

Seth Harwood

Fisher Cat

Davis first sees the animal while he's taking out the trash.

Sara has been up for a time, moving pots and pans in the new kitchen, and she greets him with a white plastic bag. "Dumpster," she says. Because of this, because he has not started to think yet, Davis is wearing only his pajama bottoms and a T-shirt when he first sees the movement in the back of the large green dumpster. At first it is this fact—that he's not wearing shoes—that occurs to him like a bolt of understanding. He freezes in the parking lot of their small suburban complex, the bag beside his knee, just as he had been ready to swing it up and onto the trash.

The movement is a brown animal in the back of the dumpster. Just a thing. Furry. This is where Davis looks again when he gathers himself to step forward. Over the lip of the dumpster's front edge, he sees it huddled in the back corner, against the brown-green wall. He can't miss an animal in his trash bin, its fur dark and shaking. And it is big. It resembles a raccoon, only bigger, and Davis has never seen a solid brown raccoon before. It is not a raccoon. It watches him with yellow lozenge eyes. It has four full, solid legs. He curls his toes, feeling the bumpy tarmac, wishing he wore shoes. The animal's front paws rub each other like an old man washing his hands. It leans forward and disappears to the shoulders into a white garbage bag that it has clawed open, its arms scratching on either side of its body.

He remains frozen, looking at it. It stops going through the trash and its back shivers, contracting as it crouches into the corner like an animal ready to defend its den. It watches him.

The animal's snout isn't narrow like a raccoon's, he notices; it's wider and flatter. More of a mouth. A thin gleam of white shines from within it. Davis steps back.

For a moment he stands there, the plastic garbage bag still in his hand. He considers lobbing it in at the animal, but imagines that it might charge out, come running in some blind fury. He pictures the animal scratching at his legs, taking small bites out of the soft flesh on the backs of his thighs, clinging to his legs. He steps back, simply puts the bag down against the curb, and walks away carefully, cautious not to move too fast. When he is a good distance from the curb, he turns and walks normally. He considers the teeth as he walks, telling himself that he would've looked longer if he had shoes on.

Inside their apartment, Davis is unsure what to tell Sara. She makes his breakfast and he eats it quietly, pretending he is still partly asleep. He does not want to scare her. As soon as he has finished eating, he retreats to their den, the place where the computer is one of the only things unpacked in their apartment.

It's the internet that he goes to first to try and find information about this animal. He starts with Google, trying to find a way to search under "Raccoons" and "animals" but can't find any good pictures. At first, he can't even find raccoons, because he misspells it with only one "c." Then he does find websites about raccoons. The first is of a guy in Weymouth who has stuffed several raccoons and appears in pictures holding them to his bare, hairy chest. Davis searches through website after website, trying to find his animal, though he's not sure exactly what he's looking for. His searches don't work. He tries "dumpster and animal": finds a lot about rats and raccoons. Nothing brown. He searches in his desk drawers and finds the Encarta CD-Rom disks he has never used, the ones that came with his computer, and puts one in. It

makes a lot of noise, but starts fine. He looks up raccoon. There is a raccoon picture and some text about raccoons. There are also two headings called “related animals” and “similar looking animals.” He tries the first and finds only bears, “a lesser panda,” and a kind of monkey that lives in South America. In the second he finds one entry: a “Coati.” This looks nothing like his dumpster animal *or* a raccoon, and lives only in the mountains of Mexico. Davis searches on the net for another ten minutes and, finding nothing, decides to check his hotmail.

That night he tells Sara about the animal. She has just turned off the TV, a signal that Davis usually reads as a prelude to making love or to sleep. But those were things they did, patterns developed in their old apartment where they were either “living together” or engaged. Their first night in this new bed, this married person’s bedroom, Sara complained about the lack of car sounds, that there were no voices of people walking outside their windows. All she could hear were the crickets, a sound she found disturbing.

“So what do you think it was?” she asks him. And before he can answer, “Tell me again what it looked like.”

