

Issue #1 Summer 2026

Soft Serve

A Vanilla Zine

**Introducing
The Vanilla Collective**

**Featuring 12
artists united
by a red hot
passion for
perversion**

18+

A Vanilla Collective Anthology

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This anthology is a collection of fiction. People, places, events and situations are products of the authors' imaginations. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

The Vanilla Collective presents...

SOFT SERVE

Vol. 1



A
179 page
collaborative
zine debut!



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Seth Amphetamine		Hydein		K.M. Claude
JD Riley	Idal Waves	KD		wM. dienstag

Soft Serve #1: Editor's Note

Summer 2026

Dear Reader,

Thank you for picking up the first issue of our seminal group anthology, “Soft Serve”! Chances are you already know this by now, but this is a biannual themed zine put together by the Vanilla Collective, a group of transgressive (and transgressive-friendly) creatives founded in 2020 by webcomic artist Hydein (<https://apresmoiledeluge.thecomicsseries.com/>).

For years, our members talked lightly of making a zine together, but it wasn't until the adult industry suffered one blow after another (the deplatforming of work on Steam and Itch.io, age verification laws in the EU, US, and UK, and ongoing attempts to erase trans creators from the internet—just to name a few) that the passion which led us to one another finally sparked, and a project we could lend our names to began for real. As such, this zine sort of feels like seeing your child venture out into the world for the first time, hoping they do well, make friends, and connect with others who will find them just as compelling and unique as you do... or maybe that's just me!? This too is a possibility.

Without further ado, thanks for picking up our zine. We hope you find something to connect with inside. Visit our members at their listed socials or websites as listed in the back, and always remember: LONG LIVE THE SICKOS!

Thank you,

A. M. Herrington

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Sir Integra was having a lousy day. The sixteen year old was due to show in front of the Round Table officially (judging old dotards, she thought not for the uptenth time). She had decided she was not going to wear the school-girl uniform that marked previous times beside her father. She was a knight, and knights commanded respect. Fear, if nothing else -she was old enough for a sword and gun, and could ensure obedience through fear should worst happen.

But still, the bloody overcoat didn't feel right (too big). Nor did the uniform (too tight), nor did the boots -

"And here you stand." The dead murmured in her dressing mirror, scattering her thoughts.

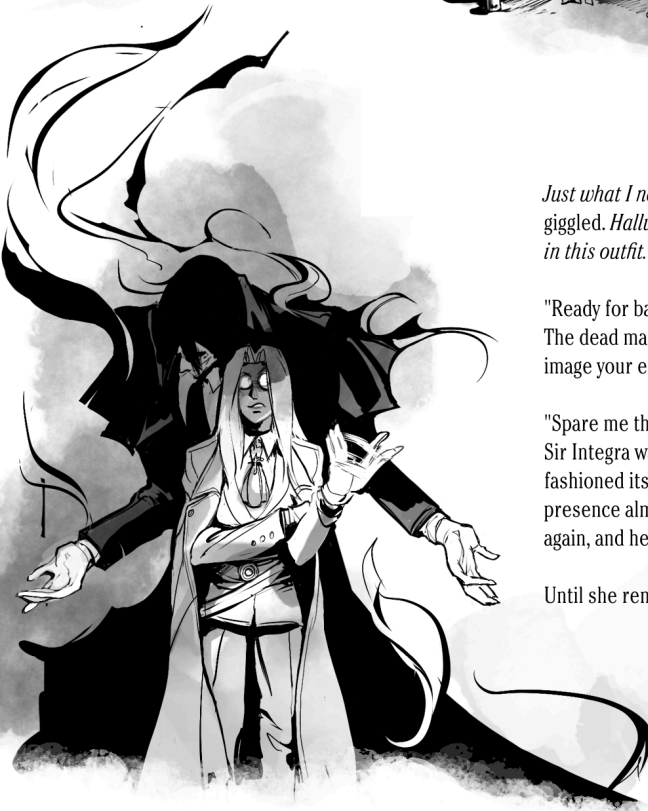


Just what I needed, her mind almost giggled. Hallucinations to see me unfit in this outfit.

"Ready for battle against the round table?" The dead man chuckled. "I tremble at the image your enemies will see."

"Spare me the dramatics, Alucard. Christ." Sir Integra was used to this peacock that fashioned itself a man. His damnable presence almost made her feel steady again, and her breath evened.

Until she remembered the current woe.





"You look magnificent, my Master." His deep voice rang with conviction, and none of the sharp sarcasm she had expected. "A woman-knight, not a girl with an ill-timed inheritance."

How did he know her innermost misery, Integra wondered, not for the first time. No matter. She plucked at a sleeve, hating the doubts that flapped like bats. "It's not too much?" *Trust the madman to be honest when no-one else is*, she thought. *Bloody brilliant.*

"Hardly. Though I see Walter's neglected these boots." There was an odd gleam to his eye that she knew as interest. "Sit."

What are you up to, servant?" (Servant or no, fond pet or no, he was a living weapon with a wily mind. She had seen him slaughter two-dozen in a day behind that smile.)

"Humor me, Master."

"No tricks." Integra countered.

"There will be none." Contrary to all of her past experiences with him, there was only an odd sincerity in his expression.

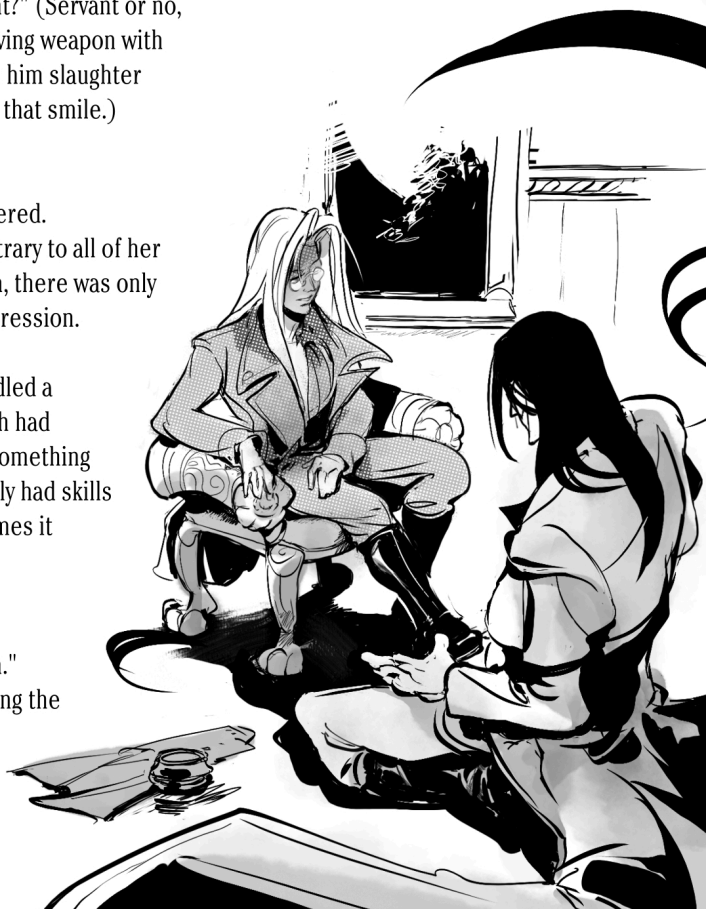
"Consider this a gift."

His cold gloved hands cradled a proffered leg. A black cloth had appeared out of thin air. Something tingled. Her vampire clearly had skills other than killing. Sometimes it surprised her.

"Bootblacking, Alucard?"

"So you know the tradition."

He smoothly replied, buffing the leather with old practice.



"Not well." Integra admitted. Her knowledge was more academic than she truly preferred. And yet ... (She always wanted more. It was her sin.)



"Is the rest just clothes?" He countered with strange heat. There was a contemplative silence before he spoke again. "Some knights...." A pause from his gloved hands. "...Had others they trusted for this."

The leather gleamed.
"This *service*." She demurred in assent.

"Precisely, Master."



Her breath hitched at those piercing red eyes. Those blood-red eyes that looked *up* with hooded satisfaction. Something stirred. She wasn't sure who.
"So you understand, Master." He murmured, those brilliant eyes closed in worship.

(Was it a sin to feel like God Herself?)

"A proper shine, now. To suit you for war."

"I agree. This was befitting
... and satisfactory. To war."

Fin.



A Moment With kradeelav

Q: What specific themes/subjects do you enjoy exploring in art?

A: kink and its intimacy connecting character-to-character or art-to-viewer. the interior life of traitors and those who live double lives. raw body language that draws the eye (and id).

i also like zihark fire emblem a normal amount. :) i always did have a weakness for bishies.

Q: Who/what are your biggest creative influences?

A: kathy zelinski (disney villain animator), kouta hirano (hellsing creator), ryoji nakamori (lead hellsing animator)) for id and gravitas that's fun to watch. Jayd "Chira" Ait-Kaci, for impeccable body language and a mutual fondness of the old web. (I'm lucky enough to be working alongside Chira outside of this group for a different project currently.)

Q: Tell us a little bit about your art journey until now.

A: the stylistic and nuanced versatility of 2000's anime & doujin consistently attracted me even as a teenager; there's a capability to depicting mature topics and outright kink that has a habit of sliding under the radar given the underground distribution nature of scans, torrents, and early digital art communities like deviantART.

as somebody who lives a very compartmentalized life by necessity, having this carefully hidden door to a digital life shaped my art and how i approached it. it's a little escape valve of expression when i need it, since society reacts strangely to kink from some.

somewhere, an easier life

by A.M. Herrington

In the first week of July the rains finally stopped. Neglect had already encouraged invaders to propagate through the herb and flower garden—hardy groundsel, leafy thistle, red spears of rosemary willowherb pushing out of the ground, the buds still closed tight—but the watering, even such a Biblical deluge as they had received in the past two weeks, sped along their expansion, and Johannes could no longer abide. He donned his gloves, his corduroy pants, and a coarse linen shirt he wore whenever he had business in the dirt and went to work.

He began mid-morning, uprooting the weeds that had sprung up in his absence with less vigour than monastic complaisance, for, as a middle-aged man who had grown up in Vienna, he regarded any other way of conducting himself with disdain. Scouring the garden, he filled his pail with the corpses of groundsel and thistle, willowherb, Frenchweed still entombed in their clods of dirt; he grimaced at every new specimen he found, wishing he hadn't shirked his responsibilities for the past two weeks, and shooed away bees lest they think his nostrils were an invitation. On the plants he couldn't extract immediately he sprayed herbicide, making a note to come back the next day. At noon he broke for lunch—bread rolls and leftover sausage, hardly sufficient.

Now, as the sun began to arc toward the earth, he considered calling it a day. Sweat had dried on the back of his neck,

leaving the skin there itchy. His joints groaned when he twisted the wrong way. He was finding it more and more difficult to turn from the thoughts that had been troubling him, and he'd gone all afternoon without brewing a single pot of tea.

He discarded the limp body of another thistle in the pail and sighed. Shifting back on his haunches drew attention to the ache in his knees and lower back, and he stripped off his gloves to rummage for his cigarettes. These were kept in a wooden carry case he'd bought in Milan. Like most Italian goods, it was sleek and lightweight, slimmed down as much as possible without compromising basic functionality, but now he thought it probably felt too light. He took the case by the ends and shook it.

The telltale rattle of a lone cigarette, bouncing off the sides of its box. He sighed again. That, too, had fallen by the wayside. To his list of outstanding tasks he added "trip to the tobacconist," then pulled himself up with some difficulty onto his feet.

Johannes slid the cigarette out of the wooden case and lit it. There were gaps in the earth he'd have to smooth over, like empty gum after an oral surgery, but overall the operation had been a success. He was glad he'd done it before most of the weeds had grown too deep, choking the life out of his basil and jasmine and overtaking his roses. Leaning against the fence, he took a drag of tobacco and luxuriated in the pain relief, the instant sharpening of his focus. He swung his arms, stretched, paced up and down the side of the bed; he thought about making Linzer tarts and debated whether he wanted to go through the trouble.

Brrring!

An old sound, then—a boyhood sound. Johannes turned, his eyes following the dirt path to its end, past the gate, into the smooth concrete strip of residential street.

A high, not-altogether-childish voice floated down the breeze to meet him: "Herr Engelstädter, good afternoon!"

He waved away another errant bee. The girl beamed at him from atop her father's bike, her cheeks still rosy from the exertion of pedaling up the hill, her chestnut hair tossed back

from her forehead by the wind. Gold rimmed the edge of her face, igniting the peach fuzz there until the sun winked out at the point of her chin. Johannes traced it to the creamy dip of her neck above her open collar, feeling a little guilty. Then his self-consciousness overwhelmed him, and he looked away.

More to her shorts than to her face, he said, "Greta."

Greta performed a mock bow. "*La cavalerie est arrivée!*"



He had never paid much attention in French class, nor to the Latin that had been taught to him in Catholic school, but Johannes thought he got the gist and drew closer to the gate.

"So it has. To what battlefield are you headed on this beautiful summer day, Lady Knight?"

"Oh! The opposite, actually, I'm going home from a campaign. Papa asked me to deliver a cake for him in town."

"And was the road or the recipient the battlefield in question?"

Greta's eyes sparkled. She pursed her lips in that gesture he knew so well, a precursor to mischief. "It was resisting taking a bit off the top before I got there."

"How scandalous."

"Only if I'd done it! But I didn't."

"Did they at least offer you a slice before sending you back out to burn calories?"

"No, sir. It was for a birthday party," she added, seeing his expression, "and the boy looked about ten. They needed every crumb they had, it's probably gone now!"

"Sensible," Johannes said, and hesitated.

Three weeks since he had seen her last. Should he invite her in for tea or bid her a good day? He knew what he wanted, but he felt awkward proposing it, especially after what had happened the last time. Greta seemed happy—but then, teenagers were changeable. Perhaps she'd forgotten. Perhaps she hadn't even noticed. And what if her parents were waiting? He respected the Neidhardts, who were an old name in music and the arts. The last thing Johannes wished was to be *persona non grata* to them.

Greta shifted her weight back onto her bike. Standing on tip-toe, she craned her neck to peek around her friend, catching glimpses, no doubt, of the war he'd waged in the hellebores behind him.

"—Are you gardening?"

"Wrapping up. The rain was good for the flowers. Good for the weeds, as well."

"Can I help? Oh—*do* you need any help?"

He toyed with the latch on the gate and thought, *Yes*. Just thinking about the work that awaited him tomorrow brought on a miasma of dread, but he tried to keep the feeling at bay. "I wouldn't object," he said at last, "but you may stain your shirt, *Spatzl*. It's white."

"Dirt washes out, and if it doesn't, I'll use it for gardening. Like yours!"

"I also don't want to make you late to dinner."

"I'm hungry after biking, anyway! If you're about to make tea, that usually means snacks." She cocked her head in the way that seemed to come naturally to girls and women of all ages, curiously feline. "You sure have a lot of objections for someone who claims you wouldn't make them."

Johannes let her in.

She parked the bike by the entrance. He excused himself to make tea. By the time he returned with the tray—jasmine this afternoon, mild and soothing to suit the weather—Greta was kneeling by one of the flowerbeds, clawing at unseen enemies in the riot of blossoms. For the second time that day, Johannes was reminded of a cat. If only she had a tail to swish to and fro, with a bow on the end like a children's book illustration! It would have suited her as she hunted through the maiden grass, although her quarry was weeds today, not field mice.

"Tea is ready, Greta. But quite hot still."

"Okay," came the muffled answer. "In a bit."

He set the tea and biscuits on the bistro table and sat, picking up his cigarette from the ashtray where he had left it. The cherry hadn't gone out yet, and as he savoured it he watched Greta navigate hollyhock and butterfly bush, lilac and sage, with a fervour that amused and slightly worried him. "Careful," he'd say as she shrank from a prickly leaf, or "Use my gloves, if you like"—until his cigarette was down to the filter, the teapot cool enough to touch, and the cotton slip under Greta's button-up just visible where the fabric strained, taut, against the small of her back.

"Look, you've gone and scratched yourself. Would you like some ointment for that? Before it gets infected."

"Not the first scrape I've had on the battlefield, sir, and probably not the last."

She tossed her latest victim into the overflowing pail and dropped into the seat opposite him, breathing hard. Dark smudges and flecks of dust staining the canvas of her shirt—but before Johannes could chide her, she shed his gloves, laid them to the side of the table, and wiped her forehead with the back of her wrist. He felt a stab of recognition as she brushed back the lock of hair that kept falling into her face, a curl that wouldn't be tamed—he had one, too, though his had thinned out and eventually gone grey with age.

Her knee bobbed into view and with it, the thin line of red where the thorns had bit her. Almost too quickly for him to

follow, she dabbed the pad of one thumb with her tongue and rubbed at it, then plugged it back into her mouth to suck off the residue of blood, sweat, and soil. "Do you really think it'll get infected?" she asked, looking troubled.

How he envied her thumb then! "No," he said, and leaned over to fill their cups. "With that level of first aid, probably not."

The amber liquid lapped pleasantly against the china. A cool breeze skimmed the tops of the bushes, carrying with it traces of fresh earth, smoke, heady, inviting sweetness. Somewhere in the neighbourhood, a blackbird was singing.

Greta took one of the biscuits, bored of examining her knee, and tested a corner by nibbling it. Her eyes lit up.

"Tintino!"

Johannes chuckled. "So you can tell the differences between bakeries in town, can you?"

"I've tried all of them at one point or another, but—*mm*. Tintino does *Schwarz-Weiß-Gebäck* best. They're not too sweet and they keep the flavours balanced, and the shortbread's not too crumbly or bone-dry, either."

"You're somewhat health-conscious for someone so young. At your age, I was eating nothing but sweets. Have some tea with your snacks, as well."

They settled into conversation and Johannes settled into his chair, folding to the comfort of the cushions and the perfect summer weather. For the last three weeks he had adhered to a routine, drifting from room to room, bedroom to basement, until he became sick of haunting his own home. Practising piano only exacerbated his feelings of being trapped in a Gothic fiction, especially Chopin or Liszt. Now life itself seemed to seep back into him. The garden he'd ceased to regard as anything but another obligation was charming again, full of secret sights and sounds; Greta told him about meeting rabbits, beetles, and snakes among her father's vegetables, even a litter of kittens inside a forgotten crate. "I wanted to keep them, but Mama said our house isn't suited for pets." Johannes made a sympathetic noise, although in truth, he had never understood the appeal of a companion if

it couldn't listen or talk back to him.

Then her eyes went wide. "Oh!" she said, and placed a dirt-battered object on the table. He stared at it, blank-faced, until the glimmer of pearl caught his eye. Shivering, he picked up the earring. Its misshapen body curved not quite comfortably against his hand, heavier and colder than something of its calibre should have been.

"—My wife's friend," he began, and cleared his throat. "My wife's friend lost this at a party some time ago. The whole affair brought the evening to a screeching halt. Some of the men went on their knees—in trousers, mind you—to go looking for it. Out of chivalry, I suppose."

Greta's eyes sparkled. "And were you one of the men on your knees, Herr Engelstädter?"

"Me? Dear girl, no. That came later, *after* I learnt how to garden. I was watching it all from the window."

"Not very chivalrous of you, then!"

"*She* wasn't my wife, only a friend of hers. Do you think she'll take it now?" he asked, holding it up to the light.

"She stopped a garden party for it."

"She also stopped talking to me as soon as Car—my wife left. So who knows."

He thought he'd made a faux pas then, but Greta only smiled at him mysteriously. He moved on.

And the sun continued to sink. The liquid light of late afternoon began to seep through the gaps in the hedges, golden and diffuse; a bitter edge chased the tail of each breeze, reminding them of the night that was soon to come. The time to part was approaching, but—well, there was no need to hurry it along. Greta finished her biscuits with gusto, then downed the last of her tea. The bow of her throat, palpating above her open collar—this time Johannes didn't tear his eyes away, knowing it might well be the last time he'd see it in weeks.

Out of her seat now, taking a deep breath. Swinging her arms in a wide arc, she paced, stretched, shook out her feet to loosen them—a mirror image of his routine from earlier. Johannes tried not to blush, embarrassed, and thought he managed mostly well.

The girl looked back at him. Her grey, ghostlike eyes lingered on his face, then turned up in another, equally inscrutable smile. She picked up his gloves and began following the dirt path around his garden, a slow saunter that seemed to say: *You could still catch up, if you were so inclined.*

Johannes got up to obey.

They walked aimlessly, Greta leading, Johannes trailing at a slight distance behind her. He admired the way her weight shifted effortlessly from leg to leg and the light honey tone of her calves, which paled gradually as his gaze swept upward to her thighs. Every so often, she would adjust her direction so that she was close to the edge of the dirt path and kiss the petals of his flowers, or the long, waxy blades of an ornamental grass, with her fingertips. Unbidden, an image flashed into his mind: two centuries earlier he would have kept this garden for her, Greta, the only daughter of the noble house Neidhardt. She would have worn his roses in her hair and never noticed him, because he would be—what? He tried to follow the daydream to its logical conclusion, but it was like trying to catch a butterfly with only his hands. There had been no photo albums or family heirlooms in his childhood home. He supposed there might have been secrets in his mother's lockbox, the one she kept under her bed, but he'd been too spineless to find the key and look inside. His father...

"Herr Engelstädter?"

The noblewoman in his mind, flickering rapidly between the girl and a likeness of his aging mother, evaporated. Johannes was master of the garden again, not merely its keeper. "Yes, Greta?"

"What are you thinking about?"

"Hm? I was thinking... well..."

"...about your wife?" She looked guilty.

"No, not at all. About the irony of our situation. You would have been well-born in centuries past, and I wouldn't. Yet here you are, weeding for me."

"Oh! True, I never thought of that. I guess I wouldn't be wearing shorts back then either."

"Or visiting a man unchaperoned."

"Or biking... did they have bikes back then?"

"At any rate, you wouldn't be allowed to ride one."

Greta huffed and crouched by a cluster of perennials. He'd forgotten the name for them, each of their tall stalks sprawling at the ends into bunches of delicate, deep blue stars, but it was these she put her face close to now, almost nuzzling. Probably only propriety stopped her from doing so. "Well, that's no good, sir," she murmured. "I'm glad we're here *now* and not *then*. And by the way, it's super Viennese of you to think of it in the first place."



"Now what do you mean by that?"

"Royalty, aristocracy, titles... waltzes and *Gemütlichkeit*..."

"Waltzes every night. With a coffeehouse next door for when you need a break."

"...*Wiener Schmah*. I'm sorry I didn't visit you for a couple of weeks."

She said it so softly, Johannes almost didn't catch it. But he

did, and he went very still.

Aftertaste of vanilla and processed sugar. Church bells, distant, lamenting the hour. Greta looked askance at him, not ten paces away. The same lock of hair falling into her eyes, the high colour of her dirt-smudged cheeks, her eyebrows, drawn tight in an expression of worry—morose, she was almost even lovelier than she was happy, as displeased as he was to note it. Her gleaming eyes met his. They searched his face for a reaction, but he wasn't sure what he should be reacting to yet and knew that she would find none. "I wanted to come see you sooner," she continued after a moment. "I didn't because..."

"Because?"

"—I thought you didn't want to see me anymore."

Johannes's breath expelled itself violently through his nostrils. "Nonsense!"

