

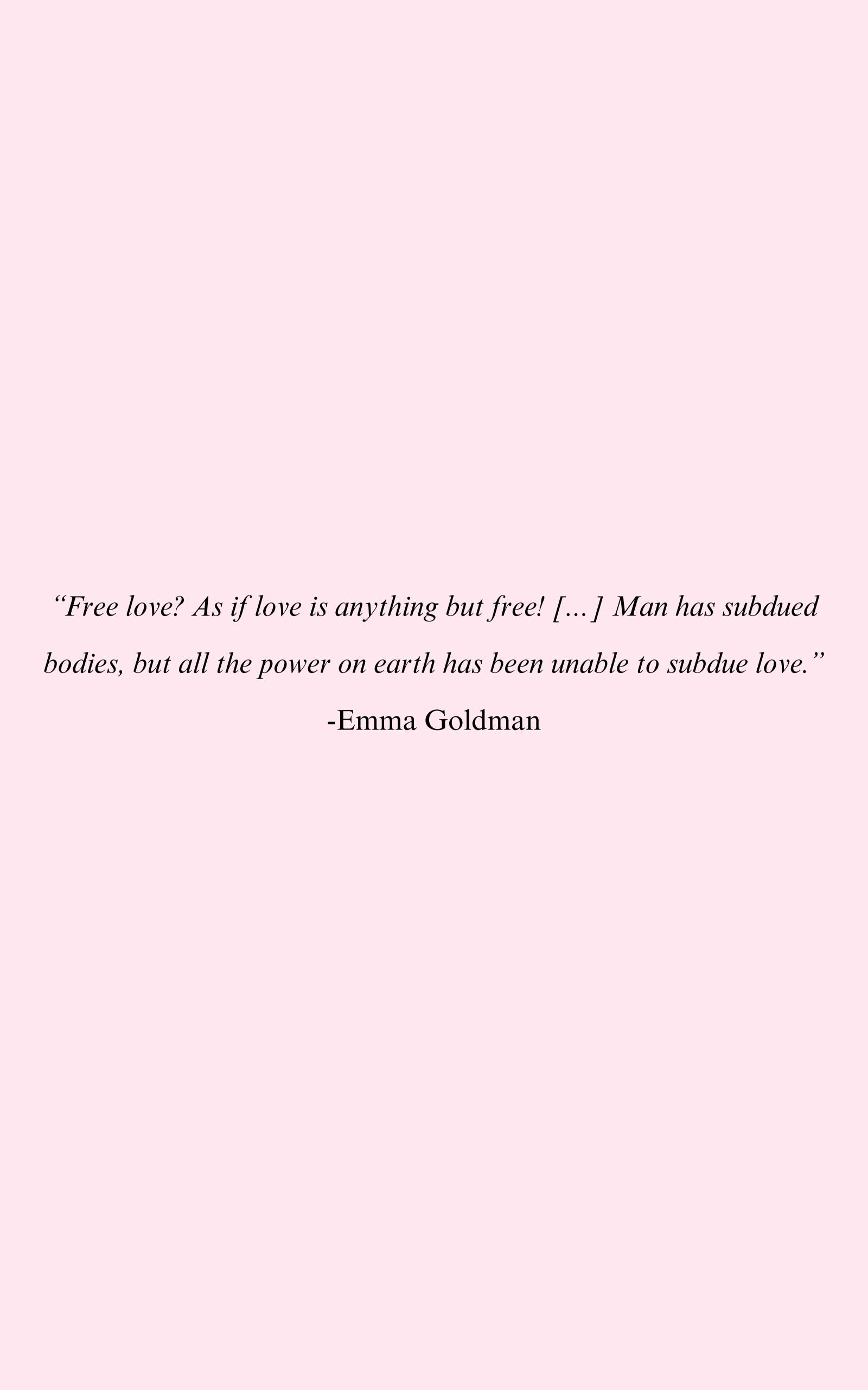


BOY APPARITION

a travelogue of atemporal genders

by mk zariel





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love letter

i walk through the halls of my decay—
afire with loss of comforting stares
& assurance.

