American Husband

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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.