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Dirt

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Dirt

Abstract

Hair. Muscle. Clitoral enlargement. Heart. Liver. Kidneys. Chest. Arms. Legs. Knuckles. Palms. Nose. Jaw. Forearms. Feet. Ovaries. Uterus. Back. Shoulders. Potential hysterectomy. You try to count on your way to the car. One shot a week for the next fifty-five years, if you make it to eighty-five. So 2,750, thereabouts.

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Dirt

Nonfiction by Rushing Pittman

Hair. Muscle. Clitoral enlargement. Heart. Liver. Kidneys. Chest. Arms. Legs. Knuckles. Palms. Nose. Jaw. Forearms. Feet. Ovaries. Uterus. Back. Shoulders. Potential hysterectomy. You try to count on your way to the car. One shot a week for the next fifty-five years, if you make it to eighty-five. So 2,750, thereabouts.

When you first came out you wanted to apologize to the trees to the water to the ice. “I’m sorry. I’m going by this name now.” In Old French “confessor” meant “to harm, hurt, make suffer.” And that’s exactly who you thought you were—a rude confessor marching to family and friends, slapping them upside the head with the dreadful news that you are who you are.

Your girlfriend says, “You’re perfect because you’re you.” You turn your hand into a gun and stick your fingers in your mouth Bang Bang then Ha Ha Ha and off to the kitchen for coffee. You think after this transition you’ll be single forever. Ridiculous thought. Fear driven. You berate yourself. Count all the thoughts that bring you back to yourself.

On the TV a woman is screaming because a tall, dark, and handsome zombie is gnawing off her brother's face. You order pizza and eat well, too. You're leaning into horror classics the way gophers hide in holes. At one point in your life you enjoyed playing outdoors. Not anymore. You imagine all of your arteries shrinking shut; tonight your heart beats a soft pillow against your chest. You find in yourself all the ways you'd like to be better. New eyes, ears, a new nose. In this potential world, you hold your body in a different way. You lean more often. Nudge up against things. Uncaring yet graceful. You're confident. You don't watch films. You've thrown your TV away. Whenever someone needs help or guidance, they turn to you. Everyone envies your clean home, your superbly organized planner. Like clockwork you go about your day doing everything right. When you want to leave the nurse a rude voicemail, you don't. When you want to throttle the health-insurance representative, you don't. You're tempted to turn all your medical bills into confetti, but you don't. Dramatic breakdowns aren't your style. Though, what if they were? You often fantasize. What if for a moment you did everything wrong? What if you found in yourself a new and crazy swagger? What if you stopped being so *preoccupied*?

At the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, there's a field full of dead bodies. Students of anatomy and surgery watch them decompose. You don't trust anyone who's sniffed a putrefied heart. A plane went missing, and you're in bed. You accept that sometimes planes break in the middle. Spill their human contents into the sea. Sometimes hitting the sea from great heights knocks our clothes off. And then we're all naked and dead. You're naked in the shower every day. You're flexing your muscles. Most things are meaningless. But, really, how out of all good things living are you alive?

There's no textbook with your body type, yet every textbook has a picture of your skeleton. If your grave is ever dug up, you'll be misgendered. You're laughing now. You'd like to pull back your skin and clack your bones together. Make some kind of music. Give your body a whap.

You once dated a woman who wasn't the sort who wanted to take you out for coffee. She gave you the strange impression that she was waiting to catch you in the bathroom with your pants down. Her eyes were two sockets of black powder. Beautiful stuff. You might as well have jumped into a pit.

She said, “I don’t get it. How is top surgery any different than a nose job?” When your head goes silent you know you’re angry. This silence has a calming effect but makes you a poor debater. “It’s just different. It feels different.” You went to the bathroom to collect yourself. She stayed out on the fire escape smoking a cigarette. It was summer in New York City. Supposed to be a romantic place, but the moon was only a sliver of white suspended, telling you how much of a fool you were. A food truck is just a food truck, nothing more. She wanted to know, “Why can’t I call you ‘my girl’ in bed?” She and you groaned into each other. It was all sweat and falling into pieces. You were learning your limits. Your brain unraveled all over the floor.

