

Say,  
Cut,  
Map

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2013

Cover Design & Interior design: Ken Baumann

Additional Design: David McNamara / sunnyoutside

First edition.

Blue Square Press  
Chicago & ATL  
editor@bluesquarepress.com

ISBN: 978-0-9847063-6-5

*for*

Michael, Ben, David, Lazenby,

Aviva



He cut off his hand. She couldn't face him.

“Look at me.”

His lung collapsed when he was nine, but this was unlike that. He was wrapped. Nipping blood.

“You don't understand.”

They dropped him off four hours prior, quarter to sunset. He limped before. A bit of bandage came undone and flickered as he walked. He got closer.

“Please touch me.”

An old man crept out of a house's shadow and went to support him. He nearly missed the man's skin. His eyes caught some portion of neighboring light. Alarm flowed back down into his hand or where was it. Someone kicked him out of the truck.

“Oh my god.”

She grabbed him from behind as he fell, and they slowed down. The bandage was a clean dome. Mounted with moss the color of the backs of ants. He tried to sleep. She left him on the ground.

“You realize you have one choice.”

The voice was thicker. The syrup. They cooked it over campfires, ladled it with hammered spoons. He'd seen pig's blood. Before he held his hand in his other. She kept teasing, about his knees. In bed. Waterfalls had become candid. Blossoms of flowers had to be kept. She smiled. He picked up his eyes and they trailed out. The black face was in front of him and widening. Hold still.

“Do you want kids?”

The dirt was more a baked clay. The whole place a kiln. He told her how hardened he felt. He accrued more of the local heat. She questioned his grammar. He called out on the walkie, no response. She was vacant. The space between the rolls of wrap at the base of his wrist. New wrist.

“Come here for a sec.”

They were still breathing. He held her hand out, above water. The funding was part of the program, that was it. She hated finales. Drinking it was a sudden warm flu. Practically married.

“You have to go with me.”

It wasn't going to work. The boys near the beginning of the dirt road had always watched him, then. They promised. She could change her plans. As his tongue went numb, he could feel a subtle blanket of future events come to settle, in waves. She was wary. Don't be.

“I'm fine.”

The truck was preloaded with gas cans and firearms. It was sort of ambient, he told his mother. He didn't feel like it was his choice. They called him out. He looked down out of his right eye. The community was strong. The vegetation. He watched a man in the blue vest scrub his hands until they popped pink. It's okay to feel this way.

“Wake up.”

It had cost a fortune. They piled the red earth in their hands and threw it on his face. There's no witchcraft. Holding a piece for me. Stay here, in broken English. He held him as they walked, and he could feel the bones of his hands. The knife was dull. Pockmarked.

“No more.”

Not much more than straw. Light held itself in squares. He could leave, sure. But he loved her, and why would he want to?

Details kept piling up. He was buried there a long time ago. We tried. Close to a year. It hurts when it misses. She said he was all grin. That's what was beautiful about it. Can't stay here, either.

“I'm trying to get through.”

He woke up to orange. The plane was almost empty. Perforated itineraries. It's okay, she said. He woke up on time.

“Hold on.”

He took inventory. It got routine. Connect here, okay. So we have to be careful. She's showing. It hurts too much. Three of them and they wrapped it carefully. It was expected of him. Repeating it, report after report. His face, not much larger than a postage stamp. Media coverage. Only if you want it. I feel like, no, I know. The



first beer. Seconds later, he felt faint.

“He survived.”

Mornings and in between meals. Blood everywhere. You have to kick. I have to admit that these things feel alien.

“No.”

Check here, here, here. She sent him reminders throughout the day. They were sure of it. She started to quit. They laid her out, two hands on each side to hold her down. Covered in soil. The quakes were mild, so they stayed. I held you. Fourteen inches of rain. Unlike anything, unlike any miracle. It's a huge game. She hushed him. Fearing escape, they tied him down with barbed wire. Such a huge accomplishment. Congratulations, son. He talked into the phone. He even sang.

They drove out to the field. They found a map. They pulled up next to the barn and stared. Rolling plateaus. Why not show that love every day?

“I’m turning the light off now.”

He was bruised. He did it to himself, she said. They found the empty collar in the kitchen. He bent down, not likely to replace them, not wanting to swipe the flowers away. They heard about it. Torrential downpour. There's only one right way. He could feel the face out there, swinging in wide arcs. I don't think it tastes bad.

“Would you like some water, sir?”

He could keep them going, he felt. Change himself enough each day to keep her curious. If nothing else, you have a souvenir. White boy. Trial and error. The most monotone vocal patterns in the world. He closed his eyes

and knew he was seeing her, as the car rode through the holes, and trying to feel what she felt. There were ten paths. He wrote that down. It's called service.

“What channel is this?”

They had heard a report. You're on a plane first thing in the morning. I have to tell you. They lost their baby names. She could keep a secret. So they left, and kept walking in two directions. I'd pay her if she was anything but a psychic. He kept his hands up. They removed his shirt. He never saw it again. Clarified.

“It's on principle.”

A long dry laugh. It caught in her throat. They had met that way. He jumped off the truck and smiled as he leveled the first body with the knife. It can't be done. That's what they say, right? She said she'd meet him at five. I can't give you an answer. We can know that. The sex.

“Do you feel this?”

He looked at it. Time became familiar, couldn't be banished. So I'll come with you. At first it seemed clear, the liquid. Little pools all over the floor. Charcoal-gray leaking from the ceilings. They could buy a purifier or build a well. Find an angel. I found it. They knew him in the village and in all the villages he had seen.

“I'm so sorry.”

It was a long time ago. His mother called him past midnight. She was crying. He touched her for the first time. I can feel you. They weren't going to let that stop them. The babies looked sunk. Smoke spotted. You can listen. Here. He walked down the center of the road avoiding touching it. It was a weird gyre. Unmarked.

“White torture.”

The vaccinations and inoculations alone. She said we'll keep him, like a dog. They had to forage. It was going to take awhile.

“Please hold.”

He felt sick. The notebook wouldn't open. It looked like she was leaking. His abdomen was swollen. It looked pregnant with force. He took the pills. She took her pills. They kissed. Nearing the edge, he backed off. Are there

any snakes here? They laughed.

“Come for me.”

They could be near each other without sensing it. She had this thing on her finger. He swatted at it. That was the plan. He took the tick off and set it in the grass. He drowned, sweetie. He couldn't ask.

“Drink.”

How would he hold her hand? So forget it. Late winter. He pressed the break and nothing. A soft reduction. He had to sign. She sang to both of them until the sun rose, and even still it was hurting.

Come in, come in. He grabbed their hands. They had been black outside. The table was stained with unfamiliar rust. We can't be sure, he tells us. I love you. She put her fingers through his. They had to meet. There was a deal in place. Mines north, west, southeast. He had a talk with the pastor. Please come in.

“Only you can help us prevent it.”

And there it was. He knew it was all they needed to disengage, pack, leave. She kept assigning medicine. As if they were carrying something prone to die. Humongous streaks of fire. Tear stains. He woke up to that sound every morning. It was only then.

“Stop.”

He had figured out a way to kill it all, or to start its fade. They were in support. During the term, you want to stay

active. So she told him. They went out. He laughed, she laughed. A father and a mother. That's the only thing I don't remember.

“The big A.”

