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**Georgina Voss**  
**A Small Key, Rotating Along Its Axis**  
**Harvard Design Magazine #46**

The boys make each other down on the factory floor. Metal meets metal and big mood sparks flying just EVERYWHERE. A handshake—*Good to meet you!* What if I were to shake your hand like . . . THIS?

The small boys spin underfoot, those ankle biters. I trip over them as I skip into the cathedral.

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Every day I fly in. I walk down my dark gray runway where the full clatter of my unrubberized soles is permitted. The cathedral is carved up into blocks of space, each bigger than my apartment (and I do earn well, baby). Color tells me where to be—stick a yellow stripe on the ground, and I'll follow it anywhere.

I stroll on past the groups in blue that are limbering up. *ROLL your shoulders back. BIG stretch toward the sky*, sez their leader. *Gently gently SOFT spirit fingers. WIGGLE those joints. Now tense and TENSE and make BIG STRONG CLAWS.* It's all part of a *more equitable and ethical working environment*, sez the handbook. In they roll to those big boys in red, those shining arms with their ten joints and their fancy ways. How they dance with those hovering sheets of metal suspended high! *TODOS SOMOS AMIGOS SEGUROS AQUÍ* on the poster on the wall, in five languages.

The cathedral is full of monsters, of course it is. Oh, but we make such lovely creatures here. We make the dreadnoughts, we make the beasts. Down on the factory floor the red boys and the groups in blue haul together those 10,000 unique parts to make one big beautiful boy, ready for some spit and dazzle. Fire in their nozzles and a song in their heart, give them a lick of paint and make them shine.

I love my work. I love this. You wouldn't catch me down on the floor, no SIR, but I bounce in each day ready to see the whirling magic. Those boys go so fast! Ten joints in full dervish spin; red claws getting a grip on a carbon-steel frame and giving it a waltz.

*WE ARE ALL SAFE FRIENDS HERE.*

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Deep in a file on my desktop is the paragraph that validates me. I know a version of this exists in large text bold font taupe paper taped to a wall somewhere in the cathedral, getting grubbier each day as the blue cloth rubs past it. I prefer my lines on the screen, thank you—sometimes pulling my finger across the pad I make each letter ENORMOUS, in my small quiet cell with perfectly calibrated air. I bring my face close to the screen.

The letters say that the cathedral lives because the boys are near enough *perfectly predictable*, and so we can stretch the lines out and put them all to work. The small boys *collect data* from each whirl and *process data* about how they dance, and it all gets faster and faster.

But sometimes the boys are *unpredictably physical*. Sometimes they need a firm hand of *expertise* and *management*. In the cathedral it's just me me me on my way down the lines to calibrate the boys, to do those checks. You want someone to keep an eye on what they REALLY feel deep inside? Yes sir I can boogie, I'm your [man]. I'm the only one here who knows what happens under the skin.

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MY Boy, we see each other when there's an astrological alignment of shifts on our downtime. Oh, you'd like him too. I can't take how perfect the cut of his lips is; his chewed down fingernails, the lumps of his knuckles. Sometimes when I've had a VERY cold beer or two to cut through the box of soupy air in this darn town I think about the perfect shape of his wrist bones or how his lips pull back into a sweet idiot smile when I've made a good joke, and I have to lie down on the rug. *Besos, besos*. I want to bite all the way through him.

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When the priests of the cathedral want to get past the point of human speed with *new generations and more versatile and flexible innovations* (sez the internal announcements) it doesn't matter what human speed is. The boys who build each other will last far longer than we will. I don't tell, but I know that the groups sometimes scratch their initials into the guts of a machine as a prayer for a longer life.

The boys *DO US A FAVOR*, they say, they *KEEP US SAFE*. They perform tasks that are *too hazardous or awkward for humans* as the groups in blue are stretched out with twists and spasms down their spinal cords.

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They say, *Your role is essential for our community you do the work that is too fine-grained and complicated for the mechanical systems without you the [Factory] cannot function.*

They say, *Please let your line manager know if you experience fainting spells dizziness abnormal breathing chest pain.*

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When he loses focus for a moment those dark blue eyes get bigger and his shoulders slump and he is lost in some dark space that I can't enter.

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On the empty days, sometimes, I creep on to the floor OVER the bumblebee lines (hush now). I push my face against the red bodies. I close my eyes and dare an unexpected switch to flick and those slick arms to churn away and pulp me into oblivion. The edge of the warning label imprints a line into my cheek.

The groups in blue found me once all in this hot embrace held tight. *OH Doctor Expert Doktor Calibrator what ARE you doing*, they asked, little faces glowing under the white lights.

*WHY I'm listening for a heartbeat*, I beamed. *Sometimes you have to PAY CLOSE ATTENTION to get a sense of what they want*. The group looks at me with those polite eyes that they keep in their satchels. *Hold your loved ones close!* I say. They give me the face. But *besos besos*, do they know what magic they work with my clever boys. They do not. *Is he just a bullshitter?* But look how nice my gray suit is, and look how I walk through walls. See how sweetly the boys play with each other day after day. I am management, I am expertise, I am unpredictably physical. Without me, the predictable physical plane collapses.

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They don't say, *The boys are bigger and better and faster than anything in your philosophy, Horatio, you are only here as a fragile assemblage of muscle and nerves at the end of this process polishing dusting screwing swapped in and swapped out like the multiple heads of a screwdriver.*

They don't say, *If you pass out on the factory floor like your lot always does we can find someone just like you within the hour.*

They don't say, *Your body is an appendage.*

You can't have me, I think as I glide across the floor. I am management and I am expertise and I eyeball lines of code with MY optic nerves and MY electric pulses to feel out why the boys might be unhappy. I make a traversal metacarpal arch with MY phalanges as I foment plans and strategies to adapt and massage the cathedral out of glitch and into flow. I stare them down.

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(His thick hair, carved into separate whorls. His *clavicle*.)

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*I KNOW you*, I think in those moments as I cling to the boys. In my gray cotton I don't need to justify my form to theirs or distort my body to fall in line with their world. MY work is at *low risk of automation*, so here I am dancing down those halls, each shift in my fine flesh with its perfection of sinew and nerves and good sharp eye teeth.

When I pull away I stare them down, leaving damp fingerprints on their carapaces. I flex and roll the 29 joints in my hands. **SOFT SPIRIT FINGERS. BIG STRONG**

CLAWS. I tense my shoulders. I scrunch up my cute nose. I bare my sharp teeth. I pant.

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If all of this stopped I would stay forever, buried in the nape of his neck. His breathing tends to the offbeat, and he jerks and spasms in the night when the dreams come. *Are you . . . versatile?* he asked on one of our first nights together, and I thought of the parabolic swing of those red arms in the arc of their rotations. When he sleeps and I can't, I sit where the bed meets the corner and watch his spine. He breathes a heavy *hurrrrrr* when he rolls over; eyelid flickers and little leg spasms as he sinks down deep.

The machines move so fast.

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The boys make each other down on the factory floor—so big, meeting each other like-to-like, spinning in their internal bliss.