

interspecies



DOG TEETH: issue one

letter from the editor

WELCOME to DOG TEETH issue one! I am so excited to finally bring this zine into the world.

DOG TEETH was born during the height of this past summer; I was deep in the lit mag world, submitting fervently and having so much fun. I was reconnecting with myself, and my art, and seeing so many cool queer people making the coolest, queerest work. I wanted to make my own space for people to submit their cool queer work; I wanted to create my own community.

Why interspecies? is a question I've been asked quite a few times since the inception of DOG TEETH. The answer is: because I wanted our first issue to encapsulate DOG TEETH's ethos; its vibe, its tender heart.

And the thing this zine wants to do, above all other things, is make a space for the inhuman (both literally and metaphorically; we enjoy narratives of reclaimed monstrosity by queer people as much as beagle P.O.V stories).

For me, interspecies encapsulates, of course, the relationships between humans and non-humans; in the love between humans and dogs, hands in fur through deep time; in the tenderness of vampirism transferred by bite; in the place of humans positioned within their landscape of hills and sheep and the ocean and deep, dark caves.

But it is also desire for change; a complete system overhaul, an optimistic hope for the

future, fingers in the earth and reaching. It is a desire to transform; to become something else, to embody the other you already are, to be made safe by some transmutation of form.

Interspecies is a declaration of love for the earth and all its lives. I hope DOG TEETH makes space for you to pause and do some loving: when things are hard, and harsh, and horrifying, remember: we have other species, and we have our own, and we have each other, and we have this earth.

This issue is full almost to overripeness with some sweet and impactful art. I *love* interspecies as our first issue theme because it has brought so many gorgeous narratives of hope and desire and animality to my inbox, and I am so excited to

share them with you. I hope you love it as much as I do, and I hope you are as thankful as me for the contributors. Please support them and their other works! All contributors' socials will be listed so you can go check them out once you're done with the zine!

We have gods and dogs and everything in between; I hope you enjoy species-hopping queerness, because this issue has it in spades! Thank you so much for reading and supporting this fledgling zine.

Thank you so much, once more, to all the contributors of this issue. We couldn't do this without you!

Jack

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rose mccoey

ODE TO UNEASE

**MY FAILURE FALLS BEFORE ME WITH A HACKSAW IN ITS HANDS. I CAN SENSE
MY OWN UNDOING LIKE A JACKAL KNOWING THAT ITS PREY IS NEAR.**

nerium podell

DOG DAYS

The hounds come down from their heavens
teeth gleaming, fur slick and shining.
They carry threshers in their mouths;
they are armored for war.
Dog upon dog streaking down the pink-orange sky,
a russet waterfall, a cacophony of tail & claw.
They pour into the summer evening,
bound over wheatfield and prairie grass,
park district & rest stop & highway.
O dogs! Their barking rattles windowpanes,
packs crack pavement where they roam;
they slobber, pant, and snarl.
They come wave upon wave into human crowds
until the group is all Saint Christophers;
they bark & bite, these hounds of heaven,
worse than Dominican inquisitors.
O dogs! Godspeed to your sharp-nailed paws,
you newly-crowned lords of misrule.
Godspeed to your wide & bloodstained teeth,
which gnash thigh muscle & skin to shreds.
Their howling rouses all of Gehenna,
and the dog-faced boys who hide in the night
turn at the sound;
they open their own slavering jaws
& join the barking chorus,
they unsheathe their machetes, their butchers' knives,
and head (at last)
joyfully to war.

Jackalhead moment jackal
eyes bright oh oh slipping in & out
of a crowd in the dark oh the night
is hot & the bonfires make
it hotter. the dirt sand trampled
flat under so many feet
thirsty jackalhead thirsty every
thing humming the world the sand the
sky—magicians laughing heartily
around you they offer up your name
to toast—toast!—shimmering
golden liquid in their chalices
they expose all their throats at
once

It hurts to love. It's like giving yourself to be flayed and knowing that at any moment the other person may just walk off with your skin.

— Susan Sontag, *Reborn: Journals and Notebooks, 1947-1963*

My little dog—I love him—
so unnerved by the vet
he—the dog not the vet—
bit me as I held him still
for the shot. The dog got
over it in a moment: free,
wagging, eager to lick my
bloody hand.

venn saphira

CW: GORE, CANNIBALISM



THE ATROCITY OF KNOWING ME

in just the passing night, i have danced through entire kingdoms

masked men and women whose firm and warm hands
clasped my smaller ones debut my mind's half-circle stage.

not once in my life have i ever really felt held, but here i feel close. i feel
watched, wanted, sought after. the costume hugging tight to my slinking frame will
have made up somebody's dream, will follow someone into the night even when i
don't.

i turn. my hands do not slip and i spot myself and begin to fly.
the pure magic of dancing, of movement so fluid i begin to believe i've escaped my
human vessel
in the process of passing from gas to liquid to solid.

red wine and pastries divine on my tongue. the night is decadent, i am the center
of attention. no thoughts of my stature or my stomach, my private sadness, my
shame, can catch me when
i move with this purpose.

the woman with a dress like ivy, the man in a
suit jacket with an owl's feathers, the suitor with the octagonal mask of a spider, and
the generous host
watching over in their griffin costume

there is the world and there is tonight. two entities. when i am in
their line our bodies form a syzygy.

we can leave ourselves at the door. we step inside as new ~~people~~ entirely, unknown
and greedy.
no expectations, rules. there is only leopard print, snakeskin, emerald. aged wood and
rose quartz.
pine needle and olive and creaturely musk.

far away, outside of this empire, is the moon in full glory. if i squint correctly by the window, i can hold her between my thumb and pointer. i can capture a little bit of beauty to keep. nobody has to know that i steal the pretty things to hide what's ugly.

with the moon in my fist, i take my last dance. the final steps, the hands on my torso. enchanting, welcoming. i hear songs of old whirring around me in evolving tongues i once thought to be dead. the dropping of pretences and human skin like a threadbare garment.

when i leave, it is with profound lightness and an eclipse. it is as the animal of myself. unhidden.

jasmine kapadia

birdstrike
(CW: SUICIDE)

all the birds in our neighborhood die on a saturday.

i am biking past the bagel shop

on california avenue at 9am and i see them, stone-heavy,

their bodies stacked up on the sidewalk. feathers stuck halfway

into the gutter. i walk into the f-wing and the lockers have talon marks
on them, like the metal tried to memorize life into itself. this terrible
thing. did nothing but hurt it.

the janitors are brushing the corpses into dustpans, disposing of the evidence.

last week mama said when she was younger she dreamt of killing
herself. and the scary part was, i could see it. imagined her body,
wingless, holy, falling from the sky.

halfway through the memory-dream our faces traded places.

mama and i, doppelgangers. our bodies pulled through each other,
tongues threaded. now it was my body

on the cal-train tracks. my feathers stuck between the metal. i yank

and there is a ripping sound. hot flush of blood pooling at my shoulder blades.

my spine rumbles. according to my therapist, healing is such

a circular process that sometimes we end up right back where we both started.

biking to school, a lump in our throat, a tremor in our hands.

the good girls all around us, turning themselves into ancestors

like a series of bad magic tricks. how we both want to leave something behind:
feathers, talons, sharp things and soft things.

the men wringing chicken necks with their bare hands.

the kids i don't know walking into the tracks.

birds throw themselves against my windows.
blunt force to the head, a clean death. mama and i scoop their bodies into our
palms,
trapping the heat. slip them under the dirt together.
the horns ring out every hour, filling our ears with their names.

pretty birds squawk the loudest. they have something to be afraid of.
and my mama, the prettiest one, hummingbird who wishes she were dead-
used to, i mean, not anymore.
slender throated, perfect for hands to wrap around.

who never mentioned trains but my mind that filled it in for her.
me, who wishes i were dead. used to, of course, not anymore.
me, who used to dream about flying,
but more often about falling.

who always woke up before my body splattered onto the pavement,
before mama could catch me, again, save me,
pop me under her wings.
crash us both through the glass, our tails stitched together.

would've gone back there
muddy pawed, love,

mistaken for home someplace close

lurched on command
for fingers in the thick of my pelt

and blood all around the mouth.

i am sick like—
for that state

to earn my keep

waiting for the kill.
if you'd've kept me,

swear i'd've been full off it.
and i'm not good

but i'm loyal:

just dreaming of the leash
i am plump with want

i am plump with air

captive-bred beast,
prize in my teeth

arthur dehart

Jesus

(CW:SEX)

Sweet hot,
Heat lightning,
Crackling,
Popping.

(Do you think God ever came?)

Volcanic eruption,
In the ocean,
Maybe we should,
Use less plastic.

(Do you think Jesus ever came?)

Thunder,
Rumbling from,
The stomach hidden,
Inside the earth,
She eats our dead,
And turns us into flowers.

(Then why do I say their holy names while we sin?)

