



QT

Queer Toronto Literary Magazine

No. 1



*Love In
The Time Of
Corona*

Augsut 1st, 2020

Love in the Time of Corona

This issue features art created during the COVID-19 global pandemic. “Love in the Time of Corona” is a snapshot of the contemporaneous sentiment of queer people during quarantine. It is a celebration of resilience, beauty, and connection during the time of our collective separation.

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.



Amateur: from the French for ‘lover of’

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 is a love letter to the community that created it.

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Home Calling

by Rachel



I didn't know at the time, but I was about to fall in love. She took me by surprise.

I didn't fall in love with her until I met her – really and truly met her. The kind of meeting where you discover the deepest parts of each other, and yet barely touch the surface. It's the type of love that comes along when you're not looking, it finds you – she found me.

Our first meeting was marred by a glorious shower which filled me with fear, but at the same time kept me mesmerised. I needed to know more about her. The fragments of her core, her mosaic pieces scattered as far as the heart can feel.

She showed me what it means to love and be loved. She taught me kindness and bravery. She let me explore the hidden parts of her, and shared all the knowledge and wisdom she had to offer. She showed me how to love myself, how to know my worth. She healed me.

In our short time together, she forged a better me. She rekindled a spark in me, and made me want so much more in life. She gave me new life, just as she breathes it into so many others.

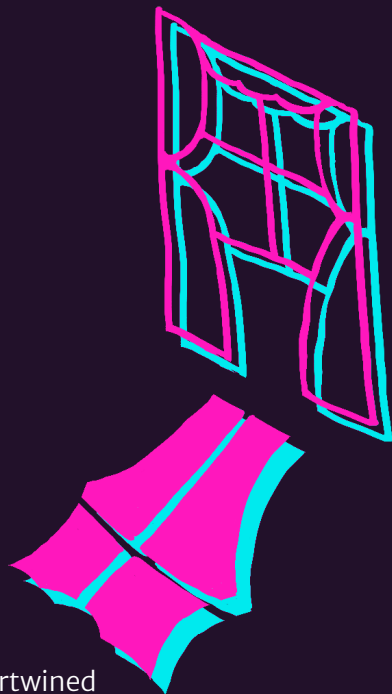
Even from here, so many miles away, I feel we're connected. We were due to meet again, but I guess that will have to wait a while. But when we do meet again, I hope she can show me more, and teach me what it means to be a true Torontonion. She's the most beautiful city, and I'm stuck here dreaming of being back in her embrace – to feel that kiss of life once more.



Rachel is a London-based musician, composer and photographer currently seeking her permanent residency in Canada, with hopes of one day joining the ranks of the many great artists in Ontario.

Existing

by Nhylar



involuntarily losing touch with humanity
is strange
sometimes I lay with both my hands intertwined
sometimes I close my eyes and reminisce the scent of her hair
weed doesn't hit the same anymore
unless I dim the lights with the night sky,
cascading into my bedroom
the only thing that brings me joy is food
sitting on my study eating meals that remind me of home
so grateful for taste buds
reading feels like a task
screens are my only apocalyptic companions
who would've thought,
real life would turn into a melancholic black mirror episode in slo-mo
still I dream of hugging trees and holding her close
of human sounds that fill your ears
as soon as you enter a cafe
never thought I'd miss existing

Queerantime

Intimacy in the age of quarantine
Has become an oxymoron
Yet we carry on,
With work-out sessions on zoom
Binge watching shows on prime
Together yet so far apart,
Sometimes I hold on to her energy-
It's filled with love
Sometimes I hold on to her gaze
Our eyes locked, filled with lust
Sometimes I tell her how I'd grab her-
If she were with me and she says
"baby I'm right here"
some days I actually believe her,

because even though I love solitude
in an alternate universe,
we're snuggling on the couch
with our doggo and plant babies by our side
content to simply be at arm's length of each other
spending days surfing in the living room
painting each other's canvas bodies till dusk
then cooking naked in the kitchen
feeding her like my life depended on it
and kissing each other's pandemic anxieties away
oh what an amazing queerantime it would be then!

