**Side Effects**

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Thirteen years have passed since I was
split in two, cracked open like a ripe coconut,
sewn back together in two better halves.

What remains is a five-inch strip of flesh
encircling my waist and hips, where a surgeon armed
with a scalpel removed sixteen pounds
of overhanging skin, a remnant of the days
where the only love I could feel came wrapped in sugar
and cellophane. I wanted nothing more than to erase
the evidence, slice away like moldy rind the part
of me left dangling, the skin I’d lived in
since love had begun to hurt.

When parts of the body are surgically altered,
moved up, down, together, apart,
the nerve endings are misplaced – lost –
firing signals to a baffled nervous system
by itching. Telling me scratch *there*, two inches to the left
of my bellybutton, but no, now an inch and a half down,
or three inches back the other way. It’s an itch
that can never be satisfied, the skin around the incision
forever numbed except for this evasive,
irritating ghost.

No one told me before my procedure
that these side effects would be permanent.
That what remained would be a flitting
scrap of feeling that I could never catch.
That a decade later, as my lover ran their hot hands
slowly down my waist, that I’d feel nothing
but the absence, the not-feeling,
of all the weight I’d left behind.