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STAGE

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K.O. & V.

A SPACE FOR US

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K. U. & V.

A camera shutter opens, then closes and a moment is captured, a fragment of life suspended in silver and light. But what is a photograph if not an encounter of some kind? It both reveals and withholds, speaks and silences. Across London and Nairobi, across borders both geographic and ideological, Kairo and Vela have been building an archive of trans-masculine existence, one that refuses invisibility, that insists on presence.

A photograph is never just a record. It is a way of seeing, a way of framing, a way of determining who and what deserves to be remembered. The images in 'A Space For Us' do not merely document as they assert. Each portrait is a declaration: I am here. I have always been here.

To exist as a trans-masculine person is to live in a world that is both hyper-fixated on your body yet determined to erase you. The statistics bear this out: in the UK, transphobic hate crimes have surged in the past five years. In Kenya, where homosexuality remains criminalised, trans people move through a landscape of state violence and social hostility. But statistics flatten experience. What they cannot capture are the gestures of resilience, the intricate negotiations of survival, the small joys that sustain.

198 Contemporary Arts & Learning (198CAL Gallery), where I have been recently appointed as the Artistic Director, has long been a home for those navigating the margins. Since its inception in 1988, it has stood against the erasures of history, providing a platform for voices the establishment would rather ignore. In the wake of the Brixton Uprising, 198 emerged as a space for radical expression, a site of resistance against systemic oppression. When Windrush elders were told they did not belong, 198CAL bore witness. Now, as far-right ideologies gain ground across Europe and trans lives are reduced to political talking points, spaces like 198CAL are more than institutions. They become acts of defiance.

In my own work for HAN publication, an archive and publication dedicated to dyke, lesbian, trans, non-binary and gnc communities and their creativity, I explored the borders of gender, geography, and perception in conversation with multidisciplinary artist, curator, and DJ Rabz Lansiquot. We spoke about crossing over, about stepping beyond imposed definitions, about claiming space in places that were never designed for us. This project is another extension of that same principle.

The portraits in 'A Space For Us' are not just about survival. They are about something more: the act of flourishing. These are not images of victims, nor symbols of struggle. They are complex, contradictory, fully alive. Yet, exhaustion lingers beneath the surface. To be trans+ in this moment is to fight for breath in an atmosphere thick with hostility. The so-called 'debate' around trans rights is not a debate at all. It is a relentless cycle of dehumanisation masquerading as discourse. But 'A Space For Us' does not seek to persuade. It does not beg for recognition. Instead, it refuses to look away.

Gathering is itself an act of resistance. To come together—to be seen, to be held, to be known—is to reject the notion that one must endure alone. 'A Space For Us' is not just a collection of photographs, nor just a book. It is a room where stories are exchanged, where understanding is built. It is the feeling of a hand on your shoulder, the warmth of recognition in a stranger's eyes. It is, simply, a refusal to disappear.

These images witness. They remember. They carve out space where there was none before. And in doing so, they ask us to imagine: What might it mean to live in a world where such a space is not just carved out, but given freely? Where trans+ lives are not documented as evidence, but celebrated as fact?

As I am writing about this project in 2025, I am once again writing against a backdrop of escalating violence. Resistance is not always loud. Sometimes, it is found in the simple act of turning a page, of seeing yourself reflected back, of knowing you are not alone.



K.U. & V.

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US

Koei

FOR

SPACE

A

I was living somewhere before where I am.
Does everyone know me? Do they know?
Whose name is this? Hii si jina yako—
Whose name is this? It's Tabitha's name. I'm Koei.

No... no... my sister's name. She's gone.

I

II

When I was 16 someone wrote me a letter
About being trans

And I took it home with me and put it into a drawer
And forgot about it until my mother found me.

She took me to a prayer and they prayed all night

Until I went away, I went away.

I went away to someone who talked to someone else
And when I came back we didn't talk about it.
Not hostile— not accepting either.

K.U. & V.

And I'm more confident. I'm in a better place
I'm in a good place.

Zac

US

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A



I

At the Lincoln Bus Station

A beautiful couple
Goes on the platform

Hand in Hand.

Her shoulders curve in a way that feels familiar
Because it's my girlfriend,
With another man.

My fist meets his
The way our hands used to,

She and I,
Passionate, Intentional,
With the force of a rocket.

Running feels like winning.

II

My favourite time of year is when I'm riding my bike,

Topless,

Cycling from the Sainsbury's
Experiencing pure bliss.

I am a super biological superhero,
Past judging eyes and hardened hearts.

I have only love to heal,
And the wind, rushing past me,

A blanket,
A home.

K.U. & V.



