

“Blue Sky”

Greg Baines

My daughter folds her arms and glares at me. She is still mourning the loss of the apartment, the death of the city in our life. The sun is sharp in my eyes, and I try to move past her but she shifts her weight to the side into my path. Silhouetted against the sun she says again, ‘I’ve done this before, I can show you.’

Sighing I push her arm gently mumbling something about *things to do*, and I get a good couple of paces between us, but she follows. Her footsteps are heavy and sure behind me. I have apartment hands and I won’t be doing anything like that. Moving to the country is big enough. She hates me, anyway; rarely talks to me. A few more paces and she will slip away into her own world and I will break free and get to work.

It’s so startling when she strings another sentence together behind me I can’t help but stop. There is eye contact as she says, ‘It’s safe. What are you worried about?’

This is the second full sentence she has spoken to me in the last few days. We are in the kitchen and I turn to her. Her arms are still folded and her head is cocked to one side as if to say *you are an idiot*. I wonder if I hated my parents as much.

If my farther could see me now he’d roll his eyes. It’s his after all, he left it with a pile of other old tools I will likely never use. I’m not good with my hands. I’m a city man stranded in the country. I’m not sure what to say. She turns in my indecision and sighs, a thousand disappointments littered between us. Pushing *me* this time she storms off toward her bedroom. I watch her go, part relieved part dull ache. We had been speaking. Almost.

Screen open perched on my lap I stare, but lost in thoughts of her. No words come and I am conscious of the chooks outside and the flutter of sparrows by the window. The country is still

settling around me. Street level sounds are still unsettling. I push the screen down and look up at the sky, trying to find a point of reference in the emptiness above. Overseas, in our other life, seeing blue like this was a treat. No one even bothers to look *up* here except to check for rain. They don't know how precious it is. I think we just moved here for sky.

I call her, straining my voice so she can hear me over whatever device she is using. She comes quickly, glaring at me, 'I'm not deaf.'

'I thought you had-'

'Well I didn't.'

As she turns to go I say, 'Well, show me how it works. I'll help you once.'

She sniffs, 'I'm doing something else now. Too late.' And she is gone again.

I wander outside and unchain the old shed doors and peer in. She has already pulled it out, the old circular saw, and I laugh out loud when I see it's already plugged it in. Did she know I would cave in eventually? It's on the concrete floor. I bend down and run my finger over the old blade. The box of tools is behind it, machines for a different life to mine.

'You need glasses.' I jump at the voice behind me, startled.

'You scared the-'

'Shit out of you?' My daughter finishes my sentence.

'You can't use language like that. How many times have I...' But I let my voice trail off. She has held out the glasses for me and I snatch them.

There is a moment when she looks like she will go again but I put the glasses on and she hesitates, on the edge of some great decision. The sparrows stop and I can't hear any dogs barking or magpies chirping. It's still, like the land is waiting for my daughter's decision, like her teenage powers have stopped time. Everything just waits for her, everything holds its breath. Then a breeze,

a flap of wings past the window and she stays. She points to a couple of pieces of wood to my left, 'They are the pieces. I have measured them. Just three cuts.'

I shuffle a bit, 'Ok, well...'

She sighs but there is a hint of a smile there as we bend down to get closer to the machine. She shows me how it works, turning off the power, placing the wood in position and bringing the blade down. It's simple and I feel embarrassed suddenly, stupid.

'Now turn the power on dad. You can do the first cut.'

It's easy. The wood is cut like scissors through paper and I stand up feeling the fresh new end of timber. One of the chooks come scratching around the shed door and I watch it exploring the weeds. Cut grass and sawdust are in the air and I take a deep breath of the smell. I say, 'I want to do the second cut.' Even city hands can do this.

She nods, and when I have made the cut she studies the new surface and looks at another pile of wood behind me. She says, 'Let's cut some more. We can use some of the worst of it for the fire.'

'What were you going to do with these anyway?'

She pulls a small piece of paper out of her pocket and unfolds it. A simple plan has been scrawled out in texture with clumsy oversized numbers beside some of the edges. I take a quick look and realise the maths doesn't work but I just smile. She starts explaining how it will go together but I tune out of the words and listen to the melody of her voice and wonder how she has got this old. She isn't just an extension from me anymore, she is becoming her own person.

We saw wood through the afternoon, the sound of our machine mixing with a far-off chainsaw somewhere. We talk about hammer and nails and discuss going to buy wood glue. Something has changed in the afternoon, and I forget about tall buildings and our life. Maybe the mourning has ended today. A new life in the country is starting to stir around us, to gently unfold.