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## Blue Eyes

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## Blue Eyes // Casey Schmidt

Stark against a fallow field, a crow picked at the husk of a mouse. Fall had leached the color out of the land and the sky and the hollow cheeks of the farmer's daughter who held her son's hands as he kicked up dust with his wrinkled feet. She liked this time best, suspending his weight so only his toes danced on the ground, staring at the back of his head, his hair the washed out color of her own. She could love him fully then, so long as she could not see his face.

It was the spring of the year before when he (we do not speak his name) rolled in from some little coastal town out east. He was the type that carried an aura of influence around him and when she held his hand she thought he could fly her away to the places he spoke of in his casual whispers in the dark. She was the type to think that seventeen was mature enough to know that love is infinite and two mottled halves become an indistinguishable one. It was such, that when he left, as he was bound to do, she couldn't sort out his thoughts from her own. Same old story, such a shame. She could have been somebody, she had potential. Wasted, wasted. So foolish, thought perfect strangers, hiding behind their sunglasses and fashionable scarves. The girl saw the discomfort in the eyes of her friends' parents as they tried to look her full in the face and not her swollen belly. She felt herself steered out of their manicured hedges with a warning notice posted on her back. She spent her time pinching grapes between her fingers and not complaining. She'd called him countless times and memorized the six rings it took to get to his voicemail, a generic woman's voice that read out each digit and then a prolonged note that hummed in her head even after she hung up. The birth was unremarkable. Average weight, crying, no complications. In March, after the hanging note, she said, "It's a boy. This is the last time I'll call you." And it was. April and May were a string of sundowns and rocking chairs, and shhh, please, just sleep, please. In July she bounced the baby on her knee and watched gnats spin like binary stars around

the porch light. Her parents hung in the shadows, watching. In August, under the star dusted sky, she ran out into the fields while the baby slept. The weeds whipped at her ankles. Her bare foot caught a crater and she was pitched forward, skinning her knees. The lights of the house glowed with halos through the tears as she looked back. She retreated. Blood and dirt stained her frayed pajamas a ruddy brown. The baby cried. It bothered her that she could not look the child in the face without seeing the blue eyes of the person she now only associated with six rings and disappointment. She'd once found the boy tearing the wings off a moth as he sat on the floor and she yelled at him until her voice was raw and the baby was crying. As she pulled him into her chest, she wondered what it meant for even your mother not to love you the way a mother should. She wrestled with the idea in the September nights, seizing up, every string in her body pulled too taught for too long.

By October, the starlings had left, but the crows remained. She wondered if the baby noticed that she couldn't look him in the eyes. Would he be okay if she kept herself from looking at him? Maybe that's what made serial killers and pedophiles, mothers that don't look into their sons' eyes. She resolved to every day to chance a look past the chin she knew so well and the puckered lips and jowled cheeks, but in those days, she hadn't the audacity. The leaves fell in crowds and she had memorized his left index finger.

The sea of corn had been hacked down, leaving the ground a bony coral reef. The little boy worked his arms like wings and his mother lifted him high over her head, until it felt as though his bulldog body was only just balanced on the tips of her fingers. Squeals rolled over the undulating hills and a winter wind whistled back. She dropped him back into her arms and nuzzled the rosy nose and cheeks, eyes closed. The crow, finished with its meal, launched itself into the air. The wind took it for a moment and the bird clipped its wing on the girl's shoulder. With a yelp, her eyes snapped open

and found themselves staring into the boy's wide baby blues.