Think before you speak.
We are tired of cleaning up after you. Of wondering what you actually meant. We are tired of being the only ones to follow up, to instigate conversations, to consider how our actions make others feel. Do you default to defending your actions? Do you often say that you didn’t mean it that way, and somehow suppose that makes things OK? Accept the fact that we’ve heard it too many times, that phrases like “I’m Sorry” feel forced, and phony. Think before you act. Your actions are powerful, and we hope that you use those powers for good. Be sincere. Be sweet. Stare down the things in yourself you don’t like, and make steps to change them. Lift up, and give space to women, queer, trans, and non-binary people. Consider the space you take up, be willing to give up some of yours to make way for others. If you have a platform, use it to support those who don’t. Don’t speak for them, give them the fucking mic. It’s ok if you didn’t think of these things before, I hope that you start to think of them now. It’s ok to ask questions, but don’t always expect answers, guidance, and emotional labor. Listen. Seek out information on your own. Unlearn the bad, relearn the good, and teach yourself as much as you can, by looking for resources on your own. It is your responsibility to work on yourself. We are rooting for you.

nightshade
No. 2

licking our wounds:
healing from gender violence on pittsburgh’s left

nightshadepitt@gmail.com
The lines are being drawn today. Watch where you stand.

The contents of this zine were created by a variety of people in Pittsburgh's leftist community. We hope readers can reflect on how each one of can uphold damaging behaviors and societal patterns. There are many changes that need to be made to eliminate forms of gendered violence that people experience both in and out of organizing spaces. We hope that this zine has initiated the processes of change and healing.

Until a world where all of this is obsolete,

-NIGHTSHADE

ANTI-COPYRIGHT  REPRODUCE FREELY
We are sick of being quiet, we are sick of waiting. We are sick of being beaten, raped, dismissed, ignored. We believe that love, friendship, bricks and fists are all necessary when confronting systems of oppression and the people that uphold them. We will take back the streets into the hands of no one and everyone. We will soak each other in courage. To rejoice, to rebel, to love, to rage, in solidarity.

We reserve the right to exclude anyone from Nightshade, regardless of their identity, who is a known or alleged perpetrator or misogynist. Nightshade is not simply a collection of people with non-cis-male identities. We are united because we choose to tie our futures to the collective fates of women, trans, femme and other gender oppressed folks. Our lives depend on the collective treatment and liberation of all feminine and gender variant identities. If you are in any way an obstacle to creating thriving conditions for women, trans and queer folks you are not on our side. You have no business standing next to us or pretending to be our friends and “allies”.

Nightshade is a collective in Pittsburgh, PA writing and organizing against the capitalist hetero-patriarchy that permeates modern society at every level. We are dedicated to providing physical, digital and written safer spaces for women and queer people, as well as engaging in direct action against patriarchal oppression.

CONTENT WARNING
Rape, Sexual Assault, Misogyny, Abuse
This piece is addressed to those who might secretly see a part of themselves in the perps described in this zine; to the men who hold excessive power in social scenes and revolutionary movements; to non-men who have allied themselves even unknowingly to the patriarchy through their deeds.

Recently in leftist circles, there has been a great deal of expounding upon the idea that since the inauguration of Trump we have entered a new era. An era of increased police repression of activists and bloated charges against them; a time where the far right is on the rise and prepared to go toe-to-toe with antifascists in the streets. Yet so much remains the same. Immigrants and their families still live under the constant fear of deportation at the hands of ICE. The snuffing out of vibrant Black lives by the slavecatchers-turned-police continues. And, as I plan to talk about in detail below, the functions of the patriarchy continue to be expressed even in the supposedly “safe” spaces we hold dear. This includes local music scenes, and of particular interest to us, “anarchist” organizing spaces. We in Nightshade have seen this expressed most clearly in two forms: sexual violence and imbalance of decision-making power. In later pages of this zine you will hear our specific accusations.

How should things be expected to turn out any differently? Spaces that boast no formal structures for decision making cannot help but function on the basis of the existing power structures of whiteness, misogyny, and transphobia that shape the world we live in. A group that eschews the idea of leaders will end up having them anyway: just listen for the loudest voice and you’ve found your leader, probably a white person and probably someone who is read as masculine.

