

bunny
and
shark

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Excerpt from *Bunny and Shark* by Alisha Piercy

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JABLONSKY AND HER HUSBAND sleep all day, as do you, seated upright in their closet with your bum squished into their shoes. When you look through the crack, you see the food tray has been taken away from the side of their bed and been replaced by a new one full of stainless-steel covered plates. The TV has gone silent. The whole place is hushed and you sense it is evening. Urgency now, to get out of here before they wake, to find a bathroom and clean up. You move your body to a hovering position and push the door against the plush carpet. Then stand there ridiculous and uncertain for a moment, shuffling stiff-limbed here and there around the partitions, trying to decide which way to go. Your tapes trail, they are covered in fuzz and feathers from a stole or costume of Jablonsky's, it all hisses behind you, your NAUI card slapping at your spine as you find the stairs.

On the lower decks things become less luxurious, the gold and brown is replaced with standard white and blue plastic. You hear plates and cutlery placed on a galley table. The crew is there about to eat supper. You slip into one of the small bedrooms: a narrow space with a slim bed, everything in place except for a white T-shirt crumpled on the floor.

In the bathroom you pummel the toilet with pee. You aim the stream to hit the front side of the bowl so it makes less noise, at the same time grabbing the dark, wet facecloth at the sink to scour your face. You taste the salt in your pores come to life. A strange, alkaline odour fills your nostrils as you drop the cloth and lower the toilet seat, pulling a small makeup kit from the back of the toilet into your chest. The shower floor, still wet and giving off steam, is so enticing, you want to get in there and blast yourself with scalding water, but you reject it instantly. Too noisy. Instead you look for scissors in the kit, hands shaky, not finding anything but a nail clipper, and with that you begin ripping and breaking the tapes that encircle your body. They've become stiff, knotted with strings and covered in crap from Jablonsky's closet-floor carpet. You only half unravel them, fraying the edges without actually managing to disentangle yourself. Drop that and move on. Panic chiseling away at you.

You prioritize: put on makeup, find clothes. You turn to the mirror for the first time, one hand in the makeup bag already feeling for the sequence of application: foundation, eyes, lips last – and you notice your favorite: British Red. Then what you see reflected back at you in the misty mirror turns your heart cold. Staying perfectly still, you start to cry.

You've transformed into everything a Playboy Bunny

fears but strives to keep at bay. Wrinkles, pouches, white roots straight as an axe running up against your greasy blonde locks. Snot fills your system along with the flash flood of tears that pushes through you. “Christ!” you whisper as loud as you dare: not only have you slipped into the world of old women within a few days, but the cloth you just wiped your face with was covered in hair dye. “Old woman” and, on top of it, a clownish mask. Two precise lines run through the middle of each cheek where tears fall.

Once, in your girlfriend Denise, you saw how a Bunny crossed over into that nebulous place where beauty of a saleable kind is lost forever. This odd shared thing: nobody likes to say they were a Bunny once they’re old. Bunnies don’t admit to what they once were. Because then ageing gets measured ruthlessly. So they all go invisible and change their names until you can’t find them anymore.

You get up off the floor and brusquely wash the black dye off your face. Which is pointless. Dye is dye; the question is, how long will it last? You swat at the bloody tapes that slap at your legs but they just fly around and chafe more. You are enraged with the irritation of it. The itch. Your inability to calm down enough to hold tight to one and carefully nibble your way through it with the small jaw of the nail clipper. Centimetre by centimetre until,

again, you give up. Set your shoulders square, firm your mouth and smear foundation over the lot. You work quickly until it turns your face sludge-colour. Then add more to make an alien complexion. Followed by shimmering white, green, and gold eyeshadows brushed in bold strokes over your un-punched eyelid. It's funny to you how the other fat, slitted eye matches the peacock eye. Twins, but sadly, one got all the looks. Both eyes are streaked by a waterfall of Pierrot tears. You dab here and there, and wind your hair, thick with salt, upwards on top of your head where it holds itself. As you are about to return to the punched eye, to approach it from another angle, you hear what is clearly the end of supper for the crew. You catch sight of yourself in the mirror: half-turned and listening, unrecognizable. But you've run out of time to feel sorry for yourself so you re-zip the makeup bag and slip out the door.