—stay alive

in memory, in starry nights:

no.

those maroon-flashback-sepia nights i had no recourse

but unwhispered secrets on bleakened bathroom floors

tainted memories adrift on shattered wind watch stolen queerness fade

then storm back with a vengeance—like schoolgirl crushes & boy-apparition-nothings

i had you, girl i met every night, your hair in my eyes

hand burning a blinding pink triangle

into mine

a scar i never knew was mine to earn. such a pain to harbor

lingering in my is-it-alive-or-faded mind but god, you were beautiful— are you still?

had you who urged me with a shy smile to feel again

thrust embers of past lives into my heart you incinerated me in light;

i just came crawling back

living for possibility, aspiring to a coveted will to live

you spurred that school & humanity to mock this queer

walking felony for fifteen years tabula rasa or else never-really-alive but still somehow casually despised entertainment for teen debate devotees with too much time yet never enough logic:

in private you dressed me in diffuse light aglow like you only see at the end of a long straight tunnel

saw him through together:

impracticalities gleaming in our burnt-out eyes: saw a roadmap

for that kind of love you've only known after falling apart

pride was a riot and we are not

there is a fight in every encrypted chat
glitter in all our hair, and i've lost five friends
and counting to some grand discourse
of zines we haven't read. problematic idols
we've forsaken dialectics of
oh-no-you-didn't, dude-that's-a-slur
—that's what we call pride, isn't it?

there is a folding table at an event full of tired devotees to trademarked Resistance half of whom are nonprofit adherents—commiserating about their children defying family, sinking into broken tapestries, woven contradictions their matching sweaters and suspiciously lesbian haircuts gleaming under the scrutiny of infighting—

like the drag artists who populate every other folding table, makeup smudging unrelenting sun, blasting the pop anthems of top-fifty assimilated

through the grimacing sky. all of us crave to flip the table at this point, throwing all our vaguely arcane literature, our refreshments that smell of panic attacks to the ground. because you're a marxist-leninist your so-called comrade is the other kind of ML, and nobody knows the difference or wants to

i am an insurrectional

post-leftist

& newly anarchonihilist
with intersectional post-civ

tendencies—

(i'm just trans)

(okay?)

(and i have a problem with you both.) your red fascism, or maybe just how every theory bro seems convinced the thoughts in his head remain in his head until they leave his mouth—

we the depressed are still handing out
the screen-printed, heavily edited words of
Emma Goldman and her distant femme
paramours—to mildly confused Straight
Allies: despite our different politics our wildly
varied emoji choices, we *all* wish the
Straightest of our Allies

would just love who they love, find passion
on opposing sides of a chasm called boyhood,
remain soft feral accomplices
ungoverned in their becoming-whatever

becoming-decent, any becoming at all, because isn't straightness so static?

so time-bound as to negate itself—but maybe they just draw existential fulfillment

bolstering their cold foundations, from striding through pride events

dancing terribly to trashy pop; clipping way too many ally pins

to their ghost-white tote bags

never noticing their (ghostly)white privilege,
because in their
glazed-over eyes, this manicured storm is all
pride-was-a-riot-first bluster
excusing their smug resumè padding they shout
"PROTECT TRANS KIDS"

to pink-white skies forgetting children of amorphous decaying bodyminds, repressed softening-becoming, are *forever* protecting them—

but we aren't much better, are we?
sure, we're explaining anarchy *at* strangers,
under blistering midwest sun
forgetting to eat, also forgetting social skills,
but for the other 11 months
we are strangers to each other.

