



Degenerates
Voices for Peace

Domestic Violence Edition

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Featured Poets

Daginne Aignend

C.M. Averin

Paul Brookes

Debbie Collins

Sage Curtis

Susan Ellis

Ed Higgans

Pam Kress-Dunn

Nina Lewis

Bob McNeil

Tahni Nikitins

BanWynn Oakshadow

Sankara Olama-Yai

Emma Page

Lucy Palmer

Emily Perkins

Beatrice Preti

Sarah Pritchard

Mantz Yorke

Gas-Lighting

In the dusk of a street lamp, another words bites
And she retreats to the safety of a mind locked tight
Where his words can't reach her, and his slaps don't sting
The only pain she feels is the burning of her ring
And when they return home, she peaks her head out
Surveys her surroundings to see if he still shouts
But he has gone to bed, and now lies fast asleep
And so she bows her head, and alone she starts to weep
But he wakes up too soon, before the dawn arrives
And he calls her a coward, full of traps and lies
Well, she herself's no fool, but it's hard to make amends
With a man who only breaks, no room to squeeze or bend
And he twists all her words, and makes it seem her fault
When all she really wants is to find some way out
But she can't ever find it, not while he still wants to play
He knows that while he's got her, she'll never get away

—Beatrice Preti

pregnant with d
 r
 i
 p
 p bloody shards
 i
 n of shattered dreams

^
 g
 i long too, need t****#***!***** white noise, the TV...escape
 fade 2 gray

V
 [. . .]

worn out shoes on the desk
 ragged fedora on my head
 curls of cigarette smoke rising
 2 make love 2
 the ceiling's slow motion fan

+x+x+x+x+x+x+x+x+

then She walked in

a dame whose legs went all the
 way up to the part in her hair
 and a voice like the sound of
 the scraping claws of

kittens!

midgets!

teeth!

whores!

on the blackboard
 reaching a part of me

eating broken dreams

&
Ecstasy
&
dinner's burned and the TV's smashed
&
Daddy's Special Little Boy
never told the Secret
&
I'll tell you something...
they always change
but they never end

—BanWynn Oakshadow

Bottle Bottle

I met her first inside the bar.
A taller glass of somethin' else
the poshest bottle bottle there
real cool, but with a kickin' bite

and Hell, it went down pretty smooth
a single sip was all it took
a taste to make my muzzle lock
around the bottle bottle neck
you can't just stop at one.

I met her first outside the church.
The chase disguised the aftertaste
'cause bitter bottle bottle's suck
like muzzles onto lemon bits

and Hell, the chase ran out today
it kept a lid on top of things
it should still work without the salt
so bottle bottle bottom's up
you can't just call a cab.

I met her first beside the stairs.
It's blurry now, just like the base
a clouded bottle bottle left
it's callin' me at three o'clock

and Hell, my paws still got the shakes
my head's still spinnin' from the punch
my teeth'll never be the same
but half a bottle bottle left
you can't just pour it out.

Why I Went Back
Ask why I went back
Frown while prodding fresh bruises
Doubt my drunk doorknob
Judgement gavels land heavy
Crushing not the abuser

Count how many steps
Call into question my tale
Push me to answer
Testimony only counts
When concussed and still bleeding

Raise a keen eyebrow
Sharpen it like cutlery
Press it to my palm
Sympathy dies with each call
Shredded by inconvenience

Blame my attitude
Tell me not to provoke rage
Wince when I explode
A silenced muzzle brings peace
Ending domestic disputes

Say it's such a shame
Clean up my mess one last time
Ask why I went back
Go wheel away the body
Ignoring my children's eyes.

—C.M. Averin

crossing the road

it is an
unbeautiful
truth that it was the
words
not the sticks or the stones
that broke these bones, for i've been
punched in the face and
kicked in the
stomach, had my fingers wrenched back and my
throat crumpled up tight in a lover's
fist, been
dragged down the stairs by my hair (and how many goddamn
times i've thought that they'd have had
nothing
to catch me with if only i'd
shorn it off all those years ago, and
this
is what it means to be a
woman, these are the things no one ever tells you, that the
length of your hair should be directly proportional to the simmering level of
violence in the man most like to
tear it from your scalp), i have seen my
blood all over the living room carpet and the raw aching
rage in my mother's eyes when she saw it
too, i have slept
fully clothed with my
shoes
on
in the living room by the
front door
because the front door was double-glazed, but the
back door
was not, and so i knew that if he
came for me
he would come by the back door, oh i

know
 what it is
 to be afraid to go home, to peek out each
 footstep from your desk to the bus to the gate that drags and sheds its
 splinters on the concrete path as though
 it too is warning you not to
 step through that door, but there is
 nowhere
 else to go, i
 know
 what it is
 to lie awake in bed, listening
 for the sound of his key in the door, scratching
 scraping, searching, your heart sinking because you were hoping that
 just for tonight
 he would not come back stinking of the
 contents of the empty bottles he used to hide in the
 laundry basket, i
 know
 what it is to feel your shit turn to
 liquid inside your
 bowels as you hear him thundering up the
 stairs while you cower in the dark next to the toilet, and
 oscar
 there is not a woman like me alive who does not understand
 why
 she was shot facing a locked bathroom door, because
 once you figure out that the danger is
 inside
 your home, you learn *fast*
 that the bathroom is the only room in the
 goddamn house with a
 lock
 on
 it
 except
 sometimes

there is a baby sleeping on your bed where you
 left her, not thinking that the
 evening would turn out this way, because you get fooled into
 believing you can read his
 moods and control his
 temper, but you
 can't
 and you know that's where he's
 headed first, the bedroom where the baby is, and so you
 get to your feet, legs like
 jackhammers, so intense you're
 sure he must feel the vibrations through the floor, and you
 pull back the bolt and turn on the
 light and stand there shaking in silhouette
 so that he'll come for
 you
 first, oh
 i *know* what it's like to think
 today
 is the day
 he will finally kill me
 i know
 i know
 and yet
 still
 it is the words
 it is the silences, what is
 said and not said and the
 terrible weight of
 all the things i no longer remember that still
 bleed at night, that form the
 knotted ropey scars of my soul, the bruises have
 faded, but the memories of petty insults are as vivid as if they were only hurled
 yesterday, *bitch, slut, you goddamn fat stupid worthless square-jawed*
 loose desperate empty-headed moron, who the fuck
 but me
 would want

