Title: Every Angel is Terrifying

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Word count: 5,601

Type of work: Complete

Published: upcoming in the October 2019 short-story collection, *Restless Town*

Synopsis: Alternating between the present and glimpses of the past, a collie struggles with mental health. CW for self-harm and suicidality.

I take the bus to the edge of Sawtooth, basically as close as I can get to the highway on local transit. Beyond here it’s all industrial. All warehouses and junkyards and hulking, silent buildings painted gray or beige, or not painted at all. Machine shops, garages, or simply anonymous buildings with rows of doors and loading docks. Beyond here, there is no living. It is a liminal space.

That’s okay. I just need out of this town. This stupid fucking town. This brown and flat and sad town. This restless town. This home to ennui and melancholy. This scrub of buildings and people and emotions spilled in the middle of an apathetic landscape like hay from an overturned truck.

I walk from there.

I walk past the buildings until the parking lots are replaced with fields and, eventually, the buildings are too.

I walk until the sound of the interstate grows from the sound of wind to the sound of a waterfall, and from there to the sound of wheels on pavement.

I walk along the county road, across the bridge over the freeway. Halfway across, I fumble my phone from my pocket and let it tumble over the railing to the concrete below.

I keep walking.

#

At fifteen, I had been an anxious and gawky dog. Too anxious. Too gawky. I took to slinking around school from class to class in silence, letting my overful backpack propel me down the halls, walking close to the walls. Any time not spent in the desk furthest from the door daydreaming was spent in front of one of the computers in the lab.

Sawtooth High had a few computer classes, but none of them warranted the lab that the school had. Twenty relatively high-end machines—at least, higher end than would ever be needed for the two typing classes, the Pascal class, or the HTML class offered by the school—and my favorite, two Linux machines tucked away in a corner. Babylon and Enterprise.

I spent hours on those damn machines. Sometimes, it would be me, holed up in the lab itself, sitting in front of an aged CRT monitor, claws clacking on the keys as I taught myself one programming language or another, worked on homework, or just plain goofed off online. Sometimes, it was me me surreptitiously tabbing back and forth between what I was supposed to be working on in Pascal class and a terminal window opened to Babylon (Enterprise being the machine that ran the school’s website, we were discouraged from actually using). Sometimes it was me sneaking out of bed once I was sure my mom had gone to sleep and, muffling the modem with my pillow, logging on remotely.

Most often, at those times, it was me logging into some text adventure or another. Where flashy video games had never caught my attention, I’d gotten hopelessly addicted to dungeon crawling with a small party over a MUD. Where instant messengers had failed to grab me, I would spend hours chatting on MUCKs.

The limitations of text only fascinated me, and though I never wrote with any seriousness other than a well-worn blog, more journal than literature, I learned to weave my tales and use my words in front of a crowd.

And it was there where I found love. There where I found love and lust and romance and flings. I dated. I set up relationships for characters in our games, and I set up relationships that transcended that, two hearts touching through only those white words on a black screen.

Merlin and Marusin, The\_Prof and rranger386, people I would dream about and likely never meet. We were all young. We were in love with each other in our own little worlds, serially and in parallel.

And while sometimes I would think about who they were beyond the screen, it was rarely for long. I was in love with Merlin the fighter who hated magic. I was in love with The\_Prof the student who desperately wanted to be a professor when he grew up, and didn’t care which subject.

Sometimes I would think about who they were when we role-played, would wonder what it would be like to have their arms around me, but never for long. It was easier. It was safer to not bother with it.

But our relationships were as real as any collocated flings. More so, we told ourselves, for the purity of essence that came with no flesh to get in the way.

I’m sure we all hungered for touch.

#

I’m regaining my *I*. My *me*. My *self*.

I’m no longer just Derek, that monster, that hollow shell, that desolate vacuum. No longer watching him from the outside, watching him move with mindless purpose.

I’m regaining my I, and I don’t like what I see.

I keep walking.

#

It was toward the tail end of high school that I began to get plagued with depression and mood swings.

I was a healthy collie. All the romance of a noble lineage had gone to my parents’ heads, and there was simply no reason one of my standing should ever feel bad. Sure, the family had come on hard times financially, and Idaho had been an inexpensive refuge for us. Flyover state or no, we could keep our large house and happy lives. How could any dog be sad?

And yet I was. I was in spades. I would swing down for a few months, life slowly losing its color, until I’d feel nothing except an ache behind my sternum, eating only mechanically, and only when reminded.

