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Losing Skin

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This book was written in the conviction that our social interaction could be far more humane. In order to change society, we must be aware of its structural weaknesses. Some of the following stories therefore also depict physical violence; these chapters are marked with an asterisk.

“Your silence will not protect you.”
Audre Lorde

“In fact, proximity to the other and closeness between us
can be reached when engendering a common world
together, a world that will not destroy the world which is
proper to each one.”

Luce Irigaray

Night blind

Let's go back this way suggests
Nino and points to the path
that dimly branches
off from the forest track and
goes ahead you don't live
far from here you know
the forest or park
or whatever it's called
semi-dense greenery
at the tree line to
civilization you walk after
Nino and the night
raises itself up from the grass
it cracks it rustles
don't be a sissy
you think you're
grown up now
and not alone Nino
is lanky and in each of his wrists
there's a freshly
screwed-in metal plate
he's not even allowed
to lift up milk
or sugar or bread but nothing
can happen here
you think and Nino says
have I ever told you about
my night blindness
he says it straight to the front
you hear it well anyway
that's not funny you say
and he says seriously
with the light like this I
can hardly see anything
at all and

just when you are about
to ask how
on earth he got
the idea to stalk through
the underbrush
you see on the ground
left of you a man
sitting up as if he had
been asleep in the leaves and
as if you had woken him up
a slow movement
a turning of the torso
into wakefulness
a shadow rushes into
your chest
just keep going
you think
just walk
you don't say anything
nothing
till the forest is
almost behind you
you ask Nino quietly if he
also saw the man
who was lying there
that's not funny says
Nino seriously you say
I think there was someone and
Nino knows his hands
are sewn together
from shards
and you can't
tell if it was an optical illusion
or if sleep itself
had been lying there
ready to rise
and you say

nothing nothing
still nothing you're in the
yard by the big tree
and only now
a question arises
the only one
what if he
needed help because
why else would someone
be lying on dead leaves and
you ask Nino if you should go
back and Nino asks if you are sure
there was someone there
and you say no
there probably wasn't anyone after all
and you agree
that you are both night blind
that if there had been a
man he would have said something
would have called for help
or made a sound
you go to sleep but you
don't sleep because there lingers
something unsatisfactory at the
edges of your breath
rubs and creeps and stays why
was there only running away in you
into your own safety
being weak instead of being human
no warmth no comfort no moss

Learning

For the first
time ever your mother
stays in the car today

and lets you
pick up your dad on your own
from the office
on the way back home
from kindergarten as
you always used to do it together
you get out of the car and
onto the polished step to
the front door you turn
around and wave to your
mother you wave I
can do this I'm grown up
she nods
you push the door
open the handle is a fish
whose belly is shiny
from being touched so often
you go to the right
up the stairs past
the colored window that
glows when the sun shines
you like best
the purple bits
and then on the landing
there's a door and then the
one that you have to knock on
you knock
and wait until
your dad's secretary
says come in
she says come in
you open the door
you stand in front of the
very big desk and say
hello Miss Möller is
my husband in
and then she laughs

so loud that your
father peeks out of his
office and laughs
and you also laugh
a little but you
don't know
why

Fabric

While
your brother grows
and becomes more and more
alert and laughs
you see in your parents' eyes
how a child should be
impetuous unafraid
not stuffed full of questions
would everyone be better
off without you
for example
to find that out
you pack your sleeping bag
your pillow a juice drink
and half a chocolate
bunny you
go out
the patio door
very quietly as always
you sneak around
the house past
the kitchen window
you walk
to the
crossroads there
you wait for a long time

although the light is
green you feel
free red free
green free then red
you realize
that you are
a child that
this plan won't
work out
you feel sad
and relieved
at once
green you turn
around to find
your way
back home
across the patio
to your room
you poke
the straw into the
the dot of metal foil
you drink and think
about the clip which comes on
before *Sesame Street*
it warns
that you can
suffocate in
a plastic bag and
without air you are
really quiet you know
you don't have a bag
so you take the tie
out of your dressing-up box
it's smooth with blue
checks you put it
around your neck
holding with each hand

one of the ends
you pull as hard
as you can
but there's something
inside of you that
suddenly gets loud
and
rages
a need
that's not made by
the head
the head does nothing
but feel heavy
pressing against
the eyes
the power of the rage
is greater than
the power in your
arms and
you let go
you know
from now on that
the silence is only
attached to you on
the outside
that inside something
can rage loud and clear
and strong

