



# Shooter...

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**Tail**

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**N**ot long ago, not far from here, there was once a girl who – yes – grew a tail.

Her twenty-fifth birthday brought a lingering ache, then shoots of pain through her coccyx when she sat at her reception desk. She consulted the employee restroom’s full-length mirror, but nothing was amiss beneath her blouse besides a twinge of discoloration, maybe, under stubble, which often appeared when she went too long between waxes.

(Just once in a while, in times like these, the girl wished for a mother. But she didn’t have one, and hadn’t for some time.)

What she did have in the way of company were suitors – a cadre of hirsute, stocky suitors to whom she could turn for a variety of needs, or phase out for newer but no less interchangeable specimen. They were indiscriminately sourced from the internet and bars, cafes and work. For all she knew, the whole roster could be the same suitor, carouseling through her life with a limited inventory of wigs and spectacles and shoes, passions for traveling and live music and craft beer, with the same bare mattress and yellow pillow.

That weekend, riding atop such a suitor, the girl tried to fend off her vestigial anguish by taking care not to slam too hard upon each thrust. In the throes of dispassion, however, she could not help but flinch whenever the suitor’s hand or mouth extemporized towards that nebulous region near her tailbone.

The suitor asked, “What’s up with you?”, as she flinched and flinched again.

“Well,” she began – his name had escaped her. And with luck he did not press further, for they were not a part of each other’s lives in this way.

Proceeding in their romp, however, the suitor’s fingertips fell down her bottom and made contact with that tender zone. His hand retracted. Tensed. Grazed again.

“The fuck,” he asked, “is *this*?”

Without a word, the girl dismounted and hastened home. Safe in her own studio apartment, she blindly thumbed her rearquarters. Could she in fact detect a bump, or the shadow of a bump, sub-stubble? A slight incline at her sacrum? Or was she merely due for a little

womanly upkeep?

She made an appointment post-haste with the aesthetician, a handsome woman with a rhinestoned headwrap who prompted the girl onto all fours. She approached from behind with a gob of molten wax, when – *Ach!* – the aesthetician retched, and pulled away. “You got a thingy there. I think I’ll go no further. Here,” the aesthetician proffered a business card that bore the name of a fine gynecologist.

Motherless, and with a severe lack of formalized sex education, the girl feared the worst. In the gynecologist’s office, she reached into her underthings to palpate the tumescent bud (for she *did* feel something now, peeking from her uppermost rumpcheeks). She had no inkling as to which sexually transmitted disease resulted in persistent aches and scaly growths; something dormant or else an exotic strain of infection had caught her immune system unawares. The more she fiddled, the more it seemed to swell.

The gynecologist spread the girl’s legs and examined the inflamed eye of her buttocks.

“I’m flummoxed,” she announced. “Not a skin tag, nor hemorrhoid. Not like anything I’ve seen in all my years of practice.”

The gynecologist unpocketed a hand mirror to show the girl with what exactly they were dealing. She winced: the thing was conical in shape, tipped with a whitehead that had sprouted three strands of dark hair. The size of a thimble, the peeling skin surrounding it an unsettling purple.

The gynecologist passed the girl a box of tissues when she wept.

“If it was rather a caruncle of sorts,” the gynecologist explained, “though I’ve certainly never witnessed one *there* – surgery would be the answer. But it would be quite costly out-of-pocket, and the wound prone to sepsis no matter how sterile the aftercare.”

She prescribed a cream laced with what she called *military-grade* lidocaine to alleviate the pain and desquamation, and told her to pick up medicated wipes for post-defecatory occasions. To ease the girl’s mind, the gynecologist agreed to take a biopsy and call with the results by week’s end.

Conditions worsened before they improved. The pain had eased slightly, but there was no relief from the girl’s excruciating *awareness* of the thing, as it had grown almost three inches long during this time, knobby and hard. At work, she had to either tuck it into her bumflaps or flip it over the waistband of her panties. The tip had coalesced into an unfortunate blister, swollen with fluid fit to spurt all over a bodega floor or an important client or a hapless suitor *in flagrante disgesto*.

