

DO NOT BRING HIM WATER

If you go back, do not talk to the boy standing in the doorway. Leave him forever in the threshold. If you do talk to him, do not look him in the eyes. Don't compare the blue of them to your own (lighter, weaker). Do not attempt to make math or order out of two bodies that haven't even touched.

Do not drink so much that first night. Do not tell him you want him on the porch, the fall air cutting against your tongue. Don't offer him your last cigarette. Do not make him kiss you with his back against the wall or let him cry into your hands. Don't wake up the next day and notice how his stomach feels against your own. Instead, notice his hesitation, how his mouth pulls down at the corners in every photo you will take together. Do not mistake his beauty for capability.

That night in the rain, do not try to catch that stray, white dog on the side of the road. Do not see her face, her blind eyes pearled with cataracts. Don't desire a silence you will never be able to maintain. Do not ask him to help you. Do not even get out of the truck.

Don't fall in love with him under a blue owl right before the first snow that second September. Claim the hatchet he threw in the woods for fear of harming you and set out from that burning house. Keep your spine straight. Do not look back at how his knees buckle.

Know that you will always be hungry, that he will always leave you hungry. Know that he will mistake this hunger for anger and grow to fear you like a serpent wrapped around his bedpost. You will always be the one to do what needs to be done; the leaving will be no different. Do not meet his father. Do not come to love his mother. Know that there will be a day when their house will be as closed to you as the receding rooms of a dream. Know that there will be a day when you will never see them again.

Do not let him teach you anything: gentleness, how to shoulder a rifle, or how to start a fire in the woodstove. Do not make him meals night after night. Do not bring him water. Do not fold his clothes. Don't

become the type of woman you will resent. Do not name your sons. Do not picture them in small coats battling with sticks in the yard.

Do not remember what he whispered as he came inside of you; instead, teach him to bury it. Do not accept his body as a burden for years. Recognize the weight of his arms across your chest; recognize the cage that you create. Do not be the monster. Do not be the apparition.

Do not try to make him your backcountry, your backstory. Listen to him when he speaks of winter and tells you that he does not dream: he is begging you to let him be. Don't touch the inside of his wrist. Take it back—your hand, your fingers. Remove them from his mouth. Do not write of the antlers you found in the birch grove. Do not think of their bodilessness, or who did the consuming. Do not name the animal you never saw.