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Angry Banshee

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I am an English major at UK. I am a student as well as a parent. Writing has always been an important part of my life. Writing has been a survival tool that allowed me to express myself on paper when I could not express myself anywhere else. This group of poems is a narrative about my childhood and how I have coped as an adult. I am grateful to Rebecca Howell for helping me develop this skill beyond a personal outlet. I am very grateful to have the chance to share my experience with others. I hope that my writing will enlighten people to the tragedy that can happen to children and inspire anyone who has endured similar experiences.



Mentor:
Rebecca Howell
 Lecturer, Creative Writing, Department of English
 Director, Women Writers of Kentucky

Melanie is courageously after one of the hardest tasks for an emerging writer: she is falling in love with language while trying to conjure a childhood that was taken from her at a very young age. And she is indeed courageous in her pursuit: she has been working for years to unlock this story from its closet, while also learning to deliver it in a way that requires us to be as unflinching as she has been. When the language is at its best, these poems patiently tell her terror in the same way a hunter walks through the woods — quietly, one foot in front of the other, with an absolute and piercing awareness of every detail in the poem’s surroundings. And, unlike most emerging writers who are working with the subject matter of personal suffering — she wants to know the whole story, the drama that unfolds, not only in her own childhood, but in her mother’s childhood, in generations of marriage, and by the tongue of her own son.

Angry Banshee

Introduction

Still I sit here waiting for your response. My insides quiver and I try to keep silent but I am forced to say that I am sorry to have brought this to your attention. You probably have better things to read. These awful words come, spewing from my mouth like a river of misery and doubt. A flowing sickness that I just can’t shake. Too weak to confront my tormenter, too weak to press charges, and too weak to cut ties and just never see him again. I spend too much of my time just wishing he would go away.

Why I Didn’t Learn to Swim Until I was Twenty-one

You carry me on your shoulders, a short stocky man and a tiny girl-child.

Water kisses your ankles, touches your knees,

Caresses your thighs and finally, embraces your chest.

You reach up and pull me down from my safe, dry perch.

You set my feet upon an old wooden post submerged in the water, then step away.

Now the water reaches my chest too.

It pulses and pulls, trying to knock me over. Drag me away.

At first I was amused by this game,

But no longer.

I thought I was safe with people all around, my family on the shore.

What could you do in this public place?

Sobs build in my chest.

The pressure forces my tears.

“Daddy, please, take me back.”

You laugh, as if it’s still just a game.

“Wrap your arms and legs around me,” you say.

Relieved, I put a hand on your chest to steady myself and start to leave my post.

As you move closer I feel something brush against my waist.

The chill of the water is now inside of me.

I know with certainty what you have done.

Cloaked beneath the water you have unzipped your shorts and freed yourself.

You move closer still, pressing against me, hard, excited by my helplessness.

I am frozen now.

You coach and wheedle, but I cannot force myself to go to you willingly.

Unable to speak I cry out my fear and confusion,

Loud enough for everyone at the lake to hear.

People laugh at the little girl who is afraid of the water.

They think you're trying to teach me to swim, to be brave.

I cannot move.

I do not care that my brother and sister will laugh at me,

That they will taunt me because I was afraid of the water.

That is a humiliation I can bear.

Still I refuse to move,

Though I see the beginnings of anger glinting in your eyes.

My thin swimsuit is little protection from you, I know.

Why do I resist?

Why don't I want my small body pressed against yours?

I only know that the thought of it makes me sick and afraid.

I look down at my blue swimsuit with little white stars

And wish it were the thickness of my jeans instead.

How easy it would be, for you to slip one finger down and shove

Aside my swimsuit's thin protection.

Still I cannot move.

So I stand on this precarious wooden perch getting colder and colder.

All I can do is cry.

Neighbors and Family

Neighbors and Family — a minefield of treachery and lies.

Good ole boys dropping by.

Family visits to strengthen family ties.

Pretty words for the war I waged.

I threaded my way through a battlefield of roaming hands and pitiless eyes.

Find a dark corner; keep my back to the wall.

Have to watch everyone, they're enemies all.

There is no safety on these friendly family lands.

Bloodied and broken, my wound is festering.

The rot goes deep.

I thought amputation was the cure.

So I cut myself out.

Gun Safety

I trudge slowly across the frost-laden ground,

Picking one foot up and stomping the other foot down.

We march through the woods, we two.

Nature is silent, our footsteps the only sound,

Father and daughter, you in the lead.

Two Kentuckian muzzleloaders, two orange caps,

And more camouflage than anyone could ever really need.

I trudge after you, cold and sullen.

Yet I never let my eyes leave your back.

I lose myself in the rhythm of my steps,

In the soft rustling of the leaves.

It's then that I hear it, the wind.

It plays with my face and kisses my ears.

Then it whispers, so softly that only I can hear.

"Accidents happen.

In the great outdoors."

Realization.

I don't want to squeeze the trigger,

Hear the hammer slam down on the cap.