Many of you that call yourselves anarchists have lost sight of the concept that anarchism was never supposed to be against all authority, but against unjustified authority; not for chaos but for an order created among peers. Bakunin, though rightly marginalized and castigated today for his anti-semitism and other failings, was at least gesturing in the right direction when he said:

---

\[\text{We fight...}\]

To abolish sexual assault.
To abolish prisons.
To abolish the couple-form.
To abolish the nuclear family.
To abolish gender violence.
To abolish sexism.
To abolish transphobia/homophobia/queerphobia.
To abolish hetero-normativity.
To abolish trans-misogyny.
To abolish silence.
To abolish the boys-club.
To live.
To be heard.
To listen.
To cry.
To hold.
To exist without fear.
To set fire.
To love.

---
"Does it follow that I drive back every authority? The thought would never occur to me. When it is a question of boots, I refer the matter to the authority of the cobbler; when it is a question of houses, canals, or railroads, I consult that of the architect or engineer. For each special area of knowledge I speak to the appropriate expert." - *What is Authority*

As women, as trans and/or queer people, we say something that might sound blasphemous to some ears: we demand that you recognize our authority. We don't have all the answers, but we have perspectives that are alien to your experience, and our movements must integrate all our experiences and translate them into praxis if we are to have any chance of victory, of liberation for us all. We must begin from where we stand, and we stand amid a landscape of silenced voices and broken consent.

**Not only will we not be silent about sexual violence and informal hierarchies within our movement, we will take action to abolish them.**

One practice that I myself want to try and advance would seek to be a concrete jumping off point that would contribute to this open-ended project. I propose a sort of permanent spokescouncil, essentially a congress of representatives from local revolutionary and activist organizations that are committed to anti-capitalist, anti-white-supremacy, anti-patriarchy struggle outside the apparatus of the state and its extensions in the NGOs and political parties. Within this framework, said groups could appraise each other of their activities and cooperate where it makes sense. At the same time, groups would be able to critique one another's politics and actions using their own experience and position class/race/gender hierarchies, so that reactionary tendencies can be pointed out and squashed. Nightshade would be one voice among many, we do not claim to speak for all women, all trans people, or all queer people, especially since most of our core membership is white.

Recognition of the authority of non-cis-men within revolutionary organizations will not guarantee victory, but its absence will make it impossible. You say that all of our struggles are supposed to connect and support one another. Start acting like it.

---

-Greer, of Nightshade and Pittsburgh Communists
WE UNDERSTAND THAT GENDERED LANGUAGE IS INHERENTLY PROBLEMATIC.
WE UNDERSTAND THAT THERE ARE INFINITE WAYS TO BE MASCULINE-
FEMININE-OR NEITHER- OR BOTH...
But the societal hatred of and violence toward "femininity," and non-conforming
genders exists in our communities, where the voices & bodies of "feminine" and
non-conforming people are silenced & abused.
IT IS FROM THIS UNDERSTANDING,
ALTHOUGH SOME OF US MAY IDENTIFY AS "MAN," THAT WE HAVE COME TOGETHER AS NOmEN
"NOT-MAN" AS defined by LIES volume 1:

"Not-man" cannot be understood as shorthand for "women & others." It is, rather than a collection of
non-male identities, a way of referring to the product of gender as a relationship of exploitation. "It is nonsensical
to describe not-men as doing something — anything — or having any unity," because not-man is a position of
silence, an exclusion from subjectivity as it is put to work within gender and patriarchy. This cannot be confined to
any group of bodies or identities, and to conflate it with a unitary womanhood would be an error on the order of
conflating "proletarian" with "industrial worker." None of us are not-men by virtue of anatomy or identification,
rather not-men is a position we are forced into, to greater or lesser degree as the recipients of gendered violence.

You make excuses for your behavior, you use
other's abusive past to nullify or distract from yours. You call out abusers, while making no effort to acknowledge your own abuse. You are terrified of being called out, you ask if we are cool, you say you want to talk, you rely so heavily on the emotional labor of those you've hurt in the past. You don't want to be seen as an abuser because you're afraid of excommunication, so you make public displays carefully articulated to disguise yourself and actions.
I see you. We see you.
Do you struggle to push down those intrusive thoughts, the beliefs you've tried to snub out, the judgements you try to ignore?

