

Celebrating the Winners of

# ***Rainbow Writes***

**An Anthology of  
Selected Works**

Inspiring and empowering queer youth to share their authentic stories, uplifting phenomenal LGBTQ+ creative prose and poetry.

# Table of Contents

<b>ABOUT RAINBOW WRITES 2025</b> A note from the director	<b>04</b>
<b>THE LOVER'S HAND</b> 2025 Prose Category Winner   Fin G., MD	<b>05</b>
<b>SELF PORTRAIT AS SOMETHING UNTITLED</b> 2025 Poetry Category Winner   Penny W., MA	<b>07</b>
<b>HONORABLE MENTIONS</b> Four pieces that caught our team's eye!	<b>08</b>
<b>NEITHER NOR</b> Highlighting a Past Favorite   Bells., FL	<b>12</b>
<b>THIS MORNING AT THE DENTIST'S OFFICE</b> Highlighting a Past Favorite   Rachel L., FL	<b>13</b>



Rainbow Writes Project Director

**Via Lipman**

GLSEN Staff Support

**k.jones**

Student Team

**Addison B.**

**Alé C.**

**Alex T.**

**Angela W.**

**Eddi R.**

**Grace D.**

**Gray N.**

**Grey P.**

Contributing Writers

**Fin G.**

**Penny W.**

**Gracelynn F.**

**Ari E.**

**Donny Z.**

**Bells**

**Rachel L.**



## FROM THE DIRECTOR

Rainbow Writes has been a passion project of mine for the past three years, and it has been a joy to watch it grow into something that serves a vital purpose for LGBTQ+ students across the country. From its origins as a National Student Council student-led initiative to the large-scale GLSEN program it is today, Rainbow Writes has always carried a bit of magic.

The contest began as a way to empower queer youth to share their stories, especially in a time marked by discriminatory legislation and book bans that disproportionately target marginalized voices. Rainbow Writes is a space — created for youth, by youth — where stories are heard, celebrated, and shared. It's a mission grounded in creative activism: using art and writing to uplift communities that are so often systematically silenced. Just as censorship feeds on fear and erasure, Rainbow Writes responds with storytelling, resilience, and collective joy.

It's been an honor to help shape and oversee this program. Reading each submission has been a profoundly moving experience, with every piece testifying to the courage, creativity, and vulnerability of LGBTQ+ youth.

I'm so proud to present the RW 2025 anthology, showcasing just a fraction of the powerful stories that remind us: our words matter, and our stories can change the world.

With Pride,

**Via Lipman**

Rainbow Writes Program Director

I want to give shout-out to Eris Robinson, an original founding member of the Rainbow Writes Team in 2023. They were a huge contributor to developing such an incredible program, and now are one of my biggest inspirations in advocacy work. Forever grateful to be a peer and a friend to such a fearless activist.

# THE LOVER'S HAND

I write a book. It is a good book. All my teachers say so. Let's find you an agent, they say. Everyone around me tells me how amazing it is that an 18 year-old wrote a book. You are doing so great, they tell me.

I say thank you. And when they ask about the book I tell them it is about poverty, classism, and friendship. And when I have to sell the book, I stand on stage, and lie. It is about friends, and classism, and the struggle of having less than everyone around you, I tell the stage.

At night, I sneak out the window. It has a latch big enough for my hands to fit right under. My mom installed it when I was little, when I could not reach the window. When I was not strong enough to lift it, but now it's soft as butter under my fingers. I pull it up and up until my body fits out.

Two years ago I got a job. A good job. I bought a car. A bad car. An old car. It only has two doors, and the roof leaks, but I love that car.

And I only need two doors.

My boyfriend's house doesn't have locks, but it has cameras, so I park down the street, and he walks the whole way to me.

I lied today, I tell him. But I don't really say. Because we don't really talk. He puts his hand on my leg, and I wonder what it would feel like if it was a girl's hand. But when I imagine that, all I can see are my sister's smaller hands. Her fingers so much more delicate than mine. The hands that need me to open jars still, even though we're only two years apart.

