

## A Statement on My Gender in Spite of White People Who Don't Understand.

When I was young, I knew I held the world in a seashell—put it to my ear and knew my hands had the power to keep an ocean. My young self-called herself “she” because that didn’t mean anything, except that you were referring to “her”—and “her” was already everything anyway. Sarah liked to be a she because my young self knew who “she” was, and if you said shes were bad because of arbitrary rules, it meant Sarah was bad because of arbitrary rules, and “she” wasn’t bad, so being a her or a she was good if it meant being me. My young self taught me everything about being me—about doing backflips off the couch in a dress and drawing pictures of women on the walls in crayon. My young self taught me about Loving women so much you will throw a plate at any uncle who says they wanted a son instead of a daughter, and eat the kola nut at a meeting without permission because *girls are elders too!* and *one day I will be older than you!* I already am! she said—she already was, and was a “she” while doing all of it, and that didn’t mean anything at the time except being me. My young self was a grl, because there is freedom in the reclamation of everything I was allowed to be before they tried to “woman” me—Igbo, mesmeaning that sex, conflated with gender, was something created when white men needed new ways of being better than—asụsụ a’ apugbhi ikowa onye m bụ, meaning I am closest to ogbanje children—live outside of myself, have been through this earth again and again, meaning that white people will have to die to themselves a couple times before they can understand who my spirit is—not a girl... unless, of course, we are talking about Black grls—unless, of course, you are also a nonbinary Black grl who can say *gurl! gurl? GURRL!* and know exactly what the difference is—unless, of course, you mean an innocence; cut-short, returned again—unless, of course, you are also the type of “girl” who has a fondness for machetes, and knows how to pound yam and hot pepper with a pestle between the legs-- unless, of course, you mean “my own” when you call me “gurl,” then I am not your girl—

do you understand? good.

## Autumn

The coconut oil has turned solid.

My bike has been aching forward—  
breaking my knees with each slow turn until  
a man stops me to fill my tires. Says  
“It’s been long overdue.”  
That he can tell by the sound.

When he’s done, I glide with ease.

I wonder why I never notice a need for change until  
my bones are near-breaking against a standstill.

When I ride my bike uphill  
and see the sunset shining on these fire-turned leaves  
how the whole sky looks like spilled grapefruit,  
I think of you.

How you told me my smile was the sun—  
how it must’ve felt when the rays set on you.

I cry, gripping my handlebars at the juncture of a hill  
before tipping into a new height.

I cry despite knowing an end means  
laying something necessary to rest,  
that there are no more bees to water the earth.