

Sexts & Sonnets



By Jen Durbent

Fnord

Boilerplate Legal Stuff

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Earlier versions of the Sext[et] poems were previously published on Jen’s tumblr page (jendurbent.tumblr.com).

For Chelsea, Leslie, and Sylvia.

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Introduction

I wrote these poems in the midst of coming out as a trans woman. Consequently, the hope reflected therein is part of my place at this time in my life. I would like to think it will continue, but we shall see.

I have not footnoted the references I've made in the text. They are out of control. I know they are there, and now you know that I know that you know that they are there. And etc.

I offer many thanks to my friends on-line and off for their support. Those folk include, but are not limited to: Jenny, Siobhan, Kate, Rebecca & Chrissy, Kelley, Kaidee, Dahlia, Tegan, Jennifer, Anja, Josie, Maria & Ibby, Eva, Rachel, Yael, Jessica, firingouty, Billie W, Ashley, Savannah, Geena, Mike, Lina, Kiva, Liz, Bailey, Nate, my chosen and biological families, and etc. I would literally not be here if it were not for you.

There are more. If I have forgotten any of you it's more a failure of my memory than of you. I love you all.

Ill-Fitting Crowns

Invocation in Broken Meter

Lest Phobos rule our nights and hatred reign over our day:
take the Realness where she comes, take new true trans souls
without regard for origins, without regards to Hedwig's Inch
and Frank-N-Furters (blessed hearts). Take them by the hand

and hold them tight, hug them with love. Lead through mazes
and around gatekeepers, through hatred, lechers, and trolls.
Say the names of ancestors; say the name of sisters lynched
with guns and knives and fists (peace, power upon them), and

don't ever let them die. Our brothers: hold them too, for
their lives are hard in their own way. And show the enby
they are righteous, they are valid, they are good and whole.

Young and old, right and wrong, may we live life untorn
from our Realness. Let us walk together, this journey
is not lock-step. Let us walk arm in arm, never alone.

No Longer Amused

In the studio of Vollmann, where bright angels rise up and down,
there is a photo of a girl (though only he has seen it) like us.
Warhol's factory churned us out with machine-like precision,
typed in stereo. Fit to inspire, like any other woman save a few

souls; our own voices dubbed in by songwriters, their oats sown
in our insides, as if we impregnated them, as if their orgasmic thrust
was how they touched the gods (well, kind of). My decision,
then, is to raise my siblings up, to let them speak and to

let them be their own muse, their words of beauty and of pain
and of lightness and of shame, where our lives are not metaphor
painfully painted on white canvases, that color skin the eigengrau

of Americana. Within amber manes and darkened curls, in the rain
making the rainbow, I hope against hope that our voices, our
paintings, our words are more than about what's in the trousers.

Does this Outfit Make Me Look Murder-able?

I ask myself in front of the closet:
What outfit will be the one I die in?
Is it this dress? Those patent heels? A short
short mini skirt? What clothes will make: a man

kill me today? light candles for me
November next? Will they remember me?
The corset, too, makes dying breaths come short.
Does smoky dark shadow conceal black eyes?

Though I may be a punch-line, I exist
and breathe and speak so I say this small thing
I am woman, no matter what I wear.

I think of my small children. Their packed lunch,
make sure they brush their teeth, and so I choose
the t-shirt and jeans.

Shaving in a Dirty Mirror

It's been weeks since I've seen my face; keep this
hidden behind a beard I fight: the face
of a goddess, her portrait sketched by stars.
A lusty glimmer of Scorpio glints

her eye, the smudge of Andromeda her
eye shadow. A meteor scars the sky.
We barely survive on pity, Jude would
pass us, leave us for dead. Snubbed Eris eats

her golden apple before chaos deigns
to see us as worthy of love, here.
And lust, the nova, blinds us 'til we ache

for touch. To spite the world, we live truth.
Among the stars, we make our light
together; smite hate, sisters! We are free.

A Wedding Dress

I bought my dress, white and satin.
silken flowers and veil whose pattern
reminds me of water on car windows
dripping from the roof's melting snow.

I have no groom, no bride, no spouse to be.
No guests to throw corsages to. Just me.
My wedding is a dream of my own day,
a day to be betrothed, and, later, to lay

in a bed with someone who promised
me, knowing me, loving every part
of this failed machine. It will not be.

Place the dress in its box, neatly folded,
and silk flowers next to it. I try
to convince myself white never suited me.

What I Should Have Said

Why did I say nothing? If you could end
a love with truth, would you? Would you end us?

Defend a silence is no easy task:
she hides another self in her essence.

My life: a search for words, for meaning, lost
identities, lost lives; I did find love
nearby my home, where I lost many nights,
days, hiding from self, ignoring the signs.

If I had known what silence would have cost
(your love, your face, your laughter, tight warm hugs),
never would I keep up this losing fight
against my will, the way my soul aligns.

I never asked for what I deserve less
Your hand again, your love, forgiveness, too.

Words on a Dead Father

Did you know I was a girl when you called me ugly, dad? No. How could you? I was and am. My brow too big, my chest too big my hands too big my feet too big my all

my everything big. I cannot restrain myself, make poetry of pain I feel just gazing upon myself, crooked nose, one eye smaller than another. And you

who wanted me to date girls, not be one. My gender defined me fully, hidden away, far from sight. And how could you know how could you. You cannot forgive the dead.

