

BOOKLIST

2021

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The 519

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A QUICK AND EASY GUIDE TO THEY / THEM PRONOUNS

Archie Bongiovanni, Tristan Jimerson

LEO BRAINARD

Theatre has been a refuge for me as a trans person. The first time I ever felt truly and completely safe and welcomed was in theatre. During the one of the first rehearsals for the play I will be discussing, I cried. I was in a scene with two cis men who I didn't know, I forgot my lines, and I cried. I felt so ashamed and emasculated. I felt that as a trans man I had to prove my manhood and masculinity to these cis men, and I ruined that by crying. I was newly out to the general public, I had never been in a place where everyone used my name and pronouns. And although this production got off to a rough start, it became a refuge for me. I wore a full suit for the part, and the costume took men's measurements. I used the men's changing room and I felt safe. I was able to trust the men around me. I did my friend's mascara for every show, since he couldn't do it himself. I taught my older cis cast mate how to tie a tie. I was not only accepted into masculinity, but I was sharing it with others. And finally, before our last show closing night, I shared with my cast mates what I had experienced. I told them I didn't think I could ever feel this safe and accepted. I didn't expect a lot from people, having just come out as trans. I was expecting a need for extreme patience on my part. But I didn't have to be patient, because I was immediately accepted into the open arms of people who are now my closest friends. When I said I never expected such kindness, there wasn't a dry eye in the room. I got so many hugs that I was late for the opening of the play.

I had never experienced such radical love and acceptance before, and I haven't since. I never expected to be welcomed, I never expected to be accepted. But despite how hard the world can be for us trans people, every once in a while some people make it feel better. Sometimes, we can find refuge and love.

PARISSA

I just broke up with my boyfriend of five years, and while I'm devastated I'm also so excited to finally explore my bisexuality with other non-men and to integrate myself more confidently in queer culture.

Wish me luck!!

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ITS POSSIBLE

by bec falleur

to have a person with which you can actually, fully be yourself
its possible

to feel unconditional love
its possible

for someone to accept, love, and encourage all of the queer, genderfluid, neurodivergent, traumatized, unhealed, messy, complicated parts of me
its possible

for someone to appreciate my chaotic, artistic, ethereal, introspective, existential, BIG THOUGHTS BIG FEELINGS self
its possible

to feel safe, truly safe, in a home
its possible

in that safe space to set boundaries, to say no, to express your needs
its possible

to extend these boundaries, say no, and express your needs with people you haven't before
its possible

to heal little pieces, day by day
its possible

to feel lighter eventually
its possible

but I wasn't sure it was
its possible

but I needed to see it to know
its possible

and I have to believe that
its possible

for you too

ARI CLAY

The thing I can't stop thinking about lately is a text I got from my friend.

He was out downtown and messaged me to say he had just seen someone who looked "exactly like you in 10 years".

I just saw someone who looks exactly like you in 10 years

I'm mid-transition, still building myself, I haven't been able to conceive of 35 year old me for a while, and I still can't.

But my friend saw this badass, tattooed, androgynous stranger and wrote to tell me about it.

I am reminded that when there are pieces of yourself you can't carry in this moment, they can be held by the people who care about you until you are ready.

WRITING ABOUT OTHERS ^{TO} UNDERSTAND MYSELF

Nicté Trujillo (she/her)

In 2020 I decided to sign up for a writing workshop with a queer writer not identifying myself as queer; the pandemic and a few drafts later, I came to terms with my sexuality and while I wasn't able to finish my book (at least yet) I was very thankful for my writing coach, and the love and care with which she supported my journey as a writer and understanding myself. The book evolved as I learned things about me and I hope one day I'm brave enough to finish it and share it with the world but for now, I'm letting myself, slowly but surely, out into the world.

JANE.IS/QUEER

// Keeping in this truth about myself has felt like holding my breath...

```
let jane = {
  sexualOrientation: 'asexual',
  romanticOrientation: ['greyromantic', 'demi'],
  gender: ['agender', 'non-binary', 'trans'],
  pronouns: ['they', 'them', 'theirs'],
};

// Let me explain--wait, there is too much--let me sum up!

function explainQueer(identity) {
  const { sexualOrientation, romanticOrientation, gender, pronouns } = identity;
  let queerId = '';

  if (sexualOrientation == 'asexual') {
    queerId += 'I don't experience sexual attraction to any gender.\n';
    // I experience other types of attraction, including aesthetic & romantic.
  };

  if (romanticOrientation.includes('grey')) {
    queerId += 'I experience romantic attraction to fewer people than most.\n';
    // My past relationships were straight due to compulsive heterosexuality;
    // Gender-based orientation labels are not useful to describe me.
  };

  if (gender.includes('agender')) {
    queerId += 'I don't have any particular gender, I only feel like myself.\n';
    // Though the umbrella of womanhood is enormously large,
    // I don't find it relevant to describe me or my experiences.
    // Other aspects of my identity have always felt more important than my sex.
  };

  if (pronouns.includes('they') && !pronouns.includes('she')) {
    queerId += 'Please use they/them pronouns & non-gendered language for me.';
    // I am also ok with not using any pronouns; not everyone feels this way.
    // Using gender-neutral terms for me is a way you can show your support.
  };

  return queerId;
};
```

