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Reading response 2

The Difference between a Metaphor and a Thing

Nadia opens the short story “A Lady’s Maid” by Sarah Gailey but she is not the real thing, neither lady nor maid nor human. Throughout the story she is variously described as “a lovely pearl,” a lifeless prize to be treasured, a beautiful object made from rough raw materials, and as a hope—also the etymology of her name—and dream. “She [i]s strong” but her strength comes from mechanics, not character. The story can take us “Inside Ada’s Brain” but not Nadia’s because she does not have one. Nadia’s internal episodes are marked as locations where things happen: “Upstairs, in the Bedroom” or “Downstairs, in the Parlor,” not as live organs as the humans’ are. She is a machine, made to embody “the perfect woman,” the latest model fifty years in development awaiting an imminent “010.wife.prt% firmware update,” with refillable blood where Isaac, “He tops me off” like a drink, and that can be overindulged like Stephen Vanderbilt is given to doing.

Ada, on the other hand, steps into the role of lady’s maid, the title character, when she answers Nadia’s call in place of the indisposed Beatrice, and in grasping that “*opportunity*,” she leaves behind her identity as a kitchen girl. She is practical, discreet, and smart. “She closed Miss Nadia’s ribs up, and, with minimal instruction, she caulked over the seams in Miss Nadia’s flesh.” When she hyperventilates, it is not because her auxiliary fan is incapable of cooling down overheated circuitry, but because of overwhelming emotion. She is “‘in the way,’ and ‘brown-haired’ and (this from Albert, when he thought she couldn’t hear him) ‘I’d give it a go, if I was desperate enough,’” not dream, not perfect, not “mother approved.” While Nadia, the man-made representation of a lady, is unacquainted with being dead, “whatever that is,” because she has never been alive, Ada, the self-declared and present lady’s maid who ends the story, does not approximate a human, dream, perfect, or otherwise; she *is* human, with a healthy sense of self-preservation (“She saw the pointed finger coming from a mile away” and “it might be awfully hard for us to remember that you didn’t murder anybody”) and a realized entitlement: “*I do have what it takes to be a lady’s maid after all.*”

Works Cited

Gailey, Sarah. “A Lady’s Maid.” *Barnes and Noble Sci-Fi and Fantasy Blog*, 25 May 2017, <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/blog/sci-fi-fantasy/ladys-maid-sarah-gailey/>.