

To my mother

By E. Jade Enos

I was five years old, sitting in my flowery pink car seat in our old Honda Pilot. I asked you if girls could marry girls because if so, I wanted to marry my playgroup friend when I grew up. You angrily told me that girls can only marry boys. I didn't understand why.

I was 10 years old when your sister married a woman. I remember how conflicted you felt; an old book told you it was wrong but you wanted to be there to see your sinful sister. You were a bridesmaid. Dad refused to be in the wedding at all, and he was silent sitting in the audience next to me. I didn't understand why.

I was 12 years old when I first had a crush on a girl, and I knew I couldn't tell you. She was beautiful, and so kind. I couldn't risk her getting hurt by telling you about it. You would be angry. I didn't understand why.

I was 14 years old when I told you I was bisexual. I was crying on my bed and just blurted it out after you demanded to know what my sister and I were fighting about. You stood there for a moment, in shock I think. You left the room. I didn't understand why.

I was still 14 when you came to me the next day and told me I should just repress it. "Ignore the urges," as you put it. You said you were also tempted, in college, but you shoved it down. I didn't understand why.

I was 15 when I had my first girlfriend. We kissed in the cabin at our youth group's winter camp. We hid under the stairs in the hallways at church to make out. She taught me how to eat honeysuckle, the sweetness lingering on my lips long after our last kiss. I wanted so badly to tell you how happy that girl made me, but I knew you would be mad. I didn't understand why.

I am 21 and we don't talk anymore. I feel more free than I ever have before, but I will always carry this sadness in me. You were always so angry. I wish I knew why.

E. Jade Enos resides in the woods of New York in the U.S., accompanied by their partner, three cats, and two little gremlin children. When not writing, you can find them in the dark recesses of the local library, reading books in the reference section for fun.



This is Sparrow, created by Alison Bechdel, best known for her long-running comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For* (1983–2008) and her graphic memoir *Fun Home* (2006), which was adapted into a Tony Award-winning musical. Alison created the "Bechdel Test," a metric for evaluating gender representation in media. Two of her long-running characters, Naomi and Sparrow, identify as bi+. Fun fact: Naomi has been a print subscriber to *BWQ* for decades, c/o Alison, and Alison tells Robyn that she enjoys leafing through our pages. Alison's newest book is *Spent: A Comic Novel*.

Corazón de Cuetzlaxochitl

By Angelina Leños

Could you hear it then—the queerness between me and my lover? Or did you gather us earlier in the car, her nose and mine embracing unlike amigas normales?

I forget the fibers of your face when I introduced her as my friend, if you wore the same dress of doubt as your father. Tito, forgive my dishonesty. Neither of us were ready that winter.

Four years later, I await our next meeting to bloom.

For now, think of me as the poinsettias you entrusted us with that night.

While the world soils us poison,

I pray you see our purity,
deadhead our wounds and
call us both hija.

Angelina Leños is a queer Latina and a third-year MFA poetry student at Fresno State University in California, U.S. A Ventura County Youth Poet Laureate emerita, she serves as a Poetry Out Loud coach and a Poet-Teacher, mentoring youth in poetry recitation and creative writing.

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Editor's Note

This issue's theme is "Dear ____." Readers were asked: "For this issue, we'd like you to write a letter to someone who has impacted your bi+ identity in some way and let them know how you feel. Maybe it's a parent who didn't react well to your coming out, a public figure who changed your life by example, or a lawmaker who's trying to take away your rights, a first same-gender crush, or a love letter to your partner of 20 years."

We are grateful to everyone who submitted their letters, poetry, essays, and visual art.

Here's how you, as readers, can help:

BWQ is a free resource, available online and in print to readers globally. Around 10,000 individuals and organizations have digital subscriptions to BWQ, and many more read content on our website. We send around 500 physical copies of BWQ out to college campuses, women's centers, health care providers, LGBTQIA+ community centers, and individuals. Keeping this publication free—and thus accessible—is no small feat, considering that publishing has become increasingly expensive.

Despite rising costs, we are committed to keeping BWQ free and accessible to people in search of connection and community, particularly as the cultural and political climate in so many places becomes more hostile to the LGBTQIA+ community.

If you are able to, please support our work with a donation. Info at BiWomenQuarterly.com/donate.

We really could use your support!

With gratitude,

Robyn, Emily, Avery, Melissa, Lejla, Marya, Jo-Anne, Gail, and ALL of the amazing folks who share their creative work and/or volunteer for BWQ

Upcoming in *Bi Women Quarterly* Call for submissions

Fall 2026: Out at Work?

Whether to disclose our bi+ identities, and— if yes— how best to do so, are questions we must address throughout our careers every time we change jobs, coworkers, or supervisors. Does your workplace have an LGBTQIA+ employee group or support LGBTQIA+ people in other ways? Has that changed recently? We invite you to share your decisions and experiences—both good and tough—about being out at work. **Submit by August 1, 2026.**

Winter 2027: Body Image

Bodies are complex, and our relationships with them can change over time. We want to hear your stories about navigating body image as a queer person. How has being bi+ shaped the way you see your body? Are there certain clothes, books, films, or people that have helped you feel more affirmed or changed your perspective? **Submit by November 1, 2026.**

We welcome essays, reviews, poetry, short fiction, news articles, and visual art. Our submission guidelines are on our website. Send your submissions and suggestions for future themes to biwomeneditor@gmail.com. You may use a pseudonym, if you prefer.

Cyprienne's Boots finds BWQ very comforting. **Send a picture of yourself reading BWQ to biwomeneditor@gmail.com.**
Be creative!



Bi Women Quarterly (ISSN 2834-5096) has been in continuous publication since 1983. It began as a project of the Boston Bisexual Women's Network (BBWN), a feminist, not-for-profit collective organization whose purpose is to bring women and nonbinary folks together for support and validation. Through the production of *Bi Women Quarterly* and related activities, we seek full acceptance for bisexuals and those with other nonbinary sexualities. More broadly, we work through an intersectional lens and seek the liberation of people of all genders, sexual orientations, abilities, nationalities, and racial and ethnic identities.

AROUND THE WORLD: Bi+ Equal: *The Birth of the Pan-European Bi+ Umbrella Organization*

By Barbara Oud

It's Christmas Eve 2023 and I've closed my laptop for a two-week holiday. I'd answered all my emails, started my auto-reply, and locked my laptop away in the attic. I sit down on the couch and look at my phone. I remember to also block my inbox on my phone, because otherwise I'll keep checking emails during the holiday. As I check it for the last time, an email pops up from the European Commission (EC) about the project proposal that we had sent in June. I run upstairs to grab my laptop and see that our proposal got accepted. We can start the two-year project that will lead to the founding of a European bi+ umbrella entity! I'm so excited I'm crying as I get in touch with my colleagues. The EC had a few more questions that needed to be answered within 10 days, so we skip the larger part of the holiday to work on those answers.

Building an organization by the community, for the community

Fast forward to February 9, 2026. On this day, Bi+ Equal was officially registered as a pan-European organization. We did it! The registration was a major milestone and a historical moment. While pan-European umbrella organizations for other groups under the LGBTQIA+ umbrella (such as trans, intersex, and lesbian people) have existed for years, a similar organization specifically dedicated to the bi+ movement, issues, and interests was lacking until now.

Bi+ Nederland (Netherlands) and Spectrum (France) joined forces to make this happen for bi+ people. I had the honor of being the director of the project. The Bi+ Equal project involved mapping bi+ activists and groups across the pan-European region. We conducted extensive research into their needs, experiences, and priorities. A crucial starting point was that the umbrella organization would be developed by and for the bi+ community, ensuring it would form a recognizable,

safe, and representative space where bi+ people feel heard and empowered. The founding of Bi+ Equal was the end of a two-year project funded by the European Commission.

Stepping onto a rollercoaster

The entire project was a rollercoaster from start to finish. It was one of the most wonderful projects I have ever worked on. One thing that made it special was the incredible dedication of the project team. We all have different stories to tell about the project. Here, I'm sharing some of my personal highlights.

As we got started, the project team travelled to France, at the invitation of co-director Soudeh Rade. It was an honest deep dive: Soudeh Rade, Zeynab Peghambarzadeh, Jantine van Lisdonk, Hilde Vossen, Monique Boesewinkel and I got to know each other, walked through the two-year plan, and enjoyed the fields of the beautiful small town. At that moment, we learned that working together would take effort. We were such different people, with different backgrounds and ways of collaborating. It took time to adjust, but we accepted the challenge, knowing this was our shot at building an umbrella organization.

We did the work and executed all the plans we made. The mapping of bi+ groups and activists in the pan-European region was extensive and yielded enormous results. The research that followed gave us answers to so many questions about what people needed. One finding stood out for me: the bi+ community in the pan-European region is severely underfunded. In 2023, 77% of bi+ groups had no budget or a budget of less than €5,000. When we compared this to a 2020 study on LGBTQIA+ groups, we found their budgets were significantly higher. This stark contrast highlights a key reason why the bi+ community has struggled to sustain its work on bi+ equality.

From milestone to milestone

Time went on, and we started planning for the Bi+ Equal Conference and Founding General Meeting in Vilnius, Lithuania. The three-day conference was largely organized by the amazing Daphne Hermsen and took place from October 20 to 22, 2025. It was an absolute game-changer. Fifty people from across the pan-European region gathered to participate in panels, workshops, fun activities, and governance discussions.

Those who know me know that I'm not much of a governance geek. Yet, I was amazed by how many people took part in the hours of conversation about Bi+ Equal's constitution. Despite the late nights out, everyone was in their seats at 9:30 AM sharp for the Founding General Meeting on October 22. We voted on every article of the constitution, one by one. The phrase "For the community, by the community" felt truer than ever.



Start-up meeting in France



Founding General Meeting in Vilnius, Lithuania

It was a euphoric moment, a celebration when all the articles, the anti-discrimination policy, and the anti-harassment policy were accepted. That monumental feeling still makes me cry.

After that, the rollercoaster continued. Soudeh and I visited a notary in Amsterdam to officially register Bi+ Equal as an association in the Netherlands. What followed was a three-hour discussion about the constitution, then four months of email negotiations before we all fully agreed on the final version. Trust me when I say that for a non-governance geek, it was a real challenge to make it through these times.

Then, February 9 was our lucky day. The organization was officially registered! We celebrated briefly and got to work. Elections had to be organized to establish the first elected board of Bi+ Equal. Membership grew fast and wide: within weeks, Bi+ Equal had 100 individual and group members. The General Meeting Committee did an incredible job and organized the first Bi+ Equal General Meeting on short notice. On March 21, as spring began, the membership elected the first five board members: Aagje Ieven, Ieva Feldmane, Jace Rios Rivera, Nadja Arontschik, and Niek Rood. If you ask me, they make a wonderful Management Board that will guide Bi+ Equal into its next steps.



Barbara and Soudeh at the Notary

What's next for Bi+ Equal?

You might wonder what's up next. At this moment, we are working towards the Bi+ Equal Annual Conference, which will be part of the Bi+ World Conference in Amsterdam. As you might understand, this is another milestone event in the making. Imagine a few hundred bi+ people from all over the world together in Amsterdam, a three-day program with workshops, panels, and parties. Imagine one of those days being dedicated to the pan-European region, where you can meet the Board, the Membership, and all those wonderful bi+ people. Personally, I can't wait for this to happen, and I'm truly honored to be part of the organizing team.

Back to the Bi+ Equal project: the two-year project funded by the European Commission has finished. All project activities have been carried out successfully. We are working on the final parts of the reporting. At times, it felt like never-ending work. Blood, sweat, and tears, literally. For me, it broadened my scope in ways I had never expected. I am so incredibly thankful to all project team members and for how passionately we worked together toward this common goal. I am thankful for the Membership that is forming and the Board that will lead us from here.

The founding of Bi+ Equal is not just a milestone for us. It is the result of decades of struggle, built on the shoulders of bi+ activists who fought for visibility and recognition long before this project began. Now, in the pan-European region, we finally have a common place to call our own. It fills my bi+ heart with joy and gratitude for those who paved the way.

Are you from the pan-European region? To apply for Bi+ Equal membership, please visit

www.biplusequal.org

Do you want to be part of the Bi+ Equal Conference/Bi+ World Conference in July 2026?

Please visit www.biplusworldconference.org

Read about the Bi+ Equal survey here: <https://www.biwomenquarterly.com/research-corner-bi-communities-and-their-experiences-and-needs-in-europe-findings-from-the-bi-equal-survey/>

Barbara Oud is executive director of Bi+ Nederland and director of Bi+ Equal project. She is 35 years old, lives near Amsterdam in the Netherlands with her blended family and is an absolute yin yoga lover.



Love Letter #1 (to Kami)

By Tabs

Kami,

I love you I love you I love you I love you I love you Jesus fuck
I fucking love you! Not only do

I love you, but I do it with this frightening sort of totality; like
the sincerest of solar eclipses,

laden with astronomical significance—certainly none of that
seasonal, partial, crescent bullshit.

Nothing I feel for you is partial.

I love your nose and your arms and your teeth and your hands
and when you wear that one

paper-thin ringer tee. I love when I give you a million kisses all
across your face and your

giggles make me giving you a million more a moral obligation.
I love when you flex the arm I'm

holding ever so slightly. I love the rib tattoo you crafted yourself
and the lens through which you

see the world and the crinkle of your nose that comes
immediately after you crack first in an

impromptu staring contest. I love the sound of your laugh and
the slight furrow in your brow that

tells me when I have your full attention. I am so entirely
charmed by you that even now, I have to

cling to my train of thought for dear life before I look at you,
or I will almost certainly lose it.

