



THE GENDER GARDEN



TRANSGENDER LIVES PROJECT

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A SCOTTISH ANTHOLOGY OF
TRANSGENDER, NON-BINARY
AND INTERSEX VOICES

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FOREWORD

KATHERINE MCMAHON

This book is a collection of writing by transgender, non-binary, and intersex people. It is the result of the Transgender Lives Project, which was delivered by LGBT Health and Wellbeing with funding from the Scottish Government. The project aimed to bring together a diverse ranges of voices in a creative and inclusive way—and the result is the book you hold. Submissions were generated through a series of facilitated workshops held in Aberdeen, Perth, Edinburgh and Glasgow. A submissions call went out across Scotland, and some of the contributors met with the designer to collaborate on the final book.

Whether you are transgender, non-binary or intersex; questioning your gender identity; a professional looking to gain a better understanding; a friend, family member or ally who would like to learn more about how to be supportive; or just someone who appreciates the diversity of people's stories—this book is for you.

We wanted to bring together these stories to illustrate some of the diverse lives of individuals who identify as transgender in Scotland today. The Gender Garden is a resource to help people with different life experiences to understand more about what it's like to be transgender, non-binary or

intersex; it is also a source of support and solidarity for people within the community—from those who came out a long time ago to people who are just starting to ask questions about their gender.

Transgender, non-binary and intersex people often experience misunderstanding, discrimination and stigma. While trans people are becoming steadily more visible in the media, trans identities are still not well understood by most of society. Non-binary and intersex identities are more often than not still overlooked. Trans people face numerous barriers—from rejection by family and friends, to lack of knowledge in services, to discrimination, harassment, and serious violence.

It's clear that things need to change.

This is one reason why it is so important to celebrate the voices, lives and stories that make up trans, non-binary, and intersex communities. We wanted to record the invaluable stories that trans voices offer in a changing society. We hope that it will be a part of hastening that change, by fostering understanding and insight, and creating connections. The voices of the diverse range of people within trans communities show that there is a whole garden of possibilities for gender, which is growing all the time—and this can only be a good thing, as more and more people are able to be themselves.

The Gender Garden is a resource, a piece of art,

a historical document, a gift to you.

As the editor, it is an honour to be trusted to look after the stories within this book. They are beautiful, honest, triumphant, sad, raw, joyful—they are about love and loneliness, community and identity, struggles and wellbeing. They form a partial cross section of the diverse identities and experiences of transgender, non-binary and intersex people in Scotland in 2016. We have collected them together with the hope that many more stories will be heard in the future.

CONTENT WARNINGS

As some people might find it difficult to read about certain topics, we've provided some warnings below for common triggers and upsetting themes. If you are affected by any of the issues in this book, we would encourage you to take care of your emotional wellbeing whilst reading it, and to seek relevant support if you need it.

You can get emotional support and information by calling LGBT Helpline Scotland on 0300 123 2523, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, between 12 and 9pm.

Suicide: 'The night journey', 'Abbie's story'

Self-harm: 'Abbie's story'

Rejection by family: 'Memories', 'Abbie's story', 'The night journey', 'An evening in Kinlochleven'

Bullying: 'Abbie's story', 'My gender'

Threat of violence: 'Abbie's story'

Sexual violence: 'The night journey' (not explicit)

Violence: 'The night journey', '(The tree)' (not explicit)

MY GENDER

NINA GRAY

When I was 20, I went to a cross-dressing party, and was very aware that I was the only male there who was not having to put on some ridiculously exaggerated form of feminine behaviour to be comfortable. I remember having a sense of being completely calm and comfortable, enjoying wearing the tights and lovely skirt lent to me. I know that I had a sense of wishing I could always wear this sort of clothing, though I knew that it would cause many issues as well that I was not ready to confront at the time, and tried to put this to the back of my mind for the time being.