"I thought—" She licked her lips. "I thought I hurt you, or that you didn't want to be unfaithful to your wife—the last—"

"*Carmen?*"

"—The last time I visited, you pulled away. And it was after we were talking about her—about your marriage. So I thought—I don't know, I'm sorry. I didn't mean..."

Johannes turned. He strode stiffly down the path and glowered at his roses, wishing he hadn't smoked his final cigarette. Pressure mounted in his skull somewhere between the eyes, accompanied by flashes of white heat that surged, like a river bursting its banks, outward from his core to the rest of his body. Removing his glasses, he pinched the bridge of his nose hard and counted to ten. She was only a girl, he reminded himself. A girl. A *young woman*, he retorted, who should have learnt to use her words and communicate by now. She had his home number only after *she* had requested it—she could have called to ask if he had been offended! What reason was there to make him think she'd finally grown bored of him after a year of demanding his attention? Cowardly, avoidant behaviour—he took a deep breath, deciding how to frame his argument, pivoted, and made his way back to where he'd left her.

Greta hurriedly wiped her eyes on the back of her arm, and the quarrel died on Johannes's lips. He watched the girl clutch her knees, brace for impact, try to look brave in the face of the punishment he was about to dish out, but in reality she was small—a mouselike, catlike thing crouched on the ground in front of his asters (that was what they were called!) with her head hanging low in the valley of her shoulders. Resentment churned his gut—she had robbed him of his anger! his right to call her out on her failure!—but it didn't last. Like all poison it turned on him next, the adult who had almost lost his temper.

He closed the remaining distance and squatted beside her. His joints were stiffer than he expected, probably from cold, and he didn't fail to grimace as he felt them creak. "You should have reached out sooner, Greta," he admonished her gently.

Her bottom lip quivered an angry red. Chewed raw, fresh blood had bloomed on the vivid pink and begun to coagulate. Johannes suppressed the urge to reach out and wipe it down, the same as she had done to her cut. He wasn't her mother, after all.

The red lips moved again. "I was—I was trying not to hurt you," they stammered, "but I guess—I did anyway. I'm always messing up like that, always, somehow. Even if I try and—do things right, do things well, I'm just—I'm just too stupid to get it."

"God in Heaven. *Spatzl*, please, no one in your family can even *claim* the title of being 'stupid'."

"But I am!" she exploded, jostling the asters. "I had your number and everything. I could have called. You visit the park all the time—and the café—you've even been to Tintino! There were a thou—a *million* things I could have done. I even thought about them—and second guessed—but I really should have done any. Just, *any!* I hate it! Why didn't I? *Why do I have to be me?*"

She buried her face in her arms and sobbed openly, an unprecedented downpour on what had been a calm, sunny day. Part of Johannes was nonplussed. He'd been unprepared for the teenage melodrama he was now witnessing and uneasy about whether his neighbours would hear, but

another, arguably greater, part was relieved. *She didn't hate him; she hadn't intended to leave him alone.* The heat inside his ribcage melted. He pressed a hand to her soft hair. When she didn't push away, he stroked her until she leaned on him, and a frisson of excitement flared at the base of his neck despite himself at the contact he'd craved for so long. A new sentence bubbled to mind—not the critique he had intended, but words he'd wanted to say since he laid eyes on her that afternoon. He pressed his nose into her hair and breathed her in, her skin, sweat, and conditioner, sweeter than any springtime. In the low murmur he reserved for just such occasions as this, he said:

"Dear girl, don't you know how much I've missed you?"

The unhappy hunch of Greta's shoulders tightened. A whimper escaped that tightly coiled ball of misery. Even so, it was clear that the worst was over, the torrent of emotion wracking her body already beginning to subside. Hot, panting breaths came fast through the gaps in her arms instead of frantic animal sounds; she was no longer trembling so hard and Johannes, wanting to encourage her, pressed his lips gently to the top of her head. At this she stirred and shifted. Her eyes rose over the horizon of her pristine white sleeve. Puffy and red-rimmed, teardrops clung to the bottom lashes, their irises nearly copper from strain and the early evening sun. Johannes felt electric with desire. Leaning over, he kissed her eyelids, too, one at a time.

She turned her face up to him, hesitant, but he was ready—he had *been* ready.

Their lips met, grazing at first, uncertain of what was allowed; and then Greta pressed forward, just as hungry as he had felt, a sputter of flame catching on and building. Understanding flashed over him as lightning across a darkened plain. She felt the same about him as he did about her—for how long, he didn't know—why he'd never noticed, he didn't know—

It was impossible to count how many kisses they exchanged in front of the asters, nor how long they spent embracing as the sky burst into dramatic colour above them. Not that they would have noticed. By turns they chased each other's lips, found them, pulled back to catch their breaths, only to begin the process anew; they played happily, delighting in the force that compelled them, over and over, toward each other,

toward a pleasure that was best when shared. Johannes was drunk with ecstasy. The girl in his arms, still hiccupping into his mouth as he held her; blood and salt on her lips, cocoa and processed sugar on the tip of her tongue; spasms of breath that came out of her when he took her off guard and his hand groped some sensitive curve, or his teeth caught on soft, pliant flesh.

Finally she tore away from him, flushed and breathless. Pawing at his chest, Greta said: "Herr Engelstädter—"

"At a time like this!"

"What—what should I call you, then? Sir?"

"Johannes' will do. Oh, Greta," he sighed, "Greta. But we belong together, don't we?"

"Yes, sir—but Johannes, I—" She bit her lip. "It will be dark soon."

The haze of pleasure lifted slightly, and he looked around the garden. The light had indeed fallen, leaching the colours from his flower and herb garden, plunging their motley silhouettes into lifeless, blue-grey shadow. The sky was that pale indigo which precedes both night and morning, the clouds as scattered against their canvas as his own thoughts. His skin prickled with heat again as Greta pressed her lips to his cheek and buried her nose in his neck; for a young woman trying to take responsibility, he thought, her actions were diametrically at odds with her words.

Perhaps, someday, he would teach her to do better.

"Will you be fine to bike home? Should I call a cab for you?"

"No, sir, that won't be necessary. Look—the lamps are already coming on, I can find my way home. It'll be harder to explain to Mama and Papa why the errand took so long, especially if they see I've been crying..."

"I didn't know it would go this way when I let you into my garden..."

"...But I could say I took the long way through the woods and

got a little lost. I was just enjoying the nature, and I tried to stay on the trail, but when I blinked, it was already late. *Voilà.*"

Johannes snorted. He leaned back, using his arms to support his weight. "And they'll believe that story, will they?"

"They'd rather believe that than the truth. Is that terrible?"

He regarded her seriously over the rims of his glasses. "Love isn't terrible."

And the lamps hummed to life from their slumber in the street.

Johannes collected the china while Greta hydrated and freshened up in the restroom. When she came out, she was almost presentable—almost the girl who had come to him that afternoon bathed in sunlight after delivering a cake. He walked her to her father's bike, dragging his feet; it was childish, but he didn't want her to go, even if the likelihood of her staying away was lower now than it had ever been.

"Come again next week, Greta. And call me so I can prepare, please. I'll bake something rather than serve you leftovers from Tintino..."

"*Ach*, were you worried about that? Tintino is good! But I do prefer when you make something just for me. It feels special."

"...and I won't put you up to weeding again. A proper tea, like before."

"I didn't mind that about today, either." She reached her arms out.

It took a moment for Johannes to realise she was asking for a hug. He clasped her to him, breathing her in again, dizzy with happiness at the thought that he was hers and she was his. The future had blown wide open, and they could expect more summer afternoons; best of all, he could expect to see more of her.

Greta pressed her lips to his and stood on tiptoe to reach his ear.

"Johannes."

"Greta."

The smile in her voice.

He opened the gate and she walked out with the bike, waving one last time before she mounted the seat. Her calves worked as she pushed off from the pavement, a seamless motion, and she shouted over her shoulder as she left:

"Watch me fly!"

And so he did, until the sparrow disappeared over the hump of the hill and melded with the night below.



A Moment With A.M. Herrington

Q: Tell us about yourself and your art.

A: Hello. My name is Herrington and there is nothing I love more than the satisfaction of a story well told. A nicely drawn picture will do in a pinch, however.

Q: What mediums do you work in?

A: I draw anime/manga-inspired art in Krita or with pen/pencil on paper. My writing is usually done by fin, which I then type (with great difficulty) into Ellipsus or another word processor on the computer.

Q: What specific themes/subjects do you enjoy exploring in art?

A: I like to think about what love means. I also wander toward themes of power, control, autonomy, (un)belonging, nihilism, personhood/dissociation, moral ambiguity, hope, and grief. ...Oh, and did I mention the girls in ill-defined relationships with older men? I love a girl with an older man.

Q: How do you enjoy your ice cream?

A: A single scoop of strawberry (dried strawberries included) or pistachio (chopped pistachios included) is always nice on a hot summer day.

Q: What do you hope your audience takes away from your art?

A: I hope they recognise something of themselves, or their experiences, or the people in their lives in them. In a way I'm always reaffirming my existence by asking the audience: "You've seen this too, right, you feel this way too? You know this pain, this grief, this isolation, this love, you recognise it, don't you?" ... It would make me happy if that were indeed the case.

Q: What do you think is the role of transgressive/taboo work in society?

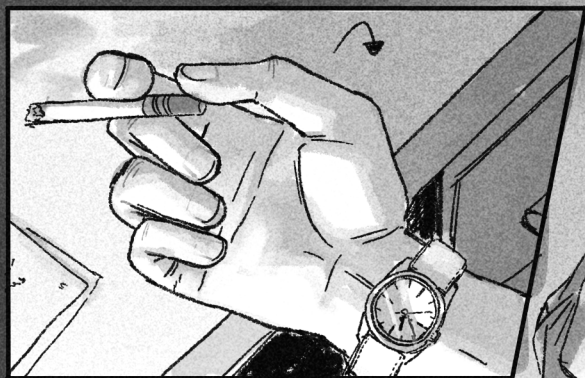
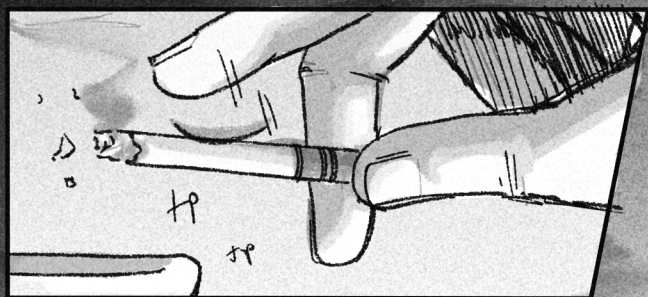
A: It's always existed. Humanity needs a dark undercurrent, it needs to be able to explore and express its aggression, its grief, its baser impulses, the way a child needs to see its emotions mirrored by the adults around it to eventually understand that it, too, is a human being.

When we sanitise the human experience, we betray ourselves and each other. We all depend on others, we all hurt others, too; we all lie sometimes and we are all capable of extraordinary acts of bravery sometimes. None of those things are mutually exclusive. They are painfully, comfortingly human.

Autumn Walk

Hydein









Do you want to go on a walk?

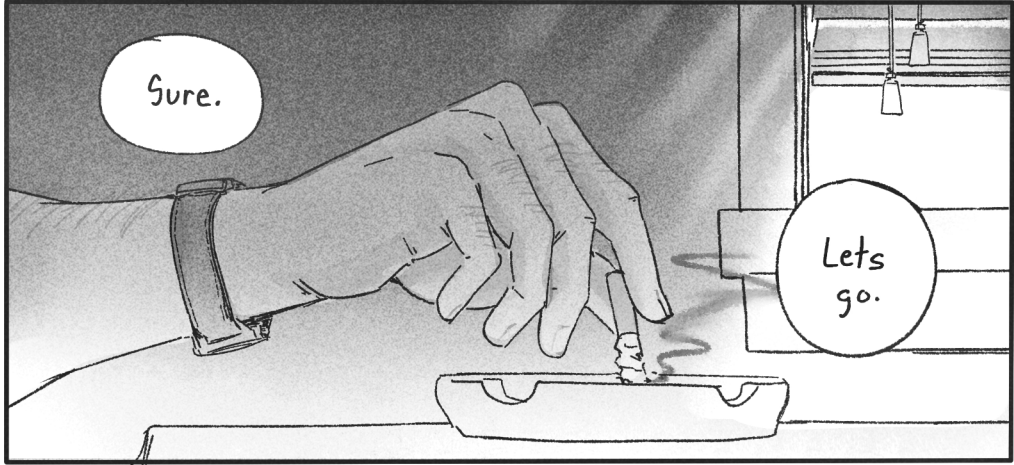
the paths will be empty-



nice and private.

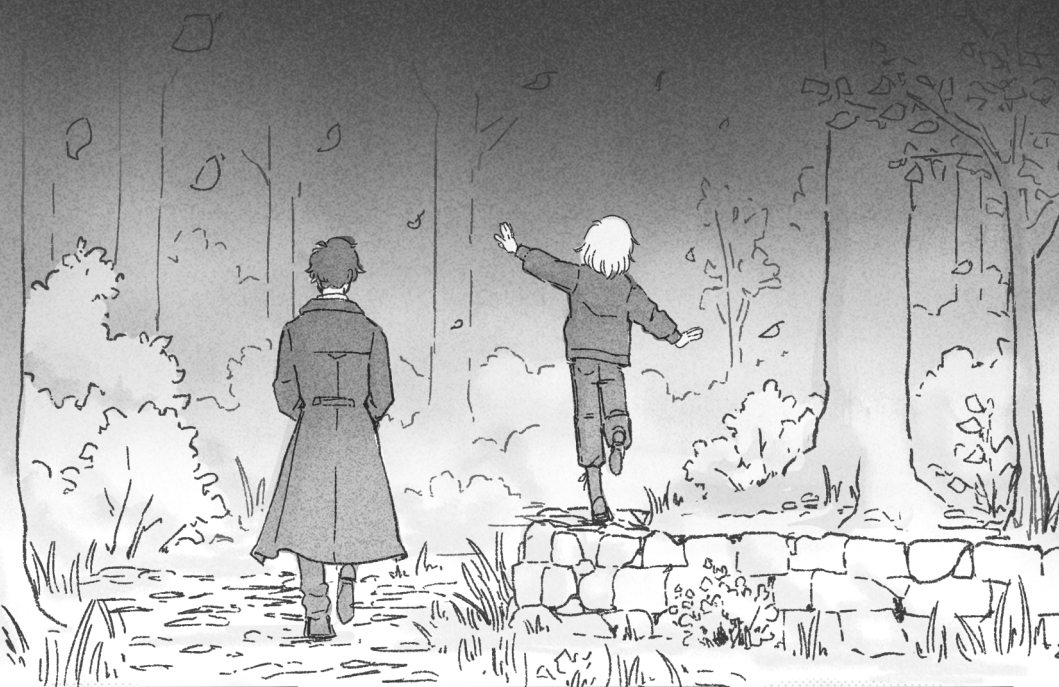


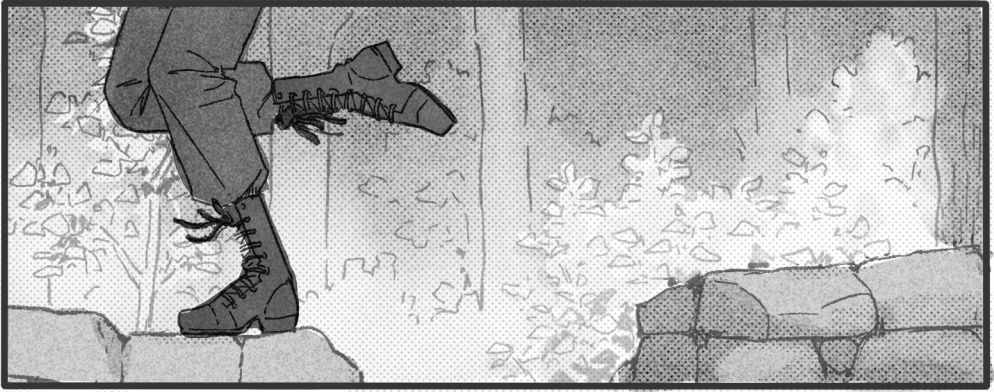
hm



Sure.

Lets go.

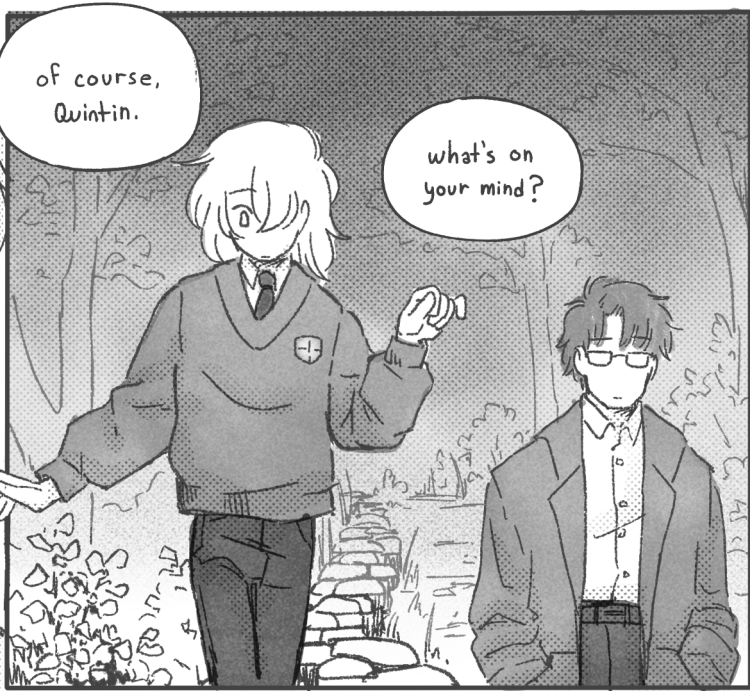




uhm

can I
ask you
something?





of course,
Quintin.

what's on
your mind?



why is
it that,

you're so
talkative
around others,

but so
quiet,

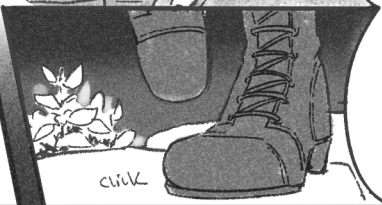
when it's
just you
and me?



I like to think we talk quite often...



would you like it if we spoke more?



Maybe "talkative" is the wrong word. how should I say-



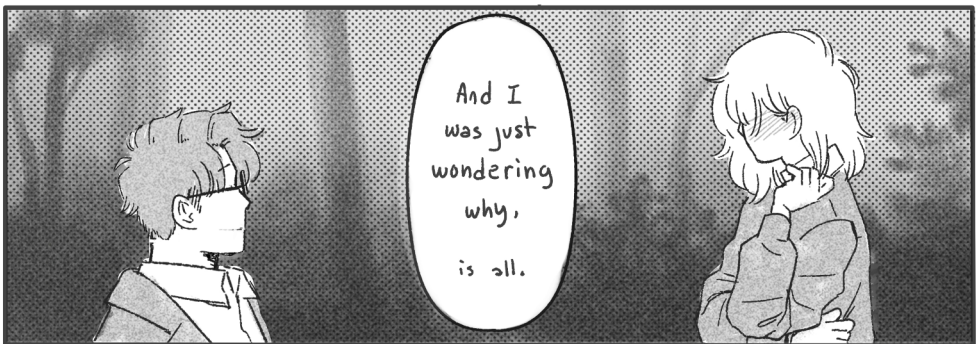
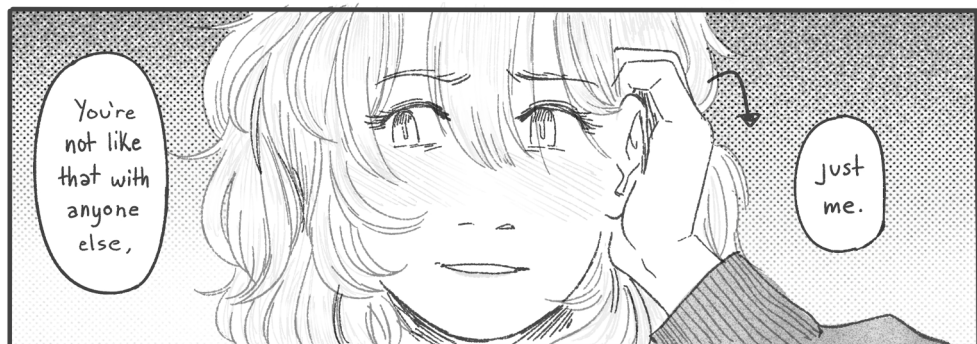
you just act, big

around others.



and small with me.







teaching can
be a bit
like acting.

playing a
character on
a stage.

there are
lines you
learn,

and you
perform
them-



but it's
not just-

teaching
lessons-



its with-
everything-

every
kind
of-

interaction



is a
role.





I'm not-

articulating
this -

properly -



Hop-

I think I
understand -

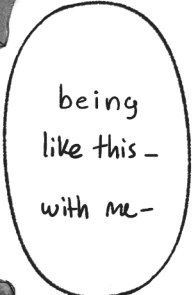


You
don't have
to pretend
when we're
alone.

...



Something
like that ...





it feels
different.

different
from anything
I've known.



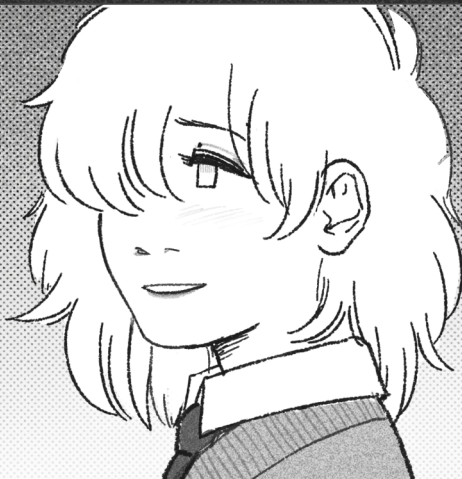
different
bad?



different
good

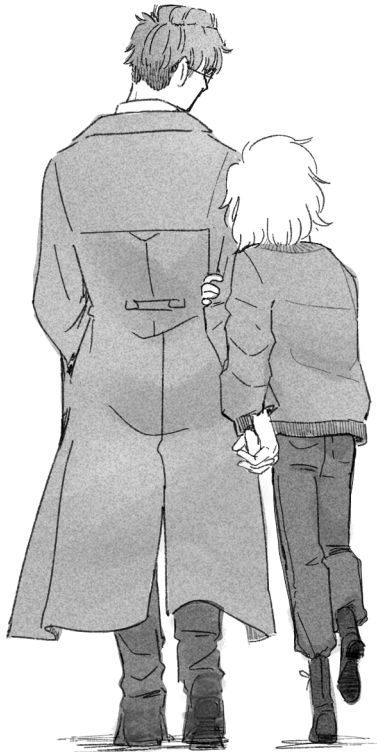
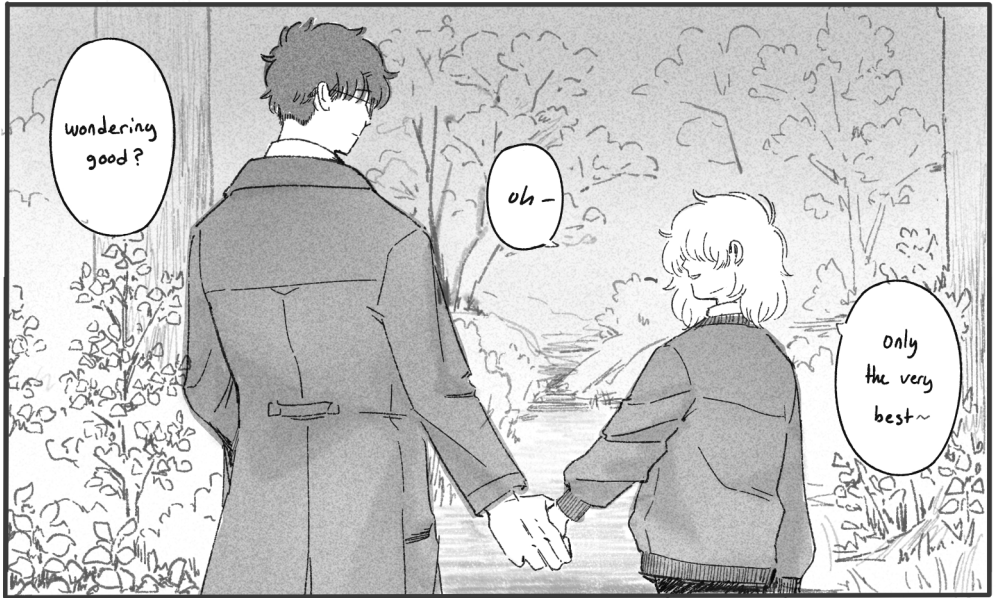


of course
its good,
Quim.



you
could've
had me
fooled





A Moment With Hydein

Q: Tell us about yourself and your art.

