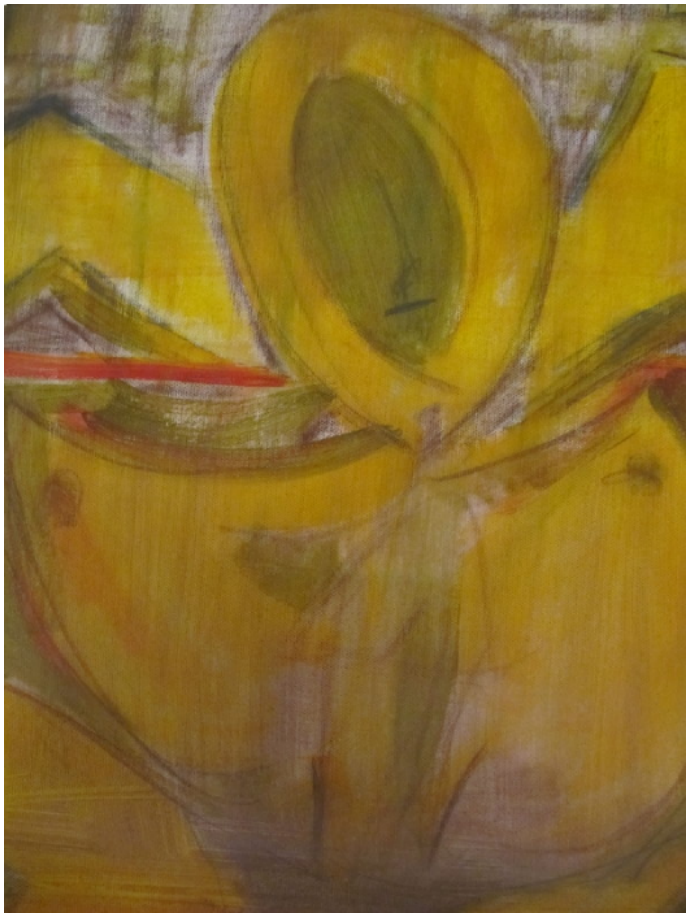
FLASH FICTION

I, Galatea

by Phi Scheiber



"What am I" by Daniel Beaudoin

Tint Journal, no. (), www.tintjournal.com

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I am Galatea. Somewhat.

Not hewn from stone but forged, cast — my hot potential poured into some form that's been made for me — no! Not even *for me*, just *made*, by some craftsman, not quite sober or not quite conscious. The metal might once have been precious, a fluid promise, but now I'm stuck within this solidified shell. Oh to be smelted down again, oh to be allowed to escape the casts, to cool off on our own terms, oh to remain free flowing; imagine the shapes, the possibilities! We ought to bond and melt together — allies, alloys — and wash away these amateurish Pygmalions, these tyrants of uniformity and *be* and *become* our own creations!

I scream all of this at the waiter. His face is blank enough to make me forget what I was saying or why I was saying it.

"What would you like to drink, Sir?" he asks — not for the first time, I'm forced to assume, and I can remember what prompted my outburst but not what I want to order, so I look at the menu and mumble "Guinness" even though I hate beer in general and Guinness in particular. But is it not what I am supposed to order to make the Irish expat owner of the pub happy?

The waiter leaves me and takes my train of thought with him. I notice that my legs are shaking. I look at them the way one might look at a dog shivering at the vet, then I decide to get up and go to the toilet instead of sitting here. Alone and immeasurably exposed.

I don't know why I choose the men's room.Well, I do, but I don't want to acknowledge this vague fear; because it's vague and probably ridiculous, and acknowledging it might make it more concrete and maybe less ridiculous and — the single toilet stall is occupied.

The warm smell of excrements does nothing to ease the tight pull of anxiety. It's a gamble, am I feeling lucky? There's no one else here, the pub's not that busy. I don't really need to pee but maybe I do and leaving would be awkward and the stall is still occupied and I don't know how much time has passed already and I am at the urinal.

It was always a gamble. Of course, I lose everything and the door opens before I can even commence to pee.

"What's up?"

Pause. Everything within me reels against the realization that he's talking to me.

"Havin' a fun night?"

I stare at the thing in my hand, foreign, useless — most importantly: not peeing. The idea of urinating has never been more absurd. How does one pee, what are the preconditions of the possibility of peeing? Everything liquid within me, everything that might once have been urine, is frozen solid and the ice crystals slice their way up my spine.

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Because this is my personal Tartarus, he cements himself right next to me; a stark contrast in everything. He is not frozen, he is fluid, confident, dynamic. My head is spinning and I am not peeing but he is peeing for both of us. I burn my gaze into off-white porcelain, inviting the blankness to erase everything I am. Lose myself in the urinal, become the urinal, be the urinal. It does not work.

We spend an eternity together. Unfathomable amounts of fluid leave his body. I hear the rhythm of the universe in the splashes; the universe is cold and unfeeling.

Eventually, he is done and shakes and shivers, contracts and expands, zips up his pants. Before he leaves, he slaps my shoulder — actually touches me, reaches through my outer layers to slap something deep within me with the same hand he just —

“Good luck,” he says, then he is gone. He gets to casually disappear, walk away as if nothing happened. This thought makes me shatter, disintegrate.

My body makes it back to the table, somehow. Time is a porcelain expanse of nothing, stretching on without mercy or reason until my aunt rushes in, scans the room, finds my cheeks to press kisses onto them.

“Wow, is that really you? I almost walked past your table, you know, I thought you were a girl for a second there, what with your hair and everything, you should really get that cut, you know, girls won’t like it when you have longer hair than them. ” She gives me a wink, looking decidedly like a wax figure of herself, and continues talking.

I’m not stupid; I know she meant it as an insult. Still…

Her words wash over my form, I’m firmly grounded — trapped — inside, but it feels a little less jagged, a little less rigid. A little less final.

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