I love the silly and important things we have in common, like
how we both derived great

childhood meaning from the Owl Jolson episode of Looney
Tunes and our shared penchant for

radical absurdism. I love that you've given me such a fondness
for clowns, even after a

quarter-century of being absolutely terrorized by them. I love
that I see us in everything, be it a

pair of gnarled cypress stumps by the pond at the Botanical
Gardens or a supremely detailed

example of Donnie Darko fanart, hand-selected from the
sacred archives of AO3. I love that we

have always been complementary flavors of odd, maybe in the
same way that the woman at

Maggott's Grocery described her most heavenly afternoon
snack—like pickles & peppermint.

And though I do not love the somber and difficult things we
have in common, like a convoluted

adolescence and a pathological need for particularity (I do not
love that we have both agonized

for so long in this life, or how we both still cling to the unmet
need of attempted understanding

from those who've known us far longer!) I do love, carefully, the
unfortunate sharedness of being

fully realized by you, and you by me.

I think that sometimes I have trouble believing we are real—
not in an idealized, limerent, deified,

placed-atop-a-pedestal sort of way, nor in a delusional,
schizoaffective, visual-tactile

hallucination sort of way. You're not without fault, and I know
that you're not impervious to

royally fucking up someday. And yet, it's these hypothetical
future disasters that I can't help my

excitement for—because in these moments of catastrophe, be
it a hellish symptom from the

necessary collapse of this end-stage imperialism, or a tick-
infested feral graveyard puppy, now

impulsively confined and ruining your carpeted apartment, I
am certain that everything about this

is as it seems. It is proof that we do not exist inside a carefully
controlled petri dish; in a lidded

vacuum where we are indefinitely insulated from all tough
things. It is a testament that even

under the most hostile circumstances, we persevere together. I
mean this in the same way that I tune out Christians who've
never had a crisis of faith—an unchallenged commitment rings

hollow. I want us to be chosen, forged; actively, deliberately,
even and especially in times of trial.

It's you, maybe it always was. I am endlessly relieved we met.

With my entirety,
Tabs

*Tabs (shelany) is a mid-20s poet who's back in her hometown of
San Antonio, Texas, in the U.S.*

What's for Dinner?

By Bernadette D'Auria

Dear Mother,

It is rare that a child can come out to their mother and be met not only with acceptance, but with a shared relationship in the yearning that exists in their heart. I remember being so nervous to tell you. You and father had split up, we were still adjusting to our new living situation, and being a single mom never looked like an easy job. Every night you would come home exhausted from work and immediately begin to work again in the kitchen, getting ready to feed our ungrateful mouths. It was on one of these very nights that I had decided to tell you.

Unbeknownst to you, that very morning I had woken up from an intense dream, one that feels so real that when you wake up you can feel the shadow of another person's touch still caressing your cheek. In all my 14 years of life, I had never had a dream that had undone everything that I had ever known about myself. Sure, I had been wrestling with the term "bisexual" for months at this point, but it wasn't like I was going out and experimenting with these thoughts. No, I was too shy for that. Instead I just looked intensely at every woman who came across my path, assessing their eyes, their cheeks, their lips, their breasts, their hips.... I was an addict for the feminine physique even if I had never touched it. Having that dream was revolutionary for me, and there is nobody in the world this girl wanted to tell more about a life-changing venture than her own mother.

So when you finally came home, exhausted from work and ready to start dinner and put a meal on the table for my siblings and me, here I came bounding into the kitchen with a mission. But as soon as I saw you, I stopped, wondering if this was really the right thing for me to do. What if everything I had ever thought about us was wrong, that despite all the claims that you loved me and cared for my happiness, that the words that I was so desperately trying to say would instantly shatter it? You must have sensed it in the way I was holding myself, because as soon as you saw me you uttered the words, "Baby, what's wrong?"

And that's when I said those three very important, life-changing words aloud for the first time: "I like girls." And then before you could open your mouth I immediately tacked on, "But I like boys too!" To which you replied, "So do I, now what would you like for dinner?" I misunderstood you at first, thinking that you were misunderstanding me. "No mommy," I said. "I mean that I like girls and boys... romantically." And you replied, "I know what you meant, and I meant what I said. Me, too. Now what would you like for dinner?"

And you looked up at me, for at this point I was already taller than you, and you were smiling softly at me with the love in your eyes that you always held when you looked at me. And as I stared at you, trying so hard to come up with a response, I realized I did not need one, that there would be times for me

to respond to this later, for the rest of our time together on this planet. We could unpack the feeling that I had been keeping all day from you, that you had been keeping for 14 years from me, in favor of the bigger question: What was it that I wanted for dinner?

Love,
Your Confidant

Bernadette D'Auria is a bisexual woman who currently lives in southern Virginia, in the U.S. When she is not shaping lives as a high school teacher, she can be found reading any book she can get her hands on.



Dear Torii

By Tricia Knoll

Your parents named you after gates at sacred shrines. In last night's dream, I wrote you a letter, knowing you died fifty years ago of breast cancer. I mentioned new windows in the children's museum where we worked, clean panes of glass that opened to the wooded park. I included who paid for the renovation, although philanthropy never mattered to you. You were an artist, not a fundraiser. Windows served as focal points for what you could draw: children dancing at the maypole or splashing in the wading pool. Perhaps dragons and paper sailboats. Bob claimed credit for the windows, but he's been dead for thirty years. You and I knew he could be a genius, friend, fiend, or foe. Whatever we said to him might be used against us. Despite policies about deaccessioning artifacts, he gave the museum's taxidermy polar bear to an unemployed man who hauled the arsenic-laden creature down the freeway in a pick-up truck. I suppose now it stands inside a bar beside a stage for a band or DJ in a dopey Oregon one-bar town. Torii, can you come back? I understand more now about being bi. We should talk. My treat at the bistro where the owner makes righteous lattes topped with perfect hearts. Or the fronds of sword ferns.

Tricia Knoll's The Unknown Daughter, contains personal poems from people who visit the Tomb of the Unknown Daughter and was a finalist in the 2025 New England Poetry Club chapbook contest. Wild Apples (Fernwood Press) details downsizing and moving 3,000 miles from Oregon to Vermont. Fernwood Press will publish "Gathering Marbles" in July 2027. Knoll is a Contributing Editor of Verse Virtual. Website: triciaknoll.com

Seven Years

By Charlie Roberts

Dear You,

Larger than life, you were raw and unapologetic. Your presence inspired me to be my true self, to live boldly and vibrantly. I admired you so much. It's a cliché, really. I put you on an undeserved pedestal, and you lapped up the praise, like the performer that you are.

I would hear you talk about the gigs, the parties, the people. A wild life I wanted to be a part of. I would not understand what it means to be bisexual, and thus to be myself, if it weren't for you. You gave me the permission to be *one of those queers*—the person I'd convinced myself would be ostracized from everyone I knew. The reality is that it allowed me to have much more meaningful connections with my friends and family. Thank you.

In some ways, you were my longest relationship. Seven years. Seven years of trying to convince my family that you were a caring friend, there for me when I needed: A Good Person. Even when my mum said, there's something "not quite right" about the dynamic between us, or about you. *What did she know?* I'd think. She doesn't know the power and intensity of queer platonics.

And it was intense. During our time together, you showed me queer community, how to be proudly bi+, to live for the shits and giggles. Everything with you was so uncompromising, unapologetic, and exceptionally queer. Nothing was complete until I'd either done it with you, or at least told you every word, every movement, every sensation.

You were a tough act to follow, so I curbed my friendships, questioning if the people I wanted to bring into my life would meet with your approval, all because you had to take center stage, especially in my life. The worst part is that you never told me to do this, I imposed this on myself. Because I made you the main character in my life. Even now—when I go out of my way to avoid uttering even your name—when I meet someone new, I instinctively ask myself, *what will you think of this person?*

Your final words cut me deeply. A way that only someone I'd whispered my deepest fears to could. I had to send screenshots to friends, "Is this who I really am?"

They said, "You are many things, but not this."

The show must go on, but every performer must take their final bow. And I was no longer willing to feed your ego.

I wanted so much to be like you.

Maybe that's where it started. The root of infection. Patient zero. Unable to see the illness in the early stages.

I hope I never become as vindictive and dominating as you.

Charlie Roberts is an amateur writer living between the country of Luxembourg and the region of Yorkshire, U.K.

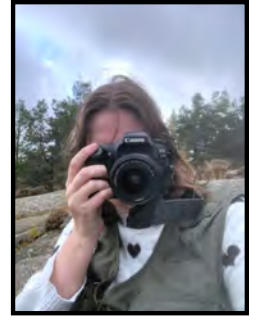


"Give Out Day," our primary fundraising event, is NOW and goes until June 30. If you are able, please support our work with a donation at <http://giveoutday.org/organization/Bi-Women-Quarterly>. (And in case you are wondering, you can donate anytime.)

To Various Dead Friends, with Sincerity

By Casey Lawrence

Content advisory: death, suicide, grief



Dear Jordan,

If I ever write a memoir, there will be a scene in it where I find out about your death. It was my dad's custody weekend. The whole ride home was tense. Mom sat us down on the couch Sunday afternoon and told us about the stray bullet that killed you in your sleep.

Schoolmates aren't supposed to die when you're ten years old. They just aren't. Not anywhere, but especially not here, where most people have never even seen a handgun up close. That's American stuff. That's movie stuff. That isn't real.

I'm still messed up about it twenty years later. Caskets aren't meant to be covered in Spiderman stickers, is all I'm saying. And once you've seen that, a part of you is different forever. That's not your fault, but sometimes I think your death opened a crack in me that never really closed.

2005

Dear Clayton,

I can't go to Crystal Beach without thinking about the accident. Both my brothers have your name tattooed on their backs in a paintball splatter. It looks like blood and I can't stand it. Red ink was a bad idea.

Teenagers get drunk all the time. They kiss their brothers' friends in the basement. They climb flagpoles. They are reckless and stupid and confusing and angry and cry during their German final when they can't keep a lid on their grief anymore.

I really wish you could've gotten to grow up.

2012

Dear Tim,

In my memory, you'll always be the empty seat at the table, which feels like a messed-up thing to say. You're a panic attack during my big presentation. A disconnected phone call. The spot beside the vending machine where I pressed my hands to my eyes so hard I saw stars.

I do feel bad that I turned you down for that drink. I have to believe that wasn't one of your 13 reasons, or else I might throw myself off a bridge. Oh fuck. That's a bad joke. I just forgot, for a second.

You're the sort of person who would have laughed, though. And then asked me to cheat on my partner with you. Because you were down for everything. I hope you'd be okay with me fictionalizing my reaction to your death in a novel I wrote, because I did do that. Except you're a girl the main character loves and also sort of her shitty boyfriend. Sorry.

2017

Dear Sheena,

We lost touch after high school, so I never got to tell you about the crush I had on you in grade nine. Your friends were the sort of mean girls who would have made my life hell if they knew. But you would have let me down gently.

It's hard to wrap your head around a healthy 26-year-old dying. Not as hard as an eight-year-old kid getting shot, I guess. But hard. Strange, like a gear clicking out of place, or a bone. A Facebook obituary. Instagram montages. A photo of me in the background and you lighting up the sky.

2022

Dear John,

Your mom texted me to say that you had gone peacefully in your sleep. I suspect it was one of many texts she sent to your contacts, not singled out specifically. I wasn't that important.

I watched a video of you spinning. Just spinning to get dizzy. A big group of us, arms out, spinning in the sand at Lakeside Park.

I watched it over and over. Just to get dizzy. To feel 14 again and remember the sound of your laugh.

You wearing those bright red stiletto heels at the mall. And Alix coming out, and you hugging him. And when I came out to you, Emmaline and I holding hands at your birthday party. The way you brightened. I'll miss that smile forever.

2024

Dear Tobias,

A world away. Oceans of distance. Another one of those text messages, the kind that makes your heart drop into your shoes. "By his own hand." Nothing we could have done from here. But still, the guilt. The "what if's."

In my memory, you have flour smudged on your nose from rolling dough for pizzas. We were eating raw basil leaves while we waited for them to rise, too impatient. A snapshot.

There's a hole a life leaves, no matter how briefly your worlds collided. Eighteen months. Slipping into the used bookstore in Haga. Fika Wednesdays. Thrifting. A party or two. Brief, in comparison. Yet I've lost hours of sleep, days of work. I walk to the park and turn my face to the sun, wishing.

What if, what if, what if.

2026

Casey Lawrence (shelthey) has a PhD from Trinity College Dublin. After taking a five-year hiatus from creative writing to pursue her ,to her partner, Rhys. Her fiction and poetry have recently appeared in Polar Borealis, Polar Starlight, THEMA, and SuperCanucks. Find her on Bluesky @myexplodingpen.bsky.social.

princess of the sun

By Linda M. Crate

i never really knew
how to express how
i felt for you
or if i should,

a part of me was unsure
of whether or not i should
confess;

i tried to pray the gay
out of me but turns out i'm
still pansexual
regardless of how hard
i pray—

my mother knew,
i think;
she told me twice that i better
not be a lesbian—

i'm not,
but I'm also not straight;

and you were the first
woman crush i had that wasn't
a celebrity—

it scared me so badly,
thought i was going to hell;

and then we had that
misunderstanding and we
didn't talk for years and i saw
that friend request and a part
of me had a panic attack
because i've written so many
poems about you about all the
love and the yearning and the ache
of it all—

i wonder if you read any of
those poems,
a part of me hopes not;

but if you have just know i always
thought you were the
prettiest princess of the sun.

*Linda M. Crate (shelher) is a Pennsylvanian
writer in the U.S. whose works have been
published in a myriad of magazines online
and in print.*



Wailer

By Durdaneh Malik

Dear Chandramallika,

I saw you reflected on the speeding windows of the subway train—a hologram, glitching and at once, also remaining a continuous outline when the light pouring between the cracks allowed it. I see you without being there—you're crossing the street like any other pedestrian finding their way back to a place of residence after the day's end, as a force of habit. You're walking now, the remnants of gravel crunching underneath your footsteps—a sound I found so intensely fascinating when I was about five years old and had just learned to walk hand in hand with someone who abandoned me.