My dad, while I was in secondary school, on several occasions asked me whether I was gay. I always remember saying words to the effect of “No, but I’m not sure what I am.” The only fair way for me to term who I was attracted to was (other) girls, though I knew this was not ‘heterosexual’ attraction and I know that I never had a strong sense of ‘maleness’. ‘Bi’ was comfortable enough for my functioning and evading questions about that which I was not yet ready to really deal with. The truth is, and I know this may be difficult for people to understand, that the only term which has ever felt fully comfortable to say is that I consider myself to be ‘lesbian’. Clearly to have expressed this

when I was younger would have created a whole raft of questions I was not ready for.

I feel that I have been assisted in coming to the realisation that I want to transition, in part, by the fact that I have had what I would regard as the most stable period of my life in terms of employment and having a group of good close friends. In my earlier adulthood I was still dealing with the aftermath of the bullying I experienced at school. This majorly knocked my confidence and it took me years to build this up to a reasonable level. My circumstances now have a sense of security to them that has enabled me to feel able to have the full me be known.

For years I have been aware that the only thing I want that I have not got is an intimate relationship. I am clear that I only wish to enter into an intimate relationship within a female identity. Although I enjoyed being in my past relationships at the time, I always had a sense of anxiety. I don't feel it is putting it too strongly to say that I basically was not fully self-accepting, and in ways always wondered why my partners were there. I see now that for me to enter an intimate relationship or even make attempts towards this, I need to transition. I have also come to the realisation that I am no longer prepared to put this on the back-burner as if it does not matter, which I feel I have done for long enough.

At a trans support session, a very good hypothetical philosophical question was raised: "If there was no one else in the world, would you still wish to transition?" I thought about this for a moment and came to the conclusion that yes, I would wish to. Although the wish for intimate relations may have been my tipping point, I now also have a strong sense of wanting my external expression to the world to match how I see myself. I no longer want to hide away my essence.

Since reaching the realisation of my need to transition and having shared this with my parents and got their acceptance, I have experienced a sense of calm, the flavour of which is new to me.

There have been other noticeable differences. I no longer have periods of numb despair thinking, "WHAT IS THE POINT?" In retrospect I feel it to be quite remarkable that I put up with this despair as just a part of my life. Though putting up with it allowed me the time to get to where I am at now. I feel so relieved in a way that words cannot do justice to, that it no longer occurs.

I also used to never be able to envisage a future beyond my mid-thirties. I am now able to see a future within a female identity. I don't kid myself that it will be easy, but I can at least see a future that I am committed to trying to make the most of.

I now feel comfortable with what I know of myself and who I am becoming. I love that I

have been finally been able to be so open about this with myself and others, and at times still feel overwhelmed by how fortunate I am to have the family and friends that I have. I have a definite sense of my mental health having improved, and it feels nice to finally have hope in my life.

WOMAN BORN, MAN MADE

LEWIS REAY

Woman born, man made,
twisting and turning to come out
of this constricted self,
finding my masculine identity
burgeoning to be born again.

Beard comes, voice breaks—
people's heads turn
to see this small version of a man.

I surprise myself with the rich tones
of my new voice.
I open my lungs and song comes out.
I am singing a new song.
My heart is glad.

Muscles flex, sinews tense—
pleasure in this new body.
Testosterone flows in my blood.

I am
woman born, man made.

ABBIE'S STORY

ABBIE-JAYNE

Hi, my name is Abbie-Jayne, also known as Andrew. On the day I was born, there was something different about me. I was born male on the outside but was trapped female on the inside. And this is how my story started.

I am a trans-woman, who from the age of ten years old realised I wanted to be female. When I turned thirteen and started secondary school, I felt like I had to follow the pack and act male just so I wouldn't be bullied for being different, liking all the girls' things. This made me want to be female all the more. So I started doing things behind closed doors. I started trying my mother's clothes on and wearing her make-up while the house was empty. I also started reading and watching all sorts of things to do with transgenderism. I never told anyone cos I was always scared of how people would take it. I think my parents realised something was wrong because they would mock me and call me a gay boy all the time.