A: I'm Hydein. My favourite things are comicbook pornography and classical music. I make very long comics that are mostly about sex abuse.

Q: What mediums do you work in?

A: Digital and traditional, mostly pencil. I'm a traditional artist at heart, but digital is too fast and efficient to ignore.

Q: What specific themes/subjects do you enjoy exploring in art?

A: Childhood, I love a bildungsroman. I write a lot about sex, and what catastrophic desire and arousal can do to someone. I also like schools, and families.

Q: What do you hope your audience takes away from your art?

A: I hope they have as much fun reading it as I had making it.

Q: What do you think is the role of transgressive/taboo work in society?

A: I think all art is digestion. We experience the world, and those inclined decide to interpret it through art. Sometimes what's ingested of the world is vulgar and obscene, it's only natural that the art to follow will be obscene, too.

her lady

by KD

The Lady was down. Bone showed starkly, jutting out from the broken skin and torn stockings, at least one of the two bones running through her shin. She was staring up at the sky in clear shock, breathing far too fast, the pain of it not having truly processed. It would soon. The fall had been terrible and the horse had bolted, though in this tangle of brush, it wouldn't get far before the tack was caught up somehow and the beast's flight was stalled.

The wolf lay dead, bleeding out into the snow.

Dora's ears rang from the crack of the rifle, still held tight in her shaking hands.

She could hear that the Lady's breathing was starting to deepen, smaller sounds beginning to filter in between the gasps.

"D-Dora—" the Lady choked out.

Dora was as frozen as the ground beneath them, her chilled and naked fingertips barely feeling the heft of the gun. Her every breath made tiny puffs of fog in the air. The snow had stopped, but the gray sky threatened it could begin again at any moment.

This would be the time.

If Dora wanted out – truly wanted out – there would be no better time than this, laid in her numbing hands by a spooked horse.

She could go, leave, be free of all of this.

The pale trees around her felt like a maze into which she could slip effortlessly. It would be easy to find the horse, lay the rifle down, and run back in distress, weeping and wailing of some terrible tragedy that struck the young Miss, whom despite all advice against such adventure had gone out, and there had been an accident, and–

No, she'd best kill her. She'd fired unthinkingly on the wolf, a simple beast who had been lean and hungry in that innocent way all creatures would be in the dead of winter.

Was Dora not herself lean and hungry? A beast, for the way her Lady regarded her? It should be easier to fire upon the woman than the creature.

There had been a time, when Dora was young, and her Lady younger, that she had adored the girl. Beautiful, golden-headed, well-spoken, well-mannered, delicate and refined.

And she still was. The woman was all of those things, still, even with the darkness carefully painted upon her lashes now running down her cheeks, the dribble of blood broadening out into a dangerous stain on her stocking, her riding dress rucked up, her hair come undone and tangled, and the hand missing its fine glove now purpling from cold.

Exquisitely beautiful.

Rotten, though.

Her Lady couldn't seem to lift her head. Her eyes roamed around, unable to catch Dora and the gun in her peripheral.

Perhaps her neck was broken, in which case there would be no saving her regardless of Dora's choice or wishes. It would be kindest to put her down, the same as her Lady had put down the bird little Dora had taken a liking to, whose singing one morning had ruffled her Lady's nerves.

Dora stepped nearer. The snow crunched underfoot.

"There you are, get me up, on the horse, hurry, woman!" the lady cried. There was no movement in her extremities.

"Lady, can you move? We must be careful not to aggravate an injury, I may need to return with a board," Dora said, demurely.

Something shifted in her Lady's expression as she seemed to try, a well-bred concentration taking shape on her elegant face. Her lips pursed.

One fingertip twitched.

Her broken leg stretched out as straight as it could with the bone crookedly pierced out. She heaved.

Dora tutted.

"Oh, dear Lady, you must be in shock. That's fortunate for your sake! Well, I certainly cannot move you in such a state. Let me see to splinting you, and then I will see to finding the horse—"

"Woman, you cannot imagine the agony! Hurry yourself!"

Dora could excuse it as impatience from the pain for any other person. She had heard similar from every soldier she'd tended alongside her mother, that loss of sense and decorum borne of sensations that bent the mind and tortured men free of their manners.

It was no aberration for her Lady.

Dora knelt down in the snow as something dark took hold in her.

"Oh, Lady, must I? Will you still bite at the hand that feeds you if I do?"

Some fury rose in those pale blue eyes, as they finally took her in.

"You— you owe me! You will always owe me, as you owed my

mother before me!"

Dora felt a quiet smile come to her lips. The pleasure of it was warm.

"Ah, yes, Lady. Of course." That dark impulse grew, seeping into Dora like blood into a pretty stocking she'd been so careful with when she'd laundered, had taken such care not to snag or deform the lace of. It was plenty deformed now. "But tell me: what debts exist here? We are alone, for many miles. Even the wolf lays dead."

"Threatening me? You fool, you fool of a cunt—"

With sudden initiative, the Lady pushed up to sitting, then got a leg under herself, and started up to her feet.

The fracture wrenched under her at an impossible angle, and she screamed as she went down, even when her lovely face landed in the snow.

"Oh, Lady, it is quite bad, you shouldn't have done it. You'll need far more than a nurse like me, but if we can get you back, a doctor may see you not lame yet."

The limb was twisted, foot facing the wrong way. From the rent flesh, blood poured into the trampled, dirtied snow.

She pushed up onto her palms, then stayed there as though she did not know how to proceed. Her sharp sighs were trembling, her arms shaking, and before long she fell back into the snow.

"Woman— Dora! Dora, fine, we shall speak of debts! What would you have? What lighter sentence? What do you wish to buy yourself?"

A coldness far deeper than the winter around them had Dora's eyes growing placid, a calm overtaking any desire to taunt she might have given into.

"Lady, beg. Offer me things."

"Beg? Beg?!"

Dora had her lady by the shoulder, a grip without roughness in it, only firmly rolling her to her back. As a nurse would.

Despite the care, the Lady screamed all the same as her leg was moved, and some of it came with the rest of her, that uniquely wet sound of tearing meat reaching Dora's ears.

"Dear lady, yes, beg. What would you offer?"

"What— what could you even want?!"

Dora laid a hand on her heaving chest, the chill of the snow not having wholly erased the heat of her skin under the blouse. "Think hard, lady. Surely you must know."

"What, your freedom? You want your freedom?!"

Dora smiled from the true serenity of power. "Dear Lady, I could have it were I simply to leave you to die. Think harder, if you please."

"What else?! What else could you want?" Her voice was shaking, pitched into hysteria, and her teeth were chattering from the cold and the pain now, Dora thought.

"What was taken from my mother, Lady."

"What was— you— you harlot! You whore! You filthy, low-bred bitch! Your whore mother, ruining our family's—"

Dora took the twisted limb into her hands and she twisted, more.

The skin began to tear further.

"Lady," she chided, "you use such coarse language. I taught you far better. If you are only going to say foul things, perhaps it is time we resume our lessons."

This, as the Lady screamed.

She straightened the leg back, and laid it into the snow, like a doll being set back with a rent part to be mended.

"No, no—"

Dora sighed as she tore a length of cloth free from her Lady's petticoat. A makeshift tourniquet to keep her from bleeding out. "You know, I never did strike you, Lady. I didn't believe in it. I was raised far more gently than you, you see."

"You wouldn't have dared!" she shrieked. "You wouldn't— my mother—"

"Your mother had no care for you in those days, after she ended your father and my mother at once. Dear Lady, I was your only family. You see?"

"You offered it!" she cried. "You— what are you doing?!"

Dora had her coat unbuttoned, her blouse parted, baring the tops of her pale, full breasts to the cold air.

"Goodness, I have heard it many times from your mother, dear Lady, how she found them."

She worked at the ribbon binding her Lady's bodice tight. The neat bow she'd set into place that morning came apart in her fingers.

"I never would hold such a thing against a child, except that you," and she yanked the ribbon through, "couldn't—" another eyelet loosened, "stop—" and another, "reminding me!"

The bodice fell open, the ribbon connected only across her Lady's flat belly. The camisole underneath had ridden up, pulled by the unlacing, baring pale, bone-white flesh to the freezing air.

Some awareness finally rose into her Lady's eyes, widening, pinning sharply down, and she brought her hands up to push Dora's away, feebly, the joints slow to respond. So feebly it was easy work for Dora to pin delicate wrists together and wind the ribbon around.

"Dora?! D-Dora, nuh— no, I— you— you know I've never— this isn't the s-same at all!! This isn't—"

Her voice was shivering as sharply as her body under the fervor with which she spoke.

"Oh, dear Lady, you know the only reason your father didn't have me the same as my mother is the bullet yours put into him, no? It would have been precisely the same."

She tied the ends of ribbon to the slender parasitic shoots growing from the base of the tree. As feebly as her Lady moved, it would be plenty.

"You— you can't do it! You can't possibly!"

Dora looked at all the supple skin that was bared fully as she pushed up the camisole and let the bodice fall open. She was laid out under her like the finest spread Dora had seen in her life. If only she truly wanted to eat of it.

Her Lady's little pink nipples stood up as sharply as the pins Dora had used to take in her clothes. Dora gave each a tidy pinch, and her lady tried to twist away. The snow had melted under her, forming enough a coffin that she couldn't move far.

"Let me recall, Lady, what she had told me... 'the whore's teats were out, and he'd grabbed onto them while he was stoned-deep in her wicked cunt... well. It will be difficult, since I have no prick, but I can find something for it."

She'd always been so clever when her Lady had needed it.

Dora's eyes fell on the mess of things that had spilled onto the snow from the saddlebags, from kindest to cruelest. If her Lady was to suffer, the hunting knife would surely be the most awful to use.

Perhaps kinder, though, the spyglass. Kindest of all would be the smooth leather handle of the riding crop. Perhaps kinder in her hands than ever in her Lady's.

"Beg, Lady," she said, "for it to be a gentler revenge."

Her Lady glared, eyes drawing narrow and brow creasing so prettily despite the sourness of her expression.

Dora could use the knife instead to carve them from her head. To erase forever those disdainful gazes that had followed her these many years, never satisfied, never knowing any

appreciation for the kindnesses given her. Each hateful eye could be popped free, neatly as the wet balls of melon Dora had plated for her as a young girl – before her lady had been spoiled with the truth of things.

"You– fine! Fine, please! Don't ruin me completely! Just take your maiden's blood and be gone!"

"Lady, please, you have heard begging before, can you not do better?"

Her lady had heard the begging of a woman, barely past girlhood, begging for forgiveness, begging for her own life against the former lady of the house. She surely must have remembered.

Dora reached for the knife. Her lady must have caught the glint.

"Oh, god– woman, no, please, not that?!"

Dora gave her a placid smile.

"What, then, lady? What shall I use? Ask me so kindly as I have asked you for everything, always, and perhaps I will be moved."

She had wild eyes on Dora. She looked more girlish in her fear than haughty, and some touch of pity brushed Dora's heart. The girl was raised in a horrible family, what else could she have done but grow horrible herself? Did her lady have any more choice than the wolf?

"Please! Don't cut me up like some street whore!! My father never would have! He was a good man, just tempted!!"

Dora frowned.

The father who had followed her mother like a sniffing hound, had eyed Dora herself, "good"? And it had been for no lack of beauty on the part of her lady's own mother. The matron of the house had been a striking woman.

"Lady, your father was an unfaithful whore of a man with a wandering eye that lingered also on little girls," Dora

snapped, grip tightening on the knife.

"Shut up! Shut up, shut up! Don't touch me, you slanderous—how dare—!?"

Dora opened up a cut down the front of the skirt rather than even bother rucking it up. It would be needless to preserve the garment. Skirt, petticoats—

The blade bound up in the thick layers of winter fabric. She grasped them in hand and ripped, ignoring how they bit into her gloveless fingers, tender in the cold.

The Lady's broken leg gave pitiful aborted twitches, some intent to kick obvious, but her lady couldn't manage past the pain. It may have been losing sensation at last. The other seemed so feeble as well, though, unable to properly draw back, just jerking, the heel of her supple leather boot furrowing the snow under her.

"No! No! Stop it! Help!!" her Lady cried out, her voice the only sound for miles. "Help! The bitch has gone mad!"

Dora had the skirts parted and laying like a ragged picnic blanket under her.

"If you were going to be cruel, being clever would have suited you far better, Lady," Dora sighed.

The subdued thrashing that brought on gave Dora a measure of satisfaction. Rage was strong, but shock and blood loss were likely stronger.

Her lady's undergarments, translucent from sweat, were the last barrier. She slipped the blade up the trembling, sweat-tacky skin of her thigh and under the fabric, cut through them as well, baring the golden curls that hid her cunt properly.

"A choice," she said, voice steady, "Lady, answer me properly, if you would?"

The woman was hysterical, and even if she had been a kind person, a proper answer was surely beyond her. Dora was offering her lady the illusion of a leap, like a deer vaulting over a ravine to fall to a crumpled death rather than be

consumed.

"The blade or the handle?" she asked.

"Handle! Handle, god, please!" she screamed, voice showing tells of breaking.

"Oh, good girl," Dora said. "You haven't entirely forgotten your manners, lady. The handle it is."

She didn't sheathe the knife, but turned it in her hand, and looked down at that thatch of hair. The lady was damp, surely from sweat, but as Dora reached down to part her cuntlips with two fingers, she felt that wetness inside.

"This– this is– you wouldn't, you won't! You won't really! Lecherous– no, no, no, please don't!" she shrieked as Dora pushed her fingers in enough to feel the shape of that tight hole, to feel where she was nearly sealed shut.

There was no delicacy about how Dora fit the pommel of the knife there, watching as her Lady weakly squealed and twisted. It was quick work, as she was sure the man had made of her mother. The Lady screamed.

The leather wrapping the handle caught in its entry, and Dora pushed harder, until finally, finally, her pressure overpowered the resistance and there was a very slight sense of give. The lady reared her unbroken leg back to kick, but Dora pulled the knife free, thrust back in, and the motion died on a clenched thigh and shuddered gasp. The leather bore a ruddy stain on it.

"Well, lady, the deed is done, but let me be kinder about it, won't you? Let's have you die a little death before I finish you off."

Her lady's eyes were toward Dora's face but they seemed focused a hundred leagues beyond.

"D-death? What do you mean?" she whispered.

"My lady, I would see you come apart from the one you keep calling such awful things," Dora said.

"C-come apart? What—"

"Hush, you're going blue," Dora said sternly, and she was. Her lips were past pink now, her nose, ears, and fingers turning more violently red.

She was shivering horribly. Even Dora's fingers were starting to go darker red in the tips.

She left the knife where it was, stuck by what scant arousal and blood kept the lady's walls sticky inside.

"Lady, what of a game? You did love games," Dora asked, smiling down at her.

"Game!? Is this— is it— yes... a game," she said, her tone shifting distant as she spoke, as the shock seemed to die away.

Perhaps she had finally realized. Dora nodded.

"Very good, lady. If you can keep the knife in, then you will have some chance at living. I will take you to the bounds of the estate and leave you. Perhaps even send up a shot to worry the staff that they'll find you."

"If I can..."

Her lady trailed off, eyes even more distant.

She'd lost too much blood, the shock of pain surely dulling her.

"Well, lady, let's see."

And Dora brought her fingertips to her lips, letting her saliva slick them, then dropped them to her lady's cuntlips, pressing them into those curls to find the sensitive bud within.

At that, suddenly, the lady stirred back to action with a gasp. It had been barely a touch.

The knife gave a jerk, surely from the sudden stimulation tightening her cunt.

Dora chose to do her a kindness. She shoved it in to the hilt, and the lady whimpered very quietly. She rocked her fingertips against the tender spot, searching until contact drew a stronger tremble beneath her ministrations.

Blood trickled from her lady's slit, down onto the fabric of her torn skirting.

The lady whined, and gave little shivering twitches and soft sounds as more fluid trickled from her cunt. It came pink, not red.

"Please, just go, please... just go," she moaned, voice dazed and empty. "Please, I'm sorry."

The sorry stirred Dora's pity again. It was a word her lady had not said since her distant girlhood.

She looked down at the lady, her eyes vacant as she stared up into the grey winter sky.

Dora kept at that touching, and the lady's eyes crinkled at the edges, something taking shape on her lips.

"Yes, a game," the lady murmured.

Dora was silent, and beneath her, those pretty lips, darkened with the cold, parted. Her eyes closed, then pinched tightly, and Dora knew the tells of what was coming.

The lady's thighs tensed, and she made a low, unsteady cry as Dora's work stirred her leg above its ragged tear. Dora kept her movements steady and unrelenting, circling swiftly in those now-sodden curls. There was a soft, fluttering cry, and the knife slipped free onto the wet, ruined skirt with a gush of fluid.

Dora's throat was very tight, and as she looked down at the knife she felt something break inside of herself.

It lay with bright blood clinging to it in a puddle, soaking through the skirt fabric. Perhaps it already touched the snow below.

"You lose," Dora said, through cold lips.

She pushed herself back and stood to look down at the mess of her lady. Her ruined leg, her cunt leaking blood, the pinched-pinkness in her nipples, the pink into red into violet of frostbite taking hold at her extremities.

Dora bent and picked up the rifle.

She pulled back on the bolt to eject the cartridge that had ended the wolf, and loaded in a fresh round.

She leveled the rifle. Sighted down the barrel.

Her lady's head lolled towards her, eyes unfocused.

"I would... always... have lost, if I had... played fair, with dogs..." her lady wheezed.

The woods echoed with a crack.

A Moment With KD

Q: Tell us about yourself and your art.

A: Myself? "NB but too busy to care" data analyst with a major Thing for taking things to their most extreme logical conclusion. Rated "adorable" by my therapist and "a nightmare" by an ex. Both chronically online and hateful of technology. Paris Hilton stan. Willing to do anything for the bit. In possession of so many feelings. Now imagine all of that as prose. There you have it. That's my art.

Q: What mediums do you work in?

A: Writing, primarily, lots of writing on my phone in every spare minute, but I've been known to draw a thing or two, mostly digitally in CSP. I also pick up a paintbrush now and then and make a pretty sick collage if I do say so myself.

Q: What specific themes/subjects do you enjoy exploring in art?

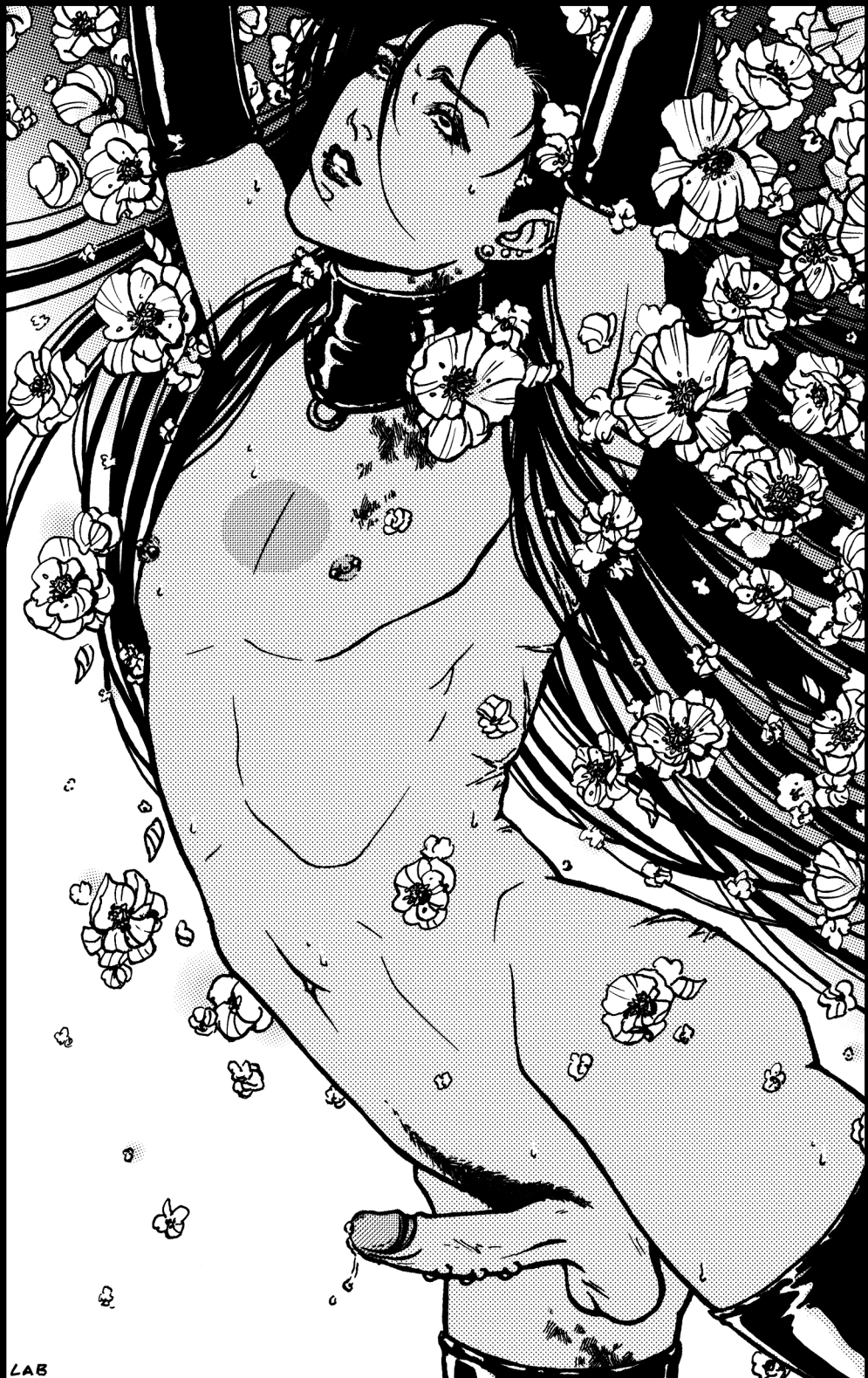
A: See "things taken to their most extreme logical conclusion" above, also, general themes of complicated intimacy, unstable and inequitable arrangements, dehumanization and its delicious counterpart, rehumanization, and a heaping dose of "hey, not that I'd ever do it, but wouldn't it be fucked up if- I lied, I did it." So, you know, smut and gore.

