

# OUTWORD BOUND PRIZE-WINNERS ANTHOLOGY



About OutNord Bound

The OutWord Bound LGBT Creative Writing Competition was set up in 2016 as a joint school outreach project by York LGBT Forum and York LGBT History.

The competition has been promoted at approximately eighteen secondary schools in York but the number of participating schools is much lower. Particular thanks must go to Millthorpe School and Manor Church of England Academy who have generated particular interest in the competition amongst students.

For the first year of the competition we split the prizes between two age groups, Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, but found in later years that participation was most likely to come from students in the 12 to 14 age range and accordingly we merged the age categories into one, having received little or no participation from GCSE students. With generous prizes including a book for each prize winner and prizes of up to £100 in vouchers, we would love to see more participation from schools who have not yet participated, both to give a voice to more students and to aid the understanding of LGBT+ issues in all schools.

On average we typically receive between 25 and 35 entries in a given year. Although the themes vary, a number of the entries continue to grapple with the issues young LGBT people are experiencing, indicating that there are still children within schools who are scared to live as their true selves or who experience or observe bullying of LGBT people. A number of the entries are bright, uplifting stories, but the broad spectrum of content implies there is still work to be done in letting LGBT school children know they are supported.

The York LGBT Forum and York LGBT History are very grateful to the schools who have consistently supported this competition and have helped raise awareness of the charitable work being undertaken to support young LGBT people in the North Yorkshire area. We hope that all schools enjoy reading these entries and look forward to speaking with each school individually in September 2019 when we will be launching our next OutWord Bound competition. We hope to collect entries for the next round of the competition in January 2020 so the awards ceremony can run as part of LGBT History Month in February 2020.

The entries have been anonymised to take a consistent approach across all the entries as some participants specified they would rather retain anonymity in any publications. Over its three-year run, the prizes have been sponsored by the York LGBT Forum and the prize-giving awards ceremony has been generously hosted by Aviva.

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The Costs Of Love

Like most games it'd happen at school Amongst the innocent rhymes and weak words, a serenade of sayings that were harmless Like the rules of Simon Says These were the rules of love

To our parents we looked up and in turn they passed down the urgency of love
A powerful pact connecting men and women
Or to them boys and girls
Rule one

I knew I was different Amiss from the armies Cut from the crowds of naive lovers Because I felt Wrong

But it was ok I just lied like the others Hiding in plain sight as I used her To look like my brothers

Two years and I entered year six

From the innocence festered insolence and I found my heart

Aching

Two parts because of the names Ten parts because of him The new boy

He filled the depths of my potent heart's empty passion as he swayed Through corridors spreading their splintering summers light behind him The sun raised A sweet thought I guess Wrong, none the less I knew the rules and my part in the game
A gentleman destined to a damsel
Like a candle is
To a flame
He could never be mine
As my friends' say
That's 'gay'

For three years I'd make myself pay for my fault as a faggot A pervert A fairy in a world of kings and queens. I told no one but seemed still to absorb the barrage of names that were thrown down the halls like spears

I pulled away from the groups that grimaced when I spoke Developed a passion for pain and a personality formed from colourful pills.

No doctor could fill in for the friends I feared making

My hatred burned through my gentle frame and broke me twice a day

It devoured my hope and bittered my dreams for years crafted with grit and cold clay...

Like most games it'd end in school

Lost were the hurtful rhymes and wicked words, a crescendo of
criticisms that shattered my delicate skin

Like the razor I had used to dig them out
These where the costs of love

I'll never forget my struggle to get here
By the pedestal where my prayers were answered
Twenty-three and finally free to give myself away
I remember him walking up the aisle trailing petals where he sway

Church bells rung for my school friends to hear as his dreamy eyes shone blue The real story only begun as my lips blushed I do



This is me.

I know who I am and that makes me happy.

I laugh and play with my friends

And talk about boys,

But I like Action Men instead of Barbie toys.

I used to believe that I was a girl
I wanted all my diamonds and pearls

And my hair to curl

But football and cricket were the games for me

And playing in the mud...climbing trees

No one ever knew

I never let it out

But inside my head I started to scream and shout.

Curse the world for making me a girl,

For wanting diamonds and pearls and my hair to curl.

When I was dirty

I felt so clean.

