

T'YXΩN

My dreams have been getting so goddamn vivid lately and I hate it. I was in the town I grew up in, up on the surface; it was nighttime, everything was lit by moonlight or street lamps, and me and my friend Lin were walking around out front of his apartment, drunk and each smoking a cigarette, and then he broke away from me and just started running towards the road; and I don't think at all that he was trying to kill himself, but he couldn't see the bus that was coming and I could, and I shouted after him "LIN!" but it was too late; I watched him and the bus hit and I watched his head get knocked off of his body in a wave of dark blood and then I snapped awake, sitting bolt upright out of the blankets that were restricting me in my sleep. And I'm really sure that when I shouted Lin in my dream I also shouted it out loud, because there is a person who was in the blankets next to me who is now giving an extremely annoyed groan and pulling the blankets away from me so that they can bunch them over their head and retreat into the corner crevasse between the carpet and the wall.

Even having just woken up, this moment feels wrong, frozen. I realize that besides feeling like I just watched my friend get killed by a bus, I also feel like while my ethereal mind was dreaming, my corporeal body has been suffocating, forgetting to take in oxygen while asleep and unsupervised. I tell my body to breathe. But it doesn't. I am frozen there, sitting upright, unsure if I have a heartbeat, sure that I don't have breath.

Thankfully, the frozen moment, however long it lasted, passes. I take in a gasp of the room's air. After I get the air into me I hold it for a moment, cherish it in a way, and then breathe it out again. With the breath taken I feel better, like I actually am awake now, and can deal with the fact that I was only dreaming when I watched my friend die. I still hate it, but, I can deal with it.

"Sorry," I say to the person who I've woken up with. I don't get a response from her—or him, I can't see much of them under the blankets, other than long blonde hair which pours out from the tangle of blankets here and there. It looks like red hair in the technical lights—here in this station, every room that someone could conceivably find the space to stand in needs to be outfitted with lights. The folk etymology is that they're called technical lights because technically you can see in the dim orange attempt at illumination that they shed. Whether that's actually why they're called that, I don't know. Take it or leave it.

I look around and gather my bearings. I am in a very tiny room; if I leaned and stretched a little bit, I could probably touch all four walls without getting up from where I'm sitting. There are no windows, one door. Looking up at where the technical light is fixed in the ceiling, I realize that above my head are railings from which to hang clothes hangers. So I seem to be in a walk-in closet. Or rather, someone and I seem to be in a walk-in closet together. On one of the wire shelves above the hangers, I spot my bundle of clothing, folded in the way that I usually fold it—I'm very particular about what I tuck into what, so that I can tell if someone's been going through my shit. At a glance it looks like nobody has.

I stand up. As I stand, I realize firstly that my joints are sore as fuck from basically sleeping on the floor last night, probably all twisted up on my side cuddling with ostensibly another stranger. When I have fully stood up and am making sure of my balance, I also feel a swirl of lubricant pool down to the bottom of my colon, and I feel a lot more confident that the person I am sharing a walk-in closet with is probably a he. Maybe a she or a they or a xi or an it who learned that I like it in the butt and had the equipment or toys to accommodate, but, if I were betting, my money would be on he.

I grab my clothes, and get dressed in the cramped space while making an effort to disturb the other person as little as possible. Long sleeved black shirt with a few holes in the sleeve cuffs; black underwear with a couple tiny holes in the ass of them; black cargo pants with the knees shredded to hell and the cuffs having seen better days; black bandanna with white floral decorative lines; the bandanna is already tied in a loop of the correct size to fit comfortably onto my head and keep my long hair out of my eyes.

I pat down my pockets. butterfly knife; toothbrush; resealable plastic bag with laundry tablets; some small but probably accurate amount of dollar bills and coins. I take the bills and change out and count them. Five dollars, eighty five cents. Yup. Nothing missing at all. I glance around the floor of the closet in hopes of spotting a whiskey bottle in among the blankets with at least a splash of something left in it, but, either I did drink all of it last night, or I have lost the bottle. It's probably for the better, because my stomach already feels like shit as is.

I open the door and step out of the closet. The creak of the closet door must be louder than I realize, because as I step out into the adjoining bedroom, there is a sheep man on the bed out here who bleats at me, his eyes screwed up into an annoyed squint. As he bleats, a woman in bed with him reaches over him and wraps an arm around him, and pulls him back down flush with the bed. He continues to let out annoyed bleats, but they are quieter as she shushes him and pats his wool.

I tiptoe out of the room, aware every single time that the floor creaks and the sheep man's next bleat at me comes out a little louder before settling again.

When I have made my way out of the bedroom, I find myself in a hall that smells overwhelmingly like cat piss. I open a door on my left, see that it's a hall closet, close it. I try the next door on my left as well, just looking for a bathroom. This time it is a bathroom, but the light is on and I see that I've walked in on someone: out on the bathroom counter are laid out the implements of someone getting ready to inject themselves with something; the 'someone' in question is visible to me in the bathroom mirror, standing in front of the counter shirtless; a sheep man with curly horns, a little square shaved into the white

wool on his left arm over a vein, flinching back from the opening door.

“Sorry,” I say, and close the door to just a crack, and stand at it sideways so I’m not trying to peek in. I ask him, “You gonna be long?”

“Yes.”

I sigh, but I’ll give him some credit that he’s honest.

“There’s another bathroom on the next floor,” he offers.

“Oh. Thanks. Have fun.” With that I close the door and continue down the hall, leaving him to his business.

I find myself in a living room. A rat man is sitting in a big cushy chair, reading a newspaper. Another rat man and a black-wooled sheep man are both conked out on the couch drooling on each other as they snore, and at their feet, a cat woman is sitting and watching the TV, which is playing without volume. I glance at the tube. Sports game from the surface is on. “Bulls are up,” she tells me.

I give an acknowledging nod and a thumbs up, look around and see a beat-up spiral staircase, and slowly make my way up it, not even touching the railing out of distrust, and taking each step slow so that if a plank seems certain to break under my feet I can backtrack.

None do break; two four-legged cats chase each other down the stairs, dashing swiftly around my ankles as I make my way up. On the next floor up, I find a white-wooled sheep man huddled up in a hill of blankets in the corner, smoking from a bong. He exhales a big cloud of smoke and then jerks his head back in a nod. I give him a tiny wave, and ask, “Bathroom?”

He looks over to a hallway beside him, and says, “Third... wait... yeah, third door on your right.”

I make my way there, and am very relieved to find a bathroom that is unoccupied.

There in the bathroom, I turn on the fan so that the muffling noise offers some semblance of privacy, and then I get to work mending myself. I turn on the sink faucet, stick my mouth under, and take long gulps until my hungover dry mouth is, if not perfectly reanimated, at least wet. I empty the contents of my pockets out onto the counter. I stopper the sink drain, drop a detergent tablet into the basin, and then turn on the water as

hot as it goes. Once there's an appreciable amount of suds available, I take off my clothes and drop them in, and let them soak in the detergent as the water continues to fill. I make use of the can in the meantime, and am amused to myself once again that without a doubt the me of last night got nailed, even though the me of the present has no memory of it, only post-hoc evidence in the form of the present feeling of the consistency of what comes out of me and a feeling of having been stretched and internally mushed around. The bathroom tissue comes back mostly clean, and with no pink traces of blood. I flush it all down.

When the sink is full, I stop the water, and go hop into the shower for myself. I borrow the bar of soap that's already in here. When I'm done, I dry off with one of the two towels hanging from the rack, and then I stick that towel into the sink with my clothes and give the whole collection a wash. When it's all been washed and rinsed thoroughly enough, I take out a dryer tablet from the plastic bag, and drop that in. Before my eyes, the water in the sink goes up into a shortlived smoke like watching dry ice evaporate, and in half a minute, I have a bathroom sink filled with dry, clean clothing. I put the towel back on the rack, dress myself again, and leave two quarters out on the counter for the use of the facilities—whether the fifty cents will actually make it to the person whose things I'm using, I'm not actually optimistic, but for my own sake I have to be able to say that I made the effort in case it comes up.

