

TRANS SURVIVORS

Zine: with art and writing by

Aenigma

Azzie Contreras

haven luya

Jay Robles

Joely Williams

Kai F.

Kipp LL Wheeler

Lawrence Kelly

Lewis

Maja

Monteray Oh

Mopéomo Adesola

Morgan LeBlanc

Namkeen Peshawri

Ro Holmes

Toshiya Kamei

Yasmine Bolden

FORGE is a national trans anti-violence organization supporting trans survivors/communities and providing training to service providers. Trauma-informed. Empowerment-based. Culturally-responsive.



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TRANS SURVIVORS

Braided Selves: Race & Culture



2026

FORGE

VOL.06

Cover art:

AzVWorld by Azzie Contreras

LGBTQ+ community stays visible all year round. Ro continues to encourage joy and resilience within marginalised groups by regularly volunteering and protesting as well as selling their work at artist markets.

Toshiya Kamei: Toshiya Kamei (she/they) is a queer Asian writer who takes inspiration from fairy tales, folklore, and mythology.

Yasmine Bolden: Yasmine Bolden (they/them) is a poet and gendersapphic descendant of Black/Nahīīi women who heard the earth speaking to them through their gardens and lovingly spoke back. They were a 2024 Writers in Baltimore Schools Teaching Fellow, a 2026 Project Poetic Teaching Artist, and they co-founded Bluejays & Poets, Johns Hopkins University's premier poetry and performance organization, and Linked Hearts, a virtual poetry reading series exploring Queer, Indigenous, and diasporic poetics in service of grassroots mutual aid. Who I Love Marks Time In Their Bones, their forthcoming poetic biomythography, won Garden Party Collective's 2026 Chapbook Contest.

Contents

About the Issue

Sunday Skin by Lewis – 1

The Flowers They Could Not Bury
by Namkeen Peshawri – 4

Get Home Safe by Toshiya Kamei – 5

Delicate by Ro Holmes – 9

How My Dream Grew Wings by Lawrence Kelly – 11

What My Grandmother Kept by Joely Williams – 14

Mardi Gras Memories by Kipp LL Wheeler – 16

Elegy for My Siblings by Yasmine Bolden – 17

Sarrāqa by Morgan LeBlanc – 18

EYE See You by Mopéomo Adesola – 23

If Something Ever Happened by Kai F. – 24

Womb is the World by haven luya – 27

Beautiful Children by Monteray Oh – 29

AzVWorld by Azzie Contreras – 32

Untitled Black Genderqueer Friendship Poem
by Yasmine Bolden – 34

two spirits by Jay Robles – 35

Man of my Dreams by Lawrence Kelly – 37

BRAIDED by Joely Williams – 39

The Forbidden Flower by Aenigma and Maja – 41

Contributor bios – 44

various social ills of America in DC and elsewhere, studying to be an EKG technician, and participating in mutual aid programs to ensure her neighbors receive the care she never did growing up. Call her if you get lost.

Namkeen Peshawri: Namkeen Peshawri is a transgender Pashtun human rights defender, artist, and community organizer from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. For more than a decade, she has worked at the intersection of transgender rights, gender equality, mental health, humanitarian response, and social inclusion. She is the founder of Trans Support Group, a grassroots initiative supporting transgender and nonbinary communities through advocacy, community organizing, and access to services in one of Pakistan's most conservative regions near the Afghanistan border.

As a nationally and internationally engaged advocate, Namkeen has contributed to policy dialogue, community-led research, and human rights initiatives focused on the protection, inclusion, and dignity of transgender people. Through both advocacy and art, she documents the lived realities, resilience, and resistance of transgender communities, creating spaces for visibility, healing, and social change.

Ro Holmes: Ro is a published illustrator, poet and training tattoo artist. Through linework and pops of colour, they depict the queer experience to ensure the

Lewis: Transgender and born in Kenya, Africa, but raised in Texas. I'm 25 years of age with a family.

Monteray Oh: Monteray Oh is a Korean-American writer based in the northern Midwest. When he is not reading or writing, he likes to hike, cook, and spend time with his pet bunny.

Mopéomo Adesola: My name is Mopéomo and I'm a First Generation American-British of Nigerian/Liberian Background. I'm a proud Nonbinary Trans Male that's a Spiritual and Ancestral Herbalist, Multifaceted Creator and Intergalactic Philosopher. I enjoy being this naturally driven and creative being, turning heads from having an indigenous unconventional lifestyle.

Morgan LeBlanc: Morgan LeBlanc is a speculative, weird fiction Muslim author of French-Canadian/Irish/Lakota roots, with a socialist slant and a love affair with body horror. Formerly known as Anathema Morgan, she self-published the experimental lesbian slasher Karma Killer in 2023, which received a 4.42 average rating on Goodreads. She later released the Irish dark fantasy novel Miasma as a free giveaway for those who donated to progressive, anti-fascist charities in 2025. A nomad without a home, she was born in Vermont but has lived in several states and three continents. When she's not putting the ills of the world under a microscope with her prose, she is protesting the

About the Issue

Many of the pieces submitted to this issue share a theme of “braided” sense of identity. In Joely Williams’s “BRAIDED,” intimacy and care allow for multiple, sometimes contradictory ways of understanding the world to be woven together. “two spirits” by Jay Robles shows us how inner and ancestral light can spill out into our communities.

These pieces touch on the joy of connection and solidarity, and also the grief of living in our current world as trans survivors with multiple marginalized identities. In “If Something Ever Happened,” Kai F. wonders “if it will ever be known / That I never wanted to have to choose / Between visibility and safety.” “Elegy for My Siblings” by Yasmine Bolden mourns the erasure of missing and murdered Black trans siblings.

Join us in uplifting the voices of these talented contributors. We are grateful for their willingness to share personal and vulnerable pieces of writing and art that speak to one another in our sixth issue of the Trans Survivors Zine.

