

THE VIOLENCE ALMANAC

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For Randall, fly where you want to fly.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Foreword: Growl</i>	1
Babies	5
Jingle-Jingle-Pop	28
Eye Wall	48
Gethsemane	71
Footfall	81
<i>Faultline: Coffee Spilled</i>	96
Clips	100
Saving a Bird	121
Been Cut	143
Ain't No Thing	158
<i>Afterwards: The Story of Every Living Thing</i>	176
Acknowledgements	181

The drops of rain make a hole in the stone,
not by violence, but by oft falling.

—Lucretius

If they come for me in the morning,
they will come for you in the night.

—Angela Davis

FOREWORD: GROWL

The rumble comes from deep in the throat, a low place, breath slow and soaked in the shaping of sound, a snarled pranayama, the chords fold and judder, their own capricious Ring of Fire. We never expect it. Our lips pull up in the way that we signal disgust, or mimic singing a Mötley Crüe song, our nostrils spread open in the scrunch, and the teeth, the canines specifically reveal themselves in the snarl. And the sound of gravel, of rumble, of some force coming. *Growl*. We can't even say the word without yielding effort, a full commitment of the mouth to convey the idea. A full, open-wide presence. *We are predators*, this sound speaks. But what does that mean?

My first memory of it is what one would expect: a dog. A hound. A long slate gray snout that juts from sagged eyes. A military housing playground in Norfolk, Virginia. I am six. I stand in front of the dog, this creature that appears so snug in the hub of civility, yet a beast. An animal. What makes this one different from the wolf or the bear? My six year-old genius suspects once peering into the dog, the mystery of this animal will soon be discovered. I stare, committed to the science, my elliptical reflection in the black glass of its droopy eyes. And then it comes, the slow

rising rumble, the quivering of slack lip, the teeth, and before I reason enough with my instincts to retreat, the whole mouth upon me, a soft bite, more of a warning than an attack. But the impression holds vivid, not so much the bite but the sound. *Don't fuck with me*, this growl says.

My mother's growl is wild and screeching and involves a frying pan in our trailer park kitchen. She, in a bathrobe. Her second husband, my stepfather, in his threadbare underwear. The smell of eggs overcooking, garlic and farts. He swarms her with accusations that don't possess much specificity, that grow more abstract with their frequency: *Where were you?* and *You should* and *Answer me*. My mother's auburn hair crackles dry and electric, knotted on her head, some grabbing down her back and shoulders, Autumn straw sprung sideways, reaching out. Bill's litany grows more confident with my mother's silence, more cracking, more adolescent. "You, you, me, you, me, you, you, bitch, you, bitch, me, me, me" and then it emerges: the low rumble, grumble in the throat, the lips, the teeth, and then further, something even more, the rise into a shriek, high in the head and splayed out in three-dimensional space, a noxious sound. And the frying pan, from stove to my stepfather's shoulder, his mouth a big stupid O, my mother's mouth a rack of violence, eggs arcing through the air, steam rising from the fury and the food. *Don't fuck with me*, this growl says.

The growl of our stomachs. We hear it, and we think it tells us we hunger. In fact, that is not the case. Our stomachs, our intestines, ceaselessly serve to push, to send things from our mouths to our assholes. It is a loyal and perpetual labor. Smooth muscle contracts in waves, steers the stuff, perhaps fried eggs, through twenty-five feet of coil. It is always happening, every moment, but we only hear it when our guts are empty. That is when the sound reverberates from inside, suddenly played in an amphitheater for its effort. It is then that we understand the want of the thing. It is an echo of need.

I am fucking a boy in Los Angeles, California. We are in the back

seat of my car in the parking structure of Amoeba Records. I meet him in the used CD aisles, between Depeche Mode and Earth, Wind and Fire. It was in the middle of one of many slutty Hollywood interludes. A bell of sweat drops from my nose onto his barely there chest, smooth muscle, his tiny brown nipples, and then he makes the sound. The growl, teeth and all, eyes fixed. He is telling me, no warning me: I am an animal. You are a beast. We are all and only nature in this cramped capsule of pleather and plastic and metal and glass. It works. I get harder than I already am, yet am so hesitant of the hunger—so not as present, in my ambivalence—that I can only giggle, watching my body disappear and reappear into his own, this fleeting boy. *Fuck me*, this growl says.

Growls suppose an incivility. It is up there with ass-picking and hocking snot. We never expect it from ourselves. *We tsk tsk*, we denounce, we condemn its bestial origin, and yet our pupils come alive, a light in our moment, our bodies sweat, get wet, get hard, get sprung. What else does it remind us of? Are we not most beast when immediate? Don't we always move from mouth to asshole? And isn't it us being our most civil selves, to give warning to our violence, before the bite, before the strike, before the demand to love?

There are people growling everywhere. At any given moment, there must be thousands of growls. A child in Yucaipa howls at her brother—that's *my* fruit-roll-up. *My precious*. A tow-truck driver in Oakland knows the roommate is gone, and the roommate's girlfriend has made it very clear that the coast is too with a condom in her teeth, a snarl of its own kind. Every day, there must be nurses, husbands, schoolchildren, baristas, carpenters, parking meter attendants, dog walkers, born-again Christians, vapor clerks that find their paws and claws, their rumble, in the folds of civility. Fathers alone must account for so many growls, the muddle of safeguard and violence so braided in their boyhood. And then there is Angela Cavallo, who lifts a 1964 Chevy Impala to save her teenage son, pinned underneath its metal and glass. Imagine *that* growl, that echo of

need so strong it rattles in the chamber of every heart.

Every time a promise is taken, a promise needs shielding, a promise is about to be fulfilled. An about to, an about to. It's all in the about to happen that we erupt, these growls, these warnings of our immense power; how often, open-wide, we echo in need.