Then it would pass. It would be dinner and I’d realize that I was actually *really* enjoying the curried chicken. I’d realize that it had been days since I’d thought about falling asleep and not waking up. I’d have energy.

I’d have a bit too much energy.

Mom would shrug and mumble something about boys. “Men in this family, always so moody. You’ll grow out of it.”

I mostly kept it to myself. When I did share it with friends online, it was to commiserate in the “Parents, eh? What do they know?” style that never goes out of fashion among teenagers.

Still, as awful as it was, I learned the rhythm of it. I’d spend a month or so feeling terrible, three months feeling pretty good, and then a month feeling great.

Not just great, *better* than great.

I’d spend all of my allowance in a week. I’d sleep three, four hours a night. I’d write page after page of backstory for my role-playing characters. I’d scribble ideas as fast as they came to me and still not be fast enough.

I still have a folder of those ideas. They’re illegible, unnerving.

And then, over the course of a week at most, I’d be back underwater once more.

#

*Every angel is terrifying.*

The words start a whisper, a half-heard echo. They are a niggling thought, a loose tooth, a thread to be worried loose from a hem.

And before long, they’re resounding within my head. They pound and boom in time with my steps, and I start murmuring them under my breath. “Every angel is terrifying. Every angel is terrifying.”

As with all linguistic satiation, I can’t tell when it is that they stop holding any meaning. It’s as though I let my attention slip, and the next time the phrase rolls through my mouth, they’re awkward shapes tumbling from my tongue, buzzing in my nose, brushing past my whiskers. Poetry reduced to its bare building blocks becomes as clumsy as any other guttural utterance, though they may stack better than most.

“Ein jeder Engel ist schrecklich,” I try, hoping the original German might somehow waken something other than dread within me—it doesn’t—and then I bark out a laugh, realizing maybe it’s doing exactly what it was meant to.

The single laugh does not echo. It dies among the weeds and crumbly blacktop of the county road.

I keep walking. I keep murmuring my mantra. Keep muttering long after the words have lost meaning. Long after all that’s left is a bottomless, emotionless nothing. Long after all thoughts have left my head, except for the realization that I desperately, desperately want to die. Realize it for the million, billion, trillionth time.

I keep walking.

#

I worked at the campus library for most of my undergrad, and quickly learned that eighty percent of the problems we took care of were reported through a form on the library’s intranet. The people who called rather than using the request form were usually doing so for a reason: they wanted service right then, their problem was urgent, and usually affected more than just themselves. Most issues with customer-facing stuff—the public computers, desktops or laptops—were reported through a phone call.

It had been a phone-intensive day.

That night, I dully made myself a grilled cheese sandwich, poured a finger of precious, ill-gotten gin over stale ice, and holed up in front of my computer, wrapped in a blanket with tail draped limply from the back of my chair.

For an hour, perhaps, I scrolled through blogs and forums. I read up on my friends’ brighter lives. I read threads I didn’t care about. After a certain point, I didn’t even read. I scrolled mechanically, and when I hit the bottom, I’d click the ‘next page’ button.

Or perhaps I read, I don’t know. Perhaps the pattern-matching part of my brain that recognized letters and words and sentences kept on doing its job. Perhaps words and meaning did flow through my mind, but none of it found any foothold. None of it stuck.

It was a flashing icon in system tray that caught my attention, and I sheepishly clicked over to chat, wondering just how long it had been blinking at me.

There, tinted cyan amid the general stream of chatter in the room, was a private message. With a force of will, I crunched my mind back into gear, and read to understand.

*Peter\_P pages, “Hey, you okay?” to you.*

Before I knew what I was doing, I was already well into my reply third reply, and by then, I had too much momentum to stop.

*You page, “Yeah. I mean, I guess I’m depressed. Work is probably the highlight of my day if only because I have to be there and doing my job. Even with classes, I can just zone out in the back and feel bad almost in private. I come home and avoid my roommates and idle on here.” to Peter\_P.*

*You page-pose, “Piree sighs, ”I’m okay, though.“” to Peter\_P.*

*You page, “Or my life is okay, I dunno.” to Peter\_P.*

*You page, “Shouldn’t complain, I’m in a good spot. It’s just hard when it all feels so pointless and empty. Sometimes I get so desperately sad and everything hurts or whatever, but this is just like having my heart and brain replaced with cotton balls. It’s like thinking through gauze.” to Peter\_P.*

I realized, by the time I manage to lift my paws from the keys and cup them around my blunt muzzle, that I’ve started crying, the fur on my cheeks damp with tears. I wished I could delete messages. Erase them from the screen, from the server, from Peter’s mind, if he’d already read them. I wished I could take it back and just be empty in my room, at my poster-covered walls, rather than empty on the internet at distant friends.

