

COLORED AND QUEER:
A SHORT ANTHOLOGY



EDITED BY:
MOON

To my sister, who was brave first.
To my roommate, who taught me how to be brave.
And to my friends, who love me as I am.

Forward

I've had the wish to release a body of work titled "Colored and Queer," for some time now - I initially thought it was going to be a collection of my own pieces recounting my ongoing experiences as a queer person of color. Though I am still struggling with my identity, I've come to realize that what I crave most in the world is not to be known, but to be loved. We all have the right to exist – it's just a matter of when we give ourselves the permission to be loved.

So, for my final project for my internship class, Front Lines of Social Change II (EDLF 3896), I embarked on a new journey: to find the stories I craved with people who might share similar experiences. To be both queer and a person of color is framed in society as the most difficult challenge, when in reality, it is the greatest gift. There is a level of braveness, compassion, and kindness that it takes to be yourself in a world determined to leave your story in the margins. That's what I learned from not only the six wonderful people who have shared their stories with me, but all the different communities I engaged with while collecting pieces for this anthology.

I want to say this to any child, teenager, young adult, and adult alike struggling with their identity, feeling like you can't be all these things at once: LGBTQ+, a person of color, a person of faith, and more - you can, dear friend. We exist, we are here, and we have been writing our stories all along.

- Moon

Like Real People Do

Helen Do

No,

I don't want a love like I've seen in the movies
Fiction is excellent for escapism and imagination
But I don't watch enough films to think anything of it

I watch people, though
And the fact of the common presence of couples Makes
love seem plausible, obtainable.
If they can do it then you can too,
Maybe

Maybe it was how I was raised
I don't know,
Maybe it's my glasses
Are the wire frame and lenses really such an impenetrable barrier to
connection?
Either way, I'm not giving them up until I save up for contacts
Plus, I've grown to love wearing mine and I'm proud of that

Maybe I don't open myself up to meeting people for love
Because it's scary
And I don't care for chastity, in principle
But by instinct, my body is a temple and my mind a fortress that only I
should have power over
Like, I want to go over there and sit with you
And say how are you
And flirt
And strike up a quirky conversation
But I can't, won't

Because it's artful, and playing hard to get will make our union all the more potent and passionate in the end?

No.

I tell myself that, but it's just fear
Just fear of anything that isn't the normal I know
I'm kidding myself though, if I think that doing nothing will get anyone anywhere

Okay, let's get this out of the way
Romantic norms can be wonderful but kind of suffocating
And that sucks
Like being serenaded?
Heartwarming, but overwhelming
Holding hands? Another touchy subject
Cute on elderly
But uncomfortable and unnecessary
Maybe it's PDA that I can't get behind
But these opinions are subject to revision, rewind

Same with my standards, which can't be too high?
An effortless conversation bouncer-offer is where I stand
I'm kidding myself if I think that's all about which I care
It's not
But it's one of the main things
Because it's more than good, it's rare.

Cheers

To when the exchange of ideas, jokes, and memories was not forced
But mutually exquisite and free
With us bubbling to the brim with excitement over how cool it is
That we get to exist on the same plane, right as rain

I think that everyone who's had the chance to love like this
The humble and unbreakable
Solid ground, sealed bubble dome
Home between us and only us
Despite everything outside of this
Togetherness feeling
Knows it's thrilling
And unlike anything else

So,

I concede, it's true.
I want a love like real people do.

Frying Pans

Anushka Dar

Sometimes I feel like I have to prove to myself that I'm real, that I'm not faking, that I'm not exaggerating. They say, "Your experience isn't that different." They remove my identity from the meeting's agenda, they stifle us with more trivial topics, such as "James Charles" or "Harry Styles Vogue Cover." All well and good, I suppose, but I know that these topics aren't for me. It isn't my fault, but it isn't theirs either. How do I blame them for wanting to have fun, wanting to have a safe space where they can indulge in these things? It isn't my fault, either, though, for wanting to be a part of something greater, more serious, where I can confront these internal frying pans within me.

At times, I feel as though I am not myself. My identity gets invalidated wherever I seem to go. I'm constantly trying to prove myself, be someone else, be better. But how? I shift between these two aspects of my identity as if I were stepping on lit frying pans. One is always too warm. One is always too cold. How do I come to reconciliation with my race and my sexual identity?

