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Foie Gras

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Foie Gras

I own a sixty-acre goose farm forty miles north of Rock Springs, Wyoming. The town is called Eden. Most of my property is gray dust; I give the patches of grass to the animals. I feed them acorns and dried corn and leftovers. The corn smells like the inside of an old dresser. When I let the pebbles go, I watch the sided eyes glare out as their gray siphons pick them up like cards. I know my birds aren't robots because I raise them myself. And I know the weather isn't engineered over here because I watch my own water evaporate from their drinking buckets.

The acorns fatten the liver. The finished product is a burnt buttery yellow. Thirty geese at a time, and I do it all myself. It's not what they do in the factories. It's nothing like that moral upchuck. You treat an animal like an animal before you kill it. Otherwise it's already dead. That's what most people are consuming. The livers of molested birds.

"Don't you know how much you could sell those jars of fat for?" That's what Casey asked me last night while straddling my bare stomach. She's twenty years younger, and we met via a dating app. She messaged me first. Casey is always regurgitating business tips; she goes to school somewhere.

"I'm sure with the wrong mind I could be making enough to get you all the pricey garments you always ask for."

She smiled and undid one of three of her jeans' buttons. "I read on the internet about a man selling half the size of the jars you sell for three times the price."

"Is that so?"

"Don't you see there's potential?"

"I like how I'm living."

"We could travel."

"I couldn't raise geese if I traveled."

She frowned and buttoned. “I’ve been living a fucking goldilocks narrative.”

“What’s that mean?”

“It means, well, the last guy I saw was too gentle,” she said with strands of her hair stuck to her cheek. I grabbed at the back of her head, grabbing fistfuls of silk and scratching her scalp.

“It was always so slow and so polite.”

“Polite is good,” I told her.

“Polite is good,” she affirmed, “but polite is boring.”

She didn’t shave her thighs. I was rubbing those as she spoke, the hairs barely detectable.

“I was seeing this nasty fellow before that one—he would slap me down if I even thought about taking control.”

I nodded and continued fidgeting, remaining silent. I didn’t like talking about other lovers.

“You think I’m gross.”

“Not at all.” I squeezed her in reassurance. I don’t normally choose wild girls like Casey. They accumulate dirt. Ironically, Casey’s sneakers are as white as they were when she picked them off the shelf. I watch her tie them every morning. My ex-wife lost it to me. That’s the kind of woman I was used to.

It’s difficult for me to relate to Casey; I don’t always get her words. She’s usually talking about the internet or trying to convince me that I’d enjoy electronic music. Once, she came home after her night class, hopped on the bed, kissed me with her soft lips, and the first thing she said was, “You know that fucked up commercial where a pop tart is running from his suburban house which is really a giant toaster?”

“I can’t say that I have.”

“It’s funny. In the car I was thinking, what does that say about the American home?”

Casey tells me I’m the porridge that’s “just right.” Sometimes I have to pretend I’m tired to avoid her libido. She doesn’t realize how sexual our relationship is. She hasn’t been with someone long enough to find out there’s more to do than fuck.

One night, I dreamt of what was supposed to be her former lover. I saw him in our bed. He had her turned over and the bed moved as if it was floating in water. I saw lily pads in the dark surrounding the mattress, beneath a white moon. I heard the sounds of suffering geese, geese being force-fed. I saw them screaming inside silver cages, the metal rods scored into their feet. Their eyes were wild and untrusting, moving rapidly. Then the image of the floating bed returns and I get desperate. Suddenly I’m trawling my shins through the

water, my entire might against the tide. The lily pads turn into gray garments. Where I saw seaweed, I got old wires. Water bottles, loose bandages and half dissolved-paper. Then I was waist deep, and I felt truly cold. I looked up and distance looked at me like a man standing a mile away. I saw it anyways and heard it just as clear, the atrocities that kept on the convulsing bed which belonged to me, floating farther away and getting louder.

Then I woke up and walked to the kitchen. I looked out the window to see thirty geese a few yards away, asleep like dogs. I realized soon that the sounds in the dream were meant to be Casey's sounds. I stood in my kitchen for a while. Not eating or doing anything. Just standing straight. When I came back to bed, I found her asleep, naked, the blanket kicked onto the floor. I never met a woman so comfortable.

