



LET'S SAY GAY! AND PWN'S BRIDGE INK

PRESENT :

RAINBOW

INK

2023 Issue

The Hate of My Life—A True Teen Tale

We knew this was next year's...
Mentors please, I just need...
numpkin, tried to just...
just a nightmare.





POWER
TO THE
PEOPLE

LIBERATION FRONT

NO
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OR

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EDITOR'S FOREWORD

I'm queer. Every artist, staff member, writer, and administrator who contributed to this journal is queer. Maybe you are too. Maybe you picked up this journal to find something familiar. Or, maybe you aren't LGBTQ+—maybe you just believe, as we do, that our identities are our own, and that silencing art endangers everyone.

Regardless of what brought you here, we at Let's Say Gay welcome you to our celebration of queer youth. I want to thank you, sincerely, for reading "Rainbow Ink" and for supporting this journal. The voices of LGBTQ+ people are everywhere, but we don't always have opportunities to express ourselves. Our publication was designed for the generation of young people being systematically silenced by Florida House Bill 1557, and all of the "Don't Say Gay" bills that it inspired. Our purpose is to create a space for young queer people to tell their stories and to pushback against the stigmatization of queer identities as dangerous and inappropriate to discuss.

Our community often speaks of pride, but perhaps that feeling might be better understood as joy—a triumphant celebration of survival and queer life. I'm as proud as I've ever been to present "Rainbow Ink" and the eight young artists who have contributed to our first volume.

Let's Say Gay! is a small publication, so we are only able to give voice to a limited group within our marginalized demographic—only queer children who are talented artists with access to the internet and a computer. In a dream world we could let all the young people gagged by a tidal wave of intolerance shout out their names, their dreams, and their own damn pronouns. Still, *LSG* is a start. Working on the journal has been a powerful experience for me and I hope it continues to grow and carve out space for those who have been censored.

Stories are important—if they weren't, the powers-that-be wouldn't be trying so hard to silence them. Art matters. Words matter. And I hope that for as long as our journal is available it can offer just a few kind words to the readers and contributors who need to say “gay.”

-Stephanie Bohland

A QUEER GIRL'S HISTORY

N.B., 15, WA

part i: kiss

the first time i kissed a girl was when
i was seven years old.
i did it because i loved her
and she was my best friend
and she was pretty
and angels are pretty
and i was in a church
so how could i not want to kiss her?
her lips were soft and
in that moment, bathed in the rainbow light
of a stained glass window,
i forgot that what we were doing
wasn't a part of who i was supposed to be.
after all, how could
something so beautiful be broken?

part ii: crush

sleepaway summer camp was a place without rules,
other than always wear your sunscreen—
a lesson learned the hard way—
and that the 24/7 fruit bowl was always open.
our days were spent in forests and on top of horses,
our nights were spent in cabins and open fields.
when i remember my first crush, it is through a haze of
golden cabin dust, horse sweat, and girlish laughter.
i can still feel the way
my heart fluttered every time i saw her,
before reality ripped off its wings
because liking her meant liking girls
which meant being gay
which meant that i could never have
my own fairy tale ending.

part iii: confession

when i first came out,
it was at a saccharine summertime sleepover,
only half awake as i lay talking to my friend
while the moonlight shone through the window
and the cicadas chirped their symphony.
finally i forced myself out of the closet at one a.m.,
and my friend's silence screamed loud,
stretching across canyons,
as my stomach dropped
from falling off the cliff of safety
into the unknown valley of truth.
finally, she started clapping and told me she was happy for me,
the moment's fear crossfading into a relief that was satiated
only by the fact that i was unaware of how many more times
i would have to have the same conversation
with people that would have reactions ranging from
"oh...ok?" to "you don't look gay" to "please don't have a crush on me."
but it eventually got easier and
years later i didn't have to force myself
to say the words i said that night,
and could instead let them fall naturally into place.

part iv: hate

the f slur is a three letter word, monosyllabic and plain,
but i've heard it so many different ways.
from my father when he was reminiscing
about his own high school days,
his eyes glazed over as he watched
friends in the living room,
not even realizing the weight of what he'd said.
from my straight friend's boyfriend,
who in response simply said: "i can fix him,"
even though half her oldest friends are gay
and she'd known him for a month.
from a boy that once liked me,
who spat the word at me so many times
that it faded against
the anger in his eyes and
the raw curvature of his voice,
blending into what was only
another name for me.