You cannot forgive the dead. He wanted forgiveness? He should not have killed himself.

Who Fails Whom

I never failed boyhood. I busied my young body with skinned knees and bikes and make believe. I read dragon tales, ran from cops, had almost men touch me there, watched TV.

I never failed manhood, but I was told I did: Cold, ugly and a pussy. I hid under black clothes and a scowl. When I learned words that pulled me from the fog, I wept.

My friends never loved, punched for flinching, stole cassettes I loved, bugged out, and stood me up.

I never failed manhood, but it fails me. It kills me and my siblings. It contracts, holds tight to an imaginary past, as if memory was not just a dream.

Lover's Shower

Your hands, made soft and supple by science
and soap, make way to my new breasts, still sore
with estrogen. Please pinch them. Please put your
lips on my lips, my tongue on yours. The hot

hot water over my back, your nails dig,
you plant seeds, my sex below blooming bright
(forgive the vulgar turn of phrase). For weeks
I knew you would come here. When we did speak,
I moaned in your mouth, my shudders alight,
eyes shut tight, no rainbows in our wigs.

I drink in you as you drink in me. Pull
our wet bodies against each other.
The world outside the steamed window flutters
away, like memories of life before.

Namesake

I make the letters of my new name, just
like teacher taught thirty long years ago.
Again I write. Smooth a rough edge here, there.
Soon, my old birth certificate will be
so beautiful on fire. I reclaim
what's myself, my true trans soul, my name, my
far and near future spliced from the past by
one night, one night where needs outweighed my fear,
let me say with a shaking voice: I am woman.

I hope I never tire of this name.
at work, with bills and sympathy cards, with
wedding cards, birthday cards, and letters (rare).
Credit cards, checks, social security.
Forever marble, my tombstone carved deep.

my trans sisters [i carry in my heart]

Can I write a love poem to you all?
For closet trans girls, girls with similes
for names, for those with puns and hurt reclaimed,
for girls who just cannot decide just one?

Can I write a love poem to you all?
The plural trans girls; the girls who are not
just girls: I love each as another one,
no less than a fresh rose that smells as sweet.

Can I write a love poem to you all?
To scientists, to writers, artists?
I carry you in my heart [yes, you too].
Would this be little, too late, far too much?

Come! Dance around our fires, below stars,
Together as women, women at peace.

To Men Holding Me Back

You claim you beat me, you hit me to make me man. “Be grateful for the bruises, scars, and all the rest. The world is cruel,” you said, but are you not the source of that? Guns

and fists and knives and hate and pride and lust for gold and girls and power? You hate me because...I do not know. I wish I did so I could help, because I pity you.

I wish I knew your reason. Lessons taught with your fists were lost on me; it took me decades to just forget them. Ignore pain. I was not meant for that, I never knew.

But you knew what you did. So fuck you, fuck you, fuck you, you're cool, fuck you. I'm out.

Adrift No More

I dreamt myself a young girl, moribund
on a raft, chopped Atlantic waves, no shore
in view nor rescue. Could I make my way
home. Would I want to? To where anatomy

is destiny? I know my land is West,
built upon a promise of liberty
for the few, for the same who would deny
me my true self. What will I do? What to do

is turn the bow Eastward, a course unknown
to me, trust the wind to guide me to new
homes, new loves, new trials, and maybe hope
my life is not a mistake for the ages.

Turn the bow to the rising sun and I
meet the light, ever forward, ever true.

What We Tell the Kids

When you made me a parent, your birth cries shook me. I have failed from that moment. When another came along, I failed more. Both bring me joy art cannot represent. Wild white cherry blossoms, soaring arias, and grace of the worlds dancers are all nil.

My children, I'm not a father, I'm more like a mother--yet not quite. I should have been, but that time is past. Still, I will not leave you all alone, as I had been.

Let me hug you, please. Please be patient with my grief; your almost mother's missed moments. Help me recall the words of better poets: this was not good bye, but a long hello.

Coronation

Around fires called our own, below
stars and among them, we make our light
no matter where we came from, how we are.
Dead hate is beautiful in ash and flame.

Let ourselves be our muses! Let
us breathe and speak and let us say true things.
I never asked for what I more deserve
than that. I trust us to guide us, make us
anew, like spring melting long frozen snow.

I will not fail this womanhood, because
it is me. I wish to remember that.

This life we cannot restrain. Our love
bright: honoring times long past we held back.
We knew this would come. When it did, we roar.

Sext[et]

1. The Train

Alone on the train,
on our way home,
you put your hand
up my white skirt
and made the
wrong parts
feel right. I
forgot the world
and remembered
only you.

2. Even Still

I know
the kids are awake,
but I crave
your curves against me,
your weight on me.
I want to give you my self
again and
again even still.
all these years later.

3. Cemetery

I still want you
Like the time in the cemetery,
Against the crypt
Your hand on my neck
Your tongue in my mouth.

4. Ice

Can you taste the liquor on my lips—
the vodka on the rocks—
the courage I needed to talk
to you? I hoped to use the ice
later, in the dark.

5. Bondage

Before the ball tonight,
when I put on my heels
and latch their tiny locks:
that click
tells me
every
step will
keep me near you.

6. The Stacks

Take me in the library
stacks
in front of Dworkin, Greer,
and Rich. Let me whisper
“I’m coming,”
into the bindings so haters
know we
exist.

Mx Jen Durbent is super happy you have their book. Thank you.

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