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 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.

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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 is a juggler of taughtnerved emotion and fingerlight morning dews

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

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
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 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
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.