After years of bullying by family and school mates, I ended up leaving home at sixteen when I started work and moved in with my cousin. I didn't have the courage to tell her, ever. When I was ever alone in her house I would mess with her make-up and dress in her clothes. Living with

my cousin, and work was going well, I was hiding everything well. Til my brother started working at the same workplace as myself. My brother had a big mouth. He told my work mate that I was gay. And from that day onwards I was humiliated and bullied because the guy at work thought I was gay. I tried to tell my work mates that I wasn't gay. But no-one would listen. Deep down inside, when I was with a male or with a female, I always knew there was something that just didn't feel right.

After years of bullying and torture by my work mates and family, I started drinking a lot and taking massive pill overdoses. And sometimes cutting and burning myself. I took the overdoses just to help me cut out the thoughts.

When I got to the age of twenty, I started to lock everything up. I ended up going into a bubble, so to speak. My friends started getting worried about me, so they took it upon themselves to find my real father. After about four years, my friends finally found him. So I ended up meeting my father. And after a few times of meeting up in Enderby, meeting a girl.

It seems stupid but I fell for her the day I met her. But the happiness soon slipped away. My thoughts of wanting to be female were back again. She used to question me after finding one of the websites I went on. She would ask me, "Do you want to be a woman?" but I denied and lied,

saying no.

Then we had a kid about a year later and I was happy again, but again that didn't last. I did all I could to make myself feel more manly. I went to gym with a friend, I also started taking creatine and nitros oxide to help me bulk. But deep down inside it was killing me cos it wasn't what I really wanted.

In November 2014 I decided it was time. I couldn't hide it no more. I chose to tell a friend first and ask them how they thought my girlfriend would take it. My friend told me it's best to just get it over and done with, you are going to hurt her no matter what. So I told her that I wanted to be a woman. The hate in her eyes that day could have killed. It scared me half to death. I really felt she was going to kill me. She ended up getting her bags packed and grabbed her son and took off to her mam's, but a few weeks later she came back and decided she wanted to help. She even let me stop at her mam's Christmas Day so I could spend Christmas Day with kids. But as soon as Boxing Day passed I was told to go.

So I got my son and left. New Year was the day I decided I was going to go and see my doctor and tell them. I also called Mesmac —they were very helpful, and they gave me a support worker. I also started going to Hart Gables. The first time I went as Andrew. But after that I started going as

Abbie. The group has helped me become myself. Every time I go to Hart Gables I feel better and better. The support from the group is fantastic, I've made so many friends at the group. I plan on going every week and keep on going even after my full transition.

My hopes are to inspire others to do the same as me.

CHEMICAL METHODS OF COMING OUT

TAY INKWELL

50 mL of misgendering was heated gently. 230 mg of facts were added gradually and the mixture was left stirring overnight. 356 mg of your own thoughts and feelings were added, and the mixture was boiled. The solution was then distilled, keeping fractions separate. After cooling to room temperature, the solution was filtered and recrystallised. The product, shiny crystals of understanding, was weighed and the yield was recorded.

YOU

TAY INKWELL

You spend your life trying to fit into a painting everyone else has painted. You try to find your space in this world of ink and brushes. They tell you to be yourself, but hold up the painting instead of the mirror. It's hard to be yourself when you haven't yet worked out who that is. They suggest you are confused now, but you were confused then. No one to help as you wandered on, trying to figure yourself out while not knowing that that was what was needed. Wandering hallways, opening doors, gradually finding yourself. Slowly, slowly, finding the pieces of your identity hidden in the world. You create your own painting of yourself. You edit it over time, in the peace of your own mind. Eventually you accept it. You accept the painting. You accept yourself. You look in the mirror and begin to see yourself. The image starts off a little abstract, but you transition into something more solid. You begin to tell people about this painting you have made of yourself. You tell them who you really are. Every day you continue to question yourself, if you made this painting right. You know it is right, but every question from an old friend, or family member, or remark from a stranger makes you doubt yourself. You find support in those

who truly care. Through all the turbulence, you create a you that matches your painting. Yet still people look at your painting and disagree. They insist their interpretation is better. But you know who you are now. It doesn't matter what their painting of you is.