The itching and scratching stopped there was a gleam,

In my eye

A regained self-esteem,

This is until my skin becomes clean

This isn't me

I know who I want to be and that makes me sad.

My breasts, my face

It all feels bad.

Feels wrong.

And I can't understand why I am a girl,

Supposed to like fluorescent pink

When red and blue take my fancy.

I am not ink.

I don't flow down a page,

My life drawn in a line,

I want to be a boy....

Is that such a crime?

I must change.

To be happy.

Will they understand?

Will they be fair?

My hair short and cut

My hips are gone

My breasts too,

The world is a song, I'm finally the true me

Never before have I danced so happily.

To be bigger and bolder,

More masculine, big shouldered

And to be finally

Me.

They Try

They try to make gay an insult

To cut me with the words of who I am

They try to make me feel guilt To run and hide from who I am

They try to make me love a girl To go against who I am

They try to isolate me Turn people against who I am

They try to use God against me Make me think he hates who I am

They try to control my life Decide for me who I am

They try to succeed
But I don't let them win

That's who I am

1 Am Human

I am gay. I am bisexual. I am lesbian. I am transgender.
I like boys. I like girls. I was a boy now I'm a girl.
I like everyone. I like anyone. I love everyone and anyone.
People say I'm different but I'm just like some.
I am not abnormal, I am not strange.
I am the same as everyone else.

I am human.

Escape Route

I draw a map in my head. Out of my room, down the stairs out of the front door and through the roads that twist and turn around my house enclosing me in. Then I repeat this to myself like I'm outlining my rough sketch in pen. This is what I'll do if something goes wrong. I'll follow that route.

I go to check my bag again, making sure that everything is correct and in its place. I take out my phone, my torch and my camping gear. The torch still works. It's a large one that's used for power cuts and emergencies. I figured it could be useful in case I have to travel in the dark. My phone I check is fully charged. It is, so I shove it in the front pocket of my bag, not before catching one last glimpse of the photo of my family I have as my lockscreen. The camping gear I check is all intact then I place it back into the bag. I rummage around more and finally grab onto the wallet which is sitting at the bottom of the bag. I been saving for the past year or so, when I've gotten money from family and friends. Other items follow but they are not as important. Honestly, I have no idea what I'll need. Or what I'll do. All I know is that I can't stay if this doesn't go according to plan.

I wake up on Saturday and for a moment I forget what I have planned for the day but then it hits me like a wave. I'm going to do it. In the evening it's just me and mum home. It's now or never.

"Mum?" I call downstairs.

"Yes?" She shouts back from the kitchen.

"Can you come up here for a minute please?"

"I'm in the middle of doing the-"

"It's important." I interrupt.

I hear her footsteps as she climbs the stairs and heads for my room. I push the bag underneath my bed, but close enough to the door that I can reach for it in a hurry.

I ask her to sit.

This always seems so easy in television shows but when I open my mouth part of me chokes the words back down. "I..." I can't speak. I feel like I've forgotten how to try to mutter the words and it doesn't work until...

"I like girls...and boys." I say this and it feels so strange. I feel so free now and I am having difficulties trying not to start smiling uncontrollably but she looks different.

My mum sits there for a while her face blank. I'm trying to tell what's going on inside her head but she just sits there emotionless. In that moment I start to think that this is all going wrong. I can picture her going crazy, shouting and screaming like she did when my brother smashed his phone screen, or I can picture her sobbing, acting like I've just died or something. Suddenly, I ache to know what she will say.

"Well..." she starts to say something and as I hear the way she says the first word I edge towards my bag. "I'm not going to lie, that did surprise me quite a bit but I'm glad you told me. It's completely fine, okay? I'm quite relieved. I thought you were calling me upstairs to tell me you smoked or something."

I let out a sigh of relief. My arm moves away from the bag and I wrap it around my mum, embracing her in a tight hug. I see her smile as she sits back to look at me, and then she speaks.

"What did you think I'd say, eh? Of course I'd love you, no matter what. What would you have done if I hadn't reacted this way?"

I had to think about this answer. "I hadn't really thought about it that much." I say casually, as I push my bag far under the bed and out of sight.