**I long to be a peach pit,
Less like the band,
Or the one in Call Me By Your Name,
Give me no screentime,
Just plant me,
And let me provide supplement.**

b.a. o'connell

I Met God Looking For His Son

(CW: RELIGIOUS IMAGERY/RELIGIOUS TRAUMA/BODY GORE)

I saw God on a commuter bus in Corpus Christi once—
it was early, it was raining—
we had to go over that big stupid bridge I hate so much to get to the tourist part
(North
Shore)

where I was going to the aquarium—God smiled at me,
His teeth were pearly and strange—He reached out His hand,
but I was afraid, so I just waved
and put in my headphones;
He watched me.
Maybe I'd done something He hadn't expected—
His eyes glowed like moonbeams, but softly, almost imperceptibly,
I felt bad so I offered Him some bubblegum—

(How awkward it is to have a faux
pax with the creator of the
universe);

He took the gum, it was my last piece,
I broke eye contact—
scribbled some notes for my class at six—
when we stopped outside the art museum,
He was gone.

jessica swanson

Indoor/Outdoor

(CW: MINOR WARNING FOR VIOLENCE/BODY HORROR)

Off in search of something akin to sunlight,
some other hands far softer than mine,
some sheets with a higher thread count,
someone who thinks you were taught manners—
that it's wrong to play with your food
And I'd lay still for you, let you do what you want with me—
shreds of my heart dragged off and smeared across the floor
Don't you know I'm sorry
I wish you well
Well, I wish—
Honestly, I wish you'd stay
Did you think I wouldn't notice
when the world told you to speak,
told you to learn some manners,
that your voice came out in a tone I loved,
triggered some instinct buried
in the deepest parts of me
And I remember you said,
Darling, my darling,
domestication shouldn't be this easy:
nothing more than series of screams,
lying together in the moonlit grass

& dissolves into moonbeams.
Crickets tune grass strings
to the stream's slow tumble
of dreams bubbled higher
with each twitch of her petal-
soft nose. One bubble glows
cerulean, lavender, sakura pink.
Unfolds a prismatic gateway
into another universe where
she molts her fursuit & bounds
out into the electric city flow
as an almost but not quite
human girl. Ears hidden under
black hoodie scarved in aurora.
Low bass hum & fuzzy green
clover scent spills from the door
of an art gallery. She is pulled
inside by a painting on the wall
that shows a girl brushing violets
along the curve of another
girl's ears. Both neither rabbit
nor human, just somewhere in
the infinite meadow of it all.

Wishing she could embrace
the artist, she gazes & gazes
until her vision glitches crystalline.
A kindling of rainbow within
quartz faces. A glimpse of some
familiar silhouette-
and the gateway folds her back
through bubbled tunnel to where
crickets sing again by the stream
holding slivered moonbeams.
She lands on her feet in the grass
& sighs. Another fleeting jump.
Then, a tender floral wind kisses
her nose. Breathing in deep,
she steps through sweet clover
& follows it to a single paintbrush
nestled into a patch of violets
in full, luminous bloom.

rinny joel

clam

you ask me
to come out
of my shell
as though i don't clink
in your pockets
and burn
in your brain
and flutter
in your navel
like i don't squeeze
at your heart

Blue Neustifter

You Never Forget Your First
(CW: MILD BODY HORROR; SEXUAL LANGUAGE)

It was a cool spring night and you were inside me
Fingers in my mouth, cock in my cunt, teeth in my shoulder
(You made me beg for the last two)
I cried with pleasure, with relief
And, after, we laid together in a sticky, bloody heap
and whispered a shared fantasy:
You would teach me to run, to hunt
We would be together, and free
Howling in harmony to our lunar saviour

It was a warm spring dusk and we watched the setting sun
It painted the sky, welcoming the moon
And we waited
I felt your fingers in my hand
breaking and healing, breaking and healing
the vicious cracking like applause, like a heartbeat
And I waited
You moaned and you screamed,
tearing flesh protesting wetly
And I waited
My gaze stayed fixed on the rising moon,
impatient for her turn to shine
And I waited
I stood with my hand now empty -
my small, hairless, clawless hand
And I stared at the moon
And I waited
You were powerful, vicious, hungry,
free
And, full of animal hunger, you left
And I waited

The sun returned and you did not
and all the moons and suns after that
And I slowly realized that when I had said "I love you"
You had said "I would love you"
(the "would" is silent)
You loved what I could be
the woman you wanted me to be
a (comple/compli)mentary reflection
A You that you could fuck

It is a vicious summer morning and I've re-learned walking alone
My bare shoulder displays scars red and angry
the last gift you ever gave me
I see someone:
shaved hair, tattooed biceps, a smile too full of teeth
She looks at my mark, and I nod
And she grins, and slows, and asks my name

If I come to love her, there will be no silent caveats
And I will beg for her teeth
bite scars like lipstick, a carnal mark of desire
Perhaps my heart will be broken again
But like your bones, it can break and heal, break and heal
Because, like you, my heart is powerful, and vicious, and hungry
and free
It is full of animal hunger
and it can't be kept from the hunt

devon webb

THE POSSUM IN THE CEILING

I'm getting paranoid about the possum in the ceiling
I hear it scuttling in the walls at night
in the morning, it wakes me up like clockwork
I stare at the gap under the skirting board
as if I'm gonna see a menacing little paw reach out
as if it's gonna dig a fucking hole through the plaster
& one day I'll wake to see it staring at me from the corner
with those big lamp eyes possums have
beaming bright & terrifying through the dust & dark
good god, I hate this little guy
it taunts me, like its one purpose in its
little possum life is to ruin me
to draw me further & further out onto the haunting brink
as I lie awake wondering how
close it is, if it can sense me
as I trust the integrity of this building to fate
which is to say, I do not trust it at all & maybe
I share the same destiny as the possum which is
to be inevitably removed
calling pest control like:
save me from this landlord's cage.

[sarah] Cavar

between the axe

(CW: DISORDERED EATING/BODY IMAGE, LIGHT BODY
HORROR/GORE, IMPLIED ABUSE AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION)

who? im

possibility learning not to fear
itself

a little

-fingered

left hand

plat-in-um composite named
sacrifice

because a cyborg is the
some of whatever

the words

made

/

know this.

there is nothing just
power.

you have been indicated

by your cartilage of violence

your redmetal

knots precede you

time has eyelids

and you have

oil

/

the future is now

&mad

e of deliberate

blue
unsalted
substances
& shaking comes
with a consanguinitous
violence
some can't cry it all out.
some may be washed;
others watched. all one
amassing grief like water
eats a cliff.

between the axe is an excerpt from Cavar's *Failure to Comply* (forthcoming 2024,
featherproof books)

CAIRN DES LIONS

WHIP STITCH

(CW: IMPLIED TRANSPHOBIA)

Your mother did not teach you well, but at least she taught you something.

You can at least thread a needle. You can at least tie a knot. It's the pattern you can never quite get right.

She taught you to make an exact copy of the old skin. Here your arm must hang, here your leg must dangle. Backstitch for security. Somehow, no matter how well you study your own face and your own stomach and limbs, the next one seems to fit worse.

(One day, after making copy after ill-fitting copy for years, will you even recognize yourself?)

When you change, ripping the flesh to shreds, destroying all your shoddy handiwork, only then do you feel at ease. It is soft and sweet, even covered in viscera. It's not unlike giving birth to yourself. You shake your patchwork skin from your fur, making a halo of bloody mist around you. Only once you've torn this thing—the thing which must be your “self”—do you feel so divine.

The nights are dark, but of course the moon is nestled in the sky. An oyster in blue-black sand. You can see absolutely everything by its light. You find rabbits hiding in brambles. You swim in the deathly cold waters of the lake. You terrify lovers in parked cars. You lose track of time.

You long to feel the warmth of dawn on your fur, to smell dew forming on each blade of grass. But as the sun bleaches the eastern sky, you hear your mother's voice in your head, begging you to return and slip into this skin she helped you make.

In the world of humans, you cover this skin as much as possible. There is something obscene about it, or does it only *feel* as if everyone's staring at you? For gym class, you change clothes in an empty shower stall, finding new strategies to keep your things dry. People see you do this, may even whisper about it, but they never say anything directly. Instead, they avoid you.

What would they do, what would they say, if they could see your skin?

(And what about the thing which lies underneath it?)

Curled in baggy clothes at your mother's feet, you confess to her. You can't make a human skin that fits, you tell her. You wish you could just abandon it and find something wild to run with forever. Your mother barely conceals her pain. She helped you make your skin, after all. Your body is also her work, she reminds you.

(She says this like your body is her possession. You keep this observation to yourself.)

It takes time to make a good skin. You will find a way to like the pattern she gave you.

(But when exactly does she mean, you want to ask.)

She sits you up, roughly dries your tears. She will tell you a story, she says, about why she always returns to her skin at dawn.

Once upon a time, your mother was young and free for the very first time. On the first night she changed since leaving home, she ran and ran and ran. She wandered so far that, when the sun came up, she had no time to return. The sun rose over the lake, and as the light sparkled across its placid surface, she felt her heart flutter. She jumped along the shore, soaking her paws and trying to catch the sparkles with her maw. She yipped and barked at birds singing and gliding among the trees. She had never seen the day like this and she forgot all about her skin.

