

# SOUL

*Kate Nahu*

I had a bad dream last night.

I was standing on cold grey lino. My bare feet could feel the separate tiles that made up the floor and my left big toe was digging into the gap between two. My breath was short and sharp, but not painful. Every time I exhaled a puff of smoke billowed from my mouth, I felt like a dragon, or the man I saw smoking outside the bus stop before school. I was completely naked and when I wrapped my arms around my torso they were too cold to warm me at all. My big toe was digging into the grout and I finally looked up. The room was about the size of a classroom and everything about it felt harshly sterilised. Fluorescent blue lights flickered from the ceiling and the walls were made up of rows and rows of metal draws. The air smelt like disinfectant and burned my throat with every breath. Despite how clean it should have been, I couldn't shake the sense of underlying filth that radiated from every surface. Especially from whatever was in the draws.

In front of me stood what could have been a man. He was so tall he had to hunch over to avoid the ceiling, and his limbs bent in strange angles. I caught a whiff of rotting meat. His entire body was covered in dark blue scrubs, so that you couldn't see an inch of skin. He wore a face mask and a hair net, but I was certain he was bald. To his right stood three identical women. They were a normal height, a bit chubby and blonde. Each of them stood with their hands clasped in front of their bodies and their heads turned to their left. They also wore scrubs, but theirs were teal. They didn't have hair nets and their hair flowed in waves of very elegant curls which would have been ruined, so I didn't blame them. All of a sudden, they turned in sync to the man. He was examining me, sharp eyes dissecting me with his



gaze. His focus fixed in the middle of my chest.

‘Scalpel,’ he said. I couldn’t see him speak from behind his mask and the voice didn’t come from any particular direction, but I knew it was him. One of the nurses turned and pulled a scalpel from the medical tray now behind them. She handed it to him, the other two didn’t move an inch. ‘lie down.’ The man commanded. My hands grasped the gurney behind me, the metal was so cold it felt as if my fingers were being pressed into ice. I heaved myself onto the freezy cot and a shiver wracked my whole body. The doctor jerked towards me, his movement scared me. It looked like he was a doll, being jerked around by a small child. He reached where I lay and pressed his cold fingers into my arm.

The doctor lifted the scalpel and raised it to my forehead. I felt the sharp blade enter my skin, cutting a sharp line from ear to ear. It didn’t hurt, but the cold air hitting my open flesh felt invasive and scary. The doctor jerked his hands to the incision, and in one surprising fluid movement, tugged my skin off from my face. He continued pulling, with the flourish of a magician tugging a cloth from a cage, my skin parted from my body with a slurp. I felt properly naked now and went to cover myself with my arms, but remembered that they had been cold so didn’t bother. The doctor folded my skin like a newly ironed shirt and held it expectantly to his left. One of the nurses walked forward and neatly collected it, taking it back to the other two. From their direction I heard humming and harring and turned my head to watch them cutting away samples and labeling sections. Test tubes were procured and the samples looked at closely, but in a matter of minutes they were done. The nurse who had collected my skin turned back to the doctor and shook her head.

He shook his head back and I could have sworn I saw a wide grin of too many teeth from behind his mask. ‘saw.’ The leftmost nurse passed a rusted



hacksaw to the doctor's shaking hand. He got to work immediately, again staring at my face and going down. He was surprisingly gentle as he dug the saw's blades into my flesh and peeled it from me in wet clumps. The nurses stood just behind him in a line, holding bright yellow medical waste bags for him to dispose it in. A few clumps of flesh were saved for testing. 'suction cup.' A suction cup was produced, and he squeezed over the stubborn patches of flesh that had stayed attached to my bones like chicken to a drumstick. Eventually he was satisfied that it all had been removed from my bones and turned to the nurses for their analysis.

In a manner identical to the first time, they fiddled over the discarded parts of me, poking and prodding in ways that made my flesh emit gross thrlurps. Again, they were satisfied and turned to the doctor shaking their heads. There was no denying the savage joy radiating from him anymore as he scanned my body up and down. At this point, all that's left of me is organs resting on bone. 'suction cup.' He says again. The first thing he approaches is my eyes, they are gently sucked a bit up from my skull, then pulled off completely with a yank. It feels disturbingly similar to grapes being pulled from a vine. I'm not looking from my eyes anymore, since they've been detached from their ocular nerves, instead from a bird's eyeview. This means I get a good view as all the organs are pulled from my body. Each yanked messily from my bones, any precision the doctor had at the start having faded as he gets closer to whatever is exciting him so much. I watch my intestines tugged from me like wool from a scarf, my kidneys both ripped out at the same time, brain slurped from my skull by a comically large needle.

