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3 Moon Magazine & Independent Publishing

One Nine Six Nine: An LGBTQ+ Literary Magazine

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Please be advised that these poems may contain triggering themes, including but not limited to drug use, death & decay, body horror, being closeted, sexual descriptions, among other possible things. Consider this your warning.



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Demons on the Trail

A short story by Renee Lake

Helen wanted to go west. She didn't care about the demons. She'd heard stories of the evil that haunted the plains. Demons of rage, lust, sloth, and fear.

In the west, Helen felt sure she could finally be herself. Not as many people, as many judging eyes.

There were no demons in polite society, and people didn't like to talk about them.

Helen didn't know anyone who'd seen a demon, and she didn't know if she even believed in them.

Occasionally a story would pop up in a small newspaper about a wagon train found abandoned, and people would hide in their homes, grateful for the walls and doors.

Helen imagined the demons sliding in and out of the shadows, eyes blinking red in the darkness. Like sinister starlight.

People didn't like to talk about them. In Helen's opinion, that only made them scarier.

Helen researched, she spent hours poring over maps, tracing the well-known safe trails with her fingers. This was the only choice, they were sick of hiding.

No one who went west ever came back to the east. There was no one to talk to about demons. Just scholars with no real experience and rumors from the gossip mill. Helen was sick of gossip.

She and Jac sold their farm, they packed up and bought hundreds of dollars' worth of supplies, and in April they set off.

Helen kept a book in the pocket of her apron, writing down everything she saw. Excited, almost hungry for the wilderness that lay ahead. She relished in every bump, each mouthful of dust-filled air and the callouses that grew on her hands. She and Jac were ignored, people had more to worry about.

Helen drew pictures of flowers and animals, wrote about bad weather and how she was getting used to sleeping on the ground. She accepted that her knees always ached and that sometimes people didn't come back from hunting trips.

She and Jac danced behind their wagon, bodies pressed tightly together. Jac developed crows' feet, and Helen found her first

grey hair. She didn't care. She told Jac they were souvenirs of the trip.

Her loopy handwriting described the people she met and scoffed at those who were afraid. Her book filled to the brim with anecdotes, pantry information, sketches, and dreams. She didn't see one demon, and only once did a member of the train think they saw something otherworldly in the distance.

Helen's enthusiasm to reach Oregon grew.

Nothing stalked their wagon at night, no one died or disappeared mysteriously. Jac told Helen that the tales of demons must be over-exaggerated.

Helen decided once and for all demons did not exist.

She dumped her china on the side of the trail, it was too heavy, and she learned to cook in the rain while standing in ankle-deep mud.

Jac's skin turned dark brown under the sun, and Helen's nose burned pink. She sang along while banjo music played and cried with a mother whose child died in a wagon accident. She placed white stones over the tiny grave, while Jac helped make a coffin.

Helen wrote about how the sound of the hammers haunted her sleep.

The days got longer, and Jac frowned more often. Helen kept writing.

The entries became shorter and more clipped.

They were so close to their destination. To a new life and a new home.

While tired, Helen still held on to her vision of Oregon.

Then she saw it in the distance, a shape that defied logic, that hurt her eyes to look at.

First, there was just one, then two and then.... too many to count.

Jac rushed to her side, and the two women held tightly to one another.

When they found Helen's journal, soaked in blood, yards from the wagon train, it had one final sentence in it.

I was wrong- they are coming.

A collection of poems by Anne Walters

Crash

I loved you fierce like the day my father got hit by a car, so fast and blinding. Your love toppled over me and made me feel like there was nothing in the room to hold me steady, steady like the rain on the window of the night you told me you told me I was your everything especially the way my clavicle shuddered under your touch and how you made my blue blood turn scorching red. Red like the color of the dress you wore to my cousin's wedding and how you danced like you didn't care my Aunt Lisa gave you dirty looks over the champagne bottles, you only cared about my eyes and the way they shone under the moonlight that night. The night you held my face in your hands and told me we were nothing, told me we were a shattered mirror that was too dangerous to pick up, but I tried anyway and sliced my hand clean through to my heart. You walked—no, sped away in your car, like the one that hit my father, dead like my heart.

Thirty

You need us to flip
a switch
turn you on and make
you feel something—anything?

No, nothing yet.

Maybe more.
Try something more.
Stretch, talk talk talk to someone
while you wait for—
there it is! Did it work?

Not yet.

Okay. Listen.
Maybe you're not trying
hard enough. Breathe with us,
take a big glass of water and
swallow it down.

...

Good. Did that help?
I'm sure it must have by now.
You've been doing this for
weeks, it had to
work.

I don't—
Well, you're out now.
Go back,
ask for a refill.

I'm sure it will work this time.

The Shore

I put stones in my mouth,
hoping to lessen the static
in my brain.
I taste the earth and breathe in
(one, two three)
I crunch the stones and feel my
teeth break apart, swallow them whole.
They sit in my belly,
heavy.
I wade to the water*cleanse me, cleanse me,*
cleanse me.
The waves chant as they break
against my hips.
The water chills my fingertips
but I roll with the tide,
on and on.

Sweet

Honey / bile rises up my mouth / each syllable / like a jab to /
the / throat / *honey please* / *honey shhh* / the words weigh me
down / pin me / his arms / trapped / under the weight / heavy /
honey / drips out of his mouth like / poison / and I wonder
how many / drops / until it / kills / me

A collection of poems by Linnea Cooley

Bubblegum Princess

As a kid
I always swallowed my bubblegum
that was me
no fears, no regrets
eager-chewer, bubble-popper, gum-swallower
candy-cruncher, girl-kisser, big-dreamer, stupid-kid

As a teenager
I checked the back of the macaroni box
seven-times
even though I always got the recipe right
pencil-nudger, stopwatch-worrier, finger-tapper
shower-singer, nervous-kisser, lock double-locker

And today?
well, wouldn't you like to know!
I'll tell you!
I'm a softball-tosser, tummy-tickler, paprika-sprinkler,
podcast-listener, ferret-owner, birthday cake-baker, and
earnest-lover!

