

## NO DOGS ALLOWED IN POOL AREA

Her breasts have just begun to swell; her hair is like lint, so fair it hardly makes a shadow on her pale forehead; her cheeks are an emblematic scarlet and white and she has just started her woman's bleeding, the clock inside her that will strike, henceforward, once a month.

- Angela Carter, *The Company of Wolves*

*"It's because she's a werewolf."* My aunt answers in a joking half-whisper when my cousin points at my armpits and asks why they're hairy.

Apparently, lycanthropy can be understood more easily than puberty. My aunt playfully daubs my hooked nose with a Coppertone finger. The glob of SPF makes my cousin lean back in laughter. Her baby teeth flash into fangs for a moment, and I am reminded that this, too, is her fate.

If my *aunt* is a werewolf, she is a master of disguise— hiding rabid blood and savage fur under a coat of taut, tanned skin— Nair-ed to perfection.

She will teach my cousin the womanly things my mom won't teach me. *The things my mom might not even know.* The pool betrays girls like me that have moms with shadowy mustaches and librarian appeal like mine. It makes me want to grr- gr- grOwl.

*"It's because she's a werewolf."*

My face burns nipple pink and period red— end of the school day pad red— under the streaky sunblock. I can see it even before locking myself into the public pool's single-stall bathroom.

Everybody knows the first physical indications of werewolf damnation manifest under the arms— too long, too curly, too much like my father, who absorbed all of my aunt's body hair in

utero. Pretty sure I've got it bad since it's spread all the way down my legs, stopping only at my big toe.

*"It's because she's a werewolf."*

I look at my sorry reflection and pray to God for a razor, maybe some shaving cream—if she's feeling generous. I pinch at my imperfect body mid-prayer, in case God can't sense that I hate the way my belly button sits too deep in my stomach or the way that the bathing suit straps sink into my bumpy arms and back like butcher's twine, silently asking her to fix that too. The smell of chlorine and waste singes my nose as I huff, and puff, and heave to find my breath. Reduced to milky tears, I am multiplied into ten yellow eyes refracted and reflected.

"Oh, what big eyes you have!" people will say when the transformation is complete.

*All the better to cry with, my dear.*