mixtape

call me your queercore, your low-slung jeans and homemade pins

acceptable rebellion of instagram-story fame, your storied path

as you slow-dance to ethel cain and romanticize

what would have been— Call me your friend your would-have-been your never-has-been-anything your thunder sounds at 1am when you wish i felt safe and instead settle for a mixtape made

by ChatGPT. call me baby or maybe lana maybe coquettecore for a few minutes like tiktok like splendor

like the time you dyed your hair brunette, pretended

you contained multitudes like aether like sharpness like

reneged promises like the fictional city of los angeles

like black-and-white photos of authenticity to sell albums

like television like press-on-nails like creamcolored suits

like the time you listened to chappell for three minutes

calling me your midwest princess for a lifetime cycling through bands

like identities like thrifted leather jackets like walls that crumble

when the interior grows too loud. call me your bubblegum pop like

someone easy to break like pastels like preservatives like cold

loving artifice loving goodbye texts that call me yours.

for them.

20 times i tried to repress this desire & learned how undisciplined this amalgam of dead theorists' convictions was, roar of desire flooding through night skies &

19 times i succeeded & it didn't matter because you were always there to release into &

18 - age we'll be when we're free of Linearity aglow in unmasked becoming &

17 fixations you've been through in the past hour & your fleetingness attracts me, moth to disintegrating obsidian i have never been relentless like you

16 nights we shone with the same flickering jouissance & thousands of miles apart & boundaries of Place dissolved &

15 - age we both are, technically, aftershocks linearity shattering & shards you use to bejewel your transmuting heart &

14 days talking nonstop, the month i was a specter & Bullying Victim & yours, so why would the opinions of the self-repressing matter &

13 years waiting to release into her sea of fire contained malleable confines of this body & yet really did until i melted into you &

12 different works of art i should apparently look up—teenage chronic procrastinator & you are the only thing on this planet worth paying undivided attention to &

11 mutual friends we've discovered via social media & many more in this social movement & aflame in this interconnected web of care subculture that's really just belonging &

10 punk albums remind me of us & i know you'd find them annoying but *still* &

9 hours at a time agonizing over whether i should contact you & not my proudest moment & maybe i am just an insecure teenager who only looks like an amorphous creature & what if it's only secure to be fucked up, gentle, treacherous &

8 confessions of desire have absolutely been said & implied in every moment that you infodump at me & how do the allistics even date & desire, simply the unstoppable current of enthralled passionate divergence &

7 high schoolers who tried coming up with a couples' name for us (no luck) failing that, have attempted a viral artifice of a hashtag & beings our age are #weird &

6 pronoun changes in the last week & flux like gender like our flow state undulates and burns & at the end of the day, our words our crafted broken narratives the same &

5 infinite moments i was certain you were the one & then realized you were everything

4 bodily boundaries are fake and made up 3 so achingly real & 2 of us & maybe we are 1 & no Selfhood can survive negation of the queer &iamyours

audacity

i am, allegedly, trans & your voiceless collection

metallic notes, melodies they scrutinize: among the repressed i sound like a girl,

deranged screaming something-or-other, ten-year-old boy who just discovered voice memos

terrified soul who just discovered ten-year-old boys

and is also having technical problems so considers her sanity ruined.

producer who attempted to use her microphone while eating it, failure at communication

that dyke who never learned to shut up—and yes, i have voice dysphoria, but why don't you?

haven't your victims ever declared you sound like a jerk—

pronounce me darlin, and she and her, perfect one

obedient with high-pitched claustrophobic pleas to be accepted

her respectability, her assimilation

-please like her,

she swears she's governable—impeccably edited audio, blue-grey demure body,

she will never be enough. is there Audacity for talking to bigots? wouldn't its be this dystopia's best invention? but until then, do you realize you can't rate me, quantify me, five plastic stars, every closed-in conversation? my illegibility isn't some hot new album you are not a music reviewer! when you're crushed by the invisible hand's iron fist, isn't there a difference between speaking and having a voice? i am aspiring to be cacophonous, dysphoric—i have a voice.