Bambi

is the shittiest movie
I have ever seen

Bang! Bang!
a slim doe falls to the forest floor
the froth from her mouth bubbling, then condensing on her
lips
her hooves twitching in the air
a single, quiet cry of pain
and then,
the vein in her neck gives a final pulse

What am I watching?
saccharine animation
mixed with death?

Warm blood pools on the leaf litter
and crusts on Bambi's mother's fur
her glassy eyes reflect the sun rays
peeking through the canopy

Walt Disney must have been on methamphetamines
when he wrote this script
when he churned out this shitshow
at three in the morning
on his Smith Corona typewriter

Deep in the glade
Bambi's mother lies prone
her moist flesh attracting flies
her hide dotted with holes.
as her neck rots
the heaviness of her skull
droops her head towards
the ground

Did no one screen this before it was released?

sitting at the round table, the committee applauds
this ground-breaking new work

*The empty eye sockets
of Bambi's mother, stare up
at the gaps between the leaves
her powder white bones glow on the dark forest floor
Ants climb up her vertebrae
worms squirm through her remaining flesh
the forest is silent*

I thought this was a kid's movie?

The Lab Rat

*When dissecting the pulmonary artery of a lab rat,
one needs only a scalpel
and a steady hand*

steady, the Mayans on the mountaintop
begin to chant, a warm wind drifts over the Yucatán
quetzal feathers twisted in their hair
the flint knife carves just below the boy's left breast
 slips into his rib cage
the Chilán cups his hand
to hold the beating heart

steady, pre-meds huddle by the lab bench
blink, under fluorescent strips of light.
the stench of formaldehyde
claws at their tongues.
With latex covered fingertips
the lab assistant slits the lab rat from the thorax
 to the abdomen
works the scalpel through the ventricle
is careful not to let the
blood drip on the tabletop

steady, streams of blood trickle down the
mountain side
and seep into the sunbaked crust
the Mayans raise their chins
to praise

Buluc Chabtan

steady, the lab assistant grips the
pulmonary artery
with snap, and swish, disposes latex gloves
re-sheathes the knife -
 the lab rats squeak

Dear Sheryl Sandberg, I recently read your book and I have
just a few questions ...

You popped out of the womb
really *popped*
ready to go, with your legal pad
and your little pen
and your pencil skirt already on

You were *ready*
Really, ready
To glide into corporate headquarters
to snatch promotions, juicy bonuses
to say, "it simply can't be done"
to shred important documents
and blame it on your secretary,
To fire interns
Oh god! To fire an intern,
can you imagine?
how delicious it would be...

Ding!
An email, on your Blackberry
(Haha just kidding, it isn't 2004!)
Uh oh!
It's the committee
Yes, the committee, and they
just wanted to remind you
that at the age of 31
a woman's ovaries begin to release
the last of her millions of eggs
and her fertility begins
to sharply decline

Ring ring! Your secretary
picks up the phone
it's your husband, Robert
your secretary gestures you over
(She has lipstick on her teeth, do you tell her?)

Hi Honey! Do you think you could
pick up a rotisserie chicken
on your way home from work?

Ding!
Another email, it's the committee again
They just wanted to remind you
that... Oh shut up!
I don't care about the egg thing!
I'm trying to run a multi-million dollar
corporation over here!
Oh? In that case never mind,
We thought you said you wanted kids..
Wait! I never said
I didn't not want kids
(What else does a CFO put
in the empty picture frames
on her corner office desk?)

Oh no!
The committee furrows their brow
displeased, you can't have more
than one. thing.
you're not a *man*
you silly, silly, woman-child
they pat you on the head

You beg them, please!
Can't I have it?, can't I
have.it.all?
the job, the husband, the kids
the shiny black kitten heels
the briefcase and expensive lipstick too?
the committee pauses, reflective
but after mulling it over for several
hours, and conferring with the
subcommittee on corporate feminism
as well as Karen in human resources
they come back to you
with their hands together

and a very grave look on their face
and say

no

you can't

it can't be done

you can't have it all

So, you drop your legal pad
on the floor, and sob
crying into the lap of your pantsuit
Oh god! Why! Why me!
of all things,
why did I have to be born
a *woman*

A CEO's Wet Dream

It was a Wednesday and I was naked all over
except for my Neiman Marcus tie. And the
pretty secretary gave me a wink as I stepped out of the
elevator
so I barked at her to keep to the phones. When I walked into
the board room
they were already gyrating on the walnut conference table.
Wriggling with anticipation. So when my briefcase burst open
and the mid quarter review oozed out, you can imagine how
they lapped it up with eager tongues. The numbers were
Good! Good! Good! and the lines on the graph went
Up! Up! Up! Oh baby, how they went up. Oh baby, the
numbers
how the freckle-necked intern trembled with desire under
his creased khaki pants. How he whimpered.
So I held him close and felt him and whispered
"you're fired" and his face crumpled into sheets of
business reports with a staple on the right hand corner and
the pretty secretary kissed me and said "you are very
important."



Photo by Ayva Kunes ©

When In Rome

A short story by Laura Hesser

The reflection of the sun off my arm is casting a reflection on the ceiling, reminding me of a small bird in flight as it flits about. I twist my arm to the side and watch the bird fly from cobwebbed corner to water-stained patch, imagining a hummingbird fly from flower to flower. I think of my wife and the summer we spent in Panama. But that was all a long time ago.

I rise from the bed now, feeling the metal plates down my spine shift with the movement. Still not quite used to that, but it gets easier to ignore the slight squeaking sound every day. My OT says that one day I won't even notice it, and that even the leaden feeling that always seems to be pulling down my right arm will feel like second nature, but it had been months since the procedure, and I still felt like a stranger in my own body. The flesh was mine, but the feeling was all wrong. The urge to scratch that wrist still felt overwhelming at times, and I wasn't drawn back to my new reality until the metallic *tink* of nails on metal plating reminded me that the itch was not a bug bite, it was just in my mind.

A short man with a beard that dominates his face moves outside the gate. "You're on, Tender" I nod, waving him off. Was this really any better than the death the physician had promised me? Other Tenders saw this second chance as a defiance of death, to face death on their own terms rather than at the hands of whatever disease had sent them here in the first place, but that wasn't me. I had been ready to welcome the final embrace of the Mother, but seeing my father's tears and the forlorn expression on my wife's face, I knew what I had to do when the option was presented to me.

