

Rejection

by Alex M. Pruteanu

When he was a baby all we heard was Let Him Cry It Out. That was the new way to teach them lessons. Reject their cries. As if we could tell then which cries were serious and which were not. Which were meant for attention and coddling and which were cries of pain. Before that we'd heard they need to sleep on their bellies. After that it was their backs. Every time something new came up they talked about SIDS. No one knew anything really. Including us. But we were driven by fear. The time I was left alone with him he started fussing lightly. Then it escalated. Let Him Cry It Out. It didn't feel right. I wasn't a smothering father or an enabler or a pushover. I wasn't cut out for that yes and I was a hard man with nasty physical scars and god knows what else on the inside but it still didn't feel right. He was screaming and yelling and flailing his arms and sausage legs. Let Him Cry It Out. It didn't feel right inside my chest. Inside my heart. My stomach was in shambles the entire time he yelled. He went on like that for two and a half hours. During that time I rejected him repeatedly. Because that's what they said to do. That was the new way to teach them lessons. To teach them to be independent. Independent. Infants. I was a hard man but that sure as hell didn't feel right. Everything they had told us seemed wrong. I didn't know what to do. I wasn't cut out for that. Wasn't ready. Didn't have any idea. Let Him Cry It Out. Two and a half hours. He was persistent my son. He was definitely that. When I was seven my father would find a tavern out in the country and tell me to sit on the ground outside and wait for him. Don't say nothing don't do nothing don't get up even to piss. If you have to piss you pull it out and piss right here where you're sitting. If you have to shit you shit in your pants and wash them later. That was rejection. I loved my father though. He told fantastic stories all the time to everyone.

I hear my son from down the hallway. He's crying. What is it are you all right? I don't ever wanna go to math he says. I hate math. I hate everything about it. I tell him I used to hate it too. I tell him

about my math teacher an old sardonic hag with flabby skin and flesh hanging from her upper arms with a preference for hitting students on their knuckles with her ruler. Edge down. Or pulling their ears. Or pulling from their sideburns. But we used to laugh to ourselves at those flabby bags swinging as she wrote nonsensical equations on the blackboard. I used to hate math too son. And then something happened. I understood the logic. Later. Much later. In my thirties. And math became the most beautiful thing for me then. It was the most pure thing in my life. Then.

After my son cries his face usually opens up and it reminds me of the land after taking a beating from a hailstorm or a hurricane. Resilient and beautiful and transcendental all in one. There are probably other things I could say but I'm not good at using big words or digging too deep inside of myself. I tell my son more stories from when I was a boy. He always wants to hear those. Always has. Since the age of six maybe. Tell me about the time *you* were a boy he'd say always at the dinner table. And when I ran out of stories he'd ask if there were any that I may have forgotten. Any that I may not have deemed important. Because those are important too. And to think real real hard. Real real hard dad.

