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Three Months

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Three Months

Month Two

The place in California turned out to be just okay. It was cheap. I could walk to work. But there were fleas no matter what we tried, and I was glad you never said anything about the bites that covered my legs. It was small too—just the one room. The big door in the center of the wall wasn't a closet, but a bed. I had never seen such a thing. You said it was a Murphy bed. Every night we would turn the knob and open the door into a web of springs and spokes. Every morning we'd snap it shut again, our pillows and blankets disappearing into the flat wall.

We crossed the country in three days, racing the imminent death of our car, as if the odometer ticked minutes, not miles. While one of us drove, the other read stories out loud because the radio didn't work. Fifty miles into Colorado it suddenly sputtered into country music. The deep twang of broken hearts. We listened in silence and stared out at the plains.

You'd spent an afternoon poking battery cables and kicking tires. I leaned against a chain link fence, looking out at the line of used cars like a horizon. You finally sparked a deal, matching a car with the roll of bills I handed you the night before. The white of the driver's door didn't match the other whites—it looked like an old tooth—and made a sound like a shotgun when you opened it. To open the hood we had to use a screwdriver and a kick, each placed just so. The fourth time we refilled the oil, somewhere in Ohio, I watched from the passenger seat, my feet on the dash, as you coiled your leg into an aim. When you got back into the car, wiping your hands on your jeans, I said you looked like a hood ornament. You grinned and gunned the engine.

Month Three

I got a job right away but wouldn't be paid for two weeks. We counted out the rest of my bills. "We can do it," I said, "Black beans. Peanut butter."

But the next day when I came home, I smelled beer on your breath. There was a pizza box in the garbage.

You told me you were leaving a few days later. You had just gotten out of the shower. I was sitting on the Murphy bed, putting on my shoes. You stood in the bathroom doorway, the steam behind you, a towel wrapped loosely at your hips. You were smoking a cigarette and your eye was squinched against the smoke. It looked like you were winking. Your smile was shy and blushed. You said you'd be back; it was just summer work, back East, for your father. But as you stood there, I knew it was over. You weren't ready. Your chest, skinny and narrow, gave you away.

Month One

The first time I met your parents I stood alone in the large living room, waiting for them to return from somewhere. You were on the porch. I walked over to the mantle to look at the family photographs. A long line of important ancestors. Stern faces with hard eyes, some framed in cases of delicately tooled leather, bedded into velvet linings. I lifted one to look closely. I was looking for you—your smile perhaps or your eyes, the parts of you that pulled me in—but then I heard wheels on gravel. I reached to put the photo back, but it wobbled, then fell and broke with a crash onto the stone hearth. Before I could pick it up, everyone was arriving. There were slamming doors, barking dogs, several small children. I turned. Warm hellos and handshakes. But all the while those dead eyes were staring at the ceiling through broken glass.