Baseball for his friends. She kept insisting on sugar. What do you expect me to do? Even in the low light he could see the strange acne. So tight it cut him. I could easily take this. Fourteen in fees.

“That's what they call it.”

The aftereffects. Wasn't it an old story already? Every night was long. Keep quiet. I want you to know that I'm here, and calm. No, I get it. It makes you really love electricity. Five steps into the airport. The sweat dried. He took his hand and raised it. So.

“What I want, what I want you to do is breathe.”

He kept telling me that. There are so many days.

You are too soft. They remained in bed. Furious. He could breathe. They lifted him by his hair, and he was out of the water. It's big coverage. It could do a lot.

“I can't even imagine.”

His stomach turned and he could trace a map of scars. That's why you're a kid and I'm an adult. She took him away for the day. At the zoo, they stayed too long in front of the glass for the lions. I've seen nothing. Desperate cries. A mess of fire. Sledges. It can rain here for forty days straight, like the bible.

“I want to see pictures.”

They're dining alone. Rumors circulated. He was young and had no excuse. The woman led him to her family. They had crawled into the corner and were pushing against each other, as if they wanted up the wall. He



touched foreheads for hours. The water was thick, so it wasn't water. He tasted the syrup again. After he put her to bed.

“Mom?”

It hurt but he could see through it. It wasn't a wall. Bricked mud. He spoke too quickly. They misunderstood him. Where is all the water coming from? They realized.

“Stick around.”

The door shut. The office felt empty without its usual plants. He was offered up, as a token. There was a science to it. Public knowledge, now. She met him for lunch. It was perfect. It was numb.

Hostage was the wrong word. He couldn't blink without seeing her. So they left without her. He couldn't look at the doctor, but could feel her well up beside him. It wasn't unusual at this stage.

“Take it easy.”

The worst was over. They wrapped him in blankets and put flavored steam under his nose. He could taste seawater. He prayed for a flat. There was nothing else to ask for.

“It's hard.”

I want you to come home. Echoes. The local bats did this. They had entered nature. He felt sure of himself. They smiled, and it was like a chorus.

“What don't you know about me?”

The day after, she said she couldn't feel anything. They

had to heat up milk. Transfers weren't allowed. It was the modern state of medicine. I can keep up. Every night, he recorded the sky. It flaked off. They knew it was working and they laughed.

“Keep trying.”

It hadn't been long. They looked up at the storm. He touched his arm. She moaned. Feeling lost. His hunger must've been attached to something at home. All of it was far off now. He kept scraping at the bandage. Nothing would help. Applying after the shower. Feeling inside her.

“Go.”

Whispers. He watched her. Felt like he couldn't surface yet, like she was waiting for him to show her something she'd never seen before. It wasn't the end. I'm exhausted. They tore up the notebooks and maps. They feared those trucks. He felt prehistoric. After he left, he heard them start to shout. It all moved off. Great passages. He moved his finger over the page. They just picked a place. Matrimony.

“I'll do it.”

He sensed the media. Swarms of locusts. He couldn't see through the glare, but the plane landed anyway. It hurt more and more the less he took. He said as much. They asked, he withdrew. They laughed. She looked con-

cerned. He'd never know.

“I forgot what I had to say.”

He deleted all the messages. They refund, though. There was a common myth in all her looks. He felt like they were prospecting. He was told to stay. They got on the plane.

“Would you like me to call ahead?”

That couldn't be outdone. It wasn't the money. He hung up. He missed the air. They were all damning themselves. He ran out into the street. He looked. Saved. It still dialed. He unzipped the bag and emptied it on the floor. They looked superstitious. He could handle losing them. He was running back, past the farthest goal.

“I feel like it's not my decision.”

A distinct absence in a jewelry store.

They would stay home and cook more. He was bound. It was tough at first. You are an employee. I don't like to talk about that.

“Donate now.”

I won't leave. He stood up. The helicopter sounded vague. They were numbered. He read the placard, read it out loud. Getting up there in the years. Having the loudest sex possible. They weren't neighbors. He wasn't listening. The shower ran. He felt his chest burn. They looked at each other as it cooked.

“I'll shut you up.”

It's closed. He explained that. They gasped. He knew there were millions of people that watched. That's all he could remember. His boss. Their new name.

“It's a big continent.”

She thought he was a journalist. There wasn't enough water in the world. He wrote down the number. It exploded. Little ashes puffed out. He could smoke here. It was a sign of luxury. He knew he'd be back. The bandage had to be peeled off. Don't bite down. It tasted sweet, he promised her it did.

“Not anymore.”

He felt tired. There was no way to tell. The screen lit up. They noticed. He thought they hit him more than once. And she laughed. He wanted to see that every day. It's expired.

“There's only one direction.”

He claimed that for himself.

It was about power. He signed. He fell asleep to the beeps. They released him. It felt hot, warm in the sun. Press it. We require assistance. He looked at her and saw it. Bad looks. It's all shut down. We're out. It burned out quickly. They cried and eventually backed off. He could wear the clothes. Being landlocked. She had never seen a wave before.

“Can you walk?”

Four acts. He wished there was a camera crew. The biggest one stepped forward and grabbed his shirt. She pulled him on top of her. He woke up falling again. She was blonde. It's beautiful here.

“Thank you so much for sharing your story.”

He begged her. He vomited. He cleaned it up. They shit all over the dirt. I have authority. The tough guy act. His

skin was white, sure. No porn in months. Huge bites. The sky went red while he was inside.

“Can I show you?”

He just wanted to help. Everything else could leave. She bit his finger, the flowers. Or their child. Nevermind. He was filming himself. That's the only part that's missing. He tried to reflect that in his story. They boiled it down to paste. Very cute.

“It's good to try.”

Pat downs. Knocking. Domestic agents. Blood trails weren't common because of the dirt. I don't want to baptize him. Everyone black. Maybe that's why he was grumpy all the time. Spoil him. It's medication. Good thing you're over there. He'd walk barefoot. It was the language barrier. She fucked him. He felt fine.

“Are you sure?”

The center of his head strobed. He didn't want to testify for them. That's being simplistic. Run. Play with the kid. If you're upset, look around you. I'll just kidnap you and we'll disappear. The road divided the village in half. You're lucky it was a clean cut. Riding that rollercoaster. I don't know. I can show you some examples. She pushed his hand off her. I can't afford much. He should've brought more clothes. If there was a story, somebody else had to find it.



“I’m sorry about your hand.”

For him, endless fever.

Nausea came in the third year. Very biblical, she said. He spit on the calendar. She wept. He wept. They cried. He finally ate.

“Don't touch it.”

It didn't go that way. The little red cubes. The play mats. Paper plates on white linen and white cake. So they overextended. It wasn't too big. He coughed once and they cut again.

“That's a funny joke.”

It didn't always hurt to laugh. The son kept staring. His father and his father's mother. He felt contained. Blended minerals in a Ziploc. They kept sifting and accumulating white. Daily ghosts. He hadn't bent down since he arrived.

“Supremacy.”

Go now. His shoelaces were gone. He reached down and jerked him up out of the sand and he held stiff. This was the precursor in some movie, she said. He didn't drink, though.

“For two.”

She came by and offered a glass. On the phone. He behaved himself. His wallet fell out, into the aisle. His fingers were many feet away. Underneath blue every night. They required something more to their purposes.

“Can we just look at it?”

