

# IRIS

issue 3: change

NEW WRITING FOR  
LGBTQ+ YOUNG ADULTS

# EDITORS' NOTE

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Welcome to the third issue of *Iris*!

This issue is about ‘change’ - the kind of change that manifests in small ways, in incremental shifts towards a new beginning, and the kind of change that’s sweeping in scope and rapid in pace. It’s fitting, coming as it does at the end of a summer which brought about an exceptional degree of change here in the United States. That’s reflected in the pieces you read here. It’s no accident that we begin with “alienable rights” (Heath Barnes), a poem of which the original context is partially a piece of history. We close with fourteen moving lines from poet Rob Jacques, who contributes a poem titled “Obergefell v. Hodges (June 26, 2015),” paying homage to the great change brought by Jim Obergefell and the other courageous couples who challenged one slice of institutionalized prejudice and won.

We hope you see this summer as a kind of first step on the road to change. Challenge those who say that we’ve had enough, that the LGBTQ community should be grateful for equal civil marriage and leave it at that. Because the truth is that equal marriage is, and should be, the foundation for imperative change: change that protects our homeless youth, change that supports and treats our suicidal youth, change that allows our transgender youth to claim the pronouns they prefer and the respect they deserve, change that brings about the kind of future that you, our readers, deserve.

There are several ‘firsts’ in this issue - appropriate, as the theme is ‘change’! You’ll find our the inaugural piece in our new First Person feature, which spotlights creative nonfiction written by a talented young adult. We’re proud to launch First Person with a perceptive essay by Jack Paul McHugh O’Brien, who writes movingly about the prejudice that confronts young people growing up in LGBTQ families.

We’re also proud to present our very first comic, a piece titled ‘A Brief History of the American Queer’ by artist Sofia Carbonara. We hope it’s the first of many!

For the teachers and counselors who use *Iris* in their work, please note that two pieces in this issue use language that may not be suitable for your younger clients. Please read carefully and, as always, if you have any questions about our editorial board’s decisions, do not hesitate to contact us.

We are grateful to our generous contributors for sharing their exceptional work with us. And as always, to you, our encouraging, wonderful readers, we hope that *Iris* brings you characters and narratives that speak to your experiences, that challenge your thinking and affirm and celebrate your identities.

Happy reading!

Amanda, Rebecca, and all of team *Iris*  
Autumn 2015

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**A**n American-Australian 16 year old writer from Brooklyn, New York. Writing has been a passion of Jack's ever since he was in the fifth grade, and he hopes to keep writing throughout his life whether it becomes his career or not.

## I SHOULD I WOULD I COULD

*Jack Paul McHugh O'Brien*

The first days of freshman year are hard for everyone. Being at a new school, you want to impress people, you want to fit in. Above all, though, you want to make sure that you don't become the "lame" kid or the "loser". This might not be everyone's experience, but it was definitely mine. I feared the idea of being thought of as a "loser"; I feared the idea of not being accepted by my new school.

I remember being in class, after just a week of being at my school. I remember the class vividly: the sound of my teacher's accent, the small room, the window that painted all of Central Park. Of all the kids in my class, there were three boys who stuck out in particular - Brian, Sam and Scott. This trio - especially Sam and Brian - were the popular ones. This meant very "masculine", excellent athletes, good looking, etc. All three were very good friends, and very homophobic. Imagine that, a kid with two moms in a class with several homophobes. It's ironic, really. Don't worry, it gets better.

Our class started to talk about gay marriage. And, no surprise here, it became a very big debate. Brian and Scott were both very much against gay marriage, and spoke of their opinions loud and proud. Sam didn't really say much, but silently nodded whenever Brian, the clear leader of the group, said something. My guess is that his ideas about homosexuality didn't exactly correspond with his friends'. He probably couldn't express his true opinions for fear of being teased for supporting gay marriage. The teacher was on the other side of the argument, defending gay rights. There were a few other kids who would agree from time to time with the teacher, mostly the girls, but Brian and Scott had the floor. I remember one instance when the teacher showed the class that there were animals who were gay, which proved that homosexuality was a part of nature and therefore a part of who people were. Brian just shook his head, saying, "No, no," and refusing to believe the evidence the teacher provided.

I remember one specific moment when Brian, after saying, "Gay marriage is wrong; they're just a bunch of fags!", turned around from his chair to look at the rest of the class. He was trying to catch other people's eyes, trying to get their support of his opinion. He wanted more people on his side, an army, and one of the people he wanted to recruit was me. I saw the glare; the stare in his eyes seemed to say, "If you don't agree with me, you will be considered weird." It was not good to be considered "weird" at this school. You would be constantly teased, and I knew this for a fact because I saw it happening with many others. People who were "weird" were looked at as lesser; they were given snarky stares and judgment behind-the-back comments. People didn't really want to associate with these men and women; they didn't want to join them in their "weirdness". You had to be "normal"; "normal" was agreeing and following all the ideas and beliefs of the popular. If you didn't, then you would never be their friend.

Being the son of two amazing mothers, I disagreed with just about everything this man was saying. For most of the conversation I had been quite worried that people would tease me for having two moms, or just for believing in gay rights. It was hard to be quiet; Brian, Scott and Sam's words hurt like daggers, and I sat there, doing nothing. I just let each dagger hit me again and again and again, and it didn't get better. It was hard for me to pay attention, because I really didn't want to: I just really wanted this entire scene to end. Still, even though I blocked the sounds out of everyone's voices. I wanted to speak up, I truly did. Yet, I didn't. In fact, I did the exact opposite. I looked at the Brian's eyes, smiled and nodded, as if I agreed. As if I agreed with him calling my parents "faggots". Those daggers had turned to sharp swords, and the pain was almost unbearable. The conversation seemed to drag itself out, getting longer and longer. I couldn't wait to get out of class; I hated this, so much. I just wanted to leave, and forget this. *Jesus, why did I nod?*

This wasn't me. Who was this boy? I suddenly saw a bird's eye view of a fourteen-year-old boy. Tall, white, with blue eyes, wearing a collared t-shirt and jeans, his smile seemed innocent. Seemed innocent. No, it seemed like just a slight nod and smile that showed the true innocence of a freshman. Nothing seemed too outstanding about it; an observer would have looked at that smile on that boy like any other. But this boy wasn't smiling at something right, or, no matter your political view, something nice. Looks deceive, and that smile and nod were from fear. It was a nod that created disappointment, sadness, inequality, and, most importantly, hypocrisy.

I felt like a disappointment: a disappointment to my family and the LGBT community. I should have said something, I should have. I remember walking straight to the subway to go home right after school. I was tired, and I just wanted to leave. I wanted to forget this had ever happened. I started to scream accusations to myself in my mind, thinking, *you should have been stronger, you should have said something, you should have done this, you should have done that:*

*You were weak.*

I tried to defend myself, thinking: *But what if I was harassed for the rest of high school? It would have made life horrible.*

*Kids across the nation stand up to homophobes everyday, getting beat up along the way. Nobody even knew you had gay parents, no one was even touching you. You could have stood up, or at the very least simply have not nodded. That showed nothing but your fear, your cowardice.*

The thoughts raced in my head; I was boxing myself, and no one was winning. I didn't know what I should have done. I didn't know what I could have done.

\*

Three years later, sitting down at my computer and writing down this experience, I'd like to end with something inspirational - a speech of some sort that answers this emotionally difficult dilemma. Maybe something like a speech that talks about how "I have gained the confidence of a king's knight", or "I've mustered the bravery of a thousand men to stand up to any man or woman who ever utters a single insult about homosexuality." Unfortunately, I don't really think that is my answer; I don't think I really have an answer at all. I mean, I don't think there's anything I "should" have done. If I had spoken up, then the next years of high school probably would have been pretty rough, and life wouldn't exactly have been easy. Then again, because I didn't speak up, I felt as though I was disgracing gays and lesbians everywhere, and, more importantly, disgracing my family. I don't really think either way is really good or bad: they're just the only two shitty solutions to a shitty situation. Whatever your answer is, just don't lie. Don't smile on the outside when, really, you want to do anything but.