I can hear the crowd thumping their feet and cheering, almost drowning out the roar of the lion with whom I am to dance for my fate. Mechanically, my feet guide me to the arena floor. Staring into the golden eyes of the beast, I am filled with a

primal rage, a roar of my own echoing with the crowd and the lion both. I feel more one with the rage than I do my own twisted flesh, and charge as the crowd screams “For Rome! For Glory!” Death won’t take me so easily today.

I spring forward, metallic arm extended to block gnashing teeth. We lock together in the air, twisting masses of flesh and steel vying for dominance. I hook a boot around the beast’s middle and manage to twist myself above it. The feline grace of the beast is magnificent, powerful, propelling us around in the air before we crash to the arena floor in a haze of displaced sand.

Claws swipe at my body, scratching into the tender flesh of my middle, but I use our momentum to bounce myself free of his grasp. I slide to a stop ten feet away and plant my feet for another assault. I must be quick, else it will regain its footing and the advantage will be lost. Dashing forward again, I strike the beast square in the throat. His mane offers some protection, but the sheer mass of the limb does damage, stifling the beast mid-roar. It shakes its head to regain composure as I dash away once more. If it manages to grapple me, I will be defeated. It is only through swift attacks that I stand any chance.

My blood drips from my side onto the arena floor and it is beginning to take its toll on my mind. The pain hasn’t reached me fully through the adrenaline yet, but my thoughts are coming more slowly and for a moment, my vision swims. No time for that. The beast is hunkering down for another attack. It is time to finish this.

I set my feet firmly, then launch into a final assault. Skin, bone, and steel combine into a mass, set on the annihilation of the lion before me. I can barely hear the crowd surrounding me, the final cheer as the beast’s spine is shattered.

A feeling takes me over, sweeping me up in the moment, elevating my mind away from my inflamed ribs, away from

the grit of the arena floor, carrying me home in front of my own steps. I see my wife, holding our daughter on her hip. I see the house I have missed these many months. I see a soft bed and home-cooked meal. I see freedom. And it looks good.

A collection of poems by Amy van de Merwe

finding love from the inside of a closet

there's a rainbow in my water bottle and i drink until my belly
distends to consume or to hide i couldn't say it hurts like
swallowing a baby instead of birthing it

to protect and to destroy i wind a rosary around my fingers
shaking brittle bone cracking phalanges blood sacrifice old
magic in new veins bone and flesh and a rainbow flag discard
pick a new lover and hope for better this time

oscillation

i am screaming at the top of my lungs

please save us,

my fists pound against walls, repeated mindless rage.

please help us

into the wall again and again and every bone in my body is
cracked marrow mercilessly sucked through the fractures.

in the window is a woman gaunt and bloodless,

her fingernails scratch against the glass until someone closes
the curtains. still the noise persists

somebody, anybody, let us out!

everything grows silent. in the wind, a whisper no one dares
acknowledge.

moments you can't forget

here is the moment she realizes she's in love with you the room is empty there is only a painting of dogs playing poker on the wall ugly brown couch in the centre and two girls sitting in the corner giggling blissfully forgotten pinot grigio in hand the dank air rests sweet and light in her head and she could watch you laugh forever

here is the moment of truth the first time you let your eyes linger just a second and then later in the safety of your room you watch bodies writhe against each other thinking maybe it wouldn't be so bad to be one of them warm and wet and hot until the heat curls like a sickness in the pit of your belly a heating pan of dessication

here is the moment you realize that they might not forgive you it begins with rain and the heavy smell of dying plants thick in your nose burning your sinuses it begins with the smell of a girl on the lapel of your jacket you don't read much but you know a girl that loves a girl is a dead girl

here is the moment you'd rather forget you stand in the rain with a girl's heart in your hands and you spit the word *queer* like it's poison it burns and the iced coffee you bought her falls to the pavement and spells out d y k e toxic sugar caramelized in your bloodstream *hurt hurt hurt* pounding like a heartbeat

A collection of poems by Bethany Garry

Awake

I had a dream my lover became
a monstrous octopus who wishes to be a man -
 and I have always thought it was blasé
 to write about your dreams, concerned as they are
 with the unregulated jetsam of our dark minds
 and there's so little transcendence in our child
embarrassments,
 nakedness and school exams
 and I have always wanted to write as if
 I could control it all, pursue a righteous and direct
purpose,
 like an arrow through an arrow through an arrow

but my dreams grow more troubling of late
it is where one sees bodies as they are,
flesh re-imagined, devoid of fear we feel awake
watching horror movies makes me sick
but my dreams draw me in,
even as the monstrosity grows,
as my lover's face melts into cartilage
and my teeth fall like leaves from elder trees

the sights of my dreams terrify my waking life
awake, selfish and afraid
asleep I am the horror I wish I was
overflowing with images unreconciled

Go Without Light

The world under shuttered star,
we go without the light,
to see it by.
Remember the run of it
these small candle flames
on this night without.

We are as the flickering electric light
or the turning wheel,
in the water of your cupped hands,
clasped tight and unafraid.
This road is known to us
even lightlessly.

Florescence

I am afraid,
not that you will leave,
but that you will never satisfy the empty
hungry space
and that all your kindness and goodness will
flow
like a river into an oil slick
and come to nothing in me.

Two poems by Alix

you got your chance to be candid, so even though i'd planned mine, why didn't i?

i rehearsed this so many times in my head and you never even let me say it.

'hey,' (I'd say softly, whilst turning to look at you. you'd be looking at the sky in that way you do, and hopefully you'd turn to look at me) 'can i hold your hand?' (and you'd smile that smile and say 'yes').

then I'd say 'hey' again before starting my perfectly rehearsed lines.

'i really like you. I think you're smart and funny and cute and gorgeous and a really good kisser' (you'd do a cute laugh here, at least in my head you do) 'and yeah. i normally don't open up to people or tell them my true feelings, i normally have a huge wall up, but with you, that just isn't there. so yeah, basically i really like you.'

i wish i knew what you'd say next.

my hopeful imagination doesn't want to be let down again.

