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The Zipper

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The Zipper

Micah Beukelman

11:00 p.m.

Time to fall apart.

A droplet runs down my cheek, forming a line of foundation, and my mascara bleeds it into grey. The blue microfiber cloth comes away vaguely flesh-toned and I think my skin has rubbed away.

Another day spent together, one piece, a whole and singular body working toward survival. I sigh, a deeply intrinsic and troubling sigh that comes from a place beyond the cavity in my chest, behind my lungs. It comes from deeper—the soul, maybe, or even the heart, but only the metaphorical heart, the symbolic representation of *me*—it sighs. This place, this cavernous, consuming mouth in my body groans.

My face is red from scrubbing, my eyes blurred from the dripping makeup. There's nothing left to take off except my clothes. I shed them and stand in front of the mirror, naked and shaking.

And I have this thought as I look at myself in the mirror: I wish I had a zipper on my chest, running from my clavicle to my navel that I could tug on and release everything, pulling, unhinging tiny teeth. The exposed laced-fingers ribcage, the metallic twist of fascia, the movement of heartbeat and breath sound. Then, I could unzip with one hand and reach with the other beneath my lungs, dig, root, search. Find. I could grab onto that place behind myself, grip it tight, and wrench it out.

I wonder what that place would look like. Maybe it would be a shadow I hold on to. Maybe it would be a tangle of blood vessels and nerves like a smaller nervous system inside of my

chest. Maybe it would be another heart, smaller and weaker and darker. Maybe it would just be a ghost of a feeling, the silhouette of something that used to be there but isn't anymore or maybe it never was in the first place. But I would reach in, twist my hand around my spine, and just feel for something. Anything.

Even if nothing is there, maybe it would feel better. Like someone who has lost a limb and feels phantom pain, maybe I would feel something that used to be there but hasn't been for a long time. Maybe simply putting my hand in this place and feeling the emptiness, the lack of substance there, would be enough for me to feel something.

I watch the process in reverse.

I wake up in the morning, stretch, weigh myself, brush my teeth. Before I get dressed for the day, I stuff the shadow, the cluster of blood vessels and nerves, the small heart, the ghostly silhouette of a feeling, back into my chest into the space where it belongs, buried under my lungs and heart.

I take a deep breath,
 let it settle back
 and reconnect to my body.

I grip the zipper with my thumb and forefinger and pull it up. I seal myself like a mortician stitching closed a cadaver.

I am together, held by metal prongs and willpower. I spend the day in a place where I feel like an imposter, exposed by my zipper, only to come home, tear my chest open, and yank out the only thing in my body that keeps me together.

Closed, I am whole, open I am undone.