



for the  
joy of it

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anaïs peterson

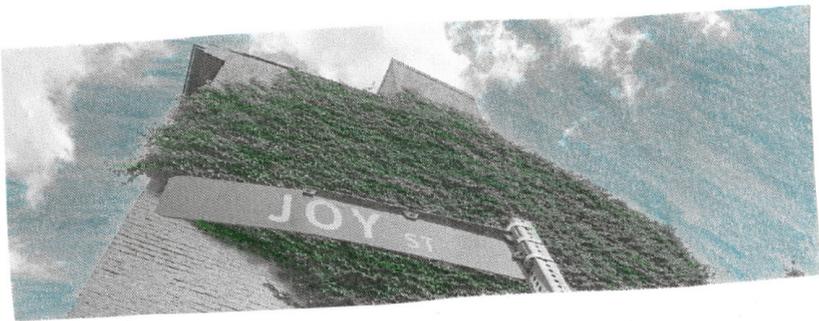


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*with love and gratitude  
to mom, dad, and boomba,  
to those who showed me what was possible,  
to pretty skies and being brave*





lavender menace



THE SACRED SCREAM  
OF QUEERNESS THE  
DEFIANT DANCE OF  
MOCKERY THE TRANSIENT  
MENANCE OF COMFORT  
THE EXPANSIVE  
INVITATION OF RISK  
THE UNSEEN  
ELDER OF BEAUTY  
THE MAGIC

*being a woman is not a consensual act*

*she* sits on the tip of her tongue and sometimes it falls. i do not flinch when it hits my skin, landing heavy displacing a gentle cloud of dust. i am not the *she* in question. i wait for

the pause, the blushing, the uncomfortable correction, the apology, the space where i feel compelled to provide comfort once again at my own expense, the gracious smile i feel i must conjure and plaster on my lips, the overemphasis, the *she* to line up on the tongue ready to fall again, the pause, the blushing, the conversation to continue, the smile —

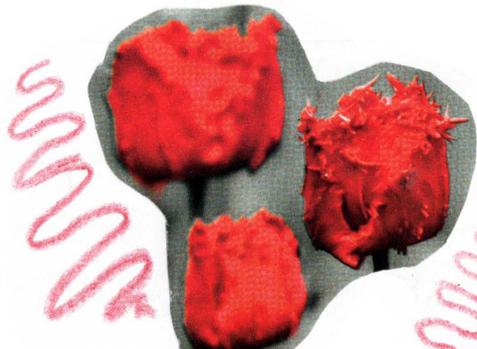
i keep it tucked behind my teeth. not waiting for the apology, not expecting for it to come.

if i didn't smile if i didn't hold space for your discomfort if i knew how to say it i would tell you it does not matter how many times you call me anything but *she* because there will be that slight pause, long enough to break up your sentence the small stutter as your lips start to form around the *s* but you force them instead to say *they* there will always be a look of relief that washes over your face when you get it "right."

you will say *they* or sometimes *them* and you will not have to be corrected but i am still hearing your whispered airy *s* it is crawling in my long hair, putting a bony finger under my chin tilting my head up till i am forced to meet its eyes, poking at my hips tracing a path that curves in ever so slightly from my ribs— i know to you, i am a woman.

and this has never been an invitation to speculate never been a declaration of what i know never been a confirmation of what i am not but

you do this to humor me, i know, because to you my body is a girl in this body i am a woman and you will never look at me without *she* rising to your lips, threatening to fall from your tongue.



"FUCK YOUR ASKING ME TO  
PRODUCE SAFETY

FOR YOU AND NOT MYSELF"

- LITANIES TO MY HEAVENLY BROWN  
BODIES - MARK AGUIAR

NOT BECAUSE THERE  
IS A SCARCITY OF  
SAFETY  
BUT BECAUSE OURS  
DOES NOT LOOK THE SAME

MY SAFETY  
THREATENS  
YOUR COMFORT

... AND YOURS  
CAN BE A WEAPON...

*if i am expected to say thank you*

then i do not want this universe.

they say equal rights are not like pie, more for me doesn't mean less for you but i am handed a slice so thin it threatens to topple under its own weight and through the collapsing custard i see you, holding an all-american apple pie. you catch me staring and plunge a fork into the center of the flimsy aluminum tin, shovel the cinnamon baked apples into your mouth where the crust collects in the corners of your grin, spraying from your lips when you laugh.

*say thank you / they whisper in my ear /*

equal rights are not like pie, maya angelou says they are like air, either all of us have them or none of us do but i have been taught never to take the last slice from the pie tin, never to take seconds before everyone has finished their first serving. equal rights are not like pie but they have already started selling canned clean air to those who can afford it.