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GENDERFLUID, SIX MONTHS LATER

Angus, 17, ME

“Who the hell are you?”

One of my best friends looks down her pointed finger at me. She's great at putting that accusation into her voice. It makes me laugh every time because it's so bizarre.

Now, imagine you're out to dinner (well, sitting in a crowded dining hall) with a bunch of queer people who you sort of know but still have that vague unfamiliarity. Three of these people are attached-at-the-hip, you have the impression that they're close, and one turns to another and goes “Hey, what's your name?” Who are these people? Do they just not know this third one? Why is he always around?

There's a hilarity to being genderfluid. There's always some joke to be made. One of my favorites has been one girl yelling at me “Your pronouns, put them in the bag!” as we pretended to be in a wild west holdup.

I have been genderfluid for a relatively short time. I probably wouldn't have realized it for a lot longer if I hadn't been hit with an acute beam of queerness when my school opened the lavender lounge, a small space for queer students. Immediately we took up residence. We are a subset of our school's queer community, the lav lounge crowd. The group solidified quickly, even though some of us were in the fringe, there were people like me who are there everyday until the building closes. There are several of us who spend more time lav lounging than in our rooms (or anywhere else on campus).

There's a joke amongst us that we will “trans your gender.” One of our elders even had a counter labeled “Days since so-and-so transed someone's gender.” (We sound like a TERF's nightmare). You have to understand the dynamic. We're all radical about gender in one way or another. We're tearing gender apart. We're giving people other options. And we believe that a lot of people are trans, just that society isn't set up to handle that.

The lav lounge was even called "The Incubator." I really like this phrase. We will bask you in the warm light of transness until you are ready to hatch. So much gentler than cracking an egg. We will keep you safe and warm until you join us.

This happened to me. My first times in the lav lounge were as a cis bi woman. I was a woman because I was "born a woman." Obviously I don't follow this line of thinking anymore. What I meant was that I was born AFAB, and at the time those things were linked for me. I didn't care what others did, but I was a woman because I was raised one. Flimsy reasoning. It's really not surprising that it took just a few weeks before so-and-so from earlier suggested we have a gender talk. I joked about my pronouns being on thin ice. Six trans people turned their eyes to me. My friend and I left the room, but one of my friends called after us: "Hope you're trans when you get back!"

I was, and now I had a shiny new name that had been pinging in the back of my mind since I was fifteen.

People were happy for me (especially the ones that remained by time the gender talk was finished).

The thing was, I didn't feel like either name captured me. My first name was sometimes dysphoria inducing and sometimes not, while my second name was euphoric, I missed hearing my first one. I'm not good at standing up for myself, but I am proud that I explained to everyone that my name changes. These are equally my names, I like them both. Both are mine. I even took a third. For funsies.

Sometimes I feel like my gender is obnoxious. Other people always guessing names and pronouns. But you know what? I get to take up space. I get to be annoying, or absurd. Coming from someone with low self confidence, this has actually been great for me. I have to let people know when I'm uncomfortable, and this begins to extend to other topics. Also, it's reaffirming that even if my gender is weird and takes a little extra thought, no one's mad about it.

I've had victories. Coming out to close trans friends, coming out to the full lavender lounge, getting my first he/him pronoun pin, trying a binder, going to a trans day of visibility gathering, and coming out to cis friends.

I still have more things left to do. Working on the courage to be openly queer, and introduce myself with my chosen names. Connecting with more of the trans community outside my college.

It's been a weird six months, but it's so freeing to make this change. I'm still working through self confidence issues, but experimenting with gender identity has helped ease that so much. And I have a feeling my journey with gender is far from over. I don't even know if my label will be genderfluid in the future. But I am infinitely glad to be a part of this community.

“A WAY OUT”

James, 15, NJ

Cold winter nights, frost quickly spreading
Ominous alleys and the people lurking inside.
Crowded streets always pushing and pulling
Perpetual darkness forces its way toward you.
Pulled into pieces
Caught like a fish
Days are ending
So are you.

You turn away
Bright, warm glow.
You follow it, you run.
Getting closer, it melts away the dark
Seeping to your bones.
A store,
One most old and ancient.
It illuminates the cobbled roads and shells of buildings
around you.
In these ruins, a haven just for you.

Warm summer nights, rays stretching through mountains.
Aisles of toys, shelves of welcoming books.
People smile inside, they laugh, they hug.
It reaches for you.
Trapped into a hug
Caught in a kiss
You've won, victorious.
New beginnings
You need this.