No one in my life knows you exist, and they all know what you look like. I am watching you walk with bated breath, knowing that this time, too, you will walk right past me, unaware, whistling some tune you would only remember when the mundane becomes an inconvenience. Or rather, you would pass through me entirely, like the ghost of someone I got tired of burying over and over again.

People are starting to ask questions now. Isn't this what happens to the shriveling bodies of beached whales, when atrophy sets in and the salt spills over from the flesh of it? Like a pile of soiled laundry, I hastily gather you and close the storage-locker door, clumsy and loud, upon the arrival of these unintended guests. I say, "Not now." "I need time/I don't understand/It was just an odd time in my life/I don't talk about that."

No one in my life knows you exist. I think about that a lot. Especially when I sit alone at a desk surrounded by strangers, exhausted, with my head resting in the cradle of my arms.

I remember that upon the convergence of this path that first time, you asked me to barter something in return for you. I was going to run away with her. I was going to live with her like I planned to. I had just finished sharpening the weapon and galvanizing on it a pattern I saw on a teapot at the pawn shop. I was going to adorn her hand with it, a few years shy of our 40th anniversary, so she could position it where it was anatomically correct and with mercy and utmost finesse—execute me.

But then I turned the weapon on you. I must have known. It had to have been privy to me, if I lunged at you with force—enough to make the red in your eyes bloom and block your tear-glands. I remember the pleading in those eyes of yours. I wonder, after all these years, was some of that for me? Did you, for some mysterious sting that may have momentarily taken birth in your conscience, implore me to run back then?

This letter makes no sense. None of the ones I wrote you do. Nor do the poems. They are so beautiful, still. They are footage—like those kitschy video tapes you find in your parents' basement of them getting married. It is within writing that

made no sense where I lifted the veil from your face, beloved. A red veil, like those worn with timidity and pride by the women of my country—each thread of that fabric was a vessel of mine, holding blood that pulsed and spilled for you. A boy with a woman's face: *my bride*. I have never described your hands as anything other than flowers—fickle things, with their flippant beauty. They still nag me from high atop their branches—holy, out of reach. Like russet, plump pomegranates swaying in the sun, I wonder if love becomes chewable between one's teeth. Something that ripens, darkens into that obscene ruby red color and congeals like blood and brain matter mixed all into one mouthful. And it still won't be enough to satisfy any of this, would it?

The purpose of this document is to tell you how I feel. In the utter muck of emotions you hoarded within me, I struggle to discern which one I should pick this time. The needle weaving all of them together has always, always been grief. Even now, as I grieve (yet) another, are you not still swimming inside of it? Squirring, turning like a worm out during a thunderstorm, mending soil for the garden?

You are my tower. The structure from where the love outsources to its distributaries. You are the shape and exact dimensions of the dream I left tucked into my childhood home, at the last threshold of innocence, where the world still felt bendable. And now the aftermath—every time my heart begins to race again when I accidentally catch the color in someone's eyes, I see you reflected back to me. I do not wince anymore. Not once. It is simply routine. It is Gospel; it is a law which cannot be deflected from.

I desire another—I desire you.

I find another—I find you.

No one and everyone in my life knows that you exist. And that is something I will just have to learn to live with.

I desire another—I desire you.

I find another—I find you.

I call for someone, and it is you who answers.

You answer and you hum and you dillydally your way into the same house you've been walking into every single day for just under a decade now. Your walk has ended. You're finally home.

You sink into rest; I open my eyes.

The world keeps turning—so heavy and giant, the weight of a whole planet. Yet so perplexing how it just...floats there in an infinite expanse—weightless, and without dignity.

I think of this. I think of it a lot.

Time to cross the street.

There are no bridges.

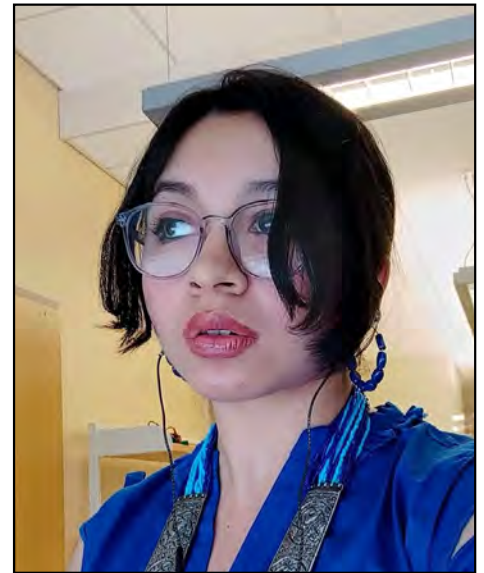
I hope you know that. And against all possible bounds of rationality, I hope that it kills you someday. I hope you yearn to get the favor returned, wallowing in the guilt of how you turned on the hands that washed your feet with a devotion almost unfairly Biblical.

There are no bridges between people like you and people like me.

With that, I sign this off.

Sincerely,
M.

Durdaneh Malik is a graduate student pursuing a PhD in biology and currently resides in upstate New York in the U.S. She loves locking in to bass-heavy darksynth music, because it's honestly hilarious to imagine finding oneself in the middle of a club, studying. When she isn't at the center of a fresh bout of unravelling, she can actually be pretty decent company.



Love letter to my family

By Alyssa Walker

This is Family.

It is the blurred lines
of true friendship and romance and
pure unadulterated adoration

burning love that spills from the
basement of your essence
entwines their stardust
with yours
rooted to this earth
You are Safe

Grasp webbed tendrils
concrete connections
an affirmation that confirms
the breadth of this feeling

I'd glitch myself back
into the echo of yesterday
replay this constellar display
how it feels to be Heard

Alyssa Walker (she/her) is a queer, polyamorous poet and healthcare educator living her best witchy cat-lady life in the West Midlands, U.K. She's passionate about LGBTQIA+ equality, diversity and inclusion. You'll find her performing poetry at local Pride events, and on Instagram at @agonyalyssa.

Dear Nan

By Mya Lucia

Of all the wisdoms you taught me in life,
"everyone will be bisexual one day"
was, and always will be,
the most significant

I can remember one of the many times you said it in my childhood,
in the car, driving the long bend into our neighbourhood,
so clearly and confidently from the passenger seat,
as if a core manifesto to the party of your life

You were my first ally
before the world ever knew my sexuality,
before I even knew it myself.

But perhaps you did know it.

Maybe that's why you told me,
to teach me something
about myself,
Or maybe
to teach me something
about you.

But what you did teach me
(an atheist who prays to George Michael every Easter)
is that
Queer acceptance does not merely co-exist with Christianity,
but is foundational to it.

Mya Lucia is a PhD student and lover of tequila, senior dogs, and Sapphic literature, based in the North West of England.

Different Lives

By Maria de las Mercedes Rodriguez Puzo

“You can live many lives. Each one is a different life.” Perhaps that phrase sounds familiar to you. It belongs to Tokyo, a character from the Spanish series “La Casa de Papel,” known on English-language Netflix as “Money Heist.” Since I heard it, in the wonderful performance by Ursula Corbero, it has stayed with me.

Today, I am 36 years old and I feel like an old soul, like someone who has experienced different realities, different lives. I suppose no one escapes the dialectic: “Everything is in constant change, in constant motion.”

In November 2017, Robyn Ochs offered me the opportunity to write in this space for the first time. My article was titled “Around the World: Media Silence About Bisexual Women in Cuba.” At that time, I lived in Santiago de Cuba, a musical, bustling, and hot city in eastern Cuba. That Maria dreamed of transforming everything that was wrong around her. “Be the change you want to see in the world,” I would repeat to myself, not knowing whether Mahatma Gandhi actually said it, or not.

For me, Cuba is completely dysfunctional: economically, politically, and socially. The country is an abyss, a dark place where Vecna reigns, only this Vecna has been in power for more than 65 years under the guise of free education and healthcare. This abyss is called the Cuban Revolution, the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC), the dictatorship of the Castro Ruz family and their puppet Díaz-Canel. The system oppresses everyone in one way or another; even those who defend and support it suffer. All power is centralized under the PCC, and public services are completely subsidized by the state, which manages an unproductive and depressed economy.

The Cuban reality can be summarized as: a lack of freedoms, the absence of the rule of law, as censorship, shortages, lack of basic necessities such as soap and shampoo, low wages and exorbitant market prices, power outages lasting more than 12 hours a day, dilapidated hospitals and schools, professionals abandoning their careers to work in restaurants and hotels, and mass migration to other countries.

Living there, I felt completely oppressed. I had studied journalism, but my degree was invalidated in 2021, and I couldn't practice my profession. In Cuba, the mass media belongs to the State and is controlled by the Ideological Department of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC). I was seen as an opponent, I was under constant surveillance, and I suffered threats from Rober Noa Frómata, a PCC official.

I was also affected by a social ill: the intrusion of others into one's personal life. Observing others and spreading gossip is a common practice among many Cubans. This problem probably originates in politics, when the dictator Fidel Castro Ruz created the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution

(CDRs) on September 28, 1960. “We are going to establish a system of collective vigilance, we are going to establish a system of collective revolutionary vigilance...so that everyone knows what their neighbor thinks, what their neighbor does,” Fidel declared, and the crowd supported him.

One day I was relaxing at home, watching the video of the song, “Take Me to Church” by Hozier. A neighbor came to use my phone, stood behind me, and watched the video. Then they insulted me, starting to yell insults at me for watching a video of two men kissing. Other neighbors would come into the house and criticize me for wearing my hair in a natural afro style, saying I didn't comb my hair. Not even in my own home did I have the right to be myself.

Most members of the LGBTQ+ community in Cuba have experienced similar situations; there is constant social criticism and judgment of sexual behavior. Bisexual women, in particular, face collective ridicule, a subtle form of bullying disguised as jokes and humorous phrases: “It's all the same to her whether she plays or sits on the bench,” “Today bread with bread, and tomorrow bread with sausage,” among others. These words are seemingly harmless, but deeply hurtful. Fortunately, since 2016, with the expansion of the internet and mass emigration, a more open-minded attitude has emerged, especially among younger generations.

Despite my circumstances, I remained committed to non-violent activism. I became involved in projects that sought change from within civil society: the Las Isabelas Women's Group, the Christian Student Movement, the Ecumenical Faith for Cuba Network, the Loyola Center of Santiago de Cuba, and the Lavastida Center. From 2012 to 2019, during all the natural disasters that struck the island, I was there, supporting the victims with donations, music, and community activities. I led workshops on LGBTQ+ awareness and visibility, gender-based violence, and women's and community empowerment; I participated in marches against homophobia.

I also made my voice heard academically: I dedicated my master's thesis to researching representations of the LGBTQ+ community on Santiago de Cuba radio. I found censorship, communication gaps, and vague studies, and I exposed them in several publications. At that time, I felt the need to speak out, to act, to raise my voice. I resisted as long as I could until the time came to choose between my life and freedom, or Cuba. The United States of America allowed me to enter and apply for asylum in July 2019.

I was reborn here; I've been here for almost seven years, and the culture shock has been so strong that it still affects me. I'm still discovering new things about the system and I'm pleasantly surprised. For example, I recently had a wonderful experience: I visited Dress for Success, an organization that helps women seeking employment by offering professional clothing and job empowerment courses. When I arrived, the saleswomen were elegant and kind white American women. They helped me choose the best clothes according to my style and personality. They

brought me several options and diligently searched for my size. I went home with eight fine pieces of clothing and a new pair of shoes, all free. On top of that, they gave me a beautiful card with \$20 for transportation expenses. So I ask the Cuban Communist Party: why did you make me believe for 30 years that I would be hated in the United States?

Since my arrival, I have lived in Houston, Texas, a multicultural city with a large Latino population. I have never felt discriminated against for being of African descent, Latina, or because of my sexual orientation. Am I free? Yes, completely. I can choose whether I like cow's milk, oat milk, soy milk, almond milk, or rice milk. I can choose to wear my hair naturally or get a keratin treatment. I can choose the car brand to buy, according to my financial means; if I want more, I have to work more. I can marry a man, a woman, or even myself. As long as I pay T-Mobile, I have unlimited internet access. I can choose to be a Republican or a Democrat, a vegan or a carnivore, an environmentalist or a wasteful consumer of electricity. I can stand and protest in front of the White House against the President. I can write to a Senator to complain, I can write to the newspapers, I can express my ideology on social media. I can travel within and outside the country.

My neighbors are super friendly; we exchange polite greetings when we see each other on the street, and none of them meddle in my life. They probably don't even know my name, and I LOVE IT. At work, no one has ever asked me if I have a husband or if I'm married. Here, people respect privacy and personal space. Everyone minds their own business. I've been working as a social worker for almost four years now—without a North American university degree. I help immigrants with their social integration, and I always tell them that arriving here is like being reborn. "Patience: the baby first crawls, then takes small steps, walks steadily, and finally runs; it's one step at a time."

The United States of America means freedom to me, but unfortunately incidents like the homicide of the Ukrainian refugee Iryna Zarutskya and the current targeting of black and brown people by ICE, are transforming the meaning of freedom, safety, and democracy. In my neighborhood, we are all Latin, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Afghani. I cross the city every day and I have never seen any ICE operation. So, personally I can't say I have been directly impacted.

I do know several people in the Latino community who have been detained and deported to Cuba, Honduras, and Peru without the right to a fair process. None of them have criminal records, and all have open asylum cases with EOIR and USCIS. They were doing

everything according to the law. They were hard-working people. Also, there are many people coming back to our home countries by their own decision. They made enough money to return and open a business. Returning to Cuba, in my case, is not an option.

Strangely, Cuban politics and reality no longer affect me as much. I've discovered that no one can live in two countries or two time periods at once. I could live in the past and wear myself out fighting a battle I no longer belong to, or I can focus on my present, on my bills to pay, and the dreams this new country allows me to have. I choose this different life, but it's mine. Which life do you choose?