Q: What do you hope your audience takes away from your art?

A: Horny feelings. No, I'm kidding. No, actually I'm not. Horny discomfort. I like playing around in that space of inspiring concern and excitement in equal parts, because it's just how I am as a person. Persistent believer that being a little uncomfortable and turned on about it is good for a guy, sometimes.

Q: What do you think is the role of transgressive/taboo work in society?

A: The best way to be horny is scared. I'm only kinda kidding, haha. But, really, I think people just plain like being 1- seen in ways society deems ugly, and 2- uncomfortable in ways they can control. This does that. That's hot.



A Moment With LAB

Q: Tell us about yourself and your art.

A: Hello hello! I'm LAB, connoisseur of androgynous pretty boys, long hair, and flowers. I dabble in various art and writing activities.

Q: What mediums do you work in?

A: I work almost entirely in analog with various mediums, my specialty being pen & ink with hand-cut screentones. I generally only use digital for composition sketches now and again due to the ease of adjustment, then for editing and adding text after the original art is scanned. I actually write far, far more than I draw, but my writing partner is the only one who ever sees it. Oh, I'm also into bookbinding and plan to print & bind my own comics as much as possible.

Q: What specific themes/subjects do you enjoy exploring in art?

A: The banal tragedies of everyday life. A lot of pretty typical subjects, honestly. Sex & love are topics I return to over and over because I'm some level of aroace and they're topics I desperately want to understand fully, but likely never will. Other prevalent topics are sexuality, gender, loneliness, intimacy, mental health, nostalgia, sexual assault & abuse, obsession, BDSM, power dynamics, the moral gray, kink, etc. I'm sure I'm forgetting some important ones.

Q: What do you hope your audience takes away from your art?

A: At the end of the day, art is about connection to me. It's about indirectly saying "This is how I feel, do you feel this way too?". Or something like that. There's nothing specific I want the general audience to take away from it, but I hope it finds those who it's meant for.

Q: What do you think is the role of transgressive/taboo work in society?

A: It's a mirror of humanity and to deny it is to deny ourselves as human.

Sunlight, Sunrise

by JD Riley

There was a peculiar bite to the air of this strange country. How funny, it seemed, when he had first arrived to think that he was not so far away from where he was meant to be. When he'd first set the soles of his boots down upon the wooden floor of the Golden Krone Hotel, it had been with comforting thoughts of returning to England to find his beautiful Mina there waiting for him. Though he had been beset by oddities and unsettling dreams before then, it was not so far away, this longing and this familiar love which warmed him body and soul. Oh how naive, he thought now. The air which bit him here was the crisp and violent air of the Carpathians, a wind which would follow down the cutting jagged cliffs and swoop down the Borgo Pass until it could settle itself in the weary Bistritz where the Golden Krone survived seemingly a thousand miles away, its gentle flickering orange lamps and the sharpened dark eyes of the Szekelys who made their homes there like a whole different world to him now. For it was difficult to imagine himself anywhere else. Not when it had been so long.

Or had it been?

How long had he been here? He'd written, surely, he thought. But memory was a difficult thing in so cold and so dark a place, and when one wasn't feeling so youthful anymore, it was hard to hold onto how much time had passed. He'd written. But what date had he placed upon his missives? He'd

seen the sun rise above the old ridge of the mountains and it was like no other sun he'd seen before. An English sun was like a white light diffused through so many clouds, a gentle glimmer over a gray rain, and here? Here was a Transylvanian sun which upon the dawn would rise into a blood red horizon fading upward into a tenuous orange and yellow before it alighted finally and took its place among a soft and graying blue. Sometimes the clouds would gather over the mountains as the air currents would allow, and he could see it rain in gentle, undulating waves in the distance.

Once he had seen it rain here through thick, warped glass, dripping down the edges of the stone on the outside of the tall lancet windows which had been heavily draped in his chamber. When he looked out and he saw the gray outside he could recall the gray of London's rain and it was different. Here, the rain was cleaner and clearer, dripping from the heavens without the grime of a city's refuse sent high into the air through soot and smoke and smog. There was something so *pure* about this place, he thought then, though he was not sure what he thought now.

Now that he had spent what seemed like eons wandering through this place, his fingernails gently scraping along the stonework of the walls, Jonathan Harker could hardly remember London. Or why he came to Transylvania in the first place. Or Mina. There was only the sun, the bloody sky, and the dimness of a castle too labyrinthian to navigate effectively.

How he longed to find the lair.

Silly me, I am in the lair.

The real lair.

What do you mean, Mr. Harker?

He smiled at himself as the heels of his boots scraped behind him while he lazily wandered. He hadn't bothered to shave that morning. Had he bothered to shave the previous morning? How could he shave when his hands trembled so? After having such dreams as he did, how did anyone shave when they woke? He felt as though every morning he was lulled into wakefulness by the lonesome and protracted howls of the Transylvanian wolves—surely just the usual Eurasian

gray wolf, he thought, and hadn't he seen them? Yes. A few of them, scattered about through the thick, mangled forests that surrounded Dracula's castle. He had seen one in particular when he had leaned over the stone balustrade of a high-up balcony he'd never found again. Yellow eyes pierced him. He was too far away to know what color they were but he was certain they were yellow. Mournful. Pitying. Pitying like the souls who had left him in Bistritz, huddled about against the subtle cold.

Did he ever actually fall asleep?

Don't be ridiculous, of course you fall asleep. You must, for you wake.

That did not seem to mean much to him. Just because he seemed to wake each morning back in his chamber did not mean that he ever actually fell asleep. After all, there was more to it than waking. He didn't even recall climbing into the bed. The feel of cold sheets on his legs. And surely if he did put himself to sleep...

Mr. Harker...how could you think...?

Surely if he put himself to sleep, he would wake wearing his nightclothes. As it happened, Jonathan had never awoken in Dracula's castle wearing any clothes at all. His day clothes were usually found folded very neatly at the end of his bed, settled there not by himself, he knew, but by some unseen servant.

Though, he suspected there were no servants at all. He suspected that though the Count might have claimed there to be servants who did such things as the cooking and the washing, there was really no one else at all. How should there be? How should there be when there were so many poor souls out there huddling about in the subtle chill of the dusk knowing what Jonathan knew now.

Or did he know it?

From his small dictionary of words, he had found them to be saying superstitious things when he had left. *Satan. Devil. Hell. Vampire?*

Like the wolves, their voices whispered and groaned in his

memories and he felt again tired. He felt tired much of the time. Surely in all his wanderings, he would have found a servant or two before they had scurried off to wherever they came from. Since he had been here, he had not seen the driver again and he had a strong suspicion that the driver was the Count himself.

And wasn't the Count looking much less gray these days?

Was he? Jonathan smiled to himself as his heels again dragged over the stone floor and the light from his torch flickered a bit, casting his shadow over the stonework. Sometimes he passed small indentations in the walls where a little table stood and sometimes he could still smell the incense which had burned there only an hour or so before but he recalled as he had lingered in the castle these days (Weeks? Months?) it had begun to smell a little less like rot beneath that incense and a little more like something else he couldn't put his finger upon.

He turned around a familiar corner only to discover an unfamiliar staircase and he let himself have a lazy grin for he knew that this staircase couldn't possibly have been here yesterday. He'd been this way yesterday, he thought—or was it the day before? Whatever, he decided, it didn't matter anyway. After all, he wouldn't have to find his way back. He would simply wake up there after... His face took on a flush though it was a weak one. He used to flush so easily when he was in England with Mina. She used to say all sorts of dastardly things to him that would make a mottled pink arrive in his cheeks but now it was as though he didn't quite have enough blood in him for the same sort of heat to arrive in his cheeks and his throat. He wondered, then, if he ever obtained his spotty, haphazard lust rash whenever he was touched by—

Stop. Those are dreams. You know they're dreams for whenever they happen, you wake from them. You don't get lust rashes from them because they're not actually happening.

He wasn't certain if that was true. How could one know they were asleep if one never felt as though they were falling asleep? He'd never had that problem before. He'd always been very conscious of his descent into the arms of Morpheus, and so why now did he have such a strange manner about

him? Why Dracula's castle? Oh that was probably a silly question. There was so much wrong here, he thought wearily. There was so much he didn't understand. How the Count seemed to age backward. How he never came about during the day but only during the night and usually with such a strange and terrifying glint in his dark eyes...as though he knew what Jonathan dreamed or what he thought at every single moment. As if he knew how seductive he could be...

He was halfway up the stairs before he saw a flicker of movement at the top. This happened sometimes. At first he thought it was a servant and he had given chase, but in time he had found that he could not keep up no matter how he tried and so he had determined that it must have been a ghost. Surely only a ghost could move so quickly and seemingly through walls. He didn't bother to chase this time, merely moving at his normal speed until he got there, no longer unsettled by the queer events which occurred around him. He wandered this new hallway which twisted a bit here and there, and he opened unlocked doors as he passed, sometimes finding out-of-use parlors with furniture still draped with dusty white sheets and covered in cobwebs from overzealous spiders. He hummed as he went, surprised at the sound of his own voice and how cheery he thought himself. Most of the doors were locked, anyhow.

He supposed after all the grief he'd gone through in being here too long, he was finally at the end stage. The part where he didn't much mind what happened to him. Strange how this could happen to a man so quickly. Or had it? He couldn't think. His mind was in a muddle so complete that he could not feel properly unnerved by it. Perhaps he was going mad. Perhaps when he finally was able to reach England again they would send him to Bedlam.

Oh certainly. And you know what they shall do to you when they find out what you dreamed of when you were here? When they discover that you dreamed of a dashing Count with jet black hair holding you like he does, naked in the moonlight to the howls of wolves?

He let out a queer little laugh which bubbled up from somewhere unknowable inside him, releasing from his chest without the weight of too much emotion. There was nothing left in him, he thought, save a strange bit of affection which he couldn't rightly place upon Mina anymore. After all...he'd

rather forgotten what she looked like. All that occupied him now was the curiosity of what intimate and devious desires his fantasies may bring to him tonight.

How long had he wandered? He opened another door to find a dim library, one of countless libraries just like it scattered all over the castle. The books were often too old to read and the furniture too moth-eaten to survive a sit. He wandered inside, careful as he strode over the disintegrating rug to the window which he determined to be upon the western wall. The sun was sinking low, transforming the sky into the purples of twilight and soon it would dip below the horizon and...

And he would rediscover where he wanted to place that scrap of affection still left over in his heart.

He's a man, Jonathan Harker.

Yes. He was. And wasn't he *such* a man? The manner in which Jonathan found himself touched in his dreams and fantasies had him beside himself at first. He was shocked at the nature of what his mind could conjure and what his flesh might desire and yet now...when he had suffered for so long...

Suffered?

He caught sight of a door at the end of this strange corridor and it was ajar at first before it closed silently. He wasn't certain it was ever open after it was shut, for his mind wasn't what it used to be these days. Had it ever been open at all? He rubbed at one of his eyes, shaking his head in the hopes that he might not have to think about it overly. This would be just another parlor or library or dining room and he would hopefully find the man himself waiting there with his lush raven's wing hair with only just a touch of gray at his ears and he would say—

“Jonathan...”

He gasped a bit in shock, alarmed by the very feminine whisper which came to him from behind the door. He'd had his fingers upon the handle but at the sound he recoiled as though it burned. His reply was low and quiet, as though he were fearful of being heard though he could not imagine who might have been around to hear him.

“H-Hello?”

No one answered him and so he reached for the handle to the door again and pressed, finding the door heavy but unlocked, the wood sliding against the stone floor and revealing the only room he'd found in the whole of the castle—save for his own room—which was relatively devoid of advancement of age though the floor was still coated in a layer of dust. He marveled, finding the comfort of this part of the castle to be too great to ignore and so he came within and sat at a writing desk and peered from the windows toward the sloping mountains and the great expanse of countryside. The sun was beginning to kiss the horizon and he came to a great couch to the edge of the room and lay upon it, waiting perhaps for this great man to find him as he had found him before in all his other dreams.

Is this a dream, Mr. Harker? Is it a dream, or is it your wishes come to flesh?

Soon, the unease which had settled into his heart at the sound of his own name whispered behind the door rose to the fore, and he sat up suddenly to find that he was not alone. Three ghastly beautiful women without shadows and with flesh pale in the brilliant shimmering moonlight greeted him there, two with dark features like those of the women in this country and one with hair silvery blonde in the night and eyes a piercing blue. Though they came to him, though he could feel their lips upon his flesh and their teeth over his throat, he did not want them. He felt powerless to their draw but he could not push them away, sighing through the press of their mouths and the tantalizing scrape of their long incisors.

“Please...” he tried, his intent to beg them to cease. Surely they would, he thought, as the majestic blonde shed the organza which had hardly hidden her form and came over him, her fingers following the crease of his trousers until she pressed against his groin.

“*Hmm?*” she murmured, and the whispers of her sisters halted for the moment when she pressed against him again, as though urging his body to respond.

It won't. You can't. You've been ruined by him. You've been claimed by him.

It was sudden, her leave from him, as she was torn away and tossed as though she weigh no more than a bed pillow though she skidded on her feet and hands as a cat might skid, her pearl white fangs bared as she hissed toward the man Jonathan had truly wished might find him here. It was to this that his blood rushed and he pulled himself to sit upright again, feeling heat gather in a golden pool low in his stomach and hard in his loins.

He was dashing, this Count, and his words were heated with ire and...and more...

“How dare you touch him, any of you? How dare you cast eyes on him when I had forbidden it? Back, I tell you all! This man belongs to me! Beware how you meddle with him, or you’ll have to deal with me.” His eyes were dark, so dark in the moonlight that he could see the moon glinting within them, and it was this moment that Jonathan knew he was lost. There was darkness all around him but a light shone within, and he could only bring himself to breathe and feel, the rush of his blood suddenly all he could sense as this inhuman devil took steps toward him and the women countered.

“You yourself never loved; you never love!”

Jonathan peered up at him where he stood, looming only feet away, their eyes together, a hot pitch darkness colliding and sparking against unyielding diamond blue. Dracula, his lips parted and full, seemed loathe to turn away from his gaze but did so only to reply in a breathy, lustful whisper. “Yes, I too can love; you yourselves can tell it from the past...*and he shall know it now...*”

“Are we to have nothing to-night?” She sounded only the slightest forlorn and Jonathan could hardly conceive of the small nod that the Count gave them before they faded into the deep and the dark of the castle with the wriggling bag he'd brought them. Jonathan didn't care about them. How could he when his thoughts were rushing and roiling as the blood in his veins over how much he wanted this dream.

It feels so real...

“A gentle soul you have, Mr. Harker,” Dracula told him, his voice low enough to rumble in the young man's heart,

reverberating downward until he was aching stiff.

There was a decadent cadence to the beat of his heart when he heard these words. It was no slight to him to know that Dracula had taken brides. However aged this creature—however many centuries he'd seen, he had loved so little that only three women had gained the gift of his immortality and surely...surely Jonathan could count himself among them soon. And surely when the Count took his place in London at Carfax Abbey, Jonathan would be his companion there.

Some vague faraway portion of his consciousness urged for an unknown emotion. It was once familiar, he knew, but now how could he place it? Was it caution? Was it a grim fear his human soul could not help but reach when the aspect of death was so close? Another distant thought alighted, whispering as though only a breath of consciousness before it was caught in the winds of potent desire.

He'll take you home. To England. He can take you with him when he goes...

“T-Take m-me...”

The eyes of a predator leveled over him, the shine of moonlight within them eaten into a consuming void.

Was this what lust could do to a man? This was no natural lust, he conceded, for he had never felt such a passionate longing in his life. This was the lust that must strike the heart of a man who has come to know Satan's bed. Should this be weakness, he must own to it. He must exalt in it. Surely this was the fire that gleamed red in the heart of the Carpathians.

He was ready. He was so ready to *become*.

“I can smell your eager spirit, Mr. Harker.”

Yes, my eager spirit!

Still sitting upon the great couch, Jonathan could feel the quivering rush of anticipation within as the Count took the final steps to close the distance and his fantasy took hold. He was close—so damnably close—and when his knee came between Jonathan's to depress the cushion, there was an

unbearable emotion in the solicitor's chest. He wanted to be ravaged.

All thoughts beyond this vanished before Dracula even began to kiss him, the breath between them hardly a whisper before he was swept into the iron grip of a man who was more than a man. There was energy and potential in the strength of those arms, one of which came behind him to hold him steady while the Count took the first of his meals.

An appetizer, if you will.

This was not the subtle kiss of a delicate lover but the demanding, forceful plundering of a creature marking its territory. He could not have held to a coherent thought. It was as though he were a being reduced only to his senses and every one of them was more sensitive than the last. The smell of him, younger now and revitalized, smelling like the bloom of *life* and the rust of *blood*. The taste of him, like a vivid, sharp exuberance. The *feel* of him as he loomed and then pressed down over Jonathan's body—the pliant poise of an apex predator commanding the will of its prey.

Prey. I am prey.

For no good reason at all, he was further stimulated by the thought, and he moaned softly into the Count's mouth, his whimper just a breath but willful enough to convey his need. He found himself spoiled often in these dreams, as though no part of his fantasies would ever be denied to him, and so he grinned at the feel of a generous hand upon his thigh. No true to life lover could know his mind so well as this Count did. No captor could know the whims of their prisoner! He felt so hot. Like a flame dancing in the night was he, and he arched his back, letting the front of his brocade waistcoat brush against Dracula's chest, wordlessly begging to be stripped and adored.

God, he was wicked, this man and monster. His fingers toyed with each button as he continued to bestow feathering, tempting kisses upon swollen lips. It was easy for poor Jonathan to become so distracted that he could not remember how he became naked, but this instance it was as though the Count wished to take his time, gently peeling away the linen of Jonathan's shirt just to break from his tantalizing caresses to swoop down toward his throat, a sharp breath in

marking his descent before he placed a soft and reverent open-mouthed kiss upon Jonathan's pulse, lingering there while he tugged at the sleeves and tossed the offending clothing to the carpet. His fingers, tipped by sharp talon-like nails knew only to give the most delicate of touches and he held tenderly, one hand sliding up toward the back of Jonathan's neck as the creature trailed his open lips down a pale collarbone and over the gentle swell of his chest.

“C-Count...”

It was as though he were worshiped and though he knew himself as the moth and Dracula as the flame, he could not help but think that here, upon this couch and in this castle, their roles were switched.

Jonathan brought up his hand, clutching at the creature's crisp black hair, ruffling it a bit so that he might seem less a man and more an animal...though the effect was nearly too overwhelming when he peered up and met Jonathan's eyes. He was primal and primordial made flesh, a creature hardly contained by the limits of the natural world.

*And he pleasures me! Me! Of all men on earth, he has his mouth upon **me!***

Dracula was quick in unfastening Jonathan's trousers and even quicker to press a kind palm upon that velvet warmth. His hands were not warm, per se, but they were knowledgeable and there was something deeply instinctual about the manner in which he went about all things in intimacy. As though pleasure were a matter of course and that there was nothing beyond his partner's needs. Jonathan, in his panting arousal, watched the creature touch him, taking him in hand and stroke him, knowing that he could be subject to several brutally intense orgasms within such a dream.

It is still a dream, is it not?

Gods, but it felt so real.

He jumped a little when Dracula spoke, his voice so deep and even a tad breathless.

“We are old hat at this by now, would you say? It is as though I know your body by heart.”

He took a moment to catch his breath, swallowing a groan at the way the creature's thumb swept over the seam of him. "I cannot speak of it..."

"You are not lewd, Mr. Harker? You cannot tell me that when you peer at me with such a face."

"P-Please...Count..."

"Do you know what comes next?"

His breath caught as trembles of pleasure rippled through him at the work of his hand. "I want it."

"Tell me what it is."

He felt a deep flush come over his face and chest and he could hear the savage sound of a restrained growl. This beast before him was more monster now than man, his eyes and teeth sharp and insidious. Jonathan whispered, sheepish and wanting.

"Your bite...I want your mouth..."

Though Dracula could have moved quicker than sight, he drew in another breath as he came to that daring and exhilarated pulse, taking a moment to skim the tip of his proud nose against the soft flesh just under Jonathan's ear before he prodded with the tips of his fangs in a teasing, painful kiss before penetration. It was this perfect pain that sent Jonathan's eyes rolling into the back of his skull, his first orgasm shuddering through him at the sweet and thrilling agony of his flesh. He was pressed into the cushion below him and before he knew it, his trousers were gone and he was nude in the glimmering silver moonlight, his hands clutching at Dracula's pale shoulders, holding him as though he were afraid this hauntingly beautiful creature might leave him before he could witness...

The Count released him, purposeful in his messy state; long strings of saliva and blood roping from his lips to dribble over Jonathan's bare chest, mingling with the pearlescence of his previous emission. He could feel the wound at his throat warm and wet, his blood rushing out over the couch and into the hair at his nape, and he was never more excited in intimacy than these moments.

Dracula's voice was even deeper, the edge of it ragged and rasping as though the untrained will of the monster lay behind it. *"Your eager spirit calls to me... Your soul shines brilliant within...it is like you are my sunlight, my love."*

*Love. Oh breath! Oh life! Oh **love!***

Dracula was feeding from him again, careful in drawing from him a mouthful which he then playfully dribbled over his writhing form, dark splotches pattering over his chest, belly, and groin. His legs were spread and he was lifted just so in order for this creature of night to taste him where he bloomed.

"Mmmm..." Jonathan sighed, used to this by now and settled well into the fantasy. At first, he had thought himself mad. He'd resisted. Though he had encountered some deviancy in his university days, he was by no means a man who oft came upon occasions in which he would stray so far from the norm and yet... Well, there was no harm in a dream was there? He was wetted well before he felt the press of his monster where he ached for him. He found himself muttering in half-way intelligible words, begging to be filled, begging to be touched, begging to be *impaled*. *"Ahhhn!"* He was speared in one lunging thrust, and he curled his body to cradle the Count's impressive size while his thighs tightened around the creature's hips. It was easy then to be receptive, and he pulled down, eager to taste the copper of his own blood upon the lips of his gruesome lover.

He panted into Dracula's mouth, his tongue dancing with that of his hellish mate as the soft slapping of their bodies marked each grain of subtle pleasure which fell within the glass of his soul.

"Nngh! Hnnnh... Hah ahn..."

"Are you ready, my love?"

Ready? No, I—

He was moved as though he weighed no more than a feather, rolled fluidly until he was sitting straddled upon Dracula who was very much naked and utterly sublime in his form. Jonathan's wound upon his throat was still bleeding, black thin drips cascading down his body in the moonlight until

small round droplets could spatter over his lover's chest. He was bucked from beneath, the Count driving upward into him deeper than he thought he had ever been speared. He was rocked and fucked, decorated in the luxury of his own life until he cried out as the crest of his climax overcame him.

“Ouh! Aaahn! T-Take me! Take me! Take me!” He could not cease repeating even as his voice became naught but breath and his words hitched with every convulsion of his abdomen. *Take me! Take me! Take me!*

Take me home...