I brush my teeth, borrowing some toothpaste from a tube of it that's sitting out. I spot a nail clippers and make use of those too. I give myself a final tidy in the mirror, check my pockets to make sure I haven't left anything that I didn't mean to, and then I step out of the bathroom, down the spiral stairs, out of the door, and onto a thoroughly unfamiliar street. Glancing up at the rock ceiling overhead, it's at least clear I haven't left the station, which is a relief.

I sigh, and smile to myself a little bit. Another exit successfully made. Part of me knows I should stop doing this shit literally every day of my life, but, another part of me knows I'm still going to. What else is the point of taking a next breath, if not moving towards a next caress?

I walk down the street until arriving at the nearest dirt cheap fast food joint. There I buy coffee and an egg and cheese sandwich, and have fifteen cents left over. I sit down at a table in the corner and eat. I chew my first bite very, very thoroughly, until it's the most pre-digested, unassuming, nonvolatile, bland slur of mush that it can be, and then I swallow. I wait for a jostling pain to shoot out from inside of me, as the bite of the sandwich hits the stomach whose lining I rinsed a sizable bottle of whiskey against yesterday. Lucky enough, the first bite of the sandwich settles itself inside of me without any kicking. I work my way through the rest of the sandwich, taking my time.

I have a sip of the coffee but quickly feel nauseous about it. My stomach grumbles, protesting at the idea that I would have the gall to give it black coffee right after it had treated me so nicely by not raising a fuss over the egg and cheese. The stomach does have a point. Black coffee might not be the move right now, as much as the brain hates to waste it.

To call a human being a living organism is a misnomer. The brain enlists the throat to attack itself with liquor, and the throat burns, does its job, coughs, and then will seethe and tell the brain that it has been harmed, but will obey the brain a second time all the same if given the order to swallow once more. The stomach shoots out stinging needles and demands blandness for the sake of its own wellbeing, while at that same moment the liver looming above the stomach radiates warmth in a contrary demand for something to work on, something to process, whether that be whiskey at night or coffee in the morning. The fingers tap nervously on the tabletop while the brain has told them to do no such thing. A human being is not, in effect, a singular discrete living organism, but rather is a seared together collective of organisms who are each currently evidencing various degrees of being living.

I figure to myself that I might as well sit there in the corner of this fast food joint and wait it out, see if the disparate parts that constitute this amalgam known as "me" will come into alignment on the matter of the black coffee, if given some more time here to sit around and hash through the issue. If the management tells me to beat it I'll beat it, but if not, fuck em, my corner.

Looking through the corner window out to the intersection, although I don't think I've been to this specific part of the station before, it's really not a far cry from the parts that I do frequent. Big lights embedded in the teal rock overhead, doing an almost convincing job of imitating daylight if you don't look up. Shops and apartments stacked on top of one another all the way from the rocks at foot to the rocks above, usually about five layers thick, but it wasn't all built in one go by one company, so the heights of each floor aren't exactly homogeneous. And then of course the people. It looks like an old zombie apocalypse movie—those are actually really funny to watch nowadays, because the relatable ones are the gaunt scabby creatures who make labored steps and flail their arms, while the creatures in flattering makeup with their hair done up seem alien. People in raggy clothing shamble down the street in their various directions; they aren't truly undead, of course, but much like me, most of them have some part or another of living that's been heavily damaged that they're deciding to carry on without. Me, at least organ failure is only an inevitability, not a present state of being. All the same, the presence of some memories can be as much a death as the absence of some organs. In among the people, industrial vehicles slowly tread forward with their flashing orange lights and their warning beeps, taking up most of the height of the tunnel and about half the width of the street, though they drive down the center as most of the tunnels are one ways.

I sip on my coffee.

It sits alright.

I have a bigger sip.

I catch my own reflection in the glass. I grimace.

My name... well, the name of the amalgamate aberration in the mirror, is Trevor. In spite of the fact that I am apparently actively trying to induce liver failure in myself every night, I would all the same consider myself to have my shit together a lot better than most of the people who are down here leading a similar lifestyle. For one thing I have bathed and washed my clothes *today*, let alone in the last month. For another thing, I don't inject any drugs, ever, unless you would count reboosting my vaccinations against STD's every year, which is another

thing I do that a lot of people here don't, because it is something that one has to save up for; usually I take one of the more dangerous jobs and work it with as much overtime as I can deal with for about a week, and then feel happy in my armor that that affords me for the rest of the year to be as promiscuous as I damn well like. I'm also snipped, so, no scares of pregnancy, and the scar usually helps convince people that I actually am forward thinking enough to be vaxxed and that they wouldn't catch anything from me.

I have another drink of my coffee.

I glance out at the street again: I observe that this actually is a pretty heavy amount of foot traffic, passing through here. I turn and glance at this fast food joint's kitchen, more so observing with my ears than with my eyes: They are absolutely short staffed today. The line for food is now out the door, and it sounds like there is all of one child back there in the kitchen while one adult stands at the counter and deals with the customers.

So, here's the play. Every day, wake up and count myself lucky if I have woken up somewhere that has a private bathroom I can use: if there is a private bathroom, wash myself up as I did this morning; if there is not a private bathroom, wander the streets until arriving at a public operation with coin-operated showers, less ideal but it works. Once presentable, find work for the day flipping burgers, washing dishes, sweeping and mopping, whatever seems to have a demand as long as it's in a place that serves food; these types of jobs will always be minimum wage and will never allow overtime to happen, so all I can count on is eight hours of work which after automatically subtracted taxes leaves me with forty four dollars and eighty cents spending money, a lunch break with a free lunch from the place, and dinner to go afterwards as long as I make it quick myself before punching out and have made a really positive impression on the management while I've been there. After dinner, use the spending money to buy a bottle of whiskey and a packet of lube and hit a bar with my outside drink, and try to save enough during the night to have breakfast for tomorrow, if possible.

That's about it. It's not perfect but it's gotten me through so far.

Moving this play along for today, I slam the rest of my coffee, throw my trash in the garbage, and approach the counter.

The woman behind the register glares at me, and says in a tone like she's reprimanding a child's bad behavior, "*Back of the line.*"

All the same, I stay where I am, and offer, "Need a hand in the kitchen?"

Immediately her tone shifts—not to anything friendly, but she swats the other unmanned register, and says, "Bring up your profile."

I walk around the counter to come use the register's computer screen. It takes a minute to boot up. The woman continues taking orders, and the kid comes and sets them out on the counter as he finishes them.

When the register comes online, I punch in my citizen ID. My public information, including my work history, comes up.

The woman finishes with a customer, and then comes over to quickly assess if I am acceptable. "Jesus," she says, punching the button to go to the next page of my work history again and again, and again, and again. If she intends to get to the end of it we're going to be here for a while. "Punch in. Spare apron is in the break room."

Without commentary I do as she says, re-entering my ID for the punch-in. My name is added to the page of currently clocked-in employees, which is indeed now three people long counting me. The woman's name is Casey May, the kid's name is Leo May. Even though I know that it doesn't matter, I do smile at seeing the kid's pronouns are they them; it's legitimately becoming pervasive, and I think the world is not the worse for it.

Anyways, I break myself away from the monitor and don't dilly dally at getting the apron on, washing my hands, and stepping into the kitchen. "Saw, brah," I say, and offer the kid a handshake, hoping they take brah as gender neutral-ly as I mean it.

The kid does shake my hand.

"Trevor, he him," I mention.

The kid smiles at me bringing it up, and introduces themselves as Leo they them or it it.

“Right on. Whatcha need back here, Leo?”

