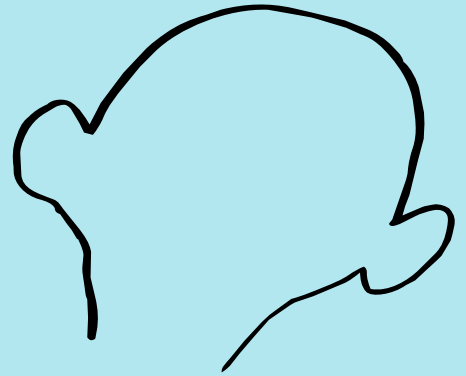
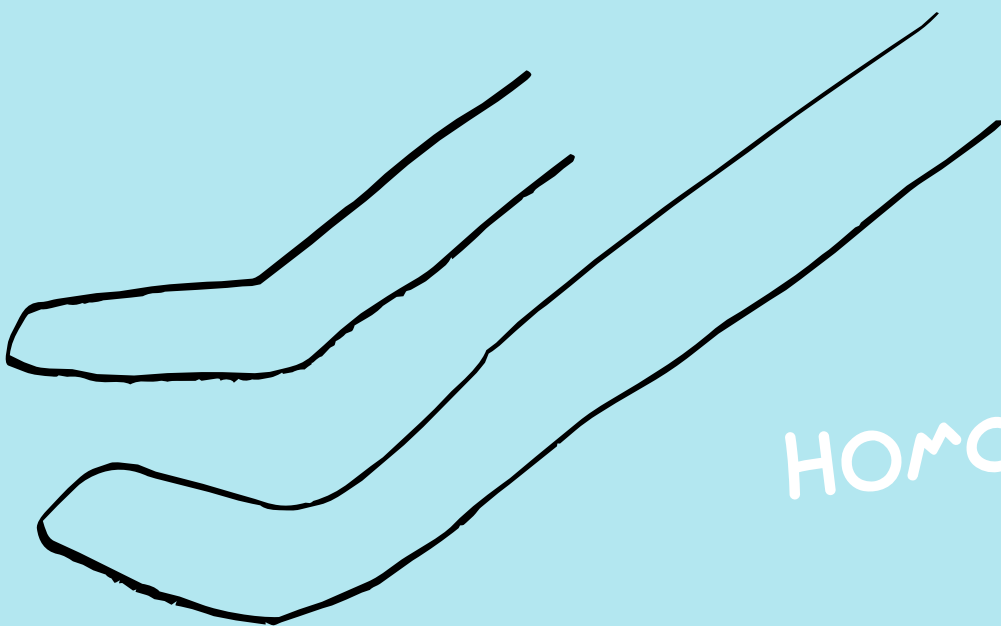


GIRLS TO
THE RIGHT,



BOYS TO
THE LEFT



HOMO NOUUS

Una

At the beginning of first grade, the teacher made all the girls leave the classroom and wait until we were called back in. I was left for last, and my task was simply to go and sit in my seat. The teacher, with her arms crossed, is smirking and saying nothing. There is a broom on the floor in front of me, and everyone is shouting: "DON'T STEP OVER IT!!! DON'T STEP OVER IT!!!" Half-frozen, I walk around it and sit down. The teacher proudly picks up the broom and announces that this was a test. The girl who was going to be a good housewife would have picked up the broom and put it away. None of us will be. We are all unobservant, lazy, and will make bad brides and housewives.

Speaker 1

When I was 10 years old, I was playing in the yard wearing shorts. My mom told me to go change because my fat legs were visually bothering her. I didn't wear shorts outside the house for the next nine years.

Speaker 2

On sports day, I was left out of the teams. The 4th-grade girls laughed at me because I had long hair. They said I was a transvestite. I asked if they knew what that meant. They said: "Someone who is both genders at the same time." And then: "Someone who likes their own gender," but in the end: "someone who likes both their own and the opposite gender." I found it funny that they didn't even know what they were saying.

Boy 2

At home, it was always clear that boys don't talk about emotions. I thought doing that was girlish. That other boys would laugh at me. Then, one of my friends came out of the closet. And I started talking to him about how I felt. I liked it. I knew he wouldn't judge me.

Chalk

I had long, curly hair. At Christmas, in my secret Santa envelope, I repeatedly received notes that read: "Bitch, go to the barber already."

