

a new hope

qt lit mag

issue IV







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Welcome letter

May 1st, 2021

Issue IV: A New Hope

April showers bring May flowers but we've been in March for a year.

The cultivation of hope is an act of defiance. It is critically necessary for organizing and enacting radical positive change, and is therefore a revolutionary act as well.

Hope depends on imagination, and allowing oneself to engage in the process and practice of imagining, takes courage. It is an act of intentionally positive meaning-making in what has felt like an endless year of the abyss. We've collectively spent one year witnessing the social, political, and economic impacts of a society in late-stage capitalism.

Hope is cause for celebration. And in the current climate, allowing oneself to be hopeful is daringly vulnerable. This month, we encouraged creators to capture what feelings of hopefulness mean to them. Suffice it to say, in this issue, hope springs eternal.

-Pax Santos, Founding Editor

"I urge you all today, especially today during these times of chaos and war, to love yourself without reservations and to love each other without restraint. Unless you're into leather."

— Margaret Cho

In times of crisis, maintaining community is vital. QT brings together our collective projects to create that sense of shared space. Queer Toronto Literary Magazine is a non-profit 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.

*This issue was lovingly designed by
harar v.a. hall @gold.tinted.glasses*



Can i actually hope.?

by gen giggles

Gen is a trans woman living with her wife and kids in what the other states call Lower Canada. She must be a Canadian at heart because she wants to move back to Little Canada if she isn't able to cross the border.

Can I actually hope?
To stay, to remain?
To stop keeping a go bag, for Canada
After 4 years I'm
Not sure it's worth it.

But fuck it
Relief was there that day
A chance
Seize it and hope and work

Work for a better future
Than compromise ever provides.



a mourner's lessons on living!

or, how to survive toronto

by darian razdar

Darian Razdar is a writer, researcher, activist, and artist based in Toronto. Learn more about Darian and his work at darianrazdar.com.

No one moves to Toronto
to find something new.
You land here fallow
to touch old shores, to get into
rubble, to find the missing clue.

The 'Good,' this city, the abettor
where callous got its name
on the knees of the polite beggar,
we watch silent and ashamed,
this city, we come to lay our pain.

Perhaps there is nothing wrong with Toronto
nothing short of same —
same wishes, same stars, same empty hollow
— no where to defiantly exclaim,
"This! Is! Me! Broken and aflame."

And I am here, still searching
for answers in tepid waves.
There's a virtue in observing
what emerges, transforms, decays
from within these gilded graves.

May I find myself a merry mourner
to remind me: life is waiting here
just around the corner,
on your knees, and in your stare
take it by the hand, be aware

trees ever curl, kiss, and howl
whether orange, green, or gray
this great unknown bares no scowl
against all odds, you'll find your way —
this whole time, we were asking you to stay.

content warning:
The following piece

**contains a content
warning.**

**The content warning is
for mentions of:
assault, gender-based
violence.**

**quiet
thoughts**

In the year where so many distractions blinked out of view, I inspect myself with interest. Tiny and self-conscious on the video call, short-tempered in the lineup outside the grocery store. Emphatically lonely, but in the background, relishing deserted hours. Instead of projecting outward to family and friends, my ransacked universe, I've gone inside. Inspecting all the little things, and wondering about the different ways to spend a life. Feeling outright curiosity about the future, I watch myself growing strangely giddy in quiet moments, and I have to tell myself to calm down, don't get so amped up. Drink some tea and chill, it's all unfolding.

I've spent the time wrapping a chatterbox mind around some gunk that was tough to look at head-on in the clutter before. I understand now, for example, about that night with the bartender in Roncesvalles. In a curious way, I wonder if I will see him again, daydreams of getting to explain something important, so that he can understand too.

I was so confused at how I would become fascinated by guys, certain guys. Because it wasn't attraction, and it sure wasn't that they were particularly interesting or even very nice. I thought it was internalized misogyny, wafting up from its drifts and deep snowbanks heaped inside of me. Pulling me to crave the acceptance of boys even as I wanted to weave my fingers through the hair of a girl, to have her pull me in.

But then, spectacularly, between novels and podcasts and soaking in a tub until I am corrugated and shivering, something new has bloomed. A Deleuzian crack in the insistent rigidity I reserved for myself, bringing the dawning of the notion that I am *allowed to be more*. The discovery of an uncanny door ajar that was always sealed, feeling the thrill of excitement, knowing there is uncharted space for me in there. Relief and embarrassment. Why has this taken me so long? Like the first time I kissed Rebecca, that sudden ignition, approval from the universe and from a beautiful girl. I am allowed to do the thing, and no one gets to stop me along the way and demand my reasoning.

