Ring Dance

Jasper Gunn

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Ring Dance // Jasper Gunn

Maybe we could benefit
if I add my voice to the conversation
about these changes, about tradition,

But how can I share my words
when that voice falls dead
before it passes my lips?

I've heard too many times, whether intended or not,
that transgender people are too few
'we can't just go about changing things
just for such a small minority.'

I feel, why bother speaking,
when I feel so small?

This is a tradition for women,
it's not for me, not for some genderqueer in-between;
they don't make traditions for me here.
I have to make my own way every time.

How do I summon the courage
to face the vulnerability
that comes with saying
"Hey, I may feel like the only one
but my pain hurts too. It does matter."

I left the country my junior spring
partly because
I didn't even want people to ask me
if I was going to ring dance.
I didn't even want to be around
for people to keep reminding me
that being put in Westhampton College
is supposed to mean I'm a woman, a daisy, a lady.
Instead, last spring,
I pretended the dance wasn’t happening,
Instead, I had Indian shopkeepers, children, strangers
asking me everyday
“Are you a boy or a girl?”
I didn’t mind so much
this chance to be visible, to speak my truth,
as I hardly ever get to in the States

I’ll be honest.
I stopped reading most emails from WC,
I didn’t go to proclamation night.
I have no reason to put myself
in those situations
where someone speaking to a crowd of women, and me,
calls us “ladies” calls us “women.”
and I feel tiny
I feel invisible, forgotten, ignored.

it’s not because i’m against being a woman
you see it’s just
i’m not one.

I wanna tell you more
like what it feels like,
rushing to find a gender-neutral bathroom
without being late to class
like the way my mood sinks
when another friend calls me “she”
a stranger says “ma’am”
how the words choke up in my throat
to correct them, again
please use “they” instead
please correct each other and yourself
I'm so tired of always
trying to be less invisible

for some people it's exhausting
to just live as yourself
day after day
in a world that feels
like someone else's

I wanna tell you more
of how it feels
but there's this voice in my head
that says “Hush.”
“Hush child, they don’t care.”
says “Hush now, your pain is your own.
You're just one in a thousand.
Why should they care?”

I know this is a voice that hides
in the back of the minds
of many of the other people
that face oppression
that face discrimination that's hard
to pin down, to point to, to tell others about

I know that I don’t know
exactly what it's like for these people
that also hear this voice
but that we have some things
in common
and can embody
the power to resist
and can stand
with one another
But knowing these things for some reason, still doesn't quiet that voice that finds me at my most downtrodden and whispers "Hush."

I still don't know what benefit my own voice, my stories might have but here it is anyway.