

EVERYTHING?

A father discovers that, even in the most desperate of seasons,
there's always time for hope.

Written by

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EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

The brilliance of the night sky's endless stars are interrupted by a gently swaying tree branch.

BOY'S VOICE
Everything?

MAN'S VOICE
Everything.

BOY'S VOICE
You mean *everything* everything?

MAN'S VOICE
That's what it says.

At the base of the tree sit father and son, CARL (39) and STEFAN (12). They're wedged comfortably into gaps between the tree's impressive surface roots, their backs against the trunk. There's a chicken coop nearby.

Stefan's hair is wet from a recent bath and he's wearing shorts and a faded t-shirt. He gazes up through the tree's branches at the stars.

An old lantern casts its flickering light onto a well-worn Bible. Carl runs his calloused finger over the words. He's still in his farm clothes, dirty from a day's labour.

STEFAN
But what about bad things like
lying and cheating?

CARL
They're not on the list--

STEFAN
There's a list?

Stefan clambers over the root structure and settles on a prominent root next to his dad. He peers down at the Bible.

STEFAN (CONT'D)
(reading)
"A time to kill!"

CARL
When do you think it'd be okay to
kill?

This is a new concept to Stefan and he pauses to think. Carl flicks his gaze to the chicken coop and his son catches the movement.

STEFAN
 (hesitant)
 When we kill an animal to eat it?

Carl nods.

STEFAN (CONT'D)
 There's lots of killing in the
 Bible...

CARL
 True. Lots of wars too.

He points further down the page and Stefan reads the line.

STEFAN
 "A time for war and a time for
 peace."

CARL
 Which one do you think God prefers?

STEFAN
 Peace. Jesus is the Prince of
 Peace.

CARL
 True, and I agree. But at one time
 Jesus also said, "I did not come to
 bring peace, but a sword."

Absorbing it all, Stefan eases back to his original spot and lets his eyes drift up to the stars.

STEFAN
 (fresh insight)
 Everything.

CARL
 Everything. In it's proper time.

They're silent for a while.

STEFAN
 (cheekily)
 So there's a time to disobey your
 father?

CARL
 (fondly)
 Let's not go too far!

STEFAN
What about a time for hot
chocolate?

CARL
Sure is!

STEFAN
Yes!

CARL
But not tonight!

STEFAN
(mock horror)
What?

They laugh.

CARL
But it could be time for warm milk?

Stefan nods happily and springs to his feet. Carl GROANS at his stiff joints and Stefan offers his hand.

STEFAN
Soon it'll be time for someone to
turn forty!

CARL
Didn't that list also say there's a
time to be silent?

He winks but waves away Stefan's hand and stands on his own, pushing against the tree for help.

Stefan grins and dashes towards the house, his feet barely missing the tree's network of exposed roots.

Ahead of him is a concrete slab leading up to the back door of the farmhouse. Some of the roots continue under it, creating bulges and cracks in the concrete.

CARL (CONT'D)
Wait!

But it's too late. Stefan trips over one of the cracks and crashes to the ground.

STEFAN
Ahhh!

Carl rushes to his crying son.

INT. FARMHOUSE - STEFAN'S ROOM - NIGHT

A Band-Aid half covers the graze on Stefan's knee.

CARL

Sorry, Stefan. That's the last one.

Carl searches through the sparse contents of a first-aid kit. The lantern from outside now sits on a chipped bedside table - there's no bulb in the overhead light socket.

Stefan lies on his bed, cradling a sleep toy on his chest. Carl kneels beside him.

There's a small suitcase open on the floor, filled with boy's clothes. Beside it is a school backpack and a few books, including a math textbook.

STEFAN

It's okay, Dad. The rest aren't that bad.

He holds up his skinned hands and Carl inspects them by the dim light.

CARL

Good thing I've raised you to be so tough.

Carl drops Stefan's hands and tousles his hair.

Through the window near the bed, the tree's leaves can be seen rustling in a light breeze.

STEFAN

Dad...

CARL

It's alright, Stefan. What's on your mind?

STEFAN

I know you didn't talk with Pa much, but do you know why he didn't cut that tree down?

CARL

Huh. That tree... Well, when I was growing up here, it wasn't so big and the roots weren't trip hazards.

STEFAN

You said when we got here last week that if they get any worse they'll mess with the house's foundations.

CARL

Don't worry, son.

