



I READ THAT TO LOVE SOMEONE LONG TERM IS TO ATTEND A THOUSAND FUNERALS OF THE PEOPLE THEY USED TO BE

BY CAROLINE EARLEYWINE (SHE/HER)

Here lies the long-haired girl at the dive bar
playing beer pong on the night we met, the one

who crawled into bed with me when I was sick, blamed
food poisoning instead of me as she knelt by the toilet

the next day. Here lies our rose-colored-glasses, our fear
of honesty. Here lies the time she taught me to cook,

my inexperience endearing, her guidance, welcomed.
The sliced sweet potatoes in the pan, the way they looked

like carrots but weren't. Here lies the night she pressed me
me against my car and kissed me and a man walked by

and leered at us, but she shielded me with her body
and I'd never felt more safe. Here lies the woman

they were, the night they shaved their head and then
helped me shave part of mine, our bodies covered

with tiny hairs, parts of us we shed like snakeskin.
Their new pronouns, new label—here lies my fear

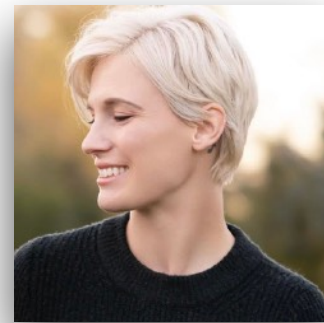
that our love couldn't survive such a change.
Here lies the day they ran through

a field at my mother's and it took them twenty
damn times to fly the kite, but they never gave up—

adjusted the strings and their run and kept going
until it flew. Here lies my doubt. Here lies

the first love poem, a seed that keeps sprouting
into something new. Here lies every choice that led us

here. All the selves we were,
and all those that have yet to bloom.



PROMPT:

Who are the people you used to be? What would it look like to honor each of the lives you've lived that brought you to this one? Throw a funeral for all those past selves, listing off some of those different versions. You may also consider doing this exercise about a relationship you have, romantic or otherwise. Who are all the people you've been together?

THE ONLY OUT GIRL AT MY HIGH SCHOOL

BY CAROLINE EARLEYWINE (SHE/HER)

wore a lot of black. Her pants
were wide and bedazzled

with chains. She had a lip ring.
Wore a rainbow of bracelets

stacked to her elbow. I remember her
walking down the hall with two girls,

and I wondered if one was her love.
I wondered if it was lonely, being a stereo

of pride, bass booming, intimidating
and loud and all of the things girls weren't

supposed to be in that small Arkansas town
where kids debated over religion between classes,

said women are supposed to be silent
and gay people were going to hell.

My parents told me to take a walk,
not a stand, and I mostly listened.

Slow danced at prom
with my own shadow. My face,

a bouquet of scarlet anytime
my name was called in class.

I was a violin with the strings
plucked out, a symphony

of silence, exactly who
I was taught to be.

She was her own marching
band, parading down the halls

and even the religious ones
respected her. Liked her taste

in music. I once sat with her
on an empty stage after play practice

and watched her go through a playlist
on her laptop. I don't remember

the songs, but I remember we laughed.
I remember the way I felt

awkward, but also excited. How I paid
attention. Like I was hearing an overture,

collecting the melodies
so someday

I could sing them.



PROMPT:

Who is someone from your past that you admired from afar, who gave you a glimpse of someone you would like to be? What are the melodies you saved up in hopes of getting a chance to sing them someday?

PRAYER

BY CAROLINE EARLEYWINE (SHE/HER)

After Nicole Homer



God of planning. God of 2.5 children smiling in the perfect
Christmas cards, photos strewn across the fridge like string
lights. God of white dresses and white picket fences.
The two car garage. The football games. God of gender
reveals, of balloon arches and frosting. God of pink
and blue. God of uncomfortable family reunions.
God of pronouns. God of avoiding them. God of changing
them. God of change. God of me proposing, but taking
your name. God of balance, of losing balance, of finding it
again. God of labels: wife, lesbian, nonbinary, queer, family
values. God of family. Ours. God of ours. God of never
stepping foot in a church. God of we are our own church.
God of we are our own. God of our Christmas card,
just the two of us, our only children the dogs.
God of we are enough. God of let us gay up
your fridge. God of let's stop trying to fit
inside any box but this.

PROMPT:

Think about a place that has made you
feel othered or like you didn't belong.
Write a new version of the space where
you reclaim it.

WARNING: PREPARE TO MEET GOD

BY BRODY PARRISH CRAIG (THEY/THEM)

At the local gas station, billboard charts
our resurrection—we come to this clutch
of gravel moving toward a selfie in the night
& flash & click of tongue to roof of mouth,
we prepare to meet god at the gas station

so sacred, saved, this closing town of sky
just like an ashtray—this tiny ember of a god
beneath our breath, between our steps.

another year held up into the mirror
without pills revolver, violent numb,
no flask or flash of bender in our knees & necks.

