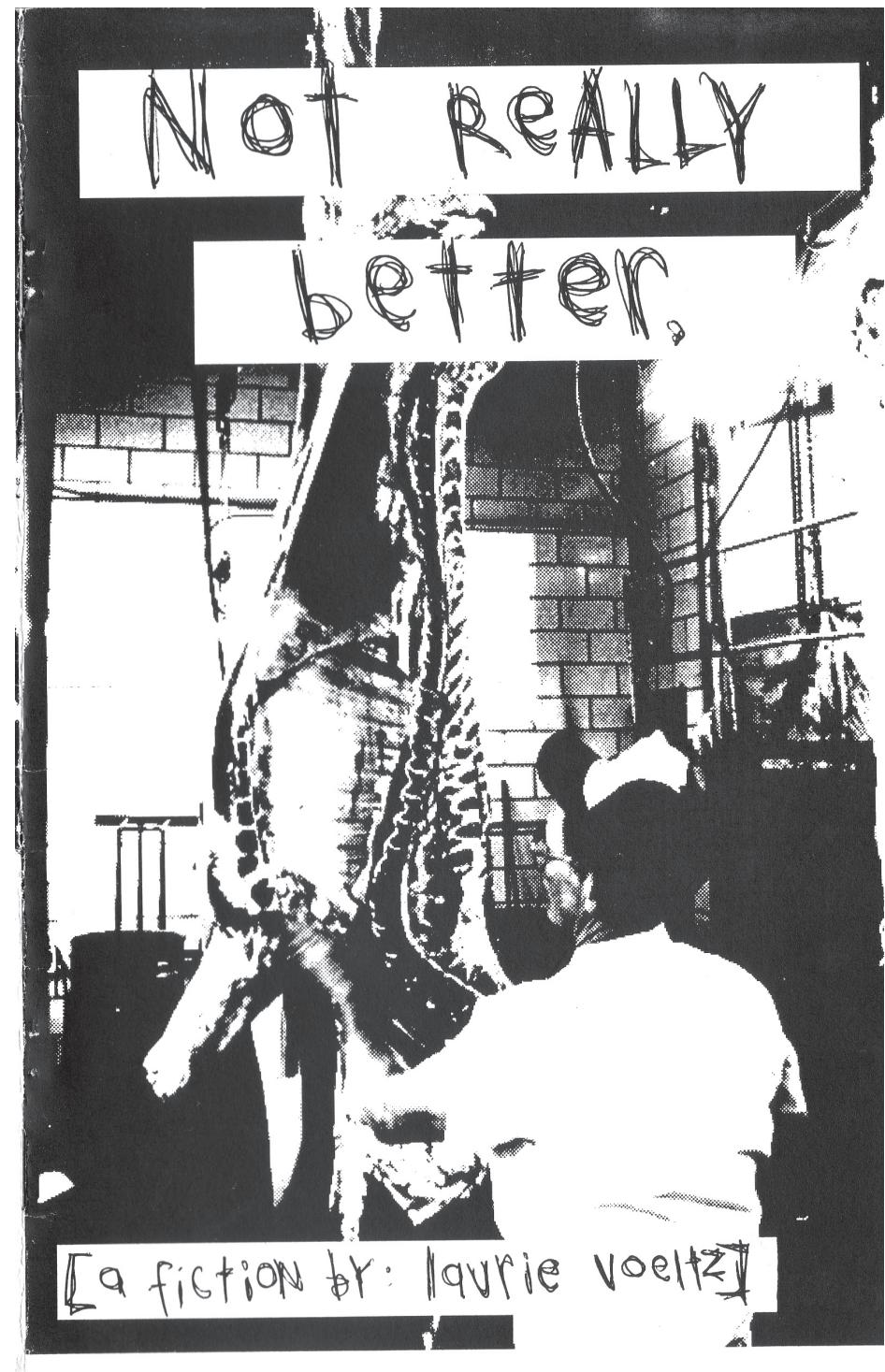


-animal rights resource site [this has tons of really good links!!! ]  
[look for the no compromise and front-line pages]  
<http://arrs.envirolink.org>

- Me!  
laurie voeltz  
email is the best way to reach me after sept. '99 cuz i'll be moving.  
[revolutiongrrrl@hotmail.com](mailto:revolutiongrrrl@hotmail.com)  
[communication is encouraged and demanded!]

anti-apathy, revolution means doing something, doing anything, to make a positive change in the world and never giving up!



