



Remember black run 'cross my hips

RAQUEL BAKER

The most radical thing I've ever heard
about gender is that it's a violence.

a kind of undoing
done to the body,

like a bruise on the 11th day

a memory of skin

a drowning — that quick catch of —
breath

like how an attractive belt really pulls together an outfit, but
leaves me a sum of my parts.

A mannequin waiting.

A rope.

A crown.

If gender is a violence, it's a marathon
not

a
race.

A violence, the writer said, more like perpetual fear,

a warding off.

The smell of a hospital in Ferriday,
my grandmother was having her a baby.

black women couldn't have they babies
next to white ladies having they babies in Louisiana, in 1940.

Not there.

You can't go there.

Take
her

to
the

basement.

It'll be OK.

If gender is a violence, it must be
a sign that tells me to get out,
restroom, be good,
wear the white tights and the black patent
leather shoes and the red hair bows,
and smile that smile that's pinned to your face
with Rite Aid

sit over here,

use this

shopping
bags
and cinder
blocks,

that smile made
wet yet cleaned of
smiling on that body
violence that is necessary

fresh

by douching,
longing,
undone by

like air.

Necessary like how my mother checks every room of her house when she
gets home before she can even breathe there.

Being a woman sometimes feels like
perpetual watching,
pounding on the door,

that necessary,

not the violence of the knock or the way the
cop growls

Get out!

but the surprise he has that I am still there
in my apartment — he already two doors down — knocking and no-one else
home.

Violence in the air falling between us,

Sometimes I think being a woman is just like that
cop's startled surprise that someone would actually
stop to gather herself up in the midst of all that smoke.

Sometimes being a woman is just
that breath I took
while wondering what could possibly be the right thing
here in arm's reach —
What — of all the things that make me — do I carry forward?

What is necessary?

Sometimes being a woman feels just like that

frenzied moment of quiet, standing in the living room of my apartment,
breathing in all that airless ash — that

frenzied moment of quiet when no decision
is as important as the one that keeps me
burning.

RAQUEL BAKER earned a PhD in English Literary Studies from The University of Iowa. Baker specializes in Postcolonial Studies and 20th- and 21st-century African literatures in English. Baker received a BA in Psychology from San Francisco State University and an MFA in Creative Writing from Mills College. Baker is currently an Assistant Professor of Postcolonial and Transnational Literatures at California State University Channel Islands and teaches creative writing and contemporary African literature. Baker is currently teaching a course on literatures of Africa and the diaspora in Fall 2022 and coordinating the Africana Studies program. Her poetry has been published in *The Journal of Pan-African Studies*.

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What's in a name?

In many cultures, the arrow is a traditional image of bravery and precision. Within the speed and chaos of our present world, the arrow symbolizes the courage to define a clear direction for how we might benefit others and society.

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