Overland

You're nine and
ringing the bell
of every front door
in the neighborhood of
Dahlia Street

at news time
good evening
in your fingers
cold shards of autumn
I just wanted to ask if
my little brother's
kite which he got
for his birthday has
maybe landed in
your yard in the
back maybe
you say it was the
day before yesterday
white backdrop with
Mickey Mouse on it
Mickey in checkered
trousers purple and
black
he let you
hold the plastic grip
and turn by
turn
unwind the nylon thread
Mickey clattering high
up in the wind your brother
laughed and said higher
you gave it more string
even higher
and held the grip
firmly you gave it more
string until the string
ran out it
wasn't fastened on the
grip the clattering fell silent
the end of the thread whirling
over your heads
good evening

I have to find the kite again
I mustn't
show up at home
without it
it wasn't on
purpose good evening
you say it was
my fault
mine
good evening

Universe

You're eleven
you're busy as instructed with
silhouette scissors
and black paper
in midair
sun and dust
while you're cutting out people
standing under an overhanging
broad-leafed tree
a lime or chestnut maybe
Alexandra slips
you a note
there's nothing on it
because you're supposed to
sign the paper why
she doesn't want to tell you
you slide the empty note back
again and
snip on
millimeter-sized
paper scraps collect
on the tabletop
as black-white

starry sky and
when Alexandra bugs
you for the fifth time with
the note she says you
can trust her
what could happen
with just your name on a piece of paper
what could possibly happen
on such a beautiful afternoon
almost summer
and so you sign it
then whispering and then
hoots of laughter because somebody
has added I love Sebi
and then slipped Sebi the note
and Sebi flashes you a glance
or the universe
on your table
and the universe stares
silently
back

Contrast

You're fourteen
and eat paracetamol
for packed lunch
to get rid of
the dull pain
which is
throbbing through your
head into the bone
it isn't a tumor
but what it is instead
seems undetectable
in the course of the examination

a contrast agent is
injected and you know
that shots make you
pass out because
it's always been like that
the sensation of
a needle in your flesh in
fibers in veins draws you
irresistibly into
no man's land
when you get the shot
luckily you're lying down
but later you're sitting up
on a beige
leather chair in the waiting room
until the result is ready
as gradually
the memory returns
the memory of the veins
the blackness
cut

the receptionist
calls your name
through a tunnel
she grasps
your shoulders and sets
you on the floor of the
waiting room she
comes from afar but
you come from farther
the others waiting
fetch water or
murmur sympathy until
the doctor sweeps in
with the images of your
de-stacked brain

what kind of a show
is this supposed to be he wants to know
all this
sensitivity this
theatricality you're
making all this up
he lets you and those waiting
around you know
this is all in your imagination
nothing real
the fainting and the
pain there's nothing
wrong with your head
he says
at least not
from a medical point of view
only all this fuss
craving recognition
that comes with being a girl
an idiotic
ridiculousness
he huffs
and advises
your mother to sign you up
for some kind of team sport
with rough physical contact
so that you learn to deal with
a little bit of pain and
your perception can toughen itself up
on the nature of the world

Recycling

You are fifteen

and way too old
but still small enough
to be dragged
through the school corridor
by your feet
you feel the
rippling of the gaps
through your jeans
on your
butt you laugh
Ron laughs Chris laughs
enough fun for
today you say
the smokers from
the other class
who are always late
step over you
and smile
and Ron laughs and
while he heaves
you into the big
paper bin
he grasps so
that his hands are
touching your breasts
that's his thing to touch
your breasts
during the short break
you let him
do it in eighth grade
you corrected
the spelling mistakes
in his love letters
punctuation too
and returned them
even though they were
addressed to you

you know you
owe him
and why not this
Ron and Chris
lift the bin with you
inside up on the
teacher's desk
seriously guys this
is quite embarrassing
for all of us right but
you can't do anything
you can't
get out of the bin
without help
because you are
after all
too big
for this