I don't want to see the spark that ignites the black powder,

Propelling the slug out of the barrel in a belch of fire and smoke.

I don't want to see the lead slug race from the muzzle to slam into your

Unknowing back.

Accidents happen.
I don't want that for you, for me. For us.
I just want to twist the gun in my hands and grip the barrel tightly.
I want to take one long step forward to gain momentum.
Rotate my shoulders over so that I can get a good overheard swing.
Mindless of the possibility of the gun going off,
Impaling me with that same lead slug.
I just want to beat you bloody.
Not just hear the crunch of metal meeting bone.
But feel the impact vibrating up through my arms,
Joining us in one profound moment.
And then finally, we would understand each another.

For My Mother

Things will never change for you.
Always he will sit on the couch,
And always you will serve him.
A cup of coffee, a glass of water,
Another thankless task done.

Dad must have seemed like salvation to you.
Your only chance of escape.
Your father and my father;
Betrayers both.

I was told your father was a harsh man,
Quick to anger and quick to punish.
No mercy, just the lash of leather,
His wide belt marking your soft flesh.

Sometimes we speak of our Grandfather,
My sister and I,
Our voices shaky and soft with unease.
Fifteen years gone, now if only he'd just stay dead.

She tells me of his late night visits to our room.
She says that I was there, and that he hurt me too.
I believe her, even though I don't remember.
Vague images of a tall man with large hands
And a blank unease is all I have.

I fear what happened to you, momma,
In the dark hours of the night fifty years ago.
And how many times in-between?
Does marriage make rape okay
They seemed to think so back then.

It hurts when I think of you,
Being raised by that tall awful man.
I understand why you married at fifteen.
Had my sister at sixteen.
Youngest of thirteen,
Overlooked by all but the cruelest it seemed.

You moved from one fist to the next.
A slave to all their demands.
Always you have done what you were told.
No library. No television. No phone.
Where would you have learned to be free?
Did you even know that it didn't have to be that way?
Did you ever have dreams of faraway places and kinder
faces?

My hand grips the phone tighter
As these thoughts flow through my mind.
I too begin to cry, when I hear your tears
Travel from your phone to mine.

I'm sorry momma,
I didn't mean to make you cry.
Your soft weeping is all that I can hear,
And more than I can bear.
Your tears defeat me as nothing else,
No one else could.

I'm sorry momma,
I'm only telling you why.
Why I'll never stay overnight,
And why he'll never stay here.

You finally asked after all these years.
I have waited so long to tell you these things.
Now I wish I could take those painful words back.
Sometimes the truth is too much to bear.

Oh momma, please cry for yourself,
 Don't cry for me.
 I got away; I won my way free.
 Oh momma, I wanted to take you with me.

I tried to believe that your midnight weeping wasn't true,

Just more bad dreams.

I tried to pretend that the late night sounds of something

Hard striking something soft was just another false memory.

But now, hearing your cries, I know you suffered too.

You'll never leave him, I know. I know.

You'll continue to get his coffee, make his dinner,

Wash his clothes, and clean his boots.

I know you will do these things.

So just go ahead, go back to the pretense that everything is fine.

We have the perfect family, and everyone is happy.

Go ahead momma, if that is the only happiness that you can find.

Go ahead momma, for you, it's a pretense that I just can't seem to mind.

My Talisman

Nathan, my mantra, my talisman, my holy word,

It's not enough to say I love you.

I need you to know it, feel it.

Feel it in a place words cannot touch,

That place of instinct and sensation in each of us.

I want the electricity in your brain to sizzle, your blood to burn.

I want each cell in your body to shudder when we rub skin to skin.

Your need to match mine as our fluids mix and churn.

I need you to know,

Because of you

My heart is not merely flesh and blood.

It is a miracle of passion and heat,

Pulsing with life and mystery.

Our pulse becomes music.

Our bodies twist and dance erotically.

When my thoughts are lost in the past,

You always find me and bring me home.

To say I am nothing without you would not be true.

I would still be me, but a lesser me.

Nathan, my beacon, my hope, my friend,

It's never enough to say I love you.

Waiting for You to Wake

I wake slowly, reluctantly.

The night air is filled with a cold, deep silence.

I feel no fear, only discomfort.

Goosebumps run up and down my naked skin.

Great, now my feet are cold.

I let my eyelids slide open and I turn to where

The source of my trouble lies.

I stretch out my hand, intent only on dragging

The warm covers back from where they have been stolen.

An in-drawn breath; your chest rises and falls.

Swiftly, in that moment I am trapped.

My questing hand drops gently to your face.

The rough bristles of your beard scratch at my hand.

Catches me, draws me closer

I trace the silky shape of your lips ...

Perfect.

I let my fingers whisper the secrets of my heart to your mouth.

My hand cradles your face.

My heart beats loudly. I blink, dazed.

I release the breath I didn't know I was holding.

My soft sigh adds little warmth to the air.

How can I ever be warm enough now?

To hell with the blankets!

I cover your body with mine.

I touch, I caress.

I kiss your eyes open and wait for your warmth to take me.