## ALIENABLE RIGHTS

*Heath Barnes*

They passed same sex marriage in the state I grew up in  
but there is no bill that guarantees that  
my grandmother will come to my wedding one day.

They passed a law against discrimination in the workplace.  
There is no law to keep my brother from whispering  
dyke,

and faggot,  
at me in the narrow hallway of our parents' house,  
no law that prevents good intentioned parents  
from forcing their children in, or out, of dresses.

Despite the laws,  
the workplace is still hostile-  
but i would trade legal placations  
in a single, terrified heartbeat,  
to sit next to my mother  
and ask which flowers  
would make my partner  
happiest.

---

**H**eat is a non-binary transgender student at New College of Florida. They started writing poetry in middle school and have used writing as an outlet to understand issues of queer identity and love in an environment that often denies its existence. alienable rights is their first published work.

# I AM NOT THE ONE

*Samantha Marie Haynes*

I am bigger than those bullies ever knew:

I am large and I contain multitudes.

I carry baggage heavy enough for the both of us:

I am as strong, tough, and rough as those bullies said.

I can take it, I never break, I grew acclimated to it all:

I am manlynastyhairyflatchestedmuscleysweatybigfeatured!

I am self-obsessed and I rest self-assured:

I am blackanddarkandburntandnappyandtallandbigfooted!

I, I, I, I, I, I,--

it always comes back to I.

I love myself so much I could not be myself:

my girlhood was never there, so it could never hold me:

my boyhood was beaten into me, so it could not nurture me:

where were my ancestors then to guide me--

this thing--this thing that I became--

neither Sor Juana nor two-spirit nor genderless nor genderfluid  
nor genderqueer nor agender nor bigender nor...me?

I fought so hard for it, how could I let it go?

I, come back to me, frilly I, dainty I, soft I...

...delicate I, I worth saving, I worth fighting for...

...damsel I, lacey I, red-lipped I...come back to me.

I want to hold you pinkish I and tell you you're pretty.

I want to kiss you beautiful I and tell you you're beautiful.

I want to love you goddess I and tell you you are human.

I want to be you, perfect I, I worthy of holding and kissing  
and loving and being and growing into seeing...

...that you, I, are bigger than any label or taunts can describe.

I am warrior, soldier, fighter, dodging words that cut  
and strip me from what all the people born like me that  
talk like me and walk like me and look like me and are  
the blackest of browns of reds like me cannot be:  
how could I ever imagine that I could be anything else,  
if I was constantly told that I am an ugly I, that the  
doctors made a mistake with I, that they were wrong with I  
that "girls" like me were never really girls...?  
...We could float back out to that sea, find our foreparents' histories...  
...I could float back into the shore, search for my foreparents histories...

But I am now yet enough of me, and I struggle to find  
my eyes in the eyes of the sand, or my nose in the nose of the wind:  
the only written history of my family trees are fossils and dust.  
But I look at myself in the mirror, and I see perfection, yet no gender:  
but I see little me as well, hurting, crying, aching, losing myself:  
and I think...that in this world where I am still not universally human:  
that I can fight for the right to be frilly and dainty and soft...  
...that I can love my lovers so much that I become both "girl"...  
...and simply...a multitudinous human that you may refer to as  
SHE.

And if I love you, and if I trust you, if I believe in you, and you in me:  
I can become the human that you may refer to as THEY, and I will  
refer to you however you wish, because you are who you say you are:  
we are who we say we are:  
we are here for one another despite lands and hate between us.  
We are strong, we are dainty, we are complex, we are multitudes.

---

**S**amantha is a (currently) D.C.-based, severely introverted writer and public servant with a penchant for drama. Samantha hails from the Rio Grande Valley in southern Texas and her experiences growing up in the region influenced her decision to pursue surviving capitalism by working in the social sector. When she isn't interning at the newest non-profit near you, she's writing short stories on the Metro or meditating in the back of a convenience store where they keep the bagged teas. Her first plaquette, *La Negrita Chiflada Escribe*, was published in 2011. After writing a few short prose pieces for zines coming out of NYC the past year, Samantha is currently working on her second chapbook which will feature many of the tales she's written while riding the train and losing her balance.

## A PIECE OF CAKE

### Stephen Reaugh

For a moment, we are the picture-perfect mother-and-son duo. Then the screen door of the trailer snaps into place, the car's engine stutters before starting. When I'm sure she's gone, I rush the kitchen, throwing around recipes and measuring cups and bowls and mixers like an armsman preparing for war. I know this from being a kid: moms love homemade gifts, so a cake from scratch will do fine. I follow her neat directions on the scraps of notebook paper, but the cake overbakes just a little. Stress crack like a fault line, right down the middle. I decide to blame it on the weather: spring thunderstorms.

She gets home early, carrying a styrofoam takeout box, catches me with the powdered sugar for the frosting.

STEVE: Let me guess, your other favorite—the turkey club?

MOM: My buttercream frosting

STEVE: We should take this act on the road. And—can I—

(She hands me the box. I nibble at the sandwich. She puts a pinky

into the frosting.)

MOM: You've got a bit too much powdered sugar in it already.

STEVE: I didn't want to put in more butter, make it too rich—

MOM: Get a little water. Tablespoon or two.

(I do. She creams the mixture with a wooden spoon while I add the water—after three doses, she holds up a hand. I put the spoon in the sink and watch, try to absorb her technique, try to understand how she can fold layer after layer into itself and come out with something whole.)

MOM: There's something different in here.

(I hold up some almond extract—I'd decided to adlib her recipe. She rolls her eyes, but she's amused. I take the bowl, frost the cooled cake as evenly as I can. I stick one candle in it—)

MOM: That's good. I don't want you having to call the fire department.

I pick up the disgruntled dog to join me for the smoothest rendition of "Happy Birthday" I can muster. Though I am twenty, my tenor's still so light that it's like my grandmother's alto, and my mother and I look away from one another. I finish, she cuts the cake and serves it with ice cream. In the living room, she tells me about her birthday dinner with her sisters while the TV she never turns off hums in agreement.

MOM: Aunt Pat didn't even come. Said she didn't have the money—I've seen her place. Just got that new television from the rental guy, Morton's, there, out in Columbus. So I don't wanna hear nothing about her not having the money. Well. Sharon used her cellphone to call her while we were in the restaurant though I told her not to 'cause it's not polite to do that, you know, it's so rude to the waitress, and anyway, Pat just kept saying she couldn't come though I could hear Dave putting his two cents in behind her—you know, I don't get why he has to do that, interrupt her all the time.

STEVE: I know.

I do know—I know all the stories about this family, because my mother has made it her priority to task me with them. She knows I'm a writer—I always wanted to be one. She's just trying to help get to know the adult 'me.' After a while, though, the same old stories are...grating. Besides: I am twenty; I know everything. And my mother will be around forever. I hold

to this just as stubbornly as the television shifts the satellite dish outside: simple, reliable, geometric motion; no variables, no changes.

I go into the kitchen to wash my hands of the mess I've made. When I come back in to sit down, she starts in on her afghan again, still chatting. For a while, I'm caught watching her fingers twist, twirl, wind and unwind, loop and unloop. I feel a little like a peasant's daughter watching her mother weave a loom, except I can't copy this to get a husband. I know I can't.

When I was little—and even now, in rare moments when I let my guard (and my ego) down—I found my parents artisans. With their hands they can make anything. My mother's long nimble fingers measure ingredients to perfection, pinch just the right bit of sugar; my father's big hands can crank off a lug nut with maybe a grunt, then slip the chips of a motherboard together with ease. But—you can't jump in on a pastry chef's line with no degree and your book of recipes tagging along, or slide onto a pit crew without the finest tools. Or maybe you can, if you know the right guy who knows a guy. But to do that where we live, in these redneck Amish country Up South god-blight-it Pennsylvania woods? Please: my father pumped gas; my mother cleans houses. I could've learned their trades and didn't; like any kid I shoved away what my parents were. I still do. I use the fingers they gifted me only to write, and can barely stand to chip a nail. All that potential, all that knowledge, and all I

do is flip pages, twirl pens, press keys. It's a ridiculous thought—my mother would tell me this, if she could read my mind—but there it sits: a billowing cake, until the top collapses.

