



terrestrial animal | kristy bowen

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Kristy Bowen

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“No dirt means less housework and more time for recreation. It’s QUIET. Easier on the nerves, perfect for relaxing and enjoying good music. But most of all, it offers the average man a proverbial island unto himself.”

1965 Worlds Fair Brochure
Underground World Home Corporation

Imagine your life here. The naugahyde couches, the faded styrofoam rocks. What to do with the body, once the body has started to disintegrate. The curtains would be lovely in the sun but the pattern makes you gag into the perfect pink bowl of the toilet. Your pink pills circling the drain. There are too many lovers in your house and not nearly enough martinis. In the bathtub, you loll while the lights dim and there is so much static. Your hair impeccable, the highs impractical. At night, you dream about dinner parties, in front of every guest, a steaming pile of dog shit, your good silver still nested quiet in the sideboard and bleached clean. The perfect pool where your guests swirl perfectly in the green jello mold shaped like a heart.

What to do with the word *daylight*. Sometimes it was so enormous, you could walk around inside it. Sometimes so small and closed you could place it in your palm. You hide it in the laquer medicine cabinet behind the spare toothbrushes. Your rings floating lonely in their dish of clear blue soap. What to do with a concept, pencils down, hands on your knees. The sort of light that made you float, arms akimbo in the pool, growing somewhere beneath your diaphragm. Oh, it was beautiful, all that shining, the glint of a bicycle rim in the sun, the heat of it against your thigh. What to do with a light so bright it shattered the horizon into shadows. Ate the world like a snake. Where to put all this hope, alive and glowing and growing somewhere in your belly. The *god knows what* of it turning beneath your sweetly powdered flesh.

You do not tell your husband, but you are secretly building your own bomb beneath the kitchen sink. Secretly plotting what to do with your arms on the awful carpet when they no longer can hold all of you in like a big helium balloon. What then, this human body with all of its detritus and unimaginable expanses of skin, soft and pearlescent. What to do with your hands once your imaginary guests have started puking all over the astroturf. When you were a girl, and yes, you were once a girl, your mother packed peanut butter sandwiches laced with rat poison for your father topside. Just a little every day. Not enough to hurt him but enough to keep him honest. No woman likes a man hurling into the azaleas when he goes to kiss her. No woman likes a cool, sweaty palm reaching for her thigh.

What does one do with a body, all that gaping rottenness, even before, your fingers exploring the pink folds between your knees. The pink poodle mobile floating above your bed. What to do with the body then, but destroy it piece by piece. You don't quite know what to do with your heart now, but still you listen to it thrum under the close fake stars. Tend your little garden of plastic hibiscus, water them with an empty watering can. Still love your husband in his dirty yellow cardigan, his hips and hives and unruly hair. He makes you sick a little with longing every night while you pull the strands of hair from your brush and cry just a little. What do you do with a body like this, closed and underground and shut so tight even the mice have fled.

In the beginning, you didn't mind the woman who lived in your mirror. She ate canned peaches and cried in the pink, pink bathroom, but she could make a mean cobbler and talk about the best way to clean a washing machine. She wore tiny horses on her dress and always buttered her toast in the same direction. She pictured a snow globe, the world swirling and furious around her and her calm and perfectly whole at the center. The world then a beautiful, ordered thing, a puzzle you could put back together. It started with the goldfish floating in the pond. The dark, unruly things that crept along the perimeter at night, chewing the obscenely plastic roses and slithering in the vents. You half expected one to crawl into the bathtub with you one day. To wind itself up your thigh. How you hated the way he looked at you, the

way his blistered hands found the hem of your girdle and pushed in with his fingers. The way the fluorescent lights above the counter hummed over you as he fucked you. The radiation had taken away the big finish, but he tried, rutting, banging your hips against the formica. How you hated the way your skin looked like something swelling and decaying softly, slowly, from your heart on out.

At dawn the fake birdsong creeps from the speakers and you are closest to madness. Like madness is a dress you hang in your closet every evening and take out each morning. Slip over your head as the timed lights make the faux horizon glow pink, then orange, then terrible blue. You once asked your husband which way was technically west and technically *did it matter?* But still, you can't figure out why the cakes go bad so quickly, even under glass. Why he keeps watching the television, its endless loop of submarines submerging and emerging from the ocean and a man with a microphone, his lips moving frantically. Technically, it doesn't matter, but you imagine what July feels like topside. All

badminton games and fireworks and beautiful girls in gingham dresses. The enormous, obscene float of it down Main Street. There are giant beetles sometimes in your pink, pink sink and you crush them with a paperweight shaped like a woman's pink heel.

What to do with the body when the body is almost indistinguishable from furniture. You've taken the scissors to three sets of curtains and are going on the fourth. Mustard roses. Green chintz. Nothing outside your windows but the smooth stone walls. What to do with the children, each baby grown bright and liquid in the belly and then seeping out onto the blue, blue sheets.

Since you've gone underground, every egg in your basket blooms and bleeds, blooms and bleeds. The milk goes bad in the fridge and your husband smears another dab of greasy canned cheese on a ritz. What to do with the body that fails, is always failing, each imaginary moon in an imaginary sky, another moment closer and further from the end. What to do with their broken bodies, the tiny clots of tissue in the basin. Once he caught

you weeping in the fake pines. Once, found you hoarding cans of thick condensed milk under the sink. You are loneliest at dawn, but then *dawn* is relative. *Lonely* is relative. He pushes balls around his tiny putting green. You place your pills over your eyes in what you imagine is the afternoon.

A writer and visual artist, Kristy Bowen is the author of several book, chapbook and zine projects, including *the shared properties of water and stars* (Noctuary Press), *girl show* (Black Lawrence Press, 2014) and the forthcoming *major characters in minor films* (Sundress Publications, 2015). Her work has appeared most recently in *Dressing Room Poetry Journal*, *birdfeast*, and *Projectile*. She lives in Chicago, where she runs **dancing girl press & studio**.

