

Such Beautiful Machines

I threw my incomplete thoughts into an alleyway. Those authoritarian sentences. What imaginations have they loitered in since?

This thought began at the locksmith's on a Tuesday. In lieu of a receipt he took a business card, calculated the difference between the amount I paid him (\$5) and the amount he returned in change (\$3.65), and slid it across the counter.

At first I didn't understand the gesture.

Contentment in fragments.

I sought you.

Without knowing where I was.

Main Street. Okay

Everything stops, then resumes abruptly.

We put lunch on hold and camp out in the YA fantasy section of the bookstore where we gossip and read Fanny Howe.

I continue working through the body of thought, a machine that believes it cannot be interrupted. I write to lose the thought. The fantasy shatters within minutes. I write to be reminded of the body hunched over the keyboard, the body who cleans the office between the hours of nine PM and two AM, the body of my nightmares.

Through what channels did gender enter the body?

I feel nauseous asking

I dare anyway like a bore.

As the train arrives above ground

Unsettling the quiet ways of life

Our converging line of sight

Like a bridge, like stages

I cross the bridge but my body hasn't caught up

Meaning: I am my body

I am not its image.

Its disintegration: vibrant. Loosened by politics, hopelessly frayed.

I am a cyborg of the present.

Yes, a postcolonial robot who loses out the movie role to Lucy Liu. Since puberty I've been told I look like her. I am older now, secure in myself, so I can say this. I am a girl who looks nothing like Lucy Liu but I was a girl who entered the visual vocabulary of many other girls the moment someone points at me, says: Yes, you look like Lucy Liu.

Yes mouthing yes nodding yes every affirmative yes is the shape of a yes.

For years I resented Lucy Liu. I masturbated to Lucy Liu.

Now I know better. Conceal the jawline acne, the discoloration, the redness. Then I shape my brows. I color them: turquoise, pink, magenta. A color less than infinite, more than enough.

Here you are, prettier and older, as a young Lucy Liu.¹

¹ It's not that I'm prettier with makeup, it's that I only begin to recognize the contours of my monstrosity, my flaws, after applying gold highlight. The light resplendent, coy and petty. Pretty little thing. And I lap it up. As drag queen Farrah Moan says, *There truly is no such thing as too much highlighter.*

There is something

very gentle about the very monstrous.

The very monstrous is often very gentle .

My feet

against

your chest.

The page

will not relinquish its control of the domain. I do not describe my feet. They are cold, perhaps anemic. I do not describe the space. I have been floating for the past five hours. We are no longer breathing in the presence of an other. The anchoring is difficult, but I am not nervous about sinking.

Is the monster truly different or is she simply better at exposing her difference?

I'm absolutely certain the cyborg is a woman. We are lying in my bed and you ask me to explain.
I don't want to explain.

I'm brushing my hair
I haven't figured this out
no one's asked
before.

In a couple of years I will return to the cyborg. This is after three moves around the country, three or four service jobs. This is after I stop bleaching my hair, ready at last to confront my mortality. This is after I decided I would learn how to love you. We bake often and call each other as often as possible. To see her again is strange. She's changed too. More guarded, more sullen, she allows me to meet her at a cafe. We eat sandwiches and split a slice of German chocolate cake. She's been growing. She is working on a text called *Louise, or: Memphis Opera Blues*. She has adopted a child. She says the responsibility has given her a new way of relating to herself. What does this mean? She says I'll have to find out. I can't: share. She keeps house. Sweeping, washing dishes, folding laundry. The usual work. For the next week, I try and fail to arrange a phone call. Each time she backs out, unaware of how the day has crept up. "I have so many chores to get done." "The child has been fussy and won't nap." When she finally returns my email, she informs me that she stopped eating meat, then became an exclusive carnivore, then quit all animal products. Right now dieting preoccupies her. So does smoking. Her hair is thin and her lashes have fallen out. "I am keeping it together even if no one cares to ask," she writes. Sincerely, with humility. The text has been scrapped. The text called "Living," or "Living is a Woman's Work," or "Play Now, Play Never." The life of a woman of a cyborg passing by and all this time I was afraid to approach her, like someone in love.