

Now My Inside
Is My Outside

Psychological abuse of men

Poetry by Marlene Jezierski

Once you have read this book,
please pass it on.

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Dedicated
to those men
who had the courage
to share their stories.

With deep appreciation
for Jon's open heart,
generosity,
and gentle spirit.

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Words Are Not for Hurting

A world of words—
the worst weapon
of mass destruction;

spoken with spite,
hatred, anger,
control,

spirits are crushed,
craters are created,
steam in despair;

souls silently
sink into darkness,
self esteem stripped,
joy banished.

Words must not be used
as weapons. Words
must be used for healing.

*Author's note: After *Hands and Words are Not
for Hurting* Project, Ann S. Keller, founder, 1997*

A Lesser Known Truth

Behind bound doors
Men are bombarded
by words that wound,
words that **E**rode.
Its **N**ame is abuse.

The tyranny—
Abuse of men—
bars the victim
from his **R**ight
to a contented heart,
Empowering love,
a peaceful life.

Growing **A**wareness
of this abuse
haunts him.
Bonds tighten.
He's choked
in the clutches
of a life sentence—
Utter loneliness,
Shame that smothers.

Impossible to name,
no one knows,
or would believe.

Struggling in bleak
hopelessness,
he dreams of **E**scape,
seeks
to define what's happening,
Defy the abuser,
and achieve reprieve.

It was foreign to him

at their beginning—
he blamed himself,
her harsh words
made him believe
he needed to lose
lazy ignorant incompetent,
he tackled
self-improvement

like a neglected plant
watered only occasionally,
his inner resolve
and determination were tidal—
ebbed or surged,
as domestic weather fluxed,
he was lauded at work,
awarded a bonus
and a plaque
which she hurled at him—
what do they know
of that man she married

he believed he deserved
to be put down, insulted, directed
with thumb-grinding hostility,
awards meant nothing
he
was nothing

never in their years together
did he name her words
abusive violent controlling
never in those years
did he think
he did not deserve it

in all those years
he felt
she was just mean

Prison of Words

iron bars
his thoughts

drop by drop
cruel words
from her tongue
her acid erodes his foundation
sentences his whole self
cell by cell

the child who joyfully
 hugged his mom
the friend who stopped
 and listened
the student who sought insight
 from his teacher
the altar boy who served
 at funerals
the athlete who advocated
 have fun in the game

is lost, isolated
he wonders

how came this sentence
who is this woman I married
what can I do
to whom can I appeal

the floor collapses
into a vacuum
no up or down
no stairway
to sunshine
no doors that open

Isolation

To entertain—
a social norm
I require, desire.

In a reasonable tone she tells me,
*there is no time, you see,
due to household duties,
child care, we both work;
social events are, after all,
not necessities.*

She would have to paint
the kitchen first.
In puzzlement—I wonder.

She argues—
it's troublesome
for my grandfather
to visit; the old man's
wheelchair
marks our fine wood floors.

Mostly, she
answers the phone,
fails to pass messages.
Mother calls me
occasionally
at work. My best friend
hasn't called in months.

Alone on Christmas Eve
I sit in sepulchral silence
by our holiday tree.
It glows with golden lights;
its branches bow
from the weight
of vintage ornaments.
I sip Merlot from a crystal goblet
and gaze at the phone
that never rings.

Count the Ways

A quiet moment.
A question
falls, an icicle,
shattering on frozen ground.

*What do I **love** about you?*

A pause—weighty
wet snow.

She frowns.
Tosses her head.
Her voice is slate.

*You get cleaned up for work.
Usually you get the kitchen floor clean,
come home on time,
make enough money.*

She squints.
Her steady gaze—
a power screwdriver—drills
a hole in his temple.

*You're getting bald but
you don't look too bad.
Your conversation
is mostly intelligent.
You can diaper babies,
keep the cars clean.*

She gazes out a window,
twirls her foot in a tight circle
clockwise,
smoothes the fabric
of her linen skirt.

Blessed Rest

scarce as ice water in
Hades.

She cyclones into their bedroom
with homely
anger, their marital bed
becomes a pallet of
nails
again.

The toilet bowl
failed
her midnight inspection,
again.

Her voice, a
guillotine's
edge, orders
him to get up,
again
do it right
as a good
husband should—return

to mop and pail,
chain and mail.

A Child's Perspective

In the deep of night,
after the mother assigned
all night feedings
of their infant son
to the father,

he, in the dark of loneliness,
flowered in the gentleness
of love which grew
with the rapidity
of an amaryllis,
and as beautiful.

Awed by the overwhelming
force of love for his son,
swathed in night's mitten,
intoxicated by the perfume
of the infant's breath,
Dad cuddled his baby.

