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Ground

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Abstract

Ground

By Dana Sokolowski

Anxiety is the state of immovability—the overwhelming inability to act beyond one’s mortality. It is the desire to be in the future, in the past, in death, but to be trapped in a forced encasement—the body—in the present. As a result, living becomes a kind of death; the body, a corpse. When confronted with fear and loneliness, estrangement and space, sex and the male body, violence and injustice, suffering and healing, such a grounded existence experiences constant weight without the prospect of escape.

Ground is a fight to divest of the body in attempt to gain control—of the body, of who and what act upon it, and the space in which the body inhabits, refusing to accept confinement.

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Rose

I cry Chicago
But look like North Shore.
Raised in one-acre rose plots,
Bordering poverty lines—
A fragmented woman. What's left?

I seek sisters—
Faces of countries
That tell me a thing about
Living.

I won't give myself
To a white man. Won't
Kiss the way they
Glow in the darkness
Because they glow.

We are not love,
Look at our hands.

What is my people?
We wear gloves—shed them
Only to strike you better.
Rape your religion, then
Don it like a jacket.

Call me but beautiful,
Let me be love.

Every rose smells sweet—
Every flower? No,
Rose. That which we call,
By any other name,
Is still white.

Selves

The snake skin must be shed whole—
I know, I have mastered it.

Keep my face out of this.

In the beginning, I'd strip
In pieces—I wasn't ready—
Or they'd yank me damp.

There was never any talk of skin.

Over time a gentle working—
Reptiles rub to be rid—
Watch their eyes go,
The reddening of their bellies.

There are many ways to become again.

I have since learned to soak, regularly,
Submerge until I fall off in ribbons,
Appear before you, skinned, and speak
in tongues.

Yeast

There are flies in my bathroom looking at me
Wondering where my wings are—
Looking at me thinking I'm made out of
Butter, not strong enough they think.

They call me maggot—ask me,
What have you been feeding on?
Watch where you lay, they warn, we'll make
Nests of leftover hair in the drains.

Look how easy, they say, just one
Bite, and you'll spread for life.
I'll be thirteen—an insect
Between my legs to please.

There are flies in the food that I eat
Looking at the inside of me.
So pink, they say, where's the butter—
Where's that cold hard slab of salt?

To the Babe in Me

Every time I bleed I'm reminded why
I'm alone.
My sex, sex-less,
My giving,
Gone.

Help, she is bleeding, I say.
Help, my little girl,
My little mouth to feed.

I want to know—
Is it a matter of feeding
Or of making full?
It must be a comfort
To carry children—

A reckless dispenser. So many
Hungry mouths,
So many oval bowls—
Just another leaking hose
In a drought.

If anyone wants a body,
Possess mine.
I am a cavity
Where the dead run.

Bone Box

my cunt cried for you today
because i couldn't
i didn't tell it to
but i swear it knows

it's like the weather
this death of mine
i check for it

i'm a little bone box
every shape i make
to fit you
every bone you are for my bending

after every dressing
i stand myself up
and look for me

In a Moment

Sometimes the big red nothing
opens up and lets you in for a peek—
it won't want you,
but you'll think it does.

You'll shirk tears for a quick one,
grab a bite to eat,
leave the mail for the

morning. The old woman said
always she wanted to kill herself
but she loved life more.

All us flirting,
deathly incompetent,
our suffering like lingerie—
a skinny little slut.

Fondle the serpent,
eat out our hearts—
suicide will never like you,
but is not unlike you.

I Am Skinny

And I am pretty
And I am white
And I am rich

I am disordered
And I am caked
And I am clean
And I am impressionable

I am perfect
And I am wanted
And I am naked
And I am empty

I am Audrey Hepburn
I am POP
I think Christina
And Miley

I am bully
And I am easy
I am weepy
And I am a joke

I am teeth
And un-sure
I am wanting it
And liking it

I have problems
So many problems
I am hate
I must hate myself

I can have all
The sugar I want
And I can anger
But later I won't have to think about it

The Statues

are laughing
at us thinking
how could the
real deal be
so much uglier
and make so
much noise.

Are You Fucking Kidding Me

No, I will not apologize.
I like my laughter

Sleeping. What do you do
With a scab?

Do you eat it like a child?