Do you unknowingly, or knowingly think about non-dudes as lesser than cis men?

Do you outwardly or inwardly describe women and non-men by their appearance, do you describe them as being "that crazy chick"?

Is it ingrained in you that you feel like you have to overcompensate by pushing yourself into feminist circles?

Do you ignore women and non-dudes in conversations or introductions? Do you interrupt or negate women and non-men? Do you listen? Your misogyny is showing, and you can try to hide it, but it is there, it is ugly, and it is a problem.

Effectively, the not-man cannot speak, cannot be represented with total accuracy, as it is defined through lack and absence. Still, it is a point in a relationship which is constitutive of gendered class, and discussion of it is necessary for any understanding of what it is to be a woman, man, transgender, or queer. Not-man is a means of addressing the problem of patriarchy — the way in which maleness and male subjectivity produces, appropriates, and exploits a condition of silence, death, and lack — while hopefully avoiding the presupposition of a coherent feminist or female subject. Not-maleness is constitutive of gender’s class reality — forms of womanhood and manhood exist only in relation to it — but it is irreducible to one or several classes.

So when we say "masculine" or "man"

We hope you can see far enough to know what we mean.

What follows is a collection of the experiences that women and queer people have had with gendered violence and sexism in the organizing community, DIY community, and various "radical" scenes in Pittsburgh, PA.

Much of what is written is vague to maintain anonymity of the contributors. Please do not attempt to figure out if you are written about in this zine.
We are writing to you because we hope that these words may affect your actions in the future. We are writing to you because you are the other half of our friends, our community, our lovers and our city. We are writing to you because every woman we know has experienced gendered violence and has a story to share, and we don’t think you’ll hear these stories otherwise.

We are writing to you because you are not there with us on the car rides soaked with tears after being victimized, or the nights of anxious self-doubt and subsequent affirmation that we give each other. You are not there for the meetings in which we do not swallow our words, in which we are not afraid to speak up. We are writing to you because you can’t be there.

We are writing to you because we are taking steps towards healing, and we want you to take steps with us.

You participated in an organizing group that was often facilitated by women and genderqueer folks. You consistently contested and disagreed with any propositions by those who fit this category. Speaking loudly and articulately, you contradicted everything we said. But you validated that which men and masculine presenting people proposed.

You told the women that they had too much power in the group, maybe because you’ve never been in a group where women have any type of power?

You quit the group because of “unequal power structures” and now participate in campaigns that are self led or in partnership with other cis men. Your misogyny is showing.

Remember that in every other group, classroom, lunch table, or organizing setting, we were on the other side of this, but we didn’t quit, because there was no where else to go.
You have lots of women who organize with you but they never seem to be able to steer the direction of your organizing or make anything really happen that you don't want to happen. You said that one of the women in your group feels like she can't take ownership over organizing. Why do you think that might be?

Do you encourage women to take ownership over organizing? Do you recognize ways that you have been more validated and encouraged to speak than women? Do you try to mitigate that by quieting down and encouraging the women around you to speak? Or by creating different models for organizing that validate and work with the qualities that women have been encouraged to have by our society?

Is making space for women to steer your organizing a serious part of your work or just a side thought?
I am writing to you because people like you have hurt people like me before we ever met.

Because

- Men have raped or sexually assaulted someone in almost every home I have lived in, including the houses that are full of such bright and radical young folks.

- In high school nearly every woman I knew was starving themselves or cutting themselves - letting their scarred and shrinking bodies speak for The Unspeakable Pain.

- When I was 14, 16, 18 asking to stop He always said no.

You bragged about sex you had just had with somebody we knew, you talked about how you really needed that, how you felt like a million bucks.

You talked about how you were horny, and how you could have fucked somebody 3 times by now.

But that person wasn’t in the room, or in the car.

What do you talk about when we aren’t around?

Do you refer to us as objects, too?

You use the space you take up to intimidate others.

You call dibs on certain shows, certain bands, certain spaces, groups, and circles.

You cultivate an air of “cool” and confidence to prevent other voices being heard except for your own.