on masking

as the shards of bias are defused i am clicking, metallic

wrecked yet smooth enough to go unnoticed soft enough for comfort—to be perceived like a lack of threat

an unusually firm autumnal breeze. like darkness, sleekness, the ideal don't let them in you say, but i have never known

who exactly you mean. this body is simply blocks stacked together yet too static, too frozen in space lost forever in time, to be toppled or even feel alive, silver and changeable foil to be molded

i am your sculpture and weapon, your armor war cry and love song. empty threats fly toward me and i catch them in the sickly-sweet poison of artifice, of becoming. hold them having never been held by anything but escape.

save our stages

and now feel as defiantly alive as your friends, the overly confident guys who just embarked on an emo phase so i am spinning out at an independent venue clawing chasms in local art, setting fire to the mutual aid shelf her mass-produced zines, hoping to see your face in the rubble.

i love two things in this irritating city—queercore, and anything that reminds me of you. so tonight i am bored at a punk show trying to picture your gender in song

would he pulse like drone and ambiance? continue staring down the band's elderly relatives imploring them to at least wear masks if they plan to cough for the next hour—

tonight i have cried to experimental music
and now feel as defiantly alive as your friends,
the overly confident guys
who just embarked on an emo phase
so i am spinning out at an independent venue
clawing chasms in local art, setting fire
to the mutual aid shelf
her
mass-produced zines, hoping to see your face

i love two things in this irritating city—queercore, and anything that reminds me of you. so tonight i am bored at a punk show trying to picture your gender in song

in the rubble.

would he pulse like drone and ambiance?

continue staring down the band's elderly relatives

imploring them to at least wear masks

if they plan to cough for the next hour—

a fleeting eternity—wishing my love for you was contagious

as the flu in piercing midwestern heat. to spread

through a haphazardly lit stage, a liminality for two, possibly the world and tonight i am technically

feral at a punk show by my own meager standards

—resisting the urge to hide and read the theory you sent me at 1am while wondering if i love you like your weird friend loves against me!'s later days, hoping that bigot i'm avoiding never meets my eyes

i am furtively answering messages i am falling apart

i am talking to straight girls in culturally appropriated clothing

i am taping the world back together i am wondering why there are used surgical masks on the floor—

i am researching terrible bands i am aglow and panicking yet still

forever wishing she were here.

dear cis people

dear cis people,

why do you think you're cool? yes, it's cool as fuck to have an identity

perform solely out of desire, artifice—except usually

you treat living like ordering coffee

humoring control when your popular cronies in oversized jeans and crop tops do secretly finding pink drinks and blue raspberry

mildly gross:

don't you wish there were other options?

dear cis men, why does life have to be like this? nature

is queer when you look close enough: why not enjoy a little self-reflection? are you sure masculinity isn't solely

a prison to erect around yourself, breakable as overpriced exercise gear

coldly unwelcoming like the house you refuse to clean?

sure, assholes

stereotype your bodies and thus think you're normal

(newsflash: nobody is normal, especially not you)

but when has normal ever stopped anyone?

dear cis suburbanites, you can in fact learn pronouns!

it/its isn't insurmounable: just exalted in its shining

alienation:: you can even learn names

instead of shouting HEY YOU every time you see a trans person!

resplendent in grey-static search engines, oversimplified podcasts

armor-piercing questions, of course you can self-educate. you just don't,

so afraid of your future, so destroyed by what could be

for some reason *you are so obsessed with* neopronouns. what, do you wanna try them?

because, my dearest jerk of the century in neon-pink athleisure

heavy self-righteous airs, you *could* if you got over yourself a bit.

dear cis girls, most of you are kinda *vaguely* cool—but just buy into the creeping enclosure of the hegemonic. it's not your mannequin body her plasticized sheen, that renders you so cis, just a lot of other things—

for example, cis world, why do you look at me like i'm an algebra problem you need to Google

to have the slightest idea how to solve?

dear cis people, there are two things in the human imagination

that truly piss me off: algebra, and you.

