

Shalefield

By

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EXT: FARM - DAY

JARED BLUSH(40) is an engineer by trade but works the land his forefathers willed him. A parcel paid on in 1842.

It's good land.

Jared rests his swollen, scraped, and scared hands against his shovel and stares at a barren field, which once bore watermelon.

It's a good size lot.

He walks out four paces and starts to dig without setting his feet.

As the early morning sunlight creeps across the furthest field, the dry dirt pulls more freely from the earth.

INT: HOLE - DAY

Jared stands five foot eleven and a half, the hole now, six feet.

The loose shovel soil is taken from the floor of the squared off pit on a free fly pulley, which works with the power of the sun.

Solid wooden slats that run the side of the ditch on a belt fling soil skyward then back down the wall for another load.

The scrunch faces of judging children breach the small quarry mouth above.

NELSON

Hey Pa, that's a mighty nice hole
you got there. We gettin' a poo?

BRITTANY

Yeah, we gettin' a poo?

NELSON BLUSH(14) sweeps the blond hair from his eyes, exposing his mother's soft features.

BRITTANY BLUSH(9) is still round with baby fat but tough and tenacious with darker hair and concerned features her father's face lends.

JARED

Doctor claim you two healthy?

NELSON

Yup.

BRITTANY

Yes, sir!

Jared smiles and raises his hand to his eyes.

JARED

Then grab a shovel and get down here.

NELSON

You know we're just joshin'.

BRITTANY

Yeah, we're just joshin'.

The two children's heads disappear from the frame but in an instant return with shovels to match their height.

Being an engineer, Jared thought it right to dig a staircase into the soil.

The three day-laborers step on top their spade and drive their shovels into the dirt floor hole.

They dig in silence till Jared measures his area to a ten-foot depth.

MARY BLUSH(28) tine back hair has become loose as she peaks over the nape of the hole.

MARY

Are you going to bring my children ground level for dinner or should I just throw down a turkey?

BRITTANY

Just toss down a turkey, Momma!

JARED

No, no, everyone out of the hole.

The three workers climb out from the hole.

Three distinct dirt levels that resemble an archeological dig.

EXT: FARM - MORNING

Jared carries his coffee to the lip of the ditch and chews on a stick of bacon.

In the background, his children laugh and eat breakfast in a big bay window. Mary washes the dishes behind them.

Jared grabs his shovel and heads down the earthen stairs.

INT: HOLE - MORNING

Jared lingers at the lowest level then begins his work.

He chips at the soil of the small wall left between his son's and his own earthen depression.

Nelson appears over the lip of the ditch. He leans on his shovel and watches his father work.

Soon the progress is noticeable and Nelson moves to help.

Nelson flings the loose debris against the machine his father built to extract the dirt from the hole.

Soon Brittany appears and sits up top. She shoes away horse flies that wait for the barn.

The family dog Jake is curious enough to take a seat and becomes a protective pillow for Brittany's lip lay nap.

JARED

Jake, you watch that girl.

Jake rolls over and Brittany's head disappears, only the blond back of a Golden Protector can be seen.

The men dig on and soon reach Brittney's wall. Brittany did an incredible job for someone her size but her body will have no more of it today.

EXT: HOLE - FROM ABOVE - MORNING

The men lean on their shovels and look at the progress so far. To someone above it is impossible to see where the division lie. The floor is level and no one can tell who dug what so far.

Brittany's wall runs flat with the stairs. The hole is ten feet deep, her wall stands six. The job is much easier done with a pick-ax which Jared procures from the shed while Nelson leans and contemplate the wall.

Jared swings without control and brings down the wall in large sharp chunks that Nelson need jump back to avoid.

Nelson uses his shovel to carry the chunks to the ingenious machine but the chunks are too heavy. Nelson looks at the chunks as he carries them to the stairs. A shiny-bright material, something alien to Nelson, like most things were.

NELSON

Pa? You seen anything like this before?

Jared holds the spade up for his father's inspection.

Jared stops his pick to take a look.

JARED

Well, that there looks like oil shale!

Jared breaks off a bit from the larger chunk and sifts it through his fingers.

JARED

Boy. You may just solve our problems yet!

Bring that load up and let's see how far this shale vein goes!

Nelson's arms shake from holding up the spade so long. He allows the shovel drop from exhaustion before he carries it up the stairs from the hole.

JARED

May want to bring in some heavy equipment for this one Nellie, looks like you're about to fall next to your sister!

Nelson turns sharp, drops most of his load on the stairs.

NELSON

Oh, no you won't! As soon as you bring in a backhoe the fun stops!

All we do is watch some fat slob push dirt all day!

No! We do this!

Jared smiles and nods his head to the side.

JARED

Okay, but this barn need be up in the next two weeks if we are going to catch the beginnin' of boardin' season.

Nelson drops what is left of his clod on the ground above the hole.

INT: HOLE - NOON

Jared looks up to his son and can see he's still scrawny but his virtues were bigger than most twice his size.

JARED

Okay, okay, let's get at it then. Why don't you go and grab another pick from the shed and we'll clean the deck in about a half hour?

