



June
2024

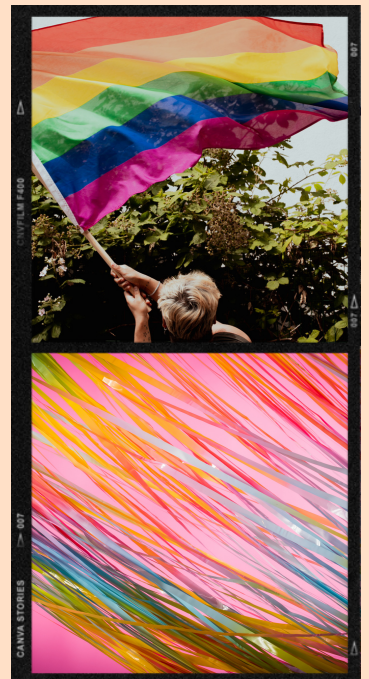
FINDING HOME IN STORIES

SHOWCASING
QUEER VOICES



STORIES
POEMS
ART
COMMUNITY

<https://queervoiccamp.wixsite.com/home>



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OUR MOTIVATION



QUEERNESS, STORIES, MUTUAL AID, AND THE LABOR OF CARE

The experiences of the queer community have been increasingly tough for the past few years all over the world. In the United States and Canada, there is a war on queer stories. Queer books are being banned and removed from the libraries in so many states in the US. The ACLU website, which keeps track of anti-LGBT+ bills in the US, tracked a record-breaking 510 bills in 2023 alone. According to Anette Choi in a [CNN article](#), this is compared to only 180 bills in 2022. Choi also states that “education and healthcare-related bills, in particular, are flooding in at unprecedented levels.” Therefore, a large part of these bills and restrictions affects schools, consequently targeting mostly queer and trans youth.

In Canada, the situation is similar. The Catholic District School Boards are fighting hard to ensure that books from queer authors are not read in secondary schools. Liam Meyers, writing for [New Ways Ministry](#), announced on their Website in January 2024 the recent banning of 2SLGBTQ+ books by the Waterloo Catholic District School Board. Since stories and their presence are among the ways we bring ourselves into being and tell about our experiences, it is fair to argue that there is an aim not only to erase queer experiences in the United States and Canada, but also to erase queerness.

Furthermore, this issue is certainly not exclusive to North America. The terror on queerness faces queer people who live in third-world countries in a terrifying manner. Ghana, for instance, passed a bill into law criminalizing homosexuality with a punishment of 3 years of imprisonment. The bill was reported by [BBC's](#) Thomas Naadi to be supported by the Christian Council of Ghana and the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council who unanimously said that being LGBTQ+ was “alien to the Ghanaian culture and family value system and, as such, the citizens of this nation cannot accept it”. This law can be said to have learned from the Nigerian anti-gay law which ascribed 14 years imprisonment to anybody found “guilty” of homosexuality. In situations like these, one begins to wonder what will become of queer youths in the face of an embattled identity. It then becomes important to look for and cling to verifiable sources of empowerment and pillars of support.

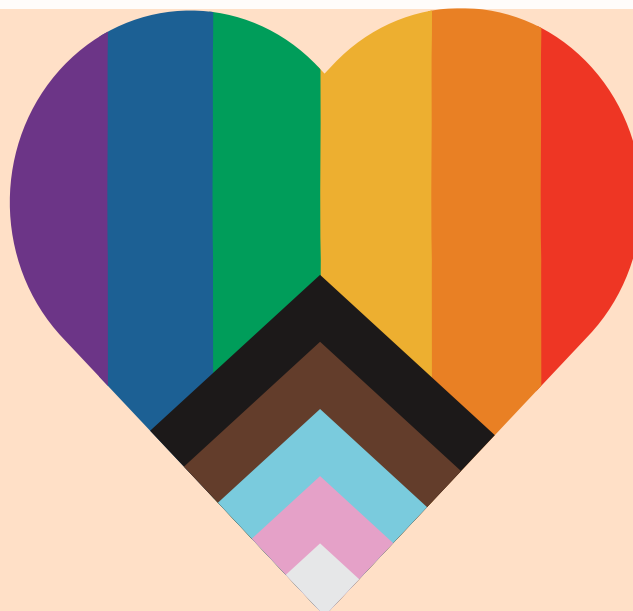




One of these sources of empowerment or pillars of support is story/storying. Our project is an effort in the interests of a group who have been pushed to hide, not be heard, who has been vilified in every field, and whose lives are rendered by the dominant heterosexual population invisible and unlivable, and their sorrows “ungrievable.” We see this as an act of solidarity, an attempt to foster kinship in the queer community through shared experiences that would be realized by individuals of the community telling their stories, using different genres from poetry to short stories, and any other medium. The genres allowed our participants to write and “right” their experiences and present, even in paintings, experiences that tend to be erased. We hope this intervention will be our way of standing with the participants’ life-telling.

Initially, we hoped to focus on the local community of Hamilton, Ontario, since this is where our group is situated, and due to the idea that interventions must be local. However, as the project developed, we received submissions that represented the voices of a more diverse audience. And then we realized that we had no control over the premise of the intervention. Now, our magazine features works from Hamilton, the United States, and other places around the globe. While we see the value of community and amplifying local voices, we decided that this kind of diversity allows us to present a wider range of experiences.

While working on this project, we met with many challenges and surprises. Our timeline meant that we could not accept as many submissions as we hoped to receive. Additionally, trying to reach out to organizations for support or collaboration proved to be more difficult than we initially thought. Budget, too, was an aspect we struggled with. Despite these difficulties, we managed to achieve a rather impressive amount of work in a very short time. As four extremely busy graduate students, we were able to make time for this magazine, since it is so important to us.





This project means a lot to us, and that is why we are extremely grateful to the creators who were brave enough to bare their souls in these personal and beautiful works of art with us. The creators matched their willingness with our enthusiasm, which led to this collection of wonderful submissions:

1. **Kolt Steele**, in ***"The Erosion of Acceptance: A Generation's Journey from Inclusion to Isolation"***, tells us about the shift within the queer community in recent years, and inspires us to unite again.
2. **Elliot's "The Lesson" (2021) and "Buzz, Cut!" (2021)** reflect the reality of queerness and transness, with an abstract yet highly intimate display.
3. **Emmy**, in ***"The Art of Being Me"***, shares his personal experience with queerness and internal acceptance.
4. **Reign's "Pretty Boys"** invites us into a personal rollercoaster of emotions that come with love and attraction.
5. **Lisa Nova's untitled work and "Hypnosis"** illustrate a unique set of emotions.
6. **Jonathan Wixson**, in ***"Drag Queen"***, reveals a secret desire to become his true self in the form of a dazzling drag queen.
7. **Vivian**, in ***"Our Sins Are More Sinful Than Theirs"***, questions the idea of sin and what it is like to learn about it as a queer person in Nigeria.
8. **A. Alex Thomas**, in ***"this world, a black box theatre"***, presents us with struggles of identity through the metaphors of Greek mythology.
9. **Mhembeuter Jeremiah Orhemba**, in ***"The Pulsating Thing In Your Chest is a Flower Bursting Blood"***, presents us with the emotional adventure that is the gay dating scene.
10. **"Ernest Ohia"** invites us to experience the turmoil that is being a queer creator.