Carl looks around, a faint smile on his lips.

CARL (CONT'D)

She's seen better days, but this old place isn't falling over any time soon.

He turns to the window, his smile fading.

CARL (CONT'D)

That tree will have to come down though.

STEFAN

I can help!

Carl's smile is less convincing this time, hiding some other emotion.

CARL

I'm sure you can...

He's struck by a thought, a way out.

CARL (CONT'D)

(light hearted)

But I'm not sure Pa's rusty handsaw is up to the job. We'd need a chainsaw and buying one's not high on my priorities right now.

Stefan can't hide his disappointment.

STEFAN

Dad, when is the economy going to improve so we can go home?

Carl takes a steadying breath.

CARL

This is our home now, Stef. I had to sell--

Stefan shifts his whole body so he's facing away from his dad. They both watch the tree sway in the breeze for a while.

CARL (CONT'D)

Oh hey!

He remembers something and goes fishing in his pockets. Curious, Stefan inches around towards him.

CARL (CONT'D)

Pa wasn't able to leave us much but he wanted you to have this.

Carl pulls out an envelope and hands it to Stefan. Inside are three fifty-dollar bills.

STEFAN

Wow! I could buy a new bike with this!

CARL

Great idea! I loved riding my bike around here as a kid.

STEFAN

And given I've been riding your old bike to school, I definitely think it's *time* to get a new one!

CARL

Ha ha, I see what you did there. I'll take you into town on the weekend. But now it's *time* for sleep.

They share a smile. Carl leans in and gives Stefan a hug and a kiss on the cheek, then picks up the lantern and walks to the door. Stefan watches him go.

A few seconds later, Stefan hears the BACK DOOR OPEN and CLOSE. Through the window, he sees Carl step carefully to the base of the tree and rest his hand against the trunk.

Stefan considers this, then looks down at the money-filled envelope.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - MORNING

A rickety old table is the only recognisable furniture. Two overturned milk crates serve as chairs.

Carl enters through the back door with a glass jar of freshly gathered milk and three eggs.

THUMPING FOOTSTEPS precede Stefan bounding in, a bundle of pre-teen energy in second-hand school clothes. There's no sign of last night's angst.

STEFAN
Time for pancakes?

CARL
(affectionate growl)
Time for chores!

Stefan salutes and darts towards the door. Carl places the eggs and jar of milk on the table, but the surface is so uneven that the eggs roll towards the edge.

Carl lunges but misses one. It SPLATS onto the floor. He shoots Stefan a pained look.

CARL (CONT'D)
We've still got two. We'll make it stretch.

STEFAN
(teasing)
I was thinking it's time for a new table.

With a grateful laugh, Carl shoos him out the door.

CARL
Go on. You've gotta be ready for school soon.

Stefan bolts out the door. Carl bends over to clean up the broken egg.

INT. SHED - DAY

The workbench and wall are cluttered with tools, some of which should have been decommissioned years ago. They're of a similar vintage to an old pickup truck and push bike.

Stefan retrieves the bike and wheels it outside.

EXT. SHED - CONTINUOUS

He emerges into the sunlight. The school backpack on his shoulders seems virtually empty.

Squatting nearby, Carl wraps wire around the crosspiece of a grub axe to reinforce the connection.

STEFAN

Hey Dad, is it okay if I go to the library after school? I want to do some extra math study.

CARL

(distracted)

Sure, Stefan.

STEFAN

Thanks, Dad. Love you.

He jumps on the bike and starts pedalling. The words finally register with Carl and he looks up.

CARL

Love you too, Stef. Have a great day! And home by 5, okay?

Halfway down the dusty driveway, Stefan acknowledges him with a wave.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

The grub axe CHOPS into the dirt next to a sapling. Sweating heavily, Carl drops the axe, grips the sapling and pulls. He feels it budge and redoubles his efforts, finally yanking it from the ground.

He retrieves the grub axe and leans on the handle, surveying his progress while he catches his breath.

Behind him, about ten metres of earth has been turned over. Before him lies a whole field of fallow ground with the odd patch of unwanted vegetation.

Carl wipes his forehead and recommences his hand ploughing.

INT. BACKYARD - TREE - DAY

In the same spot as the previous night, Carl slurps down a lunch of instant noodles.

He rests his head against the trunk and gazes at the spreading branches, patting the root beside him.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Two and a half rows are turned over but the effort has taken its toll. Carl's swings are slower, weaker.