She wandered into the forest, further than she had ever gone before, where she came upon a slumbering pack of wolves. She approached, her heart swollen with kinship. They awoke and jumped back from her. They stared, cocking their heads left and right, crouching hesitantly.

They stared for many moments before one brave soul approached and sniffed her. Caution, such caution. She understood why, but trusted they would recognize her.

(You, of course, understand that your mother can't exactly look like a wild wolf. Your kind's eyes are another color. You have no tail. Differences of this nature.)

The wolf that approached your mother snuffled at her, looked into her eyes with an unreadable expression, backed away, and calmly departed into the trees. Its kin followed suit.

They didn't so much as glance back at her.

Your mother returned to her skin late that morning. It seemed to have shrunk, to have become more pale and stiff. On every night she changed for months afterward, she looked for the wolf pack and never found them, though she heard them howling every other night. Her search came to an end and she never returned to her skin after dawn again.

Even now, she says, it hurts to climb into her skin again and her body has never been as beautiful or comfortable as it was when she was young. Don't you want to be able to come back, she asks. Don't you want to save yourself the irreversible damage she found in exploration?

You return, dutifully, at dawn. You pretend you don't feel sublime pleasure when your muzzle stretches through your human face and when you taste a hen between your jaws. As long as you live with your mother, each change must be a sorrow and you obey her pleas not to prolong it.

But, just as she did, you have to leave home someday. You take your old car and drive it to the coast. The city is terrifying at first. So many lives. So much heat. Sometimes no dirt for miles and miles. The water stinks a little like shit and death.

But then there are the people. They are beautiful here, even when they're old or dirty.

They don't care about you as you walk through them. They hardly glance your way. At first, it was a stab to your gut. Now, though, it's like prowling through an empty forest of walking trees.

You dance with them and they don't even know it.

When someone does notice you, it's with a hungry curiosity. Sometimes they bring you into their homes, taste you on mattresses lying on the floor, buy you pasta with ugly prices, help you pick out boots at second-hand shops. Here, they do not cover their skin, but you learn that some of them used to (for different reasons, but, in a way, for the same reasons).

It's not until you've lived here for a couple years that you meet someone who knows how to sew their own skin. They are the most beautiful person you've ever seen, even in a city teeming with beauty. They meet your eyes with recognition.

(Nobody has ever done this before.)

They do things you genuinely thought impossible to your body all while on a bed with a frame.

(Thank god.)

They teach you to cook better than your mother ever taught you to sew. They kiss like they forget you're two separate bodies.

The first time you change together, you catch a glimpse at their sewing kit. To you, it's massive, like your father's red toolbox. You weakly cradle your paltry Altoids® tin.

There are threads of many textures and colors. There are awls and grommet pliers. There are brass studs.

There is paint.

(Paint!)

They sew something so unlike your pattern that you hardly recognize it as a skin. They put things where they don't belong. They rip and glue instead of cut and sew in some places.

Whip stitch, because it's easy.

You stare at this process, trying to understand.

They look up, notice you watching all slack jawed and frozen. They look at your pattern and smile sadly. Then, without a word, they hand you a spool of leather cord dyed a rich, cherry red.

(Your favorite color.)

That night, the city glows. The lights bloom and shimmer. You both leap between shadows and chase each other over rooftops. There are humans still awake, to your shock. They steer clear of you. They are afraid, but not strong enough to try and trouble you. Your heart swells at their fear, because for the first time you can understand why.

Dawn approaches. Your lover-kin senses your trepidation but finds a place high above the city skyline where you sit and watch the sun rise for the first time since your mother first taught you to sew. When you do return, you and they awake in your new skins. They have changed their hair while keeping many of their tattoos.

(But your skin...)

It's an odd fit, to be sure. It's too tight in some places, too loose in others. And yet, when you trace the seams you bound together with their gift, it feels familiar. Your shoulders relax.

Your eyes glitter in the mirror.

(This has never happened before.)

Your love watches you admire your work. Their eyelids grow heavy watching you desire yourself the way they desire you.

Take my hand, they say, and we will make the daylight another kind of adventure.

Ages seem to pass. Lovers come and go, leaving you with gifts which you make into your body over and over again in as many ways as pleases you. You visit home and your mother doesn't understand, so you don't try to explain. You leap in shadows as you like, daring other creatures that walk in the night to possess even an ounce of your bravery.

One night, with the moon shining more clearly than you knew it could in the city, you come upon a pack of wolves. They meet your eyes with recognition. Some of them are wild, with pale blue and yellow eyes and with fluffy tails trailing behind them. But among them are others like you. The first to approach you is of this second kind. They sniff you immediately, but with caution, such caution.

Upon catching your scent, your kin joyfully nips at your ear. You jump at them, eager to play their game. The others join, kin and kind alike, and you find yourself running deeper into the woods than you or your mother had ever dreamed of going. You chase, you bark, you bite, you leap. You see in the eyes of your kin no timekeeping, no path-tracing. Like them, you soon learn not to think of the skin draped over your chair at home. The moon sets and the sky pales.

You don't return at dawn.

RILEY BLACK

10:30AM Bite Appointment! (CW: DISCUSSION OF MEDICAL TRANSITION)

“When did you know you were different?”

Dr. Silver sits on their low little stool, listening but not as a friend. She needs the answer. I knew the question was coming. “It’s all part of the process” was the refrain of every message board, social media whine for advice, and friendly chat I’d had about this moment for impatient weeks ahead of this date. But I still feel my insides squeeze as soon as the open-ended question mark falls from her mouth, dropped like a squeaky toy for me to react to.

“Uh.” A great start. I clear my throat. “I mean,” I start as I notice I’ve been kicking my feet this whole time. I shake my head to refocus. “Do you remember that movie, *An American Werewolf in London*?” They smirk. I guess they’ve heard this one before. “Sad movie,” they say with a sigh. “If she really loved him, she would have helped him find a way to escape.”

“Yeah, I don’t...” I start to jump in, a string of associations and favorite moments already lining up on another track.

“But you were saying?” they insist, tipping their pen so that it catches the gleam of the exam room lights for a moment. A deep breath. “So, it was on, like, *All The Time* when I was a kid. I think the comedy channel aired it as often as the other basic cable ones. It would be years before I saw the whole thing. I just got bits and pieces whenever it was on. But I just remember those fangs... that shape. Gosh, when he’s on all fours? My parents would sometimes walk in and scowl. ‘Scary movie.’” I rolled my eyes. “It wasn’t scary. It was... Or. I wanted to be like David. Not, like, his personality. But I wanted the change everyone was telling him he was cursed with.”

“So you were about...?”

“Oh! Ten. Yeah. I think ten is the earliest I can remember. Maybe I had feelings before that, but I needed to run into the idea first. This kind of, I don’t know, resonance. I’d seen photos and clips of the old *Wolfman* movie and Halloween masks, but they all seemed so fake and like someone drawing a wolf from what they remembered out of a storybook. But what Rick Baker did, I saw myself. Even though it was all fake I could look at myself in the mirror and felt like I saw the edges of myself.”

A few quick scratches against the notepad. Is that good or bad? Not that everything I just shared was essential information, but I feel as if the decision has already been made and we’d barely started. The heel of my sneaker hits the base of the exam chair with a thunk. My shoulders jump but Dr. Silver is already loaded with the next query.

“And on what day do you take your estrogen?”

“Um, Fridays. I’ve been good about making sure I’m on time for the last few months.” I do my best Good Girl grin.

“Good. That really helps your cycle. Not that it will always line up with the shift, but changing tends to go easier when you have a steady baseline.” It will? Future tense. I try not to crack too big of a smile at the realization. I stifle the urge to ask for my date. Let them bring it up. “And I had a look at your bloodwork. Everything looks pretty good, sugar’s a little high but nothing I’m too worried about. Although your testosterone is actually kind of low. We want it below two hundred and you’re at,” she scans the paper for the line, “seven. So we’ll probably have you come in every couple weeks after to check your levels and see if you need a supplement. Your body may rebalance after but we don’t want you so tired you’re just curled up on the couch after you shift.”

I bite my lower lip and nod.

“Looks like you’ve got your letters, too. Glad you’re seeing Helen, she’s lovely. But just so I can hear it, what do you want out of the change. When you think of yourself in, oh, three years, what do you see?”

I’ve changed so much already. Three years is nothing and forever. If anything, watching the hormones do their work only convinced me that I can’t predict the end. I just have to trust my body. I close my eyes and try to visualize what I saw that morning in the shower, when I looked down and imagined fur instead of skin, the quirk of my third nipple joined by a row of several more running down my belly. “I see a happy wolf. I see a wolf who isn’t afraid to ask for what she wants. Or to show her teeth when she needs to. I wouldn’t mind the change accentuating what the estrogen and progesterone have already done,” the doctor smirks at this, “but it’s kind of silly to be too specific about a physical result that isn’t really up to me, right? Like, I can’t tell how I’m going to look but I just want to feel like I’m meeting the world as myself. Even if it’s once in a blue moon.”

