

Erica Rivera

can't sleep when i think about the year that i was born into

i. sure jan

i'm on the phone with paypal, account blocked because of some capitalist bullshit. i'm on hold, so i look for a doctor re: transitioning, why don't they tell me which ones are trans so i don't have to settle for the white nonbinary physician, which, like, i don't mind at all (kind of), but it'd be nice if the site said (like it lists race and gender and degree) this is the doctor's politics, this is how much they hate cops, this is how hard they fight for abolition, this is how devoted they are to genderfucking the binary in everything, this one uses they/them pronouns, i guess that's close enough. (they're in beverly hills and they work for ucla and their profile says something about "social justice issues" so actually maybe their politics are pretty clear.) i'm on hold for over an hour, time i could be spending making an appointment to start hormone therapy, to start speech therapy, to start therapy therapy; every second counts because i want my penis gone today and apparently it takes a year of "living as my gender," before i can make that happen. do they do black-market underground vaginoplasties yet? i'm only on the phone with paypal because their bullshit is holding up my donation to black & pink, and they need far more support than the white nonbinary doctor at ucla beverly hills, but the white nonbinary doctor at ucla beverly hills may be the person standing between me and my tits and my snatch and my sweet, sweet, sexy lasik, sorry if that's chauvinistic, maybe it's because i haven't been prescribed estrogen yet, cough, cough, hint, hint. who knows, maybe they'll take my balls sooner rather than later so my hair stops falling out and my voice isn't so ugly and i can teach that class called "interrogating genius" on zoom

without keeping my camera off and using a voice changer to modulate my pitch. oh, dysphoria! oh, bioessentialism! oh, capitalism. oh, settler colonialism. wish i could just be an imp instead of having to be trans. wish i could just lay down my head and sleep. instead, i write this poem, in case the white nonbinary doctor at ucla beverly hills needs some kind of proof that if i don't transition soon i will fucking kill myself, sorry if that's melodramatic, it's just that gender is a performance. that, i've known forever, what i'm learning every day this year is transitioning is honestly super fucking boring. so boring that i'm pretty sure i've read this exact same poem 100 fucking times from 100 fucking trans women with 100 fucking mfas. at least there's still one thing about me that's somewhat fucking special: yeah i have an mfa you mother fucking asshole, just that i got mine from the bruce high quality foundation, and if you don't know what that is, then i guess your politics are pretty clear too. (just kidding, my politics are as messy as anyone else's, and anyways the bruce high quality foundation shut down because *its* politics were so messy; maybe this poem is proof that i should shut down too.)

spent all day on the phone with paypal, and all i got was an existential crisis and maybe someday ten bucks cause that's the going price for poems these days, even when they're better than anything amanda gorman or rupi kaur or sandra cisneros will ever fucking write. but maybe this is almost as good as anything [REDACTED] wrote or [REDACTED] said, at least that's what i was going for.

don't think i even came close.

(how it ends is i hang up after 90 minutes then call ucla. the lady who picks up tells me to call back monday through friday between 8 and 5 and i say, uh, ma'am, is it not between 8 and 5??? lol, and she says, girl, it's fucking sunday. and i say, oh, fuck, lol, and she laughs kind of hysterically, and i laugh kind of hysterically, hyster comes from the

greek hystéra meaning womb, am i woman enough to transition yet?)

ii. valentinesday

after SZA's Ctrl

my poetry is prosaic, maybe prolific, definitely prosaic, definitely prose. definitely pro's. poetry scares me, it requires losing: losing yourself, losing your mind, losing your dignity, losing your life, losing your love, losing your fear, losing your soul, losing and then loosening. it takes all of 90 seconds to get e— from one gas station to another and in those 90 seconds he recites the greatest poetry i have ever heard, completely improvised, completely from the heart, poetry of stars and space and logistics and monrovia and foothill college and hill avenue and where to turn left and someone he cares about in jail and how he hopes it doesn't make him gay, and then he gets out and slams the car door.

homophobia, sometimes, is safety. i know this because when he looks into my eyes i see fear and i realize he was worried it was a sex thing because i make the mistake of telling him my name—my deadname, which hurts me, and my name at all, which hurts him—because there is not enough mutual trust between us for him to feel safe unless i am invisible and he takes up all the space, which is why he talks nonstop until he gets out of the car, and i drive away grateful i didn't offer to let him stay on an air mattress in my living room because then he definitely would have thought it was a sex thing, and i am, for better or worse, no samuel delany. e— says he spends a lot of time thinking about how things get from one place to another, how they travel ("point a to point b") and i tell him, literally, *same*.