I'M NONBINARY AND TRANS NOW, THANKS 2020

Tori N. C.

There is almost nothing good about the pandemic, but it made me more reflective and thoughtful about gender...and my sexuality. I have always known I was asexual, but people always told me it was fake and not actually queer. I've come to understand I have in fact been asexual, which is a real thing, and also queer (I'm asexual, but I'm also biromantic, something I reconnected thanks to TikTok and that I also didn't know before because I was unaware that sexual and romantic orientation could be different). On top of that, I'm growing more and more comfortable with the thought that I am probably nonbinary. It's just a little thing that's sitting in my mind and I'm getting to know that lil revelation better. It makes me feel such relief to know that I'm not just having weird made-up thoughts, you know? I'm sure you do.

RAECANT

Sometimes I forget that I'm gay, or trans, I forget in the sense that it's something not everyone excepts. But it always comes back to me and I embrace it as an important part of my identity.

In my photography class last semester we had to write 6 essays one being about a photo from a long time ago, one about a self portrait that you took, and a few others. I took that opportunity to share my experiences and write openly about how being trans has effected my life. For my self portrait, I took a picture of my 4 months post op top surgery chest. I shared it with the class and my professor. I got an A and class ended and that was that. About a week later I got an email from my professor. He thanked me for being so open and vulnerable in my writing. He said I was making it easier for everyone to understand especially him as he has a transgender granddaughter. I did not expect this email at all. I started to cry because it was so incredibly sweet. I shared the letter with family who are not that accepting of me sharing my story online. I think it helped them understand a little bit better but not quite enough.

WATER WEIGHT

Michal Lake Hue

Despite it being so early in the summer, the water in Georgian Bay is surprisingly tolerable. A small school of minnows darts away as I carefully step between slippery algae-covered rocks, the lake lapping at my ankles.

I've only been swimming in Georgian Bay once before, as far as I can remember. I was thirteen. Well over a decade ago now, but it was around the same time of year. It was my public school's tradition for the grade eight graduating class to stay for a week in June at a summer camp on the Bruce Peninsula. One of the day trips during our stay at this camp was to a place called 'The Grotto'. I remember how strikingly beautiful it was, rocks that were almost black in colour that jutted in and around a small cove, harbouring caves in its shore, turquoise waves clutched in its grasp. After we explored the caves, we were encouraged to leap into the icy blue waters from a rockface that I don't think was high enough for anyone to call a cliff.

I waded out further, the water reaching my knees.

I remember jumping into the Bay holding the hand of a friend, squealing with shock and delight as we resurfaced, gasping from the cold.

The memory is bittersweet. I think of my younger self; lanky, long-haired, and outgoing. Simultaneously caring and not caring what others thought about them. Just wanting to feel wanted.

The water is far colder now as it climbs to my waist.

I think about how I've changed from that kid back then, who stubbornly clung to their innocence, their childhood, and their androgyny, despite the betrayal of their body, and despite the expectations.

I hesitate as the chill pushes past the base of my ribcage.

I shade my eyes to peer at my destination. The tip of a rounded granite boulder, barely peeking out from the gentle waves. I submit to its cool embrace, much like I had so many years ago, and paddle out the last few metres. My body, the traitor, is a reliable swimmer.

The one thing that I remember best about you is your hands. You kept your nails long and paintless. I always thought it was odd. I could never stand having long nails, they irritate me. Long bony fingers and square palms that in palmistry are called air hands. Would you hate that I know that? You always condemned my craft.

People with air hands tend to be good communicators. You aren't, I've felt the scratch of your ring against my skin when you'd hit me enough to conjure up the texture. Or when you'd say you were tickling me when really you pinched, then made fun of me for expressing pain. Or sometimes when you'd tenderly run your fingers through my hair the diamond's setting would get caught in it. When my hair was long enough for that anyway. I have hardly any of it nowadays. You hate it.

