

Origin Story

By Andrew Romriell

Listen—

in the beginning, as if by stretching,
you find yourself
empty; you run through every bookstore
in search for a different story, filling yourself
with narratives so you never transcribe your own.
At night, your dad tells bedtime stories
with magic and adventure and wild enchanted woods.
Your mom sings lullabies: Que Sera, Sera
or one about all the favorite things.
You wall yourself behind Cheerios' boxes in the morning
so you can fill your bowl with sugar,
slip spoonfuls of crystal sweetness
between teeth, grinding them down your throat,
filling your belly. The story ends
with uneaten breakfast washing down the sink,
soggy circles swirling into the disposal.
But listen—

start again, but this time
the story is you, was you, is you again.
You're out to dinner with a stranger, but this time
what you hope will be devoured
is you. By this you mean you hope
he leaves the condoms on the dresser drawer.
You simply crave the taste of flesh, the pressure
of another man's body,
to never see him again.
And though you've been told the story
ends here, it mustn't, it mustn't.
Transformation starts in rebellion,
in the ravaged T cells of your body,
in cravings, in sugar, in disease,
and in all the favorite things. To end here,
you'll only hear yourself
screaming from far behind your teeth.

So, begin again; begin instead
by leaning close:
in the mouth of the world,
you might finally hear yourself
living.

HIV: a Self-portrait

By Andrew Romriell

Anonymity is key—
the lifeblood of my culture.
Beauty in non-solidity. Doorbells
that ring like knocks on wood
invoke the protection of nature and God
and latex.
If only.

Breathing,

I name myself a martyr
or a product of my time. Of my people.
Rather, I am a watered color.

I am the sweet aroma of peach skin,
periwinkle pillowcases and pink
sheets, a pale spectrum
of rainbow pigments that leak beside creaking, groaning,
shifting men and walls.

And then I am gone—slipped
away to the click of a brass lock.
I assure myself: I know what this is.
I know I am a watercolor—
bleeding through,

I so easily wash off.

Andrew Romriell is an MFA candidate at The Ohio State University and currently serves as associate nonfiction editor for *The Journal*. His writing, which primarily explores intersections of queerness, religion, body image, and sexuality, has been featured in *The Great River Review*, *South 85 Literary Journal*, *the Beyond Words 2020 Queer Anthology*, and more. While originally from Utah, he now lives in Columbus, Ohio with his partner, Terrence, and their feline companion, Sokka.