Caleb Weinhardt

Communications Coordinator, FORGE
Editor

& the FORGE staff

Sunday Skin by Lewis

Born under the Texas sun
Bells rang in the church, louder than my name.
Grandma rubbed the oil into our foreheads,
this prayer could mend anything torn,
but nobody told her
I never was broken, first of all.
I learned early
that black boys take care walking in Texas—
shoulder blades flat and voice low,
When sirens are blowing, eyes down.
I had another secret, though.
I wore the Sundays underneath my Sundays'
shirts and hand-me-down slacks.
I carried her.
At first she lived quietly,
Within the mirror mist,
inside gospel songs,
Within the gentle undulating of my mother's choir
robes.
She seemed to be there when no one was looking,
whispering,
It's not necessary to go away to survive.

are useful. She currently lives in South Carolina, where she writes, teaches, and mails handwritten poems to strangers through the Poetry Letter Club.

Kai F.: Kai is a biracial, trans masculine activist, vlogger, and creator born in 1996. He recently completed his master's degree in Women's and Gender Studies from the University of North Texas, where his work focused on violence, trauma, healing, and hope in relation to the transgender community, masculinity, and people of color. Kai is currently working on creating zines and writing short stories and hopefully a full-length novel (or a few) someday.

Kipp LL Wheeler: I am a queer transgender male multimedia artist based in Kentucky. I graduated from Eastern Kentucky University with a Bachelors of Fine Art in Painting and Printmaking. Currently I am pursuing a Master of Science in Instruction Design and Learning Technology.

Lawrence Kelly: Lawrence Kelly (he/they) is a Black Chicano spoken word poet from the Bay Area, whose work unearths raw emotional truths and uplifts those with the same struggles with mental health and identity. He hopes that through finding his own power and voice, others can find theirs as well. His work is available in Voices Magazine, Caesura, Homies Magazine and online at @l.k.wrote_that.

I reclaim ancestral animist and queer eco-erotic technologies that help us move from the rigidity of narratives we are indoctrinated into and inherit, and reshape our body-myths so they hold our complexity. My recent creations emerge from my struggle for belonging as a transmasculine, mixed-race person navigating the anthropocene, and the wholeness I experience entangling my story with the beyond-human world.

Jay Robles: Jay Robles is Šmuwič (Barbareño) Chumash from the ancestral village of Kaswa' and a descendant of the Cahuilla and Ohlone peoples of California. Jay is a storyteller, multi-media artist, filmmaker, grantmaker, and community organizer, known for incorporating Indigenous futurist thought and generating healing restorative justice within Two-Spirit, Trans, and Queer BIPOC and Native communities. Fueled by Two-Spirit grounded normativity and honoring the gifts from our ancestors, Jay's goal is to tell stories of Two-Spirit lifeways and contribute to the improved holistic health and wellbeing of Native peoples.

Joely Williams: Joely Williams is a Bronx-born Afro-Boricua poet, teaching artist, and professional rememberer of grocery stores that no longer exist. She is the author of *Even the Spider Keeps Records* and *Put the Phone Down, We Have a Job to Do*. Her work has appeared in *PREE*, *Last Stanza Poetry Journal*, *The Woolf*, and other places that continue to believe poems

I've been called a contradiction by the world.
Black and trans.
Christian and queer.

As if God could not hold all my names,
As if God could not hold all my names,
In the same set of arms.
There were nights
I prayed to the heavens to exchange me for someone
easier.
A voice I was able to hear that my father could hear.
The thought of someone you don't know gazing you
would make you flinch
Midnight at the inside gas stations.
However, the healing was slow—
such as braiding hair on a front porch,
like sweet tea on the hot days of July,
As in the case of aunties who never got the pronouns
right
but kept me a seat at the table.
I come from people
who made suffering into music.
Who outlasted chains, crosses, hurricanes, and hate?
but all the same allowed laughter.
So does that strength of character, that resiliency, in
me.

So when I say
I'm a black trans woman of color,
I dare say it with the voice of generations.
Gospel music is in my chest,
Accompanied by my ancestors.
On my shoes was Texas dust.
I am yet still growing.
Still healing.

Continually discovering joy
without apology.
Maybe that's the holiness, too.

Contributor Bios

Aenigma and Maja: Aenigma is an Iranian writer focused on nonfiction, character-driven storytelling, and personal reflection. Maja is a comic artist and illustrator who explores emotional storytelling through comics and symbolic imagery. Together, they create personal stories through comics.

Azzie Contreras: Azzie is a Black-Dominican, queer, trans artist from Jersey City, NJ dedicated to creating compelling visual experiences through many mediums including acrylic, watercolor, and oil painting, ink drawing, pencil sketching, oil and soft pastels, and recycled materials. Azzie has an inclination to push boundaries in their Afrofuturistic-inspired artwork with the goal to bring something unique and reflective of the many parts, people, and places of Azzie to a larger audience. Azzie's current practice includes making new artwork daily, working as an assistant event producer at SMUSH Gallery in Jersey City, working as a live figure-modeling teacher with the Artful Bachelorette and figure-modeling with The New School in Manhattan.

haven luya: I'm haven (they/them/love), a (trans)disciplinary artist of Tagalog (filipinx), Celtic, and Germanic lineages born and uncolonizing on Kumeyaay Lands (so-called san diego). Through ritual performance, ceremonial tattoo, and altar installations,

مراسم تشییع و تدفین ، شب سوم و هفتم

در سوگ تو دلگشا ما پیوسته می گردیم
 مراسم جمعی شخصی من نفس آنست می گردیم
 پس هر لحظه با شما تا آخرین لحظه
 به یاد چشمه جان ما که تنگست می گردیم

