

MARCH 2018

# ACROSS & THROUGH

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SPECIAL THANKS TO JACK STEINER FOR THE COVER  
ART: 'FOUR' FROM HIS SERIES 'REACHING'

Welcome to the first issue of *Across & Through*, a brand new literary magazine which publishes the creative work of writers, artists, and photographers who are transgender – providing a platform for disenfranchised individuals to showcase their abilities in a space free from the fear of discrimination.

We, the editors, feel strongly about promoting the voices of people from all around the world in order to help bring more diversity to the world of literature and art. We hope to proudly stand alongside other literary magazines, with a publication which is accessible to *everyone* and demonstrates that one's gender identity should not be the determining factor for how their work is perceived.

We have been working hard on this for a few months, and received a lot of brilliant submissions in that time. It has been difficult deciding on and selecting the highest quality content, but we are excited to finally be sharing it with readers!

Please show support for our contributors – both here and in future editions – and enjoy the first copy of *Across & Through*!

The Editors

## ETHOS

We aim to publish talented writers, artists, and photographers who may fear discrimination within the publishing world.

We hope our contributors will be judged on their talent, not their gender identities.

We are not trying to separate writers/artists who are transgender from those whom are not, we are merely attempting to showcase underappreciated individual's talents.

We aim to bring more diversity to the literary landscape.

We would like to show that discrimination against writers, artists, and photographers due to gender identity is unnecessary.

We want to create a space where writers and artists will not be afraid to share their work.

We strive to show that writers who are transgender are more than "transgender writers" - our contributors are extremely talented individuals.

# PIE

CREATIVE NON-FICTION BY KELLI BARON

I don't even remember what kind of pie it was.

I remember the way the cold, New Jersey night wind hit our faces as we got out of the car and trudged, exhausted, towards the door of the Howard Johnson's. I remember the taste of the air – it tasted of sulphur and petroleum and too much industry in too small of a place, with a hint of overly sweet wafting from the direction of the dumpster. I even remember the smell of stale mop water when we walked in and followed the orderly, but empty, queue up to the counter to make our choices from what was left, as they cleaned up and prepared to close. And, I remember that lone piece of pie *being* in the dessert section, cellophane stuck to its surface.

But I don't remember what kind of pie it was.

See, this was in the 80s. We were driving between Connecticut and Florida. We did that a lot. Right before I was born in a little town that's barely still alive, my dad's parents escaped the Connecticut winters to sunny Florida. My Mom's parents wouldn't follow for another 25 years or so. At first, we didn't either. But, we went down to see them 4 to 6 times a year – a 24-hour drive, each way. My earliest memories of my grandparents' place in Florida always have my parents sleeping in after we arrived. We did follow them a few years later, buying a house right down the street, but since my Mom's folks held fast in that near Arctic wasteland, we still made that trip several times a year. And, it was still a 24 hour drive.

The era is relevant because, back then, there weren't a half-dozen restaurants and gas stations at every exit, open 24 hours, garishly colourful from the interstate, promising that whatever your travels required would be found inside the harsh, white, blinding box. Don't get me wrong, there were a few 24-hour places, strategically placed along that mind-numbing route of I-95. They were usually huge truck stops, set where other major arteries intersected the Interstate. They had their own overbearing illumination - I remember many times, halfway waking from the back of the van or station wagon, looking up and seeing the aluminium roof and impossibly long fluorescent light tubes. It always made me think of Disney World, for some reason; maybe partly because we almost always went to Disney when we went down to Florida.

But this wasn't one of those truck stops, and we weren't anywhere near another major freight artery. We were in New Jersey, and it was late, and the HoJo's billboard proclaimed them to be "Open Late". Looked like just late enough.

This was a cafeteria. There aren't a whole lot of them left. All the parts of your meal were pre-made and pre-portioned and individually set out on a long counter, behind a sneeze guard that made it hard to reach the back. You grabbed each small plate of whatever food you wanted and put it on your tray and when you got to the end, the cashier added it all up and that's how it worked. Normally. But this was closing time, and there wasn't that much left. A few entrées,

probably dry, a handful of sides - there might even have been some soup. Again, these details are lost to me. What isn't lost to me is that we were a family of 5. I was the oldest. I could have been 8, I could have been 13. I don't remember which direction we were travelling and I don't remember who ate what, but I know that we 3 kids were certainly grouchy and confused and being real pains in my parents' asses.

And there was that pie. I want to say it was Pecan. That's my Dad's favourite, so I might just be projecting that. I remember us all eating what we had in the empty dining room, half the lights turned off, waitresses filling salt and pepper shakers and rolling silverware for the next day's batch of hungry travellers. And I *distinctly* remember eyeing that pie the whole short meal. I usually ate pretty quickly, so there's no doubt in my mind I finished first. And I don't remember how long I waited, or if I even did, because what did I know of manners? I was a hungry kid up past bedtime after 18 hours in the freaking car.

I asked for the pie.

I remember my Dad had one plate in front of him, empty. It meant that pie represented half of the food he was going to have until we got in 6 hours later. I remember my Mom protesting. I don't remember what she said, but I'm pretty sure of the tone. But my Dad, he just looked at her, and looked at me, and he slid that piece of pie to me. And I ate it. Every crumb. And I'm sure when we got in 6 hours later that man was hungry and probably still insisted on unloading everyone's suitcases before he got himself something to eat.

