The Result of Interfering

Danielle Horn

My head bobs to the sound of the sympathy playlist Dad gave me, with a hint of kitchenware being thrown downstairs between choruses. He told me to only burn songs with instrumentals similar to how wedding bands riot while tumbling down the garbage disposal, and so far, none have been accurate enough to distract me from the real thing.

I wait for my parents’ ok to join them for raw eggs in a glass at our breakfast bar, but it’s often a solid forty five minutes behind schedule that they remember to fetch me. Today I can hear their conversation through my headphones, toboggan, and the pillow that fits most comfortably around my head, so I congratulate myself for choosing math as the class to miss *if* they began to argue.

Mom knows there’s never really a chance they won’t, so she always asks me which subject I’d prefer not to have the following day, but it’s not so much for my happiness as it is for their pride being able to coincide with their approach to parenting. After all, what child wouldn’t want to neglect their education?

My eyes shift across the bedroom to my desk and the long division equations I had been assigned for homework the night before and I contemplate my answer before fully recalling my mass enjoyment for anatomy class. No, I definitely value learning.

“Timothy is not *that* kind of a boy,” I hear Mom’s words echo up the staircase through each of my layers and start to hold my breath. The ticking of my food chain wall clock with knives for hands sounds more like pistol shots as I anticipate her troubled voice prompting me to the living room and then outdoors. The Andersons must’ve called.

“Then how do you explain…”

“There has to be another…”

“…Lorraine, darling, this isn’t the first time it’s…”

“...I’ll just have to ask…”

“You’re his mother…”

“Yes, I am, and that is exactly why…”

This proceeds long enough for me to jumble even more belongings into my backpack than necessary, including two identical books with the title *Understanding Your Body Deeper than Living in It* and a collection of journal entries I accumulated through months of self-teaching.

“Timothy Andrew!” Mom tries to sound intimidating to appease Dad, and also avoids using either of their last names on account of him. I, more frequently than not, tell people I don’t have one if they ask, but most are not that invested.

A door closes in another room and I assume it’s him so I take the opportunity to receive a lesser consequence. Thank Unidentified Higher Power for women’s sensitivity.

“Yes, Lorraine Michelle?”

She gives me a smug, then pleading look as if to say, cute but not now and then turns to little Daniel whose eyes are glossed with adolescent emotions.

“I call my mom *mommy*,” he tries to size me up from his three and a half foot stance and laughing suddenly seems too insincere, even for me. “I also called my rabbit Bugs!”

I skim my mother’s *we can’t keep doing this* face before saying, “Daniel, wouldn’t you rather spend time with your friends than a childhood pet? That would be the *adult* thing to do, and without Bugs, you undoubtedly have the free time.”

The wheels turn in his head while he analyzes what I’ve said with as much understanding as any six year old would have about life and afterlife and I spare him the, loss is a part of growing up, spiel that I gave the Garcia daughter about her Doberman.

“You’re right,” he finally says, although it’s apparent he’s still unsure as he leaves. “Thanks.”

Two doors shut periodically and Dad makes his reappearance but I pretend not to notice and drink my eggs. It occurs to me how ironic it is that he didn’t want such a young boy to see him upset.

“A rabbit?” he prods. “You’re dissecting rabbits now? I could have just bought you one of those.”

Mom’s eyes become wide and she responds with a desperate “Jackson!” as I sling my backpack over my shoulder.

“Imagine how you would’ve felt, Timmy, if Goner would’ve died when you were Daniel’s age,” she says.

“Mom, I killed Goner too y’know.”

Her brows furrow and she shoots my father a look, causing me to infer that he must have told her Goner flew directly into the wood chipper or something, because there wouldn’t have been any other explanation more believable. Even, your son took box cutter to him, felt stretched considering I was eight at the time, although it couldn’t be more obvious how overwhelmed with selfish intentions I had been while naming him.

“I’m sorry,” I don’t believe a word. “It won’t happen again; I’m through with animals.”

There’s a very sensible drop of tension between two of us and Mom nods in spite of Dad’s skeptical expression.

“Let’s get you to school, then,” she smiles like Einstein’s mother must’ve smiled when she realized half her son’s birth weight was likely made up of his brain and I respect her naivety, so after a more appropriate “I’ll come with you” from Dad, we’re all rolling along a hilly shortcut to the Morrison High School Academy for Science and Technology with me in the backseat.

They think they hold the act of yelling in a whisper well as they discuss my promise and whether or not it holds water but they don’t, and it doesn’t, and all I can piece together is Mom’s on the defensive before Dad breaks the quiet trend with a violent “Pull over!” and jerks Mom’s disobedient hands off the steering wheel, which must jar her timid personality because then she hits a speed only racecars are accustomed to and we collide into a corral withholding livestock.

Mom’s dead on impact and my head’s cut but I’m still rational enough to conclude that Dad’s never appeared to me as more of a bastard for being alive.

I inspect his legs, which might as well not be a part of his body anymore and try not to make contact with Mom’s neck. Her head is turned to the left and laid across her seatbelt like she’s napping vehicle-style but it’s clear she’ll be asleep for much longer than average. The thought infuriates me, so I palm Dad’s cellphone and punch nine-one-one. He makes a semi unconscious groan.

“My name’s Timothy McCullers,” I don’t correct how collected I sound because they’ll undeniably conclude I’m in shock either way. “There’s been a car accident near Honey Pine acreage.”

The person on the other line asks me if there have been any fatalities and I say “Two, both my parents,” before hanging up and avoiding her rehearsed remarks about being happy I’m safe.

I have approximately ten minutes to do what I’ve been practicing for.