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FICTION: THE SURGERY



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BY MAYA JEWELL ZELLER COMMENT COUNT

An Unfinished Office Girl/University Hero Interlude (in parts)

Office Girl (woman? girl?—girl again? woman?) drags her gothic body across a continent. She feels like a monster. She feels like the face of Terry Sawchuck. She picks up *Frankenstein*. *Moby Dick*. *Perma Red*. Everything chafes like the dull blade of a butter knife. She's not winning.

It's easy to fall in love, she says. Watch! She stands on the edge of a volcano and jumps. They see her body combust in the nacreous flames below. Holy shit! they say. That was spectacular! they say. (No one hears from her again.) That was some exit, they say.

*

Office Girl falls a long time, through the volcanic pipe—past the cooled tephra, the active magma, dikes and laccoliths and sill and stock and past xenoliths and right through the batholith (the best way around is always through, said someone, somewhere, a conservationist or naturalist or maybe a President, quoted to some middle schooler who could not let it go). After several years, Office Girl emerges on the other side of the volcano, like the inside of a person where the undiscovered parts are ripped and broken and torn open by love until they glitter and then they pulse like so many star thoughts.

*

A heron flies over and says, C'mon, Office Woman, you can do better anyway. For one, he isn't really that interesting. Does he have a beak?

Well . . . no, says Office Woman.

Does he have claws?

Well . . . no, says Office Woman.

Then how does he open the fish meat of you?, asks the heron.

I don't know, she mutters, gazing at the windmills chopping at the sky.

I don't know. . .

*

I had to stop listening to music, with all its knives and forks, says Office Girl.

I had to stop because it was fileting me and eating me, she says.

Oh, says the heron. I wondered where that chunk of you went, gesturing at the gaping hole under her arm, just to the left of the ribcage.

Oh that, says Office Girl. No, that's just where I let a carnivorous rabbit gnaw at me for sustenance.

Huh, says the heron.

*

Oh, darling, says Office Girl, wouldn't you like to gut me? Here is a scalpel and here is a plastic tablecloth. You can put all my innards here.

University Hero is gentle when he lifts her to the plastic. He is gentle as he preps her body: swabs the tender places with saline, the more public with alcohol. He kisses her with a mouthful of whiskey. Mmm, she says, malt? Which Scottish province? Oh, darling, he tells her, this is from everywhere, deep in the earth.

When her body is prepped he begins each incision with a line from one of her favorite poems or his favorite stories. My God, she says, are you my God?

There is no God, he tells her, gently, lifting out her heart.

Each part he treats with the care it deserves, then places it on the table, in turn. He never takes out more than one part at a time. He filets each quietly and completely, and no sooner does he make the first cut than that part tells a story. Each of her parts tells a story. Would you like to hear the story each organ tells? *Check back soon.*

*

Suddenly Office Woman screams. "Oh my God!! I have to stop letting you cut me open! Put down that blade!!!"

University Hero pulls the knife back from her spleen—a blue glittering thing the color of sky on a day before you know anything about the way colors work, maybe when you're eight or nine?

Why?, he asks, bewildered.

Each cut in her has created an equal and opposite chasm of joy inside him.

He quotes Newton's Laws to her, straight from Wikipedia. He could probably find a better source, but he's lazy when it comes to matters like this:

First law:	In an inertial reference frame , an object either remains at rest or continues to move at a constant velocity , unless acted upon by a force . ^{[2][3]}
Second law:	In an inertial reference frame, the vector sum of the forces F on an object is equal to the mass <i>m</i> of that object multiplied by the acceleration a of the object: F = <i>m</i> a . (It is assumed here that the mass <i>m</i> is constant - see below .)
Third law:	When one body exerts a force on a second body, the second body simultaneously exerts a force equal in magnitude and opposite in direction on the first body.

He cannot understand why she wouldn't want to be cut open like this. The vectors! The forces! "The second body simultaneously exerts a force equal in magnitude and opposite in direction on the first body!" It's like you take a bee hive apart and find a pistil & stamen! It's like your ribs are the veins of a giant skunk cabbage! It's like falling through a volcano, being burned to your bones! He grabs the knife and says "hold still, love. You're going to adore this or else."

Maya Jewell Zeller is the author of the interdisciplinary collaboration (with visual artist Carrie DeBacker) *Alchemy For Cells & Other Beasts* (Entre Rios Books, 2017), the chapbook *Yesterday*, the *Bees* (Floating Bridge Press, 2015), and the poetry collection *Rust Fish* (Lost Horse Press, 2011). Recipient of a Promise Award from the Sustainable Arts Foundation as well as a Residency in the H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest, Maya teaches for Central Washington University and edits poetry for Scablands Books.

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