

Transplant

Mitchell Krockmalnik Grabois

1.

My Sri Lankan girlfriend wanted me to send her a birthday present, a pretty stone from the Rocky Mountains. She wanted me to send it by Facebook, not a picture of a stone, a real stone. I tried to explain the limitations of the Internet to her, but she wouldn't accept my explanations. It seemed she had determined to believe only what she wanted to believe.

Therefore, she decided I didn't really care about her, and that I was a lousy boyfriend and she broke up with me on Facebook, which I guessed was okay, though I had never laid my hands on her, never rubbed my dick on her thigh or put it in her. I guessed I never would, either on the Internet or in reality.

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2.

A bleached robin pulls a worm from a brown spot on my lawn. I've applied *Revive* three times, but the blazing sun has its way. Drought has its way. I'm no tender green blade.

For five years, I visited the same fountain every year on my birthday. It was like tossing the I Ching, or asking God to write my name in the Book of Life on Yom Kippur. And the question was: *Will I finally be recognized as the genius I am and be hoisted in a chair above everyone's head like a Jewish bridegroom, or will I be in the mailroom forever, schleping mail?*

On my sixth visit, I decided the answers were: *No* and *Yes*. So I changed jobs.

3.

My next relationship was even more tragic. It was with a woman whose face was later torn off by a chimpanzee. That was six years ago and she's still having serious problems living, even after the police shot the chimpanzee to death like it was any black teenager who was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Even after she got a face transplant, her life remained shit. You'd think a face transplant might have solved all her problems, but she's still got a lot of disabilities. They gave her some new teeth so she can eat pizza, but she can't chew the crust. She can eat chicken, but not steak. She can dream of dating, but can't date.

4.

I met my girlfriend Eppa at my new job. Her parents owned the deli. She was allegedly an employee, but only worked when she felt like it. One day she came in at about one-thirty, wearing a black and white checked skirt, a black blouse with lace at the throat, and a black beret. She sat down at one of the restaurant tables and lit a cigarillo. She looked like a French Jewess sitting in a café on the West Bank. She only needed an espresso to complete the impersonation, so I asked her if she'd like me to bring her a cup of coffee.

How about a Doctor Brown's cream soda? she asked.

5.

She called me late at night for a long time after the chimp's assault but before her transplant, hoping to renew our affair. I reminded her that she was the one who broke up with me, but I wasn't sorry about it. In fact, in retrospect, I was happy it was over between us. *If I didn't want her with a face, I asked her, why would I want her faceless?* However, she wasn't really faceless—what was left was worse than faceless.

At that time, I never imagined that doctors could transplant a face. I suggested that she try Match.com. Surely someone would be fascinated, eager to date a woman whose face was torn off by a chimp, but she protested that that's not the kind of man she wanted to date. She wanted a kind man, a Zen Buddhist who didn't sweat the small stuff and who could find *her* kindness and intelligence behind her horrifying visage.

6.

I brought the Doctor Brown's cream soda to her, poured it from the can into a glass of ice, as I did for customers, then went back to methodically cleaning tables. The lunch rush was over, all the customers were gone. They were an ancient, sloppy bunch, oblivious that they were dripping mayonnaise and mustard, dropping pickles and pieces of tomato. Eppa watched me work with a thoughtful expression. I was soon back at her table. I swiped the rag around.

Raise your arm, would you? I asked.

She looked at me. *No.*

What do you mean, no?

My arm is comfortable where it is.

Oh, come on.

What do you mean, come on? My parents own this joint.

7.

Nevertheless, in spite of my callous pose, I was sometimes jarred awake in the middle of the night feeling bad about the women I'd been with. They were real women, but I was never enough of a man for them. In fact, my two a.m. sorrow became so wide, I could not see across it. But then I took a hundred milligrams of Zoloft and my vision improved immensely.

I discovered that I was on a bridge in a four-wheel drive vehicle. My father was driving and he said: *I was kidding you, son. You won't always be a bum. I'm going to take you to the village in the Alsace Loraine where Albert Schweitzer lived. There he had the vision to go to Africa and work at curing the benighted natives. I'm sure you'll find something to do just as noble, now that you're on the bridge and I'm driving you in a Dodge Ram, the vehicle that's all about guts and glory.*

8.

I temporarily forgot how strong Eppa was and took her by the elbow. She threw her arm back and sent me flying, to fall on my ass on the grimy black and white checked linoleum. She went back to reading her book, *L'Etranger* by Camus. She was reading it in French. On the cover was a picture of an elegant bistro, far removed from this dump, her parents' livelihood all through her growing up years.

Mitchell Krockmalnik Grabois lives in Denver, Colorado, has had over fourteen-hundred of his poems and fictions appear in magazines in the U.S. and abroad. He has been nominated for numerous prizes, and was awarded the 2017 Booranga Writers' Centre (Australia) Prize for Fiction. His novel, *Two Headed Dog*, based on his work as a clinical psychologist in a state hospital, is available for Kindle and as a print edition.