It's around 9:30 that night before I snap out of my funk. I shut down my laptop, then start it back up. When she's back from the laundry room, I set the computer in front of her, open up an essay I wrote, and ask her to read it, in full. In the meantime, I try to anticipate every Golden Girls line before it shows up on the screen.

The essay takes her an hour, because although she is thorough, she's not very fast, and when she's done, she falls into the couch, not looking at me.

Then she turns off the TV.

The silence stuns.

She gets up, steps over to where I'm sitting in one of my grandmother's old chairs, reaches down and hugs me.

This is how I come out to my mother. On her birthday. God, am I selfish.

MOM: You know you can talk to me about anything.

(She feels how uncomfortable I am with this truth of hers, and with her embrace—any embrace. We sit back down.)

MOM: Besides, Stephen: you know I watch Ellen. It's fine.

I laugh, because of course my mother would say this. The spell of performance is broken. I do not feel that other "me" there, the one who can't even hug his mother anymore. I hug her again, better, closer, fuller. We trim hedges for a half-hour, talking about nothing important but everything all at once. I feel like I am six and we are driving to the grocery store, to the bank, to drop off a lunch to my father at work.

In between the laughter, Mom looks into the blank television screen and our warped reflections in the layer of clinging dust. The silence makes the other guy come out. The chair that belonged to my grandmother feels prickly under my legs; the necklace my father gave me before he left, an anchor.

Neither my mother nor I mention the word itself. I didn't like saying it. (Gay.) It'll be years from now and as I look into her reflection in the television, I know we still won't talk about boys I like; or how I'm afraid of sex because I'm afraid when I lose control I'll be like my father; or anything involving me and boys and sex and love and happiness and all of that...stuff. It runs between us untouched, unspoken, some boundary line mothers and sons just don't cross.

No. A line I've made, myself. I took the sidewalk chalk from an old

elementary school bookbag and I, feeling juvenile and symbolic and oh-so-writerly, traced the line around my heart. I heard my mother shouting over the lines, telling me it's OK, it's OK, just come and talk to me and I just run the line over and over and over again until my hands are the chalk, my hands so thin and pristine and precise.

And, just before every time I'm tempted to call her and spill my guts about how lonely I am and how I don't know if I believe anymore and confess everything—before I keep it to myself so as to not worry her, before I remember I am twenty and I know everything, every single thing, I picture what I am so sure will always be the case: my mother, at home in the trailer, knitting stories in afghans like some sad *Philomela*, and, beneath it all, the television mumbling its familiar tattoo.

And, if I would but bother to look further: the phone, waiting, nestled beautifully in her sewing box.

---

Stephen grew up in Western Pennsylvania, and is currently an MFA student in nonfiction at the University of Alabama. His work has appeared in *The Allegheny Review Overkill*. He lives in Tuscaloosa, AL with his fiancé and their dim-witted pooch, Brooke.

# IF YOU'RE READING THIS STOP CALLING ME SHE (I'LL STOP WRITING VAGUE POETRY ONE DAY)

Noor El-Dehaibi

I have seen your  
binders full of women and ripped my face out  
of the plastic wrapping;  
do not call me what you guess, do not call me what I  
have corrected, do not call me something that rises  
out of your throat and leaps to tear my own, leaving  
shivers down my spine like echoes  
down a ravine.  
Do not call me what you see me as,  
your eyes are lying to themselves  
to make your life easier.  
You do not deserve easy  
at my expense.

Do you understand now,  
does the coffee splashed on your face  
grow cold, or did you realize that you  
have grown numb?  
(Or rather, have you always  
been this way?  
You have.)

Call me what you know  
I am waiting to hear  
or do not call me at all.

---

**N**oor is a nonbinary writer from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Xe has recently come to terms with xir gender, and has been exploring it (along with the concept of gender itself) through various art forms. Xe enjoys long walks on the beach and destroying cisnormativity.

# MASQUERADING

Alison Covie

He brushes the back of my hand with his.

It's not the same  
as when she does it.

He winks, gives me a toothy grin.

Her winks give me  
shivers.

I grip his wanting hand. This is how it's supposed to be.

His eyes relax - he thinks he's got me.  
A handhold becomes an arm-in-arm becomes an embrace  
outside my dorm.

Is she watching?

Does she know that I'm clenching my eyes tight  
to keep away his love?  
That his dry lips can't cradle mine  
like hers would?  
That our teeth are clinking like  
sloppy teenagers?

Does she know I'd rather work on yesterday's crossword puzzle with  
her and share an order of mozzarella sticks over a cider

than watch another sappy romance in his room  
while he tries to pull another makeout move?

Is she watching?

---

**A**li is a recent Bates graduate. This poem was part of her senior poetry thesis. It explores a moment from the early stages of her relationship with her wife.

# LIKE-LIKE

Christina Tang-Bernas

We sprawled on the dark-blue couch shoved against the wall of my tiny living room, him on his end, me on mine, our feet side-by-side meeting in the middle. His right foot came up to push against my left one, sole against sole, toes twitching.

"So?" I grinned up at the white stucco ceiling. "Anyone you interested in?"

"Why?" His reply came winging back to me, short and abrupt.

My smile widened. Why was he so hilarious to provoke? "Come on. I'm your best friend, the person most allowed to ask you embarrassing personal questions."

He said nothing, silence stretching the seconds until each resembled minutes. Had I really offended him? I sat up to scrutinize his features.

He sat up in unison, face pale underneath the light tan he'd acquired playing pick-up basketball in the glare of summer, brown eyes solemn. "I have to tell you something. Something you can't tell anyone else."

"So, there is," I crowed. "Spill. Who is it? Do I know her?"

He winced, then squared his bony shoulders underneath the thin cotton t-shirt, "No, I'm...I'm..." He leaned in close to me, breath brushing against the fine hairs lying against my temples from where they'd escaped my braid.

"What?"

"I'm g- " His words failed again, and he rubbed his hands together in his lap as if enough friction could conjure out the words he wanted. "I kind of like guys," he finally whispered in a rush.

I blinked. Once. Twice my eyelashes clicked together.

"Like guys? Like how? Like-like?" I whispered back, the kind of whisper usually reserved for the back pews of church while Pastor Kim droned on and on about something less important than making plans for lunch.

He snorted, "What are you? Ten?"

"Like-like," he nodded, the nods short, jerky, almost involuntary.

"Oh, ok," I thought for a moment, the right G-word slotting itself in place, "I guess we can check out guys together now."

"Not funny," he groused, arms sliding around his own waist, tight, "You're taking this awfully well. In fact, you don't seem surprised at all."

"I'm not. I - " I straightened, my back protesting the sudden interest in good posture, "I'm not surprised." And until I'd said it out loud, I'd never realized I'd known all along.

Surprised at my own lack of surprise.

As if my mind had held the knowledge, deep down, in the part that calculated the precise cant of my body in order to walk without tripping or interpreted beams of reflected light into smears of paint on a Dali painting. It'd figured out somehow, based on a million factors I still couldn't comprehend, then kept it from me.

Dumb brain. Dumb brain siding with my best friend against me, keeping his secrets secret until he'd gathered enough balls to finally confess.

I frowned down at my knees. Was there any way to punish my own

brain without harming myself? Permanently, anyway. Would the very act of thinking about punishing my own brain cause it to mutiny against me? Again.

"Are you mad?" His voice cracked on the last word.

I stifled my automatic instinct to mock him for another, more appropriate, time. "For what? Liking guys? Or not telling me earlier?"

He nibbled on his bottom lip, "Both? I did want to tell you. I just. I didn't know how. Considering."

Considering we'd first met in a random Friday night high-school group organized by our very-Asian very-conservative church.

He'd laughed at my caramel-apple-induced hyper-babble instead of joining the others in shooting me looks of vague admonishment. I'd figured that was a very good quality for a best friend to have.

"Did you know? Even back then?" I asked.