My hands are like my paternal family's. Shorter fingers, longer palms. Fire hands. Hands that make, not break. Express not repress. I feel my emotions so much, and you could never handle it. I've always been a shade of grey kind, clashing with your black and white. I see the world as layers, you put it in Tupperware and organize it. Maybe that's why we never saw eye to eye. I don't know if I even want to; to agree with you is to sacrifice myself. I promised myself I would be the only one setting fires here, no one is putting me on a pyre like that.

The leaves here are turning colors that I'd seen in the brochures all those years ago at the college fairs in the high school gym. I wander around the campus looking for botanicals to use in my craft on nicer days. I found beautiful towering maples like the pair of them in our backyard where Dad strung up a hammock and the dog would come lay next to it as I pet her. I found a lilac tree behind one of the dormitories, so much bigger than the one we had at our old house. Though I guess ours was more of a bush. Still, I can remember how carefully you cared for it. Watching you be that tender with plants and not your own kids. How I could smell the almost nauseatingly thick scent when you brought trimmed-off boughs for the dining table. In that rough stoneware vase your mother made. I know she raised you roughly like she made that vase, but that's not an excuse.

Sometimes, when the days are harder and I'm not as happy as I normally am here, I remember how you'd rub my back as I cried. Though I also remember you yelling at me to calm down when I couldn't breathe because I couldn't find something I needed. So those memories are conflicting. It'd be a lot easier if I could call you good or bad. But you're a gray space, like storm clouds. The heavy blue-black-green-purple of thunderheads, your favorite color. Who the fuck's favorite color is storm cloud grey, air hands?

HAELE WOLFE

The moon knew first.

Normally, that wouldn't be unusual—right? It's the moon. It's up there. Every evening when the sun sets and the crows go home and the air that has been patting you on the back all day like a friend turns frigid and starts to usher you to bed. We can't ignore the moon, it's too interested in us.

There are only 12 nights when the moon doesn't know. Every month when it slips into nothingness and the sun slides from its view. These are not the moon's favorite nights. These are the moon's least favorite nights.

I have 11 siblings. But there is only one moon.

It is not hard to keep track of time when you are 12 of 11. Children grow like werewolves, phasing in and out of each day sticky and feral. We would howl and scream that we answered to no one, cared about nothing, but that wasn't true. We cared about the moon.

We cared about it in the way I imagine fish care about tides or rocks care about wind. We knew that the moon could carve us, hollow us out over time, push us into deeper, blacker waters where bigger fish, fish so impossible they didn't even have names, slept.

The moon knew too. It was the moon.

AIR BLOWS OUT FIRE

Selkie Bodmer

I try not to think about you too much anymore.

I'm happy now, or at least, happier. I still count that as a win. Why would I need to think of the past when the present is warm and bright? But it's not that easy. Life finds ways of making you remember things you'd rather not.

Once I reach the pinkish rock, I clamber onto its rough surface. I hoist myself up onto a natural ledge, and stand with my ankles still underwater. I look out to the horizon, to what I am fairly certain is Beckwith Island and Christian Island, according to the park map. Satisfied with the view, I settle onto my perch, wrapping my arms around my knees. A pair of loons float past, one black, the other brown. I watch them dive into the depths of Lake Huron and resurface empty-beaked, until they drift out of sight.

My thoughts return to the lanky, long-haired, outgoing kid that eventually grew too tired and too anxious to continue the way they always had.

A motorboat rumbles in the distance, and waves break against the rock, splashing my legs.

Retrospectively, it feels so trivial. Yet, the experience was never so simple, nor so easily dismissed. It was real, it happened.

I realize that it's in places like these that I am able to visit myself, to commune with them, to tell our stories.

As the sun begins to lower in the sky, my attention is caught by what appears to be a body floating in the water, about a hundred metres out from where I bask in the light of the golden hour. Initially, I think to swim out to it, fearing the worst, but when I see the movement of feet splashing at the surface, I am instantly relieved. The push and the pull of the waves carries the small body closer to me. Without making it too obvious, I shift my body to try and get a better look at them. I've never been able to resist my curiosity.

It doesn't take me long to recognize the lanky, long-haired, outgoing kid.

Resting, breathing, being.

The lake cradles their body as if it were one of its own. They drift away, carried by an ethereal current, beyond the horizon.

Weightless.