He tells her: brown, long, four paws, yellow eyes, tail, teeth.

“Do you think our neighbors know about it?” He shakes his head and shrugs, hoping she can see these gestures in the near-dark. She rolls against his body, letting him put his arm behind her, and places her cheek against his bare chest. “It’s just so quiet out there,” she says. “Do we even have neighbors?” Davis remembers an older man wearing blue polyester pants walking out to his car the previous weekend, and the way he drove away slowly through the parking lot in his Lincoln, almost coming to a full stop at each speed bump.

“Maybe we can trap it,” he says, though he has no idea where this thought came from.

The phone rings and Sara reaches over him to answer it, her left breast brushing his face. He can smell her smell. He closes his eyes and inhales. “Dad, it’s so good you called,” Sara says into the phone. She slides back to her side of the bed, leaving only the phone cord across Davis’ body. After a little smalltalk, Sara tells her father about the animal. She puts Davis on the phone and makes him describe it to her father. He whistles at Davis’ description and starts laughing.

“Sounds like a fisher,” Davis’ father-in-law says. “Big and brown. Lots of teeth. They’ve actually got two rows of them, people say.” The old man laughs—a sound that’s more like the sound of someone who’s spent time in the woods, the sound of an old hunter, than Davis ever thinks he’ll make. “It’s related to a weasel, but it’s bigger. A small wolverine is what it is. Usually people see a fisher cat up New Hampshire or Maine. I suppose you’re about up there, now, though.”

Davis hands Sara the phone and she hears from her father what he thinks the animal is. Davis can hear both sides of the conversation: Sara’s alarm and her father’s assurances, his offers to help. The thought of a wolverine makes Davis think of a rabid animal ready to scratch hell out of any thing in its way. He thinks of how easily its hole could be his dumpster, how he could be that thing. He slides his legs out of bed, over the side, and sits up. He stands and walks into their new bathroom, onto the cold linoleum floor that sends a chill into his feet until he stands on the new, soft mat. He has always closed the door when he and Sara lived together and now that they’re married he wonders how long that’ll keep up. He closes the door now.

Davis runs water until it gets warm, then adjusts the temperature until it’s right and rinses his hands. He brings water to his face, bending over the sink, and rubs his palms over his eyes. If Sara and he can afford to keep paying their mortgage for the next 30 years, they’ll be fine.

Neither of them can imagine being here that long, but still. In the mirror, Davis sees he needs a haircut, that his sideburns are too thick and he needs to shave the sides of his neck. On the side of the sink is Sara's toothbrush, out of its holder, away from his. She leaves it here now, in their bathroom, and he could use it if he wanted. He looks at himself again, then hears a knock at the door. "My dad thinks we can trap it," Sara says. "That we should."

Davis' eyes are blue, calm. He has never considered his eyes beady or dangerous, before now. He is not a trapper, a hunter. He wonders if maybe he can see wrinkles forming beside his temples, if this is how that happens.

"Are you OK in there?" she asks.

The next morning at work, the first thing that Davis does is search the net to find pictures and information about fisher cats. He finds a few pictures and information about how they live in Maine and New Hampshire, how they *do* have two rows of teeth, and are considered extremely dangerous. He finds a site where a family shows pictures of a fisher they stuffed after it died in their bushes. Dead it doesn't look that bad.

That afternoon, a man named Tony, a co-worker who Davis has never said more than "Hi" to before—he is actually known within the office as "Knuckles" a nickname he got for the way he cracks his fingers while on customer calls, calls he is *always* on, calls that are long enough, and many enough, to make the rest of Davis' area look bad by comparison, calls that, from what Davis has heard, put Knuckles closer to a million than half a million in earnings last year—walks into his cubicle, crouches down beside the extra chair, and looks into his eyes. He crouches there, like an NBA coach on the sidelines, his impeccable tie and tie bar hanging between his legs, and stretches his fingers out from his palms, starts to clench them.