When one staggers out backwards, Tony from receiving prods it with an electric poker. I imagine what the zap feels like. The rough-haired coat on the backwards cow shudders. I don't think it's because of the flies.

I don't want to imagine the electric sting anymore, I pretend not to feel pain for the cow. We hurt so easily, I don't want to be fragile.

### **RITA**

I get confused and don't know whether the cows are true animals or just walking meat and blood.

I asked people about this on break, and almost everyone scoffed at me. But Rita with the silvery eyes said they were animals and it looked like she was crying. She told me humans are animals too. Rita with the silver eyes always looks like she's crying.

She started working here three weeks ago. I want to tell her things are ok because I want to help her. She wouldn't believe me anyway. She thinks cows are animals.

### **MORE BAD DREAMS**

One night I dreamt I smashed a gaunt cow skull. She was brown and white and sneering at me and I hit her with an oversized heavy umbrella. I hit her and hit her and hit her and laughed while blood snaked across the floor to me.

I started to cry when I looked into her fractured face. Her eyes blinked at me. They were Rita's.

### **REALITY**

I told Rita about this. She said that people really do that to cows. Smash their skulls in and make their udders puff up so full that they lose their voice from whining and crying in pain.

I didn't know whether or not cows could feel pain. Rita said there's more to these animal's lives than what we see of them.

Rita said the smallest, least painful part was the slaughter. When we kill the cows, she said, their souls race up to heaven. They go to heaven because they've already been to hell.

### **NICE DREAMS**

I have nice dreams too. Once I dreamt I was floating up and away from a big building. But it was underground and people kept trying to pull me back, only I was standing on a heavy duty cloud that kept floating up.

Once I reached the sun, I climbed into it and fell asleep. When I woke up, my body melted into mercury inside the warm ball. Then I woke up for real. My body was still there.

We wear gloves and coats and hardhats and boots. Still the blood saturates. Like it has a sticky spirit, like it has a ghost.

### **SILENCE**

"Blood, blood, blood, blood, blood, blood, blood, blood." I repeat the word until it sounds like another language.

Good thing the machinery-buzz is deafening. No one else on first shift likes to hear me talk except for myself and Rita. She's too far away to listen. So I have learned how to speak without moving my mouth.

### **THE WINDOW GAME**

I think about blood in front of mirrors. When I notice, I try to change the subject and look through the frosted bathroom window. I try to guess what's on the other side of the opaque glass layer. This is called the window game.

I used to play games like that a lot inside myself when I started here. Not when I was in the packaging department. (I could handle bundles of flesh wrapped in thick cellophane, even if they were still warm.) When I was promoted, the game came to me like a recurring dream.

### **HEAVEN**

People talk about the kill-floor in euphemisms. We joke around and call it Heaven because everyone wears white and moves around inside four white-tile walls.

Some of the employees call it The Butchery. To me, it sounds old-fashioned. It reminds me of black and white movies, meat wrapped in waxed paper.

There are no windows on the floor. I can't play the window game here. So I pretend there is a window and imagine what is on the other side. It is a game in itself.

It's bad to play games here because I need to be focused. That's what I get paid for. That's what Chuck says. But sometimes there's a little break between the massive hanging bodies that sway towards me down the line.

### **CHUCK'S LINE**

Ahead, near the start of Chuck's line, there is a commotion. The meat hooks above him are empty and motionless. Grinding noises pulsate until his eyes open wide and round. I can't see down his line, but I know something is wrong.

I look ahead to my line, pretend I don't notice while Chuck yips like a scared puppy and stomps his feet. The shock fades out and he jumps to the steely red emergency-stop switch mounted on the white wall. The grinding sound dies.