ROWAN ALLEN CASE

When I was around 11, I was extremely aware of the expectations placed on women by society at large, entirely because my grandmother had decided to enforce them upon me specifically from an early age. (The first gift I remember receiving from her was silk lingerie, when I was six. My mom called them “special pajamas,” didn’t require me to write a thank you note, and we never spoke of them again.) I knew that women were “supposed” to grow up and fall in love with a man and get married to him and then have babies with him and feed and raise those babies. The whole plot of that trajectory was laid out for me, and I knew deep down in my bones that I didn’t want ANY part of it.

I’m asexual, and even though I didn’t have vocabulary for it then, I knew that I never wanted to have sex with anyone. I also knew, then, that I wouldn’t be having any children. In fact, the idea of housing a fetus in my body was so repulsive that I had frequent nightmares about waking up 9 months into a pregnancy, not sure how it had happened or how I was to handle the oncoming birth, usually in a public place. I knew what birth control was, but I also knew that I had been conceived while using two different forms of it, condoms and the pill, and that my mother described our bloodline as “extremely fertile,” much to my horror. So when the subject of other methods for not having children came up, I was all ears.

I distinctly remember driving somewhere with my mom, gazing out the windows of the car at a city-scape while my mother explained what a hysterectomy was. I remember the knot in my stomach as I realized that I wanted this, immediately, as soon as possible, the quicker the better. The idea of removing the very mechanism through which I suffered through dysphoria-inducing menstruation, and the only means of reproduction for my body, was tantalizing. I asked, as casually as I could, how old you had to be to get a hysterectomy. To my horror, my mom asked more questions and said you had to be much older, and basically infertile already, before a doctor would agree to perform one. “My body, my choice!” I protested. She laughed again. “That’s not really how it works.”

I wouldn’t know that I was trans for another 17 years, until I was well out of college and already partnered. I wouldn’t return to that longing for a hysterectomy until I understood my experiences through the lens of transness, through the help of my community. I’m asexual, trans, and agender, and I finally have the words to express myself now.

though, until they got back from the mountains and picked him up in the morning. His dad found out about that night, though, and decided no one would stay at Grampa’s house again. Ever.

They moved away, then—far away up into the mountains, and Dad got a new job that fell apart. They got poor, and then poorer still, like people do. Dad had a really, really bad dream one night about Grampa strangling him, touching him, and doing bad things. He woke up and yelled at the new little girl when she played with make-up in the middle of the night (*who just wanted to be pretty like Mommy*) to “GO TO BED!!! GO TO BED!!!

D!!! JUST GO TO BED!!!” Everybody got really, really scared. Dad woke up all the way then, when Mom told him to “STOP IT!!!” and he got really, really scared.

He knew then that the world had to end, and so it did.

The little autistic boy (*who just loved to watch the Monster Movies and make things with his Dad*) knew it was time to say goodbye forever to all the monsters, to all the angry times and the yelling, the stomping, breaking and all the hurting, to all the bad words, tears, and scary nights when there’s no sleep at all even when you squeeze your eyes so tight.

The world ended that night, and when the sun came up it was the best they ever saw. Ever.

EM

There is no queerer snack than Jolly Rancher candies sucked down to sharp pointy bullets.

I refuse to explain this further.



I KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE WHEN THE WORLD ENDS

Caoimhín MacGhabhann *Hi, my name is Caoimhín (pronounced "Kwee-veen"; He/They) and I'm non-binary/genderqueer, autistic, and (therefore) I have CPTSD, Major Depression, and Generalized Anxiety Disorder.*

Anyhoo, I know what it's like when the world ends.

Back in 1980-81 when I was 10 or 11 years old, my Dad did bad things. He flipped out one time and killed Monks, the stuffed gorilla who was really King Kong, just 3 feet tall with styrofoam pellets for guts and thin metal wires like old clothes hangers for bones. Dad got so mad that he punched him, shook him, and slammed him down, over and over.

After that, he went over and killed Godzilla, the spray-painted green, cardboard box Monster we made (because the *Monster Movies* were really, really cool every *Saturday night* when we could watch with Dad when he was home). Dad kicked, hit, and tore him apart until that was it.

Then Dad went over and, with one big, big punch, knocked down the whole Empire State Building (*not quite done but we'll keep working on it on the weekends, Bud*). He stomped over to Mom and yelled, yelled, yelled. Then he charged over to me and my little brother, and the world went on pause just like the old VHS, staggering frame by frame until the tape straightened out and everything snapped back into place and the static lines went away. He turned, though, and stomped away to yell about how the world wasn't fair, about how he was so, so mad.

Then Mount St. Helens erupted, President Reagan got shot, ET scared the hell out of Drew Barrymore, and the Soviet Union wanted us dead with all their missiles, radiation poisoning, freedom from capitalism and other such bad dreams. They went away though, and we invaded Iraq. I grew up, went to college, got married, had kids, and I was "Dad" now.