After each removal the nurses poke and prod me, inevitably turning to the doctor to shake their heads decisively. Finally I am just a skeleton. The doctor is vibrating with excitement, large body bobbing up and down. 'forceps.' With shaky hands he rests the forceps against my rib cage and

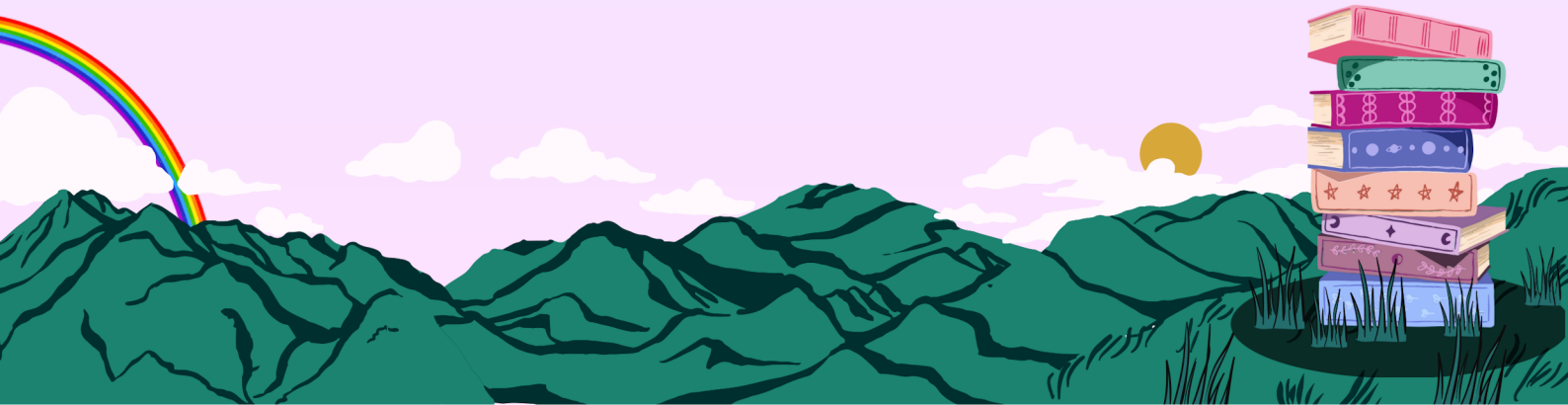


snaps off a fragment of bone. He quickly shoves it to the nurses, his impatience at being so close to whatever he desperately wants is clear. The nurses busy themselves with the bone, seeming to take the most time with this. By the time they look back at the doctor shaking their heads, he's basically salivating.

The doctor doesn't ask for equipment this time, and instead pulls his gore stained gloves from his hands. I see a jagged scar zig-zagging just above his hand and know he has many more across his entire body, keeping his mismatching limbs puzzled together. His cold fingers skate across my ribs before prying their way into the hollow space beneath them. From my vantage point I wonder what he could possibly want, all that's left of me is bones? He digs around for an uncomfortable amount of time before gasping and exhaling simultaneously. His body relaxes so quickly that he almost sags to the ground and he gently removes his hands from my ribcage.

Cradled in his long fingers as carefully as I would cradle a baby bird is a thumping pus green thing. It's almost oval shaped, but so indented and shrivelled that it's impossible to tell. With each of it's quick, wrenching, thuds a soft billow of green spurts from it and I catch the same scent of rotting flesh from earlier. I'm disgusted at this thing which was hiding itself inside of me and want to turn away, but without eyes it isn't possible. So instead I am forced to watch the doctor as he caresses the thing lovingly. 'my little mess' he sings softly 'my sad mistake', 'my flawed and broken thing'. He turns to the nurses, presenting it to them. They nod decisively. 'the root of the problem has been found.' he says suddenly, his tone a sharp shift from his previous loving coo. 'and it shall be preserved with all the others.'

He pushes my bones from the gurney where they had been sitting, they fall with a clump into a waiting disposal bag. Tenderly, he places the thing in the



center of the gurney and stands back jerkily. The nurses come forward and pull open one of the metal draws that lines the room. Together they hoist up the tray and pull it, and the thing, into the dark draw. For a second I feel relief that the repulsive thing was being locked away. But that passes as I feel my consciousness, my bird's eye view, being sucked after it into the hollow darkness. I want to cry out as I am sucked into the gaping hole, please, I try to gasp. But nothing comes out, and the last thing I see is the doctor smiling down at me, mask off revealing a face so fragmented with scars and mismatching skin I wonder how it hasn't fallen apart. The door slams shut and I am alone with the thing, pumping it's sickly scent. My consciousness pushes against the cold, metal wall. The only thing stopping me desperately yelling for help is the idea that the thing might be me.

I wake up then, so shaken that I start to cry. I go to Mum's room and fall asleep in her bed like I used to, trying to ignore the shaky thumping in my chest.