i didn't go back to the gas station for e—, i went back for the woman selling flowers in front of it, i only had a \$100 bill and i wanted to give it to her, but that is too big a gift, too big a gift is no gift at all, it is a burden, an obligation, an expectation, maybe a sex thing, at least from the perspective of the recipient. i wanted flowers so i could take a

picture of them and send them to the person i love, my bestest friend, for the silly patriarchal holy/day that starts in a few hours. i don't want to do the accountability work i have to do today because the day is so damn charged but accountability work doesn't have a priest/cryptid/time/line and waits for no one, certainly not some capitalist bullshit. we speak poetry, the lost: the dead, the loved, the hated, the lucid, the alucid, the alucid nation on every street corner, in front of every gas station. if we listened to the alucid, we would hear poetry, always, and probably we wouldn't know what it meant, like, at all, and how would that be any different from all the cute indecipherable poetry in those \$30 machine-stitched chapbooks anyways?

finally my father and his wife know what will be in the novel, my father says it's so interesting how real life influences the story and i think, if you only knew, i have talked to them so much about erica that hopefully it will be no surprise when i tell them, totally seriously: i *am* that girl.

when i get home after everything, "sunday" is playing and i turn it off because i've listened to the version he performed live, filled with laughter and ridicule and sarcasm and love, and the version orchestrated by lin "fucking haunted" manuel-miranda is so reverent it makes me want to fucking vomit, and not in the hot, fetish-y way. jonathan larsen didn't die young, he died before he became what he hated; he didn't die early, he died at exactly the right time, he died so we could live, he died so we could pray, he died so we could learn from his mistakes and not put on superbia, not write rent 2, not found art, strike!, not become what he was afraid he'd always been: a prophet, a messiah, a genius, a visionary, in love with himself above all, above everything.

(wanna be the type of girl my daddy he'd be proud of, be proud of, be proud of, be proud—you know. you know?) i really wish i was a normal girl. (this time next year i'll be living so good, won't remember my

name, i swear.) how do you be, how do you be a baby?

iii. endless march

can't sleep so i go get some tincture. i don't know, i've never had this problem, what am i supposed to get? the guy says this one and this one, and i say, i know it's just branding but what does the one called "restore" do? oh, he says, it, like, *restores* you, you know, if you're tired or can't sleep. oh, i say, that's, like, totally me, i'll take it. he puts in my order and i go stand in line at the far end of the store and the lady at the counter and the man she is ringing up are laughing their asses off, she says *grazi* when i walk up and then apologizes, she was talking to him in italian and it can be hard to switch back apparently. she and her daughter laugh when they mangle their *engtaliano/itanglish* because they trip up on the switch and i tell her, oh, i know, me and my mom are the same way with *spanGLISH*, except that we are definitely not. and she tells me she and her daughter swear by "restore," that it's made by this amazing company—a mom and her daughter, the mom a cancer survivor and the daughter a scientist—and that they put all kinds of cool things in their products like, you know, (in a whisper) *indigenous* stuff, plants and herbs, you know, and i tell her, oh, i know. sure. plants and herbs.

you know, that "indigenous stuff."

when i get home i look up the company, the mom and her daughter, and of course the mom is from marin and the daughter uc berkeley. so the mom had cancer; whatever, my dad had cancer and i didn't fucking colonize plant medicine just so he could live. i didn't build up an industrial complex just so he could survive, and find the time to find himself, and grow into an artist like his son-become-daughter, like the

mother from marin making "abstract linocut and India ink paintings— and some narrative storytelling" funded with literal blood money. the uc berkeley bitch she bore lists "doctors she worked with" from the mayo clinic and harvard medical school and sloan kettering and ucsf, i didn't know we could co-opt the resumes of people we worked with once in our own, the boring uc berkeley bitch before you could list "writers she worked with" from iowa and austin and stanford and brown, where's my cute colonial corporation.

the website says the daughter is "semi-retired from academia" and the mom runs a litmag based in new york "where she writes about entrepreneurship, feminism, and finding your path." (same and same, except definitely not.)

can't sleep, there's just so much left to doom.

Erica Rivera (she/her) is co-editor of [Art, Strike!](#), an online art/literary publication unique for paying its collaborators what they ask for out of a shared fund-pool. For fun, she likes to watch TV and pretend all the characters are trans.