

THE THINGS MAGGIE MADE

By Hannah Bel Davis

A Novella

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Davis

Signature Page

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This is to certify that the thesis prepared

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complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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Abstract

The Things Maggie Made

Hannah Bel Davis

“The Things Maggie Made” is an illustrated gothic fantasy novella starring Janet, a professional ballerina in her mid-twenties desperate to save her career after an Achilles tendon injury puts her at risk of losing her job. The novella’s central conflict revolves around Janet’s desperation to maintain her position as a dancer at her ballet company, while negotiating changes in both her environment and in her body, and simultaneously being involved in a hunt for a creature on the property that may or may not exist. As Janet tries to heal, the novella’s action revolves around Janet’s interactions with her cousin, The Director, Kerry, her late grandmother Maggie, and the fantastical hybrid creatures that roam the property. The novella’s magic, fantastic creatures and fantastic elements function as devices through which I explore themes of pain, memory, dysfunctional familial dynamics, the failure and triumph of bodies, and the celebration of unhealthy bodies in both the world of dog breeding and the world of ballet.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my supervisor, Josip Novakovich, for your endless support, feedback, and diligence in informing me of any news involving animals, especially cougars.

Thank you to Kate Sterns, whose kindness and wisdom I admire endlessly. Thank you for your time in being a secondary reader for this project.

Thank you, Mikhail Iossel, also for your time in being a secondary reader. I deeply appreciate your generous and constructive feedback.

Thankful for those who have made this journey joyful—you know who you are. I am honoured to call you my friends (or family, or both). If you don't know who you are, then please find your name in the frog-shaped word bubble below.



Figure 1

Thank you to my parents, who have supported my educational journey, even when I decided I wanted to spend two years writing a book about bugs.

Finally, thank you (in no particular order) to the lovely people who let me interview them for this book.

Hannah Elizabeth: *on getting a tooth knocked out*

Anne Tulloch: *on Achilles tendon injuries and physiotherapy*

Andrew Davis: *on farm life*

Christoph Von Riedemann: *on professional dance and Ballet, all the way from Sweden*

Dirk Von Hertzberg: *on property ownership and management*

Anne Davis: *on getting into medical school*

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Much love,
Hannah Bel Davis

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*“1996 was a hell of a year.”
-Kerry the hunter*

*“I agree.”
-Janet the Ballerina*

1

Let us Briefly Meet Our Janet



Figure 2

*I Am the Thing
Maggie Made.*

Figure 3

Passing in and out of fulfilling and unfulfilling lives alike, like noisy starlings weaving in and out of fenceposts and suet blocks, are notable somebodies— or many notable somebodies all at once in our Janet’s case— who are as invested in our wellbeing as we are invested in ourselves.

Often, these invested creatures are lovers (bright and earnest), or sisters (with a talent for sewing), or imaginary friends (with gangly arms) ... or brothers who taught you to kiss (just kidding) or mothers who memorize passages from every book they read, or stalkers who believe your trash bin contains the key to both your affection and your groin, or fathers who taught you

to draw a very specific and unflattering caricature of a person you did not realize was the family's dogwalker, or enemies, or aunts who are also enemies, or kind, concerned nurses administering IV drips, just to name a few.

These instances of infatuated somebodies vary in their degrees of beauty and permanence and rarity, and in our Janet's case, her somebodies were rarest of all, for they were not somebodies at all, but an overwhelming flock of fat little moths.



Figure 4

Moth is a Human Man



Figure 5

It is a winter without snow on the evening of Janet’s big day. The sun has barely set. Kerry and Moth are in the front yard. Beyond them is a thick forest. Hidden among the trees are unknown animals, and one unknown animal in particular that Moth and Kerry intend to kill.

“Ya’ ever shot a fuckin’ deer, man?” Kerry wears a denim vest.

“Why the fuck are you talking about a deerman, buddy?” Moth is tipsy. He swings his arms around his head in an untidy circle. In each hand he holds an open beer. The beers spill on his head and on the pile of thawing freezer meat to his right.

“Ya’ ever killed a deer?” Kerry asks, wiping Moth’s wet hair and flicking the beer off his fingers. A rifle is slung around his back. He calls it his Little Lady.

Moth is silent. He pours beer over his shoes, drops the cans when they’re sufficiently empty, finds his tobacco and papers in Kerry’s pocket, rolls a cigarette, and tucks it behind his ear for later.

“This could be my big break,” says Moth. “A discovery of a new species, how scientific.”

“I’ve been hunting my whole life, you know,” says Kerry.

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“I know,” says Moth.

The two men hug. They’ve run out of beer.

Janet watches from the dining room window.

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3

Janet's Big Day

It is the morning of Janet's big day. A meeting is imminent.

Janet twists an ice tray until it cracks; her body has grown accustomed to the motions of injury:

1. Fetch ICE Bucket.
2. Dispense ICE.
3. Submerge Right Foot and Ankle in Aforementioned ice.



4. Repeat When Pain Returns. (OR SOONER, AS NEEDED.)

Figure 6

Cold, cold, cold— numb, numb, numb, Janet sings to herself. This helps Janet forget, for a moment, that her career depends entirely on the health of her ankle.

The physiotherapist (a physiotherapist that Janet had never met before) was wearing stretchy black pants and unscented hand lotion as she assessed Janet's ankle. She was as bland as a water cracker, or at least this was Janet's opinion.

“You’ve had surgery for this injury before?” the physiotherapist asked, her voice so lackluster that Janet barely noticed the woman’s inflection. The physiotherapist jabbed with a dull, neatly filed fingernail to a jagged, silver line tracing up the back of Janet’s right leg, positioned precisely below the calf and above the heel, like a crack on the surface of a frozen pond. The profiles of faces can be detected in the scar tissue, if one is to look carefully and imaginatively enough.

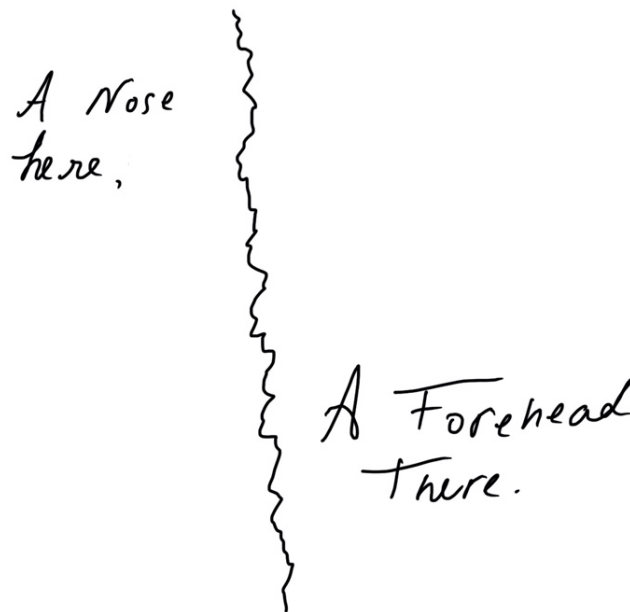


Figure 7

“No,” Janet replied. “I fell out of a tree when I was little and got my leg wrapped up in a blackberry bush.” But Janet knew that it wasn’t the fall that had cut her ankle. Her legs were quite alright (at first), despite having fallen quite a distance into the bush.

“Right,” the physio said, “this scar is thick and jagged. Accidental.”

A dull pause.

“How did you fall out of the tree?” asked the physiotherapist.

“Someone was shaking it,” said Janet.

“I am sorry,” said the physiotherapist.

“Sometimes trees get shaken,” said Janet.

The physiotherapist asked Janet to lie on her belly on the massage table. She asked her to let her feet hang off the end.

“I am running a test to assess your Achilles tendon. It is what connects your calf muscles to your heel bone.”

The physiotherapist squeezed Janet’s right ankle between her thumb and her fingers. The attached foot flopped in response.

“Good,” said the physiotherapist. “I see that your tendon is not ruptured. If it were, I would squeeze your ankle and your foot wouldn’t move like this.” Demonstrating, the physiotherapist squished and squished the ankle and tendon. Janet’s foot bounced and bounced.

“I will remember this,” said Janet.

“Up please,” said the physiotherapist.

Sitting, Janet jammed her finger in her pot of lip balm and smeared it across her lips. She studied the walls, covered in black and white photographs of men’s and women’s abdomens. Every single one of them had the most defined and swollen muscles Janet had ever seen. Aside from an abnormally tall human skeleton on wheels sitting idly in corner of the room, the photographs were all the décor the room had to offer.

Janet pulled her hair into a ponytail.

“Do you think my hair looks damaged?” Janet asked. “I bleached it myself.”

The physiotherapist looked up at Janet from the floor.

“Hair isn’t really my thing” said the physiotherapist, professionally distracted by the foot in her hands.

“Right,” said Janet. She chewed her lip and examined her hair and could not decide if the ends were split or not.

“I see a lot of Ballet dancers with this type of injury” the physiotherapist told Janet, and Janet wanted to kick her in the head. She would not be reduced to just another number in the physiotherapist’s mental record of the other injured athletes and artists who passed limping through her office. Janet sulked on the sterile massage table as the therapist continued the examination. She asked Janet to flex, then extend, her ankle. Janet eyed the physiotherapist’s framed credentials skeptically. The physiotherapist— whose name turned out to also be Janet— wiped her ankle down with a thin square of gauze drenched in seventy percent isopropyl alcohol and used a slender needle to administer a shot of cortisone.

Our dancer, Janet shuddered. On her way out, she clutched a stack of three papers on which her treatment plan was categorized and described.

“Remember to ice daily,” said the physiotherapist.

On the top of the front page was Janet’s diagnosis.

ACHILLES TENDONITIS.

Figure 8

Of Janet's Past

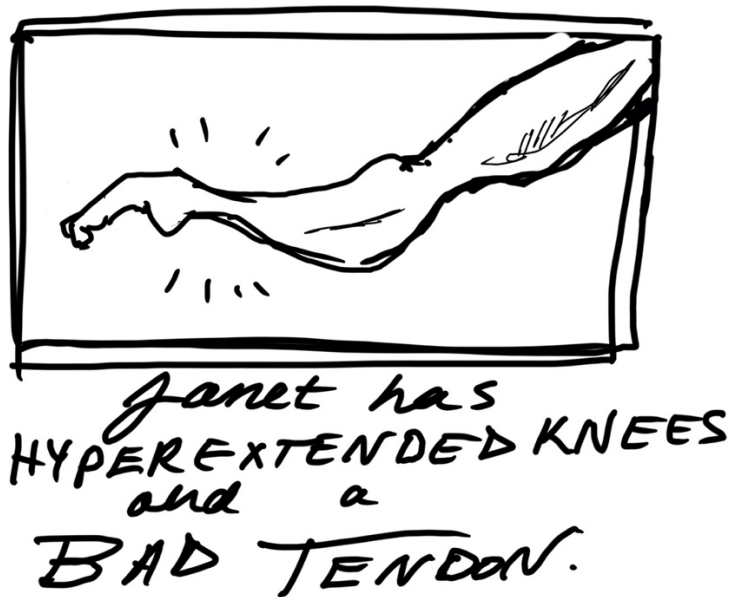


Figure 9

The ice cubes do not come loose as she had expected so Janet uses her fingernails to pry them out one at a time. They plop into the plastic basin on the dining room floor.

The dining room is the dimmest room of the house. The curtains are dark. The ceiling is high... much too high, higher than any other ceiling on the main floor. Moth (her cousin and roommate) hypothesized that there must be dead space between the ceiling and the upper floor in every other room but this one. Perhaps this is the only room where the house is as it should be. On the right side of the room is a deep purple couch with round, soft throw pillows. On either end are ornate side tables and expensive-looking lamps that do not give off enough light. (How frustrating!) After Maggie had died and her only grandchildren inherited her house, Moth

expressed difficulty emptying the home of her belongings. Janet did not argue, but she cherished the rooms she had been permitted to make her own, like her bedroom, and the kitchen, and the cramped closet under the stairs. Janet may have preferred to live elsewhere, but the house just happened to be close to her work.

Beside the couch is a bookshelf as wide as it is tall, filled with Moth and Janet's grandmother Maggie's books on greyhound breeding: rearing, grooming, training, racing, conformation, and health issues (of which there are many). Maggie was an immensely successful greyhound breeder and trainer and found herself featured frequently in magazines of the likes of *Hound Bimonthly*, *Canine Twice-A-Weekly*, and Janet's favourite, for its gorgeous simplicity, *Dog*.

Our Moth and Janet, at a very young age, learned how— and how not— to behave when surrounded by dogs twice their height. Janet was lightly trampled on several occasions, but would be quickly reminded by Maggie that the dogs, on account of their bodies being built for “impressive speed” and not for “bulk,” were, “not that heavy,” so that Janet could *easily* walk off any pain the dogs may (but probably didn't) cause her.

THEY GO FAST —



Figure 10

Janet learned to stay out of the dogs' way. She practised loving them from afar, though she always maintained the belief that the breed was a spooky one, looking more like small, thin horses possessed by the spirit of a sad little ghost girl than any other dog she had ever seen.

Across from the bookshelf is a large painting of a sleek, grey dog with a lobster in its mouth. (Maggie had the painting commissioned by a local fingerpainting artist.) At the back of the room are thick, grey curtains (they used to be black) that pool on the floor like an evening gown worn by a curtsying woman. The curtains hide a circular window that overlook the yard and forest. In the middle of the room is a dining room table long enough to seat eight, over which hangs a light fixture made of blue stained glass.