Greeted with silence, I tucked my muzzle down and covered the rest of my face with my hands and held my breath, willing time to stop, reverse its own flow, and drop me back at work.

When I looked up again, I was greeted not with a reply from Peter, nor even simple silence, but a few lines on the screen.

Peter\_P teleports away.

MEETME: Peter\_P would like you to join them at their current location.

MEETME: type “mjoin Peter\_P” to join them.

For another minute, I stared at the screen, unable to comprehend what would lead him to want to talk about this further, in some quieter room.

“Ah, fuck it,” I said aloud, typed *mjoin peter\_p*, and whacked the enter key.

*Peter\_P hugs!*

*Peter\_P says, “Tell me what’s up?”*

*Piree hugs and sighs. “I dunno. Depressed, I guess. That time of the month.”*

*Peter\_P says, “Yeah...”*

*Peter\_P says, “I know you’re poking fun, but it does seem cyclical.”*

*You say, “’it’?”*

*Peter\_P says, “Depression, yeah.”*

*Peter\_P says, “In you, I mean. You seem to go through these cycles of really energetic and really depressed.”*

*You say, “Yeah...”*

*You say, “That noticeable?”  
Peter\_P sticks his tongue out. “Don’t take it the wrong way. It’s not like super blatant or anything, just something I’ve noticed about you.”  
You say, “heh”  
You say, “You pay that much attention to me, then?”*

I grunted and spent another moment wishing I could take back what I’d just sent.

*Peter\_P says, “I guess :P”*

*You say, “Sorry, that came out snippy. I didn’t mean it.”*

*Peter\_P shrugs. “I guess I do, though. I like you. I worry about you.”*

*Piree hugs. “Thanks. That means a lot.”*

When I next looked at the clock, it was nearing two in the morning. I’d spent nearly five hours talking with Peter. I thanked him profusely for staying up so late with me—“No problem, I don’t have work tomorrow”—and signed off for the night.

I went to bed…not exactly happy, but comforted. As I started nodding off, I realized that I’d disconnected in Peter’s room, my character had fallen asleep there. A smile tugged at my lips. It felt right.

#

*The beautiful is right at the margin of the terrifying.*

And it *is* beautiful.

With the sun at my back, I trudge east. The din of the freeway long ago softened through waterfall and back into the sound of distant winds.

I feel those winds blow through me. Not just blow through my fur—the air itself was still—but through me, through my core. I feel hollow, empty. I feel like one of the pipes in an organ I got to tour some years back. I feel the wind blow through me, and I feel myself excited, humming. Hollow, but humming. Cold, but buzzing.

I realize my breath is coming hoarsely now. My steps are heavy and my feet hurt and I’m breathing hard. I’ve been stomping without realizing it.

I slow my pace and focus on walking like a normal dog. No sense in getting worn out early. I want to get away from town. I want to walk far enough away that the town of too many memories. Of so many visits with Peter, of jobs left behind, of feelings too strong to bear.

I walk east under some other authority’s direction. I am not in control of my body anymore. I am not in control of my thoughts.

I have no thoughts.

I have no thoughts. Emotions well up, rage, and die within, ceaselessly and directionlessly.

I have no thoughts. I ride my emotions from one swell to the next, surfing along, feeling that I, too, will rage and die.

I have no thoughts.

I keep walking.

#

Much of my undergrad was borne out of depression. School was just a thing I did during the days, but my time spent in front of a keyboard was a part of myself. Each story, each post, each role-play session was a piece of myself. Each was a tiny rock to throw at this vasty nothingness. Justifying the things I liked, delineating the craziness of lives real and manufactured, gushing about worlds fantastic…they were all ways for me to pound my fists against nothing at all.

I buried myself in it—in my computer and in the life lived there, the life I was soon sharing with Peter.

I found ways to write more whenever possible, just to try and fill that big, quiet nothing. I splashed around in great heaps of words, scrabbling at every pebble of a story I could find beneath the surface. I prowled through the tangled thicket of fiction and nonfiction, hunting for ideas to highlight. I took way too many metaphors way, way too far.