At home, she filled a shallow bath and flung in quarts of epsom salts, squatting low with arms folded. The thing below flicked playful



dribblets of water into the girl's face, which she returned with a light-hearted *fwap* in its direction.

Her telephone rang from the toilet lid; it was the gynecologist, with what she coined *Good News*: "The biopsy shows no irregularities! You're Scot-free!"

"I *will* be Scot-free," the girl said, by which she meant: Surely one of my suitors is so named, and no Scot of mine will stick around to witness this posterior scourge!

So, you see, the gynecologist's call was little comfort to the girl. She had rather hoped for a rarefied cancer, something to dedicate to medical texts after a clean and hasty death, then memorialized at her funeral by her collective suitors, reminiscing on how sweetly she could share a bed.

Diagnosis-less, she resolved to take healing into her own hands; she scoured her medicine cabinet for a makeshift solution. The scissors she used to trim her fringe seemed unduly violent; besides which, the resulting massacre would be hell to bleach. The internet provided an at-home alternative, a crude ligation that required only dental floss and an iron will: one tied the floss tight around the offending nodule for multiple sessions a day so as to cut off blood flow. Eventually, allegedly, it would fall away on its own, as if it had never been. Alas, one evening into the experiment, the girl found the tight loop of floss broken off in her bed; the phallic nib had escaped its hold against all odds.

Even so, the pain *had* lessened, no small thanks to the gynecologist's lidocaine ointment, but this had not curtailed the length and strength of the thing, which continued apace. It was now more than one foot long, plum-colored and waxy to the touch, the coarse hair at its tip curled in silken wisps. Through patches of dead skin the shaft emerged thick as a fist, slick and raw-looking, as if dislodged from her body after a lifetime away from daylight.

There too was the issue of mischief.

Not only was the tail difficult to hide from the public, but it developed whims not unlike a hyperactive toddler. For instance, it would, without warning, bulldoze the entire contents of an outbox when she bent below her desk. Her coworkers knew her to be clumsy, so this was not quite out of character – but the tail pulled the same shtick with tins of staples, the candy dish and, catastrophically, her desktop monitor.

There could be a more pernicious tinge to its mischief, besides. When passing by a male coworker, it would grope at his khaki-clad genitalia, but so swiftly that he could not detect the source of the offense, just a girl scurrying past, red to the roots of her hair.

She tried to discourage it: first, wrangling the tail frontward between her legs to tuck it up into the elastic of her bra, secured along its path with duct tape. But the tail's furry tip would often peek from the top of her blouse to tickle her ear, and though her coworkers could not spot it, she still managed to disrupt conference calls with spontaneous cackles and battings-away. In slacks, she guided the fifth limb down a trouser leg, but despite strict hosiery it could wriggle above her waistband and resume its havoc.

She saw no solution to her woes. She could only call in sick for *female trouble* so many times, had depleted the last of her personal days, and doubted that she could apply for disability – who had ever heard of a disability such as this? She had no mother to comfort her, no suitor to save her. Who would dare?

None of her erotic coterie had sought contact for a fortnight, as if her ceasing to call on them meant they had collapsed from existence entirely, her visitations the only thing that made them flesh. She dared one, hazarding a message to a suitor selected at random from her mental Rolodex. The response, hours later – *Who dis?* – a deathknell.

She threw her phone into the toilet. The tail whipped bonelessly through the air like anger grown sideways.

After all, what is a girl without a mother? Without a suitor? Does she cease to be?

The girl saw before her the enormous sprawl of the rest of her days. She hung her head. The tail wiped away her tears and cradled her til all were shed. Then, at the edge of dawn, it slunk from her shoulders down between her legs and eased along her southerly lips, to and fro, to and fro, until she shook with waves of solitudinal pleasure.

In the after-swelter, the tail doodled an arrow-pierced heart in the fog of the window.

The sun split open like a fruit; inside, the girl saw, all things were possible.

*A life of wandering, she thought. Suitors eschewed. Wild woman of the backwoods now, me! Made and borne of undergrowth, Tail and I!*

She screamed aloud: “Beholden to no one but our own desires!”

