

Rage
by Kelly Lee

I'm a working-class queer Black woman.

I don't have battalions of long words or big bills to convince you I deserve to be here. I don't have an army of reputable references to persuade you that I'm someone significant. I'm a working-class queer Black woman, and I've never had extensive alliances. Yet, somehow I ended up *here* – a place where tired bodies like mine only trickle up. Don't be fooled, this place is a battleground, and I've managed to survive.

I don't have what the majority of students here have; my parents don't have fancy degrees (*I don't even know what those letters mean*), I grew up with mill towers framing the sky beyond the trees (*with the wind singing blue-collar blues*), and I've known hunger and I've known poverty (*and sometimes this place makes me want to scream*). I'm a working-class queer Black woman, and no, I don't have what a lot of people here are born with, but I have a lot.

I have memory – the knowledge of being born in the spirit of fighting, and of being part of a legacy greater than the one I've become privy to *here*. Yes, *greater*. My people, Black people, working people, gender-oppressed people, have histories of struggle and rebellion and victory that are alive and well here. This history is in the walls of *this place*, in the faces and fists of the experienced students and workers, in the city streets... this people's history, my history, pushes me forward. I remember eating out of dumpsters, watching my grandmother die in pain without healthcare, and being called a nigger-bitch in grade-school, and those memories give me strength to survive *here* without allowing wet-dreams of greatness to satisfy my desires for something better. I remember, and that makes me work harder, because I have to, because I owe something to the people who have died, and to those left behind.

I have knowledge. *Different* knowledge. This isn't a knowledge you can get in school books, or suburban sanctuaries. This knowledge comes from having little (*or having too much of nothing this society values*) and making it. So I'm low-brow; well I could give a fuck if I didn't come here knowing how to *be* Harvard; words and customs aren't hard to learn (*the difficult part is stomaching the formality*), and I have the experiences from which theory is written. Yeah, I've felt lost, I've been confused. I've cried and screamed and asked for help, but I've grown accustomed to climbing and knocking down mountains and I'm stronger because of it. This knowledge has let me navigate this place without losing sight of who I am and what I want to be. Sure, this knowledge may not give me access to the advantages my wealthier, whiter, more masculine peers have (*thank goodness*). I'm a working-class queer Black woman... I've never had that kind of power or privilege, and I don't *want* it. I want only what I'm owed and what I owe – what I've earned. I want justice, and I can't get that by becoming the invisible hands that have weighed my people down for generations.

I have comrades. And this is important, so listen carefully. *This place* wears you down, it

makes you feel small and tired and lonely. It makes you feel rushed and, if you let it, it makes you feel helpless. I came *here* thinking I was an anomaly – that I'd be set apart. But I looked in the right places and I found a base of working-class, feminist, genderfucking, radical people *here*. These allies may seem few and far between when compared to the numbers of rich, white (*and not-so-white*), power-hungry men and women whose legacies here are far different than mine. But my people are loud and angry and stronger than they seem. They have made me believe in and question myself, and with them I don't feel alone. *Here*, I've been loved and have loved, and that makes all the difference.

I have my voice, and it doesn't falter; it can't afford to, not in here. I'm not going to lie and say that being a working-class queer Black woman (*or any combination or reduction of the four*) in *this place* is easy, it's not. It's difficult to keep your head up when you fit awkwardly into some mold of human worth and success. It's difficult when you find you're burdened by a different set of tools and higher expectations – greater risks. It's hard to keep track of where you came from in this circus of old-boy networks palming unattainable temptations and new-money prostitutes inching up the coattails of the elite. It's hard to stay grounded, but I'm a working-class queer Black woman – *breathing* is a struggle, and I'm more than able.

This shit is far from over, and that's a promise.