We have greatly enjoyed these works, and we hope you do too. Join us on a journey of self-discovery and solidarity.



ABOUT US ✨

Kari is currently finishing her MA in Cultural Studies & Critical Theory at McMaster University with her research involving Indigenous lived experience, social media, memes and fandom. She has two BA's in Indigenous Studies and History, that are also from Mac. She is an Auntie to many nieces/nephews and currently holds the title of Miss Six Nations, which is a community ambassador role.



Kari Hill
(She/Her)



Elise is currently working on their Master's degree in Culture Studies and Critical Theory. They have a Bachelor's degree in English Literature, and 8 years of teaching experience. Elise's research is focused on trans and nonbinary representation in literature and media.

Elise Bennet (they/them)

Gavin is currently completing his MA in Cultural Studies and Critical theory at McMaster university, focusing on pedagogies of grief and Intimacy in his upcoming major research project. When not studying or writing, Gavin spends his time reading, writing music, and hanging out with his partner and their cat Peanut in their home in Hamilton, Ontario.



Gavin Rees (he/him)



Samuel is an MA student of Cultural Studies and Critical Theory at McMaster University in Canada. He holds a degree in English and Literary Studies from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He is interested in climate change; the interplay of power, gender, sexuality, and common people; and manifestations of those in literature, media, and public discourse.

Samuel Ikueze
(he/him)

KOLT STEELE (HE/HIM)



The Erosion of Acceptance: A Generation's Journey from Inclusion to Isolation

As a member of the queer community who grew up in the 90s, I have witnessed a drastic shift in societal attitudes towards sexuality and gender identity. In the past, being queer was a symbol of unity and solidarity, a badge of honour that brought people together in the face of adversity. However, in recent years, this sense of community has eroded, replaced by a climate of hate and unacceptance.

The change is palpable. Growing up, we fought for being different, we believed it was something to be celebrated, that our diversity was a strength that made us unique and beautiful. We encouraged each other to be ourselves, to embrace our identities and express them proudly. But today, it seems that this message has been lost, replaced by a culture of fear, silence, and judgment.

One of the most significant factors contributing to this shift is the lack of desire to educate our communities. In the past, we were eager to learn about each other's experiences, to listen to each other's stories, and to support one another through thick and thin. But now, it seems that this curiosity and empathy have given way to apathy and disinterest. We no longer ask questions, no longer seek to understand, and no longer offer support to each other.

Instead, we have become quick to judge, to assume, and to condemn. We have forgotten that everyone's journey is unique, that everyone's struggles are valid, and that everyone deserves respect and kindness. We have become so focused on our differences that we have lost sight of our shared humanity.





The impact of this shift is too profound. Many members of the queer community, especially the older generation, are feeling increasingly isolated and disconnected. We are growing old in a world where our ideas or misconceptions are not met with understanding and support but instead, are met with suspicion, fear, and hostility. We are facing a reality where we are no longer part of the community, now we are seen as outsiders, and are made to feel like we don't belong.

It's heartbreaking to see a community that should be united in pride and solidarity is

instead, divided, fragmented, and disconnected. We are no longer the vibrant, diverse community that once stood together in the face of adversity. We have become a collection of individuals, each struggling to find their place in a world that seems increasingly hostile and unforgiving.

We can change the narrative, reclaim our community and create a world in which everyone has a sense of belonging. We can do this by rediscovering our shared humanity, by listening to each other's stories, by supporting each other's struggles, and by celebrating our differences. We can do this by educating ourselves and each other, by asking questions, and by seeking to understand. We can do this by being kind, by being compassionate, and by being accepting.

Let us come together, my dear queer community, and let us build a world that is inclusive, welcoming, and loving. Let us create a world where everyone can be their authentic selves, without fear of judgment or rejection. Let us make our community a place where everyone belongs, where everyone is valued, and where everyone is loved.

We can do this, my friends. We can create a brighter future, a future that is filled with hope, with love, and with unity. Let us start today, start now, and never look back.



ELLIOT, (THEY/HE)



Hello! I am Elliot, and I am an artist working in Texas. I make paintings and prints that reflect on my relationship with nature, bodies, conflict, and loss. I love to find beauty in the mundane and the grotesque.



The Lesson (2021)
Acrylic and gouache on wood panel
15" x 15 3/4"





Buzz, Cut! (2021)
Acrylic on canvas
11" x 14"



EMMY, HE/HIM ❤️

The Art of Being Me

Growing up, I found myself walking a path less traveled, one that led me to question societal norms and confront my own identity. As I reflect on those formative years, it becomes clear that my journey was, in many ways, a search for authenticity. In a world where boys were expected to embrace traditionally masculine interests, I often found myself drawn to pursuits that set me apart. I didn't share the same enthusiasm for sports or the rough-and-tumble play that seemed to define many of my peers. This divergence from the expected norm drew its fair share of teasing and taunts. I was labeled as effeminate, a softie, and at times, I couldn't help but wonder why I was different.

The realization that I would someday become a father added a new layer of complexity to my internal struggle. How could someone like me, who had always felt like a gentle soul, fulfill the role of a protector for my family? It was a question that weighed heavily on my mind. At the age of fifteen, I ventured into the realm of social media and joined the Facebook community. It was there that I stumbled upon a revelation that would change the course of my life forever. I discovered that I was not alone, that there were others who shared my experiences and feelings. It was my introduction to the LGBTQIA community.

The pivotal moment arrived when someone asked me a question that sent shivers down my spine: "Are you gay?" I was left utterly dumbfounded, as I had never thought about my sexuality before. It was in that moment of self-reflection that I came to understand my sexual orientation—I wasn't straight, not even close. Then, there was this guy on Facebook, a friend, I'd say, who embodied everything I aspired to be. He exuded resilience and self-confidence, standing unapologetically in the face of negativity. I looked up to him and admired how he embraced his true self. His example was the catalyst that propelled me to embrace my own identity after years of self-doubt and self-loathing.





