





strange machine

_____of 30

dancing girl press & studio
Chicago, IL

duck & cover

At night, the fission loves us, lathers us over,
makes our teeth glow like low watt lanterns in the dark of our beds.
This town is all carhops and canapés these days, the women
narrow-waisted and waspish. Oh nostalgia, we love it.
Write letters to it in the green light of television sets.
Meanwhile, the men set fire to the jukebox, the junior college,
the dead pigeons in the gutters of tract homes.
Oh hope, oh love, we're filled with sugar and seething
into our silk pantyhose. Our bodies as pristine as our
mother's whites, flapping on clotheslines across the low hills.
In an emergency, above all else, keep calm.
In an emergency, keep your tongue glued fast to the roof
of your mouth to avoid screaming.
In an emergency---

plutonium baby

When his says father says *boo*, plutonium baby cries all night.
The milk gone bad, leaking and souring in the folds of his mother's
nightgown. 3 am and the world glows with him, even now,
before the bombs, before the backyard barbecues and shiny
black sedans. Before the open mouth of his wanting grows
wider and wider and swallows everything not weighted down.
When he's grown, he'll take up with women named
Tina, or Charla, or Tiffany. Will tuck his shirts in and talk
about stock commodities. Everyone loves a plutonium baby,
all new and shiny as the chrome on a brand new bicycle.
As American as apple pie or insider trading.
He'll twirl the scotch in his glass and say things like
"Key West is a sauna this time of year."
Those kind of manners could be lost or poisoned or dead
for all we know. His black shoes, shiny and sure of it.



miss uranium 1954

It's months before she can recite the alphabet backwards again.

Birthdays. The chemical equation for hydrogen peroxide.

All caught in the foggy nether than begins somewhere in the cerebellum.

On the patio, all the bodies in bikinis float in a thin soup of chemicals,
and it's all good, all gone, all going to hell in an alligator handbag, she thinks,
her fingernails flaking away like pie crust. Her limbs loosening into ether.

In the hospital, the sheets were white and precise.

Her mind white and precise. She clenches her jaw and meditates
on milk cartons, lined up single file on the store shelf. The perfect slices
of bread dropping into the toaster. Scratches on her thighs and breasts
where the bees went in, and worse, where they demand to come out.

oppenheimers gizmo

"I am become Death, the Destroyer of Worlds"—Bhagsavad Gita

Later, your October will taste like tuna casserole, slightly burnt.
The device is a mechanism, the mechanism is slowly death-like.
Everyone pretend you're life-like. Like for real. The mechanism
rehearses its performance like a pro. The mechanism
knows it's bloodless, nevermind you're covered in blood.
Knows its way around your pyrex heart. Knows how much you'd love
to take the scissors to your bedroom shears, or a match,
the flames licking the soles of your heels. The mechanism flickers and glistens.
Sleeps naked beneath your fur coat all winter. The mechanism
always forgets to turn off the stove until we're all on fire.



the angels of los alamos

There are too many holes in the walls now, in our bodies.
Morning, and the driveways shine, the desert opens
us up, everything bending toward the horizon full of rusted cars
and roosting vultures. Our floors creak and the dust floats
above aproned mothers vacuuming, the blank stare of their unhappiness
burning through the picture window, the neighbors wooden fence.
Bless us now for vacation pamphlets fading on bulletin boards, the low tenor
of empty swing sets sweltering in the desert. For the backs of our thighs stuck
to car seats. For crumbling baseboards and broken arms.
For death, however far the wind carried it.



the radium girls speak

Before the bomb, our jaws wax necrotic.
So patriotic. Exotic the way the camelhair brush
strokes the dark face of the wristwatch,
our backs bent over our work. But then
all of it was work. The great machine of America
rolling over us, rolling us over in our beds. Every painted
fingernail, every bright doll's eye eating us from the inside.
What doesn't kill you makes you stronger,
but what kills you can set off Geiger counters
100 years later. Can set fires in the belly of industrial
barons from here to Hackensack. Every lawyer, every great
capitalist gaslighting us in walnut courtrooms as our teeth
crumble into our palms. Progress, the great white
spasm, seeping into our tongues and softly glowing.