.....
: *Nhyllar is a 24 year QPOC who currently resides in Toronto. She uses* :
: *poetry as a creative outlet for her existential rage. She writes about* :
: *queer representation, living away from home, intimacy and anything* :
: *that intrigues her. Instagram: @shutupitdoesntmatter* :
.....

The Right Kind of Gay

by Derek H.



A few months ago, amidst one of my regular lifeless scrolls through Twitter (which I still somehow try to convince myself is an essential part of my nightly routine), I stumbled upon a thread where people were sharing their most horrific experiences, or ones they had heard from others, relating to one of the most visibly gay celebrities of our time, Ellen DeGeneres. I was intrigued by this, as a few months prior I had seen a tweet (side note: do I do anything else besides lurk Twitter? Apparently not) that showed a video from 2008, where Ellen hosted Mariah Carey as a guest on her talk show. I would have only been 14 years old at the time and just barely starting to figure out that I might not be as into girls as I had told myself I was, so I should admit that I don't remember much else from 2008, and frankly didn't do much more research into this video. But on its own, the video was pretty frightening.

In the video, Ellen is trying to get Mariah to reveal to the audience whether or not she is pregnant. Personally, I see it as a double-

edged sword: if you go on a show like Ellen, you need to prepare yourself for shit like this. But on the other hand, people need to learn when to draw the line, especially when asking questions related to children or pregnancy. Naturally, Mariah is vague and doesn't reveal much, which prompts Ellen to offer her a glass of champagne so that if she is pregnant, it will be obvious. This ploy works, but shortly after Mariah suffers a miscarriage.

Several years ago, I can remember occasionally passing the time or ignoring my schoolwork by binge-watching YouTube clips of Ellen interviewing celebrities. What starts out as one harmless video of Ellen asking Beyoncé how she got the alter-ego Sasha Fierce turns into an inescapable trip down a never-ending rabbit hole, and the next thing you know you're totally hooked watching videos about celebrities you didn't even know existed when you woke up that morning. I have also seen Ellen's 2014 Oscars monologue a few times and thought it was pretty funny, and also followed her on Twitter up until fairly recently. This is about the extent to which I would engage with Ellen, which was honestly not much at all, but I thought she seemed like a pretty good person all around. And maybe she is – after all, I don't know anything about her outside of who we see on camera and online. But a quick glance at the Mariah Carey incident makes you wonder what's really going on.

Which brings me back to this Twitter thread. I guess I should take a second here to point out that I'm aware that a Twitter thread should absolutely not be taken as sufficient evidence to try and prove or disprove something. Some of those stories on that thread were so horrifying they were either completely fabricated, or, if in fact true, even more horrifying. But what it did do was add to the rumblings about Ellen and how she might be nowhere near this perfect, God-like icon we've built her up to be.

This prompted me to do some more research on Ellen, which this time led me to BuzzFeed. Again, I realize BuzzFeed might not be the

best place to dig up your news (although it's a great place to find out which iconic "Drag Race" Lip Sync you are – I'm "So Emotional" in case you were wondering), but I stumbled upon a really interesting piece written by a writer and editor by the name of Shannon Keating. In her piece, she questions Ellen's place as a gay icon in our world today by challenging her on the notion of 'relatability'. At one point, she writes: "But acceptance of LGBT people has also rarely extended beyond the bounds of the sort of gay person Ellen represents: white, wealthy, desexualized, monogamous; neutered and relatively nonthreatening. And acceptance... is, for some, losing its luster at a time when assimilating queer people into an anti-queer mainstream seems increasingly like settling for the straight world's scraps." The article as a whole came from an interesting perspective – one that felt new to me – and is absolutely worth a read, but this line in particular resonated with me the most.

