

You can have no teeth or all your teeth  
Broken, crooked or straight teeth  
Black teeth, cavity filled or pearly white

You can have thin lips, full lips  
Half lips or no lips  
Black, purple or red lips  
You can have smooth lips  
Cracked, wet or dry lips but,

A smile is a smile is a smile.

A real smile is a contagious smile.  
A tiny flame that spreads like a forest fire  
Burning the shades of the weeping willows that keep us hidden in our depression

I had forgotten how to smile.  
Nearly died to learn how  
Taught by others dying like me.

One knows the sweet taste of bleach  
The other comforted by a belt's hug around their neck  
Another knows the blandness of medicinal cream  
And a fourth's only friends are a handful of pills

One beat the other neglected  
Degraded or dejected  
Or all or worse  
Two with tiger stripes up and down their arms  
And me whose lungs were once water balloons

But they smile  
Those who are scarred  
Bruised, broken, torn or raped  
Or all or worse  
But

A smile is a smile is a smile

Not the forced smile of the abused

Or the guilty smile of the accused  
But the eye to eye smile of the amused  
And the bellowing laugh of the enthused even though

Two are suppressed by religion  
Another a ping pong ball between divorced parents  
All had given up once but now  
There are no ends to the rows of teeth and echoes of laughter

It could just be the walls of this building  
Shielding from the outside dangers and discomforts.  
Here where no sharps can tempt us  
Where outstretched hands exist to help not harm us

Here surrounded by peers who understand the extreme lows of depression  
Who have tightroped on the highs of anxiety  
And dream terrible nightmares with their eyes open.  
Those who hear secrets from their own imaginary friends.

Or maybe it's pure resilience  
One only known by those who've walked through hell on earth  
But you'd never know  
Because after the abuse, the lies, the false promises  
Carrying beautiful roses painted red by hands wrapped around thorns  
They smile. And

A smile is a smile is a smile.

And one would think that maybe it's faked.  
That the suffering continues beneath a mask  
Painted to hide our cries and keep anger in check.  
And for many, the suffering does persist  
But so does our smile.

A real smile.  
One whose warmth travels the whole room  
Lighting every secret corner  
Infecting every mind until not a single negative thought remains.  
Spreading a secret message born from the trauma we all share  
Telling the world

We are still here.

And no it wasn't by ourselves.  
One was interrupted  
The other didn't get the not right.  
And one never really got the chance.

That isn't to say that the pain is gone  
Or that there isn't more to come.  
Some still live in the pits of depression  
Or maybe haven't quite made it off the tightrope.

But for the time being a smile, a real smile  
Is enough to ease the stress, to forget the pain  
To give enough strength to put one foot in front of the other  
Until we've made it safely to the other side.  
Carrying a few bumps and bruises but still in one piece.

And when it seems like the corners of your lips are too heavy to raise  
When the light in your eyes is dim and the blush from your cheeks has drained

It's ok to cry, too.