You stand outside this quaint shop
Yearning, envious of the warm ones.
You stare in, observing.
Hearing the growls and the huffs of the lurking.
Footsteps rushing towards you, running, hunting.
It's for you, you know it is.
You decide.

Opening the handle, a swish of warm graces you
A bell rings above your head.
The shopkeeper comes to you.
Smiles all around, nearly makes you melt.
It's nice here, safe, warm,
you see them outside. Pawing their way in.
The door stays closed.

-

HER CONFESSION

Allison, 17, MA

she is a vital one, a flare of summer sun
fashioned of strength and sweat,
with eyes like wave-washed river stones
and cheeks so red i forget to be ashamed of mine.
but she is a soft thing, gaze gray like dove wings,
skin of sunset, budding rose of tender spring.

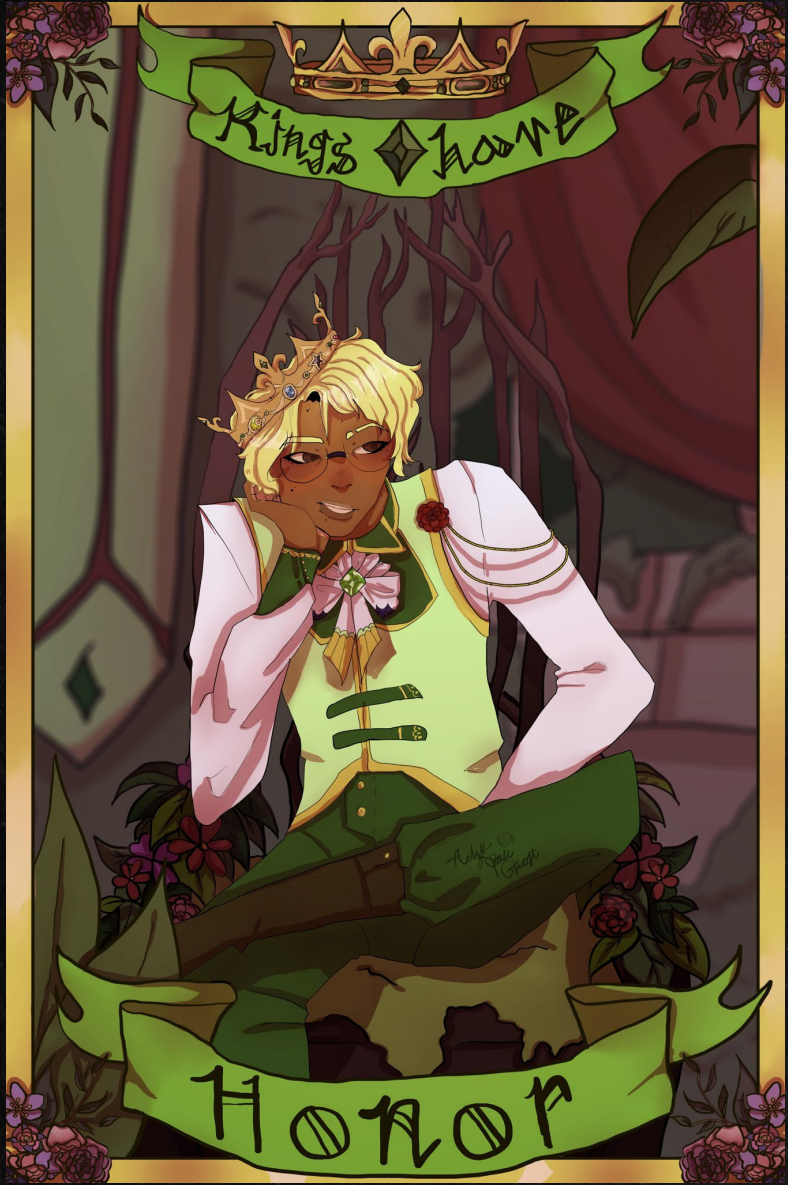
she is the motion that catches the eye,
the lodestone, the anchor, sunk deep in my mind.
jasmine breeze and scent of salty sea,
she is the summer rain that falls on me,
and lightning—
unexpectedly.
she is impossibility.

she is the question and the answer,
the electrifying tide that sets my mind alive
with perfect possibility and paralyzing fright—
that maybe i am made to live outside
the lines.

she is truth dredged deep from darkness
and brought before the light.
but if she is a star, she is a sun that burns too bright
because this sky holds tight to twilight,
to its veiled and ink-washed nights.

so she is secret, sealed in silence,
prismatic memory of mine.
with every season that slips by,
more of her vibrance fades to time.
if she must die, she mustn't smother
like an ember as she hides.
so i will scream into this sky
the truth that blazes, bleeds, alive—

i dream of sunset cheeks,
of jasmine breeze,
of summertime suspended
in her sweet and silver eyes.