Opening up about my sexuality was a daunting prospect. I confided in some individuals, only to be met with mockery and scorn. The ridicule and negativity stung, but I was determined to find answers to a pressing question: why was the LGBTQIA community so frequently the target of hatred and discrimination? As I delved deeper into this inquiry, the fear of being a victim of homophobia was a constant, unsettling presence in my thoughts, but the more I learned about the LGBTQIA community through my own experiences, the clearer it became that there was absolutely nothing wrong with being gay. We were human beings, and our lives mattered.

Yet, there were those who treated us as if we were unnatural, an aberration. We should not be criticized for our sexual orientation, for the struggles we endure, or the emotions we keep hidden deep inside. There were instances when members of the LGBTQIA community, who have suffered in silent eventually resorted to tragic measures to escape the torment of homophobia. It was a stark reminder that the discrimination and hatred we faced were not trivial matters. However, here's the crux of the matter: it's not our sexualities that cause our struggles. It's the discrimination and animosity hurled in our direction.

But if we were to be unequivocal about things—we are here, and we are not going anywhere. It's a reality that everyone must come to terms with. My journey has been one of self-discovery and acceptance. It's a journey that continues to this day as I strive to embrace my authentic self. In sharing my story, I hope to shed light on the importance of unity within the LGBTQIA community. Together, we can break down the walls of silence and shatter the chains of discrimination. We are here, we are proud, and we are worthy of love and respect, just like anyone else.

Love,
Emmyy





Pretty Boys

If you are going to write about heartbreak, then, of course, you are going to write about the boy from ten years ago; or the twins you fuck every other night, or the boys who you want, but do not see you as you see them, or all your first loves and all your exes.

The boys who do not see you in that light are from school— they are the ones you would hug and pray it lasts; the ones who make you want to sleep early every night, because, in your dreams, they'd kiss you silly and ask you to stay. But, this isn't about love or the feeling at the back of your throat when you cannot think past a recent breakup. This is about naivety. This about you; on them.



Did you delete those texts? Your phone beeps. It's a message on WhatsApp. You hurriedly ignore every other person you are engaged with via conversation to reply this one. He could pass for the one— the right one. After all these years, yes, it may be worth it. You stare blankly on the phone screen, searching yourself the words appropriate to not only soothe him, but also elevate you when you meet, as the event of the previous day comes flooding in. You respect him so much, you wouldn't want to come for him as you would other men who disrespect you— even at the slightest. Or, you love him that much, with him, you blur the lines between disrespect and love, that you evidently ignore the consequences it may pose, if any was to stand without the other.

With him, you betray your own rules, because, after all, you overlook these sides of him on several occasions; like when he comes to see you at your mother's residence, on the last floor of the large storey building. He would lie to one of your mother's tenants who happened to be one of his numerous acquaintances that he has come to see the nineteen year old daughter of the man who lived just below your mother, when, in earnest, it was you he has come to see. Giving this, what reply would you give? All of a sudden, everything about him begins to irritate you. It did not just start— it happened slowly. First, you are enraged about the previous day, when you posted on your WhatsApp update that as the day was rainy, and you were not working, you were willing to hang out with someone new; anyone who was available and was interested. They would text you and you'd have your driver pick them.





He texts you, now.

"I'm available," his message reads.

"Could we meet somewhere new and not at home?" the message continues. You oblige without stress. May men not be the end of you. One thing happens, and then another and then he starts sexting you, whilst you get prepared.

"I cannot wait to feel your ass." He says and with it comes a video call which you ignore.

"Let me take my bath. I'll send the details and my driver will pick you." You end the conversation and go in to bath.

This boy is beginning to get into your head and into your heart, but God, may you not love the wrong person. What is love? A fleeting feeling. Because, after Emi broke your heart, it's been from Blue to West to the lengthy list of boys you've been with and half of whose names you've forgotten. God save you. But men? They are gods in jeans.

You are done taking your bath now and after throwing yourself into a flirty outfit, you return to your phone.

"The Orange Room Resorts, room 90, 7pm till dawn, that's if it's okay with you. I'll have my driver contact you in a few." You text Bee.

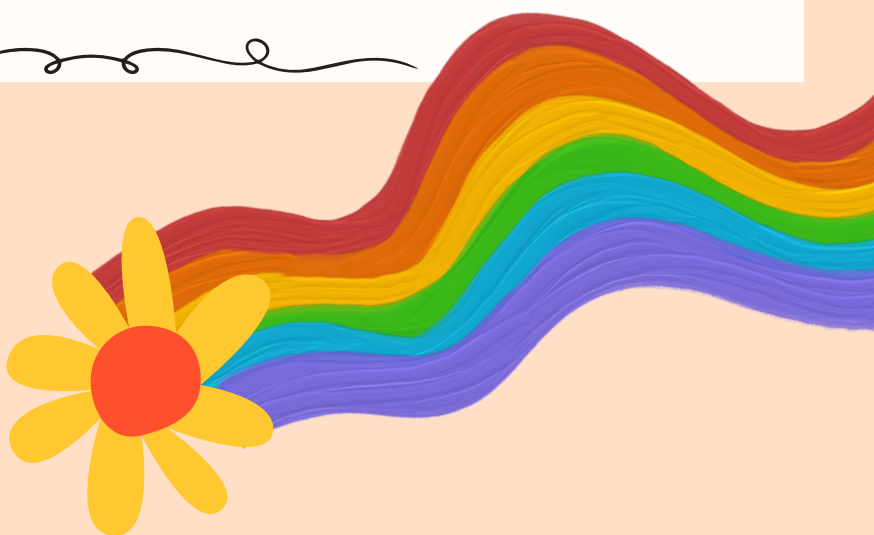
You call on your driver afterwards to drop you off. At The Orange Room an hour later, you are sipping vodka, it brings out the devil in you, the sexy devil. Then it comes in,

"Jesus What is this" the text lacks the appropriate punctuations and it's from Bee. It continues, "Please this is not me, someone was using my phone to text you."

"What is all this please?" You thought to yourself in disgust. Momentarily, you go on Instagram to reply a friend whose flight is due the next day, and then you return to reply Bee. You stare at the message, lacking the proper words. Now, you begin to text him.

"I love games that play out this way. Don't get peeved. This other person was using my phone to reply your texts, too. Maybe you should try to silence your screaming insecurities and leave me out of them. You are mad, baby, and no one has told you."