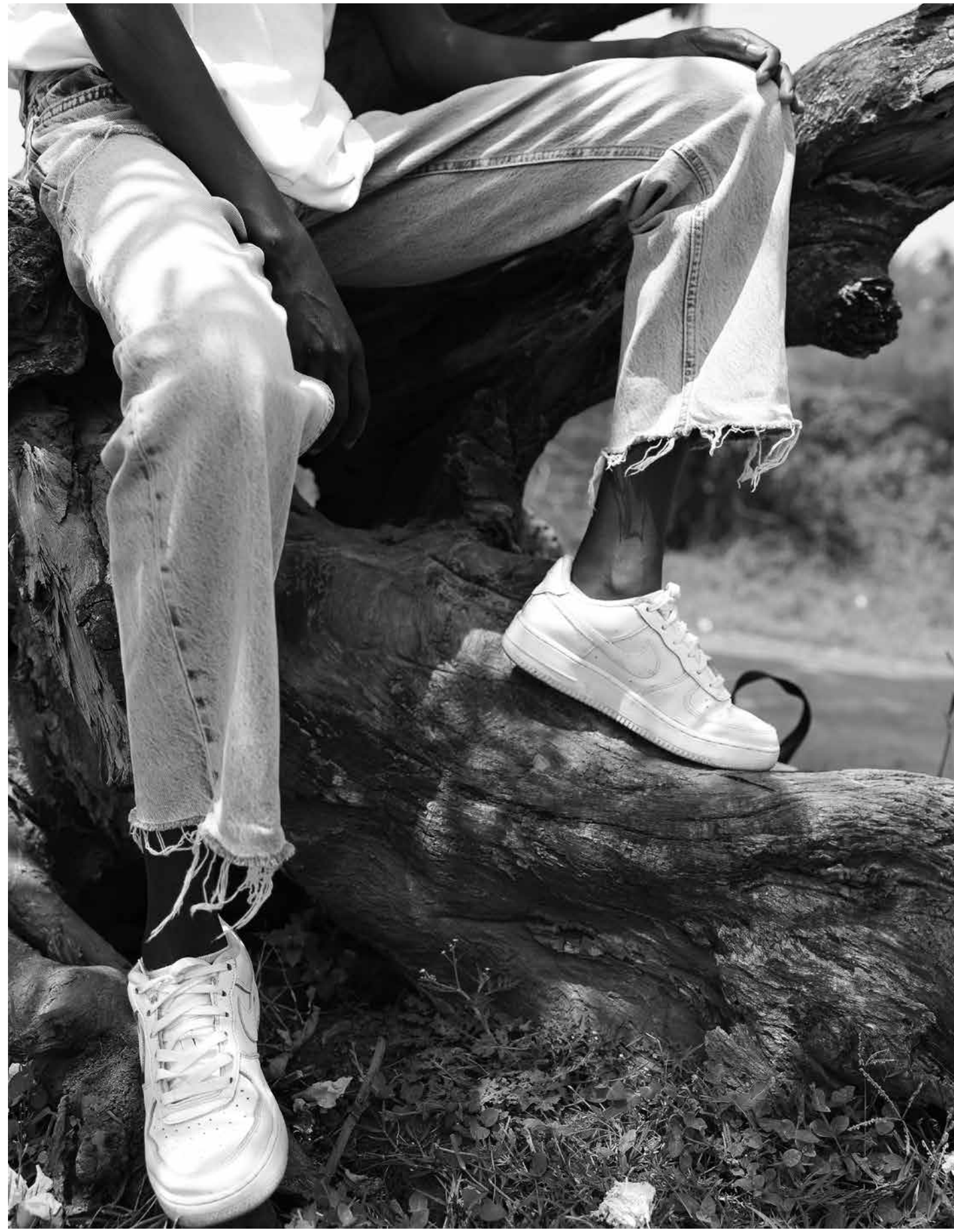
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K.U. & V.