And I really, really wish I could remember what kind of pie it was. Because that piece of pie is one of the most important things in my life. That pie, and my Dad sliding it over to me, has taught me more about life, and decency, and what it means to be a parent, than any other single event from my 4 and a half decades of life. That one damn almost forgotten piece of pie showed me what self-sacrifice is. Not on some grand scale, but on a scale that means something in everyday life, in everyday events; a scale that resonated with me as I grew. When I find it hard to dig deeper when parenting requires it, I think not so much of what is quite honestly just a piece of pie, but of how quickly my father made the decision to give it up, just because I wanted it. No, we weren't starving. No one was going to live or die based on the end times of that piece of pie. But he didn't even flinch.

It still teaches me. When my son doesn't act right and I worry about if I'm making the right decisions, I think with great regret about that piece of pie and the night my Father chose to go hungry so I wouldn't and I realize that good kids sometimes make choices without understanding the consequences. And that's OK, because they're kids. And I try to remember to always give my son the pie, because I don't know which moment is going to be his pie moment. None of us do – we just try like hell to be what we think our kids should look up to, and we hope for the best. If we knew when those moments were happening, we could make a big deal about them. But, we don't. Because we grow up in moments we don't know are going to stick with us, long after we get out of the New Jersey Howard Johnson's and back to the turnpike.

But I still can't remember what kind of pie it was, and I really wish I could, because I owe my Dad a piece of pie.



'REBIRTH OF THE PHOENIX' BY ERIC SARTORE

# AS LEAVES FALL

POEM BY KADE ALEXANDER

Leaves fall from the trees, as the wind hits us from the east.

My body close to yours as we enter our favourite bookstore.

When we get indoors my hand touches yours, and my heart skips a beat.

I sigh in defeat when you don't notice, I feel offbeat as we stroll amongst the books.

You smile, I smile. Oh god just seeing you smile makes my heart race.

We soon leave, nothing good today.

We go to our favourite park, and sit at our favourite spot. It's underneath this giant tree,  
with the most amazing leaves.

You contest as I confess my undying love for you.

I feel my heart ache, my hands quake, but suddenly I'm snapped awake by your lips on  
mine.

By your hands moving towards my hips, pulling me closer to you.

We pull apart, my heart racing.

We shared our first "I love you's" looking into each other's eyes, your hands in mine, as  
I feel truly happy for the first time in my life, and this all happened, as leaves fall from the  
trees.

# A STORY OF COLOUR

FICTION BY ROBIN NELSON

There is an assumption that what I see is the same as what you see with your eyes closed. Realities though are not so comparable. Blackness is not synonymous with non-existence. If you want to understand my world then sit back, take my hand, and let me build you the rainbow from the ground up.

Purple is the first colour I ever learned. It was found on the shelves of Madame Lucinda, a woman who River and I were paid to deliver laundry to. She was the sort of woman who didn't feel like she had entered a room until every eye had fallen on her. We were left in her bedroom, like always, waiting for the click of heels against linoleum to warn us of her coming.

Standing in her bedroom, while she rummaged for the so called "pocket change" to throw at us, was dull. The only form of entertainment was running my hands over the perfume bottles on her shelves. There were so many she likely had no time to wear them all. But this form of entertainment was against the "do not touch" rule. Which is probably why the one time she walked into the room barefoot she screamed quite as loud as she did. Then even louder as the bottle smashed to the ground.

The smell was overwhelming. Almost like being punched in the face by a bowl of potpourri. It lingered too, I am certain I could still smell it weeks afterwards. Madame chased us halfway home, screaming, "You had to break the purple one! The most expensive! You brats are never going to be able to afford to replace it." She never hired us again. Though I may be down £5 a week at least purple can always be associated with extravagance.

Blue was a tricky one. The first association I had for it was anything wet. I'd heard of oceans and the rain. Melting snow, tears, taps. All things wet were blue to me. This made sense until I learned my older sister, Evelyn, had blue eyes. Then it didn't make sense. Evelyn is not wet. Evelyn is steel and nails. I remember when she slipped in the woods and sprained her wrist, her initial reaction had been "It'll be fine. I'll walk it off."

I guess that is why I am so grateful that she taught me about the sky. This great blue void that hovers overhead, always looking over you. It may be impossible to comprehend quite what it looks like but it is blue. Always there, like Evelyn. Even the wet makes sense with that intangible blue. After all, I have a River always in arms reach.

Speaking of River, green was, for the longest time, my favourite because of him. It is the colour of nature. All nature. I know technically tree bark is not the same colour as the leaves. Hell, even the leaves are not always same colour as the leaves. Still, they are all classed as green to me.

Countless hours have been wasted laying in grass so tall it comes up to your knees. Thinking about it I can almost feel his fingers intertwined with mine. His voice soft and gentle as he describes the way the sun dances against the colours of the wildflowers.

"Nature is a type of beauty that doesn't exist elsewhere."

River's descriptions always sound like poetry. I can't believe that some of these things are what he sees every day. Learning his eyes were green was no real shock. Someone who sees beauty in every detail deserves eyes the same colour as that beauty.

Yellow is the colour of spring. I know the common association of yellow is summer but summer is always orange. Orange is fire, warmth, heat. All things that are most common in summer. Yellow is the colour of life, and life belongs in spring.