"KING'S HONOR"

Sam, 18, SC

LIES ARE BEST KEPT IN CERTAIN COMPANY, EVEN FAMILY

Madison, 16, NJ

Sitting at the dinner table.

I have juice in my cup.

You said you were proud of me.

I couldn't bare the pretenses of your pride, so,

I told you I was different.

You asked, 'how so?'

I said, 'I've grown up,

I love in a way unknown to you.'

You told me, 'love is never easy'.

I couldn't keep- it in.

"I'm gay"

It lingered.

Dinner went cold that night;
you never mentioned love again.

THINGS YOU CANNOT BECOME ALONE

Jesse, 18, NJ

this is where i end and you begin. starless nights in the
shape of pennies, handfuls that i

fasten away into this wretched singularity
rendering into sinew—here, feel it here—

this is my hand and my chest and my stomach. the coins i
swallowed like lightless dusk. and a memory of you, again,
copper consigned to turquoise consigned to salt in the
Hudson River.

this is our eulogy. tired huddled masses yearning to breathe
free. something precious that

our mothers tell us to kill because
boys cannot be
happy with each other, ever.

this is fate. ancient triads of women and scarlet threads.
silver mountains in the Duat. i am here and i am here and
we are sitting across
from Anubis as he
asks me if this is

what you wanted,
does this
feel
right?

then he
releases our hearts
onto the scale

(diseased little things)

before i can
speak at all.

this is everything beautiful and everything terrible. crashing
in and out of time like universes. like smallish souls and
human beings. like string symphonies and puddles of rain.
and i am the women and i am the thread and i am Anubis.
and i am gravity, weaving beautiful things into existence and
then watching them die.

this is where we surrender to want until it collapses into
need. breathe with me, just like this. this is where i end and
you begin.

FIRELIGHT

Annie, 13, SC

The firelight glows
as the sun rises high
the smoke reaches up
towards the sky
look up
reach to it
reach to the firelight sky
as the sun grows brighter
the days go by
as the sun grows brighter
the fire dims out
and the smoke comes down
in the soft dark sky

EVERY WAKING HOUR

Sam, 18, SC

Hey, look, there's something
I need to get off my chest.
I've felt this way for a long time
and I don't know how to explain it.

Well I do.

Have you ever been afraid of speaking?
So afraid your heart stops to beat
and your hands start to sweat
and your mouth goes dry?
So afraid that if you speak you may die?
That's how it feels
every waking hour of my life.

I wake up and comb my short hair out.
Hair I cut the night before because I tried
to grow it out but it felt like the longer it got
the tighter my chest constricted.
I brush the teeth inside the mouth that I hope
I can avoid using to strangers
Because strangers are so utterly unaware
How their polite words can sting me.
I dress in a cage to compress and masculinise my chest so I have
a chance of being called
A man.
I dress in a loose fitted shirt and jeans that hide my thighs.
I contour my face just enough to sharpen
my soft jawline and to pronouns my high
cheek bones and to widen my nose bridge
and strengthen my brow.
I look into the mirror and say "I've got today."

Then I start out the door.
On an empty stomach.

I go to school or work and I meet the people.
I open my mouth and suddenly my day crumbles with one word.
"She."

Suddenly the foundations under me shift
and they erode to nothingness.
My heart twists and contorts.

Sure my name change has been adapted.
"Sam" isn't just for "Samuel"
It can also be for "Samantha."
Samantha is more palatable.

They don't question why I would change my name to Samantha.
They just accept that I went from one woman's name to another.
They just accept it.

God forbid I want to go by a man's name.
God forbid I am a man.
Then I'm flawed and broken and selfish.
I'm unreasonable because I want to be called
something that makes me comfortable.

I'm unreasonable but those who belittle me
those who disrespect me
those who outrage over my existence
those who would kill me
are being reasonable?

Now, that's not fair.