*but /*

*at least they were kind / at least they are trying /  
at least they saw me before they raised the gun /  
they say next time i will be shot by a dyke /  
say /  
thank you /*

BETTER

PERSUADED

I'M STILL

WAITING FOR

THERE'S

US

SOMETHING

I AM THE  
COLOR RED

NOT FOR LOVE  
BUT FOR FURY

*sitting on the floor*

i've gotten good at locating my energy. a jumble swirled like the scribbles of someone trying to get the last drop of ink out of their pen. in the morning it tends to sit behind my belly button, i do not always feel grounded. when i trace it it never travels up past my heart. when i draw self-portraits of tulips i've started to add roots.

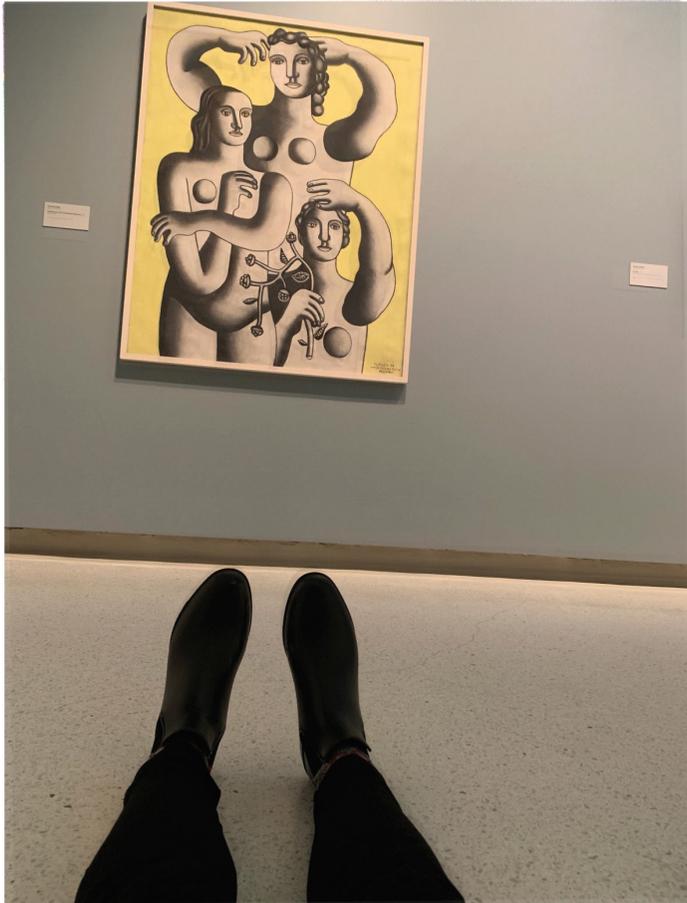
yesterday, the employee at hocus pocus told me to compartmentalize more. he said it would help me deal with the bad energy and placed a stone good for aries, stress relief, and available for \$3.00 into my right hand. i bought the bloodstone for aries, pisces, and anger relief for \$2.75.

when i go to therapy i will tell them i bring my whole self into spaces (olivia told me that's a risky move). i will tell them i have decided the problem is not disassociation. there's a weight to carrying myself that i've yet to put down. maybe when i go to therapy they will tell me atlas got 12 hours of sleep a night.

it's not that i am not in tune with my emotions. i feel anger in the tightness just left of my sternum that makes my heart beat so hard i see my pulse through my chest. i've started to feel anxiety in my left arm, it's a numb feeling that makes me think that maybe my limbs are made from lead and i am having a heart attack.

i'm very in tune with all the versions of myself, the girl, the woman, the force of nature. as someone bad at goodbyes, i'm in conversation with the versions i don't want. i see all 3 when i look in the mirror. they are like a good set of tupperware or russian dolls. they nest, some could say neatly.

i'm borrowing bits and pieces of people who are not me. caution! gender in the mirror is more disjointed than it appears. i'll give them all back when i find my own.



*Composition with three figures - fragment 1932 // Fernand Léger*

# HELLO

MY NAME IS

THE FIRST GASP OF BREATH  
CLEAR AND CRISP AND  
BRAVE AND BRAVE AND BRAVE

A YEAR OF MIDWAY CAFE NIGHTS

DANCING SCREAMING STARLIT  
SOY MILK MOON

MOONSHOT ON THE LAST  
DAY OF CANCER SEASON



how r u

I feel like an under watered plant  
delicately balanced in a earthy  
ceramic pot

can you say that in english i dont  
speak lesbian

BAD

*a new language*

---

pronouns change with the breeze and long greenblue summer dresses in august on  
mass ave / sometimes, i still ask myself *who is she* and feel guilty in misgendering even  
though it's done out of habit / i have stopped thinking about myself and started  
thinking about dancing in victory garden plots and the speckled flushed red of a  
cooked lobster in afternoon sunlight and small black flyaway hairs coming undone  
from braids and the way you order dim sum at the chinese restaurant on tyler street  
  
and sometimes when the sun rises all i ever want is to be called my name but as the  
stars glimmer i remember womanhood is more than white women in pink hats  
bleeding between their legs and i can hold complexities as i undo confinement