Then there was a new, little autistic boy, who stayed at Gramma and Grampa's house one night when he was 3, and all he wanted to do was play with some water. Grandpa got really, really mad at the little boy (*who just liked to splash*) and screamed "NO MORE WATER!!!" and the little boy got really, really scared. He just wanted his "bamily" and wanted to go home. He couldn't go home,

ANNA who can draw with their feet

After 10 years living outside my beloved but often homophobic homestate of Indiana, I was home and looking through a high school yearbook. I noticed a message from someone I didn't remember.

*I'm so glad that I got to
know you, an amazing person who
can draw with their feet!*

I was struck by this surprising sense of affirmation. It is the first recorded description of me with accurate pronouns. At that time in my life I didn't know anyone could use pronouns beyond a s/he binary. Early in high school I felt DEEP understanding when I read the definition of gender dysphoria in a health class textbook, but didn't see how I fit into a world of rigid gender identities—I didn't want to trade one for another. A few years later, when Facebook was the first creature to ask about my pronouns, I immediately chose they/them. A few years after that, when a friend/coworker asked if I wanted her to use the pronouns she had noticed on Facebook, I said I didn't know and it didn't matter. And a few years later I started telling people it did matter. It took so long to feel like it was even allowed to acknowledge who I was to myself, but here SOME RANDOM KID I COULDN'T EVEN REMEMBER had already understood me this way with no instruction!

Scouring the book I realized we had been in orchestra together, he a year behind me but a violin. I honestly don't ever remember talking to this person at all. Violas like me were a tight knit and weird bunch. If I had cared to read this yearbook earlier would I have clocked this precious simple gender euphoria of being "a person who draws with their feet"?! Would it have saved me years of soul searching? Who knows. But I looked him up on facebook, he's queer too.

I CARRY SO MUCH AT ANY GIVEN POINT

Lex Stardust

I carry so much at any given point
It feels like I'm constantly trying to
break personal bests
But instead they
Break me

Until I'm on the ground
Looking at everything I must pick
back up
Again
And again
And again

It's tiring
I'm tired

But I keep going

Each time examining closely
How these weights of identity have
always tried tirelessly
To pull me down
Permanently
How they are shoes
Too big to fill; intimidating
Always tripping over my own feet
And words

Which got stuck in the back of my
throat

I carry so much at any given point
That I've only now started to learn (at 27)
It's nowhere near an inherently bad thing
To be so beautifully complex and deep
In my state of rest

I am developing an appreciation for myself
That I have never had or felt in my life

I am learning:
I cannot summarize who I am
So I will not summarize who I am
I cannot fit into anyone's boxes
So I will not fit into anyone's boxes

I carry so much at any given point
And I see you, yes you,
You're also carrying a lot
And I want you to know you are

Magical
Loved
Worthy
Valid
And so brilliantly complex

Know I am holding space
For every person
Who feels they are carrying so much
at any given point, too
I see you and I love you
And thank you for being you,
and for being here

I am:
A transracial adoptee
A transnational adoptee
Asian
Queer
Non-Binary
Neurodivergent
Chronically ill
Estranged from my adoptive
parents/family
Have no knowledge of my birth
parents/family

I loved you. I still do. But I think I love the memories of you.

Because I've chosen to live surrounded by unconditional love and what we had
when I left that house wasn't that.

Although the memories of you hurt more than the ones of your brother.

The coldness of your eyes and fake smile when I was crying in the back of that
room was my last straw.

And I wasn't perfect. I let the gap between us grow bigger. I made him my world.

But you also never reached out in your darkest times.

I guess we did try.

Funny thing is
I'll never get to say I'm sorry

as much as I'll never get to hear it from you either.

Stubborn maybe
Proud absolutely
Loving always

Sweet when we were closest

Joyful at our most free.

What a pair of friends the universe conspired to join and then separate!

Just know I will always remember us as the two joyful and free college women
that laughed until their bellies ached and their eyes teared.

Love always.

CEOMARA C. FLORES

The biggest pain is to lose a best friend.

And not all at once but slowly.

With life seemingly trying to force you two apart with misunderstandings and barriers that can only be explained by the fact we grew apart and no longer had anything to learn from one another.

Some friendships are so easy to say "I'm sorry" I've done ----- and move on.

But for us? Apparently, we could only tell each other how much we meant for one another when we were drunk.

You once told me we were almost like soulmates. You picked your fiancé or now-husband, who knows, because he reminded you of my joy and love and I fell in love with your brother because he was in some ways a lot like you. Free and lively.