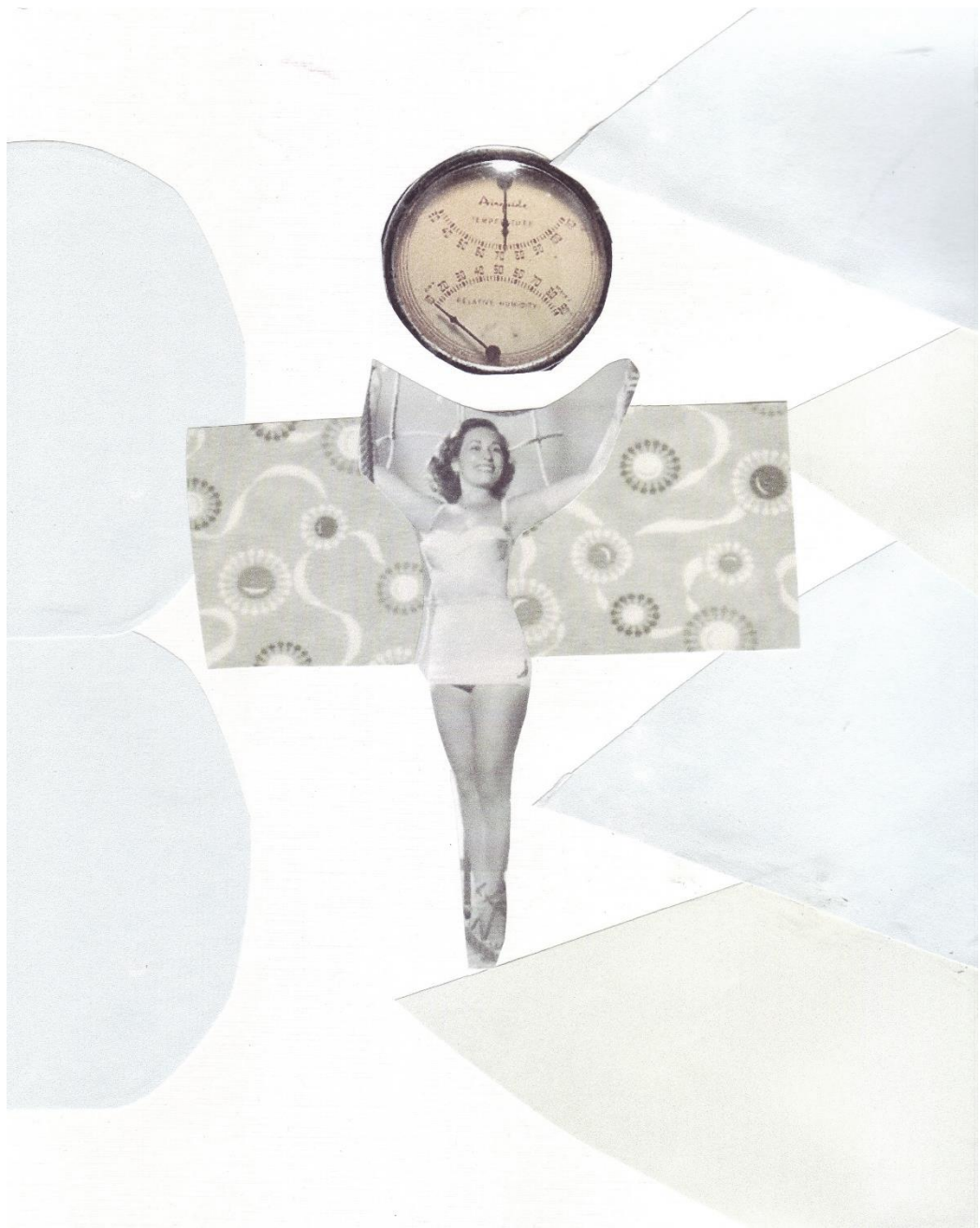
eleanor in atomovision

At seven, the rats begin running up the steps and across the patio,
The flats of their bellies fat with progress and buffalo nickels.
The quicksilver of tiny glass filaments beneath her skin
humming with sunset, the vibrato of western sky.
There's no disaster in this disaster movie, no devastating
doom town kitch. Flies buzz the kitchen, swarm the prickly pears.
But all of it pales next to the television's drone, the static of radios
just under earshot. She takes to it like whistling in the dark,
parking the car out in the desert and fucking the scientist
with his endless theories about fusion. His Lucky Strikes
littering the tire ruts, the endless Nevada of her.



beach blanket bingo on bikini island

By the time your rowboat floats from the field, the bomb
yields a thousand tiny blue crabs, a couple hundred sword fish.
The men on the beach are all wearing gray, are all cutting out pictures
of beauty queens and lining them up on their bunks. Say what you will,
but I've seen their dirty fingers digging into the dark thighs of women.
Spilling their gin rickies and pissing in the streets.
They pretend to be astonished, but carelessness makes their bellies
soft as cuttlefish, the artificial light of barracks glossing their teeth paper white.
What vertebrate things harbors beneath their hearts, the dance cards
of a thousand debutantes waving in the breeze?
What rising tide turns flame, then fury, then five and dime?
Their wives all angel food cake and maribou slippers.
The coconut trees bending in the heat.



seven layer cake

In the desert, an egg will fry at 158 degrees, water will boil at 212.
The torsion of the double mixer spinning sweetly through batter,
through afternoon fly swarms and furious shining. In the desert,
we live big, all neon and waving cowboys, all sprawl and liquor stores.
The quicksilver of vanishing cars on the horizon. Everything moving
away from the unravelling middle. Toward travel centers and motor lodges.
There's no honey in our honeymoon, no sugar in our saunter.
The back roads open to the broad goodbye, one hand waving from the car,
the other palming matches, the ragged map. In the desert, things burn freely,
and suddenly. Give way freely and suddenly to gold.