**به مناسبت درگذشت شادروان مرحوم عقیقور
 سید هادی بیرانوند**
 فرزندی بیگرم از شاهانه کز بیرانوند
 پسر اخوان علی ، سعید و محسن

و فرزند دلبدش شادروان مرحومه عقیقوره
کریمانه معصومه بیرانوند

مراسم خاکسپاری روز **پنجشنبه مورخ ۱۳/۰۵/۹۶** ساعت ۹ صبح از درب **مسالخانه صالحین** به طرف
 بهار آن مرحومان واقع در **قبرستان سرانجامی** برگزار و سپس مراسم فاتحه خوانی (ب مناسبت) برگزار

Siavash

Siavash (Hossein) Beiranvand, a 23-years-old trans man, was shot and killed by his father in Khorramabad, Iran, in August 2017 due to his gender transition; the father committed suicide shortly after. His abityary serves as a record of structural identity erasure: the father's name and photograph were included, while Siavash's chosen name and face were entirely omitted and replaced by a generic flower, censoring his identity even in death.



**The Flowers They Could Not Bury
 by Namkeen Peshawri**

“This piece was created as a reflection on what it means to carry a transgender identity within a deeply traditional Pashtun cultural context. The flowers inside the cage represent the parts of ourselves that continue to grow despite silence, restriction, fear, and social expectations. Through this artwork, I wanted to explore both the pain of invisibility and the resilience, beauty, and hope that transgender people continue to carry within our communities.”

Get Home Safe by Toshiya Kamei

The bar in Shinjuku was narrow enough that knees grazed when stools turned. Ice cracked in tall glasses. Someone fed coins into the jukebox and missed the slot twice before it took.

Joon-ho leaned back, balancing on two legs of his stool, one hand wrapped around a highball. His undercut had grown soft at the edges; damp strands fell into his eyes when he laughed. He didn't brush them away. A thin gold chain flashed at his throat each time he tipped his head.

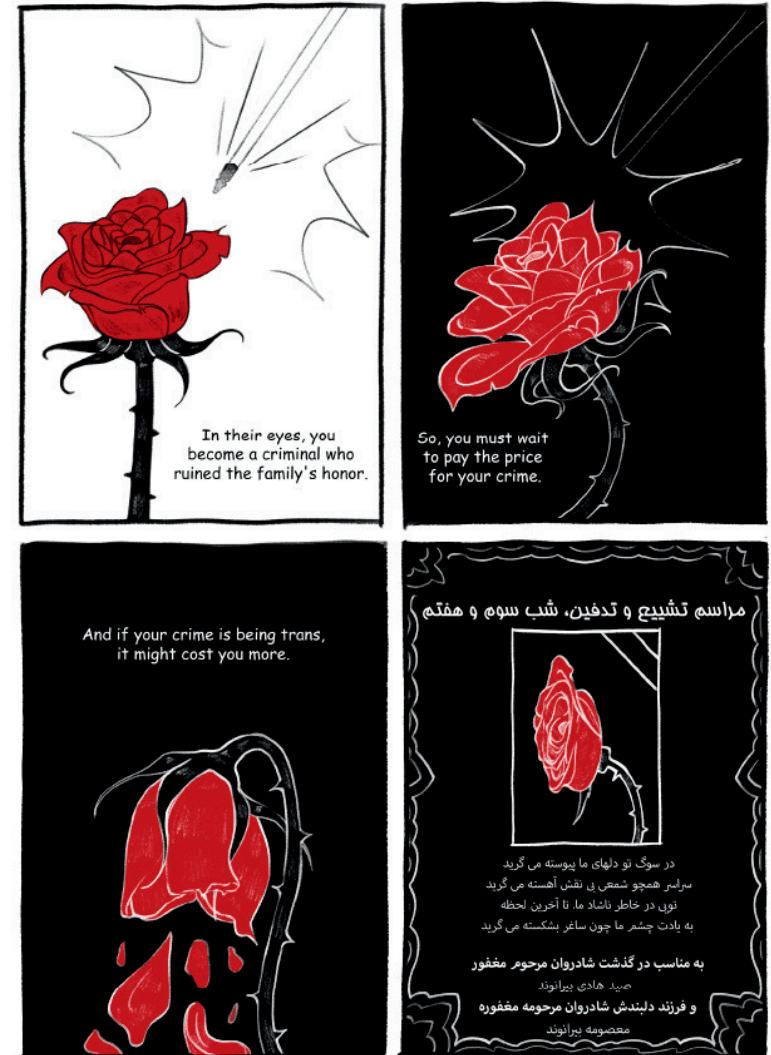
Sora sat beside him, boot hooked on the rung of his stool to keep him from tipping too far. Violet buzz cut, freshly done, the color almost blue under neon. When they reached for their drink, the edge of a binder showed for a second before their T-shirt shifted back into place. Indigo koi ink curved from their sock line up into shadow.