How did it go? he ask. But he doesn't really. Because when I talk, he hears a boy's voice. My voice. So instead, he keeps his hand on my leg, and I pretend it will reach over and take mine while I drive.

I pretend he is my boyfriend. Late at night I whisper it to myself. Boyfriend. But it doesn't feel right. And neither does Girlfriend.

He looks out the window. He has such a soft jawline. And maybe that's not attractive, but I like it. And sometimes I pretend it's a woman's jawline. I pretend that when I reach over the skin will be soft and smooth, and when I pull him towards, so gently, his face will fall away into something I can kiss.

"I'm going to Virginia for college," he tells me. And I already know. We don't talk about college, but I already know he won't stay.

"I'm going to write," I tell him. Lights come up sharp onto the windshield. He takes his hand off my leg, and I don't protest. I let him pull himself tight to the seat, his eyes staying right on his own window, never me.

"Forever?"

I shrug. "Maybe."

"About what?"

This time, he turns. He has brown eyes, but I imagine they're wild, beautiful colors. Colors that strike me at night. That make me think anything could remind me of him. But, when I look, his eyes are always just brown.



## THE LOVER'S HAND

Not the brown of the woods, or the brown of houses, or the brown of horses, but the brown of eyes. And everyone has eyes just like him, so I forget them at night.

"I don't know."

He puts his hand back on me. I drive further. Tree's start to curl over the roads, as if they're leaning down to touch the top of the car as it goes by. His hand comes back onto me. He loves me best in the woods.

"Us?" He's back to the window. But his hand comes up my leg.

He loves me best out here. Out here where no one sees us.

Every time, I think it will last and that when we leave the woods, his love will follow. But it doesn't.

"Maybe."

His hand rubs small circles on my thighs. The circles that lovers make to say I love you. I am here. We are one. I wonder if he feels that when he makes those circles.

"Is that what your book is about? Us?"

I shrug. His hands stop circling.

"Is it?"

I think of the lie I told. Just friends.

"It's about two boys."

"Oh."

"Would you read it."

He shrugs. His hand comes back. So close on me.

"Let's not talk about it."

I don't know what he means by it. The book, or us.

"Would you read it?"

His hands start to travel up me. I push at it. He moves it back down, just onto my thighs. There aren't any circles. Any love. His brown-boy eyes look at me. I try to see them as girl eyes, but I can't imagine it. I can't imagine anything but boy eyes. So I keep looking at his boy eyes.

"Would you read it?" I press again.

"Maybe."

"Why maybe?"

His hand comes off of me.

"I don't read anything like that."

"Like what?"

The trees buckle over the road. He looks up to watch them. I wonder if he thinks they are watching. He always thinks someone is watching.

"Just, like that."

"We are like that," I tell him, because I want him to think about it like I do. I want him to think about my eyes, and my hands, and I want him to only imagine me as a boy. The only way I can imagine him.

I want him to tell me he lays up at night, and thinks about Boyfriend.

"It's different," he says. And his hand is back. But I push it. He puts it back.

"Different how?"

I push harder. He keeps his hand there, but it doesn't move. And I let him because I like it. Because I know what he'll say, but still, I like it. I like him.

## THE LOVER'S HAND

"I'm leaving soon. It's okay. I'm leaving soon."

His hand moves up again. The road is quiet. The trees stop looking.

He still has brown eyes. And boy hands. And I still like both those things.

"Okay."

I think about how I wouldn't have written an ending like this in my book.

In my book, they kiss. And they don't pretend it didn't happen.

But, here, I let him pretend he can run from, from himself, because I don't know anything that will change him. And, even worse, I don't know anything that will change me either.



# SELF PORTRAIT AS SOMETHING UNTITLED

Some days, I say girl and mean boy.

Some days, I say boy and mean something with wings.