In the mornings I drink black coffee and stare at the kitchen table. Casey put a red and white checkerboard tablecloth over it. She laughed when she said, "It makes sense. For your *country* home."

I found a dark glossy stain on the side of one of the kitchen chairs. It was nail polish. One night I asked her about where the stain might've come from, and she pretended she didn't know what I was talking about. It was the night I made mashed potatoes and a roast chicken and string beans. She complained I used too much oil, and I got a call from my brother—my nephew was in trouble.

"Who is this?" Casey asked, moving her food around in a childlike manner.

"My nephew, Jerry's son. Kyle. Said he might get kicked out of college."

"Did he say what he did?"

"No, he wouldn't tell me. But he said he didn't do it."

"He probably fucked with some girl." She tried to push her plate to the center of the table to signal her miserableness, but the table cloth bunched up around the porcelain preventing its movement. Her fork fell. I looked out the window while she fetched it. A black square.

I never asked myself where Casey came from. Then I found the purple stain on the kitchen chair. I was less attracted to her. Even though she was blond and skinny, she talked too much, and she talked to seem smart or to provoke me. It made my teeth stick together. But her long golden head was there heavily sinking into the pillows when I left to feed my soldiers in the morning, and it was there when the birds were asleep, when they let the sun leave. When they manifested into the shapes of a bunch of fat rowboats she was there, crawling on the sheets like an insect on the water. Sometimes you say

a thing to a woman and it becomes like a hollowed out tree. Still full of life, to them. It goes back to their younger dreams about fairies and playing with worms. Making soup out of dead leaves, little berries, and damp dirt. But you don't mean to say it. And perhaps you say it because you know what it's going to mean to them. Even if it's not true.

You know they'll look at you a bit deeper which'll make them feel a bit warmer. The voice in them will hold more sound. All four limbs will tighten around you stronger, like they're dangling at a fatal height. Sometimes, I tell her because I feel that I have to: "I don't want you to love me."

But she is silent when I say things like that. Maybe she's smarter than I know. I reckon though, that women are more wary about saying the wrong thing when they find themselves in bed with a good man. Or even a nice one. Someone who works. Not just labor but sheer functioning, I still dream repulsive dreams. I asked her about the men she'd been with. She was more than glad to share it.

When she finished, I asked her, "So you like being pushed around?"

She was silent again. She was still. Wouldn't look at me. From what she told me, she did things I'd never pictured until then. Things not natural to me, though maybe things I wanted. But I knew she wanted those things. If she wanted them before. I showed her she wanted them.

In each group of geese that I raise, I suspect a secret agent. One goose that is aware of what I mean when I come out before sunrise, the usual feeding time, on a particular day in fall. My parents used to joke that it's called *Fall* after a guy who couldn't pronounce the word *fail*.

The man meant that he failed to do certain things when it got cold.

Outside, I walk slow but deliberately punch my feet into the frozen grass among the sleeping crowd. They get up. I'm still looking. Looking for one goose. One goose whose heartbeats faster than the others when I shine the big light slowly. Like I'm warning distant mariners. When I sing like a broken bell, and I do, and I bellow low so my mouth resembles an *O* trembling, they will collapse soon after. But I search quickly. In the crowd for a pair of eyes full of fear not hunger. Eyes wondering why no one else is flying away. I look for, even hope for it, my stomach sharp and raptured at the image—of a hesitated flap of black wings. But they all collapse when I'm finished. They all get harvested.

I kept seeing Casey and our intimate moments became more experimental. For her it was like rewatching an old, favorite movie, something we also did. One of them was a black and white movie with a famous man and an Indian. Though she said that's not what I ought to call them. But that's what they look like to me. Either way, the both of them, traveling to die already dead.

We were half way through it but I stopped watching. The dying man laid himself down next to the dead fawn. Someone shot it. Right through the eye. I looked at Casey, and her pallid skin looked, almost glowed blue in the TV light. And I started kissing her and kissing her. I moved her clothes out of the way so they caught at the ankles and the wrists. She let me pin her down. I told her I knew what she wanted. I told her a few times. And I heard it again, from the dream, except this time reverberating off the blue flickering walls, that sound. Like a suffering animal.