But this new room was different still. A radical portal, an opening. It was a clean cut to the tight leash and a mad dash into dazzling freedom. To the bartender in Roncesvalles, I wasn't drawn to you because I wanted you. You thought I was a girl, and I suppose that is how you treat them. You thought I was junk food. But me, I was hoping that I was your brother and you were mine, I was identifying with you. A little sibling chosen and blessed, invited to hang out with his big brother.

Lately, I've reworked this pull to maleness as reclaiming my boyhood, as if boyhood was this thing that I hadn't been allowed to have. But I did have it, I just didn't know how to acknowledge it without language. And yet that night, when I thought I was your brother and you thought I was a girl and we chatted until I was the last patron, I thought I was adding to it, my long-lost boyhood. Making a friend, playground style. And a gift from my new brother, that drink that I never watched you pour. And next I became noodle-limbed and couldn't lift my muddled brain off the concrete, so unsure of what was happening and how it came to be.

I never talked about that night to anyone, waking up in the bushes and the darkness, against that fence near the train tracks. Bare feet cold in the early March air as I tried to find my shoes and wondered where the blood came from. *So stupid*, righteous voices from my past floated through my head. *Never trust a boy that you don't know*, not if you're a girl. Girls *can't*.

But I'm not quite a girl. And it never should have happened, even if I was. And it changes nothing, but it lets me understand more, it somehow gives me a vibe of being mostly okay. At least I know why I was there that night, what I was looking for. I trusted my brother and it wasn't my fault. I identified with him, but I can still learn new, better, healing ways of reclaiming my boyhood. Getting to know how to talk about a masculinity I thought I was supposed to be humiliated by. I can breathe in and out and start to articulate now, how when they look at me and say Woman, I wonder who they are talking about. And now the joy of learning that I really like this

unfettered person who was always there, just below the surface, bemused and off-center.

And how did he fare during this pandemic, this social upheaval? My fellow brother, the predatory bartender, how have you been? Out of work for certain, unable to dip your hands into the slippery buckets of libation plied Women and Others, to take your pick. Many have stayed safe I am sure, in that unintended consequence of your bar's closure.

I cannot wait to be out in the sunlight, lungs full of air and with tentative baby steps, the sweet allowance of testing the space, *non-binary*. Not lost in the mire of performance or the anxiety of *why am I like this?* Just like that first perfect brush with Rebecca, where I was so astounded to find that it all made sense. An open road ahead.

I cannot wait to hug my family and my friends. I feel stronger, and I hope I meet you on the streets one day, my unhappy brother. Unconsciously, I look for you often. Because even if what I remember is mangled and butchered, marinated and dulled in shame, I do remember your face. The face that I was drawn to. Foolishly thinking, *there he is. That is the type of man I would like to be.* But there are many types of men, many types of people. And I am not like you. But what excitement, what unabashed pleasure. To get to go forth and figure it out in the springtime, with the winter receding behind and the wavelengths telling of better news.

by gillian bowles

Gillian Bowles is a Toronto-based creator, who has studied film and social service work. You can find them feigning confidence on Instagram @alias_eveline.



love language

by pax santos

Pax is the Founding Editor of QT. Her Board recently forced her to get a LinkedIn account. A decision for which she has yet to forgive them. Connect with her there!

My mother struggled
In her words
She never really 'got'
Emotions

My mother shifted
Cold beach days
Into the Ocean
My mother sifted
Bent down close
Inspected with care
My mother selected
Four sea stones
Soft-hard cold-warm rare
My mother showed me
Merits each
Ritual complete
'Now you keep'

My mother struggled
In *her* words
She never really 'got'
Emotions

All this is to say
Each time I see you
My right pant pocket
Fistful of pebbles

Good lives & better organizations

by luna moreno*

When I was in university, I studied psychology. I was particularly interested in the intriguing, sometimes astonishing, professor Philip Zimbardo - the scientist behind the Stanford Prison Experiment. Zimbardo's work argues that there is no such thing as 'good apples' and 'bad apples'. In fact, it is actually more dangerous to perceive oneself as a 'good apple' who *could never* [insert vice]. It is exactly this type of person who will trip into the pitfalls of cognitive dissonance - either justifying or completing erasing the memory of the sin they have committed because it does not accommodate their sense of self. By contrast, those who are humble and willing to admit their faults and flaws are much more likely to live good, moral lives. As I get older, I have found this theory rings especially true for institutions, and not just individuals.

I have spent the last few years working in the non-profit sector. First, for a now dissolved non-profit organization focused on international development, and now for a public health organization.

