

Maya Bushell – The Spirit of a Face

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Olena did not feel that if God really could see into her heart, He would find a truly good person. She feared He might find every bit of unpleasantness coiled tightly around itself pretending to be anything but what it was. But she wasn't sure.

This was a question that occupied her mind while at work when it was slow, when she stood at her till in the supermarket and watched through the front window as nothing in particular happened outside. Occasionally, a plastic bag might swoop by, floating freely like a dislodged feather. A car might pull up to the kerb or a child run down the sidewalk; nothing that ever lasted more than a few seconds. Her heart swelled at moments such as these but shrank just as quickly when they ended.

During uneventful shifts Olena would create distractions for herself. Recently, she had begun taking stickers from the nearby fruits and pressing them to the rubber mat of her station's conveyor belt, watching them dive beneath the metal flaps only to come round a few moments later. The endlessness of such activities satisfied her greatly and she found herself trying to create them often. On windy days she hung her washing out and sat watching it flap incessantly, its weight pulling the nylon cord taut between the poplar trees. In spring, when the creek behind her house grew with rain, she would lie in the grass just above its bank and listen for hours as the water rushed over the stones and swept away winter's remains.

When Olena revisited these moments at work she lost consciousness of her surroundings and left customers confused and her manager exasperated. She would inevitably find herself relieved from check-out duty and sent into the stockroom to refill the citrus crates. Such tasks never bored her, as she delighted in arranging the fruit within the plywood boxes, all the while considering whether the dimpled skin of lemons was similar to that of her cheek. Oftentimes she would slip one of the smaller fruits into the pocket of her polyester apron and bring it to the bathroom with her. There, she would stand in front of the mirror and hold the lemon to her face, comparing the texture between the two. She could never decide how similar the peel and her skin actually were, but questions without answers had never bothered her. They kept her mind occupied while she stocked the bread shelves and eyed the mistake in the tile patterning in front of the meat counter: yellow, red, yellow, yellow, red, yellow. It relieved her to find disorder; perfection had always made her nervous. She appreciated chairs that were slightly askew and dishtowels that didn't hang straight. She sewed curtains with holes in them so the sun would always find her face before she woke.