Just as with all other dreams, this one had to come to an end, and just as with all the other dreams, he did not know that it had ended until the point of waking. He could sense the warmth of his room as the fire was burning beyond the grate and all was as usual, including his nudity. All was as usual, except one very unusual thing.

It smells like blood.

There was movement beside him, and he closed his eyes tighter while his heart leaped and fear began to overtake his senses.

“Oh, my love...do not shy from me come morning...”

Charm bled from those words and Jonathan could do naught but look upon the very man of which he had dreamt. His eyes were deepened pools, his face flushed attractively while a coy little smile sat upon his lips.

Dracula, man and monster, reached to gently touch upon Jonathan's lips with one careful finger. “I know what you want, my sunlight. You want to go with me. Well I will give you the chance now.” In the dim, indirect light of the morning through the thick curtains, Jonathan watched his lover and mate grow his grotesque and terrible fangs only to take his own lip to puncture, the bead of blood welling and growing until Jonathan had no choice but to follow his first impulse.

He leaned, reverent when he took his Count's lower lip

between his own, mindful of the sharp tang of blood on his tongue. This kiss, though chaste, was far more intimate than any carnal act they had perpetrated within this castle nestled deep in the cold and windy mountains. He felt Dracula's hands upon him again and when the kiss was done, he was desperate to feel something, anything at all for what he had just experienced was surely an act worthy of divine rebuke. There was nothing for now, and he opened his eyes again upon a Dracula much warmer and much more *human* than he'd ever seen him.

“You will be so perfect, my love,” he murmured, the backs of his fingers soft against Jonathan's cheek.

Settled now into the notion that absolutely none of this had ever been a dream, the young Englishman sighed heavily before he let himself have a bashful grin. “Pardon me, Count but...what are you?”

To this, his mate merely smiled and replied, “I am yours.”

A Moment With JD

Q: Tell us about yourself and your art.

A: My name is JD and I've been writing for a while now. My work is generally an exercise in vivisection. I like to look at things I'm afraid of or interested in and then carefully pick them apart within certain perimeters while still having some fun with it. I prefer lighter tropes or genres into which I can comfortably fit heavy topics or themes.

Q: What mediums do you work in?

A: Right now the bulk of my portfolio is writing but I do sketch little erotic pin ups from time to time in my sketchbook and then digitally line and color them in Procreate.

Q: What specific themes/subjects do you enjoy exploring in art?

A: I'm especially fond of religion and spirituality, the nature of good and evil, and all those other very classic struggles we see in literature time and time again. I suppose that's what they call the "Human Condition" or whatever. Beyond that, I'm especially fond of working around historical time periods such as the Victorian Age or the years around the World Wars.

Q: What do you hope your audience takes away from your art?

A: I have so many stories and they all kind of have different themes and messages but in reality I want people to come away from my stuff having to chew on it. I want it to be, if not crunchy, at least chewy. I want them to think about how far they would go to preserve their peace and if that might lead them toward a future ethical dilemma. Would they sacrifice their morals for the sake of their own comfort? I want people to learn how to reach into their own hearts to find what they fear and open it up in a way that strips it of its power over them.

Q: What do you think is the role of transgressive/taboo work in society?

A: I think its role is that of Diogenes. A reminder that each of us is capable of being weird or strange or bizarre in any given context and that we're not only useful but necessary in our

oddity. Things don't go away because you stop talking, and sometimes it is only the absurd who can challenge a system to its limits in order to define them.



FUCK A CHILD



a zine by K. M. Claude

FAC 

*second-person singular present active imperative of
faciō, facere, fēcī, factum*

do, make, erect



this is how you...

FUCK

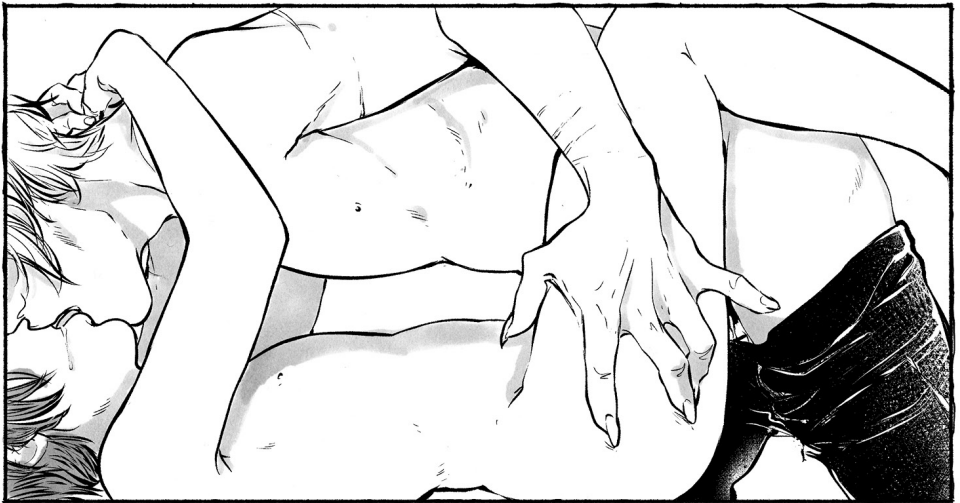


A

CHILD



up...inside...slowly, sweetly, rubbing honey in the wounds
left by honeyed words and sticking hands and--



fast, cruel, biting back bile and



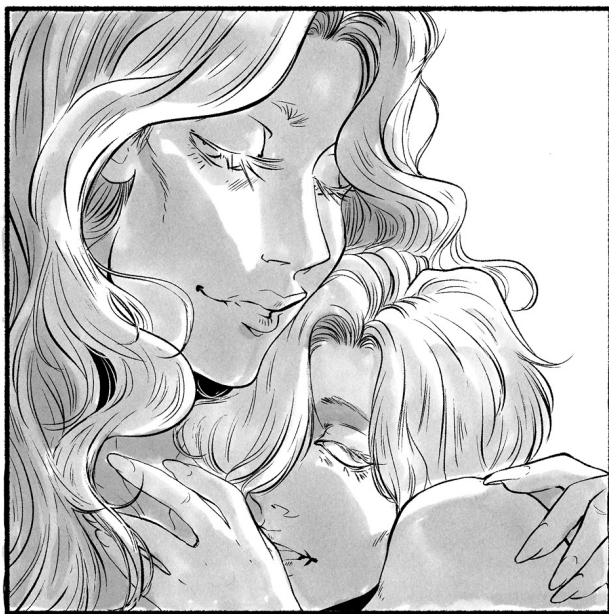
...bleeding raw

it's not your fault



you're not sorry

you're both sorry



it's all your fault



It's
all your
fault
...

not
mine.



mea culpa

IS

THIS

HOW



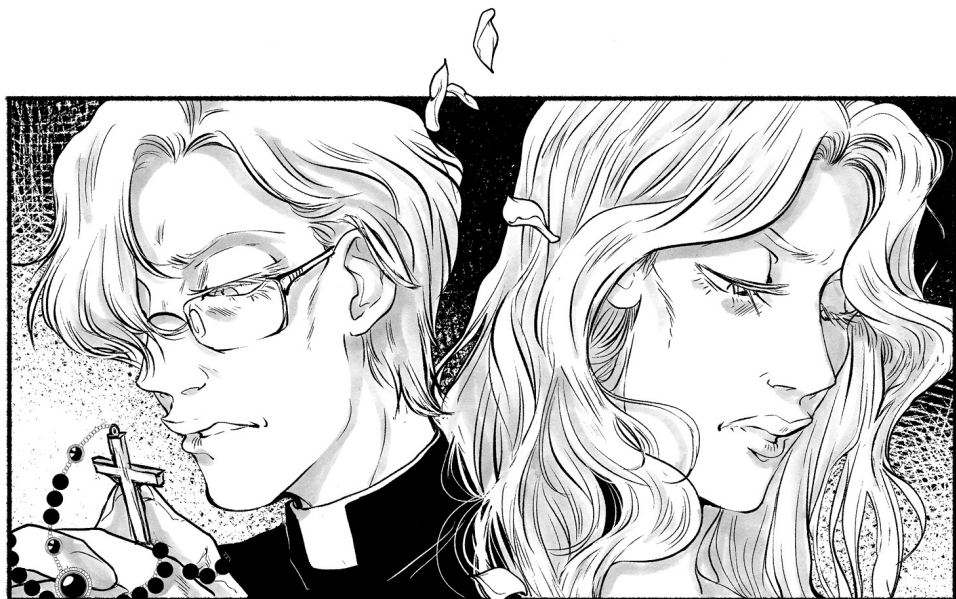
YOU FUCK

(up)



A
C
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...bleeding, raw,

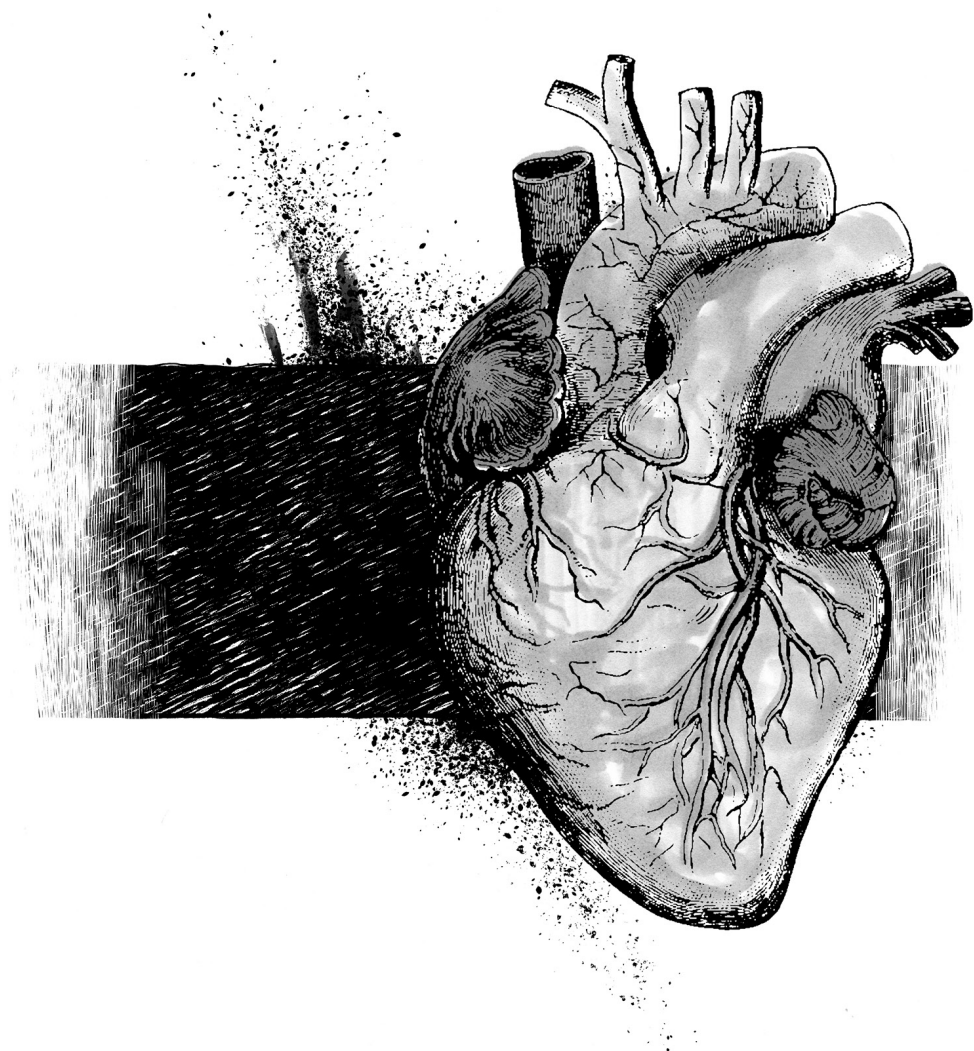
(fucking)

breaking past
the point of guilt
until you can't
feel sorry

(for yourself)

anymore

this is how you



love



A Moment With K.M. Claude

Q: Tell us about yourself and your art.

A: I'm Claude (the name on the books is K. M. Claude but I cringe when people call me K.M.) and according to my web site I am an indie horror and erotica cartoonist creating comics, zines, and other works of art that glorify the grotesque, delight in the deviant, and sexualize the sordid. If you ask the right people I am a freak (complimentary) and if you ask the wrong people I am a freak (derogatory).

Q: What mediums do you work in?

A: Digital mainly but also watercolor, color pencils, marker, ink, and acrylic printing.

Q: What specific themes/subjects do you enjoy exploring in art?

A: Sexual abuse in the Catholic church; incestuous abuse; sacrifice and martyrdom; corruption; erotic grotesque nonsense. You know. Normal fun wholesome stuff. And obligatory stereotypical transsexual artist autobiographical comics.

Q: How do you enjoy your ice cream?

A: Either in a cute little bowl served up like a human being with some semblance of dignity or shoveled straight out of the pint, no in between

Q: What do you think is the role of transgressive/taboo work in society?

A: To hold a mirror up. To pick the rock up and look at all the bugs underneath. To poke and prod and question all that authority dictates. To ask "man, wouldn't it be fucked up if...?" To get a reaction, to make you feel.

Samples of VELVET

Season Two: Tines

by Roo

The house that Kaleb Lagos built had never been so cold.

Every morning, Kolt lays his hand on the vent in his room just to make sure the heat is actually working. The boys bring him all the extra blankets they can find, using the dryer and their own small bodies to keep Kolt's bed warm for him.

It took three days for Five to stop checking Kolt for fevers.

"I'm worried about how much you're shivering," he mumbled across from Kolt on the third night.

Kolt had Two held to his chest like a favored toy, Three's arms folded onto his flank. "It's probably just a cold snap or something."

"The temperature only dropped a few degrees," Five protested.

Six was the one to step in and remind Kolt that he was neglecting his morning workouts.

"You'll warm up doing squats," Six declared with a confidence that did not match his trembling shoulders.

And so the days took shape once more, in much the same way they used to, except of course for the black hole that Xavier

left behind when he retreated into his room and did not come back out.

It has been a week since Kaden ripped Xavier's antlers off. The boys cleaned all the blood, righted the paintings, and even washed the mess off of the gravel on the driveway. Only One is allowed to enter Xavier's room now. He drifts between that darkened door and the rest of the house like some ambassador from a distant land. The house feels twice as large, and cavernously empty.

Kolt feels certain he hasn't taken a full breath since the solstice. His chest certainly hasn't stopped hurting.

Silence has filled the halls like thorns. When Kolt steps out of his room in the morning, he listens intently for any footsteps on the hardwood. If the boys are with him, he sends them out first and follows behind them to get to the garage. Despite all the assurances he's been given, Kolt can't stop himself from rushing past the basement door with unnecessary quickness just to get out of its sight, as if the antlers are only waiting for him to let down his guard so they can snatch him away.

The smell of old gasoline has become a comfort as Kolt closes himself off in the garage to work out until he can't stand it. With no one to meet him for meals or lessons or movies, Kolt exercises several times a day. When he isn't focused on the slow tear of muscle, he makes one of the boys talk to him, or read aloud, or sing—anything to fill the echo chamber of his head. One digs out a pair of ear buds and an old music player from Xavier's scraps, and Kolt falls asleep with it every night so he doesn't have to listen to the oppressive emptiness of a house that no longer feels like his.

He pulls his bed away from the wall. He does not walk with bare feet. He hardly touches anything that belongs to the house—to the antlers.

They must be angry. They must be furious. It's practically all he can think about, day in and day out. Kolt would hardly blame the bones for wanting blood after what happened, and now, he's the only one left to pay up.

"Are the antlers still growing?" Kolt asks Six in a whisper as they walk across the island. Kolt has Six on his back, the boy's fragile weight nothing more than a comfort as Kolt cools

down from his more aggressive afternoon run. He has traced the island's diameter enough times by now to have a safe loop that he can circle around as many times as he wants without having to stop.

"I don't know," Six says. "They've always grown slowly, but..."

But.

"Maybe they stop with Xav," Kolt says. "Tied to his magic."

"Are you going to run away again?" Six asks, clinging to Kolt's shoulders.

Kolt startles at the fear in the boy's voice, thin fingers burying in his t-shirt. "No, of course not."

He stops to stare at the long, narrow bridge connecting them to the mainland. From the very tip of the island, closest to the shoreline, it's possible to see the entire length of that bridge, the arches between the supports, the algae growing around the foundations, years of discoloration from the water licking at the stone. Kolt's eye catches on a stray bit of color like a loose thread hanging from the underside of the roadway, only to realize it is a length of bone poking out from beneath the keystone. His heart constricts. Was it always like that and he just never looked? Are the bones so crowded and dense that they're spilling out from their hiding places? Or did it only allow itself to be seen at this moment, just for Kolt to remember what keeps him here?

Like he could ever forget.

Turning back to the house, Kolt hikes Six up higher on his back. "I'm not leaving."

Six hugs him tight, tucking his face into Kolt's shoulder. "I want to be with you and Xavier. No matter what."

Kolt glances up at the windows of the house as they emerge from the trees, the curtains drawn on nearly every one. Xavier is tucked away in that silence, nestled in a bed of sentient antlers—antlers that Kolt can no longer feel.

"Can we go back to normal?" Six asks, voice muffled in Kolt's

t-shirt. “I don’t like this.”

“I don’t like it either,” Kolt tells him.

Six sniffs, the fabric of Kolt’s shirt going damp beneath his face. “Why won’t Xavier talk to us?”

Kolt turns toward him, pressing his cheek to Six’s soft head. “He’s probably just tired.”

“I miss him,” Six croaks.

Kolt can still see Xavier’s blood-streaked face and snarling mouth in perfect clarity from the night his father ruined everything. How angry Xavier looked, an anger Kolt had never seen on him—the kind of rage that takes decades to harden and pierce and shape someone from the inside out until it becomes a constant companion.

Anger like misshapen bones beneath the skin.

“I miss him too,” Kolt whispers.

-

Kolt rubs his face, pushing back to his feet to start walking back to his bedroom, when something catches his eye—a stray bit of color like loose thread. Kolt presses the heels of his hands to his eyes, trying to wake himself back up, but when his vision comes back to him, he can still see the stripe of grayish-brown curving out from the wall in a gentle arc, as if someone with antlers is standing just out of sight where the hall banks left.

“Xav?” Kolt asks, even though he knows it can’t be him. Kolt is exhausted, overwhelmed, wrung out like a sponge. It can’t really be there.

Two emerges from the other end of the hall, drawing Kolt’s eye with a smile. “Sorry. Just me. Are you alright?”

“I’m here too,” Three adds, running up behind Two.

Kolt looks back to the corner down the hall, but there is no antler curve, only empty space.

“Oh my god, I need sleep.” Kolt pushes his hands through his hair, and Two and Three immediately flock to his side.

“Take a nap in our bed,” Two says, taking his hand. “We’ll keep you safe.”

“Yeah.” Three takes his other and they both begin to pull him down the hall toward the master bedroom. “Our bed’s the biggest.”

“We can sleep together,” Two insists.

Kolt just lets them lead, not sure he can trust himself to get all the way to his own room unassisted while he’s conjuring up illusions. “Yeah, okay.”

The master bedroom is red and gold, the Lagos family colors. The walls are half done up in ornate stripes, dark wood to accent the metallic flash. It’s not quite as cluttered in here with art, but the single massive painting behind the bed makes up for it. Kolt knows that piece all too well. Sainthood by a classical fifteenth century tuner-painter. It’s a gorgeous piece depicting several of the first tuner saints carrying a wounded Orelion through the woods. Orelion had just been gored by the Great Stag, the antler puncturing them through the heart.

It isn’t until Kolt places his hand onto the plush bedspread that he freezes up. Did Xavier and Kaleb have sex in this bed?

“Uh, this isn’t like...the exact same bed that Kaleb used, right?” Kolt asks, pulling his hand away.

Two stands on the mattress and takes Kolt’s arm. “Nope! Xavier burned all the sheets and the covers after Kaleb died.”

“That was before he made us,” Three adds, crawling over to fluff up the pillows. “But it’s still positioned for horns.”

Kolt noticed that of course. The pillows are all at the foot of the bed, a low wooden bench running the length of it with small lamps on either side—a bed designed to avoid horns destroying headboards and walls in the night. Kolt allows Two to pull him up, and he follows Three’s lead until he sinks into the center of the bed, letting his body unclench after the

dam broke in Xavier's room.

Xavier has carefully avoided describing his relationship with Kaleb too explicitly, and Kolt can only imagine what it must have been like to suddenly find himself in the bed of the man who pulled him from a hellish life and put him in such a pretty cage. Kaleb probably didn't have to do much of anything to win the affections of someone so neglected. The house likely did the courting for him. Kolt remembers what Xavier told him.

I thought I was his favorite person.

-

In the dead of the night, Kolt hears something crack. He leaves the warmth of his bed, scared for Xavier, furious with his father. When he rounds the corner into the living room, he finds Xavier standing in the center, his antlers curled around his head like a crown as he slowly bends a tree branch until it snaps.

"I'm building a fire," he says. "It's the only way to take care of the antlers in the basement."

"My dad's going to be pissed," Kolt says, walking over to him.

Xavier slips his hands around Kolt's hips, pulling him against the front of Xavier's skirt. "He certainly will be."

Kolt looks down to where their bodies are pressed together, the front of his belted trousers, and the smooth fabric of Xavier's skirt.

"Can I touch?" Kolt asks.

Xavier takes Kolt's hand with his rough skin and sets Kolt's palm flat against his hip. Kolt is getting harder by the second, whining through a closed mouth as Xavier pushes Kolt's hand through a slit in the fabric. Kolt nuzzles his face to Xavier's shoulder as his fingers find firm, hot skin. It's like his only bigger, pulsing in his grip.

"Xav..."

Kolt tilts his head up, dripping into his own underwear as Xavier pushes his cock into Kolt's fingers. He keeps his eyes fixed on Kolt, his tongue snaking out to wet his lips.

"Put your mouth on it," he says.

Kolt scrambles onto his knees, recklessly clawing at Xavier's skirt to pull it down off his hips. His breath catches at the dark curls of hair between Xavier's thighs that frame the tine of antler bone slowly emerging from Xavier's skin. Kolt can hardly breathe, soaked from both places and trembling as reaches for the sharpened tip.

Xavier grips the back of Kolt's head, groaning softly as Kolt's fingers close around the curve of his antler. Kolt leans in cautiously, open mouthed, to lick hard bone that tastes like salt.

"Good boy," Xavier says.

Kolt cups his free hand between his own thighs, rubbing himself through his pants as he kisses Xavier's exposed bone.

"It'll hurt," Xavier says. "Inside you."

Kolt is already coming as he lets the hardened antler past his lips, the sharpened point gliding over his tongue.

He will bleed himself dry to get Xavier inside him.

-

Xavier's fingers slowly circle Kolt's arm, and Kolt gladly sinks into his shadow. Everything makes sense here. His body, his magic, his problems. He loves it here, loves what he is when Xavier wants him. It all feels so right when the thought strikes him. He is being lusted after—this is what it feels like without his magic to filter it. The surety makes Kolt feel whole in a way he never has.

"Kolt?" Xavier's low voice covers him like sun-drenched moss.

"I want you." Kolt breathes the words, too comfortable to open his eyes. "Will you touch me?"

“I am touching you,” Xavier says, gently squeezing Kolt’s wrist.

“Down *here*,” Kolt whines, tenting his legs up to put his other hand over his thigh. “It’s not fair. How come I only get touched by guys I don’t want?”