Mo Hs Mot

"It's a boy" Not it's not No **you're** not

You knew from that moment, It wasn't right **You** weren't right

Then they dressed **you** in blue, green anything but pink It felt so wrong **You** felt so wrong

You knew before **you** learnt to walk It felt strange **You** felt strange

They didn't have a name for it then
It was unknown
You were unknown

God made no mistakes, they said They thought it was wrong They thought **you** were wrong It was never mentioned, never an option
It had gone unnoticed
You had gone unnoticed

And yet you noticed, you knew You tried to ignore it You tried to ignore you

When 'dude' and 'man' were commonplace It was hurting you **You** were hurting you

When you finally told someone, **your** closest friend He didn't get it He didn't get **you** 

"Are you sure **you're** not just gay?" That's not what it is That's not what **you** are

Then **you** left, **you** couldn't cope No one would ever see it No one would ever see **you** 

#### But the next day, he had told everyone They laughed about it They laughed about **you**

"Trannie, you're a trainer"
It was entertainment
You were their entertainment

When **you** locked **yourself** away There were rumours about it There were rumours about **you** 

Picking up the knife **you** thought They don't want it in their lives They don't want **you** in their lives

But how wrong **you** were, staring into the abyss They would learn what it is They would learn what **you** are

As they came rushing into the room, screaming at the sight It turned into a blessing **You** turned into a blessing From that moment on, **you** were valued People started to understand it People started to understand **you** 

When **you** said it out loud for the first time It felt right **You** felt right

"This is my daughter", "This is my sister"
Yes it is
Yes **you** are

I don't think I have had that much of a different childhood than other kids. Quite a few people think that children need a mum and dad but I think I have shown them different. I have had the same kinds of experiences as everyone else, have friends and get on with people just like anyone else. The reason people may think I am different is because I have two mums. I was adopted in February 2006. I was the first child to be adopted by gay parents in East Riding. I first realised it was a bit different when I was in the woods with one of them and said to her "You're my mummy and my other mummy is at work".

Then I started school. At first from what I have heard, I found it very hard to leave my mums, but over time I got used to it. No one at school ever commented or comments now about me having gay parents. It was and still is normal to everyone else. Which is nice and makes me feel like I fitted in and still do, which I think is one of the reasons I think I actually decided that school really wasn't too bad after all. Now I am in secondary and still there is nothing different. Quite a few people in my year now have stepparents or single parents. Also people don't notice I have two mums unless I tell them. One of my friends didn't realise for a year and a half until I told him.

The only place where it's been questioned is at our local church. I was at 'Seven Up' club where one of the vicars asked who would be picking me up and one of my mums said my other mum would be picking me up. Now this confused him because he was used to people having a mum and dad. So the mum who dropped me off had to explain that I have two mums. He was surprised and commented that must have been a complicated birth, so then my mum had explain they had not been at the birth and they had adopted me. Now slowly the vicars and local church are getting used it and calling my mums by the names I use which is good as I enjoy going to church.

There are a couple of good bits and one amazing thing about having two mums. One way is the way my friends identify my mums. They call them by their hair colour not by name so it is quite funny to hear them call them the black haired one or the white/grey haired mum, The second thing that is connected to my adoption is I get a second birthday, where we have a family day out with cake and I get a few pressies. We do this on the 7th of August as this was the day my adoption was made official.

This amazing thing happened to me when I was 10. We went to this alternative parent show at Southbank down in London. Now I thought I would just hear some authors speaking about the books. But in the end I got filmed and shown in a clip someone made. I also got featured on channel 4 news and said anyone can be a family if they love each other.

The one thing in the world I wish could be changed is the parental consent forms at school which always ask for mothers contact details and fathers contact details. Now this annoys me as I have to cross out the father bit and write mother each time. I wish they would say parent and parent or guardian and guardian as not everybody these days have a mother and father

I think overall I am not really that different at all. I have the same experiences as other people. I think in some ways it is better as it makes me more aware if the world and all the inequality there is and we should have more equality. Also I can feel more comfortable around the house like leaving the bathroom door open without worrying. I think I am lucky to have two mums and I would not want it any other way.





