

METAL MADE BY MAN

FLORENCE POLLOCK

“What’s in your nose?”

My head tilts up at the lights, bright white in landing strip formation. They’d been a mistake in the renovations two years ago. Mum wasn’t home when the electrician arrived at lunch but Dad who always leaves work to check on the dog, was very available. That particular day he’d decided he was an all-knowing Buddha, and his wisdom gifted us the hospital lights that’d make a blind man blink.

“What’s in your nose?”

My stomach drops, I’m hoping as I’m this far into dinner it won’t fall out with it. Millions of thoughts, or rather excuses, race through my head. “It’s my body”, “I can easily hide it”, “at least I didn’t get a tongue piercing”, “I’m not gonna get any more”. These great fabrications drape across my mind in plush velvets and crimson silks, Rich purple patterns swell into waves of deep bruises, one after the other they crash against my frontal lobe, and the white cap lies become a guilty headache.

“My septum”

Small words in an even smaller voice, I look nowhere but the cupboards behind their head.

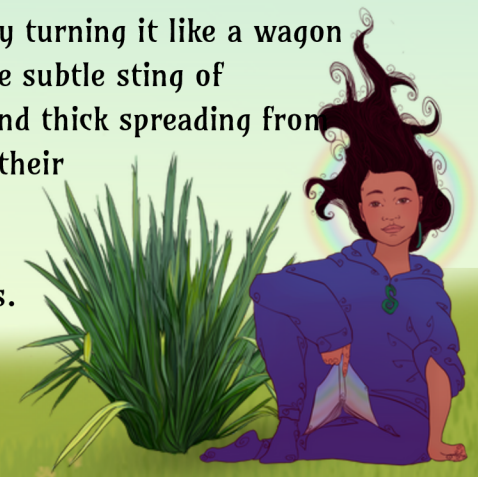
They’re saying words to me but I’m not here, I’m listening, but I’m a shell of a person. Fear and embarrassment shoot through me like an ice plunge.

“Show me”

Sarah, my sister. She’s grinning yet grimacing, all self-righteous and disgusted. That one word, disgusted. She says it often and with a spit of venom in her piercing voice that stabs my neck. Infected with her thoughts, I hate myself.

Flipping it down feels like a crusty mess. Part of me used to enjoy turning it like a wagon wheel, rooting up treasures and dirt accumulated on the way. The subtle sting of rehashing the wound, and the circulation of fresh blood, warm and thick spreading from my nose to the blocking in my ears. My little secret, right under their nose, or rather mine.

But now it was cold and heavy, a sin pierced between my nostrils.



"It's disgusting"
I am disgusting
"You look like a pig"
I am filthy
"You look ugly"
I am ugly

Like an unattended toddler, I have unscrewed the detergent and drank myself dizzy. I get that churning in my stomach and roughness in my voice, the bubbles create a suffocating stupor. I hate when she pours chemical words down my throat.

"That's your opinion"

I choke on the sentence, foaming at the mouth.

"My baby has destroyed her body"

She speaks of me as though I've died. I imagine my 'destroyed body' carved up in the bathroom, what pictures would I draw? Where would the puncture marks be? What shade of red will run through the grout?

Will Mother light candles to swarm a hive of pictures? I know the ones she'd pick, mostly from my primary youth. My hair would remain short in memory, pixie style as she decided, "I do wish you'd cut your hair, you were so cute". My hair now past shoulder length, is fried.

Photo days at catholic school, tartan pinafore, black patent shoes, and pressed white shirt, what my mother would describe as the correct "formality a child should be allowed". She never believed in children wearing black to funerals or white "Black is an adult colour and white is impractical".

That's the odd thing about my mum, she was conservative and formal on most things, but very loud and revolutionary for the average Scottish protestant. As I've gotten older it seems the less she cares about it. Perhaps it's because I'm the youngest, or perhaps she has lost interest, either way, she seems to care now.

"I can't look at you"

I don't dare speak. I walk to my room. I hope tomorrow will be better.

Perhaps I could make my room a cave of isolation. Would my constant threat of seclusion turn their minds? Or would I amend my supposed insult?



A hole through my nose didn't seem like an affront to my parents. In Chinese culture it's said that piercing affects fate or fortune. Your body is gifted by your parents, vandalising their canvas would be sacrilegious.

Although we're not Chinese I understand their perspective, I also know my body shouldn't be dictated by anyone but myself. Contemplating my decisions, Janus stares back at me, two heads with cold Roman glare. Transitions, beginnings, and gates.

As a god of motion and passages, which are intertwined, Janus tells me the middle ground of youth and adulthood lies here, but what is which? Would taking out the ring show my maturity or betray my morals?

My heavy head hits the pillow, sleep drowns my thoughts for the next wake. A part of me hopes I don't. While I'm swelled under the waves of clouded dreams, the ring that has no beginning nor end breaks in the middle. Perhaps it was inhaled or slipped between the cracks of the floor, maybe Janus interfered, but a decision was made and life kept moving.