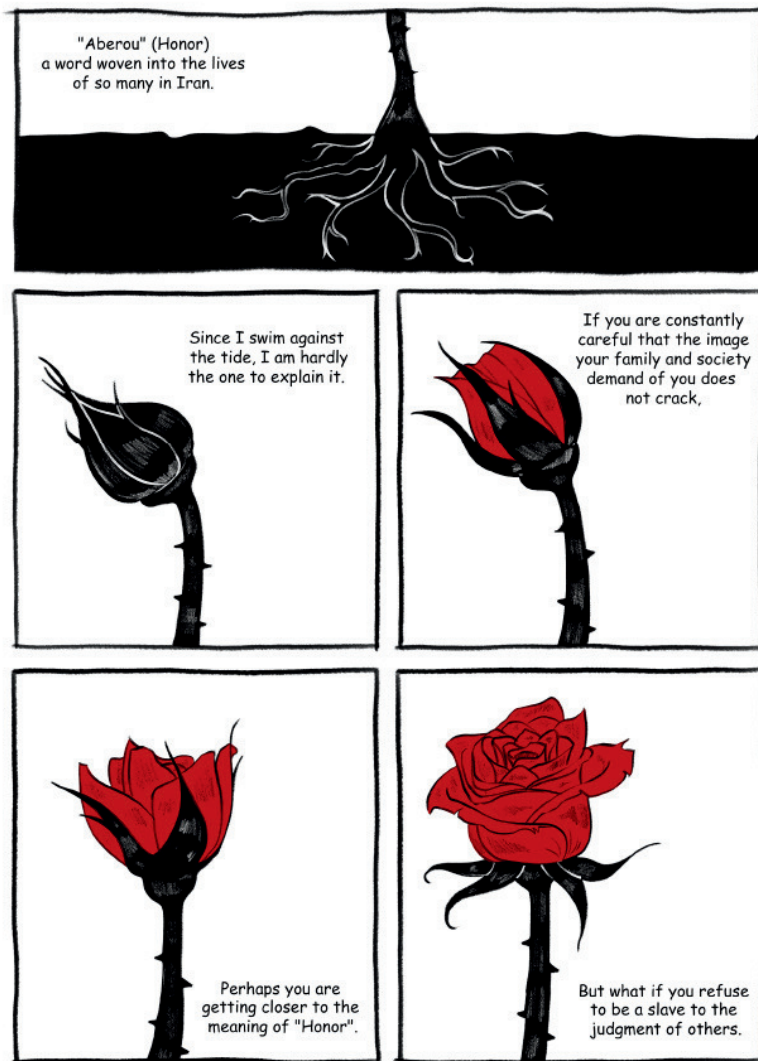
"You're going to fall," Sora said.

"I trust you," Joon-ho answered, in Japanese first, then softer in Korean. "You won't let me."

Their knee stayed there.

Later, outside, the air smelled like rain and fried oil. Neon





The Forbidden Flower by Aenigma and Maja

bled into puddles. Joon-ho stood close enough that Sora could see the small scar at his jaw, pale against olive skin.

"I need to tell you something."

Joon-ho stilled. The noise of Kabukichō swelled around them.

Sora worried the ring at their septum once, then dropped their hand. "I think I—" They exhaled. Started again. "I've fallen for you."

A delivery truck hissed past. Joon-ho's mouth parted, then pressed thin. He looked at their shoulder instead of their eyes.

"Sora." He stepped closer, not back. "I love you. You know that."

They nodded.

"But I'm gay." He said it gently, the way he had the first week they met, over convenience-store coffee. "It's not—" He searched for a word and let the sentence fall away.

"You're my person. Just not like that."

For a moment, neither moved. Rain fell in a thin mist. Sora laughed once, too sharp. "Right. Of course."

He reached out, squeezed their hand. Warm. Familiar.

“Thank you for telling me.”

They walked to the station together. At the ticket gates he bowed, quick and awkward, then turned. The gold chain caught the overhead lights before he disappeared down the stairs.

Three nights later, Sora’s phone lit up at 1:17 a.m.

Can we take a little space? I think I need it.

The typing bubble appeared. Vanished. Appeared again. Sora set the phone face down on the low table. Picked it up.

Of course. Take all the time you need.

Sent.

After that, their chat slid downward in the thread. New messages from work, from family, from group chats. None from him.

At a crosswalk near Shinjuku-sanchōme, Sora caught their reflection in the darkened window of a closed shop. Violet already dulled at the roots. They tugged their pant cuff lower, covering the koi’s head.

On the train, two seats across from each other in the opposite aisle stayed empty through three stops. Sora looked at one, then the other, then at their phone. No new notifications.

each one for its purpose, each one real.

She never saw a contradiction.

She saw a life full enough to need more than one kind of grace.

I am still learning her mathematics.

I am still sitting at her feet

watching her fingers move through the dark and tangled thickness—

both hands working,

neither one apologizing,

the braid holding.

BRAIDED
by Joely Williams

My grandmother braided my hair with the patience of
someone
who had learned to hold two gods at once—
her fingers moving through the dark and tangled thickness
of me
like she was reading something older than English,
something salt-worn and surviving, something
that smelled of nutmeg bark and answered prayer.

Both hands working. Neither one apologizing.

I am learning this slowly: the way a braid holds
is not because one strand surrenders to another.
It is because the tension is distributed.
The weight moves through all of it equally.
Neither strand asks the other to be less.

I am Bronx-born and Caribbean-bodied,
I am the crossing and the shore it crashed against,
I am the language that bleeds through silence
and the daughter still learning to speak it.
I am the prayer said in the dark
and the answer that never came in words.

My grandmother kept two gods
the way she kept her good dress and her house dress—

At home, they scrolled through old messages.

Did you eat?
Send me the link.
You'd hate this song.
Get home safe.

Their thumb hovered over his name. The last thing he'd
sent was a thumbs-up emoji, weeks ago, after a photo of
the koi tattoo freshly wrapped in plastic.

In the bathroom mirror, steam fogged the glass. Sora
wiped a circle clear with their palm. Their face appeared in
pieces—eye, cheek, mouth.

“Joon-ho,” they said, just to hear his name emerge from
their mouth. They met their gaze in the mirror. Bloodshot,
shadowed. “I love you, and I don't care about anything
else. We can make it work. We can.”

The words sounded odd, alien, tinny against the humid
tiles of the bathroom.

The city outside kept moving. Trains announced arrivals.
Someone laughed in the alley below.

Sora's phone stayed dark.



I remember that winter's day.
Messing with my makeup;
Palettes and brushes,
Sat in front of the mirror,
Painting my face until I saw what I was supposed to
see,
Until it all became so much clearer-
I fell for his stubble and 'stache,
Heavy brow and long eyelash,
I couldn't look away.