You send it across and with the annoyance you feel, you gulp down the glass of vodka you are holding and head for the reception hall, you ask for a refund which doesn't come, and at the arrival of your driver, head home.



It is the third day now. You have completely avoided his feeds, emails, and his existence— anything that would bring you into his space. This is something new. It is something you don't believe you can do, but, here, you are doing it and you are admiring this new found strength. "It's giving," it murmurs in your head. You smile.

At some point, Bee was everything you'd want for yourself, until he stopped being. Right from the first time he texted you on the then popular text app, 2go, till when you'd joke around with each other on Facebook, then you moved. You left the city for the big state because you needed to go to school. Two years in, and you return, before the COVID-19 menace, and, again, you meet. These are the earliest memories, before the past years, when in college, you wouldn't even look his way, prior to being in two different relationships and trying to maintain balance therein. He would want to hang out with you in secret places and place his arms over your shoulders and ask you particular questions about yourself, but these, they weren't new to you. Men will be men, especially closeted men. It is the last year now and you've graduated from college, letting whatever that happened in college, remain there in college, except Bee, because he followed you everywhere. Three years after college, and two previous break ups, you indulge Bee.

"Are you alone?" The text begins, in response to his "Can I see your dick?"

"No. I'm with my roommates, but, I could step out," he texts back.

"It's alright. Please, don't, call me when you are alone." You end the text here and set out to get dinner.



Your updates on WhatsApp show that you aren't currently in the city, and before that, a defiant note that you are purposely ignoring someone in your DM. That someone is Bee, and that's after you've read his texts, where he asked if you deleted his sexts. He is incessant and annoying. You flare up. You cool off. You flare up, again. He could still see your stories. You restrict him, and, again, try ignoring him, but no. The near perfect moments you share with him comes to you, again— you have spammed him with your pictures, your nudes and he's done same, holding naked video sessions with you. The stupid things you do for love. It becomes a habit, to daily spam him with pictures of you doing the littlest of things and him doing mundane things such as softly smiling or clutching his erect dick. It becomes your thing; a love language. He's the first man you are walking this path for; throwing your home training under the bus. He is, at that time, away— at the city's capital, and you, in one of the big states. He is gentle, and you like that he is. Then, during the easy days after Corona raided the country, you text him. It reads, "How do you like to be touched?"



He isn't online, so you leave to meet up on an appointment with your doctor— an eye specialist. On the way, he calls, you answer. "Come online," he says with his soothing voice. You do.

"I don't know how. You are the first man, and I don't think it's the same way with a woman, but I would always say my dick, it would be up at the slightest touch." His text reads.

You send a laugh emoji. You go offline. You let it go through your mind. You don't like virgins; they kill the moment in bed and the blackmail that follows is the other thing you hate more. But Bee, he gives you the assurance, that you think it is what you feel, so, you ignore the little voice in your head and go back online to text him.

"I'd be home late. Could we meet tomorrow evening, at home?"

"Yes."

First, it is your mother's house where you have 2 rooms to yourself; on the side you currently live, and the third, on the other side of the house, if you wish. He comes in, and after a little conversation, you move to him and begin to touch him. He sits and watches you, a young, vibrant wildness in his eyes, and you are aroused. Men can be effortlessly hot. After a series of failed attempts at kissing, it happens— you both help each other jerk off. Second, it is your room, chilly, and on your bed, a naked body with a childish face. It appears peaceful. You've just helped him explore his own body and made him understand the most responsive parts of his body, and he's grateful. His nipples made him moan loudly. His earlobes made him scream your name and he'd convulse uncontrollably whenever your mouth was on his manhood. It's a pleasant sight, that while this happens, you forgive his naivety at pleasing you— he will learn sooner. An excuse, yet, a glimmering certainty.

Third; a blowjob. Fourth; a lap job. Then, numerous others.



"I ignored this message. Now that I have the time, I'll respond. You are stupid, and your lack of respect for basic human relationships would cost you more than you can ever think. I've ignored most of your nonsense simply because it's you. Look, nobody deserves the amount of disrespect you serve me. I'm not everywhere like most people are, and, even as much as I try to respect you and tame you, you still wouldn't learn. Look, I'm past several nonsense, and I've outgrown certain spaces. I'm very open minded, and I can easily do whatever I want to do with anybody, which includes sex. But why would you make me feel bad and unsafe around you? Why would you make me question my essence, and, above all, my sanity? Simply because I make out with you? I see the way you fidget when coming to my mother's house and I see the way you sneak out and I laugh, simply because you are still a scared child. I don't have the time. There are better things to do. You treat me like sin, and I laugh, because I don't care. I don't see myself settling for you now or ever. I clearly know what I want for myself and you are not that thing. I watch the way you avoid being seen around me, and, again, I laugh because you are an unweaned child who keeps running back to the mother for breast milk. I'm not a bad person, I still hold on, hoping you learn. I still go against my standards to make you feel alright, and you don't appreciate this. I don't care, but, then, I won't have you misbehave and waste my time with your incessant needs and indecisiveness. Why would you text me to only come back to say someone else used your phone to text me? I've been with people, matured, mentally sound people and, seriously, you do not match that league, talk more, fit. Why would you ask me if I cleared my own chats? You can't even trust me— someone you've been with for a reasonable amount of years, and you want me to take you seriously?! I won't treat this issue anymore. Don't make me take measures because you'll go on to say it was all on me. Return the respect I give you. I don't care about your acceptance. Fuck it! I don't care about your stupid, demented, immature insecurities. Deal with them, but Bee, return the respect I give you. That's all." You finally bring yourself to respond to his text. You send it and in the following weeks, the silence follows— deafening— but that isn't any of your problem, not any more. You hate to be disrespected in general, let alone by men you fuck. You are commanding your respect, that is all that mattered now.



You text your best friend; about the 14th February of the same year, it is about Bee who, despite his lack of understanding of sexualities, has made love to you like never in the past. This time, different. He had you lay on your back and not wanting you to do anything. He takes the lead, from the way he kisses your neck to the way he reaches for your dick, and from there to the way he rides you senseless— dominating! The guts! It feels amazing. This is unlike him. He would learn, and like you once told yourself he would, he did. It is more different when after you climaxed, he looks you in the eyes; his eyes are smiling. He gets down and wraps his warm body around you. Your best friend replies, she calls you a slut, and like always, you cheer to that with a love and light emoji.