Speaker 1

I had recently given birth, I still had a big belly, and I was running on very little sleep. But I had to bring a package into the club Piens for a visiting foreign musician. The guys at the door started roaring with laughter and shouted loudly to the security guard: "Why are you letting crocodiles like that inside?!"

Jānis

I was born with a posture deformity. Thanks to rehabilitation and orthotics during childhood, it improved significantly, but I still have an unusual gait. At school, they nicknamed me "the skier."

Janeks

I was always told that boys don't cry. That they have to be strong, successful, muscular, with a six-pack and a big penis.

Jola

Our homeroom teacher didn't shave her armpits. My classmates talked about how disgusting it was all the time. And when hair started growing on my legs and underarms, I started finding it disgusting too. I became obsessed with shaving—just so nobody would see a single hair.

Speaker 2

In elementary school, I was regularly harassed by my classmates. They would grope me before gym class and chase me to the restroom. During one break, two boys wouldn't let me leave the classroom. One blocked the exit and told the other to take off his pants and underwear and come at me. I froze. I was just a little girl, after all.

Boy 2

In elementary school, we used to laugh at the classmate who was the first to start growing a beard. Now, the guys laugh at me because I'm the only one who still has a smooth chin.

Speaker 3

In kindergarten, my parents told me that boys don't wear pink because it's a girls' color. Even though I'm a girl, I found that mentality disgusting. In 3rd grade, I liked a girl for the first time, and seven years later, I finally accepted that I am bisexual. However, I still haven't told my parents because they've been saying how disgusting it is since I was a little child.

Alans

Once, I wore a pearl necklace to school. I thought it suited me, but the guys asked if I was gay for wearing pearls. Since then, I only wear it at home.

Speaker 4

In middle school, I was the first one whose breasts started developing. My female classmates called me "booby," and the boys regularly tried to grope me. One would hold me down while another grabbed me. I was too ashamed to tell the teacher or my mom. That was the moment I started hating my body.

Sīmanis

Kids pick on me because of my bike, calling it a grandma's bike. Sometimes they scare me, harass me, and threaten me. I don't care, I can ignore them because they've been doing this to me for a long time. If I complain, they will hate me even more. I just wish they would leave me alone and be my friends.

Andrejs

In middle school, it was trendy to wear skinny jeans. When I tried them on in the store, my dad said I looked like a faggot. I came out of the closet late and only to my mom; she told my dad afterward. Now, whenever queers are mentioned in my father's presence, he always stays silent.

Speaker 5

I grew up in an isolated rural area and went to a country school from 1st to 9th grade. I was bullied every day by my schoolmates and even by a few teachers. After 9th grade, I transferred to a distance-learning high school, and that helped a bit – it allowed me to understand my identity better, and I realized that I am queer. But distance learning didn't save me from everything, because I became even more isolated.

Speaker 6

At a family gathering when I was 13 years old, my dad's cousin measured her waist, then mine, and said: "Wow, you really are fat!"

Alans

We were dancing with friends at a party. I'm not particularly good at dancing, so I was nervous, but then I relaxed and got into it. A buddy looked at me and started laughing because I was swinging my hips like a girl. Since then, I am careful not to move my waist too much.

Speaker 3

In elementary school, a classmate masturbated while sitting right next to me. When I told the teacher, she said I had an overactive imagination and needed help. I was sent to the school psychologist, who warned me that little children shouldn't make up perverted fairy tales. The desk kept shaking.

Mia

In middle school, the boys would pull at the girls from behind to check if they were wearing a bra. I don't know who felt more embarrassed – me, because I didn't have breasts or a bra yet, or the girls who did and who wouldn't be left alone for longer.

Folk Dancer

I was 16 years old, and my baby fat was going away much slower than the other girls'. Technically, I could dance twice as well as the rest; I didn't just work until I got it right, but worked so hard that if I woke up at two in the morning, I knew every single movement. But on stage, everyone only cares about perfect waists and dazzling smiles, so the seventy-year-old instructor would often say publicly: "Nobody is going to roll around on my stage, you need to lose weight." For three months, during lunch breaks, I ate an orange in the restroom. One orange for lunch. I hid because I was ashamed of giving in to the cult of stage beauty. I did get rid of the kilograms! And, unfortunately, of a healthy attitude toward my body as well.