desire&

after "GREED" by Nora Hikari

i want to be reminded why i came out & i want to be negated by the undulating synaesthetic waves that pass as a coherent theory & i want to be perceived only by other voids & i want to watch the embers of repression flow through our souls & i want to burrow in intricate queer analysis & i've never known what the hell i want & i want to be loved anyway & i want a bespoke (a)gender for every soul in the universe & i want the only state to be an eternal flow state & the only exchange economy to be the exchange of tired old pronouns for the new ones that make you want to live & i want to, usually, want to live & i want to feel warm and stimmy and still somehow insurgent & i want human interaction without the pressure of being human & i want labels that don't sound like diagnoses &

& i want to feel normal among everyone else who's ever felt weird & i want to still be anarchocurious after a lifetime in the (non)movement & i want to live a world that negates me back.

protector

i have spent two hours solving your tech issues while you yelled at me for being a nerd a year as your deceivable romcom gay. have watched you debate at me cast me as impractical, claim i'm heterophobic—how did i think that was pro-social teasing what the fuck is pro-social teasing anyway?

i have faith in your passion to destroy that surges

through my body when you look at me—but you only have faith in your ability to socially engineer total freedom—so, okay, tell me to read lenin

while you don't even read the love notes behind my furrowed brow, full of my genderqueer

gender-abolishing infinity you'll never release into.

tell me to read lenin
and screw you—and screw the *Communist*Party—every form of control
you insist is liberation—and i just call glorified conversion therapy.

yes, i'm an anarchist and always will be—
except when i'm talking to girls
then become your anarchist, respectable
defined
abnormal, dressed in theories of others' politics
dripping with unexpressed rage: i have spent
two hours solving your tech issues:
now you use Pretty Good Protection—but
there is nothing but distance and time
protecting me from you. your mockery, petty
insults, your leveling instinct:

and i could watch you debate at me all day you're so beautiful when you care—about anything, but you have never cared about me.

tell me everything

i look at shudders in desperate becoming, but how can that be,

when you don't know how to care without exerting power

and i look at you all the freaking time but somehow never—look back into my soul, you stare into oblivion

into idealized futures, at Movement Goals—into that one girl you swear is prettier than me, and it's unfair to her when you compare us, and you get lost in her and i almost pity her.

you make fun of me for being neurodivergent, maybe afraid of the jouissance you can never govern but right now i ache to be governed by you—because then at least you'd like me.

i'm done with your stupid tech issues you can't cordon me off, only visible to your judgmental eye, hatred,

centralizing orderly lies—you can't hide me any longer

lifestyle-fascistic ex—my forgotten—i am not a fucking email

nor am i yours to protect anymore.

tranphibian

i walk through the pinks and greys of desire never fully belonging to either—i could have been your sister in arms or one of the only men you trust yet instead i am thin air and soft night skies and forgetting refer to me as your apparition—your rolling thunder

that vanishes in a second. one foot in the cleansing ocean and one on amorphous verdant

and yet i will always set fire to your prairie grasses—will always be extinguished or else negate—i swim through acidified seas called womanhood

and wonder why i'm
the only one whose skin
burns and cannot survive—
call me your tranphibian
watch me destroy every shred
of patriarchy i touch only to
crawl back am i normal enough to breathe
underwater?

i don't want to know what you assume

when you look upon my body, don't want to know

what a gender is—i will never be anything more than

the parasitic plants that linger between sea and sky

the algae that is unnoticed yet ignored—

i don't want to know
what being gay is because if i did you would
have gendered me
in the first place
—am i normal enough to drown?

sparkling glitch

a sportsball obsessive with a superiority complex, stench of fast food on his breath tells me unsolicitedly that lesbians are ugly. i'd be lucky to be coveted by a tech guy who lost a bet cannot be bought or sold so

there is no reason for the flames of my negation to resurrect him

part of me wants to tell him
we aren't ugly, just unknowable—
just contradictions in rhinestones and patch
jackets
just vintage drag-king cartoons, worldmaking
patched together—by light
of desire in her—sparkling glitch in the matrix
of the possible

around cis men every moment is our opening night

we are our own burnt-out costume designers.