On the Easter of the same year, you are texting your best friend again, it's about something you refused to do. You are not in the city, you are away in the big state, helping an aunt get her papers checked at the airport for a trip to America and whose first flight from the big state to Frankfurt, Germany is due two days after Easter Monday. He sent you some details, including what place to meet him. He has traveled back to the city to see you, without notice. He pleads when he realizes you are away, but there's nothing you can do, you are busy and you cannot help it. You are unhappy, you should have gone to spend the Easter holidays with him. He's sad and angry and alone for a week, till he leaves. Your best friend cheers you up and goes on to tell you about what she really thinks about you and about Bee.



A month of silence from him, after you've asked to be respected. You know this isn't about respect or trust or basically just about any minor quarrel. You both always work things out but this? This is something else and you aren't willing to investigate or ask to meet anywhere and talk. You restrict Bee, the illusion is you blocked him but you did not, hence, on his part, no reason to block you.

First, it is the relocation to Dubai. You pretend not to know and move on with your life. You are quickly choosing respect over any relationship. But you don't trust the process.

"Hello.... How are you?"

He calls in one evening. It's an event you are having flashbacks on.

"I'd be coming to see you. I need to talk to you, and I swear it is the last time I'm going to be with you or do this."

"I'm home; and you drop the call."

He comes in later, he begins to say somethings about his birthday and some other expenses and the gift he wants from you. He's holding back, and you are not pushing. You fuck him and he says he doesn't want to see you anymore, as a matter of fact, this is going to be the last time. He leaves, you are sober but quickly find solace in an Andre bottle.

A week later, he's calling and you are ignoring, when you finally answer, he's begging to see you. You refuse for a week and go to see him the next.

—Dubai

He does not tell you about his relocation, but you know something isn't right. he hasn't called after the last time and you are still mad at him. You refuse to either care or let him lure you into touching him. Then, one evening, you are stumbling on his stories: Dubai, be nice. You are happy for him. You feel anger. You wish him well. You feel stupid and you are texting Zikora, you are ranting, she calms you, you are pacified, at least for a bit.

He moves to Dubai, before that he pushes you out of his life, he ends everything beautiful you have going on for you both, it is what you are thinking. Exactly the reality.

Is that why he's been distant so lately? So different in recent times?

Kings do not cry. You move on, he will call you soon, nature or mother karma takes care of that. You sip chilled water, smile and go back to flirting with Rudi.

There are those of us in whose hearts pain holds a very special place. We get drunk on sad thoughts and wrong loves, those of us who, out of yearning and the very clear uncertainty, have developed a liking— more like a bond— with all that which comes to hurt and do us wrong. And Bee is no different. The sudden surge of what he has been with you and has done to you consumes you.

—Then,

It is a notification, Bee's online and he makes a post. It is a video, created with the TikTok app. There, among the slides, is Bee, holding a girlfriend of some years, you later find out, close to himself.

"Can your baby ever?" she says, licking his earlobes.

He's smirking, he always does. That shy, childish show of pure innocence. But, you know him, the untamed wildling he is. A smile tears on your lips, you find yourself silently laughing. You reserve pity for the girl. You pray it lasts, whatever it is they are having, if only she knows. You drop your phone and leave for the sitting room, you have been played at your own game. Again, may you not love the wrong person; you find yourself praying out loud.

You are no stranger to these things —pretty boys, pretty closeted boys, have their own girlfriends and they always go back to their girlfriends.

You reach for the fridge, the force at which the lid opens tells of your frustrated pain; another wasted effort. "God help me," you mutter.

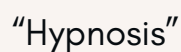
Writer, Reign.



but there's nothing in
finding it was something
like people say I
held my head in water
like I wasn't scared
to drown like I
knew when it was
over, i'd be finished
looking down and i
wondered you believe
in? Can I trust what
I can't see if I'm still
alive and breathing
you won't take the
you rest of me.

I DON'T
THINK
I HAVE
ENOUGH
TIME
TO
SHOW IT ALL
AND BE
HONEST
ABOUT IT
SO I LIVE AND DON'T SHOW IT

the quiet sound of knowing there
is nothing left to say



JONATHAN WIXSON (HE/HIM)

Drag Queen

I'm waiting for my boyfriend
And my impatience doesn't end
I will cook and do the chores
Until he comes through the doors

We watch a movie or two
While drinking wine that's new
I begin to dress in drag
Feeling pretty as you gag

I'll put on a dress, a wig, and heels
He's the one that gives me all the feels

I want to be a Drag Queen
Like I see on the TV screen
Shania Champagne is here for fun
As I'm glowing bright like the sun

Take my photos when it's raining
I'm a Drag Queen in training
I perform my lip-sync routine
As I dream to be a Drag Queen



Our Sins Are More Sinful Than Theirs.



One thing about sin is that there's a hierarchy to it. I know this because that is what I was taught in catechism classes in my holy communion class days. I was in Primary 3 and had to join other children to attend the holy communion class. It was a right of passage into adulthood for young Catholics.

One of those days, our catechism teacher, one of the boys in the minor seminary, who was home on holidays, was standing before an audience of about three hundred children reading from a yellow-colored Igbo catechism booklet. His eyes roamed from the pages of the book to us as he read out the questions and we recited the answers.

I remember that he read out the question, *ndia bu obele njo*, these are small sins. We rushed through the answers like we usually do, listing out things that constituted small sins which included telling small lies and stealing small things like pencils, pens, or a small amount of money.

Moving to the next question, he read out the question for the big sins and we recited. Even though I knew it was not included in the list of big sins, because, this was my second year in catechism class — I missed morning mass on the day of confession the previous year, hence my reason for returning to start afresh— Something inside me was waiting for us to mention it: the sin where two girls go into each other like lock and key was part of the big sins. That was what Sister Nkechi had said the day she nearly sent me to hell for kissing Chiamaka at the back of our house. Chiamaka's father lived in a compound on the other street, but being the only child closest to me in terms of landmass, we usually play together.

Sister had beaten the living daylight out of me and had threatened to send me back to the orphanage if it repeated itself. She was the reverend sister whose mother, an illiterate old widow I lived with. A year later, my sister would take me back to the orphanage not just because I was into another girl like lock and key, but because I had been accused of witchcraft and she couldn't handle me. When we finally arrived at the orphanage gate after spending one week in a prayer house where I drank anointing oil and salt for 5 days accompanied by endless night vigils with thunderous prayer sections all in an attempt to pray my desire to go into girls like lock and key away and deliver me from the evil spirit in me, she changed her mind.