I fell for the possibility
That the man of my dreams;
The man I am
And dream to be
Could be me.

Delicate by Ro Holmes

Man of my Dreams
by Lawrence Kelly

So there's this guy!
I daydream about from time to time,
He has the kindest eyes
And sweetest smile,
A gentle spirit
With a firecracker passion,
Some say he's too sensitive,
Too much
But I see through that.

His creativity flows into everythang he do;
The way he write,
Sing and sew!
The way he adorns himself;
His style, belts and braids,
Confidence and finesse,
And he looks damn good in a vest!
I catch a glimpse from time to time;

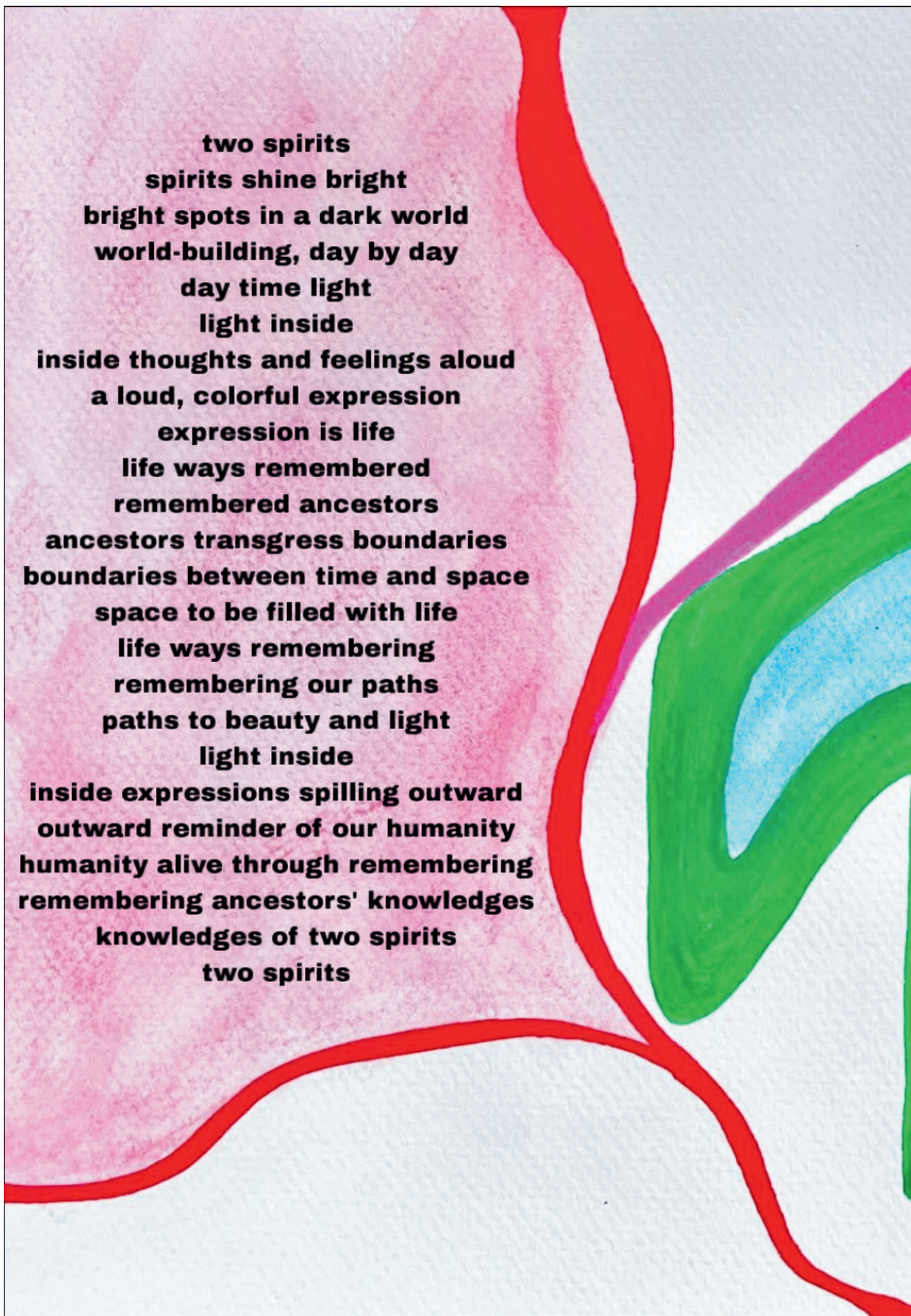
The sharp line of his jaw,
Those toned arms,
When I got my first chest binder,
Put on my cargos, chain and studs.

“As a trans person and fellow dyke, I have always felt a level of disconnect between my identity and my culture. Growing up in a different location to my tribe and away from the land created a separation that I didn't realise was there until I began engaging with my heritage in deeper ways. I have missed that engagement with my roots, but I have also gained a major sense of belonging within the LGBTQ+ community. This composition, made with watercolour paints and digital pens, depicts this longing for nature alongside my desire to stay true to my queerness.”

How My Dream Grew Wings
by Lawrence Kelly

I should've been asleep
But I am wide awake;
It's midnight
Up late.
Doing homework for English class,
Spoken word unit
I just love the rhythm to it;
That's ebb and flow,
Going fast, then slow
From the page to the stage
You feel it
The joy, the pain, the rage
It's my favorite.
Video after video of art;
Let's see what Danez got
"Dinosaurs in the Hood" was good
I'd totally watch that movie
Then "waiting on you to die so i can be myself"
And my world stops spinning.





I'm pulled into their somber words.
They're beautiful metaphors.
Something so familiar
So real, so raw
Don't need to confirm what I know to be true.
They're trans.
Shit they're non binary!
Oh my God
I see my future laid out right in front of me;
If I choose to live it,
If I choose to chase it,
Embrace it.

