

Angela Alaimo O'Donnell

Talking to My Body, My Body Talks Back: Left Leg

It's still here. The pencil point. In my left thigh,
halfway down between my hip & knee.
James Hettis thought it funny, his 4th grade
brain didn't know he'd become a part of me
forever. Since then, every time I see
my leg — in the bath, running by the sea —
James is with me, smiling. I didn't cry.
I knew somehow that was what he wanted.
I didn't tell the teacher. Instead I stayed
calm until he turned away, poked and taunted
the girl in front of him in line — who did cry,
much to his delight. Attention was paid
to a sad boy who needed it more than I.
The lesson I am taught by my left thigh.

Talking to My Body, My Body Talks Back: Right Hand

Like a toothed saw through meat, it cut me ragged.
The bread knife I've dreaded since I got it.
Innocent gift from my innocent son, who thought
it would tend only toward good, just cut
what it was meant to cut, bread instead
of flesh, the pink tip of my finger gashed
deep. Blood gushed, the white counter dyed red,
towel after towel soaked it up fast
as my almost stump could pump it out.
It was a slip, a blip, a moment's quick
misstep that could have cost me more than it did.
I marveled at my hand, the cutter, not
the cut, how strong it was, heedless and free,
and wondered what else it might do to me.

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Postcard From Purgatory #1

Dear Mom, it's fine here, I'm surprised to say.
Much better than I thought it would be.
My room is clean, though the hotel is seedy.
The roaches are small and sleep during the day.
The pool is full of algae and slime,
a thick stew of *goo chartreuse*. Yet I find
swimming in it cures my blues. There's no time
to wallow in guilt and rue. They keep
us busy. Gentle devils cheer as we
fail and try, time & time again, to climb
steep hills of garbage, compost of our sin —
we get to the top and slide down again.
When we run on hot coals, I come in first.
It's no spring picnic, but I've seen worse.