you?
casual cerebral violence committed by
people so wrapped up in their own
pain that they can't *bear* that
you can't feel it too
i am
bleeding, they say
and so i will cut you because i don't want to bleed alone
force-feeding you
compassion, jamming
empathy down your throat with
fists of rage until you vomit it all back up in a
huge great lake of pain and suffering as though they could
drown their own
in yours, as though
two broken people could
ever be whole, because it only means as much as it
hurts, every invisible scar, every
unseeable blow, every
silent abandonment, measuring
love in
pain, commitment in
self-esteem, intention in
suffering, until you start
crossing the road with
your eyes
closed, so
please
please
do not tell me that
words
will never hurt me

—Emma Page

Through A Child's Eyes

My family is happy and full of love.

I live with mommy, and daddy, and big sister, and little brother.

Our mommy and daddy love us.

Mommy's friends come over to the house sometimes. She has a book club that meets every month. They used to switch whose house they meet at, but mommy's friends like her so much that they have it here all the time now so that she doesn't have to leave us!

Daddy's friends come over, too. They laugh and talk loudly and play games in the basement. I'm not allowed down there, but I don't really want to go, anyway. It smells weird and there are bottles everywhere.

Mommy's a really good cook. She makes us dinner, and she bakes yummy desserts. She even lets me help add chocolate chips to the cookie dough. She says I'm too young to use the stove because it has fire, so I can't help make fudge, but she gives me a piece when it's done!

Daddy cooks, too. He makes his own special drinks. They're so good, he carries them around with him all the time! I'm not allowed to taste it because it's "daddy water," but whenever I ask him about it, he gets me some milk, instead!

Sometimes mommy gets mad, but it's my fault and I deserve my punishment. When my books are taken away, it's because I know I'm not allowed to read after bedtime, but I did it anyway, and when she makes me stand in the corner, it's because she caught me throwing away my vegetables again.

Sometimes daddy gets mad, but it's my fault and I deserve my punishment. If he threatens to make me eat mud it's because I was pouting again, and if he makes me stand on one small square of carpet for hours, or spansks me, or yells at me, or stomps away into the basement even though he's supposed to be watching us, it's because I must have done... something.

My life is great.

I have good books to read, and the library likes me so much they let me check out as many books as I want!

I have a fun tree to climb in the backyard. When daddy accidentally cut off the branch I loved to sit on, I found an even cooler branch higher up! I can see my whole street!

There are funny squirrels and pretty butterflies in the garden by my kitchen window. Daddy accidentally killed the pretty purple flower bush that we loved, so there aren't as many butterflies now, but one of the squirrels sat on my brother's toy tractor, and it was really funny because it looked like he was driving it!

I have lots of friends, too! Not many in my class, but my teachers like me! The school guidance counselor gives me candy whenever we talk, and the other day mommy took me and my siblings to meet a couple other new people! We went to a nice orange room with a big mirror on the wall, and I got to talk to lots of nice adults! I know they liked me because they asked me a lot of questions about school, and home, and daddy.

Life is good.

My mommy and daddy love me very much.

Of course, I'm just a kid.

I'm not old enough to realize that my mother is afraid to leave me alone with my father, and I'm not old enough to recognize the smell of beer.

I'm not old enough to know that "daddy water" is code for "vodka."

I'm not old enough to see the big picture.

I'm not old enough to know that not all apologies are genuine and some accidents don't happen accidentally.

I'm not old enough to realize that the school counselor isn't just interested in me as a person, and I'm definitely not old enough to realize that police are not "new friends" and their nice rooms with large mirrors are interrogation rooms with disguised windows.

I'm so young, I won't remember all of this. I won't remember that time my dad called the police because my mom tried to talk to a lawyer. I won't remember being afraid of my father. I'll remember my mom waking me up and whispering, "hey, let's go on an adventure," and I'll remember the shiny hotel lobby and the big, soft, bed, but I won't remember my mother crying, and I won't remember that it was less about being somewhere new and more about being somewhere else, now, quick, before daddy gets home.

I'm just a kid with a happy family and life full of love.

—Emily Perkins

Broken

every word a sharp rebuke
 every tender blow a bruise
 you stained my lips
 strawberry red
 and I tasted it
 with the tip of my tongue

our friend's averted eyes
 were all too telling

your brutal beauty
 stunned me at first
 and I fell for your sin
 you were my most
 extravagant mistake
 and you knew it

I couldn't love you more
 until the battles
 with tangled words
 and clenched fists
 became ordinary
 became normal

leaving you made me less for a while
 but I am not there to disappoint you now

you were my sweet disaster
 my beautiful broken man

—Debbie Collins

Ripped

A grapefruit knife is only tiny
 cuts through citric skin with ease
 hand held horror
 silver blinks in the dark.

Cuts through citric skin with ease
 shadows play tricks on dream-waking eyes
 silver blinks in the dark
 her scream, muffled.

Shadows play tricks on dream-waking eyes
 his body straddles hers
 her scream, muffled
 trapped between his thighs.

His body straddles hers
 hand held horror
 trapped between his thighs
 a grapefruit knife is only tiny.

—Nina Lewis

Midnight

that the fire in my pupils is a slow burning of thumping heart dungeons

I told him once, twice, how I knife & twist & kiss & kiss as weapons

This is not fear what I'm feeling, but hunger

If I stop to think—but there's no time

I sucked him in or off or both This is all the same

How I win & kill & love—

Feel that slow burn catching fire as I dig my fingernails deep into his lax muscles

I will leave bite marks & a glittering trail of stiletto prints & water stains
on the milk crate table—

find me in pieces later little love notes

If I wrote them they'd say—run

backwards it's a Led Zeppelin song

weapons as kiss & kiss & twist & knife
once, twice as many times as I need to feel full

—Sage Curtis

Tears Of God

My son's eyes are ice.
I have seen this look before.