“Let me be right to the point,” he says. “I hear you’ve got yourself a fisher cat, or that you’ve seen one. It lives on or near what you own as property.” Before Davis can answer, he goes on: “I want to help you with this problem—and what I am made to understand is that you do perceive this as that: a problem. This is true?”

“A problem?”

“Is that right?” Knuckles looks hard at Davis, expectant.

“How did you know I saw it?” Davis says.

“I am willing to help you with this problem. I am willing to find this friend and neutralize what you yourself have termed a problem.”

“Andrew must have told you. Right?”

Knuckles nods. “Do you want me to help you or not?”

“How?” Davis says, and then, “I’m not sure.”

Knuckles shakes his head at this in a way Davis understands to be pity, as if he himself is guilty of not being able to follow what has just happened. “We’ll take care of this, pal,” he says, standing, clapping his large hand onto Davis’ shoulder. He looks around them and adjusts his cuffs. “We will have to deal with this in a timely manner, you understand, but not one that undermines your sense of animal decency. This I understand. Nor your wife’s. I understand she will have concerns with this.” He adjusts his tie, as if he’s just finished a distasteful bit of business, pulls it tighter and straightens it, then fixes his collar, finally leveling the tie bar. “We’ll be all right with this,” he says, turning to head back to his office. “We will do what needs to get done.”

Davis waits for the end of the day, and then for most of the department to leave before he tries to talk with Knuckles. He makes an extra sheet-worth of cold calls, as many as he can

stand. After this, when he gets up to look, Knuckles is still in his office, on the phone, cracking each finger's first knuckle one at a time with his thumbs. Davis slips a few performance sheets into his briefcase, a wedding gift from Sara's mother, and shuts down his computer. He walks up the aisle toward Knuckles' office, their eyes meet, and Davis is waved inside. Knuckles holds up a single finger and gestures toward one of the two leather chairs that face his desk.

"And then you'll just roll back your annuity, Chet," Knuckles says into the phone. "Yes. Then you'll be on Nantucket sipping piña coladas and thanking me." He winks at Davis and rolls his eyes. "Right. Mai Tai's. Better." He laughs. "Chet, one of my assistants just stepped in here with some fresh charts I should scan." Something is said on the other end. He laughs. "Right. A *very* short skirt." He hangs up. "So," he says, straightening his tie. "Good day?"

"Fine. All right I guess."

Knuckles starts thumbing through his rolodex and then stops. "Let me tell you what. Chet just today passed along a contact." Knuckles writes something on his pad, rips off a sheet, and hands it to Davis. "Bam," he says, pointing at the sheet. "New money. This guy just signed a contract to supply every D'Angelo's with seafood salad. You know D'Angelo's subs. Fucking multi-million business and this guy has crab parts in mayonnaise for all them. You say you're my associate when you call." Knuckles winks. "Set him up."

The paper in Davis' hand has a real name on it, a contact who needs services. Davis hasn't made a sale in two weeks. "Thanks, Tony," he says.

"You bet, pal. But that's not what you came here about. Am I right?" Knuckles nods. "Don't worry. We'll take care of our friend this weekend or sooner." Knuckles rolls his chair back and stands. "Or sooner," he says. He opens a closet behind his desk, removes a jacket,

slips it on. He adjusts the cuffs, his collar, his tie bar. “We’ll take it out, pal. Over and done tomorrow morning if you like.”

“Tomorrow?” Davis says.

Knuckles snaps his fingers. “I’ll come early tomorrow morning. You’re up 93, right? By New Hampshire? I’m there five-thirty. We’ll tackle that bastard, be in by nine.” Knuckles snaps his fingers. “You’re aware of the fact that they’re nocturnal.”

“Tomorrow’s good, Tony,” Davis says. “The earlier the better.”

Knuckles stuffs a few folders into his briefcase and removes a ring of keys from his desk. “So five-thirty,” he says, coming around the desk. He claps Davis on the shoulder.