Naturally there is wallpaper on the walls. Less naturally, there is wallpaper on the ceiling; Janet (as she prepares her ankle for icing) is surrounded mercilessly by rows upon rows of a single scene, repeated against the background of deep green paper: a fat little cupid with an

elegant bow and arrow chasing an unsuspecting deer. The animal has sad, human eyes, and a long, skinny tail. Its ears are peeled back in panic, while the cupid, instead of a quiver, has a third arm protruding from the middle of its back. The arm clutches a handful of arrows. It is the worst wallpaper Janet has ever seen, but she couldn't bring herself to replace it.

This room, like the rest of the home, gives the distinct but false impression of being very old. Old enough for mouse infestations. Old enough for mould. Old enough for spiteful spirits. This is how Maggie had wanted it.

In the midst of an amicable divorce from Janet and Moth's grandfather in the late 80s, Maggie bought the house and spent copious amounts of time and money in renovating—or reverse renovating as Maggie called it—the 1950's triplex. She wanted a house from the 18th century, and she could only go about mimicking one, as one couldn't find houses that old in British Columbia. Now, because of Maggie, the wallpapers are dark and intricate, and the staircases are winding, and the curtains are thick, and the hallways creak. Maggie religiously referenced books on heritage homes, but when she brought in a historian she'd found through the local paper, he scoffed and told her it was all a disgrace (a rather dramatic and bold claim, even if the house was a mess). With an upturned nose and an air of finality, he told her, that in addition to his previous less-than-constructive criticisms, he found the pervasive smell of mothballs to be bothersome.

The mothball smell was evidence of Maggie's attempts to be rid of the thousands of moths living in the walls. As moth infestations were certainly old-house problems, Maggie should have rejoiced at the discovery of the insects—for reasons pertaining to authenticity and aura and all that—but was instead horrified to hear, late one night, not a week after she had

made her first mortgage payment, the bodies of thousands of moths bashing themselves in groups against the walls in dull, tiny, *whomps*.

“They want to get out!” cried Maggie (softly to herself), careful not to wake her pre-teen grandchildren, who were asleep in the next room (pre-teens needs many hours of sleep to grow strong and fast) before fleeing silently to her car, driving to the 24-Hour Pit Hardware Store, and buying all the mothballs in stock. She would not let the moths out of the walls; she planned to let them die there, suffocated by the naphthalene vapours. She jammed mothballs into corners and closets, all to no avail.

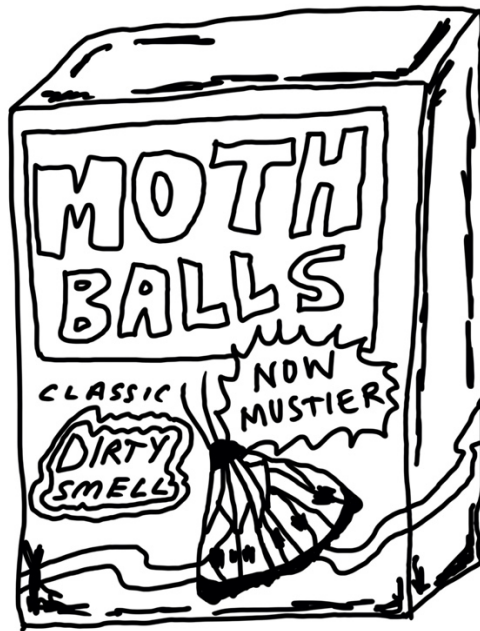


Figure 11

One night during a summer thunderstorm the same year, our Janet couldn't sleep. Lying in bed with her head titled backward onto her pillow, she watched the wall, picking numbly at a crack in the wallpaper, and heard, for the first time, between cracks of thunder, the sounds of the moths.

“They want to get out!” cried Janet (softly to herself), careful not to wake her cousin, who was asleep in the bed beside her.

And so, she set to picking away with her fingernails, first at the paper, then at the plaster. And when, not an hour and a half later, she found wood, she fetched a bobby pin from her ballet bag and picked and picked and picked little holes in the timber, all the while aware that the moths were becoming increasingly restless.

Finally, the bugs poured from the wall in what Janet could only later refer to as a “moth blizzard.” She fled the bedroom in search of her grandmother and left her cousin inside, clueless as to whether or not he had been awakened.

As it turns out, he had, and the muffled choking sounds Janet had mistaken for some especially violent moth wings were really the sounds of her cousin inhaling and swallowing live moth after live moth. Maggie, rushing to her grandson’s rescue, swatted her way through the swarm, and carried him out of the room (he was small for his age) and downstairs two steps at a time.

“Shut that door!” she had called to Janet. Janet slammed it.

Maggie cradled her grandson on the dining room couch and whispered soothing things to him.

“Are you okay?” asked Maggie.

“I swallowed many bugs,” said her grandson.

“You are so special,” said Maggie. “Those moths *chose* you. You have been chosen.” And she kissed the boy on the forehead.

“Janet,” said Maggie, who had been minding her own business in the kitchen, “would you do some ballet for your cousin? He is sad.”

Janet pretended not to hear.

Maggie whistled for her dogs. She got them doing tricks in the dining room.

“Janet,” Maggie called again, “please come dance for your cousin. Your ballet is so beautiful.” Janet agreed that her dancing *was* beautiful, and so, on the smooth, dark wood of the dining room, she pirouetted, and tendued, and arabesqued, and penchéd, until her cousin felt soothed.

“I am so strong,” he said weakly. The moths had done a number on his throat.

“You are my good, strong moth boy,” whispered Maggie.

Moth never again went by his birthname, and the moth infestation worsened. They fluttered and crawled around the house in clusters of various sizes. On days where they congregated in the bathroom in lumps on the ceiling, walls, and inside the bathtub, no one washed. When Maggie tried to wave them out the windows with tea towels and flyswatters, she learned that this particular breed of moth could bite. Moths eat sweaters, among other things.

Maggie’s six dogs (twelve if you counted the unborn puppies of the pregnant bitch named Wolf) snapped and barked at the things. Maggie was getting tired, Moth was unbothered, and Janet was wondering when the summer would just end so she wouldn’t have to sleep with a hole next to her head anymore—it produced a cold draft. She longed for the end of August, when Janet’s mother and aunt would pick up their respective children in their matching cars, and Janet would stretch out in the soft back seat of the car, and her mother, just moments before Janet fell asleep, would remind her that, “You know, your grandmother loves you very much.”

Janet was aware of her grandmother’s inability to get control of the moth problem. She used even more moth balls, special ordering batches from an experimental pesticide lab in northern Saskatchewan. She made at-home tinctures and even called an exterminator, all the

while avoiding more bites, but the bugs prevailed. Summer after summer, Maggie was unable to resolve the issue.

The summer of Janet's twentieth birthday (and the summer Maggie died), Janet was staying with her grandmother as tradition demanded, although this year was the first she was employed as a professional dancer, with the Pit Ballet Company. She rinsed a teacup in the kitchen sink and noticed two of her grandmother's self-published autobiographies sitting side-by-side on the kitchen table. This was not as it should be. Janet knew her Grandmother only kept one of her autobiographies out at a time. (To avoid seeming conceited).

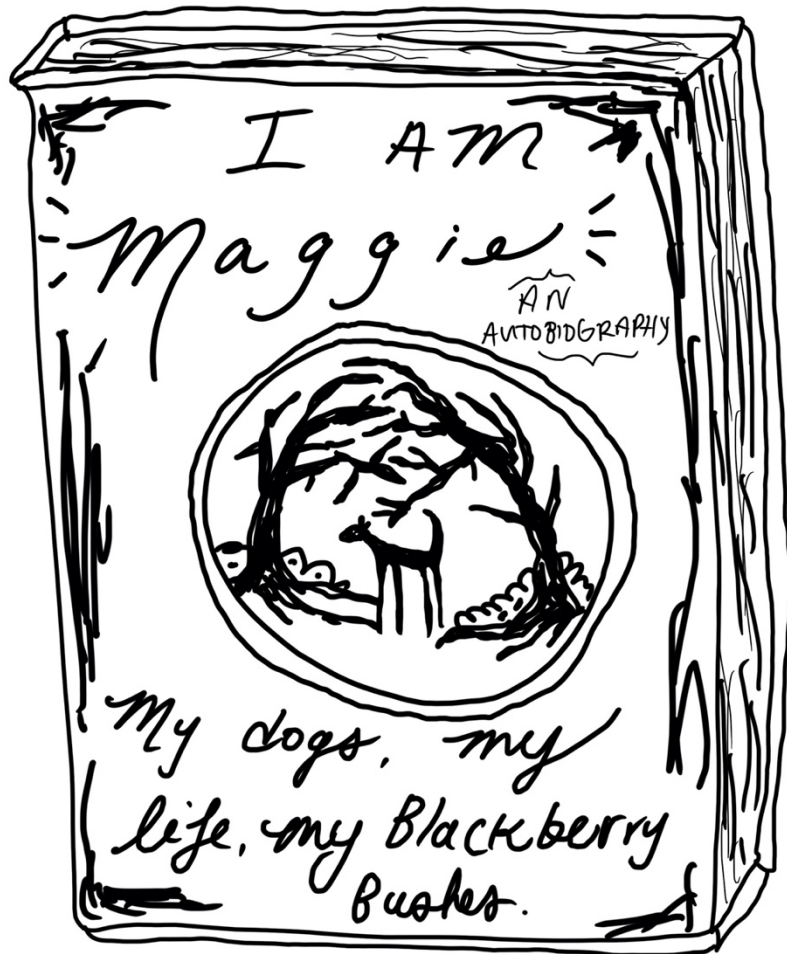


Figure 12

That day, Janet was witness to a peculiar natural phenomenon concerning the natural sciences (biology, or entomology), that had never been— and never would— be documented in textbooks. The second book was not a book at all, but was a shadow made entirely of moths, equal in their shape and size.

Upon telling her grandmother what she had noticed (a decision she would later regret), Maggie immediately recognized potential in the moths' ability to perceive shapes and imitate them in a flock, an ability she planned to take advantage of, and exploit. If she could train the moths, they would graduate from nuisance to asset. She really was a woman who knew how to harness and improve upon a creature's natural talents, as demonstrated by her astounding greyhounds.

Maggie, in the same way she trained her dogs, used positive reinforcement techniques to get the moths to flock in shapes. She started small.



Figure 13

Then she tried something tall.



Figure 14

And then something living.



Figure 15

(The neighbour did not appreciate this. The horse was short for its breed and so her owner believed that Maggie was making fun of it.)

Despite their enforced training, the moths, of their own volition, continued to imitate things *they* found intriguing.

A BROKEN AXE

Figure 16

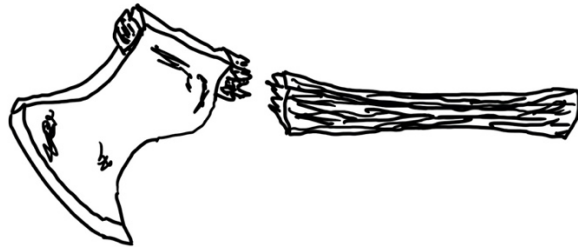


Figure 17



Figure 18

(Janet made the mistake of clutching the handle of the moth axe one evening when she was instructed to cut firewood. Maggie was affronted when she discovered the moths hadn't tried to bite *her*.)

A Sick BIRD

Figure 19

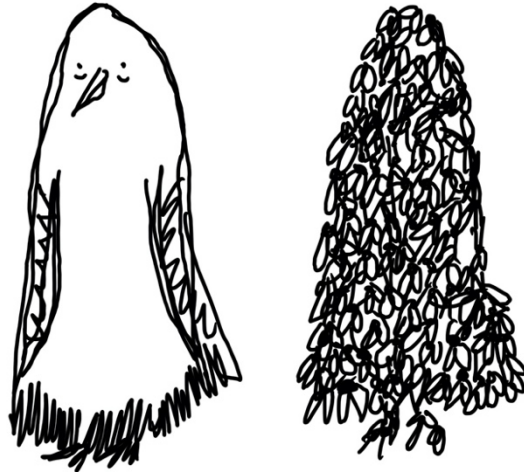


Figure 20

(Maybe A Starling)

Figure 21

(The bird later died.)

One day, after a mishap in the garden, the moths, for the first time, imitated a part of a whole.

Maggie's Blood

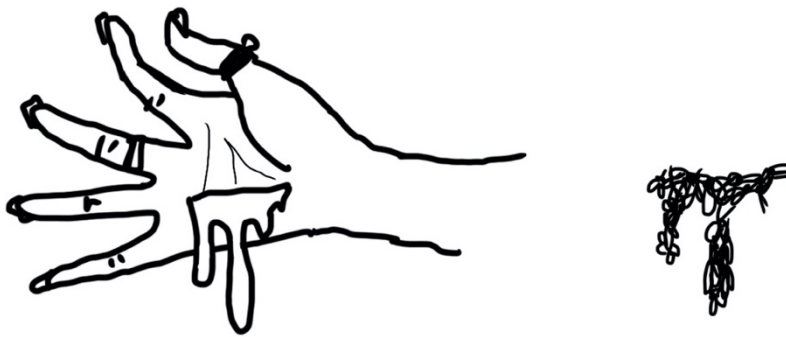


Figure 22

And then they imitated a corpse.

A Moose CARCASS

Figure 23



Figure 24



Figure 25

The moose had died on the property. Lonely and bored and deep in the forest, Janet stumbled across a clearing (the clearing now used for Moth's sapling farm), that she had only ventured to three times previously. She liked it because there were mushrooms sprouting at the bases of every tree, and a tendril of a creek ran along the East side. Sometimes she found frogs there. The frogs had no concept of East and West, and Janet liked that.

Janet was holding an armful of sticks that she intended to later set fire to when she came across what she thought were two dead moose. They were lying in a thick patch of ferns,

identical in their shape and size. She thought it strange, how the two moose had seemed to lie down and die simultaneously, in the same position, and so close to one another.

She fell to her knees out of fear and wonder; she had never come so close to such a massive creature before, even a dead one.

