

FRUITS OF MY LABOR

Sometimes I wished I could choke to death on the little plastic balls. I could stuff my pipes with styrofoam. Strangle myself with polyurethane angel hair spaghetti.

I imagined what it would be like when Mr. Man in Charge found my limp and helpless body all filled to the brim with imitation blueberries and almonds on the factory floor. I wondered if he would think I looked prettier than usual, with my gaping eyes open and my mouth finally closed. The note by my side reading: please taxidermy my body and mount it to your office wall. You may use my likeness for the children's warning labels.

LifeLike Corp's plastic products were on my mind, again, when I walked into the doctors office; I was wondering how they would fish them out of my esophagus, if that was even possible. My physician never remembered anything about me. He loved to ask about my entire medical history, write it down, then miraculously lose all the notes.

He looked at his clipboard and back at me. We seemed to be meeting for the first time.

"Name?"

"Inertia Torque."

He stared at me blankly.

“Bon Bon Macaron.”

“It seems like you’re saying random words to me,” he said. He wasn’t a psychiatrist, he didn’t care why.

“Yes,” I agreed. “It does.” I relented and gave him my Real Human Name.

“So you’re nauseous and backed up.”

“Yes.”

“No chance you’re pregnant?”

“No, not even the slightest chance. No chances at all.”

He gave no indication of surprise. Or any kind of affection at all.

“Dietary changes?”

“No.”

I chowed on Red 40 and high fructose corn syrup the same as everyone else, nitrates, nitrites, sulfites, sodium benzoate, calcium propionate. Citric acid, lactic acid, Yellow 6. Canola oil, monosodium glutamate, hydrolyzed soy. I was so full of shit.

“Dehydrated?” he asked, or said, I didn’t really know which. “Do you have any unusual stressors right now?”

I thought about my alarm clock that blasted Girls Just Want to Have Fun at six-thirty every morning. I shrugged.

He was probably just drawing eyes and hearts filled with initials on the sheet in front of him.

“I’m going to send you to the lab for bloodwork. We’ll go from there.”

There was nothing else he could do, etc. I was some great medical mystery of constipation.

Down at the lab I told them I would pass out if I saw a needle so they would give me the comfy reclining chair.

The thing bit into me and started sucking. Take the matter out! Take all the disease and horrible feeling. I smiled at the technician and she said I was doing a great job.

On the way home I convinced myself I was weakened by blood loss, and a hot tide of vomit rushed to the back of my throat. So it went.

I fell asleep and dreamed I was late to work, which basically felt the same as being under heavy fire in Vietnam or Iraq or some demented place like that, my fluttering heart didn’t know the difference, I was still shaking and crying and throwing up. The world coming to its great end. When Girls Just Want to Have Fun came and saved me, I was bathed in an earthy pool of sweat.

The woman next to me on the tram to work thought I didn't notice when she edged away from me, but I did. I saw the look in her eyes.

The only other LifeLike Corp employee I really cared for was a sixty something woman named Marianne. She worked part-time and called me Bambi Big Eyes.

In the break room she looked at herself in the reflection of the microwave and said, "I think it's time for facial reconstruction surgery."

"What are you reconstructing?" I asked. "You don't have any damage."

"Honey, look at me. Every day is damage! God, these crows feet. It looks like my skull is trying to eat my eyes." She pulled her skin tight against her face. "It's terrible."

Apparently you could take fat from your legs and ass and shoot it into your cheeks to give them more volume.

"You don't need any of that. You look great," I said.

"For my age. You can say anything you want when you're twenty-two."

I wasn't twenty-two anymore, unfortunately enough.

"Come back to me in thirty years and you won't feel the same."

I was fairly sure there would be nothing left in thirty years, beside maybe some of our signature produce line floating around the Great Lakes. The thought gave me some sort of twisted comfort.

“Then you should do it if you want,” I said, smiling.

So if I did eat all those grapes and apples that could be my legacy; better than my good singing voice or straight nose. Or, it would last longer. My skin decaying away and leaving a pile of choice plastic, still bright and peppy as ever.

“You can freeze the rolls in your stomach and they never come back. The cells die off and can’t regrow,” said Marianne.

“I was thinking of changing something myself,” I said slowly.

“What’s that?” She began putting some suspect leftovers in the microwave.

“I don’t love my insides.”

“Okay! What’s your reconstruction plan?”

That was the thing I liked about her, she didn’t care about what I said. Her eyes were glazed and distant, clearly planning whatever she was going to say when I stopped talking.

“I’m looking into this new plastic surgery technique,” I said.

“You know, I could probably start my own gut healing journey.”

“I’m really doubling down on longevity.”

“The gut is severely overlooked.” The microwave beeped and she flinched. “It’s one of the most important factors of a person’s overall health. Did you know that a bad gut can make you depressed? It can give you terminal cancer.”

I found I believed Marianne about the same as I did my Professional Primary Care Doctor.

“I should go back to the floor,” I said.

“It can make exercise nearly impossible, which of course leads to a whole other bag of health crises.”

I left the break room and headed down the dismal hallway towards the work floor. My stomach bulged against the button of my jeans, it wanted out, it was raging and deeply disturbed by Marianne’s diagnosis of imminent peril.

“Damn it,” I said.

In the factory I had the crucial job of watching over the machinery and making sure it didn't get stopped up. A spectator. The blobs of plastic drifted by untouched by human hands.

They looked the same as they did yesterday. The same as they would tomorrow. They were perfectly unchanging, a replica of what a pear looked like in a dream, there were no spots, no bruises, no factors at all that could discern it from the next pear on the line. I stumbled closer to the conveyor belt.

Before I knew what my hands and tendons and shoulders were doing, I had popped an entire apricot into my mouth, my throat straining around it. And I wasn't so empty anymore. I couldn't make a sound, couldn't say the wrong thing. I was violently fulfilled! My eyes watered. The conveyor belt quivered alongside the rest of the room. I felt like the world's biggest idiot clown, being killed by a fucking fake plastic apricot.

I tried to laugh and fell to the ground, clawing against my pulsing throat as if I could rip clean through it. There was no calling for help. A faint hum started up somewhere. It sounded like a song. My body writhed as everything started to fade into oblivion, and I was left wondering what that song playing was.

Later, maybe across universe lines or right through the planes of our existence, there were some arms cutting into my abdomen, wreaking havoc on my bloated stomach. The apricot came flying out of my mouth and soared back towards the belt, ready and eager to rejoin the line.

"Bambi!" cried Marianne.

I lay there gasping.

“Is this a ploy for workers comp?” she asked. “Perhaps to fund some certain surgeries?”

The cement was nice and cool against my cheek.

“Because that is a fantastic idea, dear. These things don’t come cheap, you know.”

I nodded weakly. It was true.