

# Excerpt from in-progress manuscript *Lifeforce Klepto*

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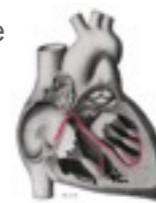
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Angela Szczepaniak is the author of *Unisex Love Poems* (an illustrated novel-in-poems) and *The QWERTY Institute* (visual fictions), which details the lives, inks, and deep-C adventures of a variety of fonts as they wade through awkward social situations. 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 Lifeforce Klepto, after all. Well. Not *the* Lifeforce Klepto, of course. Lifeforce Kleptos are many. But *a* Lifeforce Klepto. A real Queen of Hearts, all flipped logics and offwiththeirheads.



Only this Lifeforce Klepto didn't have up front bad boss tendencies. This Lifeforce Klepto—*her* Lifeforce 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 *Lifeforce Klepto* is to pin a blob of mercury

The lifeforce klepto is human, ultimately  
but just

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The lifeforce 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

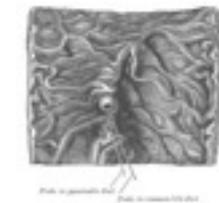
The paperclip and toner supplies seem to be dwindling  
and it's only halfway through the tax calendar

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

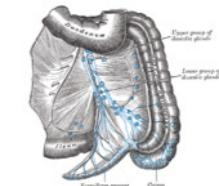
Hold, contemplate  
the possibility of unlimited darkness

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.