You use your curated status to manipulate others.
One of your roommates was a rapist. You never told me that he had raped people. Instead, you kept inviting me over and having people at your place, drunken parties, etc. Your roommate would hit on me sometimes but luckily I mostly ignored him. Throughout the year he raped multiple women that were in our friend group. I only found out that he was a rapist from another woman who told me at the end of the year. I felt betrayed by you when I heard this. I was pissed that you would put the safety of me and other women in such jeopardy so you could... have a great party?

Your misogyny is showing.

You are someone who supposedly stands up for women and femmes. A lot of women went over to your house with a (apparently naive) feeling that we'd be safer there because we were going to be around people who had similar politics to us, people who said they did not condone sexual assault, etc. By not telling EVERYONE who walked into your house that you had a KNOWN RAPIST LIVING IN YOUR HOUSE you put tons of people at risk of BEING RAPED, and enabled him to rape others. You could have prevented things. If you cannot handle the consequences of telling people you have a rapist living with you, either 1) kick out the rapist or 2) do not have anyone over to your house. Do not enable rapists. Do not try to cover your apologists ass. Do not ever invite femmes or anyone into your house when there is a known rapist LIVING IN YOUR HOUSE.

- In high school the boys I was friends with said they would beat up anyone who raped a woman. When we went to them telling them how their friend was touching girls in ways that made them cry the boys ignored us. Years later, when their friend got kicked out of college for (only) a semester for raping a woman those boys kept it a secret and told everyone not to talk about what he'd done.

- Sitting on the phone/in bed/at the kitchen table/on the front porch/at a cafeteria table/in a diner/at the library listening to the daily stories my sisters, my femme friends told me of the pain they carry with them. I have heard stories worse than what we have told you here.

- This is the "idle drama" we spend our lives talking about.

Even though the group we were part of was supposed to be run horizontally, you somehow assumed the role of decision maker in many situations. Seemingly, I should have been able to voice my opinion and have an open conversation about what I was thinking. Because we promoted this group as an inclusive, non-hierarchical and empowering environment, feeling dismissed made me question if something was wrong with me, rather than if something was wrong with the group itself. While I struggled to be heard, you were able to make final decisions for the group. This dissonance between our goals for the group and the reality
made me deeply insecure and paranoid that I was fucking up. I didn’t think you were getting more respect because of male privilege. I thought people would see my critique of male privilege as my attempt to victimize myself and manipulate the group process. So instead, I rationalized what was happening and assumed that I was totally in the wrong and that you must just be a better organizer than me.

At one of the last meetings I went to, I was giving my opinion on an idea that you sprang on the group. In response, seemingly out of nowhere, you started feedbacking the group I was running. You started saying that people didn’t feel comfortable in my group and other things like that. I’m totally down to get feedback, I had made that very clear before, but the fact that you were giving me pointed bits of critique in front of other people, in a totally irrelevant time was not ok. You were undermining my confidence again and trying to weaken me while I was offering legitimate suggestions and concerns.

Maybe you know I’ve been taken advantage of sexually and maybe you don’t, but you touched me in ways that made my skin crawl. In a way I didn’t want to be touched by a trusted friend. After being told to stop, you treated me differently for weeks. I was no longer yours to rub and grasp, and that made YOU uncomfortable.
Throughout my organizing with you, I started to feel really insecure and paranoid that I was doing something wrong or suggesting bad ideas or even just unlike by people in the group. I know that you weren’t the only person creating this somewhat toxic environment (and I know I wasn’t always blameless either). At the end of the year, I tried talking about it with you but you didn’t listen to what I was saying.

Instead, you flipped it all on me like I was the one making all the problems, and then never hit me up again. This made me feel like I was in the wrong for trying to talk about the ways you made me feel unsure of myself and unwanted in a group that seemed to be so important and so right to so many other people. When I would talk about how you had upset me to other people, almost everyone defended you because you were so overwhelming liked by others. I felt really quieted down, like I was in the wrong for holding personal grudges against you and trying to distance myself from you for my own mental health.
Worst of all, when all the dust settled between me and your group, other dudes and organizers started to talk shit on lots of the prominent women organizers in your group. These dudes blamed these women for the shit that went down, calling them liberals and saying they were bad organizers. They stopped trying to hang out with them and kind of ruined their reputation amongst radicals. But these same dudes refused to hold you to similar standards. Instead, they said that you were different from the women. That somehow you weren’t responsible for what happened, that you weren’t a sell-out like them. You maintained your prominence in the radical organizing scene. I started to think that maybe these women were all to blame. Maybe you weren’t actually a liberal sell-out even though you had literally sold me out for a liberal organization.... all of the double think started making me feel out of my mind, eroding my confidence and making me feel like I was a horrible person for finding any fault in you. Only after writing all of this down am I realizing how fucked up you are.