The world seems to have been put on a reboot at the start of each year. You get the leaves returning, flowers buds, a new season. I held a baby chick once and they were so fuzzy but so fragile. Mainly though they were yellow. To diminish it into just sunshine felt wrong, we'll leave that role for orange.

Red was the only colour I gave up trying to understand. Too many things were red. With so many things the concept of it soon became too overwhelming. It started out simple, strawberries, sweet and refreshing. We'd go strawberry picking every summer and sit in the garden eating them. Once while cutting those strawberries, I ended up slicing my finger. It got complicated from there.

No lasting damage was done. It was only a little cut and Evelyn put a plaster on it for me almost immediately. She'd laughed and joked "Maybe blood could be your red."

Eating strawberries didn't seem quite the same after that.

Too many things to link all came under the banner of red.

Danger. Anger. Pain. Passion.

It was all too much.

River tried to teach me what red meant. Though I am also not entirely sure he knew that was what he was doing at the time. The first flash of it came in the warmth of his breath against my neck. He had a habit of burying his head on my shoulder to conceal smiles, like he had forgotten I couldn't see them anyway.

Something always lingered with River. Something that made it unclear if I wanted to stand closer or run away.

One particularly orange summer the two of us were alone in my bedroom. He'd been giggling a lot that day, hiding his face a lot more too. I remember how clammy his hands felt as he took mine. I remember stuttered his voice was when he spoke, "you are looking very green today."

It wasn't until his lips finally connected with mine did I understand what red meant. It even overtook green as my favourite.

# PERSISTENCE OF LONELINESS

CREATIVE NON-FICTION BY JOSSLYN TURNER

October 2013

Horn blaring. Steel upon steel. A freight train rolls through Empire, California before midnight. Across from the tracks on Santa Fe Avenue is the Silver Spruce trailer park, bordered by blue-grey cottages. Remnants from the 70s. In the fourth cottage on the left, I shiver beneath the covers on a forty-dollar airbed. I try to sleep before going to work at four in the morning. The space heater in the corner fails to return feeling to my fingers and toes. It's interesting how the human body fights for warmth. Muscles and teeth quiver to make heat. Body hair rises on end, a trait of our first ancestors. Blood abandons hopeless limbs to protect the heart.

I've been here four months without my wife and sons. Now I think moving out was a mistake. Two nights ago, I cried in the shower. The drifting steam melded with my tears as I said aloud, "What have I done?"

I miss the voices of my kids, emanating from their bedrooms. I miss watching horror movies in the dark as my wife sleeps in my lap. *But I told the kids to shut up, and I hated when Mirna fell asleep every time we watched a movie.* I wonder if it is not the coldness and loneliness that persuades me to go back home.

When I first moved out, I thought I'd live openly as a woman. The day I picked out women's clothes at Ross, I wasn't dressed the part. I took an armful of tank tops, blouses, and a pair of skinny bootcut jeans to the men's dressing room. My neck and arms were clammy as if I was afraid someone would catch me. Some tops were too tight and some too loose, although the tags said the same size: L and XL. I stood in front of the mirror.

"Wow," I said to myself. I looked and felt sexy in the acid-washed jeans and thin red top.

A few nights later, I came back to return some tank tops that persisted to slide off my broad shoulders. It was the first time I wore makeup in public. I felt feminine in my pink floral-print t-shirt and new jeans. A mother and daughter looked up frequently as I dug through a full rack of shirts to find something else that would fit. I saw only a blur of faces, reluctant to lift my head to know for certain they were looking at me. Of course, they are, I convinced myself. I wished I had a friend to hold my twitching hand. I imagined her as skinny with platinum blonde hair in a pixie cut and tattooed arms.

"Are you returning?" asked the Indian woman directing customers.

"Yes, I am," I said. I remembered that I never practised a feminine voice, and my arms were still muscular.

"She can help you now, sir," she said pointing at the cashier. The gender title was a cold hand on my skin. I recoiled from its touch.

*You can call her ma'am, my imaginary friend would say. She is a woman and her pronouns are she, her, and hers.*

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I would learn the value of pronouns a year later in the Sacramento Chapter of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. PFLAG has helped the LGBTQ community and their families since 1972. My first meeting in Sacramento was at Saint Mark's United Methodist Church. I introduced myself to a large group of trans men and women, and parents with their trans kids. "My name is Josslyn. My pronouns are she, her, and hers." Saying my name aloud to others made me feel real. I read that as of June 2016, nearly three hundred thousand people in California identify as transgender – 1.4 million in the United States. Those numbers were unknown in 2014; the Census Bureau did not count transgender people. I was often told that I wasn't alone as if that made it easier to be myself in public. The people at Ross made me feel like I was the only transgender person in the world.

When I moved out in March of 2013, I thought I'd find an intellectual connection at gay bars in Modesto. The Tiki Lounge was the first one I tried. If I talked to someone that night, it was just small talk before they returned to their friends. I drank a Bud Light alone as I watched karaoke singers become David Bowie or Debbie Harry. I thought, *I would have to shed my skin to do something like that.*

Another night at the Tiki, I sat on a brown leather sofa with my arms folded, waiting for the double whiskey and Coke to wear off before going home. *I'm stupid for coming here alone,* I thought. A black man in his twenties broke away from his group to sit next to me. He wore a blue tank top. His chubby arms stretched out as he pressed his hands on his knees. He smelled of heavy cologne.