Eyes open wide. We have arrived.
& eye-struck by the message,

all the queer kids come in droves
for churro bites & blessings by the highway—
they take each other's pictures
with the billboard's warning signs.

county lines crossed, dressed to nine lives,
we are prepared to meet our god.

word on the street is this:
we're taking back the city's offer.

who needs a crucifix when you can have it all.

to meet our god, we laugh out loud,
don't cover our lips with our hands.

each photo-op a song to break the silence.
each open jaw a crackle in the dark.



PROMPT:

Write a poem inspired by/titled after an advertisement, billboard, or street sign that reclaims or subverts its message.

PROMPT:

Write a poem that includes your pronouns in the title in some way. Explore gender euphoria, self love, joy, or anything/everything between.

A LOVE AFFAIR WITH THEY/THEM/THEIRS

BY BRODY PARRISH CRAIG (THEY/THEM)

They mouth poems. They eat raspberries. They dance in the kitchen to a nostalgic video on loop. They watch their favorite anime in their shared two bedroom apartment. They hold cats and asterisks. They kiss them on their lips & they kiss them on their lips back. They bloom & bloom. They write love letters to them & they, occasionally, will too write back. They are unconcerned with distinguishing who's who or definitions. They aren't finite energy: they move, a fluctuation. Along their back, they curve their fingers, tracing spines and rivers there. Along their fingers, senses pulse, a pattern in their skin cells. They flux through their life for years—through Instagram, through phone calls, texts. Their first date was a Skype call where they watched them play with their cat, and they played with their cat too. The way they each dangled the string was love at first sight for both of them. Both of them are their own truth, their own self, their own beauty. They complement each other beautifully. They compliment their eyes. They compliment their ass. They compliment their smiles. They kiss under the moonlight and the moon lights on their lips.

HOW GLITTER WAS INVENTED

BY BRODY PARRISH CRAIG (THEY/THEM)

when I spit, I spell confetti
in my cursive mirror house

everything I touch after the storm,
it shines & stays for weeks.

You can never get me off
your floor. I'm sweeping off your feet

another asterisk
leaned up against some heaven's

afterhours sign.
a 90s skydancer,

see, I have broke a beacon from the sun
to see you shimmer on past afternoon.

reflective tape along the binder's dresser.
I smell a sequin in this skinny dark.

a puckered lip to stall door marks the page
of revelation: in the Walmart,

I broke the shine
right off your wrist watch

& I flexed the face.
I found a lake bed's shimmer

in its silver. Ripped it off.
a disco balled fist opening

to shrapnel when I dance or pray.
glitter never leaves—

There is no curfew for these hands



PROMPT:

Write an “angry queer” poem,
whatever that means for you!

HER

BY KAT COGGIN (SHE/HER)

I might've been ten
when I realized
the magnets inside me
were spinning toward her
whoever *her* was
she
was my everything
my longing to be close
my ache to be seen
my dream to be kissed by
touched by
missed by
her
whoever *her* was
she
was my love
and I could not help
but be enamored

the feelings
did not die down
they grew into silent flowers in my chest
until a meadow sprung from my mouth when I spoke
until petals only saying
she loves me she loves me she loves me
spilled from my lips and became my words
at that age
I did not have the word *gay*
did not have the word *lesbian*
the word *queer* just this fear
to explain my frame of reference
around my undeniable attraction to
her.

There was always a *her*
through the years of my youth
a too-far face
I could fix my eyes and heart upon
like a star guiding me out of my blackhole secret
never close enough to touch
never close enough to whisper
never close enough to be real in my arms
I was taught those fires would burn me forever
and sin was named after a woman
but
I wanted her skin
on my mouth
so much.

The first time I kissed a girl at 17
I might have been a fault line the way I trembled
the way the earth moved all around our fresh young
bodies
I remember her wild curls
falling across my face
the way she laughed the taste of her yes
the ceiling fan
spinning rings over our heads
and I may have never returned to earth that day
the way she sent me hovering into the atmosphere
with only the fear that this moment might not be real

and these kisses
and her cheek and her neck and her shoulder
and her

and her
and her
moving up so close
to the wild magnet of me
might just be a fleeting dream
but it wasn't a dream
it was

love
real love
my first love

and her name stays with me
folded into my skin
and I can remember her in poems
and be right there again
two budding young flowers
opening to each others fingers
how the memories linger after 20 years
she is married now
to a man
has two beautiful children
we don't speak
and I like
to think
it is because
there is still a part of her
that remembers
how I trembled
and to no fault of hers
or mine
love sometimes
makes strangers out of lovers

but I can write her into a poem
and thank her

always

for being
real.



