



Angelfish by Felicia Chung

The Unimagined

Mila Babic

No one has imagined us. We want to live like trees,
Sycamores blazing through the sulfuric air,
Dappled with our scars, still exuberantly budding,
Our animal passion rooted in the city (Adrienne Rich 25)

Like most queer people, I am in a constant battle with language. We are told that we must have a label, not as a comfort to us, but as an explanation for others. I have experimented with many: questioning, bisexual, and lesbian. But the constraints of language always felt claustrophobic. What if I wasn't any of these things? What if I accidentally fell in love with someone incompatible with my assigned label (which, funny enough, I did)? Eventually, I settled on queer. An identity of *in-between*. A neutral existence of love. But what I choose to call myself doesn't matter because I don't look gay. People look at me and automatically assume the language that defines me: straight, cisgender, safe. I revel in the feminine, and I have had intimate relationships with straight, cisgender men. So, how can I be queer/gay/lesbian/or anything else? My queer existence remains unimagined by language. I remember one time when my soon-to-be ex-friend interrupted a conversation I was having with an old high school classmate to ask, "Did you ever



think — would turn out to be a lesbian? Did you ever suspect it?”


He responded, “No way I never would have thought, she doesn’t look like a lesbian.”

My sexuality became a spectacle because I didn’t fit the role. And so, I was defined as a lesbian against my will and then chastised for not looking like one. Not only was I gay, the secret word hidden amongst the hate surrounding our schools’ “weird” kids, but I didn’t look gay, and so I was excluded from the club. I was, and am, an enigma amongst straight people. The person I am on the outside fails to hold up to the idea of being queer people perceive. I’m not a femme fatale that fucks women on the weekends for the pleasure of men. But I’m also not a butch lesbian, who the world calls gender confused. I don’t fit the language of being gay. The problem with that is when you don’t comply with external expectations and don’t fit into the language around an identity, people start to force that language on you. And sooner or later, you start to force it onto yourself.

I can’t remember his name, the boy who thought he had authority over my identity. I was at a Halloween party with the same ex-friend and her new friends. This boy came over to me (Ethan, Carter, something) and asked me, “What are you?” Or something to that effect, as I was a couple of drinks in and only vaguely remember the sound of the words. What I remember clearly, though, is standing in front of this man who I barely knew and being asked to tell him who I like to fuck. I told him I was queer, and he asked me what that meant. I could only tell him what it meant to me, that kissing a woman felt different than kissing a man, but that didn’t mean I couldn’t love both. Blame it on my shitty taste in my previous partners or the alcohol and club lights that typically accompanied my experience with a woman, but I was exploring my interest in women. Well, he didn’t like that. He told me so verbatim.

He then said, “I’ll tell you what you are. You’re a lesbian with a sprinkle of dick.”

The language had come so easily from his mouth but had hit me like a bullet. Was he right? Was I just a confused straight girl, a budding bisexual, a lesbian with a need for male validation, hence the sprinkle of dick? The queer identity I had recently started exploring seemed wrong now because I was being told it was wrong. I was



trapped by the expectations of what I had to be and the language that defined this small part of myself. And I let it consume me.

I didn't want to be lesbian with a sprinkle of dick, so I did the only rational thing: I chopped off all my hair. I started wearing men's clothing and stopped wearing makeup. I no longer felt comfortable being femme because I knew that image of me failed to conform to language. The image I was attempting to portray wasn't me but an accumulation of the expectations of language surrounding my identity. I didn't want to be imagined, I wanted to be known.

Language is the greatest weapon of definition: fag, femme, confused, deranged, lesbian, bisexual, queer, sinner. Language causes me to collide with the expectations of my assigned definition. As language grows, so do its expectations. So, although there are more labels to choose from, that is still what they are. As I age and experience the unimagined of the queer existence, I have come to reject language and its labels. So much language and yet not nearly enough to encapsulate the entirety of human experience, let alone the diversity of queer life. Not nearly enough to explain to others who I am, who I fuck and why. Audre Lorde tells us, "poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought" (37). However, poetry is not about the construction of language; instead, it is a "sanctuar[y] and spawning ground" for growth (Lorde 37). Poetry is where we abandon language and put our hopes for the future like Sappho once did:

I declare
That later on,
Even in an age unlike our own,
Someone will remember who we are (Sappho 87)

I want to be remembered and imagined as a sycamore tree in a poem that loved and was loved by a great many people, untethered by the expectations of language. Simply, a neutral existence of love.