

IF WE
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HOW
TO
WE
WOULD

EMMA BARNES

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For all the ad hoc mental health support teams who are out there doing their best in an underfunded, seemingly unloving world.

This book deals with themes of suicide, grief and depression. It is important to me that you take care of yourselves when reading it. Please particularly avoid the middle section if you aren't up to this content.

'We don't see things as they are,
we see them as we are.'

— Anaïs Nin, *Seduction of the Minotaur*, p. 120

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IN OUR HANDS

'Love doesn't just sit there, like a stone,
it has to be made, like bread;
remade all the time, made new.'

— Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Lathe of Heaven*, p. 159

Lineage

The man with the sharp knife cuts the fat to tissue paper thinness and two people fold it into their mouths: a sacrament, like frills, like folds. He returns to the carcass, cracks, and breaks a joint as an exclamation. His point made; his poetry recited; his lineage showing like marks on the skin. He is descended from Italian butchers back to time itself. He doesn't know it's ice cream, apples, and sheep for me. The gene for alcoholism hiding in plain sight, not even hiding if you think about it. The fat melts in my mouth on my tongue through my entire body as if it was able to travel on all my pathways. Warm and wet like a summer you never ordered. It leads me off course into a different timeline where the rules are so different I can't understand them. The shape of a forehead. The line of a jaw. The quick, unsubtle words you say to hold my shape to its current form. Let the butcher hold his knife. Let the butcher raise his pigs. Let the butcher slit my throat with intention and precision. I take it back. I'm not a pig in a field eating acorns and setting fat. I should have been. I could have been. The child of the children of farmers means nothing to me right now but it could have. I'll call out to be reborn with a squeal and a curly tail. Let me hold things solidly together. Let time reward my boldness. Let this little piggy cry all the way home. Eee, wee, wee, weeee.