NELSON

Sounds good.

Nelson walks the stairs, the pick-ax shaft bounces on his shoulder.

Jared takes off his t-shirt and ties it around his face, nods to Nelson to do the same.

JARED

You go low, I'll go high.

Go slow now!

As not to get in one another's way.

Nelson stares at Jared as he takes his first swing. Slow with control, deep into the shimmery silver wall.

JARED

Nice and slow.

Jared steps back to offer the wall to his son for a whack.

Nelson steps forward and forces the point of the pick-ax on the dirt near slow motion to get the mechanics down right.

JARED

Perfect just like that. Now we build a rhythm.

The two men step forward and back, slow and precise so to hit their mark. They establish a rhythm and the wall melts away, no longer tries to put up a fight. It crumbles so that one is left to wonder how it ever stood at all but didn't all just fall flat in a deep sinkhole in the ground.

Soon the pile of shavings has grown to where you can no longer work without stumbling over large clods of dirt.

It is the first time that Jared allows himself the time to stop and look.

The soil is black and granular and slips down the sides of the sod pile like brown sugar.

Jared takes a fistful and allows it again to sift through his fingers. A solid rock mass is left in his palm. Jared's left eye narrows.

JARED

You know what Nellie? I don't think this is shale.

NELSON

I was thinking the same thing. Keep waiting for the smell but nothing comes?

JARED

Don't smell cause' it's not. It's not shale nor coal.

Jared holds up a stone.

Gold flake shape diamond the size of his son's small fist, with liquid drop dimple turquoise and ruby, solid hard as glass.

Nelson studies the geodesic formation.

NELSON

Well, now I'm just confused. Am I suppose to be happy or not?

At that Jared stops.

Jared drops the cold conglomerate and takes a seat on the very top of the large shiny black pile and appears a remorseful king.

NELSON

Huh, Pa? What do you say?

Jared becomes tenuous but tired as his swollen shoulders ache from working the pick. He breaths out a SIGH that fills the small cavern, just about deep enough to echo.

JARED

Well, son, this land is ours. No one can lay claim. But once you have something special, something precious on that land. People will find a way to claim it.

Nelson puts his chin on the shovels wooden butt end.

JARED

Say we keep diggin' for another five miles? This vein could go right under the old stone markin' wall and through MacGregor's land. What do you think would happen next?

Or the vein stops right before MacGregor's and it's all ours? Have you seen the land stripped?

Course you haven't.

Jared speaks straight as if to a crowd.

Point is, once we let this out, nothing around here will be the same. We will have wealthy men with big ideas coming out here about how to "develop" what we have.

Is that what you want for your sister? Could you imagine how your mother would react?

Jared turns his head and awaits his son's answer.

NELSON

I don't think Momma would have to much trouble with wealthy men and things developing around here.

She is always complaining this place offers no future for Brittany.

Me, hell I could work this land till...till I'm your age!

Again Jared SIGHS and thinks of the choices for the future.

JARED

So, you're sayin' that you would be perfectly happy just working the land?

NELSON

What else is there?

JARED

Nothin' worth mentionin'.

NELSON

But Brittany and Momma? We couldn't tell um, ever?

JARED

Well, now that is true. How do you reason that?

NELSON

I don't. This land was parcel paid in 1842. I see people scramblin' from there homes cause they can't pay the bank. I don't see much but I do see that!

This is everythin' we may ever have but it is everythin' we should ever need!

I don't know if Ma' sees that?

JARED

Oh, she sees it. She just wants so much more for you two. If she could get Brittany off this farm she could have half a chance at not...

NELSON

Marrying the neighbor farmer boy?

JARED

Have you seen Taylor MacGregor? Dental work alone for that child would take a shale mill!

NELSON

And the red hair to boot! He ain't tied to it, he is the whippin' post!

The two men wipe the sweat, pity the child with a smirk.

NELSON

So what do we do?

Jared looks at the progress they have made. Brittany's wall is now a tunnel five feet past the stairs with no sign of yield to the black shiny vein.

As the sun moves off the lip of the hole and finds the top of the tunnel, it shows the crevasse like a geode pluck from the earth.

INT: HOLE - AFTERNOON

Jared moves his elbows to his knees in deep thought.

Nelson looks to the top of the hole. Jake, the dog, has moved on and somewhere during the day, so has Brittany.

No longer in the picture, it is easy for Nelson to make his decision. A decision that lay squarely upon him, the weight too much of a burden for his father to rend.

And as the sun moves down the wall at a slow but mark pace, the more the shimmer and blind mystery showed the future, held dazzling before them.

Nelson reaches down and finds a stone to feel the weight in his palm.

NELSON

No one's future worth anything
never was measured with a stone or
a handful of soil or ditch of
glimmering light.

Nelson throws the clod as far down the tunnel as it goes without reservation. Throws another and another.

Like a pitcher warms up for a late August evening game.

Jared smiles at the peculiar action of his young son's pitchers motion and sees the rare opportunity for a lesson.

JARED

Doin' that all wrong. You're
lettin' the elbow fly.