They list off the things that need to be restocked on the line, and I speed off to go get all of that. Kid is professional as hell and I love it. I normally have no inclination to work the same place two days in a row, just not how I do things, but honestly I might find my way back here again if they seem like they still need the extra hand tomorrow.

For my ten minute lunch break—ten is what they have to offer me, but I know better than to actually take the full ten—I make myself a hamburger with no salt and all the vegetable fixings, medium fries with no salt, and a cola. I get it all down in four minutes and get back into the kitchen.

When the workday is over for me and I’ve made my dinner to go, I punch out and Casey counts out my payment in cash from her register. Forty four dollars and eighty cents on the nose. I thank her, shout goodbye to Leo over the noise of the kitchen, and then walk down the street until arriving at the nearest liquor store. There I buy the night’s bottle of whiskey and packet of lube, and then I find a park to sit down in and eat my dinner. I’ve made a salad inasmuch as one can make a salad at a burger joint. Basically it’s the same meal as lunch was, but more of the vegetables and all jumbled together with the burger patty split up around the veggies inside of a styrofoam to-go box. As I eat I get started on becoming shitfaced.

The parks down here still seem kinda bizarre to me. No trees and no sky. Essentially they are rock gardens with moody lighting. The park I’m drinking in right now has a big boulder at the center, surrounded by sand, and blue light shining down from above.

I lean back on my bench and stare at the rock for a while as I drink, trying to appreciate some kind of artiness that the rock is supposed to have.

By the time I’m feeling the drunkenness particles swimming around in my blood—or however it works—I still really don’t get the appeal of the moody rock whatsoever, but on the plus side at least I am shitfaced.

I think about getting up for a while. Then eventually I do get up and begin walking. I don't really have any part of the station that I need to make my way towards. I tend to hang out in region 6, one of the more eastern regions of the station, because that's where the bespoke gay bars are at, and I'm down with that and frankly it's usually easier. But there are gays outside of region 6—myself right now, for example—and again, I'm also down with women or nonbinaries, so whatever. Anyone warm. Based on the signage that I'm seeing as I walk around, I seem to have blackoutedly made my way all the way to region 29, a region way down on one of the station's southern arms.

Walking along the street and looking around, I pass by the open double doors of a bar, glance inside as I keep walking, then I backpedal and look in again as I realize that everyone inside is dressed goth. Beaming, I squeal out a happy little noise and step inside. If I'd have known this was here I would have come to region 29 sooner.

I sit down at the bar. One of the two bartenders sees me, and with a smile shouts, "Trevor!"

Well then. Apparently I did come here already. Zero memory of it though.

Anyways, I give the bartender a big friendly over the head wave, matching his energy.

Coming over, he asks, "Can I get you anything?"

I make a low key gesture of glancing down at my bottle of whiskey and giving it a little swirl.

He gives a polite chuckle, and tells me to enjoy my stay before going and tidying up some empties that people have left further down the bar.

I'm not here for long before two sheep men and a rat man all sit down to my left. "Hey sleeping beauty," says the sheep man who has sat down on the stool right next to me.

I don't *entirely* understand the context of his jab, but I piece together that all three of them were in the apartment I woke up in this morning.

I give a little smile, and admit, "Imma be honest, I *do not* remember last night pretty much at all."

The three of them laugh, and the sheep man next to me bleats, “Whaaaat, noooo,” with a huge amount of sarcasm. He then informs me, “You owe me.”

I don’t think I like the sound of that, and I’m conscious of watching for him to pull a knife as I mentally confirm which pocket my own butterfly knife is in. He’s acting friendly but that can often be a front. “What do I owe you?” I ask.

“Last night you were gonna join in with me and my wife, but then your gay drunk ass saw how hung Lloyd is and you *immediately* started shyly flirting with him instead.”

I snicker, shake my head, and take a drink. After I exhale a sour cloud of whiskey breath, I admit, “Yeah that sounds about right. Sorry not sorry.”

“To be honest it was really cute,” he tells me. “You were seriously acting like you had a secret embarrassing crush on him. Traci and I had a fun enough time just watching you try to get with him.”

I give an agreeable shrug, not really being able to add much since, again, I do not remember any of this. I still don’t even really know how I ended up here from region 6.

“You do still owe me though,” he reminds me.

Hell yeah: makes the rest of my night way easier if somebody is not only already interested but is actually insisting on it. “Trevor,” I offer, extending over my hand.

“Shaun,” he says, and gives my hand a shake. He also introduces the others, and I do piece back where I saw each of them this morning. Shaun was the one in bed who I woke up when tiptoeing out of the walk-in closet, and I now presume the human woman with him was his wife Traci. The other sheep here at the bar is Shaun’s brother, the one who was shooting up in the bathroom—I can still see the square of shaved wool on his arm, though it’s not too noticeable in this bar’s dim lighting. The rat man is the one who was conked out on the couch.

We all chat. Shaun is into blacksmithing which is fucking rad and he tells me a ton about it as I continue to sip on my whiskey. Apparently there’s a workshop in this region which he has a membership at. At some point I ask if we can go there, but he tells me he does not want to handle searing hot sharp metal while drunk which I tell him is lame but also not unfair. From a

coat pocket he takes out some metal trinkets he's made to show off. One is a twisty little bell-shaped cage kind of a deal, the other one looks kind of like a throwing star but isn't sharp, it just has fancy decorative rounded edges. He can get inside of my asshole at any point he likes to. As he's going on about some technical detail of how he did the metalworking on the throwing star I give him a kiss. He perks up into a smile and then kisses me back, and we make out at the bar for a little bit before he says, "Maybe back to my place?"

It feels a little early for me to be moving towards putting a cap on the night, but I *am* horny as shit to rub bits with this guy and feel his wool against my horny drunk tingly skin, so I tell him yeah getting back to his place sounds good. I take another gulp of my whiskey, take his hand, and walk along as he leads the way back to his place—his brother and his friend say they'll catch up later.

As we're walking he whispers in my ear, "Hey Trevor, what did the sheep say to the human?"

I try to think of an answer, but nothing jumps into my head so I ask him what did the sheep say to the human.

He makes a sex noise.

I laugh *way* too hard at this but I legitimately cannot help it, and he actually has to hold me upright so I don't fall over on the ground laughing in the middle of the street. When I'm over it enough to keep walking at least—I still have the giggles—he gives me a kiss on the cheek and then keeps walking me back to his apartment. When we get there, Traci and the sheep man who had the bong are intensely focused on a video game—they seem to be versus each other, but I'm not too familiar. The cat woman is standing in front of an open fridge trying to decide what to eat—she glances up at me and Shaun, and mentions, "Bulls won." I give her a thumbs up.

Shaun brings us over to stand by the couch, and says, "Traci, look who—"

"Sec," she interrupts, and mashes the buttons in a way that's so fast and specific that it seems like she's making it up. She leans forward, and after a few more seconds, she and the sheep man both throw their controllers. Traci shoots her hands up in

the air victoriously, sheep man grabs his bong from beside the couch and does a big hit.

Now noticing me, Traci says, "Oh! Hi you!"

"Heyyy," I say with a big dumb smile, and rub my thumb over her husband's hand which I have been needily holding ever since we left the bar.

"Lloyd says we missed out," she informs me.

I make a gay happy noise.

Shaun lets go of my hand and moves behind me, and starts rubbing my shoulders erotically and I melt while standing there in the still-cat-piss-smelling living room. As Shaun rubs my shoulders, he informs Traci, "We missed out on Trevor *last night*, but he has agreed to amend this today."

"First on the bed gets the handcuffs!" Traci shouts, and then throws a couch cushion at Shaun's face and darts down the hall.

He shouts and chases after her.

I take another gulp of whiskey, stand there for a few seconds as it ripples through me and settles, and then jauntily walk down the hall after the two.

On the bed, Traci and Shaun are play-wrestling for the handcuffs—Traci has them behind her back, and quickly clicks them on while fending off Shaun with her feet. Both of them are already shirtless.