I want babies
Inside me.

I want to love
What's inside me.

Peel off your face
For once.

What is anger not like?

In the end, there will be
Ends. Take me to one.

I want to know alive
Like I know tired.

I want to know
Clean.

I'm watching you
Lick at my sores—

Do they taste cute?
Do they beg?

You gonna swallow?
You gonna spit it out?

On the Phone in September

I can sum it up with the dogs barking and you
In the glow of the porch light. Who called whom
I don't remember. Silence entered us like a demon.
It was all that held me upright, alert, wondering
What loss had anything to do with animals—
The birds chirping and I, noticing them
In the mornings. What moved me then?
Was it the trees, suddenly stooping, or the leaves
Piling beneath my feet? Surely not anything
You said, nor any vision of your face, wet and begging.
Perhaps it was those dogs, who, sensing fear,
Called out to our Gods, tried to shake
One of us free.

Untitled

Say there's a method
 in dissociating from your skin.
Say you float above yourself,
 incrementally,
until you are the room,
you are the floorboards and windows,
 say you watch yourself—

 the tree supporting your own hammock.

It's

 funny,

I only remember being the hammock—
my limbs roped to limbs,
torso taut, a valley of sweat
to cup your ribs—maybe
there was enough of an audience.

Laying down weighted
I mean him weighing me down—

 nature has a way of keeping you
 only slightly

 above
 ground.

The Third Law

Thank God for you, my attacker—
Without whom, I would not know
Movement the way objects do.
I would not know my flavor

Of violence—thin in the whet of control—
Why my left must follow my
Right. I envy you, and did then.

My power can't storm a bone
Nor bark a wound—my desire
Won't lie in its blood.
You must have known then,

Too, why my stillness
Wasn't satisfying, why you had
Energy left to run.
Arousal necessitates knowledge—

Fulfillment, an equal and
Opposite transaction.

Here is how:
Start from the beginning.
Stop moving.

How, Now

Teach me what you've learned
About silence—is it a pop

Of a quick comma? A lick of a little thought? Tell me
How you became this hollow—

Your teeth in my hands.
Your hands in your hands.

Where did you learn to shoot like that?
A poached log. A walled deer. A metal carcass.

Somewhere you asked of me,
Wondered of my health.

Curious: a precise negligence.

Tell me about my health.
Can I move? Can you move me?

Before the gun, what did silence sound like?
Was it full? Did it breathe?

A thick saliva, maybe
A running pant.

Tell me, did it stop for questions?

Where are my bullets?
In your mouth?

Untitled

Words don't spend
 enough time cooking.
They break apart like eggs,
 the yolks leak to my feet.

Product

form is a forced
humiliation—

it is as it is lived,
stretched like a cap
on a dirty thought, the doorknob

to my bathroom which
locks from the inside.

sew an anxiety body

but baste the hands—
play things with long

removable stitches.
watch them train

themselves
to do as they will
always do—

crawl under
the frame,

come back to hurt you
harder.

3am

I accept rides
From strangers, but I am not

Fucking anyone. It is more—
This silence, these nylon

Chair backs, my driver and I.
The dashboard is our silk

Screen. We act out
Our plot before it.

I know how long you work. You know
The state I'm in. Take a left. And another

Left. Don't say lonely.
Let's veil these shared streets

In belief, hang every curve,
Pull up to my place—and like that

You're my daddy
Helping me do a good deed and I am just

Going home alone.

Rental

I need the heat to feel hopeful.
That hotel room on the 39th floor
Where we learned how to fit—
It is still there. Every living thing in Florida
Has a color and a square foot to grow and
Be cut back. We could enter the heat, as we would enter
The pool—temporary immersion. The water has no choice.
It will displace us. Nothing left over until you
Left. Then the flood. And the worms at my feet. And these hands
That feel like yours with my eyes closed—gentle. Touch knows
No place. A body knows its place. There is a hotel room
In Florida. Forgive me when I return
To this state, its violent redundancy, at least
It includes me in its landscape.

Dimensions

My hands are still angry.
The dishes are still dirty.

What parts do you clean first?
What parts do you use last?

It is not enough to have
Or hold—lines aren't supposed to

End but they do have sides.
There is a spectrum to Touch—I want

To embrace an area. Take you in
To tell me I'm here.