-you got your chance to be candid, so even though i'd planned mine, why didn't i?

oyster

i have a problem.

i *want* you to know how i feel,

but

not through poetry pieces.

because this is my stripped-back, angry, ruthless, h o n e s t
truth.

i want you to know what i tell you-

perfectly rehearsed words swirled round in my head at night
that are just

c l o s e e n o u g h

to the truth, but far away enough that my truest truth doesn't
so much as graze your ear.

A collection of poems by Kit Breshears

Silent Sleeper

I don't snore
He said once when our love was new,
With that slight upturn
At the corner of his mouth.

I think of this every night
For eleven years.
Eleven years of soft snores
That aren't coming from him.

His soft, red and golden hair
Lying on his pillow
As those eyes I love so much
Full of mirth and mischief
Are cruelly closed in slumber.

As I settle into bed
Trying to be quiet but never succeeding
He stirs. His non-snoring ceases
But only for a moment
.

June 3 at 5:39 pm

Rough heels and calloused toes
Desperately in need of a pedicure
Propped up on the red, iron balcony rail
In the summer swelter.

Pink gin and tonic
Perspiring in my hand
With cold droplets
Peppering my “office drag” gray pants.

Loud old people unclogging
An overflowing fountain drain
That threatens to flood their
Keep-off-my-damn-grass,
Their purposes momentarily
(heroically?) aligned.

Queer folks – my siblings, my children!
One with amethyst hair
And the others in fabulous
Fuck-your-expectations-about-my-gender attire
And self-designed tattoos
Gather around a lime-colored table
Talking queer issues and cackle-laughing
At THOT on Insta
Making me jealous AF that I’m not part
Of the club.

My dog, wet black nose and slobbery
Pink tongue, revives me from my
Juniper berry fueled observational meanderings
With a not subtle reminder
That it is well past time for her food.

The Small Stuff

Those simple things
That you do – unaware
Are so precious, so meaningful
To me.

A short message at work
“How’s your day? Wanna go for a walk?”
Remind me to be grateful that we work
In such close proximity.

Your head nodding
As you doze in the floral chair in our living room
Even though the temperature in the house
Leaves my teeth chattering.

The way you cross your legs
And chatter in your sleep.

Your forehead kisses
On me. And the dog. And the cat.

The way you made me think
On our first date, so long ago
That it was okay to love
Another guy.
A good guy.

It’s all about the small stuff.

A collection of poems by Iona Murphy

But girls can't marry girls

My first ever crush was my year three trainee teacher.
She came into class. I felt things I didn't understand.
I wanted to be her. I wanted to be close to her.

The girl who wouldn't speak
suddenly participating in class
to get her attention.

I picked her daisies at lunch time
marched into class with a bouquet
she put in the bin.

I planned it all out carefully
under the tree in the field with my best friend
we were going to ask her to marry me.

acting out the wedding at play time
feeling those giddy jitters as she said
"you may now kiss the bride."

The flower girl showering me in petals
blue jumper veil
chequered sundress gown.

I stayed behind after class
to pop the question
got down on one knee

a daisy chain ring.
with five words
she just became another doodle in my diary

Being the B

Be feminine
Be straight passing
Be quiet

Be with her
Be with him
Be with them

Being greedy
Being indecisive
Being experimental

Being another straight girl going through a phase
Being an attention seeker
Being a bandwagon jumper

It's never

Being accepted
Being enough
Being

Valid?

How do you write about liking girls without hitting all the clichés?

Can I write about her
cherry red lips
and her perfume that smells like
freshly cut flowers on a hot summer day?
Can I write about the dimples
she hides when she giggles?

How do you write about liking girls when you don't feel like
you have a place?

Can I write about lusting over her
when I've kissed more boys than girls-
maybe because I couldn't accept it
or perhaps I'm just not enough?

Can I write about her
when there's never been a significant her
just a series of desires
shrouded by fear?

How do you write about liking girls when you're scared?

How do you write about liking girls when you're shagging a
boy?

How do you write about liking girls when you're privileged
enough to avoid the abuse?

How do you write about liking girls when you're passing?

How do you write about liking girls when you can't say it
without vodka in your system?

How do you write about liking girls?

A collection of poems by Sophia Kumin

the sound of anticipation is a silent alarm

hot quartz shining on the soft hair below the back of your neck
where your spine meets your skull, skipping stones down your
back. ripe seeds rolling down your calves. gaining traction
across your collar with burning fingers. flush incisors grazing
the marsh of sweat on the side of a tilted neck, open to death
yet rabidly alive. crashing loud cymbal veins, blue waterfalls
to the surface. lush shiver beneath the grip of your thumb.
thighs split like a paper cut. it stings, and you are salivating.
shimmering under your tongue. she tastes like sugar burning
your mouth. rubbing the roof of it raw. you find grains of her
stuck to your palms, her oceans streaking salt across your lips.
smells like the horizon. steam rising off her skin, shaking fuss
out of her hair. red follows after everything, sneaks into the
room through the window. curls up between legs like a snake
around its mouse. settling flushed lips in the haze of her
humidity.

day of rest

rolling her like dough in my palm, like I like
how the yeast sticks between my fingers,
how the flour dry and natural
roll around a little ball, wring her out
fold her over and under herself,
stud her with salt and butter, with melted hands
the stickiness between my fingers
the heat of an open oven door,
that creates something new
when you pull her out
a braided beauty,
split for the Sabbath

Permission

Yes I want the back of my hand to know
you O what I know of desire

is the feeling of wetness under my shoe or my
back pressed against a tree or a bridge Yes I'm
greedy I give permission to myself

consider a distance

consider I walk that distance with an open
mouth I take it in

O and yes the sweat on your neck

and yes

the wetness.

and if I am to hunger

let it be for a quick marriage to the moon

sweet slip

under a last night

or

I reach with teeth and find

a hip

O and yes

I want the back of my hands to know you

and the curl of your hair on my palm



Photo by Ayva Kunes ©



Photo by Ayva Kunes ©

Endings

A piece by Fletcher Gross

Dark. Too dark. Cold. Buses aren't running.