He lugs my dog Sheba by her mane,
hauls her along the floor

a piece of meat, slopping over gunnels
in an abattoir, blood down the drains.

Her paws scratch and scrape
he dumps her at my feet.

"Bite its ear!"
I shake my head.

"If it's done wrong, and it has
bite its ear." I shake my head

mumble
"Done nothing wrong."

"Eh! Speak up woman!"
"It 'aint done nothing wrong. Jack!"

Fine rain falls through grey skies
in the pub yard, and a yellow

fluid flows out from under the dog.
"Dirty bitch!"

He kicks Sheba in her side.
She whimpers, puts her head

pleadingly on the black shiny
surface of my court shoes.

"I'll do it then!"
Snatches her up

by the scruff
"Getting a dog

and not bringing it up right.
Stupid cow!"

He snaps at the silk of her ear.
She yelps. I cry.

"Stupid sodding cow!"
He slaps me hard

across my face. I feel
his gold rings on my cheek.

"Stop whimpering!"
Pushes me up against

the wet wall. His cold eyes
up close make me shiver.

One hand on my throat,
the other points at her. I mumble.

"Not again Jack. Please."
My legs have gone.

"Treat the bitch right
and it'll treat you right."

Sheba inches against the wall,
low and hung back like the grey clouds.

Jack lets me fall. The pub door slams
Sheba, up on her legs again,

licks my face, lays down by my side
puts her head on my black court shoes.

Her neck is warm. My back hurts.
They call the rain the "Tears of God"

—Paul Brookes

Statues in Stone

Standing still hurts more than running.
A chrysalis will not protect forever,
live with the mark on your finger, it was a ring once.

Ghost scenes torment you. A mistake repeated over,
tethers you to the past, keeps the replay sharp.
Escape.

Happy ever after was a promise meant forever,
you struggled to accept the dark ending. Once
it was over, you found your feet too tired to run.

—Nina Lewis

Domesticity

Fist slicing through blue air, eyes squeeze shut as she feels her jaw crush, knuckle sandwich, gets what she's had coming to her all evening. Squeezes her eyes tighter, so tight, so tight - lights burst behind her eyes, a sound shatters like sorrow and she realizes: it's coming from her.

His hands like cold clay that once kneaded raw skin, proud fingers that would have fucked her shadow now pound, ghosting angry bruises like kisses onto her face.

Now on his knees and he's pulling hair, her head forced back, he lets go and it smacks the floor, and all she can see is his left foot, houndstooth sock, the hole in the big toe and it makes her laugh, she sees the red nail that he let her paint after they made love and it's too too tender, it's not for right now. She laughs into unsettled air and he leans down, grabs her face, kisses it hard, lips like cold meat, bruise kiss, hate kiss, kisses the laugh right off her face.

After, she snake curls into herself, all knees and elbows and he curls himself into her, strokes her hair and whispers love things and she lets it clean her but then hates herself and wants to say Go. But the words aren't hers. Not yet.

—Lucy Palmer

Step Ten

Start with a list
the way I talk myself down in the mirror
sometimes, the way I lead with fists,

the way it feels better to kiss
and spin with someone unfamiliar
than to go over and over the list

of broken bones: my leg, elbow & wrist
the breaks we took with tonic as mixers.
We had a lead once: hand-over-fist

trying to fight this.
We lost our battle mid-winter
& I left a note on the grocery list.

You always said I was the realist,
but I was waiting for the cut of scissors.
I wonder who will cook you breakfast.

I drive the road west,
feel the air between us getting thinner.
Start again with my list.
I'll try not to lead with fists.

—Sage Curtis

Grandfather

A tall, elegant silhouette
 Chestnut silver tresses
 The tomato with rice soup
 Golden Fiction cigarettes
 Heartfelt warmth
 My beloved grandmother

There she lays
 On the kitchen floor
 A broken wrist
 Because she forgot
 to water his azalea

—Daginne Aignend
 (previously published by Duane's Poe Tree)

skin betrayed

I can hear noises I do not want
 to hear, he is a bear & she is a faun
 he is flinging and pouncing on &
 I am under the bedclothes
 cuddling my kitten
 and scratching out the noises.

Moma's taking me to school
 She is trying on different clothes
 until he likes the colour
 likes the feel, likes the shape
 over her Mummy body
 and she is coming out of the door in her high
 heels the way he likes her
 I am sitting in the back seat
 cuddling my monkey toy
 and scratching out the noises.

Moma's trying to get the house ready
 for the party and
 they disagree on where the glasses go
 and where the clock should tick
 and they are flying across the room
 and I am rocking on the elephant stool
 scratching out the noises.

—sarah pritchard

Not Your Metaphor

“My life,” the child cries
 “is not your metaphor.”
 Her small body freshly raped
 Is torn asunder.
 Hemorrhaging.
 Internally bleeding.
 Her not-fully-formed
 Fragile small being
 Was not made to take such cruelty.
 A mirror
 Hammered to bits
 She is—
If she survives
 The scar tissue will build walls inside of her
 Wrapped around her shattered mind
 Like a grain of sand—
 No pearl will come from this.

“My trauma,” the child wails
 “is not your poorly construed metaphor.”
 Should her broken body survive
 It will never love as it might have once.
 Those walls
 Ache.
 Should her mind permit her to go on
 It will never see the same world.
 Mirrors cannot be
 Un-shattered.
 There are some wounds
 The child will learn
 Should she survive
 That therapy cannot heal
 Only balm.

“I am not hypothetical,” the child screams

“and I am not your
 poorly construed
 shock-value metaphor.

I
 am
 real.”