We...what happened to us?

To me, you were the force that cracked open my true light.

I felt so loved and seen by you.

and here we are 10 years of friendship in the trash.

We parted ways. Hard and silent.

Now living as if we never met.

Our kids will never grow up together.

and us? maybe looking at an empty seat during our weddings and wishing the other was there.

You know Jude.

PLANS THE SAPPHIC LOVE STORY OF MY DREAMS Devo Sapph

You get home from a long day at work and find her waiting for you in the kitchen. Your face relaxes into a lazy smile as you make your way down the front hall. She looks so soft in her red sundress, her honey brown curls spilling over the marble island as she pores over a mess of papers. She doesn't look up as you get close, so you slide your hands around her waist and press your face into her hair. She leans into you, shifting so you can kiss her neck. At last she turns her face up and her deep brown eyes meet yours, pupils dilated and Hollywood lashes fluttering.

"Hi, love," she murmurs into your mouth, the taste of berries on her lips. You barely get to savour the moment as she's already turning back to the counter. "I have some exciting news for us."

"What's up?" you ask as you reach into the fridge for a beer. "Want one?"

"Sure, love, but come look at this."

She sounds distracted. You decide glasses aren't worth the hassle and hand her the can. You lean over the counter with her, your right shoulder pressed against hers.

What she's laid out is more than you could've ever bargained for. The marked-up map catches your eye first, but your focus moves to the spiral-bound pages resting in front of her. A contract. It appears to be as thick as one of your old university textbooks but unlike those, it's full of different shades of fluorescent highlighter and pencilled-in notes. You want to ask what it's for, but you're distracted by an invoice in amongst insurance forms and travel brochures. You reach over to pick up the paper and nearly crush it in excitement.

"A Westfalia..." you breathe. Your dream come true. You look up at her to say something more but she's busy ruffling through the contract, scanning her finger over the various highlighted sections.

"So, you wanna tell me what that's all about?" you ask, enclosing her loose hand in yours.

"This is how we finance the rest of our lives," she says plainly, as though she's announcing the weather. You furrow your brow at her, but she continues, calm as ever.

"You remember that old man we met at the bar last week? Well, while you were in the bathroom right before we left, he asked for my email because he said he had a business proposal for us. I thought it was weird, but I gave it to him

anyway because I thought at the very worst, I could just block him, right? Well, turns out he's rich as fuck and he wants to sponsor us."

"What do you mean, "sponsor" us?" you ask, cautiously sipping your beer.

"He told me he has no family left to give his inheritance to, so he wrote a new will and we get everything. I'm talking property, cash in the bank, all of it."

You blink and set down your can. This cannot be real. She cannot be serious.

"A sugar daddy," you say, completely deadpanned.

"Exactly," she says, leaning into the a. "But the best part is, we have no obligations. He wants nothing back from us, just for us to 'put the money to good use'."

She lets go of your hand to make air quotations and you take the opportunity to run your hands through your hair. You try to get a glimpse of the contract, but she's leaning in too close and you can't see anything. You look back at the invoice and your eyes go wide with understanding.

"So that's what the Westfalia's about," you say. She doesn't answer right away, still lost in her reading. You watch her carefully highlight a line and then abruptly drop the marker.

"Sorry, sorry," she apologizes, rubbing her eyes. "Yes, that's what that's about. He put it on his credit card and sent us a copy of the invoice, so we don't even have to worry about it. We should get it by... next Friday."

"Just in time for the holidays."

You're stunned. You feel like a cliché, but you can't help but wonder if it's just a dream. You look over at her again and watch her hunched over the booklet, her eyes darting across the page at light speed. You decide dream or not, you might as well roll with it, so you turn back to the counter and finally take a look at the map.

What was once a few gas station maps of North America has become a multicolour, stitched-together portrait of what your lives will be together. It doesn't take you long to realize each colour is a different road trip, and the big dots are your major destinations along the way. She notices you reaching towards it and you can see her smile out of the corner of her eye. She starts to pick up the papers scattered across the table and you start to try to help her, but she quickly grabs your hands to stop you. Her big eyes meet yours once more and she reaches up to kiss you.

Social media *(meaning exclusively Instagram)*

accounts that have helped me:

@alokvmenon @adhd_couple

@the.autisticats @i.put.the.ace.in.disgrace

@yrfatfriend @i_weigh

@manicpixiedreamboat @goodhumansonly

@adhd_alien @the_mini_adhd_coach

@theautisticlife @fatlifedrawing

Note: most of these are neurodivergent accounts. A couple are queer/trans accounts. These are both identities that I identify with. A couple of these are created by fat people. Although I am definitely not fat, I have struggled with body image and eating disorders, so these accounts have greatly helped me accept my own body AND learn more about the experiences of fat people. (sorry, that turned out longer than I expected (thx adhd), but I did think it was important. idk if it actually is or not but it felt like it to me.)