Curl up, pretend not to hear the breathy whispers, the moaning, the questions he asked long ago, now posed to someone new. Remember, months ago, his first syllables uttered over the phone in a similar darkness. Then, a haven, a place for puppy love to grow. Now, encroaching threat all around.

Hard motel floor digging into hip and shoulder, grinding bone into skin. The worst part: they think they're sneaky. Think the girl-boy on the floor doesn't know. Must think you stupid.

Grip blanket tighter. Smells like him. Fingers curl like talons, bite vicious into palms. Moan, moan, moan, whisper, laugh. Nausea, taste of bile. Punishment for the one who once tried to fall in love.

Ending is not like falling out of love. More like love extracted painfully, piece by piece, careful and cruel, from beneath the breast, snapping ribs and pinching lungs in the process. Stupid. So stupid, stupid, stupid. Naïve to trust him, no surprise. Naivete rewarded with sorrow and sickness.

Moan, whisper. Sick wet sounds. Breathly words gasped into waiting ears. Can hear him, can smell him, can taste him and his lingering pot in the air.

Can't stay.

Stand, the noises do not even pause, the boy-girl entirely forgotten. Slip into the bathroom. The noises are muffled, sinister from the crack under the door. Slip pants back on, re-hook bra, shove feet into shoes. Body and spirit loathe to return to armor, even now impaled, mourning lost

vulnerability. Shove everything possible into your bag. Short sorrow for the things left behind.

Reenter small room. Bed quakes under the weight of lust, intoxication, betrayal.

Cross before bed like an atheist before the altar, ignoring it and the discomfort it inflicts. Door before you, hand shaking too hard to open it. Hard exhale.

Slurring, confused voice. He calls your name. Something inside shrivels.

“You’re leaving?” high-pitched, injured.

A burning thing. Realize for the first time that your face is soaked in tears. Room small, too small to contain it all. Tragedy here. Tears emerge in your voice as shaking hand fumbles with door handle.

“I’m a lot of things” Voice feels strong, but still quaking under the weight. “But I’m not stupid.”

Handle finally functions, door swings dramatically open with a *whoosh* and a **bang** as it hits the wall behind. Gone before he can speak again.

The words were meaningless, useless, but proud of them anyway. Adrenaline surges, bizarre mixture of pride and pain. Laughing loudly, competing with the quiet rage of speeding traffic. Weeping, sobbing, crying harder than you can ever remember.

Takes two blocks until you realize how cold it is. Pull all clothes possible out of the bag. Extra jean jacket, cute dress meant to be worn to impress him tomorrow. Not long until both covered in tears and snot.

Late, almost 4 a.m. No buses running. Sad body, still sore from hotel floor, hobble along, lost in the town. Thank god for iPhones or you’d never find a way home. Phone groans long,

deep text tone: him. Calling back, concern and sorrow sold through the façade of text on a small, shining screen. Fuck iPhones.

Ignore. Ignore. Ignore. Blend in with the peering homeless, watching with eyes empty of judgement. Police patrol car zooms by. They do not stop at the sight of a weeping, wandering, androgynous creature.

Fuck cops.

Ignore, ignore, ignore. Think of biting, violent, clever text responses, but refuse to send them. Deny both him and self the satisfaction.

Three hours, stumbling through strange, unfriendly town. Collapse on the curb, can't walk anymore. Call everyone you love and trust. Sob the story through the phone. Wise friends give wise advice. Nod, believing their conviction. Leave him, harmful traitor, behind.

Good advice, but it will go unheeded.

This is not the last night you will see him. These are not the last tears he will cause. The touches you think about on the cold curb will grip at your skin again. Sitting on the concrete, this is not the last time he will break your heart.

But it is the last time you love him.

Three poems by Candace Sophia

I gave you my heart,
And you ate it without
hesitation, one breath,
eyes feasting. I have
nothing left to give but
goodbye.

The taste of
friendship has left
me drier than the
laughter with my enemy. Fake
friends.

I used belief to
sustain the torture
of forgiving
betrayal.
Forgiveness marks
the end. Carrying
the future I must
sustain the agony
of promised love.

Everything Did

A short story by Candace Sophia

My nails are the only thing giving me life. I look past the chipped one, I need to fix the rhinestone on it. I toss my dead phone back in my purse and feel myself going down that road again. The fight on the way to the hostel. All the food that went bad. Smashed mirror. Crying, lots of crying, and drinking. I need a drink. My thoughts come back into my eyes. Maybe she'll take me back. I feel a jolt in my chest and reach for my purse. My nail gets snagged, the rhinestone is caught in my tights. I feel my heart roll over and thud. Releasing and losing the stone, I now see a long rip down my thigh. Hector's not gonna let me work with this! Fuck fuck fuck. I'm all ready cutting it close. I don't have time to drop my stuff off, get new tights, and make it to work! My heart, now descending into my stomach, took on a sickening beat. The tear could have worked as one of those fuck life, dirty girl looks but with these borrowed Birks on I look like Im on mecca to Mount Shasta. I might as well be eating granola out of some crystal pouch. I wish that's what I'm doing. What I was. Some now obsessed new ager. Not sitting in this piece of shit train station with a ten gallon yard waste trash bag stuffed past its limits. My day was made after bumming two cigarettes off of a homeless queen, but the sun set an hour ago, the train seems delayed, and staring at this ash reach the filter, it's official. I am done with this. A chill sets in my bones. I shake the goosebumps off my hand, signs of a lurking panic attack. I begin to quickly dig in my bag for sunglasses. Flickers of light bubble and pop around, my face starts to pulse and flush ice hot. Then the wave, everything went dizzy in a blinding light. Shit, how long have I been holding my breath? Bracing one arm on my leg, my fingers grab the frames and shove them on my face. Smooth hair, that's better. Carefully tucking it behind my ears, fixing back my headphones. Sweat drips off my chin. I fish an old napkin out of my coat pocket, wipe, and pick the rolled pieces of tissue off my face. I need some gum. Clawing