STAGES OF MY LIFE

SAM

All I want when I grow up is to be a man.
Why is that so hard a thing for you to
understand?
But I am just a child, I lack the words to
explain
how I feel inside, the confusion and the
pain.
This world makes no sense to me, people act
all wrong.
What works for him does not for me. What
do I do wrong?

I wonder if they realise how differently they
act?
Simply based on what they see your gender
is a fact.
And so this world confuses me, for how am
I to learn?
I watch and hear and copy him, but all they
see is 'her'.
And so I shrink away from them and live
inside my head,
There I'm free to dream a life as I really am
instead.

As life goes on there comes a point I can no
longer hide.

I realise that I *can* be the man I feel inside.
I've never been so scared and yet I've never
been so sure,
and so I step with trembling feet to share
my truth with you.

You love me and support me, whatever I
may do,
Yet it means the world to me that it means
this too.

I finally feel I'm living, not just dreaming
life away.

Now the world reacts to me in the proper
way.

My journey isn't over, I've still to go some
way,

but my confidence is growing, a little every
day.

I thank the friends and family who've stood
here by my side,
with kind words when I've needed them
and shoulders when I've cried.

I COME FROM

SARA MARSHALL

I come from Yorkshire
a land of rolling hills
a land of grubby white sheep
a land of rugged cliffs
and of characterful people
a land of millstone grit
and crumbling chimneys

I came from Tyneside
the land of the two-legged zebra
the land of the yellow bus
the land of steel and ships
of north and south of the Tyne
the land of the proud Metro:
Stand clear of the doors please

I came to Pennsylvania,
home of the Liberty Bell
a place of *What day is it, pal?*
a place of golden leaves and blue routes
a place of tunnels and gorges
a place of Jim Thorpe and Mauch Chunk
rails glaring at each other across
the Lehigh

I come finally to Fife
a shire of coastal harbours
a shire of Hamish-and-Morags
a shire of Singing Kettles
 and of crusty fishermen
a shire of commuters
 and endless traffic reports

THE SOUL OF ME

DANIEL O.

My Soul, well, it was covered, and
for a long time, smothered,
but now it is feeling freer
and without the help of beer.

My Soul, it is a rainbow
without the pot of gold,
ageless and timeless
yet needing to unfold.

My Soul, it so loves music,
loves dancing to a beat,
flowing to a rhythm with
faces touching—cheek to cheek.

My Soul is a part of ‘us,’
the one great Soul of living,
where sometimes, maybe, always,
it stays alive by giving.

MEMORIES

ELAINE GALLAGHER

I remember when I had a family.

I would visit my parents and we would talk
about the times they were growing up,
look at books of photos, black and white,
published for tourists and emigrants.
They'd tell me about onion sellers
and horse-drawn brewery drays.
I'd ask them about Canada
and my own earliest memories.

I remember Friday evenings,
after work I would visit.
My sister and her kids would be there.
Building Lego with my nephew and my
brother,
making art and music with my niece,
saying to my sister, *Do you remember...?*
I remember warmth, a place to go
where I knew I was welcome.

I remember my father shouting at me
about the length of my hair.

I remember my mother crying,
saying *I love you*,
saying *How could you?*
the last time I ever saw her.

I remember crying myself, for a whole day,
when my sister sent me a gift *for my first*
Christmas.

I remember
once
being loved.

