

## ETYMOLOGY

### BOY

noun, often attributive | 'bɔɪ'

1. a: male child from birth to adulthood

My father was once hit by a car  
while on his way to visit a girl on the Westside  
of Detroit.

His teenage hormones guiding him into traffic  
body laying full on blacktopped streets and sure  
he was okay but named a foolish boy.

Foolish boy met my mother  
while they were bubble gum smack young.  
My mother noting all the girls foolishly

batting their eyes at my father. I have no  
reference for how they became a couple  
just that they became pregnant with me

and soon after but before I came a marriage  
would mark their blessed union by God in a  
church knowing some of his secrets.

My father, foolish man  
with wandering hands always found another  
body to mark as home.

My grandfather apologized  
to my mother, for every moment my father  
fell short of being a "good" man.

On summer nights, he'd sit on the porch  
with her and say *I'm sorry, daughter*  
*I don't know what's wrong with my boy.*

- b: Son.

When our mothers no longer call us home  
the night swallows our bodies into a rhythm

endless, our movements strobing as the disco

ball hangs with obligation, my body  
a shadow casts on the wall in obligation  
knowing that BOIs don't move, stand

in a pair of Girbaud or Sean John jeans with  
braids tucked neatly under the 59Fifty as T,  
an older stud ushers us into a night we're sure

to forget. Dark stank clinging to my spine,  
DJ begs us to forget our first names, I drink  
and forget the way it feels when a mother no

longer calls you hers or when a mother forgets  
you have her first name, this ritual of giving to  
the night sky with prayer tucked underneath

my tongue, I beg to find my father here – savior  
who calls me his Son, a boy who smiles the same  
way he did when he was young

once I tried on my father's clothes found his gun  
in the closet and thought *this is what makes a man*  
so I tried on the gun, pulled and pulled until my

face became metal, my mouth the hollow home  
a bullet each time a woman said I was worthy  
of love then said *son, you trippin'*

‘b0i’

1. a: term coined to describe masculine presenting queer Black folk

When used referring to my body, I origami  
crane, fold in the intricate shape  
of masculinity – see my delicate angles

line drawn perfect, the folding is a narrative  
belonging to BOIs like me, who craft themselves  
a worthy fit to hold a woman the way boys do

with a gentleness incapable of breaking

until the same woman laughs at the soft  
parts rendering all BOIs worthy of a joke

my mother says she didn't raise a son  
as her back hand makes any argument  
fall down my throat.