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Do I Have To Choose?

Standing in my room,
on Friday morning,
I hold a push-up bra and a binder,
wondering- what kind of pain
will I be in today,
to satisfy
the pain inside.

The buzz of my phone,
booting me
out of the spiral,
and I hurry
to see if it's
her.

I lie in bed
every night,
wondering
what it was like,
for the ones she
dated before,
who got to hug her
and kiss her,
and hold her close.
I read their text with a smile,
my face all pink
when they say I still look handsome
before I've done
my makeup.

I chose the bra and find a skirt,
fishnets tight underneath
I'm not sure if it's right for school,
but today it's right
for me.

This time, when she calls me pretty,
I believe it.

Will/Willow Burton
Ware, MA

To Speak These Petals Deeper

(after Audre Lorde, 1934-1992)

My voice brushed softly wild
a woman's yearning temple
then ear to cheekbone's
velvet skin as if within
a field of sunflowers
darkest eyes unseen
 even worse
 than the nightmare is
 the blank
in a dim back room
swaying breast to breast
 not only can we
 dance we must
to speak these petals deeper
each seed a spark
another chance
to bloom to break
the drone the line
that silences to curve
around entwined to sing
unbound in light
remembering to rise
as those before us fly
like a river of birds
pulsing touching undulates
across the sky

Janet E. Aalfs
Northampton, MA

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Voices of the Earth: The Future of Our Planet III
in which this poem first appeared.*

I am Open on Tuesdays

In 1950's one called oneself Bi
Bisexual In the hopes to claim some normalcy
You were normal, and you drifted once in a while
Many bi male and females married
To give themselves a cover To live a gay lesbian life
Then coming out I am gay I am a lesbian

In Buffalo NY in the 60's on the news
We found a gay / lesbian person walking down the street
As if it was an archaeological find No one had heard of
Gay Lesbian bars became underground havens

Stonewall defined the fight for the right to exist
Gay and Lesbian clubs came out on colleges campuses
Exploration and freedom lead to non-binary view of the world
The fight to recognize more definitions LGBTQIA+
The umbrella to cover all the choices grows

With so many choices how do you choose
What if, your attractions, your feelings change hourly

The women's movement of the 70's She whenever he was brought up
Now 50 + years later We battle over pronouns

Voting down clear water bills For having the wrong pronouns
Without clean water we have no choices

How to fight For recognition Personal rights
Health care To be seen for who you are
Free to define yourself Free to change and change again
Don't let personal politics separate itself from the bigger picture
Our own extinction Endless Wars Endless Polluting Using up all resources
For future generations we need to create cohabitate on a sustainable planet

I was asked how do I identify
I answered, I try not to join groups
I try and make it easy on myself
Give myself the freedom for the most options
I say look me up on Tuesday
I will see how I feel
Which clothes I will take out of the closet
Or take out no clothes at all
I identify with those who want to save the planet

Paul Richmond
Wendell, MA

Translation

Adventuring with gender has no end
I'm blessed with one I love, once two, now one,
There's nothing left to pretend or defend.

It took excruciating years to find the friend
Inside your real self; now you have begun
Adventuring with gender to your ends.

As a girl you had to fake and feign
Self. You couldn't be a son of a gun,
Acting pink roles you resented to defend.

Few understood. Even less would lend
A helping hand to ease your journey on
Past stereotypes to adventures without end.

You chose to be gay, bisexual, and then
Found those imprecise, asked a question:
Why defer identity? Why pretend?

You shed breasts, womb, vagina to ascend:
A young man's life your courage chose and won
With rights not to pretend or defend
There's way more than gold at your rainbow's end

Ernie Brill
Greenfield MA

The Second Coming

Yes, I do believe in God.

She's a black, disabled lesbian mother on welfare
And someday she shall rise.

She's the child abused, the mother battered
With bruises and black eyes.

She's the woman raped and left for dead.
She's the woman old and wise.

She's the woman so desperate she wishes for death to put an end to all the lies.

She's the woman who learns in her fight to survive to thank God she is alive.

Yes, I do believe in God
And someday she shall rise.

Mary Wheelan
Worthington, MA

Eating Pilaf with Edith Piaf

Originality no longer mattered.
She wanted to be fat with
half measures –fast –like
she was choking on
the bitter end. Big as
John M. Green having a hall
all to himself. One time
she went to a meeting
where people had buildings.

They said it was good
for their ego. She had to laugh
because every one of those
secondary traits was
added at the end. And it wouldn't
matter if she'd spoken
to the one she knew who

maybe would care what
she said. But they didn't
know each other all that well.
She wanted to say she
loved X's walk and hearing
Y talk. They had
no
doubt she'd check them out
and find what she needed
in one of their huts
or maybe their cloak room.

