

## Slightly Vanilla

My childhood began by realizing I was different;  
I found that I had abilities no one around could wield.  
I knew acceptance and community, and discovered  
a magic in my chest that cannot be diminished.

At ten years old, I began an adventure  
to return an old relic back to a distant land.  
I learned the meaning of friendship,  
loyalty, and perseverance.

At age thirteen, I dug into my core  
and forged myself anew with feminine armor.  
My gender is not a weakness or a restraint,  
I am a warrior, a magic-maker, and a savior.

At fourteen, I emerged from my egg as a serpent,  
breathing fire around my just-hatched scales.  
I awaited the destiny that comes to all those like me,  
those who are small and grow to the heavens.

Fifteen found me fighting with the divine,  
deciding who was worth saving and at what cost.  
Once I had grown to heaven, it could no longer hold me;  
I fell knowing that good and evil aren't always clear.

Sixteen was the age where I grew my wings,  
feathers catching fire from the sun that I flew towards.  
When given the choice to be a hero to others,  
I fought savagely instead to save what was mine.

Age seventeen gave me a disease I didn't know about,  
making me count the rose petals as if they were poison.  
Self-identity is what I strove for, freedom,  
and I heard my thoughts be whispered from their lips.

Eighteen was the year I tasted diversity and swallowed identity;  
I knew who I was, learned the canvas of my mind.  
Separation of ourselves into small boxes enraged me,  
and I set the system on fire as I burned.

Here I am at age nineteen, reading the words  
that I have just written and smiling.  
Because through all the adventures,  
I never once got a papercut from their pages.

—Aly Reed