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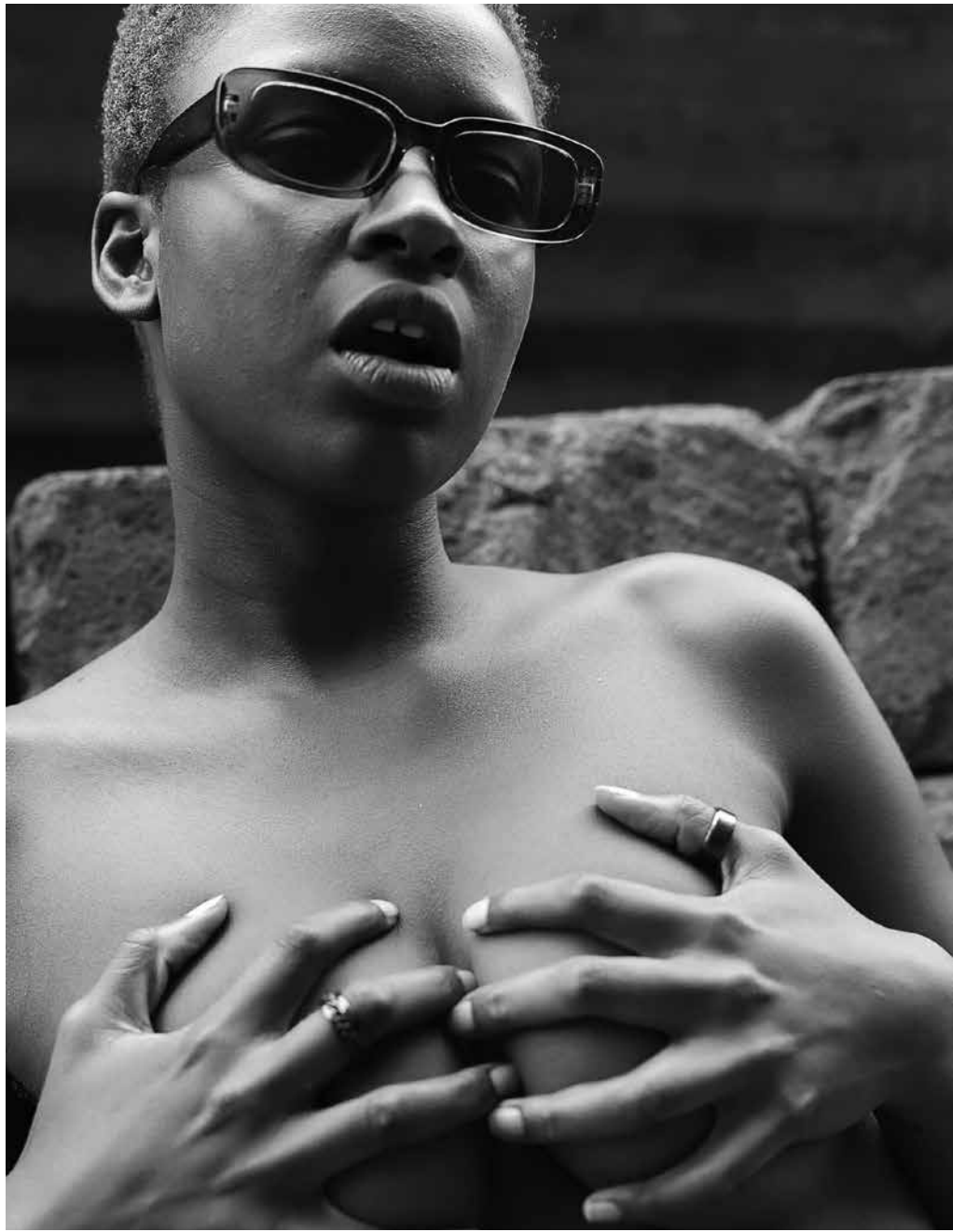
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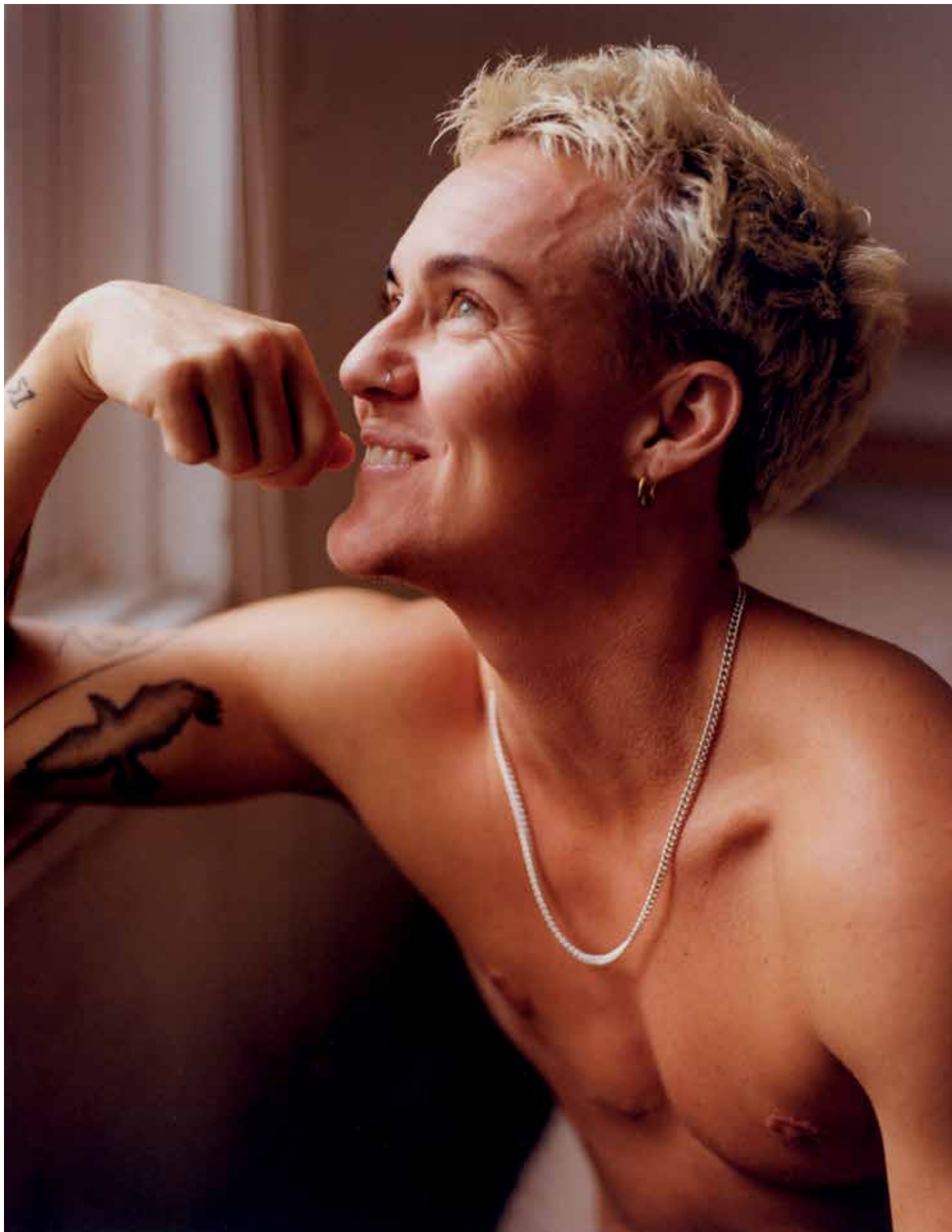
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K.U. & V.

MK

I

At the building site
they wouldn't let me touch the stones
Unless I looked like the man I said I was.

So I bound my chest every morning

And worked twice as hard as anyone else.
And on Sunday I used those arms to put on a skirt
That my cousins said looks strange,
That my cousins said doesn't suit me.

So I ran to the tree
on my own,

And I prayed.

II

If she knew or she didn't know—

My grandmother bought me vests and boxers
From when I was 10 years old,

And I wore them

To explore the life I wanted.
Knowing what I know now,
I hear what she was saying.

I am special, I am valid,

A rare breed to find.
There is no photocopy

Of me.

I

My parents are christian and catholic and
My father hugged me and said you know,

All of you are my children. The child that died,
and the reborn,
Evance.

It is still the same child, dad,
Just the body that changed

To be Beautiful.

And my father said I am going to protect you,
Anyone who has questions can come through me.

Now I know how to be a human being.
Now I know how to be a man.

II

At 37

There are 30 years of luggage to unpack

And it doesn't take a day—
People still say that they remember my face.

What happened? they ask.
I say it's nature.

I remember when I woke up

And the first thing I felt was pain
And a disconnect between my mind and my body.
And I wanted to see, and I couldn't see.

