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KIRSTY LOGAN

Kirsty Logan is the author of three novels, three short-story collections, a memoir, two chapbooks, a 10-hour audio play for Audible and several collaborative projects with musicians and visual artists. Her books have won the Lambda, Polari, Saboteur, Scott and Gavin Wallace awards. Her work has been optioned for TV, adapted for stage, recorded for radio and podcasts, exhibited in galleries and distributed from a vintage Wurlitzer cigarette machine. She lives in Glasgow with her wife, baby and rescue dog.

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ALSO BY KIRSTY LOGAN

The Rental Heart and Other Fairytales

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Things We Say in the Dark

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*To Dad –
for taking me to the great, grey, green, greasy Limpopo river
all set about with fever trees*

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It doesn't matter who my father was. It matters who
I remember he was.

— ANNE SEXTON

There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in.

— LEONARD COHEN

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Ruth:

I'm going to tell you a story. You just stay there, warm and cosy, all cooied in. I brought you here to this little house at the top of the world because – well, because you are inside me, so everywhere I go you must go too. But I came here with your other mother so we could make ourselves a shelter. Somewhere safe and steady as the beat of a heart. Can you hear our home? The wind, the waves, the seabirds crying? The shutters rattle like bones and the sea growls as it swallows the land. But don't you worry. We'll stay quiet in this patch of light, and everything will be fine.

It's just the two of us here now. Your other mother is busy at work, many miles away, turning reality into stories so it can be shared. At this moment her voice is being heard by thousands of people, while mine is heard only by you. And honestly, I don't even know if you have ears yet. So perhaps I am talking only to myself.

I can't see you, but sometimes I can feel you. You're a part of me, but still you're a stranger to me. Soon we will meet, and you will see that the world can be cold and difficult. We can't always have what we want. And what we want, and what is good for us aren't the same thing.

But I will make sure that you know something more important: at the end, no matter what happens, you'll always be loved. Before I loved you, I loved your other mother. She'll be my last love, but she wasn't my first. This story is one that my first love told me, to explain why our love didn't work. And now I'm telling it to you, in the exact way it was told to me.

So cosy in close, my Coorie, and I will tell you a story.

1

Cutting Teeth

Once a month my mother, Ash, killed just enough to last until the next. She slunk home triumphant at dusk and hung the bodies in the shed: pheasants, rabbits, the occasional deer in season. The blood trickled under the door and out onto the step. Local cats convened, their tongues rasping in the dark. By morning, the door-step gleamed white. My mother was a good hunter.

My father, Caleb, worked on a rib boat on Loch Ness. He took tourists out on trips and spun yarns about the things that lurked in the deep waters and dark woods. Some were true, some were not – but what does it matter? There’s no such thing as a true story. Caleb memorised Wikipedia entries about power stations and timber, castle architecture and Aleister Crowley. The tourists absorbed his patter like children listening to a bedtime story. They laughed at the funny bits and gasped at the scary bits. My father was a good storyteller.

Each night Ash went into their little kitchen and cooked something that she’d killed, and they ate it together at their little table. Later they’d lie in the dark in their little bed, all chatter and

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soft laughing, and fall asleep curled like puppies. They weren't my parents yet, but they were in love. Everyone should believe that their parents were in love, even for a while. They were so close to being happy. They had almost everything – but that was not quite enough. For years, it was just the two of them. And then there were three.

My mother brought the wolf home in the season of the hunter's moon: early October, leaf-falling month, the ground burnt and bloody with dead leaves. It was dawn. She was post-hunt, eyes bright, pulse throbbing hard and steady in her wrists.

Caleb came down for breakfast and found his wife standing in the doorway, as if not sure whether to come into the house or run away from it. When she saw him, she came in. The wolf followed. Without thinking, Caleb backed away, putting a chair between himself and the animal. Then he remembered that he was a man, and he stepped forward.

'Is that a wolf?'

'Don't be daft. It's a dog.' She went to the fridge and pulled out a slab of meat. He couldn't tell if it was for his breakfast or the wolf's.

'Looks like a wolf to me.'

'It's a dog. A guard dog. For the house.'

The wolf stood in the corner of the kitchen and watched Caleb warily. His eyes were the same peaty dark as the loch.

'Wolves don't live in houses,' said Caleb. No matter what his wife said, he knew that a wolf was not a dog. Even after she'd cooked the meat and served it with scrambled eggs on two plates, he couldn't

shake the feeling that she'd rather have dropped to her knees and eaten the slab raw on the ground.

But no matter what Caleb thought, from that night on the wolf did live in the house. Except for when he lived outside the house – and on those nights, Ash lived outside the house too. She named him Zev. She loved him. And every full moon, he loved her too.

Cold moon, bright as an eye. Together they ran, limbs flexing – and I with them, kept safe beneath skin, curled round as a bean. He already knew about me. He could smell me inside her. He knew long before she did.

leafcrunch – starscent – wetmoss –

I shifted as they ran: wolf to human, human to wolf. Inside her, there was no moon to guide me. I shifted with each fluttering beat of my mother's heart.

moonglow – meatsweet – teethgleam –

One father, two fathers. Two people I could be. Tiny me, shifting wolflike inside my mother.

redtongue – redclaw – tumblelust –

No need for time or patience or restraint. Only food and warmth and love. I was happy there. Softened and sharpened. Complete in my duality.

tumblehome – moondream – sleep.

Perhaps they could have managed, the three of them. But not four.

It was a quiet, bloody day when Ash found out about me. The previous night's hunt was the hunger moon, the February moon, the shortest and the sharpest. Skinning her kill, she lost herself in the texture of

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meat and sinew. She was happy that day. An unsteady happiness, the way that anything pulled in two directions is easily unbalanced. As she worked, blood pooled in her palms and dried in the creases of her knuckles.

She wiped her free hand dreamily on her apron and caught her breath. She stared down at the red smears. When had she last bled? It had been – two months, three? No, she knew. There was no use in telling herself stories. In her head she listed the next steps: pee on a stick, call Caleb, folic acid. Maternity jeans. Moses basket.

Starscent – meatsweet – moondream.

There in her hanging shed, she placed her knife calmly on the bench. She pressed her hands flat to her belly.

It was a strange day for Caleb too. There was a clan reunion at a hotel on the banks of Loch Ness. Hordes of Canadians and Americans descended on the rib, dressed in their clan tartan, each boasting about their Scaddish heritage. Caleb breathed through his mouth to avoid the reek of mothballs. He swayed with the waves along the rib's aisle, checking the fastenings on the lifejackets, and wondered whether he'd have got more tips if he'd borrowed a mate's wedding kilt. Next time, he thought. I'll remember for next time.

So there was Caleb, loch-spray catching in his eyelashes, legs akimbo on the deck. So there was Ash, hands bloodied from skinning the hunt, hair ponytailed and brow furrowed. Inside my mother, I shifted.

When he got home, she met him at the door holding a piece of plastic the size of her finger. Surprised and tired, he thought it was