Beef production is an industrial process; and the animals are treated as commodities not as living creatures. Shocked with electric prods, beaten and kicked, cattle are packed into trucks for transport from feedlots to slaughterhouses. Injured animals are often dragged out of trucks to the killing floor where the act of slaughter, even in the modern age, is primitive and violent.

Everyday, 100,000 cattle are slaughtered in the U.S.

## **BLOOD**

Chuck is the first-shift line foreman. He makes stupid jokes above the noise again. They are humorless. All of his slaughterhouse jokes are humorless.

I roll down a slick white sleeve and wonder if I should laugh. Rita with the silver eyes and I are the only two here who never find humor in Chuck's one-liners.

I watch shiny-eyed Rita. She's looking away, her eyes are working hard to tune everything out, including Chuck who's still grinning at himself. A tiny sprinkle-spray of dried brown dots his cheek. Blood.

I thought I'd never get used to the blood. I was wrong. just as a grade school teacher learns to breathe chalk dust and as an artist walks around with paint dribbles an splotches on her hands, I wear blood like a uniform.

It no longer feels foreign to me. The terror of its color and strange stickiness has worn down. It's part of the job. I may even smile when it covers me in my useless white vinyl lab-style coat. I don't really notice.

## **DAVE**

"Hey Tyler, wipe that blood off your face." Our shift manager, Dave with the white hair, sneers at me like something is funny. I obey with a start and a shake, running a rubbery sleeve across my forehead. Like it's as easy as wiping away a smile.

Again, I'm not laughing. I'm not wearing Chuck's grin. I'm not sporting Dave's confidence. I'm not smiling through Rita's weakness. I'm not smiling through any of it. I'm just doing my job.

## **SATURATION**

When you are covered with so much blood, you wear it like a second skin until it washes away in filmy shreds in the shower. Then you take it from the drain like a small clump of hair.

Of course, it's not real blood I'm talking about. It's just the kind that creeps around and pokes you in the head and tries to convince you it's real. Like when I look in the mirror, I expect to see it everywhere. I squint, stare and start to believe that it's all over me again.

## **SILVER EYES**

Rita's silver eyes make me feel like she comes from another place. She's too normal to be an angel, but sometimes I think she comes from the place angels come from...

I don't know if I believe in those white-winged beautiful creatures or not. If i asked about angels at lunch, everyone would laugh.

I don't think these people believe in believing in anything. They scare me. They walk in and out of work everyday. They hardly eat at lunch. I look down at myself and panic. I see myself acting just like them, slowly morphing into one of them. Fear runs through me like those bad dreams do.

But I just pretend I have one silver eye, and the fear fades. Around here, you have to pretend. You have to tell yourself everything is ok. Like I did when I used to have little-boy nightmares and my mom would flick on a hooded yellow-glow night-light. It made everything better. Not really better, but better.

## **\$THE CHECK\$**

I \$huffle through the line with everyone el\$e. We are out of our thick white rubbery coat\$ and in our exposed \$treetclothe\$. I wonder if people out\$ide of Heaven can \$mell the \$mell of death on me when I pa\$\$ them.

I'm at the front of the line now. The check i\$ in my winter-gloved hand\$. I don't care what I \$mell like anymore. I need to run home to pay heat, rent and phone.

I \$lip the envelope into my inner coat pocket. Like \$ilk, like \$atin, it \$lides in. I don't care if that check i\$ blood-money, it'\$ mine. It'\$ in my pocket now.

## *do something now!*

[contact any of the following for info on Animal Rights and Veganism]

-SOAR [student organization for animal rights]  
235 CMU, 300 Washington ave. se  
minneapolis, mn 55406  
[612]624.0422  
soar@contentfree.org  
<http://soar.contentfree.org>

- vegan outreach [distributes free Why Vegan? pamphlet]  
211 indian dr.  
pittsburgh, pa 15238  
[412]968.0268  
[vegan@veganoutreach.com](mailto:vegan@veganoutreach.com)  
<http://www.veganoutreach.org>

I pretend not to notice the odd absence of noise. My ears tune into the zing of my spinning blade. The sharp metal wheel whirls so fast I barely see the red drying brown. For once, I almost believe the blood isn't there.

