

# Open Graves

Grace Lundeen

my body is the plains of a cemetery.  
graves opened haphazardly lay overgrown with time,  
filled in but still visible.  
before i shed my clothes or begin a date,  
i explain my empty graveyard state.  
it's not "the" talk but it's one i must give  
every partner before we uncover ourselves.  
pitiful eyes assure me it doesn't change how they feel.  
well, one didn't. his gaze tore me open,  
solidifying the ugly i knew myself to be.  
i hate who i am, what i've become.  
shielding myself from the watchful eyes of life,  
a body with a disclosure statement, unable to just-  
be.

i forgot about my state the first time i exposed my torso  
and her eyes locked on the unmarked graves.  
we stood there in a stone-still dance with  
hollow words stumbling past our lips.  
that night she left with a silent goodbye, texting me later to  
explain she was just surprised, nothing more.  
she didn't need to explain.  
our next encounters were rigid, she crept carefully so i  
wouldn't crack.  
but it's hard to shatter when you're already in pieces.

i then remembered to give my Viewer Discretion Advised  
speech.  
he smiled weakly and looked away.  
despite the disgust i felt when i was with him, i stayed.  
at least he tried to hide his repulsion towards me, right?  
i couldn't be still for more than a few minutes, hating the feeling  
of his hands on me- but never on my stomach,

he didn't like the feeling of the ridges.  
he asked if i was "done with my depression" so i was "normal"  
again.

i was too weak to leave him.

then you came along. i assured you we wouldn't last,  
that i was a ticking time bomb.  
but you pulled me in by my waist  
kissed me gently and said you wouldn't mind getting caught  
in the blast if it meant being with me.

i fall asleep in your arms. you wrap around me like my coat  
on a cold day,  
cradling every part of my body. holding me while I unravel  
in your bed.

when i showed you the graves littering me, you didn't look  
away.

You didn't stare, you just observed. carving a mental  
picture,

a beautiful headstone of the person you cared for  
to remember me when i became still. it was never about my scars;

they were as natural as acne or body hair to you.  
although my graveyard state saddens you, i've never  
wanted to hide,  
to tell crests to disappear.

just as flowers are placed by graves, sadness can be beautiful, too.  
the nights are peaceful the stars sigh above us,  
silent observers to our bubble of time.

*First place winner, 2023 Anita (Sarkees) Bahr Award for Student  
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