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Karen Anne Buljo

**IN DREAMS DWELL  
THE DAUGHTERS'  
DESIRES**

These are parts of their stories. Parts of their lives. Painful parts. Difficult parts. I started writing these stories almost by chance, and I've felt sad and angry while working on them.

Sápmi is a small and vulnerable place. Sápmi is also my home, and I'm not trying to portray it negatively. These stories have been collected over many years. The women themselves have chosen to talk about these things and explicitly asked me to shed light on their dire situation. They've told me about experiences they haven't dared report to the authorities. It hurts my heart to hear them.

I abandoned this challenging project many times, but then I made up my mind to complete it. For me, it's important to finish this writing process as a way of bringing attention to the issues and helping society talk about them.

I've written a poem for each woman. It is my gift to them and my way of healing myself.

*The Author*

Why are Sámi women in such a dire situation?

Why is it so easy to threaten Sámi women?

Why don't they give up? Why do so many stay silent?

What are we so afraid of?

Is it a matter of honor – or what is it?

Three days after we got married, my husband dragged me to the basement. At first, I didn't understand what he wanted when he forced me down there. He grabbed me under my arm with one hand and pulled my hair with the other. I felt his stiff cock and thought he wanted to fuck. I started crying when he threw me on the floor.

He punched me and punched me until I didn't feel the pain anymore.



## *Bluebird*

When the eye no longer sees colors  
but remembers the wings of freedom  
I am like a little girl again  
singing like a bluebird  
flying like a bluebird

When the tongue no longer knows the joik\*  
but remembers, sings in secret  
then I'm a little girl again  
joiking like a bluebird  
flying like a bluebird

When the ear doesn't hear the truth  
but hears the lies  
then I am the bird  
the bluebird  
the joik

---

\* Sámi singing

«Keep your fucking mouth shut, slut! Can't believe I brought a whore into my family.»

Do I tell the doctor about what's going on at home? Ah, there's no point. It's no use. Then he might go to the police. And what will they do? Well, exactly. They won't do anything.

## *The Sky's Golden Eye*

I left my body that frosty night  
and became the morning star  
and became the sky's golden eye  
I stripped naked that frosty night  
and became the cold warrior

Since that frosty night when you sold me  
the morning star changed  
and the sky was no longer beautiful  
Since that frosty night, I've hardened my soul  
so I can remain the cold warrior

My boyfriend came over piss-drunk in the middle of the night. I saw he had a knife in his hand. A big knife. His eyes were blazing with hate. I had no choice but to run out into the bitterly cold night. I ran over to the neighbor's house with my half-naked child in my arms.

I suffered this way for many years, but luckily, I didn't marry that madman. Look at how he treats his wife now.

## *Frozen*

Yes, my cheeks are frozen  
yes, my tendons are stiff  
yes, my knees are dead

snow melts on my cheeks  
tendons stretch  
knees bend

Even though I'm frozen  
the cold warms a bit  
Even though my tendons are stiff  
they grow supple

My sister's situation is quite simply terrible. When we finally discovered how bad it was, we could finally take it seriously. But you can't exactly kill someone, can you?

I don't say anything when her husband gets a little heavy-handed now and then if she's been misbehaving. They've at least managed until now, and my own wife isn't much better. Don't think that these women are any better than others.

## *Sister's Sister*

Have you heard from sister?

We haven't seen her in some time  
maybe she can't find her way home  
if there's fog  
if there's thin ice

not this sister

but sister's sister

They came at night - three of them. I was sleeping, but they came in anyway. They threatened and swore that if I got divorced, I'd have nothing left. Of course I'd never dare get divorced. I don't have it in me. Let things go as they may.



## *Good Night, My Dear*

I won't make a sound  
I will go to bed  
sneak in next to you  
my dear  
I can't

and you might not want  
me sleeping next to you  
my dear  
you can't

He poured liquor into my eyes and blew pepper in them too. I shrieked and sobbed. The others just watched. I was still a young girl. I thought I could get some help and support if I told my family. But they just got angry at me and sided with my boyfriend. You're just making a big deal out of nothing.

## *My God*

I fear you  
I love you with fear  
I honor you  
my God

When your cock is up  
then your heart is soft  
that's when you're loving  
that's when you see yourself  
as God

And I let you be  
God  
because without a cock  
you aren't  
God

I only believe in you  
when your cock is up  
my God

People think I don't know. But I do know – that my husband is messing around with other women. I wanted to leave him, but that would have made far too much of a mess for the whole extended family. My own mother actually turned her back on me and took her son-in-law's side instead.

## *Please Don't Leave Us*

Mother, we are your children  
please don't leave us  
grandmother, we are your grandchildren  
please don't leave us

Daughter, we are your family  
please don't leave us  
sister, we are your brothers  
please don't leave us

Auntie, we are your nieces  
please don't leave us  
Auntie, we are your nephews  
please don't leave us

Mother-in-law, we are your sons-in-law  
we are your daughters-in-law

And I haven't left any of them

This spring, I knew that he was going to kill me. I can't explain why I started thinking that. It was just a gut feeling. I was skiing to the bathroom when I saw him chopping a hole near the big channel in the ice. Moving the reindeer in the spring is no small task; you depend on the conditions.

I usually took my young child in the sled with me. I heard my husband tell our son he could help him drive ahead of the flock instead. I asked which side I should drive on. He said I could drive without the sled along the river's edge. That was when I knew for sure. I fled on skis and was crying so hard that some skiers came over and helped me.

I'm not in that situation anymore.