ADVANCED IMAGINING TECHNOLOGY MACHINES

JONATHAN BAY

*I'm being held by the TSA in Orlando because
of an 'anomaly' (my penis)*

Shadi Petosky, Twitter

the way
you talk heavy
and often
sighting your own authority
I can see that
feel your plain heat
it calms me down
to remember fear
is irrational
like the number i
like the way I eat
pie, top down
like savoring

you're afraid

I have no control

this is the anomaly
of naming
my tongue ties your neurons
with a theory of bodies
and space
you can't see me
placating to some humanity
and I have to endure you

THE NIGHT JOURNEY

JO CLIFFORD

I had a dream I'd died. It was wonderful.
No more abuse in the street.
No more fear. No more shame.
I felt so happy.
I felt so happy to have done it at last because
I tried so hard. I'd tried so many times—

When I took an overdose, they pumped out my
belly.
When I hung myself, they cut the rope.
When I cut my wrists, they stitched them up
again.
And not out of love of life or feeling for me:
simply following the rules.

So I feel so happy for a while I don't notice how
dull it is.
It looks like a car park.
Only with no way in and no way out again.
And then I understand.
There is no way forward. No way back. There's
no way home.
And that's when I begin to be afraid.

And then I see a man. Or something.

Walking in the distance. Walking a little
strangely.
All muffled up in some medieval thing.

Who are you?

He looks at me with pity in his eyes
and touches me on the forehead, here...
and now I know. I know who you are.
You're my poet, Federico.

I call out to you, and you can barely reply.
Your voice is hoarse,
hoarse with long silence.
You're taking off your cloak
and underneath it there you are
in a beautiful suit, silk shirt, and floppy tie
of the kind that poets wear. Federico!

And we remember together on the other side of
death:

*Verde que te quiero verde
And Preciosa y el aire
Cordoba Lejana y sola*

and the Guardia Civil hammering on the door
and how they spoke to me,
all your poems that I didn't really understand,

but which so deeply touched my heart—
poems which somehow came from where I was,
poems which came from a deep dark desperate
place,
poems coming in spite of a certain knowledge
that the person you really were
could only be hated
and never truly understood.

And when you wrote:

“I cannot condemn
the boy who writes a girl’s name on his pillow
or dresses up as a bride
deep in his closet’s warm darkness,”

I think you saved my life.

And here you are
in this dead place
and you look at me and smile and say:
Time to go.
Where?
Where we’re going.

And we walk.
Arm in arm we walk.
Walk along the deep and savage way.
Walk through an empty and uncertain land,

a place where the sun does not shine,
a place where the sky is empty of stars.
until we come to a gate.
And behind the gate is weeping.

I don’t want to go in there, but you say: *We
must.*

And you look at me with pity in your eyes
and I’m inside
this place, where it’s sticky.
Everything seems covered in slime.

There’s people there, though I can’t see their
faces,
there’s the men who touched me up,
the men who wanted to beat me,
the man who got me drunk and stroked my
hands,
the man who got me stoned and tried to rape
me.
There’s all the lies I told,
there’s all the wishes I could never express,
all the dresses I longed to wear and never dared,
to all the tears I wanted to weep and was too
ashamed.

You take me to a church and we are lost in
adoration

before our Lady in the corner in a lovely frock,
The Virgin of Good Love
with sparkling jewels and a silver crown,
holding her baby son and laughing,
laughing in the incense-filled darkness.

And that's me. I'm the Virgin
high in the church,
looking down on the worshipers,
looking down on the supplicants from my
beautiful niche.

I love it.
Love the frock. Love the niche.
I've got a little ledge to rest my bum on
and my halo lights up when someone puts a
coin in the slot.

And when I look down I see I've got a
supplicant,
down on his knees with his face in the dust
and ... it's you, Federico,
full of guilt and defilement,
begging me to set you free.

*Take the heart's bitterness from me,
you're praying, lift this curse from me.
Deliver me from my shame*

I can't do that, Federico.
You've got the wrong virgin.
You want the other one, the respectable one,
the virgin of perverted love.
The one with the tears.
The one who's carried on the backs of men who
beat their wives.
The one that'll tell you it's your duty to resist,
resist your sinful longing,
marry a good catholic girl, and make her
miserable for ever.

But I can't tell you that.
I'm the Virgin of Good Love,
remember?