around for a stick my nails brush the edges of a torn in half Big Red. Picking out the pieces of grit, I discreetly place it in my mouth. Suck, chew, and suck. I love the cinnamon burn on my tongue. Where is this train? Cutting it close now. I look at the wrapper, I wonder if I can make something. Humming 3 songs later, I have tiny box, I don't think that counts. I hate not knowing the time. Maybe there's a sign with the time on it. I look up, and see eyes, hovering over some throwback Puffy shades. I don't know which was worse, the man, the toothpick his mouth feels the need to play with, or his hand pulling the underwear out of his nuts, at least that's what I hope he's doing. Looking down I roll my wrist between my fingers. I hate not knowing the time, it makes me feel like I'm always running late. "So you not goin say hi?" I don't look up. I really hope I don't have to close tonight. Hopefully I'll make my money early and get cut second. I need to get there first though. "I KNOW you hear me!" Maybe if I get all of the side work done when it's dead, that'll give me — "Ey girrr, ey!" Maybe someone has a charger too, then I can text and see if she might—"Oh, it's like that?You really gonna act like you don't hear me?" I fold. I shot my eyes upward, he doesn't deserve my full face. I give my best death stare, the guy next to him who was passively listening just got life, and he is that friend. "Dayumn, you just fina let her curve you like that bruh?" He leans forward with his arms resting on his thighs, apparently I was not in focus before. Dropping my gaze, my eyes examine my tights, examining the rip again. My stomach bottomed out again. The trains gotta be running late. There was something I was supposed to bring from the store too.....dish soap? No it was something like that....I can't remember... "Ppppfftttt, no one wants yo ugly ass anywayz! Stank bitch!" Can't they see they're invisible? My wrists were beginning to hurt from over massaging. Pulling my two-hour ticket out of my pocket I study the time I bought it. It's been almost half an hour. Where is this train? The text began to gloss together. I didn't feel like adjusting my eyes. I need to find another cigarette. Looking around, everyone was on the

opposite platform. Three women huddled over a phone to my right. A guy, though super sketch looking, on the left, smoking. Fuck it. Walking away from my stuff, good luck trying to steal it, I cross the track, passing by my unwelcome admirers. I refuse to make eye contact. I feel my jaw tighten. "Not even gonna look." says Shades, and cue boo boo, "Reckless with the disrespect bruh!" I walk onwards to my hope. Up close, I start to feel bad for writing off the man as a creeper. His clothes were hard from set in dirt and by the looks of his hands he looked like he just finished wrestling a bike chain. He must of crashed because he kept rotating his thumb into his palm. He had headphones on, explains the swaying. He didn't look up as I neared and it wasn't until I was standing in his shadow that he gave a lazy glance upwards. He didn't remove his earbud. "Hi, sorry to bother you, but can I please bum a cigarette?" Apparently his music wasn't loud because he replied, "I don't smoke." What the fuck? "What's that then?" I nodded at the cigarette tucked between his fingers. I felt my irritation start to bubble. "A joint." "Oh..." Damn that's even better. "Can I get a hit?" He looked at me without blinking. I saw his eyes dilate as it dug into mines. "I'm straight." Are you serious?! "Come on man! I'll put 5 on it?" His eyes smirked. "Ok." A huff came out involuntarily as I sat down, my nylons immediately cutting into my thighs again. After passing me the spliff, I took a couple hits and gave it back, holding each one in. I don't know if he's gonna pass it back. He went back to looking at the ground, slowly twisting the j between his fingers as he pulled. "Thanks again" I say as I let out the smoke. A wave of pressure flies into my skull and I close my eyes for composure. He didn't seem to notice. I hear crows cawing a few trees away. I looked up and the guys from earlier were standing now. Glancing our way, Shades flashed me a smile. "Oh I guess I just didn't have the proper equipment! I see you!" Go away. I looked over at my fellow token, he didn't seem to hear a thing, or at least was good at pretending. "That's so annoying." I said to break the silence. Still nothing. Minutes pass and he just keeps smoking, lost in

himself. "Am I bothering you?" I finally crack and ask. "No" he replies. He passes back the j. "Here you can finish it, I'm good." "Really? Thanks!" He stands, stretching his hands up and then turns around to pick up his bag. He collects himself, looks me in the face for a moment, and says, "See ya". "Oh, you don't have to go because of me! I'd rather share it" I say, I don't know why he's leaving all of a sudden. "No it's cool. No worries". Wow my kind of guy, "Well I want to say thank you, what's your name?" Maybe he's got facebook. "You said thank you, I got 5 dollars which is sweet because my bike broke and I didn't have money for the bus, and my name is soon to be engaged. I just got off work and was sitting here trying to fix my gears and practice my proposal until you came. You should probably go check on your stuff, you've been over here a minute, and I don't know if you're aware, but the train stopped running an hour ago." With a turn he and his bike walked away to the bus area. I finished smoking in silence, ate the roach, and walked over to where the ladies were sitting, chatting rapidly in Spanish. Their accent sounded Peruvian. "Buenos noches Senoras, disculpe me por interrupting, mas me puede use tu cellphone?" God I need to work on my Spanish. They smiled brightly at me, and the lady in the middle unlocks and hands me her iPhone. "Mucho gracias!" I say. "It's cool, I understand how it is." she replies. A calm washes over me as I punch in my work number. It rings five times, they ain't tryna answer. About to hang up, a snappy "Merman's Bar and Grill how can I help you?" comes on the line. Thank God it's not Hector. "Reesa! It's me Gertrude, I have to make it quick. Tell Hector I can't make it in. I have to quit. You got my number, hit me up. I gotta go, someone's letting me use their phone." "Oh wow... Ok, ya girl, I will!". "Cool—peace." "Bye." I press the end button and hand back the phone. "Gracias." "You're welcome."



Photo by Ayva Kunes ©

Two Poems by Sona Popat

gravity

a pocketful of
coins, bitten and tossed away:
copper slice-and-glint-and-gone-and-
count the seconds 'til you hear the splash.
that's how far we have to go, kid!

for you,
neither sun nor daughter nor moon:
just child.
child who plays with the moon,
carves it into a crescent,
and hangs it on their scythe.

prologue

star-cross'd lovers!
fate breathes down my spine:
rancid breath, foul spray
of spit and
sirensong:

i follow red strings
until their ends, wrapped around
tree stumps and stones,
turned over
and tossed aside-

and i follow red strings
until their ends, wrapped around
my neck
and yours,
turned over
and tossed aside-

star-cross'd friends!
meant to breathe the
same brains
until the sun returns.
and
i can't decide what aches
more

when there is only a clean cut
at the end of it.

