



QUEER
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SHAWN HOO • LEO FERNANDEZ ALMERO • FAJAR ZAKHRI





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FAJAR ZAKHRI

I Like A Boy

and in the back of his mind,
it is me that he likes
just not quite like that.
No entangled lips or hands.
No 'til death do us part'.
I met a boy. I like him.
He likes me too, just not like that.
Then we grow apart.

I like a boy.
His brown skin so soft.
If black is the color
of one's true love hair,
I guess that makes him my true love.
My one true love, who waits
and leaves other boys,
in their cloudy skin and ocean eyes,
fall by the wayside.
For he comes home to me
and stays at my side.

I like a boy.
His inky, quagmire-like eyes.
A cesspool of sorrow.
A joyful sight.
Doesn't share my vision.
Has dwelt a little too long
In the dark. The only color
he's used to.
I like boys and
it is always too blue
to my liking, somehow.
I doubt if the shade
can ever be customized.
Make it bright, sometime?

I like a boy.
And it's alright
until I say it out loud.
Becomes too real,
concurrently not enough.



Might as well duck-tape this mouth,
sell lies by the dime,
make fuck all in return.
Might as well turn red and burn.
This desire is not so taciturn.
I like a boy and wish I didn't.

Not because it's wrong,
rather because it's so right
that it will be a mistake to make
it more than what it has become.
He likes boys too,
but it's safer to be with girls,
to look for his own
safety in a world
full of mad, mad people
in mad, mad love
with ignorance and righteousness.

'We'll sacrifice this love for their betterment.
Even though ours is the best.
And I might love you less
Than you love me.
I can't love you like that, I'm sorry.'

I like a boy.
I am so woke.
Still in the dead of night,
I sleep alone.
I can't sleep at night
unless I play a sad song,
write an even sadder poem.

I've come to forget
all that young love's joy.
Made to grow old
before my time.
I like a boy,
and it's perfectly fine.
Long as I keep the love tucked.
Long as I keep it quiet.



I'll Never Be Your Girlfriend

What does it say about society
that it would rather see
two men killing each other
or loving undercover
than being open, out, and free?

What does it say about me
that I would rather be
something out of the ordinary
despite my physical disposition?

What does it say about you,
despite promising claims,
your progression falls short
of your phallic grace?

What does it say about us
that we truly get each other
yet still can't be together?
All feelings, no assertion.
We make good actors
without the recognition.

And again and again and again:
People of the opposite sex
point fingers and file complaints.

And again and again and again:
People say opposites attract
when likeness cuts above the rest.

And so it goes:
I'll never be your girlfriend.
And you'll never dare to question
the unwritten law of this land.
But what's new?

I'll be on your nose then in your face.
Then all kinds of sweet and sour.
A perversion. A disgrace.
Then I'll get on all fours—
for you.



LEO FERNANDEZ ALMERO

Measure

for Alvin

Let me tell you that ten years are nothing
to the tree that does not force its leaves
to bud, patiently rising as every summer
hurries past, unafraid of the returning

monsoon and the ebbing of time. I envy
its forbearance of seasons and its foresight
of stillness. I always knew this, though
unaware of it somehow. Until someone

reminded me once that there is wisdom
in displacing oneself, and moving. Away,
but to a precise direction. Always to a fixed
point; to be mindful of the certainty when to

root – which is as easy as the *agoho* that
seeds the vacancy beside it. When it does
arrive, to take every single memory until
all are compressed in your chest. And bloom:

make home of a quaint pad with trinkets
from travels; perfect favorite dishes
and favor particular chores; get a dog –
or a cat – or both, perhaps – to love

beyond each other. To know it past rushing
monsoons. Choosing instead stillness.