Gerald Yelle
Amherst, MA

Intricate

Floating between our hands
the paper rose we folded
two women intricate
in love as sun struck lace
one morning brought
snow on petals
rare yet even now
fragrance melts
tongue to glittering tear
and a crystal flower
like a word or a cloud
she and I have shaped
from the dark appears

Janet E. Aalfs
Northampton, MA

Shelves

I look up from the umpteenth draft of this poem to watch
You prepare the shelves you are building for our books.
How deftly you saw through the knots and sinew. A swatch
Of worn out sandpaper and drill bits lie next to hooks
You'll use as anchors on our crooked wall
While above you a school of salmon leaves swim
Away from their tree, against the wind. It's fall
And you know this light won't last, but you dare it to dim
As you pry off that lid of stain. I cannot understand
What makes you stay when I've never built you a thing
As solid or useful, by my own hand—
Just these hills of rough-hewed words which refuse to ring.

I tap on the window. You startle but point to the shelves,
Our moment read then slid back, to keep for ourselves.

Kim Keough

And The Eleventh Commandment was to Love

(For Alan and Paul)

We stagger beneath these stones
twice-carved into a covenant
of obligation. We will never know
what tenderness was lost to fury

at the foot of Mt. Sinai. Only Moses
spoke mouth to mouth with God. We gnaw
at the bones of ancient arguments,
swallow stern words transcribed by human

hands. If we could repair what was broken,
there would be gentle promises instead
of recriminations. And no fear to seal
flesh to flesh in the sacrament of devotion.

Lisa Janice (LJ) Cohen
Gilbertville, MA

Coffee with a Side of Gender

Drink coffee like a man
He said
His ignorance marched like a parade from his mind
And out his throat
I bet he felt good!
Well I'd hope so!
When being a straight white man
You never know oppression like being a woman
Drinking a cup of coffee "like a woman"

Drink coffee like a man!
Because men know how to drink coffee the "right way"?
Because men don't know sugar?
And everything that's strong and bold is masculine, right?

Well, guess what? I don't drink coffee like a man
Because while I sip coffee I'm not straight!
I'm not "on top" or oblivious to oppression
When I drink my coffee I add a splash of feminism, equal rights, and respect
I'd never drink coffee like a man when I drink coffee
I'm human
Just trying to stay awake
Like everyone else

Christian Paul Torres

Vocabulary

Vexed by vocabulary
Hurting prominently were
Words formed in tears

Perseverance halted
But I've found serenity
Embraced by a good man

Difficult is this chronic entropy
I feel my damage drifting
Laid my debt aside

Don't need a loan
Don't need charity
He's there for me

During the times I cried
Forgot disparity after I
Navigated through poverty

Craig - you are
Abundance and love
Personified forever

Jacob R. Moses
Staten Island, NY

To the Girl Beneath the Pines (Who Was Never a Girl at All)

There's a reason why you always play
the husband,
the brother,
the family dog.

A reason why
your shoes never fit,
your shirts hang loose,
your shoulders bend forward.

Why your crushes on boys
feel just as queer
as your crushes on girls.

There's a reason why you always play
on rusty tractors,
in haunted houses,
beneath the trees.

A reason why
you hide your body,
you hide your heart,
you hide your mind.

Why you'll never love
your unruly hair
until you cut it off.

Don't run from your scraped knees.
Keep climbing trees.
Someday your scars
will become your skin.

A.L.R. Keaton
Greenfield, MA

Undeniably

My children are my love.
Not because of their diversity
or in spite of their diversity
but because they are my children.
They will always be my children.
My children are my love.

Diane Davis
Chelmsford, MA

The Rainbow's Arch Bends toward Justice

Come out. Feel the cleansing shower
Break forth into LGBTQIA colors
A rainbow flowing to the sky
Arches down touching lives
Lived out, lived proud, lived free
A rainbow shout-back
To Antagonists
Crippled by hate, disgust
Reflects back, a mirror to their souls
As a beautiful rainbow grows
Resounds in a symphonic lyrical glow
Lights on spirits dwelling below
Those that hate need love
Those that fear need strength
Join hands with your cisgendered
Brothers and sisters aligned
With the rock solid belief
That the rainbow's end
The pot of gold is
Acceptance
A loving embrace of all.
Amen.

Genevieve Harris-Fraser
Orange, Massachusetts

Hag

From the first time I was called “Fag Hag,” I knew,
the only appropriate response was “Thank you.”

As a woman with a very particular appeal,
by the age of eighteen, I’d started to feel
I’d never find my place.

Then I met a boy dressed as a girl,
and my eyes were opened to a whole new world.

I found my tribe on Saturday nights,
dancing at the Metro beneath flashing lights.

I’ll be forever grateful to these men,
who welcomed my wild and took me in.

Brave men
who, with glitter for war paint
and a battle cry of “Queen, please,”
took on the hate of 1988.

Beautiful men
who wore their truth like a well-tailored suit
with a pocket square of perseverance.

Brilliant men
who knew that, though you can’t bedazzle bigotry,
you must find a way to shine through the ignorance.

Benevolent men
who readily offered me the acceptance
they’d fought so hard to win for themselves.

With the lost boys, I was found.

They helped me hoist my freak flag to the sky,
encouraged me to let it fly as high
as I damn well pleased, with no apologies.