He CHOPS the grub axe into the next patch of ground, pulls, and nearly falls over as the reinforcing wire breaks and the handle comes free of the iron head.

CARL
(fury)
Aaaahhh!

Carl flings the handle away, deeper into the field. He bends over, hands on knees, the panting from his exertion verging on hysterical sobs.

His eyes fix onto the iron head of the grub axe wedged in the dirt.

CARL (CONT'D)
Oh Dad. How did it come to this?

Eventually he straightens and tramps over to the discarded handle. Beside it is a sprout of wheat, the bright green of its leaves a stark contrast to the grey soil.

Carl stares at it in wonder.

INT. FARMHOUSE - STEFAN'S ROOM - DAY

The floorboards in the hallway CREAK and Carl passes the open door, pausing when he sees the tree through the window. He's freshened up - clean hands, clean face, clean shirt.

There's no breeze outside and the tree's branches are still. Carl's gaze drifts around Stefan's room and settles on the pile of books beside the bed.

He frowns and crosses to them. The math textbook hasn't moved from last night.

Carl picks it up, checks his watch and strides out.

INT. SHED - DAY

Carl throws the math textbook onto the bench seat of the pickup truck and piles in after it. He starts the truck after a few tries and drives out.

EXT. TOWN LIBRARY - DAY

The pickup truck is parked outside.

INT. TOWN LIBRARY - DAY

Carl scans the study desks for Stefan, but can't see him.
He moves along the aisles of books, his face hardening.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Back in the pickup truck, Carl sees Stefan pedalling up ahead and pulls over in front of him.

Stefan's backpack is now bulging with something shiny poking out the top. He twists, keeping it behind his back so Carl can't see.

CARL

How was your math homework?

STEFAN

Good, really good. My algebra's--

Carl holds up the math textbook.

STEFAN (CONT'D)

Dad...

(beat)

We talked last night about there being a time for everything. I only lied because--

CARL

No, don't use those verses to justify lying.

STEFAN

It's not like that, Dad, I--

CARL

We're a team, Stef. I need to be able to trust you.

STEFAN

Dad! Just listen.

But Carl has noticed something sticking up over Stefan's shoulder.

CARL

What have you got in your backpack?

Stefan pivots away.

STEFAN

No! Please Dad, it's meant to be--

CARL

Show me right now, Stefan!

He lunges for the backpack and rips it off Stefan's back. It falls open and his books and pencils fall out onto the dusty roadside, along with a brand new small chainsaw.

CARL (CONT'D)

What...?

Stefan picks up the chainsaw and tries to rub some of the dirt off.

CARL (CONT'D)

(realisation)

You used the money from Pa?

Giving up on cleaning it, Stefan holds out the chainsaw.

STEFAN

Happy very early birthday, Dad.

Carl stares at the chainsaw for a few moments. He shakes his head and pulls his son into a rough hug.

STEFAN (CONT'D)

So this was a time when it's okay to lie?

CARL

Don't make a habit of it!

STEFAN

What, lying? Or surprising you with expensive birthday presents?

Carl laughs and squeezes Stefan tighter, then lets him go.

Together they load the bike into the pickup's tray and then jump into the cab.

EXT. BACKYARD - TREE - AFTERNOON

The two of them stand near the tree, chainsaw on the ground between them.

CARL

This tree... Stef, you're about to discover that living on a farm can be filled with hard work and uncertainty.

He places a hand against the tree's trunk and as he continues speaking we hear the faint sound of CHILDREN LAUGHING.

CARL (CONT'D)

A lot of my favourite memories growing up here involved this tree. Climbing, hiding in its branches, racing round it with my sister.

Carl points.

CARL (CONT'D)

We had a rope swing hanging from up there and sometimes before supper Dad would push me.

The LAUGHTER FADES. The two of them look at the surface roots snaking their way to the house and the broken concrete.

CARL (CONT'D)

But it's time for a new beginning.

Stefan nods. He picks up the chainsaw and hands it to his father.

STEFAN

I've heard that life begins at forty.

They share a smile and Carl fires up the chainsaw.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - DAY

Through the open door to the backyard, we can see the stump. Beyond that, the once barren field is now filled with stalks of wheat.

In the dining room, at a new table made from the tree's wood, Carl and Stefan eat and laugh together. Carl rests his hand against the smooth surface.

FADE OUT.