"Would you have the thought the same as you do now all the way back then?" he responded.

"You still should've told me earlier," I said. "Because even if I thought differently back then,

I would've changed for you. You should've trusted me enough to do so. So yes, I'm mad. But no, I'm not mad about the other thing. So I guess it cancels out. I'm neutral. Take it as you will."

He reached out, long fingers curling around my thick black braid, giving it a firm tug.

"Ow." I grimaced. "What was that for? See if I marry you anymore."

"What?"

"Weren't we supposed to get married?" I asked. "Someday? We discussed this already," I said, "like back in tenth grade."

He raised a single eyebrow. "We can't get married. Not anymore."

"What? Cause I'm a girl?"

"No. Cause you're already married. Bigamy's illegal."

"Well then," I mock-huffed, and fell back against the armrest, swinging my legs back on the couch. "Be that way."

I couldn't see his face from where I lay, just a smudge of messy black hair and a curve of shoulder, hunched forward, but I knew he was smiling, a barely-there fond quirk of his lips, like I knew he hated the

color orange and was allergic to tomatoes and wanted to be the next reincarnation of Frank Lloyd Wright.

Silence settled down over us in a warm familiar blanket. Finally, he sighed, "I'm hungry."

"Want some meat? Big juicy meat?" I struggled to keep a straight face, but a snicker still escaped.

He leaned his head back, throat bared, Adam's apple bobbing as he swallowed. "Screw you."

I waved a finger in his general direction. "You wish."

"Actually, I don't." His smile widened until he flashed an actual glimpse of teeth. "I really don't."

## CLOWNFISH

### Zara Burton

Non sequential shift  
a multimodal operation  
was x  
now y  
imperceptible

Kink in the shirt's stripes  
Wink.  
A flick of eyeliner at the creases  
bleary eyed  
misty  
Monday

Layers of felt built up  
stripped clean to reveal  
a pelt streaked  
in gluey trails  
Tuesday

A cored apple  
browning, white, or worm  
Wednesday

Nails blue  
nails red  
mostly nude  
contritely  
time starved  
Thursday

Colour pours out naturally  
swirling veils rain over revealing  
everything, something, nothing  
about who I am  
girl  
Friday

---

**C**hristina spent a year absorbing all sorts of intriguing ideas in her travels around the world. Her work has appeared in Vine Leaves Literary Journal, Still Points Arts Quarterly, 3Elements Review, and WomenArts Quarterly Journal. Find out more at <http://www.christinatangbernas.com>.

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**Z**ara lives in North London. She is interested in ecological literature. "Clownfish" makes its debut in this issue. You can read more of her work at <http://zarallez.wordpress.com>

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN QUEER

Sofia Carbonara

Sofia is a rising senior in Amherst, New York with an interest in music and art.

UNITED STATES HISTORY CLASS, 2014

FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT WAS A NEW PRESIDENT TO SOLVE A UNIQUELY NEW PROBLEM...

AND HIS WIFE ELEANOR WAS A NEW KIND OF FIRST LADY.

ELEANOR STARTED HER OWN RADIO SHOW...

SHE TRAVELED UNDER THE PRESIDENT'S NAME...

DURING THE PRESIDENCY, FRANKLIN TOOK A SERIES OF LOVERS...

ELEANOR GREW CLOSER TO HER PRESS CORRESPONDENT, LORENA

THEY WERE VERY OPENLY TOGETHER.

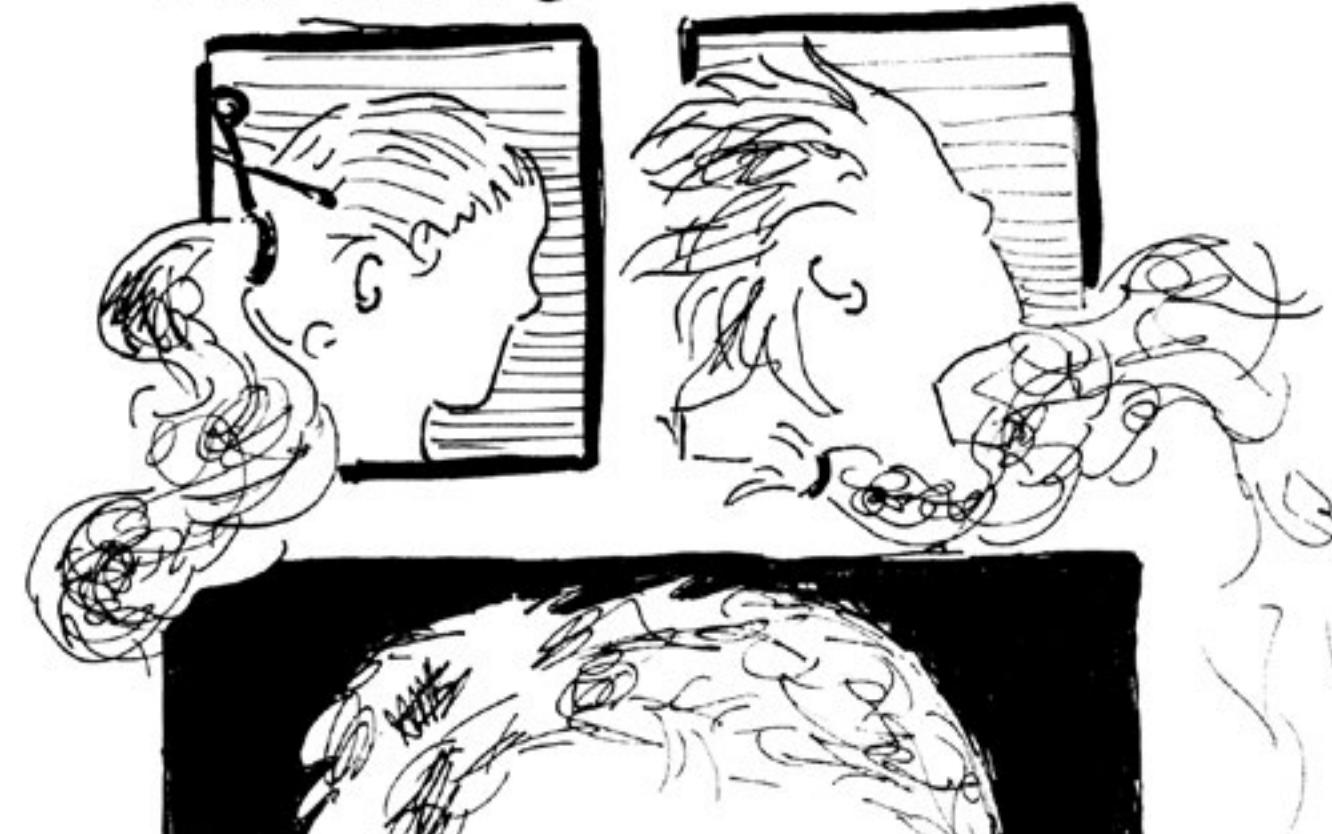
THERE IS A WHOLE DIFFERENT SIDE TO HISTORY

AND WE GET SUCH A MAINSTREAM VIEW...