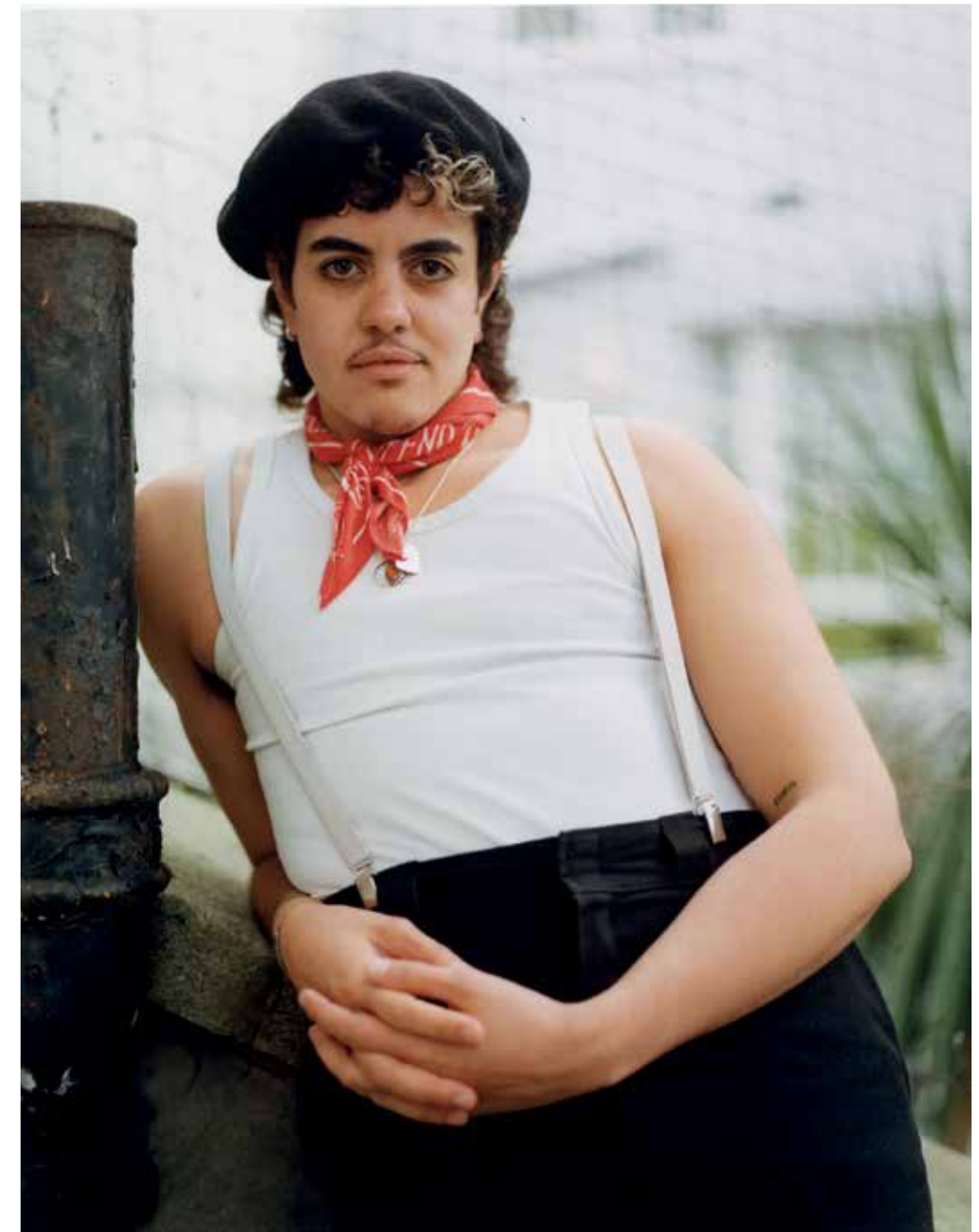
Yet I felt it,

The pain of suicide disappearing.
The thin line that threatened to make or break me,

I reached it,

and I crossed.

After that I am contented.





K.U. & V.

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Tichi

I

They teach in Christian Religious Education that there are sexual sins—

Adultery, rape, bestiality,
Homosexuality

So when girls in the year below us were caught kissing each other
No one could imagine being the evil person that did that.

Now I kiss girls, I have sex with girls, I enjoy it,
And when I told my first boyfriend what I did he told me that it's okay

It's okay, it's okay, it's okay.

I dream of a house of my own, tujenge nyumba,
A sleepover everyday.

They also teach you that sex is sacred.

So I dream of being a stripper, a pole dancer, a sex worker.
I'm at the top of the food chain and
As I talk, I hear my myself

II

I walk through town and I am in a field

Daydreaming.

Catcallers, bus conductors
Don't exist to me

I haven't seen you—
I can't hold on to you

When there is trans goodness.
When I can be ambiguous

And exactly who I am.

Oliver

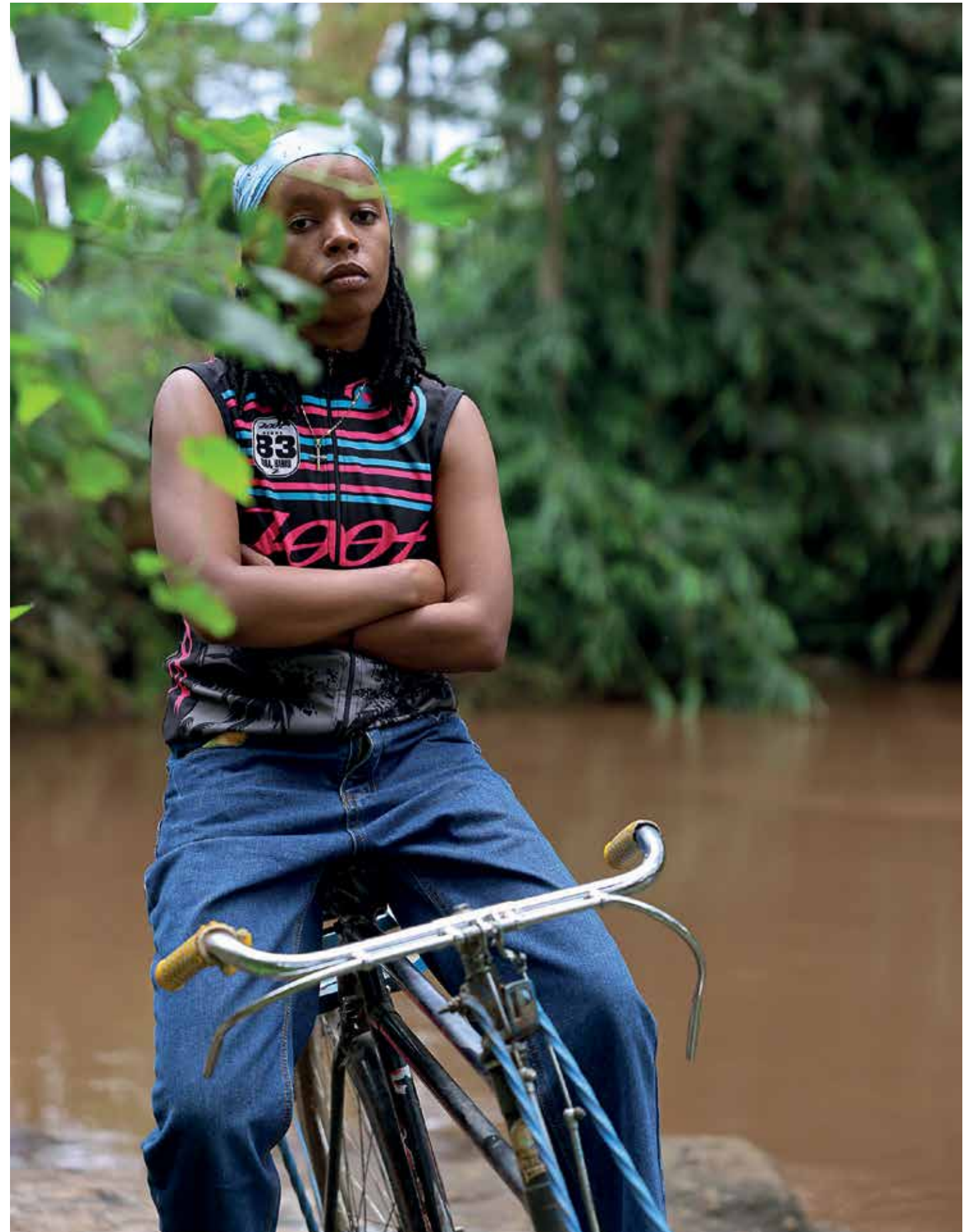
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I