CONTRIBUTORS

N.B. (she/her) is a queer writer from Washington State. Her works have previously been published by companies such as Hugo House and Barnes & Noble. She is a fiction editor for *The Diamond Gazette*, a contributing writer for *Words With Weight*, and a member of PNWA. In the future, she hopes to become an author/screenwriter.

Angus/Anastacia (They/She/Xe/He) is a genderfluid and nonbinary writer. Xe is currently a mechanical engineering student, and is heavily involved in his college's creative writing club. Their primary mediums are poetry and zines, and they are branching out into non-fiction pieces.

James Werdann (he/him) is a junior in high-school from New Jersey. He is currently still looking at colleges, but Boston University seems to be the one for him. He intends to major in environmental science and his biggest goal is to live on a self-sustainable farm. He has a passion for writing, reading, and making art.

Allison Liu (she/her) is an emerging writer currently studying in the Boston area. She can often be found revising her novel, photographing the unusual, and conducting bioengineering research. Her work has appeared in or is forthcoming in *Yellow Arrow Vignette*, *The Violet Hour Magazine*, *The Foreedge Review*, and elsewhere.

Madison (she/her) is a sixteen-year-old writer from New Jersey.

Sam (he/him) is an eighteen-year-old artist and writer who has always been ambitious and dreamt for bigger things for himself. He aspires to be an actor or a writer some day. His favorite things to do in his free time are draw and play video games. He loves to cook for others and care for animals. He has a cat named Artemis. He also dyes his hair frequently—almost every month—because he can't decide on what bright color he likes the best. He's spent most of his life battling with depression and it makes it hard to keep friends. However, he's learned the real friends will stick with you through your mental health issues. Lately, he's been working on a comic called *Magician's Gambit* and hopes to publish it on Tapas or Webtoon in the near future. He would like to add this might not happen if he keeps getting distracted! Find him at @artsyspaceghost on Twitter.

Jesse (he/they, 18) is an undergraduate at Emory University ('26) studying chemistry and theater. A nonbinary and Chinese poet, they explore queer and POC spaces with writing and with music. Their work has been recognized at the New Jersey Teen Arts Festival throughout high school. Don't be scared to reach out at @tirx.sias on Instagram!

Annie (she/her) is 13 years old and writing poetry has always been a hobby of hers. *Let's Say Gay!* is the first journal she has submitted to. She enjoys drawing, reading, and watching TV. She is very excited to be a part of this journal.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We at *Let's Say Gay!* would like to thank everyone who participated in the creation of this journal. We hope that it is the first of many.

We want to thank our brave contributors—we are honored you chose us as a place to share your unique, perfect voices.

We want to extend a special thank you to Lisa Hartsgrove and the *Project Write Now* team for joining us on this crazy collaboration idea, and to Megan Bohland, our very patient programmer and technology guru.

We would also especially like to thank Dr. Dustin Hoffman for his kindness and encouragement. Thank you for helping us tell our own stories too!

Some facts fr

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IGAY

PROTECT TRANS KIDS

VERMONT EQUALITY FOR SAME-SEX COUPLES

On December 26, 2000, "in recognition of the
common law and the Vermont Supreme Court
issued a landmark ruling in *Raker v. State* that
Vermont same-sex couples were constitutionally
entitled "to the same benefits and protections
as married opposite-sex couples."

On April 26, 2006, the Vermont Legislature,
responding to the Court's ruling, by voting to
create Civil Unions, granting same-sex couples
all of the rights and responsibilities of the
marriage statute. Effective July 1, 2006, this
controversial Civil Union legislation granted legal
recognition to same-sex couples for the first
time anywhere in the United States.

(Continued on other side)

PHOTO COURTESY FOR GAY/LESBIAN EQUALITY - 2011

Tinky Winky is
a gay menace,
says preacher

The background of the entire page is a high-contrast, black and white image of the American flag, showing the stars and stripes in a grainy, textured style.

**WE ARE *LET'S SAY GAY*, A NEW QUEER YOUTH
JOURNAL THAT IS HERE TO MAKE SOME NOISE.**

Our identities— how we define ourselves and who we choose to love— are ours alone. No one has the right to silence, degrade, or invalidate the existence of another person. LGBTQ+ stories, and thus queer presence in the country's narrative, are under attack. Our books are being censored. Our freedoms are being challenged.

We are being told to get back in our closets.



WE DON'T HAVE TO.



Let's Say Gay is a place where young, queer artists can tell their stories. A place where we all can, and will, say gay. Or maybe even shout it.