Dr. Silver shakes their head as the smirk becomes a smile and they take another brief note. “You’re right,” they start as they finish scrawling and look back up at me, both our eyes darting to the side because of the discomfort of a direct stare. They take another short note at that. “We do all we can, but the change seeps into everyone differently. It’s the same with hormones. We can talk about averages,” they handed over a print-out that looks like it’s been xeroxed several times before being scanned, “but the shift is something that this clinic has really only just begun to offer. I’ve been through it, and I’ll be with you throughout the process, but, say, the color of your pelt or how long your teeth are going to be, we really can’t know. If you had come in here with an art commission of what you truly wanted of your future self, this conversation would go a bit differently.”

“I just feel like it’s in there. Like, I don’t know. Maybe this is weird. I feel like I already am who it’s going to be. Just not physically. Yet. Sometimes I instinctively growl hard thoughts away. Or, gosh, it was so beautiful, I took this full moon hike through the desert and I felt like I belonged there, not just in the place but time. I feel like there is a part of myself I don’t know yet that wants to come out.” They scribble some more, leaving a “Well,” hanging in the air as they gathered their thoughts. “I have some memories like that, too. I expect that’s a large part of why you’re here. The wolf’s letting you know.”

My eyes feel hot. My nostrils flare like jet engines sucking in air. My throat constricts so I croak a “yes,” fighting the impulse to leave damp dots all over the sanitary paper on the seat. Dr. Silver doesn’t move, or offer a hug. That’s not what they are here for. They lay the clipboard on their lap. “So let’s talk

scheduling.” They let the streams make tracks down my cheeks as they wheel to the laptop, yanking their i.d. badge across the card reader in a motion their muscles clearly know well. “Now, we only do this on Fridays. Gives you the weekend to get through the most crucial parts. And of course you’ll be with us under observation for about five days after. Honestly you’re probably going to get sick of all of us bothering you for vitals and meals and all that. But,” they tap a few more keys, eyes scanning back and forth, “we’ve got something at the end of October, oddly enough. About a month and a half?”

I choke out a “Sounds perfect.” I gasp a steadying breath. “No need for a costume this year.”

“Are you sure? I’m going as Princess Bubblegum this year. The hard part is not shedding all over that bright pink fabric before it’s time to put it on!” The image of this doctor I just met, the gatekeeper and overseer of the change, wolfed out in a bright pink dress and tiara almost has me howling. But they’re right. There is nothing in life I’d be leaving. It’ll all be there, just different. Because I’ll be different. They snap me back to the moment as the printer begins to drool more print-outs. “So I’m sending you home with a bunch of literature, stuff you’ve probably heard before but it helps to keep you handy. You’re going to be with us while you’re under observation, we’ll watch for signs of infection and so on, and your form said you already have someone staying with you, yes?”

“Uh huh, I live with my partner. She’s excited. I mean, I had to promise to buy a lifetime supply of lint rollers, but it’s a small price to pay.”

“Ok, good. We’ll have another consult before the date and I’d like to see her here, too. You can schedule that calling the number,” they hand over the papers, tapping the digits at the bottom with a pointed nail painted with a full moon, “right there. You’re still going to be you. If you were going to rip anyone’s throat out you would have done it already. But partners can sometimes find the shift... unsettling. Or they read you in a different way. Your resting pup face might look aggressive to them. We want to get ahead of those possible misreads as much as we can.”

I nod, trying to make mental notes, knowing I’ll forget, trusting that it is all on the paperwork I’ll surely read a dozen times in the lead-up.

“Do you have any questions for me?”

“Does it hurt, the change?”

“Ah, like your favorite movie.”

I blush, almost embarrassed that I brought up a film full of werewolf cliches as my introduction. Dr. Silver raises their hands, fingers spread and palms out before turning them over, giving each digit a little flex. “So, our bodies are constantly remaking themselves. Cells are forming as others die. Even our bones are remodeled. There are special cells that eat bone while others excrete new tissue. It’s why you don’t look the same as you did when you were born, the ongoing accumulation of all those changes.”

I nod, trying not to think of cracking bones and skeletons painfully stretching skin, teeth falling out to make way for sabers. One story I’d read even included the eyes, almost everything human pushed out in a gloppy, greasy mess to make room for the wolf within.

“The shift is like a faster version of those changes,” Dr. Silver continues. “Some things will ache. Really common along the jaw, and at the hips. But you’re not going to be screaming your way into your first howl. Not unless you want to, anyway. Actually, let us know if you intend to. We can find you a room away from the other patients.”

“My girlfriend says I’m not much of a scr...” I start and land right into another deep blush. “Um, I don’t think that’ll be me but I’ll keep that in mind.”

“So what else?” Dr. Silver prompts as they cross their palms over each other on their lap. The edge of a few pink scars peek out from the edge of their white coat. Teeth. Or where teeth once were.

“Do I, um, get to pick where I’m bit?”

Dr. Silver confirms the guess, turning their wrist and glancing at it before looking back up. “Every practitioner has their preference. It’s not unlike taking blood. One nurse might prefer finding veins in the right arm and another the left. We try to accommodate everyone’s wishes as best we can, but if your vessels look better on your right than your left, that’s what we’re going with.”

“But no neck bites, right?”

They almost recoil from the suggestion. “Oh no. This isn’t a hundred years ago. We want to be precise, and there are too many sensitive nerves and airways in your neck to puncture like that. We still bite. We don’t use anesthesia beforehand, to not affect how your body takes the change. You will feel pressure but it’s very fast and as soon as the bite’s over, then we can start managing your pain. I suggest being psychologically prepared, anticipating the good ahead. So, no. No necks.”

They smile, this time for real and showing the edge of a canine just a little too long for a human. “That’s a job for our girlfriend, anyway.”

Angela Quinton

Spit

(CW: BODY HORROR, FORCED DETRANSITION, MEAT CONSUMPTION)

There's a ghost in me / who wants to say "I'm sorry" / Doesn't mean I'm sorry
Ladytron, "Ghosts", 2008

I awake on my back. Gritty linoleum under bare skin. The distant ceiling an expanse of lunar craters. Unwelcome morning pushes into the shadows. Pale gold light segmented by the window security bars. You are breathing nearby, deep and steady. I betrayed you but at least we didn't get out. A laugh slips past the dread in my throat.

My mouth is metallic with the tang of blood and stale saliva. I probe my teeth with my tongue, hoping to feel sharp crags and points, but find only the familiar flat shapes in raw sockets. *Here you all are*, I think. *Back again*.

Sticky bare thighs part with a sting. I roll onto my side, ribs and hipbone grinding against the floor through bruised and tired flesh. You are asleep, curled on your side facing me, hands folded under your cheek like a child. Blood dried on your face and in your beard. Testosterone warped me like a caricature but you wear its effects like a garment tailored for you by a god. Proof that the flaws of the flesh can be corrected. The angles and planes of your arms in shadow. The curvature of your shoulder jutting up into the sunlight, the arc of bite scars almost white. I wonder if my own scars will look the same.

The room dips and sags around me in gold-black smears when I sit up. I look down and shut my eyes to escape the blurry shapes of my legs and feet stretched out before me. I won't look at myself until I'm in a mirror. I need to see it all at once. I cannot risk getting my hopes up. I'm done telling myself stories about myself and hoping the universe will agree.

I stand. Bare feet sticky on the linoleum. My soles feel raw. My digits ache as if they'd been stubbed and crushed. Hours ago I watched through a sweat-blurred haze as my knuckles swelled, my phalanges lengthened, and claws split through my nails like axeheads through drywall. A thrill flutters in my chest. It was agony but it happened. It finally happened. The memory's euphoria and the fear of its cost mix in a dizzying blur.

The room is wrecked. We are in the husk of a foreclosed corner store the city pawned you for a dollar to start collecting property taxes you can't afford. Dusty display shelves crushed concave against the wall by the impact of large bodies. The guts of an overstuffed couch drift across the floor like dandelion fluff. Faded linoleum is scored with clawmarks and speckled with blood. My jacket is somehow untouched on the checkout counter. In the shadows towards the back, two glass-front 31

drink coolers still hum. The nearest is dark and girded with an arc of broken glass and trash. Beyond them, stairs to the basement and the upstairs living space. Further, the door to what was once the customer bathroom. There's a mirror inside. I need to see.

I step forward and my spine and hips and shoulders all shriek in chorus. Razorwire twists in my thighs. I stumble and brace against the counter. I look down instinctively and see my forearms, pale and pockmarked with grainy maroon specks left behind by the withdrawal of gore-slick guard hairs. A row of scabbed-over fang punctures on my left arm, just below the elbow. My temples pound. The room pulses in grey and black waves. I lean on the counter and rest my head on the plexiglass surface and try not to pass out.

You said the morning after would be like this. The feeling that your body is a tangle of strained muscles and broken bones improperly set. The cacophony of exaggerated emotions turning every thought into a prayer or a curse. Hunger. Nausea. Even now I can smell the broken cooler. The blood, the meat. I want to gorge. I want to puke. This is not the calm I planned for my first morning after, but it's what I get for abandoning eight months of restraint.