I set my whiskey down on a desk in here and come join them on the bed. We all have a fun snuggly time undressing each other, and I find myself caressing my body against Shaun's as much as I possibly can: he is so soft and lovely. Traci is a really lovely kisser and she is extremely pretty. Rubbing and playing happily with both of them there on the bed, I figure I am probably the luckiest drunk motherfucker in this entire station right now, and that is *not* a list without competition. When we've ramped up to actually taking care of business, I end up being in the middle and I would be happy for this to last literally for the rest of my life, but we do all eventually finish, getting our various fluids in or around each other's parts.

We all snuggle after. I am split on whether I want to fall asleep right now or get up and have another sip of my drink and try to angle towards a round two with one or both of them.

Eventually though they settle the question for me as they both get up to go have a cigarette outside.

Well, “outside,” but. Out on the doorsteps. I grab my whiskey and follow after them, having a few sips along the way. I don’t smoke but I like these people a lot and I want to hang out.

As we’re hanging out out there, standing around and shooting the shit, I suddenly lose all focus on what Shaun is saying as I see someone walking up the other side of the street. A man with long black hair similar to mine, and a tattoo on his face of a snake that comes up from the neck, bends at his right cheekbone, slithers over the bridge of his nose, and then ends at his left cheekbone with its tongue flicking out. I blink hard, and I try to disbelieve that this is my friend Lin, because I can’t imagine what in the hell he’d be doing walking around down in a station like this when he was always doing so well with his life up on the surface. But sure as shit, it’s my old best friend walking around down here. He has a black eye, which means I very well might have a son of a bitch to stab if he knows who gave the shiner to him. I haven’t been a murderer up until this point in my life—I only do tricks with the butterfly knife to impress people—but Lin is a person I would start for.

I leave Shaun and Traci’s doorstep and make my way across the street, shouting and waving, “LIN!”

Lin looks in my direction. When I get to him he asks, “Holy shit, *Trevor*? How the fuck you been, dog?”

“Shit man, better than any fucking person has a right to be down here.”

I step forward and hug him, which, after I’ve already committed to it I do realize is a lot, we were never huggers back when I knew him before. But he takes it in stride, hugging me back.

I ask him, “What are you doing down here?”

He huffs out a sigh. “Heard Tommy got hurt on the job, been trying to find him and bring him back up to stay at my place for a while.”

“Oh, shit.”

He nods.

“What happened with the black eye?” I ask.

“Fuck, is it that noticeable?”

“Bro I saw it from across the street.”

“Fuuuuuuuuuuuuck that’s unfortunate.”

“What happened?” I ask again.

He glances off to the side and smiles a tiny bit as he says, “I was talkin out the side of my neck.”

“Oh god what did you say?”

“Some kind of emu lady was hitting on me last night.”

“Sure.” I have partaken. It wasn’t not fun for me, but, I acknowledge it isn’t for everyone.

“And—oh you wouldn’t know, me and Janie got hitched.” He holds up his hand which has a gold ring on it.

I gasp. “Congrats, man! You two are awesome. Happy for you.”

“Yeah! But uh, the emu lady was hitting on me, even though I told her I’m married—”

“That doesn’t mean quite the same thing down here,” I tell him.

“Yeah, I got that impression. But anyways, I tell her I am *not* interested, many, many times, but she’s not letting it go. So. I make a *really* loud point of ordering some chicken wings.”

I snort laugh, and say, “You did *not*.”

He giggles a little to himself, and nods, and says, “I did. And so she bamfs, thank god. But then I don’t know if he knew her or just overheard part of it, but a dog dude comes over and just fucking *pounds* his fist into my fucking face. And then he left, before I could really get my bearings again. So. Yeah. My fault. I’m a dumbass.”

“I fuckin missed you man,” I tell him. “Tell me, *specifically*, what the dog man looked like.”

“Cmon, man.”

“I will straight up commit murder with a knife.”

“No, don’t. I told you, I deserved it.”

I consider, and then offer, “Assault with a lame flabby punch?”

“Oh, sure! I think he was more of—” he begins, and then stops talking and glances around. I realize he is double checking the dog man doesn’t actually happen to be present to overhear this. I giggle to myself. Not seeing any dog men around, Lin continues, “I think he was more of a mutt than any specific

breed, *I* didn't recognize him as anything, anyways. Longish brown fur, tall pointed ears."

"German shepherd?"

"Ehh coloration wasn't right, it was more of a uniform light brown than a brown and black."

"Hm. Anyways."

"Yeah. Besides that, I don't know. But if you see him leave him alone man."

I take a sip of my whiskey, and offer the bottle to Lin—he is the first person I have ever made this offer to.

He does accept the bottle, has a sip, and then coughs and wheezes and looks down at the bottle. "Jesus dude. Are you *actually* drinking gasoline?"

"Hundred and ten proof," I say smugly.

He gags, and hands the bottle back.

I take it, have another sip, and then ask, "So what are you up to now?"

"Pretty much barhopping looking for Tommy."

I gasp. "Onward!" I say, and then Lin reaches out and on reflex I reciprocate our handshake. I'm surprised I still have the muscle memory for all of the steps.

Lin leads the way, and at the bar he buys me a beer, and for the rest of the night from there forward I pretty much don't remember anything else.

Usually with my dreams I actually do end up remembering them—like part of my brain wakes up sooner than it's supposed to, and my memory is recording while the last parts of the dream are still playing.

I dream that I am in an alleyway lit only by the technical lights, chewing on an invisible granola bar. I can feel the crunch of it every time I bite down. It feels like chewing on a regular granola bar, I just know that it's invisible. Sometimes it disappears for a bite and I chomp my teeth together uncomfortably hard, but then it comes back and I keep chewing again. Then without ceremony, a man steps in front of me and shoots me in the forehead with a pistol causing a bang and a bright flash.

I snap awake, screaming. The snake lady who was sleeping beside me also snaps awake at me screaming, and she bites me in the neck.

I feel all of my muscles lock up, and involuntarily, I slowly recline back onto the ground: I gather my bearings and see that we were sleeping on a pile of garbage in a dim alley. There is *almost* relief in the fact that my lung muscles are as paralyzed as the rest of my body, and so I can't breathe or smell right now.

The snake lady gasps, and scoots backwards away from me, fingertips anxiously pressed to her mouth. "I am *so* sorry!" she says, and then reaches out a hand towards me, but then pulls it back and puts it back to her mouth. "Ohhh my god, I never do that, I am so sorry, I didn't mean to!"

Not that I know her, but I actually don't doubt that she's telling me the truth. That said, I am not much comfort anyways, as I cannot breathe or move my tongue or lips or give a thumbs up, so my capacity to tell her not to worry about it is unfortunately limited.

"You'll be fine in a minute, I promise," she tells me.

Again, I believe her. It's not my speed but there's actually a market for people getting bit intentionally for the high of it. The venom causes full body paralysis for about a minute, and then for some people there's a deep euphoria afterwards. I guess we'll see how I take it.

The snake lady glances around, reaches over me to grab her purse from our garbage pile, and then without any other commentary gets up and walks quickly out of the alleyway.

I hope that last-night me had fun with her, because it certainly did lead to one hell of a way to wake up. I don't think I'll be needing coffee today.

When I'm finally able to breathe again, the smell is about as bad as I figured. I have to have been *obliterated* last night for the smell of garbage juice to be an acceptable perfume to sleep in.

When I can crudely move my arms and legs, I jerkily slap my way forward off of the garbage pile, and have a seat sitting back against the alley's opposite wall. I take in deep breaths. I realize how much my heart is racing and it's really uncomfortable. Probably to be expected, but still, uncomfortable. I don't want to

die. Sometimes—sometimes like now—it feels like I know a heart attack is coming. I am not a healthy, well maintained body—I beat up my insides every day of my life and then the different parts of my body have to work together to fight to correct the consequences of their earlier bad decisions, and someday some part of my body will give up that fight.

