

Rachel Dupont

## *The List*



After studying the list she'd written entitled, "Things I Am Neurotic About," she took out her best pair of scissors, snipped each element free from the list, and proceeded to arrange them in alphabetical order.

She began with the As, placing apocalyptic films beneath angel figurines, followed by bar soap and bendy straws. But then, both of those could also fit under S. No, she had enough for the Ss, with spoons, smartphone commercials, and socks. Now for the Cs...damn, she didn't have any Cs written down. Well, that was no good, she couldn't have any letter unrepresented. She scrawled down incomplete alphabets, put the word "incomplete" in parentheses, and placed this new addition under the As.

Conference rooms—there, that would fit in the Cs. She'd had panic attacks in every meeting held in a conference room in the history of her career. Cats—that was another. Next was doctor's offices, followed by drinking fountains.

She sorted and arranged, occasionally remembering one she'd

overlooked. Then came more scrawling with the pen, more snipping with the scissors, more sliding bits of paper around the polished mahogany coffee table. The table was beautiful, except for that one coffee mug ring on the edge of it that always drew her eyes, often distracting her from noticing anything else in the room. She added that to the list.

Fingernails.

Shoe cleanliness.

Toilet seats.

Eyebrows.

Pants.

Vomit.

Phone calls.

Sorting. Remembering. Writing. Cutting. Sorting.

When she was satisfied—or, at the very least, as satisfied as she could reasonably be—she took a fresh sheet of paper from the pad before her, wrote down every item on her list, and snipped them apart once again.

This time, she arranged them next to the first list, but instead of alphabetizing them, she arranged them by category. Fingernails, eyebrows, and pubic hair were placed together. Milk, produce items, poultry. Pants went with other people's feet and face touching. Toilet seats were right up there with vomit. Sorting. Arranging. Duplicating (for some, of course, could fit under multiple classifications).

When her second list was finished, she put down her pen and ran her fingers over the bits of paper, making sure they were lined up straight, making sure she'd omitted nothing. She bit her upper lip until a tiny sampling of blood dripped onto her tongue, then picked up the pen once more.

Once more, she duplicated the first list.

Once more, she cut it to bits.

Once more she arranged, on the table, avoiding the ring, placing the third list next to the second one, which was next to the first one.

She arranged the third list in order of importance. Vomit was above drinking fountains, which was above milk, which was on par with other people's feet.

Cutting. Sorting. Rethinking. Resorting.

"Nell."

Dr. Rosenberg had said her name more times than she could count. She did not look up; she continued her sorting. She was not finished.

"Nell."

manuscripts

She continued sorting.

“Nell.”

Pubic hair. Eyebrows. Conference rooms.

“NELL.”

She changed her mind, put conference rooms next to smartphone commercials.

“Nell....”

She was finished. She looked up.

Dr. Rosenberg placed his coffee mug on the table, next to the third list. She lifted it up and put it on top of the notepad.

“Nell, I asked you to list the top five. You’ve taken up almost the whole hour.”

She looked at him wordlessly.

She pointed at the first list, under the Ls. The second list, under the second category. The third list, fourteenth item from the top.

All three read the same. He followed her finger.

List thoroughness.

Dr. Rosenberg pulled off his glasses and rubbed his eyes.

She straightened a bit of paper, on which she’d written face touching.

Dr. Rosenberg put his glasses back on, doing a brief calculation in his head. Six more years. Six more years, then he could retire.