You woke in a Munich hospital bed after your first change. Your body was cleansed of grime and blood, full of painkillers, its bandage-padded shape terrifyingly familiar. They found your shredded tent at the top of an escarpment and your half-dead body at the foot of the scree field, seventy-five metres down the slope. Canadian tourist makes astonishing recovery after animal attack in the night. A miracle marred by a tragedy. *I am sorry, fräulein*, someone from Bergwacht Grainau said, *but we couldn't locate your brother. Only his backpack, his passport.*

Even if you could find the words through your grief and horror how could you explain to them that you were travelling solo. That you are the man in the passport. Who would believe what had attacked you, what you became, or what you lost to the staggering violence of the transformation. Top surgery and a decade of hormone replacement therapy, undone. Your life miraculously saved so you could return to Canada with fifty grand in medical debt, a fairytale curse, and a body that had never felt like home. Back to the beginning again, but worse.

Those are the first things you said to me, eight months ago. I was shivering on your snow-covered stoop with a wad of cash in my jacket. You had the pallor of the waning moon in your cheeks and the hard-won signs of your third puberty shading your jaw and neck. The hormones were working again, despite the continued transformations, but you didn't want to discuss that. You wanted to know how I found you. When you understood, you invited me in. You showed me the chainlink cage in the basement. The threadbare studio upstairs. You tried to scare me with accounts of the monthly transformations. The pain, the horror, the loss of self. When that didn't work you tried to make me feel insane for wanting what you had. Financially ruined, socially outcast, scrambling to afford the shots and save for the surgery. The fridge and coolers full of pig's blood and whatever scraps of meat Save-On Foods had put on clearance that week.

Meat. The scent from the smashed cooler floods my mind. The nausea and weakness have

merged into the sort of hunger that feels like sickness. I lift my head. The room has settled in the encroaching morning. Your shadowed form is motionless. The post-change sleep is the only time you seem truly at peace.

There's no telling what this will do to you, you had said on the night of our first full moon together. You could change like I did, or it could take years, or maybe even not work at all. Will you be ready, June? Ready to see what your body thinks of itself? Moonrise had been an hour away. We were preparing the basement cage that once held cigarette cartons and scratch-and-win tickets, which would now hold you. Water bucket. Blankets. A cardboard patch on plastic sheeting where you could piss and shit. A folding table outside for the raw meat I would feed you through a narrow rectangular gap in the chainlink. The gap through which I would receive my compensation.

It took me four years to recover, you had said. I had to remake myself. Remember that. This could do the same thing to you. Just because it's not a bite doesn't mean you're safe. All that progress, all that you, gone. I only managed because I know what I am. Do you? If you don't, you won't make it. It will kill you.

You know better than most what dysphoria is like. You know how it feels to contort yourself to appease those who control your next dose. Why would I explain it to you? We do what we must to become what we are. You know that. Why else would I have done any of this? Finding you. Proving my trustworthiness. Begging for your help. Confessing to you that the spironolactone and estrogen and clothes and makeup keep me functional, but my human body still hangs on my bones like a wet straightjacket. Coming to this place every full moon to lock you behind chainlink and concrete, to keep you from roaming the city streets, to feed you and talk to you. To watch you curse and scream as you become a copy of the thing that cast you down the mountain and back into the body you escaped. You hate it, but I need it. Shaggy, snapping, feral, ivory teeth and charcoal fur and amber eyes. A beast but still *you*, wearing a shape I crave with vicious hunger.

I told you I wanted to be a werewolf for the same reason you wanted to be a man. We always were these things. Our bodies just needed help to catch up. The fundamental wrongness of my human form has always been a prison. I would do anything to escape. You replied with the kindest words people like us can hear: *I don't understand you, but I believe you.*

Nevertheless: I was strange to you. I still am. My motivations must seem alien, but you are a practical man. We made an arrangement and we both got what we wanted. We both do a similar dance for endocrinologists and pharmacists. Every twenty-eight days I gave you the safety and company you needed to turn without hurting anyone or getting yourself killed by a cop. I slid trays of meat through the gap. I unlocked the gate and draped a blanket over your pale human shape when the change melted away and left your unconscious form shivering. I cooked us breakfasts in the little studio kitchen upstairs. I gave you five hundred dollars a visit for your top surgery fund. And all I asked in return each time was just enough of what you had to make me a little more myself. Last night I wanted more and I took it. This morning I will accept the consequences.

I shuffle to the broken cooler. Crushed plastic containers of pork blood on the floor, their contents congealed around the glass on the floor. Smearred black and sticky. Brighter red on crumpled styrofoam butcher trays and tan scraps of butcher paper. Tacky maroon footprints and handprints, roughly human in shape but massive. Animal in detail. Pawprints. Starpoint punctuation of claw tips. Bloody fur brushstrokes. The overlapping patterns diagramming a frenzied dance.

We did this instead of breaking down the front door and disappearing into the night. I remember now. A swipe of my claw shot back the bars locking your cage and you emerged and we came upstairs on all fours like children playing. We lunged and snapped and wrestled. You towered over me, barrel-chested on two legs, enormous fangs bared, pointed ears brushing the ceiling. We were in your home. I was the interloper. I slunk low and deferential before you, revelling in the perfect harmony of body, instinct, and will. Then you knocked me down. I threw you into the shelves. Behind it all was wordless joy, sharp and sweet. A play, a dance. I was myself for the first time.

I remember shattering glass. The distant sting of shards against the pads on my feet. We ate. The joy of it, the rightness. The moon and the city and its bounty hummed outside but we had each other and so we ate and played and played and ate. My long-palmed hands holding a ragged pork shoulder, claws sinking sharp and yellow into the meat. The blunt shape of my muzzle. The mobility of quasi-lupine lips and nose. The scissoring shearing sensation of my fangs at work. The slick salty flesh cold on my tongue.

I retch and spit into the congealed mess on the floor. The self in the memory howls for more, but my human body won't tolerate it. I step over the mess, past the gaping tangle of broken wire shelves and the remaining scraps of styrofoam and raw meat.

The bathroom door is here. The mirror. What did I lose? My shape? My face? The light in my eyes only visible in photos taken in the last few years? All of it? Nothing? The answer is mere steps away. Instead I open the second cooler, avoiding the reflection in the glass, and withdraw a bottled protein shake by feel. I stocked them there a week ago. I like how they taste for breakfast and you need them. Now I need one too. I tear off the plastic cap and drink the bottle in three mouthfuls.

My stomach heaves. A chill runs through me, down into my bowels. Another convulsion. I keep it down. I feel stronger. I take another bottle and slink onto the floor with my back against the bathroom door. Across from the basement door, which hangs askew, smashed off its hinges. The linoleum is in ragged shreds where we scabbled out of the stairway. I see my legs and feet. I don't turn away. They look like my legs and feet. Pale and dirty but mine. The green polish I put on my toenails last week is gone. I drain the bottle, put it down and massage my thighs with both hands. The big muscles are still spasming.

When you finally change it will hurt in ways you won't expect. You said this the morning after the fifth moon of our arrangement. The quads always hurt the worst. They're the biggest muscles and they resist the most during the changes. You were limping around in your shorts like a powerlifter recovering from a competition. Swatches of the new transtape I bought you bright orange on your chest. You were chatty. Offering advice. I was counting out your cash on the counter, exhausted and exhilarated by the minor changes I'd seen in myself for a few hours.

Nails marked by half-moon crescents of claws pressed into their undersides. A dark skein of hair on my forearms. Things moving inside my chest, my skull. Proof that the flaws of the flesh can be corrected. That morning I still had my breasts, my hips, the roundness in my cheeks and jaw. I was still me.

Don't fight the change. Don't help it either. Just let it happen. Don't distract yourself by talking or repeating a mantra. What else. Oh yeah. Be ready to puke or shit like a blackout drunk after you change back and your human guts freak out at what you ate.

I had intuited much of this already from years of studying the shape of my desire. Assembling something like a true image of myself from scraps of popular culture. Being Human. Mazey Day. The writing of M.D. Lachlan. No one who chooses to remake themselves does so without building an edifice of the imagined challenges and hardships. You don't climb a mountain until you can picture the summit. I knew it would hurt. Then I found you and saw *how* it would hurt.

I saw how it made you anxious and volatile in the hours before, though you smirked at me and laughed at the absurdity of a prisoner preparing his cell with the help of the jailor. I saw you crouch, naked and waiting. I watched it in your contorting, straining extremities, werewolf surging out through arteries, human receding through veins. How you braced yourself against the wall with one arm covering your chest. The spasming flex and tense of muscle under sweaty fur-darkened skin. The wet snaps and hollow tearing sounds, the shuddering cries that started so human and shifted downward octave by octave, breath by breath, losing articulation, shedding resentment and fear and revealing raw animal hunger.