You cut me off all of the time when I am talking or assume that you already know what I am going to say. Your misogyny is showing.
You, without knowing you are doing it, are demanding an end to women and queer spaces.

You told us that nightshade shouldn’t be just queer people and femmes because it is “exclusionary.” Take a moment to think about why there needs to be organizing spaces that are not dominated by those who have the power in every other space. Take a moment to think about why people might feel safer to drink, to have fun, to speak up, to talk about how they feel, in meetings and parties hosted by nightshade. Patterns of abuse and unequal relationship dynamics are so deeply engrained in our lives, spaces and communities. You are aware of this and you are trying to fight this, aren’t you? We must work to undo such patterns in every space with every gender and identity, while still creating spaces that are specific to those who are routinely excluded, so they can be given a voice. Sometimes, you silence us. Sometimes, you make us feel bad. Sometimes, you touch us without consent. Sometimes, you don’t ask us to be in your group either. Sometimes, you ask him to help you with your project instead. IT’S FINE. But don’t question why you were not asked to be in nightshade.

We are not asking for consolation here. We just need you to know where we’re coming from. That this is not a new conversation for us. We are writing this for ourselves. To mark what has made us the people that we are.
We had a meeting with administrators. Before the meeting our entire group had discussed how we didn’t want to have any sustained contact with the administrators and that we were having this meeting just to say that we did. At the end of the meeting the administrator suggested that we meet with other higher-ups soon to talk about how we could work together to achieve our goals. The administrator left and I said, “We’re not going to have that next meeting with them, right?” But I could already see the stars in your eyes. Both you and the other dude, maybe entwined by the masculine power of administrators in suits (?!) suddenly thought it was a good idea to have a meeting with the administrators again. I started to explain all of the reasons that the group thought that was a bad idea, how it was part of our very strategy to not engage heavily with school officials. You snapped back at me, “Can you stop being so emotional?” Your misogyny is showing. You reduced my rational and logical arguments to a nonsensical emotional outburst. You tried to silence me with a stereotype used to quiet generations of intelligent and emotional women. Your misogyny is showing when you somehow believe I am incapable of thinking logically because I’m just too fucking emotional.
It's really gross that you sexually objectified the only woman you had in your band.

After a march we organized together you got interviewed by a news station. After, you ran up to me. “Hey! The news crew wants to interview you! They said they want to interview a woman!” Your misogyny is showing. Thank you for tokenizing me, as if my biggest contribution was simply my pronouns <3

You have sexually assaulted women I know but have never had to face any consequences for it. You are an incredibly powerful organizer and people still look up to you and let you speak even though almost everyone knows that you treat women horribly. Your misogyny shows all the time.
You had been one of my best friends for a while—one of the only men I felt comfortable around. You often told me I was your best friend. You knew I was gay. But none of that stopped you from texting me at two in the morning one night asking me to have sex with you. When I said no, that you were just my friend, that I was not interested in you like that, you didn’t stop. Instead, you begged. You told me that you knew I was gay but that you could still make me feel good and to PLEASE give you a chance. I stopped responding, only to continue getting uncomfortable messages from you. The next day I heard from you again, but only saying “wanna get food?” as if nothing had happened.

And I just want to scream until my eyes pop out of their sockets
Do anything besides nervously dig my fingers into my palms
in fists inside my pockets

Because it was your hands
and your grip
but
my strung out body
Lying like dead weight
Beneath your malignant manipulation

And my bones were screaming telling me that this is all wrong
And my heart pumping so hard in my chest trying to escape
And get as far away from you as it possible could
And I thought I hit rock bottom
Until it hit me back and it looked just like you
And you’ve left my body a pile of filthy rags
While your sanctimonious power
Towers
Over everyone & everything you claim to fight for

And your guilt is either absent or benign
But even now your breath has a way of choking mine
I scrubbed my skin so hard it bled, just to try to clean my skin of the places your hands vitiated. But I don’t know how to clean the empty spaces between my bones. And that’s where I feel you the most.

