



PROJECT MUSE®

American Husband

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HEAD OF A GIRL

A boy presses one knee on his sister's ribs, spits
and sucks and spits again.

The father in another room holds headphones
on his red ears, country music
loud enough for the girl to hear.

When the wife touches his shoulder
he aims for an eye, spits
and he hits it. She walks away, calls the kids
cuts four steaks on white plates and sits.

Just like that: the mother drops the girl
on the edge of town.

The girl presses against a twin bed,
tracing the ribs on a pale strange bedspread.
Her aunt says God won't give you more than you
can take.

Nothing. Not even water that week.

Years: a desert, the grandmother
dies. There's the bird
the girl starves and buries in a coffee can,
a man, his thermos of gin, twin

hospital beds under thin ribbed spreads
guarded by brick bridge rails.
She scrapes her name in water

on a wet step and forgets it. No matter
what weather, she keeps her fingerprints
pressed inside a pair of gray gloves.