

Dude?Fear
by Prithiva Sharma

I was six, when a movie told me mice are taught to be afraid
Maybe women are not that different.

You ask me why I am such a dude, and why my strut,
Even in stilettos looks like a death march
I tell you about that time, when I first performed a slam poetry
For my aunt and all she told me was that I perform with my legs open
Too wide

I haven't shaved in far too long
Is my excuse every time you invite me out for a party night
With a dress code that screams short dresses and shorter skirts
But in real? I refuse because I don't want to wear a dress anymore,
Because I still can't pinpoint that one moment when my body was turned against me,
And my grade 8th professor told me, in front of an entire class of boys
That if your skirt is above knee length, you're asking for it, and you don't want that.

Sometimes, I think everyone should get waxed because the only difference
Between my legs and theirs and is that they have more hair.

Shame comes running at me at 12 miles an hour
(In reality, it was a total of 5 minutes it took her to walk up to me
But I didn't notice because I was reading lesbian smut online)
(The internet is the only person who knows my fantasies)

So, she comes at me and I didn't know how to dodge it
Because, um, lesbian fantasies?
So I looked at her, followed her gaze, nodded,
And tucked my bra strap in

(I wanted to crack a Victoria's Secret joke, but my bra was from an
Unknown brand, which, as the salesman told me,
Will be only one to box my breasts)

When I got a skin infection at the underside of my left breast,
I could not wear bras for a month straight.
So I started wearing too loose T-shirts bought from the men's section
And realized, hey, you can't see my belly fat or my breasts in it
And hey, it covers me without boxing me in and hey,
This is too much a dude outfit, dude!

See, I was way too young
When I saw more than heard,
That my body is a time bomb that ticks
In someone else's pants
It blasts not when I want, which is a shame because I am the bomb

Maybe this is reason why they have added 'bomb' to
"The Comprehensive List of Words That Can Be Used to Harass Women"

We are sitting in the cafeteria at lunch time, and Regina George
Is distressed because her diet isn't working
(Weddings are hard because you have to plan them,
But they are harder because you have to fit into the dress)

I think, hearing someone fat shame you should be a part of a self-motivation book,
Titled "How to Lose Fat 101"
Because words can cut through however many layers of epidermis there are,
And make your calories burn into themselves

(I don't say this to Regina, and instead we spend the next 15 minutes
Of our lunch trying to name her food babies)
(We ignore the fact that when her fiancé sees her belly,
She may never have real babies) (at least with him)

I became a dude when I was still a little girl.
Learning to jump around without her breasts tating
Too much of space in their vision field,
Till I stopped trying and instead, started learning
How to become the vision fielding said field

See, I thought boys had a gun in their pockets.
Now, I know boys have guns in their pants,
Which shoot whenever they want, at me, at someone else,
At least where I live

(Yeah, we really need gun laws)

I'm scared of being scared, and also of not being scared
I'm scared of short dresses and too hairy legs
And so, my brain googled a defence mechanism, which is called,
Being one of the boys

I say all this, in one breathe and you look at me for 1.46 seconds,
Yes I was counting, and then you said,
Boys are closer in vicinity to boys
Chances of harm: increased by 45%,
Ratio of survival: 46/64

(You can never be one of them long enough to be unharmed your whole life)
(Live like a girl)

I threw away the most loose tee I had, and started shining my stilettos.
Tomorrow is LBD day with a strut that will kill, without looking like a death march.

At night, I lie still
On the pathari, purple cloth placed
Delicately on the gray carpet
Next to my mother. She's
Shut the blinds, left the lights off,
Fallen asleep. In the room I
Am the only one with
Eyes open, breathing quick.
My mother is breathing in,
And out.
I inhale along with her, but the exhale escapes a little earlier
Than hers. I try again, and again, but her breath
Is skipping away from mine, teasing, tormenting, slow, fast, slow, fast, now my breath is
beating me, I cannot
Catch it either, now I
Have lost both, am I really her child if I cannot
Match her sleep, match her smile, her walk,
Was I born ever? I realize, in the darkness, I cannot confirm
The length of the floor. It is not my floor, at all, it is hers, benevolently
Gifted to me, but right now
She is not awake to supervise,
And if I move
I will plunge into my depths.