may never find our perfect lighting and our only sound cues are slurs our cryptocurrency-obsessed ghosts shout in our ears and text messages, yet we still dress

to provoke, stereotyped flannel
our jeans with one too many rips
mens' shirts cast off by our
transfeminine sisters in arms
somehow look like care, like shattering, on us
all

knowing men who yell, and other nuisances, will be intentionally clueless, in he-i-mean-she-i-mean-they-actually-it performance.

under the sun, sometimes all
at once. in new worlds we thrifted
settle on he/they for
an infinity or a second, yet still
none suit us quite so well
as the sound of genders breaking—

consume

watch me survive on a diet of cis tears and unanswered texts for you—i am the cardboard

cutout protector, shout down bigots for the world

then answer emails for you. i eat order like seawater

watch my bloodstream decay for you—i am in becoming

in this race to the end of oblivion

where you stand in soft exalted voids and tell me you miss

whatever we had. i will read all the theory you don't

tattoo dry arguments on my faded illegible body, glow ultraviolet in the light of archive.org, the affinity group you never had

would be delighted i will be undone for you sink into your static, your singleminded imagining; i will be real for you and fade away like your whispers i have no gender other than your best-kept secret.

bash back disappear first

my friend always swears she's
learning to love the great lakes
crafting her unbound undefinable storytelling
amorphous as a body of water, rolling with it
when jaded new yorkers, angelenos with
questionable politics, assume she's never
encountered another human—part of me
always wonders if this scene
is more about what we unlearn.

we're all from small towns with all of two
people
cities with cliqueish individualist Scenes
yet we make this place ours—the
taped-together charm of every punk venue
truth & our trauma echoing through
streets where we got hatecrimed a few eternities
ago

& suburbs remain uncharacteristically terrifying

sadly full of poorly written propaganda & we remain perpetually followed

by weird men making weird fashion choices held by the maelstrom of our ten affinity groups

all ten have the same five burnout cases & infighting

will be the death of our hope, because in our bleakest moments

a small city starts to feel like middle school &

sometimes middle school starts to feel like eternity &

it's easy to fancy oneself insurgent, ordinary—these islands of blue, these seas of red live conflictual where even our autonomy is illegal. we still

sculpt our bodies in the shape of jouissance, knowing every moment

could be our last & our forever & we are all too gay for this

we bash back, we disappear first, part of a scene

& some don't know where it ends and we begin

& keep drowning in the forgotten and each other & this is us.

labels for people who won't remember them

after sg huerta's "trans poetica"

signs you might be atemporal:

what happened yesterday is still happening. what happens tomorrow doesn't exist. what happens now is all eternity

and what's happening now is that you feel awkward as hell.

you binge-read emma goldman's completed works when you're stressed, but only the ones about family abolition. her prime feels like yesterday and forever.

if a liminal space had pronouns, that would be you

when you were six someone said "what do you need, little girl" and you responded with "the annihilation of all order" and then everyone got worried

when you were infinite, tomorrow and gone already, you were still worried

you have three planners. you're compensating for many things, mostly the forgotten

feral anarchy is a goal, feral anxiety is a reality.

you have a calendar. most of what's on it is aspirational. and you have a pinterest board, where you do your actual planning.

texting makes you wonder what it's like to be incomprehensible

you wish you were a void creature, but the cute kind

nothing feels real, except what does.

signs everyone has noticed you're atemporal:

well, you don't notice, because that was last year

which means, of course, it's happening right now.

teenage summer

a teenage summer is a knife that pierces through my not-glowing not-clear imperfect skin

& are we supposed to be statuesque well-behaved girls

at academic programs, or are we supposed to be Out

(not of the closet but of the house) cheap perfume like teenage polaroid-romcom purgatory