They're just like me;
Black, trans, queer and proud.
To know that I could do it;
Perform with *all* of me,
About *all* of me,
Not leaving anything at the door
And be successful?

Oh my God
To know that one day,
I'll be on stage with that scruff on my chin

With the words that draw people in,
A menace on the mic
And a joy that comes from within.

This was a confirmation,
Now I know my destination.
My dream grew wings
And I'm 'bout to take flight!

**Untitled Black Genderqueer Friendship Poem
by Yasmine Bolden**

i once read that one pound of sugar can be enough
to slow the solidification of dozens of pounds of
concrete. please
ruin me like that: halve an orange and share it with me
as the citric acid shares itself with my eczema-born
cuts,
stinging & singing like summertime porch talks and
walks
during which the mosquitoes go to town on my dark
exposed ankles,
reminding me that even my angles are soft and tender.
let me bake you tenders, badly. let me love you, dearly.
let me
come up with fifty-leven comebacks that i could've built
and
dropped on the construction worker who made you
uncomfy.
my mom and i talk about you in the kitchen so that
means you can
come visit. we debate on how best to measure
pettiness; who gets
to decide how much is too much shade? the one
bringing the smoke
or the one inhaling it? we laugh when i mention that
you do a little bit of both.

What My Grandmother Kept
by Joely Williams

She kept the spice in a jar with no label
because the name lived in her hands, not in her head,
and hands don't need to be written down.

She kept the particular pitch of a prayer—
not the words, which changed depending on the season,
but the pitch, the place in the chest it came from,
the precise pressure of a need pressed upward.

She kept the smell of the first house,
which was not a house but a way of arranging people
so that the cold couldn't reach the smallest ones.
She kept the specific weight of salt water on the skin—
not grief, exactly. More like origin.
More like the body remembering what it came from
before it could speak.

She kept the songs without titles.
She kept the remedy without the pharmacy.
She kept the name of her god in a language
the archive does not hold.

She did not keep the silence.
The silence was kept for her
by every room that told her to be smaller,

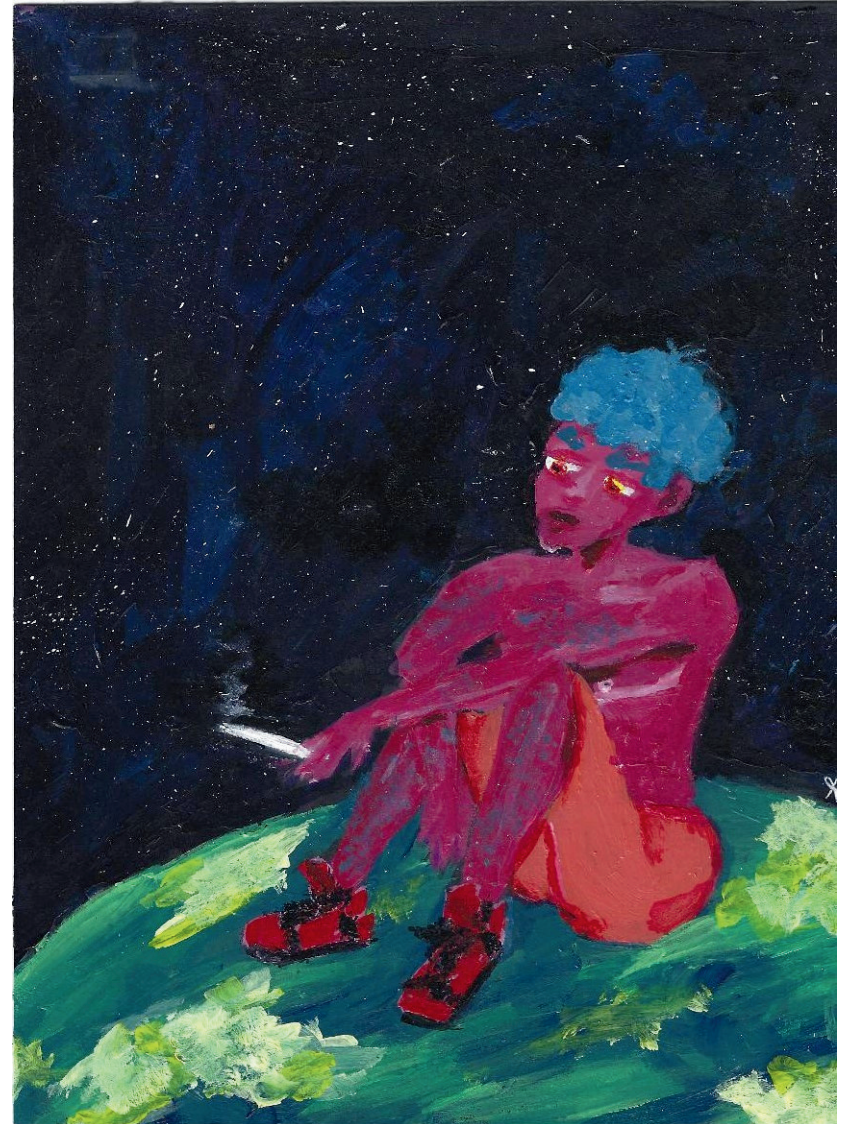
“AzVWorld is a self-portrait showing the grief and loneliness I still felt, despite having gotten top surgery and feeling more in my body than ever; I felt farther from the world as I knew it. I also felt like an outsider to my family members as the first out trans person in the family, and for some, the first trans person they've known, period.

I found it difficult to navigate the heavily gendered language (Spanish) and highly misogynistic culture (Dominican) as a non-binary person whose expression is ambiguous to most. I was either treated with an uncomfortable emphasis on one gender so that I could be easily categorized or ignored completely for the comfort of those around me.”

every form that had no box for what she was,
every border that charged her for crossing
and gave her no receipt.