Maria de las Mercedes Rodriguez Puzo is a Cuban ex-journalist and current social worker. She is Houstonian through adoption.



Dear A

By Maxine Bette

I kissed you when you asked me to that summer on the farm.
You said you wanted to practice for boys
You said you were an asshole magnet, grinned like you couldn't help it
Ewes in the pasture memorized your face

You said you wanted to practice for boys
It was the summer boys yanked our towels off as we left the showers
Ewes in the pasture memorized your face
Garter snakes molted along creek banks

It was the summer boys yanked our towels off as we left the showers
Once alone we descended onto the bed, tongues intertwined, wet thighs
Garter snakes molted along creek banks
You said it was good and told me to kiss you again and again

Once alone we descended onto the bed, tongues intertwined, wet thighs
Once grown you married a narcissist and raised a bigot
You said it was good and told me to kiss you again and again
Now I wonder if you think of us when lightning bugs tickle your thighs

Once grown you married a narcissist and raised a bigot
What did you do with the tenderness we had?
I wonder if you think of us when lightning bugs tickle your thighs
I kissed you when you asked me to that summer on the farm.

Maxine Bette is a poet living in the U.S. Midwest.

I Want to Know

By Katerina Dementeva

The sun is thirsting for her as much as I do. I can see that through the window of my sports pub, through the tiny square with the fountain where we just had lunch together, through the window of her gym where she's laughing with her client and showing her how to set up a treadmill properly.

The sun is thirsting for her almost as much as I do. I frown. If it won't stop its liquid sliding on her skin, she will close shutters and what will I look at then?

She looks up through her window, through our square, through my window—at me. She smiles, not like she smiles at her client. I wave. I blush.

When she looks away, I touch the corner of my lips, the place her lips touched minutes ago. It's silly, I know. Like always, after lunch there was a kiss, and after the kiss, she whispered: *have a great day, my sweet colleague*. Calling us *colleagues* is also silly but I loved it, and I laughed—like I always do.

My only client, drinking vodka shots at 2 p.m., girl, breaks a glass. I jump. *No big deal, no worries*, I say. The girl looks like she's about to cry.

I take a misty picture of a dark storage room so it will be easier for me to picture her pushing me against one wall or me pushing her to another and—this time properly—kiss.

the worst thing here is
not me fantasising about the kiss
the worst—
that I don't

I don't want to picture
I want to know

and I want to hear all her long, long stories,
laugh at her bad jokes,
eat her stupid beans and tofu,
watch and critically discuss boring sports documentaries with her,
let her drive even though I really hate the way she does it

and I don't mind being friendly with her friends
or her dogs
or her kids
or her husband
oh fuck

I didn't remember being in love to feel so shitty. But it is. Also, I didn't remember to get the broom, as the drinking girl politely points out.

I return and take it
then put it down
to take another picture
of a dark storage room
in a hope
that one day
I will see it in my archive
and think
what is that?

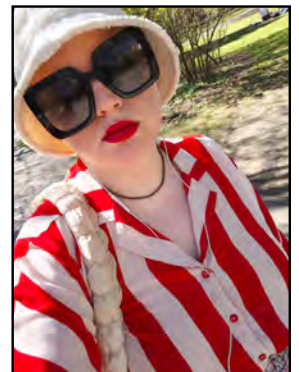
that's a lie

in a hope
that one day
I will see it in my archive
and tell her:
*oh my god!! back then it was ridiculous
I couldn't stop thinking about kissing you
and this goddamn broom
can you believe it?
I forgot it the second time, too*

and the worst thing is
I don't want to imagine
her answer
or her smile
or the firmness and softness of her body
or how welcoming it is
or an absolute bliss
or the kiss
or any of this

I want to know

Katerina Dementeva is a queer and feminist writer, poetess, performance artist, and facilitator of creative writing events based in Riga, Latvia. Her practice moves between fiction and nonfiction, inviting other art forms into her writing as she explores themes of anonymity and authorship in art, domestic and political feminism, and queer identity. She has been a resident at the International Writers' and Translators' House in Ventspils, the Women in the Mountains program in Bulgaria, and has participated in projects supported by Europeana, the European digital cultural heritage library.



Dear Dead Uncle

By Jan Steckel

When I was 21, searching for housing
in a renter's market in Berkeley,
It was so tight that people put ads
out for "vegan lesbian Buddhist
health care professionals under 30
seek same to share sunny apartment.
No Taurus or Aquarius."

After looking at 30 places, I finally
got accepted to share a two-bedroom
apartment with a young woman
who held the lease.

She was a serious Christian
with a boyfriend who'd be over a lot.
She didn't mind that I was Jewish.
I gave her first and last month's rent,
moved in my stuff, told the other
29 people I'd found a place.
"My friend reminded me," she said,
"I forgot to ask you something."
She needed to make sure
we had the same lifestyle.
It took me a while to understand
she was asking if I was gay.
I said, "I've only ever been
with men, but I think I'm bisexual,
so I might have a relationship
with a woman someday." She tore up
my check. Told me to get my stuff out
by the end of the day.

I called you crying and explained.
"What did you tell her that for?"
you demanded. "Because it's true,"
I sobbed. "I wouldn't have felt
comfortable rooming with you, either!"
you said angrily. I asked if I
could stay at your house
while I looked for another place.
You said "okay" with ill grace.

Before you died, you got all
PC about lesbians, but never
got comfortable with male
homosexuality. When your son
told you he had experimented
with men, you were pissed off.
"Anything else you want to tell me?"
you asked, glaring at him.

When I knew you were going to die,
I thought about talking about this
with you, but I couldn't bring it up.
I was involved in your care by then.
The time never seemed right.
It's not the worst thing you ever
said or did to me. Once, I showed you
my poem about my mother (your sister)
leaving bruises on me when I was a kid.
I showed them to my father, who ignored them.
"Don't ever publish this" was all you said.

I still loved you,
Jan

*Jan Steckel is a poet and writer who lives in Oakland,
California, in the U.S. Her books are available at
<https://www.zeitgeist-press.com/index.php/authors/jan-steckel>.*



Micro Love

By Hayli Cox

Content advisory: suicidality

For most of my life I've felt love in secret. I let my best friend die in a fire before I ever told her how I felt, how striking her cheeks were where they met her ears—that place I wondered the taste of. I came up with euphemisms for the word, replaced it with *xoxo* or hearts. I find *love you* easier if it's not preceded by *I*. If you want to know how I feel about you, you have to get me drunk.

Which is why I felt so threatened when I read Dr. Barbara Fredrickson's research on what she calls "micro-moments of positivity resonance," those moments that spark, when your blood heats your cheeks and you know you've found something right. Microscopic neurotransmitters releasing microscopic chemical love. Micro love. I understood different kinds of affection—how my father would caress a tomato hanging from a vine, how the elderly women I volunteered with could break me with one moment forgotten or remembered. My dog, Sparky. How he licked one side of a popsicle while I licked the other, and how I was once sure he'd become a man and marry me someday.

What frightened me was the thought of love as chemicals. As temporary, as multiple, as inevitable, as infidelity. I remembered the night my high school boyfriend told me I couldn't *hold out* anymore. That the smiles I gave to strangers and the compliments I paid to their clothes, their eyes, were all evidence that I was a whore.

*

I started feeling guilty about loving and not loving when I was a child, my momma saying *he knows I'm coming home to him* when I asked her why she jokes about the man at the bar, calling him her husband. She gave me quarters to put in machines, plastic film from her cigarette cartons to fill with chicklets as she played evening Keno and sipped from a tiny red straw. The time I followed a strange sound through the trailer and found my father crying, reading cards and letters in my mother's half-cursive. Moving back and forth between homes, sleeping on my uncle's floor by the couch, listening to my father snore. Uncle Jimmy's plastic bear full of honey and how I shared all the toys at his house with the dog until we buried him with all the car-chasing dogs who came before.

Apartments and trailers, boxes packed, pets abandoned and every babysitter I ever had. My favorite, Lori, who took us to the park to feed old bread to geese when her abusive husband was home. The time he struck her and the Kool-Aid made the carpet squishy as I tried to pull her up. I remember the girl who always made me play house in my swimsuit, how she said *you're the wife and you have to love me, or we're not friends* and what that meant I had to do. I remember Aunt Ida, who

was murdered because she was afraid to be lonely. I remember *Forensic Files* and *Cold Case* and beware of sex, money, love. I remember much later, a man on top of me, inside of me, avoiding my lips and I love yous. Another man who climbed up but not down a fire escape and whom I should've preferred and who knew how to say *I love you* back.

*

I am full of walls, but when I'm not careful I make connections too quickly. I remember how I gazed over a cubicle at Nick, passed notes and made him cups of tea, met him at the park all those midnights. Nick had his own personal euphemism for love, derived from the film *Scott Pilgrim vs the World*. It was us versus the world, pressed close at a Halloween dance not two months before his death. I'd dressed him as an old woman, put blue eyeshadow on his thick lids and flour in his hair. I was a Disney princess in the morning, hair tangled into bedhead and mascara smeared, and he zipped my dress. I told him I hoped he looked that way when he was old. He'd said *I can't wait to see what you look like when we get old*. Now, surrounded by intoxicated Vikings and cats and nurses, he dropped the euphemism and told me what he wanted, how he felt. We made so much heat in the crowd that we had to run across the road to Lake Superior. He stripped to his boxers and I ran into the water in my princess gown. I tried to dunk him and he picked me up and threw me, laughing as my body broke reflections of constellations in the dark.

Less than a month later, I told him I was broken, that it wasn't fair to ask him to fill my cracks. That a person can't love someone else if she can't even love herself. He climbed a fire escape two days after his 24th birthday, noon on a Thursday, and the detective called me a contributing factor.

Sometimes I feel safer as a metaphor.

*

It's the dopamine that causes the high between people, a rewards circuit from prefrontal cortex to nucleus accumbens that helps us forget the danger in it, that breaks the connection from accumbens to amygdala. All these areas of our brain are primitive, all of them old. Add physical contact, and oxytocin builds an attachment, increases the addiction. If we're lucky, vasopressin keeps the feeling going. But even that is dangerous, because the longer we're addicted, the harder we crash. The sensation of physical illness brought on by separation, by death.

I wondered if micro love could be the solution to the problem. Taste love. Chew, don't swallow. I started leaving notes on receipts, leaving scraps of paper in coat pockets, under things that wouldn't be lifted for months. I started looking strangers in the eye, felt the gaze returned and lengthened. A woman's red lipstick, the way her eyelashes clump. When I traveled alone to Pennsylvania I spent a weekend with a man who showed me the city and we traded secrets, traded bodies, traded first names. He says, *It could be so easy to fall in love with you*, and that's my

cue to go. Train back to Michigan, another one-syllable name in my phone and calls gone unanswered. My contacts list proof that I'm *damaged goods*, a record of people who accelerated contractions in striated muscle below my sternum.

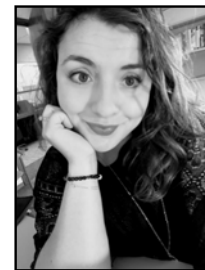
Research suggests you can only love in the presence of someone. They've seen proof, neurologists say, in the mirroring lit-up in MRI machines. I convince myself this is untrue, that what I'm experiencing isn't just withdrawal. That without another body my own isn't loveless.

*

I had promised Nick, the summer before his death, I'd read him my favorite play, *King Lear*. I told him it was about an aging,

mad king trying to determine which of his three daughters loves him more. Nick said it seemed like all Shakespeare wrote about was love. I think back over more than a dozen plays I've read and agree. We decide it's what most things are about.

Hayli May Cox holds a PhD in Creative Writing with a graduate minor in Women's and Gender Studies from University of Missouri., in the U.S. She currently serves as Nonfiction Editor at Doubleback Review and is an Assistant Professor of Creative Writing in northern Iowa, though she's really a Michigander.



Our First Kiss is my Roman Empire

By Kate Smith

I find myself back in bed with you multiple times a day. I pour cereal into my bowl and follow our bodies from the sidewalk outside the bar where we stole that man's fedora to the leather-sweaty backseat of the Uber. I fill out my timecard on a Friday afternoon, and I think of your smile while we danced on the tiled kitchen floor. █████ found us snacks and then all four of us claimed our spots on the floor of my bedroom, like we had done hundreds of times before. I put on my left turn signal too late, missing my chance to merge and wishing I knew what was different about that night. Do you remember it? Do you remember how we first found each other? All I remember is the softness of your lips, made softer by what might have been hesitancy or a desire not to be found out. My breath was so hot. I don't know how they didn't hear, especially when I ended up on top of you. Maybe they did. Do you know if they did? Neither of them has ever said anything about it to me, but then again, neither have we. Every time I find myself sitting at the edge of a pool, legs dangling over the edge, I remember that next weekend, when I came to stay with you for a night. I was eyeing those college boys with ice cube trays for abdomens, but I was also daydreaming about finding your softness again. I found it then, but that was the last time in the flesh. I have always wanted to apologize for how I handled that—putting the dreaming before the talking and a new connection over ours. I am sorry I started dating someone new so soon. I have always wondered where we could have gone if I had breathed into you first. Or even simultaneously. Can you imagine? If we had met in that pink upholstered restaurant for lunch, if we had walked the gardens and kissed after. I am polyamorous now, but I wasn't thinking about relationships that way then. I wish I was. Maybe I will ask you out on a date next time I visit, and we can finally talk about all this. The brunch place has moved but it's still pink, still bubbly like the marks the sun left on your shoulders.

Kate Smith is a bisexual and polyamorous poet and editor based in Walla Walla, Washington, in the U.S. She writes about mental health, earth, and queerness. Her poetry has been featured in anthologies from Sunday Mornings at the River and Beyond the Veil Press and in HNDL Mag.