Before I go any further, I'd like to say that this is not a free-for-all critique of the nonprofit sector. I worked very hard to become a member of this community (many positions in non-profit institutions require master's degrees) and I still believe that non-profit organizations serve a vital role in society and do important work. But I believe what is most dangerous about non-profit organizations is their unwillingness or inability to confess that *nonprofit organizations are not immune from sin*. In fact, the belief that non-profit organizations are made up of inherently good people with good intentions often prevents these institutions from taking responsibility for real problems impacting the lives of real people.

In the last ten months I have spent working at this organization, I have seen cognitive gymnastics that would make your head spin. Shortly after I began working for [Anonymous Organization], a former employee publicly claimed that she had been harassed, discriminated against, and wrongfully terminated by my manager. Shortly thereafter, dozens of employees signed a letter to leadership demanding reforms within the organization, including a commitment to pay transparency, improving equity in hiring, re-establishing a Human Resources position (the organization had been functioning without one for months), and acknowledging the history of oppressive, unjust and racist practices within the organization, as well as externally with a focus on decolonization and anti-racism.

Despite the organization's acknowledgement of the letter, it is difficult to feel as though much has changed. Myself and other employees have taken up initiatives of our own to foster a sense of community and belonging, including the creation of employee resource groups and the celebration of 'non-traditional' holidays such as Juneteenth, Hispanic Heritage Month, and LGBTQ History Month. However, after organizing these events without feeling as though the more pressing issues have been addressed, I feel almost complicit in 'Pinkwashing' - or helping the organization promote a facade of diversity and inclusion. Hosting Hispanic Heritage Month is less empowering knowing I, a Hispanic Woman, am being compensated less than my peers.

Although several employees participated in an investigation into the former employee's accusations against my manager, the investigation was closed. Shortly thereafter, I came forward with my own concerns regarding my supervisor's management of people and programs. In addition to making inappropriate comments in the workplace, including disparaging remarks about black colleagues and a rape joke about me, she was reporting inaccurate data to the organization's stakeholders.

Her mistakes had caused the organization to publish that it had mobilized approximately 200 million dollars more in assistance than was actually the case. When I became aware of this, I was instructed to "cook the books". Sometimes "cooking the books" meant reporting millions of 'beneficiaries' had been treated for diseases whether or not the data existed to support this. Finally, during the COVID-19 pandemic she was responsible for creating a tool for assessing the risk of restarting activities in countries across the team's portfolio. I realized the tool did not work when I was asked to manually change the score of an assessment before sharing it with the head of our department for approval.

My experience sharing this with senior management was, at best, terrifying, and, at worst, demoralizing. I was asked if I understood "*the severity of accusing someone of fraud*", all the while continuing to work on her projects. Thanks to another supervisor at the organization, I was transferred to another team. Within a week of being transferred from my manager's team, I was replaced with a consultant. A few months later, the CEO arranged for my manager to apologise to me, especially in reference to the rape joke she had made (a comment she apparently maintained she hadn't made during the course of the 'investigation'). *See what I mean about cognitive gymnastics?*

It is difficult to feel as though real change is taking place when a part-time manager who is responsible for managing approximately a third of the organization's funds, and who has been 'investigated' twice for workplace misconduct and fraud, is allowed to replace employees without so much as completing a sensitivity training. She was so emboldened as to even apply for a promotion during this time and was put in charge of the organization's ten-year strategic plan later in the year.

It is difficult to feel as though we are decolonizing development when we cannot afford to properly remunerate our community drug distributors (the men and women who risked their lives to distribute medications during the COVID-19 pandemic), however the organization's financial statements indicate that the CEO is earning over \$400,000 annually (her bonus alone, it is often argued, could have compensated the HR employee the organization so desperately needed).*

It is not enough to say that non-profit organizations, and the people who work there, are well intentioned. In fact, it is dangerous to assume so. If the Oxfam scandal has taught us anything, I hope it is that. Today, companies and organizations across America are reckoning with its history - a history uncomfortably marked by racism, prejudice, and inequality. I implore the leaders of these organizations to meet these times with humility rather than defensiveness - to admit their faults and flaws, their sins and vices. They are much more likely to lead good lives and better organizations if they do.

There is a need for renewed hope in the humanitarian sector and this starts from within - with self-reflection and accountability.

* This is a pseudonym to protect the author's identity.