—Tahni J. Nikitins

One-on-One

Before my clothes were scattered like confetti on the driveway,
I lost the small diamond ring.

I am only as beautiful as the grey icicles in your irises, so how
do I explain they've turned hard as carbon?

This only happens when we're drinking,
both determined not to turn
tongue-to-tongue.

We are feeding ourselves methanol anyway.
We thought we could be less fucked up.

We thought we could bury it in each other.
Here's how we hang on:

You don't drink Coor's Light. I flex my vocab.
You say, *my parents drank it.*
I say, *my mom gets stupid.*

It digs itself up: in *bitch*, in *leave*, in
getting closer to breaking with fists and spit.

The ring, hovering mid-air, is only the opening act.
We were not always this way.

We were calm mornings, waiting for a table at Country Waffle.
Here's how we try to get it back:
we're not like that,

Hang up the clothes in the closet, rinse out silver beer cans,
my forehead to your collarbone,
holding.

—Sage Curtis

Stain

I stared at the stain on the wall, safe in my anonymity.

I in my usual seat, the lucky one.

My brothers having nowhere to look, no place to hide their fear
 clinging to invisibility like cockroaches on fine china
 staring down at their laps.

Always risky...either invisible or not paying attention.

No way to know,

no way to tell if the boys would pass for decorations
 or be crushed underfoot

But safer than looking at Father--and maybe catching the attention of those brown eyes.
 brown as a roach's back. Brown as the stain.

Me? I already knew those eyes.

I stared at the stain.

It was a growing thing, a life, an entity, the expanding offspring of an unchaste
 and spermless conception,
 a sixth member of the family,
 living on the dining room wall.

The size of my head at birth--

except where a gravy umbilical dripped towards the floor.

That was a couple years ago.

Back then it looked like nothing...Back then I wasn't me

And it?

It was just a gravy stain on the dining room wall.
 A stain made when a stew tasting more of cabbage than beef
 along with Grandma Emm's blue delft gravy boat
 smashed against that very same wall,

Letting Grandma Emm,

80 at passing and

3...years...dead,

give up her porcelain uterus to help birth a new member of her family:
 a stain growing on the dining room wall...

Behind Mother, where only I could stare.

Now it looked like things...

many things...
 different things as it grew...
 and it changed.
 Sometimes you had to peek at it from the corner of your eye
 to see anything more than a stain on the wall.
 Sometimes it was as precise as the crunch of a car tire when a cat dodged
 the wrong way...
 A paint tube opened at the wrong end...
 mostly red.
 As Father flung more and more and ever more dishes at that wall
 like some Jackson Pollock inspired artist possessed by the muse of the abstract,
 flinging food and crockery across the canvas of our dining room wall in a mad
 and,
 in the end,
 futile effort to say something even he could not explain.

The stain grew.

One night it looked like a chaotic gerbil in a Pope's hat clawing at a delicate fairy that had
 only one arm.
 That one made me want to cry,
 but I didn't.
 After all, it was just a stain.
 The night before it had been a lawn gnome orgy,
 when the next meal met with disapproval,
 it would look like something else.
 But not that night.
 The meal was served and nothing was flung...and I knew...
 I knew that I would get to stare at that doomed fairy for at least another night.
 Father tasted, and chewed, and swallowed, and grunted.
 He grunted like a hog, I thought to myself...
 and then look furtively away as if Father could read my thoughts.
 Who knows?
 Maybe he could.
 At least every time I mustered up the courage to look at him while thinking such things,
 it was to find his stain colored cockroach eyes already staring into mine,
 a disdainful sneer curling his lip.

"Well? What are you waiting for?
 A goddamned invitation to eat?
 Dig in, you little bastards."

We fell to,
 not really tasting what was on our plates.
 It was not food.
 It was just paint.
 Just fuel.
 Just a doorway to another day.

Mother had to wait until everyone had been served before she herself sat down to eat.

Her hands would shake when she ate
 and Father would growl at her every time
 her silverware clattered against her plate.

Then he would somehow sneer disdainfully and smile smugly at the same time...
 telling her that she was right to be afraid...
 that all of us were right to be afraid.

Mother had to stop eating when the first person finished their meal,
 clearing plates, washing dishes,
 checking each thing she washed for anything left...
 even fingerprints must be wiped away

All signs, that is, except the stain.

Weren't nothing gonna get that off.

Sometimes I swore that Father ate fast enough to give himself a belly-ache
 just so he could finish before she had a chance to eat.

Some nights were good.

Dinner was acceptable--never worthy of praise or a thank you.

The immaculate house got only cursory complaints about dust that wasn't there.

You know why hogs wallow in their own shit?

Cause they like it!

The TV shows he liked were on,

even though the commercials made him grunt in protest.

Family afraid so still and silent.

He could make us near piss ourselves
 by just raising an eyebrow...

as if he had just seen something...
 something that was not how he wanted it.
 He waited until we were nearly whimpering...
 then the commercials ended and the eyebrow lowered back to its usual place.
 He'd chuckle quietly to himself.
 I hated him more than usual when he did that,
 Hated that fat, happy, grunting hog.
 As we needed more reminding of how sharp-edged was the razor-blade tightrope
 we walked...every...day.

A hog happy in his shit.
 Maybe it would be a good night.
 Maybe no one would be beat.
 Maybe we wouldn't have to close our eyes and pretend we were somewhere else
 as we heard to the heavy, meaty smack of flesh on flesh,
 so much like the sound of her heavy rolling pin
 when Mother beat out a ball of pie crust.
 Mother's pleading cries for forgiveness for sins she never done!
 Sometimes she got hard to understand,
 as her false teeth would clatter on the floor,
 like the toe bones of something dead and gone.
 But he wouldn't leave marks.
 No stains...leastways not on her face.

Those were bad nights.
 Those were the nights that nightmares are made of,
 but not the worst.

