

An Introduction:

Originally intended for a spoken word presentation, this poetry collection “Imperilment” is in memorium of the overlooked victims of violence against women. Home is the most dangerous place a woman’s body exists (Wedge). The genre of true crime in modern American society has turned into a booming business from books to podcasts and documentary series. Though at a surface glance this can be viewed as a way to honor victims, I find it vital to see its flaws in the victims left out. Most commonly the stories shared via these platforms are the tales of white, straight, middle to upper class women being murdered by strangers, but this is not an accurate depiction of the majority of these crimes. The most common perpetrators are intimate partners, and victims are disproportionately represented by women of color as well as women in the LGBTQ community (“Victims”).

Bloody Knuckles

This is a poem to both the survivors of domestic violence as well as victims who lost their lives to it.

The game is played until
her blood is on his knuckles.
This is a poem to the seed who grows
whether or not it was sown.
Through the drought and
the sea of cement.
Persistence.
The women who know
of broken hearts
as he breaks her bones
as he calls her unworthy.
As he threatens her life,
as he swings a gun.
As he screams his face infected
with anger. This is to the women
who still say, "I love you,"
through both swollen and fearfully cautious lips.
To the women who jump out the window.
To the women who call the police.
To the women denied justice.
To the women who fear--
their voice may speak the truth.
To the women who played hide n' seek with a man
to escape their life being bottled into a crime of *passion*.
The women whose bodies were
cocooned into the crawlspace.
To the women who lived to be survivors.
How I love you
and encourage you.
How I hope you hold on.
How I hope he goes to prison.
There is nothing you could do to deserve
this.

The daughter cries
unprotected. I love you, still.

Baby Hope

[1987 - 1991]

Angélica Castillo's naked and bound body was discovered in an Igloo cooler in July of 1991, but her body remained nameless until 2013 when police were anonymously tipped the name of Angélica's mother. The story now revealed: Her mother, before returning to Mexico, left Angélica with her father. Her father brought his daughter to the home shared with his siblings in Queens. At some point Angélica's uncle sodomized her before smothering her with a pillow, to which he admitted in police custody in 2013, and with the assistance of his sister, they abandoned her body in the cooler she was later discovered in. Investigators paid for Angélica's previously nameless gravestone which was inscribed with "Baby Hope", the name they had given her to remind themselves to continue seeking her justice (Paddock). This poem aims to memorialize Angélica's life outside of its brutal end.

The sun pools in her pupils as
a smile fills her perfect face.
Laughter billows out,
lifting every heavy heart with it.

A butterfly sits, tickles her arm, and
she battles to sit still,
to be gentle enough for it to
stay. Eventually it takes flight

so she waves goodbye and
takes a seat to marvel at the ants.
They call her tiny, but
she does not understand.
These creatures are smaller,

and she recognizes their strength
even in her young mind.
Dandelions decorate her hair as
she hops down the sidewalk.

Hundreds of people pass her
not knowing her mid-July joy to be
a last miracle. The sky is infinite glory, but
the ground will always hold her.

Social Constructs Before Her Name

[no obituary found]

On January 22, 2016, Monica Loera, 43, was murdered in her Austin apartment by a man who had used her for sexual services via an internet search for trans sex workers. At the time of her death, police released her name from before her transition, meaning until it was corrected, her community was unaware of Monica's death. In the murderer's court defense, he stated she attacked him with a baseball bat, and he claimed he shot her in self defense which the investigation quickly proved to be false. Her murderer's internet history revealed that he search, "approximately how many people get away with murder each year in the United States," as well as that he was back on the prowl for more trans sex workers, yet he recieved a sentence of a mere 20 years. Those who were in the courtroom noted the effect of the accused being defended through being a church-goer and family man (Marloff).

The church falls silent.

“This is what happens when
the will of God is changed,”
they said.

A bloody bouquet
as she opened the door for him,
the rush of breathlessness.

Trans Latina murdered in Texas
so it barely makes the news.
Not all murders sink the heart the same.
So I urge you brothers, sisters, and those
with it not so simple.
Repeat:
Love is love
is love is love.
Sing it in the forest and in the parking lot.
Sing it in the shower and from the mountain top.
Monica was only trying to survive
in a land of alienation for her identity.
May your life be a song
in reverence;
Love is love is love.

Hide 'n Seek

[1968-2016]

Tierne Ewing was murdered by her husband on August 30, 2016, but her death was fully avoidable. The previous month he held her captive for eleven days, and during that time he tied her up and tortured her. On July 8 he sent her into a bank; as he waited in the vehicle for her to get cash, it allowed her to notify the tellers who then phoned police. After posting \$100,000 bail, which the district attorney discouraged, he was released with a GPS ankle tracker after a mere three days in jail. Before taking her at gunpoint for one last time, he cut the tracker off and handed it to his mother. The couple had lived together since the eighth grade, and Tierne told her father, knowing the long history of abuse, that should she go missing, he would take her to his father's barn. Her husband shot her twice in that barn before turning the gun on himself (Jeltsen).

