

LATANYA MCQUEEN

Muscle Memory of a Body That Is Not Her Body

It begins with tremors late at night. Her body in bed, her head propped on pillows, she will feel her hands shaking and then her feet. It will be for a few seconds only and she'll blame it on nerves before closing her eyes.

Weeks of these tremors with increasing intensity will force her to the doctor. His gloved hands will feel the muscles in her arms and legs while she performs a series of exercises. After it's over the doctor will attribute it to restless leg syndrome due perhaps to an iron deficiency.

What she does not tell the doctor is that she is beginning to feel her body becoming something other than her own. Yes, it is her flesh, her muscle and bone, but it is not part of her. Its actions are not of her own doing. It is as if they are behaving on behalf of another body and she is unaware of what to do.

She has always loved her body. Despite its flaws—the dimpled flesh of her thighs, her thick hips, even the slight pudge of her stomach—to her it is beautiful, but now it has become something foreign and strange, and she does not know how to exist within this new place of unfamiliarity.

Twice a week parts of her body will want to touch other parts of her body. She tries not to recoil when her hands slide down to her breasts. She knows where this is going and it does not take long until her hands are venturing further.

After, there is the sense of a violation having occurred, but how can there be when the act was made with components of her own body? Still, there is an unrelenting shame that forms each time her fingers grace the fabric of her underwear.

Two days quickly becomes three, then four. Soon it is every day, several times each day. She is fucking herself on the couch, with her

back against the kitchen counter, in the shower as the hot water burns her back.

Even this is not enough. Her body has an appetite and is relentless in its search to fill it.

Her body is interested in sex. Her body fucks and is not sorry. Her body knows the quickest way to pleasure—the taste of a tongue in her mouth, the feel of a stranger’s hands on parts of her, the feel of a cock inside her. She wants to straddle and ride.

At first it will be men in bars. Men in suits who buy her cranberry-tasting cocktails, who will want to talk to her about them, as if she is interested in more beyond what lies underneath their pants. All this will take too long—all this talking to get from bar to bedroom, so she’ll post online ads.

One morning she wakes to find a man next to her bed. “Who are you? What are you doing here?” she yells.

He is a large man. There is the slight, putrid smell of unshowered flesh coming off his body.

Across the room a tied condom that has been slung into the wastebasket hangs on the rim.

He rubs his eyes awake. “You asked me here. We fucked last night. Don’t you remember?”

Her body remembers but her mind does not. Her body feels the urge to have sex with him again, and she has to act quickly before she has succumbed to her body’s decisions.

“Get out,” she says, much to his confusion. “Get your clothes. It’s time now for you to go.”

But this is not her body. It is an alien body and she is not responsible for the choices it makes. Her body is acting as proxy to another body. Somehow, sometime when she wasn’t paying attention, this has happened.

“Get rid of it,” she tells her doctor when the inevitable comes. “I don’t want it inside of me. Why can’t you do this?”

The doctor explains that even though yes it is her body (although to

her it is not her body) there is no place for her to do what she is asking. She will have to live with what comes out.

She doesn't tell him she's afraid. Her doctor assures her it will be instinctual, bodies are meant to procreate, after all, and she will feel differently once it happens. Her body will know what to do.

Yes, and it does. Her body will punch her stomach until the skin is bruised and swollen. Her body will drink down a bottle of vodka before unhooking a coat wire into one long, thin piece. She will not know what she's doing, but as her doctor said, it will be instinctual. Her hands that aren't her hands will put this wire inside her, poking and prodding until there is blood—dripping down her legs and onto the floor, blood getting deep into the cracks of the tile, and blood on her hands, in between her fingernails as she searches for the clump, and when she finds it, she tells herself it is not of her body, because it isn't. How could it be, when it is—was, never hers?