PROMPT:

Think about your first kiss, or your first love. Write a poem remembering that moment, or that time in your life. Describe a memory or scene with that person using sensory details. From a place of tenderness, thank that person.

LESBIAN FLOWER

BY KAI COGGIN (SHE/HER)

(for Sappho)

Our hillside is blooming pale purple and blue this morning,
lush with a rush of color after the rains, soft heart-shaped
leaves, pushing up through soil and splaying themselves open
across the meadow, vulnerable, fresh, saying *I am love itself*.

Newly sprung springtime is unfolding and I bend at the waist
into the lushness, don't waste a moment fretting about guessing
the names of these wild flowering things—the naturalist in me
needs their true botanical handles. I zoom in with my plant ID app
and snap to reveal the common blue violet, *Viola sororia*, also known as
lesbian flower—what perfection, what queer botany, what synchronistic bliss
that this wildflower kissing by the thousands the whole of our hillside is called
the lesbian flower, violet, purplish blue sky dropped down to the earth
spreading here at home with supple hearts underfoot. *The violet's nectar* says the app
is jarred loose by butterflies and bees who must burrow deep inside
the flower to reach its sweetness... lesbian flower burrow deep, shake
me loose, nectar-sweet blooms all along our wild valley, our hills and curves.

From the isle of Lesbos, Sappho speaks in her Ode to Aphrodite—
Many crowns of violets, roses and crocuses...
many scented wreaths made from blossoms around your soft throat...
with pure, sweet oil... you anointed me, and on a soft, gentle bed...
you quenched your desire... no holy site... we left uncovered, no grove...

This trove of lesbian love language, 10,000 lines of lyrics, burned by men
who could never love with such softness. Only 650 fragments remain
yet here on our hillside, my lover and I walk barefoot in the after-wet rain,
crush violets, their edible petals and heart-shaped leaves, stepping toward
each other's heart-shaped hearts and heart-shaped hands, lips and tongues,
burrow deep for the nectar, edible flowers, lesbian flower, common blue violet,
fragments burned into seeds over millennia blooming here, purpling blue free and wild,
10,000 lines of lyrics open and blushing lush wet petals, garlands and wreaths of violets,
laurels of violets, laureate of lesbian flowers—I sing my un-fragmented un-singed song
to the poet who gave us her language of softness throat neck lips hips thighs
strummed on her lyre the music that pulses pulses pulses perennial
through time and blooms blue here this morning,
my lover and I wet
with rain.

PROMPT:

Think of your favorite flower, plant, or tree and
look up the scientific or other names of that
species. Just as Kai discovered the common blue
violet is also called the *lesbian flower* and the
history of Sappho is tied to it, try to discover the
symbolism and history of your special flower,
plant, or tree. Write a poem that weaves that
symbolism into your identity. Or write a poem as
that flower, plant, or tree—from its point of view.



THINGS I LOVE ABOUT THIS GENERATION OF QUEER KIDS

BY KAI COGGIN (SHE/HER)

I love their courage.
I love their refusal of closets.
I love their chosen names.
I love their use of the singular *they* pronoun.
I love their blurring of binaries.
I love their honesty.
I love that they go to therapy
 and work to heal themselves like we never did.
I love their healing,
 how it somehow heals backwards through generations.
I love that they set boundaries and choose families.
I love their hairstyles and hair color, how they change like mood rings.
I love the pride they wear on their backpacks,
 their scrunchies, their clothes, their pins, their eyelids.
I love their fierce goodwill thrift-store outfits.
I love that they are not afraid to love each other.
I love their tenderness and vulnerability.
I love their empathy, how deeply they feel.

I love their freedom—
 the freedom that my generation wished for,
 the freedom that our queer elders and gay trailblazers dreamed up
 in the quiet temptations of generations
 in the isolation of closets and shadow
 in the Black trans women led riots of stonewall
 in the breaking apart of families
 in the death beds of AIDS lovers
 in the bright bold colors of the pride flag
 in the kisses, mouth to mouth, man to man, woman to woman,
 in the revolutions in film, poetry, art, music that named us real.
These movements line the path with scattered rainbow flowers
for this generation of queer kids to follow into their hopeful futures.
I love their hopeful futures, thinking of them grown up
and how the world will be better just because they are living in it.

I love their inability to be brought down by the outdated thinking of adults.
I love their inclusion and sensitivity.
I love their passion, their protest, their fight,
I love their loud brave voices demanding what's right.
I love that they are the fruits of so many trees,
 and that in each of their eyes, I see a little piece of me.