## *Spring Bloom*

So fragile  
that spring bloom  
it didn't survive  
it froze

So pale  
that spring bloom  
invisible  
faded

So pretty  
that spring bloom  
when it came  
bloomed

He used to really abuse the poor thing. Once, he hung her out of the window completely naked. She got eaten alive by the swarms of summer mosquitoes. He sat there with his weapon, keeping watch in case someone came to help her down. And I'm so weak that I didn't tell the authorities. But there's little use doing that since they only keep them locked up for a day.

Now, the poor thing is no longer suffering.



## *The Walking Stick*

I remember you, my friend  
don't be afraid that I don't remember you  
I remember you  
we carved our marks  
in the walking stick  
by the firepit

I remember us, my friend  
don't fear that I don't remember you  
I remember us  
we wanted love  
when we carved our marks  
in the walking stick  
by the firepit

Boarding school was terrible. Like a big black hole in my life. I wish everyone would watch over their daughters.

## *My Little Puppy*

If you weren't for you, little puppy  
I would have been all alone  
you barked and howled

you helped me joik, little puppy  
you were my soft friend  
you were my joy

we grew up together, little puppy  
you into a good herding dog  
me into a good herder

if it weren't for you, little doggy  
I would have been all alone  
you snapped and growled

then I could escape, little doggy  
you were my soft friend  
you were my refuge

Even when it was dark, I loved riding my bike home after work. I would sing loudly if I was scared. That's what I did now: I sang a safe, beautiful psalm. Suddenly, a car stopped in a cloud of dust. I wasn't scared since it was a «nice guy». He told me to get in the car, but I didn't want to since I had my bike. He drove in front of me and hopped out of the car. His eyes were burning and his nose was swollen. That's all I managed to think before he attacked. He was so much stronger than me, and I was only fifteen.

My mother supported me. She said there was no point in saying anything. That family is better than ours. No one will believe me anyway. It's best just to let it go. So I did. I let it go.

## *The Hornet's Nest*

You're not safe near the hornet's nest  
there are both shooters and collaborators

You don't want to be the first to find the hornet's nest  
they've built such a solid foundation

if I were so bold as to poke  
a hole in the hornet's nest  
then they'd be driven out  
then the nest could be destroyed

so what if they sting  
until my eyes swell shut  
until my skin goes red

so maybe I should dare  
poke a hole in the hornet's nest

Our neighbor used to force himself on me like a fool. I used to be so scared of running into him in the woods alone. He was always extra bothersome during the summer. You almost didn't even dare to go to the storehouse on your own when the creep was nearby. We were always so scared, us women, that we never dared to leave the young girls alone.

## *Stallo's Cock*

He doesn't seem to be scared of anything  
the Stallo\*  
he doesn't seem to be picky  
the Stallo  
he takes women as he pleases  
the Stallo

The Stallo drives his cock  
into stone  
into anything at all  
he doesn't seem to be picky  
the Stallo  
he takes women as he pleases  
the Stallo

He lures to his rock  
the Stallo  
he cons gold and silver  
the Stallo  
he takes women as he pleases  
the Stallo

He lures cunningly  
the Stallo  
Whatever comes will come  
from the Stallo  
Cunning must drive cunning  
toward the Stallo

---

\* A mythical figure in Sami folklore; here in the sense of a demon.

Guns are scary. The first time my son pointed one at me, I wondered why Our Heavenly Father would put me in such a horrible situation.

That's how I know my daughter-in-law isn't lying. She's telling the truth.



## *Biret's Boy*

Haven't you heard?  
Biret's boy's a drunk  
Haven't you heard?  
Biret's boy's evil  
Haven't you heard?  
Biret's boy's dangerous

They said he pointed his gun at her  
That's what I heard  
They say he beat up his own mother  
That's what I heard  
They say he drank himself stupid  
That's what I heard

Have you heard this, too?  
Then I guess it's true  
But Biret's boy's been lied about  
Biret's boy isn't a drunk  
Biret's boy isn't evil  
Biret's boy isn't like that at all

I remember when we were little, my brother and I. He was a tiny baby, asleep in the *gietkka*. Mother and I were in the sled. It was terribly cold. Suddenly, Father swung toward a channel in the ice. Mother put a reindeer pelt under me. Father unhooked the sled and drove off with my brother in the *gietkka*\*. How did Mother get us out of the water?

I still don't understand to this day.

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\* Sámi reindeersled

## Me Too

When I was born, they made  
a reindeer mark for  
me too  
so I also have  
one

Then they arranged  
a baptism for  
me too  
so I also have  
a name

Then they arranged  
the confirmation for  
me too  
so I am also  
a woman

Then the proposal reindeer  
was tethered by  
me too  
so I am also  
a wife

I don't regret it. I don't regret anything.

But I should have let him sleep while the house burned.

## *I Regret*

There's nothing worth regretting  
absolutely nothing

There's nothing worth grieving  
absolutely nothing

There aren't many dawns left  
There aren't many evenings left  
for me to see

and not for you  
either

I have a girlfriend. She's married. We've been together for years. When we were young, she didn't want me and chose him instead. I don't blame her. Who could have known that this «nice» man was the devil himself? The other family was better than mine, too. I've tended to my girlfriend's wounds countless times.

I'll never leave her. My love.

## *Hand in Hand*

My love  
come sit on my lap instead  
I'll keep you safe  
on my lap

so, my love  
we're young again  
you're sitting safely  
on my lap

My love  
hold my hand instead  
I'll guide you safely  
with my hand

so, my love  
we're young again  
we walk safely  
hand in hand

He carries the reindeer calves over to me by the fence.  
He threatens me while he's marking them, when no  
one else is in earshot. I'm so scared.

That's how we mark most of the reindeer calves as his.



## *Gender Mark*

Whose reindeer mark is this?

Do you know it?

Come on, don't you know it?

I know this mark!

Why wouldn't I know it?

Come on, I know it!

This is my husband's mark!

It's based on his father's mark.

This mark is the men's mark.