A collection of poems by Britta Alford

Floodwaters

In the dark of my room, with a stream of constant chills
caressing the goosebumps on my legs, and a vomit-like tinge
of inconsolable heat spiraling around the back of my neck, I
stand on my bed.

I jumped up and down on the mattress, then a foot in front of
me into the dark abyss.

My heart flew forward—crashing into my bedroom wall, even
when my feet found land on the black fabric ottoman...

• • •

MONDAY 2:14AM

it feels like I'm choking
on water.

i'm trying
to tread
the liquid...
but my feet
can't find
 any solid ground.

my eyes will soon be
submerged,

and i will
surrender
to the
undertow.

and,
for once,
i won't
fight the sea.

WEDNESDAY 1:11AM

so i know it's like, yeah,
"libra with the scales" and shit

but i'm getting tired of having to
balance all of it, all of the time.

my brain derails
from the
train
and so i walked on the
snow-covered
tracks
last night.

SATURDAY 3:13PM

I screamed at
the skies—
damned her for
cursing me,

and she poured
a subtle waterfall
alongside my bedroom window.

I went outside
to hold her against my skin,
and let her cry
on my naked shoulders.

i told her of how

my Scorpio moon rises
up to my neck and
into my lungs.

i told her of how
water and air
battle through the clouds
to make hurricanes
that block the sun.

the skies dropped down
to her knees,

wrapped her arms
around my ankles,

and we slow danced
in her floodwaters
while the trees swayed
to our rhythm

like a silent metronome
in the night.

• • •

... "A leap of faith,"
I laugh, and hold my sides closer to me, so my ribcage doesn't
follow my silicon-splattered sack of useless valves and arteries
clinging to the grayscale wall;
"but not blind. Not any more."

all of savannah is a graveyard

no marble or wood or cardboard
no walls holding me in
cushioned silk or cotton or acrylic
smile painted on my mouth
frozen to the verge of
crumbling off with the slightest touch.

only dirt warmer than
my lifeless skin
still can feel the vigor
of a worm bragging against my left hand
left alone
not crossed against my still chest

somehow not empty or somber or bare
but left with a phantom beating
for you
put the bullet to my temple and drained
any chance I had to tell you
I loved

the way you pulled my tie closer to you
or your scarlet lily claws crawling through
my hair
or the way you kissed your fist and puckered
your lips
before shoveling dirt on my chest.

Holy Bible

Scribblings in Latin of love notes we left—
deliver me with your tongue,
then wash your eyes with bleach.
You skimmed over the chapters I'd written;
you thought you understood me.

My feet were dipped in battery acid
disguised as communion wine.
My white dress clung to me
as pipe organs clawed their way through my skull.
Unions don't hinge on the truth.

I used the pages as rolling paper
and I set us ablaze.
You've bound me in chains and hung me to dry,
my snake veiled in lamb skin
spewed in tongues and poured your venom on me.

When God is dead, what drives you?

You ripped the leather spine
and glued the pages of our holy book
to the windows of the house
we built.

Sunday morning is one hell of a drug.



Photo by Ayva Kunes ©

Trees by Ayva Kunes

the trees they whisper my name
from every direction i hear them

voices surround me as i spin spin spin
& stop
i am still
as are the trees & the forest
nothing moves
in your head it's in your head
it's not

the trees they shift they move
the voices crescendo

i run & the trees follow
in my ears their whispers are screams
i cover them to no avail

the voices are inside me now
i cannot block them out

down
 down
 down
i hit the ground
& sprawl breathless
get up get up get up & run
i stand
but the trees they circle me
trunk to trunk no space between
caged without escape

the voices are back louder than ever
they laugh laugh laugh
& i can only scream

A collection of Poems by Siobhan Dunlop

(personal)

In a world where we all have a circumference
extending beyond our physical edges

where everyone has a different span
to get deep into their heart

where tube trains look half empty
though all room is taken

where a crowd tessellates
blank space in air

I reach out
touch your

boundary

Bizarre Love Triangle

There's someone dancing to New Order in 1986
and someone dancing to New Order in 2019,
jerking their limbs in unison
as if time never happened.

I shiver at the similarity,
the obvious mistakes:
a freckle, a jawline, eyes hazel and green.
Sometimes it feels like a dream.

They fall to their knees;
I pray, they'll never meet.
Zipping the eons of time is my secret;
I cannot choose between their smiles.

Spending each day beside them both,
a double shot of eternity,
and yet the fear lingers on:
their paths could cross someday.

Scientists say it's close now:
time travel, the great beyond.
I visit both guys, looking
for signs they've heard the news.

If everyone else has this power,
my loves may lose their shine.
I'll leave them dancing alone,
find one from the future next time.

N.B.

I am both sides of the story
Each version of the myth
I am what I am, and I am not what I seem

The flesh that encloses me
Is me and it is not
I traverse its boundaries
Sometimes it cooperates
And sometimes it fights back

Every day I cross their definitions
Metamorphose before their eyes
Second guess which side I should be on to them
Really I am on no side
Playing neutral
Floating indistinctly through the solidity of categorization

In a mirror I am there and not there
half-me
half-nobody
I flicker
Disappear

Astral Projection

Drifting, disconnected.
In between jobs.
In between life.
Unable to soul search beyond typing four letters into Google.

They came like a saviour through the internet.
Quizzes, astrology, personality types.

Each click, I thought
you know me
better than anyone I know.

Couldn't stop. Filled up the gap.
Which European city should I live in?
Which minor Friends character matches my personality?
What does my zodiac say to eat for breakfast?

A friend asked me out for a drink
but the horoscope said I'd be betrayed.
Augury. I stayed in, clicking.

Checked where I should live
according to my sign and my taste in ice cream.
I had to move.
I was surrounded by Scorpios and pistachio.

