



PROUD OF
MY FLAWS

10

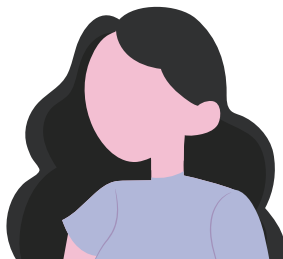
ONE DAY
AT A TIME

bloom

I LOVE
MYSELF

ON MY
HEALING
JOURNEY

SELF-LOVE
& SELF-CARE



you
are
meant
to
bloom





NOVEMBER 1ST, 2022

Hey, Cutie!



For this issue, we sought pieces that reflect upon, interrogate, and examine the intersection between mental health and queerness.

The following questions were provided to prompt:

- How does the ostracization of queerness compound the stigmatization of mental illness?
- How does the long and ongoing history of medical pathologization of diverse experiences, expressions and presentations of queerness, gender identity, and sex characteristics, impact our ability to ask those same systems for help?
- How can other systems of marginalization eg. housing, capitalism, racism, climate change, etc. impact our mental health? How can queer community disrupt or reinforce these systems?
- How can mental wellbeing be cultivated in queer community?
- How can caring for one's mental health be radical?
- What does safety and peace mean for queer people?

We believe that the ongoing traumatization of queer people is a result of the ongoing struggle against a system that was actively structured to erase and marginalize us.

At the end of the issue we've provided a list mental health resources, many of which are specifically designed for or accessible to queer people.

In times of crisis, we know that maintaining community is vital. That's why QT brings together our collective projects to create that sense of shared space. Queer Toronto Literary Magazine is a nonprofit dedicated to elevating and celebrating queer voices in Canada.

Thank you to all the writers, poets, artists and makers for allowing QT to share your work with the world. Thank you to all the volunteers at QT, without whom we would not have a magazine.

– **Pax Santos**, Founding Editor

***“No person is your friend
who demands your silence or
denies your right to grow.”***

– Alice Walker



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“I can make attendants laugh”

by **Rebecca Casalino**

MEDIUM:

Poetry

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Rebecca Casalino is an artist, writer and curator based in Oshkosh:wakon (Hamilton, ON). Casalino completed her BA in Studio Art, with a minor in English, at the University of Guelph in 2017. She is a 2021 graduate of OCAD U's MFA program in Criticism and Curatorial Practice. Casalino is a queer Italian-Canadian settler, maintaining her practice through deeply personal collaborations in her community and sheer willpower. Casalino channels her lived experiences through her quirky, often deadpan, humour.



I can make attendants laugh
While declaring I am a risk to myself and others
Watch them chuckle with me at this insanity
Put my belongings in a plastic bag and I am left feeling naked
after a mandatory coat check
Shuffle into a room, maybe with thick glass
onlooking rows of desks and monitors
Maybe a locked room with privacy curtains drawn
Dart around the space like a fish in a new tank
An unfamiliar concrete castle in the distance
A serpentine moat designed to wrap around sick bodies
To keep them in place, strapped to linoleum floors
I am suspended by drop ceilings
And suspected by an iris in the corner of the room
Why are there no doorknobs in this place?

“forget”

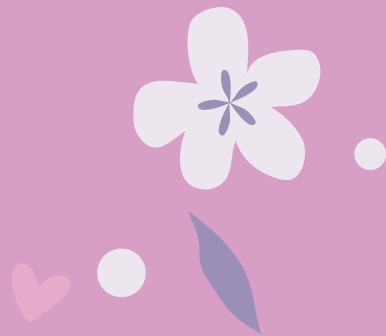
by Alex Bauman

MEDIUM:

Painting

SIZE:

11" x 16" Mixed Media



ABOUT THE ARTIST:

Alex Bauman is an American/Canadian artist currently living in the UK. Her work focuses on home, nature, and identity using a variety of mediums both traditional and digital. || IG: @albbbaum.





“Lines”

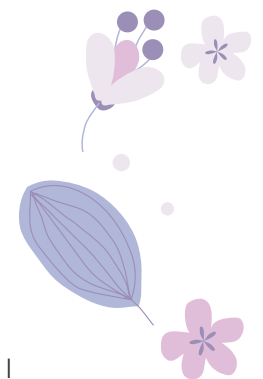
by **Anonymous**

MEDIUM:
Poetry

CW:
Substance Abuse

Lines on my arms, one two three
Lines on the table, four five six
Cut lines somewhere on something
Credit card and rolled up bills
Razor blade and a rolled-up tissue
Bloody hands and how'd I get here
Black out nights and black out blinds
To stop the sunlight from telling you that
Afters need to stop, that afternoon's arrived
When did we get in last night?

Who drank all the vodka? Was it me?
I haven't left the house in four days
Last night's party was a blast
Joe had that fit after a nitrous balloon
Crying fit on the floor because no matter
How hard I try I can't come out of it
I close my eyes but it's like
One long bad trip that won't end
Did you know James is on 2C-B tonight?
That's why he's eating chips whilst
We all take more MDMA in the back room
I can't see my phone screen I'm too fucked
Someone else turn on the music please
Turn off the light when you leave
I haven't eaten in three days
Don't order me a take away
I swear I'll be ok by the morning
Anyone want a McDonalds?
We're going for a walk because Chez and I
Sniffed this entire bag and now
We have the overwhelming urge





To go somewhere different than this kitchen
Now I'm sat at the kitchen table
In my dressing gown trying to
Force myself to eat a bowl of cereal but
It feels like trying to shove carpet down
My unwilling throat into a churning stomach
Half smoked spliff on the table
Was that from last night or the night before?
I quiz myself on what's happened
We smashed the pub quiz on Tuesday
Round of shots for us for best team name
Quickly deteriorated into drugs in my kitchen
I'm just having fun, don't mind me
Don't mind me, I whisper to my flat
As if living here has inconvenienced it
Cig ends and empty bottles strewn
Across the floor and tables
I can't remember how I got here
Nose blocked and in my overdraft
Apparently I rung my dealer last night?
Can't sleep at 8am because of the coke

Or can't sleep because of the anxiety
Heart racing either way staring at the
Light on the ceiling wondering what it
Feels like to have a normal night
How to not completely lose control
Every fucking time
Birds begin chirping, mind whirling
People beginning to worry when
I don't show up for afters or pre's
I never miss the chance for a line or key
Scraping up the will to get out of bed
Get off the floor, stop staring at the wall
Comedowns blend into real life
The drugs don't get me as high anymore
So I cut a line at night somewhere
And on something
Razor blade or credit card
Red or white
Three, four, five neatly in a row
Up my nose or on my wrist
I've relapsed again.



