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## from The Brush

Ester lives with Pablo, lives off the land like him, tends to their animals, believes in the evil eye, says it's nothing but other people's envy, that's why you shouldn't let babies be seen too much after they're born.

You also need to note the time and place: locate their star and track it carefully each year.

Ester is patient on the phone: she spends hours listening to other people's troubles.

She has a radio from '85 she switches on at lunch, can kill an animal with a single blow.

Her favorite thing: eating clementines on the porch.

There's a sweetness in Ester's eyes, her rounded face, she knows who people's children are: when she goes down into the village everybody tells her their secrets. Pablo and Ester live up in the hills, not too far from the ocean.

Their children all moved to the city and never learned to tend the animals.

Pablo works on Wednesdays and Fridays peeling tobacco leaves, walks back through a forest of guayacans.

Sometimes he gathers strange-shaped rocks and tucks them in his pocket with chamomile flowers that Ester likes and sticks them in a beer bottle once he's home.

They have a Rottweiler, a cat that mews at the front door: he misses the kids, says Pablo of the cat and not himself.

Ester gets up early to make coffee, strains it through a black stocking, the sun's still hidden.

Pablo carries tobacco leaves in his arms like ruana cloth.

He also knows exactly when they can be cut: they're pale, round-edged, yellow-veined.

For some time now he's felt a heavy change pressing the air, and can't explain it. Like when he walks through town at night, and when he hears the animals can't sleep.

Meanwhile, the daily tasks at hand: I called you yesterday, he tells his oldest son, who says a half-asleep hello when he picks up:

what are you doing, why didn't you answer me?

A helicopter roar wakes Pablo from his nap.

He goes into the yard and sees white papers tumbling down like snow:

## EAT YOUR HENS AND SHEEP AND LIVE LIFE TO THE FULLEST THIS YEAR BECAUSE THE END IS COMING

He feels the heat between his eyes.

Best to keep his hands busy, pace around the house, shuffle documents.

Fear settles like a cat in his throat. Best to crumple them up, get rid of them outside. The night before they come Pablo can't sleep: he knows that something's going to happen, just not what.

He gets up in the dark, Ester snores in her fifth dream, he rummages in the bedside table drawer, unfurls the fabric that still smells like wild animal.

In haste, he sees what Ester keeps in the wooden box:

a chain, a medallion,

some envelopes,

and, finally, the deeds.

And now who gives a shit. He grabs the shovel, takes the shortcut through the fields,

swift,

then silence.

He switches off the flashlight, thinks better if no one sees me.

He counts his steps, digs a hole in the very spot, and does his burying.

He does it when the sky's still dark, repeats to himself, thirteen

steps, thirteen, one and three, not the best number,

best not tell her, it's always better not to know.