Jou Were Happy

You were born a girl Lovely, blonde hair

Big, blue eyes Your parents got you into ballet class

Pretty frilly dresses Hair up in a nice pink bow

Your room was pink
Love heart patterns on the wall

Barbie dolls you never played with You weren't happy

You turned 16 Hair cut short

Fluffy jumpers and jeans You got into football lessons

Trainers and shorts

Not afraid to get down and dirty

Your room was blue Football posters scattered around

You were happy



My Story

Gay boy. Saddo. Creep. Embarrassment. These are all words that made me lead to suicidal thoughts. It all started when I was thirteen, a new school, and a new start. I thought that if I made new friends as I was 'changing' then I would maybe be accepted for who I was. But that wasn't the case. The first day at my new school. I couldn't wait. This would be a fresh start, leaving all the bullying from my primary school behind. I knew going in that I was different to most boys. I didn't like football or basketball, I didn't like the outdoors and I definitely didn't see any girl in a way that I could possibly 'go out with them'.

I remember walking into the locker room and a group of boys came up to me and asked me if I wanted to go onto the school field and play some football. Of course I went along with it, how could I say no to friendship? I was the worst one playing; I had terrible coordination, which now looking back at I laugh. There was one boy though, that I could tell, just by looking at him, wouldn't judge me. His name was Ben. From that day when I played football with him I knew I had found a friend. I knew we might not have had the same interests, but he still accepted me. We did everything together. We ate lunch together, we sat with each other in lessons, we met up out of school and we even had sleepovers sometimes. He was my best friend. It was just what I had hoped for when I came to this school. A best friend who understood me and who didn't judge me.

The further throughout year nine I got the more 'different' I became. I would talk more about fashion and makeup to my older sister and also talk to the girls at school about their bags and makeup. Some of the boys started teasing me about talking to the girls. They said I was a 'player' and I was just leading them on to something and then I would let them down. In reality I just wanted to know about makeup, fashion and hair, but I didn't want any of the boys to know. Everything was getting a little too much to handle. So I told my mum and sister that I was starting to get interested in makeup, fashion and hair (girls' stuff), my sister loved this, she said she was happy that she had another person to talk about all that stuff

On the other hand my mum said that she would need to get used to it but she was happy that I was finding out who I wanted to be! I was overjoyed that my mum and sister had accepted me, but I wasn't ready to tell my dad. I remembered growing up watching him and my brother playing football, making dens and climbing trees, so I could kind of guess that he wouldn't be happy with a son who liked playing with makeup!

After telling my mum and sister about myself, that weekend they took me into town to buy my own makeup! I was so excited and I remember coming home and spending hours with my sister dolling each other up. Since I told my mum and sister it felt as if a weight had been lifted of my shoulders. But I knew everything was going too well. The next Monday at school when all the boys were in the changing rooms, one decided it would be funny to tip out peoples' bags. I didn't think they would get round to me. But I was wrong. They grabbed my bag, I tried my hardest to get it back but it wasn't worth it. Then they tipped everything out, and as my eyes were welling up with tears, my PE kit came out, then some deodorant and then the makeup that my sister and I had bought.

The room went silent, everyone was staring at me. I grabbed my stuff and ran out of the changing rooms, ironically quicker than I had ever run in any PE lesson. I ran straight the nurse's office. I told her I felt sick and she sent me home. Once I got home I told my mum what happened and I cried for hours. She started apologizing for letting my sister buy me all the makeup and I kept telling her that it wasn't her fault because I loved the makeup and I was happy I had it but it was just sad that my friends had to find out this way... I had a few days off school after that, but I knew that I would have to go back some time. When I did, the first person I saw was Ben. He just walked up to me and hugged me, what a relief. Not matter how hard I tried the other boys did not treat me the same.

They wouldn't involve me in their games at break time any more or even talk to me. Soon enough I felt all alone. Like there was no one who cared about me. Without realizing I started imagining how much happier I would be if I wasn't alive. The thought of suicide made me cry, but I couldn't help feeling that way...

My mum sent me to therapy and soon enough I started to realize how lucky I actually was. I might not have had many fiends but I had an amazing relationship with my family and Ben and I was acing all my exams at school. My mum said I should ignore the name calling because I was going to go onto great things, and somehow now I think maybe I will....

The Talk

Blood rush, Heart throb, Hard swallow, stomach churn, Weak knees, strong doubt, Shaking hands, aim...

What could it be?
Could this be it?
She looks so perturbed,
She's shaking, it's not?
Please let it not be...

The words shoot out like a bullet from a gun, I see her open wound, face solemn and distraught, Regret and relief wash over me,

In a wave of emotions.