Janet's certainty that they were dead was shattered when the creature to the right moved— or rather, its fur moved. Like twitching muscles, if the muscles were in all the wrong places— and she wondered if they were really just sleeping. Janet hid behind a tree. The second moose kept twitching, but in a way that looked as if water was boiling under its fur. Janet, becoming increasingly confused and afraid, pressed herself deeper into the trunk of the tree, still unable to look away, but then... a piece of the rightmost moose floated up into the clearing... and then another, and another...

Piece by piece, the moose floated away, spilling upwards above the trees. Janet knew they were going back to the house.

After they'd gone, Janet picked fern leaves and lay them across the real moose's eyes. She picked mushrooms and lay them at the real moose's feet. She knew not to go back to that clearing for a long time. It takes a long time for large creatures to return to the earth.

After that, the moths developed a passion for our Janet.

JANET.

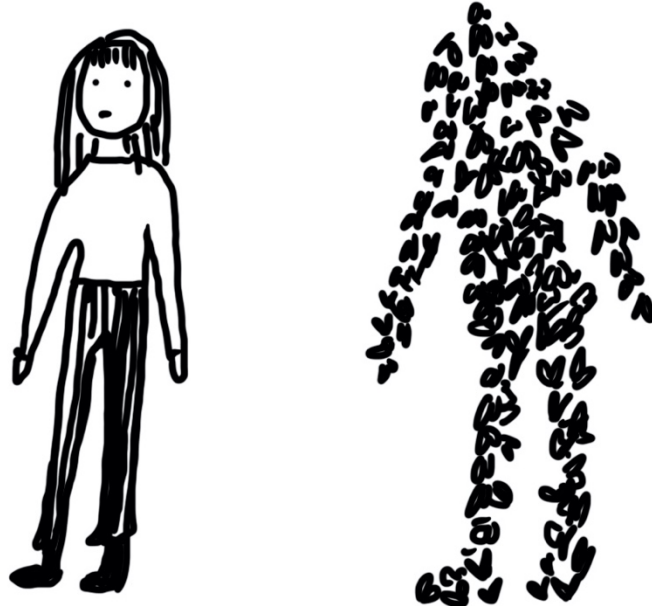


Figure 26

Janet asked her grandmother to get the moths to stop imitating her. Maggie assured her that it would be an act of folly to discourage the “entomological miracle.”

“I do not like when they do it,” said Janet, gesturing to the moth-Janet hovering beside her in the kitchen.

“Are you crazy?” asked Maggie, tossing scraps of sweater to the swarm.

“Stop encouraging them,” said Janet, “they are not your dogs.”

“No,” said Maggie, and she shut the kitchen door behind her to run agility drills with the dogs in the yard. Janet locked herself in her summer bedroom, leaving the moths in the hallway. When she finally came out later that evening, she found the house empty of all moths, save her cousin, the front yard filled with mounted police, and her grandmother dead. All that was left of her was her right foot.

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The RCMP determined that Maggie had been eaten by a bear. That was in 1991.

5

Of Science and Medicine

As previously established, we find our Janet and Moth in 1996 as fully individuated adults with their own developed passions.

Janet slips her right foot in the water and ice bucket until it is submerged above her ankle. She waits for numbness and looks at the circular window to her right only to find that the curtains are drawn. Janet leans back.

“Hey!” she shouts in the direction of the library. She rouses Moth from his textbook concerning human anatomy. Moth splays his hand across the centre of the book so as not to lose his place. He leaves his freshly poured coffee and his notes behind but brings the book with him.

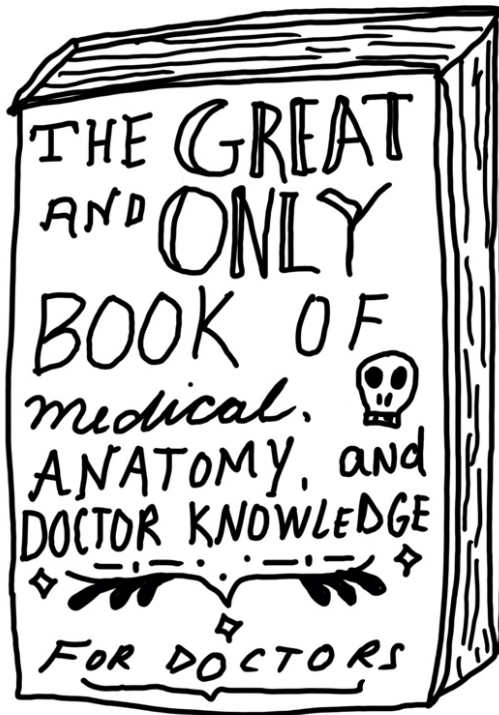


Figure 27

“I’ve been learning *many* things,” says Moth as he rounds the corner and sees Janet with her heart-shaped face, brown eyes, freshly bleached hair, and thin eyebrows (she plucks them like that, as is the fashion.) Her ankle soaks in the ice water. He looks away, unties the sweater from his waist — 50% wool, 50% cotton, faded navy— pulls it over his head and starts chewing on the cuff.

“Oh my,” says Moth, looking at the closed curtains. “What a dark morning!”

Despite his clean hair, Moth looks ragged, like a dog toy that has been left out in the rain. He sports a mullet, his hair thick and long at the back. At the top it spikes and curls haphazardly. Under the sweater he wears a limp white t-shirt and jeans that were once a deep blue but have now quite obviously had bleach spilled across them. A pencil sits crookedly in his front pocket, and another sits snugly behind his ear. Behind the other ear is a hand-rolled cigarette, and in each earlobe are bright gold hoops. Of late, he’s been plagued by a chronic irritation around each earring’s post. He fears the piercings will get infected, but he refuses to remove the jewellery.

Janet’s earrings are the same.

Moth is a self-proclaimed student of medicine. He is a self-proclaimed student of many things.

“Could you look at my ankle?” asks Janet.

Moth looks at the wall and runs his hand down its smooth surface. He tucks the textbook under his other armpit.

“The wallpaper seems faded,” says Moth.

“It’s not, I don’t think,” says Janet.

“It might be,” says Moth, and he pats the wall like he’s patting a horse.

“Can you look at my ankle?” Janet asks again.

Moth does not look at Janet.

“Moth, why are you distracted?” asks Janet.

Moth continues to seem distracted.

“Thinking about two weeks ago,” says Moth cryptically.

“If you look at my ankle, maybe you can talk about it in your next medical school application,” says Janet.

Moth crosses the room, tosses the textbook on the couch next to his cousin, and drops to one knee. He takes his sweater off and ties it back around his waist. Gingerly, he cradles Janet’s foot and ankle in his wide hands and lifts it out of the water.

“I see your ankle is swollen. I can’t say much for what’s going on inside,” says Moth.

“Does it look any better than yesterday?” asks Janet.

“No,” says Moth.

“Well then,” says Janet.

“The water is very cold,” says Moth, sticking his hand in the ice bucket and subsequently wiping it on his shirt.

They sigh.

How frustrating Moth can be, thinks Janet. He is talking too much and doing too little.

Moth lowers Janet’s ankle into the water. “Your ankle is hurting you very badly. I can see it in the way you sit there. You’re an angel of the cold, Janet.”

“It bores me,” says Janet, “The injury is insidious, and a nuisance, but it bores me.”

“You need a break.”

“On what authority do you say this?” Janet spits. She knows he has no medical authority; he hasn’t even gotten into the medical college. She knows that being a student of medicine is different than being a medical student. Why does he think he can prescribe her rest?

“I have a book,” says Moth.

“We all have books,” says Janet.

“I have *many books*,” corrects Moth.

“Yawn,” says Janet.

“Once there was a dentist who pulled a mayfly from a woman’s tooth. And the dentist was so good, no one died in the procedure, not even the mayfly.”

“How did the mayfly get inside the tooth?” interrupts Janet.

“What?” asks Moth.

“How did that happen?” rephrases Janet.

“I never thought about that,” says Moth.

“Pity,” says Janet.

“That isn’t the point,” says Moth. He continues, despite Janet’s bad attitude.

“The dentist kept the Mayfly in a jar in his office so he could show everyone how skilled he was as a dentist. And then he was offered an award from his dental association, but he declined, because he said the Mayfly had told him not to accept the award, because the Mayfly was miserable and blamed the dentist for his suffering. The dentist brought the Mayfly to a forest next to a rushing river. When he took the lid off the jar, the Mayfly flew into the night.”

“What are you saying?” says Janet.

“The dentist had not taken a day off in over three years.”

“What a bad story,” says Janet.

“But doctors get a lot out of that story, it’s about something medical and human,” says Moth.

“Fantasy medicine,” says Janet.

“There is *something there*, Janet,” says Moth, driving his fist through the air to emphasize the something he is referring to.

“That can’t be from a real textbook,” cries Janet, horrified.

“Real life medicine, Janet. It’s magical,” says Moth. He runs his hair through his mullet. This is, no doubt, how his hair maintains its sheen.

Moth picks the textbook up off the couch. He shows her the cover.

“Anatomy,” he states simply, then continues, “there is a section in here regarding the human ankle.”

“I trust that there is,” says Janet.

Moth cracks his neck. “This,” he jabs the cupid with the third arm growing crookedly from its back with his finger, “is not anatomically regular.”

Janet, producing a pill bottle from her pocket, shakes two orange ibuprofen tablets into her palm and swallows them without water.

“Yes,” says Janet, “and the dog looks frightened.”

“Janet are you a dog psychologist?” asks Moth. He shuffles nervously. His arm flops to his side.

“I am a ballerina, you know this,” says Janet.

“A dark morning,” reiterates Moth, as if Janet does not have eyeballs herself.

“Can you tell me about ankles?” asks Janet.

Moth flips through the book without hesitation.

“The human ankle,” says Moth. “Is a very precious joint. It supports the knees, among other things.”

Moth tilts the book so Janet can see. The colours are muted and pink and red and strange. There are lines linking words to places on the foot. Everything looks connected and inseparable and mushy. She cranes her neck. She cannot help but feel cold towards this ankle. There is no life in it, like there is life in hers. Hers is a lively ankle. Janet knows, though she sometimes forgets. It aches, but it lets her move and dance and have a career, most of the time.

“The ankle is the wrist of the leg,” Moth states simply. Janet is proud of Moth. He reads a lot. But then he points to a page number and refers to it as a measurement, and a great jolt of fear runs through her.

“What are you trying to tell me?” asks Janet.

“I am just telling you what I know about ankles,” says Moth.

Janet’s ankle is numb now. She removes her leg from the water and cradles the basin in her arms. She uses a towel to dry herself off. Then she points to the curtains on the right side of the room.

Moth pulls them open— revealing a dusty, porcelain greyhound dog figurine on the windowsill— and lets an inkling of morning in, and then he stops, for darting into the dark recesses of the forest that skirts the property he sees a quick shadow. A gasp.

“It’s that cougar again, the dog” says Moth, and he points into the yard and to the pines and cedars beyond.

Janet limps to the window and draws the curtains with one arm as the other cradles the sloshing water bucket.

“No talk of the dog today,” says Janet, “because you know this is a big day for me.”

Janet walks her ice bucket into the kitchen and dumps the water down the sink.

The kitchen is shades of teal and dusty rose. The floor is the same dark wood as the rest of the house and depicts more signs of wear than in any of the other rooms. A farmhouse sink sits under a window that overlooks the forest at the edge of the land. The view from the dining room is nearly the same. Hanging from the middle of the ceiling is a stained-glass light fixture—also teal and pink—that casts the room in a light that is confusingly neither warm nor cool.

Janet shoves the ice bucket under the sink. A plastic air freshener clatters to the floor.

Moth, still in the dining room, opens the curtains and watches the forest obsessively until he is convinced that either nothing is, or nothing was ever there. Then he hears a faint howl that is probably a coyote and nothing more, or nothing strange, but a hot and overwhelming wave of embarrassment rolls over him as if he was back in that stuffy office at the medical college not two weeks previously, unknowingly and desperately failing his admissions interview.



Figure 28

Moth's admissions interview fell on the same day he found his beloved cat, Shots, dead in the front lawn, lying in a patch of compressed grass the shape and size of a cougar. It was rare but not unheard of for cougars to come down from the mountains and spend some time in this area.

There were no external signs of trauma, and so Moth suspected that a mountain lion had come along, found itself on their front lawn, and having become suddenly and hopelessly tired, decided to lie down—right on top of Moth's beloved Shots—and have a nap that ultimately suffocated his cat. Moth found a shovel.

His suspicion graduated to theory when Moth perceived a dark, lurking shadow in the forest. It was the size and shape of a cougar, but the colour was all wrong. The coat was short and smooth, and grey. And then it was gone. Moth started to dig a plot for his cat.

Confused, he wondered how a cougar could be grey. Cougars are not grey. Cougars are colours other than grey. Moth, all wrapped up in the drama and emotions of gravedigging, concluded that the cougar must be a hybrid of some sort, but a hybrid of what? He thought of mules. He thought of ligers. He thought of grey animals and could only think of one (other than an elephant, but the idea that a cougar and an elephant could procreate would be insane). Moth, with his deeply scientific brain, concluded logically that years ago, one of his grandmother's greyhounds had gotten loose, come across a lone lady cougar, impregnated it, and subsequently produced whatever offspring he had just seen in the forest. Moth, the discoverer of new species. Moth, the doctor and entomologist.

This was the only explanation.

Moth piled the last of the dirt on his cat and drove to the interview three quarters of an hour drive away.

He decided not to fight the tears, so he sobbed on the highway to Alanis Morrissette's "You Learn" and practiced reciting his personal introductions, professionally and with conviction—a great challenge when one suddenly finds oneself in the suffocating grips of loss.

He scared himself when he finally pulled into the medical college parking lot and realized he had no recollection of his transit.