PROMPT:

Write a list poem about something or someone you LOVE. Maybe it is a season, an animal, a certain food, a family member, a friend. Start every line with “I love” and pour a lot of JOY into this poem. It should make you smile by the end of your writing.



LGBTQ+ POETICS: ANCESTORS AND OTHER LIVING POETS TO DISCOVER



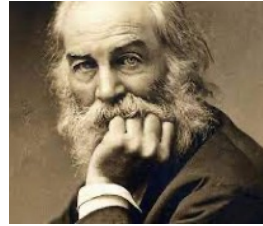
AUDRE LORDE



JAMES BALDWIN



SAPPHO



WALT WHITMAN



LESLIE FEINBERG & MINNIE BRUCE PRATT



LANGSTON HUGHES



NATALIE DIAZ



NIKKY FINNEY



RICHARD BLANCO



JESSICA JACOBS & NICKOLE BROWN



JERICO BROWN



FATIMAH ASGHAR



JUNE JORDAN



ELLEN BASS



EILEEN MYLES



HIEU MINH NGUYEN



CARIDAD MORO-GRONLIER



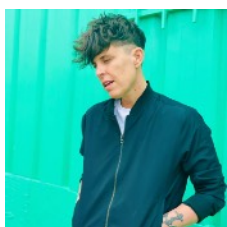
JP HOWARD



SHIRA ERlichman



ANGEL NAFIS



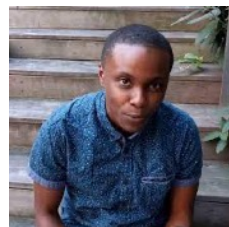
ANDREA GIBSON



MEGAN FALLEY



ALOK VAID-MENON



CAM AWKWARD RICH



MARY OLIVER

LGBTQ+ POETICS:

WRITING THE RAINBOW

MORE POETRY PROMPTS

1. WRITE A POEM ABOUT JOY OR HOPE OR LOVE.
2. WRITE A POEM ABOUT A TIME THAT YOU HELPED SOMEONE, OR SOMEONE HELPED YOU.
3. WRITE A LOVE POEM TO YOUR YOUNGER SELF OR WRITE A LOVE POEM TO YOURSELF AS YOU ARE NOW.
4. WRITE A POEM/STORY ABOUT YOURSELF 20 YEARS FROM NOW, AND SEE ALL YOUR WILDEST DREAMS COMING TRUE. WHAT ARE THOSE DREAMS? WHAT DOES YOUR IDEAL HAPPY LIFE LOOKS LIKE? REALLY SHARE THE DETAILS.
5. WRITE A PERSONA POEM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A CLOSET, A HOUSE, A DOOR, A WINDOW, OR A WEATHER PATTERN.
6. WRITE A POEM ABOUT TELLING A SECRET OR KEEPING A SECRET.
7. WRITE A POEM ABOUT JUDGING, PREJUDICE, STEREOTYPES, OR BIASES.
8. WRITE A POEM ABOUT YOUR FAMILY AND/OR YOUR CHOSEN FAMILY.
9. WRITE A POEM ABOUT YOUR SPIRIT ANIMAL, OR ABOUT AN ANIMAL IN YOUR LIFE WHO YOU LOVE.
10. WRITE A POEM ABOUT A TIME YOU FELT SEEN AS YOUR WHOLE SELF.
11. WRITE A POEM/LETTER OF THANKS TO SOMEONE YOU HAVE BEEN MEANING TO THANK.
12. WRITE A POEM/LETTER ADDRESSED TO SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS HAVING A HARD TIME.
13. WRITE A POEM ABOUT SOMEONE OR SOMETHING YOU MISUNDERSTOOD, THAT YOU NOW SEE DIFFERENTLY.
14. WRITE A POEM ABOUT A SPECIAL TIME YOU HAD IN NATURE, OR COMPARE YOURSELF TO SOMETHING WILD AND GROWING.
15. WRITE A POEM ABOUT A SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUE THAT MATTERS TO YOU. INTERSECTIONALITY MEANS NO ONE IS LEFT OUT.
16. WRITE ABOUT YOUR SPECIAL GIFT THAT ONLY YOU HAVE, THAT YOU CAN GIVE TO HUMANITY.
17. WRITE WHATEVER YOU HAVE ON YOUR HEART TODAY. ❤️

THIS IS JUST A FIRST DRAFT OF YOUR WRITING, A START, A BEGINNING. DO NOT WORRY IF YOU DON'T FINISH. THESE POEMS AND PROMPTS ARE YOURS. PRIDE & POETRY AT PAPER HEARTS IS A SAFE SPACE. YOU WILL HAVE TIME TO SHARE IF YOU WANT TO!