I guess it's not today though. As I sit there breathing, my heart rate does settle down a little. My lips are still tingly, and I try to say something to myself and am unsurprised when my words come out a slurred mess. I look down at my hands, wiggle my fingers, make fists a couple of times. She told the truth: the paralysis passes, and soon enough I'm just a garbage juice scented dude sitting in an alley. No rush of euphoria from the venom comes to me. Which is honestly good. I don't need to add "try to get bit by a snake" to my daily agenda.

I pat myself down, checking my pockets for everything. Butterfly knife, tooth brush, laundry tablets, all present where they should be. I feel something in one of my cargo pockets that *cannot* be what it feels like, because it feels like a wad of cash. I pull open the pocket, reach in, and take out the wad of cash which it does indeed turn out to be. My eyes go wide as I thumb through the bills: five hundred dollars in twenties.

I stuff the bills back into my pocket before anyone can see them—not that I have any company here in the garbage alley, but that is a *lot* of money to be handling out in the open. And I'm not completely sure of what to make of the fact that I have it. I don't think I would have gotten it by dishonest means, but the fact that I don't know where it came from at all still makes it concerning.

But as I think about the fact that I basically get to take a vacation from the eight hour grind for a while, a weight feels like it's lifted off of me. It's gonna be a *really* good week or two.

I look around for my bandanna. Eventually I do spot it, tied up around a cowboy hat which is sitting on the garbage pile. I say to myself Jesus fucking Christ, and then beam at the way the words came out so articulately. Once the paralysis goes away it really does go away, no lingering effects at all, it seems.

I pick the cowboy hat up off of the garbage pile, take my bandanna off of it, put on the bandanna, and set the hat back down. I leave the alley and go find a place to shower.

At the nearest shower house, I use the change machine—it accepts a twenty, fortunately—and after feeding some coins into the machines for the soap, the shampoo, and then the shower itself, I do an even more thorough job than usual of cleaning myself. I wash my clothes in the farthest sink down. I never feel more homeless than when I have to wash my clothes in the public sinks, standing there naked while I do so, but on the other hand fuck everyone, I am not going to go about the rest of my day literally smelling like garbage. Luckily I'm done with the process quickly enough that only a handful of people happened to come within sight of me. I give my teeth a courtesy brush even though I don't have toothpaste on hand to do the job entirely properly. Always seemed like a weird omission that these places vend soap and shampoo but not toothpaste, but whatever. All in all, I have put myself together acceptably well by the time I step out onto the street again.

I glance both ways, spot a diner, and go in and splurge on an omelet with my newfound mysterious wad of money. I almost order a long island iced tea, but I catch myself.

Here's the thing, is I've come into money before down here. It's easy to get stupid with it. Last time I had two hundred to my name it was gone that night, between getting fancy drinks and cocaine. With five hundred here, I'm sitting on a very good thing, but to be honest I'd pass on the very good night if it means a very needed break. So instead of the long island iced tea, I leave the diner after paying, then step into a liquor store, and get the usual bottle of whiskey and packet of lube.

I go sit in a rock park, fail to appreciate the moody magenta rock, and sip my whiskey. When I'm good and morning drunk, I step out onto the street and begin wandering, feeling a friendly amicability towards really just the world right now, and everyone else walking around in it.

At some point a short ways into my walk as I'm feeling like getting to know someone, I happen to pass by a sports bar. My usual repulsion towards sports bars tells me that I probably never would have entered the place before ever in my entire life,

which means I probably won't encounter anyone I know, which seems ideal right about now because I am having a really strange day and I don't want to tell anyone about it.

I step inside. Glancing around, I don't recognize anyone, and nobody seems to recognize me. It seems surprisingly busy for this hour of the morning, but I gather that some important game is on. Again, not my world, but whatever.

"Getcha anything, boss?" the barkeeper asks.

I hold up my whiskey.

I don't think he likes it, but he doesn't make a stink of it. He just turns his head back down to the puzzle he's doing from the newspaper, leaning back against a post behind the bar.

At the far end of the bar, I see a glass of beer rise and fall with nobody holding it. I screw my eyes shut, open them, and look harder. The glass is now sitting there on the bar, its contents waving back and forth as though it was only just set down.

You know, fuck it. I go sit down at the barstool beside the drink.

"Saw, brah?" I ask.

Only silence greets me. I glance down at the drink, which has now basically settled—sometimes this deep down there are tremors that could easily account for a slightly wiggly glass of beer. Shit, that and I'm probably hallucinating from the snake venom from earlier.

I take a swig from my whiskey, exhale, and say, "Ghost or just a glass of beer, you're a friend of mine dude."

A squeaky laugh comes from the air beside me, and I laugh a little back at how unintentional of a laugh it sounded like.

"That's such a friendly thing to say to someone invisible," the voice tells me. "Usually it's all 'ah what the hell!' and 'get out of the lady's room, perv!'"

I snort laugh at that, not having expected to be hearing invisible man humor today. The voice does *sound* masculine at least, if a bit on the soprano side.

"Trevor, he him," I offer, and hold my hand over.

"Oh," he says.

After a brief pause, I sense that my handshake is unwanted—no big deal—and I retract my hand.

After I do, the voice stammers out, "Sorry, uh, just. Anyways, hi. Rex. He him."

"Pleasure, Rex," I say, and nod. I have another sip of my whiskey.

"*Right*, you cannot see I was holding my hand out to shake when I said that."

"Are you always invisible?" I ask.

"Not strictly. Put this on."

With that I hear a weighty tap on the bar counter, and look down to see a black ring. I pick it up. It's heavier than I expected, almost like it was a part that fell off of one of the machines instead of a piece of jewelry. I slip the ring on.

Beside me I can now see a dog man, wagging his tail and smiling at me.

At first I have extremely mixed reactions, because on the one hand he is adorable, but on the other hand I've been on the lookout for a dog man who punched my friend. This dog man here with me is the wrong breed though, some kind of long furred, white with patches of other color.

"Well ain't you handsome," I tell him, and he wags harder. "What breed?" I ask.

"Australian shepherd. You?"

It takes me a second to realize that what he's saying is a dig on me for asking his breed, but taking it in stride I do answer him. "Oh, Chinese. I will say for an Australian shepherd you sure don't have the accent."

"I can summon it if needed," he says. Watching him talk, I realize that it's not strictly that his voice is high pitched, but more the tone of a happy, excited dog.

"You need the ring back just ask, by the way."

"Nah," he says, and then he snaps his fingers and the ring is back on his finger, and off of mine. Within a second I'm again sitting next to what would look like an empty barstool.

"You watching the game?" I ask.

"No, not at all. Just needed a breather, thought I'd grab a beer somewhere."

"You wanna see me do tricks like you do?" I ask.

"Ooh. Please, go ahead."

“Ay, Barman!” I call to the bartender. He looks up and raises an eyebrow at me. “Knife trick!” I tell him.

He raises his eyebrows harder, and then just says, “No liability. Don’t hurt yourself,” and turns back down to his newspaper.

Nine times out of ten they *do not* care, but it is usually for the best to declare it, instead of waving a surprise knife around.

“Stay away,” I mention to Rex, and wave a hand over in his direction, feeling my hand brushing against dog hair.

He giggles, and insists that he’s away, he won’t get cut.

I take out my butterfly knife, give it a few safe basic moves to make sure it’s not sticking or anything like that, and then I go into a routine that apparently looks *very* impressive and dangerous, because it’s gotten me in the door with people more times than I can remember, though to tell the truth it is the same routine I’ve done every night and every day since I’ve been down here, and the muscle memory is so tight that it is literally impossible for me to mess this trick up. I actually find it easier when tipsy. Sober I realize I’m about to overthink it, and I throw the knife away from myself before I do overthink it and cut myself.

