! Is that it? That’s what nervous teenagers say to their fathers, right?” he joked, obviously not taking the conversation seriously.

“What? No, dad I-”

“Plus your mom said something about a pill,” he continued, cutting her off “You started taking birth control, right? So you better not be telling me you’re pregnant.”

“Dad!” Sam shouted in frustration “Mom wasn’t talking about birth control, I’m taking testosterone pills.”

Her father looked puzzled. Sam could see the cogs turning in his head, but it didn't quite seem to click.

"Dad." She paused, tilted her head forward, maintaining eye contact, and connected the dots for him "I'm transgender. I'm taking those pills so my body can match my brain."

Her dad didn't respond immediately, it took him longer to process than she expected. A fearful expression washed over her face in anticipation.

Finally, he burst out laughing, tilting his head back and clutching his stomach. Sam rolled her eyes just as he was about to speak "I always thought of you more like a son than a daughter anyway." He paused again "At least I was right that what you were telling me had to do with those pills."