“Post
traumatic
joy”

by **Jasper Bryan**

Digital collage inspired by my sculpture series

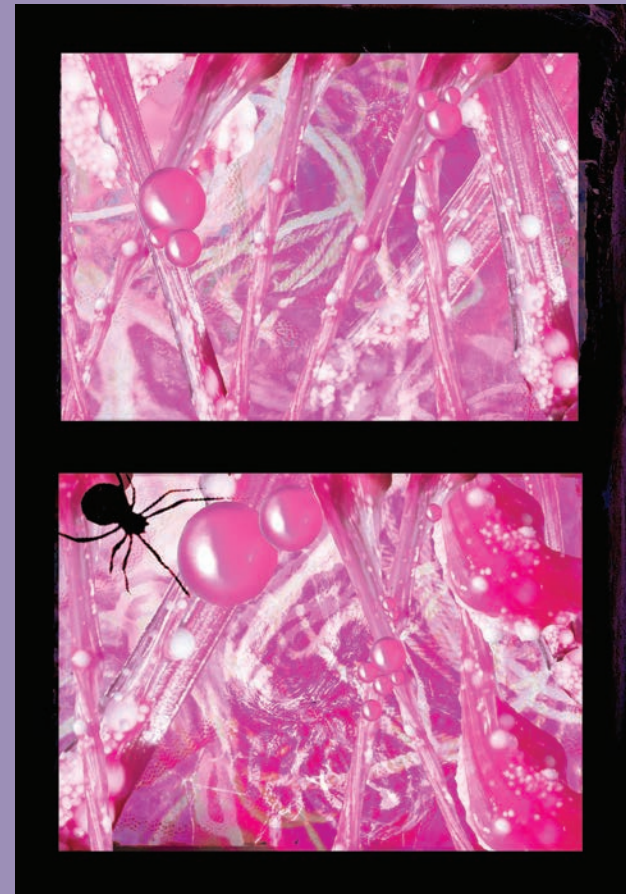
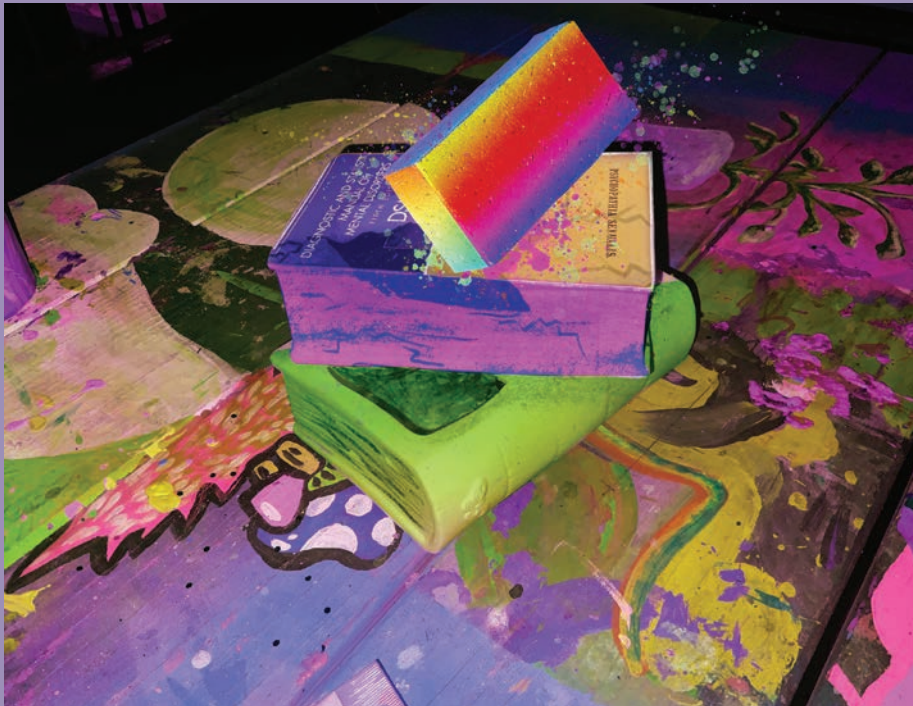


“Smash the DSM”

by Jasper Bryan

MEDIUM:

Photography, digital collage and drawing



“Bubblegum”

by Jasper Bryan

MEDIUM:

Digital collage inspired by my sculpture series



“Eclipse of the Heart”

by **Ramesh Dohani**

MEDIUM:

Poetry

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Ramesh Dohan lives in the city of Toronto with his partner and an exceptionally perfect dog. When he is not writing in his favorite café, he spends his time reading, hiking, and travelling the world. He has also seen his poetry published in several literary journals including *Toronto Poetry Magazine* (2020), *Trouvaille Review* (2021), *Bosphorous Review of Books* (2021), *Bengaluru Review*, *Pinecone Review* (2021) and *Modern Literature* (2022). \\\ IG: @republicofram



In the dark
Of my mind's night
I return to
Your calloused hands, your body
Undone in its searching arms
The one who taught me
To bear the black throat
Burn of bourbon
Sleeping beside you
I realise that
Hunger is who we are
Under a black lacquered moon

“Diaspora”

by **Ramesh Dohan**

MEDIUM:
Poetry



For at least a minute
I had discovered
your smell on the pillow
these are moments
soon after
that I bear for now
in a raft of these words
I call poetry