SHAWN HOO

Mempat

after the myth of Hu Tianbao, the Rabbit God

A crow dreams of the pink mempat
and is sent to die on a fern. The avian
underworld is full of others: a recalcitrant
bulbul who would not stop singing
falsehoods; a mynah who took too much
from a satin hand; a lost egret. They laughed
at his story for being sent down, conferred
him the status of the crow who would guard
other crows who dream of the pink mempat.
The following month, he revealed himself
to a citizen of the rain tree. He caught him
drinking a mango, from behind the morning's
folding screen, watching as the mempat flushed
into colour. That those whom we call gods
can still know desire. That those who desire
may not act on them without a god's impetus.
Now the crooks of the underworld have given
me the title of guardian, he said, that I may
be in charge of the crows who delight in—
without deserving—the mempat's dowry.
The guardian dropped a single seed into
the beak of this simple crow, instructed
him to plant it where he thinks it safe. What grows
in its place will be a temple for other birds
like him. What others like him who have yearned
for bearing like that lost egret. When the guardian
disappeared, the citizen of the rain tree understood
he had to leave for elsewhere. A crow dreams
of his own home and is sent to die abroad.



Ode to the Public Toilet

Blessed be the stained urinals passing for high windows. Blessed be the saints you make out by staring at these panes. Blessed be the view of priests' hats and bald queens. Blessed be the conscientious men who shake them dry. Bless he who practices personal hygiene in public. Bless the lewd looks. Bless the tight jeans. Bless the other bodies swimming in and out of view. Bless darkness. Bless the ungoverned park which holds this toilet like a cup holds water. Bless the water fixture for its background pleasure. Pleasure—bless her. For a man walks in like a stray tune into an empty hall, searching for another voice, and is blessed with noise. Bless the man that comes to each cubicle and knows which confessional sputters forth which sin. Blessed be the boy who puts his ears on the panel hoping to receive something. Blessed is the old man whose value climbs with the night. Blessed is he who comes once, and leaves three others pining. Bless the mouth. The toe. The lobe. The foot. The fetish. The fold. The jaw of the man—the man whose knuckles bled you for daring to want him? Bless him for teaching rejection with a human punch. Bless the sight of him kissing his knuckles, and count yourself blessed he was no undercover. Bless those who taught you how to spot an undercover. Bless the men who finally acquired names—one night, this gift, like a proposal. Bless him for acquainting you with other blessed men. Bless the less lonely, bless the blanket



of a cheap hotel. Bless cheap hotels built beside parks. And bless the man
who opts for sex in public. Who knows a tap is not a tap
without a shoulder. Who finds friction arousing. Who strolls
all night for nothing
but to leave the scent of his publicity—not scroll
all scentless night into nothing. Bless he
who knows a grid is not a public square
—it is nowhere. We have no one.



BIOGRAPHIES

Fajar Zakhri is a writer based in Jakarta. A Libra/12th House Stellium. Ecoanarchist. “If the love doesn’t feel like 90s R&B, I don’t want it.” Can be reached via Twitter (@whatsthefaz) or Instagram (@whatsthefazzz).

Leo Fernandez Almero is a lawyer and LGBT activist. He writes in English, Filipino, and Bikol. His poems and translations were previously published in *Sunday Inquirer Magazine*, *Voice & Verse Poetry Magazine*, *BKL/ Bikol Bakla*, and *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore*. His poems will also be featured in Issue 57 of *Voice & Verse Poetry Magazine*.

Shawn Hoo writes poetry and non-fiction, and is interested in exploring speculative histories and queer aesthetics. His poems have appeared in or are forthcoming in journals such as *Voice & Verse Poetry Magazine* and *OF ZOOS*, and anthologies such as *A Luxury We Cannot Afford* and *EXHALE: An Anthology of Queer Singapore Voices*. A recent graduate from Yale-NUS College, he won Second Prize for Poetry at the Yale-NUS Literary Awards (2020) and is the recipient of the Outstanding Capstone Prize in Literature for his senior thesis on HIV/AIDS in Singapore theatre. He is currently the Editor-at-Large for Singapore at *Asymptote*, and working on his first collection of poems.