“Til death do us part”

so he took her to the grave,
after the bouquet was well dead.

Her skin told the story
of the love she grew old with.

Covered in burns and bruises and cuts
so bad he stapled the gashes himself,
the bank teller called the police.

She was safe for three days
juxtaposed to Jesus in the tomb.

He wired her wrists
down the road of opportunity
he'd been lent.

After knowing he locked her in closets—
After knowing he branded her like cattle—
After knowing he put a gun to her temple
more than once— They gave him opportunity to
make her past tense.

For \$100,000 bail
society was less mournful than the earth,
to bury her battered body in the summer soil.

The judge said, “okay,”
as the bullets brought a muted goodbye.

Hometown Murder: March 2017

[1997-2017]

Abshantianna Johnson was brutally beaten to death by her ex boyfriend and two others outside of her home in Mount Wolf. Her ex Edia "Richie" Lawrence arrived in the middle of the night with his accomplices at which point he threatened her mother with a metal bat and knife, and he also threatened to murder Shanti's brothers. Lawrence's motive was for missing money in a drug deal which he believed she stole. The men forced Shanti's mom to call her daughter and tell her to come home, claiming it was a family emergency. Though her mother was able to escape to the neighbors and call 911, it was at the same time Shanti arrived home where she was then attacked. She was on life support for six days before passing away on March 31, 2017 (Scolforo). She was only 19. This tragic murder occurred less than a month before my close friend was killed as a pedestrian in a hit and run, but while my friend's killing evoked strong reactions in our community, Abshantianna's murder did not receive the same attention. Three years removed from these tragedies, I have been able to see the role that race and class have played in the victims I have mourned.

Her skin
guilted by God.
Mercy
held ransom.

The darkest point of night got
darker. His eyes.
The blade only reflected
limited endings,

All entailed
premature death.
Consciousness
blurred by closed fists.

Slip in
to sleep
before death. A prayer,
she did not suffer.

Closed casket
in the church
decorated with sobbing,
holy tears.

Sanctuary

This poem is based on the corruption of the Catholic church in Baltimore in the latter half of the 20th century which Netflix's series The Keepers details, following the coverup of innumerable cases of child molestation. Cathy Cesnik, a nun and teacher whom victims spoke to regarding the abuse, was murdered, but no one was ever charged for her murder ("Keepers").

1967

Charlie tells his mother
the priest, Maskell,
made him drink wine.
He was assaulted in the room called
sanctuary, noun:
a place of refuge or safety.
Father Maskell is not fired.
He was moved to a Catholic high school
where he buddied up with Magnus.
To be called to meet with this Father was
to meet with trauma,
to have prayers braided into death threats.
A gun to the head,
the key to silence.
In the teacher and nun,
Cathy Cesnik,
blunt force trauma stole her voice.
Maskell knew the girls told her their story, and so
he wrote a new tale
of what is to come for those who speak against the priest.
He takes one who spoke to see her body.
Halloween night, 1970
Maskell and a police officer
take a student for a drive.
He waits outside as
a wolf disguised as a safety net
makes a meal of her body.
Maskell slips drugs
into the coke of his student secretary.
She cannot tell what happened
when she was not conscious.
A blessing and a curse.
The archdiocese
layer lies to bury the stories of
over 35 victims.

Maskell retained his power
as they lost their sanity.
Blessed by Heaven
and made their lives Hell
as they bowed before a statue of Mother Mary limitations

I believe in their testimony against
the Holy Catholic Church,
the manipulation of priests guised as saints,
the forgiveness only God can give,
the resurrection of molested bodies
and everlasting life, Amen.

A List of Things That Make Me Afraid

1. Good people do bad things, and people refuse to believe that these acts could ever make them bad.
2. The industry of porn reinforces violence against women.
3. The industry of porn supports the corruption of teen bodies.
4. A video titled “slut teens get fucked in a pool” with 1.2 million views
5. They want me to talk about it but the language itself is violent:
6. nail, screw, bang, smash.
7. My abuser may be a threat to others like my therapist said.
8. Walking alone at night
9. Walking with a guy I do or do not know
10. My friends invite him over even knowing what he did to my friend that night.
11. On the bus in middle school, an older boy asks my best friend what he would do to me if he found me in a room alone with no clothes.
12. In high school I was groped in class while I had a boyfriend
13. no one said anything so
14. I didn't say anything.
15. While at work a man in his 30's hits on me after being surprised I am not a minor;
16. a manager listened in the other room.
17. My abuser loved to remind me of his father's gun in the closet
18. I still cannot say my abuser's name.
19. His father threatened to charge me with harassment for
20. speaking out about it.

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