* At the time of publishing this piece, the organization has hired an HR professional.

content warning:
the following piece
contains
mentions of
racial violence,
sexual violence,
and war violence.





elegy for
soon chung park,
hyun jung grant,
xiaojie tan, suncha kim,
yong ae yue,
and
daoyou feng

I yearn for a homeland that no longer exists in the
planes of the East

To connect to the heartbeat of a drum whose name
I do not know

Because my mother tongue has been slashed away
through generations

Of violent assimilation to a culture that will never
accept me as its own

I can't go home to another country because I don't belong there

And if I don't belong here, then home is nowhere for me anymore

My passport is nothing but a piece of paper and my eyes are just a relic

Of the collision of families from villages that are slowly disappearing

Every day I see the violence against grandmothers who look like my own

Who left their communities at the hands of western imperialist conquest

To live in the land of the white victors, with nothing but a suitcase

Full of dreams and pockets filled with hope in the eyes of their children

I see women who look like my mother shot in their place of work

Simply for existing as women who look like those whose stories

Have been erased and appropriated for the pleasure of American soldiers

From Madame Butterfly to a faceless woman offering sex in broken English

The men who looked like my father and grandfather deemed

Somehow both a threat and not manly enough to be equal

Socially castrating them through imperial emasculation and Exclusion Acts

Still man enough to stain yellow the white cloth of western society

I will never be the blond-haired girl with freckles and big blue eyes

On the front of the anti-terrorism flags blasted across my childhood

My country has never aimed to protect people like me, rather our nations

And our bodies were their playground, to settle arguments and assert dominance

Today's violence is no accident, rather the echo of militarized imperialism

Across the continent our ancestors and family called home

Whilst we live in the same fear our grandparents wanted to escape

Our elders who carry the torch of cultural knowledge are being extinguished

I stand with all my sisters, and cry as they fall one by one

Held hostage at the brutal intersection of racism and sexism

At the hands of men who do not care to know our stories

Whilst they greet us in a language they will not allow us to speak

Yet a political awakening is happening in my community

Which has been told inside and out not to make waves

But a tsunami is coming if you think we'll just sit idly by while

Our people are killed as they were in the wars the west started

But with the fear, sadness, anger and mourning comes hope

If a beautiful lotus can grow in the murkiest, dirtiest waters

So too can the rebirth of our communities and our people

The diaspora has been galvanized, fuck white supremacy, this is our home.

by ALLI

ALLI is a Toronto-based human being who spent the past three years in Manchester, England. Wino by nature, writer by habit.

last night
i prayed to
God
and they didn't
know who they were

I am thinking / About all the labels / That we used / To
liberate ourselves

That no longer serve us

The ways that we have / Confined ourselves / Into the boxes
Of a language/That only wanted to
Conquer us

And all of / The ways /That we have
existed

Yesterday

And today

And tomorrow / Are all true

And when I think

About

Our bodies / And desires / And needs

I am reminded

Of a Black woman / Who thought / Of change /And
called it God

I am thinking / Of the way

I am Black woman
And not

I am thinking
About all the ways/ I have changed
The way I too
Am God

As in
Look how I create / Joy
From a life / That thought / It would only know
Suffering
Look how I weave

Healing

Through the strands / Of my DNA
Shaping futures

And one day / I will create life
Through love
And it will not / Matter
If their life / Never came from mine

I am thinking
About all / That was once

true

And the ways
That change / Turns truth
Into survival
Or necessity
Or good enough / For right now
Until I find / The collection
Of syllables / And sounds
To define

all
That I am

And all that/ I want
But
We will / Exist in the future
That much / I know
To be true

by harar v.a. hall

Harar is a multi-disciplinary artist, writer and poet raised in Toronto and currently living, organizing and creating in Montreal. To find their work you can go to hararhall.com or @gold.tinted.glasses on instagram.

the gener

The Next Generation

They had an appetite for adventure

They didn't yearn for a life of ease

They wanted to go where the wind blew them

Across the vastness of the lands and seas

They required an adaptation

They didn't want money to be the only wealth

They desired to commune with nature

They chose to prioritize their wellbeing and health

They craved to work together

Towards visions of common hopes and goals

They wanted a sense of community

They wanted to be seen for their souls

-IBM

next ation


by brooke martin

Brooke is a bisexual registered nurse and political activist. She is an advocate for personal sovereignty, positive sexuality, indigenous rights, & environmental restoration. Brooke is a strong believer that love, acceptance, and compassion can change the world; and that we are all more powerful than we have been led to believe.

An abstract, vibrant splash of pink, magenta, and purple ink or paint on a white background. The colors are layered and blended, creating a dynamic, organic shape that resembles a starburst or a cloud. The edges are soft and feathered, while the center is more concentrated and darker.

QT

Queer Toronto Literary Magazine



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.



@qlitmag