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mainly graphics
with the aftermath of abuse, a fractured identity,
and loneliness
as it is felt by diaspora populations.

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My ancestors have left their laundry here
It spills from towering baskets and floods the open floors
I cannot see the carpet.

If I were a better woman I would have
Drowned them in detergent
Folded them into neat stacks
Sleeve, sleeve, top, bottom.

But I avoid showers to smell like myself as long as I possibly can
Before soap and rubbing red and raw abrades my old skin.

Besides, how many cycles would it take to swallow the sweat of a generational curse?
Lavender-scented distractions are how we ended up here.

My room is rotting because I remember.

Diaspora Imposter
by Devaki Devay

Dirty Kid
by Devaki Devay



The Healing
by Katie Gilgour

tear open my skin.

break every rib,
and you will find something
like a heart. it tried to be
a holy thing,
to exist
unscathed by worldly temptations.

to be pure
is to ache until your
armor cracks beneath
the weight of poisoned promises,
and to be saved is more than
empty prayers and piety.

but to breathe
is to claw your way out
through the dirt until
you hear love knocking
at your door.

i was not born
to be buried alive.

Katie Gilgour is a twenty-something writer,
tea addict, and cat lady. She lives in Atlanta,
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Woman
by Megan Ryals

Megan Ryals studied poetry and theatre at Southeastern
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PTSD* was previously published in *Rhythm and Bones Lit's
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She can be found on twitter under the handle @dirtyunshine,
where she frequently posts about intersectional
feminism, disability activism, and her life as a trauma survivor.

Nostalgia
by Megan Ryals

The taste and smell of honeysuckle
Of baked pears with cinnamon
Butterfly wings, flame, cloud, air
Are all within grasp of tiny hands
Scrubbing dirt off of scabbed knees under grass stained jeans

Things that you shouldn't be able to touch
Butterfly wings, flame, cloud, air
Are all within grasp of tiny hands
Scrubbing dirt off of scabbed knees under grass stained jeans

Fear had a taste
It was metallic and made you want to cry
And it smelled like contraction paper and a freshly opened box of crayons
It came on Sunday nights and Monday mornings
When school was an inevitability

And on Friday afternoons
Excitement tasted like freshly baked cookies
And smelled like Christmas tree needles and exploding magnolia blossoms

Joy came with dirty swamp water and loud splashes in mud puddles
Or skidding on patches of ice under a dazzling blue sky
With joy there is an intermingling of all five senses
And whatever brings you that feeling gives with it a
Taste, smell, sound, touch and sight
That cannot be put into words
But that you will remember as clear and distinct twenty, thirty, fifty years later
And you'll call it nostalgia
Because when you're an adult the senses are not enough
You have to put a word on it.

I am
A woman
Proud
Of her legs, her hips, her breasts, her swan neck
Flowing out of me
I bring blood and I bring life

I am
Unapologetic
My stigma
My taboo
Are worn proudly

My scars are a compass
They point north
Allowing me to avoid paths of past mistakes

My acne is a map
The backroads and highways of stress survived
Life pushing through the skin in swollen red bumps and tiny white sparks

My stretch marks
The battle my belly and breasts fought
Through too big and too little
Fat fluctuating like waves pulled by tide
And pushed back through seawall

My womb
Empty thus far
May overflow someday
Life coming in screams and gasps of air
My lungs starving as her's take first breath

Or my womb
May remain empty
Life filled in to the brim in other ways
It will still come in screams
Of pain pleasure rage love

Either way
My body has served me
And I will worship at the altar of me.

Prithiva Sharma is a 20 year old
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She writes, a lot, for her course,
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