

I AM, I AM, I AM (IN YOU)

Words by P. Eldridge

[Eyes closed]. Breath detonates inside me. A body is always gamble, always ransom note, always some trembling skin held hostage by somebody else's gaze. Writing risk makes me think of stakes hammered through ribs, not symbolic, not metaphorical, but real puncture, real hazard. What if my body is only scaffolding for somebody else's monument, what if every touch is exposure, what if love is the most corrosive element in the room – burning, unstamped, smuggled inside my chest. There should be hazard tape around my ribs. There should be gloves. But there are no gloves, only nerve endings. I've got your breath inside me like smoke that refuses to dissipate.

Transdermal application: needle, gel, molecule tunnelling under dermis. Reverence in the pause before it absorbs. Alone. I pull intimacy apart like fabric splitting at the seam. Neighbours hammer and drill their illusions next door, and I fabricate mine from chemicals, from flesh, from sentences that throb. Tools stacked in drawers like silent conspirators. Parcels stamped with names that belong to ghosts. Birth dates belonging to strangers who still breathe through me. I stand between mirrors that make fugitives of my reflection. Fugitive because the image never holds. Fugitive because completion is a mirage. A person will call themselves whole unless transitioning. Wholeness is an alibi. I don't have that alibi. I live in the never-ending tense of alteration. Change as oxygen. Mutation as pulse.

When does one become transitioned? Trick question. Never, always, both. The word is a chokehold. A finish line painted over quicksand. I am only unfinishedness, uncompleted construction site, scaffolding shaking in wind. And then you. You arrive like breach charge. A detonation that rearranges the rubble into shelter.

We walk together and I slip into the hallucination of your stride: your worn boots, your knotted hair unraveling in the wind, your mouth with its flawed geometry already rewriting scripture. Illusion of permanence cracks the moment my fingers slide into the open chamber of your chest. Not illusion, not hypothesis, but impact. A crash site. We lock.

I thread my fingers through your sternum. Into your muscle, into your shadow, into everything you are holding. The word risk stops being abstract and instead becomes skin. Risk is the electricity running across my knuckles when I reach for you, it is the scar that glows after you pull away. Risk is not a lesson; it is a wound. Risk demands attempt. To risk is to throw the body forward knowing it may never return intact. To risk is to agree to be remade.

Fear is stitched into the attempt. Not the kind of fear you name easily, but the subterranean kind, asbestos in the marrow, impossible to exorcise. We don't know our bodies enough to know where fear even nests. I touch your shoulder and my arm vanishes into you as though our bodies were two broken halves of a sculpture left in a junkyard, but somehow when we meet the fracture closes.

Everyone paints risk dark. Hazard warnings. Dismay. Dread. Why not paint risk ultraviolet, phosphorescent, the colour that burns inside the retina long after the flash. Risk as bloom. Risk as soil wet enough to raise something other than rot. They said no risk, no reward, but I say: no you, no world. Dating was always negotiation of risk – who gives, who takes, who crumbles. With you there was no arithmetic. I wanted to risk obliteration. I wanted to risk being erased by the force of being seen. I wanted to risk becoming unrecognisable, because in your sight unrecognisable was the only kind of beauty that mattered.

Rejection was always parasite, gnawing. Every word I spoke carried its shadow. The bar soundtrack flayed me open, every beat an incision, every bass note a knife in cartilage. But then you appeared. And all of that machinery broke down. Not welcome but seizure. Not hospitality but raw takeover. Not an invitation but possession. You overflowed the frame. You arrived without borders.

We don't talk; we write. That's what you told me, traced into my phone like secret code. Writing as safer than air. Writing doesn't stumble, doesn't betray itself in stammer. Writing means fragments can live, even broken. Writing means I can hand you shards of rib-

cage and you will know instinctively how to assemble them into cathedral. You wrote me into existence. I wrote you into ignition.