& what is summer but some unattainable gilded thing

& what is summer but both the carrot and the stick

reward for compulsory-education obedience, spit-out information between walls lifetimes of boredom, alienation, where the hell is everyone

(probably off exploiting another culture for tourism

service work solely to get into an achingly preppy college)

where the hell is everyone, where the hell is our conscience? *are we supposed to rot at home, obedient*

Such Good Kids, or are we supposed to have a Healthy Social Life

& why must we spend our summers pandering to everyone but each other? because we are never a dua lipa song nor will we *ever* be accepted by princeton. we're just sunburnt, left behind so let's question our genders under blazing lights and know we are not cinematic, nor are we

cool,
but at least we're still alive.

vestige

i cannot find wisconsin on google or in my soul nor do i want to. milwaukee fades like greyed-out photographs moves like water, recedes—even the small towns known for sports for white guys, the backdrops of family ghosts, falling leaves, haunting every vignette. can i transition for you? become the last vestige of life this blaze-orange memory of what was. my friend texts me that

she can't make it out here this year due to being in portland—she apparently did not know how far it was despite having access to google—she wonders if milwaukee is in oregon.

wonders if every city is a carbon copy of the next

wrapped in the silver film of twitter, of transaction—infighting and desire trampled on like suspiciously yellow snow, like dark wood

like watching your gender drown

in the great lakes you once belonged to. she wonders

if the world is liminal—the only reality nestled in the corners

of her labryrinthine mind. i have to agree. so your body is trans

and mine is a map of the isthmus

i am bent at the edges only here through the displaced

through greyish waters that linger on the borders

of reality and satellite images green and grey and faded just because you find madison tiny, insular doesn't mean you can't disappear in her.

lose you

i hope i lose you to queerness watch you fade into her, softening in the ecstasy of belonging

synaesthetic being forming
the kind of fire that consumes all
i hope we never have serious boyfriends,
plotted-out narratives, branded archival
transports

of certainty—no, i just hope you belong the way neither of us ever will. i hope you're never a partner in sameness, bride in faded photos—no, just be someone's treasured negation.

i hope you destroy
and reinvent me—in the faint aura of impulse
i become your canvas
your darkest secret
and maybe just yours

i hope vacant perpetually bored boys notice us in the street

never knowing what they're missing staring and gaping in the corners of their dimly lit hearts as you ignore them with studied indifference i hope their eyes widen and fill with light

they cannot comprehend the sparks of your uncontrollable being.

have—

i hope you stay too bright to hold too free to ever be understood, categorized gendered in sterile brokenness.

and i hope i lose you to queerness or maybe find you in the future we'll never

Acknowledgements

this is for the warm embrace of the void. this is for every trans boy who's never seen himself represented in poetry. this is for my friends who are family, and my family who are friends, and the interconnected web of abundance that is anarchy, this is for the BashBack tendency, because of course it is, and every friend i associate with it—for my fellow "teen liberationist" especially. this is for midnights and soft-spoken declamations and pronoun changes and the will to negate and desire. this is for the entire core collective at my mutual aid network, whose unbridled joy and weird opsec obsession and love for planning multiple events in a week animates me, inspires me to create belonging and care and trans utopias in the shell of our sadly fascistic world. this is for small-town infoshops and their denizens (you know who you are) and mentorship and care and the way we hold the undulating waves that are each other's genders. this is for the team at Vinegar Press and the infinity of queer joy i wish them.

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mk zariel {it/its + masc terms} is a transmasculine neuroqueer poet, theater artist, movement journalist, and BashBack aligned anarchist. the author of VOIDGAZING (2026, Whittle Micropress), it is fueled by folk-punk, Emma Goldman, and existential dread. it be found online at can https://mkzariel.carrd.co/, creating conflictually queer-anarchic spaces, writing columns for Asymptote and the Anarchist Review of Books, and being mildly feral in the great lakes region. it is kinda gay ngl.

xoxo, mk