For years, the mother's
words flowed
like lava from Kilowea,
spewed acid on her husband.

There were days of silence,
nights of hysteria,
putdowns in front of friends
and family,
irrational accusations
of infidelity,
the checking of his cell phone.

Countless times
the child saw his father
avert his eyes, stand speechless.

Lousy father.

Colossal slob.

Incompetent cook.

Idiot.

The boy heard.
Molten language
engulfed him.

At six, the child mumbled
in a voice like an old
burned-out teacher,

*Daddy, you always
do stuff wrong.
Try harder.
You need to make
Mom happy.*

Time had passed.
The mother's words
had colored her son
in black and shadows.

Innocent

The young, gallant man
of peaceful heart
means to overcome
horrific allegations.

I did not cut her.

I would never cut a woman.

His gentle spirit balances
in an orbit
of injustice;
fatigued hands
grip the wrist of reason and truth
with faith that these will lift him
from a twisted pit
of control and cruelty.

Will they believe him?
Or her? The crazed cougar
who stalked him in the dark,
stole his phones,
X-box, laptop
and independence,
and now seeks to bury
him with lies.

A deep unknown lives darkly
inside, secreted
between omentum and pancreas;
silent pangs stab.

Lying, curled tightly, pillow
crunched between knees and head,
light shut out; worry is subdued.
The unspeakable is quiescent—stilled
in the reality that the weight
of waiting cannot be borne.

No. No
tears, there is no point,
the well is dry
from years
of tyranny.

He stuffs lurking fears
and stifled desperation
through the slot
of a steel lock-box

and waits
for sword, scale and blindfold
to measure and mete.

Clinging to Hope

I feel disbelief,
this can't be my life.
I have a good heart.
I am a man of honor.
I am a successful man.
I have true friends.

I pursue hope,
respite from
cutting words,
disdain,
rejection,
judgment,
shame.

Men are not
abuse victims.

Belief in self reappears—
or is it desperate
grasping,
that love,
once felt

or perceived,
will prevail
somehow yet

nothing
changes.

Journey to Freedom

I was walking...the sun was setting –the sky turned
blood red –there was blood and tongues of fire
above the blue-black fjord...I sensed an infinite
scream passing through nature.

--Edvard Munch on his painting *The Scream*

He enters cradling filmy dreams,
a naïve sense of the nature
of life with another—
spring breezes,
sunshine that coaxes

crocuses and tulips
from darkness.
Truth told, after he and his bride
cross the threshold

he's lost in a maze of trick mirrors
and images—her back to him,
her face twisted in disdain.

*Everything I do is wrong.
Why can't we visit my parents?
I walk on eggshells in fear she'll explode.
I used to think I was a decent guy.*

Who are these people?

The wintry air
of her unhappy moods,
the ratchet sound
of her voice fills
his hall of horrors,
defies his denial.

The repetition numbs him.
After years, the darkness
grows heavy as lead, loneliness
creates weariness, the journey
becomes increasingly futile.

Voices he can barely discern
pose questions, doubts—
must this go on?

Taunted by the image
of a Munch *Scream*
in his mirror, he sees darkness
circling dead eyes,
his face shrouded in shadow.

Behind the image he sees beacons
that glow golden with hope.
He turns from the mirror
and walks toward the light.

Sometimes I Wished for Death, But I Wasn't Suicidal

For sixteen years
a chamber of ice
weighted me down.
The polar vortex
of my wife's disgust
slowed inspirations,
froze aspirations,
shrank life's dimensions.

Her flattening words—
stubborn, incompetent,
dumbas—birthed
an alien that mirrored
hollow eyes, slack mouth,
head slung low.
A shamed dog.

Her face—
a frown, eyes averted,
if-looks-could-kill fury—often
for reasons unknown, stopped
the clock.

I had no control,
felt I might as well
have stepped into a bear
trap while climbing
Mount McKinley.
I imagined an easy escape—
brain cancer, lightning,
or a fatal trauma—perhaps
beheading by a semi.

One day, weighted
by uncertainty, shame,
and desperation, I stepped
forward, reached out. A friend
welcomed my hand.
Her eyes were alight
with the flame of truth.
She spoke of my goodness,
defined healthy love,
and helped me
shed my shame.

Gradually, the ice melted.
I looked up.
A day of promise
and love had dawned .

Now my inside is
my outside.

Dawn

I feel sad

our impossible dream lost
her unending unhappiness
my powerlessness to help her

I feel relief

having accepted the facts
having recognized reality
having named the abuse

I feel release

know I'm OK
believe I deserve more
have a life without pain

I am proud

I was kind
I was respectful
I saved myself

I am free

my days are joyful
my nights are without fear
my heart is light

I am whole

in the mirror I see
a contented man
awash in peace

I had forgotten he existed

