

*On being Black, queer, femme, and tired of pretending that rainbow capitalism is enough.*

I work in a pharmacy at Target, and on June 1st, I braced myself — I've lived enough Junes to know how bad it gets. Every year it's the same: either a garish explosion of rainbows with no soul behind it, or worse, silence.

This year? Silence. No rainbow banners. No music spilling into the aisles. It's like Pride never happened—no trace left behind, no signs that we were ever here. And that's what stings the most: the message beneath it all. *You're tolerated when it's profitable, erased when it's not.* Pride Month is treated like a seasonal sale—one month of staged celebration, then the shutters close, and suddenly, it's as if we never existed.

I grew up learning how to hide myself. First because I was too loud, then too soft. Too emotional. Too smart. Too queer. Too Black. It was always something. Always too much or not enough for someone. When I first started liking girls, I thought it was a phase — or at least I hoped it was. I didn't want to make life harder than it already was.

Being Black already put me in a spotlight I didn't ask for. Being queer just added new ways for people to misread me. Being femme meant learning how to perform for safety. I didn't know it at the time, but I was living exactly what Judith Butler meant when she said gender is a performance — except mine was graded in real time. Wear the practiced smile, speak without queer inflection, disappear into the background. My body had to be convincing, or it became dangerous.

So no, I'm not interested in your rainbow tote bags or allyship pins. "Love is Love" on a water bottle feels hollow when people are still losing jobs, families, even their lives just for being themselves. What I really want isn't a slogan or a trinket — it's something deeper. I want to hold my partner's hand at work without fear. To be celebrated, not stared at. To have softness, freedom, and the radical permission to rest.

If brands can't offer that, they can keep their dusty displays. Pride has never felt like mine — not really. Not in a store, in a campaign, or a shallow show that only welcomes those who smile, stay cute, stay quiet. The parts of me that are complicated? They're never for sale.

I think about states like Texas and Florida pushing to ban gender-affirming care for trans youth. I think about school boards in places like Tennessee and Arkansas removing queer books like *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe and *Lawn Boy* by Jonathan Evison from classrooms, erasing stories that help kids see themselves. The same companies that wave rainbow flags every June quietly funnel

money to politicians who back laws that exclude us from public life. And I'm supposed to believe this is progress?

That doesn't mean I'm not proud. I've carved out my own way to celebrate — raw and unfiltered, far from anything polished or performative. It's a joy that refuses to wait for permission, a love that demands no validation, and a pride that can't be bought or sold. This pride lives in the quiet moments, the everyday acts of survival and self-acceptance that no marketing campaign can capture. I already know this. I see it every year. So when asked, why do I keep hoping for more? I can't say anything other than I'm hoping for better.