Davis sits up in bed before five. He has been awake since twenty-one minutes after three. On the other side of their bed, far from Davis, Sara breathes heavily. He rolls out of bed, chooses a dark gray shirt and a pair of green army pants from his dresser, and takes them into the bathroom. In the mirror he sees himself, balancing with one hand on the sink, trying to slide into a pair of pants he hasn’t worn since college. Here he is, wider around the chest and waist, sucking in mightily to button them closed, seeing himself in a mirror surrounded by small, white bulbs, the kind for putting on makeup.

He chooses an old pair of boots out of the hall closet, and sits down on the carpet to put them on, lacing them all the way up and tying them tight. To get up, he rolls over onto his knees and then lifts one foot at a time onto the rug. It has become harder to start up from the floor in just the past year, it seems. In the back of the hall closet, behind his old jackets and the vacuum cleaner, he finds a small shopping bag that holds what few tools he owns: a hammer, a pliers,

and a little-used electric drill he bought when he was in college. Also in the bag is a large red monkey wrench. He picks it up and hefts it, feeling the weight, the heaviness in its head.

They have reached the early part of fall when mornings are bright and dewy, cold but with the promise of sun still to come. The trees have not lost their leaves, but the greens have turned to brown, some reds. Outside, the morning is still gray, with white light coming over the houses. Davis can see the dumpster ahead, not thirty feet from him. Nothing moves. He wants to throw something from where he stands, but he has only the wrench. He taps it against the inside of his left boot, then his right, as he would imagine a batter in a baseball game tapping the mud from his cleats before entering the box, and starts across the asphalt.

Over the front lip he sees only white kitchen trash bags. Then he stops when he hears a scratching. Davis thrusts his head over the edge and pulls it back. This time he does not see any creature, just the plain white and black bags. He hits the side of the bin with his wrench. At this, a great bonging sound comes from the metal, like hitting an empty tanker's hull. It takes a time for this sound to dissipate, as if it has scarred the morning itself, sent a ripple through the gray dawn. He looks around expecting car alarms, curious neighbors, wishing he had never made the noise. In time, however, the morning returns to its calm. No one stirs, or has moved, and in fact the scratching has stopped. Davis looks over the edge again, imagining a crouched, angry cat ready to pounce at him, when Knuckles says, "What's up?"

Davis jumps back, raises the wrench, and Knuckles takes it from him with one hand. "You've got to relax, pal," Knuckles says, tapping Davis' chest with the tip of the wrench. This is when Davis notices the absurdly large silver handgun that Knuckles holds by his waist.

"Jesus. What is that for?"

Knuckles raises the gun: a silver monster with a scope sight on the top. He points it toward the sky. “Just a simple tranquilizer gun, brother.”

Davis feels inadequate with the wrench now. Knuckles has his hair slicked back and wears a tan hunting vest with lots of pockets and a plain white T-shirt. He has on white leather sneakers and black nylon running pants. Davis notices a cell phone mounted on his side. Knuckles pushes the wrench into Davis’ chest so that he has to take it. “If that makes you feel comfortable,” Knuckles says.

Davis grips the wrench. “What do we do?”

“Why don’t you hit the dumpster again with that while I stand back and watch. Then, when he comes out, you can chase him down and beat him to death.”

Davis forces a smile. “It’s in there,” he says. “I heard it scratching.” He eyes the gun again, still not used to its size. “What are you going to do with that?”

“OK,” Knuckles says. With both wrists, he smooths the hair back along the sides of his head, then he leans his neck to each ear, cracking it, and exhales. He turns and paces back to the cars, turns again, and looks through his sight at the dumpster. Davis takes two steps back. Knuckles walks to the dumpster slowly, counting his strides. He looks briefly inside and then walks around the outside. He stops and crouches by its back corner listening. His nose rises, as if he has found a scent. Davis looks up to his condo, the kitchen window, hoping to find it empty. All he can see is the horizontal blinds, halfway raised. He looks at the other condos’ windows and, not finding any curious faces, relaxes.