“Solitude”

by **Ramesh Dohan**

MEDIUM:
Poetry

It all begins
With a single breath
Leading to a place
where Memory resides
Packed up in a box
With those dusty
Black and white photographs
This is a trick
You perform
Only with words
Nothing grows thinner
Than your own disguise



“Workers”

by **Yusra Usmania**

MEDIUM:
Poetry



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Yusra Usmani (AKA Majnun) is a writer and performer of poetry, with an emphasis on spectacle. Her work explores the use of poetry as a religious instrument. She has performed throughout the GTA and can be found on Instagram as @im.majnun. || IG: @im.majnun

Steaming brick on steaming brick
The work is long and without help
For us who build our houses in
The sobbing depths of hell

I'll take the crown of indignity
In place of promised gold
I'll have slander as my feed
And swallow each blow as it's told

Don't be so wretched, please!
Give this all your best
And don't deny your seat
As misfortune's honoured guest

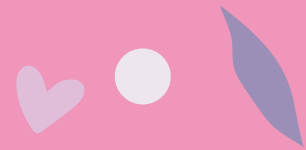
With me stands a thousand fiends
Each holding their own pocket knife
They wait, hushing each other as I speak
Ready to plunge into my side

Tonight, once again, I'll lay
Within these boiling rooms
At each corner an ambush awaits
As my relentless passion blooms

An impulse has made me its victim
Pouring intrigue into the hearts of all
Its laid my brain out wide open
For this religious night of song

I seethe underneath the fan
Impatient for the task i'm sent to do:
To plunge into the origin of man
And re-emerge with the new

I imagine someone at my side
With me carrying this cross—
We happily toil, with a certain pride
Indifferent to the taunts



Queer Mental Health Maintenance Contract

This mental health maintenance contract, entered into force on the twenty-fifth day of September 2022, is a binding agreement between Justin Ancheta (hereinafter known as *property owner*), and Justin Ancheta (hereinafter known as *contractor*).

This contract applies to the property situated at the following locations:

Name:	Justin Ancheta (He/Him, They/Them)
Location(s):	Physical Residence (hereinafter known as <i>Justin</i>) Mental Centre (hereinafter known as <i>Justin's mind</i>) Emotional Centre (hereinafter known as <i>Justin's spirit</i>)

I. Contract Terms:

- A. This contract will commence on the twenty-fifth day of September 2022, for an indefinite duration.
- B. The property owner requests the services outlined in this contract performed by the contractor at the locations listed above at least three to five times per week.
- C. Notice of termination may be verbally offered, but meditative and spiritual renegotiation and/or arbitration employing Justin's therapist is required before this contract may be cancelled by either party.
- D. The contract may be renegotiated by the property owner in the event of:
 - i. Gross negligence by the contractor towards Justin's mind, body or spirit
 - ii. Consistent inability to perform specified duties
 - iii. Consistent patterns of aggressive activity by the contractor towards Justin's mind, body or spirit.
 1. Aggressive activity may include instances of
 - a. Self-cutting of Justin's right arm
 - b. Punching of walls for the purpose of experiencing pain
 - c. Internalized hypercritical self-dialogue taking the voice of Justin's parents.
- E. The contract may be renegotiated by the contractor in the event of:
 - i. Failure to maintain a safe environment for the continued healing of Justin's trauma from partner and family abuse
 - ii. Being impatient with Justin's healing and asking too much of themselves in their self-care and care for others around them

II. Service Terms:

- A. The contractor will perform the following set duties at a preferred interval of five days a week. The contractor will awaken and be present between 8:00 am and 12:00 am on the following days:

Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday

- B. The contractor will perform the following physical self-care services *daily*, recognizing through conversations in therapy the powerful connection between physical and mental well-being:

Justin Ancheta 2022-10-14 11:13 AM

Comment [1]: This wasn't in previous versions. Could you clarify?

Justin Ancheta 2022-10-14 11:15 AM

Comment [2]: This is something I'm trying out, for the purpose of self-honesty. I admit I've started to feel a lot lighter now.

by Justin Ancheta

MEDIUM:

Hermit Crab Essay

“Queer Mental Health Maintenance Contract”

Sufficient hydration of physical body	Appropriate provisioning of daily nutrition (1-2 servings of fruit)
Ensuring intake of sufficient oxygen through deep breathing exercises	Proper consumption of daily vitamins and minerals (See vitamin supplements)
Providing caffeine through coffee or tea, or other beverages as required	Granting self-permission for napping and/or break activity during the day

C. The contractor will perform the following mental self-care services *at least three times a week*:

Performing self-tarot readings (e.g. daily card draw or three-card spread)	5-10 minute journal free writing based on cards drawn during self-tarot reading
Meditative breathing, including incense or use of singing bowl (<i>once per week</i>)	Necessary restraint from engaging with acephobes and queerphobes online
Meditative prayer using prayer or rosary beads (<i>three times per week</i>)	Grounding and centering exercises involving deep breathing

D. The property owner should provide all necessary supplies for self-care whenever possible, including any required time and space for the contractor to perform self-care services.

E. In the event this is not possible, the property owner should make allowance for the contractor to do whatever is needed to procure what is necessary for mental and physical self-care.

F. The contractor will be required to limit Justin's Twitter intake (e.g. "Doomscrolling") related to:

- i. The general dissolution of queer and women's rights
- ii. Exclusion, violence and discrimination against bisexuals, trans/non-binary individuals, and asexuals/aromantics
- iii. Racism, climate change, fascism, and capitalism

III. Boundaries

- A.** Situations may arise where a cohabiting family member may display acute levels of negativity (towards Justin or their partner), which may be defined as:
- i. Tasks accompanied by a demand for Justin to drop whatever they're doing at the time
 - ii. Passive aggressiveness due to disproportionately insignificant domestic tasks
 - iii. Racism, xenophobia, acephobia, general queerphobia
 - iv. Body shaming and poverty shaming

B. The contractor may be required to:

- i. Establish a clear boundary for tasks placed on him (e.g. "*I'm in the middle of something right now, but I'll get to your request in a few minutes.*")
- ii. Temporarily relocate Justin from a conversation or interaction to a space where he can be alone to silently scream
 1. Areas may include:

Justin Ancheta 2022-9-28 10:11 AM

Comment [3]: Can we renegotiate to allow for the inclusion of certain other foodstuffs alongside fruit?

