

## BELL

“Hey Hot Topic!”

I looked up from my book.

“Your food’s ready.”

“Oh,” I said.

The arm warmers were indeed from Hot Topic.

I put the bookmark in place, dropped the book into my left cargo pocket, and went to the counter. I picked up my vegan sandwich, all wrapped up in paper.

“Thank you,” I said.

“Enjoy, you have a wonderful rest of your day.”

“Take care.”

I went outside into the 108° Fahrenheit clear sky sunlight and ate on the terrace that has a scenic view of a big and mostly empty parking lot and grassy hills beyond that.

The sandwich—vegan—turned out to be spicy as all hell but with a kind of pretend-cheesy underlying sauce that mitigated the spice as long as I kept eating it. A lot of crunchy veggies. I don’t know all of what was in it. I have no idea what that particular kind of sandwich was called; I hadn’t asked what a “#23” was. I was wandering through the fifth floor of a building I’d never been in before, never been asked to be in—you would be surprised how far you can get by walking like you belong everywhere and by wearing a lanyard, almost any lanyard, it hardly matters at all what’s on it. I was wandering there on the fifth floor with hunger vaguely on my mind, passing by offices and esoteric corporate visions secured away behind glass doors

and windows, and then, in among it, I saw a café on the lefthand side that had the word “vegan” somewhere on the signage, and I went in. I saw the food listed on the chalkboard menu overhead was all itemized by number, and I wanted to be surprised. I picked a number from the middle.

While I was eating, out there on the terrace, in the 108° heat that made the railing nearby me look like it was engulfed in flame, someone else opened the door to the terrace, and stuck their head out to shout to me, “I like the tail.”

I smiled, and said, “Thanks.”

Ever since my husband died, I have not had the pleasure of burying my face in belly fur and inhaling; I have not held a sheath and helped a penis slide out through it, and then helped the penis thrust in my hand as the base of it swelled amidst my fingers; I have not licked whiskers or felt a tongue lap at the back of my throat.

Before him, I had been with other animals. After him, I have only been with other humans.

I deliberately do not ever say “four legged people” or “the human animal” or anything remotely like that, even when talking with other vegans, therians, zoos. I use “animal” and “human” as terms of hatred. I desire enemies and offense at my lacks of stepping carefully. Human, animal; I am of both; fuck you all.

Before my husband entered into my life, I had been with other animals in one night stands. After my husband’s death, all of my partners have been humans.

It’s not that I’ve forsworn the smell of canine breath or the injury of gripping claws: it is not that I have forsworn animals. I would feel euphoria pouring through my blood at being pistoned, pumped, dicked, by thick aroused red dog penis again. I want, before I someday die, to bury the seeds of humankind inside of she goats, cows, mares, bitches, and have impregnation fail, but only fail after contact between the incompatible sperm and egg has happened.

I am out for blood. I have said to multiple of my human sexual partners, in no uncertain terms, “I am not your boyfriend.” I will break your heart intentionally if you flirt with me like I am not someone who has seen the beginning and the

end of love already, and the very long middle that was so very full of sticking our necks out for each other, me and him. Find out what it's like to ask for my hand when you're not even brave enough to get over your deathly crippling phone anxiety to check on our reservations out loud, to make sure that they have it booked; I will kill you before the phone does, I promise. Put simply, I suspect that I will truly love a dog again someday, and I doubt I will truly love a human ever, at least in the romantic sense, and I feel nothing but stubborn hatred for anyone who would even suggest that I should pretend contrariwise.

A human being would have to impress me. He or she or they, it, so on, would have to deeply and utterly make me know that they are someone who I want to go through the world with, for me to even begin to feel like taking their hand. It will not be done through a feat: no triple backflip will make me fall in love; that action does not correspond to that lever. The person who stuck their head out onto the terrace to compliment my tail—I had on the hot pink one—was much closer: finding any and all excuses to butt happily into the lives of strangers and enchant them; having no fear at talking to a stranger—me—who is probably thinking very violent thoughts about humans writ large—I am—and having a little chat, just for fun, just to do it.

“There’s seats inside if you’re dying under all those clothes.”

Why yes, I am dying under all these clothes, thank you for noticing.

No, I said something about loving the summer, and the person said “Ohhhhhkay” with a tone that meant “If you say so, my hurting son,” and then they went back inside, leaving me alone again.

That person was probably much closer than most to the kind of guiding energy I would require of a human partner. A one in a hundred kind of person. Probably rarer. And even still, I did not get up and go follow, did not try to get their number, in fact I hoped to not see them again in passing when I was leaving.

This is not me teasing, this is not me acting hard to get, to coax attempts to woo out of people; this is me saying to 99% or more of the population of human beings, you will waste your time talking to me, if love be your intent. I am not really worth it

anyways; there are other human beings from whom it is far easier to steal from and who hold far more things.

Maybe some aromantics can find *schadenfreude* or something like it to see the pain that we sad dumb sacks put ourselves through when we are deprived our terrible drug. How bitingly we can find ourselves sympathizing with their side while never actually learning a lesson.

Here is something about zoophilia that I am right about:

There are three groups of problems. Three problems, three sources of distress, three angles from which we feel friction. One is base reality: humans live longer than most other animals, usually, and outliving a partner—or, for some of us, serially outliving our dearest loved ones—that weighs on us mightily. One is present oppression: we can be arrested for sane love. And one is remembered oppression: even if it turns out we can be open about our zoo feelings among friends, so many of us grew up feeling like such a thing was utterly within the realm of make-believe, and so, within our core, within our guiding senses of narrative, we feel, no matter what the case actually is, that we have some kind of unspeakableness within us.

But then, pragmatically, I always want to ask myself the next question; I always imagine it as though someone with a great amount of power was asking it to me: “What would you want a program for zoos to address, as far as those three problems?”

Christ, how much are you willing to make society bend over?

“Not a single inch,” is what I imagine the average person’s response is. “I support you being a crazy perv in the comfort of your home, but anything that leads to me even remotely having to explain to my mom that your dog is actually-actually important to you?; I would sooner ghost you for all the rest of time. I will never as long as I live tell her that your dog has ever been in a vet’s office if her brother is still facing any medical bills. You, Bell, are a hypothetical good citizen. In all theory, you deserve everything. In theory.”

So we are left with empty, airy things on our offered plate. No one will ever decriminalize bestiality.

And you may notice, among the three problems that I outlined, among the three groups of issues that zoos face—the realities of biology; present oppression of queer sexualities;

remembered oppression of queer sexualities—none of these deals with the mass slaughter of animals for human food.

It is a separate issue. In everyday matters, a zoo is injured by human carnivores only as much as a sports fan is injured by seeing another human wearing a jersey of the rival team.

I am vegan not because I am under any illusion that I am helping animals. I am vegan because it offends. I am vegan because it makes people who I say it to hate me. I am vegan because I will wedge myself into the gears of anything that is running smoothly. I am vegan by hatred. Fuck you all.

Someday they will put me in a camp against my will.

I throw the paper wrapping of my sandwich over the terrace's railing, and return into the world I pretend I belong in, fake pink tail wagging behind me as I go.