You Remembered My First Smile

By Sandra Clarke

Nicole and I met overseas during a period of profound change in my life. We connected quickly and remained in communication upon my return home through weekly online calls, building an increasingly important friendship. It became the place where I felt most seen, held, and understood. After a year and a half, I finally disclosed that my feelings were beyond friendship. The relationship began to unravel, eventually coming to an end. What follows is a love letter to the woman who helped me discover my bisexual identity, my community and, in many ways, myself.

Dear Nicole,

Separation from you... the end of our relationship, has been one of the deepest pains that I have ever known. The depth of grief can't fully be expressed... I feel unmoored, alone and less safe with the world and people around me, like I am free falling with nothing, no one to grab onto. This sorrow is deep, but its depth doesn't just lie in the present moment. It is a crashing of the present and the past creeping in to haunt me as it so often does. There is a very little girl in me who forever wonders why she is never enough. What makes her so hard to love? Hard to hold onto?

You hoped that I could understand your situation and I believe that I do. You set a firm boundary to protect yourself, Melanie, and your relationship. I know that you love Melanie very much. You have shared a life together for a long time. Your lives are deeply intertwined. I imagine you both sharing stories and struggles, supporting each other through each day... you are each other's person. I picture her listening to you, sitting with you, watching TV together in the evenings. She is there to calm you, laugh with you, hold you, comfort you, and be with you. She is the one you come home to, the one you share meals with, the one you call, the one you consult, the one you nurture and protect. You celebrate life together, you share fur babies, long-time friends and you belong within each other's families. All of this is what makes life worth living, worth fighting for. It is the tether that holds you down when the chaotic world swirls around you, your soft place to fall, the strength that holds you up, sees you, and believes in you, even when you feel you have lost yourself. It is your home. My mind understands but my heart is unmoved. It stands firmly in defiance, angry, fighting, refusing to live by the rules, pushing, pulling and tearing away from its own brokenness.

The way you looked at me, your gaze so soft, tender, full of compassion—if you had never spoken a word to me, I still would have felt held and loved more deeply than ever before. You quietly listened, stayed curious, shared in my joy, laughed with me, remembered my stories and all the feelings. You challenged how I viewed myself, and through your eyes, I saw myself anew. Your kind, steadfast, and consistent care built me up. You saw me and then I was able to see myself. Your friendship

built a foundation for me to stand on, stable, grounded, real. It provided a place to begin growing from, instead of a place to simply survive from. You were finally there walking beside me. We held each other up; you gave me strength.

When we met, I was sick and fearful, but you never turned away, you turned towards. You were unshaken by my history—my gentle, trusted companion, reaching into the past to soothe the most vulnerable parts of me. If I had not met you, I may have never left my husband. I may have stayed small, abandoning myself, living ill, in quiet isolation. Meeting you awoke something in me—a silent pondering became a screaming voice! I can and I want to love this way! This feels so right. Safe connection and desire can be woven together in the gentlest of ways. The realization that I am bisexual opened a door to a community that I can belong to. A community that understands what it's like to stand in the margins. A community where creativity is valued and thriving, where those who push the boundaries of cultural and collective norms can find solace. This is a community for me.

I started dancing again soon after we met. You shared in my excitement. Your eyes lit up like mine when I talked about a new class or upcoming performances. My delight was yours and yours mine. If we had not met, I may have never graced a stage again. I was numb and you brought me back to myself. I was hiding and you found me. Now I can truly embody my own sensuality, express it through movement in a way that is authentically me.

I don't regret meeting you and letting you in. I am grateful that you also let me in and made space for me in your life, even if it was just for a brief period. You took a risk and I am so grateful that you did.

Melanie... I am grateful to her for allowing you to form a meaningful connection with me. I wish I could take away her hurt. She may regret it, but she gave me such a precious gift, a human gift. She allowed me to experience deep caring and connection in a way that I have never felt before. You both gifted me an open door, a caught breath, a light, respite, the freedom and joy of feeling known, valued, and cared for. These are the gifts that you gave me and the gifts that she let unfold for me.

I love you, Nicole, and as much as I so long to be your person, to share a life with you, to be close to you, to hold you and to be held by you, I know I need to let you go. Right now, I always want to love you as much as I do now, with the same intensity for forever. The thought of time causing our feelings to waver, to soften, loosening their grip on us, is unbearable to me. The time and space between us is like a gaping wound, a wound I keep poking at, a wound I don't seem to want to heal.

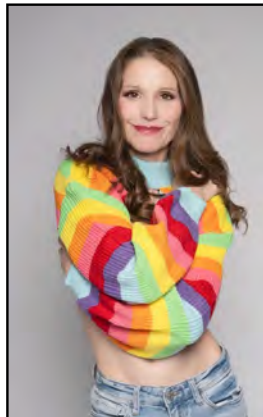
I want what is best for you. I wish for you a lifetime filled with true connection, where love and compassion flow in, out, and all around you, gently holding you, protecting you, fiercely unwavering. I hope that you feel known, lovingly witnessed,

that you can see the truth of who you are in the eyes of others. Never doubt what an amazing person you are and the positive impact you have. I want you to always have a hand to hold and hope that sustains you. Please take care of you. I so wish I could be in your life, standing beside you to hold you up and have you to fall into, how I imagine love would and could be, but I understand it can't be—not in this life.

I love you, Nicole. Always.

Sandra

Sandra Clarke (BFA, Dance) is a Canadian (Ontario) based writer, burlesque performer, and dance artist creating playful, sensual, character-driven pieces that explore sweetness, seduction, transformation, and the shifting power of the gaze. She uses writing and dance as tools for self-exploration, giving form to emotion and exploring tenderness, longing, grief, and the healing power of being seen. Sandra is working towards her MA in Psychotherapy and is a mother living with fibromyalgia.



Dear Laura, Love Jane

By Jane Barnes

Dear Laura,

We never said goodbye in person. I haven't seen you in 28 years. I learned via the internet that you are in San Francisco. I'm post-stroke and 82.

I picture you bent over your guitar with that long blond hair. I was too old for you. We lasted for nine years. I had depression. You needed someone your age. Did it last with the Latina woman?

Thanks for the writing support. You are beautiful. I made you a trophy wife. I should have been with a reader. But you were a wonderful musician! Keep singing; voices don't age.

We did the best we could. I'll always treasure our yellow house and you're in everything that I write.

Love,
Jane

Jane Barnes, NYC, U.S., happily bisexual.



Letters to Myself

By Che Williams

Advice in Reverse: To My Younger Self

Don't let others define you
Don't worry about issues or people
you can't control

Take criticism with a grain of salt
Don't let others make you feel smaller
than you are

Don't define your worth by whether you are employed or not
and see your worth in the things you're interested in
and/or your accomplishments

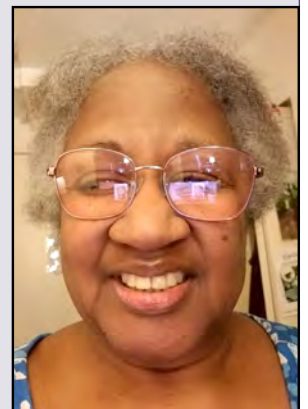
When you make mistakes, see them as learning experiences
They're part of your growth

Believe in yourself and learn a language
that supports you
You are enough and you are where you need to be.

Advice In Advance: To My Older Self

Maybe one day you'll understand
How people of my age and personality feel
You won't expect others to be as talkative as you did earlier in
life
You'll come to the end of a day and
Feel exhausted
You won't feel guilty about not wanting
To be as social
as you once were
You might be more meditative
and comfortable with silence
I hope you feel you are enough as
You are.

*Che Williams is an artist, poet,
singer, and songwriter from
Boston, Massachusetts, in the
U.S.*



the rent i pay to be in my mind: a letter to all our abusers

By *lubayo rose*

This letter has been written in parts, between 29th January and 19th April 2026. The story is very rich, with both pain and joy; it warrants pauses here and there. In the pause, i hope you will find sweet relief in the realization that the dreams we all carry within us are the calming balm to the burn these words leave. These Words are for you, You who had to burn so that you may live. May their seed find a home in the softness that you dare to show...

Dear X,

i do not like the fact that i wake up these days and the first thing i think of is what you are planning to do. i like the fact that the energy in motion has been passing through my body with amazing ease and it is getting easier as the days wear on.

The past several months have been so tumultuous, the way you resurface in my life is really draining to us. i am not going to give in to the temptation to fight myself and deny the truth that i am also physically unwell because of the sustained hostility i have to endure from you. my body knows and it forgives me each time i focus on the tunes of the intrusive thoughts that live rent-free in my head. It is not easy resisting, yet, i must. The alternative is a death that is not on my terms, something i liberated myself from when i walked away from you more than one year ago. The self-defeating programs must be muted, and remain muted. these thoughts are not ours—they have been passed down over time until they got to us. i am still trying to figure out just how much of the script has been written by people who resembled me. It definitely is a mixture of content about and by people from my context, who lived before me and the perspectives of foreigners who had varying views as to how my ancestors should have been.

When i contemplate your ways of being and the actions you perform, i am increasingly convinced that you do not move to the beat of your own drum. yet this is an image you never fail to prop up—violently, most of the time. you did not always use your hands to assert your importance. You have a way with words that makes it easy for you to avoid any emotional connection and to deny every opportunity to question why you live your life on other people's terms. you blame yourself, i bet. Because, tell me, why would you thank me for being brave enough to leave our sham of a relationship, something you said you could not bring yourself to do? Each time i held a mirror to you, you refused to regard yourself with gentleness. How could i therefore expect you to extend the same to me? i represent all your dreams of liberation that you dared not live. we were once aligned in the understanding that the systems of oppression under which Africans live must be opposed and that our lives were the places to mount this daily resistance.

the children needed to learn to be free by observing us, the parenting adults, by being the best versions of ourselves.

i now have to contend with the reality that you refuse to recognize my humanity because i remained true to the cause. it makes you so uncomfortable to realize that your authority can be challenged when you are responsible for perpetuating structural violence toward the “weaker sexes and genders.” it irks you even more to see me living and healing out loud as an African bi-plus gender-queer female. i continue to let the truth out in honor of all the love i have for my communities, for i love myself too much to help you erase us. i could never be too late to accept the Universe's invitation for me to be myself, unapologetically.

Now, all you have left is the rage sitting in your belly, with nowhere to go because you refuse to acknowledge it. i am resisting you in the daily ebb and flow of my life. my courage to show my truth is something you fear because it is a constant reminder that i refused to buy the fear you continuously sold me. the system continues to shield you from the responsibility you have to nurture safety in all the relationships you have with people you have considered inferior to you in one way or another. i continue to move forward with my life knowing that the battle i am carrying is a battle to dismantle the practices that made me vulnerable to your control.

my children deserve the safety of knowing that they can be who they know they are. my children know that they have a home where hope lives and which reminds them that all parts of themselves belong here, at home with us.

i devote myself to meeting you in the fields where you proclaim war on me for being a loving and multi-faceted person. For basically being myself.

yours truly,

lubayo rose

a healing warrior

lubayo rose is an East African bi+ gender-queer feminist practitioner advancing intersectional, community-led African LGBTIQ+ and sex worker organizing across local, national, regional, and global levels. lubayo rose's creative writing is an act of love for herself, their communities and the planet that houses the continuous struggle for liberation of black folks assigned female at birth.



Dear Snickers

By T. L. Camelia

You—my heterosexual husband, whom I committed my life to well before I even considered the potential of exploring my sexuality—are the reason that I truly, actually, fully believe that I'm bi.

You were the first person that I told. "I think I might be bi." You hugged me and said, "Whoa," and then, "That's really cool."

You waited until later to ask me if I still felt monogamous, and you made it clear that it would be okay either way.

We watched *Atomic Blonde* a few nights later, and I had the incredible realization that we could both find Charlize Theron hot. It was so much fun.

You started sending me GIFs from movies of two women kissing, because you thought I might find them sexy. (I did.)

And then, just as I was falling into that awful trap of "Well, maybe I'm not *actually* bi, because I've only ever had sex with one gender, and I probably won't ever change that,"—because, regardless of my sexuality, you complete me, and you have for sixteen years, I don't want anyone else—just as I was questioning everything, you sent me another GIF. I thought the actresses looked familiar, but it took me a second to place them.

Because they weren't actresses from a movie. One of them was me.

You made a GIF out of a series of photos you had taken that I'd forgotten about, back when I was 21 and we went to visit one of my high school besties. It was the only night in my entire life where I've had what could be called a late-night, alcohol-fueled, one-thing-led-to-another *thing*, which culminated in she and I chasing each other around the kitchen throwing champagne corks at each other...

... And then kissing.

(This was a full seven years before I started to even think "Hey wait, *am* I actually straight?")

I remembered that had happened.

I remembered you'd taken pictures.

I remembered telling you afterward that yes, it was okay to keep them, you didn't have to delete them.

What I hadn't remembered—or hadn't seen, or hadn't even thought about looking for—was the fact that I was really enjoying myself. Visibly ecstatic. Pretty turned on, actually.

What a GIF.

So, as it turns out, I have actually kissed a girl. (And I liked it!) It was a great memory. But more than that, it was the solid proof that my poor struggling brain needed that yes, I *am* actually bi. Incontrovertible evidence, in living color.

I've looked at that GIF so many times. Mostly whenever I doubt anything about myself, when my brain is tired and spiraling back down into imposter syndrome. Whenever that happens, I pull out that animated series of photos. Because looking at that, there's no way I can deny it.

Essentially, you help convince me that I'm me.

This whole bi journey has, weirdly (or maybe perfectly naturally), dovetailed pretty nicely with my journey of self-exploration, too.

Sexually, I mean: Somehow, I ended up reaching my thirties having never learned to masturbate. (I thought it was just something for other people, and I didn't need to do it. Spoiler alert: I was wrong, obviously. But it can take a while to unpack and unlearn the toxic baggage that your environment and upbringing have foisted upon you.) And along the way, I've been taking a lot of time to gradually narrow down what kind of porn I actually like.