Dave with the white hair bursts into Heaven. He runs to Chuck's line, runs to Chuck's rescue. I don't follow the scene of events

I don't want to see the mangled cow, stuck in its shreds and fractures. I don't want to realize how one bone can break in so many places.

### **MY (TYLER'S) LINE**

The giant bodies hang from worn machinery and ride down the line towards me. They hang by their back legs while their front ones dangle and poke out like furry tree branches.

Sometimes skin-muscle rips and tears. They hang by only one back leg. It looks strange, with bones and shapes poking out at random. The pokes and curves work against each other so they are almost ugly, yet somehow beautiful. Like they follow a forgotten rule of aesthetic.

### **MISTAKES**

By the time they get to me, they are dead. Except when people make mistakes and the bodies pulley-roll towards me with twitching legs. Their strange milky mucoused eyeballs roll back into their angular heads like the white triangles floating around inside magic eight balls.

It's worse then, to do what I'm supposed to do. But I still make the gash, split the skin, hoping the round eyes don't roll forward in time to watch the whirl-buzzing blade.

### **HALF-HOUR LUNCH BREAK**

Rita tells me about the places we get our cows from.

"They never see daylight. They're stuck inside huge cement-gray concrete places."

Her silver eyes reflect the pain of knowing across the round lunch table. We sit by ourselves. Five empty blue plastic chairs and two full.

I spin spaghetti around a plastic fork, wondering if the cattle play games inside themselves like I do when no one's looking. I want to ask Rita, but I don't think she can say any more. The tears are already puddling up in her fragile reflection pools.

I want her to stay. I want to share lunch with her always. I give her a week. She's already trying to find another way to support her children. She doesn't want to do it with blood money.

### **WONDERING**

Sometimes I wonder about Rita's "factory farms" when I'm supposed to be busy at work. So I crack myself out of it in time to make the blade zing, and grab for another still neck.

I wonder how they get so many cows to keep all of us busy. I wonder if I wonder too much. My mom always said I did. She'd still tell me that if she was around.

She never liked my job, but I reassured her that I wasn't responsible for killing the animals. I never spoke about the ones who gasped their last spastic breath onto the reflection of my tiny blade, fogging it up like shower steam on a bathroom mirror.

### **WARMTH**

Another hanging cow rolls closer. Its ears are frenzy-flapping, and something is trying to push through its teeth. It tries to scream, to cry, but the escaping noises don't sound like anything. They don't sound like zing, like my blade, Chuck's blade, and everyone else's blade here in Heaven.

I look away when the metal tucks itself into the taut flesh, and remember the worst thing about fresh blood. It's not the way it drains in thick trails or how it slips against the ground near my feet, it's the warmth.

It reminds me of the kind of storytelling warmth I used to crawl up against my grandmother for. Death isn't supposed to be warm, not like this.

### **BAD DREAMS**

I have terrible dreams at night. Once, I dreamt I was walking around in a cow-skin shroud. It was heavy and sticky damp. I wanted to throw up, but the skin kept my vomit in. When I moved my mouth, a dragon voice whispered out. I couldn't understand what I was saying.

Another time, I dreamt God was a cow. Happy in the sunshine and flat green grass. I don't think I believe in God anymore. I wonder if anyone here does.

### **LIVESTOCK TRUCKS**

38-head. That's how many cows fit into one of those trucks. I don't know why they say 38-head instead of saying it fits 38 cows. I can't trust them anyway, because they always stuff at least 40 cows in at a time. They don't know what they're talking about. If they can squeeze over 40 into one trailer, why do they call it 38-head?

I watch the cows popping out of the trailer, stumbling, not knowing whether to step out head first or last. Their hooves make smothered noises. They try to stumble through their own shit.