I am not here to write an essay about how problematic I think Ellen DeGeneres is, or a case for why she should be the latest victim of cancel culture. For all we know Mariah Carey agreed to the pregnancy/drinking incident beforehand and Ellen is in fact the Saint she's been billed as. Or maybe she's a real-life Marvel supervillain and the hype is crap. I don't know, and that's frankly not something I'm overly concerned with. Instead, I want to share how this experience opened up my eyes to the abundance of ways in which heterosexuality dominates the world around us, even in ways that I may not have initially realized. This surely sounds naïve, so bear with me. Yes, we have seen tremendous progress for the LGBTQ+ community over the past several decades, and even in the last few years alone. I don't have the time or space to go over all of these tremendous accomplishments, but despite all this, we continue to live in a heteronormalized world in which gay spaces still feel entirely distinct and separate from the world around us.

The case of Ellen has made me consider the acceptance of homosexuality and sense of tolerance that has been bestowed

upon the gay community. But I'm not sure if acceptance is really the right word to use. Rather, it might sadly be a case of what is deemed allowed or tolerable by heterosexual people. Ellen was an easy choice for a gay icon because straight people were comfortable with the kind of gay she presented. Her homosexuality was easy for people to digest without pushing the boundary too far. But can you imagine if she had come out and was more than 'just gay'? Do we really think Ellen would have been as idolized as she is today if she had, for example, come out as transgender and waged war against the Bush regime? Of course, we now know the latter wouldn't have happened based on who she watches Dallas Cowboys games with, but that's beside the point. What I'm trying to get at is that despite decades of progress and a heightened visibility for the LGBTQ+ community, it still feels like we are stuck in a vacuum, where escape can only stem from a fight to ensure that all identities are not only equally visible, but equally accepted, too.

On the one hand, my reflections might just be stating the obvious. Precisely the issue here is the very nature of something like transphobia, or perhaps a general lack of acceptance for other sexual identities that fall under the queer umbrella. That our society has come as far to be generally OK with people who are gay, but the minute gender identities enter the equation, heterosexuality refuses to look any further and goes on the defensive. Ellen DeGeneres would not have been accepted as a gay icon if stout defenders of the heterosexual status quo could have found a way to suggest that she would be a predator in the "wrong" bathroom, as an example. But it's not just a matter of being gay or a less visible queer identity. It also comes down to how being gay is perceived. It's OK to be gay if you're monogamous and don't "flaunt your sexuality" in people's faces, as the saying goes. The result is an enormous spectrum of sexuality being condensed into one very tiny version of homosexuality that has been deemed tolerable, arguably because it is the one version of queerness that is the least threatening to heteronormativity.

This whole exercise has meant to be reflective for myself, but hopefully as well for anyone who is even remotely like me. I'm a cis-gender, white, homosexual male. With this comes a tremendous amount of privilege despite some of the obstacles I have had to overcome as someone who is gay. But sheesh, I guess in many ways I should feel pretty lucky that I generally fit the type of gay that allows me to navigate our heterosexual world with little disruption to the status quo. My three job promotions in the span of two and a half years might not have been so easy if my queerness was anything other than easy to comprehend. Or my family might not be quite so accepting of me if my homosexuality didn't fit so seamlessly into a brand of gay that they had already slowly grown accustomed to, thanks to people like Ellen. And in case you're wondering, it didn't take a Twitter thread at midnight to discover that I carry more privilege than someone who is transgender, bisexual, pansexual, gender fluid, or anything else outside of plain ol' gay (and white and male, for that matter). Rather, it's given me more clarity on where exactly this privilege comes from and why it exists as so. Despite a growing acceptance for LGBTQ+ as a whole, many minorities within the community still struggle to find their footing in our everyday lives because of how constricting outsiders' perspective has become of what gay really is.