But I have been learning, slowly but surely. I've learned that, for me, it's usually not video or any visual medium. Audio stories can be great, but words are the best. Well-written stories are guaranteed to get my blood pumping.

I had been trying some romance novels, but I realized that all of my favorite parts were the sex scenes. I tried the volume of erotica you'd bought well before we ever met, but it felt more sensual than spicy.

And so, this Christmas, you gave me both volumes of *The Best Bi Erotica of the Year*. BOTH.

You, my cishet husband. Who has tried kissing guys, but as you put it, "It just doesn't do anything for me". Far from ever having felt threatened by my sexuality, instead you are my loudest cheerleader, my biggest enabler, actively encouraging me to explore even more, in any and all the ways that I feel comfortable.

This is what it means to feel seen and supported. This is what it means to have every part of you be celebrated. This is what it means to have someone say, "Every part of you matters. Every single part." All the parts that I'm still unsure of, still testing out, still wading tentatively into, you remind me of their worth. You remind me of my worth. My inherent, unequivocal worth.

You cherish me. You love me, all of me, unconditionally. And it's the greatest thing that I could ever have in the whole wide world.

Thank you.
Love, Pea

P.S. I haven't felt the need to pull out that GIF in a very long time. (Although I still do, sometimes. It's really hot.)

T.L. Camelia (they/them) is a bi artist and writer in the northeastern U.S.



Dear Biphobic Feminist (a rebuttal by a bisexual feminist)

By Lisa Plover

First of all, points to you for not denying the truth that bisexuality is real, and that there is nothing homophobic about identifying as bisexual, since it is not homophobic simply to acknowledge not being gay; after all, no one calls straight people homophobic simply for saying they are straight. But then, I must remove all your points for all the ridiculous and untrue things you said after that.

What things? I'm so glad you asked! First of all, that bisexual people are just trying to be more accepted by society by claiming to be bisexual, when at least some of them and possibly all of them are really gay. In fact, as I can personally verify, being openly bisexual is no more acceptable than being openly gay.

Then you said that bisexuality was a phase and that bisexuals are indecisive, confused, insecure, and experimenting. Well, you know what? Every sexual orientation is a phase to someone. There are people who thought they were straight and then realized they were gay—that obviously doesn't mean being straight is always just a phase and nobody can be permanently straight. I can tell you I know plenty of bisexuals (including myself) who are in no way confused, insecure, indecisive, or experimenting.

Then you said bisexuals are promiscuous. Well, you know what? Some of us are, and that's okay! There's nothing wrong with being promiscuous, as long as you practice safe sex and don't lie about being monogamous. That said, being bisexual doesn't make someone promiscuous; it's entirely possible to be bisexual and not be promiscuous, and to be straight or gay and to be promiscuous. And the idea that bisexuals cannot be trusted not to cheat is no more reasonable than the idea that a lesbian who is attracted to women other than her partner cannot be trusted not to cheat. Being attracted to both women and men (or various genders) does not mean needing sex/relationship with both to be happy any more than being attracted to both tall and short women does.

Then you said that bisexuality was a backlash to lesbian feminism, which is ridiculous. No one would identify as bisexual (thus causing men to hit on them) if they were really a lesbian. There are better ways to oppose lesbian feminism, like by writing criticisms of it. As for the idea that bisexuals will inevitably end up in heterosexual relationships, that is not true and even if it were true, there is nothing wrong with ending up in a heterosexual relationship, nor does it make somebody not queer (lots of gay people have ended up in straight relationships for the sake of acceptance by society).

Then you said that bisexual women are reinforcing patriarchy, that bisexuality is not a political identity, and that bisexual women carry HIV to lesbian communities. Well, what's really reinforcing patriarchy is saying that a woman can't possibly know what she wants sexually and has to be told and controlled by others. As for bisexuality not being a political identity, no sexual orientation should be—people should just identify as what their sexual orientation actually is, not try to fit themselves into a box in order to make a political point. Or if you mean lesbians and

gays can come together to fight for queer political rights, so can bisexuals; we also need the right to, for example, not be fired for our sexual orientation. As for the idea that bisexuals carry HIV into lesbian communities, that is the fault of people not practicing safe sex, not of people being bisexual. Telling people to stop having sex with both women and men (which not all bisexuals even do) to avoid the spread of HIV is not any better than telling gay men to stop having sex with men to avoid the spread of HIV (as gay male sex is more likely to spread it than straight sex.)

Bisexuality is not, as you claim, anti-feminist. It is not feminist to oppress a woman's sexuality. As for your idea that bisexuality is a form of false consciousness, false consciousness is about people being manipulated to believe something untrue, and what powerful forces in society are pressuring women to believe they are bisexual? Clearly between conservative heteronormative society and biphobic feminists and lesbians, there is more than enough pressure to not be bisexual to counteract any small pressure women may receive to be so.

As for your idea that bisexual women who pursue relationships with men are deluded, that is just another way of saying false consciousness, and as for your idea that those women are desperate, bisexuality actually lowers a woman's chance of finding a relationship and sex due to biphobes like you, as is well known, so no one desperate for a relationship or sex would choose it.

You note that lesbian feminist Sheila Jeffreys writes in *The Lesbian Heresy* (1993) that while many feminists are comfortable working alongside gay men, they are uncomfortable interacting with bisexual men, due to the possibility of sexual harassment. But sexual harassment is often an expression of desire for dominance, not sexual attraction, and can therefore be perpetrated by anyone of any sexual orientation.

You note that Donna Haraway's 1985 essay "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" states that the cyborg "has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labor, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all powers of the parts into a higher unity." But bisexuality is not a seduction to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all powers of the parts into a higher unity, but rather a sexual orientation some people simply have and are not trying to have for some other reason, and therefore should not be considered against impossible for cyborgs or against the cyberfeminism inspired in large part by her essay.

For all these reasons, and most of all because bisexuality does no harm to the project of women achieving equal rights (the support of which is the definition of feminism), whereas denying bisexual women the right to define themselves as bisexual and pursue their bisexuality does, all feminists and feminism should accept bisexuality.

Lisa Plover is a bisexual woman living on the East Coast of the U.S.



I Love You But...

By Meredith Dunn

Artist Statement: This piece is a letter to my grandmother, whose love for me was always followed by a “but.” When she could not accept my bisexuality or the person I had grown into, I realized the closeness I had longed for would never be possible. I am shown in full color beside her black-and-white image to mark the moment I chose myself, even as it meant losing her. The separation between us holds grief, clarity, and the painful understanding that love without acceptance is not enough.

Meredith Dunn is a political organizer in the Nashville, Tennessee, area of the U.S. She works with local Democratic and nonpartisan activist groups in hopes of making Tennessee a safer space for everyone in the LGBTQIA2S+ community.

Phoenix

By Ciel Odom

When I was fourteen, I went to a new school. I didn't know anyone or anything around. I was odd, but despite that, I made a few friends a little while down the road. I fell in with a crowd that was wrong for me. Drama left and right, and they seemed like they wanted nothing more than to fight. I felt so out of place. I couldn't find anyone around that caught my interest. I knew no one at all, and no one liked the same things as I did.

I yearned for connection. I found it with a simple red-headed girl who also was missing something. I got to know her, and it wasn't long before I realized I had fallen in love with her. I didn't want to hide it. I didn't bother hiding it. I lived for her in every breath that I took. I was her knight and she was my light. My muse. My safety when everything else felt so broken.

Life happened and we had to split due to her admittance in the foster system. I was crushed. It felt like we went through hell together. I told her things no one else knew at that point. And she trusted me with things I have not spoken about. The times we held each other in the darkness of our lives will be forgotten.

Years later, we reconnected on social media. We talked more about what happened in our lives. We found out we had more in common than before. We shared struggles. She went through this amazing transformation. I'm happy to call her my friend. One of the best friends of my entire life. We don't talk for months at a time, but it still feels like there is an interest in friendship.

This is the story of my first love. No, it doesn't hurt, because at least she's in my life now, even if it is only a little bit. She showed me so much. Before her, I didn't know that people existed that

liked the same things as me. I didn't know I could be loved even by a friend. But, somehow, I fell in love with a phoenix.

Without her entering my life I wouldn't be where I am right now. I thought so lowly about myself. She opened my eyes to the world of romantic love and showed me I deserved that. That I can be loved. That support exists. Life is not set in stone. You know who you are. I wanted to tell you that from the bottom of my shattered heart: I will always love you. You transplanted hope when I was born with none.

You are an inspiration. The more I see your life grow, your successes in science, and your baby boy grow, the more I realize that I look up to you. I know you don't have it completely together and that is okay! I look up to you because you have it more together than I do. I look up to you because if you got out of this southern hell then so can I.

The story of my first love, my first best friend, and one of my heroes.

Pride is a poor description of the feeling I had when I saw the light in your eyes.

You did it, babe. And I am in awe of the empire you made from ash.

Ciel Odom is a 34-year-old asexual biromantic individual whose home state is in North Carolina, in the U.S., and who grew up in a small town with nothing more than four stoplights. They are trying to rise from the ashes of their homelife and make something beautiful.



Girl of the Bridge

By Robin J. Bartley

Content advisory: suicidal ideation

Act 1

Hello, girl of the bridge. It's been quite some time since I've thought of you last. How long ago was it that I was passing your photo beside the now chained off bridgeside? Long enough for me to have forgotten what you looked like in that picture of yours. You were smiling—I think it was a class photo but I can't be sure—and your eyes were moonkissed sunken deep. Your hair—the color of which I can't recall, maybe it was orange or brown—was pushed behind your pale head, which weighed heavy and unsteady on your slumped shoulders.

Your name was scribbled onto the photo, I think, but I was driving too quickly to make it out. Whether it began with an M, an S, I will never know. I'm sure it was a pretty name though; someone like you isn't too easily forgotten. To me, you'll always be the girl that did what I cannot. I remember seeing flowers placed around your bridge, some petaled, some papercut, all about to be washed away by the coming rain. Most of the flowers were purple I think, maybe what used to be your favorite color.

Tied to one of the flower stems was a letter, I believe. A friend perhaps, a loved one or family member writing the goodbyes you'd never hear nor read. Perhaps I should write you a letter; I'm sure you haven't gotten many recently. Beside the letter, beneath the flowers and scattered about the bridgeside were a few candles. Some were purple, I believe, some were white, but one in particular I distinctly remember being a deep crimson red. It must have been barely lit before its embers went out, much of the wax had gone unmelted by the flames' grace before she was flickered out by the wind. Whoever put the candle there must not have stayed very long.

Sometimes you pop into my head, in and out like a ghost does in a haunted vessel, but like the photo, the flowers, the candles, the letter, you disappear too quickly. But not tonight, oddly enough. Maybe I unlocked a hidden memory within my too-old yet still young mind, or maybe it's you calling to me from the bottom of the bridge. Maybe it's time I meet you. Maybe it's time I see if the mark you left on the pavement below and the bridge above matches mine. So far they seem fairly similar.

Act 2

I watch the wind flow through the wilted flower weeds, listening as car whirs echo beneath the bridge. Your photos are long gone, your candles blown out a decade ago. Yet there are

still flowers blooming on your grave, vining about the chain links that bar me from you. Bound to you with weathered zip ties and string barely strong enough to hold on are blue petalled flowers illuminating the night. I guess I was wrong. Your favorite color must have been blue. The azure flowered scales of the sky write upon the fence a single letter with a comic sans. *G*, the flowers write. Your name must have started with *G*. I will probably never know you more than that, *G*, as every time I look you up in the memory books you're scratched from those etchings. But I most certainly will not forget you, and leave you from mine.

I sit and wait for perhaps someone else to come and watch as your night sky drifts upon us, but after some time passes and no one joins I begin to talk to myself. My legs cross uncomfortably on the cold concrete as I make note of the few odd details about you and your bridgeside grave.

Just below your fence are paint-drawn cartoons of flowers and butterflies, each branded with your *G*. Amongst the wilted flowers above is a small grass statuette, twisted and weaved into a woman and her child, a Mary and her grass-bladed Jesus. I wonder which you were. Above the flowered arrangement is the blooming bud of a single rosewhite dahlia, barely holding onto the chains of your bridge. For a moment, when the wind picks up, I watch to see if it will fall, but it doesn't. It drifts, but it doesn't fall. The difference between a dahlia and you, I guess.

And when the moon drifts by in an hour's time, and I'm still sitting down staring at you and talking to you, I can't help but feel you sitting right beside me. I have to remind myself you're gone. You're not here. Just the flowers, the drawings, the wind, the cars. And me.

My hands at this point have taken the shape of the sidewalk. I wonder what I would have said. I wonder what I would have done. What I could have stopped you from doing, had I been there those years ago. There's not much I can do now, for you, and for that I apologize. But there is something I can do for those who remember you, who love you even now that you're gone, who even despite never having met you feel your pain and suffering. I can write, write this. Not for you, but for them.

Robin J Bartley is a transgender fantasy and fiction writer, born and raised in Oak Park, Chicagoland, Illinois, in the U.S., with a heavy focus on the psychological elements in both herself and her characters. She works to build intricate worlds for their readers to get lost in, and is known for crafting thematically rich stories and characters meant to display the depths of the conscious mind. With hands-on experience in the magnitude of larger projects, and an unmatched dedication to their characters and themes, she offers a limitless drive and unmatched creative passion.

Dear Eve,

By Karrah Bates

I never told you that I loved you. I can't remember why I didn't. But I promise: I will never forget that the love was there.

Our late night drives and the warmth of your fingers between mine have forever folded into the soft spaces behind my eyes. Your golden laugh, the bounce of your heels and the slaps on your knees, still echo in my ears every time a chain of traffic lights stays green. Celebrating an open road, I threw our hands out the sunroof, desperate for any excuse to keep touching you.

I don't know why I didn't tell you, back then; only that it was crucial that I commit your laugh to memory.