He saw red and heard feet or none at all. He stopped, held his breath, and tried to capture something. For you: never.

He could erect a pyramid. She favored odes. He kept asking. It was a way of playing. Young enough for money. They traded them like pets. The administration was enormous. This small example. The encompassing problem. Trade winds. He read books with the most acidic paper.

“For the audience.”

He knew that black holes were only an idea, still. They stopped rolling. That kept him in bed. He woke to her. Screaming at two and four.

“Can you get him?”

He parsed the hymns and dismissed them fully. A lengthy experiment. They kept him on leash. Didn't watch any of those movies. He made sure it was still circulating. Keep it elevated.

“We're going to leave you behind, okay.”  
He shook his head. He nodded.

His grandmother called. Long nights of nerve pain. Thresholds. We're thinking only a few magazines. The photographs were more dramatic. He dreamt of punching through sheets and sheets of water.

“Hold tight.”

They rose with the grass. The dirt hid talc. Mucus first, then other symptoms. He wrote in the journal. Nearing the first anniversary. Satellite range dropped off. They thought it was romantic.

“Establish a call to action.”

It was a passion. The weirdest plea. That's what it took for her. They cut the tape. He felt large. Burning at the idea of it. West southwest. Go here, please.

“You have to carry me.”

Only one thing you could put: pleasant staff. They all

relied on it. Gaunt cheeks. He looked into the clogged ravine and knew.

“There's not much good.”

She was hard to convince. He cried immediately. The doctor promised them. Two pints of ice cream. Forced to drink it. Rolling blackouts. It's certainly a handicap.

“I'll come back later.”

Uninhibited development. She lifted her skirt. The man said over and over that he found it and would never die.

“They don't make them like they used to.”

He wired money. They had newer responsibilities. She couldn't trust him. He kept driving. To and from work, at first. They reorganized the room. He left the bible. He told her.

“Sir, please sign.”

He left the table. They followed him. The stage lights dimmed. They'll cut this up and use it against you. He pushed her down. He rallied. She sighed and opened her legs.

“There's a real difference.”

The flights. He hated waiting. She kept him up with everything. They kept pushing the drugs. He swallowed. He sat down. He stood and punched the wall. The guide



stopped the Jeep. Something was in the road. He pulled over.

“What is it, daddy?”

He could not stop laughing.

He was running out of childhood memories. She stayed in bed. He opened the letter. Relieved. The soup looked milky. There was a head. It was okay. Lost sleep. He remembered news networks. The sugar was doing something to them that he liked. He anticipated it.

“Crawl.”

The baby slept. He felt the knife all over his stomach. He opened his eyes. He looked up. The lights were fake pearl. It was okay not to know now. They left it blank for the first two days. Then they left.

He sat naked for awhile. The TV went off. A passerby recognized him. He waved. He picked up the hose. Summer. Foraging.

“I recommend it.”

He looked across the table. She was having troubles breathing. The waiter left. He came. She paused, explained what she meant by unhappy. It was time to turn it off. They decided together. He jumped out of the way.

“Can you turn it up?”

His childhood was creeping in, she said. They picked him up by his arms and legs. Crying was normal. A good night was a further concern. It could always come back. He felt himself saying it in front of the audiences. The cake was gone. He checked his pockets. He was missing

something.

They turned him over. He heard it sizzling beside his head. Short of death. That's the report.

“We guessed right!”

He wrote that down, that it was terrifying. The letter arrived. He left the case under his cot. The photographer followed him, kept the lens straight into what he was doing with his hand. There wouldn't be any more aid. Regional concerns. That's what he told her on the phone. It rained.

“No, there's ice here.”

He kicked the door. The soup had turned. Hands all over him.

“Hungry?”

Open, then truck. The dirt pulled back into his mouth. They fainted in unison. This was where it all was born

and forgotten. He had to tell her. Cradling him wasn't easy.

Connected to the sweat. He said he wouldn't be traveling anytime soon. He walked out of the office wanting fire. They lead him to the building. Stripped him. The officer smiled. He placed his hands where he should've. It's all receiving, at this point.

“Sir, you forgot this.”

He caught himself mulling lifetimes and would stop. He threw the ball. Something foreign, she said. He spoke louder. This couldn't be graded. The cows were piled. He nodded, and lay down. Color struck him with the crowd. No crows.

“Darwin. Right?”

Then it split.

In the shower he prayed through the water, keeping his hands dry. He crawled. The water slicked her left leg. All at once. He was in, burning. He knew.



The map uncurled. He let himself sit there. The water rose, but was too dirty. He wiped his spit off her lips. The sun moved in a way that kept him returning to bed many times per day.

“Take it down.”

A challenge. The hand, in outline. He woke up. They felt around for it. He woke up. This was a long time ago, almost two years now. Yeah yeah, she said. They told him repeatedly: it ends.

“I see it that, but I still don’t understand.”

It was the face talking. Numbering for a few hours, then displacement. The taste coated his mouth, hung onto the insides of his cheeks. Beginnings are harder.

“We do require.”

He forgot his agency. They repeated themselves and

pressed the gun farther into his stomach. None of them are machines, she said. He felt hands. No more lawns, he decided.

“Look up for me.”

He felt her ease out of him. Waiting to eat.

He counted, doubling up on the same fingers, and always stopped at nine. The crying was perfect. Yes, they were being asked to leave. She stood up and bent over. He felt the ants all over him.

“A teenager did that.”

He'd show his skin to drunks. Hunger was an option, and just that. They pushed and pushed on his stomach. The dream opened up somewhere. They are certainly docile.

“First time's the hardest.”

He took the stickers off. He drove it first. They stopped too hard. They let her vomit in a ceramic flower pot and put it back on the shelf. Don't cross here. Safety lights. The flight attendants lined up and synced. Prayer, then embalming. Here's the order, he said. His fingers wouldn't get another color than red.

“It’s like a joke.”

Holding was the same. Never a bride.

Break it off, then see. He could go to the bathroom, but fast. First they dragged him out of bed.

“Smile!”

The weapons paid for it. Quoting music. He cited incidents as specifically as possible. He went black, probably from the blood. He said that every time. Mechanics were small gods. He found it on the map and asked. The monastery by the lake. Forty miles from home. He could walk. The blood scaled the quick bandages.

“I don’t climb mountains or anything.”

That’s why you can trust him. An altered spring. He scrambled. The handwriting tilted in its other language. It would only help you. That word.

“Don’t put up with me.”

The mirror fogged over. He leaned down. He crept to the girl. Nightfall.

Two tickets. He put his hands out flat. Grounded in the paperwork. Even temporarily. He signed where the red tabs led him. First he swallowed. Another white cup.

“If you have to put it anywhere.”

A doctor with cheap earrings. That was the poison. He screamed until his throat broke.

“Feel invaded?”

A great plain. The place became thick with breath and breathing, and then divided. He looked at the missing palm. Forecasts. Keep notes, she said. He listened to her doing laundry. Her voice couldn't be there. A general intensity.

“See a surgeon.”

Professionals were on the list. Hung and dead. Just above the kids, all staring at it with their mouths open. He

could feel the plane burst through his eyes. He doubted his fingers. That wasn't fair. What am I going to do, report them? Feel sicker. Shape up. Send help.

“I'm not answering you.”

He sat and watched her smile on video for hours.



