**Runner up – Forward/emagazine Creative Critics 2019**

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**Responding to ‘Flowers’ by Jay Bernard**

**Her**

The streets will run red

Tonight

The stars will shine from a blood-soaked mirror

Tonight

The flowers will die

Tonight

The meadows will thrive on my beating heart

Tonight

You beg to know my

Crime

You assume I must be punished for my

Crime

You hunt me for my

Crime

You do not get the right to decide my

Crime

Why won’t you help me

Escape?

We’re crying and screaming, desperate for

Escape

But they won’t let us

Escape

Because in Russia, hunting us is their

Escape

Do I have your attention now?

Will you come and save

Us, the innocent?

All I did was love her.

**Reflection**

Jay Bernard is an LGBTQ+ black poet who, through their poetry, fought to raise awareness of the suffering of black people in our society. As a member of the LQBTQ+ community, I feel that it is my duty to follow in their footsteps and fight to make the suffering of our community known. In Russia there is a website dedicated to identifying gay people, only so that they can be hunted and brutally murdered. Their only crime is loving who they want to. On July 21st, 2019, gay activist Yelena Grigoryeva was stabbed to death for trying to defend members of the LGBTQ+ community who had been detained by Russian police. This website turns the murder of LGBTQ+ people into a game based off the Saw movies, and Yelena found her name listed before she died. Despite numerous death threats, Yelena continued to fight for her community, and this poem is dedicated to her memory, and to the memories of all the LGBTQ+ Russians who have been slaughtered because of who they loved. Bernard’s poem expresses so much anger at the murder of innocent people, who died because of something they couldn’t change. “Flowers” is an inspirational step towards breaking the silence surrounding the treatment of oppressed minorities, and I would like to follow in the footsteps of Bernard and Grigoryeva and tear down the extreme censorship we are held under. “Flowers” actively accuses the general public of their ignorance, and I themed my poem, “Her”, around more directly accusing the reader of not doing enough to fight for us. Poems such as these are a call to arms to the people, and it is now their responsibility to respond.