

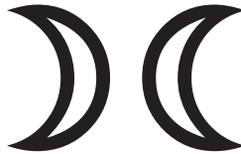
**WRITERS 4 UTOPIA
PRESENTS**

LIT FUSE



**An anthology of queer sci-fi
The relationship edition**

The Writers 4 Utopia Collective operates on the Unceded Coast Salish Territory of the Sto:lo, Musqueam, Skwxwú7mesh, and Tsleil-Waututh nations. As creators, it is essential to understand the spaces we occupy and the effect of our presence. We recognize that this acknowledgement doesn't begin to address or make reparations for the hundreds of years of violence and continued violence perpetrated on this land.



This zine is also available in eBook version.
<https://writers4utopia.wixsite.com/zine>

“Any human power can be resisted and changed
by human beings. Resistance and change often begin in art,
and very often in our art, the art of words.”

Rest in Power Ursula K. Le Guin (1929-2018)—forever an inspiration.

Introduction

Welcome to Lit Fuse, the second zine of queer sci-fi from Writers 4 Utopia. Here, there be monsters, animals, lovers, and distant planets. The theme of this anthology is relationships in the broadest sense. In writing of all kinds, we explore relationships between humans, objects and ecosystems. Each contribution takes the genre of sci-fi in a new and often unexpected direction. These stories, poems, songs, and images have one eye on speculative worlds and one on the world around us, always conscious of the way we can build our hopes for the future into the present.

Cultivating relationships under systems that actively drive us apart takes work. It takes learning, unlearning, fighting, and reckoning with the ways our differences affect our interactions. It takes consideration of our relationship with the land we live on. It takes a commitment to the radical notion that no one is disposable. Can we use fiction to imagine a future where loving relationships take precedence over the divisions inherent in colonialism and capitalism?

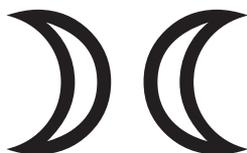
Coming together as a group to make this zine in a collaborative process of talking, workshopping and editing is a testament to the power of relationships between queer people and queer writers. Outsider art can be an isolated process or it can spring from community encouragement. We believe wholeheartedly that everyone can create if they want to. Sometimes the support and laughter of folks with similar values is all that's needed to unearth the stories within.

Thank you for joining us in these pages. We hope you like it.

The W4U collective

March 2018

xxx



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Note: Accompanying illustrations were assembled by their respective writers, unless otherwise noted.



Having grown up in the Okanagan and moved to the cities of Unceded Coast Salish Territory for resources, Fenrir is always yearning for the mountains and the solace they provide. They write of space, fantasy, and science for the same reasons. They hope to provide that same solace in fiction that centres rather than others queerness, disability, and mental illness.

YES, MONSTERS

Fenrir Cerebellion

cw: intergenerational trauma

“I don’t do that anymore.”

This isn’t the first time he’s told Wallace this. This is approximately the thirtieth time he’s told Wallace this.

Wallace leans back against the doorframe and shoves her hands in the pockets of her skirt. She looks up to inspect the overall creaky-ness of her grandfather’s house. It’s a tangible kind of creaky.

He had built it himself, decades before Wallace was born, and fewer decades before he stopped “doing that”. Under aurora-streaked skies and two moons, he nailed together all forms of wood into this home that swelled and shrunk in the constant climate changes and collected dust as much as it did creaks. A younger Wallace found it exciting, somewhere between then and now, she had found it quaint. Now it was a part of him, like the monstrous notions on her grandfather’s figure.

Stay long enough in the Trauma and you start turning, he told her.



In another some years, Wallace is leaning against a bedside table. Her grandfather lies under quilts he had sewn for his husband’s life events and achievements. An anniversary of theirs, his graduation from pilot school, his first year away from the societies of known space, another, much later anniversary of theirs. With all the bulk, it’s hard to make out the added bulk of his figure.

She shoves her hands in her pockets, hiding the bulge along her thumb and the bristle growing from her pinky up her wrist and forearm. “I know you don’t do that anymore,” she starts.

She’s cut off by her grandfather’s glare.



There was a sign that read YES, MONSTERS over Aidah’s door. Aidah could have put anything over his door, including his name, but YES, MONSTERS indicated both his room and, YES, MONSTERS.

Bagong Tamsi was a Barrier Class starship with modifications for the gargantuan crewmembers. Folks that would fill the space of Aidah’s doorway, folks that often did.



Wallace spent five years in Trauma, through it all she was always a genuine person. This was the nice way people would describe her unwieldy, unyielding, stalwart self. She appreciated being called genuine; people appreciated her unwieldy, unyielding, stalwart self.

She didn't mind her arms. Those who came to her were at first hesitant to keep her in contact once the changes started to show. She never hid them, the bulging of individual strands of muscle, the spreading growth of bristle, the veins turn black and oily. It was a part of being here, of doing this work.

When five years came to pass and she told those who came to her that she needed to move away from this place of monstrous people, she told them she would continue the work. She shook her monstrous hands with the nimble, delicate hands of her friends and clients, hugged her monstrous arms around those who hugged her back with arms no longer elongated or spiny.



On a starship-turned-spaceport known as the Chozi Mzuri, Wallace finally had her own office. She had been working out of her own quarters on planets and starships across Known Space. Here she had a desk she could fold her bulging, bristle-covered arms on, had a coffee mug just the right size for her gargantuan hands, had an open door for anyone who needed her.

Right now, that was Aidah—no taller in age than Wallace's desk. He sat himself down on a chair much too large for him, with a sense of practice. "Hi Mom."

"Hi Aidah," Wallace hummed. "What's on your mind?" Wallace often asked this question, it was her work to.

"No one else has big, hairy arms on this whole port!"

"How about big, toothy faces?" Wallace played along.

"Not one! Why are we here?"

Wallace smiled, she always smiled when Aidah was in the room. "Because people come from all over to this port on their way to other places or on their way back. That's a lot of people to help."

"Ok," Aidah sulked, then asked the question he always wanted to ask. "Why do you have big, hairy arms, mom?"

Wallace always told Aidah why, to the best of his comprehension.

Unwieldy and growing in age, Wallace expanded on her answer for him. “You become beastly to deal with beastly things, events and people that hurt you. Some people have so much of this, they can’t be unbeastly without help. Some people have so much of this, they’re hurtful to others without intending to, and they need the most help.”

“And you helped them.”

“Yes.” She smiled. “Which is how I learned how to help other people.”

“Like great-grandfather.”

“Like great-grandfather.”



Wallace doesn’t lean against her grandfather’s doorframe or bedside table and her hands are too big to fit into her pockets. She watches her grandfather slip away, too old and tired to keep going on. When she was young, she hadn’t understood what had happened to her other grandfather, the husband of the monstrous man lying under blankets dedicated to that husband, sewn by that monstrous man.

She hadn’t understood how her grandfather had hurt her other grandfather, after taking every day to be compassionate and caring for those hurt the most. She hadn’t understood why her other grandfather, like her parents, had left. Why he had become a monster without the tools to recover. Why her parents had run from the home built by hand, hands that built a monster.

“I don’t do that anymore.” It was his chant now, it meant more than the words.

Wallace knew. Knew that he had stopped because he hurt others and continuing would mean continuing to hurt others. Knew that he had stopped because there were people in his life still, that he didn’t want to hurt. Knew that he had done so much, for so many people, but had thrown his entire self into it. “I always admired you for it.”

Her grandfather smiled. It creaked like his creaky house. “You’ll do good.”



In decades, Aidah will be living on starships and keeping his door open to those who need it. Now, he takes his mother’s hand, so much larger than his, as she suggests they go someplace for a while, watch the starships dock maybe. When they walk out of her office, he looks back as always, to the handsewn sign over her door reading, YES, MONSTERS.

Future Me

Ellen MacAskill

The first time, she comes to me at night
smelling of the perfume I've worn forever
I wake from a dream to find her curled
up beside me asleep
warming my body, holding my waist
I take a long look in the dim light
of the supermoon outside my window—
hair red, streaks grey, arms inked, cheeks soft—
let out a sigh and close my eyes.

When I rise at dawn she's gone
bed empty but warm
I stretch, sneeze and see a note
on my cluttered altar-desk:
learn some practical skills before it's too late
E x
I run my fingers over the scrap of lined paper
and stick it to the wall.

In the office I google words like
obsolescence
heterotopia
jouissance
and roll my head around on my stiff neck.

Last spring I couldn't imagine summer
it evaded me like a slippery fish
each time I flipped the page of my diary to make a date
the shapes blurred on the paper
and I melted
into myself like hot wax
flame snuffed out, dragged lifeless
from one night to the next, absurd
that life could keep going on this linear trajectory
I wanted to grow up but not like this

can't make plans if you have no future
can't grow a cactus in a tundra.

Next time she turns up in the library
a converted church
wearing velvet and a faux fur coat
I watch from my desk as she approaches
the books and runs her manicured finger over the spines
I am researching plants, their properties and places
as the world burns outside
herbs can be just as potent as pharmaceuticals
she avoids my eye and I wonder
for the two hundredth time
if she knows what she is doing
if she is lost
if she loves herself and why.

Sometimes queerness is just throwing a rope into your future and dragging yourself towards it with red raw hands.

I'm not scared of death *per se*
just poverty and the heat death of the planet
I was both gladdened and disappointed
that my aesthetic had not changed
curious about the machines
of mind or metal that allowed her
to pay me these visits.

The third and final time, she returns to my bed
and runs her tongue over me so softly
I think I am dying
in a puddle of hot skin and rolled back eyes
she makes me weep with her gentle ways
then holds me in the dark like a child
whispers into my tingling ear
the things we would do
cloaked in ambiguity
the way the stars would swirl above our heads
invoking passions and praise and fluctuating moods

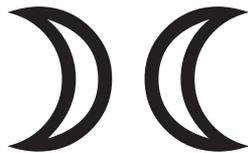
happiness is fickle, she says
don't miss it too much when it leaves
the glow in her eyes as she says this
makes me bury my face in her neck
and kiss her until I pass out, soothed.

Interviewer: *where do you see yourself in twenty years time?*

Star: *well, I just hope the world's still turning
and the beauty salons are nationalised!*

laughs

Summer came
after fading into nothing
as it almost always does.



Ellen is a Libra redhead. She keeps a dream journal, reads a lot of poetry, loves to dance, and spends a lot of time thinking about prison abolition and queer failure.

Bluebell Dragonheart or Life...