Here with Rex though, the trick is of course going off without a hitch. The final move is to toss the knife up in a ballerina spin, where it seems to hang in the air for a moment, and then reach up and snatch it out of the air and flip the knife closed. I know well before I do it that what I’m about to do is really dumb, but I already made up my mind to do it while my mind was wandering during the routine course of the trick. As the knife is spinning in the air, I add a snap to the routine, clicking my fingers together like he did when he called the ring back to himself. *Then* I catch the knife, flip it closed, and count myself lucky that deviating from wrought memory didn’t just cost me a finger.

“Wow,” he says, which is a relief to hear because I couldn’t see him during the entire routine. Hard to gauge the reaction of an invisible guy.

I put the knife away, and have another swig of whiskey. He has another sip of his beer, or at least, I see the glass levitate and then go back down to the bar.

"You want the ring back, or is it more fun to you if I'm invisible?" he asks in a little bit of a tongue-sticking-out-y-face tone.

I point over towards him with the index finger of my whiskey hand, lean in closer with him, and say, "Can I actually be candid about something?"

"Heh, I guess. If it's too terrible I'll just like, leave, so, yknow."

"When dogs have sex they get stuck ass to ass afterwards."

Amused, he answers, "That is a fact of the world, yes. I am so here for this question please go on."

"Does your... junk... situation... do that too? Why does *theirs* do that?"

"Bro you never seen dog cock?"

"No! There are like almost zero dog men down here, I was always curious!"

With another loud tap, I see that he's put the ring on the bar again. I back off—I realize I have been leaning on him—and I grab the ring and put it on. He sips his beer with a little smile and a sideways glance towards me. "Wanna go back to my place and see?" he offers.

"Oh my god yes," I tell him. "Chug your beer let's go."

He actually does, which I didn't expect. As he chugs I notice his wardrobe isn't wildly dissimilar to mine: he is also a fan of black. Black button up shirt, black cargo pants, black bandanna but he wears his as an accessory around his neck that goes down as a triangle over the top of his chest. His long light hair really is beautiful. I wonder if he combs it or if it's just like that.

When he's finished chugging, I mention, "So eager to get down to it."

"Yeah it's such a weird departure for me, because as a dog I normally haaate humping things," he says with coy sarcasm. I want to give him a handjob right there at the bar but I think the bartender is already fairly grumpy with me, so even if Rex is invisible to all but the person wearing the ring, we'd probably be better off actually just getting back to his place.

"You lead the way," I tell him, and then take his hand and take a swig of my whiskey.

As we walk, I ask “Why are you invisible” even though I’m pretty sure I know the gist of it.

“Treasure hunter. Down spelunking in a deep system underneath Region 22—son of a bitch of a system, all ups and downs—I found a bottle of gem wine and a ring. I’d already met my minimum of treasure to sell off from that trip, so I thought I’d roll the dice on drinking the wine for myself.”

So yeah, about what I figured. I stop in my tracks, still holding his hand, and he comes to a surprised halt along with me. I drag us over to a little alley, press his back against the brick wall, and plant a deep kiss on his dog man mouth. He lets out a moan—I know it’s not a big deal but I love the little vibrating feeling of someone moaning, in this case the little vibrations of the mmm as I press my lips against his wet fuzzy muzzle. After a moment he kisses me back, muzzle effortlessly opening bigger than any human mouth ever could, and he sticks his tongue into my mouth. Our tongues slide over each other like competing tentacles, his tongue trying to explore every bit of my mouth from the lips to the back of my throat, and my tongue trying lick his tongue wherever it is that it goes to.

Eventually we step back from each other and catch our breath a little. I give him a smile. “Anyways. You were bringing us somewhere. Your place? Actually is this alley fine?”

“Heh. My place is like another block. And it smells better.”

“*That* is fair, you lead the way,” I tell him, and have another swig of my whiskey.

We keep down the street and then head around a corner, and find ourselves on a stretch of this region where it’s not all stacked shops and apartments, but actual bespoke houses, with little sand lawns in between them. I actually find myself a little thrown by the spaciousness of it all.

He leads the way up to a home that has a pink exterior. I tell him that pink is pretty gay, he tells me that I’m pretty gay, I tell him he’s not wrong, and then he places his hand on a scanner beside the door. After a moment the deadbolt shunks open, and he holds the door open for me. I skip into the living room, and take a big deep sniff of the air. It smells like scented candles, pumpkin-y and cinnamon-y. All along the walls, above the couches and chairs and all that, are shelves on which rest

crystals. There have to be a hundred in the living room alone. I wander away from Rex for a sec to look at some of them. Pyramids, spheres on little stands, cubes, prisms, shapes I wouldn't quite know the names of, and a good number that are more chaotic fractal kind of things.

"What does this one do?" I ask, looking at a sphere of some kind of very pure blue stone.

"Makes my living room look pretty," he answers, and sidles up beside me and licks the side of my face. I snort in a little laugh, and turn and kiss him on the side of the fluffy neck.

He grabs each of my wrists, and brings my hands—and my whiskey bottle—up to his eye level, turning them around and around and examining them. "Yeah your nails are good," he says.

I am internally glad for whenever the last time I used a nail clipper was, because apparently it had to have been fairly recently but I'm blanking on when exactly I would have had the chance. I take a swig of my whiskey.

"Are you going to be okay?" he asks. "Do you need food? Can I make you food?"

I take another tiny sip of whiskey, and then admit, "Food would be good but let's do that after."

He gauges me for a second, and then nods, and says, "If that's what you want."

With that, he takes my hand again, and leads me through the living room to a flight of stairs leading upwards. We go up to the second floor, down a hall a ways, and he opens the door into what I presume is a guest bedroom, though it's very well decorated, with paintings of farm life—four legged farm animals mostly, although one painting is a barn, and there is another wide painting of a field of wheat.

"Are you from the surface?" I ask as I flop backwards onto the bed and start taking my pants off.

"Yeah," he says with a smile at me. He begins unbuttoning his shirt. "Paintings of the farm I grew up on, actually. Good read on your part."

In another moment we're both naked and making out on the bed, and I get to stroke his beautiful long coat from his shoulders all the way down his back and down to his butt. I

eventually break it off and look at his package, which he is happy to accommodate, sitting sort of cross-legged leaned back, propped up back on his hands.

Balls, very familiar, they are basically the same as how human balls hang. Sheath, also familiar: a lot of beast men's penises don't hang out all the time like a human's; instead what's on the outside is like a sort of elongated pouch of skin that the flaccid penis rests inside of, with an opening at the end, comparable to how a retractable pen works, or a tube of lipstick. Speaking of lipstick: there is the tip of a somewhat aroused red shiny penis sticking out of his sheath, which is, in my past experience with beast men, also also a familiar sight. But I do need to find out if there's more here that I need to keep in mind. A lot of beast men and women are *generally* what you would expect, but *do* have their own particulars that you should really know about before getting all gung ho about it and assuming everything will work out.

"Sexy boy," I tell him, and he wags. "How do I... I don't want to say 'use it,' but, for lack of access to more sober vocabulary, how do I use it?"

"Heh. I mean it sounded like you're into being on bottom—"

"I *really* am, thank you for picking up on that."

His junk does a little excited twitch, and he says, "If you assume the position I'll kinda do the rest."

I feel a moment of dizziness, and then when it passes, I tell him, "That sounds awesome but since this is new I wanna just... see it, first. Maybe a handjob?"

Again he wags, and nods. He gets up onto his hands and knees, and crawls forwards and nuzzles against me. "Go for it," he says.

