



FLASH FICTION

*Delve deeper into the world of **SPLICED**,
JON MCGORAN'S debut YA novel, with*

CALL ME SLY

Everything was different. He knew it, even before he remembered last night. He could feel it in his bones.

He wiggled his toes and fingers, flexed his arms and his legs. His muscles and joints ached like he'd just run a marathon. But he felt strong, energized. Ready to run another one.

"There he is," Donovan said softly, leaning forward in his chair. "Wasn't too bad, was it?"

Flashes of the night before came back to him. It had been scary and painful, but he'd kept it together. And every time he had opened his eyes, Donovan had been right there.

"No. Not too bad." He ran his hands up his arms, feeling the changes: narrower, sharper, but more muscular. "I have to pee."

"Easy," Donovan said, helping him up. "You've got to get used to yourself."

The floor wasn't where it should be at first—like when you're at the top of the stairs and you think there's one more step. But by the time he crossed to the bathroom, he felt steadier.

The hand he put on the doorknob seemed leaner, more defined, but he wasn't sure. Maybe it had always looked like that.

Once inside, he willed himself not to look at his reflection. Not yet. He needed to take care of his bladder before anything else. Which would involve a bit of a reveal, as well. Things could go always wrong with a splice, and there were some things he was more afraid of going wrong than others.

Standing at the toilet, he took a deep breath, and then took care of business. "Oh, thank god," he said, steadying himself with a hand against the wall and feeling several kinds of relief all at once.

He washed his hands and dried them on his sweatpants. Then, finally, he looked in the mirror.

It was a moment he'd imagined for so long. And now here it was.

His first impression was that he didn't look like himself, but then he thought, yes, I do. For the very first time.

He'd seen a fox once, as a child. His mom had taken him outside the city to a park near where she grew up, in some zurb neighborhood that was still hanging on. A place where his dad wouldn't think to look for them. She did that sometimes, while waiting for dad to calm down or pass out.

She'd lain down in the weeds, eyes closed, and he'd wandered off. And there it was, looking right at him, unlike anything he'd ever seen.

It wasn't like a dog or a cat. It was wild. And it wasn't like a rabbit or a squirrel, either. It was a predator.

Its eyes were gentle and playful and smart, cute but vaguely dangerous, too. It scared him but thrilled him, captivated him. He felt an instant connection. Then it was gone, off on its own, wherever it wanted. Free.

He became obsessed: fascinated to learn that foxes used to be everywhere, and devastated to discover they hadn't been seen in so long that most people—his parents included—assumed he'd seen a cat or a rat. Or that he'd made the whole thing up.

And no one had seen one since. As far as he knew, that might have been the last of them. Until now. Because one was staring back at him in the mirror.

He ran his hands over the new angles of his face, the soft hair that dusted it—fur, more accurately—white along his neck and jaw, rust-colored above his pointy nose, covering his cheeks, his forehead, mixing in with the darker hair on his head. He lowered his head to watch his hands exploring the combination of colors and textures.

When he looked up, his face was transformed yet again, this time by a grin. And more striking than the canines was the joy it revealed. That might have been the biggest change of all.

Donovan was waiting outside the door with a grin of his own, pleased with his handiwork and happy for his friend. “So, what'll we call you then?”

With so much else on his mind, he hadn't even thought about that. Glancing back at his reflection, he said, “Call me Sly.”

JON MCGORAN has written several books for adults, including the D. H. Dublin series and the eco-thrillers *Drift* and *Deadout*. He is also the author of *The Dead Ring*, based on the television series *The Blacklist*. *Spliced* is his first book for young adults. For more on Jon, visit him at jonmcgoran.com and follow him on Twitter, @JonMcGoran.

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