And you know what? It worked.

At least, after a fashion. I started to feel fulfillment. I started *filling* my weekends with writing. I got in trouble with Peter for idling out repeatedly during conversations, words flowing into the editor instead of between the two of us. I started to gain energy just from the act of *spending* energy on something I loved wholeheartedly.

In a flash of insight—or perhaps mania—I scheduled an appointment with someone in the arts department. Changing degrees and the course of my life was, it turns out, as simple as signing a sheet of paper and waiting a week for confirmation. The next semester, I would be able to start signing up for classes to work toward a degree in creative writing. It would likely extend my undergrad by a year, but thankfully, I’d gotten plenty of the core curriculum classes out of the way already.

One of the downsides of working on insight is, by the very definition, a lack of foresight. Telling my parents resulted in them immediately pulling financial support for my tuition.

“I’m not going to help buy you a useless future,” dad had growled. “I can’t stop you from throwing away your life; you’re a fucking adult. That won’t be on me, though.”

It was only by dint of luck that the current semester, plus my living situation for the remainder of the semester and summer was already paid for. That check had already been deposited.

The thing that sealed the deal for me was that I still enjoyed my time at school even when the next downswing struck later that semester. I’d already realized that decisions made when I felt good weren’t always the right ones, but if they still felt right when I was depressed, I could be sure that they’d be more likely to stick.

Such had not been the case with comp-sci, it seemed.

Depression was not solved by increasing quality of life. Its tenor changed, to be sure, but the dependable five month cycle continued throughout the years, souring summers and leaving me bedridden with “the flu” or “a cold” for days at a time.

I would spend the days under the covers with the second-hand laptop I got from the library surplus and, depending on the weather, either a glass of gin and ice or a hot cocoa spiked with peppermint schnapps, alternating between writing and programming, masturbating to old TS logs, and crying.

I would role play as my best, purest characters. Or perhaps, with Peter, I would role play as my better self. Someone happier than I was. Healthier, more responsive, more engaging.

I would go to bed feeling guilty for wearing such a mask, consoling myself in the fact that without it, I might wind up without him.

I would marvel the enormity of this empty space in which I inhabited.

I would marvel at the film-like quality to my life.

I would marvel at the diegesis of objects, sounds, tastes, smells.

I inhabited a spotlight shone on a flat gray ground.

I began relying on alcohol to feather the edge of it, making the boundary between myself and that emptiness softer, less cruelly sharp.

I used the pain of plucked fur or hot knife-tip against skin to send up magnesium flares, enough to briefly light up the world around me and offer a sense of clarity, however superficial. The mundane, everyday-ness of wound care would ground me for a week, two. Before long, my arms were ragged, scarred.

None of that made me any less of myself. They didn’t sweep away Derek. It simply became a part of me while I wasn’t watching. The pain, the gin, the days holed up in bed were a fine set of glasses for helping me see which things I was burning myself over were real, and which were just phantoms in that dreamscape.

And then, with clockwork predictability, it would lift. With a sharp coolness burning my nostrils, I’d rise before the sun and walk the neighborhood, find my way to The Book and The Bean, and see eyes other than my own.

With only a modicum of foresight or perhaps practiced nonchalance, I slipped from my undergraduate program to an MFA program in Moscow, Idaho, off in the far west of the state.

#

Memories, fragments, wordless things crowd me, wraiths tugging at my clothing and fur. I am caught up in these non-thoughts, these non-memories and non-words, buoyed up, borne aloft, buffeted.

My steps falter. I stumble and weave. I fall once, twice. Tired. Exhausted. Spent. Drained of life and purpose and intent.

Derek is gone. The collie is gone. There is only the *I*, the *me*, the barest speck of *self*.

#

“Oh god, it’s so much easier to fly into Boise than Moscow or Sawtooth,” Peter grunted, luggage clattering to the floor as we hauled it from the carousel.

I laughed. “The city does come with its benefits, yeah. Pretty good food, and it’s big enough to get you to visit more.”

“Yeah, I turn into a pumpkin if I leave the five boroughs at all.”

“Well, it’s not *that* big, and not nearly as tall, thankfully.”

Peter smiled apologetically, tall ears splayed. “Sorry. Can’t help my apartment’s so high up.”

Telescoping the handle out of one of the shepherd’s two suitcases, I guided him away from the crowd and over to the rental car stations. “You’re fine, love, promise. You turn into a pumpkin when you get out of the city, and I feel like any building higher than three stories is bound to come tumbling down.”