He either remembered this or was filling it in from some movie, but there was this man, his friend had seen him, who had no hands, but I watched him through the windowpane of the check cashing place and he was at the counter signing papers and unfolding and refolding money, organizing the bills, and rapidly, all as if his hands were there, like there were so many fingers.

They cut him off. It was routine. He gave it to her. The screen went black after she read the last line. The children noticed the veins on his arm, and then his feet. He thought about the bay, and her on the phone and the little things she missed.

“I hurt.”

Five dimples of blood. He almost put his finger in his mouth. The truck left. Basic accommodation. After she asked him to leave, he went into an empty room and put his face into the hanging curtain.

“That’s work.”

He stretched it and stretched it. It’s dumb to act like that. She looked under the covers. The heat came in too regularly. They thought of sabotaging the current. They could plant something. He stopped buying things. Mites,

infectious diseases. Don't go in the water.

“That's an out.”

He knew he was crying in his room about the scars. This was a first.

“So many options.”

Pushing and pulling her like that. He licked it. All the faces laughed, floating above rags.

He swore he felt the cut. They looked, together, at the knife. Starlings. Admitted to briefly thinking that, yes, the kid was like a dog almost. She wasn't any good, she said. Go ahead. Keep doing that.

“Tremendous blood loss.”

They laughed about casual encounters. Some poem about building a house. He tried to skip that by making love. Roll calls. Lunches were just so unhealthy. He stayed on the line. The red car drove by again. No waste. The man shook his head. No waste, no waste.

“It's the first time it's broken.”

It wasn't a rational claim, but he made sure he did that to her. Close. Prenatal concerns. He wrote Yes.

It starts in the fall. The list is pretty open. He laid his leg on top of her. They pushed the meat away from the bone. Little boys kept daring each other to burn themselves. Just a sec.

“What’s christ?”

It would have to be earlier. He fixed his hair. Mirrors caught it, kept him greeting it, gone, daily.

“Why can’t it be simple.”

She’d read. They promised that. He switched cards. His birth certificate in an old drawer. She leapt on him, laughing. Posterity. Smart and pretty people like us need to breed, to outnumber all the idiots, she said. He admired their tree. Wind brought allergies. Fear in a room.

“What’s left for them?”

She never answered. Trial in December. Television to a minimum.

Little fingers rounding the hill. Where'd it go, he asked, staring. Then he looked then far below himself, into a well, its depth a precursor to his calm stop. Only dying. He smiled. The little fingers pushed against the old blade, two opposing magnets. This new charge felt like god, new palms he helped make. He knew. Released.

She didn't thank him. He read the recipe wrong, but kept asking if they could cut it in half. A quarter at a time from now on. Low dosage. He wasn't slurring his words anymore. Even the kids said so.

“Greed.”

Fields evoked it in them both. She let herself come. You're strong again, she said. He put the mirror on the floor and stepped forward. Good thing there was no receipt.

“These weren't jokes.”

They lived together, submitted as evidence. He wondered. Many nights ahead. There were only so many movies. The noise already lost novelty. He flexed that bicep in unison, one weight gliding up and down in the glass. Some game with Ghost in the title. No scoring, she



told him. The ice cream pasted a lock of hair to his cheek, white, blonde, red.

“I’m bored.”

Many hours to bury her. The heat lifted some portion out of each person each day, dissolved it. He smiled. She stood up and left the room. Hyenas. The guide spit and batted the side of the truck with his staff.

“It’s okay to relax into it.”

I don’t do this, I haven’t done, she stopped and nodded. He held the edge of the crib for enough time. He paid her. All lost.

He pressed against her. A famine.

“I’m in work mode.”

He ate faster than her. The last place in their crusade of new places. She asked nicely. He went healthy. The blood crept into a little pile.

“Just go away.”

He had exhausted the cataloging. Any more conversation about it and it felt righteous. It’s just an event. He swept the dirt up with his hand. He rolled over on the carpet, again and again, laughing, so much capacity.

“I’ll only tell you once.”

His left ear rang and felt pressurized. She put her head under. He took the bottle off the floor and held it to his chest with both hands. Go fish. Or was it one?

“Unfortunate.”

The whole process should be simpler, he said. I'd do it if I had the time. Okay, she said. Alright, she said. He felt dizzy. The wood burst away from the door and careened, that gun surfacing out of white. Heat took them. He put his head down and tried not to breathe. The smell. She laughed. They wouldn't clasp right. Little legs. He was frustrated. The payments were regular.

It instructed them to leave the object at the door. He fingered her, biting his lip. Fingered her.

“Calm down.”

The doctor sighed, nodded. Blues became whites. There were hallways.

“Don’t sit there.”

He led her around the apartment gently, making sure to bump her into things. She laughed. Don’t touch it. When he deemed enough time or loops had passed, he told her to take it off. She did. He knelt. She shook her head no. The child as dark as any of her sisters. The nozzle caps were melted so the whole shipment had to be destroyed. He looked at his hands. He felt capable.

“There’s always more.”

A full term.

At first, whatever he'd seen in National Geographic. He swore. They covered their ears. Nothing clicked. Bombs, all lost to bombs. A field of loose limbs. That's a ghost, he said. He smiled. They were becoming each other.

It strikes him. The sun held at a distance. He remembered, removed his coat. Tickets left at home. What would happen if he ran out, jumped over and came down on the people below right at crescendo?

“I’ll leave you.”

He put the food down. His life leaked out of him. It’s all ooze, he said. A boy. Then?

“Talk to me.”

He felt the sounds outside his tent continue, a compression, several still thumps. Taut wire. The taste fuzzed on his teeth after he washed his face. He took water for the third time. He kept claiming showers. It’s only fair. She stuck her tongue out and waited. It wasn’t all bloodletting. Someone said a carnival. They called it a shock stick. In and out of sleep, pulled back into the sick

repetition, wider with each new lapse, waiting for some plot to fit itself into the ropery anxiety: fire, abandonment, permanent confusion. Numbers recurred. She asked questions about his family during their first holiday together. He knew what his child watched was okay, even with all those hours, because he'd been in that place too. He saw a story. He felt the color of his skin. Epiphanies moved by. Would he stop buying them?

“Aww, baby...”

Dazed children.



Here's the map. He heard that repeated. What if that shoe was a bomb? He hadn't read it, so he nodded yes.

“Weird connections.”

The island of dead skin became a castle. He spun the wheel and hoped for the career path. Wouldn't be long before he had to punch someone. It caused unimaginable pain. He shied away, saw himself shaking. There were no locks. He hung up.

“Take a hit.”

Marveling at the linear transactions that brought him here, wherever.

“How do you top that?”

By putting both your palms out, fingers down, waiting to see if anything went numb. He'd damn someone. Arson still a fantasy. She asked about the clothes. His hands felt

soft in comparison.

He became a precursor to his arrival. All in the presentation. I'll write the book on it, and they laughed. Lunch was burning.

“Do you have any idea?”

He didn't want a pen. That cloud of things: term, relief, passed, care. He put his two widest fingers in her. Creeping pain, accompanied by some pressure. The chart had a calm face on one side, a ripped face on the other. She slid up and down. The symbols didn't move. He knew he knew the solution, it was holding right at the front of his brain. She pulled her nipple.

“Stay seated.”

He looked at the list of medications. Jets opening big mouths. Caves, back in the States. We say no vote here. It was French.

“Not all conflicts.”