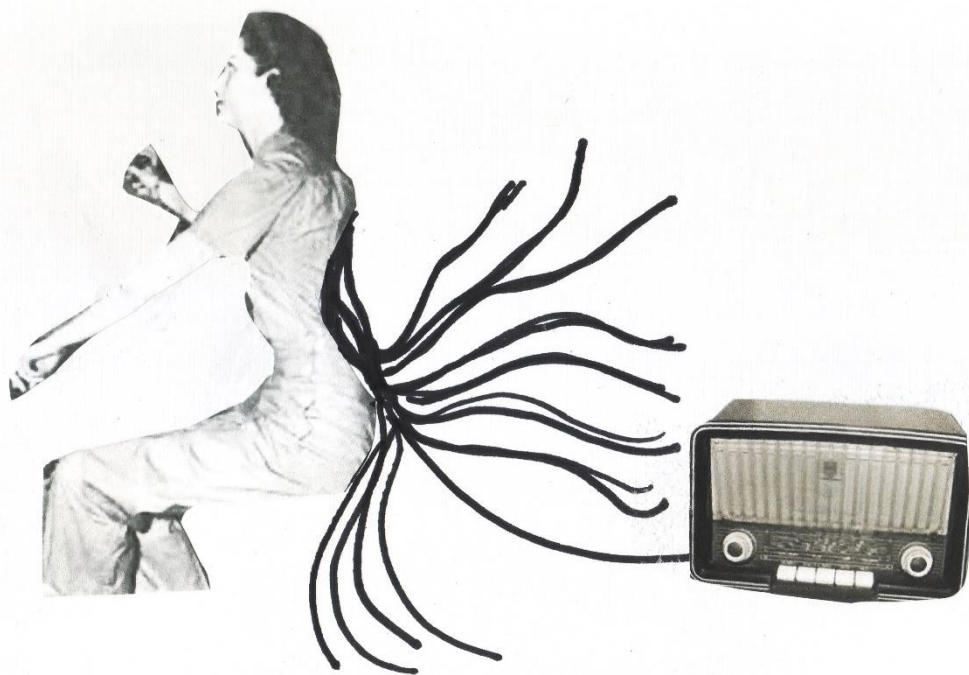
attack of the 50 foot woman

You could be happy here, if it weren't for all the helicopters.
The flock of navy planes flying overhead and the headache
of high heels and haute couture. White Sands only dries you out,
Drives up the prices of tangerines and good coffee, but oh, you love
the way nothing stops your line of vision to the San Andreas, your suitcases
all too small to make it to California, that milk and honey dream of poolside
starlets and questionably straight leading men. But oh you love the drama
of it, the sweep of your Valentino dragging a trail in the sand. The tiny men
that woo you with sedans and tract homes in Santa Fe. Caress the arch of your
foot with their hands while all around them the desert swarms with
dragonflies.



nothing to fear but fear itself

In the grocery store, the shelves are lined with sugar,
with silver tinted plastic delicacies preserved like bodies.
Frosted and precise marzipan roses. One afternoon falls
through another, then another. The dryer rumbles over the sound
of children playing outside in the dust, laying dead like soldiers,
lining up their dolls along the play lot fence and firing. It's tiring,
How she was sleeping through an ocean full of grit and soda cans.
The neighbor with over thirty parakeets thrumming against the cages.
Her husband in the lawn chair, holding his martini, while the aisles
at the Safeway shine and tilt before her like god.



matinee

On the screen, the monsters are always female.
Full of egg sacs and suckling tiny reptilian things.
Sliding their hands beneath
their skirts, bodies fertile and providing.
On the operating table, everything gleams,
everything sharp and slick with mucus,
with sticky wings harbored beneath sweater sets.
On the screen, all the monsters are spilling
over the dining room table. Down the laundry chute.
Jamming the dishwasher with broken crockery
and shiny scales. It's distracting how they wander from
department store to drive-in without batting an eyelash.
Shedding angora and talc, bedding lawyers and insurance men
while inside them, the body's strange machine mutates
and glistens, beats with a tiny reptilian heart.

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