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1912

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Stephanie Dickinson

1912

His woman stirs his cornmeal mush. He loves looking at her as he drinks the farmer's coffee from the blue-speckled pot, dark and harsh. Her body slender after three children, her hair the color of creekwater coiled, those blue eyes whose salt he likes to taste. Not for the first time he wonders if a husband and wife who share this flesh hunger are unnatural. Especially living a half mile from the First Moravian Church near Ely, Iowa. It kindles the man in him to see the pale flash of her forearm. He has put his tongue there. Like a whore-son. He loves to clean her. He gets up, stokes the corncobs in the cook stove. First light comes, chores waiting. No time for her to comb her fingers through the his hair, follow the shirt collar to overall. She kneels to help him on with his boots. No talk. The children are getting up. It is a word-starved time, things of silk and meringue and moth wings not spoken of. Named are hoof, manure heap, hillock, nettle, dill. Now she is standing at the stove. He approaches her. *I could eat this woman, all cartilage and muscle and curve. Or harness tufts of her hair, have her again in the hen coop.* To him her buttocks are leavening bread, her ass two cleaved loaves. Her breasts tender pullets. He tells her today he'll clear the tree from the north field so they can plant, he'll dynamite the stump.

When he leaves this kitchen she will never again see him on his feet. In the field the dynamite charge goes off before he reaches cover. He falls thinking of the chicken coop and his wife picking eggs, reaching under that feathered darkness to cradle what comes from the hen womb. He and his wife take each other on the startling straw as a tree splinter drives itself into his brain.