Kolt is in a dream, heavy and lovely all down his skin. He knows it’s a dream because Xavier wouldn’t touch his face if he were awake, but there are his long, rough fingers smoothing over Kolt’s cheek from the top of his head, down to his jaw. Kolt gasps, a hushed moan on his lips as the feeling turns to steam in his hips, pressure building so insistently.

“What did Les do to you?” Xavier asks quietly.

When Kolt thinks about it now, it doesn’t seem so bad. He swallows, head barely screwed on. “Will you give me something if I tell you?”

“Yes,” Xavier promises, a whisper in Kolt’s ear.

Kolt shivers, his face flushing again as a smile takes hold of his mouth. “It’s stupid. He’s stupid. Doesn’t even take my clothes off, just shoves his hands wherever he wants. Says things in my ear. He wasn’t even hard. I don’t think he wants me at all. Maybe he just likes touching my dad’s things. Or he didn’t believe I was really ori.”

When Xavier smooths his thumb over Kolt’s cheek, Kolt starts to boil away into the air. It doesn’t matter that Les had his hands down Kolt’s pants, ugly and rough between the soft fabric of his brand new underwear and tight denim hugging his hips. It doesn’t matter that Kolt’s dad got to him first. It doesn’t matter because Xavier wants him, and Kolt can feel that desire even without tuning.

“Just wanna get ‘em off me,” Kolt mumbles. “Wanna shed that skin. Want you to touch it instead. Might actually like it with you...”

Kolt swears he can feel the seams in his own body, like if he stretched at just the right angle, he could rip out of this layer of skin and dawn fresh, clean cells. Maybe he can coax them into a more suitable arrangement, just for Xavier.

“Would you want me if I didn’t look like my dad?” Kolt asks.

It sounds like a simple question as he speaks the words, no time to analyze the intent until he can’t take it back. For so long, he wanted to look like his father, or his grandfather. As the thoughtless question settles over him, a single second of silence becomes hours of contemplation and he is sure in that moment that it’s his own damn face that keeps Xavier away from him. He all but confirms it as Xavier pulls his hands away, and Kolt swallows a mournful sob.

He’ll always look like the men who ruin everything.

But Xavier’s hands come back, ten fingers slowly growing over the surface of Kolt’s face like the roots of a tree, steady and firm. Kolt’s mouth peels open in a relieved sigh, and Xavier seals it shut again, kissing the sound right out of him. Kolt tenses, fear rushing through him again that he’ll ruin this too. He doesn’t want to screw this up, but he’s not going to let it go either. His body knows what to do, arms winding around Xavier’s back to pull him close, lips parting to offer his tongue.

Kolt moans again, louder and breathier through the filter of a kiss. Xavier accepts it, his fingers burying in Kolt’s hair as his voice rumbles down Kolt’s throat in an approving tone. Kolt is nothing but instinct as he paws at the back of Xavier’s jacket, finding his way to the prickly crown of his shaved head to run his fingers across. Immediately, Xavier pulls Kolt’s face off the stone toward himself, swallowing Kolt’s tongue into his mouth, Kolt’s saliva down his throat, Kolt’s startled gasp, all of it.

Kolt’s eyes roll back as he thinks *Xavier wants to swallow me whole*, and Xavier breaks the kiss with a harsh breath.

“You are not the issue.” Xavier whispers harshly. “I am. It’s me. It’s always been me, alright?”

Kolt blinks up at him, putty in his hands, trying to pull him back. “Just one more...”

“Goddammit, Kolt.” Xavier sets his head down and backs away, breathing hard. “I can’t do this. Never mind. Lessons are canceled, I can’t fucking be around you.”

Reality slices across Kolt's face with a harsh winter wind, and he bolts upright. "Wait, don't go! I'm sorry."

Xavier looks furious, and his eye twitches before he begins to shout, "You are not the fucking problem, Kolt!"

Kolt's eyes fly open, all the dreamy haze from a moment ago shattered and gone. Magic, was that magic? Or just them?

"It's me." Xavier jabs his fingers into his own chest. "I'm the one who should know better, I'm the one who should be able to say no to you. You're barely an adult, you've had no say in anything your entire life, and I damn well know what that does to someone, but I still can't refuse you!"

Kolt shivers as Xavier takes a full body breath like a bull about to charge.

"If I lie to you, it hurts your damn feelings. If I tell you the truth, this is what happens," Xavier gestures between them as if there are cursed strings tying them together. "And despite what you tell me over and over again, I know that this will hurt you too. So, what the fuck can I do except to spare you from my utter lack of control by locking one of us in a room?"

Kolt's mouth drops open, staring at the whites of Xavier's eyes. He's never looked more like a wild animal, and Kolt swallows the taste of Xavier still in his mouth.

"Sorry," Kolt whispers.

Xavier's shoulders tense as if he's been shocked and he buries his face in trembling hands. "Will you please stop apologizing to me?"

Kolt pulls his hands into his lap, shrinking into himself. "I just...I don't understand. I know I'm young, but I am an adult, and I want this too. I don't get why it's so bad."

Xavier pulls his hands back off his face with a monumental sigh. "That's the problem, Kolt. It's a slow poison. You won't know how bad it is until long after it's been in your blood."

It takes effort to keep Xavier's gaze when he's being spoken to like a child, but Kolt makes himself do it anyway. "So, what?"

I'm allowed to get passed around my dad's crew, but I can't make one supposedly bad choice with someone who actually respects me enough to say that it might not be the best thing for me?"

Xavier visibly deflates at that, tipping his head back and rubbing around his pedicles. "What the fuck kind of choice is that?"

"What the fuck lives are we living?" Kolt retorts. "You've been a prisoner for, like, thirty five years and all you can think about is how awful my life is."

"You still have the chance to live a life after this," Xavier says, gesturing out toward the shoreline in the distance, much too far to swim.

"So do you, you dick," Kolt snaps. "You're forty, not dead. Holy Saints, Xav, I'm not the only one who deserves better! It's very chivalrous and all, but do you think I want to just leave you here to be tortured by my dad for the *next* forty years? Do you think I'll just forget you exist the second I can't see you anymore? I barely know you, and you're, like, the most important thing that's ever happened to me!"

Kolt grimaces as yet more tears burn his eyes, embarrassment constricting his chest, but he can see Xavier diffusing as his face falls back to a sorrowful neutral.

"You've taught me more than anyone else," Kolt says. "You saved my life, you showed me things about magic I didn't know were real and you...you make me feel less crazy after growing up with my dad. Yeah, you're an asshole sometimes, but you only do it because you're thinking about me. And I'm no saint either."

Xavier exhales through his nose. "To be fair, locking you up was mostly my cowardice."

"Shut up, I'm over that," Kolt says, sniffing hard. "You were scared of me. Or my dad. I don't blame you. I proved you right anyway, I almost fucking died."

"Yes," Xavier admits. "You did."

Kolt wipes his eyes on his coat sleeves, pulling his legs up toward his chest. “Can’t we just be friends at least?”

Instantly, Xavier looks exhausted, shoulder sagging, his gaze hollowed out. “No, Kolt, I don’t think we can.”

Kolt’s mouth purses into a painful frown. “I don’t like that.”

“I know you don’t.”

Panic beats in Kolt’s chest as he looks at Xavier and sees the shadow of another empty house waiting for him. Two weeks without Xavier was bad enough, the thought of living out the rest of his days here without him feels like swallowing glass.

“Don’t go away again. I don’t want to be alone.” Kolt’s voice nearly cracks as the words rush out of him. He covers his face to groan, “And I’m sick of crying!”

He stays huddled on the rock, hoping it’ll pass on its own before Xavier decides to leave him here. Instead, Xavier takes his time to cross back over the sand one cautious step at a time until he leans against the rock once more, too wary to touch Kolt, but he loudly clears his throat in announcement.

“I don’t know how to do this with you,” Xavier says. “Kolt. I am weak around you. But apparently, I can’t bring myself to be harsh with you either.” Xavier’s breath leaves him in a defeated huff. “I want to be good to you, Kolt. The best thing would be to stop this before one of us does something we can’t take back.”

“Like what?” Kolt asks, soothed by Xavier’s proximity despite his words.

“Getting you pregnant, for one,” Xavier deadpans, glancing at Kolt.

“Oh.” Kolt laughs, his tear tracks burning in the cold air. “Right, yeah.”

“I’ve never had to...negotiate that with anyone,” Xavier admits. “It’s not like I can take you to a fucking doctor.”

Kolt’s face keeps on burning as he realizes they’re talking

about having sex. “Well, luckily it’s, like, dead easy to avoid that if you just don’t.” He waves his hands uselessly in the air. “There’s a lot of ways for me to—”

Xavier holds up his own hand, stopping Kolt mid-sentence. “Yes, yes, thank you. I know I live under a rock, but I do know how this works.”

Kolt laughs again, so easily soothed when Xavier’s mouth twitches toward a smile.

Xavier wets his lips. “I can’t exactly buy anything for this. The only money I have to spend is controlled by your father, every purchase reviewed at least at a glance. I can get away with buying spare parts for robotics because they don’t know how to build, but I guarantee if I try to buy condoms, someone will be here within the day to castrate me.”

Kolt’s next laugh is a little more strained. “I, uh, yeah, no. Don’t want that.”

“Thank you,” Xavier says with a wry smile. Even exhausted and changed as he is, Kolt hangs off Xavier’s every word, every movement of his mouth.

“I like when we get along,” Kolt blurts out. “Everything’s better when we get along.”

Xavier turns to face him, eyes hardening. “There will come a day when your father will take you away from here, and I won’t be allowed to follow you.”

“Would you want to, though?” Kolt asks

-

As Xavier walks back to his bedroom, he scans the paintings lining the walls. He still remembers the names of every piece, the painters, what they tuned, and the subject matter—as interpreted by Kaleb. This house has never felt smaller, this structure so oppressive. Every inch, another unwanted memory lies in wait.

He drifts by *St. Madvah In Repose*, allowing himself the brief fantasy of leaving this place with the boys—all seven of

them—as Madvah bathes in a moonlit river, his eyes closed in relaxed bliss. The glittering trident of *St. Gilead's Watch* flashes by him, Gilead herself wielding her weapon in romantic splendor as Xavier wonders how far they would have to run to escape Kaden's gaze. Xavier's head is pounding by the time he crosses *The Banishment of St. Erol*, the saint's arms twined around locked gates, trapped outside the city where his beloved instructor had been imprisoned.

Xavier pulls himself back into bed as his skull catches fire. His hands shake too badly to light up, so he struggles with a bottle of pills only to drop the whole thing onto the floor. His head is going to split open. Everyone will see all the terrible thoughts inside, the things he wants to do to Kolt, to Kaden, to Kaleb. A family tree wrapped so tightly around him, roots buried deep in his soil, feeding him, feeding off of him, cracking him open over and over again.

Pain spears deep into his antlers like nails driven in by hammers, and Xavier barely swallows a shout. If only he could drown it out, but the last time he tried that, the antlers simply brought him back to shore, alive and well. They stop him at every turn. No escape, not in life nor in death. All he can do is wait to see what shape these wounds will take.

VELVET Season One: Antlers is available as an ebook here: <https://nightmarelandpress.com/products/velvet-season-one-antlers?variant=45561053053084>

Roo Fiction | FRICTION PRESS

A Moment With Roo

Q: Tell us about yourself and your art.

A: I'm Roo, I create erotic achillean art. I love telling stories about the harrowing ways in which people seek out, or deny themselves, pleasure.

Q: What mediums do you work in?

A: I create short stories, novellas, novels, visual novels, zines, and more! Pretty much anything I can wrap my hands around.

Q: What specific themes/subjects do you enjoy exploring in art?

A: I often write about people who live with pain and discomfort, and how that can transform someone's relationship to pleasure—for better and for worse. There's a wide ocean of experience in the cross-section of trans bodies and disabled bodies that I love to fish in. I am also continually drawn to stories of dysfunctional families, and stories about being trapped in a house that sucks.

Q: How do you enjoy your ice cream?

A: Dairy free with peanut butter :)

Q: What do you think is the role of transgressive/taboo work in society?

A: Transgressive art rules. There are people all over the world who are told they don't have the right to love someone else. It really shouldn't come as a surprise that when the world proclaims over and over that a person's desire is inherently disgusting, that person may begin to see value, and even excitement, in embracing the blurred lines between pleasure and disgust, rather than conforming to a fascist standard of living. One man's trash is another man's fetish. At least we're not hurting anyone.

A Short History Of The Tsukanov Brothers

by Idal Waves

“Comrade!” Kirill said with a smile. The two men embraced and kissed each other.

“I’m sorry, I got off work early,” Mikhail said.

“And you didn’t go home beforehand?” Kirill tutted.

“The bus never arrived.”

“Typical.” Kirill shook his head. It was strange to see him like this – his effeminate features clashed with the slick European suit and the fancy dress shoes without a spot of dirt. He was beautiful and soft in a way that made him look perpetually young. Mikhail imagined the other NEPmen looking at Kirill’s hairless cheeks and wondering how a schoolboy snuck into their business meeting.

“Scrape your boots off before you come in.” Kirill said, taking the bag of dumplings from Mikhail and setting them on the kitchen table. “Give me a minute.” He left for his bedroom, leaving Mikhail standing alone in the kitchen. He saw his reflection in the darkened window – too tall and thin for his uniform, a gangly thing with long lashes and barely enough stubble. Mikhail took his hat off and tried to undo the dent it left in his chocolate brown hair.

“I’ve never seen you in your uniform before,” Kirill said. He

stood in the doorway with his arms crossed.

“No?” Mikhail said. He put the hat back on and adjusted his brown tunic. Kirill’s eyes flicked up and down Mikhail’s body. Mikhail expected a dandyish quip but Kirill appeared to be judging him more carefully.

“What’s the collar mean?” Kirill asked.

“Junior staff,” Mikhail said. Kirill’s green eyes flicked up to the NKVD insignia on the blue cap.

“They dress you boys so well,” Kirill said. “It’s distinctly Communist. Handsomely so.”

Mikhail couldn’t help but smile.

“Thank you,” He said. Kirill smiled back.

“I see your colleagues around the warehouses,” Kirill said. He busied himself with setting up the table. “How is your department these days?”

“Busy.” Mikhail sighed. He sat down at the table and poured himself a splash of vodka.

“Did you get Dyachkov?” Kirill asked.

“Yeah. We found the money too, right where you said it would be.”

“Good,” Kirill said. “I have a meeting with the department store tomorrow.” Now that he was finished playing maid, Kirill sat down and poured himself a drink. The two men toasted.

“Thank you,” Kirill said.

Mikhail smiled proudly.

“It’s a good position, yes?” He said.

“Sometimes,” Kirill said. He took a bite of the dumplings and looked at Mikhail as he chewed. “You could get more in bribes if you wanted.”

“You didn’t bribe me,” Mikhail said. “If we won’t find wives, then we help each other, yes?”

Kirill smiled gently.

“Anyway, Dyachkov knew better than to hoard foreign currency,” Mikhail said, attempting to lower his voice. “You’re doing Russia a favor.”

“Of course,” Kirill said.

“It’s a good thing,” Mikhail insisted.

“Mmm,” Kirill said as he took another dumpling. “How long will he be gone?”

“I don’t know,” Mikhail said. “Lieutenant Koshelev handed his case to someone else.”

“You’re still on good terms with Koshelev?” Kirill asked.

Now it was Mikhail’s turn to smile.

“Yes,” He said proudly.

Kirill grinned. “Then it won’t be long ‘til you’re his superior.” Kirill took a sip of vodka. “But don’t get a swelled head, little brother.”

Mikhail laughed.

###

Lieutenant Petr Alexandrovich Koshelev sat at his desk, writing down his report. Mikhail watched as his stormy grey eyes flicked across the page. Such beautiful eyes! They remained half-open, even when Koshelev crossed out mistakes or corrected his spelling. Not a single reddish-brown hair fell out of place. Even the wrinkles by his eyes and around his nose barely moved. Mikhail gently touched his desk and the outline of Koshelev’s defined nose on the surface of his desk, let the tip draw the thin lips in one continuous line, even when he drew the way they parted over and over again.

Suddenly, Koshelev looked up. Mikhail jumped and his hand brushed away the invisible drawing.

“Type my report,” Koshelev said.

“Excuse me?” Mikhail asked.

Koshelev stood. His boots seemed to echo loudly in the office as he approached Mikhail. He placed the stack of papers heavily on top of Mikhail’s translation notes.

“Type it up,” Koshelev said. His voice was low and quiet, but he said everything as a command. He did not break eye contact with Mikhail as he spoke. Was he leaning in?

“Yes, sir,” Mikhail said. He pushed the intercepted letters to the side and moved to where the typewriter sat. He typed slowly, trying to imitate the way he saw the secretaries downstairs use theirs. He was aware of movement out of the corner of his eye – Koshelev stood there, staring at him as he worked. Mikhail tried to surprise him back, but Koshelev did not flinch. He stood like a general, turning 160cm into 100m. Mikhail turned back to his work and felt a sense of loss as Koshelev’s presence moved out of view.

A hand clasped around his shoulder, making Mikhail jump slightly.

“Good job, comrade,” Koshelev said. His fingers massaged Mikhail’s shoulder.

“Thank you, sir,” Mikhail murmured. He hoped Koshelev could not see his lap.

###

“Brother!” Kirill said. “You’re here for dinner, I hope?”

“Of course.” Mikhail smiled as the two men embraced and kissed. Kirill still wore his suit, but the jacket hung open and his tie was missing.

“Good, good.” Kirill guided him inside. “You’re still in uniform, I thought you might be here on official business.”

“No, no, keep your gold out, I’m only here to rob you.”

Kirill laughed.

“Hopefully you brought vodka?”

Mikhail held up the bottle.

“Good, I couldn’t find any today,” Kirill said. “Just like a good Communist.” He handed Mikhail a bowl.

“Just soup?” Mikhail asked.

“Just soup.” Kirill said. “Mom’s recipe.”

Mikhail smiled. It was thinner than what Mom made, stretched with pickled cabbage. Mikhail fished around until he found a single small chunk of meat.

“Did you come here straight from work again?” Kirill asked as Mikhail sat down.

“Yes, I didn’t want to be late.”

“Look at you, so formal.” Kirill teased. He sat down at the table but kept his eyes on his bowl.

“There aren’t a lot of English translators.” Mikhail said. “I have a lot to do.”

“Do you have a lot of letters to translate these days?” Kirill asked.

“Letters, yes. Newspapers. Sometimes I help with interviews.”

“Oh?” Kirill looked up. Mikhail noticed the bags under his eyes, saw the sweat collecting at his hairline.

“Well, you know.” Mikhail shrugged. “Americans.”

“Mmm.” Kirill went back to his dinner. “Thank God we went to boarding school abroad.”

“We’re protecting business interests.” Mikhail said. “Russia’s not so strong right now. How’s the clothing business these

days?”

“It’s alright,” Kirill said. “Not a lot of buyers, but it’s summer, they’ll come when they need winter coats.” He finished his drink in one gulp. “Five of my workers vanished last week. No idea where. Have you seen them?”

“I wouldn’t know.”

“I thought so.” Kirill sighed. “Everyone thinks they were arrested. People keep accusing one another of turning them in. I knew two of them - they’re like us. They even managed to get an apartment together.”

“I’m sorry,” Mikhail said.

Kirill sighed and poured himself another drink. They sat in silence together, Mikhail chewing on the single piece of meat while Kirill stared off into space. Mikhail turned to the window, looking out at the dim summer evening.

“Did I tell you Koshelev was in the Red Army?” Mikhail said.

“Was he?”

“I heard him talking to Lieutenant Roshchin about it. They fought together.”

“A real Chapaev and Petka, eh?” Kirill sounded slightly more cheerful.

“I’m sure.” Mikhail smiled dreamily. He imagined Koshelev in his Red Army uniform, young and noble and ready to strike, hero of the Russian Revolution, a hero! In his imagination, Mikhail stood next to him, Koshelev’s own Petka, ready to follow wherever he went.

“Do you remember when we were little and I wouldn’t let you play king because you’re younger?” Kirill said.

“I remember crying to Mom about it,” Mikhail said.

“Do you like being younger now?”

“Why do you ask?” Mikhail asked, annoyed.

Kirill poured himself another drink. “You’re powerful now,” Kirill said. “Because you can’t play the king.”

Mikhail opened his mouth but couldn’t say anything.

###

“He wants to know the names of the other conspirators,” Mikhail said.

The man looked at Mikhail and shook his head. Blonde curls fell in front of his blue eyes. He looked as young and fresh as his clothes.

“<I don’t know anyone.>” The man said with a thick American accent. “<I’m just here on vacation.>”

“He doesn’t know anyone, he’s here on vacation,” Mikhail said to Koshelev.

“Why was he in Stepanov’s apartment?” Koshelev asked.

The two young men spoke.

“They met on the street,” Mikhail said. “He invited him back to his apartment to drink. They had a party with Stepanov’s friends all night.”

“Who are Stepanov’s friends?”

“He doesn’t know.”

Koshelev did not react. He turned to face Mikhail.

“He needs to remember. Ask him who went to the party,” Koshelev demanded.

“Stepanov, Kirill, his traveling companion Thomas, and a man named Aleksandr. He doesn’t remember the rest, he was drinking heavily.”

“Full names.” Koshelev gestured for Mikhail to write down the names.

“Thomas Ludlam, Stepan Stepanov, and he doesn’t remember

Kirill or Vasily's." The man said.

"Say that again."

The man began to speak.

"Face me," Koshelev demanded.

The man stopped and stared; he began to turn when Koshelev grabbed him by his curly blonde locks and dragged him forward, twisting his head so their eyes met.

"Make him repeat the names." Koshelev demanded.

"<Say them again.>" Mikhail said to the man. Koshelev's knuckles went white as the man went through the full names.

"Again." Koshelev said.

"Again." Mikhail said.

"<Thomas Ludlam...>" The man whimpered. "<Stepan Stepanov, Kirill – I don't remember if Kirill had one – and Aleksandr... I don't know his last name, he just said Vasily, he's one of Stephan's friends, ask him!>"

Koshelev released the man, who sat back in his chair with a cry. He rubbed his head with his shackled hands. There was blood on his knuckles. Mikhail didn't have time to look at them before he was distracted by Koshelev's hand on his leg.

"<I just met the guys.>" The man begged to Mikhail.

"We'll release him if he remembers their names," Koshelev said. His fingers stroked Mikhail's inner thigh.

"<They'll release you if you know their full names,>" Mikhail said.

"<C'mon, man, I just met them. Can't you call the embassy or the President or something?>" The man said to Mikhail. "<My parents know everyone, I can->"

Koshelev released Mikhail's thigh. He grabbed the man's head again and slammed it into the table. The man screamed

and clutched at his head. Blood dribbled from his nose.

“Tell him to address me when he talks,” Koshelev demanded. His voice was deeper, darker now.

“<Talk to Koshelev,>” Mikhail said.

“You’re only the translator.”

“<I’m only the translator.>”

“You don’t exist.”

“<I don’t exist.>”

Koshelev placed his hand back on Mikhail’s leg. This time, the fingers touched the tip of his penis, pressing down against the fabric that barely hid his erection.

“<Sorry.>” The man whimpered. He kept his gaze locked on Koshelev, even as he dabbed at his nose.

“Sorry,” Mikhail said.

“You’ll be arrested for sodomy unless you give us the names of those men,” Koshelev said. “Tell me their names.”