“I know. Different strokes, I guess. I feel so exposed out here. It’s all so flat, I feel like the tallest thing around.”

“And I feel like a tiny speck in New York.” I shrugged. “Despite growing up next to the mountains.”

The rental car was a concession to life in the Midwest. It was all well and good to take public transit in a place like New York City, or even cabs, but even though public transit wasn’t exactly terrible in Boise, it was much harder to get from the airport to my apartment here on public transit than it was out east. Besides, it would allow us the opportunity to hunt down good restaurants or hunt for good hiking east of the city.

We spent the drive back catching up. We talked plenty, both over text and phone, but for some reason, those first few hours after touchdown always felt like a period of reacquainting.

I told him of life in grad school, of looking at doctoral programs, of the way that it always felt like stumbling when I started teaching in the fall, before I’d fall back into the rhythm of it, no matter how many fall semesters I taught. He told me about his design work in the city, and though I’d heard plenty about it before, it was suddenly more engaging, if only for the fact that I could see his wild gestures when describing it out of the corner of my eye as I drove us home.

An hour’s lazy conversation, a shared shower, and a glass of wine on the patio led us to the conclusion that it was far, far too nice out to bother with eating indoors, and so we walked to the convenience store for a simple dinner and struck out for the park.

“It’s a different kind of height.”

“Mm?”

“The mountains,” Peter said.

We’d settled down on a pair of folding camp chairs in a small park and were sharing an inexpensive can of wine—though perhaps ‘inexpensive’ isn’t a necessary prefix to ‘can of wine’, but they looked like sodas from a distance, so they worked well for picnics. Before us rose a slow slope, the neatly manicured grass of the park ending abruptly at the base of a dun-colored hill.

“That’s hardly a mountain,” I laughed.

“Yeah, but, like…in Sawtooth. Those were real mountains.”

“Fair. What do you mean, different kind of height, though?”

Peter took a long sip from the can, and we sat in silence, waiting for the last of the sun to slip off the tip of Camel’s Back. Once it had settled into the evening with the rest of us, he continued. “It’s so haphazard. All the buildings in the city, they’re all so regular, even when they’re tall. I can stand by the base and look straight up and know—*know*—that I will see sky. I don’t feel that way with mountains.”

“I suppose I felt the opposite,” I said after a pause. “I always felt like they were looming over me, like their whole weight would topple down on top of me if the wind blew wrong.”

The other dog laughed. “I guess we’re the same, then, for different reasons. I always felt like the mountains were going to come down on me. They sit there to the…well, to the east, here, but back in Sawtooth to the west, and they just–” he waved his paw vaguely at the hill before us. “–they just stand there. Wild and untamed. There’s no order. You don’t know what they’re going to do. Not like in cities, where the buildings are…are manifestations of order. Order imposed on physical reality.”

“You, my darling, are drunk,” I said, and we both laughed again. “But I think I understand. You feel like the mountains could coming crashing down on you, because there’s nothing to stop them from doing so.”

“Mm.”

“And I feel like there’s nothing to stop the buildings from coming down on me because I know how bad we are at ordering our lives; how could we possibly be any better at ordering nature?”

Peter passed the can of wine to me to finish, waited for me to transfer it to my other paw, and then took my closer one in his. We sat, paw in paw, until evening settled into twilight.

That night, as we lay curled together, I wondered aloud for the millionth time what kept Peter with me. He drew so much strength from order, and I was such a train wreck.

“Sometimes I feel like you’re the mountains. There’s nothing to stop you from falling, because there’s so little order in your life. Doesn’t mean I don’t love you.”

I hesitated in the slow strokes of my fingers through his fur, frowning up into the darkness.

“I’m sorry, Piree,” he mumbled, falling back to that comfortable name of years ago, a username turned pet name. “That maybe came out wrong. Maybe I’m still a bit drunk.”

“No, you’re probably right.” I sighed, turning until I could tuck my muzzle beneath his. “I *would* have a hard time trusting order. I don’t have any proof that it actually exists.”

We slept.

#

Shivering in the March evening’s chill, I come to a tee in the road. Staring out at the unbroken rolling plains beyond town, I linger. The sun sets, the moon rises. Stars fade into view, and still I stare at the low scrub.

All that I love feels poisoned to me, tainted by the fact that I burned so hard in an attempt to light up all this nothing a little better. I feel forced to like these things because I’m trammeled by this indescribably empty space with them.