As though to prove it, she pulled the tail up between her legs and performed that most pleasurable maneuver once more, then once again.

Lest we forget that old saying: *For every crooked pot there is a lid.*

Fear not. This girl would not be alone long.

At the knock on the front door, the tail shocked straight. “My!” cried the girl, for she had never had a visitor in her life, preferring rather

to visit others, leaving before outlasting her welcome.

In her doorway, regardless, a visitor appeared. Flush-faced, he offered his deepest pardons for startling her as the tail rose above the girl in a two-foot question mark. But the visitor did not balk. Even as the tail intervened towards his unsuspecting nads, he wrenched it up and down in a business-like handshake.

A fear she'd never spoken was suddenly extinguished: the girl had not gone mad, nor dreamt the tail. *He*, the proof.

The visitor asked if she would be so kind as to offer him a lemonade.

His voice was so soft, his gaze so winkish, that the girl found it difficult to say no to him. Once in the kitchen she remembered she did not have nor like lemonade, so improvised with salt and tap water. He took a gentlemanly sip. Just as he had accepted the tail, so too he accepted the lemon-less lemonade. She felt a tremendous pang of affection for him as saltwater ran down the sides of his mouth. Just when her suitors had vanished, he had appeared, as if by premonition. *Ought I to breastfeed him, she wondered, or take him like a pill?*

The boy smacked his lips appreciatively and rubbed his stomach. He asked the girl if she was hungry.

Without fail, the girl replied. His wants were hers; that was a good sign. He flapped a wad of pungent bills in front of her face and declared they ought to order in.

So began their life together.

She had no cause to work, nor subject the tail to the public. Everything she could ever need arrived before the need occurred to her, right to their doorstep, ferried by various deliverypersons the girl never saw, heralded by a buzz the girl never heard, but she did not have to, as the boy always heard it, and fetched it, and brought from the hallway crates of pre-prepared fish dinners and two-in-one shampoo, and shut the door behind him, chain (*rattle*), knob (*click*), deadbolt (*shoonk*).

When they first made love, this suitor – or better to call him boy, kinder-eyed than those who preceded him, not one to force her face into a yellow pillow – this *boy* was meticulous in peeling back each layer of her clothing as flakes of a delicate pastry, confirming after each that she liked it, that it was good. And he was so insistent throughout, so full of praise – the delicate conch of her ear! that savory tuchus! – with no mention of the thing that stemmed from its crest. The tail tried at first to insert itself amidst the ardent tangle of their legs, wiggling into any variety of hole, but the boy fended it off using the same gentle but forceful grip with which he had greeted it that first day.

The tail remained persistent. In ensuing sessions, it tried to find a way back home, an eel to its pit, and soon discovered the boy's rectal cavity. For several moments the boy mistook this for the girl's finger in kinky pursuit, until he realized that both her hands remained clamped upon his ears. He leapt from the bed with a cry. He fetched a pair of stockings with which to tie a constrictor knot around bedpost and tail, to deter it from such funny business altogether.

The girl vowed to love all the boy's bodily foibles, as he did hers: his deafening sleep apnea, the smells he left in the toilet. Soon she felt safe enough to admit, despite his all-enveloping love, that at times she still felt like sewage bound together with five feet of bad skin.

"For instance," she said, "there's all this hair. Here."

A month had passed since that fateful visit to the aesthetician, and select parts of her had become covered in the natural down of her *shtetl*-dwelling foremothers. Particularly, that stubble from which the tail had reared.

He fingered the small of her back and meditated upon it deeply, then led her to the shower. As she goose-pimpled under hot water, he extracted from his pocket a straight razor, flicked it open from its pearl handle with a *shkk*, and lathered her back, vulva, and belly with musk soap. Ever so reverently, he shaved her most hated places with long, careful strokes.

"Who else," he asked, "could love you the same as me?"

"I admit," the girl replied, "I feared the void of love. And then there was... you."

