**Misgendering Myself While Sleeping with a Straight Man**

Catherine Garrett

they say what you don’t know can’t hurt you

so I look the other way when he takes my shirt off

the man on tinder asks me:

*“so in what way are you bisexual?”* says you don’t look

nonbinary

& suddenly

I am just a confused woman

pulling out pronouns for a party trick

*do not urge me to leave you, to turn my back and not follow you*

*wherever you will go I will go, wherever you lodge I will lodge*

he calls me

beautiful

so maybe in this moment i believe it

he tells me to say his name when I don’t know mine

& he does not ask

he marvels

at how much of me he can fit in his fists

if I am uncomfortable, we can stop

my breasts are in his hands

I guess this could be called a prayer

both of us brought to our knees

& just tonight

my gender leaves the room when I turn off the lights

but he can’t tell the difference

I let him call me

*woman*

it is such a heavy word

but I seem to only have to explain that to the men

I first read the story of Ruth and Naomi in kindergarten

I didn’t know why I liked it

maybe it’s the thought of seeing

& being seen

but not having to question

he asks

if I like it

& his clumsy hands shake

the *yes*​ ​ from my mouth like baby teeth

I say *yes*​

forget myself

say *yes*​ and mean it

until tomorrow

until he comes

re-traumatization looks a lot like desire before you hold it up to the light

three thousand years later my love is still the same how long can I have one foot in each grave before burying myself alive?

I have spent 24 years thinking I have to lie to be loved

woman or attention seeker

mentally ill or faking it

too afraid of the empty side of my bed to tell the truth

but I change the pronouns on my social media

lighting a candle for a loved one

hoping someone notices

Ruth welcomes Naomi into her house after she lost her husband and two children together/ the two women chased the grief from each other's bones

history names them friends

memory will call them destiny

Ruth promises Naomi she will stay with her always

I don’t remember the last time I trusted myself not to leave

so I go out on every first date dressed for a funeral

my mom says she wants grandkids

my dad refuses to learn pronouns

he tells me to pretend I’m straight

*your people shall be my people & your god shall be my god*

two women who braid their stories together into legends

born in different countries

still somehow can’t breathe without sharing the same space

Ruth prays to the stars & whispers Naomi's name like a constellation

Naomi’s bottom lip trembles & Ruth's rib cage turns to dust

these two/are proof that the word love/sounds the same in every language

thank god you’re here

thank god you’re mine

my love I am not going anywhere

*because where you will die, I will die too*

*& there I will be buried*

I don’t tell my parents about my first girlfriend until after we break up

I tell a tinder date I prefer they-she pronouns before I tell my mother

*thus and more may the lord do to me if anything but death parts me from you*

the same word used to describe how Adam loved Eve

is used for Ruth’s old testament feelings for Naomi

she is alive again in the words of wedding vows centuries later

& with these words in mind

I decide to do myself the justice

of finally being honest

otherwise

when my family finally gets me in a wedding dress

I’m afraid it will be an exorcism

& not

a celebration