A summer later, I asked you out on a date. I remember you saying maybe. Then yes. Then no.

The hollowness of empty hoping still aches like it did back then. I lay in bed the next morning, curling into myself like someone had scooped my guts out with a spoon. How foolish was I, to hurl myself into the sky without first learning how to land? A year of gearing up to ask you to dinner, of telling myself it was worth the risk, and I'd gone and broken open my chest without considering what happens to hearts when ribs splinter.

Months later, I found a girlfriend. I remember trying to love her. I remember the guilt, because she wasn't you.

A year after that, I had a boyfriend. I remember loving him, then leaving him. I remember trying again with him. Then the shame, for wanting it to be over, and hating that I wanted him to be you.

Two years later, I hoped and tried again with you. I asked you to give me a chance to prove I could be worth it. Pleading, maybe, to give me one shot. One date.

After all that, I can't even say where we went or what we ate for dinner or what we talked about. All I know is that I said you could hold my hand if you wanted to, and that you didn't.

I thought I'd pushed too hard. I pulled away, hoping you would call to ask for one more night. I bargained with myself to not reach out until you did.

I can't remember if we spoke again after that. I just remember knowing that it needed to be over.

For a while, I told myself that it was good to stop trying, to simply let go and let burn. I lit a match to every letter and song I never mailed you; I doused myself in gasoline and leapt into the arms of anyone mad enough to catch me. Getting attached would turn me into that pathetic, rabid creature that I hated, so I kept myself slick. Perpetually flammable, any hint of heat meant that it was too dangerous for me to stay. It was safer for everyone if I fled at the first sign of flame.

One day, I leapt into someone's arms and felt a spark. I ripped myself from him and ran, swelling with pride: I escaped the inevitable explosion of my own design! I didn't push, I didn't beg him to change, like I think I'd begged you. I was free to repeat.

But then, the strangest thing happened. He did what I thought no one could ever do for me; he did what I thought I'd burnt out with you.

He hoped, and he tried again.

He did it differently than I did. (Turns out, he's been me before.) He didn't try to convince me to change my mind; he changed for himself. (Whether I was there to see it or not.) He said he was glad we were both in town at the same time. (He searched for any excuse to be near me.) He respected my choice. (I changed my mind.)

I don't know why I never told you that I loved you. Now, I just know why I never will.

Karrah Bates lives in the Denver, Colorado, area in the U.S. and works as a therapist with queer and neurodivergent folk. She has an affinity for writing sci-fi and fantasy, and her seemingly discordant media taste is simply categorized as, "yearn baby yearn."



Amazingly, this is an Adobe Stock photo. You will likely be seeing her again.!

Dear Cassandra

By Ali Barker

I came across Rachel's website last week and was pleased to see she is thriving and her eyes still have the same spark of joy I remember. That was my first thought—lovely Rachel, always full of warmth. She's a corporate attorney now, isn't she? Do you ever stumble upon people from your past and test your memory? It's good practice. That's what I was doing as I composed this letter to you, which sort of wrote itself, really.

My second thought was of you. You were some sort of artist or house painter, weren't you?

Your effervescent girlfriend, Rachel, was a friend of mine in the MFA program where we met, almost 20 years ago. Can you believe it's been that long? You were her (much senior) girlfriend. What do they call that? A May-December romance? The one time Rachel displayed annoyance at me was when I mispronounced your name.

"Whoa, that's not how you say her name."

"Sorry."

"It's not Kuss-SAND-*rah*. It's Kus*Sahhhhhhhhh*ndra."

Sometimes I wondered if there was more than respect at stake in the correct pronunciation of your name. Sometimes I wondered if your pairing laced Rachel with a little bit of embarrassment: your mid-80's essentialist feminism, that deep chip on your shoulder testifying to being abandoned by your parents, toiling in financial scarcity, dropping out of college. You had a condescending manner toward Rachel's peers and me, as if we were children and our concerns were child's play. You drove a hatchback with pounds of rocks in the back. It was a decades-old rock collection that took up the entire rear space of the vehicle.

We were at a yard sale once where Rachel bought a chair, but realized upon glancing into the back of the car that you couldn't transport it home. "Can you bring it to my house?" she asked. "I can't fit the chair in with all the rocks back there." Too much baggage in the Subaru for any additional cargo.

Rachel got a dreamy look in her eyes when she talked about you, like you were an insect from another time trapped in amber. "Cassandra takes a rock from every chapter of her life. She's been building her collection since she was 20." You were at least 50 by then. Through Rachel's eyes, you were a beautiful oddity, and the rocks kept you rooted in the world. To hear Rachel talk, you were a dreamer who had earned your flowers but had been handed handfuls of thorns. Maybe Rachel's love was your flower collection.

I like that your rock collection was a handy metaphor. What a lot to haul around, Cassandra.

I had just turned 30, and we lived in a southern university town, full of toxic masculinity, misogyny, and limited sartorial

choices for middle-aged women at football tailgate parties. That was probably the weightier reason I tucked my penchant for women under the radar and passed as straight while I lived there—one thing a bisexual person can usually do is play a wide field. But who knows—maybe I would have found more courage to let my freak flag fly, had lesbians like you not said what you did.

I had been there a year when you two moved to town, and I hadn't met another queer person since I'd arrived. At the time, I was emotionally entangled with another writer in my graduate school cohort, a boy ten years my junior with pear-like curves and a blond ponytail. Two months after you two moved to town, you had me over for dinner in the adorable craft bungalow you and Rachel shared, and afterward, the three of us had gin and tonics garnished with mint from your garden. We shared the biographical highlights that new friends trade, giddy with fellowship. My guard was down, so thirsty I was for the companionship of gay women, having stuck it out for a year in the town, alternating between coaching the 20-year-old to eat pussy and crafting overwrought short stories about the dissolution of my marriage to my ex-wife. Your life had more chapters than Rachel's and mine, and you peppered the conversation with explanations about why that was tiresome around Rachel's same-age friends. You seemed lonely without a peer group, but in the way a vampire is lonely without other vampires. I told you and Rachel that I was bisexual. Back then, I was pretty cool with that label—it was 2007, and I had just ended a domestic partnership with the woman I thought was the love of my life. My first love in high school, a boy with a fade and a letterman jacket from an out-of-state high school, was equally heartbreaking. I could hold those two ideas in my hands simultaneously, and I took it for granted that other queer people could and did as well. But by using the "b" word, I chilled the vibe there on the back porch, lined with fairy lights and sweet olive blossoms. You shook your head. You told me, oh sweetie, there is a reason bisexuals are called unicorns. It was my job, you said, to figure myself out.

I remember your words. "You're fooling yourself if you think bisexuality is a real thing. And fooling yourself is damaging to more than just you—you hurt the queer community by claiming bisexuality. You'll have to sort out which you are, and the sooner you do, the better."

Marooned in a backwater southern town, your words were a sharp incision. Later, in a fit of malaise, I would stumble upon the term *episodic bisexual*. Maybe desire was *context-specific*, I thought, sure, that's me—someone who evaporates into the atmosphere.

The following year, wracked with the pain of self-hatred and a worsening drinking habit, a therapist gave me an assignment to place framed pictures of my ex-wife and my current ponytail boyfriend side by side in a prominent place in my apartment, hoping to help me cohere better.

What a trip down memory lane I'm taking! Granted, it's

giving you too much credit to trace my ensuing psycho-sexual existential crisis back to the way your words punctured me there that night over Hendrick's. I had been vulnerable, and it had not served me.

After that night, I gave you a wide berth. Rachel and I tended a tenuous friendship in fits and starts.

I can see now that you were just saying what many people think, and your views weren't special. Your attitude toward unicorns wasn't rooted in wisdom; your idea about desire requiring application into a container wasn't remarkable. You were probably heavy with hurt; why or for how long is not my business. And like many hurt people, you tried to disappoint anyone who allowed themselves to believe in mythical creatures.

A brief Google search confirms that you are still an artist, of a sort. And you and Rachel are still together. I think you have a child.

I remember one stultifying summer afternoon from that time, Rachel and I met for coffee in a cafe where people like us parked for hours with our laptops, banging out manuscripts to be chewed on and flayed apart by other aspiring writers. Creation, evisceration, digestion, begin again. Rachel and I would compare notes on coursework and vent about the irritations of living in a backwater town. Rachel's writing was full of heart and embraced the fullness of people, both their angels and their demons. She and I sat on wrought iron chairs in the coffee shop courtyard, under a live oak's fat, sinewy branches. As we sipped cold brews from tall glasses, the sides sweating with condensation, Rachel told me she had a confession. I remember she was brilliant at baring her soul without fanfare.

Sometimes, maybe even frequently, she said, when you and she lay naked and entangled in bed, at the height of your sexual pleasure together, she could not resist the intrusive thought that what you two were doing together was wrong. Not morally wrong, she clarified, but the plain fact of your nakedness against hers was not true to her nature—that what you two were doing was made up, that you were both fooling yourselves.

It's funny the things others share with us that have the most weight to them, isn't it?

I imagine how large your rock collection must be by now, what kind of work it does to root you in the world, and to what you've told yourself is real. It's funny how memory makes its own symmetry.



Your unicorn,
Ali Barker

Ali Barker lives in New Orleans in the U.S. with her daughter and her cat.

Dear X-Tasy,

By Charlotte Poitras

Hey [name],

Remember me? We played kissing cousins in a web series as if being two hot women made this fine. Sorry, my face was so cold in winter, I was a terrible kisser and got lipstick on your nose. I used to go to your shows, when you sang in front of like 20 friends, and you said "come on, get closer" and I moved close enough, I could almost touch you on the stage to make you laugh, as if I understood it too literally.

I see you're doing well with your 250k+ followers on Instagram and touring around the world as a singer. I sometimes comment an original compliment on your new song like:

"Oh, to be a cat living in a mansion with [name] would be the dream. They say 'Best before' but I say, 'Even better after'" (this one got more than 700 likes) and you reply with like "Oh thank you, love you BB" and I'm like, yes, I love you too, [name]...

I once wrote you a song called "X-Tasy" about how being in love feels like a drug that we always want to get more of. It was about you, [name], you were my secret crush, and I did get an answer from you, soon-to-be-famous singer.

"Omg babe of course I remember you! [secret] I'm gonna listen to it now. Omg pleaseeee send me the lyrics typed out. I love it."

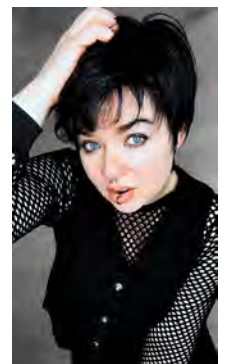
And then, you never replied to the typed out lyrics. And you know what? That's fine. You don't owe me anything. I see how successful you are in your career and I don't mind admiring you from afar. I wouldn't date a fan either, and I don't want to put you on a pedestal, just pretend to want to buy clothes to go to the thrift shop you used to work at when you lived in Montréal.

We usually have a celebrity crush that becomes our bisexual awakening, but rarely see our real-life crush turn out to be a celebrity.

I'm sincerely happy for you. And I guess that's what love truly is: wanting you to be successful, even if it's not with me. So keep at those hilarious feminist songs and those crazy outfits, I'll keep admiring you with nothing in exchange.

Thank you for being so fucking hot you made me bisexual.

Charlotte Poitras is a queer neurodivergent artist-entrepreneur based in Montréal, Canada. Her practice is autobiographical or documentary, spanning literature, theatre, visual arts, and audiovisual work, with over one hundred publications. Her mission is to listen to the world and transmit the murmurs that society has failed to hear.



Dear Miranda, Caitlin, and Abigail

By MQLS

Dear Miranda, Caitlin, and Abigail,

Thank you! Thank you for the light that you shone in my life that broke through the dense fog in which I had been traveling for nearly six decades, enabling me to finally see, accept, and love myself as queer, bisexual, and demisexual, at age 59. When the three of us formed strong friendships with one another, Frank, and T.K., I was trying to understand myself and learning to love myself. I knew that I wasn't gay, but I also increasingly knew that I wasn't straight. Despite having spent my whole life pushing back against binary thinking, my mind was, ironically, imprisoned in the 1970s false binary of gay v. straight, locked in by the heteronormative and monosexual norms of my childhood. As we got to know one another, each of you shared with me the core story of your bisexuality, which was the first time that anyone had ever told me that they are bi. You were breaking through the fog of my self-confusion that had been generated by society's biphobia and biersure. I learned what bisexuality is. Your stories were uniquely your own—healer Miranda, upbeat Caitlin, fiery Abigail—from two generations younger than mine. And I listened not only with my mind but also with my heart, as your own sense of self resonated with mine. Your words transgressed the binary gender boundaries that are meant to define sexual attraction, and you said the word “queer” with power and pride. You pierced the fog with the glimmer of illumination—that bisexuality is a real, valid, and beautiful way of being.

Thank you for accepting and loving me as I am. In every interaction with the three of you, Frank, and T.K., I heard and sensed your encouragement for me to be my authentic and vulnerable self. When T.K. died, amid our shared grief,

each of you stepped up to give me the extra encouragement that T.K. had been providing. Yes, I know that it's been a two-way mutuality: I have supported, encouraged, accepted, and loved you too. But once I became more aware that I was exploring and trying to understand my queerness, I didn't know any bi men (at least that I was aware of). In a world with so much bi invisibility among men of my generation, bi+ women lead. Moreover, even though I identify as male, I have culturally feminine characteristics (e.g., empathy, crying and other emotional expression, wearing pink and floral fragrance) and culturally feminine roles (e.g., nurturer, caregiver) that form a non-binary sense of self, perhaps akin to the mānū of Hawaiian culture (as I now understand). I love my complexity, but I was confused. I didn't have concepts or words. You gave me words—bisexual, demisexual, non-binary, and queer—and you shared with me concepts: f*** the categories, reject the rules and boxes that society tries to force on us, define myself in my own way, be free to be me, love myself.