"You are going for a holiday, I am not returning you to the orphanage, did you hear me?" She asked in the Achina Igbo accent

"Yes, sister," I responded as I opened the gate to home like a proverbial he-goat that knew the way to the barn. I was ten.



Thirteen years later, I would be at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in my penultimate year. That Sunday morning when the Catholic and some non-Catholic students who enjoyed good music would crowd the entire church premises of St. Peter's Chaplaincy for mass, I would be seated on the choir seat like most choristers and listen to my chaplain preach. He would divert away from the entire topic of the three Sunday readings and face what happened on campus over the weekend where a gay guy was caught and beaten at Hilltop. I would sit there and listen to him justify his assertion of supporting an innocent brutalized for whom he chose to love.

Apparently, his stand was that the boy warranted the beating because he had sinned against the holy spirit and against God the Father. My mind would wander back to my catechism class and I will remember that the sin against the holy spirit was never taught. As if reading my mind, the priest would state that any sin that has to do with sex is a sin against the holy spirit.

Seated on the pew, sweat would begin to break out from virtually every pores on my skin and it had nothing to do with being jam-packed like a sardine. Nsukka weather in June-July had just one thing that separated from the white man's winter; snow.

This line of preaching would become a tradition for three Sundays and more where every priest who mounted the pulpit found a way of including homosexuality in the sermon. I would sit on the choir seat sweating profusely, avoiding eye contact with the crucifix, begging God to take away the urge while asking for forgiveness.

Two years later, I would sit in that same space in the heart of that dry season that makes you think you are capable of drinking 20 liters of water in a day, with a wind of nonchalance around me. It's a mothering Sunday and the priest, this time, begs mothers to do their duty by raising their kids well to prevent them from turning gay. This time around, I would stand, hiss, and leave the church, wandering outside St. Peter's gate to the women selling snacks and other edible things. I would use my N100 offering money to buy groundnut, something in me would remind me of the compulsory one-hour fast before receiving holy communion, but the devil that had been on my shoulder in 2018, that same own that had made begun to ask some questions for myself would ask me if I still believed in God after all that happened at Achina. My lips would stretch apart in a devilish smile, and then I would chew away at my groundnut. I would remember Achina again and shake my head.





The events that led to my leaving Achina will always be one that amnesia can never take away from me. The stealing of a finger of banana from the head hanging from the tree in the school garden, a student reporting to our headmistress, reverend sister, let us call her Sr Justina, giving me six strokes, and the teacher who made a comment of how I don't and can never cry because of my witch power and how she went further to explain to The primary 3 teacher, Sr. Appolonia, who was present sorting out the costumes used for our graduation ceremony the previous day how I used to initiate my fellow children and how I go about making out with other children. Sister Appolonia stopped dead and stared me in the face. And that was how my nightmare began.

In her anger, she took me out into the school's courtyard, and asked me, "I so na mmuo miri?" Do you belong to the marine kingdom?

My response was, "no." I would think she would believe me, this woman, this reverend sister who had known me when I was 4 years old at the orphanage. But my belief in her would fail me because she would connect her strong palm to my tender cheeks in three deafening slaps and order me to kneel down, I would obey. Knelt under the scorching sun of August break 2005, I would remember when I first heard the clause, "I so na otu", you belong to the marine kingdom, used on me. I had just joined the school in the third term of nursery 3, rounded up the term, and was in Primary one when the rumor broke out in my class that I was from Marine Kingdom. Like harmattan wildfire, the rumor would go around the entire school, spilling over into the village. The avoidance, bullying, molestation, and beating that came with it. Still, on my knees, I would remember how my then headmistress who also knew me back at the orphanage had stopped it as she exorcised my accusers and instilled God's spirit into them with her koboko. It died down and she left the school after two terms. Little whispers of it still hung around up till then when I was on my knees under the sun that felt like it was on a mission to melt the earth.

I always believed that I was hardened and couldn't cry until I was stripped naked in my school in the presence of my schoolmates, canes were raining on me. I lost count at hundred. But I wasn't crying. Not even a drop of tears. And so, Sr. Appolonia had to take it a notch higher. Our school garden had ripe peppers. She took some smashed them and forced them in between my legs into my vagina and rubbed the remaining on my eyes.

Shaking my head, I walked away from the groundnut seller to join the mass, because the preaching was over. It would take me another two years to finally connect with my faith in God. This time, I strive hard enough to make sure nothing disconnects me from it, except that sometimes we cannot get what we ask for.

It's 2023 and I am interning as a web designer while I work in a school (I felt bored at home and needed extra cash that wouldn't require me staying at work until 6 pm). I met a gay man in my workplace and like the unlike poles, we were attracted to each other. Our discussions would transcend the daily mundane things like he usually refers to the gossip that flies around in the staff room.

"Vie, you can't lower yourself to their standard, we queer folks have a way of sticking out and being excellent wherever we are," Ejiofor (that's his name), had said one fateful sports day.

I smiled at him as I strolled into the Physics lab where I usually plug my gadgets while praying to God to touch the electricity company's heart to keep the light on because apparently, we pray for a lot of things in Nigeria.

Ejiofor and I have a tradition of exchanging movies, it was mostly him doing his best to quench my undying thirst by transferring movies to my laptop. All I did was give him the names of movies and remind him of my Netflix password. I have an inherent hatred for downloading movies. "They took long to download and may stop halfway due to network issues," I would always tell him.



"Just accept that you are impatient, love. I won't beat you, I promise." he would throw back at me and most times walk back to his space in the principal's office and I would follow him.

I would come to school one day and notice that Ejiofor was gone, his detachable keyboard that used to be beside my seat, gone, too. I would ask my colleagues and one of them, let's call her Mrs Amarachi, would look me in the eye and tell a lie about one of the best humans that has ever walked the ground of that school. "A student was caught cheating in an exam the previous term and the boy said Ejiofor gave him the question paper he had smuggled into the exam hall. When probed, the principal would be convinced that Ejiofor hadn't only given question papers but also taught them how to be gay. I would remember thinking, and remember asking Mrs Amarachi how you teach someone to be gay and how sure the principal was that it was Ejiofor who gave him the boy the question paper. That must have been what turned the beam light to me.

The principal called me to her office and accused me of making out with Ejiofor in her office, which I told her I never did.

I would remember going on my knees to apologize for being in her office in her absence. That was where she anchored her anger when I told her that I didn't make out with anyone in her office. Being someone who demands respect I went against my rule of not kneeling for anyone just to make the case go away, which she promised that it had.

During the first meeting of the term, she kept on hammering that teachers, especially the female ones should only go to class to teach and nothing more.