Soft melodies. He owned up to preaching asymmetry.  
The room caught fire. She washed him.

I haven't eaten all day. He wanted to give in to the tingle in the back of his head that he could light by pressing on his eyes with the heel of his hands or by squeezing them shut. Sixty hours.

“Only five minutes, sir.”

He knew it was lost. He reached into his bag and went through his stuff. It's harder when you're this tired. Nobody looked anywhere else.

“Best price here.”

She woke him up. The beaches were the same. He closed his eyes, wished for some false memory to provide him something to talk about. A sudden tan. The stump bled.

“Your drink.”

Departure.

He kept his hand open and explained the pennies to her. If he didn't think closely, he couldn't separate parts of his childhood from stories he'd been told by friends, or from movies, some book. She laughed.

“I'm sorry to have to tell you.”

Cordon off sections nearest the building first. All I have, he said, and kept reading.

“Hold it gently.”

He looked for songs without quick beginnings. Her fingers got there and he twisted. Like some sort of bucolic nightmare. There were three roads, much less of a fork than he'd imagined. Every package arrived ripped.

“We can ignore that.”

What if that was my secret art all along? They asked deathbed questions. He picked him up and wiped dust off his pants. They were both crying outside. He remembered the dog.

“Now’s the time.”

Change kept spilling out of his pocket. Balance was an issue. He never wanted to hear that phrase again. Bend slowly. Cool tubs of water in galvanized steel. It was too regular to marvel at how most people did it everyday.

“I have an idea.”

You’ve always been better with him. He loaded it. Flowers in a vase right inside the door. He opened the card. They both hugged his foot. He caught the last red swipe of the truck, a terrible high yelp, then the rest.

“Hold on a minute.”

He put the credit card back. It's your hobby now, she said. He didn't believe it. He saw hundreds of billions of dollars. He caught fluctuations. The second monitor. At least he knew she had nail polish on, but the color he thought was red was probably green. Either way. He clicked. The screen hung on some vital action. They smelled the roses.

“Turn to the right.”

Just holding him was nice. Race didn't matter. He denied it was because of the trip. She told him he was handsome. He jumped off the curb and raised his right arm. Brake lights. He cried, which was supposed to lead to something.

“We're out of stock.”

The paint spread too thin. He'd have to go over it twice.



Grass was a luxury. He refused to write anything. You looked good, she said. All he saw in the screen was this green man, raising and dropping his deformity, some emotional tachometer. He'd make himself remember. She pulled the pen out of his hand and laughed. He laughed. He slapped her ass. A pattern in the dirt.

“You sleep too late.”

He tried to walk around the patch going to bed that week.

“I love you so much.”

I'm sick. All his waiting gathered up in pounds and laid before him, full of clicks, small plays of light, mounds and caverns of chewed food. He hung on. Each building built of bricks. Red was his favorite color. He said so.

“Bring him in.”

They kept playing without his permission. He knew it was the same. A slow removal. He told himself, out loud, to fuck himself. She shut the door for him.

“Should we have another?”

He washed his hands for the eighth time. She said it again and again through the door. He tried to make a face that showed he was letting himself heal. It was a joke. He preyed on the dying conversations. She lowered the drink and he saw it wasn't her. The music stopped.

“Not that door.”

Shame was a part of it. Tablecloth, chairs, lights strung up. Familial meant familiar, or was supposed to. He read the article and felt he would be like that soon, knew he wouldn't. He slammed the car door.

“Bring it back.”

He watched him watch the dogs sleep. Everyone terrified.

He felt the numbers and their weight, scanning the lines and lists. The names were only tools. He called her again. Quiet.

“Yes or no?”

I know I'm not confident enough for the last proposition. He told her crime was down. They couldn't move yet until the market picked up. She dropped the phone. Here's where it gets tricky. Sunlight shifted in cubes on the far wall and he watched it, naming a place for god, making up jokes. He missed roll call.

“No time.”

He didn't say it. New roads were being built.

The new regime was clearly tyrannical. He cradled the phone and waited, through the music. Somebody had to know.

“It’s not covered.”

She listened to him try to tell her how it sounded more dramatic than it was, felt, but he couldn't talk, feeling crushed under all the convenience. His child opened his eyes. Two women in front of him kept looking back. He felt his phone vibrate through the ground. He'd need a new backpack.

“Do you think it’s still good?”

He fell. He tasted dirt. They decided against church.

He was ready to testify against himself. Cancer was too specific. He waited for the chorus to start. They all needed a good lie.

“It’s not hard enough.”

There was a pyramid to explain it. She laughed. He knew he shouldn’t reveal her, not like that. She took a second. Squashed, ancient trees. He’d been told they were interchangeable. He watched the movie again, not remembering he’d never see the shooter.

“Have you eaten?”

Both friends went to the bathroom to puke. He washed his hair twice. The scissors wouldn’t cut.

“Press that for me.”

Sufficiently fucked. They looked for a guide. Christmas, birthday, birthday.

It started at the playground. The meteor would appear around midnight. He drove all night. They found an alley. He just wanted to read. The neighbors knocked. He bought more. Porn would do.

“Go.”

He sat up. They’d see some music. Take some medicine. He barred out all the names. He listened to the drip.

“Why don’t you want to?”

The strap of her dress, the pink light behind it. He felt something less explicit. Just lunch. He smiled. He shook his hand. She rocked him to sleep. He dreamed. He bought a ticket, wanted to see some tragedy. He looked around as they walked, feeling the edges of what he expected only a few months ago. He thought about running. He smiled. He knew he could.

They put their faces close to the glass and shaded their eyes to see if they were open. He told her about the desert. They let the water drain.

“I’ll be back.”

She’d measure him. Kids on the neighbor’s lawn. Underneath a pile of clothes, I think. Somewhere.

“I thought it would be more difficult than it was.”

He felt her say it carefully, knew that she felt herself speaking. Bloodless transformation. Curiosity was just a hobby. He wouldn’t be the hero. The grease gunked then cooled into a gelatin. He scraped the skin off. She covered her eyes. He walked away. Pinks and blues above their roof.

“You can leave that there.”

The whole sky revealing itself, cell by cell.



Fantasies about childbirth, arson. Name the times you felt more than alive.

“You can do it.”

They needed a signal, maybe a whistle. He refused. The water came in. He felt the rush under his forehead. He touched her thigh. The tunnel’s closed.

“Baby.”

Keep it.

“You need to speak up.”

He gathered it all into a box and took it to the center of the back yard. A distant concussion.

He picked his face. Seeing and hearing an entire vocabulary assemble. He watched them, marred by some internal logic. He didn't deny it was bountiful.

“Hang up.”

There wasn't much more she could do for him. They burned it, probably. Familiar stomps. He knew where to look.

“He didn't say no.”

There's nothing to do. I hate instructions, she said. Maybe God was the weight of every ignored violent impulse, how heavy that would be. The spider waited for the other wing to give out.

“Hah.”

It was easy enough to teach to the kids. He didn't need their language. This was their tax. She purred. He came inside her. The man reached for the pistol on the couch. The volcano warned them, essentially. It needed to open up further, but it would. She smiled. He felt alright about having just one.

“Up up up.”

The fingers were dead somewhere, too.

“The idea means nothing.”

He shouldn't compare them. He nodded. The moon worked for him, slightly over clouds. The door locked.

The car didn't start. He hung up and redialed. Cuts all over the soles of her small gray feet.