In forging my own masculinity
I abandon every sense of place

That doesn't feel like a home.

Who is a good father?
A man that knows himself,
Or a man that lets others know him?

II

Eight years on T

Makes a third of my life
That I will remember
As concrete.

I'm going
To keep going
Until it's half of my life,
Until the needles in my mind,
Are just a memory,



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US

Olga

FOR

SPACE

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I

Friends, sometimes, can be your biggest enemies.

I sit down and have a meeting with myself
and decide it myself.

That my time is the best time.

This thing, they say, it doesn't exist:
You won't prosper. You need to pray.

But in the nightclubs I meet myself,
I love myself.

Despite what people talk.

I won't be discouraged.

II

It's coming,
But it's getting lost.

It's coming,
But it's getting lost.

I'll get there,
You know.

It's coming.

K.U. & V.

Osewe

US

FOR

SPACE

A



I

If you treat me as a man,
I will be a man.
I will be my father's son.

If I have a child
I will also be my father's son.

I birthed my child out of love,
And I will have another, out of love.

My father always told me:
Whatever happens in life, survive.

Survive.

I awake in the early morning
To watch my lover and my child
And I tell myself to live
For the sake of these people.
Jitume.

I will send myself
To the edges of the world for you.
And one day, I promise,
We will save enough
And live in a city that loves us.

Unlike the jobs I work
I won't have to prove
That I can fix it:
We're already here.

II

He calls me mom,
Mom. I love you and I'm proud of you.
I love you the way you are

Even if it doesn't make other people happy.

How do you see me?
Am I a mirror?

K.U. & V.

K.U. & V.

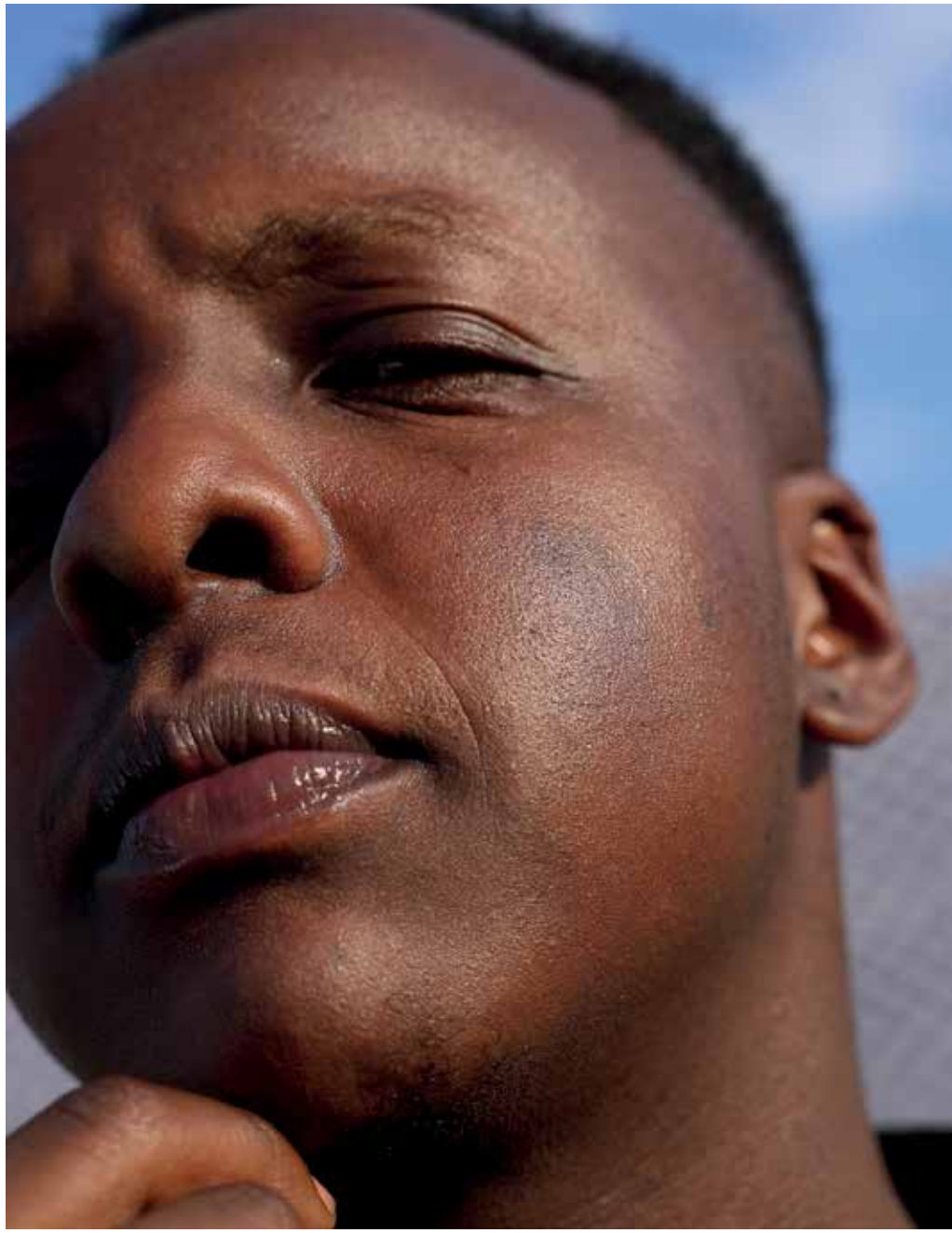
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Mary Caroline