JAMMIE P

I was in college the first time I questioned my gender. I unknowingly applied to an all girl school. No problem right. I was female and it was the only school that offered my major as an undergrad program. Almost immediately I start to have an emotional break down. But no worries after a year long mental crisis, going to therapy every week, and talking to several friends I realized what I always knew. I was just me. It was not until a decade later that I learned the word that I felt fit. Genderless. I don't have a gender, I am just Jammie. I still get hit with dysphoria. There are days I wonder if maybe I would like to start T and become more masculine. For the most part I am doing ok. I felt so alone going through this in my mid twenties. Here I am in my mid thirties and I still don't have the answers. And I finally realized that is OK. You can question, come out, or reassess no matter what age you may be. Be free all my fellow Queers. You are all valid no matter your story.

FELIX

I've been having a bit of a hard time lately, with a lot of schoolwork (some of it late :/) and some stress about relationships with my friends. I have ADHD and Anxiety, which means that I struggle to keep up with assignments for school and sometimes have trouble navigating social situations. As a kind of buy one get one free with ADHD, I also have RSD, or rejection sensitive dysphoria, which means I feel negative emotions around things like perceived rejection or arguments with friends very strongly. Overall, the past couple weeks just haven't been great, and I don't have much in the way of a happy ending yet.

But what I do have is just a couple of bright spots. I've been working on positive self-talk recently (the weird thing is I'm not even in therapy right now; I've just been following a lot of very helpful social media accounts (I'll list a few at the bottom for anyone who reads this who wants to check them out)). A couple nights ago, I actually started believing a few things for the first time in years.

- I am a good person.
- I am capable of change.
- I am capable of and deserving of happiness.
- I am worthy of love.
- I do not owe anyone anything.
- I am allowed to feel comfortable in this body.
- Even if I make mistakes, none of this changes.

Today I put some of that to use, especially the "I do not owe anyone anything." My friends really wanted to drive somewhere, but the original idea morphed into what would have been a 6 hour road trip starting at 8:30 PM. I wanted to go along, but I knew I had way too much work to do (remember the schoolwork from the first sentence?). And, most of my wanting to go along was much more of me wanting to make sure they were happy and wouldn't be both literally and metaphorically leaving behind (remember the RSD?). I ended up saying I couldn't go. At first, my friends decided to not go if I wasn't going with, which was very sweet of them, but they were obviously disappointed and I felt really bad for making them stay. I almost caved and went anyway, but I knew I wouldn't be happy and it would only create much more stress for me. Now, they're on the road, and I'm sitting in my room typing this, still a bit sad that I didn't go but mostly relieved and gradually becoming more proud of myself for doing what's best for me. So, I guess this story might have a little bit of a happy ending after all.

"I've got it, babe," she nearly whispers, gently pushing you away from the counter and putting your drink back into your hand. You decide it's best not to argue on this one and lean back against the fridge. You watch the sunlight pouring in from the front windows dance and reflect off her wedding ring as she carefully organizes what looked like a cyclone when you first walked in. She kisses you one more time before scooping her stack into her arms and moving it over to the round oak table to the right of the island. You follow her with her drink and kiss the top of her head as you set it down beside her. She murmurs a thanks and lazily reaches her hand back to brush your arm as you walk back over to the map. You gently pull it to the edge of the counter, making sure to wipe the condensation from your beer off the counter with your sleeve so as not to smudge anything. You decide that it's best to just let the old man thing go for the time being. You know that you'll get the explanation you need once she's not so focused on reading.

You take a deep breath, close your eyes, and picture the Westfalia. You picture the two of you in it. You open your eyes, ready to see what adventures are in store. The legend in the top right corner of the giant map makes your heart melt. She's given each trip a name and some you even recognize from late-night conversations the two of you have had about "the trips we'll take when we get rich".

I guess this is when we get rich, you think to yourself.

As you trace over the lines of the road trips with your fingers, you begin to lose yourself completely in thought. You can't help but picture how perfect it'll be, taking turns driving and navigating, sleeping in Walmart parking lots when you're too exhausted to make it through the night, unplanned stops along the way, picnics at scenic lookouts, cooking together in the campgrounds, finding secret trails that lead to perfect pools for cliff jumping—

"Babe."