Forest.S.Blume

You pace our small house in awkward stumbling circles searching for just the right place. Beside the woodstove you snuffle & dig a nest & with a contented sigh marred only by a clear wheeze of discomfort, one of the greatest loves of my life snuggles down deep seeking slumber, head proudly pillowed inside a tiny round cat bed. Fire blazing, I lie down beside the warm, worn body. Immediately Blu presses her length deeper into my own. Do you remember? i whisper; when we soared through the trees? When the wild filled our senses? As our eyes close, each others familiar smells fill our nostrils. Breathing deep, we drift backwards.



Crisp, Cold, Clear. Last nights rain drops fall onto our necks as we burst through undergrowth, low lying Ceder branches, Honeysuckle & Oceanspray. Soaked from the ground up, Sword Ferns smacking across our legs as we weave & duck, hiding momentarily from each other before jumping out to playfully scuffle on soft moist duff that covers the forest floor. Exhausted, out of breath, we clamber up into the Shale boulders.

We collapse beside one another, hot breath billowing, cold november morning, chests heaving with exertion & joy. Our tongues hang out, tastebuds scenting the morning air, refreshing beads of moisture erupt inside our mouths. I break off low dead Cedar twigs & collect stashed dry wood. As i clear a small circle in the deadfall leaves, so's not to burn Forest down, you fly into a frenzy of smells & delight. Scritch & scratch, you roll around on your back making perfect piglet noises. I fiddle with a wet lighter, cursing a lack of matches, a lack of flint, a knowing of losses. You wiggle over to me on your belly, all smiles, sparkles & teeth. Pure life plastered across your existence. Movements that always bring this smile to the corner of my face. I breath deep. As Smoke fills out the tiny tent of wood we snuggle up, side by side, leaning with love for support, hiding our faces in each others body until Smoke clears & Flames rise.

We sit, tangled together, staring into Forest. Imagining that construction, commerce & control surrounding wild spaces is a lie, myth, fiction, false. When all we see & smell are Plants & Clouds, Ants & Raindrops, Dirt & Breezes, as scuttling Mice nearby create tempos of the sweetest sounds, as the winged whoosh of Birds settling in treetops momentarily drowns

out the little towns highway. Moments like these it's easier to believe.

The soft tread of Deer, your head pops up, eyes wide, ears on high alert. I grunt a soft low sound. With a deep breath & small whine you settle down, pressing your face into my neck. I run hands again & again over your perfect vibrating body. Slowly as calm quells prey drive, u sink deeper into our nest. It is late morning. I throw a couple pieces on the small Fire before we drift off into the spaces in between. Here but not really here at all. Sound, smell, touch, taste melt into one & where we each begin gets lost the tail ends of each others dreams.



A cold wet nose wakes me. A low sad whine. Ok girl, i'm here. You nudge my cheek. I open my eyes. It is warm. Where is the soft damp Breeze? Where is the fresh Fern'd Forest? I'm lost as i look upon Cedar planking where branches would be. Slowly i collect myself... We are here, not there... It is now, not then... I look to you. Brindle coat a dull sheen, ribs pushing out from your once muscle bound body. I'm seeking the sparkle beyond your eyes; beyond the confusion, the failings of body & mind. It's still there i tell myself. A second low whine & i wrap you in a grizzled old bear hug breathing you in deep, your tail thumps the floor & i awkwardly edge myself up & gently, painfully lift your old body & together we crawl out side.

It has snowed. You wag your tail twice looking to me with wide eyes. Do you remember? you say. There is it. The spark. Finding pure joy. Holding light to all our tomorrows, shining with all our yesterdays. I remember my love, i reply.

Kneeling on the cold ground I hold you. Straining to drop your wastes, you lean into me with small whimpers. I got you, i say, i'm here. Bracing us sends strain, sharp and dizzy through my body, arms threaten to give out, shoulder almost popping. It seems love for you is stronger than these failing limbs & we make it back into the house.

Bed or Fire, i ask. Fire you say. I place you on a low, round padded mat near the woodstove. You rest your face in my hands, staring deep into my eyes, such luck you seem to say, us finding us. A tear hits the edge of my lashes as i trace my thumbs up the bridge of your nose, around your overhead, down your jaw bones. In moments you are snoring, with soft small twitches. Back into dreams inspired by newly lain Snow, dreaming of yesterdays, of days to come. I kiss you between the eyes & gently lower your head to the mat.

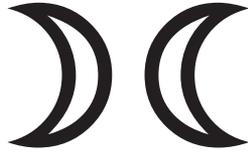
Freely, silently, the tears flow. I breathe deep, trying not to fall into despair of what I know is to come. Ignoring the fear inside telling me you will be gone. Instead i fill my heart with all the Love you ever shared, unabashedly deep, no beginning or end, with all the Joy you have shown, unconditional in its time, with all the peace you have wrought, with all the lessons we have learned, with all the times you have saved me. In that moment I make a promise, to take this [my] Life you have given me, & find a way to Live it.

Rest deep dearest Love. October 26th 2005 December 16th 2017



art by Jiulian and Beyon

Forest.S.Blume is a genderqueer crip white settlertype artist living within the territories of the K'omox peoples. Their work reflects the struggles and dichotomies of a world chalk full of liberation and oppression, creation and devastation, truth and lie. They have a deep desire to learn how to show up better each day for the worlds around them. You can follow their work at brokenstapledwings.wordpress.com



Although they live in the city, Ian Oak dreams of the fall of civilization and the possibilities that exist thereafter. They are slowly amassing a queer sci fi/fantasy library of rare and out of print paperbacks, understanding that ephemera is often all that survives of queer communities as they are destroyed or co-opted by capitalist cisheteropatriarchy. Ian is interested in documenting queer resistance, cultural memory, and living off the land in non-oppressive ways.

countdown

ian oak

trigger warning: dissociation

this chest bears fingerprints like
footsteps on the moon's surface
vestiges of a limitless era

areolae like launch buttons send
the incorporeal body away, beyond
touch to burn up on re-entry, meteoric
a falling star caught by a crater

shoulders curve, trapezius muscles
carry the weight, a prototypical
pressure suit, theoretically enabling
the wearer to reach dizzying altitudes

in a constant counter-pressure system
the heart can beat even in crushing
1g atmospheres, volume maintained
under extreme stress by restraint layers

yet when tested, the back is reshaped
by the shoulders/trapezii/heart
volume inconstant from rhomboid strain
external pressure an unknown variable

one theory claims it's muscular
another says it's skeletal, but it's not so
physical, this is no comet frozen solid

more like ganymede's swimming
surface, aurorae whispering of a
subterranean sea stirring
beneath icy lunar craters



Bo Del Valle Garcia is non-binary sometimes femme, sometimes grandpa who was born on kwahnt-len (Kwantlen) territory, under the looming shadow of HBC's Fort Langley before moving to the unceded territory of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), sə́lilwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh), 'skwɔ:mɪf (Squamish), and Stó:lō peoples. They use writing as a way to heal, by creating alternative endings for their lived traumas. Bo is a self proclaimed sci-fi nerd and apocalypse prepper. They love the genres of science fiction and fantasy as a tool for envisioning a future in which their queerness can roam free, in which they do not have to make a choice between being oppressed or oppressing others.

The Final Gift From The Final Human

Bo Del Valle Garcia

~ HUMAN ~

The rising sun begins to wake me from my sleep. The speckled light hitting my closed eyelids, creating an orange glow that works better than any alarm. I resist opening my eyes, preferring to remain in the happiness of my dreams. I had dreamt of Charli again last night, and the time before. Of the sounds that filled our sweet little two bedroom cottage in the woods, that Summer before everything changed. Stirring into wakefulness I could still feel the sweet touch of their lips on mine, the graze of their almost adolescent mustache, more of a peach fuzz, on my face. Similar to the fuzz of our little one's hair the night Charli gave birth. Our sweet little Lyra.

The grief of that thought slams into my chest and I am instantly awake, sobbing uncontrollably. Reminding myself that those memories are off limits, I struggle to lock them away, back in the depths of me. Startled by my sobs, Gem, the small short haired tabby that moved in with me last Winter strides up to me and starts nuzzling my arm. In the way that only cats have the ability to do, Gem purrs nonchalantly despite the fear and grief sizzling about the room like lightning. Gem has her own stories of pain, I'm sure. She came to me starving, with deeply infected wounds on much of her body, a missing ear and with a ragged stump of a tail. I managed to nurse her back to health, and now she is my constant companion. She mews twice, her indication that she needs to be fed.

I wriggle myself out of bed, trying to stretch the heavy sorrow from my limbs. The weight dissipates slightly, as it falls to the ground and through the cracks in the old wood floor. Walking across to the kitchen, the symphony of creaky floorboards sounds loudly in my ears; the only noise in the early Spring morning. The world is so quiet now. I add the groan of the kitchen cabinet to the soundscape. Searching for Gem's food, I notice that there are only a few cans left. This means I will have to head into town soon to do some salvaging. I loathe those trips. The desolate, empty urban landscape is so wrong, so out of place. Every journey there used to trigger a deep depression in me for days afterwards, but as human structures crumble and the wild things move in, the sadness of the place gets buried under layers of new life.

Soon all the supplies will run out and I may have to move on, but for now I tell myself not to worry. I am not yet ready to let go of the home I shared with them. As the months and years go by since I lost everyone I loved, I find myself often wondering if I had imagined their existence. Like it was all some strange dream that I awoke from. The lingering scents on their clothes, the carving with our initials on the old cedar tree in our back, the tiny hand prints in the cement of the workshop, are all the proof I have that they ever even existed. If I leave, I don't know if I will be able to convince myself that they ever even existed.

Gem mews impatiently at me from the floor as I stand holding her can of food, lost in my thoughts. Coming back to the world, I quickly spill the contents of the can into her food bowl and get on with my day. Perhaps it was the dreams, or the monotonous routine of it all, but today it is particularly challenging to stay present and in my body. As I move through my morning routine of eating, chopping wood for the fire, planting seeds in the early Spring garden, and turning the compost pile, I stay locked in the past. The temptation to remain in the pleasure of my memories and escape the fear and grief of the present is too strong. Trapped in an endless loop of recollections, I find myself haunted by ghosts. I chat to Charli as I pull a dandelion root from the garden; their favourite spring tonic ingredient. I hold Lyra's hand as I wander through the forest to collect wood, helping them to scramble over fallen logs as they teeter on toddler legs. It has been so long since I have talked to anyone. I'm afraid I have finally lost my grasp on reality.