The worst nights were those in which the door would open on our bedroom, the tiny room
 I shared with my younger brothers.
 Father would be standing in the doorway nude,
 his hard, blunt penis swaying, bobbing, pointing,
 One potato, Two potato, Three potato, Four...
 shining with a thick film of lard
 by the light my youngest brother's
 Winnie-the-Pooh nightlight.
 He would stand there for what seemed like hour after hour...

looking from face to face,
 knowing what each of us was thinking.
 "Is it going to be my turn tonight?"
 "No! Please, God, let it be Robin! Let it be Paul!"
 "Please, God, let it be someone else!"

It was always the same,
 didn't make a difference if you were ten like me
 or only five like Robin.

On your belly!
 Spread them legs!

Then that sharp pain that was a stab and a burn and a punch in the stomach but deep inside all at once
 as he took what wasn't his to take.

He grabbed us tight--like any of us was strong enough to get away--
 He would mount! fuck! bang! hump! bugger! rape! sodomize! heave! pump! copulate! fornicate!
 nail! hammer! screw!

The hog would pork...makin' bacon
 He grunted his hoggy grunts those nights.
 but I didn't have to avert my eyes.
 My face was buried in a tear-stained pillow that did little to muffle my screams.
 We could hear Mother on the other side of the wall,
 rocking in her chair,
 silent,
 pity but no rescue to offer,
 pretending not to notice was happening,
 what always happened on the other side of the wall.

But it was okay.
 We all learned the trick.
 The trick of turning off your mind while he fucked you and just be someplace else,
 a quiet place inside your head.

Me?
 I'd picture the stain...
 and then that brown stain would turn red...
 and gray and all wet...
 and something more I can't say.
 He'd pull out with a 'pop' and, in a voice as full of contempt,

as if we were the ones who had forced ourselves on him,
 would tell us to get up and go wash ourselves for God's sake.
 Even if it wasn't your turn that night, you still had to fall asleep remembering.
 Remembering that you had just prayed.
 Prayed to God!
 To Heaven, to Jesus...
 To the Holy Virgin Mary...
 To the Savior...
 The Farther, The Son and The Holy Ghost!
 that it be your baby brother that got fucked instead of you...
 and worst of all...that you had meant it.

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us
 but I couldn't forgive.
 We had to change the sheets when it was our night.
 Under them, the mattress was stained.
 Stained with blood, and piss, and the other stuff.
 The stuff that ran down the inside of your legs
 'cause you were too stretched to hold it in.
 The sperm that had made you once and then
 remade you into something else night after night...
 I tried real hard not to look at those stains.

At school, they told us to tell.
 On the TV they told us to tell.
 Police and Priests told us to tell.
 Father warned us never to tell.
 I told once.
 I went down to the Parish and went into the Confessional,
 its once velvety cushion shiny and stained,
 with several generations of penitent behinds.
 I told what I'd sworn never to tell.
 Father had said he'd kill Mom and then each of us,
 making the one who told watch all the others go
 before he allowed that one to follow.
 But I told. I should'a known.

There's a reason they call the priests "Father".

The priest said I needed comfort and called me to him.

I left my side of the confessional and joined him in his.

It was a special treat.

I'd always wondered what his side looked like.

It was disappointing.

Pretty much like the other side with a softer seat.

But there were worms.

His fingers, cold and damp like worms wiggling...

Wriggling their way up the leg of my shorts.

Mushy worms rubbing my belly under my shirt.

Him telling me that I would burn in hell if I told.

Worms, warm and suffocating over my mouth

and his wet, slobbery whispers to keep quiet in my ear.

I went to God for help...and he sent me worms.

I didn't know where to go once I reached a bus station.

The one that I don't need to bother describing,

because you're already picturing it in your head.

I hadn't had much of a plan beyond making it to somewhere else

faster than the police.

The Chicken Hawks descended like flies on old meat.

I can recognize them now, but not back then.

Even if I could have, where else was I going

to find a smile and a place to sleep?

It was okay now.

I never knew I had it in me

to do the thing I done.

But Mother is safe now.

My little brothers are safe now.

If someone had to pay the cost,

this time I didn't pray that it not be me.

I stand here and wait and look at the stain.

There are plenty of stains on the walls behind me,

left there by everything from paint cans to piss,

but I don't look at none of them.
I have to look inside myself to see it now,
if I squeeze my eyes real tight and go away
like I used to do when Father fucked me,
I can kinda see the stain.
I can't tell for sure, but it looks a little bit bigger now than it did,
when I got off that bus a year ago.
Anyways I gotta go.
A car just turned round the corner a second time,
rental plates and a single business suit-type guy
behind the wheel driving slow...
Cruising.

I sometimes wonder if they can see the stain too.

—BanWynn Oakshadow

It Shouldn't Hurt

Did you know childhoods aren't all made of
 Big smiles, ice cream and warm embraces
 In a trailer in west virginia, a girl covered in bruises
 Runs away from this world in her dreams
 Every night she bleeds from the drunken fists of her
 mother, protecting her sister, untrembling, in front of her
 But her soul cowers in the shadows, crying in agonizing
 Silence, desperately holding on as she bears the corpse
 Of her fleeting childhood. She sleeps on a bed of bloody
 Tears, the hands of a loved one should never cause such pain
 A mother's love is quintessential, when loving hugs turn
 to heartless beatings, she can't help but break can she ?
 The loud sexual leers of an older man, a predator
 his cold touch tiptoeing upon her innocent skin
 the harsh, piercing clink of an unbuckled belt is the
 most terrifying sound for young ears. Why won't they
 Believe her?! the muffled chorus of her painful wails echoes
 in the night, it's dissonance quarrels with the moonlight
 The thick stench of alcohol plagues a home that's never
 Truly been a home. Drugs take her mother to a dark eden
 Leaving her child drowning in a storm. the wounds she carries
 In her heart, from a tormented childhood that should have never
 been, are unseen scars upon her purity's withering white rose
 These chains weigh her down like the world on atlas' shoulders
 Forgiveness may uncage her mind, and lighten the unfathomable
 Pressure of this cruel world, from upon her before she crumbles
 But frail she is not, a stronger woman you'll not find for this little
 Girl has shed her brittle infancy and blossomed and truly I
 See unrivaled beauty in that...