I’d stick daggers in my eyes to slay the triggers of you in my brain. I’d drink bleach to clean my insides of your pollution.

But your mouth was always louder than your hands anyway.

And I can still feel you in my guilt. Feel you in my shame. Feel you in the disconnect between my body and my brain.

Still trapped rotting from the inside out with fear. While your percolating social capita impels your career.

At a party at our friend’s house you and your dude friend got into a friendly argument with a guy about politics. You kept going back and forth and I tried to chime in, but couldn’t really work my way into conversation. Finally the conversation paused and I tried to add my thoughts. The guy you were arguing with immediately turned to me and YELLED in my face. I stopped talking and the three of you kept arguing, ignoring that A MAN YELLED IN MY FACE TO GET ME TO STOP TALKING. Your misogyny is showing. At the end of the night I went up to you and said that dude was a huge sexist. You just laughed in my face, thinking I must have been telling a joke? Your misogyny is showing. I was taken aback. You always made like you were such a feminist and shit. “I’m serious. He yelled in my face and he was being really sexist.” You reached out and hugged me. Touching me without asking, thinking that what I needed to feel better was physical attention from you.

When you wanted to divvy up responsibilities for the collective that you mostly oversee you only gave responsibilities to the dudes or more masculine presenting folks who organized with you.
I was at a hardcore show with an absurdly aggressive crowd. There were posters of porn stars all over the walls and none of you were even reacting. After taking a walk to chill out I got back to the venue and, refreshingly, there was a femme fronted act.

The front person was giving a ten minute speech on sexual assault. She talked about the silencing of women and queer people's voices in hardcore and punk communities. She stated statistics about rape and sexual violence. She said she wouldn't be silent anymore and dedicated the song to victims.

The pit, full of very masculine large, people was unwelcoming all night. I was pushed on the ground just trying to stand and jam out. I was shoved into the dryer and cut my arm. During the song about exclusion, silence and sexual violence, the all dude pit got so rowdy that they knocked out all the plugs and silenced the singer's voice.

Before the next song, she asked if femmes and queers would come to the front to be with her. All three of us were pushed out in the first 30 seconds. How will you help to make hardcore more inviting to smaller people, femme people, and differently abled body people? Is your moshing more important than our safety?
You were facilitating a training with one woman. It was her time to (finally) facilitate part of the meeting. She started presenting and you immediately cut her off and started talking over her. You pretty much ran the rest of the training and she just sat next to you, silently nodding her head in agreement. **Your misogyny is showing**

**OUCH!**

You refer to me as so and so’s girlfriend.

I am an accessory.

Your misogyny is showing.
You said that you had a problem with the way that I organize. I try to organize to open up space for the voices of femme and non cis dudes. It takes a lot of energy in every meeting to try and make sure that cis-dudes aren't talking over everybody and to try and build up the confidence of femmes and encourage their participation. A lot of my personal energy each meeting went into keeping the space open for femmes, which I know you didn't notice. Instead, you would sometimes seemingly hijack the meetings we were having. Like you would suggest something and if we all didn't jive with it you would keep bringing it up in a way that made it impossible to move on. We would engage with what you were suggesting but you wouldn't listen to our concerns or critiques. Still, we took on several of your ideas and put in leg work to make them happen. But I guess that wasn't enough for you? You left the group after things didn't go just your way.

So much of that critique you gave me had to do with me being a woman who organizes. I see lots of men doing what you accused me of (having friendships in the group that I prioritized over people who weren't
Men make a mirror out of me.

They stare at my body and they see the way their mother's covered hers up.

They take my hands into theirs and pretend I'm their dad who never called them "honey".

They press their noses against me to see themselves/kiss themselves/hurt themselves.

I don't look like anything & I'm not an equation for you to figure out why you hurt other people because you don't know how to trust yourself.

They practice their best lying face and learn the physics of their mouths and the weight in their groins.