"What are you doing here all by yourself?" he said over the music.

I shrugged. "I don't know anybody."

"You're too cute to be by yourself. So what are you here for?"

"I'm just trying to figure out who I am," I said. My curly hair had grown over my ears. I had shaved twice that day. I wore a little bit of makeup and a feminine tie-dye top, but was not passable as a woman.

A corner of his mouth turned up. "Who do you think you are?"

"I'm transgender," I said.

"I don't know anything about that. So do you like men?"

"I'm into women and transwomen."

He leaned back, twisted his face and said in a high-pitched tone, "You like vaginas?"

I nodded. A slight smirk.

He said something to end the conversation and rejoined his friends. I felt rejected. Then I began to reject myself like the human body rejects a newly transplanted organ. My own body did not match how I felt inside. I was not strong enough to convince people that I was a woman. In October of 2013, I was ready to go back to my family. I was willing to forgive Mirna's bitter phone conversations. She often brought up my cheating and wasted hours spent on internet porn. I asked her if I could move back in.

"I'm sorry for all the shit I did," I said on my flip phone. "I miss you and the kids."

Mirna spoke carefully. "I'm afraid you'll change your mind and decide to be transgender again."

I wanted to tell her that it wasn't about me *wanting* to be transgender. I was. Instead, I said, "I won't change my mind. Living as a woman would be harder than I thought."

I was afraid. Afraid I would be harassed or beaten at the mall or restaurant. Mirna said she wanted to wait a couple months before I moved back. First, I had to agree on some things: throw porn in garbage, cut hair, regrow facial hair.

I couldn't stop smiling on my first night back. My sons were also happy that I was going to live with them again. After we tucked them in bed, Mirna and I stopped in the hallway. She was dressed in black pants and a red sweater. Her brown hair hung over her shoulders. On the wall behind her were two separate photos of us at five years old.

Mirna reached up and put her arms around my neck. Her voice was muffled against my chest, but I could hear the playful tone when she said, "Why did you leave me?"

"I don't know," I said.

*Is that true?* I thought. *Didn't you leave because she could not accept you? Because she made you feel alone?* I ignored the voice in my head. Mirna felt good in my arms in that moment, and later when we had sex for the first time in six months. However, the warmth of familiarity turned cold. I started to think about wearing androgynous clothes instead of a full transition. One day I set up my laptop on the dining table and showed Mirna pictures of young men dressed in feminine clothing with feminine hairstyles and makeup.

"They look like women," she said.

I turned to her and said, "You don't want me to dress like that?"

"You don't need makeup. I like the way you are."

I looked back at the images on the screen. Lowered my eyes. I don't remember saying any more, but knew that I would not be living there much longer.

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**October 3, 2014**

I'm in a stuffy waiting room at the Gender Health Centre in Sacramento to receive my first hormone treatments. Ben and Rachael Hudson, a transgender couple, manage the clinic. Two doctors, a few medical interns and staff, volunteer on two Fridays each month to serve the transgender community. Tonight, trans men and women also wait to see a doctor, talking to a friend or looking at their cell phone. I'm reading Stieg Larsson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. When I made the appointment three months earlier, the receptionist told me to bring a book to pass the time, but I keep watching people coming in the small, red-carpeted room. A thin trans woman with a back-piece tattoo follows an intern into another room. I listen to a teenager talk to a clerk behind the desk. It's hard to believe he's also transgender. He has a voice of a boy going through puberty. I'd heard that testosterone shots work faster for transgender males and help lower their voices. Oestrogen, on the other hand, does not make the voice higher for transgender women. Last month, I spent two hundred dollars on speech therapy.

When I look down at the book again, I hear, "Josslyn?"

A young intern dressed in green scrubs, holding a clipboard, stands in the doorway. I close the book, grab my purse and follow her down the hall where I stand on a scale. After adjusting the dial on the beam, the intern says, "One-fifty-five." The sound of the number turns up the corners of my mouth. I dropped twenty pounds to fit into women's size eight jeans. The intern leads me into a room with a cluttered desk and old sofa. I sit on a creaking office chair. The intern checks my pulse with two warm fingers on my wrist, looking at her watch. After recording my blood pressure, she says, "The doctor will be with you shortly." When she's gone, I sink into the faded brown sofa and smile. I do not feel alone here. My imaginary friend is holding my hand.



'REACHING' BY JACK STEINER  
LEFT TO RIGHT: 'ONE', 'FOUR' (TOP), 'EIGHT' (BOTTOM), 'FOURTEEN' AND 'TWENTY'

## FEBRUARY

POEM BY JACK STEINER

I saw the cherry tree's first blossom today

You know, the tree by the library?

Pink, pink  
Pink and white flowers, buds and bloom

Some already trodden in the ground.

Frilled lace, waving "Hiya"

amongst the drab  
muddy  
skeletal,  
February.

For fuck's sake,  
give me green shoots!

Give me rude new leaves

the return of the weeds  
the unloved, grasping, exasperating tendrils.

Give me something I can hold on to  
something I can wrap my hands around.

Give me something I can tear and then inhale,  
the greening scent of life.

Show me brazen fresh-turned earth  
and with my own hands, caked and grimy  
I will bury the despair of this winter,  
the piercing ridicule of living  
and I will feast on everything that's left.