— Sankara "Le prince héritier" Olama-Yai

From My Mother

(after Enough by Suzanne Buffam)

I learned it from my mother
who learned it from her mother before her.

How to use a knife and fork like a machine gun
to attack the food I wish I hadn't had to cook.

How to be a mine field of hurt and explosive feelings
the family have to tip toe round to arrive unsafely in bed at night.

How to prepare Christmas dinner slowly loudly banging pots
pans & cupboards until even the dog is willing to go without its meal.

How to play statues in the middle of a birthday party and
say nothing after opening all the presents.

I learned it from my mother and her mother before
How to arm myself fully and carry on the war.

—sarah pritchard

He drank

Excessively. And this worried her, of course. But in WWII he'd been a tail gunner in a B17 Flying Fortress. He completed seven sorties over German occupied Europe. Over France he was shot down and declared missing in action, presumed dead. She spent most of the government insurance money then moved in with her parents in Bangor with her two young children.

noon's summer sun
line-dried towels
rubbing her shoulders

He had been wounded earlier in a Bremen raid, struck by flak twice in his right leg. So he had bad dreams when he came back from the dead. With shrapnel now in his back also, from German Focke-Wulf 190 fighters that shot down his Flying Fortress, shooting parachuting crew members as they drifted down over French hayfields. He also beat her up occasionally when drunk.

all these wars
both inside and out
the shifted earth

Mostly nothing terribly serious, some bruises, a black eye now and then. Once matted blood in her hair from a large cut when he shoved her against the door frame as she was coming out of the locked bathroom where she'd retreated to escape his rage. She thought he was gone but he had silently waited in the hallway for her to come out. When he grabbed her she fell backward cracking the back of her head sharply against the door moulding's edge. Her crying and the blood stopped his anger as he helped her up and back into the bathroom daubing the bleeding gash himself with a wet washcloth, repeating how sorry he was. She forgave him. The seven stitches left a scar and a slight bald spot.

All scars are areas of fibrous tissue replacing normal skin after injury or disease, and have inferior functional quality.

remembering once
she spent the night
crying in his arms

—Ed Higgins

My Mahogany Muse,

Certain males
 Try to malign and confine
 Your Sojourner Truth mind.
 However, you,
 Sun-hot with fire,
 Burn your way free.
 My Mahogany Muse,
 Once hellish hands
 Exert their fervor to hurt,
 You become water
 And swan away.
 My Mahogany Muse,
 Soon as injustice
 Attempts to choke us,
 You become air
 That resuscitates with care.
 My Mahogany Muse,
 You are Scripture on Sundays,
 Giving the sum
 From wealth-filled wisdom.
 You are my Guidepost to Utopia,
 Providing angel-glazed rays.
 My Mahogany Muse,
 You prevent my descent
 Each time I near
 The Foolishness Abyss.
 Blessedness is the bridge
 You built for us to cross.

—Bob McNeil

Born to Herself

Every third pack, every
 “one more for the road”
 taught his cells to multiply,
 cells that kept him home at night.
 She washed the hands
 that bruised her, the mouth
 that kept her in her place,
 changed soaked linens,
 slipped morphine past
 the tongue with no control,
 mourned his passing with love.

Fresh, mounded earth to her back,
 she strode to dawn,
 bought a purple dress,
 sold the land,
 and walked toward herself.

—Susan Ellis

(on the phone with) A Would-Be Survivor

I hear
 Screams.
 Somewhere, tonight
 In Eugene
 A terrible thing
 Is happening.
 My pen recoils at writing the words—
 The effort to verbalize
 Sticks in my throat
 Like a bone.
 Somewhere, tonight
 In Eugene
 A mother is too afraid
 To save her child
 From her child's father
 And I hear
 Screams.

 I answer the phone
 "Crisis line"
 But do not ask
 "How can I help you?"
 I have long since accepted
 I cannot help.
 Somewhere, tonight
 In Eugene
 A terrible thing
 Is happening
 Nothing can be done
 By people like me
 To stop it.
 My house is not big enough
 To welcome everyone in—
 This child
 This child's mother

Do not fit the bill.

"I am sorry," I say into the phone
 And in my heart of hearts
 I hear a child screaming.
 "We do not have the money.
 Our shelter is for IPV.
 That is what our grants are for.
 This is child abuse.
 I cannot help you."

 I hear
 Screams.
 My house is not
 Big enough.
 I am
 Sorry.
 My apologies mean
 Nothing.
 This child is slowly
 Dying.
 A mother too afraid
 To save her child
 Listens at the door—
 Listens to this horrible thing.
 Later tonight she will be bloodied.
 She is terrified.
 No one else will hear the screams.
 We all look away.

 The screams will visit me
 In dreams
 Tonight.

 —Tahni J. Nikitins

Packing to Leave Again

Up and down the block
 this morning,
 women are packing to leave.
 Getting down the smaller suitcase,
 emptying out half the closet
 and the upper dresser drawers,
 while their husbands sleep,
 sleep it off again, spent
 from the effort of keeping her in line.

His throat will hurt when he wakes up.
 Not as much as her arm,
 grasped too tightly, her cheek,
 slapped too hard,
 the small of her back, those bruises
 matching up to the sharp edge
 of the counters in the kitchen.

By noon or one o'clock, he'll have called,
 placed his order for dinner,
 offered his diffident apology,
 slung that silken lasso out
 to reel her right back in.

All over the world this morning,
 women assess the damage,
 take inventory, survey
 their chances of escape.
 They weigh the horror
 of homelessness
 against the hollow contents
 of this home.