I

Can I have your trousers?
I'd feel better in them.

Could you brother,
Sit with me?

I'm so happy to see
That you're like me.

Could we know each other?

II

I've gone through a lot since I started knowing myself.
You understand me,
More than anyone ever could,

My child.

There's a whole universe that welcomes us

To be safe, to be seen.

I'm so glad that you're here.

K.U. & V.

Joey

US

FOR

SPACE

A

K.U. & V.



I

Father,

What have I got to confess to?

Guilt and Shame lay heavy
On my conscience,
More than you can ever know.

In the church I feel your lasting presence
Tearing at my soul—
I will light a candle.

For my father.

Keep him Safe.

II

Bodies—

Vibrating at the Ponyboy,
Pumping at the gym,
Pushing against the dark earth
Of the forest.

Testaments to life
On this planet,
To the sanctity of the earth,
And of ourselves.



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Finn

I

That was you walking,
When you were young.
In the garden with the backwards cap on.

The nicest thing to do is to
Try and enjoy the waiting,
The things that are happening
And will happen
Are always meant to be.

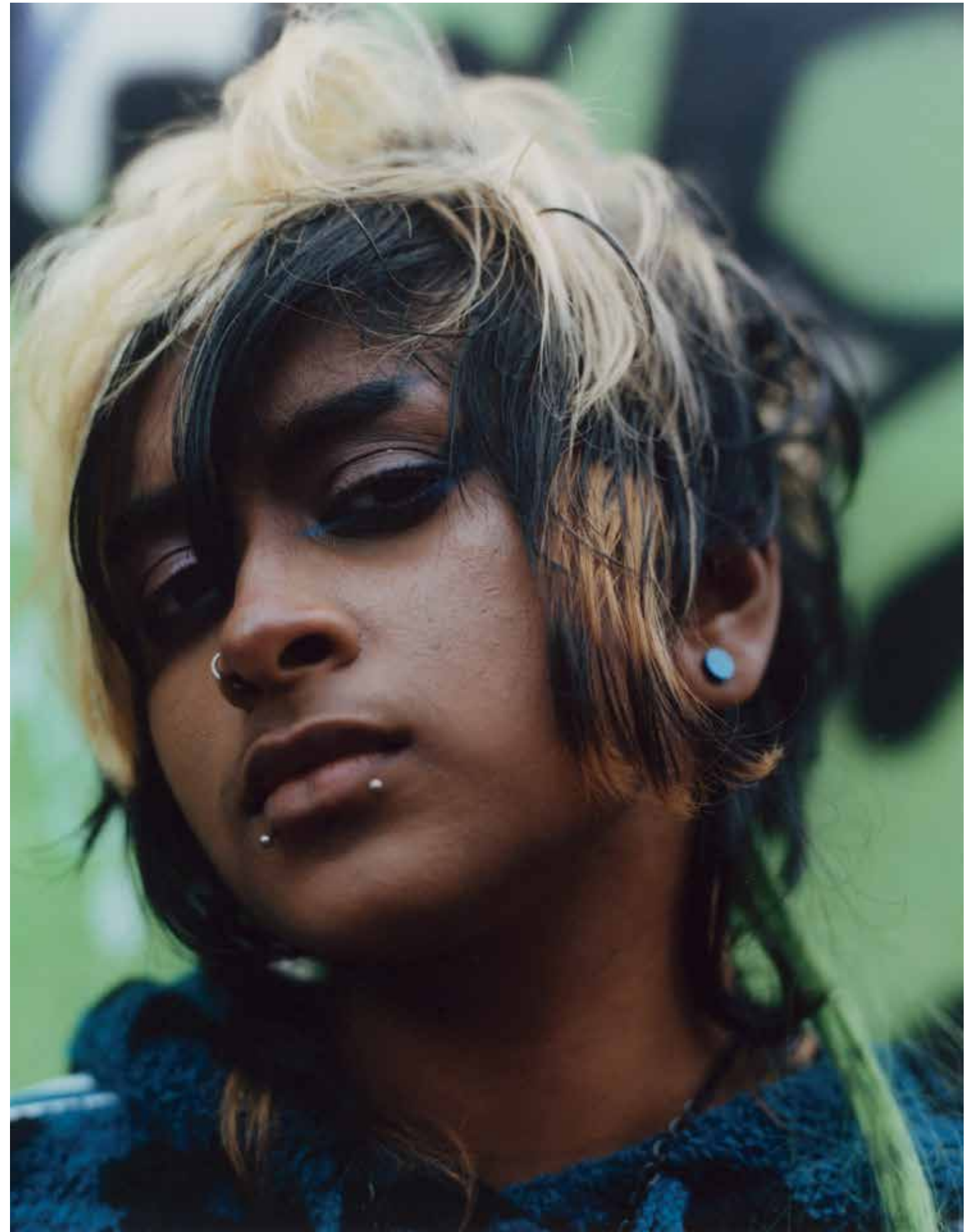
II

Summer all over my body,
The sea, all over.
The lochs are chilling,
Cold as ice from still water.