In the interview room, Moth sat at an oak desk much too small for the amount of people occupying the other side. Three women blinked up at him as he tried to get settled on an uncomfortably tall wooden stool.

“The usual chair is broken,” said one of the three medical school representatives from behind the little desk. This was the professor who taught the Biostatistics lecture. She was also the director of the school, Doctor Steed. The other two were referred to vaguely as anonymous “board members,” but Moth suspected that the one with a half expressive face was the author of the current anesthesiology textbooks. (She was rumoured to have tested numbing agents on herself in the late 1960’s.) He believed the other taught a lecture on pediatrics.

Behind the three interviewers was a tinted window. The lights in the room behind it were dim, but Moth could make out eight motionless heads resting on eight patient shoulders. These people were referred to as “the panel.” They had notepads on their laps.

“Thank you for coming in today, Moth,” said Doctor Steed.

Moth’s tight-lipped smile concealed his quivering lower lip. He nodded until the silence spreading over the table became tortuous, and he had no excuse but to speak, and when he did, the tears flowed like urine from an incontinent dog. Against his firm will, he sobbed, stooped on the tall stool, cradling in his arms the vision of his dead cat, stroking her invisible head, scratching her invisible chin, and trembling over her invisible body.

Each panel member made a note in their laps.

“I am not crying,” said Moth. “I am calm. I am very calm.” He wiped a silver smear of snot on his sleeve, then remembered not to chew it, as this would be deeply unprofessional.

The panel members scribbled on.

“What is the matter, Moth?” asked Doctor Steed.

“There is nothing the matter,” sniffed Moth before being overcome by a particularly violent wave of sobs. He crossed his hands over his chest and clutched his shoulders.

“You should ask me questions,” said Moth.

“Oh,” said the interviewer with the half-expressive face.

“What makes you want to be a doctor?” asked Doctor Steed.

“I want to help people,” said Moth, choking back a sob. “Next question.”

The panel, in strange unison, shook their heads sorrowfully.

“What are your thoughts on the Hippocratic oath?” asked Doctor Steed.

“Many,” said Moth. The interviewers waited for him to elaborate, but then he did not.

“If you cannot speak,” said the third doctor, the one Moth suspected taught pediatrics, “write what is the root of your grief on this—” she rummaged around in her blazer pocket— “napkin.” She slid it across the narrow table. Director Steed handed Moth a pen.

Moth meant to write “cat died,” but instead, compelled by a force he later decided was either supernatural or divine, found himself sketching an illustration of a cougar with thick teeth, pointed ears, and two dark specks for eyes. Its haunches sloped downward, from which a whip-like tail extended and curved gracefully at the end. The creature’s paws were wide. Its snout tilted up as if sniffing at something beyond the edges of the napkin.

“A cougar?” demanded Doctor Steed.

“It is no regular cougar,” said Moth with blind conviction, “it is the combination of a cougar and a dog. It is vicious. And it is what killed my cat this morning. It sat on her. It is at the expense of my cat’s life, I believe, that I have discovered a new species.”

The panel gasped, though it could not be heard through the thick glass. They made more notes. Some had used up several pages of their notebooks.

“You cannot be believing in fantasy animals if you wish to become a medical professional,” whispered the doctor who taught pediatrics.

“This is *real*,” insisted Moth harshly, “a discovery.”

“You are in grief,” said the pediatric doctor. She cooed at him like a dove.

Doctor Steed slipped the napkin into Moth’s file.

The panel stopped breathing, each pitched— to varying degrees— forward in their seats.

“If he persists,” whispered one blonde panel member to a brunette with an eyepatch, “then his medical career is over before it has even *begun*.”

“Good riddance,” replied Eyepatch.

Moth smoothed his mullet, twisted his earrings, and folded his hands in his lap in a manner that was most self-possessed.

“Please,” said Moth, “ask me more questions.”

“There will be no need,” said Director Steed. “If you are to be a doctor, you cannot be believing in fantasy animals.”

“But what about... science?” asked Moth.

The interviewers shook their heads in response, then walked Moth out of the room, and then entirely out of the college, so as they could see him to his car.

“Goodbye, Moth,” said Doctor Steed. She shut his car door. He pressed his face to the driver’s side window and twisted the key in the ignition. The radio too roared to life. His nostrils made foggy circles on the glass.

“I will bring you the animal,” said Moth, but the interviewers chose not to hear him; they were walking back to the college, and they had interviews to conduct.

Davis

6

Pit

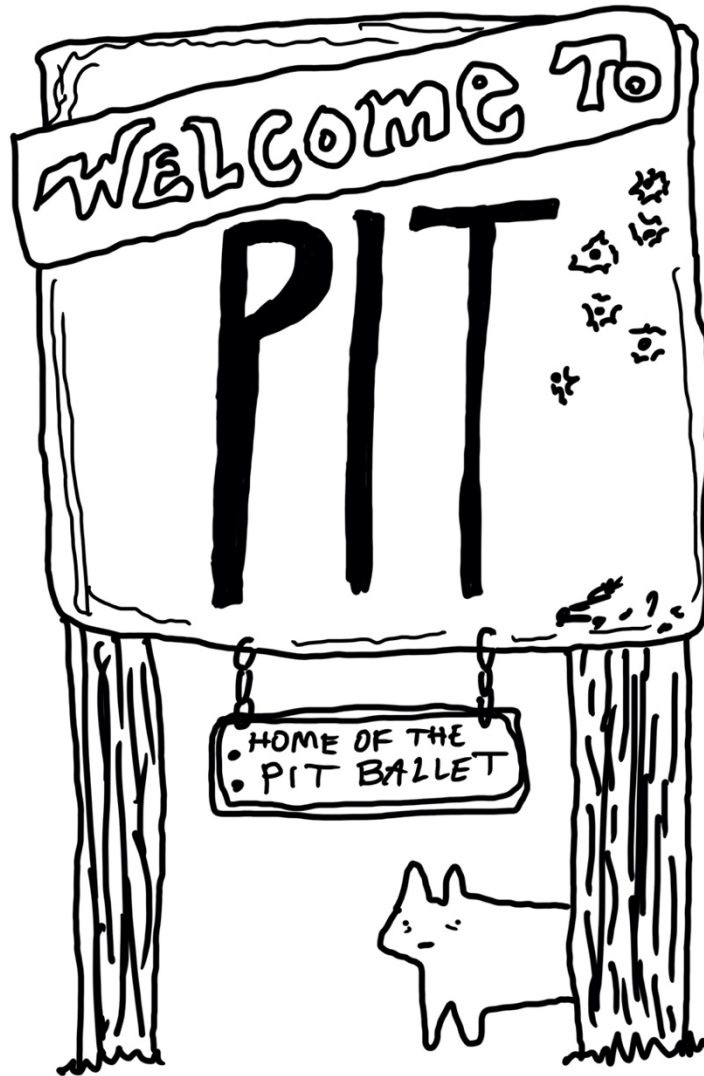


Figure 29

Nestled somewhere between Bridal Veil Falls and Hope, Director Natterjack pulls off the highway in Pit upon seeing the landmarks Janet had told her to look out for: a wrought-iron gate marking the beginning of a narrow trail leading into a thick forest of pines and old cedars, and

next to the gate, shoved into the ground, a small, rusted metal statue of a greyhound, yet another reminder of the late Maggie.

All of their other meetings have occurred elsewhere, in the professional confines of her ballet company's offices, but the Director was restless and wanted to see where Janet lived. This, and nothing more.

If Janet were a raven flying above the property, she would see Director Natterjack gliding through the gates and down the path. She has no cuticles, as they had been pressed back into oblivion and slathered generously and frequently with expensive body pudding. The Director buys the body pudding in micro-batches from a local self-proclaimed skincare expert who lives in a cabin on a hill and is always wearing a scarf on account of her chronic chill. The Director's knuckles are smooth, unlike the knobbles on a tree, a comparison she had once made about Janet's knuckles, after which Janet took it upon herself to find the woman in the cabin on the hill and bought herself two small, expensive pots of body pudding, which got subsequently buried and lost in the depths of her dance bag. Also at the bottom of Janet's dance bag are loose bobby pins, several blocks of rosin, a single sock, a loose almond, an extra bodysuit and a collection of torn hairnets.

Janet waits for the Director on the landing between the kitchen door and a tall set of stairs that lead into the front yard. The stairs are metal and noisy, and if Janet or Moth is ever to run too quickly down them, they cause an awful racket that startle the Cliff Swallows that live in the eaves.

With the kitchen door flung open, Janet picks through Moth's ashtray, looking for something to burn, agitated and therefore oblivious to the fact that an awful lot of heat is escaping the house. Against the wishes of winter, Janet wears a black tank top (of linen) and

black, spandex shorts that cut off in the middle of her lean thighs. Her socks are wool— socks she had pulled on *after* soaking her foot in the ice bucket— and warm. They hide her thin, strong ankles, calloused toes, bruised toenails. Earlier, Janet had monologued to Moth that her choice to wear athletic clothes to a meeting involving her career was both professional and strategic, as it would remind the Director of her athleticism and grace despite her injury. Janet did not care to hear what Moth had to say about this, and when he opened his mouth to speak, she pointed to his earrings and said, “You must clean those,” and limped out of the library. Moth made a note in his personal medical notebook that due to Janet’s low body fat, her muscles look like ribbons, running delicately this way and that under her skin. He also made a note he considered to be quite poetic, that if Janet’s bones were playing hide and seek, they would be losing, as they jut this way and that whenever she walks, or moves, or breathes. This is just how Janet (and the Pit Ballet Company) like it, though they would never admit this to be so.

Standing on the kitchen porch, Janet finds a lonely filter and reaches for the matches in her pocket, but then remembers that she doesn’t smoke (anymore) and therefore doesn’t carry matches (anymore). She jams the filter into her pocket. If she remembers, she will burn it later. (She will not remember to burn it later.)

Director Natterjack emerges from the forest path and crests the lump in the yard that Janet and Moth call a hill. Janet positions herself behind one of the thick timber pillars on the little porch. She peers out from behind it, rubbing ash between her fingers. The Director is far away; she cannot see our Janet.

After sneaking into the house and inching the door closed, Janet puts the kettle on. She checks for wrinkles, first in her clothes then in her reflection in a small, warped mirror glued to the refrigerator door next to Moth’s poster of the cougar-dog.



Figure 30

Janet pulls a sample-sized bottle of perfume from the kitchen cupboard and sprays her wrists. The perfume is called *Figure*, which Janet purchased because its name felt sensual. The scent to her was sensual also, described by the marketing team as the scent of “a plump, happy fig buried in wet dirt”. How natural, she thought. The label depicts an anthropomorphic fig wearing lingerie. The bottle is round, like a plum.

Director Natterjack pauses next to the compost bin, close enough that Janet hears her pointy brown heeled boots clicking on the stony pathway. The Director peers inside the bin from which protrudes a repurposed broom handle Janet uses to stir the compost. A raven perched on the end of the handle looks for insects.

The kettle whistles. Janet ignores it. The Director gets closer. She is next to the pickle shed, where moss creeps down its roof and walls and spreads across the path like tentacles. *I wish all my body hair was replaced with moss, and I wish my skin was moss, and I wish my ligaments and tendons and bones and veins and organs were moss too. Soft, consciousness-less lumps*, thinks Janet. *I wish I was out in the middle of the forest, sprayed across some boulder, where I would never succumb to injury.*

The Director strokes the moss with one hand.

Revolted, Janet mentally retracts her previous sentiment. *I do not wish to be moss anymore.* The kettle screams. Janet turns the element off.

Creeping backward still, crouched like a gargoyle (retracted arms and all, so as not to be seen before she is ready), Janet enters the hallway connecting the dining room and the kitchen, her breathing deep and controlled. She will take a moment to compose herself, to be the professional dancer she is, so that when she opens the door for the Director, she will be calm and masterful and— Janet walks straight into Moth’s stomach.

“Why are you here?” demands Janet, incredulous, as if she’s forgotten they live together.

“Did you see it?” asks Moth.

“Do you mean *her*?” says Janet, jamming finger towards the front yard.

“I mean *it*,” says Moth. “The cougar-dog that killed my cat.”

“No, I didn’t,” says Janet, “because it probably wasn’t even there, because the thing is just a coyote, I am sure.”

“I was watching the Director arrive, from the window in the library, and then she scared something out of the bush when she walked by. The path is long, and I watched her for a while, and the forest is usually serene, and so you can’t miss a thing that moves,” says Moth.

“I watched her too and I didn’t see a thing,” says Janet.

“But were you keeping out of sight? Hidden away from the window?” asks Moth.

“Yes”, says Janet.

“So, your lines of sight were compromised,” says Moth.

“Perhaps,” Janet concedes.

“She scared the thing, and you missed it! You missed it! You have to believe me. She scared the cougar. The dog. I saw it run,” says Moth.

“No more dog, cougar or otherwise” says Janet.

“Let me call Kerry,” says Moth.

“He cannot be here now,” says Janet.

“We will not bother you. And *finally*, we will get that thing,” says Moth, “and I will show the college that it is real.”

Director Natterjack knocks on the kitchen door.

“Stop talking now,” says Janet to Moth as she lets the Director inside. In her long fingers she clutches a slender purse the length and width of a TV guide. Janet wonders why she has brought so little to such an important meeting.

“Who is that man in the hallway?” asks the Director over Janet’s shoulder.

“This is my cousin, Moth,” says Janet.

“What a strange name,” says the Director.

“My name?” asks Moth.

“Yes,” says the Director.

“What is your name?” asks Moth.

“Judie Natterjack,” says Judie Natterjack.

“You are not one to speak of strange names,” blinks Moth. He unties the sweater draped around his waist and pulls it over his head, then starts chewing and on the cuff.

“You can call me the Director,” says the Director, and she jams her hands into her deep brown pockets. Moth continues to chew on his sweater sleeve.