— Pam Kress-Dunn

Revening the narcissist

He ordered a rump steak
 'I like it rare' he said
 'the bloodier the better'
 As he gave her his radiant smile,
 she knew she was lost
 Such a kind, affable man

She didn't remember
 the moment he changed
 Her days were filled with
 taunting humiliation
 An ugly messy dowdy, she was
 A good-for-nothing, a mental case
 She believed his accusations,
 slowly she changed into
 an insecure submissive woman

He came home from work
 Eagerly, she waited with his favorite dinner
 A rump steak, rare cooked
 Something broke inside her
 when he gave her a disdainful look
 and proclaimed that horseshit would taste better

She stabbed him with a kitchen knife
 As life fades away little by little, she smiled
 'The bloodier the better'

—Daginne Aignend

Football Nights

Last week,
 her relief as the scores came in:
 his team had won.
 As she had expected,
 he was back late,
 drunk and full of curry
 which he puked in the sink
 before going to bed.

Tonight,
 the news she feared – they'd lost,
 3-2 after being two up.
 He'll be back late, drunk as usual
 and bloody angry.
 She won't want to wait up
 for the inevitable, but she will,
 because she always does.

Tomorrow
 she'll go shopping.
 She'll have her make-up on,
 of course – extra thick.

—Mantz Yorke

Maya

Abuse muted
 her vocal wellspring.
 In that inexpressible Hell,
 Maya understood birds
 held behind metal.

Exploring her circumstance,
 she advanced
 and discovered ways of recovering
 her fortitude.

No longer at an imperceptible decibel,
 she uttered tutorials
 that helped spiritualize our trails.

Maya published our wishes.
 Her books birthed our ambitions.
 Today, we, Angelou's orphans,
 use humbled keypads
 and type tributes
 to her gospel.

—Bob McNeil

Blow Up Doll

The Lays There Dead Like and Lets Yuh Fuck ‘er Like Yuh Like!
 Made of real flesh—she even bleeds!
 Wouldn’t you know? You certainly wouldn’t think.
 And if you tickle her just right
 She even moans with something like delight
 To make you make believe you’re real good in the sack.
 Just don’t let her get on top.
 She might get...ideas—
 Start singing like that goddamn puppet.
 “She’s got no strings
 To hold her down!”
 And we’ve had some technical difficulties—
 Sometimes she gets it in her head that she doesn’t wanna, you know...ee-er!
 We’re working on that, though, and don’t you worry!
 She’s much improved upon
 From the last edition.
 You don’t gotta hit her, or strangle her, or anything like that!
 Just keep at it, you know—just *convince* her.
 Eventually she’ll just lay there dead like
 And let yuh fuck her like yuh like!
 If she acts like she’s not into it—don’t you fret!
 It’s just the glitchy programming—
 We’re working on getting that right fixed!
 If she cries into the pillow—just ignore it!
 She ain’t got feelings to worry about anyway.
 She’s just a doll, after all.
 But real flesh, don’t you forget!
 She even bleeds!
 But don’t you worry—
 We’ve buffed out the scars
 And painted over the bruises.
 She’s all nice and ready for you—
 And what a bargain, too!
 We’ll get back to you with those program updates as soon as they’re ready, my friend.
 Now—let’s talk about the pricing.

—Tahni J. Nikitins

Biographies

Daginne Aignend is a pseudonym for the Dutch poetess Inge Westdijk. She likes hard rock music, photography and fantasy books. She is a vegetarian and spends a lot of time with her animals. Daginne started to write English poetry five years ago and posted some of her poems on her Facebook page and on her fun project website www.daginne.com She has been published in some online Poetry Review Magazines with a pending publication at the Contemporary Poet's Group anthology 'Dandelion in a Vase of Roses'.

C.M. Averin is a bilingual jackrabbit and seldom fox currently residing in Vancouver, BC, who enjoys writing provocative poetry, romantic thrillers, and cosmic horror. So far having escaped termination, they work as a proofreader for Thurston Howl Publications. A metafeminist and avid reader, they specialize in intersectional analysis of poetry and feminist epistemology. While it is a known fact that they are not awake unless they have two or more impending deadlines, C.M. Averin can be sometimes be found conscious at @averincm on Twitter, or under the handle averincm on all other platforms.

Paul Brookes was shop assistant, security guard, postman, admin. assistant, lecturer, poetry performer, with "Rats for Love", his work included in "Rats for Love: The Book", Bristol Broadsides, 1990. First chapbook was "The Fabulous Invention Of Barnsley", Dearne Community Arts, 1993. Read his work on BBC Radio Bristol, had a creative writing workshop for sixth formers broadcast on BBC Radio Five Live. Recently published in Blazevox, Nixes Mate, Live Nude Poems, The Bezzine, The Bees Are Dead and others. Forthcoming this summer a chapbook called "The Spermbot Blues" published by OpPRESS, and tentatively in autumn "The Headpoke" illustrated chapbook published by Alien Buddha Press.

Debbie Collins lives in Richmond, Virginia with her California husband. She's been writing for quite some time, but just recently decided to try and publish. She's trying to shine a light on some of society's most damning topics, especially with this poem. It happens, people.

Sage Curtis is a Bay Area writer fascinated by the way cities grit and women move. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in Main Street Rag, burntndistrict, Yes Poetry, The Fem Lit, Vagabond City Lit and more. She has her MFA from University of San Francisco.

Susan Ellis is a poet living in Houston. She has multiple previous publications in the U.S., France, Scotland, and Switzerland.

Ed Higgins' poems and short fiction have appeared in various print and online journals including: Monkeybicycle, Danse Macabre, Word Riot, Triggerfish Critical Review, and Blue Print Review, among others. Ed and his wife live on a small farm in Yamhill, OR, raising a menagerie of animals including a whippet, a manx barn cat (who doesn't care for the whippet), two Bourbon Red turkeys (King Strut and Nefra-Turkey), and an alpaca named Machu-Picchu. Ed teaches literature at George Fox University, south of Portland, OR. Ed is also Asst. Fiction Editor for Brilliant Flash Fiction, an Ireland-based flash journal.