My friends) but have never seen you or anyone call them out. I am scared now to organize in non-femme spaces because I am scared of cis-men seeing me as too bossy or too assertive. When I was a kid, my New Year's resolution was always to be less bossy. Only later did I realize that people called me bossy because I was a girl with an opinion. It has taken me years to know that it is ok for me to be assertive around men. I am afraid that my confidence will make you feel hostile towards me. I am afraid that your hostility might be dangerous to me, my mental health and my reputation. I can sense that the men around me feel that my confidence is a threat to them. You gain your power from me and other femmes being silent. Being myself, being outspoken and believing in my visions disrupts this silence and questions the foundation from which you've built your pathetic egos.
To the person who ‘cared’ about me

What do you do when the person who you confided in about your abuser becomes a mental force of manipulation?

Dark corners at 1 am, telling you about my self-destruction, you holding my bloody wrists whispering to me about the anarchist politics revolving around abuse. You getting closer while I’m sputtering about my significant other.

Unanswered texts about my anxiety, asking to meet up for a cigarette, getting closer.

Me, alone in my room, convinced you are the type of partner I need, one who is in tune with femme presenting individuals and the complexity of their psyche. You, lying about your own relationships, open and close, stop and go, telling me I make you feel safe.

Gaslighting.

You, telling me I am strong for leaving him.

You, telling me I never deserve to be treated as lesser.

You, telling me we can be safe spaces for each other, as my mind is reeling from the after-effects of mistreatment.

You, asking if it’s okay to touch the skin of my lower back in the middle of January underneath my five layers, while you already are.

You, giving me literature on the strength of femmes, telling me I am significant.

Not significant enough to let your partner know what you say to me when they aren’t there, but significant nonetheless I suppose.

forced to endure this pain. The embers seared my skin, bubbled and oozed and I just didn’t understand why the words still hurt more.

You’ll forget what you did, or at least lose the raw guilt you said you felt – that lump in your throat you were able to swallow when you saw my face and all the burning embers searing behind my eyes. You won’t ever think of my face again and so the words won’t linger in the air in front of yours.

I see the burn that’s scarred on my hand every morning when I wake up, every time I look down anxiously avoiding the world in front of me, every time I touch, every time someone reached for my hand – I see the scar that I made.

But you won’t see the scar that you made – you don’t see me every morning when you wake up, every time you look down, every time you touch or when someone reaches for your hand – you get to forget the scar that you made because it’s walking around out of your sight, struggling to make it through another day.
The first time I said it out loud to someone I got so angry at the words. I wanted to hurt them. Hurt them for the way they tasted in my mouth, the way they vibrated in my diaphragm and under my skin, the way they lingered in the air, so vile and taunting, right in front of my face.

I got so angry at the words and that no matter how much I wanted it I could never make them not true. I got so angry at the words that I pressed my burning cigarette onto the skin of my hands, the skin. The skin that your skin touched and your lips kissed, the skin that felt your heart beat, the skin that will never understand why it’s being:

You, hinting at being alone with me at 3 in the morning.
You, telling me you care about me, as you deny your interactions with me.
Me, texting you about feeling unsafe in the man’s bed I am in, you telling me to crawl into bed with you when I get back to Oakland.
You, telling me in mid-July you want to be in a relationship with me.
You, confiding in me about your partner, telling me you want to leave, over and over and over again.
You, two months later, telling me I always overstay my welcome after spending an hour in bed with me.

Me, getting ready to leave in response, you, asking me to stay.
You, three inches from my face, me pushed against a wall, physically and metaphorically.
You, exasperated when I am unsure whether to get closer or stay where I am.
The answer is stay where I am.
You, isolating me in group events for a cigarette.
You, using this time to tell me you cannot look at me due to how attractive I am.

Your misogyny is showing.
You, whispering across pillows you are in love with me.
You, a week later, telling me you never meant that,
you simply felt you had to say it to make me happy.
Even though I never brought romantic love into the conversation.
Even though my happiness was never the point of focus in our interactions.
Even though the situation was created so you could manipulate multiple femmes in your life.

So I’m curious, why you feel the need to be sexually active with those who you supposedly care about?
Why you felt the need to make me feel as if I asked for the ways you fucked with my head, when you
could’ve simply, at any point told me, “I am in an open relationship, however, this does not include our interactions”

You, asking to smoke a cigarette after everything is over, telling me I still mean the world to you.
Me, falling for your manipulations, until the moment that I don’t.
Me, still unable to look you in the eyes in public spaces.
You, to this day, lying about me.
Me, feeling unstable in the community because of one person who said they cared about me.