There he is! Sometimes you think you see yourself. When you exit the car in the grocery store parking lot you see him. Where’s he going? You want to follow him. Try to speak to him. But really, you aren’t seeing yourself. You’re not crazy. Maybe you want to look like him. It must be his hair juxtaposed with slim hips. And beneath this desire is a sadness. One that slips and has ears. One that listens to all of your bad thoughts and agrees with them. Nodding its head. Licking its scabs.

You leave the house in a mist, the clouds low, the trees high and dark. The sky presses an angry fist into the gut of your neighborhood. Your feet feel small, your body loose; you waver like damp paper. Your head droops. You walk, hopping between fallen acorns. You’ve made a game of it. Acorn, hop, acorn, hop, shuffle, hop. And out of the corner of your eye, something snags your attention. Next to your very small feet is a dead squirrel, full of body, no broken limbs, no torn belly. So you cancel your walk. Turn back to your house. Keep your head down and walk quickly over all the fallen acorns. You hear them crack under the soles of your very small shoes. You leave behind a dusting of seed.

You wake up at six every morning because you don’t have curtains. You’ve been planning for the last year to get them. Each weekend you consider what color, size, and thickness. Excited, you consider a trip to the store. Curtains, finally! But never go. And every week you complain, “The sun woke me up again.” You must be enjoying this annoyance. Though some things are deeper than annoyance. Sometimes you’re trudging into harmful territory. Sometimes you see a bus and think, “What if I jumped?” Then you see yourself mangled and splattered like a popped blister on the pavement. No, you’d never do a thing like that. You’re ignoring the whole world so you can live as yourself. The whole world is a dangerous thing. Humanity will cut off its own arm if that arm looks any different than the rest of its body.

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You and your girlfriend lie in bed. The TV lights the room blue. There's finally snow outside. She says, "Wouldn't it be great if you had sperm?" You both start laughing. It's a ridiculous thing to say. Of course, you've wanted that your whole life.

The scars on your chest are pink and restful. Complete. Already there forever. You like them. People all around you are becoming married. They're multiplying and expanding outward. You're wrapping a blanket over your shoulders, trying to see whether your face has changed. You're laughing into your glass. Your drink tastes good. You're full of hope. Do you feel the change? Don't you want to know why you are the way you are? Don't you want some kind of answer? Can't you feel it slipping in your toes? It's warm. It's barely audible. It's hidden under your blanket, in your gut pumping awareness. You undress feeling the way your body moves. Aren't you, just by being, an answer?

This whole process is messy. You're making a soup of it all. Really, you've taken to making soup. Potato-leek soup. Southwestern soup. Lentil soup. You're taking time out of your day to notice the small things. The dead fly on the counter top. The yellow tips of the dying bamboo. No. Try again. The positive, small things. The way the dog runs under the desk to hide any time you pull out the vacuum. You know he's scared, but it's okay. He looks like such a sad lump hidden in the corner. Poor, brown dog. You can't help but hold his head in your lap. Stroke his head. There's nothing softer in the house.

Your father calls you your sisters' brother. It's a good day. Your arms are getting hairier. You've grown a small patch between your pecs. Every day you remember you have pecs. Some stranger was under your skin sucking away the fat with some sort of plastic machine. How strange. Some sort of weird, plastic machine that you don't know the name of.

We all came to the consensus that gendered bathrooms don't matter 35,000 feet in the air. In line for the bathroom. Their eyes flick from your waist to your jawline. The strangers are stumped. You never thought about how cis men don't need toilet paper after they pee. You once heard of a transman who carried toilet paper in his pockets so he could wipe without making any noise.

Hitting late afternoon in South Carolina, and your car out of gas, you pull off at the nearest exit. A secluded jungle of trees and kudzu, the place lit up twisted and green. You step out of your car, and two men walk over. They stand near your car and stare. Your heart jackrabbits in your chest. You don't move. Why move? You have every right to be here. Your hands shake as you pump gas. Cents add up to dollars. The two men keep their hands in their jeans, chewing tobacco. Two angry bulls gnawing on their cud. When you finish, they walk up to you and each spit a wad of brown on your shoes.

You and a friend stand outside a professor's house as the temperature plummets into unreasonable depths. You tighten your vest. Your friend has brown hair and writes beautiful poetry. Sometimes you envy her. She knows how to end a poem with grace. Or a bomb. But really, you're glad. She listens to you all the time. She's watching you become someone, then no one, then someone again.

