

Automata Factory

by Elizabeth Aoki

1.

The only way you can get sick here
is if you bring it with you, messy fluids smeared
in fingerprints against the white diamond glass.
Breathe hoarse steam against vibrating steel grates.
Cough your flu unheard against the engines of the night.
The workers wear white masks and helmets
exoskeletons carve their sinews
into windup toys with silver capillaries.
Voices flit from radio to radio, barking orders
less human-looking than their handiwork.

2.

It walks like a duck.
Quacks like a duck.
But as a trickle of oil leaks from its beak
and behind, well
we know it is not a duck.

3.

This is the assembly line where they press down faces
for market; they start out cerise, taupe, green
and end up bronze, ebony, ivory, pink.
The faces they give you repel disease,
attract wealth, give off pheromones
that will linger in hallways. But you
will only speak the language of faces
once you put them on. The ears
are part of the deal and only buzz
in a certain range. The poor are gone
and you cannot smell them.
Only a humming like a refrigerator

constant and in the background
might make its way to your jaw.
Sometimes this face
will clench and grind
your prosthetic teeth in the night.
You won't know it
except in your bones.
No one would know anything
to look at you.