No, tell a lie. I did this. I tore Peter up and threw him away because he wasn’t in there with me in the midst of that nothing. I was a coward: afraid to be alone, but more afraid to ask for help, so I removed my choice in the matter.

All these words, all this burning bright in an attempt to light up vast, crenelated spaces of nothing…perhaps it’s just a hunt for a reason to incinerate myself.

#

These upswings, if that’s what they are, have long since ceased to actually feel good. It’s just depression at the speed of sound. Depression, but if you stop moving, you die.

And now that’s where I am. That’s *who* I am. That’s all that’s left. In the last week, all of that sludge of depression sloughed off and I was left jewel-hard and burning from within. All of that nothing had transmuted into hatred, utter revulsion for myself and everything good in my life.

I am not myself.

Burned too long, and all that’s left is a charred scaffold of a personality.

I am not myself.

In the middle of class earlier today, I simply gave in. I must have stopped talking for a long moment, as a hesitant “Doctor MacIver…?” came from the middle of the room. As my only response, I stood up and walked silently from the room.

No, not ‘I’. I was not the one doing these things, anymore. Someone else was. Derek MacIver was. I watched numbly as he paced out the door.

He didn’t stop in the hallway.

He didn’t stop at the door outside, nor at the quad.

He didn’t stop until he made it home.

He didn’t stop at his door. Not until he made it to the computer did he stop, and only then to lean over the keyboard words spilling directly onto the screen with no thought to back them up.

*You mail, “I honestly feel sorry for you. The only thing more pathetic than myself is anyone who would love me.” to Peter\_P.*

After countless nightmares wherein I would somehow find the one single thing I could say to hurt someone—no, not hurt, crush; completely and utterly destroy—any revulsion of actually doing so was lost amid the flames of boundless loathing for this Derek, this hollow shell of a collie.

Then it was just a matter of him grabbing a few things and hopping on the bus.

I had no thoughts.

I had no thoughts.

I had no *I*.

#

The sound of a car door shutting brings me out of my reverie, if reverie it is, and I blink at my surroundings. I’m standing at the side of the road with the barbed wire of the fence clenched in my fists, a small, cheap two-door parked about twenty feet away. It’s a small wonder I hadn’t heard it before, nor even noticed the headlights casting my shadow before me. There’s a dull pain in my hands. A far away pain. A someone-else pain.

Once the driver walking towards me resolves from a blurry black cutout against their headlights to the features of one of my students—a solidly built mountain lion, glasses, feminine features on a masculine face; the one who had called after me in class—I relax my grip on the fence. Without saying a word, the puma leads me over to the passenger door of the car and makes me sit in the seat. They tear strips from a towel in the back seat to wrap my bleeding pads.

My paws. My paws covered in lacerations and punctures from the barbed-wire fencing. They are not my paws. They are someone else’s. They are somewhere else.

Am I me? Is Derek myself? Who lived this life? Who loved? Who destroyed? Great, choking sobs begin to muddle all the ‘who’s and obscure all the ‘why’s.

With my student’s help, I use one of the strips to wipe the tears and snot from my face. The mountain lion shuts the door, pads back around the car, and turns it around on the narrow county road.

When we reach the university, the cat finally speaks, asking me where I live from there. I mumble my address, and another two minutes of silence follow before we pull up in front of the condos I live in.

Both of us get out of the car. They ask if I need help inside, if I need an ambulance. I shake my head, and the mountain lion gives me a hug.

It isn’t a guy hug, isn’t that chaste, dry form of affection I’ve never been able to understand, though it’s far from any embrace I’d shared with Peter. There’s more support, more emotion, more understanding in that hug than in any of the many words I’ve been capable of hearing over the past week, month, year, lifetime, and I have to try my hardest to make it back inside before bursting into tears once more.

*Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the ranks of angels?*  
*And even supposing one of them took me suddenly to their breast,*  
*I would perish within their overpowering being,*  
*For the beautiful is right at the margin of the terrifying, which we can only just endure,*  
*And we marvel at it, because it holds back in serene disdain and does not destroy us.*  
*Every angel is terrifying.*

I have found my *I*.

I fumble the snub-nosed revolver from the waistband of my pants, swing open the loading gate, and, one by one, dump the rounds into my bandaged paw. Acting on serene autonomy, I lock the gun into its case once more, and tip the cartridges out of my paw and into the trash.

# # #