



PROJECT MUSE®

American Husband

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Published by The Ohio State University Press

Wayson, Kary.

American Husband.

Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2009.

Project MUSE., <https://muse.jhu.edu/>.



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THE CHIEF

When what has helped us
has helped us enough and knows it
and walks away
with her backpack over one shoulder,
then what will want us
will sit opposite on the other couch.
What will take us
will practice tennis at night
while we sit in the dark inhabited house, heat on
and all the windows open,
each car driving by driving hard
up the hill.

When what has held us
has held us harder than we wanted
and who we thought we heard knocking
was knocking
but on the neighbor's door,
then what has harmed us will hold
what has helped us
like one egg in a very small bowl.

I am standing at the dirt grave of one buried Indian chief.
My love has brought me to this cemetery in the cold.

When what will hold us loosely,
with one hand on the back of our neck
does have her hand there
and keeps it,
even while we bend down
to stab a scrap of a poem
into the weeds where the chief's chest should be,
then what has helped us says enough.

It is the first moment of midnight in the exact middle of winter.
My love has brought me to this cemetery in the cold.
We stand very still for just one minute and then I'm ready to go.