

Mass: 1

The Body Politic

Here she is. She has woken earlier, from a particularly bad nightmare, to find it not yet morning or anywhere near. She has sat up in bed and waited as her eyes slowly adjusted to that dull glow that always accompanies city nights, suburbs notwithstanding. Then she has stood, removed her pyjamas, placed them in a neatly folded pile at the foot of the bed, and carefully, noiselessly, exited her room, descended the staircase, inched the back door open (a task more difficult than all the above twice over), and burst into the world beyond.

She does not know why she did it, only that there is something in the cool night air and soft glow of the moon, a something sorely lacking in her waking life these days, and she soon found herself dancing, filled with an energy not her own.

At first she was content racing circles around the lawn, round, round, until she could not breathe and fell gasping to the turf, basking in a full-body wetness, stretching fingers and toes like roots to drink in the dew. Then she tried doing handstands, but this was less rewarding and had threatened exasperation, so she soon gave up and decided to go exploring.

And so yes here she is, quite naked, rummaging through a neighbour's pantry at two in the morning. Not out of hunger or desire to steal, and not even out of curiosity, but because some force compels her to move, to be where she should not. This is the third house, though she has already begun to forget the first two. Where she has been is not important, only

this impulse, a continuance of action. For there is some part of her, hidden away, that realises the danger in her position and is screaming for her attention. Were she to stop for a moment and think, this new-found power might drain away, leaving her very small and very exposed, paralysed in a stranger's kitchen.

So no, she does not think; she moves. She leaves the pantry, dancing around a waxed marble island and entering the house proper. There is a sitting room, filled with oversized chairs, and a resignedly humble foyer. Nothing here especially interesting. She moves on, tip-toeing up the carpeted staircase, past pictures that might be someone's great aunt, someone's nephew, someone's long-dead great grandfather—and then herself, and a shock runs down her spine, hair standing on end. A shock not particularly alleviated in realising it's only a mirror. Still shaking, she reaches the summit and a short hallway, lined with two doors to either side and terminated by a square, waist-height sliding window. She glides to the window and opens it. Crickets. An empty, soft-lit drive below, phalanx of houses to left and right. These houses were near identical once, but all are now so modified, in the four decades or so since their creation, as to be no more than distant cousins. The fullness of the moon peaks out through sparse clouds.

She shivers a bit, too used to the over-warmth of this house, and struggles to shut the window again (just enough force to move the thing but not enough for it to slide freely and slam). Perhaps she should go back... but no, she can't be thinking that. And so she turns to the first of the doors, now on her left, and then it is open and she is inside before any chance to think further. And she finds herself in a bedroom. And the bed is occupied. Even in sleeping, the man looks tired, so tired. He must be somewhere in his sixties, just at that age where his face has begun to give way, folding in on itself in heavy creasings across his forehead and beneath his chin. The whiteness in his stubble shines in the faint moonlight, poking out like little tendrils of bone. She stands there staring at this alien creature, trying to see in it something she can recognise, that is like herself. But she sees nothing, an old man, until he rolls over on his side and curls in his knees and she feels compelled to do the same, stretching her spine just so, placing her hands just so, flexing her toes just so. Yes, he is a human after all. She moves closer, leans in towards the back of his head and sniffs, and there is some-

Small Sad People

thing there like cinnamon and the faintest trace of day-old sweat. How strange, that a human could become something like this creature here before her, his face red as a (red) tomato, as pocked as a wandering asteroid (and twice as lonely).

But she has had her fill and it is time to move on, and she's down the staircase in half the time it took going up, somewhat reckless in her hurry to be off, and she's just passing sitting room, with its stuffy old leather arm-chairs, when she hears a faint "hello?"

"Oh, ah... hello"

It is her schoolteacher, the woman who teaches her Greek History and yells at the girls when they giggle over marble penises or draw bikinis in their textbooks with ballpoint pens. The two stare blankly at one another, the woman in a chiffon nightie and her in nothing at all. Then, just as the woman moves to speak, she cuts in, "I'll be going then", and instinctively gives the little bow all the schoolgirls are taught to use with their teachers.

"Ah, yes, alright"

...And then she is racing, racing, out the door and down the street, not bothering this time to hide in the shadows or look both ways before crossing. Stones are biting her bare feet, branches tearing away at her cheeks, and she is laughing now, laughing uncontrollably.

"Ah, yes, alright"

AhAHAHAHahahHAHAHhahhhaAHAA

She is at her house again. She scales the drainage pipe and climes to the roof's peak. She looks down on the neighbourhood below, wind in her hair, and is the lady of her demesne and all she sees.