## CONTRALTO AT THE END

POEM BY ANGELA ALICE SIMPSON

Look for my heart, and you'll find none  
No blade or bite, by hand t'was done  
Cry not child, for this is true  
Its torn from my chest, and bound for you

Time has run out, of this I know  
The God's have come, to end the show  
Crazy yes, but please believe  
A Storm is brewing, it's time to leave

They told us before, when war was rife  
"Meddle not child, it'll bring just strife  
Listen close, beware the flux!"  
But they didn't care, the damn stupid fucks

The Storm has come, the panic has grown  
It's full of fury, a heart of stone  
Weep not child, come to my arm  
I'll shield you away, safe from all harm

I hear you now, my weeping child  
You seem so small, all meek and mild  
Fear not now, just hold on tight  
Clutch this beating heart, it is your light

The Storm has passed, and all is gone  
The world is changed, the night is long  
Smile now child, don't be so blue  
The sun will soon rise, and shine on you

# THE DOOR

FICTION BY KAITLYN STONE

A gaggle of girls made their way out of the ladies' room into the slowly emptying J.C. Penny. The sun was setting outside the glass doors nearby. The mall would be closing soon. The last, indecisive shoppers rushed to make their purchases before the doors closed. Cara just stood there, staring at the large, suddenly intimidating door.

They can go in just fine, she thought to herself. They get a group. Why don't I have a group? That would make this easier.

"Come on." She revved herself up. "Come on, there's almost no one left now. It'll be fine." Taking one final glance at her clothing, convinced that they were androgynous enough, she made her way for the door, only to swerve at the last minute, finding herself in the men's room.

Her eyes got heavy and her vision was blurry. She felt disgusting. A freak. She left the room quickly and made another lap around the store, looking at jackets that would probably look amazing on her, but that she knew she would never buy. The clocks scattered here and there all said what she already knew. She had about ten minutes to get out of the store before a security guard came by and made her leave.

She found herself by the restrooms again. "You're an adult," she told herself. "Well, almost anyway. This shouldn't be so difficult. This is something every other girl in the world does on a daily basis." She slumped. The door was made of a dark wood. She could tell just by looking at it that it was sturdy, but nothing too amazing. It wasn't the diamond ring that would impress other restrooms in other stores, but it might make the restrooms at public schools a little jealous.

But to her, it was huge. It was the Wall of Jericho, built to keep her and others like her out. The little girl with a cute little dress, white paint against a black square, mocked her. She could feel the little demon staring her down, sizing her up, and looking at her sideways, wondering if she really belonged.

Cara wanted to stand up, and stare back. She wanted to scream, and yell, and hit the door. "No, I don't belong, but I'm damn trying, aren't I?" She wanted to cry and heave and be held. More than anything, she wanted someone to go in with her. She wanted a friend who would understand, and walk her inside, and just be there with her for a minute.

As if hearing her prayers, and feeling determined to stomp on them, one of her classmates walked by. "Dylan?" he said, obviously curious as to why she was sitting on the floor against the wall while the employees closed up around her.

She cringed visibly at the sound of that name, before she heard herself say, "Hey Tim. Whatcha doin' here so late?" She felt herself curl up inside at the sound of her voice.

"Came to get a few things from GameStop." He held up a bag. "My ride's comin'. Why are you still here?"

"Eh, better than being at home." At least she didn't have to lie.

"Oh. Hey, you played this yet?" He took some game out of his bag and showed it off. No, she hadn't played it yet, and she couldn't care less. She just wanted him to leave, in case she finally got the courage to make her move.

"Nah," she replied. "But I've heard good things about it.

"Yeah, it's got this cool mechanic..."

She tuned him out. He was so into the game and she was so experienced with her persona that she barely had to concentrate while he went on about it. She would give him a nod, or an "Uh-huh," and maybe make some comment about something, and he just went on without a clue.

After what seemed like hours, a car pulled up outside, and Tim finally said, "Hey, gotta go. See ya in class," and Cara waved him off.

She sighed. If she had done anything to encourage herself before, her meeting with Tim destroyed it. She rolled her head back and stared at the ceiling. She couldn't have much longer before the security guard made his round. Outside, the sun was almost gone, and she knew she would be walking home in the dark. She had to make this trip worth it.

She tugged at her purple bracelet, twisted her hair, and worried of what would happen if the guard saw her walk in. What would he think? What would anyone think? What if Tim had walked by a little later, and he had seen her go in? Would he tell anyone? Would it matter?

There were only a few minutes left. She was sure she was the only customer left in the store, and so she finally allowed herself to cry. She wiped tear after tear off of her face. It wasn't fair, but she didn't know how to change it. She knew other people did. She heard of other people through the internet—her only safe haven—who were able to walk into the ladies room, and actually use it. That was still light-years off for her, but she just wanted to go in. Just be in there for a minute.

It wasn't fair. She should be allowed to go in if she wanted. She felt defiant now. She patted herself down again, sure that she could pass if she just didn't talk. She brushed her hair to the front of her shoulders, and readied herself.

When she heard the jangling of keys coming down the narrow walkway, she knew her time was just about up. She stood. She had to do something. She sauntered up to the door, and she stared down that little girl of white paint, and she rested her hand on the metal that, for some unknown reason, was meant to make the door easier to open. Her mind rushed. The guard was almost there. She took a deep breath and felt her whole body relax. She was ready. She pushed the door open and peered in. Her heart quickened but her breathing stopped, and she took a step inside.