I trace the memory across my back
And down my chest:
I revel in the newness.

On infinite directions.
I bask in the euphoria
Of being free.

K.U. & V.



The feeling used to be
an adrenaline rush

Is now

Shifting shape

Is now

Who I always am:

Words don't always exist

Between us:

You, the observer,
Me, your mirror.

I can, I will, I am, change,
What do you see?

I

II

A joy,

To be here.
A Confidence.
A Will.

A Joy.



K.U. & V.

A

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US



K.U. & V.

A

SPACE

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US

FOR

SPACE

A

Miri

I

Pictures for my memories,
For the love that's coming.

Portraits for the proof
That I've become what I was going to become,

That my children may witness the passage of time,

Blossoming like early spring,

The waves of joy.

II

I've stepped into a manhood
that I've created for myself,
By myself,

Unborn into these ideas,
I am able to build my own
Reality.

It scares you, doesn't it,
To see me climb the wall.

Escape over it
Into a parallel universe.

K.U. & V.

Tom

US

FOR

SPACE

A



I

In my fathers final weeks he forgets
The word for river.

He rode his bike and crashed it
And forgot where he was,

Forgot that he was in the midst of leaving us,
Dissolving.

In those final weeks of giving my father's body away
I felt my own beginning,

Wings rising from his ashes,
A man being reborn.

His final breaths against the tiny mirror held against his nose.

I take them in.
As my birthright.

II

While walking him from one room to another
My father's face changes.

Out the fog that has settled between us
He reaches out to touch my face

In recognition.

Out of the fog that has settled between us
Light glimmers.

And from the upturned corners
of the mouth God blessed him with
Comes the confession.

Oh, I have a son.

K.U. & V.

K.U. & V.

A

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K.U. & V.

Pion

I

I'm loyal to what I choose,
I live without fear.

Hakuna kitu kizuri kama kuwa wewe,
Sikujificha.

Hope is found in achievement,
In passing from one room
Into the other.

Before queerness, before transness
We are human beings—
Complicated shapes, but I will keep insisting.
Maisha Lamia iende.

Life must keep moving—
With me in it.

II

Kutoka Hapa

Kufika Mwisho,
Hautapata watu watano
Mwenye wanakuuliza
Maswali.

From here to infinity
There is no one
Who won't ask you questions.

The more I answer,
The more the water flows.
One day we will reach
Understanding.

Cam

US

FOR

SPACE

A

I

Riding down the street with my shirt off I am not bereft of anything,
Except the feeling of absence from my own body.

The wheels turn, are my mind, good in every way
To be somewhere I belong,
In a smooth meditation
Of the beautiful life I have made for myself.

II

I remember when Elliot Page came out,
And my heart sank into quietness, that
First thought heavy, "He can never escape—

Never slip free from eyes and echoes." The world

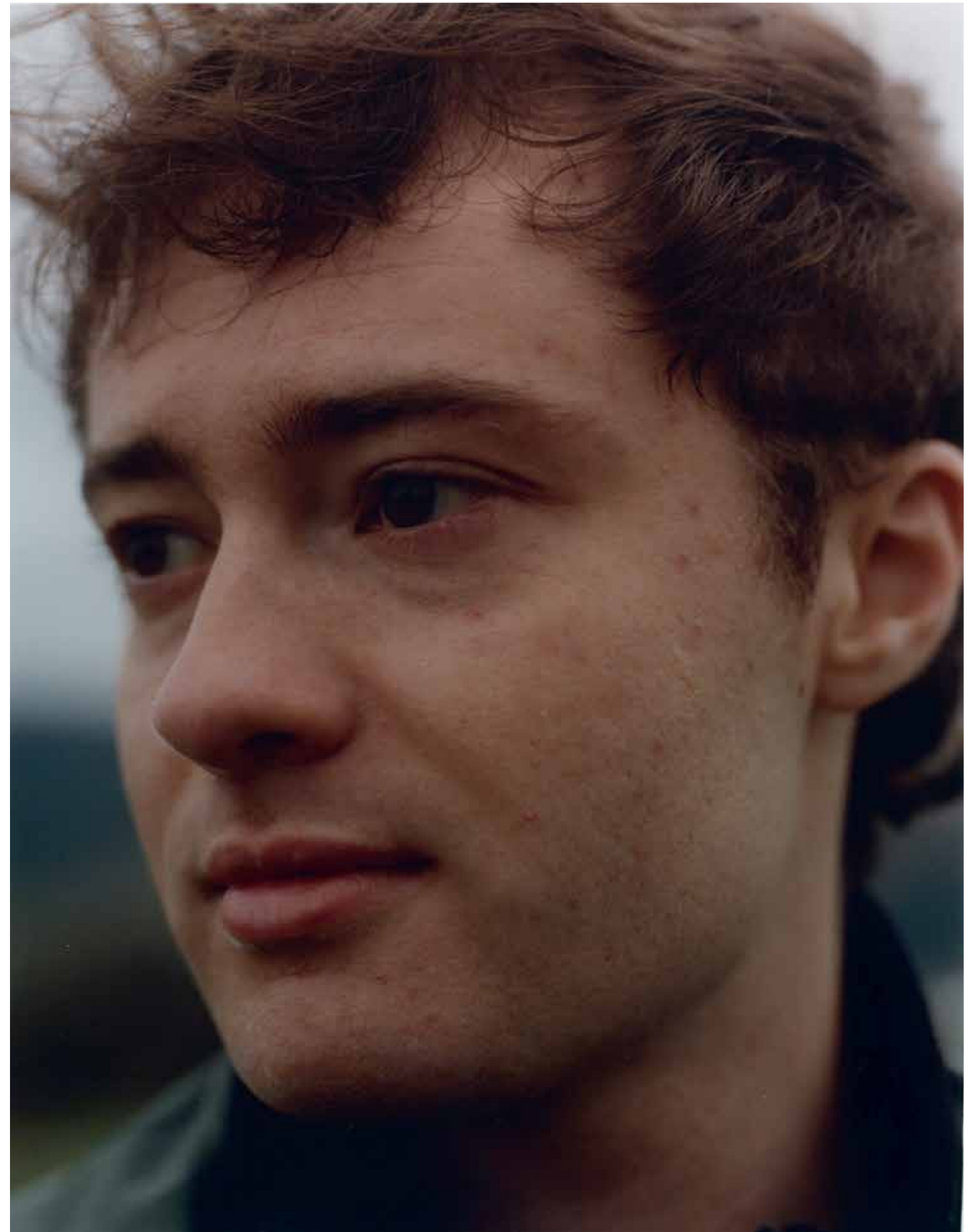
Etched a permanent Spotlight, bright, relentless,
Heavy as stone.