So, you can call me Ally,
straight Queer or simply friend,
but I will proudly own the title
of “Hag” until the end.

Donna Ison
Lexington, Kentucky

LGBTQIA

Don't hate them know their problems,
Their gender is not fixed they don't,
Have any normal life like as you,
They can't fulfill their desires as well as,
Satisfaction like as you,
They are so much helpless and tired,
They don't have get their any freedom,
As well as happiness their voices,

Are not listened or heard,
They want to go far away from this world,
Where they can get a lot of cares and happiness,
They are begging for their freedom please,
Know their pains they are always hated,
Dominated as well as discriminated by all,
So why such things are occurring,
Give them their happiness and freedom.

Binod Dawadi

Kathmandu, State Nepal

any form of love [haiku]

any form of love
(better than their form of hate)
I welcome it all

Dan Brook
San Francisco, California

Guide To A Grace Gem

Along the shoreline they are giving
of more time and great lines let out
and they real it all in
greedy for love

Love for an embrace of me in all
of my undoing and grace and
knowing I can be here, now, in
my skin for my skin

And gracious for the sake of
knowing who I am holding tight
in recognition of fluidity and the lines
of gender meandering and melding

Together I am they and forty years
it took to shout my truth without
any anguish or cloaking of my being,
being instead present and real

Reality shifts within and without
my love for the ancient me, dropping all
after 40 years, kissing goodbye,
kissing hello, smeared lips loosening

Love on an extended heart string of
identity bracelets, and other jewels that
drop gems of my essence, my core, and
wow, it's twisted up laying fierce yet fallow

I will now stand here, unclothed, inert,
ignoring all of the swells of danger,
and swelling with Pride for me with this
one small life to begin

Christine Gay Dutton

*[Note: The Middle Name "Gay" Is My Legal Birth Name]
Northampton, MA*

Acceptance

She calls to me
From across the void
“Walk with me and be
The person you truly see”

Born of thought
Of her own design
A bringer of hope
Inspiring change

Her hand outstretched
For all to see
A waiting invitation
To be truly free

Her smiles are beauty
And eclipse the sun
With brightness of life
Fought and won

Against lies that bind
I reach for her hand
To walk by her side
And my life redone

From ashes I rise
The girl I truly am
I match her smile
Brighter than the sun

Aila

Houston, TX

It's More Than Just She

I know
they'll always say she,
never they or he,
no matter how I change
how I look to them.

It doesn't matter, I tell
myself.
She is still right, I say.
But is it right
for me today?

Yes,
it bothers me.
But with those I love,
I'm set free.
In strangers' eyes,
I'll never be he.
But with my friends,
I'm all I want to be.

So is what others say, really more than a "she"?

Will/Willow Burton
Ware, MA

Impulsive Warrior

Give it time, it'll patch up your mind.
Control the urges that tend to control you.
Little warrior, it'll be fine,
Call up on me, I'll be there in a dime.
No one else will say it so I'm telling you.

And here I swear, by all the times you cut your hair,
You wouldn't be in such despair, if they'd loved you.
Little warrior, hold your chin high,
Keep fighting back with all your might,
And rest assured that I am not leaving you.

Of all the reckless things you do
I wish you know what you want from you
From me, Little warrior.
Impulsive warrior.

Louise
UAE

Untitled

In a world diverse and vast,
Where love knows no bounds or caste,
Let's raise our voices, strong and clear,
To support those we hold dear.

For the LGBTQIA+ community we stand,
Hand in hand, a united band,
Embracing love in all its forms,
Shattering prejudice and norms.

Let love be love, in its purest essence,
Transcending gender, defying the fence,
For love knows not the color or creed,
It blooms in hearts, fulfilling every need.

To the brave souls who've fought the fight,
Through darkness and struggles, shining bright,
You've paved the way with courage untold,
Inspiring hearts, breaking through the mold.

Every letter, every hue,
We celebrate the beautiful you,
Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender,
Queer, intersex, a spectrum to remember.

We stand as allies, friends, and kin,
Erasing hatred, letting acceptance in,
Championing rights, equality's call,
Embracing love, together we stand tall.

In unity we find strength and power,
A rainbow tapestry that will not cower,
Let's spread compassion, understanding, and care,
For love knows no boundaries, no walls to bear.

So let our voices ring out loud,
In every city, village, and crowd,
Supporting LGBTQIA+ rights each day,
In this diverse world, let love hold sway.

Anonymous

Just in Case

We gave darkness a voice
When there was nothing left-
No hope, no choice.

A confluence of words
Arrived without notice-
Corrupted into the absurd.

But we will not stop for hate
We will not yield to anger
We will not bow to fear.

Instead we continue on
With our worn out shoes
Lined with peculiar grace.

We march to the streets
Covered in graffiti
And yesterday's newspapers.

We take them to roads
without names-
and to houses

That didn't forget to leave
the lights on-
Just in case.

Heather Milkiewicz
Belchertown, MA