*The Killing of a Sacred Deer*

The world ends when two farm boys in rural northwestern Iowa kill God— a blond and a brunet, both barely men, scraping the edge of 21 with their uneven fingernails. They are filled with so much rapturous joy it cannot be contained— it’s scaring the birds off, but they’re too caught in the upswing of themselves to notice. One is in love with the other. I will not tell you which.

It is newborn September. The cusp of deer season. A week too early to be hunting. They could easily get caught and fined, but the younger of the two got a new rifle from his namesake grandfather for his birthday and risk is an afternoon snack to a boy. Everything in their lives has cradled them. Consequence occupies the same cerebral space as memory, they only feel guilt in hindsight.

“Watch this,” one of the universe destroyers says to the other, and he shotguns a can of Busch Light so fast even the thousand-eyed angels on the telephone wires miss it. (He hates beer. He'd prefer red wine, but it is feminine and reminds him of blood— these are the same things in his mind). Wiping off the tick-swell of his cupid’s bow, he points to the hazy edge of the clearing, past patches of prepubescent wetland, where two deer arch up into the sun. A buck and a doe, both with shiny, black animal eyes. From afar, the boys do not see the intestinal gleam of omniscience rolling through the doe’s eyes— kinetic and white and all consuming, like a bad case of lice.

“I'm gonna get that buck in one shot,” the boy says and then he makes himself burp. He is decked out in orange and camo. The hat is his father’s. The other boy watches— the shirt he has on is his mother’s and he wears a blue fleece jacket over top to cover it. Both think the other is the echo of every correct thing they’ve ever been taught.

The boy takes aim, turns his rifle sideways like they do with the handguns in those action movies. This gets a giggle from the other boy. The sunlight catches on the pale silk of his teeth, golden rotting fractals, tiny opals in an open mouth. He pulls the trigger.

They are both mid-laugh when the bullet misses the buck and strikes true in the gentle valley between the doe’s sad, unsurprised eyes. Twenty meters behind her, hidden in dappled light, her fawn watches, curled atop a plush bed of long prairie grass and empty Snickers wrappers.

The universe contracts as the doe’s knees buckle, the red wine nebula of her body matter herniates and seeps outside itself, turning the mulch below her hooves into a shadowing patch of blackhole. The world crumples in, like the dark blue crinkle paper the boy’s rifle was wrapped in. For the length of one death rattle, the only thing in existence is a light-soaked Iowan field cradling a small family of deer and two farm boys, laughing and looking at each other everywhere but in the eyes.