

A Fucking Riot

By Austen Tucker · 2026

Stonewall was a riot. So is this. The finale folds in Obergefell, because the numbers I carry in my body and the medical condition I have to defend in every conversation are the same fight in two registers.

We Belong

You never stop being trans. You get less visible with time, sure, but the feeling of being that Strange Other Thing never quite goes away. No matter how hard you try to forget it, the world finds ways to remind you that you are a monster and you don't deserve to exist.

It comes down to numbers.

30%. The percentage of the voting public that holds unfavorable or very unfavorable views of trans people.

I feel weird talking to children. Kids wave at me, strike up conversations passing by. My friends and family's kids make me uncomfortable. I am a monster, after all. What if one of their parents realized they were talking to a pervert in a dress? What if they took action?

46%. The percentage who don't think I should use their bathroom.

Every time I'm in a bathroom in a non-queer space, I get in and I get out. No eye contact. I'm out and proud, and it's a coin-flip on whether the next sixty seconds go sour. Don't even start me on red-state bathrooms. God forbid a bathroom in a place of worship.

2 bathroom doors. 5 times the fashion choices to get wrong. Infinite messages from the media that my body is ugly as hell.

Being trans fills me with paranoia, sure, but goddamn — losing male privilege sucks. People stop respecting my opinions. I get stuck with the woman's work at Thanksgiving. And bra shopping — is there anything more awkward than thumbing through racks of those things among other women, trying to find a shame slip for these bouncing fatbags on my chest?

1 realization: gender is a whole load of bullshit.

thorn in your side

I had my tonsils taken out around the time I started HRT. I'd complained to family members that I was having trouble swallowing. My doctor aunt took a look and gave me the most savage dressing-down for not handling this sooner. "They're touching!" she shrieked. "Why in the hell haven't you had those out yet?"

I wonder how that conversation would have gone if we treated tonsils the way we treat trans medical issues. Indulge me.

It starts with my aunt shining a light down my throat. The tonsils are there, huge and red, leaking pus. She clucks her tongue. "Maybe they just like being swollen from time to time. You could let them swell up on the weekends. Preferably not in town. Hey — you could go to the next town over. Nobody would see your tonsils there."

Dejected, I go to a doctor specializing in tonsil medicine. He has to hide his clinic in the middle of a residential area for fear of being protested out of business. He sends me to a tonsil therapist — he calls himself a "tonselor" with the same smug look as a dog who just let loose the raunchiest fart ever smelled by man or beast. I proceed to pay over a thousand dollars in therapy bills to talk about how my tonsils were never normal to begin with. Yes, the tonsils are always this inflamed. Yes, I can get by with gigantic swollen tonsils clogging up the back of my throat. Yes, I would still be much happier if they were just gone.

The tonselor hands me a referral to a tonsil specialist. I'm given meds to reduce the swelling. I'm to live a tonsil-free life for a year before they'll recommend surgery. They call this the real-life tonsilless experience.

Relieved, I begin the process of telling every person in my life that I'm going to be living without tonsils. The reaction is stunned silence.

"I had no idea you wanted to have your tonsils out." I gag on the lump in the back of my throat. "Now you're just playing it up for drama."

"But you always seemed so happy with your tonsils." They don't know I haven't been able to eat a bite of food larger than my thumb without gagging for the past few years.

"What will the neighborhood think if you start going around without tonsils?" Because obviously my tonsils are the property of the commons. Just like every other tonsil in the world.

"Have you tried just not having swollen tonsils?" Said in love. They're trying to help. They live just fine with their tonsils. Can't I just learn to love mine? It's not healthy to hate your tonsils. They read it in a book.

Over and over I defend my medical condition. I read up on the history of tonsillectomy hoping to cut the conversations off with facts. It doesn't help. Everyone, regardless of medical experience, has to weigh in

on the state of my tonsils. The ones who don't weigh in often act like they're doing me a favor: "Hey buddy, I'm down with you having your tonsils taken out. I'm so nice. Don't you think I'm nice for not jumping down your throat about wanting your tonsils out — oh, right. Swelling. Not like I could jump down your throat anyway."

Eventually people will complain that you talk about your tonsils too much. You'll throw your hands in the air and give up. They'll chide you for not trying to help them understand your peculiar tonsils. It's not their fault your tonsils are swollen. They just want to understand.

"But when are you going to have... you know?" They nod their head back like swallowing a hard pebble. "Are you going to go all the way?"

"The surgery" becomes the drumbeat of every conversation. A heavy word. Judged. It separates the genuine from the part-time tonsillitis-goers. Everyone has an opinion — some good, some bad — and there's no way to tell who will roll your way without telling everyone about your tonsils and hoping they stick around.

Until one day, after being ambushed by a double-team intervention from two people you thought were okay with everything, you break down in tears. It's tiring, defending your tonsillectomy to every person you've ever known. You just want to stop gagging when you eat. What's so hard to understand?

Some cry with you in that moment. Some get that your tonsils are just different. Others shun you for wanting to mutilate your body. Until one day, after having this conversation with every person you've ever known, you just decide: fuck it. I'm going to find folks who understand tonsils and make a new family. Because it's too goddamn tiring to struggle with your tonsils and coddle people who aren't quite okay with your decision to treat them.

If we treated any other physical or mental malady the way we treat trans people, there'd be a fucking riot.