You sometimes hate your shape. Hate that anyone would see you as a monster. As anything other than what you chose to be. You are always yourself, though. Beautiful. Never a monster. A monster wouldn't come to me at the edge of the cage. Wouldn't dip his muzzle into the cupped hands I held through the gap. He wouldn't let his tongue loll, let his saliva collect and pool and spill around white fangs, over pink gums and black lips and into my waiting palms. A trickle of liquid diamond. A dose of thin clear liquid that I then raised to my lips and swallowed, as syrupy and metallic as my mouth this morning.

Every twenty-eight days I became more myself. There is no analogue to that feeling. Not even my first estrogen shot. The profound intimacy of the act. The shivering joy of choosing it. Of casting my fate and form to chance. By the third month there was hair between my breasts that didn't trigger dysphoria because I knew what kind of hair it was. While you paced in your cage I would stare at my hands, touch my face. I could feel it working. Every ounce of lycanthropic saliva pushed me nearer the threshold where the pathogen would ignite instead of merely smouldering beneath my skin.

Last night I got tired of waiting. There's nothing more to it than that. Every moon intensified my need. The partial transformations. The growing excitement. Your human body flourished under your hormone regimen. Mine never diminished. The elation of certainty. Each dose wracked me with euphoria and gratitude. The pressure built, like an aftershock of your transformation, always on

the cusp of realization, subsiding with the moon to leave me starved and trembling in the flat light of dawn. For all my metaphors about self-actualization I am still selfish. Maybe even monstrous, considering the harm I may have caused. Certainly I was stupid for not understanding how the accumulating changes would break my self-discipline. Again: the wrongness of my human form has always been a prison. I would do anything to escape. I would risk losing my breasts and hips and softness. I know I would be no less a woman if that happened, but I saw your face when you described waking in that Munich hospital. I knew what was at stake when I held my cupped hands through the gap and then thrust my arm into your open jaws. I knew what I was doing when I felt your tongue, your breath, the sudden tension of your lips, the rows of fangs dimpling my skin for an instant and then piercing, entering, aching, blood and saliva and your growl and my cry intermingled.

When you finally change it will hurt in ways you won't expect.

It was like falling from a mountain. My human body dashed against the rocks and the rest of me plunged deeper, headfirst, screaming and ecstatic. Liquid fire in my body, surging with each heartbeat, immolating in an instant the grey veil of wrongness and incompleteness that had clouded my life. Estrogen had prepared my vessel and now I was being filled.

I remember all of it. The crawling, pulsing agony that made whole everything that it first destroyed. It broke bone and warped cartilage to the point of splintering. The growth of my pelt pierced my skin a million times over, a constellation of needles, a galaxy. I revelled in the contortion of my spine and ribs, the shuddering elongation of my skull and limbs. The hooked claws that slid from my fingers and toes. The huffing breaths forced out of my convulsing chest. You had said not to speak but I tried anyway, spitting small harmless teeth and strings of saliva, my jaw crowding with fangs, my voice choked and broken as I tried to say *I choose this, I choose this, I choose this.*

I chose it for myself but you gave it to me, Liam. You didn't understand but you believed me. No matter what you believe of me now, you have a sister in me for the rest of our lives.

Your breathing changes. Long deep inhalation and loud sigh. The creak of the floor as you roll over. In a moment you'll be awake and the door will shut on this chance to see myself first.

I apologize for putting you at risk and depriving you of a caretaker. I don't know how your human mind will react to what I did. Maybe you'll throw me out. Maybe I'll make us breakfast upstairs. I have no more control over that than what the change back has done to me. I will accept whatever comes.

I get to my feet. With pale and trembling hands I push open the door.

Are you ready, June? Ready to see what your body thinks of itself?

Yes. I know what I am. I see myself in the mirror.

Max Vree

Passenger Seat

(CW: GORE, DEATH, CANNIBALISM, DISMEMBERMENT, TRANSPHOBIA, DISCUSSION OF MENTAL HEALTH)

It was an hour past midnight, the lake ahead of us and the moonless night had merged into a singular sheet of blackness, and I wanted to bite Mason's leg so badly that it made me sick. Weed made it so much worse. Whenever we playfought, Mason always found a way to brag about how easy it was to overpower me. I prayed that statement would hold true tonight. The back of his swimming shorts was stained with wet sand, and his hairless calves were sunburnt into a crisp red. Mason was the only man I knew who shaved his legs, and that, paired with his greasy, ear-long hair and pastel pink hoodie, had made me gravitate toward him when he transferred to our school. When I realized he wasn't a closeted trans girl, we were already hanging out every day, and I convinced myself that cozying up to the outcast white boy who'd taken up fishing only because he enjoyed watching the dying twitches of small creatures would be a good move for the long run. Then he wanted to date me, and I was alright with that. Nights got lonely, especially in St. Martin. Jodie's, the only cafeteria-lunchroom-diner-bar we had, modestly closed at 11PM, so the youth drove their jeeps to the bigger lakes up North, where they danced around campfires to bass-boasted 2010's party music, fueled by watermelon vapes and 5-dollar box wine. Or so I'd heard. Mason loved telling me how he wouldn't get into one of those wobbly jeeps for a million, but we both knew that we just didn't get invited. Realizing I hadn't said anything in a while, he pecked a dry, obligatory kiss on my cheek.

"Hey Theo, I do like the hair, by the way. It's cute. Makes you very puckish. Like a fairy on a tree branch who gives me the wrong directions and traps me in the forest forever."

I squeezed my face into a convulsive smile. The first compliment Mason ever gave me was that I had cute wrists. It was after he made us compare hand sizes, after I fought the urge to tell him I wanted to fucking decapitate myself over how bony and long-fingered his hands were compared to mine. As if I was a quick sketch and he was the finished product; still growing wirier while my development had stopped with my first period at eleven. A dull nausea spiraled in my stomach, and the feeling of sucking on a rotting tooth diffused through my veins. This lakeside, this joint, this town, this company, it all made me fucking sick. Mason peeled a flake of dead skin off his chapped lips and tossed it, lighting one of the wafer-thin mint cigarettes he shoplifted from the corner store. His face was lost in the swirling darkness, and I found that I preferred it that way.

"You should really buy some lip balm."

Mason laughed, then kissed me. He never minded my boorishness—either he found it endearing, or it went over his head completely. I wasn't opposed to some warmth, but when I

locked my mouth into his, his blood swirled into my saliva, and at once, I knew I had made a mistake. I winced and locked my hands behind my back, letting them strangle each other so they wouldn't strangle something else.

Glistening blood tugging on the corner of his mouth. "What's wrong?"

Ears rushing, I went through the motions of a goodbye: Sorry, adios, jumping to feet, slapping sand off my shorts, stumbling thrice as I ran down the winding forest path, my mind outrunning my body. The blood glued to my palette, sweet like wildflower honey, so different from how it tasted when I was seven, sixteen—how it tasted only a few months ago. Sick, sick, sick.

I cut my own hair last Thursday, and this mundane decision has yet to cease disturbing every aspect of my life. Mom's caseworker begged me to keep sharp objects out of the house, so I'd stolen a bread knife from the school's canteen and hacked away at my curls in a bathroom stall. The same caseworker's number was ready in my dial bar when I showed Mom my pruned head.

If you're trying so hard to be a man, why don't you enlist in the military and go to war? Not even blind ole' Anna would mistake you for a man with hips like that. It's a shame, Theodora, really a shame.

Mom's jealousy used to make her tender. When I was younger, she'd wash my hair with expensive oils that probably did more harm than good, bitching lovingly about how she'd wished her wispy hair twisted like that. I'd been hoping for a blow-out argument that would lead to a strained understanding, but instead of tying nooses in front of my face, her new mood stabilizers had properly zombified her instead. She could still explode, but chose not to. She knew that the cold hurt me more.

A looping of thorns lashed my face as I burst through the path's overgrown exit, onto the main road, where the hell-white of a lantern pole split into two rushing, roaring headlights. A shriek of tires. A window rolling down, but weirdly, no cursing. Through my raised arms, beyond the foggy windshield of the powder-blue RV, there was the shape of a narrow-shouldered man. An out-of-towner: the only other RV in a fifty-mile radius of St. Martin was rusting away in the back of Ms. Holder's garden. Squinting, I imagined how easy it'd be to pretend to be a hitchhiker, knock on the window, climb in, bite—leave only an abandoned RV as evidence. Knowing the people who lived on this road, they'd call their cousin to come tow it, never the cops.

The wheels came to life forward with a squeak, and the RV made a slow, awkward loop around me before skidding off down the road. Too late. No will to go home or go back, I dropped down on the curb and lit the crooked cigarette I'd nicked from Mason when he wasn't looking. I knew I didn't deserve to be rewarded for these fantasies, but I would never act on

them. I couldn't even do it if I tried. Not with my rounded canines, and not with my tiny hands that were built to care, not strangle. I could do anything I wanted, but not with my puny saccharine woman heart.

