

with gasoline

excerpt of poetry chapbook
by nat raum

poem as instructions for survival

keep a baseball bat in the back of your car. clip a knife that's bigger than it needs to be to your work lanyard. tuck a field hockey stick under your side of the bed.¹ bind your chest just enough so that you don't look feminine, but don't tip the scales so far that you don't pass.² don't correct people when they misgender you. don't flinch when they're casually transphobic or cissexist.³ don't think of meghan riley lewis when people point their fingers at red states.⁴ when all of this inevitably fails, lose your marbles. cross out *he/she* on that form you have to sign and write *they*.⁵ refuse to conform to sanitized image of a trans person with all their angles pulled taut, no room for slack.⁶ push the outlines; color all over the page. when someone implies you are wrong for it, ask who taught them what is right.⁷ ignore everyone who minds. embrace everyone who still matters.

¹ this is in case anyone tries to fuck with you.

² this is so everyone respects you to your face.

³ this is to preserve your energy for the people that deserve it.

⁴ this is because she was shot so close to where you were born but no one here thinks they're the problem.

⁵ this is called *taking up space*.

⁶ this is inspired by your friend basil, who once wrote *why must i be on my knees for you to feel comfortable?*

⁷ this is just common sense.

poem for drinking down that gin and kerosene

my firespit slicks bridges
for miles, i swear to you—

i am through with structures
that seek only to support

their kin. if my refusal
to go on like this forever

means i must build a town
of my own edifices, so be it.

i want baby blue and cotton
candy pink banners strung

up between the bank
and the fire station. i want

no cops, including the ones
in your head. in chemistry

class, we mixed metals
with bunsen burner flames,

made a rainbow of elements.
may copper and rubidium

ions decide to salt the surface
of this planet, cause a flurry

of proud flames when
the first molotov cocktail hits

the spans. i am past renewal,
past peaceful assimilation;

we must destroy to rebuild
a world that could hold us.

poem for the cishet woman who says including trans masc people in “women’s” issues isn’t relatable to her personally

this is a focus group. focus on identifying five things
i can see, four i can touch. focus on the cursor as it slides
over the camera button, switches it off. focus on the way
she says *i hope you don’t take this as offensive, but* after i say
the menopause website we’re all looking at doesn’t feel
trans-friendly. recalibrate; losing focus. don’t focus on
the way i feel, the way she doesn’t realize she swatted
me down like an attack helicopter would fall if struck
by such a blow. don’t focus on all twenty people who said
nothing and kept talking about the hot pink web design.
focus on the talking-to my boss says is coming for her.
focus on the email from my other queer coworker
sending love from her gay little corner of the world.
focus on quitting this job in a few months, anyway.
this is a focus group—focus on collecting my gift card
compensation. focus on a future without cis nonsense.

poem in which i die mad

An abecedarian

autopsies cannot rule a cause of death as
brimstone but i've always kind of wanted to set a world record,
carry enough anger in my gut on an average
day to
ensure my demise will be born of
fury. the ones who get it
get it; we have been
held down by a loud minority
itching to take us out
just because we have the audacity to question power structures,
kindle something in the shape of our own genders.
like fire ants, i take unkindly to threats against
my community. i will
never rest in pursuit
of better futures—some things, i may be naive to think are
possible, but nothing is possible if we all stay
quiet. if you have not accessed your
rage, are you even paying attention?
something is happening, and it grows more
terrifying by the minute. my anger courses veins, staving off
undue stress with adrenaline. the
votes are in: overwhelmingly against freedom of choice unless
white and rich and cis and male; in favor of
x markers stripped from passports overnight,
yapping about only two federally recognized genders.
zealots of liberty, count your days—we are not going away.

poem in which i terrify boomers

A villanelle

i identify as worse for wear.
only two genders? then i shall choose:
i identify as your worst fucking nightmare.

mediocre male gospels hang thick in the air
and the boomers are still bottle-fed by fox news.
i identify as worse for wear.

i identify as pain in the ass, jump scare,
the only person not aligned with “family values.”
i identify as your worst fucking nightmare.

i switch the code ten times daily, so keenly aware
of how i would be treated were i to refuse.
i identify as worse for wear.

but it's just an opinion, and fair is fair—
you don't really think i believe that, do you?
i identify as your worst fucking nightmare.

i am beyond your thoughts and prayers.
you are the scum i scrape off my shoes.
i identify as worse for wear.
i identify as your worst fucking nightmare.

poem for the student who took the mic at graduation to say i don't exist
An American sonnet

now everyone go around the circle and say your name,
your pronouns, and a fun fact about yourself. well, i'm nat,
my pronouns are out of order, and a fun fact about me is
that i'm the only trans person in this room. all of you will

misgender me more than you get it right and honestly, that's fine
with me even though i know some of you aren't even trying.
and let's not talk about what happens when i venture outside

the bubble of people it's theoretically safe to be trans around—
you'll catch me succumbing to every *she/her* for my own
survival, grateful for once that my body still looks like camouflage
and especially so after a graduate yanks the microphone,

blasts a rented music hall with her transphobia. here's a fun
fact for you: universities don't make statements when trans
rights are under attack on campus—i know this from experience.

poem for the family members who voted for him

A golden shovel

for the capitalists, for the bootlickers, for the
ones who cry at the sight of billionaire blood,
for the ones who can't be bothered to think of
me for a second before opening their mouth, the
last letters of my deadname a broken covenant,
like a shard of the worst kind of mirror: is
my presence such an affront, gay vibes thicker
in my aura than you could ever imagine, than
the strings attached to your kindness? the
way you still say *i love you* ripples, sound across water,
imprecise delivery of truths you won't say, of
the things i know you are thinking. i am the
one who will speak it: *begone*. i'm not just a womb.

poem from my deathbed

i wish i had kicked. i wish i had screamed.
i wish i had screamed the words *fuck off*
far more, for so many more people deserved
them. i wish i had carved *they* into my right
breast, *them* into my left, and worn
my deepest v-neck. i wish i had found
a vessel for all this wrath before i came to
lie here, listing it all off like this is confession
and anyone who will listen is an eager-
eared soothsayer on the other side of a partition.
i wish being trans didn't come with a side
of people so uncomfortable with themselves,
they have to project it onto others. i wish
i didn't have to shut up about it to maintain
any modicum of respect the average cis person
has for me. i wish i didn't have to say *i use any*
pronouns to dull the sting of a misplaced *she*.
i wish anyone in office gave a damn,
but they don't. i wish the words
enshrined protections extended to me,
to us. i wish the fact weren't,
but it is.