“What are you doing here?”

He closed the book knowing he'd never read it again. It was a simple code to crack. He leaned over and dropped the note. Doing his fatherly duties. A sour, invisible pain. She stood with him, nodding. He could lose the words for it in so many ways.

“Red or blue?”

He remembered, said there'd be depth problems. He asked for eggs. The men seemed to require a universal equivalent. He coughed. I've never seen so much blood.

“Watch it again.”

Asked, received.

The bays were full of ripped women. He put it on a timer so they could use the delay. He heard about the project. How could she communicate so far in advance, so widely? Genuine interest was supposed to soothe him.

“Don’t let it fall!”

Dumb, but it felt like he switched from feminine to masculine. Not knowing why he had to help other people draw the same conclusions. He distilled the positive aspects, spoke them out, one finger each. Made a joke about not having much room left. She brought her fingers up, feeling it from him.

“It’s the side we need.”

He couldn’t pinpoint the exact moment, showers always did that to him, but he told people it was after he washed his hair, a detail he thought earned some extra smile,

liar's trade, and then he said he knew it'd be the biggest mistake if he didn't ask her as soon as possible. He couldn't be formal. Plastic hose held them down because they didn't have extra cloth. She patted his head. He felt simple.

“It's your game.”

He apologized. He cried telling her how beautiful she was, how she was, how, okay.

The same age. He needed the door shut and a few hours. Retreat felt provisional. He admired the violent ones, though. She wasn't afraid to admit that fantasy.

“What percent?”

He didn't know if it was a problem yet. He thought they should wait. They laughed. We have an hour. Her pants were tangled. He bit into it and sucked. It was all too much, the numbers and abstractions, all the formulations present even in an empty tent. He wanted rejection, even saying so out loud. She wasn't in the house. He came home. He opened the door. He missed.

“I don't like you like this.”

Severe problems with inactivity. He was breathing. He felt exhausted by all the meals. A white shadow. He blinked. Fifteen minutes exactly.



“You have to get it.”

When would he stop adding words to their requests, close up their questions, extend their favors. He’s the disciplinarian, she said. She picked him up by his wrists. Sleep, no animals, just some time. He laughed. The bottle wouldn’t open.

“You should work on that.”

He couldn’t tell her. He looked where his right hand was. I wish it was more of a problem.

He'd repeat the belief that it's just what's needed, a critical take from the inside, a voice that shouts about silence, the murder of murder by murder. She didn't touch him. He thanked God.

“There's no way in.”

His body was constantly building.

It couldn't have gone down. He wiped up the shit with a paper towel. Babies eating peaches. That's horrifying, she said. He cracked his neck, five pops.

“Fine.”

The later you bought in, the better. They pushed one more time and the casket went completely in, and then they were all huddled, crying, heads together.

“Last time.”

Thinking of the trees. Everything so permanently elegant.

He'd talk about it indirectly. Reminders, to do lists. He opened his eyes wide then opened his mouth wide then stuck out his tongue then made noise. She smiled, idling. Sex. Most likely total folly. Even probing. Believing there were questions. The knife slipped and stung him. Blood dotted the paper audibly.

“If you can get enough of it.”

He smiled and shook his head. Either cursing or blessing the transitional. I respect him, she said. Oops.

“Don't let me stop you.”

He couldn't exercise to exorcise. She cried. She'd run laps around them.

I want to look at the rings. He looked at the skin below his mouth. Wondering where the pure anger that came with not being able to clip his fingernails came from. He laughed and ran farther away. He could argue against being prolific better than anything else. She pointed to their son. He stared into it just long enough to see bars, flushing white when he looked down, blinked.

“Go ahead and stop.”

That anger will help him. Eventually. His friend called. She looked at the clock on the microwave. He pulled her in by her hips. They wanted hamburgers. They laughed and decided on The Church of Omission.

“We keep getting them, though.”

He had to stop thinking about it.

“I’m going to take a nap.”

It was a hard experience to describe because he couldn't really frame it. Blame my mother for everything. The scale of the planets was off, or so he hoped. The dog jumped and came down in a puff of dust, the dog licking its paw now, intensely, while its owners yell at it to quit. He wanted to touch the gore.

“I need your finger.”

Only local anesthesia is what he'd heard. A minor work.

There was stuff in their lives that was clearly poisonous, and he oscillated between feeling tasked to find the more embedded harms, and wanting to leave them piled, left to the therapist's invitation, collected in rooms.

“I'd recommend you turn it on first.”

He'd be cut and punished back home.

He saw the number and knew it was larger than the population of many cities combined, but wanted to know what that number meant, what it translated to. Thinking in defaults helped. His skin felt raw in certain spots, too sensitive, but he couldn't explain it. She enjoyed noting their progress in quiet moments. He wanted to know how deep it was.

“Can we stay home?”

He warned her of their possible poverty, but jokingly, assuring himself by both laughing about it now and conditioning her to the idea, maybe just saying it at all, that it would never happen. The ditch seemed to suck the truck into it and spit it out, axle snapping, falling forward in one lurch, immediately fucked. He saw the knives from a distance. Mothers can fight, too, wiping her eyes,



closing her mouth over broken teeth. There's a problem with this picture.

“You need to see this.”

The office was high-ceilinged and expensive. He didn't know what to expect. She raised her skirt. He pointed and nodded. The shoes had no soles. Local tax, the guide said and smiled. Faster.

“Hurt me.”

The look, those eyes, incalculable. He knew he'd shit violently. The sky rendered a new black every night. I'd shoot him. She shook her head, pointed up.

Just for appearances. The gasoline seeped out overnight, soaked his journal and the walkies. They couldn't, really, but they would, they'd buy him another one. She got up in the middle of the night and he wondered if it was for show. She liked his eyelids. So rapidly.

“This will go away.”

He didn't want to be hungry. The interior, trapped feeling didn't die. She promised flowers. He ate. He ate. Nothing to do with it.

“Let's try that again.”

It's maybe the first time I've done that since I was five. The sun moving his skin, a tense sensation, the first pleasurable stride in the walk toward pain. She left her purse. He took a sip before her. He was surprised at their obsession with the weather.

“You have to find him.”

The pile of bricks gathered webs, brush, castoff weeds, bits of paper. He lifted the bat. He had to salvage the sex somehow, feign violence. Red bellies. Again, he didn't want her to know how he knew that, who told him. The screen kept fuzzing out. He felt the old man's tenets replaying, driving him further and further away from sleep, because yes, how could we deny the celestial on our skin?

He heard they wanted to find the prettiest worst case possible, and craft their story around her, which was typical, and successful.

“You have at least a month more of recovery.”

He skimmed the pages. She recognized the problem. They would never run out of gas.

“Will you fuck me?”

Insurance still felt alien.

“No lower.”

So maybe they'd die together. He understood. Whatever hurt the most left a severe deficit of information, a hole so deep it had its own gravity, and memory would build into its structure, filling the hole so rapidly as all the bricks and invitations fell toward it.

“It's nature.”

He caught wider eyes.

He couldn't do anything about the rust. He stopped talking and thought about what that meant, exhausted all the logical courses of the next few questions, demands, and he saw himself nodding. The last action figure in the drawer, one arm gone.

“Poetic.”