Justin Ancheta 2022-9-28 10:11 AM

Comment [4]: No. A bag of ketchup potato chips does not constitute "daily nutrition". See section V.B., under "Compensation".

Justin Ancheta 2022-9-28 11:30 PM

Comment [5]: We've had a lot of problems with this recently. It's important that we make this a priority going forward.

Justin Ancheta 2022-10-14 11:00 AM

Comment [6]: This is a good idea. Review notes from therapy sessions with Evan for this.

Justin Ancheta 2022-10-14 11:19 AM

Comment [7]: We should be prepared for negative emotional reactions from others, should this situation arise. Others might think us rude or overly aggressive, for example.

Justin Ancheta 2022-9-28 11:31 PM

Comment [8]: I'm not sure about this. We need to keep ourselves updated on these issues. We can't just shut them out.

Justin Ancheta 2022-10-14 11:04 AM

Comment [9]: True, but remember the last time we lost ourselves in Doomscrolling: You gritted our teeth so hard our jaw started to ache. You felt our chest throb, squeeze and tighten. You wanted to cry. You wanted to slam a fist on the desk.

Justin Ancheta 2022-9-28 11:52 PM

Comment [10]: "Your tummy is getting bigger! You're gaining again!" Those words still rang in my ears loud and clear above my tinnitus. I want to take all of the food she's cooked this afternoon and dump it in the trash out of pettiness and spite. But I don't.

Justin Ancheta 2022-10-14 11:12 AM

Comment [11]: I'm grateful you didn't do this. Thank you.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
Justin Ancheta is a stuttering Filipino-Canadian passionate about tarot, science, and education. After teaching EFL in Korea for four years, he currently resides in Treaty 13 territory. He is exploring his writing voice, drawing from his experience as a racialized bi+ ace person. || IG/Twitter: @rampancy



- a. The bathroom, with the lights off and the door shut
- b. South stairwell
- c. Outdoor patio

iii. Perform any of the self-care routines outlined in II.B and II.C, as required

IV. Relationships

A. In the event of situations where the property owner feels unsafe around others (online or offline), the contractor may be required to:

- i. Upon a triggering incident, do regular check-ins with the property owner to assess the condition of Justin's Mind, Body and Spirit (e.g. "I was interrupted in the middle of my stuttering again, and I want to scream at the other person. How am I feeling in my body?")
- ii. Remove Justin from the current situation, with a requisite fabricated statement to facilitate a socially acceptable exit (e.g. "Sorry but something urgent came up and I have to go. But I'll message you later!")
- iii. Block or unfollow the involved parties from Justin's currently used communications channels and social media feeds.
- iv. Abruptly leave in-person conversations when chronic stuttering disrupts speech and induces emotional distress
- v. Reserve the right to say "No" to requests

Justin Ancheta 2022-10-14 11:07 AM

Comment [12]: Recommended steps:

- Allow mouth to rip itself open in silent seething to wring yourself back to normal
- Straighten clothing after finishing
- Dry tear stains and check eyes for redness in mirror

Justin Ancheta 2022-9-28 11:55 PM

Comment [13]: Due to current building maintenance, this area will likely be unavailable for mental health purposes until Spring 2023.

Justin Ancheta 2022-9-28 11:56 PM

Comment [14]: This should be bumped up in priority from (v) to (i).

Justin Ancheta 2022-9-28 11:57 PM

Comment [15]: I've deliberately made this open-ended for your benefit. I trust you. Just don't go too overboard, okay?

V. Compensation

A. The property owner will remunerate the contractor on a daily basis at the daily rate of:

- i. Three positive self-affirmations about their body and their accomplishments, no matter how small.
- ii. Unlimited forgiveness for mistakes made in managing Justin's mind and spirit, especially in unsafe/acutely negative situations
- iii. Unlimited forgiveness for any social difficulties tied to Justin's stuttering

B. The property owner will allow for occasional consumption of snack food (ketchup potato chips) and baked goods (butter tarts) as a positive self-reward for navigating situations outlined in III.A and IV.A, while successfully regulating their emotional and mental responses.

C. The property owner will allow for occasional acquisition of desired items (books, tarot cards, computer hardware upgrades, cool hifi audio shit on Amazon) as a positive self-reward for successfully navigating situations outlined in III.A and IV.A for sustained long-term periods.

By signing below, both parties agree to be bound by the terms of this contract.

Printed Name, Property Owner	Date
Printed Name, Contractor	Date

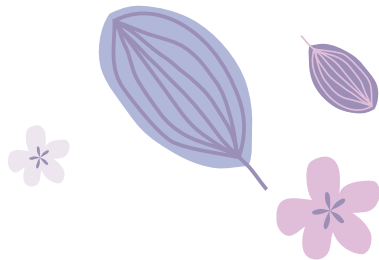


THE BEACH AFTER A 10-MINUTE THUNDERSTORM \\\ ELEGY FOR A PERSON
I SAW IN A VHS TAPE \\\ TREADMILL \\\ CITY NOISE

“The beach after a 10-minute thunderstorm”

by **Cass Cervi**

MEDIUM:
Poetry



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Cass Cervi is a writer, editor, and strategist based in Toronto. They write scripts, poems, editorials and more that have been published with *Slice Canada*, *eMpower Magazine*, *Watch Your Head*, and *The Feminine Collective*, among others. They have also mastered the art of mirror pics (see for yourself on their IG: @casscervi).