“Here’s what we do,” Knuckles says. “We have to flush him out.” He looks at his watch. “If we can get him out and I can sight him, if I can get a clean shot, our problem’s solved. I take this guy home in my trunk, mount his head on my wall; everyone’s happy.”

Davis imagines the brown Cheshire Cat face smiling down over a hunting room with a big fireplace, leather chairs, and a bear skin rug. He can see the fire burning and Knuckles in a hunting jacket, smoking a cigar. “That’s what you’d do?”

Knuckles nods. “Fucked up, huh?” He moves to the dumpster. “You hit this spot right here with your wrench,” he says, and taps the back corner of the dumpster with his sneaker.

“You hit it hard, and then stand back. He’ll come out the other side, running apeshit for those shrubs, and I’ll shoot him.” He smiles. “Done.” Davis shakes his head, wanting there to be something more solid than this, something that involves a big cage and some peanut butter.

“You just knock that bin when I say to, brother.” Knuckles walks back toward the cars and kneels. He places one right-angled leg in front of him and rests his left elbow on it, steadying the gun in both hands. Just like this it is happening, Davis thinks, giving a last look at his empty kitchen window and thanking Sara for sleeping through this. He crouches next to the dumpster and winds up.

“Stop,” someone says. Davis can only see Knuckles from behind the dumpster, not the source of the voice. Knuckles turns, pivoting the gun in his hands, his shoulders shifting behind it, and fires. The gun makes a hissing sound, as if it’s just let out some long-held breath, and that is all.

“What?” Davis stands and looks around. He hears a thump on the far side of the dumpster and, coming around it, he sees the old man, the one with the Lincoln, flat out on the lawn, a small white dart stuck in his neck. Knuckles walks over and kneels by the man’s side, feeling his neck.

“What the fuck!” Davis runs around to stand over them. The wrench slips out of his hand and thumps on the grass. He looks up, all around them at the windows, sure now that someone has seen this. He doesn’t see any faces, shakes his head. “What’d you do to him?”

Knuckles removes the dart from the man’s neck. He swallows it into his large hand, then tucks it into a vest pocket. “He’ll be fine,” he says. “Just reacted is all.”

“Who did?”

Knuckles whistles through his teeth, shaking his head. “Wow. That was fast.”

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” Davis says. “You shot him! Why?”

Knuckles stands up and, turning from the old man and back toward the parking lot, puts his left hand on Davis’ shoulder. In his right hand he still holds the gun. “Let’s just do this thing and then we’ll get him fixed.”

“Do what?”

Knuckles takes one step away from Davis and points at the dumpster. “Get that thing,” he says. He slides part of the gun open, looks inside, and then closes it again.

“What the fuck?” Davis turns to look down at the old man: his eyes closed, he lies flat on the grass, wearing white, creased pants and a blue sweater, a white collar sprouting up around his neck and a white golf cap still perched on his head. Only the red dot on his neck begins to explain what happened.

“Let’s go,” Knuckles says. He walks back to his original position and kneels again. He waves Davis back to the dumpster. “Come on.”

“Are you crazy?” Davis says. “What you just did to this man was wrong. So very very wrong. How can you not still think about that?”

Knuckles stands. “He’ll be fine.” He gestures with his empty hand. “I shouldn’t have done that. Me a culpa. But let’s not forget what we’re here for.”

“This guy’s my neighbor!”

“OK,” Knuckles says. “Time to let little boys be little boys.” He walks to where Davis stands and raises his hand. Davis flinches, and Knuckles laughs. He bends down to pick up the wrench, and springs back, into a crouch beside Davis. “Fuck me,” he says. The old man squints at them, his hat still on his head. He sits up and rubs his neck.

“What the hell was that?”

“Wow,” Davis says.

“Shit,” the man says. “You boys are three sheets of fucked-crazy.” He rubs his neck.