“Stop gnawing on your clothes,” the Director tells Moth, “and wipe your face. You have a sheen to you.”

Janet wipes her face. Moth does not.

“What do you do, Moth?” the Director inquires.

“I am a medical student,” says Moth.

“Not yet,” says Janet. “When he is not studying, he plants trees on our property and sells saplings to the Pit Nursery.”

“I have been to the Pit Nursery,” says the Director.

“Would you like a tea?” Janet asks the Director.

“Only if you have Lapsang souchong, and if you do not then I will have water,” she replies.

“Lapsang souchong tastes just like smoke,” says Janet with a shiver. “I cannot drink the stuff, so I do not have it.”

“Pity,” says the Director.

“You know, Janet, I used to have a dog named Janet, I just remembered,” says the Director. Janet fills two glasses and leaves a third on the counter for Moth.

“That’s nice,” says Janet.

Water in hand, the Director follows Janet into the hallway, but Moth is still standing there, useless, chewing on his sleeve, not paying attention to anything but his own vengeful thoughts when, flustered and all of a sudden too hot, he rips the sweater back off his head and knocks the water glass from the Director’s firm grip. It shatters on the next to a framed photograph near the baseboard, splashing water in a wide fan on the hardwood floor. Janet is surprised when the Director’s instinct is to throw herself to her knees and collect the shards of glass in her palm, but not before remembering the handkerchief in her pocket and wrapping her hand with it.

“Can’t be hurting myself,” says the Director. She pauses. “Hold on, what a strange place for a photograph.” She gestures with her hand (the hand holding the glass) to the large gap between the photo near the floor and the other framed portraits, which otherwise run across the wall at an average height. The Director does not notice when a particularly sharp shard slices a thin, red line across an exposed section of her middle finger. The blood does not drip.

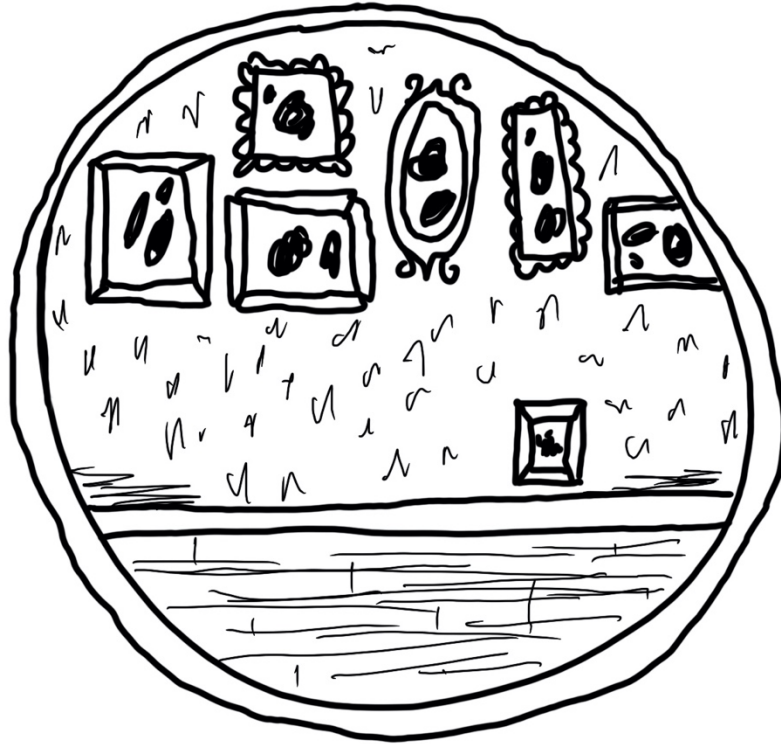


Figure 31

A family portrait, taken in the front yard by the white pickle shed, portrays Janet and Moth as children, poised stoically on either side of a woman whose age is hard to determine. In the background are lithe, grey blurs; greyhound dogs— with the thinnest skin imaginable— running laps by the trees. Next to Janet is a fourth figure, equal to her in its stature and posture, three dimensional, but with lines lacking absolute definition— like Janet’s shadow had been peeled off the ground and propped in the air behind her, wraithlike.

“Oh dear,” says Janet, and she, dispassionately, calmly *and* surreptitiously, kicks the picture—hard— off the wall, hurting her ankle badly.

“Janet,” scolds the Director. “I was *looking* at that.”

“And I *lost* my balance,” says Janet.

“Your balance is impeccable, so I am suspicious of your claim,” says the Director.

“Let me get you a bag for that,” says Janet to the Director, who, having been distracted by the intriguing photograph, had forgotten she was clutching the remnants of the broken cup.

Janet returns limping from the kitchen with a paper bag. The Director drops the glass inside.

“I am going to make a call,” says Moth, stalking to the kitchen and chewing on his sweater, which he’s thrown back on again.

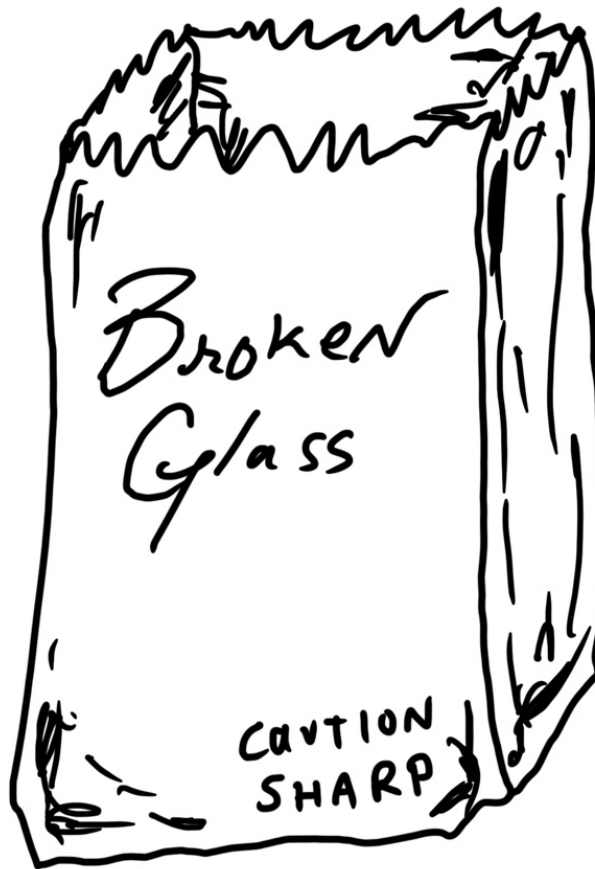


Figure 32

Janet and the Director sit on opposite ends of the dark table meant for dining and merriment. Both women have tall, impeccable posture. The bag of broken glass sits between them. Janet shoves it to the edge of the table so they do not have to look at it.

The Director presses her slim clutch onto the table.

Davis

“Your new contract is in here.” She taps the clasp on the purse with a bare fingernail, then takes a slow sip of Janet’s room temperature water. The water is hers now.

Janet’s hands fumble as she unties and reties her ponytail, then shudders. There is a terrible energy in the air. It runs through her like snakes.

“Please read this,” says the Director as she hands her the contract.

Janet reads:

The PIT BALLET
OFFICIAL BALLERINA
— CONTRACT —

I, the UNDERSIGNED,
JANET, do Agree
THAT IF I do Not
HEAL my **ACHILLES TENDON**
POSTHASTE, then my
enemy Smayla Lirebird,
WILL TAKE my PLACE AS
PRIMA BALLERINA at
the **PIT BALLET COMPANY**,
AND MY CONTRACT WILL
HENCEFORTH BE
TERMINATED.

SUPERVISOR: _____
JANET: _____

Figure 33

Or at least this is the gist of it.

I will be replaced, thinks Janet.

Davis

“What do you think?” asks the Director.

I am thinking of setting fire to the theatre, thinks Janet, and... I think you are vile.

“You’ve become a liability,” says the Director.

I am abandoned by my own body, thinks Janet.

“It is a little cold in here,” remarks the Director.

UNDERSTUDY! thinks Janet desperately.

“The show must go on, the razzle must continue to dazzle,” says the Director.

“Do I have to sign it now?” asks Janet.

“Yes,” says the Director.

And Janet signs the following.

JARNET.

Figure 34

The Director doesn’t notice any problem. Chuffed, she tucks the contract away in the shallow recesses of her skinny purse.



Figure 35

Meanwhile, in the kitchen, Moth’s hands poke violently at the telephone.

He bites his lips until Kerry, whose livelihood is deer hunting, picks up.

“Kerry,” says Moth into the phone.

Kerry sits at his kitchen table in Hope. The drive from Hope to Pit is ten minutes, and much less if you maintain a severe disdain for traffic control laws, which Kerry did.

“Is this Moth?” asks Kerry, stirring chocolate powder into milk with a long spoon. He adds whiskey to the milk. Kerry pulls a pen from his breast pocket, then scowls as he notices a crack of light seeping from his refrigerator. In Kerry’s refrigerator, there are apples, and ketchup, and thin strips of homemade deer jerky, sealed tightly in a brand-new plastic container he bought by acting fast and calling the number in a late-night infomercial. He pushes the fridge door closed with his foot and then outlines the shape of a deer on a lightly stained napkin he finds under his elbow.

“Are you busy today?” says Moth to Kerry, who gives his deer two antlers.

“I have not made plans yet,” says Kerry.

“I saw the cougardog,” says Moth. Kerry gives the deer a third antler, jutting up from the middle of its forehead.

“Oh,” says Kerry.

“Can you come here and bring your gun?” asks Moth.

“Moth,” says Kerry, giving the deer a long, wide mouth and beady, inky eyes. “If there is really a cougardog, I have to bring my camera.”

“Camera,” says Moth. “Okay.”



Figure 36

Kerry pins the deer to his fridge with a magnet. Moth chews his sleeve.

“This would be great for my show, do you remember my show?” asks Kerry.

“Of course, I remember your show,” says Moth.

“It will be the best show on local television, and this cougar dog might just be my big break, if it is real, Moth,” says Kerry.

“I agree,” says Moth.

“You know, if that thing is out there, I will kill it,” says Kerry. “See you soon.”

“Yes,” says Moth. He slams the phone onto the receiver with such passion that the wall shakes.

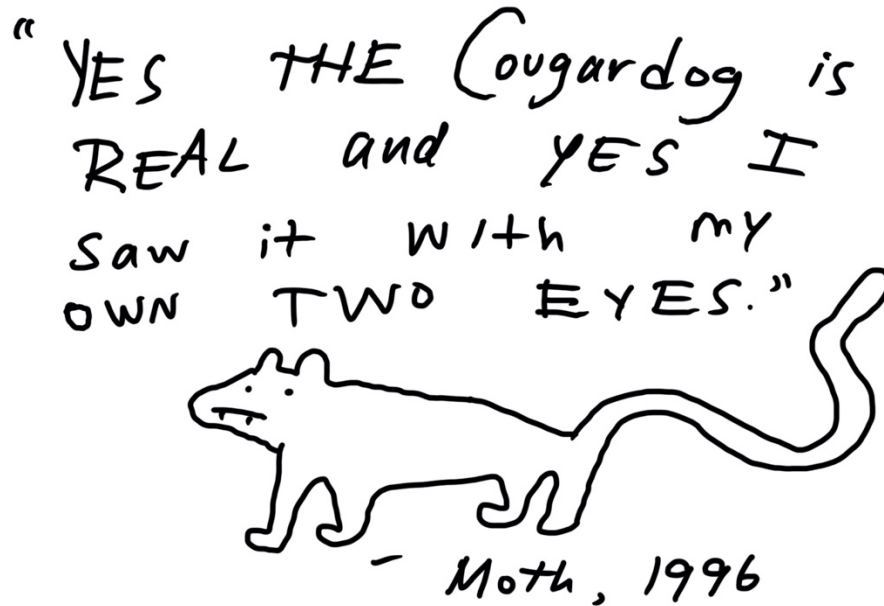


Figure 37

Moth barges into the dining room as the Director finishes her water and collects her single possession.

"Confidence!" proclaims Moth. "That man has so much of it!"

"That is good to hear," says the Director, not knowing or caring who Moth is referring to. She leaves. On her way out, she jostles by our Moth's beloved Kerry. (He has arrived with such speed!) He waits patiently on the front porch next to the kitchen, paying little heed to the Director as she disappears down the winding metal stairs.

Kerry is a stocky man, around thirty but seeming older on account of his slouched posture and rugged hands. His hair is dark and curled. His beard matches. He wears no hat but sports a mullet that matches Moth's. His vest is denim and padded inside; his shirt is shades of green and beige. He wears matching pants with deep pockets. On his belt loop is a portable radio he turns on only when he's on long drives as his car radio is broken. Slung around his back and diagonally to the right is his camcorder, slung diagonally to the other side is a rifle no one but he knows the model of. He wears binoculars around his neck.

He hasn't knocked yet, and doesn't need to, for Moth was patiently awaiting him by the door.

"Hello Kerry," Moth sputters.

Kerry steps into the kitchen and slaps Moth heartily on the back.

"You're looking like you've gotten better at hunting," says Moth.

"Why?" asks Kerry.

"Your clothes. They are the clothes of an outdoorsman," remarks Moth.

"Yes. You need the right clothes to hunt," responds Kerry. "And I need to look the part for my show."

"Your hunting show," says Moth.

"Yes," agrees Kerry.

"Your forearms are solid. From pulling the trigger and loading bows, no doubt." Moth grips Kerry's forearms. "I've been reading about anatomy, so I notice these things all the time," Moth shrugs nonchalantly.

"Do not for a second, be modest," says Kerry. "You're a medical man."

"I like the sounds of that," says Moth, smiling genuinely.

"And I do not hunt with a bow," says Kerry.

"What?" says Moth.