As midday brings a bright sun directly overhead I begin to notice the heat. Coming back into my body enough to notice my dehydration, I realize that my water tank is out of water, which means a trip to the creek to fill it up. I have fastened a backpack out of jugs to make the trip easier. Grabbing my pack and walking stick, and with a quick goodbye to Gem, I head up the trail to the creek. The woods are still cool, and are beginning to bloom as the growing season approaches. The chatter of bird alarms follow me.

The gurgle of the creek, swollen with Spring melt, welcomes me like an old friend. As I dip the jugs into the chilly waters, my mind wanders. I remember the midnight swims Charli and I used to take on the full moons. Our naked bodies glowing in the bright moonlight. I was so in love with their androgynous body, neither male nor female, but somewhere in between and always changing. Always teasing the masc or femme from my body in ways I didn't know I had in me.

In the middle of that thought a smell catches my attention. A musty

odor of unwashed sweetness, mixed with the leaf mould and pine smells of the forest. A smell from my past, one I struggle to recognize, the familiarity tugging at my memory. The crack of a breaking branch behind me brings me back with a start and suddenly I am terrified. Turning, the odour hits me full on and is overwhelming, but also oddly intriguing. I see nothing. My hackles are up and that sensation of being watched by something unseen tickles the back of my neck. Grabbing my water jugs, I flee back to the safety of the cabin. The woods remain quiet and peaceful, but the smell follows me, leaving me at the forest edge.



I wake again with the sun, the feeling of Charli's body against mine. Shaking off their soft weight, I wiggle free of my blankets preparing for the assault of affection from Gem, who is up and ready for breakfast. My day flows with the same old regularity as I trudge through my chores. I chatter away to the ghosts as I go, unable to shut them out since yesterday. Charli and Lyra are here again, but also my mother visits me today. She chats to me as I repair the roof, which had sprung a leak during the freeze and thaw of the Winter, telling me the right way to patch the old shingles. She was the one who built this cabin, in the early days, long before the fall.

Finishing up the roof, I head to the garden to harvest some of the sweet Springtime greens I have been craving all winter. I fill my basket with the fresh young leaves of chicory and dandelion, sampling some as I go and savouring the spicy bitter flavour. As I chew methodically, my nose catches a faint whiff of that same sweet musty smell from yesterday, and once again I feel eyes on me. I swivel my head over my shoulders trying to find its source, but all I see is the familiar clearing surrounding the cabin and the dappled light of the forest.

The smell grows stronger, surrounding me in its embrace, and my nose tingles, not unpleasantly. Closing my eyes, I inhale deeply and can almost feel the weight of the scent on my body, like a thousand pinpoints all over. I feel my body begin to respond to the sensation. My nipples tingle and I feel moist between my legs. A small gasp leaves my mouth. A rustle in the forest edge pulls me from my euphoria, and suddenly recognition comes to me: a bear. My eyes slam open and cold fear rushes over me as my bloodstream fills with adrenaline.

Turning to run to the cabin, I notice a hulking figure meander out of the woods. Momentarily blinded by the high afternoon sun, I struggle to assess what my eyes are seeing. The smell grows stronger, surrounding

and intoxicating me until I can no longer move. As my vision clears, I see before me a giant of a bear.

The bear rises up onto their hind legs and walks over to me, stopping just a few short meters away. My throat catches and I can feel my heart pounding in my chest, but their scent has an almost numbing effect on me, causing me to remain where I am. We stand there, still, silent, paralyzed, for what seems like an eternity. The bear makes eye contact with me, unblinking. After a few moments of this, I feel a sensation on the back of my neck, a tingle that runs down my entire spine. Then a slight breeze in my ear, almost as if someone is whispering to me. I try to shake it off but the sensation moves up to the top of my head, growing stronger.

Suddenly a vision forms in my mind. It is me, from behind, holding a water jug in the creek. My shoulders are slumped and hair a tangled mess. The jug overflows, but I am too lost in thought to notice. The vision changes, flashing to me sitting in the cabin as night falls, a far away look in my eyes as Gem weaves between my legs trying to get my attention. Then another of me repairing the roof, chatting away to my unseen ghosts. As I watch these visions flash before my eyes, I see myself as this bear has witnessed me; a person lost in their grief.

Something within me snaps and as the visions clear I collapse to my knees. The grief overwhelming me. My ghosts surround me, suffocating me. I sob into the garden beds, curled into a tight ball. My tears stream out of me into the humus of the soil below, and along with those tears flows my sorrow. My defenses break down as it pours out of me: the memories, the pain, the love, the loss. It all flows out of me in a torrent. Unable to stop the flow, I remain in a ball, untying the knots of grief for what feels like an eternity. Eventually the flow dries up, all my grief now a part of this garden bed, and I realize my complete exhaustion. I try to stand, but the world starts to dim. I fall to my knees and to the ground once again. The darkness overcomes me and I lose consciousness.

~ BEAR ~

Hunger. Ravenous hunger. I feel hollow inside from my long slumber and the need to eat is overpowering. I stretch out my limbs, which are stiff from so long being unused. Taking turns flexing and stretching each muscle I manage to bring some life back into my emaciated body. Shakily I crawl out of my den, and find the entrance covered by a layer of something like thick crumbling rock. Using my claws I am able to break it apart and climb out into the sunlight. My eyes, accustomed to many

lifetimes of darkness, burn in the light and I squat, blinking until they adjust. It takes until the morning sun is above the treetops before I am able to walk and see the world around me.

The scene around me is strange. I find myself in a human settlement, that much I know, but unlike one I have ever seen. That crumbly rock-like substance is everywhere, but cracked and frayed. I can feel a deep sorrow in this place. Pain of the forest that once existed here. Pain from deep within the now-buried forest floor. Pain from a thousand birds, insects, deer; creatures big and small. The sorrow of this place overwhelms me. I see no humans, but everywhere I look I notice the creations of man are being taken over by the wild things. Trees are growing out of the buildings. Plants emerging from the cracks in the ground. Birds are making nests and deer graze nearby. This can only mean one thing. The age of man has ended. This is why I have woken. It is time to rebuild our world.

My empty stomach tugs at my attention and I notice my burning thirst. I know I will need to eat and drink very soon and, eager to leave this place, I follow my nose towards water. The sick and dying human landscape seems to go on forever. Everywhere I go, the pain of this place follows me, and I find it wearing on my mind. Exhausted, I finally reach a forested bit of land with a stream running through it. I take a long sip from the waters, but the water doesn't taste right. It tastes of poison and I spit it back out. I will have no choice but to follow the stream and see if I can find some cleaner waters. I follow the stream until the sun's rays are high in the sky and my body is weary. The landscape around me begins to change, from human-made to wild, and I find myself in a forested area. The water begins to run clearer and I risk a sip. Fresh. I drink my fill, letting the sweet water fill me up.

With my thirst satiated my stomach screams louder with hunger; I must eat today. I catch a faint whiff of fish in the wind and decide my best shot is to continue following the stream in hopes of finding some deeper pools more suitable for fish. I walk until the sun is high in the sky, the scent of fish getting stronger as I go. Rounding a corner with the stream, the sounds of a waterfall fill my ears. The stream widens and before me stands a massive cliff face made of that same smooth crumbly rock that had covered the human land. From a small vent at the top was the source of the waterfall.

I ramble up to the cliff trying to find a way to the top. As my paw touches the stone, I am overcome with a vision of grief. I feel the pain and confusion of countless salmon meeting their ends at the stone. I feel

their desperation as they try with all their might to return home of their birthplace but are unable to make the leap required. I feel their sorrow as they fail at providing the same safe home for their unborn children. I feel the fear of the other creatures of the forest in knowing they will lose their food source for the coming years.

Following the forest's edge, I climb to the top of the structure and am greeted with a vast lake. Taking a sip of the lake's waters, I can taste more sadness. Here is a human sadness. This was once the home of a large community. These were an old people, born to this land. They had their sacred spaces here, places used to worship other beings such as myself. Another type of human had come to this place from far away. They built this structure, flooding the people and preventing the salmon from finding their home. This is an evil structure and one that must go.

Surging with the anger of thousands of salmon lives and the frustration of these ancient humans I feel my strength grow and I set to work tearing down this structure. Using my strong paws and claws I swipe at the crumbly stone bit by bit, aided by the disrepair of the materials. The work is slow though, and my hunger makes work too difficult. Walking to the lake's edge, I ask for the sustenance required to continue my task. I wade into the lake and stand waiting, silently and patiently, giving the lake time to find my request. Eventually I am greeted by a fish grazing past my paw. Closing my grasp around the fish's tail, I bring it out of the lake and, with a quick offering to the lake, I eat my fill.

Satiated for the time being, I continue my work on the structure. I work for hours, days, weeks. I work until most of my claws are torn out, and my paws are raw and bloody. When hunger overcomes me, the lake offers me a meal. When exhaustion weighs too heavily on my limbs, I sleep in the surrounding forest. When the work becomes too much, others join in my labour. Deer come and scratch at the rock with their hooves and horns. Other bear come and swipe with their paws. The lake's water surges against the material, pushing it over the edge and carrying it away downstream. I lose myself in the work, consumed with it. After countless sunrises and sunsets, my work is complete. The structure has been torn down. The stream surges into the healthy river it had once been, remembering the channel it cut throughout its lifetime. The lake, diminished back into a valley, exposes the lost artifacts of the old humans. I speak a word of love for these humans; the ones who tended this land before. Then, overcome with exhaustion, I sleep.

Awakening to the bird calls, I hear them chittering about a human that lives in a clearing about a half day's walk from here. This human is the only one they have seen in a very long time. A sense of rage shoots through my body and I stumble up, intent on destroying this final human. Their time is over. I cannot let this one remain to destroy anything further. As I walk, my thoughts swarm with the horrors of humans and my rage only grows.

It is not hard to find the human. As with many of this species, they seem almost entirely oblivious to the world around them, and carry on loudly. I first catch their scent. Following its source, I see the human in the distance. They are filling water from the stream side. I brace myself for the kill, waiting and watching intently to ensure that no other humans are nearby. This human begins to talk to someone, but when I see a shimmer swirl around them I know they are alone. Only humans who have been alone for a very long time begin to commune with their dead.

I begin to stalk forward, creeping closer to make my move, but as I get closer my anger diminishes. I can see the sorrow of this human hanging in a thick cloud around them. I know that they have suffered as well, and I know that I cannot end this one's life. My muscles release as I let go of my hunting stance, and the shift in weight causes my paw to step heavily on the earth, snapping a branch. The human hears, and I smell the fear in their body. They flee the woods and I let them go.

