The Clothesline Project*

Thirty-five women tear off
their shirts. Now they can wash their bodies
back into the hot single bedroom at three
in the morning, the air from the alley
the moon avoided, the rank palm
clamped over the mouth, the six hours
it took trying to want to
live with each spent sinew,
the approximate height and the scrape
of the hair and the scar and the slant
of the laugh remembered
down to a raw valentine.

Thirty-five wide-awake
flags of the all-night sky
wave unabashed at noon, safe wings
grazing the shoulders
of women who without touching
help each other
get up, get dressed, stay dirty,
and write their names all over their clothes
in the blood of the husband, the father,
the other who keeps their breath
on the splinter of mirror
in his hip pocket.

Then again, underneath
on skin still tender: in the same brash red
of the roses that rage into bloom
even though someone still strips them
of every last thorn.

* The Clothesline Project pays tribute to survivors of sexual violence. Survivors and
their loved ones write their stories on tee-shirts, different colors signifying different cir-
cumstances. These are displayed on a clothesline for one week in April.

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