"You said my forearms are strong from loading a bow," says Kerry. "I do not hunt with a bow."

"Even more impressive," says Moth. He squeezes Kerry's arms.

"Your grip is also strong, from what?" asks Kerry.

"From digging holes for the saplings," says Moth.

“How’s the sapling business?” asks Kerry.

“Booming,” says Moth.

“Wow,” says Kerry.

“I’ll show you my sapling patch in the forest one day,” says Moth.

“I would like that,” says Kerry.

“You’ve always liked baby trees,” says Moth.

“Right you are,” says Kerry.

“My strong forearms are also from taking notes,” says Moth.

“That won’t do it,” says Kerry.

“You misunderstand. It is not the notetaking that gives me strong forearms, but my grip strengthener. I use it while I take notes. Have you ever seen a grip strengthener?” says Moth, smoothing a wrinkle in Kerry’s nice shirt.

“Yes,” says Kerry. “Wonderful inventions.”

“I don’t know where I would be without mine!” says Moth. “I could show it to you sometime.”

Kerry dismisses the suggestion with a lazy wave of the hand. “Even if you showed me, I wouldn’t have time for that with all my work on the show.”

“But it is exercise you can do... while doing other things,” says Moth, perplexed.

“No thank you,” says Kerry. Moth, being one to respect his friends’ wishes, pushes no further, though he knows the grip strengthener would do Kerry great good.

“I wish some station would pick you up already,” says Moth, handing Kerry a beer and opening his own with the other hand.

“Me too,” says Kerry. They click cans.

“Your call, on the telephone... sounded immensely urgent,” says Kerry.

“Yes. Look in there,” and Janet’s cousin leans out the kitchen door and points to the thick, dark forest only a hundred metres away.

“I see,” says Kerry. “There are animals in there.” He sips pensively.

“As there always are,” says Moth, taking a long drink from his beer.

“And you need me to kill one of those animals,” says Kerry.

“Yes,” says Moth. “Because it cost me my admittance.”

“What good will that do?” asks Kerry. He steals a long swig.

“I am going to dissect it and bring it to the medical college, as evidence that I was not losing the plot,” says Moth. “I need to show them that the cougar dog is real, and that I killed it, all in the name of science.”

“You’re a fan of the scientific method?” asks Kerry.

“Oh,” sputters Moth, fanning himself with his hand. “*Such a huge fan*, as doctors are and should be.”

“Let me tell you,” says Kerry. “If you weren’t my best friend I wouldn’t be here. But I sure hope this animal is real, for your sake, but for my sake too.”

“I could be discovering a new species!” cries Moth.

“Would make for great television,” says Kerry.

“Would make for great television,” agrees Moth.

“I do not watch television,” says Janet, who is now also in the kitchen. “It is boring.”

Kerry wants to stroke her hair and kiss her neck, but doesn’t, because he knows Janet does not and never will see him in that way, and besides, a romance at this time would distract him from his goals of becoming a reality television star on the local television channel.

“Would you watch my show?” asks Kerry.

“I’ve told you, yes I would, but only if I was in an episode. I’ve always wanted to know what I would look like on TV,” says Janet, swishing her long ponytail off her shoulder.

“But you have tapes of you doing ballet,” says Kerry.

“Yes,” says Janet. “But that is different, and that is for performance purposes. I watch the company tapes like a football player watches good football plays. Or like a dolphin trainer would watch... good dolphin training footage.” Janet’s argumentation skills are precise.

“What were you saying would make for great television?” asks Janet.

“The discovering and killing of the cougar-dog hybrid animal,” says Moth.

“Life or death style,” says Kerry.

“We read about the animal in these books,” says Moth. He holds up two books, which he undoubtedly pulled from his own personal library.



Figure 38

“We just combined the knowledge we gleaned from both books,” says Kerry. “And then we decided that the cougardog must be nocturnal. So, we must hunt it at night.”

“That makes sense,” says Janet.

“Would you like to be filmed today?” asks Kerry. “We have to wait until the sun sets, because this is when we will have the most chance of spotting— and killing— the cougardog.”

“I don’t know,” says Janet.

Hunting reminds Janet of horror movies, but Kerry is her cousin’s best friend, and so she has never shared these thoughts with them. She eats the meat he brings them sometimes, but mostly it sits in the freezer.

“You are an athlete and an artist, I think you would look very good in my show,” says Kerry, gushing secretly over our Janet, but not so secretly as to not be betrayed by his body language, for he melts into the door behind him, and in doing so his rifle slips off his shoulder and knocks against the doorknob, and Kerry, not being the most careful of hunters, had forgotten to put the safety on after shooting at a road sign off the highway from his car on his way in, and this doorknob is more oval than round, with a point on the top like the tip of a pyramid, and it is this that knocks the rifle’s trigger and a single shot fires into the bare strip of wall next to the fridge.

A tin box falls off a shelf on the opposite side of the kitchen, spilling its contents all over the kitchen floor.

“Great fuck!” cries Kerry.

“My god!” screams Janet.

“What happened?” pleads Moth.

“She went off!” yells Kerry.

“Put the gun on the porch, Kerry,” orders Janet, and he does.

“I’m sorry,” says a humiliated Kerry.



Kerry's Feelings Resulted
in DESTRUCTION.

Figure 39

“Can you see what spilled?” Janet asks Moth, and he does.

“It’s the teeth box,” says Moth. The teeth box is where Maggie kept Janet’s lost baby teeth. Janet had willingly forgotten about the teeth box.

“There are puppy teeth in here too. Mingled in with your teeth, Janet,” adds Moth.

Maggie told her that her teeth were too sharp for the tooth fairy (sharp like puppy teeth). Janet’s teeth would cut the tooth fairy’s hands. They would go in the tin box in the kitchen, where Maggie kept the lost teeth of her greyhound puppies. Janet never understood why she wouldn’t just throw them away, or put them in the garden, or bury them in the yard. She knew the dogs swallowed most of their teeth anyways. As far as Janet could tell, looking from afar at the collection Moth swept up, her baby teeth were not nearly as sharp as the puppies’.

“Put it away,” said Janet. And Moth tucked the box back on the shelf, too high up for Janet to be able to see it.

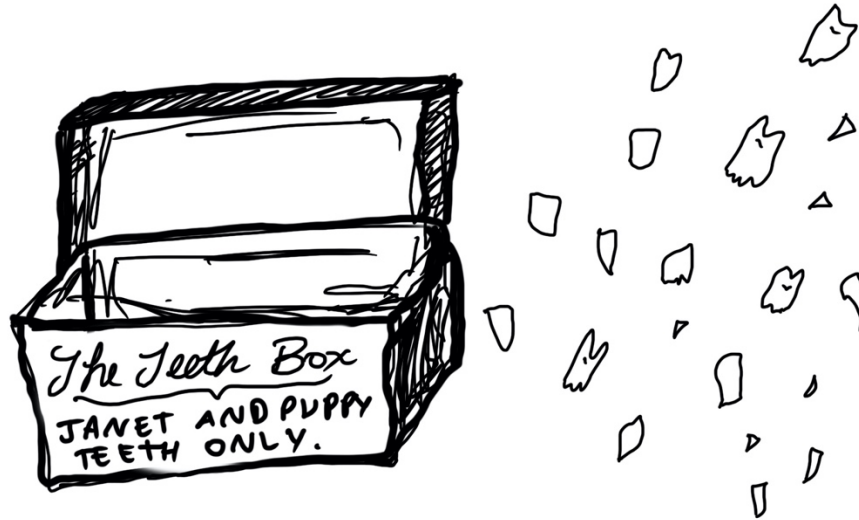


Figure 40

The yellow landline phone rings. Janet answers.

“Hello?” says Janet.

“Hello Janet,” says the Director. “Or should I say Jarnet?”

“Oh no,” says Janet.

Moth, who can hear the Director’s voice buzzing through the receiver, knocks Kerry on the head, “you should film this,” he tells Kerry, and they are in agreement, for the men realize that the moment is filled with drama perfect for reality TV.

Kerry pulls his camcorder from behind his back and learn that it is in a perfectly miserable state, having suffered quite badly in the wake of the speeding bullet. Moth and Kerry hang their heads in sorrow.

“Do you think you’re being funny?” asks the Director on the phone. She takes a sip of her dirty martini.

“I am not funny,” says Janet.

“What happened?” asks the Director.

Janet says nothing, though she tries to.

“You were trying to make the contract void,” spits the Director, “you were trying to pull the wool over my eyes”.

“There was no *wool pulling*” says Janet. “It was a slip of the wrist.” (It was not a slip of the wrist.)

“You’ve lost your chance at a fair negotiation, because I have a company to run,” says the Director. “Your contract, which was your saving grace, is now void. I do not care if your injury is to improve, because I do not want dancers who wool pull.”

“I am a good dancer!” cries Janet.

“Your understudy will take your place. Goodbye.” The Director hangs up and spills dirty martini on her lap. If Janet knew this, she would interpret it as evidence of karmic retribution.

“Oh no,” says Janet.



Janet has a
CRUSHED SPIRIT and
a VERY BAD TENDON.

Figure 41

“Janet, we heard that phone call, that sounded uncomfortable, would you like to watch us hunt to take your mind off things?” asks Moth.

Janet nods.

While our Janet pulls the bucket from under the cluttered sink and fills it with ice for the second time that day, Moth takes to emptying the freezer of its meat.

“Cougars like meat,” says Moth, tapping the cover of the cougar textbook. “And dogs also like meat.”

Moth scratches his head while Kerry, needing a moment to mourn his obliterated camera, collects the rest of his hunting gear from his truck.

Something Happens to Janet

The men reconnect in the dying light of day. Janet, ankle submerged in the ice bucket, sits on a chair she pulled up next to the circular dining room window.

She decides that she will draw the curtains and close her eyes and cover them with her hands if the scene gets graphic. She doesn't want to see death, even of an animal she doesn't know, but she doesn't want to sit idly with the overwhelming fear that her injury is worsening. She rests her head on the windowsill.

Kerry and Moth are talking but Janet cannot hear them. They wave their beers around their heads and gesture toward the trees. They hug. Janet is happy they have each other. Darkness falls. Kerry and Moth take out flashlights.



MAGGIE NEVER LET Janet
use the Good Flashlights.

Figure 42

The beams dart around the yard, and then flash into the dining room, across Janet's face and eyes, sliding haphazardly across the deer and cupid wallpaper. Watching one of the flashlight beams, it rests for a moment on a particularly decrepit piece of wallpaper in the dining

room. This strip is plastered behind the plushy couch on the far side of the room. Janet had never noticed it before, but there is an irregularity in the pattern here, and the light, the beautiful flashlight light, as if begging her to notice this fluke, this bump in the road, this deer-in-the-headlights-blink-twice-so-you-know-you're-not-dreaming irregularity in the wallpaper, pauses like a spotlight on the problem, and Janet is about to figure it out what it is, but then there is yelling outside. (She hears it muffled through the window.) Kerry and Moth are flapping their arms around their heads. (Moth's head is doubtlessly filled with thoughts of what sort of formaldehyde solution he will use to preserve bits of the cougar-dog's body.) Moth points to the forest. Leaves rustle. This is what leaves do; especially when the wind is a-stirring, and the wind on this night is undoubtedly a-stirring, albeit gently. *They've lured the creature*, thinks Janet. *And so, they are nervous— this is their big moment*, thinks Janet, and then the rustling stops. Stillness.

Moth stops wringing his hands. Kerry kicks an empty beer can against the side of the house and Janet hears a dull thump.

Then a whole lot of nothing happens and Janet falls asleep.

In her dream, she is in a tall tree. Beside Janet is a nest filled with crow eggs, and beside that, a modest collection of shiny things: a piece of tinfoil, a lock chain, a blank aluminum can, a spoon, and an emerald. Below Janet is a grey blur. It runs in circles around the base of the tree, and then, exhausted (before she can even identify its species), it falls over, dies, rots, dries up, and returns to the earth. The bottom of the nest falls away. Janet tries to catch the tumbling treasures, but falls herself instead, into a wide clearing filled with moss and ferns. In the middle of the clearing sits an orange cat. She washes herself.

“Hello Shots,” Janet greets the cat with respect.

“I am a happy cat,” says the cat. “These are my babies.” She uses a clean, orange paw to lift away a thick bundle of fern leaves. Underneath are little lumps of fur and ears. Some of them are grey, and some of them are orange.

“Tell me about the human ankle,” Janet requests of the cat.

“I don’t know,” says Shots. “I am a cat.”

Dream Janet pops her leg off clean at the hip, the same way one might remove a leg from a doll. She rolls it towards the cat, who picks it up and turns it over twice in its paws.

“BAD,” cries the cat. Then she starts yowling, as if in great pain.

The mossy forest floor disappears, and Janet falls into a pit full of orange cat hair.

When Janet wakes, she is thirsty. All the ice in the bucket has melted, and her foot is wet.

In the kitchen, Janet fills a glass with water and dries her foot with a tea towel. She watches Kerry and Moth from the window over the sink. With a quick glance at the clock, Janet confirms that her nap was brief. She debates going to bed, in the hopes that one miraculous night of sleep will heal her failing ankle, and she will go to the Pit Ballet Company theatre, and she will change the Director’s mind, but then she sees the cougar.

A cougar, or something very much like it, emerges from the forest’s shadows. Kerry and Moth are on their feet. Janet cannot look away.

The animal steps out of the thick branches. Its fur is sleek and grey. The teeth, she cannot see the teeth, but Janet imagines that they are long and would feel mighty sharp if they were to clasp around your thigh say, or your ankle, or your neck. Janet sees a ragged face, a bestial face that has endured several winters in the Canadian cold. Janet, even from the window, sees the animal’s ribs, but it does not look malnourished, it looks like it is built for speed. Its nose tests the air. Does it smell the freezer meat? Janet hopes *someone* will enjoy the freezer meat, even if

it is as a last meal. The legs are thin, but strong, with muscles like ribbons. All but one of its feet are planted firmly on the mossy ground. The front leg, however, dangles loosely at the ankle, hovering a few inches above the ground.