Jared lifts his old body from the pile of granular dirt that sticks to him like sand and require a brush.

Jared steps down from the pile and over the softball size clods about Nelson's feet. He picks a good one from the dirt floor and drops it in Nelson's palm.

JARED
Now. Do like you were doin'.

NELSON
Okay, is it my follow through?

Jared stands behind Nelson and guides his elbow back.

JARED
Nope, when you bring back your arm,
tuck in your elbow, so when you
release it you have one final pop
for control at the end.

Nelson turns, brows raised.

NELSON
So wait for the pop?

JARED
No! Never want to hear a pop, just
want to give the ball a little more
pop, at the end.

Jared guides Nelson's arm down straight.

NELSON
Oh, okay.

Jared rubs his right shoulder which remembers the motion.
Nelson concentrates and brings back the clod to his chest.
Jared pushes two fingers down on his elbow to tuck it in.
Nelson releases slowly to watch for technique.
The clod only drops inside the tunnel.

JARED
That's the idea.

EXT: FARM - LATE AFTERNOON

The two men bring their picks back to the shed and return to their shovels to fill in miner's tunnel.

They decide to hide the black dirt wall with two additional feet from Jared's back wall, which drives the ditch two feet further into the ripe cabbage patch.

Three more feet of brown sugar sod at a ten-foot depth.

INT: HOLE - LATE AFTERNOON

Jared and Nelson pile and tamp all the loose dirt from the three additional feet to ground level.

Three additional feet before the now fill tunnel. Two feet from being flush with the stairs.

INT: HOLE - DUSK

Brittany appears at the edge of the earth.

BRITTANY

Where'd my hole go? You dug around it and now it's gone.

Brittany points to the two-foot indentation in the earth where the wall used to be flat with the stairs.

NELSON

It's still here Brit. All three of our holes made this one big hole.

BRITTANY

But my hole ended right here, where did my wall go?

JARED

Well? We dug it out. What do you want us to do?

Brittany squats at the edge of the ditch, a grimace at the entire situation.

BRITTANY

Put it back!

At this Jared turns to Nelson with a shake of his head in disbelief.

Nelson plants his shovel in the ground and takes a deep breath.

NELSON

Do you know!...

Jared is quick to put his hand over Nelson's mouth.

JARED

Don't you worry, Brit. We'll fix it.

Brittany rises and stomps away from the edge.

BRITTANY

HUMPH

Jared places his massive hands on Nelson's steady shoulders.

JARED

Remember, never. Not if you love
this land.

NELSON

Yes, sir.

The two men decide without a word that it will only hurt more in the morning and get to work.

INT: HOLE - EVENING

The men remove two more feet from the back wall of Jared's ditch, brings the stables now two feet deeper among the cabbage.

The work is rote but laborious and takes them the same time to move three feet as it does two. Pour the dirt into a pile, pat and tamp like masons, clumsy shovel for a trowel.

EXT: FARM - NIGHT

When they finish it is nine thirty at night and the pain in their shoulders is only numb when set to hang loose as they walk into the house for supper.

INT: HOLE - NIGHT

But Brittany's wall is construct. Protecting a future never to be foretold.

Under earth and soon wood and hay and horses and dung and more shovels to clean out stables for the Noble girls and their show ponies and glistening Arabians only oil money can buy.

EXT: FARM FROM ABOVE - NIGHT

Safe from outside forces that look to change the landscape. Never again see the fields go follow or ripe with spring seedling.

Never again would the land know bounty, just strip, and mine till the empty husk remain. An empty husk the call company that has no room for family business.

INT: KITCHEN FROM ABOVE - NIGHT

Jared sits at the kitchen table and thinks about the day, sips hot decaff from the green glass cup.

Mary wipes her hand from the sink and joins him.

MARY

So, what did he say?

JARED

Exactly what you said he would say.

MARY

He's a good man. Reminds me of, Father.

JARED

He makes me miss, Father.

MARY

That girl is all we got. We got to set that straight now.

Jared says nothing but stares out the window.

INT: KITCHEN - VIEW OUT PICTURE WINDOW TO FARM - NIGHT

In late August, Jared can usually peer a sea of green, even in the middle of the night. But the land is bairn and he can see straight through to the MacGregor's kitchen. Through the lush berry bushes that hang and cling happily from the wrap-around railings of their bright estate house.

INT: KITCHEN - NIGHT

MARY

So you think he understands?

JARED

In time he will. In time they both will.

MARY

That's the last time we dig that up. I know that Sarah MacGregor was watching from her kitchen window. Lookin' all pompous.

Jared snaps a steely stare at Mary.

JARED

That's fear sister. Don't confuse
envy for fear. She's barren of
envy.

He sips out his cup and stares through the field.

JARED

They're new to the land and only
got sires. They think they need us
to survive. They know what it means
when we dig the hole. They were
here for Nellie. They're scared we
won't share our Bounty.

JARED

The horses are a calculated risk.
The future for his family? That
needed be decided.

Mary places her palm against Jared cheek and smiles.

MARY

Father be proud.

END