I found a room and looking for an Aquarius, and I knew.
I threw out anything that seemed to be bad luck
and flipped a coin for the rest,
then packed up two suitcases and was gone.

In my new room, I could be myself.
The improved myself.
I looked at my horoscope
and though it said 'Be open with what is important to you'
I knew what it wanted to say:
you've done the right thing

Salmacis

I am the colour of the purple-blue sky.
Sometimes blue, else almost bleeding.

I am a nymph in a pool of water,
failing my sisters, dripping away.

I am neither man nor naiad.
I desire to be both. I desire.

I am the prickling brambles, the tangling vines.
He is the clearing: the flowers I need.

I am a mirror that cannot hold back.
He stares in my eye. I take what I want.

I am he and he is me, eternally.
We shall not be twain. We are man and naiad.

Author Biographies

Renee Lake is a bisexual Puerto Rican writer from Utah. She loves bats and is passionate about women's reproductive rights.

When she's not taming four crazy kids or working full time she is writing. You can also find her exploring the wilds of Thedas or shopping at the Citadel. (See pages 5-6.)

Anne Walters is a gay writer who lives in New Jersey. She has been published in *The Avenue*, *Babe Press*, *Awkward Mermaid*, and others. You can find her on Twitter at @_annemadz. (See pages 7-9.)

Linnea Cooley is a queer undergraduate poet at the University of Maryland. Their poetry appears in *Neologism Poetry Journal*, *Boston Accent Lit*, and *Straight Forward Poetry* among others. More of their work can be seen on their website, linneacooley.weebly.com or by following them on twitter @linnea_cooley. (See pages 10-17)

Laura Hesser is the founder of Quill Again Editing, as well as the mother of one. Originally from Rayne, LA, she now resides in Johnson City, TN. When asked what prompted her to move, she will gladly tell you that she has always been drawn to the mountains and was only waiting for the right excuse to make the move. Her hobbies include aerial silks and trapeze, volunteering at the local animal shelter, reading, and singing. She is an alto and participates in The Civic Chorale. She is bisexual and uses either she or they pronouns. (See pages 19-21.)

Amy van der Merwe is a bisexual woman born in South Africa and raised in Canada. She is currently studying English and History, and hopes to one day be able to answer people

who ask her what she wants to do with her degree. She has been previously published in *Kaleidoscope*. (See pages 22-23.)

Bethany Garry is a Scottish writer living in London. Her poetry has been published in *Octavius*, *Vast Sky* and *RAUM*. She tweets @brgbethany. (See pages 24-25)

Alix is a seventeen year old writer, poet, and creator from the UK. She has previously been published in Shout Magazine and A Portrait of Youth Magazine, and is currently launching into the world of literary magazines. Her lifetime goal is to be a published author, and to live in France with a multitude of kittens. (See pages 26-27)

Kit Breshears (he/him/his pronouns) writes poetry, flash fiction, exceptional haikus, and an occasional spell or incantation. He lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota, with his partner, Duane, and two children - a cat named Ravioli, and a dog named Piglet. He has been a creative writer since he was 8 years old, when he wrote a short poem about a dead mouse he found in his grandmother's basement. After a 20 year exile into the public relations field, he has recently come out of the creative writing closet. He tweets at @KitTheBadPoet. (See pages 28-30.)

Iona Murphy is an Mst(res) student at The University of St Andrews, navigating her way through her early twenties in her own messy way. Currently, she is working on her first collection of poems *Numbers*, throwing down messy ideas for a novel, and of course trying to finish her degree! She is a feminist, bisexual, mental health advocate, student journalist, and is forever reading Sylvia Plath. She has a poem published in Black Bough, and creative non-fiction in Ayaskala and MID-HEAVEN Magazine. You can keep up with her on Twitter @write_with_iona and Instagram @ionasmurphy. (See pages 31-33.)

Sophia Kumin is a poet, potential novelist, and all around foolish lesbian residing in the Pacific Northwest. Her work has appeared in private Google Docs and not many places otherwise. She recently attended the Tin House Summer Workshop and can now be found reading, writing, and agonizing. (See pages 34-36.)

A dragon-obsessed, nonbinary witch, **Fletcher Gross** likes to write speculative fiction and memoir. They like to fill the world with gay fairytales and stories of heartbreak and tragedy. Find them on twitter @FletcherByrde. (See pages 39-41.)

Candace Sophia is an independent artist from Merced, California. A writer, singer, and photographer her work captures the hidden realities of personal relationship with self and others. Raised in California and the South, she explores concepts of love, intimacy, and spiritual growth. When working, Candace envisions creating art to speak to the unearthed emotion many feel inept at conquering. Her work is a reflection of the expression of life lived with completion in mind. Her music is featured on the 3 Moon website. (See pages 42-46.)

Sona Popat is a natural sciences student from Leicester, UK, who believes that science is analogous to art. Her work has most recently been published in *awry*, *BAIT*, and *Notes magazine*. (See pages 48-49.)

Ayva Kunes is a junior creative writing major at Susquehanna University. She lives in Pennsylvania with her family and the four-legged lights of her life, Sophie and Badger. Despite being an aspiring writer her only published works so far are photographs. She's also bi but maybe don't tell her family. See pages 18, 37, 38, 47, 55-57.)

Britta Alford is a nonbinary, pansexual artist/model/performer, focusing their efforts into visual arts on canvas and through street art, as well as poetry, prose, theoretical conversations, and social activism. They have recently worked with The Athenaeum Press on the upcoming book *Trans/South: Ten Stories of Identity*, to highlight the presence and heartbeat of queer communities in the Deep South—where they also have grown up. Their published work can also be found in various issues of award-winning *Tempo Magazine*, and *Archaios Literary Arts Magazine*. Follow them on Instagram @unitedsnation, and on Twitter @wowokba. (See pages 50-54.)

Siobhan Dunlop is a UK-based poet and book blogger with poems published in 404 Ink, Pixel Heart, meanwhile magazine, and The Speculative Book 2019. They love reworking classic texts in new ways and drinking tea, currently work teaching people digital things, and can be found on Twitter under @fiendfull. (See pages 58-62.)



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