CAPELLO'S HAIR SALON, 2012

YOU KNOW BOYS DON'T  
LIKE GIRLS WITH SHORT  
HAIR, SOFIA

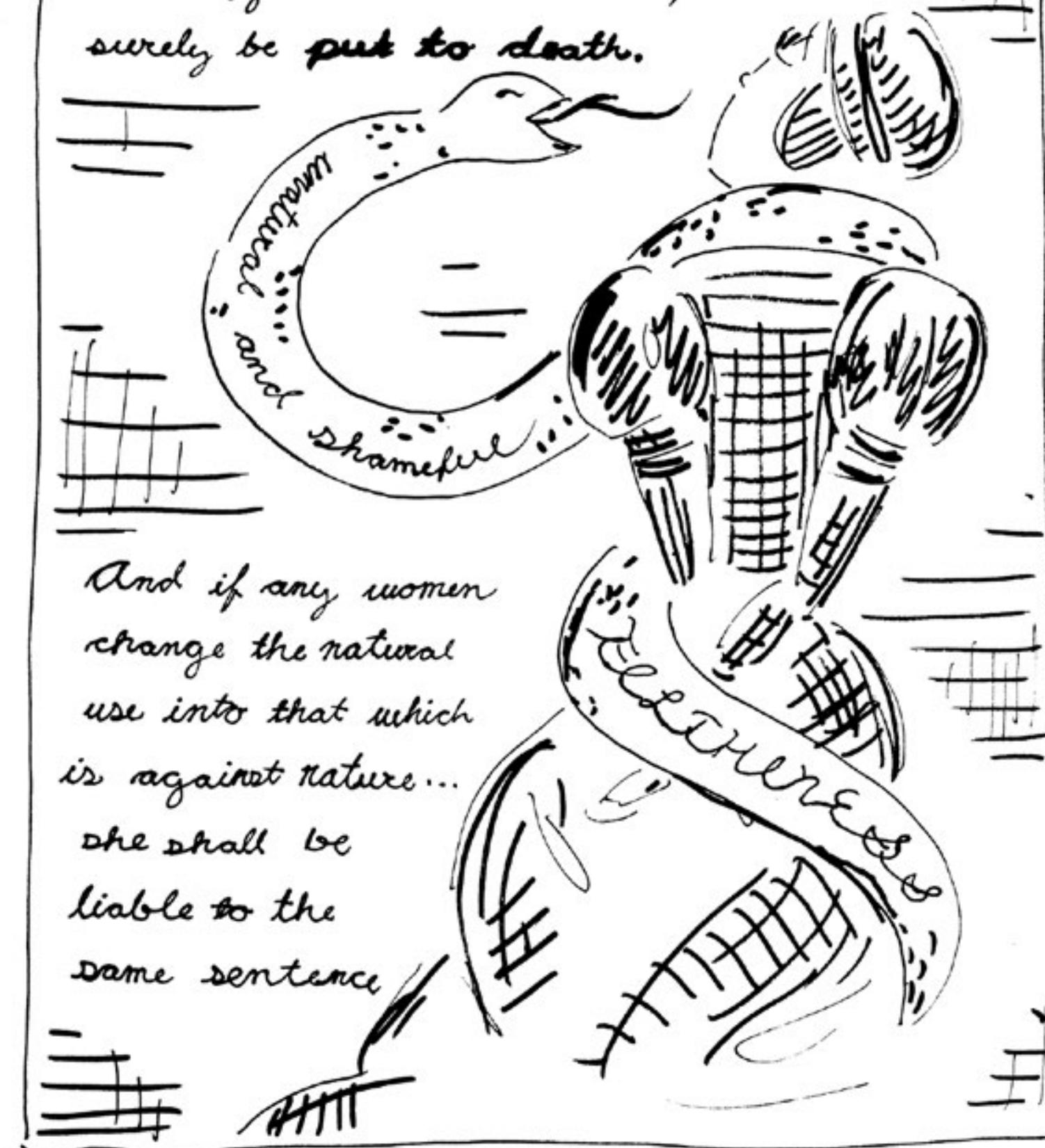
# JUST GETTING A TRIM, HONEY!



THIS IS WHAT I'M SUPPOSED TO LOOK LIKE.

NEW HAVEN COLONY BODY OF LANS, 1655

If any man lyeth with man kinde, as a  
man lyeth with a women, both shall  
surely be put to death.



And if any women  
change the natural  
use into that which  
is against nature...  
she shall be  
liable to the  
same sentence

## CAFETERIA, FALL, 2013



## MASSACHUSETTS, 1823

AS MY EYE ONE DAY WAS RANGING ABOUT WITH ITS ACCUSTOMED COLONELNESS .. IT WAS ARRESTED BY A FACE MOST FAIR, AND WELL-KNOWN, AS IT SEEMED AT FIRST GLANCE - FOR SURELY I HAD MET HER BEFORE, I AND WAITED FOR HER LONG.



INTERLOCUTEN ARTS CAMP CAFÉ TERRA, SUMMER, 2014



BESSIE SMITH, 1926



NIGHTMARE, FALL, 2014

I DON'T KNOW...  
I JUST DON'T FEEL RIGHT  
ABOUT IT ANYMORE.

I DO TOO... BUT NOT LIKE  
THAT, ANYMORE, I GUESS... I  
FEEL MYSELF LOSING MY TEMPER...  
I'M ATTRACTED TO OTHER PEOPLE...

THERE'S THIS GIRL... BUT THAT  
REALLY ISN'T WHY I'M BREAKING  
UP WITH HIM, I -

I'M BISEXUAL, I THINK.  
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT.

I MEAN... I HAD THIS  
GIRL FRIEND IN COLLEGE... I  
ALMOST CONSIDERED IT... BUT  
I REALIZED I WOULDN'T LIKE  
THE INTIMATE STUFF. WE  
WERE JUST SUCH CLOSE FRIENDS.

OH.

SO YOU WANT A BOYFRIEND...  
AND A GIRLFRIEND...  
AT THE SAME TIME?

NO MOM! ONE  
AT A TIME!

IT'S JUST SO NEW  
TO ME.

I KNOW.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT, 1933

MY PICTURES ARE NEARLY ALL  
UP, AND I HAVE YOU IN MY  
SITTING ROOM WHERE  
I CAN LOOK AT YOU MOST  
OF MY WAKING HOURS.

IACHE TO HOLD YOU CLOSE.

I WISH I COULD  
LIE DOWN BESIDE YOU  
TONIGHT AND TAKE  
YOU IN MY ARMS.

2014 - 2015



I WANT TO KNOW EVERYTHING

WASHINGTON, D.C., 1954



SPRING, 2015



REPUBLICAN NATIONAL CONVENTION, 1992

HOMOSEXUAL RIGHTS... THAT'S CHANGE ALL RIGHT.  
BUT IT IS NOT THE KIND OF CHANGE AMERICA WANTS.  
IT IS NOT THE KIND OF CHANGE AMERICA NEEDS.

YES, WE DISAGREED WITH  
PRESIDENT BUSH, BUT...



BUFFALO PRIDE, JUN 6, 2015



Works Cited:

Alsenas, Linas. *Gay America*. New York: Amulet Books, 2008. Print.

Eakler, Vicki L. *Queer America: a GLBT history of the 20th century*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2008. Print.

Katz, Jonathan Ned. *Gay American History: lesbians & gay men In The U.S.A.* New York: Penguin Books, 1976. Print.

## IN PLAIN SIGHT

*Jay Dresden*

Punch to the gut; gasp.  
Slap to the face; wince.  
Return with a smile.  
Don't let them see you.  
I laugh and tell them, 'knock it off'  
Push back with the same hits.  
I slap my own face,  
To hide the bruises,  
To hide my heart.  
How can love be wrong?  
How can this be choice?  
I'd choose anything but this.  
But,  
How can I not choose myself?  
How can I walk away from family?  
So instead,  
I pull down my sleeves,  
Throw on the shades,  
And smile.  
Punch to the gut; gasp.  
Don't let them see you.  
Slap to the face; wince.  
Don't you dare.

## THE CURSE OF BEING DIFFERENT

*Eden Chua*

We're cursed to the shadows,  
The precious gold of our love tarnished  
and stolen  
by your words laced with arsenic  
and your rough hands  
that slapped us out of sight.

We, those who fell in love with those of our own gender  
are forced to crouch in the darkness  
because we're different.  
And our difference was our crime.  
You sneer at us and bully us and  
force some of us  
into death's hands,  
Accumulating your collection  
of diamonds ground to powder  
under your heel.

Why,  
Why don't you understand,  
That we were as helpless as you were  
when it came to falling in love.

---

Jay is an English teacher from Mississippi. She is currently working on her first novel and other projects.

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Eden comes from Singapore, a society with rather conservative views on issues concerning LGBT. It pains her greatly to hear the word "gay" or "faggot" being used as a taunt. Through her writing, she hope to be able to open up the minds and hearts of her conservative fellow citizens as well as global citizens and bring about equality for all one day.

