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Self Portrait as an Anatomy Lab Cadaver

By Lisa Kerr Dunn

There is a country in my missing womb—a frontier myth. The lesson here is not of a woman; think bigger: of striving, of servitude, of witches. In my belly, in that barren scape, is a public square where they carried out hangings, erected monuments to the hangers. Is a trail blazed across someone else's land. Is the name I gave something I had no right to own. There is a history of animal offerings there. Of trespasses. A great table where men made virgin sacrifices to old gods, wrong ones. This is a country of missing books. Lessons unstudied. In life, I learned enough to know that my body was a palimpsest. That this missing thing they once called "animal" was chained and starved long before my time, and repeatedly. That it became sunless, silent as a blunted knife. Take this emptiness under your scalpel. Open it like any other organ, to know it. But when they come for the pinning, do not let on: name it hysteria, call it absence.

Lisa Kerr Dunn is a Professor in the Writing Center at the Medical University of South Carolina, where she is also Director of the new Office of Humanities. She edited the collection *Mysterious Medicine: The Doctor-Scientist Tales of Hawthorne and Poe* and is the author of a new young readers' chapter book, *Dreaming with Animals: Anna Hyatt Huntington and Brookgreen Gardens*. She's at work on a poetry collection about her experiences as a cervical cancer survivor.

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