**Body**

Adeline J. Wells

Five feet seven inches, one-point-seven meters; taller than the average American woman. Six years since the eyes dipped low to a scale; since I began trying to believe that I no longer cared what number it read. Feet long and narrow, calluses etched into soles toughened by Earth. Feet meld into boney ankles that trip over sidewalk cracks; roll too easily with a careless shift of weight. Legs run long and tanned, shorn of all hair religiously. *Great legs*, they say, until they get close enough. Legs that are actually canvases featuring divots and scars; petite crescents, make-believe birthmarks, white patches almost faded into sheets of skin. Prominent hip bones, two handles to hold onto: a small swell of belly almost-flat. Ribs jut monstrously from the center; pried wide, unhinged, coaxing the torso between their jaws. Full, flooding breasts; swollen orbs that loom from the chest, milky flesh untouched by the sun. Popping shoulder, lack of muscle; weak wrist broken, buckled. Short fingers swarming with rings; pearly nails, shaped and filed. Mane a mess, waves thick and wild.

This is a body.

Little feet that scampered through the thin woods that lined the neighborhood. Bare feet: body weight pressed, connected to Earth’s grit. Thin ankles hooked around the flakey arms of maple trees; wrapped about fat fistfuls of wispy willow branches; a body flung, swung through sweet air. Right fibula fractured; told to crawl. To naturally nurture the wound, tend to the leg; listen, care for the whole. Legs long wires, wandered into natural depths, cutting water gently to ride with tides. At one within the tide, unafraid of its flux. Legs later smacked the water in fury, flurries of foam washing headily onto bleached concrete. Pointed hands sliced, split waves slinking over skin in a rush. Wobbly ankles made rigid in the race; fervid feet taught to fight the flow.

The reflection in the mirror grew older, never enough. Legs grew longer, weighted in between; grew hungry for that hunger. Hungry to peer in the glass and be met with a woman; prayers that bled into nightmares. Red rivers ran down the legs, fat clots sullying their stream. Rivers flooded to form lakes, oceans with raging tides that stained the shore. Oceans with dark, ominous waters; drowning all sanity, plaguing the body, haunting the bed. Pills stuffed and hidden in envelopes, tasted like female freedom. A secret tonic to subdue this slaughter; the waves lose their bite; their flow falters out. Shorelines dry, slowly start to swell. Hip bones become hidden beneath a new pudge of flesh; belly bloated over belts. Breasts round and plump; balloons billowing to hang lower, heavier on the chest. New rivers run thick from muddy eyes, smaller amidst the cheeks’ extra puff.

An upscale supper club in winter; hesitant fingertips introduced to the throat. Glassy eyes dulled beneath warm bar light; rich risotto still spread over floral china. A black comedy film; learning to run water over weapons. Sharp blades scratching at the uvula in a locker room, an announcer’s boom echoing harshly against the metal. Ice cream on homecoming; its chill a soothing balm sliding up. Polyester polo to the knees, gummy fingers washed twice; latex gloves to conceal bile’s burning stench. Hunched, heaving in the night, face pressed between palms as pretty pink pills plunged through the system. Guilt lines the belly when food does not. Arms splayed across cracked tile; forehead pressed weightily against dirty porcelain. Full, lush lips forever swollen sucked in, made smaller, red from the pinch. Face blanched; empty eyes smeared black with mascara. A reflection shattered, left to haunt countless mirrors.

Healing: a concept shaped into shapelessness. A couch colorless in my mind, afternoon sun washed and muted as it floods in through big windows. Puzzles pried from within weekly; they fill the room, settling into its clean space. An island covered in half-filled coffee cups; music’s thrum masked by voices loud, full of love. Color-crusted fingers toying with gritty teeth, promises plead over a squat toilet. Palms pushed against ribbed vinyl; body stripped naked, sinew tight within my limbs as they reach, sailing high. His mouth pressed to my shoulder, angry puckers miniature moons in the hollow light of night. A needle’s dull bite, breasts blooming in my hands as ink is etched into skin. The disco’s blurry cadence, my hips falling slowly to its beat; arms flow languidly through air in a daze. Writhing on an exam table, speculum deep in my body as plastic plunges into my uterus. Stretched open in the fuzzy glow before dawn; two mammals feral, lost in a desert dream. Legs bronzed beneath the sun, slung over black rubber; warm river bathwater washing over in cleansing. Draped over my peeling radiator, curves and impurities laid bare under the scope of her lens. My chin heavy atop his shoulder as we run wild alongside the crest of mountains, blush beams seeping into the sky.

This is a body; this is my body.

Narrow feet that stumbled up mountains in the dark before dawn. Soles rooted into the ground; soil smudged between my toes. Weak ankles that slip from stones, crash over curbs. Ankles fade into legs that carry; they wander unlearned city streets, clamor over gauzy green rice paddies, bend and patter against rolls of sea. Roadmaps: skin marred with marks that prove their resolve, scars softened by river water. Prominent hip bones: two handles I hold onto. Hips that rock side to side, circle about dimly lit dance floors, bowing to the beat. Breasts abloom on my chest; fat blossoms that never shrivel, their colors fail to dull. Four blemishes sprinkled across my shoulder: symbols of a self past. Hands rough and calloused, tanned from catching golden arcs. Hands that catch each fall; they press, push my body up from the Earth. Hands that wrapped around the hands of strangers, caressed the necks of moonlight lovers. Hands that hold the pen each time again.