

**Lee Merlin | Miss Atomic Bomb, 1957**

Standing in nothing but  
sand and sky, phone poles

erect in the distance. Even  
through black and white,

desert air burns  
your eyes. In one shot:

elbows bent, hands  
behind her head, pin her

hair up from the nape  
of her neck. The other:

her arms explode  
into clouds.

You've never  
met her, but recognize

that smile, the fluff  
of what covers her body,

how close the bomb  
sits to her skin.

## The Smallest Thing

When Heim reveals his “Atome”  
in Cannes, it’s the smallest  
possible thing  
a woman can wear

on the beach until days later  
in Saint Tropez, Louis Réard  
creates a suit with only  
thirty square inches of fabric—

a series of triangles  
connected by string.  
He hires skywriters, boasts  
*it’s not tiny if it can’t fit*

*through a wedding ring,*  
a thing so small only  
a nude dancer will model it.  
He calls it explosive, names it

“bikini” after Bikini Atoll  
in the Marshall Islands,  
where five days earlier,  
the US began testing

atomic bombs,  
leaving a layer of snow  
that would radiate  
into and out of

the islanders’ bodies,  
particles  
that would strip them  
of their homes.

## The Mannequin Stands in Front of the Instant Pot

While she'd sworn the whole thing off,  
another unused contraption on the counter,  
it was a gift, so now she scrolls for minutes,  
an hour? searching for time-saving recipes while  
the red digital "OFF" light stares her down. She's  
intimidated by the number of buttons, the pressure—  
when it's released and how. In some states, it's not ok  
to put noodles in your chili, in others you must,  
but on Pinterest, quinoa; sweet potatoes; black beans—  
*anything-goes* in your chili. This is what she chooses,  
the day so cold malls, schools, liquor stores close.  
Even mail has stopped moving. The mannequin  
has mastered the basics of surviving winter: stews,  
tea, bulk depression meds from Costco. And now  
DoTerra has found her scrolling Pinterest, and while  
she ignores MLM mom-party invites to learn more  
about essential oil detox, she remembers a Facebook  
friend saying black pepper oil is "an oil of unmasking,"  
and is that what she's looking for? She hits "sauté"  
on the Instant Pot, peels sweet potatoes, their flesh  
pale and dusty as anything trying to live now.  
Timer set, the kids look up from TV to ask  
what's for dinner and whine about it. Her husband  
is skeptical, but the mannequin has learned to adjust  
her expectations, is posed to fit into any space  
she's needed, to balance a stack of plates  
like a waitress. She makes veggie dogs and nukes  
frozen broccoli for the kids as steam squeals  
from the top of the pot, soaking the cupboard  
above it. Finally, she unlatches the lid, finds  
what she has made is not chili, but topped  
with avocado and hot sauce, anything is delicious.

## After Genetic Testing, the Mannequin Lays Naked on the Operating Table

*Perfection is terrible, it cannot have children.*  
—Sylvia Plath, “The Munich Mannequins”

Sterile hum and blur  
    more blue  
    than white, doctor/nurse  
mumble, disposable

    shuffle  
        of the pad  
    beneath her body,  
the whisper  
    of Danskos on bare  
        floor,  
    clatter/clank, the surgeon  
        takes everything

she can live without:  
    breasts, uterus, ovaries,  
        part of her  
    colon, it is not

enough, she asks them  
    to remove

    throat, pancreas, liver,  
    her brain, where  
memories  
    begin to fray,

    her body  
        may as well  
be broken  
    down to the flesh-

    colored pieces

that carry  
    no risk,

a stack of limbs  
    that might  
        still be of use  
        to someone