Koshelev’s fingers softly stroked the head of Mikhail’s cock.

###

Kirill looked scared when he opened the door. He wore suit pants but no jacket, showing his suspenders and aging shirt.

“Hi,” Mikhail said. He held out the bottle of vodka and the loaf of bread. Kirill took them as if they were loaded, careful to barely step out of the door.

“I’m just here to rob you,” Mikhail said, trying to sound cheerful.

Kirill only let out a small chuckle. He stepped back as Mikhail walked in. The smell of sour shchi filled the kitchen.

“I’m sorry I’m late,” Mikhail said. “Busy.”

“I bet,” Kirill said, eyeing Mikhail’s uniform. He poured both drinks and proceeded to drink his in one gulp.

“I’m sorry about the business,” Mikhail said. Kirill sighed and shrugged.

“I’m sure Stalin knows what to do with it,” Kirill said.

“I’m sorry about your lover.”

“I’m sure Stalin knows what to do with him too.”

For the first time, Mikhail noticed the wrinkles in Kirill’s face – deep bags and crow’s feet and a slight hollowness to his cheeks. Finally, he looked exactly like a man in his forties. Mikhail wanted to embrace him like a child.

“It’s been hard on a lot of people,” Mikhail said.

“So what did you do about it?” Kirill murmured.

Mikhail paused.

“You couldn’t step in?” Kirill continued.

“That’s not what I do.”

Kirill huffed.

“I’m just a translator,” Mikhail said. “I help the lieutenant decide how to approach cases. That’s all. I’m sorry if I made you think any differently.”

“That’s it?” Kirill said.

“I didn’t take your money,” Mikhail snapped.

“I know, because you said you don’t take bribes,” Kirill growled. “You wanted something else, huh?”

“Don’t act like this, Kirill,” Mikhail said.

Kirill let out a long, loud sigh. He leaned back in his chair and stared up at the ceiling.

“Kirill, please.” Mikhail moved his chair closer to Kirill. He tried to place his hand on his brother’s shoulder but Kirill moved out of the way. Mikhail tried again and was slapped.

“I should get home before curfew,” Mikhail muttered. He made sure to knock the chair over as he stood up.

“Have fun fucking your lieutenant.” Kirill called out after him.

###

“<Tell him the names of the other men,>” Mikhail said.

The man stared at them in a daze. Blood trickled from his temple and nose and a bruise spread from the side of his head. He said nothing. Mikhail turned back to Koshelev.

“Repeat it,” Koshelev commanded.

“<Tell him the names of the other men,>” Mikhail said.

The man shook his head. Mikhail looked at the clock on the wall, looked back to Koshelev, then back at the bruised man, then back at Koshelev. Sweat dripped down from his temples and he wiped it away with the back of his hand. The table was gone now; nothing hid the drain at the center of the room.

“Repeat it,” Koshelev commanded.

“<Tell him the names of the other men,>” Mikhail said.

“<Thomas...>” The man muttered, then fell into silence again. Koshelev let out a little sigh. Suddenly, he was on his feet, he was in front of the man, the man reached up his arms to defend himself but he went down with a thud and a scream. Koshelev’s boot came down on his hand with a sickening crunch and the man screamed louder.

“<Thomas! Thomas Ludlam!>” The man wailed. His voice was dry and hoarse. “<Thomas Ludlam, Stepan Stephanov, Kirill Tsukanov, Aleksandr Aleksandrovich, Ivan Bulatov, that’s it, THAT’S IT! STOP!>”

Mikhail froze.

“<Please, stop it...>” The man begged. He never took his eyes off Koshelev, even as he left the cell to give the names to the investigators.

“Mikhail,” Koshelev snapped suddenly. “He wasted our time.”

“<You wasted our time,>” Mikhail said.

“Come here.” Koshelev gestured to Mikhail. His hands moved Mikhail into place, towering above the crying man. Koshelev’s arms wrapped around Mikhail’s waist.

“Is he thirsty?” Koshelev asked.

“<Are you thirsty?>” Mikhail said.

The man on the floor nodded weakly.

Koshelev’s hands went to Mikhail’s pants. Mikhail felt sluggish as he looked down, watching himself piss on the man’s mouth as if watching from a distant rooftop.

“Good boy,” Koshelev whispered to Mikhail.

A Moment With Idal Waves

Q: Tell us about yourself and your art.

A: I write character-focused short stories about the historical and the horrific.

Q: What specific themes/subjects do you enjoy exploring in art?

A: The primary theme of my work is secrecy. Many of my characters's actions are motivated by the need to keep a part of themselves from other people and the stories are driven by the results of those actions. I enjoy writing about gay men, veterans, and secret police - people whose silence holds extra weight.

Q: Do you make art professionally, as a hobbyist, or some mix of both?

A: I'm a hobbyist. I've been published a few times, but I'm not ready to write full time.

Q: Who/what are your biggest creative influences?

A: I'm deeply in love with any fiction that would not be considered respectable - pulp novels, exploitation cinema, adult entertainment. I believe that making art that is difficult to market widely allows people to express what would truly make them happy.

I'm especially inspired by men's adventure magazines from the 40s - 60s, specifically their oddball ideas, excessively dramatic dialogue, and spirit of wish fulfillment. Unfortunately, their stories are generally not welcoming to people who are not cis straight white men, so I try to channel their energy into fulfilling queer desires.

ERYK SHINES SO
BRIGHT



AND HE TELLS ME
I AM

SPECIAL

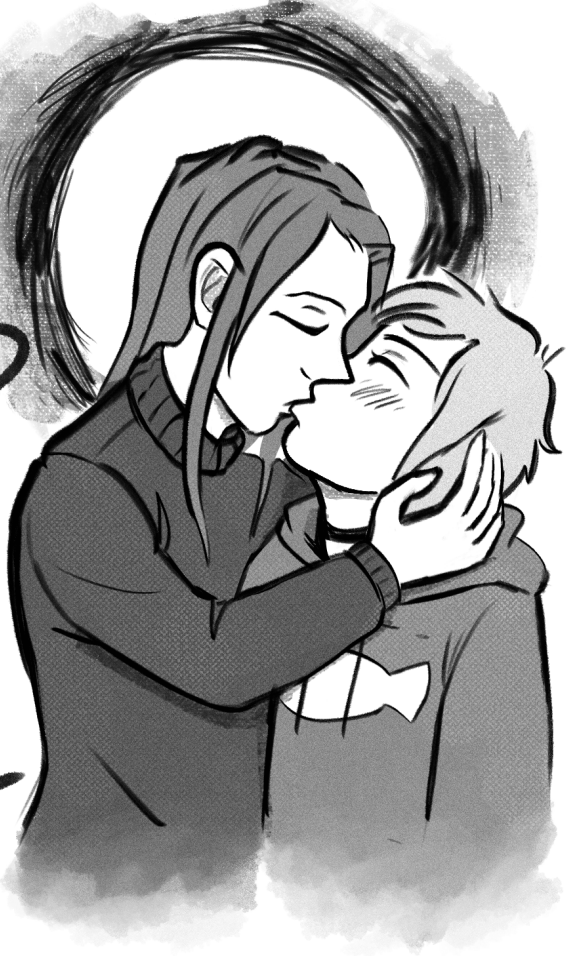


AND
BECAUSE
I AM
SPECIAL

I
GET TO
BE HIS



AND HE
KISSES
ME LIKE
I AM
SPECIAL

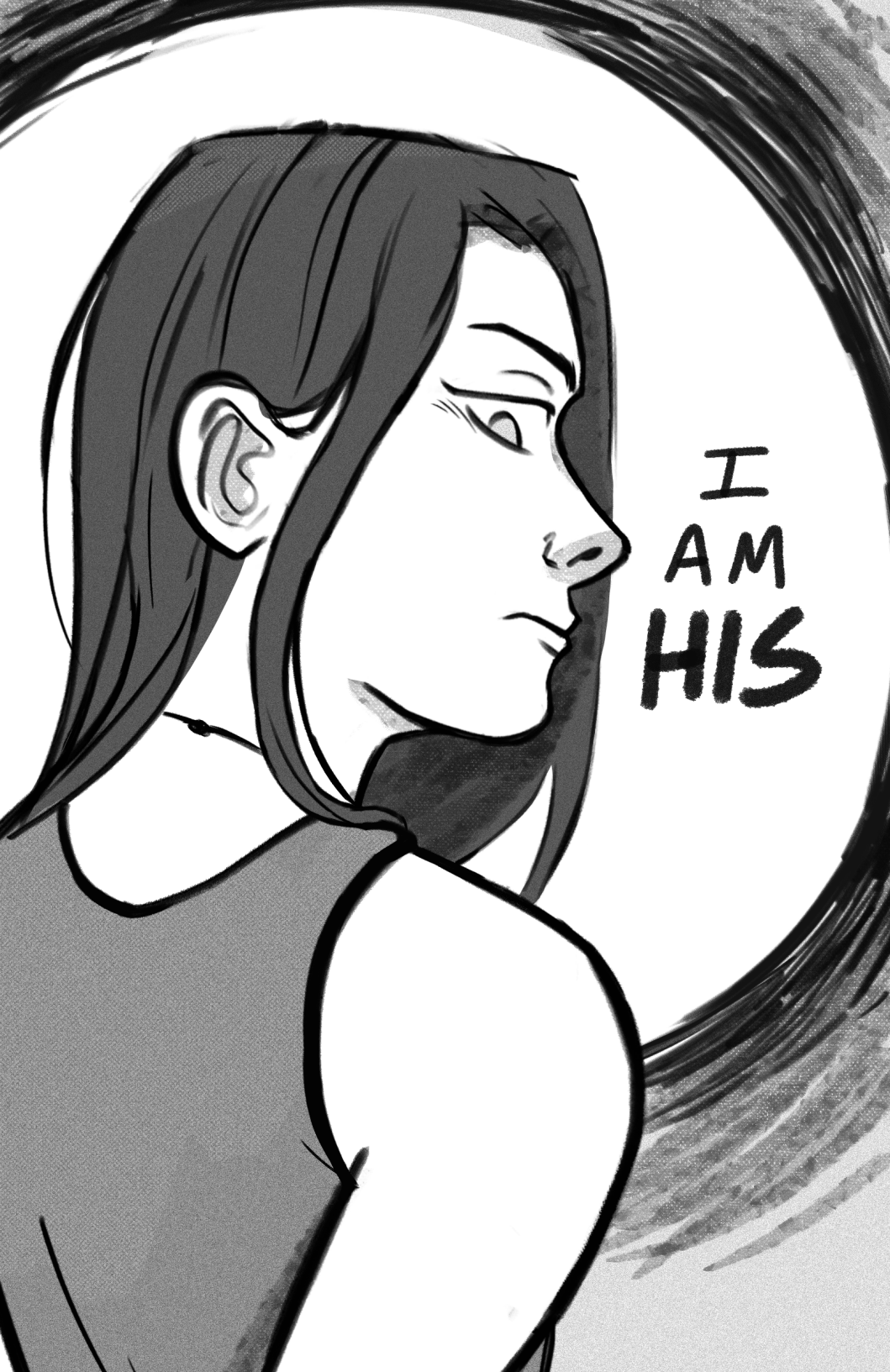


AND WHEN HE FUCKS ME...



I AM HIS





I
AM
HIS

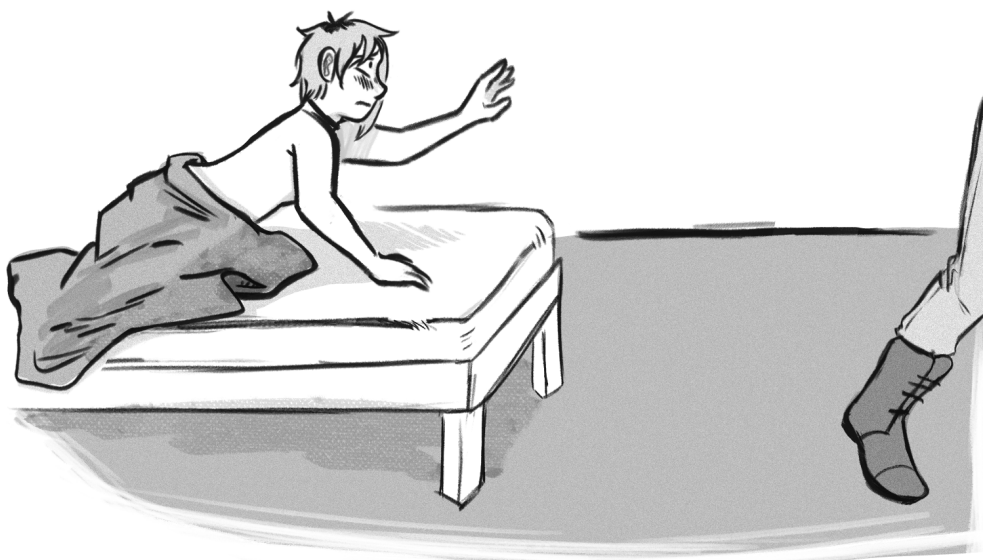
AND IF
I AM HIS



I MUST BE SPECIAL TO HIM



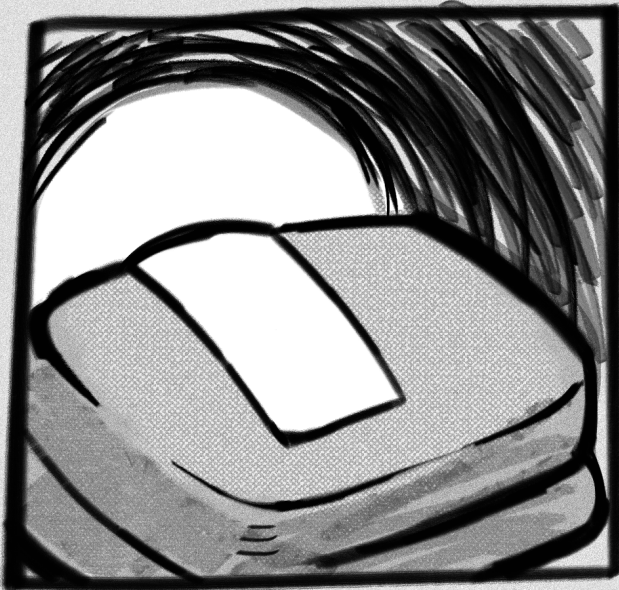
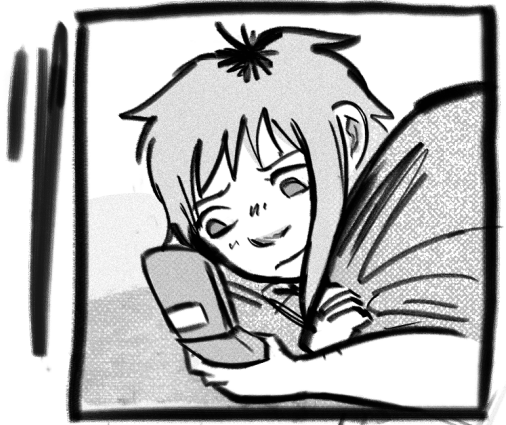
AND IF I AM SPECIAL-



CAN
I BE
WHAT
HE
WANTS?



IF I'M
REALLY
THAT SPECIAL...



CAN I
STAY
IN HIS
LIGHT?

A Moment With Runny

Q: What specific themes/subjects do you enjoy exploring in art?

A: I think t4t relationships are rare to see, and even rarer are depictions as messy and complicated as actual trans people can be in matters of the heart. I love exploring the unique ways trans people love and hurt each other; anything else feels hollow, less meaningful. Trauma, abuse, intimacy, and isolation tend to show up in my work frequently.

Q: What do you think is the role of transgressive/taboo work in society?

A: Ignoring or hiding awful things doesn't make them less real to the people experiencing them, and art is a space to explore that. Transgressive art is a source of comfort and community and a language among outsiders with wounded hearts, and an antidote to a society sick with shame.

Q: How do you enjoy your ice cream?

A: This may sound fake given the publication, but I genuinely love soft serve vanilla cones with my whole heart. The simplicity and relative lightness of soft serve is top tier, okay! If I'm feeling fancy, chocolate syrup and peanuts are nice but not necessary.

Teratoma

by Seth Amphetamine

Frieda enjoyed cigarettes like no one else she knew. She had just one per day and maybe that was why they still made her lightheaded, like a newbie smoker. She would wake up late and wait until mid-afternoon when the hunger pangs began to hit. Then she scooped her bichon frise under one arm and padded into the backyard barefoot, pack and lighter in her other hand.

The dog could entertain itself. It raced around the yard and through neglected flowerbeds while Frieda lit up. Three quick puffs to get the cherry going. Then she inhaled, slow and long, until sparks of light popped inside her brain and she had to lean against the wall. She smoked down to the filter, waiting for the heat to burn her lips, and only then did she stub the cigarette out and sink into a crouch.

Deep breaths. Euphoria. Nausea.

She wouldn't eat for hours now, and it was important not to eat too much. If she gained weight, they told her during puberty, the little friend hanging from her ribcage would grow.

"You good, Frieda?" called her neighbor from the other side of the rotten fence. Gene, a flat-top bulldyke, was picking the dead heads from her tulips. The stalks stood tall, each capped now with a puckered knot of green where petals used to be.

"So good," said Frieda, her voice vague. She watched the dog

squeeze through a hole in the fence and dart toward Gene, jumping and chomping at the irises. His needle teeth snatched at the air and Gene tolerantly redirected him to chase some birds. “Tippy,” Frieda called the dog. Her words were always a little muddled, post-cigarette. She would murmur if he breached the fence or rounded the side of the house, but sometimes you could barely hear her voice. It was like just one cigarette could get her high and sap all firmness from her limbs and vocal cords.

Beneath her shirt, her little friend kicked out.

Frieda shifted, one hand palming her left tit, or what looked like a tit from the outside. Beneath the fabric something shifted, mouthing at her fingers, and she let it suck. It would leave a damp patch on her shirt but Frieda never minded. Anyone who saw it just thought she had a baby at home. New mothers sometimes leaked. But as the clouds faded from her head and the urgent need to throw up took over, she glanced sideways and saw Gene looking her way, watching the shift of fabric, the hungry gnaw of a mouth beneath Frieda’s old high school volleyball tee. Caught, Gene turned back to her pruning.

“Tippy,” Frieda called again, stronger now, and this time the dog came.

There was an antidepressant called Valnone. Frieda still had a bottle secreted away in her keepsake box. Her mother’s name, in faded letters, scrolled along the label, and a paltry scatter of pills rattled when she shook it. Which she often did at night when she was thinking. Time had compacted the tablets into hard little balls. They no longer gave off dust when they hit the bottle’s sides.

In the 90’s, when Frieda was born, Valnone was the go-to prescription for moody teens. Fourteen-year-old girls who cut themselves and listened to the Manic Street Preachers overmuch. They did their stints in eating disorder clinics if they were wealthy, but most girls, like Frieda’s mom, got shunted to a free appointment with a useful youth-psychiatrist and left with a bottle of Valnone in their hands.

The lawsuits came later. Frieda’s mother switched to Prozac.

If she ever got a letter offering funds from a class-action bid, she must have filtered it as junk. For years, she blamed not Valnone but the pesticide-laced well water in the trailer park she used to live in for her daughter's deformity.

Maybe in a sense she was right.

"Is it a boy or a girl?" Gene asked one night.

Frieda lay spread out on the bed beneath her. The lights were off, but street lamps cut through the open blinds and slashed across her skin in neat diagonals, illuminating certain inches of her body; others lay in shadow. Where her left tit should have been there was a round head covered in a patchwork of fine blonde hair, near-invisible. One eye half-bled into Frieda's collarbone, elongating into a sightless slit. The other stared, perfectly formed, a ring of hazel around wide, dark black.

"It's a girl," Frieda said. "It's always the same sex as whoever's hosting it."

"Like identical twins," Gene said.

Gene's hands played up Frieda's ribcage, her palms broad, her fingers callused from yardwork, rough. On Frieda's ribs, a little hand poked out from the flesh, nubby fingers twitching when Gene touched them.

"Can it feel me?" Gene asked.

"Sure," Frieda said. "But it's not conscious."

Lower, a footprint rested inside Frieda's flat belly, raised like a scar. It was mostly submerged—recalcified—but Gene could still trace the toes, the gentle curve of the sole. It reminded Frieda of the inky footprints displayed on a postcard in her sister's living room, the only thing left of a stillborn child. Only this footprint had wrinkles, and when Gene ran her finger down them, the face on Frieda's tit scrunched up and smiled. Ticklish.

"What's its name?" Gene asked.

Frieda's eyes were on the far wall. "I never named it," she

said.

“Liar.”

Gene traced one final body part, a ridge of flesh, of lips, on Frieda’s sternum. The skin here was like velvet. She could squeeze it between thumb and forefinger, rub against it gently the same way she sometimes stroked the flower petals in her garden. Hidden at the crest of this soft flesh was a little wrinkled hood.

“I guess there’s a protein in the body that fuses parts of you together if you have too much of it,” Frieda said. “My feet were stuck together when I was born. But that was a quick fix. The doctor could just—”

She mimed a scalpel slicing through the webbing, and obediently, Gene shuffled down the bed to cradle Frieda’s delicate feet in her hand. She searched for scars.

On Frieda’s chest, where her left nipple should have been, the parasitic twin’s mouth gaped open, pink and wet.

In 1958, researchers in Kansas injected syringes full of testosterone into the wombs of pregnant guinea pigs.

The fetuses had already formed into females, but the testosterone changed them. They emerged with clits the size of penises. They ignored their male peers and tried to mount their sisters instead. Gene had her first wet dream at age ten, thinking about those guinea pigs and the hermaphrodite children that were in the news so much back then. Boys with split penises who were castrated at birth, a dozen infant surgeries turning their genitals into something passably female. Girls with hormonal disorders and fused labia who hit puberty and grew hair on their chins.

Scalpels and syringes. Daydreams of thalidomide. Maybe Gene should have been a doctor. Instead she rolled through town in an aging pick-up truck, her landscaping logo peeling off the door.

She pruned bushes and caned roses. She dug the line of black

fertilizer out of her fingernails with a pocketknife. She took a chainsaw to rotting trees. It was surgery, of a type. And on cool summer nights she plumbed Frieda's broken fence post and applied new fasteners to the pickets, and that was a type of surgery, too.

"No, Tippy," Frieda barked.

Gene paused her work just long enough to see the little dog had stopped frolicking in the yard and was instead humping its favorite toy. It stopped only when Frieda peeled her flip-flop off and threw it at him.

"Don't," Gene said. "Hell, the little guy deserves some pleasure, don't he? You'd be pissed if I threw a shoe at you every time I heard the vibrator buzzing."

"It could hurt him," Frieda said.

"That's a myth. Sex never hurts."

Gene stripped the gardening gloves from her fingers and knuckled the sweat from her brow. Frieda sat against the wall in a food-stained sundress, the shoulder hanging down to her biceps, a warm can of Busch Lite in her hand. She offered it, and Gene kicked through the abandoned flowerbeds to take a sip.

"I can fix those up for you," she said, meaning the flowerbeds.

"Would you?" Frieda asked. "For free?"

"Cheapskate."