You sit down at your computer. The house is dark and quiet. Blue light on your face. You're only in your underwear. It's two in the morning, and you've got an eerie suspicion that the world wants to swallow you. Who would employ you? You scroll through the listings. Aflac salesman? Teacher? Tennis coach? Administrative assistant? What if they heard your voice, how it's so high? What if they only thought you were strange? Who would want you to sell insurance? Everywhere you turn you see a closed path or layers of hurdles. Always someone up ahead with their hand out saying Stop-Stop, and so you don't bother walking near them. You don't even bother walking. You take a sip of water. You twirl around and around in

your desk chair till you're dizzy and rocking on waves and pulling the mast and running on deck and tonight you can feel it, you're a sailor.

It's not the snow melting in drifts off the sides of buildings, falling wet blankets that splatter into bits as they hit the concrete. It's not in your stomach, which widens and contracts as you breathe in the frozen air that almost cracks your face in two as you open your mouth to claim a breath. It's not the ground, which you try not to look at, so you don't appear weak or tremulous, ready to bend or swerve around anyone who says "hello." You're living in your spine, holding onto this blue feeling, and directing it outward you see the lamp is just a lamp on your bedside table. The shower is just a box of plastic with water falling, as if from a hose, onto your head. And this blue feeling, it's because you feel that you're sneaking among all the people who are neatly divided into their categories, and you're hiding in a gray place, a shadow composed of incongruent parts, and you fear that once you reach a light everyone will see you, and everyone, including you, will be afraid.

Anyone can live. You're not doing anything special or different when your lungs expand and contract. You take milk from the fridge, and the milk isn't doing anything special or different. It comes out regular into your regular cup. The kitchen is being a kitchen, and it doesn't take much thought. But to live doesn't mean that you'll be considered regular. Living we all do if we're alive. But not being regular. Standing before judgment when you aren't yet dead and not yet lost leaves you wondering who all these people are who define your worth. Who make up laws that you scuttle beneath like some fearful beetle. Feeling like a beetle puts you in a sour mood. You won't voice any opinions till all their damn drums quiet down, and they listen, and you will also listen, because you know, they don't, but you know, you didn't lose your way. They did.

What warrior hasn't mistaken war for something else? What person hasn't slipped into the nearest ditch hoping to evade that loud-noise-in-the-woods when there was never any sound? In you there are wars and woods, and you cradle yourself against yourself as you fold your laundry. There's no blood at your feet. There aren't any ghosts whispering through branches. You stand by your bed, as you do many afternoons, folding your clothes. You used to dream of snakes, snakes in the walls, piles of snakes, snakes biting your ankles. You used to wake up in a sweat. You used to fall into lakes stuffed with alligators, the alligators hungry, but there'd always be one colossal snake slipping between the reeds on his way to snatch you up. Now your problems aren't nearly as difficult. Answers seem to trickle out of you. When your girlfriend asks what is twelve times eight, you don't even have to think; you know, of

course, it's ninety-six. You've pulled your weight through your problems, and now you listen to your blood instead of spilling it all over the floor. Your house is cleaner. You try to be happy. You say to yourself, "I've done it. I've got it all together now." But you know that's not truly the case. You're just no longer bitten by snakes when you sleep.

You can feel the sleep of your aging neighbors. You're standing outside where you always stand on these late nights when you want to say fuck the sea and the trees and the sky and the birds and the alligators and all the people who roam the Earth. You don't control a thing. Not the weather. Not that tree out back. People have come and gone. There's no one here right now to kiss you. So you kiss your own shoulder. And you feel your life piling up around you, your movements, creation and birth. You're so small in these woods, and you're happy for it. Thank god, you're happy and crazy enough to rise above yourself, to count yourself as greatest, to do the most reckless thing, to be a body living, loving yourself insanely.

Rushing Pittman is a trans & queer man living in Amherst, Massachusetts. His poetry has appeared in Queen Mobs Teahouse, The Knickknackery, Toad, PHANTOM and elsewhere. He is the author of the chapbook *Mad Dances for Mad Kings* (Factory Hollow Press, 2015) and the chapbook *There Is One Crow That Will Not Stop Cawing* (Another New Calligraphy, 2016). He earned his MFA at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.