You jump, beer spilling onto your left hand. "Sorry, I was... sorry."

She's already grabbed a cloth to wipe your hand with. You blush as if you're on a first date and she smiles gently back at you. "Come on, I wanna tell you what this is all about."

She doesn't let go of your hand and you follow her to the kitchen table. She scoots her chair right up against yours, pulling the contract between the two of you. You spend the next hour discussing what Amos, the old man from the bar, is doing for you. She explains to you how Amos lost contact with his family years ago after a traumatic family event and has no desire to reconnect with them.

He instead wants to take the two of you in as his new family and leave you as the sole inheritors of his will. When she told you property, cash, everything, she meant it. She explains that he has no need for all of his wealth and would rather see the two of you put it to good use.

"But babe," you begin to argue. "We don't really need it, though. We have enough that we can afford this huge house for God's sake, we own riverfront property, what else do we really need?"

"That's the thing. I already made that argument," she says, eyebrows raised. "But he wouldn't let me get away with that. He told me that he doesn't want us to miss out on any of life's opportunities because we're tied down to a mortgage or can't afford to take time off work to get away. So, like I said, this is how we finance the rest of our lives. We could quit our jobs today if we wanted to."

You sit stunned in silence for a few moments and contemplate the contract. You can't believe how few strings are attached, and you really start to think this is all a dream. The prospect of being able to fulfill all of your life's dreams without having to ever worry about the money, all just to make some sweet old man happy? It seems too good to be true, yet here the contract is in front of you, her signature already on it.

She leans her head on your shoulder and whispers up into your ear.

"We can finally open the bakery I've been dreaming about. Plus, all the trips you love to talk about..."

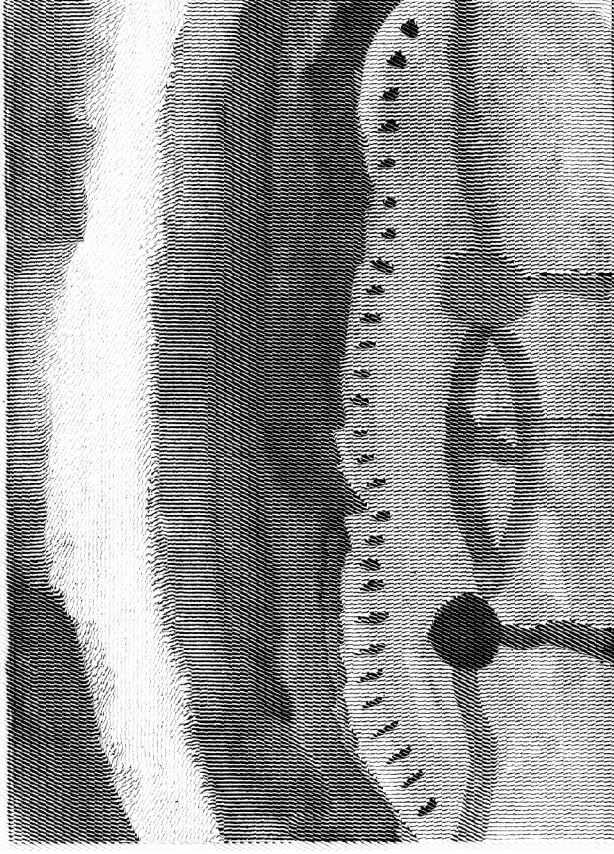
Without saying a word, you grab a pen and sign your name below hers. You can feel her start to smile and before you know it your face is in her hands and her lips reunited with your own. You pull away laughing and snatch the Westfalia invoice off the top of her stack of papers. You grab her by the hand and drag her over to the map, itching to talk about all the summers of the rest your lives that you'll spend on the road.

You spend the evening on the balcony making plans upon plans upon plans. You can see it all just like a movie in your head; the rest of your lives drafted in colour on a highway map.

"Sometimes I wish I could marry you all over again."

UNDER THE BRIDGE OVER THE DAM

Stef Dunlap (she/her)



LATE BLOOMER ^{Joe}

I don't have many regrets in life, but one is not committing to my chosen career path sooner than I did. As a kid I was very creative, artistic, and nerdy—attributes that I think I subconsciously attributed to being different, to being queer. When my dad told me not to go to college for basket-weaving, I went to pursue biology, hoping to prove myself to the world by studying a very difficult subject. I didn't come out as gay until after college. When I did, I also came to grips with what I really liked, what I didn't like, and what I was passionate about—as most people do. I like art and design! I actually love basket-weaving, dammit! Now I'm happy to be a happy queer designer and I love it. ^_^