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Touching in the Headlights

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TOUCHING IN THE HEADLIGHTS

i.

There is a man waiting for me in a red pick-up truck. Our bodies speak a code of older and younger, a code about playing fields and fields where food grows for the people. He has the fields of Iowa in his boyhood. I have a damp Eastern meadow with a loose wooden bridge. He has a gathering of tired cows pushing at the fence and breaking through. I have burrs stuck to my socks and dark leeches thriving in a moss-covered pond. He has a stone bench under his knuckles, etched with declarations of True Love Forever. I have a stone bench pressed with broken marbles by children of the last century. The children were orphans, they mostly ate porridge and soft broccoli from the big, steamy kitchen. They slept on cots and climbed into bed together where their knees touched. Sleep finally came. Or it didn't come and one or two of them stood at the flat windows and watched the night meadow. The man in the truck does not have orphans looking at his field, he has a farmer watching the snow fall too early again this year, another young crop freezes. He has a farmer with a regular appetite. The farmer hauls fifty-pound bags of sugar from the town just to keep the sweet things coming, the pies and sugar rolls. He has a farmer with rough palms and rough thumbs, still good for mending what buckles with age.

ii.

There is a man waiting for me by the fountain where copper fish bend and wash the warrior in the center. We measure introductions across the skin with dials and clocks, here and there, the needles dip. We watch the needles spin. I put my stethoscope to the man's torso, I hear his boyhood there. A swimming pool crumbles in New Jersey. Winter comes and statuary guards the pool, stone fingers break in the cold. Whole limbs fall in the grass. Under his ribcage, I hear the whir of

amusement parks, late night sweeties riding higher and higher above the plot of neon circles. I hear the taxi-cab that picked him up after matinees, a boy alone with a pocketful of money. The fountain is dry, the man lays me down under the oxidized carp. He hangs my stethoscope on the warrior's outstretched hand. He puts his ear to my stomach and listens to my father racing a car, my brother whistling in the street. He hears the fishing boats moored in New London, the bowling alley rumbling with out-of-work drinkers. He hears rain on aluminum siding. He hears the men who stand close to me on a Midwestern street. I feel like a beauty queen stretched along the basin's cool spine. The man is a misfit. He holds a finger to his lips for hearing me better.