

Excerpt from in-progress manuscript

Lifeforce Klepto

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Angela Szczepaniak is the author of *Unisex Love Poems* (an illustrated novel-in-poems) and *The QWERTY Institute* (visual fictions), which details the lives, inks, and deep-C adventures of a variety of fonts as they wade through awkward social situations. She is a Lecturer and Programme Director of the MFA in Creative Writing at the University of Surrey, and is at work on a novel-in-performance-anxiety constructed from reshaped audio recordings of panic attacks.

She wasn't sure exactly how long she'd wanted to just lie about eating Mr Margherita mini pies but it was around the time she started crying at X-Factor auditions that she really knew something was up. No one could put their finger on it, but the slow creep of indiscernible malaise dug its claws into her pluck, bit by bit, until there was almost nothing left but blah.



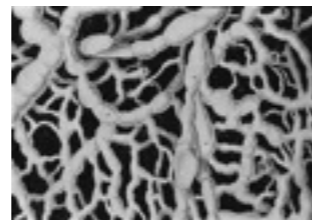
She could slightly remember the fringes of having vitality and gumption, but then when it came down to it, she just ceased to be able to muster. It started small—meeting up with friends, going to movies. She'd make enthusiastic plans, then bail at the last minute. Was she coming down with something?



Job stress, everyone kept saying. She did work for the Liferforce Klepto, after all. Well. Not *the* Liferforce Klepto, of course. Liferforce Kleptos are many. But *a* Liferforce Klepto. A real Queen of Hearts, all flipped logics and offwiththeirheads.



Only this Liferforce Klepto didn't have up front bad boss tendencies. This Liferforce Klepto—*her* Liferforce Klepto—made nice with the small talk, kept the coffee pot steady, argued in favour of keeping the top shelf donuts stocked in the breakroom. But there was... a quality. A low rustling.



According to the Journal of Nerves & Absorption Diseases

To define the *Liferforce Klepto* is to pin a blob of mercury

The liferforce klepto is human, ultimately
but just

The liferforce klepto complains when they get your energy stuck
in their teeth

The liferforce klepto fibs spiderspun narratives about little known
wines and exotic cheeses

The liferforce klepto is a juggler of taughtnerved emotion and
fingerlight morning dews

The liferforce klepto works by nudges and squidges until
you're nudged right off the map

The liferforce klepto will steal your shoes if you're not careful

The liferforce klepto pilfers your sleep through
a straw in your ear

The liferforce klepto sneaks gratuitous sodium into your salads
and your wounds

The liferforce klepto hires pigeons for
faecal revenge
but you can never prove it

The liferforce klepto will call you toots
if you're not vigilant

*Transmissions from the Desk of her Lifeforce Klepto:
Re: I've been reviewing the metrics*

I've been reviewing the metrics
the eyes through which you are being viewed
and they are seeing some alarming trends
these watchful eyes

A 3% fall in proposal acceptances from this department
Do you not like acceptance? Is there something
to be done to raise your inclination toward acceptance?

30% rise in lunchtime tardiness by up to 4 minutes;
studies show that chewing food 26 times
per bite is equally effective though less time consuming than
the archaic advice of 32 times. We'll revisit the numbers on this
chew-reduction directive next quarter

7% increase in the reporting of workplace
injury. Nicely done. The protocols are in place to help you
Do ensure your monitor is optimally placed for your eyeheight
and, as ever, it is your responsibility to find time
for hourly stretching

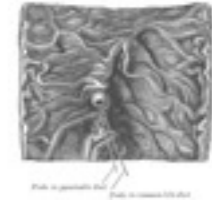
The paperclip and toner supplies seem to be dwindling
and it's only halfway through the tax calendar

Have you been fileflagging with whole post-it notes?

Employee satisfaction has slipped 6% over last year
despite the bespoke pastry basket at the coffee station
Please consult the wellness literature in the breakroom
to find ways to raise your personal happiness. The metrics
don't like such downward slopes—see to it things move
upward at the next survey



Maybe more electrolytes would help, she thought. Antioxidants.
Anti-inflammatories. Adrenal support.



*Home Remedies I: from the Journal of Nerves & Absorption Diseases
For the Treatment of Eye Disorders Brought on by the Anxiety of Seeing*

Warm compress over both eyes twice daily
Press moistened terrycloth in place with
adequate pressure

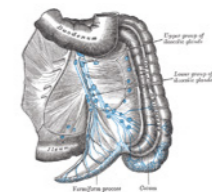
Hold, contemplate
the possibility of unlimited darkness

Count three sets of thirty

Release

Reconsider life choices
in front of rising mirrorfog

Tear ducts should flush within five weeks



*Transmissions from the Desk of her Lifeforce Klepto:
Re: I've been reviewing your schedule*

I've been reviewing your schedule and it looks wide
open for the study of mermaids and
other aquatic creatures of repute.

Need the numbers for
next quarter so snipsnap and butterquick,
no finning about.

Graph it, venn it, plot it on every axis;
leave no gill unturned.

Stay up all night if you have to.

It's crucial to fix the starcharts and puddlemaps
for close of business tomorrow.