Acute pain resonates through me,
Do I hug or slap her?
The wound seeps deeper, and I am weak
I collapse, only darkness.

I've pulled the trigger, the deed has been done, I can't go back, I wish I could, What happens now? I've jumped into, The darkness, There is no escape.

My daughter has gone, a stranger has entered, I have to walk around with this wound so open, My blood, My memories, My past, My emotions,

Pour out of the wound.

My daughter,

Today's The Day

Today's the day,
The day they'll know.
Everyone. They'll all know.
I'm going to tell them,
I'm going to try.
I'm going to come out.

20 minutes. 10 minutes.
I'm not going to do this.
5 minutes. 3 minutes.
Oh, this is going to fail.
2 minutes. 1 minute.
Today's the day - now is the time.

I'm standing up now, My legs are shaking, My head feels faint.

Why am I doing this? Why, oh why? I'm at the front.
The front of these people.
People that'll judge me.
Judge me for who I am.
I look out into the crowd.
40 pairs of eyes look back.

They're expecting me to bore them.

Expecting me to lecture them about a charity.

That's not what I'm doing.

But I'm different, I'm not the expected.

Today's the day they'll know.

They'll know everything.

They've always thought I was different.
I never knew why. I do now though.
I think some might've guessed.
Guessed that I was gay.
There's been rumours, there's been gossip.
But I'll show them, I will.
I'll show them that I'm proud to be gay.

Not a sound comes out, not a single word.

I tell myself:

'Come on, you know this.

You know this off by heart.'

I try again,

But this time, sound comes out.

I talk.

I talk about 'normal.'

About 'gay,' 'lesbian'

About being judged for who you are,

I finish with one sentence:

"I'm gay and I'm proud of it."



Deathly silence surrounds the room.

I stare at my feet.

Then at the crowd.

They're all looking at each other.

Some trying not to laugh,

Others looking amazed,

But then. I see a few.

They're not laughing, not even grinning.

They're looking at me with admiration.

Me? Being looked at like that? In admiration?

Without warning, a girl at the back stood up.

She started clapping. Clapping? For me?

Then another. And another.

There's twenty of them now.

Twenty people clapping for me.

The people that were trying to suppress the bursts of

laughter have stopped.

Then they stand up.

Then another. And another.

Now the whole room is full of people clapping for me.

For me!

This is my very first standing ovation.

Today was the day.

The day I came out.

The day I ended the rumours, the gossip, the lies.

The day I realised something.

Something priceless.

Something that might just change my life.

I'm gay and I'm proud of it.

Hour by Hour

#### 7:00

My alarm clock chimes, but I'm already awake. To be honest, I didn't get to sleep at all last night, or the night before, so I'm pretty exhausted. But sleep is not an option. Every time I shut my eyes, visions of what I have to go through in the morning flash straight into my waiting mind, making rest impossible. Because no matter how many times I go to sleep, there will always be a morning ahead of me, full of more lies, more torture and more idiots. I tried to keep it from my parents as long as possible, but mum kept receiving emails from my teachers about how I was acting strangely in class, so I had to give in to her eventually. She was very shocked at first, but eventually came to accept things for what they were, but from time to time I notice her looking over at me with tears in her eyes, and to be perfectly honest, I don't blame her. Dad was a lot more supportive of my decision, telling me there was nothing wrong with what I was doing, and if anything, congratulated me on it. He doesn't understand though. How could he possibly know how humiliating it is to walk through the school gates, knowing you're a failure, a disappointment, practically a teenaged criminal.

#### 8:00

I leave the house with my head down-perhaps if I stare at the ground hard enough it'll open up and swallow me. My bag thumps painfully against my leg. I still haven't got round to fixing it since the fight on Tuesday. I guess it was partly my fault for giving in, but he really was asking for it, saying all this stuff about what an idiot I was-am. Finally I reach my bus stop. My head was still hung so I couldn't see if anyone was staring. I didn't have to. I could feel a dozen or so pairs of eyes burning into the back of my neck, all bitterly judging. Eventually, after what feels like forever, the bus arrives. I shuffle to my usual seat and gaze blankly out of the window at the grey landscape. No one attempts to join me; they never do. But the eyes are still there, hunting me down, and ripping me apart. And don't even get me started on the whispering. Whenever they think I am not looking: bam, bam, bam-hushed insults, silent rants, muttered comments. I feel completely trapped, and there's nothing I can do about it.

