

Problem Areas

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Something had been different ever since the eye transplant. She'd been offered the list of possible side effects: dryness, graininess, the occasional floating aura. Yet there is nothing to the effect of "I don't recognize myself in the mirror" in the information packet, nor online.

And the doctor is only taking phone calls, from home, because of the virus.

"We're not a mental health office," adds the receptionist.

In other regards, Laurie is lucky to have acquired such young and healthy eyes. They're young, anyway, in comparison to the standard; she'd been told that most recipients had accepted their poor vision as 'better than the alternative'. Yet Harold Splinter from Dayton, Ohio had died at 34, and he hadn't even worn glasses. His cancer had been in his colon, too: all the way at the other end of his body.

Now she would have fresh eyes, the time to make revisions to her novel. She'd spent the last of her savings on her short leave; to stay home with her rent on pause is a chance that she'll never have again. Everyone else is writing about how suffocated they'll feel in self-quarantine — yet having had a hole in her vision for months, she only feels free.



No distractions. She pulls her router from the wall, cancels her Netflix billing. She takes down every mirror in the apartment, having been poking into every crevice of herself with her new eyes.

She'd been lightly disappointed that, like her old ones, they're blue.

But hair becomes her biggest problem. Each moment before she presses the power button on her computer, it's all that she sees: bright in the reflection of the dark screen, its grayness especially apparent, always messy in several directions.

As she goes on to try to read her chapters, her hair in more than one way takes root at the back of her head. She feels as if she's been invaded, penetrated. It's a canker sore that the tongue can't leave alone—and, in the same way, Laurie often feels her hands slipping upwards.

On the fourth day, leaning over the kitchen counter and eating liquorice from a bag, she stares at the piles below her chair. It'll soon reach her knees: a taunting manifestation of each wasted minute, of every unwritten word.

No one will see her for at least three months, anyway, she begins to think.

It might even be smart. Everyone's freaking out about not being able to get haircuts.

The next day she throws all of her hair—picked and shaved—down the garbage chute. This will motivate her to finish the book earlier, she decides. If she doesn't, she'll have to tell

everyone she underwent chemo.

Work comes easy, for a while, after that. Yet the more that Laurie types, the more conscious she becomes of her hands. It's the skin around her nails that bothers her, really: the way that it hardens and whitens, victim of the winter air and harsh sanitizers. She re-attaches the router to order a luxe hand cream—but it's a thin wall which she always digs through. Gloves are the same.

What purpose do nails have, anyway?, is the nascent thought. She doesn't need them to type.

They grow back in four to six months. That's just how long everyone will be isolated.

Later, noticing how quickly the skin on her lips grows back, too, after she becomes too aware of it—she sees it, always, in the reflection of her forks—she figures that they'll just as easily grow back as a whole.

They're just flaps of skin, after all, she rationalizes. Just more skin.

Peeling at them without nails takes too much time.

She won't be speaking to anyone for a long while.

She's more comfortable, after that, and her couch her creative caucus. One might just have to destroy a bit to create, she thinks, as she fills another page. She's had to suffer, a little, for her art: to overcome the challenge of distraction.

It wasn't like she'd been self-harming, anyway—merely chipping away at her edges.

And the evening that she sits in her nightgown, cross-legged, is when she comes across the hideousness of knees. Hers are uneven, and knobby, and they protrude from her legs like faces.

Since skin grows back, she thinks, it'll be better to remove the whole thing; if she secures her calves back to her thighs, she might even get around without too much struggle. It'll keep her sitting, working.

But she wakes the next day, to her truculent horror, sensing overgrowth. Her eyes open to a long head of hair, full nails, fleshy knees. She must have dreamt all of her auto-surgeries, she thinks, until she finds chunks of herself in the freezer.

Every morning becomes a routine of shaving, ripping, of sawing at herself before she can sit with her manuscript. The acts become as casual, to her, as setting down her keys. She stops noticing the lengths of hair along the floors—the knees atop the dresser, the counter, the couch.

Yet one dripping morning, as she's bringing the knife down onto her lips, she looks to herself in the reflection.

Her eyes would probably regenerate brand new, too, she realizes. Maybe they've even been ready, this whole time, and waiting behind these ones like adult teeth.

She finds that she's wrong; yet without sight of her body, Laurie can only think about her book. She gets through with voice-to-text commandment faster than she's ever typed.

Finally, she thinks, stretching herself outward. I can relax.