The boy concluded his work with a flourish. The girl looked down: he had expertly pruned upon her *mons* a smart, follicular lightning bolt. The one, he said, that had once split them down the middle. But, thank fate, he had found his way back.

And where was the tail during all this, you may well wonder? Not frolicking in the water with its typical impishness? No, it lay flaccid, sodden with the rivulets that streamed down the drain.

You see, since this visitor had come to stay, the tail had gradually unlearned its usual swagger, and took instead to trailing lethargically along the ground. The girl tried to tickle herself with the tail's balding tip, but it evaded her grasp. She even left out orderly piles for its dishevelment, made a whole charade of coquettishly shuffling past, but, to her chagrin, the tail was no longer tempted into chaos.

Beset with apnea, the boy would roll over in his slumber to rest atop the tail so that it developed a permanent kink. Oftentimes, with the tail pinned beneath the boy and the boy's breath thick at her neck, the girl awoke drenched in panic of unknown origins. She developed a mantra for these occasions: *How easy things are with the*



*boy! You will not have to go this alone! May you never want for a mother again! You have... him.*

She repeated this mantra to herself one morning as she gazed out the window into the airshaft of her apartment building, phlegm splattered on the walls, horrible swears echoing from adjacent units. *How cruel and inhospitable the out-of-doors! The sky, white as a tarp. And how kind the boy to shield me from it!* The tail crept over the open sill. A breeze rifled through their hairs.

She felt the boy approach, so nudged the tail from the sill and closed the window tight.

He kneaded the dough of her belly from behind and whispered into her ear – was she still thinking, perhaps, that he could not possibly love her, with a body such as hers? Was she feeling perhaps like a fatberg in a skirt?

“Fatberg?” asked the girl.

Of course he meant one of those clogs plumbers find in tunnels under the city, all curdled oil and scum and sanitary pads, then shoved, re this analogy, into a skirt. He told her again, she was the one he’d dreamt of growing gray with. He told her they were once but a single cell, he and she, split in two, healed into one –

“I *do* believe you, I swear it.”

She fell into the bowl of his chest as he sang reminders of every cruel shape the weather could take, and how the world could ruin her in ways unfathomable.

The moon streamed in as they made love, and, though they had no need for restraint since the tail put up no fight, the boy held it fast against the headboard. They fell asleep together with the tail clenched in his hand.

Hours later – she did not know how many – the girl felt a pinch.

The pinch became a tug.

Half in slumber, her first thought was that the boy had rolled over onto the tail as he often did, but with peculiar force.

Pain shot through flesh, through muscle – she tried to jump from the bed but found herself fastened there. By the light of the stars, she could make out the boy’s square teeth and the whites of his eyes. The glint of the razor. The tail wild and flailing.

When at last the limb was severed, he held it from its bleeding root above his head. He shook it like a whip. He screeched, panting wet: Now did she believe that she was perfect?

The girl finally freed her hands and fumbled at the wet gape where the tail once was, wide as a puck, but felt no pain; felt nothing, in fact, but for a strange heat pooling, the pool being blood, the blood being hers.



## *Tail*

The boy reassured the girl that there was no need to thank him! That she was more than most welcome! As he thrashed the tail upon his chest, the tip hooked under his right armpit and the stump wrested itself from his left fist. Red spewed across the walls as the tail lashed around the boy's neck, his face, his entire head, muffling his screams as he grappled blind. It tightened around him with all the power hoarded in its muscles these past weeks – the girl did not think she would witness such vigor again. The boy fell, bloated and unbreathing. Her periphery dimmed. She smiled.

The tail fell too. It slunk towards the girl smiling numb and blue upon the floor. It pushed against her sacral hiatus in hopes of reattachment, squirmed ardently against its host. The girl pressed too. But no use. Thus split, the two could never hope to rejoin.

The girl pulled herself towards the slice of light beneath the front door. She slipped in blood but carried on. The tail followed. She undid the chain, the deadbolt, and with the last of her strength, unlocked the door. The tail swept over her body in a final caress – soft, an ache – and then fled down the stairs, onto the street, in search of other motherless girls who might have need of it.