Let's be clear: people like myself owe a huge gratitude to people like Ellen. But people like myself also owe it to other members of the queer community to do better than to be complacent in this basic shape of gay we've been gifted. There's no sense throwing out terms like LGBTQ+ and equality if you're going to cower in the most visible letter of that acronym and try to camouflage in society as if you're just another straight person who happens to have sex with people of the same sex. We are at a crucial point in our history where we need to work even harder, not to please straight people, but to continually challenge and deconstruct the notion they have created of the 'right kind' of gay. We need to do better to ensure

that everyone around us is comfortable with every single letter in the ever-growing LGBTQ+ acronym, and not let certain gender and sexual identities sit on the sideline while the more visible people get to pander to both sides of the aisle.

As I sit here currently amidst a global pandemic and an increasingly visible amount of activism relating to Black Lives Matter, I think these feelings of guilt and self-reflection are more relevant than ever before. In a way, we have all been forced into boxes right now by being told to stay home and stay away from basically any form of human interaction. Though not quite the same, it channels the way that the world around us has tried to force queer people into boxes for as long as we can remember. We now live in a world where you're allowed to be gay, just don't be *too* gay. And if that's the case, I think it's time to cast aside the Ellens of pop culture and replace them with gay icons who, quite frankly, *will* make people uncomfortable and *will* present them with a type of queerness that is new and uneasy. Only then will we create an honest place for all identities, and not just the ones that are most visible and most self-serving to the heteronormative world we are constantly trying to navigate.

Derek H. is not a writer, sometimes funny, always a wine drinker.

Wolf and Moon

by Kat

I

What would I do if I caught you?
My teeth are my hands:
biting, gnawing, scraping, clawing
my hands are gentle.

Since you're so far away,
we'll never know.
You are the moon
and I am a wolf.

Will we ever conclude this antici-
pation?
I thrive in the uncertainty.

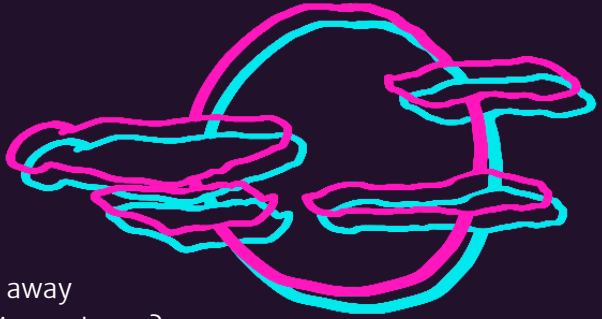
Forever wanting,
never having.

I knead you. I want you.
Do I already have you?
How do I know?

II

My moon,
lovely and fearsome.

My guiding light,
you may seem small
but I know
you are just far away.



How can you be so far away
when I hold you close in my heart?
It's a metaphor.
I long for you.

III

You are the moon. I am the wolf.

I howl at you, impressed by how
brightly you shine among the stars.
I long for you, yearning to hold
your form in my paws. But you are
far away.

Our love is cyclical. Its shape changes.
Forces of nature keep us apart and
bring us back together. Don't worry,
I still love you.

Always,

.....
: Kat is a full-time employee at a marketing agency in Toronto.
: To cope, she makes weird and dumb art in her spare time.
:

Pacing

by Cassandra Cervi

I've been
pacing
around my room, finding
pieces

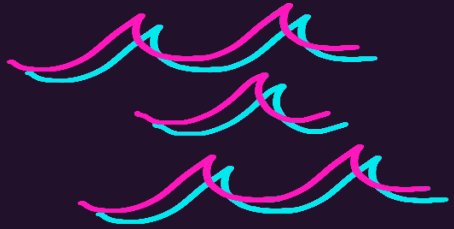
of you
in dusty corners and
drawers
I only use to store
things I don't know
what to do with
but can't
throw away

everything feels
bigger
now that my world is
my room

I can feel my walls vibrating
from the
sound of you
laughing at something
I said

I catch your glances
in my dirt-speckled mirrors,
recognize your touch
in my comforter

I wonder
if you're finding me
in the
dusty parts of your
shrinking world, too



Suspended

Sometimes I feel like I'm floating
nothing is going anywhere
and people sound like they are underwater
there's no forward, no backward