Love with you is not romantic. It isn't decorated. It is raw terrain seized by insurgents. Fierce, feral, incandescent. Love with you rips sheetrock off the walls, wires buzzing exposed, foundations quivering. This is not candlelight; this is blackout poetry scrawled in blood across condemned buildings. Desire as survival, tenderness as weapon, devotion as manifesto. If they bury us, it will be with our mouths pressed together, a fossilised kiss in the ruins of empire.

Sole once tried to tether me. *Tu vas créer tout un son d'elle qui ne correspondra jamais à la réalité.* Their words failed because you are not reducible. You are not chartable. You are seismic fault tearing atlases in two. Reality is small. You are enormous. You are what reality could have been had it chosen tenderness instead of control.

Risk is lexicon, expanding daily. My hand glancing against yours in public like a flare. Eyes crawling over us like cockroaches. Your laughter flaring in a room that wanted silence. My body sculpting itself unconsciously toward the curvature of yours. Risk as devotion, not deterrent. Risk as currency I spend until there is nothing left, gladly.

Once you asked me my subject. I should have said: you, you, always you. Instead I camouflaged the truth in sterile vocabulary: exile, speculation, surplus. As though I wasn't burning to press my mouth against the corner of your jaw until it rewrote history. Now I know: the subject is not exile, the subject is home, the subject is the way your shoulder blazes against mine when we walk, the subject is my blood galloping each time you appear. The subject is community grown in derelict factories, fungi insurgencies sprouting through cement, spores rewriting infrastructure the way our love rewrites the body. The subject is your body altering mine, mine responding, both of us refusing to be private property. Love as shared resource, love as common ground.

Sometimes I imagine us projected on broken walls, a film reel eating itself, each frame stuttering between risk and revelation. But reality is not neutral. Reality is graffiti written in muscle fibre, reality is vandalised tenderness. Reality is us refusing silence. Reality is us amplifying each other until no one can ignore the sound.

I whisper it to the glasses sweating on the bar, to the spectral crowd that never leaves: I have found my one true love in the whole world. They grin like accomplices. They already knew.

The risk is not rejection. The risk is not hazard. The risk is not dismay. The risk is that you have altered my trajectory beyond repair. The risk is that without you, the body collapses into archive, unlit. The risk is that I cannot ever again pretend to be incomplete. You make me dangerous to the idea of solitude. You make me volatile to the myth of safety. The risk is that love has carved itself permanent into the marrow.

I take it. I take all of it.

[Eyes closed]. Breath contracts into syllables of your name, repeating like a pulse that won't stop banging on the door of my chest. I inhale and it is you.

Everything before you was rehearsal footage, discarded takes, background noise. You are the ferocity that makes me articulate. You are the architecture that emerges from the wreckage. You are the incantation etched into scar tissue. You are the one for whom I would hazard body, exile, memory, myth. You are not risk alone, you are the explosion that rewrites the definition. You are not bloom alone, you are eruption. You are the only subject that can still rearrange the world.

I am, I am, I am. And in you I am without border.

P. Eldridge

P. Eldridge is a curator, writer, and cultural agitator working between London and so-called Australia. She is the founding editor of *SISSY ANARCHY* -- most recently featured at the sixtieth Venice Art Biennale -- director of *Worms World*, and co-founder of *The Compost Library*, platforms dedicated to unruly voices, queer resistance, and experimental writing. Her work has appeared in *Flash Art*, *Studio Magazine*, *Gay Times*, *Worms Magazine*, and more, and she has interviewed artists and thinkers such as Judy Chicago, Juliana Huxtable, Shon Faye, Cortisa Star, and Torrey Peters. She has edited writing by Chris Kraus, Anne Rower, Estelle Hoy, and Octavia Bright, and her practice has been featured in collaboration with Amnesty International, *DAZED*, *Service95*, *AnOther*, *Trippin*, and *La Fomo*. Her practice is a soft weapon, a sharp tenderness carving space for queer embodiment, refusal, and new ways of living.