

Soliloquy

by Tess Kerbel

Uterus

I'm sorry I tried to sell you once, for forty cents,
to a lover who laughed and said he would keep you in a box beside his bed.
I said I didn't want you, said I didn't need you. Forgive me;
it was careless. A callous moment. I know that now.

It was just a joke.

The thing is, when I was young enough to believe what I was told,
I asked my generation about the true nature of the feminine principle,
and they told me it was nurture – weak, hateful nurture,
as soft as a rotting peach and just as useless
when it comes to curing AIDS or cancer
and I believed them, and I blamed you. And I wished you into

emptiness. In ignorance, I wished you into this.

Oh, and all the prayers, I almost forgot about the prayers,
on those warm, lithe mornings when the sun streamed through the curtains
and hummed against his skin. There were condoms sure, and sugar pills,
but I still prayed. I prayed that you would not do
what they had promised you would always do.
My one devout, ritualistic moment. Answered.

Of course, the hatred was unnecessary.
I didn't have to hate you.
It's just that, like the women Margaret Atwood interviewed,

I never wanted children, I wanted books.
I wanted manifestos, manuscripts.
They're much cleaner, for one thing.
Birth is piss and shit and blood and all those doctors all around us
with their fingers wading through the soft, wet guts of us,
is that really what you want?

I'm sorry, fuck, I said I'm sorry.

And yet still, still you lie there, mute and weak,
punishing me for my facetious wishes and all my careless prayers,
with a thousand searing cysts of sadness and resentment
and I still hate you, you have no right

to threaten me with infertility,
to remove my right to choose.

And the sun still comes through the curtains,
And that same lover still wants to love me, but
I don't want to be loved. I am incapable, like you.
These days, the light lies silent on his skin.

And the doctor, who believes in somatoform disorders,
says there is little good news she can give,
she says that I must go within to dissolve the mental cause.

Look, I'm sorry, that's the main thing.
To you. To all of you.
To all the uteri out there.
All the rest has just been
bravado, indulgence and confusion.

And here, on this operating table,
I'm nothing but another awkward,
abject artist with an overwhelming urge
to open up my cervix to the world.
And that means manuscripts
are just the same as children.
Forgive me, Annie Sprinkle,
I think that it meant more in 1979.

Pancreas

If we could, we would leave each other, you and I,
we, who do each other so much wrong.

Me, smothering you, for all these careless years, with my fat butters
and sugar jellies, with my sweet wine venoms and unnatural milks.

And you, pulling at my softest places,
pulling at my stomach, calling out for food.

And then, all at once, losing consciousness in the scarlet dark,
and poisoning our blood.

And the doctor tells me that your name, in Greek, means meat, all meat,
and that I must be careful with you now.

You are bruised fruit, it seems, soft, damaged flesh, and on the verge
of rancidness.

And so now I cradle you, self consciously, and carry you
from careful moment to careful moment.

And drink only water, and take your tablets for you.
And let you sleep, warm between my belly and my spine.

Tongue

Poppet, how could you betray me? We swore to never speak of death,
to speak of only pleasant things, and softly so,

so softly, and only when we must. I trusted you. You took my gifts –
cinnamon butter, sweet plums and ginger,

and we were intimate – so intimate you placed your food between my teeth,
and kissed the crumbs from the creases of my mouth.

Just yesterday, we lolled together, sipped soup and coffee, smoked.
You touched my lips, lay down in me, and sang –

hummed me hymns and quiet mumble music. And innocently,
you asked me, why the word ‘cake’ doesn’t taste of cream.

I did not suspect that last night, in our bedroom, you’d betray me –
lash at my soft palate with your thick, bloodmuscle weight

and howl out all the things that we swore not to say,
to our lovers, to our friends – to the whole house, while I slept.

Heart

You have never been so listless. You are just a murmur now,
a rumour of movement, soft pumping a slow, dark denseness through me.

And all of our bright, beating nights, this is what they have come down to – cool sheets
and shallow breathing.

But as I lie here, wound around you, I remember all of the pulsating
years we shared, pounding down the midnight alleys

cutting meth and other uppers with your blood in railway tunnels,
and in and out of pubs, drunk and fever dancing, slick fucking

on the dance floors and hallucinating love –
until you beat your raw bloodfist against my chest, and shook me

with your panic pounding, until I was terrified that you might up and.

Skin

I can't even touch your softest places,
where, smooth, you travel into me,
and are just as warm and wet as summer butter,
without thinking of your flaws.

Damn it, all this porn that we keep burning;
should be *Cleo, Dolly, Girlfriend*,
fucking *Girl Friend* – like some sick simulacrum,
like Orwell's Ministry of Truth.
Hustler, at least, is half honest with itself.

Honestly? I don't know how they got to me.
I know all the arguments. And yet,
still I tear and tear the hair from you,
and hate that I've done it and do it again
and hate that I've done it and do it again
and hate that I've done it
because every single time I do it
it represents another battle lost
to the flawless images that follow me
from the bathroom to the bedroom,
from the bus stop to the bank,
with scarlet lips and lies –
more lies between their smooth, white thighs
than the thousand things they sell
to cut you with.

And everywhere I go
I see women with bodies well cared for,
and kept healthy and clean.
And yes, I want to tell them
that they're beautiful,
lest they don't know,
lest they thrash about inside themselves,
but to be frank, I fear them.
I fear their eyes on me,
their inward hate turned outwards,
as I turn my eyes on you.

And so, instead, I feel pleased with winter,
and that itself is shame, for I am pleased to cover you
with sleeves and jeans and coats,
because the truth is, I'm ashamed of you,
ashamed to show that you belong to me,

and ashamed to show that I'm ashamed.

And my best friend, who's the first to remind me
that he's been a feminist since way back when,
says that I should cast off the shackles
of concealers, waxes and blades,
and be more like the women he chooses.
But I've noticed, he only chooses women
with clear skin, and fine, fair hair.

And so I just scrape and scrape the hair from you,
and hate that I've done it and do it again.
And yes, today I do want to press a little harder
with my lubricated blade, I want to find out
what it is that lies beneath you, not the organs
or the spider veins, not the bones like twigs,
like white, dead wood, but something new,
some other feminine, not eternal, but my own.

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