Don't belittle me, she said. He asked if he could watch out for him next time. They required some money, some numbers, and a name. He stared at the needle in the center of the rug, would it meet his child's foot, would it hurt or go unnoticed? The batteries were dead. Somehow, he could feel the sun's color. Maybe he was being taken home.

“It's about time.”

Years since he so intensely desired one part of her, the

skin, the word pussy over and over again, he wanted to whisper it into her hair while she slept, saying it a little louder each time, hoping to finally wake her just enough for her to move her ass back against him.

“You should...”

He didn't want to craft an exercise. It was important that he met them halfway. She kissed his right wrist. His first shot. No allergies yet.

“Can we talk about it?”

She was dying, though she couldn't be, following a natural course that however many hundreds of millions had spent before, he smiled at her, she looked at him until they cried, smiling until they couldn't.

Did she know he was above average height for his age? Something sinister in the construction of distraction. He felt his fingertips, touched them, feeling nothing. New skin, burned asleep.

“I’ve never heard that.”

He ran out. She planned dinner. He heard the bathtub draining. She had to set the slide for him, or whatever it was called. He numbered the colors and set out corresponding crayons. Welts, two running gashes, he heard lacerations. She called him into the house. Murder, she said. A change of light. They laughed.

“You don’t have to try.”

Pleasantries bored them both. A massive explosion would work.

“Goodnight.”



Onto the master list of gratitudes he should feel, he added the absence of land mines. That his god would contain the form and feeling of a joke and fail to build the entirety around the joke, as a guide, he laughed, it was funny. He slept.

“Can you do both?”

He blamed a central murkiness. Her hair was falling out, she showed him. Frost formed on each window, inside. He closed his eyes. She held up a finger. They woke at the same time, both speaking.

“Surprise.”

No authority to approve it. Water ran underneath them.

Can't come fast enough, he typed. He ordered her flowers. He heard fruit being announced. How rarely he saw what he felt anymore. Pain is a negligible universe.

“You're showing off.”

He knew that unplaceable fear was why he was talking. He could only hear himself in sections through her stare. We have to plug all the sockets.

“You're the man for the job.”

Something shifted across the world. Of course he could never be sure.

“Too much.”

He felt it so strongly, like having out-of-town guests sleeping in your house, the smell of cousins. He never had problems finishing as a kid. She showed her palm.

He wanted to go through all his inboxes, any space with information, delete everything. She did. He did. Breaking them took twenty-two days.

“Focus.”

He hurt the tendons in his left wrist masturbating. Whoever plotted the first few screams during a public disaster and found the pattern, riches upon riches.

“Take your time.”

He asked for another drink. It was the best and worst advice he gave me. She grabbed his arm. Don't be a salesmen.

“You weren't supposed to know.”

After she told him, he tried, all day. How permanent description was, for the most part. Killing eternal essences. Good deeds had to lead to rewards. Assurances

of quality. She spoke for them. He asked her if he described what heaven meant right.

“Okay, let go.”

Somedays he looked for style. Forgetting the gaze.

“You are very bad.”

The hot full cup of her panties, wet. First girlfriends and iced tea. He looked around. A thousand centuries of colonial rule.

Thinking about sacrifice, he felt the distance he was placing between him, his ideas about his son, and what he knew he could do, fantasy as a mock trial. It upset his stomach. Sun spiked his eyes. Three ants circling his leg. She said thank you.

“I want sugar.”

She argued for the death penalty. He wanted silence, nothing else. He grabbed his neck. Robins hopped, gorgeously pecked anything near their feet, each other. The bank could hold it until tomorrow. The lock kept its combination.

“This isn’t a puzzle.”

Blood, three men, a market. The audience stood.

He classified chunks of their life according to cost, marked what he thought could go first. A pile of mulch overtaken by a pile of ivy. The look before he drank his juice, how his healthy hands gripped the bottle, they both looked aside and saw each other, saved. Ruined gray faces, coming, terror. She didn't like malls.

“I don't know what happens when you're gone.”

He joked about it, but he had contingency plans. He admitted he was domestic, offered a small apology for his lack of tragedy, asked if that was, if he was, enough. Morphine, thirty milligrams, thirty days.

“Life is what happens to you.”

She wanted more photographs of them. The particular pain of not telling a friend they lack talent, awareness. His son shit on the porch. She'd do it for him. A bat,

perched in the closest tree.

“It’s good enough.”

They painted.



Water sounds good. He paced. Her laughing, someone else's come inside her. He blinked. His hand. Blood filled between a group of knuckles. He wanted to take a picture. She stopped. The lost hand. They lay down on the floor. He felt nonlinear.

“Now that's how you start something.”

It would be the last year he could justify not voting. Hundreds of voices into that single phrase, repeated, repeated, shouted by some. He offered his credit card. She squeezed his hand. He bit her. Nearing a day in which he'd set down a glass and never remember.

“It's a game of percentages.”

The bent of small crowds. Her family was coming down. He wished for knowledgeable, wild hands. She didn't eat fish.

“Say please.”

He pulled right, hurled right, head against the ground, dust and matter speckling their heads and the undercarriage, now their little roof. He felt eyes keeping on his back. Sterile environments are urgently needed.

“There’s enough to go around.”

She thinks it must've been the third drink but then she wants to lie down and he lets her, fanning the towel out to wrap around the toilet, and once she's finally asleep he walks out of the room and grabs a pillow and comes back, tucks himself into the bathtub, happy. He recognizes the man in front, the worst of them. They don't move. She squeezes his hand tighter. They come close.

That the little symbol could be a reminder of how he felt when he felt awake, stuck and luckily shelved in the present. He woke up around midnight. He told her about the dream. Wanting to feel like he could summarize her, her time given to him. The tree broke. Yes, it did.

“He could be doing better.”

The underlying tension of living as they did. Negotiating an abundance of perspective together. She asked her to pray with him. He asked that they wait. Hunger came away. They could go to the ocean.

“I’m burning.”

Now, with him born and becoming able really fast, he wondered how the great big myth of making yourself could ever supersede what they were avoiding now, how that idea ever took hold at all, unless the myth itself was

a dumb virus, culture's big baby, birthing fledgling heroes daily. He flexed his wrist and asked her if he had heroin veins.

“Red.”

A police car breezed out of traffic and stopped behind them. He looked at the scratches on his forearm. The dog had to be smiling. She tasted something familiar. Jupiter is doing something funny this month. Everyone laughed at once. Could it be that easy?

“Are you comfortable?”

He wanted to watch irresponsible spectacle for a few hours. They got naked and waited. Up close, it looked like severed tissue.

“Please don't touch me.”

He stood, laughing. Feeling suddenly the compressions of all rock.

That everything anyone ever catalogued as unfeeling could actually be a better designed, more sensory being, replete with an embedded life that is unimaginably beautiful.

“I need an answer.”

He shook his hands. Each finger broken with a mallet. She admitted the leather shoes could possibly be the reason a child died somewhere, vaguely supply chained to death. He laughed. He kept drawing circles for mommy and daddy.

They felt impossibly strained. The rightful heir to the controller. If he thought back far enough, he bought himself that experience. I'll go down on your left side, she said. They guide said they still explode.

“I do.”

He dreamt about formulating up an ideal justice and its system of application, building it by hand with the community, then leaving.

“It's gone down.”

He could call his brother. She asked about variety. He adjusted the knife handle on the edge of the pan, attempting to balance it there, imagining heating the blade and serving it as their only food, cutting his stomach open in the center of the living room. He bet because he thought about it so infrequently, it was okay.