Walking on eggshells, the frying pans under my feet only scald more. At home, I tuck away the nature of my sexuality, hoping that I don't step out of line. I talk about how the actors on Mahabharata are so attractive in front of my mother, hoping I can conceal my truth, what lies within me, even for just a few moments longer. On a subconscious level, I feel like she knows. How could she not? They all know. After the multiple unintentional outings, the exposing of texts, the gushing about my female friend. They won't ever admit to themselves that they know and they wouldn't tell me. I won't force them to either. They haven't proven worthy of truly knowing this part of my identity.

So, school. Where I can be myself, I think. You know, barely. I trade my brown identity for comfortability in my sexuality. I put on my accent and I pull up my skirt after my mom drops me off at the bus station. Same old idea. How do I be more like them? I don't have rainbows shooting out of my eyeballs, you know? I constantly feel like I have to prove myself. The heat turns higher. Obviously I like women. I can never fit into that stereotype, though, you know? I'll never be "gay enough" either. I can't even do that right. I try to express this thought in words, in front of all the white queer faces that I look out upon, but I grow flustered. The impact of the heat consistently turns up, always. It's a surprise that I haven't boiled over.

I guess the benefit of intersectionality is never feeling like you exist wholly in any space, except with those that exist the way you do. And with them, I feel at peace. I write poems for white girls that will never look my way and I mourn for a homeland full of individuals who would spit in my face. I exist in the inbetweenity of it all, letting the frying pans burn my feet as if it were a game at this point, relishing the blackening soles as they are only proof of my existence and resistance.

Homecoming

Zoe Pham

Because of my Vietnameseness, of my Asianness, of my boyiness, people made me feel like I couldn't be loved or desirable or beautiful so I decided I didn't want to be loved at all

I never knew that anyone that looked like me could be gay, or trans, so until then, I made myself up as I went along

People wielded the word "tomboy" like a knife that I picked up and ran with

And maybe I hurt people with it but it was all in self-defense

Me still doesn't fully understand me, but she loves me, she is trying

It's a triumph and a loss all at once, but it's mine

I am finding a home in my Vietnameseness, my lesbianness, my transness, which are things I have never really left, just found words for

"I Do"

Hana Suliman

It's raining outside and that's the way I know you like it,
Rainy and gray,
Gloomy, dark, decrepit,
Unlike how it feels when you're with me.

The way I comfort you,
When it feels like everything is falling apart around you,
Falling down and hitting the ground, Like
raindrops on cloudy days, Snowflakes on
frozen nights.

The way you can rest in my arms,
In a twin-sized bed,
Big enough for the both of us,
Big enough to hold us, No
space between us.

No space between our bodies,
Our minds,
Our hearts,
Our souls,
Often it feels like we're one.

We cram together,
In hopes of squeezing the rest out,
To allow for only us,
Only you,
Only me,
Just the two of us against the world,
Against everybody else.

When the rain hits the window,
And you hear the patter,
It's as if the storm brooding outside
Can't reach us in here,
In a small bedroom,
With bookshelves stacked thick with children's stories, With
children's books.

How can you feel so safe here,
When there's a tornado right outside our window?
You can hear it right around the corner,
About to tear us apart, Rip us in halves.

How can you feel so comforted here,
Knowing full well how dangerous it is to be together?
To be here,
To live as you do,
As your authentic self,
True self,
Full self,
Completely,
With me,
Alone here,
In this room, With
me.

How can you let yourself forget,
About the risks,
Problems,
Dangers,
Looming over you like an inescapable black thundercloud above your head?

Though, you do escape,
Somehow,
You manage
To forget
All that troubled you When
you're here.

"I hope to be your shelter in darkness and in despair,
In difficulty in desperation,
Desolation,
Dysfunctionality,
Depression
Fear not, my love,
For I vow to be your protection
Through love and laughter,
Lust,
Desire,
That Ache,
That Hunger,
That Thirst,
That Craving,
That Yearning,
The Inclination."

Meeting you felt like a memory

Hawa

Meeting you felt like a memory.

We're nine again, wearing tight one piece swimsuits with frilly swim skirts over them. You brought goggles and an inflatable floatie that's half the size of your body. My mom gave me a bunch of freeze pops to share with everyone. We run barefoot through the prickly grass as our parents fill up the trunks of their cars. There's no sunlight that feels too bright.

