

Deer People

by Trent England

"Why do they want our books?" The child asks. She is still a girl and unable to carry the water. She sits by the window with her head rested on her hands. In the street the men stand by an old truck, loading it with boxes of our books.

There is nothing to say to her that cannot be seen from the perch. Already her room has been padlocked, and we only enter once a day to get fresh clothes and exchange a doll. I have built around us an inventory of our goods, but the books were only weighing us down. Besides, I tell her, I have all the stories in my head.

"I did, too." She says.

They came back, days later. They came and nailed a post on the door, four legal-sized papers, dotted and blue-penned. The city was now involved, it said. The city would have to call its dogs on us and we would have to give up the deer, it said. In so many words, the dogs would come to our house and they would squat and they would pee.

Reading the post to my daughter, I said Men instead of Dogs. I said Regulate instead of Pee.

There was no provision for keeping the post on the door, but I did not have the fingernails to pry them off. I did not have the energy to fetch the hammer because of my curled hands and sawed nubs.

Not once was she offered up by me, or written into negotiations by them. We slept side by side on two beds in the basement. I tied her hair into knots so it wouldn't catch on the new construction, and I only let the knots loose while she slept. In the bathroom, we brushed our teeth and she said her scalp was blistering.

We got distracted and she wanted to know about Indians.

When they came to take our furniture, she didn't stand at a window and ask why. She ran downstairs and jumped on her

mother's couch. In her bolted hair she laid on the grass and screamed for her mother. From her bowels and her underdeveloped privates she bawled for her dead mother.

There was no bed left, no dressers. No hallway stable for our muzzles and mud boots. Every item taking up the space in the furniture was released onto the floor, and we waded through the annals of life and death to even get to the kitchen for milk and bread.

This is because appliances were not listed as furniture, per the provision of agreement seventeen, section A, part two, point C, fourth paragraph, line seventeen. The removal of furniture precedes the removal of goods located in or on top of furniture, according to line eighteen.

The bubble beds were gone. A neighbor who had forgiven us our trespasses brought us lemon handovers and two-layered spiced pie, and shook her head when we told her we had nothing soft to sleep on. She said of the sea of clothes and candles and broken picture frames, "You two can probably find pillows and clothes and make fitting beds."

We thanked her. She had a special love inside her.

"I would offer you our furniture, but amendment B states I can't."

We stood back against the wall like two visitors at a haunted house. They picked out of our belongings picture frames and photos and albums with glass and glitter. One man was in charge of breaking glass over his left thigh, leaving the bits on the porch and all over the flooring. They removed photos of us and of the girl's mother.

They were thorough. In corners of closets there were once sticky photos of our wedding and honeymoon, and further into time our school days and courtship. The dampness of time had stuck them together and now they were unstuck, shipped off and trucked away. Not even in my wallet was the hopeful swallowing face of my wife,

who in the seventh year of our marriage had been consumed and taken upward.

“Know what.”

“What.”

We lay over a pile of clothes. On top of ties and snow vests and bradjackets. Any and all soft clothing was piled up and in the morning left sock-shaped bruises on our backs.

I said again, “What.”

“Katy told me that her grandpa used to kill them.”

“Yeah, that's right.”

“Used to go out in a field and hide, or they'd sleep in a forest and wait for one of them to come and then they'd shoot it.”

“They'd shoot it?”

“Know what else?” She asked.

“What.”

“They used to eat it, too.”

“No.”

“Yes.”

“Katy told you all this?”

“Well.” She said. In the dark I had to improvise her shape and her face. There was no moon. The wires to the streetlights had been cut and we were left to soak up the blackness. I made a new version of her face in my mind. “No. I was just making that stuff up.”

I heard something that was either her turning over on an old dress of her mother's, or crawling into it.

Countymen came to our house and said the same thing as the citymen, except their vowels required less use of the tongue. One looked at our yard and said the sod would be removed according to the new regulations. He said, “It aint life if it aint Dennison Sod.”

“That's right, it's from Dennison.”

He unsheathed an imaginary dagger and pointed to the lawn. “We're going to cut the grass. Square by square, see. Won't see nothin but bare brown out there, and I don't mean in the good way.”

He was rebuked by his elder countyman. They promised that if I did not give up, they would be back for the grass and for the shingles and for the clapboard siding. I was shocked to hear about the clapboard siding, though, because I knew for a fact that three hoarders west of Thayer have immaculate siding, and it is still intact at last report.

They came with frightening scissors and cut off the padlock to her bedroom. The painted headboard was chopped by axe and its pieces were sent out the window. From the hallway we watched them toss her mirror, her stringed mittens, her one-piece swimsuits. The pins were pulled out of her voodoo dolls and they, too, were evicted.

I held her little head in my lap as we watched from the hallway, and then she let out a sound that from within the house was familiar and complete.

What do I want. I'll tell you what I want.

I want more than anything for one day for another car for a buckled boy hopefully for something of an explosive vehicle for something like a red ball bomb to collide with the truck for my daughter and I to be left alone in our home for us to rebuild it hand by hand for us to hear the clacking of hooves for us to wake up from sleep for us to live without parasitic disorders for us like mad men and women to run after a bus in the systemic cold and stand there with the ability to curse the driver and then walk the rest of the distance to the stables.

