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In the early days of this world, lifeforms were not as distinct as they are today. There were no separate species but only a single fecund mire of creatures indiscriminately breeding, changing and striating with each new generation. With every blind coupling, new forms of creature came into existence.

Mere speculation, you might say, were you free to speak. Yes, speculation. Perhaps the truth, perhaps not. And yet the idea struck me as offering a compelling map for the future.

Which is why you are here.

How are you? Are you comfortable? Can I get you anything ? A cup of water perhaps ? A crust of bread ?

No, I shouldn't needle you. We both know your needs are being provided for, being dripped slowly into your body by way of a central venous catheter. To allow you to feed yourself I would have to undo the straps that keep you immobilized. I am not sure that is such a good idea. Not until I have convinced you of the necessity of what we are trying to accomplish.

But don't worry. I am a patient man. I will not give up on you. I will convince you.

As the world sickens further, as the air grows poisonous, as the oceans die, so too must we shift and change if we care to survive. We must extricate ourselves from humanity and become something other than ourselves. Something that can adapt to the harshness of this new world. We must loosen the strands that differentiate us from other creatures, unravel our coding—loosen it just enough that our bodies are free to become more than what they are.

By *us*, I mean of course you.

You see these suspended bags ? If you tip your head back and crane your neck and look behind you, there they are. These ones to the left, the ones bloated with clear fluid, need not concern us; they are simply meant to keep you nourished and hydrated, to keep you alive. They contain, as well, a painkiller. Nothing too addictive. Or, rather, yes, quite addictive, but the treatment plan I have developed for you allows me to taper you off slowly. Withdrawal will not be pleasant, but you will survive it. I have learned from past mistakes.

It is this other bag that matters, the one to the right, the one filled with an absinthe-colored fluid. This will enter your body much more slowly. In the time it takes for the entire bag to enter your system, we will go through a dozen bags of clear fluid. But this, my friend, is the bag that matters.

I claimed these bags of clear fluid need not concern us, but of course they do. Think of them as a sort of clock. By the time the first bag is empty, you will sense something beginning to happen to you. By the time you reach the fourth, your skin will feel as if it is on fire, despite the painkillers. By the sixth, you will begin to transform.

How you will change exactly, I cannot predict. It is different for everyone and depends on what sort of choices your body makes.

Some – most, if I am being honest – dissolve into a kind of muck. They writhe and fold inward and expire sometime in the course of the seventh bag. I hose what remains of them off the table. A few, a very select few, have made it all the way to the final bag, the twelfth. By that time they have become something else. Something at least more theoretically suited to live in this new world. They are more resistant to cold or heat, their skin becomes scaled or slimy or photosensitive, they lose or gain a limb or two or three.

I have chosen you very carefully. I have faith that you will be one of those select few.

Perhaps if I were to remove your gag you would have questions for me. Perhaps, instead, you would just shriek and scream. Those who came before you have done sometimes one, sometimes the other. There have been those who, gag removed, remained stubbornly silent. I am, I admit, tempted to remove your gag, if only to see if my guess about what you in particular would do is correct.

But the screams in the past have been too shrill to be anything but a distraction, and the questions asked are always the wrong ones. The silence I find even worse. Whatever you choose to do, it will only make me think less of you.

No, it is a waste of time. Better never to loosen the gag.

Have I been clear enough? The world is dying, in fact already well on its way to being dead. Were it not, you would never have wandered in here. You never would have had occasion to think, *What is this? An unoccupied bunker in which I can shelter myself? What luck!* and then have fallen into my trap. You would, instead, have a job in a small town as an accountant, say, or a data entry specialist. But there are no real towns anymore, small or otherwise. And that I am alive here, in this bunker, is due only to my foresight. I could see the collapse coming, and I said to myself I needed to prepare. The world was changing. We had ruined it. Things had gone too far to change them back. And so, I told myself, it is *we* who must change to meet the world.

Or you, rather. By *we*, I meant and still mean you.

Don't worry, friend. We're in this together. I want humanity to survive. I have done my best to calibrate the formula exactly right this time. I will stay beside you. I will observe the change.

True enough, I couldn't save the others, but that is no reason to think I won't be able to save you. The one just before you made it through all twelve bags and still lived, gasping, for thirty-eight minutes after that. His skin had begun to extrude a slick, mucosal layer, and I suspect he no longer belonged in air but in water. I learned so much from him, and I will use all I learned to save you.

Even if I do not succeed, perhaps we will learn enough so that the individual who comes after you will survive. Or perhaps the individual after him. And, once the procedure has been perfected, it will be ready for me.

When will be begin ? your eyes seem to be asking.

But can't you see we have already begun ? Look at how much less clear fluid there is in the first bag than in the bags that will succeed it. Yes, we have already begun.

I will do what I can for you. I am rooting for you. Whether you survive the change or perish, I will be here with you, I swear, until the bitter end.

Brian EVENSON. "The Extrication." *The Glassy, Burning Floor of Hell*. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2021, pp.204-207(from the very beginning to the very end of the short story, made up of eleven blocks of paragraphs).

Read the entire short story and consider the following questions:

1. How would you sum up the story in one sentence?

2. What means and strategies does the text resort to in order to "convince you"?

How does it echo Catherine Conan's claim that:

"direct references to climate change and environmental crisis are not the most efficient ways of involving the reader [...]. They may even be counter-productive. Ecological value is created when the experience of reading the poems stimulates in the reader the sense of the porousness of the self and its entanglement with other objects" (Catherine Conan, 2021, 20)

3. According to you, what does the title, "The Extrication," mean?

4. You may rehearse the monologue and get ready to perform it.