Just suspension

and then the panic sets in

like when I used to sit on the floor of swimming pools
to see how long I could hold my breath
but then would scramble back to the surface
afraid that I had stayed down there too long
and would run out of air before breaking through

sometimes it feels like
I've stayed down there too long
and will always be scrambling to the surface with
not quite enough air

but, then, I'm in your arms:
a towel straight out of the dryer
and I forget that I was ever underwater at all

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: Cassandra Cervi is a marketing strategist in Toronto, having :
: graduated with an Honors Specialization in Creative Writing and a :
: Master of Media from the University of Western Ontario. She serves :
: on the editorial board of Room Magazine and is a volunteer for The :
: Malahat Review. She has been published with eMpower Magazine, :
: Synaerisis Press, The Feminine Collective, The Impressment Gang, :
: Beautiful Losers Magazine and Pip Magazine. :
:.....

Old Bones

by Pax Santos

Stubbornness is hereditary, particularly if you trace the X chromosome. Mothers especially love to pass stubbornness onto their daughter. My own Grandmother had four boys until she finally settled on my mother. My mother had me. I could have married Jason but chose Jane instead. Stubborn. I'm sure there are other people in other cities. Toronto is no New York, let alone a Hong Kong, but I'm quite certain I'm the last one here. The bloodline ends here, The Strike was successful, and as always straight women gave themselves far too much credit.

As I arrived, a small herd of deer was passing through; they barely rose their heads in acknowledgment. Grandma said the first time she saw a deer in the city she yelled "holy shit!" so loudly she scared the both of them. I have seen photos of the old Honest Ed's building, my Grandmother even had one of their hand-painted signs in her house. She showed it off with the smugness with which one might hold themselves when passing through a Degas exhibit. It was literally cardboard.

Honestly when she first forced me to look up photos of the old building my first impression was that it looked *garish*, and that truly is the kindest adjective I can come up with. But the way Grandma spoke of it, it must have been something special. To her at least. Nostalgia has a way of making the horrid seem whimsical, but you need to know what you're missing in order to feel it. The condo that replaced it was now in its second glassy iteration, much smaller to accommodate a rapidly declining population. I like coming here to try to feel the same way about the first replacement condo, as Grandma did about its predecessor. My mother never cared for it, but she was direct and unsentimental. Garish things

are for sentimental folks. But I liked this new one much better in fact. They chose to build a beautiful edifice in brick, for posterity I guess. Not the whole thing mind you, the back and sides were as reflective and shiny and heartless as ever, but on the face of it, it could stand like the pyramids. Nostalgia. It haunted the builders, and now it haunts me.

There used to be a Pizza Pizza on this corner facing the Honest Ed's. It had lasted longer than anything in the whole neighborhood. It wasn't particularly nice, in fact as far as Pizza Pizzas go, it was small and grubby and only second from the bottom after the location at Queen and Bathurst. When the aliens come, I hope they try to figure out how the Pizza Pizzas lasted so fucking long. Let me be clear, I don't weep for lost humanity or even for myself. I had sixty long and wonderful years with my Jane. I just really hope aliens find us. I hope they study us, cause we were pretty interesting if I do say so myself. Anyway, I took Jane to this Pizza Pizza for our second date because I had an apartment nearby and hoped she was as slutty as I was. Sixty years we were together what the fuck. She was lovely, and a lesbian, which made me feel better about my personal decision to consciously end the bloodline.

The conditions for The Strike were quite perfect really. Climate change was producing unseen tornadoes, hurricanes, heat waves – it was the apocalypse from what I know. In my Grandmother's astute words: "it was all kinds of bullshit." On top of that was the global quarantine, because that's what happens in dense populations, pandemics. Finally, rape was already well established as bad in theory and not to be condoned by politicians publicly. There were laws and everything. So when the First Women proposed The Strike, they had both science and morality on their side. For once. When the First Women started publicly declaring their participation there was naturally, pushback. The Christians were loudest of course, because anyone without a religious calling quickly found themselves morally dumbfounded.