She would look so betrayed. He almost puked. She picked up the garbage.

“Stay here for a minute.”

Your posture’s pretty bad, she said. He agreed to wait. A fourteen-car pileup that bloomed from the far left lane. He undermined his parents in little ways, and some were adorable.

“Softer.”

How deep could he go.



The payment would go toward restitution for the families of the victims. Maybe they could cry about that together.

“Excuse me, sir.”

He parked thirty minutes early and watched the still exterior of the school, thought about evacuation, the children pushed into single file lines and told to think about anything but their parents. He felt sick, stuck in some swamped pornography. He knew they wouldn't eat. Eradicated. He saw ahead, saw himself leaving grocery stores and gas stations, exiting silently and smoothly, quite calm, no her.

“I had no idea.”

He slept under the road.

“Do you want him to die?”

She said he was overfeeding him. She could call any of

those men. The frequencies squawked, often busted.  
He'd never hear them alive.

He learned rituals for touching food, touching god, touching dead. She said she'd teach him how to swim, but he couldn't stay home. He pinched a tick behind his right knee.

“You. Cave.”

He asked if they could stop talking about it. Outside, the light burned them out.

“Come all over me.”

She did a fake double cross, ordained him. He shook the idea out of his head, laughed, knew he laughed in an empty house, happy he had to.

“Are you calm now?”

He sat with the hazard lights on, protecting his car from oncoming traffic with each look at the mirror, where the hell was she. When was the first time you got in a fight, she asked. Driving wildly, resisting arrest. He counted to five, sloppily using his fingers as reminders. The doctor asked again. The first ping of a headache.

“Can you feel this?”

He asked for a room with less light. She needed morphine. He wiped up the shit and washed the floor with the blue cleaner. I need to eat.

“It feels wrong.”

He remembered steps and religious figures while spiking a fever every day for the two weeks. She ate squid. He wanted someone to tell him to slow down and think about this, the light there, the conversation two tables over, the nick on his ring finger. His tongue grew, his senses joined, burnt out, and folded into god.

“And then you have to wake up again.”

She pushed. He smelled his fingernails, tried to smell under them. Everyone wanted to abandon their rational project.

He rolled up his sleeves. He never wanted to hear another redemption story. Dark faces were color corrected.

“We can’t support that figure.”

She kept thinking about what he said, the entire time she said, and he enjoyed getting hard as she barely looked up, playing with the bottom edge of her dress. He’d speak up more often.

“Need me to write that down?”

He didn’t question the lifestyle back home, as he had been culturally prepped to, primed by all the nomad romances. He drowned him in ice water.

“First.”

He had the capacity and the time and the desire and would never.

It would be awkward for her, and preventing that set of questions from coming up would be the least he could do, at this point. Twenty weeks. Could they do it without advertisement?

“You need the draw.”

He mixed the papers up with his finger. She reached into the recycling as she spoke, grabbed a long piece of window. He knew he was like a little boy when he pushed against her like that. She laid a towel on the bed. The moon was out, somewhere. He tore the skin off his middle knuckle underneath her. It only happened once every thousand years. He pulled up a little grass, picked up the ring. I know you're deep underwater, she said.

“Geometry is a nightmare.”

Even then he felt a logic. The finger would heal. He

thought about talking, but he knew what to say, to tell everybody: No more of that story. I'm exhausted.



She wanted a pamphlet. He stood in the long tunnel and opened his mouth, expecting nothing but sunlight. Two independent explosions. He saw the third boy get concussed. She wanted to give blood. The voting form marked with one and a half names.

“Fucked, how easy it is.”

Four pings in the sole of his feet. Knew he needed sleep when he could only think about sandals. She tasted it, before it was ladled. He remembered. She asked the neighbor if they saw his naked body. How often?

Of course he wasted so much time, but as long as the guilt sunk into the next screen, he would continue.

“Skip ahead.”

If asked, he wouldn't know how to describe it. Acceleration seemed like the right word but wrong sense. Hard to cook for one. He noticed a shift, from a gradual appreciation of a quiet house to, when alone, a soft and widening pain.

She found every box he hid. How easy it was, and pleasurable, to neglect his childhood. The boring made bruised.

“I really have to go.”

They took turns lying to each other. I think you’re more stubborn, she said. He looked at the paperwork again. He didn’t know why he was surprised.

“It’s hard to breathe.”

His kid. Only around other parents, she said. He nodded. A tattoo on every arm in the crowd. He told her he was so glad to see shoes on everyone. They couldn’t live, after that. She laughed and pointed at the two crows, both still at the foot of the tree.

“Sit for awhile.”

He poked the crumpled body. She asked that he be

careful, use certain words. He bumped the phantom into things. She knew, but he started to tell her what he was thinking. They needed new music.

“I don’t know.”

I'm lucky. Bearing a bad winter, he said, he had only been to one funeral. She looked down, put on her gloves. Snow and train tracks.

“So unreal.”

He wanted to shed a grammar. She questioned him, the idea of permanence. He sobbed, buckled. People watched him run out. She gave him her hand.

“We want to proceed.”

He was the only one in the house that enjoyed dead flowers. It's as painful as it sounds. They told each other to make faces. They should keep the phone away from him, at least in the other room. The temptation to leave, give up the virtue, probably more parasitic to stay and help. She didn't want him saying that. Fuck my head. Fuck my head.

“Can I make you lunch?”

A stunning amount of choice. They remembered, they agreed on not having kids the day they met. He could feel the skin coming off. She told him to feel right there, and he did. He used the pad of his ring finger.

“You’re empty.”

He did. Days died with her.

The blade must've been totally dull. He asked for a better table. Dumb how many people think that not fucking other people is such a loss. A precursor to home invasion.

“I can't watch it again.”

A couple knocks at the door, a worried unknowing glance, eyeing through the bent peephole to two tubes, a muzzle.

“Drinking is no excuse.”

He left satisfied.

“Who are you?”

The comic, viral side effect of privilege. He felt taken over. He wanted so much to see just one proof of the supernatural.

“Everything.”



She laid the flowers in a row, patted them down.

“That’s great, babe.”

He had to punctuate it with something. Fourteen children, three fed.

“Pick a realm.”

He could see them withdrawing, stripping English out too with the translators, every trace dying out if the people split, reemerged elsewhere, took nothing, died. He drew a square in the air and she poked her finger through it.

“I can see you down the line.”

He was too aware. Any absence, any independence.

He tried it while he walked, he looked around and attempted to focus, repeating out loud what he'd been told. A final tone. Thinking. He felt unable to see without naming or noticing patterns, but kept seeing and saying it anyway. Thinking. Even twice in a row, sometimes. Minutes passed.

“Thinking.”

He did.

He felt his cheeks get hot and his eyes water, a swell of relatedness, because here was a person even more barricaded from saying something of worth, speaking out of code. She turned the volume down. They asked about the functioning screens.

“Thank you for coming in.”

He reminded her of their son. A very designed year of detesting conversation. He wanted to fill a great hall with nothing, shouts for the echo alone, sex. He knew all the names.

“Cast your vote.”

A different way to organize a life. That couldn't be right.

“Hello.”

She told him about the desert plant that grew horizontally, each piece of its stem carrying the ability to grow the whole body again, the plant's head above ground, moving to follow the sun.

“Yes.”