Federico. Listen.
They say my son once took a boy into his arms,
a little boy the disciples wanted to send away
because they thought he would disturb him,
and my son said:

*No. Let him stay. Be like him.
Be like a little child.
If anyone destroys the faith of a little one,
perverts the faith of a child who believes in me,
it would be better for him to have a millstone hung
around his neck
and be thrown into the depths of the sea.*

Oh Federico. How many millstones would it
take
to hang round the necks of everyone
who's ever misled a little child
and told them they have to be ashamed?
Not enough millstones, Federico.
Not in the whole wide world. Not enough sea!

And Federico's running out the church.
Federico's sailing away in an ocean liner,
sailing away to a new world!
To a city that has no walls.
Not like cities in Europe. Walled. Guarded.
Imprisoned.
But open. Open to the sea!
Guarded by a lady with a torch,
offering freedom to the outcast,
shelter to the oppressed,
a welcome to the rejected and forlorn!
An open city.
A city of the free!

But instead you reach New York,
a city made of ash,
a city made of death and copper wires.

And I'm there, the Virgin,
standing on a street corner on the Lower East
Side.

selling my body for petty cash.
It's the American way.

And I see you,
Federico,
walking down Wall Street
watching all the criminals,
watching them deal in millions.
Their hands are shaking.
Their hands are shaking
because they're holding money.
There's a beggar without legs
pushing himself down the street on a trolley
and you and him and me are the only honest
men,
the only honest ones on this street of thieves.

There's a man threw himself out the window
because he lost ten million dollars.
Threw himself off the forty-third floor of the
Astor building.
His hands.
I see his hands.
His hands are white on the cement of the
sidewalk. His white. floury hands.

And I think I understand.
I think I understand the logic of America.
This place that's occupied our mind.

This place that's colonised our dreams.
All of us living working, breathing, seeing,
living under the shadow of advancing death,
doing what we can
to defy the approaching darkness

And I'm with you now.
Now, this night in the railway station.
Now the civil war's beginning and you're on
your way home.
All the crowds are hurrying.
They're all rushing past.
It's bedlam. Everyone's afraid.
It's the last train south and I beg you not to take
it.
Don't go home.
They hate you there. And it's not your home.
Not any more. Your home's with me.
In my arms is home.
Not there. You won't be safe there. They hate
you.
Rancid little city.
With its rancid little minds.

Stay with me.
Let me protect you. Let me keep you safe.
It can't be helped!, you say,
It's where I belong.
Let go my hand. Don't embrace me.

We must not kiss.
I could not bear to cause a scandal. Don't cry. We
will meet soon.

And you walk away
You hold your mouth rigid. You hold your back
stiff.
It is not the body I know any more.

The crowd swallows you
and I never see you in this life again.

And this is the place, Federico,
this is the place where traitors live.
It's where they make those fragmentation
bombs,
the ones that explode on impact
and send little plastic pellets flying everywhere
that are invisible to X-rays.
It's where they make the powdered milk
that they know will poison babies.
It's where they dump the nuclear waste and if a
bit leaks out then what the hell.
It's where the cowards and the bullies live,
the ones addicted to violence and hatred,
the ones who shot you that dark night and
boasted afterwards they'd shot you twice up
the arse for being queer.

And, Federico, in the old amazing story
of the lost sad soul and his poet guide,
when they come at last to frozen heart of hell,
there they find a secret hidden stair
which they climb up until they find
the sweet fresh air of earth
and see once more the shining stars.

And I say, Shall we climb, Federico, shall we
climb
the secret stairway out of hell?
Let's climb. Let's climb...

And I know, deep in my stomach's pit, I know
This is the moment I wake up.

And I'm lying on a trolley.
And I feel so ill.
And my throat's so sore.
And I know.
I know
I'm still alive.
They've pumped my stomach out again.

I'm in a cubicle. There's curtains all around.
And when I poke my head out
I can see it's like a war,
late this night in the casualty ward.

