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## A Gun in the First Act, or How a Story Changes

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## A Gun in the First Act, or How a Story Changes

Hansel and Gretel were foxes  
not children. The lonely woman built them a nest  
in the woods where they grew large and ate her.

My uncle didn't send poison  
to government officials he sent reminders  
of the fragility of being.

The shoreline isn't shrinking  
the ocean just wants us more.

An enemy looks back at you  
in the mirror  
as your own hands Spiderman  
up your throat but at least  
it is thrilling.

Believe in failure and failure will believe  
it is king. Convince the suffering they are learning

and you have done your daily act of merciful kindness.

There is always that part in the story when it is clear  
the horse won't make it, the despot laughing

atop a pile of eyes, when all seems impossible, hope

caught like an anchovy in a throat, soldiers multiplying  
over once-green fields, god's stage-hands shaking a saw for thunder.

What was it some famous captain said as his ship sank—*I entered this glam world  
by luck?* In this story the mouth eats what it will. A boy,

his boat, his beautiful dog. The boy learns to live  
in that darkness. To use teeth the way a sailor uses stars.

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Hansel and Gretel were actually  
just an eccentric's metaphor of *joie de vivre*  
taken to its breaking point. The house  
was made of bones and the woman's magic  
when distilled was just dumb luck.  
By that time in history it was clear magic  
was an uncle poisoned at a wedding.  
The shoreline isn't shrinking you're just getting closer  
to death. Your enemy backs into your car  
or at a grocery picks up the same piece of fruit,  
either way ends the same: there will be a duel,  
the both of you count to ten  
but only one cleans up the body.  
There is always that part  
in the story when you have to choose:  
love or duty; truth or the ugliest  
intentions. Which are antlers. You know  
the parlor game. There's a word caught  
in your throat so act like the animal  
your card describes: "Large desert." "Girl queen  
plucking out eyes." "Boy learns  
in darkness." "Mouth."

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Actually, the house was candy,  
but the children were thieves.  
The woman was scared. She hid  
in the oven. The children cornered her there  
and you know the rest. This world  
has its presidents. My uncle drank poison  
for years, called it his vitamins. His shoreline  
shrank to the size of a single home  
in a single desert. You can find it  
if you want. I suppose you don't want  
to. My cousin hated my uncle  
so much he left teeth in his freezer.  
*Whose teeth are these?* My uncle would say,



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understandably. The light would be an alien's  
beam through the rotating dust. The earth would be  
calm. Things change. My uncle used to  
be able to recite every element including  
Einsteinium and Tungsten. Yugoslavia  
existed. Pluto was a planet.

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Hansel and Gretel were really just occupying forces  
in the old woman's house. The old woman was forced to repeat her history  
to make sure it stayed. She troubled the walls with scratched versions

of a name that can't be spelled with English letters. She called  
*little boat little boat where are you now?* I can't say she isn't my grandmother  
within me. My uncle shooting his gun into the empty desert. Vultures

look down at everything. They do not hunt. They wait. A boy in his boat  
is starving. He will drink this water. He will uncouple this thirst.

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My uncle misses the desert he thinks  
has abandoned him.  
The desert is there.  
It is not a mouth. It is not

teeth. There is that part in the story  
then there is *that* story. Convince yourself  
it is not a story and it becomes memory.

My cousin once killed a bat right  
in front of me. He stoned it. Its sin  
was so great. The kind of sin you couldn't cry

out. Nothing is clear. The horse might make it.  
Even desert has water. Every storm has a name. Bradley,

Jeremiah, Lydia, Casper. The boy walks into water  
with a bag of petals dropping them as he gets deeper.

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Red trail undulant in the light. Red  
shadow. What kings take when they die.

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Filthy boy. Filthy  
girl. What sea. What  
light. What light. Bradley,  
tell me.

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Believe in failure and failure is king.  
Learn to suffer. Convince yourself  
there is always a different story.  
A throat in the saddest city but still  
a throat. Sadness in the saddest city  
but still: a city.

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In the original, Hansel and Gretel had had a daughter.  
The daughter was in love with the way she felt  
while spinning. Hansel and Gretel found her

in a house but the house was already burning.  
The woman was already dead. There was no  
candy. My uncle is an actual uncle. He shoots the desert

nightly. He tells me about Jonah in a whale,  
his friend who'd died building his own landmine.  
He tells me about the hardness of certain fruits. What land is

best to farm. He also tells me  
he entered this damn world by luck and god willing  
he'll take someone terrible with him when he goes. At night he offers milk

to foxes. He says you have to look at your enemy so you know  
him at least as much as yourself. Or maybe until. A story  
is only so large. There is still so much to believe.

