**Side Effects**

R.B. Simon

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.