View*

You are sixteen
and at Kessy's
birthday
barbecue party in a
forest cabin Kessy
was desperate to
have Thomas show up
because she's been into him
for forever
but he has a
girlfriend or doubts
or other problems
anyway he
cancelled last minute
and Kessy

has invited Seiler
a guy from her village who's
been into her for forever and
lets her know regularly
by spraying the message
on a shed
across from her house
with marking paint
stolen from his dad's
business
after all it's my
birthday today says Kessy
and makes a face
that she must have seen
on Heike Makatsch
or on GZSZ
still she
looks beautiful
because Kessy is
beautiful and you don't
protest when she
uses you as her
extra for some time
after all
it's her birthday
you say the right
things so that she
can be cool and shine
you think
Seiler is most likely
a member of the volunteer
fire brigade and his
three fat-headed pals
too Kessy tries way too hard
so much trouble
you think and
you say I'll be going soon

because at
eleven I'm supposed to be home
and you don't want to
discuss why
you're not allowed
to stay out longer
you don't want to
talk about anything you
snort another
pinch of fizzy powder and
feel the
raspberry froth
tingling up your nose
you aren't strong enough
for lemon today
you know when
you blow your nose
the handkerchief will be
be pink and suddenly
this thought makes you
somehow sentimental
because there
is sky and
fire and forest
and people
and everything seems
to be just in the right place
you empty out
the rest of the powder packet
on the back of your hand
between thumb
and forefinger we
can drive you
says Seiler
and you have to sneeze
so that the powder
blows into the grass

Kessy laughs
hysterically and gives
you looks you say
nope thanks I'm good
and you take
the last sip of
Batida and
Seiler pours you
another and says
that would be irresponsible
and also takes a sip
straight from
the bottle and
points casually
Mucki will drive
and that is exactly
what then happens
Mucki and
another guy in front
and Seiler
and another guy in the back
with you
you give Mucki
the directions
well ahead
so he has time
to react in
one of the pauses
Seiler asks where
you get a good
view around here
of what's this
hicksville's name again
maybe near the cemetery
you say but what's the point
of a view
if eventually everything

comes to
the edge of the forest
you direct
Mucki to take
the main road
you wonder what
they want to see
in the dark
and Seiler
puts his arm
around you and
the other arm
behind the other guy
and arches his back
and you're
still in the dark
fizzhead
the car
is parked
behind the
cemetery nursery
and
the only sound is
the fan's
humming
and
four
guys
four guys
in four
trousers
four guys
with eight
hands
four guys
with
just one

idea
which you now at last
catch on to
not because you
understand but because you
see what they
do
as Seiler grabs
the back of your head
two unzipped
in front and two
beside you
your stupidity
buzzes between
your ears
like grazing wire
the stallions
aren't
ashamed
in front of each other
probably also not
in front of anybody else
you push their
hands away
hands that
want your clothes
that's
what you manage
to defend
but they
don't give
up either
knowing
how many
they are how
strong
how big

you touch
them as
they want
they drip
on the seats
and footmats
and then
you hear again
the ventilation and
cigarettes
fuel lighters
belt buckles
and breath
and sky
and forest
and decay and
Mucki starts the
engine and drives
while you
do
not
know
what
to say
Seiler writes
down his number
on a receipt
from an Aral gas station
which he found in the
door pocket
where the
pen
came from
you didn't
see
his writing
angular and

steep
left-leaning
he says anytime
again
call
me
just
ring
me up
anytime

White noise

The next day
Kessy calls
and while you know you
can't say anything
about the matter
you could say something
else or say
nothing at all
and listen to somebody
else's talking
and breathing
like powdersnow
but there's
no crackling on the line
no world noise
there's Kessy
who's screaming at you
why on earth
you had to make out with
the guy
the very same one
she's into
what kind of

a friend are you
Kessy wants to know
and you have
nothing more
than a laugh
in your throat
dry
sluggish
lump
what kind of person
does a thing like that
Kessy asks you
tell me that
what kind of person
do you have to be
to come up with an
idea like that
and you ask
what he told her
and Kessy says
don't you talk your
way out of this now and
you nod like
little children
nod when on the phone
because for them it's
simply impossible
that the other person
doesn't want to
see them when they
are clearly there
in the hallway on
the carpet while
everything about
them
is attached
as usual

skin-color
soft
Kessy hangs up
and will
never
speak to you again
because you
are a traitor
you nod
and listen to
the regularity
with which the signal tone
rustles
a little
or breathes
or blinks
or twitches
because of all this
continuous
decay
of the atoms
you assume

Housewarming*

You are nineteen
and wave to your
parents in their pumpkin-seed
green station wagon
the trunk filled
with farewells
toolboxes
cleaning devices and
on the tapas bar's patio
is the real estate guy
who is always sitting there