And very slowly I get up.
And very slowly I put on my clothes.
And a nurse pops her head in.
She wants to be nice but she hasn't the time
And I say: Don't worry, I'm just fine.
Don't bring me trousers,
I'm happy in the dress.

And when she's gone,
I very quietly slip outside.
There's rubbish in the streets,
a cold wind and dirty paper blowing about.
I can still see Venus up in the sky.
It's almost dawn.

Federico's left me now and I walk alone
past the cardboard houses and the broken
rubbish bags
and high above me, hidden behind the clouds—
the secret hidden harmonies of the revolving
stars.

It's love, they say,
It's love that moves the stars.

TRANSFORMATION

MAXWELL REAY

the work of the people is in this place
this time
this space
create from within
not hampered by fear
nor damaged by the past
scars healed
sacred scars
bodies able to cradle truth
strong enough to go on
strong enough to let go

lift up our lives
lift up our lives
stories
journeys
names
and places
creating a new path
a sense of wonder
stepping out on sacred ground
dancing towards all that is just
clapping our hands to the beat
songs echoing in our heads

transformation
transformation
sacred journey
moving
flowing
changing
life giving spirit
opening
closing
life giving spirit
entering
leaving
returning
life giving spirit
you transform
create from within

OPEN BUT NOT BROKEN

MAXWELL REAY

bread not broken but open
the life of Jesus revealed in the
transformation of each of us
holding the hand of a stranger
touching the face of a lover
looking into the eyes of a friend
standing alongside one and another
we become free
open but not broken

(THE TREE)

DANIELLE CHELSEA-SOMERS

society looks down on me
it's not what my life should be
a homeless person on the street
the two of us some want to beat
the face of prejudice all around
where hate and injustice can be found
I am upset by a remark I hear
trying to hide my inward fear
but a kind word from a woman near
brought to me a little tear
she gives me a hug and waves good-bye
I'm calmer now as I breathe a sigh
in the distance can be heard a sound
carol singing all around
it stands alone for all to touch
a transgender tree of hope
for people in life who have to cope

AN EVENING IN KINLOCHLEVEN

SARAH FANET

Exactly why Chloe had decided to walk the West Highland Way in Scotland remains a mystery. She would have found it hard to say when the journey began. She could only remember a special encounter at Kinlochleven the night before completing the 95-mile walk to Fort William.

The class had finished fidgeting and the pupils were waiting for her presentation to begin. The teacher spoke: “Now we listen to Chloe and the story of an exciting journey.” That was it. She was sharing her story.

The last evening we slept at a hotel near beautiful Loch Leven. I ordered food but there was nowhere to sit so I ended tucking myself into a chair next to an old lady who was tuning a guitar that belonged to a backpacker. I introduced myself. She called herself Fionnghuala, a name she had chosen from an Irish legend The Children of the Lir. Fionnghuala is a character who is sent to wander for 900 years as she is no longer wanted by her family.

When the old woman was my age she was living inside a boy’s body and nobody could see that she was a girl. That’s how she was born and

it was causing her distress. It had to change but her family never believed her so she had to leave her home. After months of wandering she heard of Kinlochleven, a village with a dam built by itinerant workers a long time ago, above a loch where once the wooden statue of a goddess was found buried in the peat.

The guitar was eventually tuned so Fionnghuala turned to me and whispered: “Now you know my story. Here is a song about driving here for the first time on a beautiful winter day. I turned at North Ballachulish, followed the road to the village, leaving my anger behind as if it was burning to its death on Beinn a’Bheithir, the mountain of thunderbolt above the narrows.”

Sensing I was about to hear something special, I pulled my phone out of my pocket and recorded the song I want to share with you now.

Chloe carefully put her phone on the desk and pressed the play button.

