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A Simple Statement

It was going to be simple she told herself for what felt like the hundredth time. The man would come, he would ask her about the day her husband had left, and she would tell him a response he would write, but would garner no special attention.

“That mornin’ he got up, grabbed his rifle and bag, and then he left. He was wanted to go in the mountains to go huntin’ some deer before it started snowin’ too hard.” she would say. None of it was lies. If all went according to plan, the man would leave, the village would console her, and eventually her husband’s disappearance would be something only whispered about by the local gossipers.

She wasn’t worried about acting sad or scared about her husband’s disappearance because she was. They had met back when she was sixteen and he was twenty. She had been living in a small town in rural Virginia. He had been a hopeful frontier man carving his way out west, and had been passing through Virginia. Somehow he had convinced her to join him.

Finally when they had reached a village bordering the Rockies he had declared that it was time to stop. He had built a small cabin with a little work shed and she had done her best to manage the household. It wasn’t easy for her, things like mending clothes wasn’t her strong suit and she couldn’t bring herself to kill a chicken.

“I can’t stand it,” she said to her husband, “to raise ‘em and feed ‘em and then turn around and kill ‘em.” He only sighed.

So now that he was gone she didn’t know what to do. Without him, she could never hope to survive out west, and she had no money to get back home. Perhaps her demise out west would be divine punishment.

“Oh, but I didn’t mean it, I didn’t know!” she cried to her empty house.

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It had been the day before he left to go hunting. It was as he had done every year. He would pack enough clothes, food, and ammo to sustain himself for about three weeks in the mountains. He would keep all the stuff he had needed in the shed. The day before he planned to leave she had finished mending some thick socks, not the best mending job, but for her it was impressive. She decided to save him the walk to the shed and pack the socks in his bag herself.

Entering the shed, she walked up to the workbench where the bag was sitting and struggled to put the socks in. "I swear I am gonna buy him a bigger bag this year, I don't know how he manages to fit all his junk in here." she grumbled to herself. She started to head back to the house but something caught her eye. Next to her husband's bag was his map and compass. The mountain range was big and confusing, without a map and compass it was easy to get lost. Curiosity grabbed her and she picked up the compass. She walked around the cramped shed and watched the needle spin as she moved. Her husband had tried to explain to her how it worked, but most of it had gone over her head. Still she loved to watch how it danced.

All of a sudden she remembered something. The other day her husband had come strolling back from market with this strange magnet. At the time she had asked him "What in the name of God do you need that for?" He simply shrugged his shoulders at her. This had lead to the start of a fight, as she hated it when he would go to the market and waste what little money they had on things they didn't need.

"Let me show you something neat before you start in on me woman." he said to her, and stalked off towards the shed. She waited for him, hands in the pockets of her apron, silently fuming. When he came out of the shed she caught a glimpse of something metal in his hand. "Look." he said. In his one hand he held the magnet and in the other his compass. Slowly he

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circled the compass around the magnet. Mesmerized, she watched as the compass' needle spun around in circles. Still, she was mad at him for wasting money on something that they had no real need for. She went back inside the house and left her husband alone, holding his magnet and compass.

She began to look for the magnet in the shed, as that's where her husband was sure to have left it. Squinting and shuffling in the half light she searched. Then she saw it. In the far corner of the shed, stuck to a horseshoe. She struggled to pull it off the horseshoe, but it wouldn't budge. She thought about going to ask her husband to pull it off for her, but if he knew she wanted to play with it, then in his mind he would've won their argument and she knew that she would never hear the end of it. She decided that it would just have to stay on the horseshoe. She grabbed the horseshoe and brought it over to the table. She entertained herself for a while, watching the compass' needle flicker as she moved the compass. Eventually she took the compass and set it directly on the magnet. Quick as a horsefly, the needle jumped around in its tiny compartment. She heard her husband call her from outside. She put the compass back on the workbench and walked the horseshoe back to where it had been before, and then went back to the house.

The next day her husband left without incident and her time passed into a repetitive solitude. She woke up, got dressed, let out the chickens, and made herself breakfast. She noticed that she ate a lot more eggs and a lot less chicken while her husband was gone. Staring at her second plate of eggs that day, she told herself she would do it. She would go out and kill a chicken for her dinner that night without her husband's help.

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She went outside and watched the chickens for a few moments. Then she caught sight of one of the old hens. The hen had been laying less and less lately and would probably stop laying altogether pretty soon. She went over and grabbed the hen, wrapping her hands around the hens back and pinning its wings. She carried the hen over to the old stump, and saw that the hatchet was laying against it. She silently praised god, she hadn't even thought of the hatchet and she wasn't sure how she would've gotten it without letting go of the chicken. Then she realized her next problem. How would she cut the chicken's head off when she was holding it two handed? She started to readjust her grip, but the chicken, sensing its chance, began to rapidly flap its wings and kick its feet. One of the hen's claws caught on her dress and she heard it tear. Tears beginning to form in her eyes, she dropped the hen and walked off to the house. She tried to console herself. Maybe she couldn't kill the chicken but she could mend her dress, even if it wouldn't look as nice as some other woman's mending. When she got to her sewing materials though she realized that she didn't have any thread. Borderline crying, head in her hands, she sighed realizing this meant a trip to the village.

Her time in the village was good. It had been nice to talk to another person for once, even if it had been only the shopkeep who sold her her thread. While walking home she caught a few words of a conversation and began to listen. “,You be careful with that there magnet young man, it can mess with your things.”

“What do you mean mess with my things ol' man,”

“Fer example a compass, if you put a compass on the magnet you'll mess 'er up, she'll read backwards.”

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She felt the hairs on her arms raise as she went hot and cold. She had done that. She had done that exact thing to her husband's compass before he had gone into the mountains. She picked up her pace for home. She had to remind herself that her husband was smart and strong. He would be okay, even if she had unknowingly messed up his compass.

That had been three months ago and he still hadn't returned. People were starting to ask questions, and while she had never lied, she had never told them all she knew either. Finally, one of the sheriff's men was coming out to question her. She kept telling herself the same thing as her shoulders shook with quiet sobs. It would be a simple statement.