“How do you feel?” Davis asks.

“God damn!” The man rubs his neck. “You boys shot me.”

“Relax, sir,” Knuckles says, moving toward the man. “Just take it easy. You’ve had yourself quite an experience this morning.”

“You’re damned right I have. God damn!” He stops rubbing his neck to get a good, long look at Knuckles. “You shot me, you fucker.”

Davis offers the man his hand. “No thank you,” the man says, making his way onto his hands and knees, then working his way up to a kneel and bracing both hands on a knee to stand.

Knuckles moves closer, his wallet out. He steps forward holding a single, crisp, clean hundred-dollar bill toward the man. “I’m very sorry about your troubles today, sir. Can I offer to pay for your medical bills, or any dry cleaning you might require?”

The man looks at Knuckles’ hand, and purses his lips—his whole face tightens, as if getting ready to spit out a filthy taste—and then Knuckles takes out another hundred and the man

looks at his hand again, the money, and his face loosens. “Well,” he says, taking the bills. “No harm done, really.” He slips the money into his pocket, then brings his hand out empty and rubs his neck.

“What?” Davis says.

Knuckles looks at Davis. “We were trying to trap ourselves a fisher,” he says to the old man. “We’ve got him right here in this dumpster.” He picks up his gun.

“Oh,” the old man says. “That fellow’s been around here for a long time, a *long* time. Just picks the trash is all.” He points his chin toward Davis. “He scared you good I bet.”

Davis wants to sit down on the grass now and make all of this stop. He wants to reclaim his whole morning, just go back up to his bedroom and have Sara make all of this go away. He sits down, touches the wrench laying in the grass. “How did this happen?” he asks.

“What’s a matter with you?” the neighbor says. “I’m the one who’s been shot. Get up and help us get this thing.”

In disbelief, Davis makes his way onto his feet. “Get your wrench,” Knuckles says. In the grass, the wrench looks perfect, like it’s found a nice soft home and a place where it could stay for a while. Davis bends and lifts it. He stands.

“Get ready, bro,” Knuckles says.

The old man crouches down along the wall of the dumpster, knocking on it with his fist and moving slowly. He gets to the back side and stops, knocks twice in the same place. “I believe it’s here, boys. Right here in this corner. You want to flush him, you’ll need that pipe wrench.” He walks over to Davis and, leading him by the wrench, brings him to the corner of the dumpster. “Hit it hard now.” He walks toward the parking lot to stand behind Knuckles, who kneels again, repositioning the gun.

“Get ready.”

Davis crouches low beside the dumpster, on the other side this time, the side the old man came from. He winds up to hit low, on the corner, and then to dive out of the way. “What say now?” The old man claps his hands once, and bends over, hands on his knees like a third-base coach.

“Go ahead, brother. Send him out.”

Davis steps back a little, then lunges forward, swinging the wrench and diving toward the dumpster at the same time, using his whole body to move toward his mark. He hits the side, making a louder bong on the metal than before, and continues his movement forward, falling and rolling behind the dumpster, away from where he thinks the fisher will run.

Nothing happens. The sound slowly dissipates and there is no movement.

“Damn!” the man says. “Hit that sucker once more.”

Davis releases now, swinging blindly from his crouch behind the dumpster, hitting its corner and sides once, then again. “Get out of there, you fucker,” he calls, feeling the pain of the metal vibrating in his bare hands. “Hoo-woo!” he hears, then Knuckles’ gun going off. He stands as fast as he can and sees the fisher shooting across the parking lot. Spread out long, it looks like four feet without the tail. It runs under a Ford Explorer parked in 22G.

“Yes sir,” the old man says, walking toward Knuckles, his hand extended for the gun.

“We got him now.” Frowning, Knuckles holds out the gun, handle first, to the old man.

“What’s going on out there?” Davis turns to see a face in a first floor window, a woman in curlers, with white hair and broad, strong features.