Being a late millennial, I am like that first daughter who understands my younger siblings better than my parents and is always a mediator between the two parties, often pleading with my siblings' cause. All I have to do is see a child on their knees and I will step in, find out what they did, and take them to apologize to who needs to be apologized to. If it requires a beating, I do it myself, so naturally the students both male and female are drawn to me. Perhaps that was what triggered the talk and accusation.

After hammering about how there are lesbians everywhere and cautioning the teachers to be role models to the students and nothing more, the meeting was adjourned and the school administrator announced that I should see him immediately.

As he sat down in his office, other teachers came in and tailored their complaints with the door left ajar, and they were all addressed. However, as I stepped into the office, the atmosphere was stiff. Something on my shoulder told me it had something to do with the lesbianism the principal couldn't let go of during the meeting. I managed to push the thought aside as I remembered the first time I was there. I had just been newly employed and had a consulting section with the school administrator. It was a mandatory thing for every member of staff to do. I remember Father welcoming me into the school and assuring me that I would enjoy my stay. It wasn't up to two days later that I saw him bashing a teacher in front of her students. Fast forward fifteen days later, standing on the altar for Christmas carol mass, Father, a priest who was six years old in priest stood before God's presence and called an entire staff and students plus pupils of the school irresponsible because people had forgotten to select a lay reader for the holy mass and because the church was noisy. My mind went round to other similar events that had happened and the high level toxicity of the place hit me hard.





Now, I am seated in a seat in front of this stout man who stared at me as if he could see your soul, as he asked me about making out with Ejiofor.

"Did you do it?" his voice pulled me back to him. Fear hit me so hard that I felt my fingers shaking, but I had to steady it and fight for myself. Don't let them see you cry, an inner voice whispered to me.

Without breaking eye contact, I responded, "I didn't," my voice coming out stronger than I imagined. That was when he called in the principal who came and tried to lie about not telling Father that she had said that I was making out with the secretary. Father corrected her and dismissed her. As she walked away, she made a comment about how I should stop teaching the children lesbianism.

Again, the thing about sin is that it is in a hierarchy: the big and small sins. I guess defamation of one's character falls under a small sin. I also guess witch-hunting your colleague, trying to find dirt on her to make her lose her job is also a small sin. I guess that was why Father didn't reprimand her or try to probe why she sacked Ejiofor. Even when she began calling me a lesbian openly in staff meetings and other official gatherings, accusing me of teaching the students lesbianism alongside Ejiofor, she got no reprimand. I guess our sins were more sinful than hers even after Father found out that she had asked an entire population of 700 students to pay N200 the previous term and had cornered it. I know this because after she had disgraced me in a staff meeting and the devil on my shoulder told me to defend myself verbally, I practically stopped myself and told myself it was time to go. Two days later, I went to her office to turn in my resignation while the same rumor career who told me that Ejiofor was caught leaking question papers was complaining to another staff about how the principal took the entire YCS money without giving her a dime, even after she had helped her get Ejiofor fired. I walked passed her and the other woman whom she was complaining to, stopped by the principal's, and got my business done.

Later that evening, I would be seated on a bed in Ejiofor's apartment and he would tell me that he was sacked because he had wanted to report to Father about the YCS dues she corners every term.

"Even if you report, he wouldn't do a thing to her. After all, she is not gay, hence our sins are more sinful than hers."



A. ALEX THOMAS (SHE/HER)



A. Alex Thomas initially intended to be a dragon trainer, however, when that failed, she decided to get her (Hons.) Bachelor of Arts in English and Philosophy at the University of Toronto. Currently a graduate student at McMaster University's Department of English and Cultural Studies, she remains dedicated to analyzing (early modern and long eighteenth-century) literature, cultural artifacts, and visual iconography through the intersecting lenses of feminist, sexuality, late-colonial, and critical race studies. In her free time, she enjoys reading sci-fi/fantasy and watching courtroom dramas. Most of all, she enjoys taking naps almost immediately after she wakes up.

this world, a black box theatre

I struggle in this flesh arena
/ a stage \
against the Greeks, against the Romans—
again, those children (borne out) of darkness.
Plato once came to me in a dream,
in a golden dress with flowers in his hair,
he emerged from the cave, looked back—
and whispered...
everything echoes in a theatre.
In this one too, our big black box,
pasts, presents, and futures reverberate—
stringing together with unheard voices
like loose threads dancing in the face of a needle:
a Dionysian cult; a group of Lost Boys; a play on rebellion.
everything echoes.
And I dance too—
slowly stitching myself together,
and bridging my worlds a-part
\
a path /
My name is *No One*
but I also go by *No More, Never Would Be,*
Too Late, and In My Time.
I stumble out of the way; I stretch myself like a cat—
Oh, how I know this place,
(an Apollo of my own déjà vu)
suffering in all its saving grace, I—
make space for all that once was,
all that should have been,
all the acts that are yet to come.
everything.



MHEMBEUTER JEREMIAH ORHEMBA (HE/HIM)

Mhembeuter Jeremiah Orhemba is a Nigerian greysexual homosexual man living his best life through his writing and spontaneous moments of small laughs. He's had his own share of gay heartbreaks, and has as well drank of the vitality of rainbow joy and community. Some of his creative works have made award shortlists / found home in Lowle, Akewi, The Muse Journal, & elsewhere. A strong believer in reincarnation, he envisions a world where everyone is seen, heard and loved in all their uniqueness.



The Pulsating Thing In Your Chest is a Flower Bursting Blood.

A sudden cold cuts through your spirit, urges you to hold yourself t(r)ight. Urine urges you to go outside and ease yourself.

Outside, smoke is in the night air. Chukwujekwu flashes across your memory's eye. He lurches onto you, lips meeting & tongue searching into yours; the wetness is drenching; your thoughts, a whirlwind. Body pushed to his bed. Chukwujekwu half-way over you. Hand quickly jolts out to the rescue, You should have at least given me a forewarning. He smiles, says sorry.

Back in your room now. You are on the bed, scrolling through your phone the draft of a short story as your eyes fall on a reference to Fireboy's Peru

....and you are hurtled into that night, glow of red bulb cast like a blood sea enveloping, Chima's room, where the song booming out of his speakers in the background, first met you. Your mind is a wobbly ceiling fan. Chima takes your hand, places it on his hardness. You pull away, gently, slowly, you almost cry.

Grindr notification. A pebble plopping into water, loud & clear in the emptiness of night. Fun asks, You fuck too? If penetration, then no, you write back. Knowing fully well you can't bring yourself to do even the frot & 69 & thigh sex designated in your bio, even though you wrote it anyway because you like to believe you can at least bring yourself to do something.