#### 9:00

I'm out of the torture truck as soon as it pulls up outside the school gates. I hurry inside and rush up the stairs, but not quickly enough. The head, Mrs Barton, has spotted me, and begins to stride towards me. I try to dodge around her, but she manages to stop me mid flight. She asks if I know why she needs to see me in her office and I shake my head-but of course I do. She'll have heard about the little incident after maths by now, and I wasn't in detention yesterday evening. It was an innocent mistake, I totally forgot about it and besides, even if I HAD remembered it's not like it was a big deal or anything. How was I supposed to know the imbecile would be so touchy? He thinks he can just go about, spoiling peoples days? I decided it was time to do something about it. I so wish I hadn't even tried. All I have to show for my efforts is a black eye and a sore nose! I wasn't even looking for a fight, I was just trying to set him straight. I only wish I could do the same for myself, too...

#### 10:00

Mrs B's office was a doddle, but I do wish it could have taken her a teensy bit longer to call home. I hate to say it, but I was kinda hoping I could have been put in isolation-at least that way I wouldn't have had to face the torture of lunch. I'm sitting in history now, desperately trying to concentrate. We're supposed to be working in groups, but as usual, no one wanted me. No one ever wants me. Including myself. Perhaps they think whatever I've got is catching, infectious like a disease, and if anyone gets too close, they could become a freak too. I slouch lower and lower in my chair at the thought. I wonder if anyone would notice if I made a run for it now, or vanished into thin air altogether. Maybe they'd be relieved when they finally noticed, or upset that they would have no one to mock. But I swear, nobody in their right mind would miss me; I mean, I wouldn't.

### 11:00

It's time. There's no way out. Totally unavoidable. There's nothing I can do. I take a deep breath, close my eyes and I'm strutting down the corridor, cool as a cucumber, as if not a care in the world. People stumble out of my way as I pass, glaring at me in a mix of terror, anger and recognition. It is this recognition that I live for, the only thing that keeps me going at times. As I approach the playing field another couple of lads join me, blank, mechanical expressions on their faces, clenched fists at the end of robust, muscular arms. They hardly acknowledge me, just continuously stomping at either side, so I'm trapped in the middle, no escape, no way out. Just like yesterday. Just like always...And then we reach the little gay wimp, and then they're yelling and then I'M yelling, and then my fist is raised and then he's sprawled on the floor, his nose bleeding. And then there's silence.

And I know that being the pathetic homophobic bully is a billion times tougher than being a happy, open, gay.



The Wait

I chew at my thumb as I gaze numbly through the phone that sits so smugly on the table beside me. It's as if it's trying to stare me down, to win me over, to convince me that it's not the right time. But if not today, then when will it be? Tomorrow? Next week, next year even? Or just put it on hold altogether. But how can I? I've got this far, I only need to hold on a little bit longer and then...then what? I can try to kid myself that they won't shout, or throw anything, or be disappointed, ashamed. But my family have been old fashioned in their views ever since I can remember. I was only little when same sex marriage was legalised but I can still remember the conversations that occurred every mealtime, the prejudiced remarks over the phone, the protests I would witness from my brother's bedroom window. And now, here I am, with only an hour left until my life changes forever.

I glance at the clock, 43 minutes and 29 seconds remaining, I've been counting down for today since June. It was the day of my year 11 prom and my mum was straightening my tie, when she asked who was going to be my date for the evening. It wasn't the first time she'd asked me, but I'd always been as vague as possible, muttering quietly and changing the subject instantly. But she was persistent this time, and I'd considered just telling her there and then. That was when the doorbell went, dad answered it and came in with my bemused looking date for the evening; my boyfriend, Aaron, He had come out to his parents ages ago, and assumed that I'd done the same. God I wish he had been right. I wish I had just come out of the closet right there before the lies began to spill. But no. Instead I made up a story, how he was just one of my friends and we had decided just to use prom as an opportunity to hang out. My parents were well and truly fooled. I remember breathing a silent sigh of relief as my mum flashed away, taking enough photos to fill the Tate, but I cannot forget the confusion, disappointment and hurt that came over Aaron's face and stayed there for the entire evening. I can still see that face every time I shut my eyes. That was the night I promised myself I'd do it. I'd tell my parents. I'd be proud of who I am. Me and Aaron broke up nearly 3 months ago, but I'm sticking to my promise. That's the other thing I've come to terms with about myself: I always keep my promises.