**Y**asmin is 24, from Hertfordshire, England and is currently completing a Masters degree in Creative Writing

## TOXIC

*Yasmin Rahman*

I pull on my pyjama shorts and a peach tank top before spraying some perfume on my neck. Hearing footsteps creaking in the hallway, I turn the lamp off and climb under the covers. There's a click of a light and a flush of the toilet, then a door creaks shut before the house slowly settles into silence. My heart starts pounding as the clock ticks along. I can't stop the grin from spreading across my face.

Ten minutes pass before I hear the telltale crunch of gravel. There's some shuffling as the window is pulled fully open and I hear a harsh thump followed by a stream of whispered cursing. I try to stay still with my eyes closed, but my whole body is buzzing, and I let out a small giggle. When the mattress finally dips, a gust of cold air streams in as the covers are raised. Arms wrap around my waist from behind and a cold kiss lands on my cheek. I turn around.

"Hi," Emma whispers, snuggling up to me.

"You're late," I say, trying to put on a stern face. The streetlight outside filters in through the window and illuminates her face; I see her smirk as her eyes flit down to my lips.

"I'm so not late." She moves closer. "I was waiting to make sure your dad was actually asleep this time."

"Don't pretend you didn't enjoy that," I say, running my fingers up her arm and into her hair. I feel her breath hitch. "Hiding under the bed, trying to keep quiet. You loved all the drama."

"What I loved," she says, her lips just centimetres away from mine. "Was you trying to make it up to me?" She flashes me a quick grin and then we're kissing, our mouths fusing, my hands in her hair, our legs intertwined and a storm of butterflies fluttering all over my body.

"Listen...I'm really sorry about what happened at lunch today," she says.

"It's okay," I mumble.

rest of it's just for show."

"No, look. You know I didn't mean to—"

I nod and let her reassure me with a kiss.

"It's fine. I keep a change of clothes in my locker, so it wasn't a big deal."

"I'm still sorry." She pauses. "Kevin's such a dickhead."

"Then why are you still friends with him?" You'd think after all this time, I'd know not to bring up the topic, to just keep quiet and enjoy our time together while it lasted, but sometimes I feel like I can't stop myself.

"Ally, come on. Let's not get into this again," she sighs, pulling away from me. The cold invades the space between us.

"Is there something going on between you two?" I blurt before I can stop myself. I can't get the whispers I heard in the hallways out of my head.

"Of course not," she says calmly. "I hate that dickhead as much as you do. But you know I can't stop hanging out with him, not without losing all my other friends. Ally, you know how much everyone looks up to him. I can't say no to him without—"

"I know, I know." I sniff back the tears.

"Hey," She tilts up my chin. "You and me, we're the real thing, okay? The rest

\*\*\*

There are post it notes stuck on my locker again. I don't even read them anymore, just scrunch them up and toss them in the bin. It doesn't seem to deter whoever's doing it, though. Someone pushes into me on my way to registration and I almost topple to the ground. I put my head down and carry on walking.

Morning classes drag on. I glance at my watch every few minutes and when the clock strikes twelve, I almost run to English. I'm the first one to arrive, as usual. I walk to the back of the classroom and take my seat. My eyes immediately lock onto the door. I get that tingly sensation all over my body and can't stop my leg bobbing up and down. Seconds tick by and the commotion in the hallway gets louder and louder. The door opens and Leslie walks in. I give her a little wave and she walks over to sit next to me.

"Hey," she says, getting out her books. "Get up to much last night?"

"Oh, y'know, the usual. Just doing... homework and stuff." My eyes are still on the door. It opens again and I sit up a bit in my chair, but it's only a couple of girls, giggling away.

"Is that what the kids are

calling it these days?" Leslie laughs.

I turn to her, my cheeks turning red. "What do you mean?"

"Girl, you've got it bad! Who is she?"

"What? No one. Nothing. I mean..." I fiddle with the bracelet Emma got me for my birthday, looking down and waiting for my face to return to normal. "There's no one. You're just imagining things."

The door opens again. My heart jumps and my palms get sweaty. But it's not her; it's Courtney Summers. I avert my eyes quickly, but of course she sees me looking. I feel heat creep up the back of my neck and I busy myself organising my books on the desk.

"I saw you staring, dyke!" Courtney shouts across the room. I feel my face turn red but continue to ignore her as the giggle twins start up again at the front.

"We're all staring," Leslie says loudly. "But only because your skirt is tucked into your knickers."

Courtney turns bright red as she spins around, inspecting her skirt from all angles before rolling her eyes and sitting down. The door opens again and finally, there's Emma. Her eyes flit around the classroom and when they finally land on mine, my body turns

finally land on mine, my body turns to liquid. I know it's pathetic, but this is probably the highlight of my school day. It never lasts long though. We lock eyes for a few seconds, no smiles, no words...nothing. She looks away and goes and sits at the desk next Courtney. They both begin talking quietly and laughing. Courtney keeps looking over her shoulder at me, but Emma never does. Kevin bursts into the room; just the sight of him makes me clench my fists. He struts over to Emma and Courtney's desks and I secretly watch as they have a carefree conversation.

More students flock in as the bell rings, but my eyes stay firmly on the back of Emma's head. Her hair's down today—she's curled it and it looks gorgeous. I think back to last night when my fingers were tangled through it, my lips on her neck. Mr Evans walks in and gruffly tells Kevin to get to his seat, which puts a small smile on my face. Kevin groans theatrically and moves away. But before he sits down, he rushes over and plants a kiss on Emma's cheek. A small gasp escapes my lips. I wait for Emma to recoil, to curse him out, to punch him...anything. But she just smiles at him before turning to face the front.

\*\*\*

I replay the moment over and over in my head as I lay in bed. I tell myself it meant nothing. She couldn't do anything about it; Kevin surprised her, that's all.

"I thought I was going to find the window closed," Emma whispers as she climbs into bed. I was so preoccupied reliving the kiss that I didn't even hear her come in.

"Did you want it to be?" I ask, refusing to return her embrace.

"What? No, of course not. This is my favourite part of the day." She kisses me on the cheek, just like Kevin kissed her. I pull away.

"Ally, c'mon, don't be like this..."

"So, we're not even going to talk about it?"

"What's there to talk about? It was just a kiss. Not even a real one, really."

"So when I kiss you like that, it's not real either?"

She groans. "It meant nothing, Ally. I'm not interested in him, you know that."

"Yeah, but he obviously doesn't. Why didn't you stop him?"

"What was I supposed to say? 'Don't kiss me, I have a girlfriend?' You know what would happen if they found out."

"Yeah, I do. I've been living

it for the past year. You've seen first hand how toxic those kids are, what they've...all the things they've done to me and still...still you want to be one of them."

"C'mon, Ally. That's not fair. They're not all bad. Even Kevin's a laugh sometimes."

I throw the covers off us and sit up. "I can't believe you're defending them! They are all bad people, Emma. You just can't see it because you're turning into one of them!"

"Ally—"

"You don't see it, do you? The way they treat other people, anyone who's not pretty or popular like them; it's disgusting. I don't understand why you'd want to be like that. In fact, I don't think I can be with someone who agrees with the way they behave."

Wait, what?

"I've had enough, Emma. I'm sick of being your dirty little secret. I need you to choose. Me or your fake little friends."

We're both standing now, she's a metre away from me and I'm shaking. She pauses briefly and in those few seconds my heart breaks all over again. She's going to choose them, of course she is. I want to take my words back, tell her I want her in any way she'll

have me, because I realise now how much I need her.

"Of course I choose you," she whispers. "I love you."

\*\*\*

I practically skip into school the next day. There are no new post its stuck to my locker, which I take as a sign that things are finally going the way they're supposed to. I always thought it was cheesy when people said that everything looks different when you're in love, but now I know it's true; the sun really is brighter today, the air really is fresher. I replay Emma's words in my head over and over, and can't stop smiling in class when I think of her saying those three words for the first time.

"Someone's in a good mood," Leslie says as she takes her seat next to me in English. I think about the empty seat to my right; will Emma sit there today? The thought makes my smile widen.

"Seriously, it's like you slept with a hanger in your mouth. What's going on?"

