

Antibody

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Body-Focused Repetitive Behavior

Obsessive and un-

becoming, I denounce the mirror's
incessant framing, its crooked technology, to take
what's predictable but tell it slant. If I'm being honest,
I leave my face by the door with my shoes, I was taught not to mix
pambahay with *panlabas*, became possessed by their distinction,
the body draped and painted is useless unless seen.
I want to be left alone, to be ugly in peace, I've crafted
ritual out of duress, I itch out of my dress
and take time with what I've allowed: my hands
in protest against the bigger picture, who cares
who tomorrow delivers to my doorstep; tonight, I don't
want to hurt, so the ablution is prolonged, is a long drawn-out
study in excess it's almost absolution parading as sin
to destroy what you've been given is a gift
not everyone can have. I want to be kind
in the way I know how, but like a wound I can't
leave alone, I stun the picture silent and work it
to its core, want to secure the source and extract
the essence, I pick and prod at the surface, my resentment
finely practiced, I upturn all the scabs, like water
that seeks its own level, like a river that is not yet a river,
what's mirrored is meaningless, if hands were meant to take
they can also take away. The solution, simply,
is to stop, the hands are a tool of the mind and not
the other way around. The clock is ticking:
I'm repentant for what's to come,
I look at what I've become
and roll my eyes.

America Has No Face

as if the face in the glass is the one I remember; as if mirrors betrayed the same view; as if tender in translation; as if eyeless in a crowd; as if every white man could be my father; as if genetically sound; as if unshaped by assumption; as if defaced by supposition; as if looks could kill; as if the face bore betrayal; as if stares could disassemble; as if the mirror betrayed memory; as if memory betrayed the same view; as if every mixed-race half-breed could be me; as if their faces were mine; as if the one I wore I wore right

A Brief Medical History

Let me see—there was the brief bout
of pneumonia at six or seven, I was alone,
the house too big for me, I asked for a sister.
A few cases of bronchitis, weakened lungs
from my mother, but no need for an inhaler.
My joints hyperextend, no broken bones, but a predicted
future of early-onset arthritis. I have stabbed myself trying
to dislodge an avocado seed from the flesh. I am prone
to high fevers. My father has a bad back but refuses
to talk about it, or when he nearly slammed
into the sink when it gave out, or in the midst
of a storm, refused to swim back to shore.
My mother told me that, wanted me to blame him
when she said I went crazy like him, acting up
all American, and why don't I take something
herbal, don't I know I'm ruining my liver?
I've been medicated on-and-off since eighteen.
I'm terrified of burns and scalds, I laugh
as a coping mechanism, I feel nauseous
before a panic attack. I've cried on top of men
I didn't want but needed, I've been touched at
seventeen by a man who didn't want me when
he saw me naked. I've worn makeup to bed
after sex, but really I cannot sleep next to a body
I don't love, my nerves are alive. There are scars
I regret and others I don't. There are nights I bargain
with my body until the mirror makes sense, my breath
on the glass my only proof of life. There are nights
I lose hours tearing at my skin, like Narcissus
digging for something beneath his own reflection.
There are three pills I take before bed, sometimes four. I think

I have been numbed by pharmaceuticals, but fear the alternative.
During emergencies, I am calm: the first time I am pulled
over, the first time my sister stiffened and convulsed, her lips
turned blue. When I cannot think a complete thought, I blame
the drugs instead of my own refusal. I am stubborn
when I am sure of love and soft when I want it.
My mouth is missing eight teeth, but the gaps are gone,
I can hardly remember.

Change of Hands

To begin: the famished shapes my body
makes to circumvent

shame. When the spotlight
carves me out of shadow, I step forward.

I am a great contortionist, a performer
by birth. Let me show you

all the costumes I wear, my sequined
varieties of could-be fantasies

cocooning my vulnerable
narcissism: I want them all

to see me, tell me where my face
is beneath the gauze, show me

the eyes following my coming
-to and into the room. Like waking up

into a dream, I defer to the logic
of stares splitting me in half,

it's painless, really, all veins
and organs beneath organza, unhinging

all the moving parts I could do without.
A crowd favorite: to split without a rasp of resistance

means they forget they're being made
to watch. The applause comes after

my show of hands: I wear so many
it's hard to keep track of all my tricks.

My favorite is when I hold the wrong
tools but still try to use them

to orchestrate my undressing. See,
if I respected myself like I did another

man's property, I wouldn't be here fumbling
to reattach the joints. It's not like

I like it, being naked on stage, but without
all the lights they can't see I'm earnest

about it, the job I do
is simple: I'm twisting all the wires

barbed, I dig a hole and try
to claw my way back out.

Performance

The body threaded through with wire. The body with a marionette's precision. Positions without hesitation. Learns to move with resolution, when the situation allows. To ignore the blinking caution. To gallop into occasion, to split the junction. To sew up the seam. To gnaw off the thread. The body maneuvers without detection. Modifies the execution. Bows and bends the wires. The body dances to the rhythm of its rewiring. To the spark of malfunction. To the whirr of its machine mouth. The body learns to take its medicine. Learns to taste sweetness, learns the difference from rot. The body wired through with dead ends. The body moving without the puppeteer's instruction. With the learned dependence on recognition. With the frayed thread of devotion. The body awaits the splintered rays of morning. Awaits touch with a marionette's devotion. Repeats the run without hesitation. And moves without blinking.

Self-Assessment

Choose an image

Please check the box

That best describes your symptoms

From 1 to 5

How often is a mood a tidal force

How well does this sentence describe you

I need to be punished

Holds the tongue hostage

But how often do you curl into its knife edge

Other times, none of the above

The claustrophobic as a checkbox

Fluorescent doctor's office where

I'm tender as an apology

For someone I've forgotten

From 1 to 5 how terrified

Am I of being abandoned

Again it's easier to recover

From what you've wrecked yourself

So I've rewired my devices

Treatment can help people understand

Their compulsions: I look at

My hands and cannot recognize

Reduced feelings of helplessness

The recurring thoughts of imperfection

Yes or no can you relate

To this scenario not looking

Anymore in the mirror for fear

After all is said and done

Of how it animates your mouth

In the end what other names have you called out

Have you been promiscuous

Or rot your way through someone's teeth

Been hungry or exercised an injury

Do you recognize the

Washed-out wrung-out exterior

Excoriated to exhume

If yes how long

Have you felt this way

If yes have you intentionally or on purpose

No Good Man Wants to Hurt Me

I.

Memory fine-toothed,
I learn to miss what threatens
to rot without recognition:
my heart a black river where
I go missing without a cause

II.

In my dreams my father has died
at least five deaths, says he'll see
me in another life. When?
There's this one and the ones
we left behind. My father does it
so well: he teaches me how to forget

III.

To the Patron Saint
of the Abandoned, how I bow
to thee, carve myself
in your image, and envy
those who follow you

IV.

In a different memory the man
refuses touch because
he is afraid

V.

To tell a story: to dig until
the hands are raw.
To tell a story (the hands
come up so empty
the hands are gone)

VI.

I raise my hand to my image:
broken gate, rust, land
I must tame, wild brush,
invasive species, antibody, goodbye,
broken, grate, bust, scan,
same, same, same, lust
for nothing, mistaken
body, so I lie—

VII.

Spitting image of a splitting image,
I half my eye;
I wave

VIII.

IF I DON'T ACT ON THIS / IF I DON'T
MOVE THE WAY I WANT TO MOVE /
I KNOW THAT I WILL DIE UNTIL I DIE

IX.

Broken glass—I take my opportunity
with touch—I clean it up—to nurse
the wound all night—to hurt something
to heal—to call it progress