Injured! thinks Janet, feeling great pity, but then she reconsiders. She decides that this creature doesn't know how lucky it is.

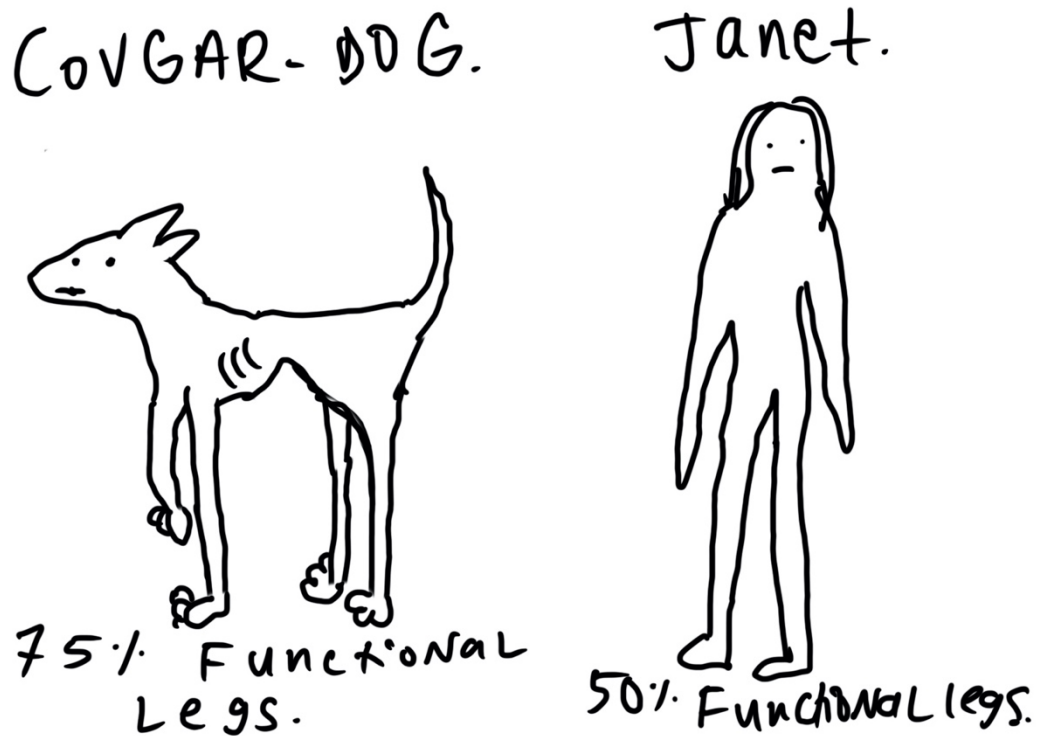


Figure 43

Kerry lifts his gun, and the animal does not flinch, it doesn't even try to get away, *but it can*. Our Janet is furious, and all in a blur, she runs to the front porch (her tendon aches), down the winding metal stairs, into the cool evening, across the lawn and to the edge of the forest. It's gotten colder.

"Kerry, you're a worm if you kill that one!" cries Janet.

"Janet, quiet," whispers Moth.

“Why would I be a worm?” asks Kerry, gun still cocked and loaded.

“Don’t you see she’s hurt?” asks Janet.

“Janet, I said quiet,” whispers Moth, all the while creeping up behind his hunter friend.

“Hm, I see” says Kerry. “She does have an injury, it seems. But I am not a veterinarian, I am a hunter.”

“And when you kill this,” says Moth, breath hot on Kerry’s neck. “*I can become a doctor.*”

“Killing that makes you a coward,” says Janet. She knows her opinion means a lot to him.

“Not a coward,” says Kerry.

“You’re not a coward, my friend. My friend you are not a coward,” hisses Moth. His lips are nearly on Kerry’s ear. He’s breathing heavily. Lightly, it starts to snow.

“But wait,” says Janet, trembling. “They are *both* are injured,” and she lifts a finger to indicate that the animal is not alone. The men realize that she is absolutely right, where they thought there was only one, to the right and slightly behind the first creature is a second of equal size and posture, with pointed ears and a long tail, obscured almost perfectly by the foliage and shadows and lightly falling snowflakes.

“Two...” says Janet. “What does this mean?”

“If you kill the first one quick, you can kill the second right after,” whispers Moth, shaking. “And what’s better proof than one than *two*”

“If I kill it, I am not a worm— I am a hunter,” says Kerry to himself or to Janet. He aims for the first animal but Janet, overwhelmed by a fear she can’t tell is for her or for the animal, lurches bravely— at the same moment experiencing a rather sickening release in the back of her

bad leg. She hears— not with her ears but simultaneously with and inside her body— a great snap, an organic, hopeless sound. She succeeds nonetheless in knocking Kerry and the gun to the ground. The shot, sent miserably off course, fires straight into the pile of thawing meat. (It smells like steak.) Janet falls.

“It’s gone!” cries Kerry.

Janet pulls her knees into her chest. With her right hand, like her physiotherapist had taught her to do, she squeezes her ankle between her thumb and fingers. The attached foot hangs unresponsively and Janet knows that her tendon has finally decided to sever itself from her foot.

“Oh no!” cries Janet, splaying her limbs out in all directions. She hopes she seeps into the ground and disappears.

“Wait,” says Moth. “The shot did not scare the other one away.”

On all fours, Kerry scrambles for his gun.

“Get it,” says Moth.

“No,” says Janet. She swipes weakly at the kneeling man.

“I am aiming like this so you can’t knock me over again,” says Kerry from his knees.

Bang goes the Little Lady. The shot is perfect. The shot tears through the creature.

Nothing. Janet flinches.

Bang, another shot, perfect. Nothing still. Janet is chilled to the bone.

“This is unusual,” says Kerry, voice shaking. “Is it deaf?” he asks, certain that he must be imagining things. The first two shots must have gone wide, his shots were not perfect, and it was the snow making him think otherwise. There is no creature that could sustain two bullet wounds— to the chest, no less— and remain standing.

“Take this as a sign,” says Janet. “To stop.”

“What’s the matter with you?” asks Kerry. “Don’t you support your cousin’s dream?”

“This is not about him,” says Janet.

“Let me do it,” Kerry says to Moth. He takes the gun, fires, and though, this time, the shot actually does go wide, it is what finally triggers any sort of response in the animal, just not the response our Moth was anticipating or hoping for. While clinging to dreams of killing this creature (hybrid or otherwise) and scientifically placing pieces of it in jars filled with formaldehyde, reality hands our Moth a conundrum; that the second animal was never really a single creature at all, but was in fact (and Moth, as a man of science, is a fan of facts) a flock of hundreds of fat brown moths.

The Mystery Remains as
to whether or not the
COUGARDOG ever Existed.

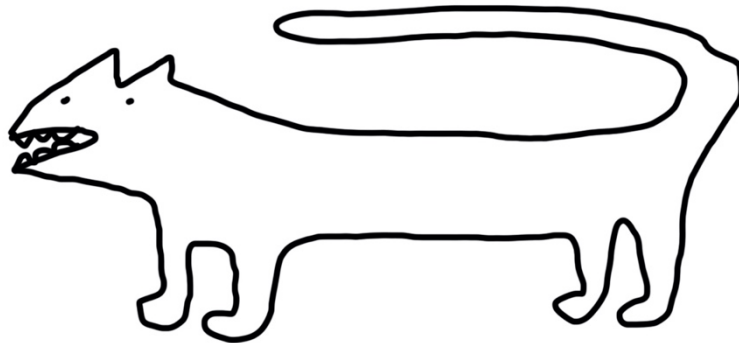


Figure 44

Piece by piece, the creature loses its form, bringing to mind images of stitches loosening in a knitted scarf, until all that is left of the cougar-dog imposter is a swarming, hovering mass of moths.

They are all headed for our Janet, who is still lying under the snowy sky, exhausted and defeated on the beer-soaked lawn.

“They’re coming for me!” cries Janet, and they are.

In the midst of the swarm, she sees little faces like fairies.



Figure 45

Davis

She sees sharp teeth and falls unconscious.

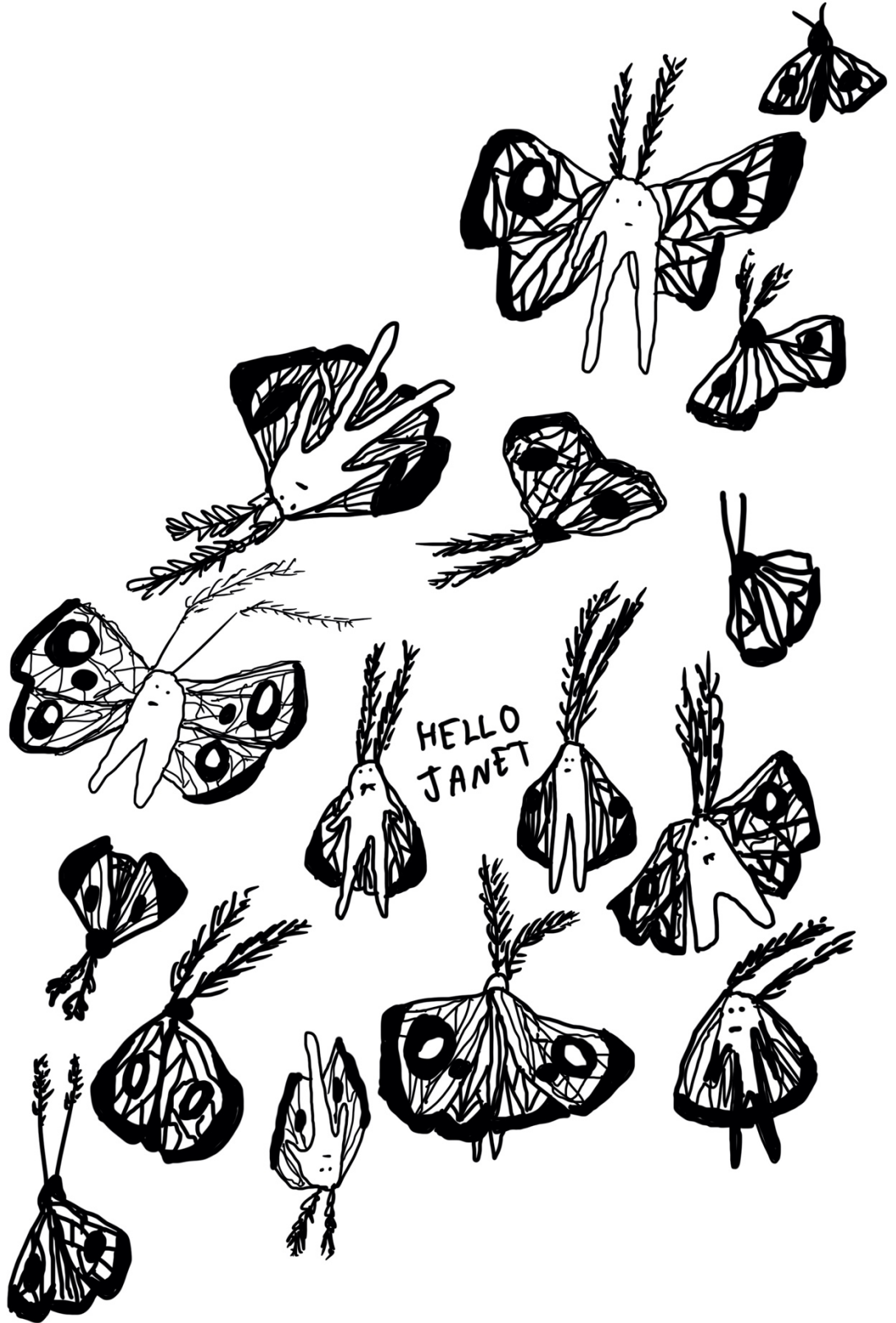


Figure 46

Davis

The moths eat into Janet's ankle.



Figure 47

Her ankle is too small for the whole swarm. The unneeded moths disappear into the forest.

(Moths like to eat sweaters, and other things.)



Figure 48

The remaining moths take the shape of Janet's snapped tendon.



Figure 49

Davis

They pull her skin closed like curtains.

The moths have taken a liking to Janet.



Figure 50

8

Reunited

Janet comes to consciousness on the dining room table.

“The moths are in your ankle,” says Moth. “This is an emergency.” Moth is hiding his panic. He alternates between drinking from a large glass of water and flicking through his textbook on human anatomy. Janet feels life in the back of her right ankle.

Kerry stands in the corner of the room, smoothing his hands down the front of his vest. When he’s done drying the sweat, he stands motionless and upset. There are tears in his eyes. He has never seen insects invade a human body. He has never been to the jungle. None of them had.

“An emergency?” asks Janet. She squeezes her right tendon and her attached foot flops in response. “There is no emergency,” says Janet.

“You are wrong,” says Moth. “I am calm, and I know what needs to be done.”

“You are oh so calm,” echoes Kerry from the far side of the dining room.

“Do you realize what an incredible phenomenon we are witnessing?” asks Moth, frantic.

“I am not sure,” says Kerry.

“Kerry,” says Moth. “If your camera had not been blasted through with that fucking bullet, I would ask you to film this moment, because this is a moment that I could show to the medical directors and show them that I am capable of being a doctor. No... not just a doctor, a *surgeon.*”

“What are you going to do?” asks Janet.

“I need something sharp,” says Moth. “We need to remove the moths.”