The table looks beautiful, although not actually visible due to the endless amounts of cutlery and cuisine. The living room is clean and tidy, not in its usual messy state. I even went to the courtesy of dusting, an activity I'm not prone to. The flat doesn't look like something belonging to a boy like me at all. It makes me feel guilty that this is all just a front to try and stop my own family going ballistic. I glance at myself in the mirror. Maybe I should change, the pink shirt might be a bit of a give away, and I look too smart anyway, they'll know something's up! I run my fingers through my hair, half expecting it to come out in clumps. I'm just too nervous, and I've only got 8 and a half minutes left to gather myself. How can one tiny sentence feel like such a huge change - BE such a huge deal?! I know that what will come after is what I really should be worried about; mum will cry and start calling all her friends for support, dad will start yelling and telling me what a disgrace I am. Or won't they? Stop this!! I'm overwhelmed with stress, and I can't take it anymore. I bury my head in my hands just as the buzzer goes. I stand up and with trembling finger, press the button of the intercom. My mother's soft, kindly voice answers. "Hiya, we're just outside. Buzz us in then?" For the first time in what feels like forever, a grin crosses my face, "Sure, come on up!" I take a deep breath. It's time.

"And, um, mum?" I whisper down the line, "there's something I need to tell you."





The day I was born, my whole family rejoiced and breathed a deep sigh of relief. My mother had already birthed two daughters, but at last, they were granted what many middle eastern families yearn for. A boy.

My country has often been deemed notorious for the oppression against women. Any freedom is usually intertwined with male approval. Marriage, divorce, travel; all out of the question without permission.

So why, since I first learnt what the concept of gender was, did I wish to be one of them? Why did I want to willingly strip away my own rights, voluntarily force the oppression onto myself, throw away my privileges and chuck out my freedom? I craved to shoulder the extensive burden of being a woman in Saudi Arabia. Awaiting my death behind bars, the reason is clear.

It started a year ago when I was 24. I would swallow smuggled hormones, lowly developing feminine characteristics as my facial hair thinned down, and my hips gained fat. Sometimes the pills never arrived, and I would resentfully watch as my body morphed back into the slender, masculine figure I had endured so far. Later, I decided to go further and went for illegal surgery. We had heard stories on the news of trans people getting tortured, slashed to pieces or even beaten to death by the police. Many family members feel obligated to kill an LGBT sibling or relative in order to restore the family's honour and esteem within the community, which is exactly what my oldest sister did in getting my arrested. Doing this would be suicide. And it is. I knew that. Suicide is less painful when you feel comfortable wearing your own skin.

"Bring him here." An assertive voice orders. Hearing that pronoun is painful, worse than the slash and whip marks across my chest, despite having used it for most of my life. "I'll shoot him. Whatever will squeeze his soul out the fastest." They shove me to my knees, forcing my jaw upwards. A throng of spectators are spread, patiently waiting to see what filthy cross-dressers really deserve. The midday sun overhead drives blazing daggers raining in a harsh shower, slicing the surface of our skulls.

"This sinner," he continues, this time directly addressing the crowd, "has committed the most indecent, immoral, evil act against our nation. It is by our duty that we crush the last breath from his lungs." He pronounces his words with a slow and delicate tongue, allowing them to echo into each and every ear.

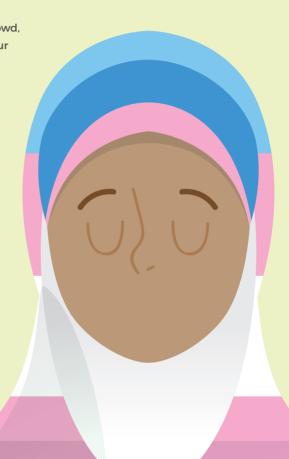
"This man," an arm is thrust carelessly in my direction, "has tried to go against natural law. You know what happens when you go against natural law."

The murderer draws his weapon with a slick scrape, running it dangerously along my left cheekbone.

It glints with spite and satisfaction, reflecting the sunlight into my blinded eyes. "Natural things."

