

The *American Short Fiction*
Pinup Series presents . . .



Miss November

Arizona

by Rachel Khong

1. **Where I live in Arizona, the lawns are aquarium floors:** all gravel, punctuated by the occasional upright succulent. In recent weeks, a coyote has deemed it his duty to howl at quarter to eleven each night.
2. My research on coyote-human attacks does not confirm my primary hypothesis, which is: this coyote wants to devour me. Evidence points unequivocally to the contrary. In the U.S., in the past fifty years, it seems, there have only been two known coyote attacks.
3. The body of texts in support of my second theory—the animal is my ex-boyfriend, in actuality a shape-shifter, come from Boston to haunt me—is large.
4. A woman comes by selling tubes of charm. Pheromones are what she calls them, with authority. The only pheromones I know about are the ones that make my period cycle in tandem with my sisters' and mother's, which was what happened during the six months I lived at home. I moved away and now my monthly rhythms are my own.
5. Failure in logic pertaining to ex-boyfriend, who cares for me no longer: Why would he be here?

6. I have a habit of— I have a habit. I have a habit of telling this terrible joke. I am not a true nun, though I dressed as one for Halloween. My then boyfriend was Captain Von Trapp.

7. The look, sound, and feel of “then boyfriend” is much preferred.

8. I thought this one was in the bag. One night, when he thought I was asleep, he said, “You’re too perfect.”

9. If a coyote comes near I am to shout, not run. Or at the very least: shout before running.

10. I grew up! A long time ago I stopped buying low-fat English muffins.

11. In the news today, report of coyote bite: A boy from Fallbrook, California, is bitten on the calf while sleeping on the deck.

12. My new neighbors are a family of four. Their first week in town they bring me a Bundt cake. “Them coyotes—” says the father. “They always this noisy?” Except the way he says “coyote” rhymes with “Hi oat.” The cake looks like a giant donut and smells like a lemon.

13. A whole cake. A *hole* cake. Ha ha. It goes without saying that I eat more than is sightly.

14. The mayor of Tempe has approved the opening of a zoo within city limits. Should I apply for a job? On my resume, under my degree, I can now list: “second grade teacher.”

15. Every Wednesday, another of the teachers, Ms. Grover, asks if I want to climb at Ladies’ Night at an indoor rock climbing facility. Over and over she asks. Over and over I say no. What is my problem?

16. This Halloween I tape strips of bubble wrap to an umbrella and call myself a jellyfish. I had considered donning my old habit, but drove it to Williams instead and chucked it into the Grand Canyon. Goddamn myself, I thought afterward. I could have pawned that habit. I spend the entire Halloween night with tired arms, drinking beers in Grover’s living room with a fifth grade teacher I always catch glancing my way. We are the youngest of the teachers. He is not unattractive. He says, “What are you doing this weekend?” “Oh,

lots,” can you believe, is what I say. Grover, who is forty-something but dressed as Wonder Woman, has taken off her top and is crying.

17. “Are you OK?” My mother calls to ask. “I can schedule your teeth cleaning for Christmas.”

18. I practice saying “Coyote” like “Hi oat.” I do it in front of the mirror, but cannot bear the sight of more than two run-throughs. It is unnatural.

19. What I actually do this weekend is I finish that cake and, later that night, absorbed in Oprah, forget to floss. I call home to ask: “Did you schedule that appointment?” “What honey? What’s that?” says my mother. “Can I call you back?” They are at the mall, shopping for a new cordless phone. My sisters: formidable.

20. “You never answer the phone,” is how he explains his presence at my door. I try to hide the beef jerky in my hand but he is oblivious, awaiting an invitation inside. “How do you pronounce ‘coyote’?” I ask.

21. “You have a nice place,” he says. “That’s a nice lawn.”

22. This year his fifth graders are learning to keep their work bound in three ring binders, with subject dividers. They’re also learning fractions. “What’s a heart divided,” I say, and he says, “What? What was that?” “Nothing.”

23. What, now, does he want? A dinner invitation? My pantry contains dried mangoes and Grape Nuts. The fridge holds a gallon of rancid buttermilk, remnant of a more ambitious week. I see him to the door, say “See you on Monday,” and shut it quickly.

24. Good God, they are *howling*. What’s so funny? Or sad? I turn the radio on. I, who never wants to call anybody, now want to call someone. It’s late in Boston but my younger sister, age twenty, is of course awake. Von Trapp has a new girlfriend, she reports. He has asked her father for her hand in marriage, but so far no ring.

25. Strange for this time of year: The weatherman says, “It’s going to be a wet weekend,” and chuckles, like it’s the name of an amusement park. The rain continues into Monday, and at lunchtime I remain in the classroom,

considering my sack lunch and staring at my blank daybook, when without my noticing the fifth grade teacher enters.

26. He has a word problem for me: A grocery store has a sale on bananas. There are 636 bananas. Buying a bunch of six gets you the sale price. What will you do you do with all your ass-cheap bananas? "Banana bread?" I try. "Affirmative," he says.

27. After school he walks me home. "A hospital has thirty-three patients in need of heart transplants," he says while we wait for the Walk signal. "Too many steak frites?" I say. "Heart failure," he nods. He starts to say something about donor hearts but before he finishes I interrupt with the answer.

28. "Disaster?" is my best educated guess.

29. "Not at first," he says, before he lets himself inside, and I follow.

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