

## there there they/their

You ask boys if you can kiss them, if they're okay  
And they find it funny, but you meant it  
You hold doors open, buy them flowers, gentlemanly in your pursuit  
But maybe men want to chase, and so they break your heart like you're a woman, because that is what they thought of you.  
Maybe you encouraged it, with your doe-eyed giggly sweetheart routine, but maybe they should have paid more attention to the way you sat, the way you fought  
Is it misogyny if you find it emasculating to grieve them like a woman scorned, compare yourself to every girl they date after? Does the misogyny count as internalized to think this way?

You put a they/them pin on your backpack, add your pronouns on every platform, but people still default to she/her. You don't correct them, call it a common misconception because you're an hourglass through and through, and too vain to not work with what you're given  
"It's like drag", you tell yourself, but it's actually the thrill of deceit

It doesn't bother you very much when your friends slip up, and "girl" is gender-neutral if you follow it up with "let me tell you about this bitch". It doesn't bother you when your parents call you their daughter because they find you quite peculiar for one. Your father gives you his best men's *settu* mundu, and your mother raises you like a son. Your grandmother jokes about how God meant to make you a boy but then changed His mind very last minute. There's no malice in it, nor judgment, so you know even if they never get the terminology right there's space for you to be who you are, how you are, as long as you're working a cushy tech job while doing it

You work a careful balance of how to live in the world, exist in it. There's power in demanding to be seen the way you see yourself, but there's effort in it too and you're lazy. "I don't have anything to prove" but it would be so nice if they just knew  
There's also a coward's comfort in the ambiguity, in existing neither here nor there, in knowing you can turn back at any moment. You're lucky, your gender is in your mind, your heart; easy to hide in bathrooms and at family gatherings. You call it being "soft trans", and accept the rejection of your transness from those that carry the weight of who they are in their blood and bones. When there isn't enough space under the umbrella you'll politely step outside

You love it when you're asked to open a jar though, or reach the top shelf. You love when pretty women tell you they love your arms and when your shirt hangs off your broad shoulders in sharp angular lines, delightful pretense, absence of curvature. You love your father's hand-me-downs and how they sometimes freak your roommate out because she thought "there was a random man in the house but it's just you". You love the unbridled joy of

coming out to someone and being met with a shining moment of realization, of comprehension  
"actually that makes a lot of sense".

Being seen and heard and described the way you want and knowing it's rooted in truth, your truth, because who are you if not honest, on purpose?  
And despite everything that is difficult, you remind yourself your life is luxury — what a celebration it is to sow the seeds of your identity in euphoria! You get to put on shoes and clothes that fit, tailor them to perfection when they don't, and with the knowledge this reality can exist you hope for a world where everyone can experience the same.