I wait at the stream for many moments, but something deep inside me tells me to follow the human. A deep burning need within me flares up. One that I thought had been destroyed long ago. I think of that beautiful time, ages ago, when I shared my life with humans. That time was so joyous and full. I begin to notice the loneliness of centuries that I have been carrying in my body, and suddenly the need for contact with that human is unbearably strong. I follow.

Quietly I stalk the human back to their home—a small log cottage in a clearing surrounded entirely by the woods. I sit on the forest edge, camouflaging myself amongst the dense underbrush of salal and fern. I watch as they open the door to the cabin, looking over their shoulder but not spying me, a cat at their heels mewing a hello. They quickly enter the door and lock it tight behind them. As the sun begins to make its final crawl along the horizon, I hunker down, preparing myself for night fall. Loneliness and a burning desire cover me like a thick blanket for the night.

It is my nose that wakes me in the early hours of the day; the sweet smell of morning dew. Rousing awake I look to the cabin and catch a

glimpse of this human sleeping in their bed. Such desire takes over, causing my legs to carry me to their window. The ghosts are thick in the air and I see the human twitching in their sleep, their hands grasping the mattress beside them in tight fists. Their eyes open, catching mine and the smile of complete and utter joy that washes across their face causes my heart to flutter, but it was the briefest of moments and soon they are falling back into a fitful slumber. Getting control of my body once again, I head back to my spot on the forest edge, waiting for them to wake. Waiting for the moment to show myself.

As the sunlight begins to pour into their bedroom window, I watch them wake. The realization that their visions were only dreams dawns on them, and I see tears stream down their face. I feel their pain of loss. I yearn to lick the tears from their eyes, tasting the salty brine on my tongue. I yearn to make them feel good again. I watch as they go through their morning, followed by the cat and the ghosts. Their body moves without their mind, weaving through a predictable pattern, following the worn path of their daily routine.

As I watch, my desire to touch, to lick, to be with a human once again grows beyond my restraints and my legs once again carry me beyond my forest camouflage. Walking on my two hind legs, as is the way of this species, I approach the human as they work in their garden. At first they don't notice me, but I let my scent offer greetings; I know it can have a powerful effect on humans. Eventually they turn to face me and I feel their fear rising. I walk closer until we are only a few feet apart and they stay put; a good sign.

Worried that they might still run back into the cabin without allowing me to connect, I begin to reach out to them with my thoughts. It is a struggle at first, as their mind has become buried under layers of grief, but I peel them away piece by piece. I begin sharing my thoughts with them. I show them that I have been watching them throughout the day. I show them that I mean them no harm, but notice their grief and loneliness. I share with them my own stories of pain. As I do this I continue to remove layer upon layer of sorrow from the human, freeing up space for more connection. Finally I reach the final layer and as I remove it, I watch as the human falls to the ground and releases wave after wave of sorrow into the earth below. Free from the bonds of grief, I hope they will now be able to feel my desire, but before I can communicate that to them, the exhaustion reaches them and they fall into oblivion.

~ HUMAN ~

When I wake I am lying in the garden bed, lost in confusion. At some point I become aware once again of the bear's scent. It tugs on my heart, filling me up with something other than pain. Opening my eyes I see that the bear has not moved. They still remain standing, watching me sleep. I stir to rise, finding my knees first and then struggling to stand. Shaking out my feet, I feel a lightness to my body. Like an unseen weight has been removed. My ghosts are gone.

Unsure how to proceed, I take a step towards them, curiosity now my strongest feeling. This is no ordinary bear. I take two more steps towards the bear, wondering about this creature, when another vision appears in my head. This time I see the bear in another place, in another time; an ancient time. I learn that the bear identifies as female and uses "she". I try to express that I identify as somewhere in between wondering how to explain such a concept without words, but quickly realize that there is no need. She already knows. For wild creatures have no need for gender binary constructs. I see her living and working with humans. I see the humans offering gifts to her of food and crafts and in return she offers them the gifts of the forest. I see her embracing the humans, making love to them. I learn that she was once dearly loved by these people.

The visions start to change, moving faster again. I see her people being taken away; murdered and enslaved. I see her forests start to change from the wild spaces to farmland to towns to industrial wastelands. I see her being forced from her homeland and journeying to this land. I feel her grief as she flees. I feel her loneliness. I watch her endless wanderings, hiding from the destructive forces of human beings. I feel her overwhelming despair tinged with anger. I see her giving up and falling into a deep sleep, that is, until now.

I also feel her deep burning desire; her ache for physical contact from a human once again. A question forms in my mind, and she reaches out her paw. I know that she is asking if she can touch me. The extent of her desire catches me off guard. After so long alone, I had sealed up my own desires so as not to deal with the grief that resides there. I explore the boundaries of my desire, bracing myself for the flash of sorrow, but I am surprised to find none there. Digging deeper, I discover a faint warmth in the depths of my body, which grows, consuming me and growing to a fever pitch. Suddenly my greatest need is to reach out and touch her.

I close the distance between us and take her massive paw in both my hands. I rub her soft fur between my fingertips and following my desire,

I lift her paw to my head. She cups my entire face in her paw, using the sharp claw of her thumb to draw a circle on my cheek. I rub my lip against the rough surface of her finger pad and a shiver of pleasure runs down my spine. She responds with a soft growl. Now the space between us becomes too much and the need to feel her soft fur against my entire body is too great. I look questioningly into her eyes, unsure of how to proceed. Her gaze is confident and she takes the final step towards me. As her fur grazes along the length of my body, my nervous system explodes in pleasure. Her arms wrap around me and I find myself encased in her sweet musky scent.

We spend the remainder of the day exploring each other's bodies. I learn the ways in which she likes to be stroked and she responds with an expert knowledge of mine. By the time the sun begins to set we are caked in dirt and sweat, and hunger and thirst become more overpowering than our desire for touch. Extracting my limbs from hers I roll onto my back into the garden bed. My body is weak with hunger but the happiness I feel prevents me from moving for many moments. Unsure how to communicate something such as food, I roll onto my side, facing her and thinking of the food I have inside the cabin, wondering if there is anything there that she might eat.

Nodding, she rises on to all fours and I see a vision of myself riding on her back. Nervously, I climb aboard and find it to be a peculiar seat, but also quite comfortable. She wanders through the forest and I perch atop, wondering what the creatures of the forest must think of this sight. Making quick time, with her pace, soon we have reached a small lake. She crouches down, indicating for me to dismount, and wades into the waters. She pauses for a moment in the lake with her eyes closed, and remains so still. After a few moments there is a quick movement, and whisking her arm out of the water I see that she has a fish dangling in her paw.

She brings it ashore, using her dexterous claws to gut and clean the fish, something I know she does more for me than herself. She tears the fish in half and offers me a portion. I get to work building a fire, much preferring to eat the fish warm. Thankfully my flint had remained in my pocket throughout our lovemaking. It takes me some time to collect the wood and get the fire burning, and by the time my fish is staked and cooking she has eaten her portion and caught another fish for herself. She now lies curled up near the fire, falling into a slumber as the darkness creeps upon us. I finish my fish and my tired body tells me that I will be sleeping here. I curl up between her and the fire and fall into a blissful slumber, my dreams free of ghosts and sorrow.

~ BEAR ~

I wake early in the morning before the human does, but not wanting to wake them, I remain curled around them, keeping them warm against the chilly Spring morning air. Their body pressed against mine sends waves of pleasure throughout me, and I bathe in the happiness I feel. It has been centuries since I have felt such complete joy. I try not to let the thought that it must end soon enter my mind, but it of course lingers on the edges of my consciousness. I know it must. Despite the pleasure that I feel, this is not meant to be. Our time to be together has passed.

Eventually the morning wakes them and their eyes open, searching for mine. I meet them and see the joy reflecting there, too. I hoist myself on all fours and head to a nearby patch of salmon berries that had come early to the warm banks of this lake. Gathering as much as I can carry, I bring the meal back. We can share one more meal before I must go. While I was harvesting, the human built the fire back up and is sitting, warming their bones and stretching out the kinks from a night of sleeping on the ground. I drop the berries in front of them and I can see their pleasure. They pick up the largest of the berries and pop it into their mouth. Placing one in my mouth, I watch as they savour the sweetness, rolling the berry around in their mouth. I mimic their actions.

In no time at all the berries are gone, the sweetness lingers in my mouth, but I can taste a sadness rising up in the back of my throat. The human senses that something is wrong and reaches to stroke my fur. Feeling the sadness that hangs from the end of each hair like an overweight bead of water, they pause their stroking. The human also knows that it is time, that we are out of time. I see the sadness in their eyes, but they stand and square their shoulders to me, resolutely. I stand to face them.

I stroke their cheek one last time. They hold my paw against them with their own hand and I can feel tears stream down their face and puddle between my digits. I bring my paw away and taste their salty tears. One last taste before we must part. The temptation to stay with them, to live out their life together in the little clearing in the woods is overpowering, but I can't. I have work to do. I must repair what the age of humans has done to this planet. I know this. We both know it. The time of humans is over, even for a human as harmless as this. This must be the way.

We both take a deep breath and they close their eyes. They say their first words to me, "Thank you." Standing on two legs now, I aim true and strike them in the back of the head, on the soft spot where the neck meets the skull. I feel the bones shatter under my strength and they fall to the

ground, the life gone from their eyes. I roll them over so that they can face the sky. Their body now empty. I take their hand and sit by their side and I cry my own tears now. I stay here for many moments allowing the sadness to pour out of me, but I know I must go. As I walk away I take comfort in knowing that they have been given a wild funeral; their body will nourish many. The final gift from the final human.

"Kindred"



The Place Behind the Palace

Kaden Jelsing

YOU PLAYED THE SAW IN MY UTOPIAN CITY

On the crest we enter town,
We roll in.
But before we roll in
we roll down
We roll
by.

You're headed down on your lanks,
you ask:
where

In the bowl
you scruff my cheek and tender
if

On the parched rim of the estuary
pull me by the Empress
and toward the open door.

Dry grasses slouch and scatter
crescent speckled
August shadow

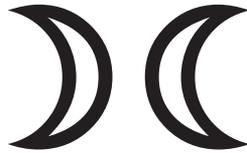
hairs on the bowstring
chafe on a stalk
a metal plate bends and three cards fall.

