CAVITY
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body cavity.

a hole
in something.

something
to be filled.

something
that rots. blackened
pitted
infected,
hurts
to
the
touch.

Prodding a toothache. Molar. Weeks-old and starving. Her tongue presses into the split, only place in your body you can feel bone with no skin, now a chasm deep enough she'd swear to find hell at the bottom. Falling down a ravine. Cicadas thrum and when she breathes whistle-quick through her front teeth her lungs fill with air that's already passed through somebody else. Sun strung low overhead, it sinks lazily into a spilled-grease horizon. Her uniform socks are rolled down to the ankle, one foot behind the other and arms splayed out to her sides as though tightrope walking the spiderwebbed pavement.

Daddy's pliers. They sleep in the knickknack drawer, under the cracked kitchen counters, sleeping muzzled in the graveyard of rubber bands and Schroedinger's batteries. She jams the bathroom door shut, trading the drone of a thousand insects for the needling buzz of a few, for the overhead light's jaundiced glow. Her face, inches from glass dressed in three-and-a-half kids worth of grime, weeps. Not tears, weeks of sores she couldn't keep her nails out of, potholes in a pretty face as she draws her lips back like a cat at the vet.

Taste of rust. Metal teeth grating bone and the nerve twinges down her jaw. She can feel the word ‘novocaine’ melt on her tongue like a prayer, right eye wrenched shut against the judder and creak of tooth-shrapnel hauled from her car wreck gums. Gauze pad wedged in the corner of her smile, blooming from white to carnelian-red. Grave to be filled.

Night passes, sweaty, sheets crumpled and tossed in the turning of crawling hours. She hears every little insect leg and swats idly at the flies, when had so many gotten inside?

Next morning, pliers tucked into the pocket of a blazer too frayed-about-the-edges to be prim and proper. Her bag is slung over her shoulder as she trudges into the late-August heat, stifled under fabric. She probes the empty spot in her mouth with the tip of her tongue, still raw, irresistibly so. We press fingertips down on our mothers’ sewing pins for the same reason.

The vacancy of the space grows unbearable and she can feel the cotton of her shirt clinging to her skin when she smells it.

The reek of it, carnivore's death, finds a home in her throat and she takes to it like drowning. First few frightened convulsions then it comes easily. She lopes iron stomach and all, morbidly curious (or perhaps just hungry, in a way), in the direction the scent of rot hung thickest.

A dead dog sprawls in the overgrowth in a way not even its funeral wreath of writhing vines with their royal-dark flowers could cover. Throat crushed open, tire tracks splitting hackjob-imprecise across its neck. She was sure as shit it would've held a magnificent bark had it not been laid out like this.

Her gums ache. She stumbles down the edge of the ditch, carved by God-knows-what but sitting shy as an open grave, landing on her knees on the side of the dog opposite the grey-brown-blushed entrails baked dry in the mourning sun.

Has anyone ever pet this dog? No collar to be spoken of, no beloved housepet, had to be too big and she tangled her fingers in its matted fur, back of the neck where daddy's shepherd Trigger liked to be scratched.

It's now that she weeps, not just her wounds, cathedral chest and a space in the edge of her mouth that she wishes the thing could curl up to rest in before a long journey across the rainbow bridge. Salt washes her tongue, parody of cleanliness, stings the all-too-empty space where she'd nursed her own decay.

She grips it under the lolling jaw, turning its roadrashed smashed open face towards her, heads don't survive that kind of impact, she'd seen it in a movie once. It had fangs, carnassials, and molars jutting like little mountains from a bloodied mess of bone and pulp whose skin held little form. She wipes her right hand on her faded skirt, dirt and congealed ichor, fur, a maggot falls down its folds into the dirt. Fishes up the pliers and with second-time dental precision she pluck-and-twists one of those perfect canine teeth. Not canine as in 'the big, biting, ones', canine as in they're the dog's- she picked a molar, same size same spot same pit in the jawbone as her own.

Rolled the ruddied pearl between her fingers. She could feel the hollow in her own jaw. The tooth tasted of earth and blood and something resembling sweet, screwed her eyes shut as her own skin resisted intrusion but the root took hold where she planted it, no square-peg-round-hole.

She'd filled her own damned cavity.

written + illustrated by b. abstraktme, 2025

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