

Animals

Balled up, her shaven head and spine visible through her skin, the wolfgirl was a singular presence.

-Bhanu Kapil, Humanimal

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vi. xvii. There is a home in New York where my mother, at six, walked in on her own mother slitting her throat. There, eleven years later, she hangs linens on a musty clothesline before the car moves up and stops, and her mother screams and she knows that her sister is dead.

xx. There is a forest in Massachusetts, and one tree in particular, I'm not sure which kind, where my aunt, at twenty, took the rope to tie twice; once around the rugged trunk, once around her throat. She must have jumped quick into the broad awake dark, because a nameless peer walking through the raw trees saw a pale swaying stiffness drooping coldly from the black branch the next day.

o. What sound does a throat make when it purrs to its child? When wind is heaved out by bullet or cable. Does it differ from brute to being? How does it sound when it is being slit by a kitchen knife? By a swift sever to finish off the beast? Does it look different to a crawling girl at six who runs or walks to eat or sleep with milk in her cave or belly or climb a tree, laughing or grunting for pleasure or purpose or none at all. What sound does a throat make down the dark through the trees?

Catatonia

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It's a thing that haunts me in a thin way,
the way my mother when she

was young might have felt
from one fragile day to the next, and

how the days felt in her conscious
as the hushed minutes snuck

by as she did,
up the stairs to bed at night

and as she got older
how she might have felt

when she woke up
in her dusty bedroom that overlooked the lake,

the way of her slow sight transitioning from sleep
to consciousness in her little white bed,

and the light from the window to her right
glimmering evenly, dusty through the old dry glass.

How she knew that her beautiful, shivery mother was just out the door and down at the foot of the stairs in her rocking chair, as vacant as the world was when my young mother ducked her head beneath the lake and sounds and sights vanished, even when she opened up her eyes below the water, no matter how hard she might have squinted, holding air in her tiny lungs, it must have all just looked like empty glints of light.

Headstones II

From a year is almost is close enough because seventeen is fine when it's sudden, the fragrance as he drives slow as breath and the headstones hover white in the dark when it's late December this certain night, when no one knows where you are.

You climb to the back seat black with beams of moon softly touching the air so lightly so you see the triangle shadows of his nose and the bristled rims of his lashes and the soft thin layer of his lips, the tower of his back as he lowers himself like honey beside you. The air falls sudden sucked the cracks in the doors, you can't breathe as you look, the eyes that keep you.

Everything is listening, in the back seat in the night back out near the quivering trees because here is the first time, everything has been waiting. Everything breathes in.

The lace that gravity takes, the December flowers which your pale fingers feel for and find and tug lightly to the floor. The moon-beamed air you breathe.

He breathes out over you. He lowers himself like fog gathering down the windows.

He breathes out. You could kiss him the way he breathes like that, the way he keeps his bristled eyes as he moves over you, licks and everything swallows and breathes out when you do the way he softly quietly echoes your name.

Seventeen is just fine in the hazy winter night when a year is close and the heat pulses in your sacrum through your teeth and down your legs like blood. He breathes over you like fog and closes his bristled eyes.

You could kiss him and you do, so soft and quietly his eyes closed, the sweet light feather hairs on his neck where it meets his back when you sigh when it's over, here is sealed in the thick black of the dark night in the back behind the headstones that hover whispering and breathing your names.