I laugh and shake my head. The classroom door opens and Courtney Summers walks in. She glares at me for a second before one side of her mouth twitches up and she walks to her desk.

"It's a girl, isn't it?" Leslie almost squeals. "I knew it! Who is she?"

I shake my head again, but the perma smile remains on my face. "You don't know her."

As much as I want to shout about our relationship to anyone that will listen, I would never out Emma like that. I know what it's like to have your secret revealed to everyone when you aren't expecting it. The door opens again and a group of people, including Kevin, traipse in.

"Oh come on, tell me! We only need one more person and we can start up our LGBT club! Can you ask her to sign up?"

The bell rings and a guy whose name I don't remember takes the seat I was saving for Emma. Mr Evans walks in and closes the door behind him. Everyone slowly stops talking. I crane my head and see that there's only one empty chair left in the room. I start to panic. Something must have happened. I saw her in the hallway earlier, so I know she came to school, at least.

Courtney turns her head slightly and smirks at Kevin, who returns the gesture. My throat begins to tighten. They must have done something to her. Oh God, she always warned me they'd do something drastic if she ever stood up to them. What if they've hurt her? It wouldn't be the first time they've done something like that.

Mr Evans says something when I jump out of my seat, but I don't hear it over the thumping in my head. I run out of the classroom and begin sprinting down the hallways looking for her. I whip out my phone and call her with shaking fingers, but she doesn't answer. After a while, I have to walk to catch my breath. As I round the corner, panting and clutching my side, I hear some squeaking against the floor and then a light pounding as someone runs away. I approach my locker to find something on it. Not just petty notes, like normal. Someone has spray painted the word "dyke" in big black letters. The paint is still dripping and the toxic smell hangs in the air. I can still hear the echoes of the footsteps so turn to follow them, pain shooting through me at every step. I turn another corner and run straight into Emma. She almost tumbles to the floor, but I grab hold of her.

"Oh thank God," I pant. "You're okay."

"Other than the rib I think you just broke, yeah I'm okay." She grimaces.

"You weren't in class, I got worried. I thought...I thought that... Oh God. I'm just so glad you're okay." I wrap my arms around her. She hesitates, but eventually returns the embrace.

"I was just in the bathroom,"

"she explains, wiping her forehead. As she raises her hand, I catch a glimpse of black on her fingers. "But keep up this protective girlfriend thing, I quite like it."

I watch her fingers as they fiddle with the same strand of hair I always end up tucking behind her ear. She twirls it around her finger, and the black paint stains her blonde hair. My heart begins to slow, as it comprehends that she's safe and she's here, with me. I realise I've never felt that scared before. The thought of something bad happening to Emma literally makes me shake and regardless of all her flaws, I'm hopelessly in love with her. When our eyes meet, she smiles widely, her cheeks turning an adorable shade of pink. I can't stop myself from placing my hand on one and leaning in. She sucks in a breath, but doesn't move away.

"Did you just call me your girlfriend?"

## DAYS OF HISTORY

Darinka Thijss

Some days I want to live in an aquarelle painting.  
Some in a faded picture of times long lost.  
Other days I want to wander in far foreign lands in that favorite book from my youth.  
And then there are days when the music lifts me higher than I've ever floated in my dreams before.  
And then some days I don't know what I want at all.  
Those days I wish for you.  
To love me.  
To hold onto my last bit of strength forever.  
Some days I wish I could live in a fictional world.  
Some days no imagined world would ever compare to the magic and the adventure of the love between you and I.  
Those days were the best history of our lives.

So I hold onto our memories a little while longer,  
built on that realm of strength to breathe a little bit softer.  
The soul reflected in your eyes is the only thing that made the jungle of my brain any calmer.  
Even though our love is misunderstood, I never knew anything that I understood more.  
Some days I wished for a world where all love was loved.  
Some days, some days I longed for you.  
Every day I wish for you.  
Some days I longed for a better place or a different place to live my days.  
But never ever on the days when I still had you.

---

**D**arinka is a history student from The Netherlands. As an aspiring writer she can be found wandering through old libraries while she dreams of fictional worlds. She loves to read, scroll through her tumblr dashboard and be with loved ones.

## SLAMMING THE CAR DOOR

Beck Corby

all important conversations with my parents take place in the car. it's absolutely horrifying, being trapped there, having to listen, 65 full miles per hour preventing you from hiding anymore, running away, or, put generously, taking a break.

it was my freshman year: i wasn't straight, but i wasn't anything else, either. my involvement in gsa prompted a discussion of "the gays," which prompted a quote that still pounds hard in my ears when i'm tossing and turning at night: "if you marry a woman, i won't come to your wedding."

of course, this was purely hypothetical. my mom didn't know anything i didn't even know anything. but it stung, more than it should've for the time. then, of course, i came out, but not to her, and it all made sense, but not to her. i guess she thought she was being nice. her words still echo when

my girlfriend holds me, itch like old scars when we kiss, ache like my feet at pride parades. every reminder of my queer identity is accompanied by that painful ringing in my ears.

"i know that you're gay. and about your girlfriend."

the worst part was that this was because i was getting depressed again. trust me, i'm not missing school because i'm too queer to go in. of course, i couldn't tell him that. i couldn't even think of a joke. i sputtered for a second, choking on my words, and possibly vomit.

i admitted that i'm gay (which is an oversimplification necessary for straight people), but lied about my girlfriend. i feel no shame in that. my identity is my own, as are my actions, and i am hurting no one with my choices. i refuse to be ashamed of needing more time. i refuse to be ashamed of wanting a proud announcement instead of a muffled whisper. i refuse to be ashamed of wanting to make my own choices, rather than having them forced upon me by others. i am only seventeen, and there is no aspect of my identity that i need to share. i feel no shame.

---

**B**eck enjoys cats, red lipstick, and playing viola. They are currently president of their high school's GSA, and look forward to graduating in spring of 2016.

# AQUARELLE

Amanda Bennett

Catherine first breathes French air when she turns seventeen, on a birthday trip from her parents. She wears a pale blue dress to see the Eiffel Tower, with shoes to match and a sequined scarf around her neck. (*Every girl going to France must have a scarf*, her grandmother said.) She commits all of it to memory: the blue of the sky, the cold of the metal, the mélange of languages shouted between the traders selling souvenirs along the Champs De Mars. She takes few pictures; she has no need of them, not when so much of her time is devoted to observing and memorizing. It is tedious work, but for a good cause: she has journeyed across an ocean not just for herself, but for her grandmother: to see the places her grandmother will never see. Her grandmother travels to France in other ways: she listens to music, and watches every Gérard Depardieu film that's shown in the local cinema, and drinks French wine, and breakfasts on croissants when the mood strikes her. Catherine is in Paris as a tourist, but also as a storyteller. When she returns to New York, in a city that bustles to a rhythm she recognizes as her own, she will tell her grandmother all that she can remember of Paris, of the city her grandmother has long wished to see, the city that has captured her imagination since long before Catherine was even thought of.

If left to herself, Catherine would draw and paint. She has brought a set

of travel watercolors, and makes quick sketches in her book when the mood strikes her: the streams of people leaving the cathedral after Mass (*I must remember the sound of the bells*); the old woman feeding the birds in the Jardins du Luxembourg; the café in the early morning, being readied for its day. She knows what to do with colors: she knows how to blend them to find the perfect shade, how to layer them to create depth, how to use grays and whites for contrast and contour. She doesn't put words to these works of her hands.

Catherine has some skill in description; but then, art students describe, on the whole, things which don't move and which don't change. Catherine can sit before a painting for hours, jotting down notes about this and that; disappear to a different gallery or for lunch; and return some time later to find "her" painting waiting for her, just as she left it. There's a method to describing a work of art; there are things to look for, precise aspects to consider and in a particular order, specific vocabulary to employ. But describing works at the Louvre for her grandmother will be nothing like writing a formal analysis at the Metropolitan for one of her classes. (*Tell me what it felt like*, her grandmother said. *I'll remember, if you remind me*.) In French, *remind* can be translated as *se rappeler*, which derives from the Latin *appellare*, which means to name, which is fitting: Catherine's task is

to put a name to all that she experiences, and in so doing, to remind her grandmother of things she used to know.