Surprised by her own speed, Janet jumps off the dining room table, runs through the hallway, (the hallway in which the Director, not hours prior, had broken the cup, and Janet, not hours prior, had kicked the family portrait off the wall— what an exciting place this hallway is!) and into the kitchen. She reaches the porch door, only to realize that she doesn't remember the last time she was able to run without pain, and with such grace and agility. She pauses, and with the care and excitement of a person test-driving a new car, Janet prances in a small circle, feeling nothing but a lively humming in her ankle. Janet calls for Moth, not realizing that he had chased her into the kitchen (much slower than our Janet). He picks her up and throws her over his shoulder. Janet may be faster, but Moth is much bigger.

Janet thumps Moth on the back.

“Put me down, cousin,” demands Janet.

Janet continues squirming and thrashing and thumping, and then, in a great flooding of memory that makes her ears ring, she remembers the blackberry bush.

Janet fell into the bush because Moth had been shaking it. Maggie, who was hanging the dogs' towels on the line to dry, had rushed bravely to our Janet's aid.

“My Janet! My heart!” she cried.

Lying amongst the brambles and berries, Janet told her grandmother that she needed to get out slowly and with great care— she hadn't been too badly cut up yet. Janet believed it would be best if she got herself out; she could climb back up the tree and find a way down from the other side. Slowly, gently, and carefully.

“No, no,” cried Maggie. “Don't you see how much anguish this causes me, to see you in such a state? I do not like to see you hurting like this.”

“Slow!” cried Janet, but Maggie was already pulling on Janet’s arms and legs so vigorously that the entire blackberry bush shook. Maggie would later say that she couldn’t hear Janet’s requests over the sound of the rustling leaves. It took three hysterical tugs for Janet to be freed from the bush, but on the last a blackberry vine had become quite desperately attached to Janet’s ankle, and tore into it aggressively upon granting Janet her freedom.

“I was so worried,” cooed Maggie. “I was so scared, Janet.”

Janet gave her grandmother a hug.

“You are bleeding,” said Maggie, pointing to Janet’s ankle, the worst of the injuries.

“And would you look at that,” noticing scratches on her own hands. “I am too.”

Sitting on the kitchen counter, Janet let her grandmother wrap her ankle in gauze.

“That fall was a nasty one,” said Maggie. “It’s a good thing I was there.”



Figure 51

“Put me down please,” Janet says again.

“Janet,” pleads Moth. “There are *bugs* in your *leg*. No one knows what happens to a person with these sorts of bugs in their leg. They could spread.” Janet thrashes once more. Moth carries her into the dining room and sets her down on the dining room table. She runs once more for the kitchen, but Kerry blocks the hallway door.

“Look,” says Janet. “Look at how well I am moving.” She jumps as high as she can. Moth and Kerry look unimpressed.

“This is *bad*,” says Moth.

“This is *scary*,” says Kerry.

Moth's hair, which was earlier wet with beer, is now wet with sweat. He flicks chaotically through his medical textbook: "Where is the chapter on the human ankle?" he cries.

"You dog-eared it, I think," says Kerry helpfully.

Moth has a eureka moment and finds the page with the folded corner.

"Ah yes," says Moth. "The human ankle is a complicated joint."

"Why?" asks Janet.

"I don't know," says Moth.

"I feel a warm humming," says Janet. She looks at the space between her heel and the bottom of the most defined portion of her calf muscle. She sees small, bloody holes. She sees what she thinks might be teeth marks. Those moths chewed through her like a sweater. They are doing their best. Janet pulls her right knee into her chest. She squeezes her ankle again. Her foot still wiggles in response.

"As suspected", says Janet.

"What?" asks Moth.

"Look," says Janet, and she gracefully flexes and extends her ankle. Everything moves painlessly, in perfect harmony.

"I have healed," says Janet.

"You are filled with bugs!" cries Moth. And he hands Janet a glass of water. Janet drinks.

"Oh god," says Janet, and she flops her leg upon the dining room table. Thin specks of blood splat upon the dark wood. "What will they say at the Pit Ballet?"

"Say when what? You will never dance again," Moth diagnoses.

"But *look* at me," says Janet. "I am healthy now. Look at me."

Moth, in his most doctorly voice, sits Janet on the dining room table. He tells Kerry to put the kettle on. He does.

“Look at me,” says Janet, and she takes another sip of water.

Kerry hands Moth a first aid kit packed neatly inside a red tin. Inside are first aid essentials, like gauze, and ointment, and athletic tape, and tweezers, and scissors, and isopropyl alcohol, and more ointment with different purposes, and bandages, and a needle and thread for stitches, and superglue, and scissors, just to name a few. Moth thinks that everyone deserves a first aid kit. Kerry has one, it was a gift from Moth. Janet has one; it was also a gift from Moth. He gifted them in October, because October is, as Moth scientifically puts it “the month of oopsies.”

Janet sees that the wallpaper is swimming. She remembers the discrepancy in the paper, revealed to her previously by the flashlight beams.

“What a strange feeling,” says Janet, delirious (Moth had dissolved a triple dose of lorazepam and a half dose of ketamine in Janet’s water.)

“Please,” says Moth to Janet. “Would you roll onto your stomach?”

When she doesn’t, Moth does it for her, gently and with care. Her eyes roam the wallpaper... where is the bump in the pattern?

“My head,” says Janet, meaning that the table is too hard for her face to rest on.

Kerry rushes forward with a cushion from the coach.

Janet lays her head upon it. The sedatives affect her greatly. She is a small woman.

Moth rummages around in the paper bag full of broken glass, the bag on which Janet herself had written “caution, sharp,” not a few hours before.

The ice works wonders in numbing Janet's ankle, but Moth's drug concoction makes it impossible for Janet to know where her body ends, and the moths begin, or where the room ends, and her thoughts begin, or where Moth ends and his dreams begin... and besides, Janet is too interested in the wall.

Moth, with an especially pointed shard of glass he had selected from the broken glass bag and consequently sterilized with freshly boiled water from the kettle on the stove, cuts into her ankle with the precision of a practiced surgeon. He could have used a knife from the kitchen, but in his panic, he hadn't thought of that.

Inside, Moth sees moths.

They wrap around one another like fibers in a length of rope. They grip the broken ends of Janet's Achilles tendon. Moth is overwhelmed with emotion.

Where is the problem? thinks Janet, even her thoughts feel slurred. Her gaze drags sluggishly along the wallpaper.

"Kerry," says Moth. "I wish you could understand the significance of this moment."

"I can't," cries Kerry. "For I am not a doctor and I do not have the appreciation for these things." He keeps his distance. Human blood makes him squeamish.

"But you're a man of nature," says Moth, gesturing at Janet's open wound. "And this is wondrous. Have you ever heard of a symbiotic relationship?"

"Yes," Kerry responds thoughtfully.

Janet nestles her head in the pillow. She keeps looking for the problem.

"Hand me that jar," says Moth with an outstretched hand. The other hand fumbles violently for the tweezers.

Kerry opens the jar and places it on the table next to Janet's open ankle.

One by one, our doctor Moth removes the moths from Janet’s ankle. Kerry helps trap the creatures in the jar, like fireflies without the light.

I swear I saw something, thinks Janet.

“What a miracle,” says Moth.

Yes, thinks Janet, but she isn’t listening to her cousin; she is barely aware of him. She is silently triumphant; she has found the problem. Above the soft couch, next to the bookshelf filled with her grandmother’s interests and passions, is a single iteration of the wallpaper scene wherein the cupid is alone—the frightened dog has gotten away. She thinks he’s found freedom. *I am happy for you*, thinks Janet, and then she is yanked into unconsciousness.



Figure 52

Janet wakes on the couch, tucked under a blanket, groggy (but not as groggy as she could be, for Moth was precise in his measurements of the drugs.) Her ankle is wrapped tightly in a strip of sterile white gauze. It hurts. It is a little past midnight. Out of sight, Moth and Kerry sip chamomile tea in the kitchen. Kerry’s nerves are shot. He has skinned many deer, (and elk, and rabbit, moose, and even once a bear) but he has never seen anything like *that*.

Where there was that pleasant humming, Janet’s tendon now feels dead, and in pain, if the dead could feel pain. When she squeezes her ankle, her foot is unresponsive. She sees the jar of moths on the table. They’ve settled on the bottom of the jar (Still alive, somehow) and decides that they must have been panicked and fluttered about wildly; the sides of the jar are splattered with her blood. *Only natural*, she thinks.



Figure 53

Janet, limping, walks to the circular window at the end of the dining room. She throws the window open and calls into the kitchen.

“I am going to throw these damned things back where they belong!” cries Janet, successfully feigning a great loathing towards the insects. She takes the porcelain greyhound dog off the windowsill and tosses it into the yard, aiming for a rock, on which it shatters beautifully, perfectly mimicking the sound of say, a shattering mason jar.

She rushes to the dining room table and stuffs the moths under her blanket. Janet announces that she is going to bed. She passes (still limping) Moth and Kerry in the kitchen. Their cups of tea steam delicately. Janet takes a sip of her cousin’s. Kerry is lightly trembling from shock, but Moth keeps a hand on his shoulder.

“Did you throw the moths out?” cries Moth.

“Yes,” says Janet. “Didn’t you hear the glass shatter outside?”

“I did,” says Moth. “I was going to do something with them. They are a scientific, and biological, and medical miracle.”

Kerry shudders.

“No one would believe you,” says Janet. She leaves the men to their respective existential crises.



Figure 54

Janet opens all the windows in her bedroom. She sits in the middle of the floor, setting the jar of moths beside her. She picks at the knotted gauze. It comes undone easily. She drops it in a heap beside her. Janet sees that Moth has given her a neat row of tight stitches up the back of her ankle. The moths in the jar quiver in unison. Janet removes a gold hoop earring and uses its curve to individually pick out each stitch.

“How marvellously effective,” Janet says.



Figure 55

The moths are restless. She opens the jar, and knowing they have every right to leave through the cool, open windows if they want to, she lies flat on her stomach on the floor and waits. The moths exit the jar in a mass, and once they disappear entirely back inside our Janet's leg, they pull her skin closed like curtains.

Davis



Figure 56

9

Janet's Most Perfect Return

It is early in the morning the day after Janet's big day. It was the first night with the moths. Janet did not sleep. She blames it on adrenaline.

Janet strips naked and admires herself in the mirror. Aside from some vicious bruising, the thin, pink line on the back of her right ankle is hardly noticeable. She pulls on tights, and a bodysuit, and pins her long hair into a bun. She pulls a sweater on, and then another; it is a cold morning. Today she wears her fleece-lined pants with wool socks.

She floats downstairs after gargling mouthwash and plucking her eyebrows and finds Kerry and Moth asleep at the kitchen table.

"Good morning," says Janet to the men. "You've had a big night." She kisses them both on the head.

"Oh," says Moth. "You look so tired."

"I do not," says Janet. She fills a glass with water from the sink.

"Dark circles," says Moth. He points politely at her face.

"You look nice," says a voice Janet thinks is Kerry.

"Thank you," says Janet. Kerry says nothing.

"You're looking strong," says another voice Janet thinks is Moth. The voice is weak and reedy.

"Clear your throat," Janet tells her cousin. Moth does, though he doesn't know why. His face is creased with worry.

Janet gulps the glass of water, walks herself to her car, and drives to Pit.

The Pit Ballet Company Theatre is located in Pit's downtown core— prime, expensive real estate, where people like Maggie would make an effort to be seen. The windows are tall and clean, rounded at the top. The front of the building is brick. Inside, there is beautiful crown moulding and ornate mantelpieces installed over hearths that never see fire. The lobby is a wide room with a low ceiling. Pillars encircled with narrow countertops run through the middle of the room. The bar's backdrop is a mirror, in front of which hang green glass sconces that cast the lobby in a ghoulish light.

We find our Janet here now, red heeled boots (she's missed these boots, she couldn't wear them with her injury) clicking on the smooth stone floor. She hears the piano in the rehearsal studio as it echoes through the bare wooden hallways, indicating that rehearsal has already begun. *They've surely missed me*, thinks Janet.

She swings the studio door open and finds Janet's understudy, Smayla Lirebird, has rather confidently and obnoxiously taken her place at the barre.

"Janet," gasps the Director. The pianist fumbles.

"Oh," gasps Smayla the understudy.

"That's right," says Janet. And she does a beautiful pirouette, eight turns, all on her bad ankle, which has now become her best ankle.

"Smayla," says the Director, massaging a dirty martini-induced hangover headache from her temple. "It seems there has been a miracle, and you are no longer needed."

"You are no longer needed," says Janet to the understudy. She shoves her off the barre. Everyone in the company fawns over our Janet. The pianist plays beautiful music.

"You're glowing," says one dancer.

"Your legs," is all another says.

Davis

“You’ve never looked better,” says a voice Janet thinks is the Director.

Janet sees herself in the mirror, a perfect hybrid beauty. A true beacon of health.

With reverence, she takes her place at the barre, just Janet, her healed body, and the kind, raspy voices of the moths.



Figure 57

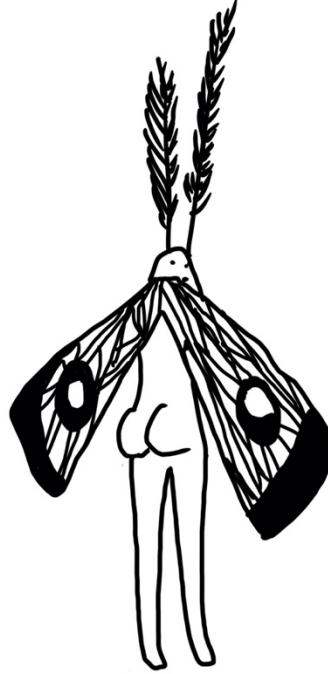
Davis

A Final Thank You

Dearest reader,

Thank you so much for getting far enough to see this confident little guy. His cheeks are your reward.

Love,
Hannah Bel Davis



Hannah Bel Davis

Figure 58