there's more trash
than usual
on the dock

the smell of rotting food blends
with damp wood,
beached lake scum

this is not the usual
fresh post-rain smell

the dock
bends
more than it used to,

the wetness has made it
spineless,
the rain has
taken the sand out from
under it

the tunnels that the
downhill overflow
traced toward the lake
have created new terrain of the
once-soft sand:
hardened scar tissue of
once-soft skin



THE BEACH AFTER A 10-MINUTE THUNDERSTORM \\ ELEGY FOR A PERSON
I SAW IN A VHS TAPE \\ TREADMILL \\ CITY NOISE

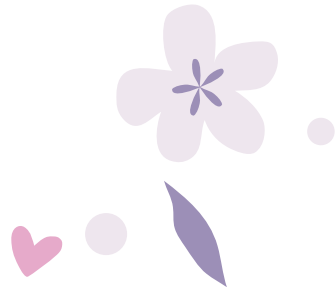
“Elegy for a Person I Saw in a VHS Tape”

by **Cass Cervi**

MEDIUM:
Poetry

There's a home video that we can't
watch anymore
because our VCR
broke

I remember it,
though



I'm the age where you're walking
but it's still a bit
wobbly

My mom's voice, static
in an old camera:
“Don't fall down!”

I laugh,
the babble of a brook that
has been dry for
longer than the VCR has been
broken

then,
I fall down,
still laughing

this is in memory
of VHS-tape me,
the one who would fall down without thinking
about how hard the ground is
the one who had a laugh that bubbled
over
the one who didn't yet know
how hard it is
to get back
up



THE BEACH AFTER A 10-MINUTE THUNDERSTORM \\ ELEGY FOR A PERSON
I SAW IN A VHS TAPE \\ TREADMILL \\ CITY NOISE

“Treadmill”

by Cass Cervi

MEDIUM:

Poetry



I went on a walk
in the nighttime,
after a day that could have stretched over
two,

the sky was burnt orange behind
a thick curtain of mist,
it had the glow of
a sunset,
or a sunrise

the horizon was black,
the sky didn't know
what time it was

the underbelly of panic,
life, noise,
seeped
into the silence like
mist carrying
a subtle, almost imperceptible
wetness
into the air:
you could feel it
sinking
into your skin

under the orange mist,
the road felt like
a treadmill:

time stretching and winding
in front of
me,
every day is
too many days

I'm thinking about all the things I said I didn't
have enough
time
for, how
now that I have
seemingly endless time
I don't do them





maybe it was never about
the time

I keep staring into my
white walls,
getting lost looking at
a canvas I'll never
fill,
wasted time passing in a parallel universe and I
emerge, unscathed, with an entire day
ahead of me
that I will fill with
nothing

I'll feel bad
about the nothing

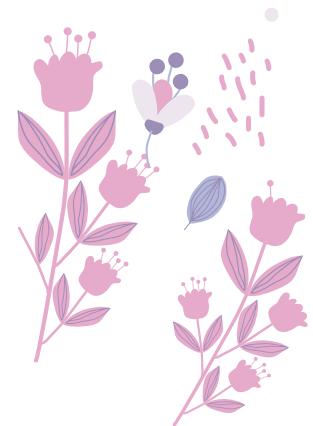
not bad enough to do something,
but bad enough to stop me
from doing something
Tomorrow.

THE BEACH AFTER A 10-MINUTE THUNDERSTORM \\ ELEGY FOR A PERSON
I SAW IN A VHS TAPE \\ TREADMILL \\ CITY NOISE

“City Noise”

by **Cass Cervi**

MEDIUM:
Poetry



Right after I wake up
everything is too loud

The cars passing by
send tremors through my room
the creaks of my house are screeches echoing through the hallway.
Birds chatter on top of one another,
the wind pounds my walls—a meaty fist trying to knock its way in
the leaves crunch like bones
everywhere it is
honks and pounds and creaks and screeches and screams.





This entire week
has felt too loud.

Every stranger's conversation felt like
it was happening in my head
words layering over words until I could not find
the ones that were mine

Music and chittering and the whiz of traffic and the
booming laughter of men who could be a threat and the
clacking of a keyboard or maybe high heels on pavement
or maybe both and
the far-off shout of a woman saying nonsense
or maybe
asking for help
or maybe both
or maybe those words
were mine
and I couldn't hear them



“Our Safe Word is Panda”

by **C E Hoffman**

MEDIUM:
Flash Fiction

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

C E Hoffman (they/them) is a grant recipient, Writer's Union of Canada member, and winner of the 2022 Defunct May Day Chapbook contest. They edit Punk Monk Magazine and host the podcast Scribbles & Spills. Find their books at cehoffman.net/publications, and follow them on Twitter @CEHoffman2.





So little is forgivable these days. When I was 2x too stoned on our picnic table I stopped writing for fear of divulging too much, but that's meta, and my editor at R***** hated my meta, but that doesn't matter anymore.

In other news, I'm Cancing*.

*cance [cans]

verb (invented)

1. to behave in a manner similar to the Cancer Zodiac, characterized by dreaminess, moodiness, and intuitiveness
 2. to engage in self-deprecation, self-destruction, or self-pity
- In other words, I'm studying the universe. That's why I bring paper everywhere: I'm taking notes. I'm not from here. Or I'm not for here. Regardless, here I am.

What if Jesus was a dyke? Why does nobody talk about being cock-whipped? If placebo is powerful enough to use as a control group, is imagination dangerous?

If mental illness is my superpower and brainwashing can be positive (think: affirmations), what about forgiveness? Pixie sticks? Dunkaroos. So much sugar! All that starch. No wonder I was such a sick kid.

(I still am, but in different ways.)



I think our only hope is bringing love to the darkest places.

There's so many nightmares to go through, and so many are found in bed.

There's always the possibility of an exception to a rule and there's always the possibility YOU are that exception. Statistics do not speak. Data does not know. Only you can say, "Yes, this works," or, "No, this hurts."

Only you can learn the difference.

In the tent, I said, "mosh pit full of angry pandas", and you understood, like when you stayed up with me all night, or most of it, while I peeled my heart into strips called sentences.