Speaker 7

I wear men's clothes, and I have a short haircut. In the school hallway, I heard someone ask in a condescending tone: "Is that even a girl?" When I started wearing men's clothing, my mother often called me a boy, and my father asked: "Why can't you dress like a woman?"

Speaker 8

In middle school, a boy mocked me, ridiculed me, and hit me with his fists for several years. The others just watched or laughed. When I told the school psychologist, I was forced to sit at the same desk as that boy. That only made everything worse; he threatened to gouge my eyes out.

Demur

I arrived late for dance class and honestly explained to the teacher that I was drinking tea, eating cookies, and didn't notice how time had flown by. In front of all the children, the teacher grabbed my love handles, shook them, and pointed out that I really shouldn't be eating those cookies.

Janeks

I never ended up telling my parents that I am gay. We avoided the topic, even though it was always hanging in the air. My parents passed away recently, and I never got to introduce them to the person I love.

Speaker 9

There is no point in talking about it. Or trying to fix anything. I just have to keep fighting. Nothing is going to change.

Speaker 4

At my new school, during a break, someone slid a piece of paper to me where every single classmate had written a mocking sentence about me. The whole class watched me read it and laughed when I cried. On that day, I learned how not to cry.

Speaker 10

Once, I overheard someone say: "Look at how big her feet are!" But my mom had promised me that I, just like her, would wear a size 36. Another time, she jokingly said that just like in the fairy tale, I should cut off my big toes because they were too long. Recently, I moved up to a size 42. My big toes are crooked, the bunions stick out, and I am still ashamed of my feet.

Speaker 11

When we were kids, my older brother told me that I was fat and that if he cut my thigh with a knife, fat would come pouring out instead of blood—and I believed him.

Lola

A classmate told me that after finding out I was queer, she felt uncomfortable changing clothes with me before gym class.

Vira

During my first year at the lyceum, an older student tried to play a prank on me called a “flash haircut”. It means lighting someone’s hair on fire with a lighter. Someone noticed it and shouted to warn me. I spun around, but he just pulled his hands back and laughed.

Speaker 12

In 3rd grade, I was walking home from the bus stop and two older boys followed me. One of them said: "Little girl, want to come over to Edžus' place, play with Barbies, and have some sex?" I didn't say anything, I just kept walking forward. When I got home, I couldn't stop crying. I was wearing a skirt that day, and for a long time, I believed that was the reason I targeted with that comment. After that, I avoided skirts.

M

When I was planning to invite friends over, my parents found out that some of them were gay. At first, my parents said nothing, but later, questions followed about whether everything was alright with me – whether I was heterosexual? My parents said they didn't want people like that coming to visit me. They still don't know that I am a lesbian.

Speaker 13

Once, the teacher published a class ranking listing everyone's full names. I hated being at the bottom, so I determined to study as hard as possible, but in Kengarags, studying well wasn't popular. I was picked on and ridiculed, so I often started getting "sick." In reality, I would heat up the thermometer against a lightbulb, and that was enough for my mom to let me – the sickly child – stay home. So, I was sick every other week. I talked to my parents about changing schools, but the answer was always: "It will be the same or even worse there." I was a nerd, and nerds get a nerd's fate. In 9th grade, I was accepted into a modeling school, but my classmates only found out during the second semester. That's when they started showing kindness. It was too late.

Janeks

In middle school, I was overweight. Once, in the gym locker room, a classmate asked me if fat guys really can't see their own penis past their belly. Since then, I always changed in the restroom.

Dāgs

At school, I couldn't come out of the closet and stayed hidden. Then, during a school field trip, as an 11-year-old boy, I experienced sexual abuse. I fell into a depression, and my mother thought that school specialists and antidepressants could help me. But instead, I made playlists about my feelings, and to this day, music is the only thing that calms me down. I am afraid that professionals wouldn't truly listen to me.

Kate

I used to be in a group of girls that called both strangers and people we knew names, making disgusting comments about other people's appearance. Due to my shyness and fear, I couldn't say anything to stand up to them, even though my hands were absolutely itching to do it. I was terrified that I would become the next target of their bullying. Now, I struggle with terrible social anxiety and panic attacks, and I still feel like everyone is constantly criticizing and judging me.