The next day, I spotted the blue RV in the parking lot behind Jodie's, and when I rubbed the sleep out of my eyes and peered into the storefront, I saw the stranger for the first time. An uninspired painting of woodlands was wedged under Jodie Granger's armpit, and she used both her free hands to enthusiastically close a deal with a willowy man wearing a man bun and a charming morning smile. Even through the dusty, double glazing, I could hear his crackling laugh and see the tattoo on his sun-kissed underarm; a hand-poked dagger in a traditional style. My lower spine tingled. When their handshake ended, I turned and speed-walked down the road.

Embarrassingly alone and perpetually away from home, I wasted my summer listening to podcasts on my duct-taped headphones while hiking so many laps around town that I lost five pounds in a week. Mason didn't text me; I concluded he was pissed at me for ditching him, but I couldn't find the spunk to meet him at the lakeside where he spent most of his time dooming and fishing. If I somberly stared at the road ahead long enough, I could give a heroic bent to my isolation. I was doing the right thing by making sure I couldn't hurt anyone. As long as no one got hurt.

The heatwave weighed down on me like a boulder, but over the course of two days, I watched with disbelief and sweat in my brows as the stranger cheerily mowed five lawns and taught the neighborhood children the basics of accordion. With his beat-up van and armful of tattoos—with the mere fact that he wasn't born here—he was an outsider, yet within a few days, he received more love than I had in seventeen years. I wondered if he was popular with the people from his hometown, or if he started traveling exactly because he wasn't. Staring at his tan, illustrated arms, I wondered about a lot of things.

On Sunday, Jodie organized a barbeque on the town square, where I watched the stranger laugh forgivingly when the Miller's five-year-old punched her greasy hand through the folds of his accordion. I was devouring a grilled corn cob while sitting on the edge of a flower box, but my spell of invisibility was shattered when the stranger sauntered up to me, flipped over an empty bucket with his foot, and sat down on it, landing his chin in his hand.

"Are you the kid I nearly ran over?" His thin mustache had made me think he was in his twenties, but up close, I came to the startling realization that he couldn't be much older than nineteen. Outgoing people loved to throw me a bone of conversation so they could feel good about themselves, and I didn't trust this man—nor did I trust myself near the milky ring of untanned skin under his collar.

"What happened to your hair—Theodora, was it?"

I dug my dirty nails into my wrist and pressed hard, a blue humiliation surging through my bloodstream. All the townspeople knew that I preferred Theo. None of the townspeople could bring themselves to care. I wanted the stranger to go back where he came from—back up in smoke, for all I cared.

“Theo,” I gritted, taking the bait. “I cut it. You should do the same with that beard of yours.” Unbothered, he reached out for a handshake, “I’m Jean.”

“I don’t give a shit.”

“I could fix up your hair if you want. I used to earn money with barbering before I started to paint. I have clippers in my RV.”

I critically took up his man-bun, but my eyes kept getting pulled to the web of veins by shaded collarbones. It was a bad idea, and not the part where I followed a stranger to his vehicle. But he was sweet, and despite my attitude, I was lonelier than I’d ever been. His RV had been moved all the way to the back of the parking lot behind Jodie’s, into the shade of the elm trees. He’d built a modest campsite in front of the blacked-out backdoor; a camping chair surrounded by hemlocks, a mini-fridge, and a foldable table with a pack of Camel’s and the clippers—ready for use.

“I never smoke in a town.” He skillfully whipped a cigarette into his mouth and tossed me one as well. “Always attracted the wrong crowd to me—” He was muted by a pathetic cough, waving for me to sit down. “—Ahem—So, Theo, how’s your summer going?”

“Shit.”

“Elaborate.”

“I don’t know you. Why do you care?”

“Would you believe me if I said I have a big heart?” He laughed, gripped onto the clippers, and pointed them at the folding chair, his smile unfaltering. “Sit.”

I sat. He folded a checkered towel around my neck, his sleek hands glittering in the lowering, orange-red sun. I bit a chunk of skin out of my cheek, gagged on the bitterness and the breathless silence as he hovered over me, poking my jaw with the clippers.

“I can give you a buzzcut, a mullet, or a regular men’s cut—but you kind of fucked up, so it’ll look mediocre anyway.”

Unsuspecting skin next to my mouth. My iciness had molten into a nervous, pathetic sludge, yet I wasn’t scared that he would kidnap or diddle me anymore.

“Something regular, please. Thank you.”

He locked his cigarette into his mouth, switched the clippers on, and started buzzing without ado. He noticed my clammy hands, but he’d never guess the reason.

“So, now that you’re saying ‘please’ and ‘thank you’, can I ask you how your summer is without getting a big mouth?”

I swallowed my pride. “I’m sorry. My summer is shit. My mom’s a bitch and so is my boyfriend.”

“Your boyfriend’s a bitch?”

“Sure sees me as one,” I laughed sheepishly before realizing Jean wouldn’t have a clue what I was talking about. “It’s just shit. Being—uh—different. In a shithole like this.”

“I grew up in a town like this,” Jean didn’t miss a beat. “Under 3000 people, nauseatingly Caucasian. I left at sixteen and never looked back. Have you ever thought about running away?”

Hands on my shoulder, briefly, before zipping by my face again; once-pale skin toasted by the sun until it was just right. A bit wrinkled and callused, as if it'd crunch if I'd bite. When I'd bite. A question. He asked me something.

“My mom is—not well. No one likes her. Not even me. So I have to take care of her—or no one will. But I think about it every day.”

The clippers freed me from the sweaty mat of curls on the back of my head, but my head only felt hotter. I dug up the words of the school counselor I visited when I was fourteen; Let your thoughts flow away like a river, watch them, but don't float along with them—

Two hands, slinking closer to my neck. Icy hot touch. I didn't know what he was doing and didn't get the chance to ask. Before I could think, I'd lurched and sank my teeth into the meat of his forearm, grinding my teeth until I hit bone on both sides, snarling out bloody saliva, dizzy with curiosity and longing, sanity leaking out of my nose. It was disgusting. Bitter. Nothing like Mason. The clash of expectation and reality made my ears ring. I spat him out and sat back down with glowing cheeks, hoping that if I focused hard enough, I could rewind time past the point of no return. The silence grew teeth. I tasted salt as tears leaked into my bloodied mouth.

Jean scraped his throat. I jumped up and sprinted until my vision was water-grey and my knees were mauled by falling and falling and falling. My mind drained and I was the only person in the world—until the end of the road, when I realized that my feet had brought me to the lakeside again. Mason was stowing away his fishing gear, his bare chest lambent in the dark. Wipe tears, wipe blood, lick teeth, be normal.

“You cut your hair even shorter?” he half-observed, half-inquired, then clicked his tongue. “Did you fall?” I set out to wipe a dot of leftover blood off my chin, but as I opened my mouth, long threads of saliva cleared that job for me. I glanced over my shoulder but saw only the rustling night.

“It's nothing...”

He stepped forward, awkwardly shook his hair dry, then performed worry, cupping my chin a bit too roughly, tilting his head. “Theodora—I notice you've been—distant. I know you've got some stuff with your mom—and I get it, alright? I'll get you through it. I'll totally be there for you. Always. Really.” A self-assured smile. He'd read off the script, and now he'd get his reward; a kiss, or maybe even something better. He didn't notice the error; there were no errors in his mind. A hand on the small of my back. He didn't deserve any of it—not the flat chest, not the skin that fit him. I was going to take it from him.

I smiled, ran my pointer finger down the crisp skin of his sternum, for one, two, three, seconds—until it made me too sick. Lurching, a bite that locked around bone, using his big body as a shield as we crashed into the gravelly sand. I was eager to clean Jean's bitterness from my palate; still, I punched before I bit. Cherry-red blubber, pinning wrists down, digging his sternum out with tactical bites so I could get to his heart. But he always beat me at playfights.

He always let me know how puny I was. He flipped me over with a twist of his hips and punched my throat with fervor. He screeched needles. I saw dots. A thud, then he flopped into the sand like all his bones had been removed at once. Jean guardedly raised the clippers again, flipped in his palm to make a mean little baton, but he'd hit bullseye. As if he'd done it before. I'd feel scared if he didn't look more scared than me.

"Fuck—" he tied his hair back and rolled up the sleeves of his crumpled blouse. "Alright, alright. What'd you know about this guy? How's his home life?"

He summoned an XL zip-tie from his pocket, kneeled by Mason's caved, twitching body, and cleanly sealed off his air supply. Drowning in unreality, I recalled the last police procedural show I'd watched.

"It looks—murder. What if—find."

"No one will find him. Now, Theo, you have to help me, alright? Do they like this kid in school?"

"No. They flinch when he reaches in his backpack." A violent shudder breached my body as I recalled the fantasies me and Mason indulged in on this very beach, back when he was still animated, still frustratingly thriving.

"He hates St. Martin. Badly. But I don't think—"

"As long as they think he might run away, it's enough," Jean brusquely cut me off. "I drag him up, you brush out the marks. On three."

Not counting, he looped his arms around Mason's torso and jerked him up with a grunt, then dragged him to the treeline, where I glimpsed powder-blue beyond the pines. Thoughtless as a robot, I picked up the bigger clumps of red sand and flung them into the dark water, then stalked Jean uphill, feverishly wiping out our footprints with my heel. Mason's dying quivers reminded me of the stranded bluegills he'd put out of their suffering with a rock. Jean unlocked his RV with shaky hands and motioned me inside when the spell of the adrenaline broke. I hesitated.