A sudden controversial streak of rainbow flashes in the corner of my eye as a rare but familiar flag is lifted from amongst the crowd.

An uproar, two gunshots, and we are silenced.





This is it. The inevitable. This is the day I've been thinking of for so long. So why am I shaking?

Is there any way I can get away from this?

#### NO. NO. NO.

All I can hear. Echoing in my head. This is it. I will never be allowed to be who I am if I'm truly honest but I don't want to live a lie. I can't hide myself forever. This is my only option where no one will jurt me or judge me. I can never be me and I will never be someone else.

I'm only young but I know the real me and whatever everyone sees is just a lie. That's not me. But this is Hitler's Germany. My former profession was frowned upon and torn apart. So I can never live as me. I can also never live as the person who does not accept Hitler as the Führer of Germany. He's not my leader. Leaders teach acceptance. They are compassionate and care. He only cares about himself and the power he can take from others. He is prejudice against me and my community.

Anyone who is different to him he hates.

Well I am different, and nothing can change that. I was a drag performer and the SS tore down the place. That was the first time I've ever felt true fear. I can't live life feeling that way. My heart pounding, clammy sweat racing down my body. My body shaking. Cowardly, hiding from the gun fire. Eyes wide open with fear. I cannot live a life that way and no one deserves to. I will forever be haunted by that. Blood trickling from his head.

His handsome face defeated and blank. Hitler had him killed. He was mine, my first experience of this happiness. My first realisation of the real me.

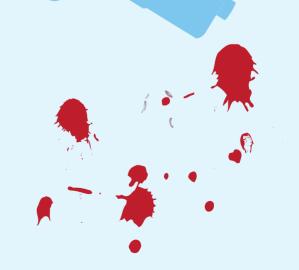
He made life fun and new and exciting. I will never have the thrill that he gave me ever again I can dress up in my dress and try to joke and dance but it will never be the same if I'm shrouded in fear.

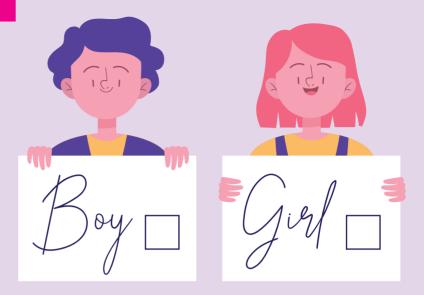
So this is good bye. I can never forgive reality for its harshness, and I can never try. I am queer, and I am a crossdresser and nothing will change that!

Blood splattered the name that had been hurriedly scribbled on the page.

He was dead on the floor.

Gun fallen next to him. The wound on his neck will never be as large as the one on his heart. The wound formed by the hatred of others.





Go on, tick the box
This question isn't sly like a fox
And it's not made for unease or to flummox
It's merely a question and no, it's not faux

It's simple, or at least that's what they say Others say I'm one but I feel a different way Have you ever felt that you are a they? Not a he nor a she, well it's hard to explain

Sometimes a boy, sometimes a girl Androgynous, non-binary, the thought makes me feel coy, Telling my friends it gives me such joy, But for others I use what's called a decoy

Me? I'm a person as real as you Not some fictional character, here, I'll give you a clue I'm here in your class dressed in white black and blue The words I hear you say are also real too

You don't mean to offend or at least most of you don't And when you do it makes a frog in my throat You make the world minor with your silly wrong note You make me stay in my camouflaged coat No one close is against me, it's all in my head But I still get nightmares when I go to bed What of the future, is it hopeful ahead? For now, I suppose, I'll take care where I tread

I imagine a world where I am just normal, Not something scary or quite paranormal The suits and the skirts are not needed for formal The way they oppress me is frightfully awful

I don't know the words yet, yet I know how I feel It's hard to grasp like a slimy wet eel, But I know one day you'll get it, you'll know that it's real Until then my skin shall remain as thick as steel

So please understand, as I hope that you will For as I write this in ink paper and quill I am sat here still hiding and it gives me no thrill But here I must stay until my world is not ill

Does it give you joy to make me conceive? That I am just nothing, to make me grieve? But to all like me out there, you must believe Don't hide anymore, we shouldn't have to deceive

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If you have any queries about how to get involved in this project or other projects run by the **York LGBT Forum**, please contact **schools@yorklgbtforum.org** and we will do our best to assist







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