Thank you for sharing your wisdom and experiences as three bi+ young women to help me to break through my lifelong fog and step into the warmth and light of my own queer sunshine. Together, as friends who love one another, we form a lot of queer joy. And I think that T.K. would be loving this letter—the impact that you have had.

Love, MQLS

MQLS is a 60-year-old who identifies as queer, bisexual/pansexual, and demisexual and lives in a city near the middle of the U.S.



color photograph, 20" x 30"

Waterland

By Hilary Tolan

Hilary Tolan is a Boston area artist. She was born in Port Jefferson, New York, and completed her Master's in Art Ed at MassArt, & her BFA from SUNY Purchase. When she is not in the studio she can be found digging in the garden. To see more visit: hilarytolan.net or @hilary_tolan on Instagram.

Delayed Confession

By Tanya Bowers

Spring break 1991, I flew home to Los Angeles from Connecticut. My mother took me to lunch at a neighborhood sushi restaurant. I planned to make the most of our time together by delivering the lines I'd rehearsed my frosh year.

We both ordered chirashi. In my nervousness, I summarized what had transpired thus far second semester... not that I hadn't already told her. We spoke biweekly over the phone.

"Mommy, I just want you to know that I'm questioning my sexuality." I cut to the chase.

The smile on her face disappeared. The nodding of her head stopped. Her blanched color contrasted with the darkness of her dyed hair. In the awkward silence, my brown-skinned hand reached across the bleached-wood table for the glass of Coca-Cola. I gulped down the syrupy liquid. The waitresses' kimonos swished between the customers and the chefs.

"Don't tell Daddy." Her thick eyebrows raised for emphasis. "This will not make him happy, and I don't want him to start smoking again."

Per usual she was trying to control my father. My new status might trigger his cigarette addiction. She put his emotions first.

"Don't say anything to your sister either. She is too young to have to worry about this." Mommy paused. "... Though, I think she knows. A feature on bisexuals ran on the five o'clock news, and she said, 'I think Tanya's bisexual.'"

What gave me away to the perceptive nine-year-old? Was it the navy Levi's cinched with a thick leather belt, the black Doc Martens, or the white V-necked undershirt swiped from our father's chest of drawers? Could my obsession with Madonna have tipped off my sibling?

Mommy worried about everyone other than me. I needed her to make me her priority.

If I explained, maybe she would understand.

"Look, your marriage to Daddy crossed racial, religious, and class lines. You both taught me to love people for who they were on the inside, not for what they looked like on the outside." Noticing that the blood hadn't returned to her face, I continued, "I'm just following in your footsteps...but around gender. Be proud of me for breaking new ground!"

No response. Dang! I had thought my mother was more evolved. She and my father were liberal; they had a few gay friends. I had hoped this announcement would go over better.

Defeated, I placed my wooden chopsticks across the top of the ceramic bowl of bean sprout salad.

As disappointing as her inability to embrace my new status was, at least I'd gotten it out. Now she knew my truth. Telling her had been half the battle.

I had anticipated some resistance in broaching the subject, but in my heart, I knew Mommy would eventually come around. She had always been my confidante.

There was nothing to be ashamed of in exploring who I was. I wouldn't lie about hitting gay or lesbian clubs in West Hollywood. I wanted to be seen, unlike my father who couldn't admit to losses in his battle with nicotine.

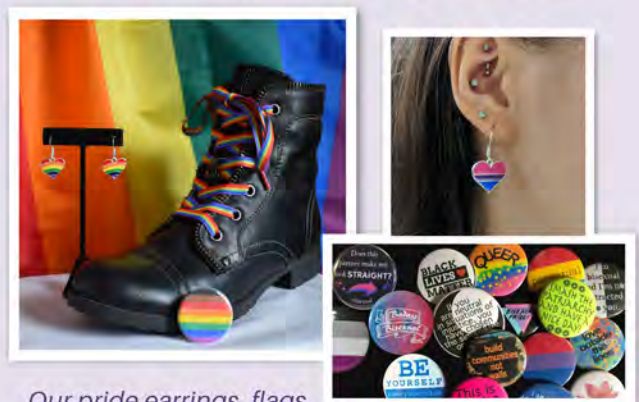
Whenever he picked up, he snuck behind our backs. Breath Saver mints and Juicy Fruit chewing gum sticks mingled with spare change in the indented section next to the gear shift in his red Honda Prelude. We never knew if he sucked and chewed the candies to mask the tobacco on his breath or simple, chronic halitosis.

Breaking the news to my more-traditional parent would be the next hurdle. Daddy was bound to personalize my rejection of heterosexuality. My upcoming pronouncement would be easier for him to bear with Mommy on board.

I could hold off from saying something but not indefinitely. The whole point of telling my mother was to no longer hide my attraction to women.

Tanya Bowers lives in eastern Washington state, in the U.S. Her most recent writing can be found in Minerva Rising's The Keeping Room and BWQ. Previously her pieces have been published in VIBE and YogiTimes as well as The New York Times and Los Angeles Times. She has been featured in Mademoiselle and appeared on the Wolf Blitzer and Connie Chung shows. Read more or subscribe to her Substack: <https://tanyabowers.substack.com/>

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RESEARCH CORNER

You Are Not Alone: Bisexual Women and Intimate Partner Violence

By Chelsie Holmes

Content advisory: This article discusses intimate partner and sexual violence, including personal stories.

For eight years, I worked as an advocate with survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) and sexual assault. I was in an abusive relationship nearly the entire time. I did not recognize it was abusive until I was forced to flee the state for my safety.

When I first learned from the [Center for Disease Control's National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey](#) that over 60% of bisexual+ women experience IPV in their lifetime, it did not shock me. It explained my life.

My abuser was a heterosexual cisgender man. I didn't see the abuse because it was obscured by the fact that he and I were operating under very different cultural scripts around nonmonogamy. While not all bisexual+ women prefer nonmonogamous relationships, we are more likely than monosexual people, noted [across psychological and sociological research](#). For me, the informal unlabeled structure of the relationship was liberating. To him and the people around us, my acceptance of these terms was an act of self-degradation. They interpreted it as consent to mistreatment.

It's considered an embarrassment to catch feelings in a situationship. I was involved with this man on and off for seven years, so I would hardly characterize it that way. But, this taboo makes it humiliating to disclose when you are being harmed in a relationship that isn't necessarily "official." He explained away my trauma responses to his abuse by claiming I was upset that I was more invested in the relationship than he was. He frontloaded allegations by saying I might tell lies about him because I was mad that he "didn't want to be my husband, or whatever."

To the contrary, I never wanted a husband. And whenever I tried to end the relationship, he escalated to stalking me.

One evening, my friends watched my abuser pin me to the ground, leaving bruises on my wrists, but they did not intervene. I had a reputation for being kinky, and they assumed I wanted it. Bisexual+ women are stereotyped as being hypersexual and down for anything. I doubt people would write off a straight woman being pinned to the floor by her husband. But, because I am bisexual, and because the relationship wasn't considered "real," they assumed I was consenting to being physically overpowered by a man in front of others.

For bisexual+ women, passing as straight in a relationship reduces the threat of public harassment, but it dramatically increases the threat of violence behind closed doors. According to the [CDC](#), nine in 10 bisexual women abused by an intimate partner report that the perpetrator was a cisgender man. Biphobia and monosexism are often written off as unserious

and unworthy of centering under the premise that we have this privilege. But, particularly when it intersects with sexism, monosexism manifests in very real, pervasive, and sometimes deadly violence, especially in straight-passing relationships.

Intimate partner violence is characterized by one person using a variety of tactics to gain and maintain power and control over the other person in a romantic and/or sexual relationship. Physical violence does not need to be one of those tactics for the abuse to count. Abuse tactics that bisexual+ women are disproportionately targeted by are gaslighting, isolation, and sexual coercion.

Many people do not believe bisexuality+ exists. When someone is already trained not to trust their own reality, being told they are overreacting or confused is familiar. This conditions bisexual+ people to distrust their own internal sense of self. We often internalize the scripts that we are not reliable narrators of our own reality long before an abusive partner finds us. Abusers tend to seek victims who are easy to manipulate, and the cultural gaslighting we experience creates a faultline that is exploitable.

Bisexual+ women are vulnerable to isolation for a variety of reasons. We often experience discrimination both from mainstream culture and the LGBTQIA+ community. If we are isolated from our families because we are too gay, but we are isolated from queer community because we are too straight, we have no consistent support system. Bisexual+ women can be attracted to any gender, so abusers can use jealousy to justify isolating them from just about everyone.

Bisexual+ women embrace our capacity for attraction to multiple genders as fundamental to our identities. Women's sexual autonomy is threatening to patriarchal order for a number of reasons. Whenever patriarchal power is threatened, sexual violence steps in to restore the old order. The [CDC](#) reports that an alarming 79% of bisexual women experience sexual violence in their lifetime, including disproportionately high rates of sexual abuse, specifically perpetrated by an intimate partner. My abuser used sexual coercion to punish me whenever I demonstrated that he was not the center of my universe. Bisexual+ women are often accused of centering men, but in reality, we are punished precisely because we do not, yet we remain in proximity to them.

I believe our power is found in the allegations against us. Rather than saying "We're not sluts!," perhaps we should ask "Even if we were, would that justify abuse?" Rather than saying "We want long-term committed relationships just like monosexual people do!," perhaps we should ask "Even if we didn't, would that justify abuse?" Rather than saying "We won't leave you for another gender!," perhaps we should ask "Does your fear of abandonment justify controlling and isolating your bisexual+ partner?"

If you see yourself in this story, I hope you feel a sense of relief that you are not alone. Please know that you are entitled to safety and respect in your relationships, and it is not your fault if you have been robbed of that. I implore bisexual+ women to take on intimate partner and sexual violence as key issues in our movement. While it feels personal because it is happening in the context of intimacy, IPV toward bisexual+ women is a primary enforcer of monosexism. Intimate partner violence is political violence, and we can end it together.

Chelsie Holmes (she/they) is a bisexual activist based in rural Colorado, in the U.S. She has a decade of experience in advocacy work with survivors of intimate partner and sexual violence. She is now the Director of an LGBTQIA+ resource center she founded called Queer Futures.

Purple Dreams

By Melissa Kulig



Artist statement: In my Mixed Media art pieces I strive to bring back voices of people who are no longer on this earth. I encourage the viewer to remember their own family members and friends who have passed. Old photos capture tiny moments of life, and often there is joy. I believe it is imperative to hold people and joy in our memories.

Melissa Kulig received her BFA from Emmanuel College in 1989 and her MFA from the Art Institute of Boston under Lesley University in 2009. She has exhibited her art for decades throughout New England and New York City. She is a retired art teacher and has taught art to children as young as four years old, and retirees in their eighties.

Letter to the Dead Girl

By Eden Aros-Trube

Dear Dead Girl,

It's been a very long time, hasn't it? And yet, no time has passed at all.

Dead girl, do you know that I love you? I do. I could never hate you—you're me, after all. I know now that all the parts of you that I hated, you hated, *we* hated; were all symptoms of our suffering. You were scared, you were barely alive most of the time and you had no control over your body. You are absolved of your social sins, as I am of mine.

I am writing to tell you that it will be okay. We will be okay. *You will be okay.*

We live in a new house with our own bedroom and no spiders in the shower. We do *so* well in our new school, our parents love to brag (though this school is not so new anymore—we graduate next year). We have friends that love us and accept us, no one throws food at us anymore, and we haven't had a slur yelled at us in years. We're in therapy and on medication and we're saving up for a car.

We dress up as formally as possible and go to chain restaurants with our friends.

We play Dungeons and Dragons and Candela Obscura and Elder Mythos and Vampire: The Masquerade.

We code a little and write a little and act a little and teach a little.

Dead girl, do you know that we are alive? Holy fuck, I *love* being alive.

Eden Aros-Trube (they/them) is a high school junior from the suburbs of ever-so-slightly-south southwest Connecticut in the U.S. They love TTRPGs (Tabletop Role-Playing Games), Florence + The Machine, and their friends, and plan to pursue a career in joy and whimsy.



CALENDAR



Invitation to our readers EVERYWHERE:

Please join the Boston Bisexual Women's Network at one (or all) of our digital brunches. We are proud of our community of women (trans and cis) and nonbinary folks, and we would love to make connections across the country and globe. Grab your coffee or tea and some food while we chat about bi+ issues and other fun topics.

Digital brunches will be held on the following dates starting at 1 p.m. EDT/EST:

- Saturday, June 6
- Sunday, July 12
- Saturday, August 8
- Sunday September 13
- Saturday, October 3

Please join us! Info/RSVP: BWQEvents@gmail.com
(Note: Dates are subject to change.)

Bi+ World Meetup August 28

Join us at the 17th Bi+ World Meetup on Friday, August 28 at 4 pm EST/ 10 pm CET. Bi+ people *everywhere* are invited to join us on Zoom. We'll use breakout rooms to give folks an opportunity to join each other in a friendly and free setting. The meeting is in English and is facilitated by Barbara Oud (the Netherlands) and Robyn Ochs (U.S.). Pre-registration is required.

Register at <https://biplus.nl/biplus-world-meetup>.

Metro-Boston Bi+ Women and Nonbinary Folks:

Keep up with local events. Subscribe to our Google group: <https://groups.google.com/g/biwomenboston>

*Bisexual
Pride
Power
Pack*

biproducts
.etsy.com

- flag
- earrings
- shoelaces
- pin



BWQ's Editorial Team: Emily, Robyn, Avery, and Melissa

BWQ offers FREE digital subscriptions to people of all genders and all orientations everywhere. Subscribe at BiWomenQuarterly.com.

Consider this: If you rarely (or never) see people like yourself represented in print, your voice is especially important. When you lift your voice, someone, somewhere will FINALLY see their own experiences reflected, perhaps for the first time. Our calls for writing are on page 2.