Participation was entirely optional. Each woman chose for herself whether and when she'd participate. Some women had already had eight children by then, but once they declared, they were welcomed into the Movement with open arms. The Movement was incredibly organised too, if you wanted to participate but circumstance meant you couldn't declare, no problem! Secret tube ties for everyone. You even got a little ribbon to wear in your hair afterwards to let other women know you were safe, if they also needed the help. Genius. And if you hated your period enough, you get a hysterectomy! You get a hysterectomy! You get a hysterectomy! And the men quickly followed suit, there were literal lineups of men rounding the street corner to sign up for the vasectomy. And once that made the evening news, all of a sudden the politicians were on board publicly with The Strike. Funny, the order in which these things happen historically.

It takes longer for me to get places at this age. Ugh age. Even the word is clumsy at best and cumbersome at worst. But I'm making my way at my own pace and no one can say anything. I've walked this city my whole life, I'll be damned if I don't walk it today. See, stubborn. I'll go east along Bloor, I've always liked this stroll. When I was younger there were still a couple of Japanese restaurants that had clung desperately to life as the population dwindled. They were run by the loveliest people, so kind to me. I think they were just happy to see a real child.

You can see the streetcar tracks in Spadina. Another relic of pre-Strike days, the TTC. Another piece of nostalgia which had no real particular excellence in and of itself. However contextualised with people, I suppose it was pretty curious, or even delightful if nothing else, to see what was essentially a trolley system carrying the burden of public transportation well past its expiration date. Jane lived

down Spadina, so me and this car became quite close friends in those early days. I lied to her and told her I wanted something casual, then fell in love with her anyway. My propensity for counter productivity and jealousy were truly astounding back then. But she was older and wiser and god love her, stupidly patient with me. I hate that I knew I was hot. I wasn't particularly pretty, just demand was low. I was the youngest person I knew throughout my life, and she was already in her thirties. What an asshole.

We moved to the waterfront when we got married. As close to the Yonge dividing line without going over as one could possibly get. As two self-respecting westenders, neither of us would be caught dead east of Yonge. It was a nice place, a sky box like all the others. It was hers but became ours. She had a good job, a history professor. The poetry of being a history professor keeping the memory of the past alive amidst the most significant change in human history in the present, was never lost on her. Her body was flawless. Fuck me we used to be so hot together. Ugh age, AGE. I miss being able to make others around me laugh. Something happens when you're the youngest in the room in that you are always the funniest. Something about the juxtaposition of wanton disregard for the wisdom that surrounds you, and the entitlement to further poke fun at it, is just intrinsically hilarious. It's the politician practicing physics. I miss lacking perspective. Anyway, Jane always laughed at my jokes. And she was funny too. But actually funny in a way that was quick and clever, not just absurd by nature.

Final destination, the ROM. Perfect for an old relic such as myself. I shouldn't say that, I feel guilty already. Though I shouldn't, I am a relic.

I go inside. Walk around. I only want to see the dinosaurs. It always upset me that once you reach a certain age you're no longer allowed to voice your love of dinosaurs because it's childish. They were literally giant monsters and we have their bones, how is that not

the most compelling shit you ever heard of. Whatever. I'm going to go look at the dinosaurs. Jane and I used to have memberships but never visited often enough to make them worthwhile. No matter, it didn't take long for everyone to collectively decide to just make everything free for the Remainers.

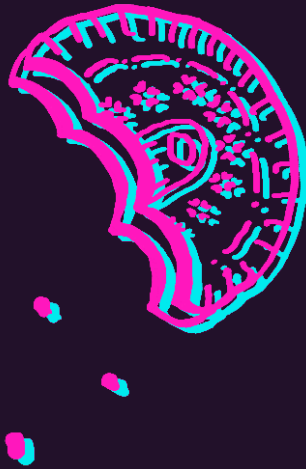
I take my seat at my bench and look up at the t-rex. I wish I had a more niche favourite to really flex my intellectual curiosity for dinos, but the t-rex is tried and true. I'll stay here for a bit, and then go home for the day.



