1. Winter Solstice

The sound of splintering wood doesn't register at first.

She's watching the woman in yoga pants continue down the sidewalk, the knockoff tote bag banging against her hip. The woman just gave Quince the Stare—which to be honest she loves. Last week she got her hair dyed red and green, and her brother says she looks like an elven Christmas bauble. She was actually going for more of a pomander look, but instead of aromatic cloves inserted into a piece of fruit, her nose and ears are studded with implant-grade titanium steel. Now that she's turned eighteen, piercings are her own business.

Hence, the Stare.

Her sister, Thisby, would've shouted at the woman, something like *Heigh-Ho, reeky pignut, we're not afraid of your lunatic stares.* She would've gotten the insult right, but would've butchered Brutus' line. Thisby never got Shakespeare's quotes quite right, despite their parents raising their three children in the Bard's echo chamber.

Quince has been thinking a lot about her older sister in the last three months. Well, really, for her whole life, but more so now that Thisby's dead and gone.

"Did you see that, Oberon?" she asks her large furry dog who

strains against his harness and woofs, presumably at the bane of his existence, the squirrels scampering in the trees above.

His bark turns strident as he abruptly lunges, hauling Quince stumbling down the sidewalk. Looking up, she finally sees what he sees and hears what he hears: the deep-chested growls coming from muzzles thrust between fence boards, and the screech of nails as the wood protests and separates.