We sit in the back of my mom's cloth upholstered Toyota SUV. You fall asleep and drool onto the jean shorts you put on over your swimsuit. I stick my head out the window and smell air filled with ocean and sand.

And when we get to the beach, it's already starting to get dark. We get matching mood necklaces at one of the stores on the boardwalk. And then we found a spot to watch fireworks for the Fourth of July.

Your bus stop is one stop ahead of mine. So for two and half minutes every day, I miss you. But you run as fast as you can to meet me at my stop. The late afternoon sun peaks through the neighborhood trees. It colors the white vinyl on this suburban house orange. We wait to make sure no one can see us before taking our secret shortcut through the woods. Your house sits directly on the other side. We knock on the door. Your mom says hi to me and I give her my most polite "Hi Ms. Shaikh" back. Maybe I should have called her auntie. Too late. The air in your house is full and a dull smell of shaan masala lingers in every corner. Your mom gives us both water. I fog up the glass as I gulp down the water. You let out a dramatic exhale after you finish yours.

You tell me to ask your mom if we can go to Walmart. Moms always say yes when someone else's kid asks.

At Walmart, we stare at the flat white tiles and spin around in circles as your mom looks for the perfect laundry detergent. We try on rubber masks in the halloween aisle, and compare our favorite candies like they're our zodiac sign. We're both twix kids.

Our families sit together by the playground. Chinese takeout boxes sprawl all over the wooden picnic table. Our moms gupshup on one end of the bench. I ask my mom three times if I can have another plate of orange chicken. But when my mom talks to your mom, somehow she can't hear anything else.

The sun is setting now. Our dads are playing soccer in the street and you swing your legs back and forth as you wait for me to finish eating. An owl hoots in the distance.

"Did you hear that?" I say.

"Hear what?"

I try to mimic the sound of the owl. You giggle and ask me to do it again.

"HOO. hoo. hoo."

My hoots turn into laughs and you hold your stomach in pain as you laugh with me. I think your laugh sounds like monkey bars.

You ask me if I'd consider myself a tomboy. I say yeah I'm a tomboy. You say you're a tomboy too. You point to a tree on the other end of the playground, and we race all the way there and back without another word.

I show you how to make a glove out of two socks and a hair tie. You say you think I'm a genius. We hobble outside with more layers on than we can carry. Each step I take in the fresh, unbroken snow makes me feel a little guilty.

In the woods behind my house, I carefully dig through the snow like an archeologist looking for dinosaur fossils. You're six trees ahead of me, gesturing for me to hurry up. "Hey Hawa! Look what I found!" I don't know who taught you my forbidden first name, but it doesn't sound so bad when you say it. I abandon my intricately dug hole and run over to you. In your hand are two sticks, half the size of our bodies. You hand me one, and off we go — into a battle to save the ice kingdom.

Darkness doesn't arrive before long. My mom tells us we have to take our boots and jackets off in the garage. My lips are so chapped, they're nearly bleeding. Your hands are shaking and bright red. I show you where the vent is so you can warm your hands up in front of it. And I sit there with you, even though the air is only making my lips drier.

I stand up on my tiptoes and stretch out my arms to try and reach the swiss miss packets on the pantry's fourth highest shelf. This is the best kind of hot chocolate, 'cause you can make it in the microwave. You tell me your mom doesn't let you eat marshmallows, so I don't put any in my mug either. We share a blanket on the couch and watch episodes of Arthur until we fall asleep.

Holy Spaces
Humaira Halim

I wish I could throw my name into the voracious sea. Kiss
my love goodbye, and hug my mom one last time, as
tight as she held onto me growing up.

I'd fall face down in a field of vermilion poppies and be lulled to the
edges of my sleep spindles, where grueling thoughts are as soundless
as the heartbeat of a mouse.

And in those dreams, I'd bid farewell to fairest devotion himself, with
hands clinging tasbih of cold, viridian glass.
But, as heavenly as it may seem, heavy hearts can't transcend a stained-glass
skylight.

Dear Lord, I couldn't quit sugar even if I wanted to. Once
I had a taste of it, it settled in my hollowed veins like a
baobab tree thriving amidst arid nothingness.