Where does the wind settle?
I will lather the pans,

Fill this cupboard.
I will move to prove them—

These things take up space,
And they will be loved gently.

Between You and Me

I will tell you how I punish myself,
Because it is easy.

You recognize the wind
When it hits you—know the way

Ice stings
On a bare face.

I will tell you
Why I do it, too,

Because it is honest
As a flesh wound, and honesty

Will get us hot, and our minds will lay us
Stark, and search each other.

You will start with my coldest parts,
And they will warm to you, slightly—

Prove I am willing to risk
Being found out.

Tell you I am learning
To touch, which will give me freedom,

Or that
My breasts are off limits,

Because it is simple
To be bold, harder still

To keep the numb parts
Numb. For every

Simple, bold, honest
Thing—if I told you I want

To be loved,
I might not believe myself.

I will tell you I have no secrets,
Because it sounds true,

Because I am a glacier—
Impenetrable.

Devotion

Comfort is a sin—
Like drowning.

That's why it feels so good.
That's why it doesn't

Last. Comfort loves discomfort,
Because it's bored.

Because every night as I slept
You couldn't stop

Thinking of us in our seashell
Bed, the headboard

Coddling us, wondering how we slipped
Inside or if we were taken

In—webbed on the sand,
Wedded to the sea, waiting

To see how the high
Tide would take us,

How high, or how the time could
Take so long.

4am

My house is under attack.
There is hissing from somewhere
Unheard of, and a scratching—
I know because of these marks.

The intrusion will subside. I don't
Need medication. The blinds will open
When I am ready to look outside—rather,
My body will prepare to be exhibited.

Visitors are arranged daily, to maintain
The goings-on—check the drains, add to
My countertops—though I am seldom awake
And they are always leaving.

Then there is this hour—
I tell you, my heart does all the work;
A raucous repetition—takes what I know
And makes me fear it.

Storytime

There is a girl. She looks like a girl in a dress,
In jeans with a ponytail; went to a summer camp and
Ate their food. She is a girl in love. She maybe
Prank called a principal or kissed a Scott,
Went away to school and rebelled against
Herself. She's had all the firsts, this girl,
Who was left. She looks like a girl in a book,
Reading a book—she is a book, this girl.
You can read her on every shelf. Pick a genre.
Pick a page. Her story can be yours too—
Add a line. There is a boy. There is
A duck with one foot. There is blood in the bathtub.
There is a beginning and an end. There is love
And then there is
And then

Chris

They are all named Chris
At one point in time.
Scattered and sensitive Christopher—
A bobby pin in a beehive.
Christian with the hands,
Handling things, he's got it
Under control. We are of this little tent.
It must be of us.
We lost our way
Easy—uprooted handfuls
Of grass. There is nothing
We cannot cover up.
In the summertime,
We are sad.
The sun, squinting.
I have a cunt.
I must be a country,
A continent—nothing left
To hurt. Christensen will keep the dirt
In his fingernails and I'll
Have a story to tell.

This Time

I know you are not real.
But you are

What is here—this glass
To taste or shatter. You

Are function
Or possibility. And possibly

This energy will take shape—
Provide for itself

A mold. I will fit you

In my hand,
Choose your death.

Dawn

but in the morning grey
when the room is still as standing
water
 be it a lake
 be it a tub
our words slip out
like boats, *turn over*, our lips
barely part for their passage, *face me*.

and the murder is that
there is none—the Carolina sound
before a stilted house,
a baby beside a basin.

we can drift or shift to curl,
but can't begin the breaking—
breathe the boats to sea,
and pretend we won't drown.

Nighttime Ritual

I feel so much dead
In my shower.
Belly and breasts,
Beneath the fluorescents—
Hams on a meat counter.

I prepare myself
Like the dead—

Rinse the crown,
Wipe the lids,
Poise the hands—

I am the mortician
And the work;
I prepare myself
Nightly. But then

Because I can,
I hurt this body.
Dig until it pinks all laughable,
Slap it around—
The skull warms to it.

I can break it silly,
Provide for what follows me,
Everything merely a matter—
Something to cook with.

And when I'm done,
I let the water slide
Over the carcass—
Thick and rubbery—
Turn off the showerhead,
And air-dry like a babe.