

# MY BODY, A BAROMETER

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*Sasha Steensen*

Elsewhere, phloem  
lift you up

tuber or bulb

the first word  
I heard

when I woke  
was the nurse's

*well*, she said  
*it went*

just outside.

At first I thought  
a hole

filled with water  
a bucket on a rope

my sleeping reach  
I guess

but even that  
(assumption) seemed

a struggle

what does  
the body know

of where it goes  
when the breast

is open  
eyes closed

there is a fog  
unfolding

that sits low  
on the foothills

for some days  
and nights

for some weeks  
and months

the strangest  
thing

is the way  
words hide

✧

Sometimes it is ok to be afraid  
& necessary

I have one hand  
with fear

in it

I hold  
it out

toward the wilds

the dove  
or eagle

the beak  
or feet

land  
and tear

the branch

to be  
*in fact*

is to be  
itinerant

inside  
that which is

errant but unable  
to move

by virtue  
of its holding truth

tight in its fist.

Only one of us  
needs

the other,  
doctor.

I spend my days  
with you

looking out  
your windows

my dove hasn't  
come back

with its olive branch  
but I look out

for her  
from my post

on the second floor  
of the cancer center

go ahead,  
touch me there

here & here & here.

# WHAT DIES AND WHAT DOESN'T

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*Sasha Steensen*

Did you see the white, white moonlight last evening?  
The lighted field, the dead grass tips shining?  
Quail broods hiding and salmon spawn, too,  
in some river starving?  
Their little bodies by midnight,  
carried along the gravel bottom  
or floating as dead fish do  
on fire with that same light?

The mayflies. The blackflies. The stoneflies.  
The midges, must go.  
Just let the underside of leaves grow  
where these insects would have clung until dawn.  
The white so bright it might slip through  
the leaf's tight pores. It might open the little stoma,  
for the leaf to breathe the night air. Or, choke on it.  
What do we hear?  
The space where the insects once buzzed.

Does anyone love a fly anyway, she asks,  
no doubt remembering me swatting at them in the kitchen.  
What if we never again see  
those little legs rubbing  
cleaning their  
"diseased" bodies?  
What wealth of them?  
What obliteration,  
not unlike my own,  
comes to claim them?

And the boll weevil,  
devouring the cotton,  
must go also!  
And with them,  
inevitably, the fish of Flint Creek:  
white crappies, bass and sunfish.

Carp, buffalo and drum fish,  
gizzard shad and catfish  
each first turning wine-dark  
and swimming about  
as if in a daze.

And the fire ants, too, must go!  
In our bare feet about to dip our toes  
in that cold silvery moonlit water  
the mound hidden well below  
the rotted log; they latch on.

If I weep wondering what  
will be left to devour my body,  
what will the dirt be teeming with  
if all the insects are dead,  
if all the earthworms poisoned,  
I keep encouraged instead.  
In each case, they come back,  
Legion.

The Ancient Fly.

The Native Boll Weevil.

The Red Ant Eternal does not die.

100,000 float in a mound  
on the surface of flood water  
living to care for the large blue  
caterpillar, who, through mimicry  
secures protection for itself  
in the red ants' mound  
until its wings  
open out.

Or, the gypsy moth.

Mother of all moths.

Mouth open wide  
to choose not to die  
not to be  
sprayed  
to oblivion,  
open wide, I said

be born into this  
toxic world  
and keep  
breathing.  
At least you,  
gypsy,  
keep your mouth  
open to receive  
the air we once  
shared.