

# *Ana*

Her fleece sweatshirt keeps riding up my stomach, chafing. It feels tight, hot and uncomfortable. I wonder if she feels uncomfortable. It's a changeable London day. An oblique grid of light flashes across her desk, catching on concrete stubs resting atop. These are too awkward to even dislike them. They are nothing like mine, yet they are progeny. I feel partly responsible. I want to consume them to avenge them.

I walk over to Ellie's space and rummage through a pile of black bin bags on the floor. It's a layer cake of random performance refuse. It's filthy and exciting. I fish out the grubby wig. Back at the desk, I lower myself into her chair and run my fingers over the dry bumpy surfaces. I imagine what it's like to covet my work; the desperation. I imagine what it's like to be an opportunistic looter. I see a stack of salmon paper folders. I fan them and flick the spines: *Vanessa, Kim, Sean, Stewart, Nikolai, Ana*. I draw the last one and save it for later.

I set up the tripod and mount the camera. I pull closer a slab with a contorted paper face. On the side table, a bunch of loose wood bits from which I am able to reconstruct the mold. I slot the piece in, rest it there for a brief moment and take it back out. I cradle it in my arms. I imagine what it's like to birth it; the disappointment. I study the drab surface: her brushstrokes are laid over an empty sheet of paper; there is nothing at stake. I detach the camera and screw on the macro lens. I scan at two hundred percent. I imagine printing out close-ups and making ugly sculptures with them. I imagine my work consuming hers.

I move the tripod, snap the camera back in and compose the stumps into a still life; stillborn; test tube mishaps; *Kunstkammer* curiosities. Mine are blue bloods; these are just bleeding blue. A limp paper piece completes the arrangement. I put myself in front; the camera is on timelapse. I'm an imposter. I'm an opportunistic looter. Every thirty seconds, I'm found out. I let her rest in me for a brief moment after each click.

I pick up the tall piece with a floppy half-cylinder of paper grafted onto the bottom half. I whoosh it around and pretend-smash it against the edge of the desk. I imagine what it would be like to smash it for real; the frisson. Vanessa sticks her head in, curiosity aroused; observes the scene. "You are such a fucker!" she pronounces. She can hardly contain her glee. She senses an upcoming comeuppance.

I lower myself into her chair and consume the folder. I rummage through contact sheets, emails, notes in handwriting so compact it nearly flatlines. It's a layer cake of anxiety, insecurity and self-doubt. I can't sleep. She can't sleep. I'm tired. She's tired. The wig starts feeling tight, hot and uncomfortable. She feels uncomfortable. I take pictures.

Soon I will walk in on her ransacking my workspace. She will look contrite. She will feel awful, or so her tutor will tell me. "Good", I'll say, knowing it will get back to her. We won't speak for the rest of the course. Imitation is the sincerest form of failure.

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