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Wasting Away

Morganne Armstrong

She was wearing a summer dress. Purple with red paisley and wrinkled straps. It'd grown sheer from wear and old women sneered at her body's silhouette in stores. Night swallowed her whole as she walked shoeless from her lover's house.

48 The fiancée, over 2,000 miles away, was quiet on the phone. They hadn't spoken aside from the obligatory hello and she walked slower than usual, prolonging the silence. She stood in the middle of an empty concrete ring and despite street lamps she could see the stars' white sockets.

"Dom?" She hadn't known him for years. How strange, how impersonal to say a name. How often does one hear their own name?

"Yes." Picture him. The long dark hair she only liked when they were in high school. Sitting in his car on the reception hill, long legs splayed and tan, his hand firm on his thigh.

"Have you been thinking of me?"

His head shakes, "Don't go there."

She closes her eyes and pulls the dress' hem down her marbled legs. There's an aspen forest surrounding, the gray trees hollow and punctured. They moan when the canyon winds bear through them.

"Where are you?" His hand tenses. It'd been four months since he touched her.

"Where do you think I am?" Her eyes were open now, focused on a figure ten feet away.

"How the fuck am I supposed to know? You say Tennessee and then bills show up from Washington. You say Canada and yet you aren't worried about twenty minute phone calls where nothing is said."

At the pavement's edge there is a deer carcass. A young doe done in by a car. It'd been thrown here in the winter, to be frozen and forgotten.

"I'm sorry I've been inconsistent with calling, I just need space. You know that."

He snorts and says, "Would you get a load of that? I give you everything you ever wanted and yet you want more."

"What do you mean you gave me everything I ever wanted? An a-frame twenty miles from town? A community where we're the youngest people by some thirty odd years?"

She walked closer to the body to do her daily inspection of its dismemberment. Scavengers had become aware of it with winter's thaw and picked at the tough hide, gulping the spare, gray meat within.

49 "Who's feeding you? You haven't bought anything for two weeks."

It was true. She bent over the deer's body, it was eaten whole from the ribs down. Its hipbones shone clean, protruding like white coral.

"I've met some nice people on the road."

"Oh yeah? Any of them men?"

She stands up straight and turns to the street, a blur.

"Are you trying to say I left for someone else?"

"I'm just trying to figure what you left me for, and how much longer I can expect you to be gone."

The doe's body would be a bruise in the green upshoots of summer. Just tufts of coarse sable hair and white bones. She gave it a week, maybe two.