It wasn't what she imagined. Actually, it wasn't really all that different from the men's room. Urinals were replaced with extra stalls, and there was a fairly large metal box that dispensed feminine products. She considered buying a few, just to keep in her bag, before she realised

that she didn't have any change. It wasn't much, but it was enough for her. It didn't matter if it looked different. She wasn't disappointed.

A moment later she stepped back out, worried the guard would lock her in without knowing. Unfortunately, he was standing right in front of her when she left, and the look on his face made her want to hide herself.

He looked disgusted, angry, and very surprised. She didn't want to know what he was surprised at, and he didn't make it all that clear. She tried to make her way to the exit, wanting to say sorry but also not wanting to talk in fear of giving herself away. But his voice stopped her.

"Uh, Miss, shouldn't you be gone already?" His face softened to match his voice now.

"Sorry," she managed, looking down. She stepped outside, and cried.

# VICTORY TO THE QUEERS

CREATIVE NON FICTION BY CHARLIE LOGAN

Manchester had always been my safe haven. I moved there for university to escape what, at the time, was an unsupportive home. During my first week there, I went to Canal Street. For those of you who don't know, Canal Street is part of Manchester's Gay Village. As a young queer, I stumbled across the rainbow smattered streets; the clubs thumping out music; and the people dressed unapologetically as themselves – unreserved. From that moment, I could safely say, Manchester was the first place I called 'home'. It has its problems and is far from perfect, but isn't any true home?

There was never a moment, whilst in Manchester, that I felt particularly 'unsafe'. The village provided a safe space for me to explore my sexuality and identify, without the fear of judgement or anything worse that comes with being openly queer. It was, in fact, on Canal Street where I overcame my fear of using men's bathrooms – nobody said anything, and nobody questioned it because in the Gay Village anything goes. Over the years, my confidence increased, and I no longer felt the need to hide who I was. A combination of starting testosterone to appear more masculine and an acceptance within myself that I am a gay man, led to me presenting however the hell I wanted. I thought I was bulletproof.

This came crashing down with the harsh reality that homophobic people still exist and that nowhere, not even the Gay Village, is out of bounds when it comes to hatred.

I'd read that LGBTQ based hate crimes had risen by 80% in the last four years alone, and I believed it. I'd always see stories from my friends, about people I didn't know and how they'd been a victim to a horrible hate crime. I'd get texts from my Mum telling me to be safe on nights out, and of course I was; I would never go out without a good support network and I kept my phone on me at all times. I'd do everything within my power to stay safe and would never expect anything to happen. You never expect anything to happen and then it does, turning your safe haven into a reminder that you're hated.

Surprisingly, I wasn't attacked under the cover of night; it happened in broad daylight whilst waiting for a bus, where everyone could see.

Do you know that feeling when you're aware that someone is talking about you? It started with that. That day, I was very aware that I was wearing, what can only be described as, 'obviously queer' clothing. But, as I mentioned before, I was bulletproof and had nothing to be ashamed of. There were three lads, younger than me, who had made it very obvious that they weren't happy with my presence at their bus stop.

"Do you have a cig?" asked the first lad – the ringleader.

I don't smoke. Even if I did, I wouldn't be giving cigarettes to a kid who looked like he was in his second year of high school. So, I just told him the truth – that I didn't smoke – and I thought that would be that. But sure enough, it wasn't. He then followed with another question.

That question that all trans people really enjoy being asked (and there's a few of those).

"Are you a boy or a girl?"

I just stood there, taken aback, as by this point I had been on testosterone for almost a year and nobody had second guessed that I am trans. I had passing privilege. It seemed, to me, that he only asked because I was wearing 'feminine' clothing. Whatever that means. Either way, I decided to just simply reply that I was a boy and continue to wait for my bus.

I don't know what went through his head when I replied, and I have no idea what I could have done to prevent what was about to come...

"If you're a boy, why do you have a faggy girls voice?"

"Are you a faggot?"

"Oi, I asked are you a faggot. Are you gay?"

The questions kept coming, and I now had a choice to make: If I ignored him, would he continue asking questions and get angrier? If I replied, would it fuel him more? In hindsight, I should have walked away. I should have moved to the bus stop 10 minutes down the road. But in that moment, my feet were glued to the floor, my body had gone into survival mode, and all I knew was that I had to get on the bus. I had to wait where I was.

"I asked if you're gay. Are you stupid or something?"

"Yes, yes I'm gay." It felt the words leave my mouth before I had chance to think about what I was saying.

I stared at him and his eyes narrowed; not in anger, but in what looked like fear and confusion. He hadn't been expecting a reply, and it's not always anger that fuels hatred. Fear is what keeps homophobia and transphobia alive. As long as someone is different, people have something to fear – such individuals knew nothing about me other than what I looked like and that I'm gay. I knew then that this was going to set him off.

"You're a disgusting paedophile. Do you know that? You're a disgusting paedophile that takes it up the ass!"

The ringleader was shouting, but it seemed as though his two friends weren't quite as agitated and hateful. They had less to prove it seemed.

"Come on man, he's just waiting for his bus." As one of his friends tried to challenge him, I couldn't word to him how much hope I had for him.

"Fuck off."