CITY SKIN

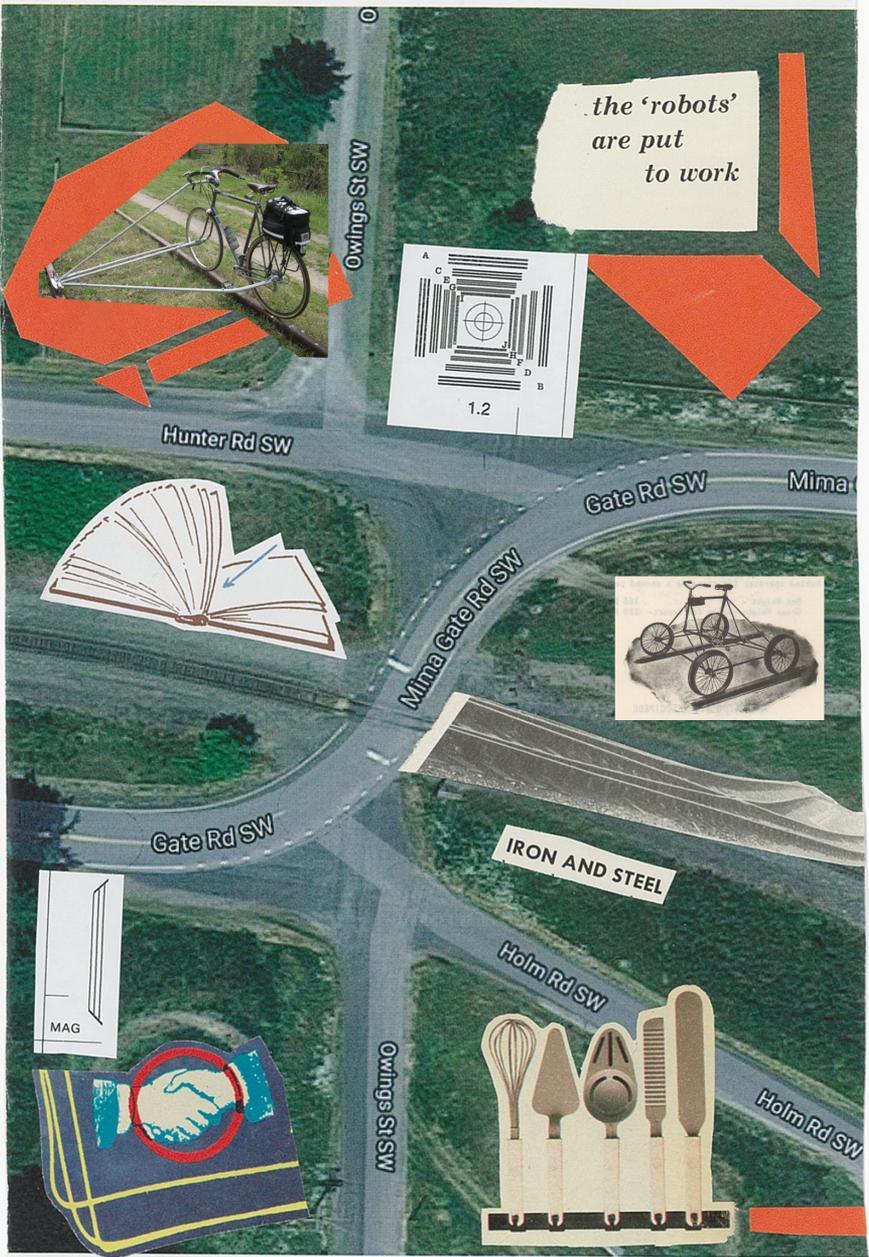
I still don't understand
the border like
ring around the retina

Capitalism makes poets
to die for
desert scars trees can't hide
trees you leave the house to find

Spring skin on
the city.



Kaden Jelsing grew up in S·duk^walbix^w (Snoqualmie) Territory on a hill dividing two watersheds where coyotes howl, donkeys bray, Doug firs toss, and the moon watches it all. He is currently a PhD student at the University of British Columbia (unceded x^wməθk^wəyám (Musqueam) Territory) where he is working on a dissertation project about Indigenous prophecy, settler colonialism, and environmental change in nineteenth-century North America.



Liina has seen, heard, and practiced many strange and wonderful things, coming in contact with potent teachers and teachings, growing up as a settler on the wet low coast of the Salish Sea and spending a year in the dry high desert before returning.

Hell Yeah

Liina Koivula

CW: alcohol and cannabis use.

I heard footsteps bounding up the stairs. I was pretty sure it was Sweetpea, and I was right. She quietly turned her key in the deadbolt lock and stage whispered, “Hey. Glen. Are you awake?”

She poked her head around the corner of the entryway to my studio apartment and saw me sitting up in bed, reading the free local entertainment rag.

“Oh, hey.” She came in and sat at the foot of the bed. “Could you help me with something? Sorry I didn’t text first, I forgot my phone charger.”

“You want to borrow my charger? That’s fine,” I said. “I don’t plan to leave the house today.”

“Could I? That would be cool—but that’s not it. It’s like, someone left a huge donation, like someone’s estate, in the reception hall of the Unitarian-Universalist Church,” she explained. “I’m running the SOFFA Ice Cream Social fundraiser there at 6—you’re still coming, aren’t you? Everything has to be processed for their thrift store and they only have one volunteer today.”

Sweetpea was cis, trained as a social worker, and ran a support group for significant others, family, friends, and allies of trans and genderqueer folks. She’d been planning the Ice Cream Social all month, securing vegan ice cream, gluten free waffle cones, and locally sourced fruit sauces. But she wasn’t even upset by this obstacle: it was just an obstacle. I rarely saw her express anything besides total enthusiasm or righteous anger. Then again, she probably didn’t see me express much except vague annoyance and resigned indifference. We’d known each other peripherally for years, and had been dating off and on for a while—recently we’d sort of fallen into spending most of our time together. But last time hung out, things had ended poorly, and I was still feeling sort of raw. Now she acted like nothing had happened, and I found it easy to go along with that.

“Aw, man,” I moaned. “This is my first day off in 9 days. Where are the other volunteers? I thought Universal Basic Income was supposed to free up everyone’s time to volunteer more.”

Sweetpea shrugged, “Why are *you* working 9 days in a row under Universal Basic Income?”

“I don’t know,” I whined. “When everyone was saying they’d be too bored if they didn’t *have* to work, that they’d keep working, I was like, never—I never said that.”

“I know. I remember. You had a lot of plans, and it really sucks that you’re still stuck there. You should quit.” I’d been washing dishes at the same diner for longer than I could have imagined when I started the job. Most of my friends worked there. I thought taking on the low ranking position, and staying off any decision-making committees of our member-worker cooperative, would free up my time to complete and self-publish the graphic novel I’d been working on for almost as long as I’d been washing dishes—while keeping me social. Instead, I just kept working while the same folks who swore they’d never *stop* working had long, drawn out meetings—with food and drinks—everyone repeating the same arguments and ending up nowhere in particular. I *believed* in Universal Basic Income, but I couldn’t believe this was how it was panning out for me.

“I can’t just *quit*.” This was an ongoing conversation.

“What do you need to keep working for? You’re just hoarding your money,” she’d say.

“I feel like I should keep working until I have, you know, 3 months of living expenses saved, and the same amount for an emergency fund—”

“That’s totally outdated thinking. You need to get used to the fact that your needs are taken care of.”

“And enough for art supplies, and to print the first run of my book—”

I’d spit out some more excuses until she’d get fed up and say, “God-damn it, Glen, what is it? Do you ever ask yourself if this might be a form of greed?”

“I just like to feel secure,” I’d object, feeling defensive.

“There are other kinds of *wealth*. I refuse to believe that money is what actually makes you happy.”

Instead of repeating these lines again, she shifted back to the more immediate concern.

“Look. I’ll make it up to you, you know I will! You just live so close. Don’t you think it would be kind of fun to go through all that old stuff? It’s not even noon yet, we have plenty of time.”

“No, yeah, totally, I’m in, I’m here with you, or for you, or whatever,” I told her, shaking my head and combing my hair with my fingers. “Let

me just get dressed and stuff. I'll meet you down there in a few minutes."

"Cool," she smiled at me. "I knew you'd be down." She kissed me quick. "Hey, can I hit that?" Sweetpea noticed the pipe on my bedside table.

"Oh, it's probably out, I can load you another one." I patted down the blankets around me, looking for my weed. She was already lighting the bowl and I heard the ash pop in. She blew out a tiny plume of smoke and sputtered black flakes, wiping her tongue on the back of her wrist.

"Oh, here, let me load you another one," I said, but she was already up.

"It's cool," she said, waving dismissively, "I gotta get back over there! See you in a minute!"

I drew my shoulders up towards my ears, trying to get my jacket collar to meet my hat. It was late October and the weather had changed overnight from clear and mild, to rainy and cool. It would be like this until spring, I thought, pushing away a sense of dread. I ducked into the overhang of the back staircase and jiggled the door handle to the reception hall. It rattled, locked. Sweetpea heard me and skidded across the Marmoleum floor on thick wool socks. She grinned through the wire-glass panel of the steel door and shoved it open to let me in. "That was fast!"

Past her, cardboard boxes were stacked in piles of 3 and 4, flaps unfolded and askew. The owners of the donated estate had been smokers; the smell of stale cigarettes worsened my feeling of dread, reminded me of helping my mom clean out her parents' house after her dad finally died of throat cancer. I was 15, and I got to wear my favorite ragged boy-clothes because we were going to get dirty, something I'd never been allowed to do at their house when they were alive and hassling my mom to enforce my assigned gender. It was a final fuck-you, in a way. Double that age now, the smell still brought me right back to scrubbing their walls so hard that my arms ached too badly to sleep that night. I told my mom I was glad they were dead and she told me that was my business, not hers.

Sweetpea surveyed the donated estate for potential accoutrements of some temporal drag playhouse—she decorated like a hip grandma, herself—but I could sense the emotional residue clinging to the shitty knick-knacks like the sticky nicotine. I couldn't help feeling resentful that this was how I was spending my first Saturday off in a month and a half.

Sweetpea had dumped out a few boxes and sorted the contents into piles. At a glance, the categories seemed to be hardcover books with glossy dust jackets, vases, coats for every type of weather from a number of eras, and barware.

“Check this out!” Sweetpea laughed, holding up a book with a fluffy-haired white woman on the dustjacket. “It’s Tanya Tucker’s autobiography!” she giggled.

“Weird,” I said, not really sure who she was.

“She’s a country singer,” Sweetpea explained, her smile falling slightly, realizing that I didn’t share her knowledge. “But if her autobiography is as boring as her reality show was, I’m not interested.”

“She had a reality show?”

“Yeah, for like, a minute. It was maybe like, the second wave of reality TV? Before it got really outrageous. Maybe that was *why* it got really outrageous. I think I’m gonna set this aside.”

“Can you *do* that?”

“I’m doing the labor, here, aren’t I? I deserve *some* form of compensation.”

