

Now My Inside  
Is My Outside

Psychological abuse of men

Poetry by Marlene Jeziarski

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  
**M**en are bombarded  
by words that wound,  
words that **E**rode.  
Its **N**ame is abuse.

The tyranny—  
**A**buse of men—  
bars the victim  
from his **R**ight  
to a contented heart,  
**E**mpowering love,  
a peaceful life.

Growing **A**wareness  
of this abuse  
haunts him.  
**B**onds tighten.  
He's choked  
in the clutches  
of a life sentence—  
**U**tter loneliness,  
**S**hame 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,  
**D**efy 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