Lo

The teacher told us that at her previous school, there were two "girls" who identified as boys and asked to be called by boy names. The teacher mocked them and refused to do it. Later, in social studies class, a classmate started calling others faggots and threatened to beat them to death. The teacher said he would write a disciplinary note for homophobia, but later apologized to the boy, saying he had overreacted.

Eli

At school, any bullying directed at me felt justified, even though I was neither fat nor ugly. Later, I discovered that I am non-binary and perceive things differently, so I was the perfect target for bullying.

Speaker 14

I am 12 years old, and sometimes it feels like I have always been different. When we moved because of the war, I thought things would be different at the new school. I tried so hard! I was quiet, polite, and didn't bother anyone, but they wouldn't even say hello to me. Then they started laughing, whispering, and acting as if I wasn't even there. I thought maybe it was my own fault – that I look strange, talk strange, or have weird hobbies. Why do they get to feel happy while I don't? I became angry and jealous, but I felt ashamed of it. I don't want to be a bad person! I just want someone to say "ciao" to me and invite me to hang out. I can't go back home. I just want to find a place where people actually care about me.

Speaker 15

In elementary school, I was ridiculed because I had a very close relationship with another female classmate. In later years, I realized those were my first romantic feelings. I used to cry when we were split into separate groups. Once, this classmate grabbed me, choked me, and whispered: "I'm going to kill you!" When I went to the school psychologist asking for help, she offered no support. I realized that adults cannot be trusted and you cannot expect help from them.

Renarčiks

In 8th grade, I bleached my hair. My classmates' reactions ranged from toxic smirks to twisted, disgusted faces. The atmosphere was heated – brutal mockery and speculation about my sexuality. Summer flew by, my hair grew out, and I decided I wanted dark blue hair next. Mistake. If the word "blue" (zilais – slang for a homosexual)* was a matter of debate when I had brown hair, with blue hair it became an outright statement. At 23 years old, I finally started doing what I like. A small step – a pierced nostril. With this hole in my nose, I have slowly begun to patch up the massive hole in my existence.

Emīlija

When I was little, my dad called me his little princess and often added that no prince would ever love me because I was fat. When I protested, I was called stubborn. Sitting around the holiday table drinking beer, my dad and brother would openly discuss my stubbornness and excess weight. To this day, I still struggle with episodes of binging and starving. Everyone knows me as an active, athletic person, and I am proud of my achievements, yet I still agonize over the number on the scale.

Speaker 16

In 5th grade, my best friends turned against me and started talking trash about me. They rummaged through my things and found a love letter to a schoolmate that I never even intended to send – I was just writing out my feelings. The girls copied it and sent it to that boy. They tricked the hall monitor into giving them the spare key to my locker and drew all over everything inside with a marker. This went on for several weeks until I finally told my brother's girlfriend. She called one of the girls and threatened to tell her parents everything. The next day, the girls just muttered that I could have solved my own problems instead of getting adults involved. But they left me alone after that.

Speaker 5

When I told my parents that I am gay, they forbade me from telling my grandfather. I waited for a long time for that to change. Then, one day, I was visiting with my boyfriend, and my dad suddenly changed his mind. He simply told me to go to my grandfather and tell him. It turned out that my grandfather already knew. He had known for a long time, and he had absolutely no problem with it. The next day, my car broke down. My grandfather brought some oil, shook my boyfriend's hand, and said: "Pleasure to finally meet you."

Speaker 17

During gym class, an older boy, while playing basketball, blurted out: "Someone here is a flat board," and pointed at my small breasts. I was startled and didn't understand why he was commenting on my 14-year-old body at all. As time goes by, I have wondered whether I should tell him that it was totally not okay... Now, he has a daughter himself. I hope he has grown as a person.

Speaker 18

In Ukraine, I had many friends. Then the war started, and we moved from one country to another. I really wanted to be with my friends, but the exact same thing kept repeating everywhere. Nobody wanted to play with me and they told me to go away. They stood there, laughed, and acted as if I wasn't even there – that hurt the most. Then they started shoving and hitting me. At first, I just cried, but then I couldn't take it anymore and started hitting first. Even if someone just looked at me, I thought they were about to hurt me. I was so scared that attacking first felt like the safest option. In Norway, my only friend was a large boulder. Every day I went to talk to it and brought it little gifts. It never told me to go away and it never laughed. It never betrayed me.