There's a yearning to relinquish it all, procure the crinkled gift receipt of
the immaculate scarves I don't wear anymore.
Bought gradually over the years for my modesty, echoes of my devotion to
Him.

Was there ever anyone on the other end of the telephone line?
I've had to pack my jai namaz in the bottom drawer, to clear that
confining foliage of dying brown that had so long ago bloomed.

In reality, the most freedom you'll ever possess is in the womb,
shapeless, drifting, developing your cells to become a cavalry to
kick and fight every disease of the body, but not the mind.

Telegraph to God

Moon

Even before I was queer, I was colored. And before I was colored, I was queer. And before I was colored or queer, I was a child, like most of us were. It would be odd to say anything but. What were we if not children? My mother told me souls come down like stars. There's a moment when they're traveling through the skies that they come down to the very last heaven. It's at this moment, my mother tells me, that our memories are wiped of heaven because it would be too hard to live on Earth knowing what we've lost.

I think about what I must have been remembering in that moment, suspended between scorching lights or vast chasms or whatever my mortal brain can make sense of. I try hard to remember, but I come up short. There's only a blank and then my earliest memory of accidentally breaking a glass filled with milk when I was 3 years old on our living room couch table and being terrified of getting in trouble when my dad came out of the bathroom. And that's what it's like to live on Earth: even our first memories are filled with fear.

I grew into my color early, in the simmering heat of Texas summers, skin a honey brown, much to my mother's dismay. But I was still a child then, liked all the crayons equally. The blue one especially. Only years later would I understand what it meant to be *brown*, what it meant to be muddy. My queerness was there too, here, I'll paint a picture: a young child, flat-chested with unruly black curls, missing teeth and skin turning golden in the backyard sun, playing soccer with their father. I liked cars and trains and stuffed animals. I hated wearing dresses because they just didn't feel right. What does it mean to be molded? I didn't understand then, but I think I do now. It's like the clay bird I was trying to make in the 3rd grade, but it wouldn't fit in the kiln properly, so my art teacher told me to make

something else instead. I clipped its wings and made a frog and pretended that's what I wanted all along.

Are we gendered in heaven? I try so hard to remember but I can't. I wonder if it's not enough to grovel and cry and beg, or to love and remember and worship; if it's not enough to be good and spend your life believing. In mosques, men and women are separated, but in heaven, we were told it's not going to be that way. Everyone can be with whoever they want, you can be with who you loved on Earth or with another person if you wish. But who will be with me? I haven't been loved on this Earth and I don't know if it will happen. If I'll even have a lover to look for once I'm there. That's presumptuous, though. My friends, my family, my mother – they're all praying for a girl to get to heaven, but I don't know if that girl is me. If she gets there, I hope she asks to bring me up too.

I've been colored and queer for some time now, but I can't quite admit it to myself. Even as I write these words, there's a part of me scoffing, berating me for holding on to labels, something I've always rebelled against. I reckon children and souls don't have to use labels. Is it possible? Can I undo myself? Shrink down further, wring out the melanin in my skin, throw out womanhood, erase girlhood, grow smaller and smaller until I'm just a tightly packed atom of light, roll out on a hot summer's day and wait for the heat to evaporate me up into the clouds. And then I'll go up and up and up until I'm way up in space, until I'm hovering right underneath the lowest heaven, and I'll whisper to the angels *I've been good, I've been good, I promise. I've loved my mother and my father and treated others with kindness and prayed and fasted and I did the best I could I've been good I have, please* – and maybe they'll let me in because it was true. Or maybe they'll tell me those are the kind of pleas they've only heard from the unforgiven.

Here's what I'll ask for if I get to heaven: to please take me to my mother and father, so I can kiss their foreheads. Then I'll ask to be a boy. I won't ask to be a man, because on Earth they made me kill a boy once and I want

to give back his life. I'll admire myself in the mirror because all the rivers are made of honey, the same color as my skin, and no one can tell me I'm not beautiful, because I'm in heaven and I've been remade, because I have wings now, I can be a bird and not a frog, I can like trains and soccer and live gently, love gently. I'll ask to remember what I forgot before I was sent down on Earth. I'll ask to be a child and a soul and a star. I'll ask to be something people can believe in.

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