Some days, I mean mouth, open.

Some days, I mean nothing at all.

Who told you the body

was meant to be pronounced the same way twice?

I ask my mouth to say girl and it glitches

spills its syntax into light— /// (static between the teeth)

I call myself tender

and the wind calls me back thirsty—

some words mean the same thing,

depending on who loves you.

You ask me if I have always

been like this (in translation)

[bracketed between]

a name and a refusal.

But queerness is a verb, a slipping.

The tongue a sieve,

sifting through invariability.

Some days, I unbutton a love and it spills like honey,

thick and golden, coating the tongue—

other days, it hardens mid-air,

falls to the ground with a quiet shatter.

Somewhere, I am a girl with ink-stained fingers,

a question mark in a borrowed jacket,

a stray cat waiting to be let in.

Somewhere, a version of me never learned

how to answer to what was never mine.

But here, in this translation,

I am the windhook page.

I kiss a woman like a prayer and

watch my god blush in the mirror.

Lover, I am learning to name myself open

like the breath before a confession—

\*\*Come closer. Let me teach you my language\*\*

\*\*//// glitch, static, restart\*\*

乖孩子



# HONORABLE MENTIONS

EXCERPTS FROM SOME MORE OF OUR FAVORITES

## WHAT I WILL TELL MY GRANDKIDS

By Gracelynn F., OH

“I’ll tell them joy was rebellion.  
That survival was sacred.  
That we bloomed in a world not made for us—  
And made it ours anyway.

Because we came into a world  
That never welcomed us.

But we built one  
That always will.

And that—  
That is what I will tell my grandkids.

That we rise,  
Even when they step on us,  
When they try to burn us down.  
Because we are a force of nature they try to erase.  
We are the wildfire they try to drown.  
We are the storm they cannot contain.  
We are everything they fear  
Because we refuse to disappear.”

# HONORABLE MENTIONS

EXCERPTS FROM SOME MORE OF OUR FAVORITES

## I WILL FLY US OUT OF HERE

By Ari E., MD

“You hated not just when people jeered at you in the halls but also when the short girl with purple hair and dozens of pins on her backpack came to talk to you because she assumed you were like her. You had to awkwardly tell her you weren’t while some part of you wished you were. Maybe then you could understand why you felt so different. Whenever you tried to imagine yourself as a lesbian, that weight in your stomach returned, a weight that became more and more familiar. It began only when you wore dresses to your friends’ Bat Mitzvahs, but by the end of middle school you were hunching your shoulders and curling your back over itself every day. You wished for an escape from your dreadfully dull life, but you were too old to hope for a fairy to rescue you.”

# HONORABLE MENTIONS

EXCERPTS FROM SOME MORE OF OUR FAVORITES

## AN OPEN LETTER TO THE QUEER YOUTH OF AMERICA

By Donny Z., GA

“What will we do as queer youth when the people who fought for the rights we have today are forgotten? The ones who died while their lovers held their hands, the ones who had no one? The ones who were outlawed, and the ones who are still outlawed right now. What happens when the world tries to erase them from history?

I know what we'll do: We'll learn our history. We'll honor the names of those who never thought they would be remembered in the 21st century. We'll remember the sacrifices they made, the battles they fought. We'll fight for our own rights. We'll be hated by many, and we'll be loved by many. We will intertwine our lives with the ones who got us to this point, and the ones who couldn't make it to stand with us today. We'll keep their stories alive, because if we don't, our future will be nothing more than a dream we could've reached, but we didn't.”