Speaker 19

I only recently realized that I was being bullied. At dance classes, they called me the “low chassis,” and said I was a good girl because I had slimmed down over the summer, even though I hadn’t been fat. I wasn’t allowed to go to dance competitions because I wasn’t blonde. I didn’t miss rehearsals, I didn’t skip classes, I stretched into splits at home, and I taught my dolls the ensemble’s entire repertoire. With a 40-degree fever or a blue, bandaged ankle, I traveled to out-of-town concerts. Later, my therapist asked what I expected from her. I said I expected her to push me, speak to me strictly, and call me out if I did something foolish. She countered that she could support me through my challenges instead. Hearing that, I started to cry. Such an idea had never even crossed my mind.

T.

I was photographed sitting on the toilet in the school restroom, and my classmates posted it on Draugiem.lv. My mom contacted the website, and the photo was taken down. Discussions with the school followed, and at least in the restrooms, peace finally returned.

Speaker 6

My family still hasn't accepted me, even though I told them I am trans a year and a half ago. They still call me by the wrong name – the one that isn't even on my driver's license anymore. They treat me like a girl. But I have a family. The one I chose myself. Friends, acquaintances with whom I feel good. We meet often, celebrate birthdays together, and ask each other for advice.

A.

In the nineties, I started studying at a new school. That autumn, the movie Congo was being advertised – the title text and a gorilla's face with big nostrils. My classmates agreed that I looked exactly like that and started calling me Congo. They threw my backpack out the window, spat chewed-up bits of paper all over me, declaring – you are not human, you are not a girl. You are an animal. You are "it". Congo. I spent the entire eighth grade thinking about suicide. Funny enough, what held me back was a debt at the library. I was afraid it would classify as stealing and God wouldn't accept me. I grew up to be a pretty normal person. (Thanks to the unreturned book!) But there are moments when I know for a fact that something is wrong with me, and everyone surely sees it. The stench of humiliation doesn't wash off that easily.

T.

After school, we played Truth or Dare. I was blindfolded and told to taste and eat something. It turned out to be pet poop. The girl who owned the pet was ashamed that she had been too afraid to stand up against the injustice. Later, we became real friends.

Petr's

My dad took me to a football game a week after his brother had passed away. At one point, I noticed that he was crying, and I hugged him. He said: "I'm sorry, grown men shouldn't cry." I told him that was nonsense: "Everyone cries. I cry often." Then he started crying even more.

Katrīna

They turned on me when I rushed to defend a classmate who was regularly beaten up during breaks. When the bell rang, everyone pretended that nothing had happened, and even the boy who had been beaten up tried to compose his face and straighten his clothes. I couldn't stand it and screamed at the ones hitting him. Of course, he and I were immediately "married off." Because you only defend someone when you love them, right? And then I became the boys' main target for ridicule. They would cackle, mimicking a goose, whenever I appeared in the school hallways or when the teacher called me up to the blackboard. Upon entering the school, there was a giant mirror wall ahead. Every morning in my mind, I buckled a sword around myself and put on invisible armor. I went to school like it was a war zone. Then, thank God, I got into an art school. I escaped. I try not to be the kind of teacher we had in the 90s, who allowed this and stayed silent. I see, I hear, and I step in if the evil of silence is turned against anyone.

MD

When I was about 16 years old, I heard my mother crossly telling relatives behind closed doors that she had a fat cow growing up at home. Shortly after that, I ended up with an eating disorder. Only much later did I realize that my mother herself had lived her whole life with an eating disorder that she never acknowledged or treated. From time to time, I still feel the remnants of those bad thoughts, but I have worked on myself a lot to break the chain of misery and not pass it on to my daughter.

Speaker 7

When I was living with my boyfriend, my parents came to visit, looked at our apartment, and my mom asked: "And where do you sleep then?" There was only one bed in the apartment, and she knew we were a couple. But now, she wants to go to Pride.

Anna

During the Soviet era, when I was in 7th grade, they measured our heights and bodies. The nurse measured my chest and loudly announced that I was like a chick – with no breasts. I was devastated. The smallest size in the store. When I got divorced from my husband at 40 years old, I got modest breast implants just so that there would finally be something about myself that I liked. Now, I like how I look, but my breast size has become completely unimportant to me.