“It’s true, you’re not a volunteer.”

“Not for *this*.”

“I guess I’m the volunteer.”

I opened a box and something in it moved. I screamed involuntarily.

“Holy shit, what!” Sweetpea demanded. “You scared the crap out of me.”

Before I could say anything, a demon emerged from the box, the newspaper that had covered it fluttering to the ground as it darted around. It seemed to be propelled by the manual eggbeater that was its base, beating the air frantically. It had a badly tarnished spoon for one arm, and an ornate fake ivory letter opener for the other, handle mercifully facing out. If it hadn’t been so terrifying, it would have been hilarious that its head was a clamshell with googly-eyes hot-glued on, some corny beach vacation souvenir. Actually, Sweetpea looked as if she was trying not to laugh at it. She held the Tanya Tucker autobiography shut, her mouth shut tighter.

“What the actual fuck,” I said shakily. Sweetpea tried to scowl. “What do we do? You seem to know more about this than—”

Another demon pushed its way out of a partially closed box. Its body was a metal vegetable steamer that opened and closed as if it were breathing, and it had wings made up of paint-stained brushes. A tomato-shaped pincushion where a head might be seemed to guide its motions. A couple of bottle openers dangled like talons.

The demons danced.



Two nights earlier, Sweetpea had been waiting for me when I got off work.

“Someone’s gettin’ *laaaaid*,” my co-worker Denny muttered under his breath, ending in a high falsetto. I couldn’t help smiling to myself. I untied the strings and hung up my rubber apron, pant cuffs wet to my knees, trying to find a dry spot on my sleeve to wipe off the layer of oily sweat on my face from the dish pit steam. I saw Sweetpea at a booth in the diner and approached her, hovering for a moment, trying to decide whether to sit next to her or across from her. She had three-quarters of a pint in front of her and she’d shoved a book into her bag when she noticed me, like she didn’t want me to see what she was reading. I wondered if she *wanted* me to ask what she was reading, but decided not to risk making it awkward, in case she really didn’t want me to know. I went ahead and sat across from her in hopes that she couldn’t smell me. It had just gotten dark outside, and the lamp hanging over the table cast a warm, shadowy glow over Sweetpea’s hands and into her golden beer. My eyes kind of relaxed, after hours under fluorescent lights in the kitchen.

“Is it fun to be out here, on the other side of the restaurant?” she asked, a twinkle in her eye. “Do you feel like you’re getting away with something?”

She scooted the damp paper coaster holding her beer over to me, and I took a long drink.

“Not really,” I admitted. “I just like, feel really gross and I really want to change my clothes.”

“Oh come on, I don’t mind. I mean, you look fine—”

“Sure, yeah, basic black is always a good choice,” I smirked, gesturing to my filthy black t-shirt and too-baggy uniform pants. She took a drink of beer and looked at me.

“OK, yes, I get it. You’ll be more comfortable if you change clothes.”

“Thank you.”

“Finish this,” she gave me the beer.

“That’s nice, having a beer right after work,” I commented, finding myself in a good mood as we walked the 5 blocks to my apartment.

“You only had like half a beer! You don’t ever do that, after your shift?”

“No, but maybe I’ll start. Maybe you can come meet me again sometime.”

“I’d love to, it was super chill.”

“You got there at just the right time, between the dinner crowd and the late night crowd.”

“Oh totally, that makes sense.”

I bumped into her gently, on purpose, and she somehow caught my hand in hers. I wondered if she meant it. I glanced her way and she wasn't looking at me, but she was smiling, a little. I played it cool.

“What do you want to do tonight, anyway?” I asked Sweetpea, letting her into my building. “Look,” I said, turning the light on as we stepped into my studio, “I'm even turning on the overhead lights, instead of the lamps. That's how committed I am to getting ready to go.”

She laughed. “I mean, we don't have to go anywhere.”

“You want to just stay here? I have some beers in the fridge, see if there's anything you want.”

“Yeah, let's stay here.”

“Fab, I'm not going to rush then. Actually, I might just take a shower.”

“Yeah, go for it,” she said, head in the fridge.

I was trying to wash up fast but Sweetpea knocked on the door. “Hey Glen, can I come in?” she shouted over the running water.

“Yeah, do you have to pee?” I shouted back.

“No,” she said in a normal voice, walking into the steamy room.

I stuck my head out of the shower curtain, grinning at her.

“Hold this,” she said, handing me an open beer. I took a drink—it was a cold, peppery pilsner—and realized she was undressing. “Do you mind if I join you?”

I laughed. “I don't know why, but I thought you were just going to sit here and keep me company.”

She laughed too, “You were wrong.”

“I'm so naïve,” I giggled, and she shut me up by kissing me, slipping up against my soapy chest.

“I like your minty soap.”

“It's just Dr. Bronner's.”

“I know. I like it.”

We closed the shades to my studio's big windows and stayed barely dressed, drinking beer and smoking pot, eating snacks, tweaking nipples and slapping asses, talking dirty nonsense.

In bed, we humped lazily, panties on. Sweetpea was on top of me and I alternated between imagining that she was inside of me, or imagining that I was inside of her. I wondered if she could tell the difference.

“I have a cock,” she whispered, and we burst out laughing again. “I mean, I have one with me that I would like to put on.” I couldn’t believe how frank she was. With my last partner, he didn’t want me to look, he didn’t want me to see him in a harness and in fact I never did; I never had any idea what it looked like.

“I hope you know I would be down either way,” I assured her, running my palm down the inside of her thigh as she climbed off of me.

“Of course,” she said, getting out of bed.

My eyes were closed but I opened them a little. Sweetpea lingered in the bathroom doorway, backlit by the yellow glow, hips jutted out, black glitter vinyl harness, black glitter cock. She had let her still-damp hair down and didn’t smile. I closed my eyes and opened them, closed my eyes and opened them. I lay still on my side facing her. I didn’t know if she could see my face in the shadows and I didn’t know if I was supposed to say something. Do something.

“Glen—” she said my name and it sounded different, and I snapped in. I thought I was just gonna lay there and let it happen; the path of least resistance was my sexual preference. But now I was snapped in to her vulnerability—her vulnerability required my engagement.

“Yeah?” I said, and it came out soft.

She sort of tumbled into me and pinned me and I caught her cold cock between my thighs, squeezing to warm it up.

“It’s sanitized,” she mumbled into my shoulder, and, “I fucking love you, Glen.” I twisted out from under her and reached beneath the bed for lube, coming up to kiss her more.

“I love you too,” I said, “Like, yes,” and we hadn’t said that before. I was putting lube on myself and on her cock and she was rocking her hips to keep momentum. “OK wait.” The lube was still cold and I gasped. I got her cock inside of me. “I have to get used to it.” She made a little impatient squealing sound and lowered her chest onto mine, being gentle. I wrapped my arms around her and I liked how flat I felt, beginning to move slow, the way I liked to fuck, and for a while I wasn’t frustrated about my gender at all.

We got off together, loud. I spread my hands across her back, and I had a tear leaking out of my eye running towards my ear, and my breath came fast into an unexpected sob. I couldn’t remember the last time I cried. I didn’t even try to stop. Sweetpea stayed there; she didn’t move or say anything.

“I’m so, like, relieved,” I finally choked out, “I’m so glad you’re here.”

She kissed my face all over, smearing my tears. After a while we got up and drank some water. Getting ready for bed, I noticed a lightness in my chest, some space opened up. I felt pleased and sleepy and a little dehydrated. I tried hard not to think about going to work in the morning.

Sweetpea seemed asleep already. I ran my fingers through her hair and my nails gently over her back. She liked that and sighed.

“Butch in the streets, femme in the sheets,” she giggled, and I stopped moving.

“That was a cheap fucking blow.” She was already apologizing before I finished.

“No, you’re right, that was lousy, I know, it was cheap—”

“I don’t identify as butch—”

“I know—”

“I don’t identify as femme, for that matter—”

“I know—”

“I don’t identify as a woman, I mean, you know that—you know better than that!”

“I know, that’s not what I meant, I’m so fucking sorry—”

“And it’s not like I haven’t heard it before, either!” I huffed, pointedly rolling over away from her.

“Glen—” Sweetpea sat up halfway and tried to wrap her arms around me. “I’m sorry, I fucked that *up*, I was being lazy. Please know how much I care about you.” She petted my shoulder hurriedly, insistently.

I cleared my throat, turning so that I was almost on my back. “If you are thinking of me as a woman, I can’t be with you,” I said firmly.

“I’m not,” she swore, “I don’t.”

“Good,” I turned all the way towards her and buried my face in her hair, somewhere between her neck and her armpit. “Because I was having a really great time tonight.”

“Me too,” she breathed, pressing her cheek against my forehead.

I fell asleep in Sweetpea’s arms, but I woke up alone, in clouded daylight, to the sound of her rustling in her bag. She was putting a book away.

“What’re you reading?” I mumbled. She looked up, surprised.

“Oh, nothing.”

“Are you leaving? What time is it?”

“Yeah, I couldn’t sleep anymore. It’s almost 8. I like, *just* decided to quit waiting for you to wake up.”

“I should get up soon anyway. I work at 10. How are you feeling?”

“A little hungover,” she admitted.

“Want me to make you tea?” I asked, starting to get out of bed.

“No, it’s cool, I got a bunch of shit to do today, for the Ice Cream Social tomorrow. I gotta go.” I lay back down and she came over to me, hesitating like she was trying to figure out whether or not to kiss me. I wasn’t sure what I wanted her to do, either. She looked kind of sad as she tucked the blankets around my shoulders, in a maternal gesture that weirded me out a little. “Are we cool?” she asked, drawing a ragged breath.

“Yeah, sure, of course,” I told her, but later, I didn’t reply when she texted me after work. I couldn’t deal; I turned off my phone.



“She’s an *amateur*,” Denny said belligerently, wiping foam from his third or fourth beer out of his moustache.

“No, but the problem is she *isn’t*, she’s a fucking *social worker*. She connects trans and genderqueer people with resources, like, *professionally*.”

“Well, everyone makes mistakes,” he gently reversed his stance and tone. Denny was a busser at the diner. We’d worked closely together on Friday nights for years. He could tell something was eating me as soon as he got in to work.

“You look like shit, man.”

“Feel like shit.”

“You sick?”

“Nah.”

“Are you high as fuck?” he grinned with bloodshot eyes: surely he was.

I couldn’t help laughing. “No, I wish,” I said, even though I kind of hated being stoned in the dish pit.

“I’ll buy you a beer when we’re off. You can tell me all about it.”

