



SUBHAGA CRYSTAL BACON

Cautiously Watching for Violence

August 2020: the month of no murders of trans people

His voice at the end of the line, middle of the night,
bored and languorous, described what he
would do to me, knowing where I lived.

*I'm going to come where you live
and rape you and kill you.*

as if he was following a script. The telephone—
1981, a plastic-shelled landline—waking me. The bed
against the wall, between windows overlooking the street
in my hometown, the town where I lived the first 20 years
of my life, so known—me to it, and it to me. I was tired
of the threats.

Men calling me to tell me these things.

Men speaking about me in loud voices from the bar
while I bought a six pack of beer, saying who I was
and what.

Men intentionally banging into me, their bodies
like bars surrounding me, hands in my hair, breath
in my face.

Years and years by telephone, on streets, when I was lean
and rangy in torn jeans and sheer shirts, biker boots,
even once by an old Russian woman in Brooklyn,
and later by a car full of men following. Even then,
I shouted them down, shouted them off, walking
in the daylight somewhere in New York City,
always the angry mouth that talked back.

A psychic once said that I have the unique aura
of women who in their lifetimes migrate from male
to female. I knew this was true, having known
myself a boy and then riding that knowing into puberty,
confused in skirts and fishnets and desert boots.

Crushes on girls.

With cheekbones like knives.

Who pushed into my lavatory stall.



Who let me wear her leather jacket.
Who was pregnant and married at 17.
Whose hair I stroked by flashlight.
Who embarrassed my dreams with longing.

The pressure for dance dates,
the gay boy smelling of beer,
the boy who never called,
the one who was refused,
the son of a butcher,
the cousin of a friend,
the friend of my brother.

I lost my virginity when I was nineteen, in college,
to a man twelve years my senior I thought I'd marry,
who wore women's perfume, did manual labor,
owned a dress shop with his mother, and dumped
me for a younger woman pregnant with his child.

Years and years, women and men, the flush
of yin and yang in me.
Big hair, red lips, short skirts,
colored tights and shoes and boots
and leather jackets in many colors.
The wide legged stride said
don't fuck with me
an irresistible invitation to do just that.

Even, at sixty, walking my foofy dog across the street
in the suburbs, a spring day, from the car window
he says *get out of the way you ugly old dyke*.
Dyke. Cunt. Bitch. Even, once, Faggot.

Listen: there's a way that I'm as queer and trans
as you can be despite my femininity: hair to my waist,
eyeliner, and inside, the man I've always known myself to be.
It's a kind of drag, the girl over the boy within the girl.
Tight jeans, big belt, even under my elderly paunch, still
that fire that says let me scorch you/scorch me with desire.



Selena Reyes-Hernandez, 37, Chicago, IL, May 31: A Pantoum

He kept seeing her face, so he went back there to do it again.

Selena, everything about this is wrong, murdered for being trans
by an 18-year-old—it's hard to say man—high school student
who lived two blocks away from you and owned the Luger
he killed you with after coming home with you for sex.

At 18, every boy becomes a man, even if he's still in high school—
old enough to vote, to own a gun, to pick up a woman at 5 am—
to get in her car and then go home with her intending to have sex.
Selena, you can't have known he'd react this way to who you were.

Being old enough to vote, to own a gun, to pick up a woman at 5 am--

why would you expect that he would kill you because you were trans?
Selena, you can't have known he'd react this way to who you were,
that he'd go home to get a gun to shoot you, then shoot you again.

You certainly never expected that he would kill you for being trans.
You brought him home, you washed his hands, then he asked, and you said.
So he went home for the gun and came back to shoot you again, then again,
to kill you Selena because who you were, he said, made him mad.



Bree Black, 27, Pompano Beach, FL, July 3

The average life expectancy of a Black trans woman is 35 years of age.

Like everyone, what she wanted from life was independence, just the usual American dream with its varied and fixed rewards: health, the safety to travel, to walk without fear on the street, and at the end of the day, when it was time to sleep, silence. She wanted to live and be recognized in the world as a woman, who could keep a job, enjoy her life, and have her own crowd.

That weekend, on her own block, close to home, in the crowd was someone who shot her and ended her hard-won independence. No one can say if she was shot because she was a trans woman. The Sheriff's department increased its initial offer of a reward in hopes that someone will want the money enough to break silence about what they saw, and who killed Bree by gunshot in the street.

Even after ten o'clock, it's brazen to shoot someone in the street in the midst of a large and rowdy holiday weekend crowd. Someone must have heard the shot even if it was far from silent being a loud holiday, fireworks and music to celebrate Independence Day. But keeping silent about witnessing a killing has its rewards regardless of who did the shooting, and that the victim was a trans woman.

American Independence didn't change life for American women, or most men. Black people were expected to step into the street if they met a white person. If they didn't, they reaped a violent reward, public humiliation at least, or flogging before an angry crowd. No. It was a long time before many got what you could call independence, the freedom to learn, work, vote, marry whom they loved, and break silence

about the many and unsubtle ways this country continued to try to silence them. Jim Crow, and the marriage laws that essentially treated all women as property. *Don't forget the ladies!* So much for American independence. Still, many feel patriotism or at least the desire to celebrate in the streets, gather together to barbecue, parade, drink beer and, in Florida, crowd the beaches. Then, once it's dark, a fireworks display is their just reward.

Bree went out, close to home, to be part of the action, to celebrate, and her reward—
American, taxpayer, employee, her parents' child—was to be forever silenced



there, shot by an unseen killer who disappeared into the holiday crowd. Twenty-seven years old, she was the tenth Black and nineteenth trans woman killed in the first seven months of this year. Shot and left dead in the street. You have to wonder what there is to celebrate when there's so little independence.

The world offers very little in the way of rewards, even safety, for trans women, undervalued and silenced, often by those they know, on their own streets. The trans dead form their own crowd to demand for the living independence.



I Have Room for You in Me: A Litany

For the handsome trans-woman and cis-gender wife,
for the suit and tie and heels, for the skirt and corset
and beard, I have room. No one can say a life is not right.
I have room for you in me. For the one whose father

loved her like a *son* until she became one, I have room
for you in me. For those who claim their own names,
break free from the limited *born-as* cocoon, for the one
with the wide-hipped sashay, big hands smoothing her dress,

I have room for you in me.

For him whose voice rings high, whose chest bears scars
under hair and ink, I have room. For the one who wears
their self-made clothes and hand-painted shoes, not trying to pass,
I have room for you in me. For the pregnant man, and woman father,

I have room for you in me. For the sex worker's food
and rent. For the elderly boy's sparse whiskers and soft eyes.
For the statuesque matron, the broad beamed man; for your lives
and your loves and your rights, I have room.

I have room for you in me.



BIOGRAPHY

Subhaga Crystal Bacon the author of two volumes of poetry, *Blue Hunger*, 2020 from Methow Press, and *Elegy with a Glass of Whisky*, BOA Editions, 2004. A Queer Elder, she lives, writes, and teaches rural northcentral Washington State. Her recent work appears or is forthcoming in the *Bombay Review*, *Bangalore Review*, *Indianapolis Review*, *Cheat River Review*, and *Limit Experience*. Her work can be found on www.subhagacrystalbacon.com.