Primke or something
like that who
also waves at
your parents says
well kid now
they're off
it was a lot of
work wasn't it and orders
you a crema catalana and
gets you a chair
and wants to know
all about the renovations
professional interest
you assume
and after having spooned
the set milk
you say sure I can show
you the apartment quickly
it's just upstairs and unlock
for the first time
your own apartment
to a guest
point at bathroom and kitchen
there's the living room
there's Primke already on
your bed and
pulls you down
so close you
can smell the
restaurant's oil in his hair
and kneels on top
of you this Primke
guy you can't believe
what's happening
that above you
Primke who had
got boozed up on red wine

evening after evening
with your parents
is kneeling and fumbling
his belt open and
his pants and heavily
breathing so heavy
that before he
can tamper with you
he comes
on your sweater
right next to the
dried paint splodge
silky gloss
brilliant white
on the walls
of whole generations
was what the label said
this is what you think
while the Primke guy
packs in and leaves
not because of
realization compassion lucidity contrition
but just
because of
blown manhood
and consequent
childish
shame

Blush

You are twenty you
are the last one
to pay for your drinks
at the bar counter the
taxi's already waiting outside
when a rose peddler
appears nobody
wants roses in here has
anyone anywhere
ever bought roses
you wonder while he
tries to nail you down
with his dull gaze
you can have one for free
he says and you say
no thanks and he
insists that
you choose one
a gift
he says no worries
just a humble present
just cell walls made of
polysaccharide
the driver wants to go the
others shout in between
you and the exit
a bridge of flowers unfolds
at collar bone height
between you and the peddler
take one he says
and you pull one
of the roses from the bunch
and while this keeps
you busy
he puts his hand

under the cover of roses
on your breast it
just rests there so that
his fingers can touch
your flesh
through the T-shirt
while your hands
are busy with their own
movement lifting up the rose
with the right
hand while keeping the other
flowers from
being dragged along
with the left
you're mistaken
you think you must
be mistaken
you take your
present and a
step back from the peddler
get in says Ole from the car
another one
the peddler asks
you turn away
you get in the car you want
to interrogate the rose whether
it caught
what just happened in there
but unfortunately
she blunders into the taxi door
which is hastily slammed shut
the only
witness so headlessly
exposed

Offside

You're twenty-three
you flip through your
portfolio in front of the
agency head whose tongue
plays with his eyetooth
there are different ads
from a campaign
for a major soft drinks brand
for the World Cup
he settles
back and says I
would never let a woman
work on a football theme
you imagine
a sharp-edged punctuation mark
and yet you ask
why instead of
getting up without a word
because target group because
identification with
the product because
men are simply better at this
he lectures you
listen to the rest
of the interview from
the edge of the playing field it ends
with the agency head
offering you a job in the
subjunctive mood and
prudently adding either
you are close to killing yourself
after two weeks
or the time with us really
advances your skills
that's not self-criticism but

advice from him
to you to you as a person
delicate thing that you are
that nature intended
to be wooed and won
and therefore is not evolutionarily
capable of holding its own
in this world of competition
clichés customer presentations
your intercellular mass can't
help laughing
you know he takes it as
girlishness because
sheer contempt
lies outside his imagination
no matter how
you put it
how sexy how
snappy how short

Public transportation

You're twenty-four and
a hand is looking
for a key
in your waistband
or change
or a tissue
or perhaps even
a ticket
but you're sure
that whatever the fingers
are fumbling for
it can't be found
there
you turn away
it must have been
a mistake
who in the thick of
evening U-Bahn-squeezing
would want to reach into
someone else's trousers
you think and
you stare into the
tunnel noise
put your hands
in the jacket pockets and
hold the pocket-fists
in front of your waist
and while
the automatic woman
announces the
next stop
the hand finds
without any problems
what it was looking for
because it knows

that decisiveness is key
to get where it wants
and so
it is quicker
in your underpants
than you and your
fists could do something
useful
and still there's
not a sound or a word
willing to travel from inside
you to the outside
you just turn away
just leave
the train
into the air
you squeeze
towards the door and see
on your way out exactly
one smiling face