I always asked, "What's wrong with me?"

Turns out, nothing.

I'm just different.

The End



“Son”

by **Daryl Bruce**

MEDIUM:

Flash Fiction



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Daryl Bruce (he/him) is a recovering dairy farmer turned writer based in the GTA. An emerging voice in queer Canadian prose and poetry, his work has appeared in *The Antigonish Review*, *Open Minds Quarterly*, *Fourteen Poems*, and more. Chronically over-caffeinated, he is currently working on his MA at Concordia University. || IG: @daryldbink

The apple teeters on the table's edge for a futile moment, its flesh oxidizing from the stab of Dad's teeth. The laws of gravity prove too much, and it rolls off the edge hitting the linoleum in a dull thud.

Dad hardly notices, scarcely moving his foot out of the way as it rolls past, leaving a faint trail of tart juice in its wake. He's on a diet now—has been since the factory closed months ago—with no discernible results. He has a white t-shirt on, the armpits stained yellow. His body looks like it's melting down into itself these days, the flesh suffocating his chair.

He's talking with Mom on his cell while trying to finish his post-workout snack. *Well, he's your son.* He tries to be discrete, placing his hand over the receiver. But Dad's voice carries in the air, the words stick to me. He says this whenever I'm in trouble as if his DNA has swiftly been extracted from my genome; I'm in trouble all too frequently these days. I can tell from the way he looks at me, the shadowy bags hanging under his eyes, puffy and weighted down in bitter disappointment. It took three daughters to get the son he wanted, and I don't quite measure up to expectations.

Mrs. Atkinson had called earlier, her scratchy voice



agonizingly audible through the speaker. I don't know how she found out, but she is nothing if not a master of everyone's business but her own. Even from home I could see her silvery hair bobbing, curled so tight it pulls at the jagged creases of her forehead, and smell the salt and vinegar breath emitting from between her sandpaper lips. I knew she was patronizingly lecturing Dad about school policy. A week of unexplained absences was grounds for failure.

Oh, come on, give the kid a break. A rare defence from Dad! *It's just gym class.* There's a sharp, stony tone when he says this that gives away his frustration. I knew what he was really thinking; *Of course he hates gym class, have you met him? Have you seen what a colossal disappointment he is?* Mrs. Atkinson reminds him that as vice-principal, she has a duty to uphold the rules, and the rules are taken very seriously at St. Thomas Aquinas Secondary school.

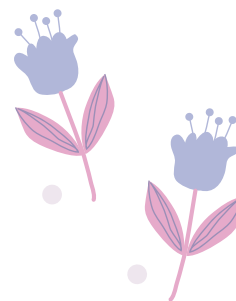
My gym teacher, Mr. Kelly, is willing to help me make those classes up. He's younger than most of the teachers. He is still naïve enough to believe he's here to make a difference and not just putting in time for the pension. He is an assemblage of parts that my eyes find appealing. A solid

bulk of glutes straining against dark denim, of nipples kissing white cotton, of polished teeth behind dewy, raspberry lips. He had found me, hiding at the far end of the parking lot, where the traffic cones were set up for driver's ed. I think he gets it—I think he gets a lot of things. He rested his hand on my shoulder with a frustrating lack of intent. *We'll get you through this class, son. Son!* The word wet the corners of my mouth and flowed through me until it danced in my stomach.

I don't tell Dad about this conversation. I don't speak up.

Dad sits there, listening to Mom cuss him out. *For fuck's sake, he's your son, too,* I hear her say. *I've gotta get back to work.* He tosses the phone down on the table, avoids my eyes, and for the first time, realizes his apple has rolled away. He walks to the fridge, leaving me there to stare at his doughy back. He won't say another word until Mom gets home.

It's not about gym class. It's never about gym class.





SELF-PORTRAIT \\ IMMORTAL SOUL \\ CRYING \\ HAND \\ TIRED

“Self-Portrait”

by **Shepengul**

MEDIUM:

Pencil on Paper



ABOUT THE ARTIST:

Shepengul was born in Siberia. Since 2021, her main medium has been graphics. She loves how the movement of a pencil creates a unique stroke, just as a moment creates life, and a white sheet of paper creates free space. Since 2020 she's been living and working in Kharkiv. \\ IG: @shepengul



SELF-PORTRAIT \ IMMORTAL SOUL \ CRYING \ HAND \ TIRED



“Immortal Soul”

by Shepengul

MEDIUM:
Pencil on Paper

SELF-PORTRAIT \ IMMORTAL SOUL \ CRYING \ HAND \ TIRED

“Crying”

by Shepengul

MEDIUM:
Pencil on Paper



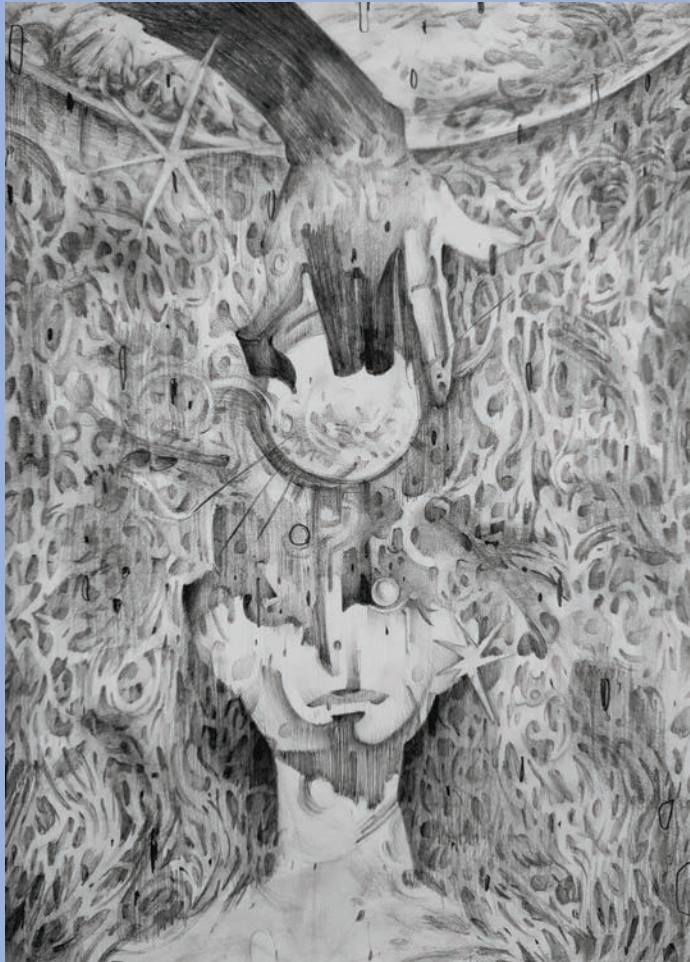
SELF-PORTRAIT \ IMMORTAL SOUL \ CRYING \ HAND \ TIRED