Denny transitioned as a teenager, and was very out about being a trans dude. When we first met, I was afraid he’d pull some older-brother crap on me, because I used a low dose and still sometimes got misgendered, but he never did. We even made out a few times, just drunk and having fun, laughing about it the next day at work.

“Work,” I said, spreading my palms on the table and then scratching an old lipstick stain off the rim of my pint glass. “That’s the other thing. Sweetpea thinks I should quit.” My eyes darted up at Denny but he had

a poker face. “Would we even still hang out if we didn’t work together?”

“Dude. *Dude*. Chill out. One issue at a time. I mean of course. *Of course* we would, that’s not even a thing.”

“I’m afraid I’d get really isolated if I didn’t work at the diner. I mean, maybe I could just work *less*.”

“OK, but you wouldn’t. You wouldn’t work less and we all know that. I know that, you know that, your girl must know it too.”

I slumped. “Maybe I just shouldn’t date girls, or, like, cis people. We were having so much fun though! I mean like, I think we—or, I thought—we had each other’s best interests in mind and that’s like, the most important thing.”

“It is,” he agreed. “OK, like, what did she do when you called her out?”

“I didn’t even have to, she knew she said the wrong thing right away. She was sorry. She didn’t make it about her. She had to leave though, before we really sorted everything out. She had to get stuff for the Ice Cream Social.”

“Oh yeah, the Ice Cream Social!” Denny perked up. “That’s gonna be fun. I’m totally going.”

“Everybody’s going,” I grumbled.

“Aren’t you going?”

“I don’t know, it might be really awkward.”

“Dude, you have to go! *That’s* your community, *that’s* how you’ll stay connected when you quit working. Whatever you decide to do about Sweetpea, it’s still your community.”

“I didn’t say I was quitting.”

“Ohhhhhkay,” Denny drawled. “Even though you’re *not* quitting, Polly is the person to go to to get your paperwork done and cash out your shares.” He drained his beer

I went home alone, kind of drunk, but nothing felt resolved and I didn’t feel any better at all.



We watched the demons dancing. I was sort of in shock. They dove into the pile of coats, flinging them around. And then Sweetpea did laugh.

“They’re messing everything up! Aren’t you worried about the Ice Cream Social?”

“It’s cool, man, they’re helping. Seriously. Watch.”

When she said the word *watch*, the tomato-pincushion demon sort of hovered in front of me, with an actual watch dangling off the hooked lip

of the bottle opener.

“Take it,” she whispered. I gently removed the watch.

“It’s very literal,” I offered, glancing at Sweetpea for a sense of what I was supposed to do.

“It’s *giving* you *time*.” She looked at me. “I just can’t believe this doesn’t look recognizable to you.” She held the autobiography towards me.

I realized I *had* seen that woman before. On a record cover. At my grandparents’ house. My blood pressure dropped and my heart raced to catch up. I picked up something from an open box. An ugly resin cast cartoonish mouse hoarding a filthy likeness of Swiss cheese. I remembered it. To my left, an oversized ceramic lamp base, embossed with uneven squares in 1970s algae colors. I remembered it. On the floor underneath the price tag gun: my grandmother’s powder blue belted trenchcoat that she wore to church in spring. All this shit I never wanted to see again.

“Sweetpea, what the *fuck*. Is this my grandparents’ shit? This is my grandparents’ shit.” I remembered the clamshell head of the demon—I wasn’t allowed to touch it when I was little. I remembered the eggbeater, in the back of the silverware drawer—asking my mom what it was for. The paintbrushes, the tomato pincushion, they could have been anybody’s. But I remembered that my grandpa *did* have a bottle opener collection, bearing long out-of-business promotional logos.

“OK. I’ll tell you everything while they do the sorting.” She took a deep breath and began.

This was Wednesday night, or, I guess it was, technically, Thursday at midnight. I’d been out to pick up the berry sauces from Claudia. You know, the coop farm where she lives is way out by the casino. And you *know* she also has the *good* herb. So like, I was high AF, driving home. There’s this weird intersection out there—yeah, you’re nodding, you know the one—where there’s like train tracks that go across Gate Road and all those other little farm roads. This is really embarrassing, but, I got super disoriented at the intersection and I ran off the road. Don’t look so horrified! You don’t even know what *happens* yet, man! Obviously I was fine, the car was fine, but I couldn’t get it out of the ditch. There’s no cell phone service out there, so I figured all I could do was walk towards the casino. It was probably like 3 miles away. I got out of the car and I was walking back through the intersection when I heard this like, totally bizarre sound, like, this weird

creaking. It kind of scared the shit out of me, but like, what could I do. Someone called out like, heeeeyyyy, and you know, it was clear, and the moon was full, so I could see OK—and get this—it's this fuckin' guy on this like, converted bicycle? He's fucking *bicycling* on the *train tracks*! I know! It was outrageous! It was kind of the coolest thing I've ever seen. So I was all heeey my car is stuck in the ditch, right? And he's approached me by now, his bike-thing like, fits into the grooves where the train track crosses the pavement. Like the bike's upright on one side, and there's a metal rod attaching it to a modified wheel on the other rail. Straight up, he's all, I can help you, but I'm the fuckin' *Devil*, so you gotta give me 3 drops of your blood, I'll give your car a soul that will, like, enable it to get out of the ditch, but don't *leave* the soul in the car, because like, it won't be able to stop driving. The newest in self-driving cars, ha ha, just kidding. So he says, put the soul into some small vessel or whatever—I ended up putting it in a water bottle—it can stay for a couple of days—then it has to go into another machine. But *my* wheels are already turning, up *here*, because I have *Claudia's blackcurrant syrup* in the car. Which looks *just like blood*. I asked if he wanted to smoke a joint because, I mean, when am I going to get another chance to smoke weed with the Devil? He said hell yeah—he literally said *Hell yeah*. I went back to the car and I gave him 3 drops of blackcurrant syrup! It worked! So at least *my* soul isn't compromised, just in case. I mean, I don't think you can go to actual Hell for smoking weed with the Devil. I mean, who knows.

I felt woozy. I sat down right on the floor.

Sweetpea continued.

I made it home fine. Obviously. I got the demon-soul into the water bottle. No problem. It worked just like he said it would. So I checked out some folklore books the Devil recommended to me from the library. You kept *almost* catching me reading them! I learned about this demon in Estonian folklore, the *kratt*. Some call it a “treasure-bearer”; it can even steal things for its person. It can be made out of hay, or household goods, and it's like, a helper. It seemed like everything was aligned for me to make a *kratt*—the book even suggested meeting up with the Devil on a

Thursday at midnight! At a 5-way crossroads! I always thought that intersection was creepy, didn't you? Now we know why. It makes total sense. Anyway, I split the soul in two parts so that neither of them would get smarter than we are. I guess they're soulmates? Literally? These little dudes—these little demons—are just here to help! They'll do anything we tell them to. I figured we could each take one home, to like, do the dishes, run errands, stuff like that. I bet you wondered why I wasn't even worried about the Ice Cream Social! Well, it's because they're going to do all the work! I figured it was OK to let demons into a church, since I didn't *actually* give my blood to the Devil. I mean, it's the Unitarian Church, they'd totally *include* Satanists, right? Wait, I didn't even get to the weirdest part. Your mom is the one who donated this stuff—I mean obviously. She had a storage unit—you didn't know that? She is so weird. I shouldn't say that. I really appreciate her being in the SOFFA group. That seriously just happened yesterday. I tried to text you but you didn't text back. But I realized it was the *perfect* place to get parts for the *kratid*. That's what you call them in plural. I just dumped the soul-things into random boxes and this is what they came up with! She told me that you didn't get along with your grandparents, so I thought it was especially cool that your little demon helper would be made out of their old stuff. I thought maybe if you had a helper, you'd have more time to work on your graphic novel, when you're not doing wage work.

My grandparents would have hated that, so naturally I loved it. The *kratid* worked efficiently, unwrapping and sorting everything from the estate.

"I never realized my mom was paying rent on a storage unit for all those years."

Sweetpea offered me her hand and helped me up.

"I'm sorry, again, for saying something stupid the other night. For being insensitive. I know better. You *know* I know better. There's no excuse. But, please know that I never, ever think of you that way. I was just joking and it was a shitty joke."

"I know. I understand. And I feel *understood*. And, I mean, like... thanks...for the *kratt*."

We watched in awe and amusement as the demons danced, prepping for the Ice Cream Social.



Sweetpea squeezed my knee under the table. She had vanilla ice cream with dark red blackcurrant sauce. Denny sat across from us, digging into chocolate ice cream with corn-free rainbow sprinkles. My mom waved at us from the ice cream line.

“Can I join you folks?” Polly asked, and we all nodded enthusiastically. She pulled out the chair next to Denny and set down her dish of pumpkin spice ice cream with a squirt of whipped cream on top. Denny raised an eyebrow at me. I looked into my bowl of coffee ice cream with walnuts and took a deep breath.

“Hey Polly, I’m thinking about getting out of the collective. Will you help me get my paperwork together next week?”

Sweetpea choked on her ice cream, coughing and laughing at the same time. We all looked at her until she regained composure.

“Glen, I seriously didn’t think you’d do it!”

“Of course I will,” Polly answered. “Really, we didn’t think you’d last this long! Congratulations.”

“Yay!” Sweetpea said.

“Yay!” I repeated. “And yay for ice cream! Thanks for getting this all together, Sweetpea.”

“I couldn’t have done it without you. And...you know who.” She winked.

“Hell yeah,” Denny said.