# NEITHER NOR

being something neither man nor woman is a palpable freedom.

it is as though i am the great god hephestus' sculpting hands and my own creation alike, though knowing i am no pandora. for unlike her, i am not set in place – stuck the way the gods made me – i have not yet been placed in that fiery kiln to be solidified, not yet has fire graced my skin.

for with clay legs, i can still climb from my mold and change, take pieces of the gentle masculinity i crave (the knightly chivalry of being a friend's coatrack, the warrior's protection of opening doors for others and offering to be the last in line) and shape them into my very skin, take the pieces of fierce femininity i want (the intensity of a mother's love resting in band-aids and hairpins, the sapphic admiration hidden in laughter, in spinning skirts as they shyly brush ankles) and claim them as mine, take the mystery of androgyny (the kind acceptance of its cape worn like a blanket, the warmth of coexistent shared struggle held in mugs of tea) and make it entirely my own.

because being something neither man nor woman is a breath of fresh air, ducking and weaving in and out of expectations – embracing some, rejecting others – and building new ones in their wake. be kind, be heard, understand, find those who make you feel understood, be soft, be strong – not because i must “be a man,” not because “it is the way women are” but because i am human, because i am alive, because air enters my lungs and they exhale so the trees many inhale, because i exist, plainly, simply, outside of the binding bounds of something i am not.

because being something neither man nor woman means that i am truly me.

# THIS MORNING AT THE DENTIST'S OFFICE

I find myself sitting in a chair at the dentist's office. My dentist pulls my mouth apart, examining its contents. "You haven't done your homework." She sighs, referring to the state of my gums. She holds up a mirror, gripping my upper lip towards my nose, so I can see my deteriorating tissue. She asks what I think about my gums. I don't say anything. I don't know anything about gum health or what redness means. I think that gums are meant to be red. Apparently, they're supposed to be pink. "How do you expect to get a *boyfriend* if your gums look so ugly." She rattles. The creakiness of her voice scrapes me, and the word *boyfriend* haunts me. I am left feeling violated and strangely invigorated.

Her assistant continues the teeth cleaning ritual. It's full of rattling numbers, stabbing needles into rotten tissue. Two-two-three. My anger swells. Four-three-three. She types what she speaks verbatim into the computer. Two-one-four. I see X-rays of my mouth. Five-three-four. She tells me it's a shame that I didn't learn Mandarin better. Two-two-three. Her words sting my eyes. Two-three-four. I feel suffocated. I can't stop the tears. She pulls out a scaler, scraping, scraping, scraping. She tells me a lot of plaque has built up from not brushing properly. She asks me why I'll never change, why I'll never learn. I continue to cry. From the pain, from not being good enough, from my dentist's *boyfriend* remark.

I go home and stare at my gums in the bathroom mirror. I attempt to smile, feeling awkward, flushed, angry. *Maybe she's right. Maybe I'll never find a boyfriend.* But, *why does the word boyfriend make me cringe so....* I am left bothered for days after, not just from the pain.

My mother brings up the subject of college, an incoming future. Boys. *Boyfriends*. Winter breaks. Bringing *boyfriends* home for winter breaks. I feel sick again. I rub my hands around my neck, picking at my skin, pinching it awake. "What about girlfriends?" I test. "You're not gay." She declares. I roll my eyes. I walk away from my seat and retreat to my room.

I start to question things about myself. I look to my bookshelf—filled with characters questioning too, but also knowing. Being sure. Being unsure.

I go for a run. I am accompanied by my father. I run until my side burns. I run until I can't think straight. I run to erase the thrumming in my head that tells me I'm not who I once thought I was, that I don't fit into the black and white world my mom wants for me. My thoughts crumble and deteriorate. I come to a stop, and my dad does too.

I tell him I need to talk. We sit on the pavement, small rocks poking our legs and hands. The lake is in view, and I begin to speak.

I tumble over my words, straining to get my point across. I want him to hear me, and he does.

I talk and talk and talk and talk.

He listens and listens and listens and listens.

I apologize for the way I am.

He dismisses my "sorry's" and replaces them with, "It doesn't matter to me what you are."

Queer joy is your dad saying that when you get a boyfriend or girlfriend in college, you can bring them home.



# RAINBOW WRITES

**MAY 2025**

<https://www.glsen.org/rainbowwrites>