“Hand”

by Shepengul

MEDIUM:

Pencil on Paper



SELF-PORTRAIT \ IMMORTAL SOUL \ CRYING \ HAND \ TIRED



“Tired”

by Shepengul

MEDIUM:

Pencil on Paper



“I Choose Me”

by **Vanida Lim**

MEDIUM:
Poetry

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Vanida is a freelance graphic designer based in Toronto who has a love for solo traveling and advocating for mental health. When she's not a digital nomad remote-working globally, she enjoys indulging in any other form of creative self-expression such as art, dance, fashion and make-up, music, tattoos, poetry/spoken-word, and books. || IG: @VanidaLim

I *chose* me,
So I broke free from your betrayal and lies.
I chose self-love,
So I'd stop crying my eyes out at night.

I chose transparency,
So that I could finally be understood.
I chose mental health,
Because no person ever would.

I chose rebirth,
So that I could finally spread my wings and fly like a bird.
I chose proof,
Because your silence was louder than words.

I chose courage,
After years, I finally told my family and friends the truth.
I chose strength,
I'll never again succumb to anyone's abuse.

I chose forgiveness,
Go kill yourself were the words that made me rethink my life.
I chose enlightenment,
Hate is only a reflection of who people are truly inside.

I chose respect,
By realizing all the love I am deserving of,
I chose compassion,
By reminding myself that I am worthy enough.

I chose integrity,
Let them go if they think the grass is greener on the other side.
I chose values,
I will wait for someone who waters my grass and tries.

I chose peace,
The hate of you abandoning us no longer grows,
I chose happiness,
So I had to learn a hard lesson of how to let go,

I chose dignity,
So I'd stop feeling insecure about why they didn't stay.
I chose truth,
Accepting I may never get closure and that's okay.

I chose honesty,
By forgiving myself so that I could finally breathe.
I chose to live,
I travelled to feel the sand and smell the sea.

I chose ambition,
So I pushed myself to work towards my goals.
I chose resilience,
By rediscovering the depths of my own soul.

I chose growth,
By surrounding myself with people who are self-aware,
I chose to challenge,
Because being too comfortable is my nightmare.



I chose determination,
Because I believe it's not about the size of your home.
I chose kindness,
Because I'd rather do good than care about what I own.

I chose risk,
So I'm sorry that I'm not your average girl.
I chose to be fearless,
Because there's so much more to do in this world.

I chose to surrender,
Ironically known as the solo traveller, the one thing I couldn't do alone.
I chose hope,
By admitting I need help, I can't do this on my own.

I chose to fight,
From therapy, paramedics, meds for my stupid brain...
I chose healing,
I don't want to die, I just want to stop feeling pain.

I *choose* to be heard,
So now I want *you* to please listen and pay attention.
I'm 30 and still working on myself,
Learning to love all my perfect imperfections.

Please take these examples of *why* I chose me,
Because if I did it, I truly believe you can too.
So let me ask you this, my darling girl,
When will you choose you?

- VI



“Courage to Fly”

by **Som Kong**

MEDIUM:

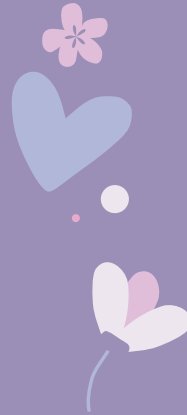
Pole Dancing (Video: 4 mins)

PERFORMANCE:

1st place winner \ “Pole Sport Organization” competition
(Coach: Elspeth Cudmore \ Studio: Redefine Fit)

ABOUT THE ARTIST:

Som Kong, he/they/them, 01/15/1991, Canadian Born- Cambodian/Chinese,
human being based in Toronto.



FRAME 1



FRAME 2



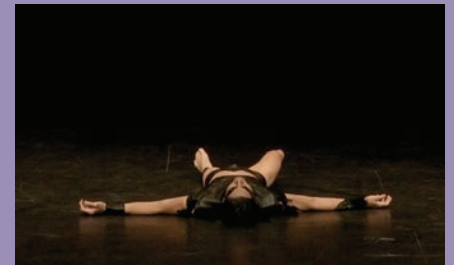
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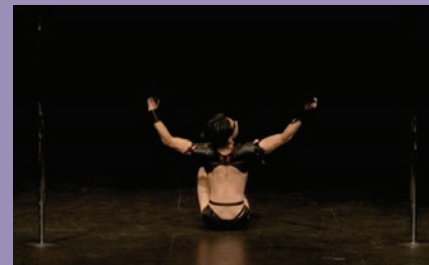
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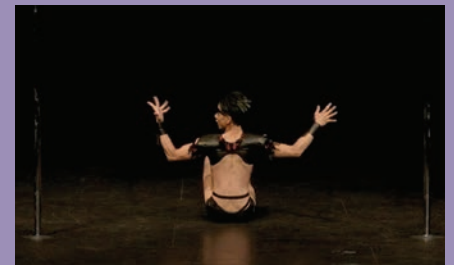
FRAME 5