He rounds back on me. "Do you have a sick faggy boyfriend too? You're disgusting, do you know that? You're absolutely sick, you make me sick."

Then he spits on me, and I back off. I feel like now is an appropriate time to mention that throughout this whole exchange, people were walking past; hurrying with their shopping, conversing, and clearly within earshot of what was going on. There were even people stood at

the bus stop with me. Not once did they ask if I was okay.

"You know, one day you're going to look back on this and feel embarrassed by what you're saying. I hope you know that." I looked him in the eye whilst I said this, feeling brave, and then at his two friends (who were already embarrassed).

I knew that the words coming out of his mouth weren't his own, and that they were learned from someone much older – maybe from someone at home. But just as quickly as you can learn something, you can learn that something is wrong. I wanted him to know that he could call me what he wanted, but I wasn't going to stay silent as that would make him think he'd won.

"I'll fucking kill you, you fag. I'll fucking knock your lights out."

One of his friends piped up. "Come on mate, are you homophobic? My uncle is gay."

"I'm not fucking homophobic."

He then looked at me and swung, his small fist connecting with my cheek. I didn't have the time to process what had happened, but looking back, how much fear had risen in him? How confused must he have been to have said he wasn't homophobic and then commit an act of violence in retaliation? He'd certainly looked confused; scared even.

Just as he threatened to swing again, the bus pulled around the corner and they lined up to get on. I held back. There was no way I was getting on that bus if they were – self-preservation had finally kicked in. I could now feel the reality of what had just happened. The prickle of tears were irritating my eyes, but there was no way I was going to let them see that they had beaten me down. In a spur of the moment decision, I joined the queue to get onto the bus, deciding that even if they were going to attack me for no reason, I would not let them win. I had just as much right as they did to get onto that bus.

The queue was not moving, and I could see the boys arguing with the driver about something. I guessed that he had seen their behaviour whilst driving up and wouldn't let them on.

"You're a fucking faggot too, you might as well be fucking him up the ass."

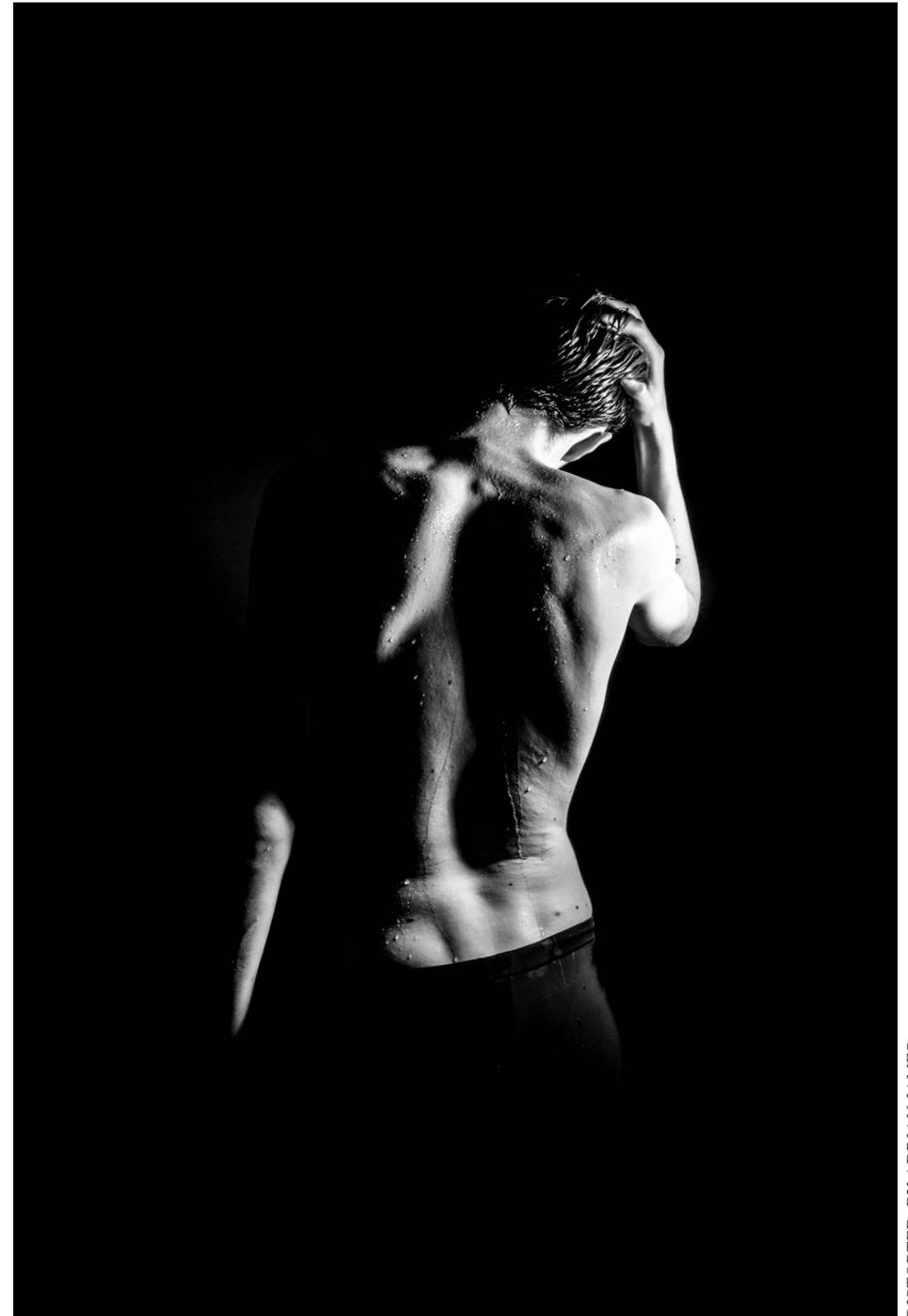
I saw them gesture to me, but knew they weren't getting on that bus. The two quieter lads got off first, keeping their heads down. The ringleader got off last, after causing a scene with the driver, and I made a final exchange of eye contact with him. He may have landed a swing, but I was the one getting on the bus, which was the victory I needed in that situation.