I am what she kept.
I am the jar, the pitch, the prayer,
the salt-and-origin smell of the first house.
I am the name in the language the archive doesn't hold.

I am writing it down now.
I am the receipt.



AzVWorld by Azzie Contreras

fought over it for years after, the gift of an American name thrown back in Halmoni's face, the gift of a Korean memory withheld from a daughter who wanted to understand. With Halmoni's name, perhaps my mother could follow its threads back across the ocean, back to a family she had known as a very young girl, could tug on the line and dredge up a link to the past. Halmoni wanted only to escape it, snap the thread that bound her to a language ringing with dirt and poverty, the scrunching of white noses and narrowing of white eyes at strange foods and foreign names.

Now, I knew Halmoni hoped Tamara Choi would take Jason's last name someday, whatever it was. Perhaps she would have, if she existed anywhere outside a wishful imagination.



Mardi Gras Memories by Kipp LL Wheeler

I called Jason after I left, as soon as the shuttle dropped me and my overstuffed backpack at the airport. He laughed, with as much acknowledgement, if not first-person understanding, as he always gave to my troubles with Halmoni.

“I’m afraid I won’t be able to follow through with those great-grandkids,” he told me. The sound of his voice made me smile. I hefted the bag on my shoulder as I walked through the automatic doors.

“I think I’ll be alright without them,” I said. “There’s more to life than beautiful children.”

“This piece was based off of my memories that I have of Mardi Gras as a child. It’s not super detailed, but the gist of what I remember happening every year specifically at the Carencro parade. Everyone had a good time, no one cared who you were, who you loved, how you dressed. The only thing that mattered was if you caught my beads, especially if they were the good ones.”

Elegy for My Siblings by Yasmine Bolden

Elegy for My Siblings

the reporter blinks, then swallows
the names of our dead & missing she
stumbles & regurgitates, mangled
Blackness spilling into our laps. even
when we are heavenly, they cannot
get our names right.

handing it back to me, unwilling to squash her hope entirely. My mom and I had a tacit sort of agreement when it came to Halmoni. She insisted my grandmother was too old to understand, and anyways didn't need all the stress of trying to since Grandpa had passed. I saw the relief it gave my mother, to hang on with one other to the name I had parted with, and I let her have it. She knew where to forward any mail addressed to Ethan Choi, and she could say her goodbyes in her own time.

“I was her age when I met your father,” Halmoni insisted. She had met him in Korea when she was twenty-two, when her long hair was still black and her face unwrinkled by age. She spent the next sixty years with him; four years ago, the three of us had gathered to see him off, escorted by two uniformed servicemen, a folded flag, and a solemn playing of Taps.

My Grandpa Tim was white, and Halmoni insisted that was why my mom was so beautiful. My mom had spent a few years married to a white man, and that, Halmoni said, was why I was beautiful too. My mother and I were American, so many miles and so many decades from the war-torn cities and worm-ridden hunger that Grandpa Tim had plucked Halmoni from, and I let her keep my old name and fawn over my mixed features, because I could not break her heart by being anything less.

When she divorced my father, my mom did not return to her maiden name. She took Halmoni's. The two had

Beautiful Children by Monteray Oh

When I fell in love with a white guy, my grandmother was delighted. She looked at the photo of him, squinting at my phone, from the photo to me, and she bubbled: “You’ll have beautiful children!”

Halmoni did not know that Jason was a guy in the same way I was a guy, or, in fact, that I was a man at all. She had long suspected me of lesbianism; her worries she confessed to my mother, who would later, somewhere between laughter and chagrin, share them with me. But now it was a boy—a boy!—who smiled up at her from the tiny screen, and all the lines on her face crinkled deeper with her joy.

Perhaps it was her enormous hope for great-grandbabies—white great-grandbabies—that so greatly suspended Halmoni’s disbelief. It took four months of testosterone to thicken up my vocal cords and set her to worrying that I had caught a terrible cold. Three years on, my voice had plummeted nearly two octaves, and she found it an awful coincidence that every time I visited I seemed to have another cold, allergies, or some other ailment of the throat and sinuses. I wondered if her eyesight had declined to allow her to miss the goatee growing in on my chin, or if she just intended to be polite by not mentioning it.

“Tamara is too young to be thinking about kids,” my mother said, taking the phone from Halmoni and

Sarrāqa by Morgan LeBlanc

My soul has shriveled in emaciation for eight years. Pardon my shoddy prose — I am not a writer by trade, but a painter. I do not merely fill in the blanks or pester a program, either — I spool shades around the sharpest angles, waste hours on the minutiae and beautify the bulk. Mostly, I pray upwards to the sky until I get it right.

No one could care less about my whispered ambition, until they do.

3/13. That’s the day the world finally welcomes my work. That’s the day I’m seen as a painter, freed of lewd commissions and performative praise.

It’s the beginning of my life, I’m convinced. I sell my magnum opus, authentic to myself, no quarter nor caveat. I haunt Twitter for a week, scouring the comments of every ebullient op-ed. I seek supply in all its myriad forms. I’m starved. I’ve waited too long.

For the first time that night, I see myself in the mirror.

I’m so enamored with my admirers that first week, I forget to keep working. It doesn’t matter. Seven days pass, and they’ve forgotten. The hype cycle moves on.

The train barrels out of the station without me. I search my name on Google, yet it's like they've scrubbed me from the annals of art — I find nothing but my own website.

I know what will happen if people don't start talking about Methaq Radi again. I shut myself in my studio and starve. I speak not to my family and to myself even less. I practically pollinate my pores with the produce of the paintbrush. I consider the canvas so long the world exudes Expressionism. My dreams are speckled with acrylic automobiles.