FRAME 6

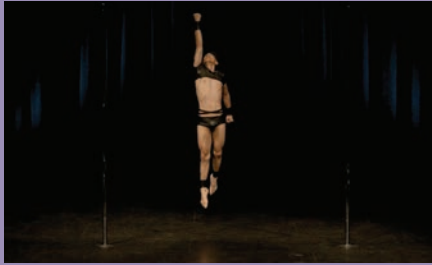


FRAME 7



FRAME 8





FRAME 9



FRAME 10



FRAME 11



FRAME 12

Wing Reveal & Details

MATERIALS:

Dye sublimation process used to create the wings and ribbons, pleather, synthetic feathers

MEDIUM:

Fashion Design (Video: 6 secs)



THE ARTIST'S CONCEPT:

Doing Pole workouts changed my experience with fitness by learning the condition exercises were aligned to calisthenics. At a specific moment, I recall standing beside the pole, wearing little-to-nothing, looking in the mirror and having the realization that the pole accepts you at any shape, stage, and form. In other words, the moment I allowed myself mercy and forgiveness, I felt self-love. In accepting where I was at physically, I knew mentally and intuitively that this was not where I was staying. And that was the moment I felt the transformation and magic of Pole Dancing.

This pole routine is sharing the story of shedding old wings to make space for new ones, so as to soar higher than ever before. It was inspired from my experience in attending my first WFG Convention in Vegas alongside a crowd of 30 000+ people. Members were invited to share their stories of overcoming challenges and adversities. I was deeply inspired as I felt the stream of tears roll down my cheeks. This inspired the intro monologue of my pole routine, "And in that moment, perhaps I was mourning the person I thought I should be, to make space for the person I was becoming. After all, what good are wings, without the courage to fly."

My mental health has been attributed to this experience in finding an activity that has become a part of my lifestyle. It continues to be a challenge and I believe that every challenge has an equal opportunity. Putting myself in an environment that is going to help me grow paired with the circle of influence I choose to surround myself with and has allowed me to tap into courage within myself: the courage to fly.



To watch the full videos, please visit:
www.qtmag.ca/issues

resources & helpful links

Friends of Ruby

Supports 2SLGBTQI+ youth (aged 16-29) by providing free counselling, housing and social services. friendsofruby.ca

Umbrella Mental Health Network

A network of queer and trans mental health professionals serving the 2SLGBTQI+ community umhn.ca

Rainbow Health Ontario

RHO trains healthcare providers with clinical and cultural competency in caring for their 2SLGBTQI+ service users. RHO contains a directory of professionals who have completed this training. rainbowhealthontario.ca

Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)

The Ontario Structured Psychotherapy Program provides free cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). Organizations offering this program in Ontario: Ontario Shores, Waypoint, the Royal, CAMH, Health Sciences Network, Carepoint, etc. All CMHA staff in York Region/South Simcoe are trained in 2SLGBTQI+ issues through Rainbow Health Ontario. cmha-yr.on.ca/OSP

Anishnawbe Health Toronto

The Two Spirit/Trans* Services has a dedicated counsellor available for regular ongoing sessions to community members. The program also includes a Peer Mentor who provides access to traditional knowledge and ceremonies as well as guidance in transitioning. aht.ca

Across Boundaries

Across Boundaries provides holistic mental health and addiction services for racialized people across the Greater Toronto Area. Our Values Our staff practice harm reduction, sex-positivity, queer positivity, trans-inclusivity and trauma-informed counselling. acrossboundaries.ca

CAMH

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)'s Rainbow Services Group therapy is provided to 2SLGBTQI+ people who are concerned about their drug and alcohol use. The Adult Gender Identity Clinic offers services to individuals and their primary care practitioners in regard to gender identity and expression. camh.ca

Hard Feelings

Provides low-cost, short-term counselling and mental health resources based in Toronto. Hardfeelings.org

Connex Ontario

A mental health directory for Ontarians to connect to mental health, addictions, and problem gambling services. Confidential and free services are available 24/7. connexontario.ca

TBN

The Toronto Bi+ Network provides a community where bi+ individuals and people questioning their sexuality can share diverse perspectives and experiences. Offers support, a social network, information and referrals to bi+ friendly counsellors. torontobinet.org

The 519

Counselling Referrals for Adults 30+ provides a repository of mental health resources including: crisis response lines, free walk-in counselling and support services, 2SLGBTQ+ Settlement and Trauma Counselling, free peer support groups, and Registered 2SLGBTQ-positive Private Practitioners. the519.org

24-Hour Crisis Lines

Toronto-based
Gerstein Centre: (416) 929-5200
Toronto Distress Centre: (416) 408-4357
Assaulted Women's Helpline: (416) 863-0511
Victim Services: (416) 808-7066
Toronto Rape Crisis Centre: (416) 597-8808
Trans Life Line: 1-877-330-6366
Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868

Ontario-based

Ontario Mental Health Helpline:
1-866-531-2600
Ontario Drug & Alcohol Helpline:
1-800-565-8603
Ontario Problem Gambling Helpline:
1-888-230-3505
Good2Talk: 1-866-925-5454

Canada-wide

LGBT Youthline:
1-800-268-9688
Trans Lifeline:
1-877-330-6366
Kids Help Phone:
1-800-668-6868
911 or your nearest Hospital Emergency unit

about QT



Queer Toronto Literary Magazine is a non-profit dedicated to elevating and celebrating queer voices in Canada.

QT was started in response to the criminal shortage of Canadian queer literary magazines. There are so many LGBTQ2SIA+ artists out there! And in times of crisis, maintaining community and connection is vital.

QT brings together our collective projects to create that sense of shared space. QT celebrates the art queer individuals make for ourselves and for each other. We accept poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, book reviews, personal essays, reflections, memoirs, as well as artwork, drawings, comics, photographs, collages, and other visual media.

www.qtmag.ca

[@qtlitmag](https://www.instagram.com/qtlitmag)

thank you

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The 519

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