

A Poem for the Next Generation of Women

Caitlyn Bruszewski

I walk the streets at night
hoping, wishing, praying
That my clothing does not hug my body too tight.
That you cannot see the definition of my curves.
That my perfume does not travel through the alleys
to those waiting for someone like me
to walk the streets at night.

Alone and unable to resist
when they say,
“Take off your clothes
or we will hurt you.”

But someone like me is always around
and in danger.
Someone like me is you.
Someone like me is her, and her, and her.
Someone like me is your mother, daughter, sister.

I put on clothing that masks my body
because I want to, need to, must hide
it away because it is an open invitation to a man.
If I wear shorts, a skirt, a dress, a tank top
my freedom of choice is an open invitation to a man.
To touch, to stare, to judge.

So I put on loose jeans and a turtleneck
because then I will not be seen by a man
as anything more than a prude.
But then it becomes a challenge.
The desire to conquer my body will wash over him,

And the judge will tell him he gets a punishment
of 6 months for branding me as his behind a dumpster
when I will die unhealed from the tragedy.

Caitlyn Bruszewski

The land of the free is only referring to the man
because my body is not free.
My body is not my own.

Every inch of my being burns because I am told
that he has a right to touch me, grab me, take me
because I was there and beautiful.
How could he resist?

How could it ever be expected that a man was at fault for rape
when the woman was dressed provocatively?
But if I do not dress this way,
I am told that I will not be loved by a man
because then I am not a trophy.

Keep a man happy because he is your lifeline.
Be beautiful, quiet, sexy, ignorant.
Be all things and hope he accepts one of them.

But a change is growing within me,
rising like a wave
and I will crash
into this damn patriarchy
that has taught me to dress
to please a man but not to please myself.

That I was unfit for him if he had to
hit, cheat, rape, or demean me
because men do not want us to know
that they are weak.
Because only a weak man would
hit, cheat, rape, or demean
his wife, daughter, mother, sister, lover.

And I am learning not to give away
my freedom of choice to any man.
So I finally say,
“Grab me by the pussy,
and I will grab back.”