I too, once walked visibly, early in transition's glow—

But the silence crept in slowly, an unspoken shift to shadows.
The quieter path, less visible, less loud, and true in subtler ways,

Where knowing is invitation,
And acceptance quietly since.

K.U. & V.





K.U. & V.

A

SPACE

FOR

US



I returned from the States late December of last year with a stack of Robin Hobb fantasy books that were my mom's from the early 2000s. I felt kind of weird taking them from her, considering she's unlikely to ever see them again. But I like books and I like not paying for books, so the pros outweigh the cons. I recently had the pleasure of chatting to Kairo Urovi and Vela, two

photographers brought together for the project A Space For Us, a collaborative initiative with a focus on acting as a site and space of gathering for the trans-masc communities across Kenya and the UK. Their work together, facilitated through British Council funding, intertwines their distinct yet overlapping experiences, building a transnational conversation that resists erasure and affirms the necessity of self-authored narratives. In the multitudes of photographic imagery and recorded conversations, a sort of playful dialogue emerges in which the politics of visibility and representation are pushed beyond meaning and into something more tangible, resonant, and evocative. There's this myth that in visibility we find safety, that recognition brings protection. And while photography can be utilised as a tool for archiving trans experiences and bringing trans perspectives to the fore, there is an inherent violence rooted in its colonialist history. So what role, then, does photography play in shaping trans narratives? Kairo shares that, "Sometimes, I do feel like we are just reduced to being a body. And I think that's when the person behind the camera doesn't really give agency to the sitter, the subject, the collaborator. But when it is used in a way that is empowering for both parties, it's empowering for the viewer." A Space For Us acts, then, as a site of reclamation: rather than reducing, homogenising, and narrowing the frame of trans experience, these photographs and interviews thwart normative archival practices by foregrounding trans agencies. By honouring oral traditions and other modes of storytelling not predicated upon white cis het values, a virtual, ephemeral space is created where, "being vulnerable, being joyful in ways that you can't express, or fucking up" is welcomed and celebrated, they both share.

On the inside sleeve of the third in the series, Fool's Fate, I was surprised to find something that didn't quite belong: what appeared to be a plane ticket. I didn't recognise it. It was old and green and from 2004. Each portrait in the series, whether flagrantly joyful and silly, or

thoughtful and introspective, acts as a tether; building bridges in the way a story in Nairobi can hold resonance in a flat in London. Reflecting on the importance of building global solidarity with open and fluid collaborations, Kairo says, "Our histories are the first to be erased or the first to not be listened to, so to have two people behind the camera who see you is important." There is a shared language here of not just resilience from the heavy weight of histories negated, but of tenderness and intimacy that is cultivated and grown as a result. Vela says, "My relationship with these guys has always been. It's more of a family rather than just a project. There was a lot of trust, even before we approached these people, because of the relationships that we have created and how we have managed to be there for each other, socially and fully and wholly." Through their work, Vela and Kairo reclaim photography as a site of care rather than extraction, emphasising mutual trust over voyeurism. This project functions, in many ways, as a living, changing archive; one that seeks to safeguard trans-masc communities as well as challenge traditional documentary practices, which often position the photographer as an external observer rather than an invested community member.

There was one for my dad, one for my sister, and one for me, but with my dead name on it of course, because it's from 2004. I would have been six. We went to San Francisco apparently. I think I remember the hills and the way the cars bled into the buildings bled into the tarmac bled into the soles of my shoes.

Brighton [UK]		Marvel	Nairobi [Kenya]	 	US	Oliver	Edinburgh [UK]	 	Havi	Nairobi [Kenya]	  
Mary Caroline	 	Montecarlo	Kisumu [Kenya]	  	FOR	Koei	Nairobi [Kenya]	 	Valia	Edinburgh [UK]	
Oumah		Lucas	Brighton [UK]	 		Olga	Kisumu [Kenya]		Kimani	Nairobi [Kenya]	
Cazimi		George	Brighton [UK]		SPACE	Cyd	Nairobi [Kenya]	 	Lee Junior	Kisumu [Kenya]	 
Dee	 	Evance	Eldoret [Kenya]	   	A	Osewe	Kisumu [Kenya]		Zac	Edinburgh [UK]	 
Jacy	  	Miri	Brighton [UK]	 		Pion	Mombasa [Kenya]		Finn	Glasgow [UK]	 
Tom	 	Dee	Nakuru [Kenya]	 		Phillippos	Manchester [UK]	 		Glasgow [UK]	
Tau	 	MK	Kisumu [Kenya]			Joey	Glasgow [UK]				
Tichi	 	Cam	Glasgow [UK]	 	K.U. & V.O.	Nyx	Bristol [UK]	 			

A Space For Us

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Stix Two
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printed by Alex Picasso Messer
London College of Fashion, London
with thanks to Mary Jennings
printed in March 2025

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Dee (Nakuru)
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Havi
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Lucas
Mary Caroline
Miri
MK
Montecarlo
Nyx
Olga
Oliver
Osewe
Oumah
Phillippos
Pion
Tau
Thom
Tichi
Valia
Zac

thanks to Photobook Cafe, London
Two Grapes, Nairobi
TEI, Nairobi



this project is supported by British Council


Kairo Urovi & Vela