.....
: Pax uses her formal education to continually disappoint her :
: Immigrant Mother by committing herself to writing nonsense. She :
: spends her time wrestling with how much to water the 32 plants she :
: currently takes care of. Pax laments over the days when she was cool :
: and had an eyebrow piercing. :
:

Untitled

by Toluwa Fayemi



When you're a kid you spend a great deal of your time slowly trying to figure out exactly who you are. When your family moves around a lot – and you look the way I look – piecing together your identity can be made just a little bit harder. My family immigrated to the United States from Nigeria before I was born. They wanted their kids to have more opportunities than they did, and they were willing to sacrifice anything to ensure that. Finding our footing was difficult at first as we found ourselves moving from city to city quite a bit before eventually setting down in a small neighbourhood in the California Bay Area. It was one of those neighbourhoods that Army recruiters love to frequent, picking off young boys with nothing to lose with tremendous efficiency. I think this is where I started piecing together my identity.

Being the kid of immigrants meant that, even around people that looked like me, my “black” was always a *little* different than their “black”. Even as young boys, they were able to spot the difference.

It was in the way I dressed, the way I talked, the way I walked. And in a way, they were right; their family trees had roots soaked in the blood of the slaves that built this country. Mine didn't. However, being American born and melanated, I was never considered an outsider. The "Black Community" was always my community. Black culture became my culture, Black pain became my pain, and Black issues were always inherently my issues. Similarly, African culture – inherited from my own family and ancestors – became a part of *their* culture; a small substitute for those vital parts of their identity, taken from them long before their time.

Being so young in such a community, it was hard to recognize how much the way I looked influenced how I lived. I never wondered why we had to stop playing and go inside when the police came around. It just seemed like something we were *supposed* to do. I don't think I ever questioned the stares we received from the convenience store clerks, or why we had to walk with our hands on our heads as we browsed the aisles. I was probably more concerned with whether or not my favourite Ninja Turtles popsicle was in stock. It was Donatello, in case you were wondering.

I was still pretty young when my parents were forced to leave the country. We left our community behind in California and moved to Canada, which according to our family friends was "pretty nice, I hear." In a familiar exodus, we traveled from town to town, eventually settling in this tiny Ontario suburb called Oakville.

Oakville was weird.

For starters, I suddenly looked like very few of my new friends which seemed to be as jarring for them as it was for me. My skin became a point of discussion as I was bombarded with questions about where I was from, what my name means, and whether or not there are lions in Nigeria. But these were kids, they were curious, why make a big deal out of it?

Sports in Canada were weird too. The coaches celebrated my speed with names like “Black Lightning” and “Nubian Prince”. From players on the other teams, my speed would inspire alternative names like “runaway slave” or, arguably less creatively, “run nigger, run,” which, while a clever allusion to an African-American folk song, isn’t even a name when you really think about it. “Don’t worry Black Lightning,” the coaches would say. “They’re just mad that you’re beating them.” So I let ‘em hate. Why make a big deal about it?

Putting my hands on my head in a convenience store became an instinct in California. My new friends didn’t understand. “This is Canada! We’re not racist like in the states,” they assured me. “You don’t have to worry, T!” They called me “T” because “Toluwa” was a bit too difficult for them. My first name is actually Toluwalase. I suppose I thought Toluwa would be easier.

The weirdest thing about Oakville was how quickly I became aware of all the things that were expected of me based on the way that I looked – and, more upsettingly, all the things that were not. By way of daily jokes and comments, I learned of all the things I was supposed to love, things like watermelon, fried chicken, basketball and *Shaft*. And it was the gentle cock of the head and the falsetto “Oh!” that made me realize that things like comic books, metal music and contemporary dance were interests that made an anomaly out of me.