For days after, I was in shock. I feared going out of the house, as I began to expect the worst from everyone. Even though I wasn't badly hurt, that boy's words kept replaying in my head. When I held hands with my boyfriend, I could hear him calling me a sick faggot. When I spoke, I questioned whether my voice sounded masculine enough.

I knew that being ashamed of who I am, was never in my character, nor should it be now. That boy's words and actions, fuelled by fear, should not affect my life. Fear should never dictate someone's life. Their hatred was used to drive me back into being the person I was before I found my safe haven. His punch was a reminder that I should stay in my lane and not be confident, but looking back, my victory was knowing that I got on that bus and they didn't.

When I told my Mum what had happened, she told me I needed to 'be more careful'. I'll say now what I said to her then: I am careful. I never go looking for trouble. However, being visibly queer is to walk with a target on your back. The majority of the time, people turn a blind eye to you – they don't waste their energy. On that one occasion they did, it was a situation I could do nothing about. I could hide who I am and go through my day-to-day life trying to masquerade as someone I'm not, or I could have said nothing that day, but I don't think the outcome would have changed. If anything my words gave them something to think about.

Canal Street is still my safe haven. The experiences I have there cannot be erased by hatred or fear. Years spent discovering who I am cannot be erased by senseless violence. By hiding away, you're letting the hatred win; by not speaking up when you see something, you're letting the hatred win. As a community our victories aren't always the massive things - the freedom to be our authentic selves is the ultimate victory, and sometimes it can be as simple as dusting yourself off and getting on that bus.





DISTORTED BY ADRIAN JAMES

## CONTRIBUTORS

IN ORDER OF PUBLICATION

**Kelli Baron** is a trans woman from the US, with a Master's degree in Social and Political Philosophy. She has said that she has been fortunate to live an interesting and full life, populated with amazing people and interesting experiences; and although she doesn't think of herself as a writer, she likes to tell stories. She is currently retired due to a heart condition, and spends what energy she has volunteering with a local transgender support organization and hanging out with her 8 year old son.

**Eric Sartore** is an Archaeology student from Padua, an artist, and an aspiring writer of fantasy books. 'Rebirth of the Phoenix' is a watercolour and pen piece, which was created when he was trying to escape dysphoria and imagining the feeling of when he would be able to transition.

**Kade Alexander** is an aspiring writer and journalist from Twin Cities, Minnesota, currently working on his first novel. 'As Leaves Fall' is a poetry piece, covering romantic themes.

**Robin Nelson** is currently a student of creative writing who specialises in fiction, from Runcorn.

**Josslyn Turner** is a writer, poet, and artist based in Modesto, CA. She is an English Major at Modesto Junior College and her publishing credits include The Celebration of the Humanities at MJC and South 85 Journal. 'The Persistence of Loneliness' is essay about the moments of loneliness she felt in the early stages of her transition.

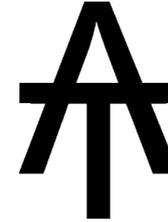
**Jack Steiner** is a writer, poet, artist, photographer, musician and stylist from Bristol, he is passionate about making the invisible visible and speaking out both personal and political "blunt truths". After a long period of illness and social isolation, Jack began painting in Winter 2016. The results of this were Jack coming out as trans and also this 25 piece series of paintings called 'REACHING'. Each piece is utterly unique and produced on reclaimed wood; exploring through colour and shape, the act of hope. Jack's poem 'February' was written a few months later and is part of a larger body of work examining the places emotional, physical and environmental landscapes cross over and connect.

**Kaitlyn Stone** is 22 years old and pursuing her bachelors in English with a Creative Writing minor. She realised she was trans when she was 15, and finally came out when she was 21 and has been living full time as a woman for a little over a year. Her story 'The Door' is loosely based on her experiences starting to use the women's restroom before she came out, when she felt the most vulnerable.

**Angela Alice Simpson** is a writer and artist of various talents residing in Skelmersdale, Lancashire. Her piece 'Contralto at the End' is inspired by her character, Contralto Grave, a transgender bard in a fantasy world.

**Charlie Logan** is a 21 year old queer, trans masculine individual who resides between Manchester (where he attends university) and Lancaster (where he lives with his wonderful partner). He is currently a third year English Literature and Creative Writing student, however his passion lies within journalism and creative non fiction. He currently writes for a couple of magazines/blogs, and focus the majority of his work on queer voices and narratives.

**Adrian James** is a 22 year old artist and photographer, who studied photography at college and now has a Bachelor's degree in the same field. He loves to mix art styles and connect photography with art to create fine art pieces.



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