Weird-ass position to assume for a handjob, but I'm not doubting that he knows what he needs. I hang out on my knees beside him, and fish out the packet of lube from my pocket. The packet has two sections to it: one containing powdered lube, and the other containing a liquid solution that mixes with the powder to produce the most effective slimy lubricant in the entire world. I twist the packet to break the seal between the two sections, squish the packet around for a sec to make sure it's all mixed, and then rip open the top. I press the lube out onto my

hand, rub it around for coverage around my palm and fingers, and then reach under him and touch his sheath.

He pretty much takes over from there. He pushes his temple down against my shoulder, grabs my hand in both of his, and more or less starts using my hand as a sex toy, humping my hand like a dog-dog would hump another dog-dog's ass. Right away his cock pokes all the way out of his sheath, and its full length begins sliding back and forth against my hand. I'm not in a position to be able to see it, but for a few seconds, it feels pretty much the same as what most sheathed red-penis-having beast men are working with. Suddenly though—and I wish I could look—I feel his penis growing outwards. Every thrust, the base of it swells bigger and bigger, while the rest of the shaft stays the same size and continues to do its business. I wonder if it's going to *stop*, because the base part keeps growing, and growing, and growing. I think it's finally stopped when it feels like something the size of a tennis ball, maybe even bigger, and my entire hand is wrapped around it.

He starts letting out adorable “ah!”s as he keeps humping, making my hand slide back and forth around the slimy bulb. I feel his warm loads hitting the side of my body. He keeps going for a pretty good while, but eventually settles to a stop, continuing to hold my hand on his junk. The bulb pulses inside of my grasp, about a beat per second. He's stopped with his cute noises, and he's just quiet, holding my hand really firmly on his crotch. I let him have the afterglow, let him have my hand for as long as he needs, let him have his own internal euphoric state that he's having without interrupting.

After maybe a minute, he lets go of my hand and flops over onto his side, facing me, big smile on his dog face, tail wagging, cock very much still out of its sheath.

And goddamn, I haven't seen anything quite like it before. At the base of the red slimy shaft is this enormous bulb—the part that was growing. It's all veiny and throbbing.

I ask him, “Is that what goes *in* the other dog? That's what makes them get stuck ass to ass?”

“Yeah,” he tells me, and then pets my head, and his tail thumps a few times behind him. Mine would too if I had one.

“How long does it last?” I ask.

“Depends, but, for me usually forty minutes—”

“Forty minutes?!”

He snickers. “Yeah. But that’s if I’m actually tied in someone. Since I’m not it’ll probably be less—”

“Can I suck it?”

I see a shiver go up his body. “I already finished so I can’t promise to be like, the *most* into it, but yeah just be gentle.”

It’s a fair warning on his part, although again, that much is territory I am familiar with already. If it’s red skin that comes out of a sheath, it’s going to tend to be pretty delicate, and it’s important to be gentle with it in the interest of not hurting anyone.

I take the end into my mouth, and we pass the time this way as his bulb goes back down and I get to really familiarize myself with this new corner in the realm of genitalia. Sometimes I stop sucking head-on to approach it from the side and slob on the bulb directly. As promised, he seems agreeable to all of it but more like he’s just getting a casual massage than anything else. He keeps a hand on my shoulder as I go, petting and stroking me.

Eventually, the bulb goes down enough that it no longer holds the cock outside of its sheath, and the red member slips out of my mouth and retracts back into Rex.

“Round two?” I ask.

“Oh my *god*, give me *one* second maybe,” he says with faux exasperation.

I lick his balls.

“Gay,” he tells me.

I give them a longer, more meticulous lick, and suck some of the scrotum into my mouth for a second and then let it fall back out.

He shivers, and then answers, “No but really, it’s usually like, one per night for me. Sorry.”

I snuggle up against him and fall asleep.

I have a dream that I’m an eagle, soaring above the surface in the daytime, looking down at the green flora-claimed landscape that glimmers in the sunlight. The wind is cool on my breast and warm on my back. Without transition, I’m a rabbit in a dirt tunnel dug into the ground, and a wolf is pushing his muzzle

into the mouth of the tunnel: soon he breaks through, and chomps down on me and kills me.

I awake with a scream, snapping upright. I look around, and recognize the room with all the farm paintings—I think it's the first time in a while that I've woken up in a room that I actually fully remember going into. Woken up by my scream, another person on the bed stirs—Rex. I remember him too. He had apparently fallen asleep right on the edge of the bed, facing away from me. Not a cuddler I guess. As he sits up, his sleepy face gives me a concerned look.

I wipe drool off of my cheek. He does the same, running a hand under his jowls to get his.

"Nightmares," I tell him. "Sorry."

He scooches towards me, makes himself higher than me on the bed, and gives me a hug, cradling my head in his arms, pressing my face against his soft fluffy chest. I let him cocoon me, happy to exist in this warm pocket that smells like the fur of a caring stranger.

After a while, he asks, "You want breakfast?"

I nod, and say, "Yeah. Please."

"I think it's like 5 PM," he mentions.

Well that doesn't seem quite right. "When did we go to bed?"

"Like, eleven. AM."

"Oh." I did get a very early start on yesterday. So yeah, I guess that tracks.

"I can make breakfast food or dinner food," he tells me.

"Chicken?" I ask.

"No," he tells me. "It's... look, I told you I grew up on a farm, and there's a reason I'm not on a farm anymore. I really just, can't, with taking life like that."

"I just meant because it would be good for the whole hangover situation—"

"No I know, it's just, a sensitive topic for me."

"Okay," I tell him, and then I snuggle my way up him until we're lying on our sides face to face. I give him a peck on the front of the muzzle. He gives me a polite lick on my lips. "I didn't mean anything by it," I tell him again.

"I know," he says again.

"Eggs?" I ask.

“I have eggs,” he confirms.

“Cheesy eggs?” I ask.

“It’s fake cheese,” he admits. “Not for lack of wanting real cheese, on the surface I know ethical sources, but it’s difficult to get that shipped down here.”

“Oh I’m sure I haven’t had real cheese once since I’ve been down here. Eggs and fake cheese sounds perfect.”

He leans in for another kiss, and I kiss him back, and we do that for a while before he eventually slinks away from me and prances out of the room, naked, to go start on the food.

I gather up my clothes. Checking all of my pockets, I still have all of my shit, including hundreds of dollars in mostly twenties. I also still have the dog man’s black ring on my finger. I fidget with it, twisting it back and forth over my finger. Lying on the floor with the cap screwed on is my whiskey bottle with half of the whiskey left. I really did conk out early. I pick the bottle up, open it, and take a gulp. After wheezing and coughing at the high-proof liquor hitting my throat, I muscle down a second sip and then screw the cap back on.

Dressed, I step out of the room and begin down the hall towards the stairs. As I shamble across the carpet of this very nice home, I kinda don’t know what to do with myself. Normally I would wake up in the morning and get back out onto the street as soon as possible. This time it’s... not morning, I guess. And I have also been promised food. And I still feel I have unfinished business with Rex’s dog man junk. It feels like I’m going against the natural order of things to be hanging around after being up and ready to go. But, when I get to the bottom of the stairs, I go shamble around looking for the kitchen instead of escaping out of the front door.

On a side table next to a couch, I see a stack of unopened mail. I stoop over, and although I don’t touch, I peek at the address. Besides having the address of this house, these letters are addressed to Trevor Rex. Hungover—and very slightly drunk—I have to squint at it for a pretty good while, trying to get the blurry words to make sense. I can’t conceive of why these would be addressed to me, Trevor, if I just got here. When I realize *his* name is Trevor too, I shake my head rapidly back and forth, trying to get my stupid self a little more awake.

I wander into the kitchen and lean against the doorway as the Australian shepherd man is getting all of his ingredients out onto the counter. "Is your name T-Rex?" I ask.

He stops, freezes, and then deflates with a sigh. "Yeah my name is T-Rex."

"That sounds amazing," I tell him honestly.

He shrugs. "It's a little grandiose." He gets back to preparing to cook, flourishing a pan and setting it on a stove, then setting the burner and turning back towards the ingredients. He has a pink apron on and nothing else. His butt is cute.