3/24. The first fissure vivisects my velvet vessel, a flaccid flap of flesh dangling from my left arm. Beneath the skin is the weight of everything, an abyss of my incompatibility. The land of my birth is a sea away. My mother soil cannot mend me. All I can do is work.

So I work. Sometimes I even convince myself that this catastrophe was a miracle in disguise. A masterpiece of this immediacy could not have arrived in the high of success. Stay hungry, I say, and I do.

My teeth begin to fall out, alternating abandonment with emigrant strips of skin. Beneath is the nothing, the croon of Al-Ḳafiyy. I work with my headphones on. When my fingers succumb to the paradoxical weight of invisibility, I paint right-handed. The resulting quiver

“The womb is the root of all of creation. The womb belongs to all bodies shedding empire. All bodies gestating futures of mutual care and belonging. Returning to the womb is a prayer for trans futurity. For rematriation. For the dissolution of domination.

The ocean connects my trans diasporic body to my archipelagic ancestors - the Babaylan, Druids, culture bearers, and magic weavers - who defy western, colonized ideas of gender and binary/puritanical ideas of race. They, and the spirit of beyond-human kin, remind us that we are the fertile places from which the liberated world is born.

This piece will be made available as a print and a ceremonial tattoo invocation for transfemme mutual aid.”

adds some pathos to the piece.

In this parasitic pit, I still humor myself. Where will I be in five years? Iconic, of course — never mind my swift disintegration.

4/14. I sell my next work to a gallery, *Fy ʒl Ālšwq*. The acclaim is enrapturing. My mentions break six digits. My checks nearly do. Everyone acts as if they've known me all along, despite my involuntary Internet blackout. I'm even asked for an interview, and the host doesn't mock my English. Again, I rule the world.

I wait for a 1M beneath my name that never comes.

4/21. I bolt upright from bed with my stomach in my hands. I stumble to the bathroom, where I spill my guts out into the world. They coil like serpents, chains crocheted by the cosmos. I gape, Al-Ḳafiyy's maw absorbing my waist.

I brush my teeth, mimicking mundanity to perforate the panic. Something snaps, and scarlet shards spill out of my mouth.

I leave the sink coated in crimson. I must work twice as hard and twice as fast for half the praise. That is the labor of Al-Ḳafiyy's shadow.



Womb is the World by haven luya

In the scant seconds I'm free of toil, I scour the Internet for any mention of me. The articles and appraisals remain, but every link spits forth a 404. They're all blank white ghosts, editorials that just scant days ago flourished. Millions of hits, gone with the wind.

I search for days, neglecting the importance of my labor. Try, try again, until the soul falls famished. I do not have it within me to cut myself for the craft, to hold my hands to the sun and beg for relief. It never complies. It has seen many a parched traveler down the road to Jannah, and billions more dead upon it.

My computer dies the same day my kneecaps peel off. The stars splatter the bathroom tile, their constellation my impotence. I'm frantically checking my email between Google searches when I find it.

A living link, promising *Fy Zl Alswq*.

Praise and adulation frame my piece, fiercer than ever. This strikes me irrational, though, because it's all wrong. The surreal self-portrait, once crowned in celestial confidence, could now be on her knees. Her eyes sting beneath a sky spilling smog. Not a single swath of my pearly blue remains. Every inch of my fumigated form has suffered an unctuous touch, a far cry from my treasured acrylic. It's all wrong, not in the composition but the details — a vicarious cry for life

If anything ever happens to me
I wonder if it will ever be known
That every choice I ever "had"
Turned out to be illusionary

If anything ever happens to me
I wonder if it will ever be known
That all I ever wanted was to survive
Even on the days when I said I wanted to die

If anything ever happens to me
I wonder if anyone would've truly known me
In a world that constantly punished
All that I might be

But the actions and choices of those in power who
never had my best interest in mind

Would I be blamed for my own death?
For the harm that gets inflicted on me?
Again? For one final time?
When I finally can no longer speak back?

“He should have complied.”
“He should have followed the law.”
“She should’ve fought back.”
“She should have never transitioned.”

If anything ever happens to me
I wonder if it would ever be known
That all I ever wanted was safety, comfort,
And the freedom to exist authentically

If anything ever happens to me
I wonder if it will ever be known
That I never wanted to have to choose
Between visibility and safety

If anything ever happens to me
I wonder if it will ever be known
How much I tried to fight and escape
The painful abuse of this violent society

rendered bestial by the howling gape of my mouth and
the animal intent of my upholstered eyes.

My eyes flick down from my former exemplar and find,
in place of my name, the scrawled signature of one
Mary Smith.

I follow, in gaping horror, the link to her website. Her
own portrait fit for a postcard, she stands before a
multi-million dollar mansion, her hair a halo, her
illustrious eyes so perfect they’re plastic. In *her* hands,
beneath a cheek-splitting grin impossibly composed of
my lost teeth, she cradles *her* caricature of *my*
masterpiece.

I try to back out of the page, but my computer declines.
Teeth spill out of my mouth and clatter over my
keyboard. A melody I’ve heard a thousand times before
takes grip of my skull and *shakes* it. I try to speak, but
my tongue has left me.

Al-Ḳafiyy swallows my face whole, even my scraps
mangled by the maelstrom.



EYE See You by Mopéomo Adesola

If Something Ever Happened by Kai F.

If something ever happened to me
Would the world ever know
That I never wanted this
That I never wanted to be hurt
Or arrested
Or killed

That I laid awake at night scared
For how I might be targeted tomorrow
Wondering if it is safer for me to speak out or shut up

Wondering if I am betraying my own community by
choosing the safety of passing over the danger of
using my voice

Would they know that I never wanted to be a martyr
that I much rather would have lived a long, happy,
gentle life
Instead of one where I felt no choice but to fight

Would they see that it was never my own actions or
my own choices that put me in harm's way