*White blankets slope down to the shore.
It’s morning. Water glitters through the trees.
Winter will stay whitening the day,
from the isles to the ridge of Binheim Mòr.
Darkness now lifting, goldeneyes drifting,*

*above the narrows. Thunder rumbled through
the night.*

*Water is falling. Mountains are calling.
It's the low road to Kinlochleven.*

*I'll find a house with empty rooms,
light a fire and warm its heart out of the gloom.
Now I'm alive and I will drive,
drive the low road to Kinlochleven.*

*Songs will now no longer feel the same:
no space left for torment, fear and shame.
Walk and listen round the loch—they all call
me by my name.*

*There was a goddess under my feet.
They stole her wooden body from the peat.
I'll carve her name on every tree
on the low road to Kinlochleven.*

*Abide with me, journey with me.
Let the goddess fill the glen with mystery.
We'll write the story of life and glory
on the low road to Kinlochleven.*

“This is not a story about a sex change or a transsexual. This is a story about loneliness, about a woman. It could have been your story, my story.”
Chloe walked back to her seat through a wall of

silence.

Three weeks later she asked the teacher if she could address the class again. She stood up and simply uttered:

“I am in love with another girl and today she has told me that she loves me.”

She sat down amidst a standing ovation, relieved, as if this time her journey was really over, or maybe just beginning.

I AM NINA

NINA GRAY

To finally have my world know me as I have
always understood myself to be,
to have the liberation of there being no hiding
room left,
no more internal pain,
I have taken my greatest step.
I could never have imagined being this
fortunate.

Only now can I truly appreciate the real
unconditional love I have in my life.
I cannot imagine what it may be like to have
better colleagues, friends and family.
This is what it means to feel blessed.

To feel reborn is now my reality.
I could never contemplate a backwards step now
that I understand real happiness.
Simon did a good enough job in getting me
here.
In retrospect I can see he contended with so
much.
I can only offer him my thanks, though he is no
more.
It is now time for my world to get to know
lovely Nina.

NAMES

SARAH FANET

Meet the folks you've never seen:
Paul, Ilona, and Eileen,
Milly, David, and Aileen.
Listen.
Here life will never be the same.
They all call me by my name.

AN UNASSUMING LETTER

(THAT PIECE OF PAPER YOU FOUND
WINKING AT YOU ON THE FLOOR)

JAMES HIWATARI

Dear [you who picked up this letter],

Your quest, should you choose to accept it, is to navigate through the vastness of a space that makes no sense, and might not even be real. (Terms and conditions apply subject to one's understanding of the word 'real'.)

You shall cross the Neverending Valley, where each step is the beginning of a new journey. Ignore anyone's attempt to set your course or draw you a map. Do not give in to the fear of getting lost. Remember that this adventure has no set destination, so you will never lose your way. Your wanderings will eventually take you elsewhere. There is no telling of when and how, only the certainty that it will happen when you are ready.

You shall then join the echoes at the Cave of Ideas. Live among them, and observe how they gather their essences and step out into the world. Watch and learn as their personalities solidify and take shape. Experience this unique process of creation and look inside your own self. Take your time to discover your essence. Work on sculpting

the shape that is yours and nobody else's. Then step out of the cave and into the last part of your quest.

You are ready to build your own Neverending Valley. Fill it with the journeys you want to make, and ones you may never start. Worry not about where they end, for you will know when you get there. Next, build your own Cave of Ideas. Give space to the echoes in your mind. Let them reverberate until they grow into their shape and are set free to the world.

Your quest is over, but the reward cannot be printed on paper. You can only gain that which you work for, and that is up to you to decide.

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A SCOTTISH ANTHOLOGY OF TRANSGENDER, NON-BINARY AND INTERSEX VOICES

WRITTEN BY: Abbie-Jayne | Jonathan Bay
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This book collects together exciting, moving and honest writing by a diverse range of transgender, non-binary, and intersex voices.

Whether you are transgender, non-binary or intersex; questioning your gender identity; a professional looking to gain a better understanding; a friend, family member or ally who would like to learn more about how to be supportive; or just someone who appreciates the diversity of people's stories—this book is for you.

This book is also available in a variety of digital formats from our website:

www.lgbthealth.org.uk

LGBT HELPLINE SCOTLAND: 0300 123 2523