THE

DEFIANT

ONES

pronouns change with the breeze and long greenblue summer

mass ave /

THE LAST SURVIVING MEMBER

el guilt / misgender

tho / done out of habit / i have / thinking / myself and

ng about dancing in victory garden p / ed flushed re

ed lobster in afternoon sunlight and / nyaway hairs coming

m braids and the way you orde / sum at the / hinese restaurant on

THE MEANING OF GENDER  
MOVES

metimes when the sun n / all i ever / s to be / y na

s / glimmer i remember w / hood / more th / n in

bleeding between their legs / an hold complexities as i / emer

AND I AM THINKING ABOUT  
HOW  
EVERY LOVE  
MAY BE / MIGHT BE / MUST BE  
A LOVE WORTH DYING FOR



Paradise  
Revisited



*because our roots find each other underground*

because



sunflowers keep coming up, first growing against the worn lattice of my front porch on a sticky august afternoon, then cut and sold from leaking black bins at sunday morning farmers market in boston, shocking me bright and blooming between the cracks in the cement inside the walls of a pennsylvania state prison, and finally on a thursday afternoon in march where she describes us as perfectly arranged sunflowers, catching the long rays of sun in an infinite moment of long novels and naivety.

because our lives end and begin and end and end

because the world is small and the head of a sunflower is not one flower but a thousand tiny blooms

because i am grown from rain-soaked illinois soil, sunlight peeking out from wispy gray skies and the way you say my name a's softer than a whisper during sunday sermons – the smallest joys of living

because sometimes, when i laugh, your giggle slips out and lingers on the air, stirring up courage in my soul whispering softly *i am still with you even when they can not see me, you have never been the only one*

because sunflowers will always turn to find the sun

because the sun is the sound of a smile catching on your lips when you say my name and the glimmer in your eye when you smile only at me because in every variation we find our way back to sand between our toes, garden plots in the backyard, to dark blue waves glimmering with the long rays of the sun and glowing pink with evening clouds gently landing on the shore

because a sunflower without deep roots will fall back to earth, exhausted by the weight of carrying the flower

because standing in your kitchen i could close my eyes and be in my aunt's house with coffee brewing on the black countertop or in the small kitchen of my childhood home pots piled up in the sink my dad taking leftovers out of the fridge for lunch

because the further a sunflower's roots spread the taller they grow, sturdy green stems and striking yellows flowers reaching out to the sky

because you remind me we live in the same world as a field blue with scilla blooms, of small dandelions woven in my hair, of tight hugs that steal my breath, and of moments where we hold each other with the love we have always given away



because planting sunflowers too close together results in weak stems and toppling stalks but plant them in the same field and their roots will find each other underground working together to heal the soil

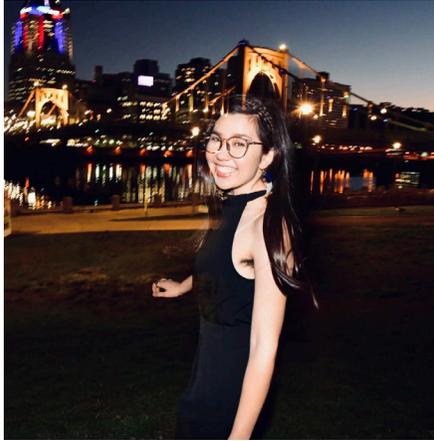


# acknowledgments

“being a woman is not a consensual act” was first published by *you are here: the journal of creative geography* in May 2021.

“sitting on the floor” was first published by Off Menu Press (formerly All Female Menu) in August 2020.

# about the author



anaïs peterson (no pronouns) is a poet and organizer currently based on the occupied land of the Osage, Hopewell, Monongahela, Lenape, and Shawnee peoples, as well as many others. anaïs' people love pretty skies, are barefoot in the summer, and are queers, especially those who view gender as a game. anaïs' words have appeared in *Sampsonia Way*, *Mixed Mag*, *SLICE*, and *you are here*, among others. anaïs writes in black pen and garamond size 11 and tweets from @anaïs\_pgh. A full list of anaïs' publications and more information may be found at [anaispeterson.weebly.com](http://anaispeterson.weebly.com).

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