"C'mon, Theo, this isn't the time to be a fucking bitch—" His voice immediately spiked with tension. "I'm cleaning up your mess here. You have nothing to fear—not from me. You taste as disgusting to me as I tasted to you."

"How do you—"

He flashed me the mauled tattoo on his forearm, faltered, then gave me a ratty, nervous smile.

"If you'd liked the taste, I wouldn't be here."

The RV felt smaller on the inside than it looked on the outside. My mind consumed the insignificant details first—a vegetarian cookbook, a wilted bouquet in a vase, a pinned picture of a dark-haired girl in dungarees—until I could no longer deny the beat-up operation table in the middle of the room, its restraining straps marred with dark-brown stains.

"Please don't tell me that's your bed."

"I sleep in my driver's seat." With the force of an ox, Jean heaved the grey-eyed remains of Mason onto the table. My instincts knew he was dead by the way his arm flopped to the side. Jean slammed the door, summoned a toolbox, then paused—his black eyes flicking to me with

something akin to embarrassment as he lifted the bonesaw and hovered it over Mason's purple-red leg. The sound was nails on a chalkboard, but as the scent of split skin prickled my nose, I had to sit down on the mini-fridge and twiddle my thumbs to distract myself from the longing. In my biology book, the organs were discerned with clean colors and separated by strict lines, nothing like the gory trash heap of brown-red shapes that was Mason's inside.

Jean deconstructed him with furrowed brows and short, aimed stabs, like solving a complicated puzzle in reverse.

"Are there more like us?"

There were zero people I cared about because zero cared about me, but I felt an abstract worry for the kids playing in the park and the teens walking home from a party—aware that there are monsters in the world, but still not cautious enough. Because monsters we were, there was no denying that.

"I don't know," Jean licked his lips, a hacksaw in his splattered hand, and continued in a voice I hadn't heard before.

"I'm—stupidly glad to have someone to talk to about this. I've always thought that if I'm here, there have to be others who—need this. I think they're incarcerated, medicated, dead by suicide, vagabonds like me, or rich enough to not have to worry about any of it." He got distracted by the blood on his fingers, his pupils flipping to dimes, and licked it off before continuing; "Listen, personally—even after meeting you—I don't believe it's linked. But if the feds find us, they'll draw their own conclusions, so it is important to stay in the shadows, always. As in; don't lose your shit and try to eat a random kid's heart in plain sight, m'kay?"

I ignored the jab. "Linked?" Jean sighed, flicked his thumb to the picture of the dark-haired girl, then matter-of-factly pointed at himself. I blinked.

"You're joking."

"I told you I ran away at sixteen, right?"

I nodded, but my smile faltered when I realized why he'd brought up 'running away'—why he'd offered to cut my hair in the first place. It certainly had nothing to do with his big heart. "I know I should probably just kill myself," Jean said suddenly, staring at the minced red under his hands as if he was in love.

"It's not just the lives I end. It's the lives I'll endanger if—when all of this catches up to me. To us. 'Cause you're in it now."

He gave me a moment to contest that last statement. I didn't.

"The thing is; I really like being alive. After sixteen years of misery, I'm finally seeing the world in color. I can't bring myself to care about anyone I hurt. They'd hurt me too if they got the chance."

I stood up, hovered over the deconstructed body, and dipped a nail into the red sauce that pooled in the crevasses of his torn, half-dissected heart. As the dark-red honey dizzied me, my thoughts

fluttered back to Mom. Mom who wore her femininity like a silk dress fastened to her flesh with staples; a miserable, lovely burden. Mom who would never miss an opportunity to tell me I was beautiful, dainty, so pretty in my grandma's old sundress. Worthy of everything except for what I wanted. I was going to stay with Mason for the warmth and stay with her for the cold. I could see myself ten years into an alternate future; hunchbacked by humiliation, possibly pregnant, forever despising my worthless, mediocre husband for the gift he took for granted, but I stayed—fucking stayed—not because I didn't know I could get better, but because I thought I didn't deserve it.

The fantasy made me sick—until I looked down at Mason's big, severed hands, at the greasy mop of short hair no one had ever made him feel like shit for. I turned to Jean and found my mischievous, euphoric relief reflected in his bug-eyes. There was a strange, twisted beauty in our shamelessness. I slinked a hand past the bandage on his arm and grabbed his hand—a bit too forward—but his smile only grew wider. I kissed him, not in the least to get the leftover blood off his red lips.

“Is there still room in your passenger seat?”

Max Vree

CW: GORE, BODY HORROR




THORNS

contributors



james penha

Expat New Yorker James Penha (he/him ) has lived for the past three decades in Indonesia. Nominated for Pushcart Prizes in fiction and poetry, his work is widely published in journals and anthologies. His newest chapbook of poems, *American Daguerreotypes*, is available for Kindle. Penha edits *The New Verse News*, an online journal of current-events poetry. TwitterX: @JamesPenha



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Jessica Swanson (she/her) is a librarian and a writer from Florida. She has a fondness for cats, cheese, and hot tea. Her work has appeared in *Hearth & Coffin*, *Voidspace Zine*, and others. Follow her writing on Twitter at [Cooljazzsheepie](#) or Instagram at [everystupidstar](#).

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Blue Neustifter (she/her/hers) is a white, queer trans woman. She has been previously published in *Transcendent 4*, *Werewolves Versus Everything*, and *Your Impossible Voice*, and her short story "Unknown Number" was a 2022 Hugo finalist in the Best Short Story category. In addition to her writing, she is a statistician and board gamer. She lives in Ontario with her deeply loved family and, like most of us, is trying to find hope and survival in a difficult world. [BlueWrites.com](#), [@Azure_Writing](#) on X/Twitter, [AzureFemme](#) on [itch.io](#)

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Devon Webb is a 25-year-old writer based in Aotearoa New Zealand. She writes full-time, exploring themes of femininity, vulnerability, anti-capitalism & neurodivergence. She shares her poetry online, through live performance, & has had her work included in over forty publications worldwide. She is an in-house writer for Erato Magazine, an editor for Prismatic Press, & is currently working on the final edits of her debut novel, *The Acid Mile*. She can be found on Instagram, Twitter, TikTok & Bluesky at @devonwebbnz.

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Cairn des Lions (they/them) is a queer/trans writer and artist. Their work uses horror and fantasy elements to explore trauma, relationships, queerness, beasthood, and neurodiversity. They live in the Pacific Northwest with their cat, Kimchi. @mutantmustard on twitter!



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Hi! I'm Riley Black (she/they), and I'm the award-winning author of ten nonfiction fossiliferous books. My latest, *The Last Days of the Dinosaurs*, won the AAAS/Subaru prize for excellence in science writing and I regularly write for *Smithsonian*, *National Geographic*, *Slate*, and others. My fiction's been published in the anthologies *Fornicate* and *Werewolves Versus: Everything*. I'm a huge fan of creature features, and I'm hoping to write more fiction so I can further make monsters queer as fuck. Bluesky: [restingdinoface.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/restingdinoface.bsky.social) telegram: [RileyBlack](https://t.me/RileyBlack) website: rileyblack.net



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Angela Quinton is an autistic trans woman in her 40s. She codes for a living, she writes because she has a lot of complicated feelings about gender and lycanthropy, and she runs ultramarathons because she'll go completely feral if she doesn't. She started *Werewolf-News.com* and created the *WEREWOLVES VERSUS* anthology series. She and her family currently live in Canada near Lake Erie, in a house that is SO full of cats. Federated platforms: werewolf.town/@angela Bluesky: [@werewolf.pizza](https://bsky.app/profile/@werewolf.pizza) Web site: argylewerewolf.com



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Max Vree (he/him) writes horror and speculative fiction that tends towards the queer, the bizarre, and the macabre. In his daily life, he studies Fine Art, gives himself shitty stick-and-pokes, and hangs out with deeply strange people who may or may not be vampires. [@maxcantdothings](https://twitter.com/maxcantdothings) on twitter, [@affoeenjoyer](https://www.instagram.com/affoeenjoyer) on instagram



thank you

THANK YOU SO MUCH for reading this (our first!) issue of DOG TEETH!

If you liked what you read, please share it with your friends and visit the contributors to let them know how wonderful you thought their work was!

Issue two is coming soon, and if you're interested in updates on the progress of that, sign up to DOG TEETH's newsletter! We're DOG TEETH NEWS on Substack; if you subscribe, you'll get updates on submission windows, issue themes and progress, and interviews from contributors in your inbox!

If you want to join the pack, submit to the next issue! Our second issue theme will be KIN; keep your eye on our Twitter or the newsletter for submission window dates! You can find us on Twitter @dogteethlit.

Thank you so much again and don't forget to check out the contributors and their other amazing work! It would mean the world to us if you'd let them know you loved their art, and shared it with your friends!

See you in the next one and stay strange,

Jack



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