Like Rain

Hansel Howl

Saturn came and sat all night with me
His fingers small and delicate, tangled in my hair
Chubby cheeks
Tiny breaths
He grabbed my hands in his, baby-soft
For one last embrace

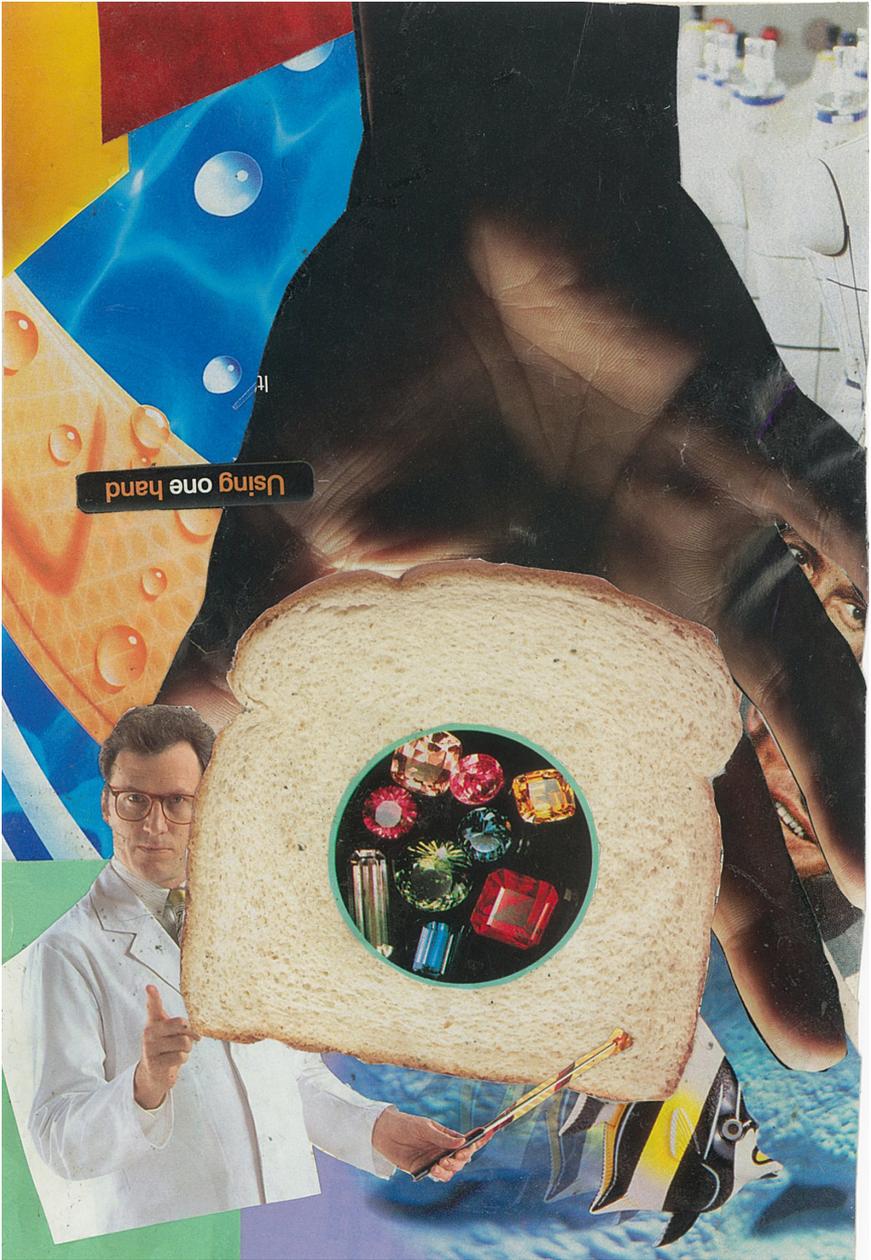
How do we reconcile
With the loss of a planet

In a thousand years, he will be stardust
And I only ash

How dare I be so fragile
To hurt this much

Like rain in Vancouver
I hit the pavement often and fast

Losing him
Like a child of my own



Steven is the organizer of Slam For Hope, Vancouver's charity POG tournament. His favourite SF author is Theodore Cogswell. He used to have a lemon tree, and may have one again in the future.

Hand Me The Tears You Carry

Steven Masuch

I heard advice from Steve Martin that you should begin your story with its most unbelievable part. But I don't think it's a good idea to just tell you we found a dinosaur.

So let's start with our crying cafe, and we'll get there.

I'd been working a marketing job for a high-protein gummy worm company for two years out of university. A degree in marine biology, and I had ended up there. It sucked. I was planning to leave after six months. Those six months became a year, and then they became two years, and eventually I almost stopped dreaming of moving on from the slog of sponsored content and co-branded opportunities.

But one afternoon when I was checking my phone at work, I saw a post about this Japanese crying cafe. Sort of like a cat cafe, except the people just go there to have a good cry in a welcoming space. I posted it to a group chat with our friends and then things took off from there.

Rupert was into opening our own crying cafe, of course. He's always been big on getting in touch with yourself, and crystals, and drinking a lot of water each day. Then Megan said that the new cat cafe in town was doing great, and she told me I knew how to do marketing for this sort of thing thanks to my current job. Megan's more steady-headed, so she sort of swayed me into actually considering it. At least I wouldn't have to come up with new candy-based instagram posts every 3 hours. Two failed and one successful Kickstarters later, our cafe was open.

We found space in a mall, squeezed between a shoes-only thrift store and the last survivor of a donut chain from the 70s. Our deal was that people could come in, buy a large coffee, and cry for up to twenty minutes in a booth. We wouldn't ask why, and we tried to keep the space friendly. Rupert put up some hanging prisms by the door, which he claimed would help the aura of the place. They did help the look of it: teardrop-shaped glass, slowly spinning and pulling bits of rainbow light across the room.

We had planned on putting soundproof dividers between the small tables so people couldn't hear each other crying, but those cost way more than we could afford. So instead we got a big-ass speaker system to play ocean waves to cover the sound and just had some nice blue curtains instead.

The first few months were hard, but we scratched by. Business picked up a bit after people started to get used to the idea, and a bit more after we

got better coffee. We would bring in posters we found, stuffed animals, just whatever we thought would be soothing to look at.

September is when it got weird. I was the only one there in the middle of the afternoon. The sound machine cut out, I think because we had forgotten to pay the music provider, and suddenly the sobbing had no cover. I fought with the machine to get it going again, but I wasn't prepared for the wave of a dozen people crying. I started crying too, out of frustration at the stereo and the fact that I had made a mistake even leaving the gummy worm fuckup crew and everything.

And people started laughing. A reluctant laugh at first, and then the laugh that comes at the end of a storm, a loud hug. We sort of formed a bond there, people leaning out of the curtains to look at each other and smile, tears still coming down their cheeks, and laugh. It was the best day I had in the cafe. After that, I was calmer than I had felt in a long long time.

When I came to open up the next day, I looked at the event posters by the door. I realized one of them was weird, because it said that there was a book reading at the donut shop on Wednesday the 16th. But the 16th was a Thursday. I thought it was just a typo until I looked at the other posters on the door. They had the 16th on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, one on Tuesday. I didn't know what to make of it.

Rupert came in for the later shift, and when I pointed out the flyer thing to him, he wouldn't let it go. It was strange, sure, but we had to move on and get things done here at the store. He thought it was something more; convinced that the prisms he had set up had had some sort of magical effect. He asked what had happened, and I told him about the music cutting out while people were crying. He insisted we try again to see if anything had changed. He added more prism drops by the door to increase whatever it was he thought they were doing. We called up Megan, and she actually went along with the whole thing. But we agreed that we had to do it after the customers had left, because it did seem a bit off-brand (unethical, Megan called it) to be experimenting on them.

So when the store had emptied out, we got together and drew up chairs in a half-circle. We were about to start a group sob session when there was a knock on the door. A customer still wanted to get in and have a good cry, even though we were closed. I was about to say no, but I paused. He said that he really needed this, so I told him we were having a private session to test out the acoustics and invited him in.

Then we cut loose, just crying and working into some good sobbing, and we didn't stop until we were all dry, all four of us. I was trying to

pull from the stress of running the store and hit something deeper, some overarching stress of all the work I had done in school not getting me as far as I hoped I would. Rupert made big bawling sobs; Megan let out small sniffily tears.

After our tears were exhausted, the customer thanked us and left in a quiet hurry. We went about cleaning up. Rupert eagerly checked the posters, and was disappointed when nothing had changed. And after we locked up and walked out of the mall, that's we found the dinosaur chained to the bike rack outside.

A stegosaurus, dog-sized. It was bright red. And it moved like a dog, pulling at its leash to try and reach us, looking for attention. I kept on trying to ignore it as Rupert squealed at it, enthusiastically petting it as it pulled at my pants with its muppetish mouth. I was glad that our customer had left before he could spot this result of our experiment.

I stared down at it, and reached out my hand to give it a pat. It chirped like a bird and moved its head up to meet my hand. It was cool to the touch, but not ice cold.

We took it back to Megan's for the night. She had a lot of animals around anyways. Rupert called the dinosaur Rex. He insisted he knew what the names of dinosaurs were, just that "this one looks like a Rex!" Megan tore apart a dog sweater to fit around Rex's back plates to keep them warm and gave them some leftover iguana food.

We talked about what could have happened all night as Rex slept in a dog hammock next to the couch. But next morning, we finally got some answers. We were just opening up when the customer from last night ran in, asking if we had seen his dog. I decided to gamble; I showed him a picture of Rex. He shouted in joy, simply glad we had found his "dog" and totally unsurprised about seeing a dinosaur. Megan gently asked some more questions. We found out that to the customer, of course that's a dog, that's what dogs look like, yes dogs have been around for 100 million years, why would anyone think differently?

From talking to Rex's owner and more experimenting, we've sort of got an idea of how the little dinosaur had entered our lives. We discovered people all have separate histories, sometimes wildly different from each other, and one shared present that we only see a slice of. It turns out we all carry an individual history with us, in our bodies, like animals carrying bits of the sea inside them.

People think blood is where our histories live, but that's not true after all. It's in tears. Tears are an invitation to share our history, sad or happy,

tragic or joyous. We made a space in our cafe where all that could flow together, combine, share the bits of our histories that we need to move forward. And I think that mingling is us, the customers and staff here, becoming a grex.

See, one time after a week of rain, I took the trash out behind the store. There was a big yellow lump growing down around the base of the dumpster. It was a slime mould called Dog's Vomit. It's usually a lump of single-celled creatures. But when they're stressed, when they're held back from growing, they mesh together form one big slug. Then they can move to new places, better places. That big slug is called a grex.

I don't know where we're moving to, together, when we cry. But we're definitely moving, even if it's slowly. We found a magazine on the desk from fifty years from now, and it mostly seemed pretty good. I think that we're coming together across time now. We're reaching up onto the sand, pulling ourselves out of the ocean towards somewhere better.

Anyways, here's a flyer for the next session. Come and let yourself cry with us.



Writers 4 Utopia is a collective of queer writers focusing on how science fiction and speculative fiction can help generate ideas that create more safe and equitable futures for all beings. We meet, discuss, and share ideas to help each other re-imagine futures where our queerness is a super power, a magical remedy, or a utopia.

This is our second zine of queer sci-fi. Taking the genre in new and often unexpected directions, these stories, poems, songs, and images have one eye on speculative worlds and one on the world around us, always conscious of the way we can build our hopes for the future into the present. The theme of this anthology is relationships in the broadest sense. In writing of all kinds, we explore relationships between humans, objects and ecosystems.