*A dreary Tuesday ago, you held A-boy's brown erect penis, fondled it a bit.
That was 'something'?*





Lights off. Heave your weight onto your plastic table into a sitting, your shorts pulled down to your ankles. Gaze upon the blot of vaseline on your finger. You wish that you had it in you to bend into the shape of a funnel: it receives & it gives. Rush of desire. Heavy waters of pleasure overwhelming.

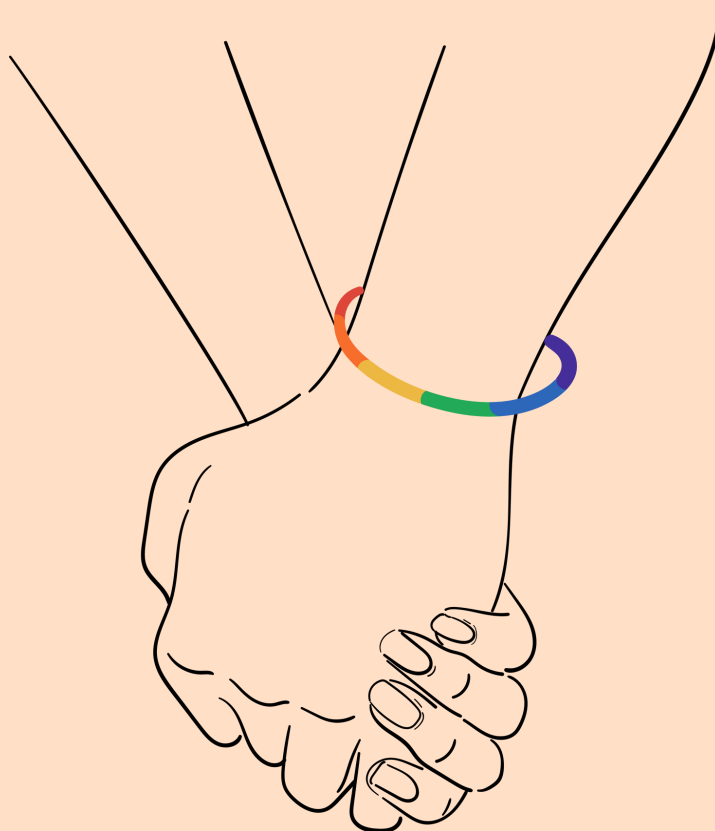
Don't lie to yourself: you'll never know it.

A thick blanket of darkness is over your eyes. You are back in bed again. You can't sleep. The itch to write your despair into the white of paper keeps drilling your chest. Once, a man lay in this bed, next to you; he, too, like Chukwujekwu, took the leap onto your lips, fast, no warning; swallowed your hardness even. Later, you said, I'm sorry I'm not like other boys. Someone in the asexual online community you created wrote, You wanna go shopping but buy nothing. As in eh, you responded.

Is that water in your eyes?

You should sleep now.

You have a lot to do tomorrow.



ERNEST OHIA

Ernest Ohia is a queer Igbo writer from Nigeria.



for several months I tried to write a poem

but I failed. the inability reduced me, only for a short period,
because I decided to try painting. that, too, didn't come
quite easy & now, on the drive back from walmart
for more bottles of gatorade, I'm sobbing like hell
in my bf's car. I remember avicii's *hey brother*
playing on the radio that day. that was the third time I heard it,
the first being 2018, with a relative in an uber outskirts of town.
the other time was on a farm in kentucky, surrounded by sows
& rabbits & those fainting goats, with the sweet smell of alfalfa
reigning. my bf was filling up the water troughs.
the song was blasting on my thinkplus lp40 as I stood by.
we were alive in a richard siken world. the orange sun was calling
at us. I totally loved it. my bf wanted me
to make him a painting, *maybe your waist*.
he wanted me to write something, *maybe about the bumble bees*
swarming above our heads. I couldn't promise him anything.
at the corner of the street, there was an old barn with the rusty corrugated roof
where I took him in my mouth
& my mind couldn't find the time to wonder if the poem will come,
or when I would likely finish the painting.

the days that came after were ordinary. one time, I took out a canvas.
then I went to the bathroom to look at my angles.
I started to mix the colors.
then I poured everything in the sink. then I watched as the weeks went by,
as if someone had fired a starting pistol & off they went.
When I turned on my computer, I wanted the blank page to speak to me.
but then it never did. I wanted to speak to it,
but the words didn't come.

today was ordinary,
very much like the others, the Japanese red maple starting to wilt
too early, the birds outside surprisingly quiet,
the page still blank, the canvas still blank,
I wasn't even sure what a cold bath would do for me.





for several months I tried to write a poem

about the man I thought I was in love with, how he came to me one complete morning, his hands gifting his body, his eyes saturated with hope like they were begging me to feast, the cold hadn't arrived, the black ice hadn't encroached the pavements outside, all the birds hadn't even left yet, when he reached out his hands, they turned into a vortex that swallowed me, I allowed myself to be swallowed because the world I had known before was a world of chaos, each hurt that I had survived threatened to return, he kissed me under the vastness of that sky, his other head wouldn't stop nodding like hell until I took it in my palms to pat it quiet, so I looked up to find his voice deep down my own throat, so I waited for his voice to leave, but instead it remained awhile, sometimes he would reach for it, he would swing his arms in the manner that showed he was making a demand, his ruffled hair on my cheeks, our heartbeats lying feebly on the floor, for a minute I believed he was it, a man, an intention, the soft light pouring across my face, I could try to love him until I tell myself that I must, or I could lose him in the end like the others, soon the poem began to gather itself in my stomach, it strapped itself to my legs when I was sure it was time to get out, of course I adored the poem, the way it collapsed itself inside me like the man's voice, asking me, *in the absence of love or loss, what else is there to occupy you?*





A MESSAGE FROM THE TEAM

We would like to express our gratitude to all the creators who submitted their art and stories for this issue.

We appreciate the courage it takes to be vulnerable in sharing your personal experiences with the world.

In the current political climate, and despite the censorship and oppression, we cannot take for granted how difficult it is to stay true to yourself and express that openly.

We are also grateful for the suggestions, tips and help we have received along the way. Thank you to anyone who promoted and supported the creation of this magazine. You all made this a wonderful experience for us and we are glad that we initiated this project.

Finally, we say a warm thank you to Dr. Amber Dean who guided us along this journey.

Sincerely,
Kari, Elise, Gavin and Sam





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