"Well, Trevor Rex, if we ever need to differentiate between ourselves, I'm Trevor Wong. And if you need a hand, I mostly work in kitchens."

He does look around, but then says, "I think it's all ready, actually, but thank you. If you want to wait in the dining room it's just down the hall, I'll bring this out when it's done. Shouldn't be long."

I raise my whiskey bottle and tip it towards him in a salute, then saunter off down the hall he pointed to. I have a sip as I go. The dining room is actually cozier than I expected—a little round table with four chairs around it, light fixture overhead, paintings and shelving around the walls, the paintings mostly of natural landscapes, the shelving mostly occupied by plush woodland critters and wood carvings of dogs. Another hall leads out at the opposite end of the small room.

Feeling nature calling, I actually do sneak my way down the farther hall, and try a couple doors before one does turn out to be a bathroom.

I wash my hands after. When I come back out and get back to the dining room, there is a steaming platter of eggs at the center of the table, a plate of tortillas beside it, a couple glasses of orange juice, and a long haired dog man sitting at one of the chairs, chin planted on his hand like The Thinker, wagging at my arrival. He has taken off the apron.

I slide a chair over to be right beside his, and sit down.

He turns and gives the side of my face a lick, then says, "I was thinking of going a breakfast burritos route with this, but I'm not really great at folding them. Everything comes out of the

bottom. So, you can roll yours if you want to, but if you want me to do it, accept it at your own peril.”

I reach forward and grab a tortilla, lay it over the table, scoop a bunch of eggs into it, fold the burrito in one second, and offer it to Rex.

“Wh—really? That easy?” he asks.

“I worked a lot of kinds of fast food,” I offer.

He takes the burrito, and bites into it. I make one for myself too, and eat it with intermittent sips of whiskey and orange juice. The eggs are great, very cheesy as requested, but also mixed in with tomatoes and onions and that sort of thing. When we’ve each finished our first burrito, I roll up another for each of us.

“You’re naked,” I mention to Rex.

“My house,” he counters. “And I’m a dog.”

“Fair.”

“You’re welcome to join me,” he offers.

I start with my shirt, and within a few seconds he and I are both naked on the floor, him on top of me, the two of us making out again. I drape my arms around his back, hugging his fur-covered athletic frame. His mouth tastes like the cheesy eggs we’re eating, which is not a bad thing.

“Round two?” I ask.

He presses his fuzzy muzzle against my lips, and we kiss a little. “Are you ready like, right now?” he asks.

I reach down and pat a pocket. “Oh. Already used the lube on the handjob.”

“Oh I got us covered there. I just mean are you ready to bottom.”

“Always.”

“*Always?*” he asks incredulously. “You never have a bad butt day?”

“Literally never I don’t even understand what people mean when they say they have problems with that, like eat two vegetables in a day, Jesus.”

“Low key you have no idea how jealous I am of that.”

“*Basically* a super power,” I agree. “You said you have lube?”

“Yeah! One sec,” he says, and gets up and leaves back down the hall towards the kitchen.

I stand up, wolf down the remainder of my second amazing delicious burrito, and sip on whiskey until he returns.

When he does get back, he throws a little cardboard box onto the table—it's the display box that the packets of lube come in in the liquor stores, but he just has the entire box of them here, and like thirty packets scatter out onto the table.

"Okay dude I wasn't planning on *that* many rounds but that is pretty great."

"We should probably get back up to a bedroom," he suggests. "More comfortable to snuggle after."

I snatch a handful of packets and begin running out of the dining room on a path for the stairs—Rex chases after me, shouting after me that I am so gay and to wait for him to catch up. I make it back into the farm-painting-decorated room on the second floor, and fling myself onto the bed. Rex comes in after me, and the two of us are soon making out on the bed once more.

When I am *more* than ready, I open one of the packets and start preparing myself, making sure my insides are slimy and receptively aligned. We keep kissing as I do. His huge tongue is really amazing, as is getting to pet his long sleek hair with my free hand. When I'm definitely ready, I roll away from him, and get on my hands and knees.

He's on me in the next second, crouched behind me and laying his whole body weight onto my back, his hands hooked around me and gripping my hips. The tip of his dick pokes me a couple times, then finds the target and he's in, and I am getting my world rocked, thinking of how rad it is that that big red thing I saw earlier is sliding around in my ass now, getting the dog man off. He makes cute huffing noises just like last time, and I stay there on my hands and knees and bear it, swimming in euphoria from the fucking and from having been drinking and even a little bit from the oniony taste of the breakfast burritos that lingers in my mouth. I start to feel an extra pressure around my hole as he keeps thrusting, and I make pleased gay noises as I realize that it's his bulb thing growing inside of me, and I tell him not to pull out.

By the time he's finished, that thing is *huge*, but it manages to sit fairly comfortably inside of me anyways, being that it's

actually deeper inside the wider colon, rather than stretching the tighter anus itself—the very base of his penis, which is the part of him that my anus actually settles around, the part *before* it expands into the bulb, is pretty comfortably narrow, at least, for me anyways.

Rex grabs me tight in his arms, and very carefully rolls us over so that he's lying on his back on the bed, and I'm lying on my back on his chest. He continues to hug me.

"Are you gonna be alright?" he asks, sounding kind of sleepy, but also a little nervous.

I nuzzle the back of my head into him, and answer, "I'm great, thanks. You?"

"Awesome," he says, and gives my cheek a lick. "You said you'd never been with a dog man before? Because you're taking it really well."

"Why shouldn't I be, it's stupid crazy fun. Also if you mean the size I have been with donkey men, so."

"Ah, I see. Bit of a thing for beast men?"

"I mean, all the same, but I am a bit of a beast man."

I can't see his face since he's behind me, but the second of silence is telling as to his perplexion. "How so?" he asks.

I tell him, "My grandmother was a rabbit woman. I had my genes profiled once, back when I lived on the surface. Turns out I still have the recessive traits for rabbit. So, if I ever got unvasectomied and had kids with a fully human woman, or, one who seemed like it but also had the recessive trait too, twenty five percent odds that the kids would come out as rabbits. But, in my day-to-day life it doesn't really mean jack, other than that it's easier to feel a sense of kinship with hairy people."

He licks my cheek again, and I turn my head and we manage to share a little moment of kissing.

As the kissing settles down, he's about to say something else when a piercing loud noise goes off, and we both flinch.

Outside, there is a loud digital alarm siren going off. There are no words, but the sequences of tones all mean unique things—most of them mean different reasons why a region is being immediately evacuated.

"Is that HVAC?" I ask Rex.

“Yeah, uh, that’s the oxygen in this region about to be gone,” he affirms.

I wiggle my butt around on his bulb, and tentatively try to pull my ass off of him—he gives a small yip, and I stop, settling back down on him.

I mention, “If we’re about to *die*, I could get you out of me at this point, if that wouldn’t too seriously hurt you.”

He grabs me by the hips, and moves me up and down on him a couple times. He could do it a couple more for all I care. But after he’s assessed the situation, he says, “I think I would also be fine at this point, but, I have a way crazier idea.”

“Oh my god I live by those what’s up?”

“This house has its own HVAC, all separate from the station’s. Treasure hunter thing, we have some paranoias about redundancy when it comes to survival. We *could* stay here and wait it out by ourselves while everyone else is evacuated. Worst case, we put on the spelunking gear and leave that way if we have to.”

In spite of my guiding instinct to flee, I kind of love this. A multi day sleepover with this dog man sounds actually pretty amazing.

I ask him, “If it goes on longer than today can we rob a liquor store?”

“I will invisibly walk into a liquor store and get us drinks and leave money on the counter,” he offers.

“Perfect,” I tell him, and with a smile, I relax back onto his soft muscular chest and his big throbbing dog man penis.