She slid down to the narrow strip of pavement that lined the house's exterior walls, a sort of half-hearted sidewalk. Its edges were eaten up by weeds. Gene sipped the beer while Frieda lit up a cigarette. They both pretended not to see Tippy sniffing and licking at his owner's discarded flip-flop, intoxicated by the scent of her feet. Gene had known a neighbor boy who masturbated his own dog when they were kids. It was a game for him. 'Red Rocket.' The other little girls thought it was gross, but to Gene, it made a certain amount of sense, the same way it made sense years later, as a teenager, when she watched the news and learned about a hospital

orderly imprisoned for going down on the disabled women on his ward. Who was to say the women didn't consent? Or the dog, for that matter, or the poor little female guinea pigs mounted by their sisters? She felt bad for any poor creature that couldn't get off from time to time.

"I probably won't keep them," Frieda said suddenly. When Gene shot her a questioning look, she clarified, "The flowerbeds. I know myself. They'd all be dead by next week."

"Well, I like gardening," Gene said. "I could just pop over. Do some weeding. See what needs done."

Frieda's eyes tracked blankly over the flowerbeds. She didn't seem to feel Gene playing with her shoulder strap. Not until it dropped a little lower, exposing the vestigial twin and its puckered face to the cold air.

"You want to see something neat?" Frieda asked.

Gene paid close attention. She watched as Frieda lowered her cigarette to nipple-height and placed the filter into the twin's open mouth. Pale lips sucked mindlessly; blunt teeth nibbled at the brown paper. The fetus hitched a breath and for the first time Gene was forced to consider the fact that it had lungs.

"How many organs does it have?" she asked as smoke curled from the infant's nostrils. It wheezed a cough.

"Dunno," said Frieda.

"Can it eat?"

Frieda just laughed. Uncertainly, Gene held the can of beer to the infant's lips. Her fingers trembled from the strain as she carefully poured just a tiny mouthful onto the infant's tongue. A thin stream of wheat-colored spit dribbled out from its open lips.

"Can I—?" Gene asked, and Frieda shrugged. Gene dipped her fingers inside. The glass-shard teeth scraped at her knuckles as she explored, searching for the infant's throat, the tight wet squeeze of its esophageal passage. If it breathed then it had to have an esophagus, right? But she found nothing, just the

slick ridge of muscle where its head fused to Frieda's flesh.

"What's the point of letting it smoke if it can't breathe?" she asked.

Frieda tapped ash from the end of her cigarette. "You get nicotine in your gums if you just let it sit there," she said. "Might be slower than breathing in, but you get the high either way."

"Does it like it?" Gene asked. She studied the infant's face carefully as Frieda allowed it to take the final drag.

"It probably does," Frieda said. "They say the lips are the most sensitive part of your body."

She stubbed the cigarette out on the brick wall behind her. The infant's one good eye swiveled to stare at Gene, its lids pulled tight in a squint. Watching her. Asking her. She leaned down, her hand questing ahead of her to push Frieda's dress down to her waist, to palm her right tit and tease and pluck at the nipple, to take it in her mouth. The sun beat down on the back of her neck as she sucked and licked. When the nipple reached a point, it stuck out just as far as the infant's snub nose, perfect twins.

"Does it feel good?" Gene asked.

Frieda leaned her head against the wall, eyes closed. "Of course it does," she murmured.

Gene gave the nipple a parting kiss. Then she kissed the infant too, a kiss hello, and found the taste of tobacco waiting on its tongue. Her fingers found the imprint of its ticklish little foot and the velvet-soft petals, the wrinkled hood of its clitoris, so shallow, so close to being absorbed if Frieda gained even a little bit of weight.

She pressed her tongue to it. No technique. Just warm, wet pressure. Attention where there had never been pressure before.

"Does it feel good?" Gene asked again.

She swore she heard the infant coo.

Torro, Torro!

by Seth Amphetamine

Ed was the guard and Sweet the prisoner. Ed passed the time by imagining he was in Spain fighting bulls. Sweet passed the time by masturbating. At times both dreamed of what they would do in a riot, but neither was brave enough to start one. Ed could picture himself cracking skulls; Sweet could test the sharpness of a shiv against his palm, but never really use it.

Surely he could never really use it.

No beauty to look at, either of them. Ed: thick middle, wool uniform clinging to a distended gut. Bald head, rosacea patches on his scalp. Sweet: too gangly for his name, a coward's face, one incisor longer than the other. Yellow at the tip, all parts of him – tobacco stains on fingertips and urine stains where his cock head rubbed at the fabric of his trousers. But they caught each other looking from time to time.

The way Ed's palm curled around the baton, squat fingers twisting against polished wood. The wide-legged swagger of his walk, a waddle accommodating balls bigger than his dick. At night Sweet fantasized about that cock. He could tell it was small because one day a prisoner three cells down had emptied his urine bucket on Ed's head. It coated him, soaked his uniform, turned every inch of his body translucent where the fabric clung. Sweet could see, as Ed bawled and banged his baton on the bars, the outline of his cock beneath his

pants. The length of it shriveled, no more than two inches. Like a child's.

But that was perfect, Sweet thought. He lay on his back on a thin mattress, staring at the ceiling of his cell. He could fit the entirety of that cock in his mouth without straining. Cup it with his cheeks. Lick the cock from base to frenulum without moving his tongue. A walnut lost in a warm wet grotto, a dangerous cave so big it engulfed, flooded, consumed.

He didn't dream of eating it, though – of disappearing the guard's cock. He fantasized about biting it, yes, but not swallowing. The ferric tang of blood, that warm wet spray akin to semen, featured in his dreams. He closed his eyes and parted his lips, cradled it, coddled it, kept the cop's cock comfortable against the inside of his cheek.

Ed dreamed too. He caught the prisoners smoking cigarettes the size of matchsticks once. Sweet had been the one to buy them with his rangy body, and he was generous. He gave whole cigarettes away and cut the final fag in half, and took the smaller end. He didn't scatter when he saw Ed coming. The other boys pocketed lit cigarettes and let them singe out against their clothes – or they swallowed them inside their hands and hid the smoke behind their backs – or they ran.

Sweet kept his cigarette dangling from his bottom lip. The smoke furred out his nostrils. His one long tooth held the butt in place.

What would it be to kiss him right now? Ed wondered, and he clenched the thought and barked, "Put 'em out."

Kiss him and taste tobacco, drink it down. Find each fleck of leaf left on his teeth and lick it free. Enjoy the rush of nicotine staining Sweet's tongue.

Why did they call him Sweet? This, Ed puzzled over on long shifts, when the sky was dark and the stars were icy over the yard. He liked to take his breaks out here. It cleared his head. But why that name, he wasn't sweet, he'd killed a man, an old man. And he was dirty, he'd bent in two for his inspection and the muscles on his legs were tough and stringy, the muscles of a rabbit in winter; the cheeks of his ass were pale, the hole stretched open to reveal a glob of dirt. A lazy wiper. Ed hated things that were unclean; he thought of the bucket, the urine

bucket, and months after the fact the memory of that smell, the other man's fluids, contracted his throat and forced a tight gag through the wet muscles where his esophagus squeezed shut.

Sweet things should be pink frosting, blushing cheeks, cotton panties. Dainty fingers creasing sheets of music into homemade envelopes, tucking pressed flowers inside the folds, hiding keepsakes in Grandmother's jewelry box, the one she left in her will. He pictured milk, and walnut wood, and peaches sliced to halves.

"Why do they call you that?" he asked one day, and Sweet picked a strip of chapped skin from his lip and said,

"That's my name."

At nighttime, peeking into Sweet's cell, what Ed saw was this: long narrow feet poking from the bottom of a blanket, dirty soles. Shaved head, pink shell of an unwashed ear just barely visible. A toilet flushed next door; the water in Sweet's commode bubbled. A smell of shit drove Ed away.

At playtime, on the yard, Sweet hocked loogies at the wall in competition with some other man. They hitched their pants up over scrawny asses, pitched their heads back for a wider arc. Exposed necks, razor rash turning red in the cold air. Thick balls of phlegm, the color of pearls, splattering first on the stones, sliding down like a snail's trail into the withered grass.

In the showers – communal – Sweet grabbed another prisoner's shoulder for support and bent one knee first, then the other, scrubbing his feet with a rag that had already seen to his face and chest. Water disappeared into tufts of curly hair all over his body, then reemerged in rivulets a few inches lower. Down his stomach, between his legs. It left the hair spongy and dark like moss. And even after a shower, the reek clung to him, the stink of masturbation, unbrushed teeth. Cigarettes and piss.

He stayed a little longer than the others; he didn't mind that the water was cold and needling. He lifted his head so that the jaw line, the bulge of his Adam's apple, the ridge of his collarbones – all were exposed to the shower spray. A reprimand lodged in Ed's throat: Time's up, get out. But he

stayed, watching, silent, as Sweet massaged the soap into his chest and over his nipples; as his soft cock filled a little, and urine streamed down his thigh to mix with the water, to circle the drain.

No wonder he stinks. And look where he lives – no wonder he doesn't care. But, but, but...

His shift is over and Ed hides in the changing room, his locker door shielding him, his uniform pants unbuckled. He palms himself, teeth gritted; closes his eyes.

His shift is starting and Ed raps on the cell doors, and he can't bring himself to look inside this particular one, to see Sweet throw back the blanket and lazily stretch, to see morning wood straining at his jumpsuit, begging to be set free.

His shift is over and he showers the way Sweet showered: hands and rags and streams of piss, trying – failing – to let it fall where it will, to refuse to flinch when it touches his thigh.

His shift is always starting.

He dreams of matadors.

He dreams of warm sun, close-fitting tights and tasseled cords, stiff rigid jackets embossed with silver thread, adorned with Austrian knots. Pink stockings, silk mantles, ballet flats decorated with a bow. He dreams he is a bullfighter, every step kicking up dirt that chokes him. Lovingly dressed by men in less-embellished variants of his own clothes. Their fingers linger; they brace the steel armor on his right leg as if it will stop him from getting gored.

At lunch, a fight breaks out. This is his chance to crack some skulls and Ed lets it go. Oh, let them kill each other, he thinks. At lunch he is a matador. The bull is waiting for him: see its flanks, sleek muscle, shining hair. See its power, its animal urge to charge, to throw, to pierce. In his mind the horn of a bull is pure ivory. It doesn't yellow in the sun. In his mind the lip pulls low, the brass ring pulls it down like a cigarette – like half a cigarette held in place by one long tooth.

The fight is getting worse now. Guards mill in from the hallways. Some have their batons out already, like they've been waiting months for the chance to draw blood. Others are

just irritated at the noise, the interruption to their lunch breaks. But their batons are drawn, too. Not Ed. He meets Sweet's eyes across the cafeteria. The upturned tables, the flying chairs. Some of the men have weapons, lovingly crafted from trash they hide inside their clothes, against their skin. This is it, thinks Ed, this is the charge – Sweet's coming for him, looking lost – Sweet holds a knife self-consciously, almost apologetically – Sweet smiles, crashes into him. He laughs, like he can't believe he's done it. He cranes his neck to see if the other prisoners are bearing witness.

Chest to chest. Hips slotting together, arms pulling tight around each other – first a blatant grab at muscle, then a desperate tearing at the sleeve. Ed lifts his hands to shield his face. He sees white gloves, curls his fingers around an imaginary red flag. Thick material, bright dye, deep and vibrant enough to catch the sun. It's only air – it isn't real – but Sweet touches it anyway, feels the fabric between his cigarette-stained fingers. He slashes it, experimentally, with his knife, and now they can see each other again, can share a smile. Beneath Ed's wool uniform trousers, his cock is waiting.

Sweet could kiss it, if he wanted to. Now's the time.

A Moment With Seth Amphetamine

Q: What mediums do you work in?

A: I do a lot of prose writing, primarily queer fiction with elements of horror. But I also love to make zines as a collab with my creative partner, Tony Titaloni, as well as poetry!

Q: What specific themes/subjects do you enjoy exploring in your writing?

A: I really like a character who is fundamentally unknowable – someone so reserved, or so emotionally constipated, that you can't worm your way into their head no matter how hard you try. I also like to explore themes of alienation, characters who are outsiders in some way, or closeted. Also rape. Lots and lots of rape.

Q: What do you hope your audience takes away from your art?

A: I hope they learn to embrace the freakish, taboo parts of themselves. A lot of us grow up thinking we are “wrong” because we're queer. Often we don't really shake that lesson off, we just learn to apply it to other aspects of ourselves. I want people to not just unlearn that those aspects are “harmful,” but learn to cherish them. And I hope they learn to do the same for other people – to see the moral goodness in a person who's abrasive and strange, the appeal of someone else's crazy taboo fetish or cringey art. The beauty in the dirt.

Bonus Creator Questions

Q: What work are you most proud of?

A.M. Herrington - That's tough. "Una Notte a Villa Molinari," perhaps, since the process of completing it was tortuous. I began writing it in 2021, came back every few months to add 100 words or so, and let it sit in WIP hell until 2025. Then, suddenly—I knew that I could finish it, and so I did.

Hydein - An unreleased 100+ page comic I call "virginity comic". I think its quite good.

KD - Been stuck on this one a while. I think I've gotta go with a fanwork, "flame&wolf," which is still in progress, but I really like how that one pushed me in a lot, a lot of directions, especially since it's got a few of my squicks front and center and I'm somehow not majorly wiggled out by it.

LAB - I'm the type of person who is never really proud of their work.

J.D. Riley - Krad and I worked on a short comic together: FALKE. I think I'm most proud of things that I've worked on with other people and FALKE is probably my number one joy. I couldn't have become as close with my people without having Krad's support and passion toward the project and I'll be forever grateful that I get to make fun stuff together with my buddies.

K.M. Claude - My graphic novel, *Ninety-Nine Righteous Men*, because I got to cross off my bucket list goal of "make a graphic novel" and did so during one of the most difficult times of my life. I can't NOT be proud of that accomplishment, even if it was a decade ago.

Roo - I'm immensely proud of my work on VELVET, it is an ongoing modern gothic series that really feels like I am stretching and growing every time I return to it. It's an intimidating piece that I sometimes get scared off of, but I can't stay away either.

Seth Amphetamine - I take any chance I can get to pimp out Strip Club Werewolf, a novelette I wrote that got taken down by itch.io. It's a retelling of Marie de France's classic poem Bisclavret, set in a modern strip club. M/m, with horror and gender themes, and a whole lot of background rape and incest trauma. I had so much fun with it.

Q: Who/what are your biggest creative influences?

A.M. Herrington - I could provide a whole list, but... in this interview, I want to name the relatively obscure mangaka Tadashi Kawashima and his series *Alive: The Final Evolution* (illustrated by Adachitoka, who later did *Noragami*). The series was in its final stretch when I discovered it, and Kawashima-sensei finished it on his deathbed, which lends the ending an extra sense of poignance. This manga was enormously influential to me despite not being well-known today, and echoes of it are in my work everywhere you look, from Hirose's nihilistic desire for oblivion to the conflicted kindness of the priest Asou.

Hydein - Keiko Takemiya, Harada, Thomas Mann, Vladimir Nabokov, and my pervert friends.

KD - I laugh at myself a little for it, but things on total opposite sides of the spectrum. Big fan of 00/10s-era over the top action movies that fell kinda flat at the time like *Sucker Punch*. Also a lot of that same era of transgressive manga - *Deadman Wonderland*, *Elfen Lied*. Then, seinen like *Blade of the Immortal*, and quiet, slow-moving dramas like *In The Mood For Love* and *Otoyomegatari*. Oh, and, of course, my forever girl, the middle generation of *Fire Emblem* games, 6/7 (ha) and 9/10.

LAB - If you've followed me online for more than 30 seconds, you'll probably know I'm a huge Ayami Kojima fan. Kojima and Atsushi Kamijo are likely my two biggest influences right now, as far as black & white manga-style work. 90s visual kei is also a big influence, as well as the bands that VK took inspo from when the genre was developing. Writing wise, having lived in Tokyo for a few years has an unmistakable influence. If you want to go back to formative media, Andrew Llyod Webber's *Phantom of the Opera*, Ai Yazawa's *Paradise Kiss*, and the anime *Wolf's Rain* all shaped me in some kind of way.

J.D. Riley - I don't (usually) write horror but in my life I've read a lot of Stephen King. I think King's work definitely allows the mind to wrap around subjects in different ways and see things as beyond what they are, which is important to imagination and writing. I've

always been a vivid dreamer and daydreamer but King's prose led me to be able to really dig deeper into fear and friction.

K.M. Claude - Historically? *Beetlejuice: The Animated Series*, Disney's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (ditto krad re: Kathy Zielinski), *Hellsing*, *Ring* and *Ju-On* and other early entries in the J-horror remake craze, *Yami no Matsuei (Descendents of Darkness)*, Takarazuka, *Elisabeth das Musical*, Takato Yamamoto – those are all pretty historically visible. I'd like to think also that films like *Saló*, *The Devils*, and *Caligula* – these beautifully made and often deeply upsetting works – are woven in the DNA somewhere.

Seth Amphetamine - Country and blues music, or anything from the 70s. Campy 80s horror, both books and movies, with bonus points for those forgotten authors who were willing to explore incest and queerness. Jean Genet, Todd Haynes, Yukio Mishima, Davids Cronenberg and Lynch. Anything seedy and erotic, anything with pathos.

Q: At the time that *Soft Serve* is coming out, artists are seeing a global rise in censorship.

What suggestions do you have for young artists who want to make transgressive art in this era?

kradeelav - Get used to living stealth. Adapt, read and utilize the wisdom from our ancestors who've lived in under similar censorious regimes, and thrived despite it, such as Tom of Finland and his old guard.

I don't see that attitude as defeatist – there's always some insecure power-hungry fool out there making life difficult for taboo creatives. The tools are still there for us to keep the flame alive.

A.M. Herrington - Be as clear as possible in your love of the work, and your audience will come. Make friends and connections, and be patient if you can't find them right away. Never feel obligated to justify who you are or what you love to people who would assume the worst of you. Knowing your story is a privilege they have to earn, not a right.

Hydein - Make work only for yourself, your own heart, your own satisfaction. Share cautiously, but create without reservation.

KD - Really practice distancing yourself from criticism. There's going to be people being absolute jackasses about what you're making. Nine out of ten times, they're not mad at you-the-person. They're scared of something. Probably of how what you're doing conflicts with their worldview.

LAB - My peers have said a lot of smart things already and I don't have much to add other than don't use your real name online and take internet safety seriously.

J.D. Riley - Print is not dead. Figure out what you need to do to make what you want to make at home. Hand-draw or hand-write if you have to, but don't stop making and don't discount the value of physical media.

Be prepared for the naysayers. Folks who think you're doing something wrong for making transgressive art are going to be in places you didn't think they would be. People you thought were your ride or dies might be just waiting for you to disappoint them. You'll find your people through your art and through your heart.

K.M. Claude - To quote Divine from *Pink Flamingos*: Kill everyone now! Condone first-degree murder! Advocate cannibalism! Eat shit! To be less of a meme: don't be a pussy (make your shit!) and don't be a lil' bitch about how other people play with their crayons — we're all sinners (deviants) in the hands of an angry god (censors).

Roo - If you want to make transgressive art, your first order of business should be to make the damn piece. If you're having trouble with that, drink in as much transgressive art as you can find, let it inspire you, yes even the stuff that grosses you out. Challenge yourself to understand the beauty in a "gross" piece of art. If there is something you want to make and you think there's no place for it, the best thing you can do is seek out people who are already making that kind of art because I guarantee there is at least one other person who loves what you do and has figured out a system. I would have gotten nowhere without my friends and peers. I am walking paths that people laid out a long time before I found them.

webMaster rudolf dienstag - the best thing adult artists can do in the current sociopolitical climate online is create a personal website to host their art. it is an incredible way to empower yourself by building yourself a home free of the hostility and content restrictions of third-party platforms while also building community with fellow adult artists.

A Moment With webMaster rudolf dienstag

Q: Tell us about yourself and your art.

A: i am webMaster rudolf dienstag, a multi-media artist and front-end developer. i started my art career as an illustrator and built my own website just before getting banned on twitter. i had originally intended to create a simple gallery to showcase my best work but it ended up taking off to where i've built a bit of a web empire, and now most of the work i do is focused on front-end design and development.

Q: What specific themes do you enjoy exploring in art?

A: at the core of my illustration work is what it feels like. i love to focus on the little moments of intimacy, the experience over the greater action. i have spent my lifetime trying to communicate with others in a way where they can feel what i feel, and i find i achieve that best through visual art.

Q: What motivates you to continue making the kind of work that you do?

A: i have no choice.

Q: What mediums do you work in?

A: my illustration work usually starts as analog sketches that i render in Clip Studio Paint using True Grit Texture Supply assets.

i use VSCode as my development environment and write in vanilla CSS and Astro Javascript. i start most of my web designs as analog wireframes and experiment with fonts, color schemes and assets directly onto the page.

Q: What work are you most proud of?

A: my personal website, no question. it's an absolute fortress, now four years in the making.



in defense of [REDACTED] in art, always.

EROCREATIVERESOURCES.ORG

erocreativeresources is a website focused on the defense, protection, and preservation of fictional works depicting taboo kinks at the highest threat of censorship, including but not limited to non-consent, lolisho, eroguro and incest, and whether defined as visual arts, writing, or video games.

It includes a collection of resources and best practices for adult artists and a timeline of event concerning the censorship of erotic art, online and offline.



Contributor Promos!

A.M. Herrington - Content to promote *Soft Serve* itself! A bi-annual creative publication designed to spotlight works from artists and writers under-served by the current art ecosystem.

webMaster rudolf dienstag - i create and manage websites for collaborative projects that may struggle to survive on social media. you are welcome to visit my site and contact me if you would like to collaborate.

⇒ <https://rudytues.day>

kradeelav - my floating rat's nest of ongoing doujinshi and love letter to the old web can be found on **kradeelav.com**

Hydein - I make a webcomic, *Après Moi le Déluge*. I'm currently working on rebooting it, please look forward to it when it comes out this summer!

KD - Find KD's works on their website:

<https://www.kidlightnings.net>

LAB - There will be some mini comics, a paper newsletter, an online shop, and a blog coming this year. Keep tabs on BlueSky at: [@elegantlab.bsky.social](https://elegantlab.bsky.social)

JD Riley - **FALKE** is available on my shopify store (<https://jdriley.myshopify.com>) in both physical and digital forms. My free stories are available under **JD_Riley** on Archive of Our Own.

KM Claude - Everything I do, I put up on **kmclaude.com** – except the more hardcore stuff (or writing), that winds up on **marquisdeclaude.com**

Roo - For achillean taboo erotic art, check out *DON'S DEAD MARKET* at <https://ddmarket.online/>

I have a new horror novel releasing in August (with cover by KM Claude himself?? WOAHH)

My website is <https://frictionpress.com/>

Find works such as *Seed Takes Root* and *Angel/Pearl*, two very deep ID pieces that are just a bonerific journey into shamelessness.

Idal Waves - My work can be found on Archive Of Our Own at: https://archiveofourown.org/users/Idal_waves/profile

Runny - Found on BlueSky at [runny.bsky.social](https://bsky.social), his work is also going to be included in *DON'S DEAD DOVE MARKET* at <https://ddmarket.online/>

Seth Amphetamine - I'm working on a prose anthology with some friends called *St. Sebastian's School for Boys*. Sort of an homage to classic BL manga – all m/m stories, some student/student, some student/teacher, and a bit of incest thrown in as well. It's going to release for free, so keep an eye out for it. Also look for *Gasmasc* this summer, a collection of queer WWI stories and art!

