

A MEDITATION ON THE SMELL OF BLOOD

By

Maura Devereux

I have been sitting here for two hours and 45 minutes and I can smell my bandage. I know it's my bandage and I don't know how I know it. It's not like I know the smell that well. I don't smell this every day. It really stinks, though. All the blood's drying. Maybe that's the problem. When I cut it at the shop, it really gushed out. I've never seen so much blood. It didn't even hurt when I did it. It didn't hurt at any point. That's probably why I just kept working, until I saw that I'd gotten a big ass gob of blood on the matting. It was a good thing I saw it when I did. I could have put that lady's Mary Cassatt print right on top of it, and then, boy, would she be pissed.

So my boss ran to the back and gave me this big wad of paper towels and told me to get to the hospital. He offered to drive me but he had a great parking space, which was pretty sweet for him because he needs to load up and make some deliveries at the end of the day, so I said, you know, man, it's ok, just call me a cab. He said, you have to keep direct pressure on there to stop the bleeding, so don't be pulling that stuff up to just to look at it. So I said ok and got in the cab, and I

could really feel it pulsing, you know, throbbing, not like it hurt but like everything was getting forced into it. That tripped me out for a minute. I had to think about it. I had the good hand covering the cut hand, controlling the bleeding with direct pressure like he said, and I swear, with the throbbing and the pulsing it felt like I was feeling my actual heart, you know? Right there. Right in my hands. Like if I pulled my good hand away for even one second, my big pumping heart would just jump right out. It was just something I was tripping on, sitting in the cab, watching the little trickles of red soaking through the paper towels and dripping onto my shoe. I crossed my leg to catch the blood on my pants, so as not to make a mess of the cab.

I thought that with all that feeling of holding my heart in my hand that maybe I was really in serious trouble, and was going to start to worry about it when I got called in to see the nurse. She took off the paper towels and took a close look at the cut. I thought it looked pretty nasty. I couldn't tell if that was skin or muscles or what, little blobs of fat or what, but she didn't seem grossed out at all. She pinched it a little, because the blood had dried some but there was still some coming out and she wanted to see where and how much. But then she must have decided it wasn't all that bad because she stuck a gauze pad on top of it and wrapped another gauze around it and I was going to make some kind of joke about how the word "gauze" is like the word "god" and she seemed pretty cool so I thought she'd probably laugh, but I couldn't figure out a good thing to say about it and she told me to go ahead and wait in the waiting room and they'd call me when they had a room available.

So I've been sitting here, and sometimes I hold my hand on the bandage because it seems like I should be doing something while I wait. There's a guy sitting next to me with an abscess like a second bicep growing on top of his arm. He's about my age and I feel like maybe I should talk to him but he seems kind of skanky and I don't want him to touch me because I don't want an infection

like that all in my hand. The only other person who seems to be my age is this Asian girl, maybe Korean or something. Kind of Chinese, but not exactly Chinese. I could be wrong. She's here with an old lady, probably her grandmother. The old lady is sitting in a wheelchair, looking straight ahead. She's just waiting, so the girl's waiting, too. If she wants to be somewhere else, I can't tell it. She must be bored, but she's not catching my eye. It's not that she's really cute or anything. It's just that if I'm bored and I'm in a room full of people, well, I just start getting kind of curious. I guess she doesn't. Everyone else is older than me, some a little and some a lot, and even though they all look miserable, I can't really say that they all look sick.

But the smell of my bandage is becoming a real concern, because I'm having one of those experiences that might be like *deja vu* but I don't want to call it that, exactly. It's one of those things that I recognize instinctively and I can't tell if that's because I've smelled it before, or if it's coming to me from deep somewhere in my brain. It could be a Collective Unconscious smell. The smell coming off my bandage smells like both meat and metal. It smells dirty, like literal dirt. It smells like salt and copper. But it smells animal, too. That's what's awful about it. It smells totally animal, but not like other smells, shall we say, of the body. It doesn't smell like sweat or shit or piss but it smells alive just the same. It smells like butchery, is what it smells like. My hand smells butchered. Now I think I might be sick.

And now it occurs to me: if now I know what butchery smells like, I'm a whole lot deeper into the smell of darkness. This is the war smell. This is the murder smell. It's just this. Not a hair smell, not a mouth smell, not an ass smell. This is what they cover with sawdust. I don't think this is what death smells like, but I haven't smelled death. I think this is worse. I think this is the thing that comes with death.

I guess I'm so used to seeing blood from horror movies that I've gotten used to thinking it's a

visual thing. I always thought it was kind of cool looking, too. It was cool looking running down my arm. But now it's getting stale and it's not cool violence any more. It's the aftermath of violence. My bandage is turning brown and crunchy now. I've been here three hours and 20 minutes. I can pick what used to be the bright red streamers from my arm with my fingernails. The blood flakes into little ant hills on the carpet, and the Korean or maybe Chinese grandmother watches me, dispassionately. I think of going into the bathroom to wash it off myself, but then I'd have to ask the nurse for another gauze. And she's probably going to call my name any minute anyway.

I think when I go in there, I'm going to ask if they can give me some rubbing alcohol. I'm going to rub that under my nose, and when the doctor sews my hand up, I'm going to keep my eyes shut.