Speaker 20

In middle school, I liked a classmate. He was a football player, but I was the fat, smart girl of the class. When I was walking down the hallway, his cousin loudly said to her friend: “Look, that’s Sabīne, she likes Mārtiņš! But she also likes pastries.” That summer, Māris Putniņš’s book *Wild Pies* (Mežonīgie Pīrāgi) became my favorite book, and it changed my life. I became interested in the sea, went sailing, and even met the author of the book, who showed me basic fencing moves. I accepted that I really do like pastries a lot, and they play a big role in my life. 15 years after that nasty comment, I am married to a man who also likes pastries.

Karina

Once on the metro, I saw a girl in a top and shorts whose entire body was covered in scars – on her arms, legs, everywhere. The kind that are left after self-harming. I tried not to stare, but I couldn't look away. She was beautiful, seemed cheerful, and the scars had healed. She was talking to a guy and laughing. She carried herself with dignity. People probably still look, but she is at peace with herself, not ashamed to show her body and its entire history.

Speaker 21

TikTok helped me develop a strong mindset. Right now, when someone says something nasty to me, in my mind I say everything I would want to tell those people to their face. I completely do not care what anyone says about me.

Varvara

The fact that you are queer can be hidden for a while, and for many of us, it is a survival mechanism. But that doesn't mean you don't hear every comment or joke. I am 36 years old, but I still hear that 13-year-old child inside me who is completely convinced that something is wrong with her, and that she therefore deserved all that mistreatment. For most of my life, I have tried to be "normal" and fit in; I wanted to be liked and, at the same time, to go unnoticed. Right now, I know that I am the one who needs to forgive, but it will take years to unlearn everything and get to a place where my first instinct isn't to hide.

Janeks

When my daughter went through her gender transition, all my friends supported her. But nobody understood my pain. They said: "It's so beautiful – now you have a daughter. And she is happy. That is the main thing. She isn't dead." But I needed time. I needed to grieve the loss of my son. And it was my daughter who helped me the most. She tried to be with me as often as possible. We went to the cinema, we cooked together. She practiced putting on makeup on me. I am ashamed of how hard it was for me to accept it. That I needed help. But I am so proud of her—that she had enough strength for both of us.

Jozefs/Petrs

I am a homemaker. My wife works, while I take care of our son at home. People think we decided this because she earns more. It's easier for them to accept it that way. But they don't understand. In reality, this is how we had always wanted it. Even before he was born, we agreed that after a year, I would take over the primary care. And the time I spend with my son, the relationship we are building – there is nothing more valuable.

Speaker 22

When I returned from maternity leave, some male colleagues commented that I had gained weight. If I ate anything more than a salad at work, I received comments. At family events, my brother laughed that I must be drinking heavy cream because I am so fat. I had anxiety about eating when visiting people or in places where I didn't know how many calories were in a specific product. I still know the calorie count for most foods. I only fell in love with myself after the age of 35, when I started exercising to become stronger, not thinner.

Pēteris

In fifth grade, I was called a faggot for the first time, and I kept hearing this label all the way until the end of high school. My appearance, my gait, my high voice, and my way of speaking were different from what others perceived as fitting for boys. I was the “effeminate” guy from class 5B, whom even girls from older classes came to look at like a circus freak: “Yes, he really is a faggot!” The “visits” from the older and parallel class girls were more humiliating than the fact that the boys often beat me up. The teachers simply pretended they didn’t hear anything. I went to one of the prestigious schools, and the teachers didn’t want to call in the elite parents for disciplinary discussions. When I realized that, something inside me died, and my resentment was joined by a fighting spirit and a critical attitude toward adults. The ridicule subsided when a few classmates started being friends with me because I was “different.” This prompted me to cultivate my individuality. I tried to turn a “defect” into an “effect”—I read and cultivated my interests so that it would be pleasant for me to spend time with myself. It paid off when I found like-minded people and understanding at university.

Anete

First I was the pimply one (a genetically inherited skin condition), then the one with a mustache (at around 14, it didn't occur to me that I needed to wax my upper lip). However, I have sinned too... Maybe girls grow up when there is no longer a need to bully others just to make themselves feel better.