Syllables*

You're twenty-eight
a friend of a
friend is visiting
you haven't seen each other
in ages
kitchen party evenings
in Wedding come alive again
drinking thin beer and
going to a good concert
and you apologize
on the way home
constantly for the conditions
of your accommodation no

shower no hot water
no kitchen but
bed and door and roof
and while the bed may be small
door and roof are standard size
it's fine
says the friend and you
tiptoe past the
apartment of the neighbor who
threatened to call the police because
once you left your clothes
on the line in the laundry room for a week
past the apartment of the
woman who lent you DVDs
at her door dressed only
in underwear
past the violist who practices
far too little at home
voilà the cheapest room in
town you say but OK
says the friend of a friend
looks at the shelf looks at the table
looks at the bed then you say
good night and you try not
to mind that he's much less far away
than the mattress width
would suggest so close that you
have to push hands aside and
laugh again and again and
eventually you say
nein this simple word
a diphthong parenthesized
by one consonant three
four five times you struggle to
extricate yourself in utter
inferiority it seems like
a monosyllabic game that you

can't explain and yet
the rules are so simple
hide and seek
every child can follow them
why not you your turn
go to start
you push yourself up
him away without success his
body heavy with
certainty that he
will win that you
really mean yes
what else could you
possibly mean
except asking for
defeat to be laid out
to be straightened out
the only thing
left for you is to bite
until your front teeth
become hyphens inscribed
in his shoulder flesh
long long
an M for
misunderstanding telegraphs
the friend of a friend
urgently via deep-sea cable
over tundra over ice

Really

You are thirty-five
you are sitting in the library's
comfy break room
on the top floor
above you a skylight next to

you tea in your yellow cup
which is one of the reasons why
you love this place so much
every member has their cup
and supply of teabags in a
personal compartment neatly
partitioned and arranged
so that you can write
as much as you want to you
enjoy taking a break up here
which still means writing
but in an armchair but with tea
and those who know each other
nod silent greetings before
turning to their books or
laptops well isn't that
a cheerful cup says the
old man who maneuvers himself
into the armchair next to you he must be
almost hundred years old
you think somehow fit
but nonetheless not quite
here anymore you
offer him a tea bag
because you don't understand what
the question is about do you
know where the writing room is
he replies and you explain and
ask even though it's pretty
obvious is this your first day
here and he confirms the membership
is brand new because he's writing
a book now as a former hotel physician
in Las Vegas he has so much to tell
he says and Sinatra und Marilyn
he knew them all and you say interesting
and he this is my first book I

just finished the first chapter
and it's really really good
and you'd like to keep working because
this chat isn't going to go anywhere
but more leaning over on your part
and he says look my daughter printed
it out for me here you can
take it if you want and you say
I don't know but he keeps offering you
the sheets until they start to tremble
he coughs up air please take them he says
it would make me so happy you take
them say when I have time
I'll take a look and your voice
is in italics just like the
light green pre-formatted
headline font splendid he says
I'd very much like your feedback
on it when you get the chance
whether there's anything I can improve
you fold the paper into your documents
you open the laptop so that he notices
your patience has run out you
aren't typing since you are angry inside
because when will you ever
be able to say no thank no
I can't do that for you
no this isn't my job no
please stop
grating my kindness
and before you can
calm yourself and go
back to the last paragraph
he slips you a note
in spidery handwriting
in which he asks
you have to read it several times

if you have time tonight to meet
the king of Balochistan
you have to read it again
king is underlined twice
a dinner
in a club with five other
men and no other woman
and if yes then just text
him the club isn't fixed yet and
now he writes he has to go
find the loo he pushes himself
out of the armchair nods and
puts his business card in
front of you and
says good-bye and
you read the note again
you still don't know
what the question is about
and why
you look for Balochistan and
find out that the note
in your lap
is a kingdom in the
Pakistani provinces which
consists largely of desert
and five mountains and
no other woman

Q&A

You are thirty-eight
in a hotel room which
despite being tiled
smells of wet carpet
you sit with colleagues
drinking house wine out of

plastic cups
the talk burbles
along until one colleague says
men always draw the short straw
in college sex because
with hindsight girls call rape
everything they actually
agreed to at the outset
and you try to
ask a question that allows
him to rephrase better
yet take back his
disastrous sentence but he
doesn't accept
and Thea gets loud
louder than you ever
thought she could be
Thea's round hands
in the air and
to substantiate her arguments
she suddenly finds herself
smack in the middle of the room and points
at each woman one after the other
she asks in the circle have you been
raped have you been
raped have you been
raped have you been
raped and voicelessness is a
crack between ceiling and wall
and one by one
they shake their heads
and when it's your turn
you say no
actually
I've been
pretty lucky