Pam Kress-Dunn lives in Dubuque, Iowa, where she recently retired as a hospital librarian. She received an MFA in creative writing (poetry) from the University of Nebraska. Her poems have appeared in journals including Crab Orchard Review, Pulse: Voices from the Heart of Medicine, The Formalist, The Lyric, and the medical journals Chest and Headache. She received an individual artist's grant from the Iowa Arts Council for her show of family photos and poetry, "Photographic Memory," as well as a grant from the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs for an event celebrating local artists' creative responses to 9/11. Pam will be launching a blog in July 2017 featuring an archive of over 300 columns published in Dubuque's biweekly arts and entertainment paper, 365ink, as well as new essays, photos, and random thoughts.

Nina Lewis is published in a range of anthologies and magazines including Abridged, Under the Radar and HCE. Schooldays (Paper Swans Press), Nuclear Impact (Shabda Press) and e-books in the Malignated Species Series (Fair Acre Press). Nina performs poetry around the U.K. In 2014 she was commissioned to write and perform at Birmingham Literature Festival. Nina is interested in poetry working in different places, her Haiku were used in an Art Installation at the MAC, poems have been displayed on the Wenlock Poetry Trail and at The BIGLIT festival. Her poetry was placed in Municipal Bank Vaults as part of an International Dance Festival and she performed in Poetry Ballroom, a collaboration with DanceFest. Her début pamphlet 'Fragile Houses' was published by V. Press in 2016. Nina is currently working on a festival show, 30-40-60. She organises an annual writing retreat in October from <https://awritersfountain.wordpress.com/>

Tenaciously, **Bob McNeil** tries to compose literary stun guns and Tasers, weapons for the downtrodden in their effort to trounce oppression. His poems and stories want to be fortresses against despotic politics. After years of being a professional illustrator, spoken word artist and writer, Bob still wants his work to express one cause—justice. For further information about Bob's work, kindly refer to the following links:

<http://frankandpoe.blogspot.com/2014/04/first-place-poem.html>

<http://crabfatmagazine.com/2015/11/pushcart-prize-nominations-2015/>

<http://voypoetica.com/editions/>

Tahni Nikitins - I am a recent graduate of the University of Oregon with a degree in Comparative Literature and Creative Writing, completed during a year long study abroad program at Uppsala University in Sweden. Some of my fiction and poetry have appeared in the online journal *Eternal Haunted Summer* in addition to the anthologies "Lilith: Queen of the Desert," "Garland of the Goddess," and "The Dark Ones: Tales and Poems of the Shadow Gods." I am looking forward to the publication of a flash fiction of mine in the independently published anthology "FLASH!" In 2014 my essay "The Deconstruction of Narrative Framing in David Markson's 'Wittgenstein's Mistress'" was published in the Comparative Literature Department's annual journal *Nomad* and during my time in Uppsala I completed a honor's thesis analyzing non-traditional uses of narrative tropes in Mark Z, Danielewski's "House of Leaves."

BanWynn Oakshadow is a 54-yo hermit, poet, writer, photographer, husband, father, survivor of child abuse, mentally ill, disabled, gay Cancer with a criminal record. He digs the interesting the odd and uniquely weird people. His favorite hobby is tilting at philosophical windmills. He loves writing, but despises finding good homes for his work and is attempting to train his Border Collie to become his agent. If you would like to share your personal experiences of surviving abuse, living with mental illness or disability for possible anonymous incorporation into his poetry and writing on these subjects, drop him a note at: We.Have.Survived@gmail.com

Olama-Yai. Sankara is an aspiring writer and poet. He is an 18 yrs old, LGBTQ+, African American student who currently lives in Silver Spring Maryland. Previously unpublished looking for recognition for writings. Writings and poetry explore many controversial topics such as: War, race, politics, the election, Transgender issues, depression, suicide. Poetry collections containing dozens of different poems give an introspective look into the author's mind as well as a critical view of society and human nature.

Emma Page is a self-published poet and novelist from the UK. Her work covers various themes, including domestic violence, mental health, and the darker side of love and relationships. She has also lived in Italy and Jamaica.

Lucy Palmer is from Cornwall in England but now lives in California with her family. Her poetry has been published in *The Pickled Body*, *Unbroken Journal*, *By&By Poetry*, and others. She can be found @lucyprich.

Emily Perkins does not know how to describe herself without seeming either self-deprecating or egotistical. She is a fourteen-year-old writer currently in high school who enjoys poetry, music, and peppermint tea. If you would like to ask her questions, simply talk to her, or see slightly unfocused pictures of sunsets, she can be reached on Instagram at [randomprettytrees](https://www.instagram.com/randomprettytrees) .

Beatrice Preti - I am a freelance writer, poet, and author with a love for a variety of genres. Prior publications range from the CMAJ to the NY Literary Magazine. I regularly publish original and experimental work at my blog, The Flowing Words (available at theseflowingwords.wordpress.com).

Sarah Pritchard. Norfolk born U.S. military baby made in Manchester, U.K. Pippi Longstocking like free ranges with dog son Louis-the-lurcher 'turnupstuffing' in the wild. Still personal & political & passionate about poetry strolls & poetry en plein air. Co-host of Sale Out Loud. Published anthologies: Beyond Paradise, The West in Her eyes, Urban Poetry, Nailing the Colours, Manchester Poets Volume3, Bang, Full Moon & Foxglove, Rain Dog, The Grapple AnnualNo.2, Stirred Zines: Twisted Tales, Bjork, Winter, Audre Lorde, Desire , Women Beats & Picaroon's Deranged. Breast-'occasionally limitations of the love lyric are transcended...Sarah beautifully integrates the themes of the political & personal mutilation into a love narrative.' Livi Michael North West Arts Magazine.

Mantz Yorke lives in Manchester, England. His poems have appeared in a number of hard-copy and electronic publications in the UK, the US, Canada, Ireland, Israel and Hong Kong.