*Récit* is the most delicious French word, she thinks, sitting alone on a riverboat café, sipping café-crème in the shadow of Notre Dame. It means *story*, but has its root in the same Latin word as *recitation*, as in the poetry she tries to remember, to no avail, and *recitative*, the brief bursts of operatic dialogue sung in the cadence of everyday speech. The act of recalling memories is inherently an act of storytelling; Catherine knows this better than most. She dutifully records the afternoon in her notebook: the sunlight glinting all manner of colors off of the stained glass windows; the chatter of the schoolchildren running from the school gates; the tourists who stop in the middle of the sidewalk to take pictures whenever they see French street signs (*wrought of green metal, with blue enamel*, she notes, they look somewhat art nouveau). She takes notes on the hubbub in the Métro and the wild frenzy of the Place de l'Étoile, where cars whiz past pell-mell, without lane demarcation and without any apparent concern for pedestrians. She learns, belatedly, that there is an underground walkway, but her story is better for having had to brave the traffic.

Catherine makes it a point to revisit all of these places at night, to remark on the change in the air and the beauty of the city lit up in the darkness. (*You must tell me everything*, her grandmother said.) She notices things

she didn't in the sunlight: the radiating boulevards seem to go on forever, lit as they are by streetlamps as far as she can see. The Louvre is a revelation: the pyramids, something of an eyesore during the day, glow from within. The lights from the cafés spill out onto the streets. She doesn't have enough words for *light* and its assorted characteristics in her vocabulary; she'll need to expand it before she sees her grandmother.

Part of the problem is color, which is the most difficult thing to describe, Catherine realizes, staring out at the Seine, leant against the stone railing steps from the Musée d'Orsay. (*Color is extremely important*, her grandmother said.) She knows how the Seine has been described: silvery and serpentine, neither of which would be good enough for her grandmother, and when pressed, Catherine would be obliged to agree with her. It's poetic, but the Seine really isn't homogenous silver; in some places, it certainly is, but in others, in the afternoon light, it seems tinted a blue-gray. Looking down from her current vantage point, it flows a brilliant sapphire blue. The trick to color lies in poetry, like so many other things. Catherine considers, when noting the grey of the cloudy sky, whether or not she will describe it as the color of Camus's Amsterdam; of stormy seas or of day-old snow; or still the grey of early-morning fog that tints the world in shimmering, obfuscating smoke. Her grandmother isn't sighted, but she sees color in other ways: Kafka is grey; Dickens, scarlet; Woolf, robin's egg blue; Hugo, the glowing gold of streetlamps at midnight.

Catherine gives in to the melancholy that has haunted her trip on the flight home, somewhere between Greenland and Canada. Try as she might, she'll never encapsulate the full experience. There are no words to adequately describe a city for someone who will never see it. And then it occurs to Catherine that her grandmother would have a very different experience of Paris: she might not have seen the lighted boulevards, or the boats docked along the quays, or the sunlight streaming rainbow-colored spots on the cathedral floors, but she would have savored the sounds of it, the languages tossed between people, the street musicians whom Catherine has mostly ignored, the flurry of activity in the flea market. She will have pressed her fingers to the worn stone of the cathedral pillars and felt not for texture but for something more, something inarticulable that escapes Catherine. She would feel the roughened stone, perhaps, and know then what it is to be in Paris, as Catherine felt looking down on the city from the Basilica of Sacré-Coeur. She will have lived in the city in a way in which Catherine cannot.

*Tell me about the streets,* her grandmother will say, and Catherine will describe broad avenues with wide, flat granite sidewalks and cobblestone streets, and twisting medieval alleyways that seem to go nowhere but in circles, but eventually, inevitably, lead to the river. She will describe the thrill of standing at the Arc de Triomphe and looking out at the radiating boulevards and the exhilaration of seeing the city from the Eiffel Tower. She will describe the wind and the sounds and smells it carries, and how it feels to wake at six-thirty and find the city still half-

asleep, laced with latent energy but only just beginning its day, on the precipice of coming alive. She will talk of the Vespas that zoom down the streets at all hours (*Glorified bicycles*, her grandmother will say).

*Tell me about the Louvre,* her grandmother will say, and Catherine will tell her how her shoes echoed on the stone floors. She will describe the Nike of Samothrace, rising majestically over the staircase; the throngs of tourists crowding around the Mona Lisa, its protective glass darkening with each photograph they take. She will describe the sculpture galleries in the dungeons, with light streaming through the barred windows, lighting the sculptures from behind; she will tell her of Leonardo and Michelangelo and Delacroix. She will think of ways to describe layers of paint and varnish. She will tell her how it is to stand in awe before the ruins of Persepolis, in a gallery quieted by its commanding objects. She says that she was moved by the strokes of pencil and the visible grain of paper; that she traced it, in the air, with her finger; that she settled for hours before Leonardo's *St. John the Baptist*, one painting among the many that line the hallway toward the sanctum sanctorum of the Mona Lisa, ignored in the rush for Leonardo's masterpiece. She will describe how difficult it is to look away.

*Tell me how you looked,* her grandmother will say, and Catherine will do her best to describe her hair, which she's dyed auburn, a far cry from her natural dirty blonde; she will describe dark blue jeans and the blousy peasant shirt she wore, with its embroidery around the neckline, and the kitten heels which kept

the outfit from looking as if it stepped out of the seventies (her grandmother will laugh). And she will look for the words to describe how it feels to have another's hand - a woman's hand, a slender hand, with painted nails and rings - slip into her own. To describe the taste of her lipstick as they kiss, the velvety texture of it, the way it blends with her own. She will settle for the impression of her, words that recall the way the wind took the edges of her scarf, the way her hair kissed Catherine's cheek as leant together to talk. She will speak of her in metaphor, in fleeting shadows passing alongside Catherine's own.

*I see it now,* her grandmother will say, and Catherine will touch her grandmother's hand to her mouth so she can feel her answering smile.

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## SHE MATTERS

Caryn Turgeon

long before i knew her  
she was a tiny tendril of star dust deep  
within the soil  
delicate hands tended to her  
and with patience and praise  
her roots took hold

there she would stay  
roots deeper and stronger  
bright green stalks shooting out to wel-  
come life  
branches hugging the world  
leaves and fruit blossoms painting the  
canvas above

as a young girl  
i skipped and danced through the back  
woods  
gathering flowers and dirt  
tiny bunches of the season  
grasp tightly in my hand

i brought them to my mother  
she would display the collections on  
the kitchen table  
the blossoms welcoming us with the  
new day  
and quieting themselves to the moon

every day i would venture out  
the tree canopies above trailing path-  
ways to each open field  
another place to gather flowers  
another place to tread the dirt  
bringing home another piece of cre-  
ation

she was always there  
as i skipped and danced through the  
back woods  
her leaves protected each path  
and her seeds created the flowers  
i wildly gathered each day

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**Y**ogi. lover. creative collector. always up to good. resident of chicago with partner and cat.

## OBERGEFELL V. HODGES June 26, 2015

Rob Jacques

I will, finally, slowly, softly begin  
doing what is no longer sin: finally,  
slowly, softly kiss and behold life  
in acts no longer illegal, forbidden  
territory now a truly Edenic land,  
and I will be bold, Love, and I will  
break silence to say "I do. I stand  
beside you. I am yours this day."

Our union is one, *e pluribus unum*:  
love's last, sad prohibition trashed,  
done. We're alive in united states of  
bliss and law, our constitutions, our  
Constitution's strong enough for this:  
all our people sharing love in awe.

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**R**ob Jacques grew up in northern New England and enjoyed a 30-year career as a technical writer. He now lives on a rural island in Washington State's Puget Sound. His poems have appeared in national and regional literary journals, including *Passager*, *Quercus Review*, *Poem*, *Poesia*, *Atlanta Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Slant*, *Windfall*, *Amsterdam Quarterly*, *The Huffington Post*, and *Assacarus*.