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## Teeth

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# TEETH

Andrea Marcusa

I notice before he does. My husband of fifteen years has turned bearish. His nails are suddenly hard, black and sharp. His arm hair is darker. Coarse tufts have sprouted on his back. When I met him, I immediately noticed his strong back as he hoisted himself up on the side of our local pool. I can still see it's bronzed, unblemished skin. Its heft. It was the kind of back that can lift things. Outdoor things like lumber, sacks of fertilizer.

There are other changes, too. His nose is longer and today he comes to me holding a worn, discolored incisor. "Look," he says, "I've lost a tooth." I peer into his mouth, poke around the row of upper teeth and find the bloody hole where the incisor had been. I press, pull my hand away, and wipe the blood from my finger on a tissue. It blooms a surprising scarlet.

I hold a mini flashlight and send a small bright beam into his mouth.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm looking at the hole."

There are tiny, pearly buds. I touch them, they feel rough and sharp. "You are getting a new tooth," I say and shut off the light.

"That's impossible. You don't get new teeth at age 45."

Over the next months, each tooth falls out. In their places erupt larger sharper ones. The pain as they grow in is dreadful. My husband, a man of few words, is stoic. He whips up pastas, soups, poached fish, tasty meals that are not hard on the teeth. It's terrible to sit across from him and watch him suffer as he gingerly chews soft rigatoni. I apply cold compresses and buy king-sized boxes of grape popsicles.

"Shouldn't we call someone?" I ask.

"An alligator regenerates teeth fifty times." He sounds defensive, like I've

suggested he skip dessert. “I don’t want to make a big deal about it. I don’t run to doctors for every little thing the way you do.”

Later, while loading the dishwasher, I consider the alligator’s lost teeth and worry I’ve misunderstood. Perhaps he’s becoming an alligator. How would we know? On Wikipedia, I learn alligators have three digits not five.

That night my husband takes me in the ravenous, thrilling way we were in our first years together and then falls fast asleep. I’m startled by his desire. My heart hammers, my lips ache where his huge teeth pressed into me. In that dark nighttime place of the mind, I consider how monstrous my husband’s transformation is becoming. I reach for his fingers, feel each to make sure they haven’t shrunk to little alligator nubs. He pulls me toward him. I spoon him. The wiry tufts on his back a comfort now, as I imagine rough reptile skin against my cheek. I study his changed profile in the shadows, feel his enlarged ears under his gray curls. Perhaps all men are destined to change. Perhaps we all become what’s hidden within us.

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ANDREA MARCUSA’s literary fiction, essays and poetry have appeared in Cutbank, River Styx, River Teeth, Citron Review, New South, and others. She’s received recognition in a range of competitions, including Glimmer Train, Raleigh Review, New Letters and Southampton Review. Andrea divides her time between creating literary works and photographs and writing articles on medicine, technology, and education.