“You leave it, Nancy,” the old man says. “We’re going to catch us that fisher’s always hunting the garbage.” He slides the gun open and then closed again.

“Davis?” Sara’s face appears at their own kitchen window. He waves from behind the dumpster, holding the wrench down and out of sight. “Is everything OK?” she says. “Everyone all right?” Davis nods. He puts his first finger up to his lips and then points to the Explorer. The old man walks straight out into the middle of the parking lot, close to the dumpster and not ten feet from the Explorer, and drops into a push-up position. After slowly lowering his body to the ground, he takes his hat off and sets it beside him, then bends his elbows and sights the gun. Davis walks out from behind the dumpster to see, aware that Sara is watching. The man lies prone on the blacktop, the creases along the back of his pants pointing out from his torso in a V.

“I’m sorry, boy,” he says, and shoots the gun. Davis hears the hiss and a thud from under the car.

The old man stands, holding his hat and the gun. He puts his hat back on and runs his finger along its front edge. Davis comes forward to where the man and Knuckles are, and the man hands Knuckles the gun. “You get him,” he says. “I’m not crawling under there.” Davis bends at the waist, trying to see under the car. He can’t see it, so he gets on his hands and knees and turns his head sideways. A brown animal lies under the car with the white butt of one dart stuck in its belly. It looks peaceful, the head settled on the ground beside its front paws; it lies on its side, as if it has just fallen over, all four paws facing the men. Its mouth is not as big as Davis has imagined it: just a snout, not even grinning.

He hears a door close and sees feet walking on the other side of the cars. Then Sara emerges in full, wearing a T-shirt, her college shorts, and old flip-flops. She has her hand extended and she walks right up to the old man. “A pleasure,” she says. “Very nice work.”

He tips his hat with one hand, shakes hers with the other. “Gus Wilkes. Pleasure.”

“I’m Sara. Sara Porter-Thomson. That’s my husband Davis.” They both look over at him, then back at one another, and she smiles. He stands up as the old man laughs politely and they stop shaking hands. Behind Davis, Knuckles stoops to pick up the dart he fired, now laying at the foot of the dumpster, and goes to his SUV, parked a few spaces from the Explorer, and opens the back door. His arms emerge without the gun, wearing thick canvas gloves and holding a canvas duffle bag. “I’m Tony,” he says, aiming his chin up when he notices Sara eyeing him.

“What are you going to do with it?” Sara asks.

“Set him loose in the wild,” Gus Wilkes says.

“That sounds fine,” she says.

Knuckles comes over to where Davis stands. “Coffee,” he says. “I need some coffee.”

“Would you like to come in, Mr. Wilkes?” Sara asks. He nods, then follows as Sara leads him inside, starting to talk about how she and Davis have just moved in, and how happy she is to have met a new neighbor that can help them get adjusted.

Knuckles sets the bag down next to the Explorer, lowers himself onto his hands and knees and crawls under the car with it to his thighs, then comes out a moment later with the bag sagging in the middle, noticeably heavier. “You really care what I do with this guy?” he says, standing up.

Davis shrugs. “I don’t, but they probably will.”

“I’m taking it,” Knuckles says, turning away. “I’ll see you at work.”

Davis watches Knuckles walk back to his car, a bright silver SUV that looks simultaneously fast and over-large. He imagines himself setting the fisher loose in the wild, seeing it paw around for garbage and finding nothing in an endless carpet of pine needles. He sees himself shaking the animal out of the bag as it’s fighting mad, seeing it fall to the ground

and then spring up onto him. He says nothing as Knuckles slams the door to his trunk, points at Davis with his index finger and then makes a trigger with his thumb and snaps it down. He also says nothing as Knuckles gets into his car, closes the door, and backs out. As Knuckles pulls away, Davis notices how his car hardly moves going over the speed bumps, absorbs them like they were nothing at all.

He looks around at where he is, at the morning and the fact that the trees still have leaves, that there's grass around his apartment, and he heads inside.