By the time I was a Junior in highschool, comments about the way I spoke became a sort of white noise. A familiar tilt of the head and a higher-pitched “You’re so well-spoken,” became routine. And from the bolder of my peers, “You talk white,” “You’re totally scary... until you start talking!”, “You’re like the whitest black guy I know!” **OREO** was a term I heard a lot. In reference to the popular cookie snack? Black on the outsides, white on the inside. You get it. The

way I spoke, the way I wrote, my interests, my passions, everything was given a color code. And I let this happen for years. How couldn't I? When you've had your head slammed into the hood of a cop car while being called a "nigger" with the hard -er, names like "Oreo" and "Black Lightning" just don't seem to worth the fight. Besides, this was Canada. They're not racist here. Not like in the states.

In California, my best friends and I loved anime and science and Lord of the Rings and Star Wars and Dungeons and Dragons. We listened to 90's hip hop and punk rock. We wrote and illustrated comic books on my mum's printer paper and sold them for 10 cents apiece. We were nerds, but we were never "white". We were never **OREOs**. We were always just us. And where I grew up, not many people spoke the way I spoke. But you could sit on any given porch in the neighbourhood and hear the best fucking story you've ever heard in your entire life, and that shit will stick with you.

Last year, my vehicle was surrounded by plain-clothes officers in the Yorkdale parking lot. Their guns were drawn and trained on me as they ordered me to turn off the vehicle and put my hands on the steering wheel. I had just dropped off my friend Rasa and was eating a snack. I froze in fear with the snack still sticking out of my mouth. Believe it or not, I was eating **OREOs**. Cinnamon Bun OREOs, but still.

At first, I had no way of knowing that this was law enforcement and that I was not, in fact, being robbed. I then had the silly thought that this was because I was parked, for just a moment, in a spot reserved for pregnant women. The last thought I had before being pulled out of the car was that I was about to die. I started thinking about what my last day would look like. What would they say about me on the news? Would they call me a thug? Or will they use my "white" traits to capitalize on the tragedy?

A few moments later, handcuffed and pressed against the back of

an unmarked cruiser, I was told that my car matched the description of a vehicle that was reported stolen. I was told that I, too, matched a description. After searching my car and confirming my identity, they sent the only Black detective over to me to explain that this was an honest mistake, and to assure me that this was not a “race-thing”. I don’t remember exactly what he said, but it might as well have been “Besides, this is Canada. We’re not racist here.”

Despite how derivative it may sound, I truly believe that the hardest thing for any one person to truly know is themselves. Like many, I allowed myself to be influenced by the expectations of people who could never hope to understand my experience. I’ve spent a lot of time working on freeing from these expectations and I admit that, in smaller ways, I’m *still* working. To this day, I still sometimes find my hands on my head in a convenience store. But you better believe that if I hear the term **OREO**, I’m going to make a big deal out of it. I know who I am. And your expectations will never change that.

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BLACK LIVES MATTER

This time in our world has not only been defined by the COVID-19 pandemic, but by a global surge in resistance to anti-Black racism and police violence. When homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, misogyny, and capitalism are key features of white supremacy, police violence upon the most marginalised members of our community is not new. QT stands in solidarity with calls to defund the police.

With quarantine, there were no Pride parades this year. Instead, we remembered how the rights we have today exist because of the Black and Brown trans women, sex workers, and butch lesbians who led the Stonewall Riots. We remembered that from Stonewall to the Bathhouse Raids, protests against police violence are engrained in queer history and justice. We remembered, reflected, organised, and protested. This work must continue.

If you are QTBIPOC yourself, know that your voice will be prioritised in Queer Toronto Literary Magazine.

Some Local Places to Donate:

519 • Not Another Black Life • Black Lives Matter – TO
Black Legal Action Centre • Black Women in Motion
Nia Centre • Our Women's Voices • Across Boundaries
Serving Our Youth • Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention
Native Youth Sexual Health Network
Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto
Egale Canada • Rainbow Railroad

qtmag.ca

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.

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