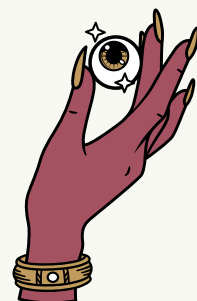




I PUT A SPELL ON YOU

...AND NOW YOU'RE MINE



**(UN)JADED WITH JOCE:
COMMITMENT IS
SPOOKY**

Ghosting, Tarot Cards, Love Spells - Galore!

**FICTION: SURGERY IS AN
ARTIST GONE
WRONG**

An artist falls in love with her artwork, but every time she looks at it, something seems a little off.

**LOVE NOTES WITH BRI:
I LOVE YOU...MORE**

What love is, what love is like within all the senses, how it makes life look

so come up to the lab, and

see what's on the slab

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I SEE YOU SHIVER WITH....

BY: Airea Johnson, Enola, Emily Murman, Gabrielle Stones, Matthew James Hodgson, Jocelyn Wong, Tanushree Gogoi, Natalie Chan, Laura Kirkwood, Ruth Niemiec, Shivani Verma, Violet Payne, Ella Breunig, Taneesha Pradhan



editor's note

Immerse yourself in universes of love. With musings on friendship, family, love, and ghosting, this is your one-stop-shop for all your love problems and wonders. This is our first issue with the team, and I couldn't be more grateful to have such talented people dedicated their time to the magazine. Watch out for the witches scattered across our perfumed pages! The symbol of the witch has a long connection to sexuality because of its embodiment of a woman being forthright and using magic to attain what is supposed to be hers. Our guiding witches are coupled with words that drip with honey to redefine this long history. Make what you will of them, but you can't deny that they're a delight to encounter <3

All of our columnists deliver their best in this inaugural issue. A q&a session, lessons on dating questionable people, dealing with breakups, healing with friends—there's no topic that isn't attended to.

By the way, our columnists take questions! Write to us @perfumedpagesmag on Instagram to ask them what's lingering on your mind.

Relax with some beautiful poetry, be invigorated through the short story gracing our pages, and let our illustrators enchant you. Don't forget, it's all made with love.

Taneesha Pradhan
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Biblical absence

Have I swallowed moths
all summer? If you dissect
my belly, there'd be a busted
porchlight—no bubblegum sky
or Fanta cloud sunset.

I'm familiar with dying
every week, hovering around
some amber glow
until it burns out.
Now there's no sun

so all I'm left with
are larvae crawling through
my chest like a plague.
If absence was biblical,
burning bushes would be

jukeboxes stuck
on Usher's U Got it Bad,
but there's nothing holy
about heartache.

When fall comes
I won't watch the sky
for a savior. I'll hang
sweaters and stitch holes.

By Airea Johnson





BY ENOLA

A decorative border on the left side of the page, featuring a dark red vine with small, five-petaled flowers and leaves, curving upwards and then downwards.

syntax poem

I ache to call you thou, to shape my mouth into the o it holds
before & after kissing thee—to nudge the syllable from tongue-tip
to parted lips just as I nudge a single sigh into thy drawing in.
to say “I love you” does not exalt the way it should, but
to say “I love thee” when cheek to cheek, exhaling
simultaneously, we cling to one another, does so properly.
hold my heart, my sweet. thou art the ruler of ‘t.

by Emily Murman



LOVE NOTES WITH BRI

I love you...*more?*

It's very subjective to understand the term *love*.

If you type *love* into the internet, the definition is: '*an intense feeling of deep affection*' or '*a great interest or pleasure in something*'.

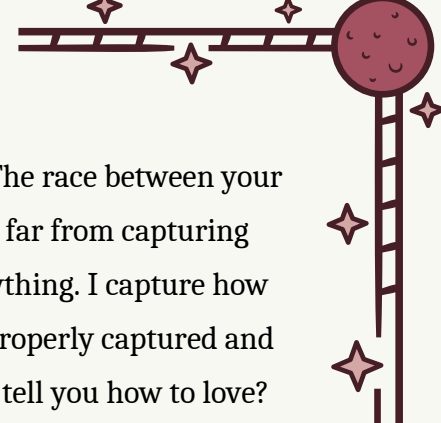
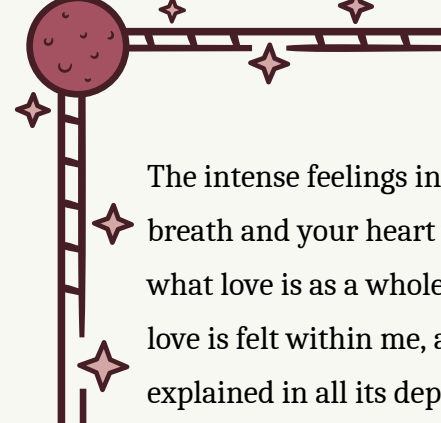
Surely that doesn't even touch the surface of what love feels like. It expresses admiration, but I don't believe it reflects love. Love shouldn't have a definition.

Even more, I don't think love can even be put into words, let alone a set definition... and that's coming from a lady who writes poetry that vocalizes love and has lived in romance novels for over ten years. Realistically, love is a feeling, and normally an intense and sometimes overwhelming one. Love is meant to be felt, not explained. How somebody loves, may be different from the next person; it's a given. As I said, it's all subjective. We can love the same things, same people, but to what intensity do we actually consider it to be love? And, to what degree are we actually able to like or admire something enough to label it love? My partner and I always say:

"I love you more".

Yet, it's quite infuriating because realistically, you feel like you *DO* love them more because you can't feel how much they actually love you back (to a certain degree). We can feel *loved*, but I will never be able to fully interpret the love he feels for me. That's a personal feeling. All of this is taken into account and we still argue that we're adamant we feel the same for each other, if not stronger. In reality, we have no clue. The only thing we're certain of is our own emotions, we just take each other's word for the love aspect.

As a self-proclaimed 'romance poet', I think stereotypically, I'm meant to understand what love is and have a solid definition. All of my poems are meant to depict how love really feels, and give that feeling to the reader 'oh, *THIS* is love'.



The intense feelings in your gut, which we soften with the label ‘butterflies’. The race between your breath and your heart when you’re made to feel loved. When realistically, I’m far from capturing what love is as a whole feeling. I capture moments of love, glimpses of it if anything. I capture how love is felt within me, and then I remodel it into poetry. Love could never be properly captured and explained in all its depths, because like I said, it’s subjective. And who I am to tell you how to love?

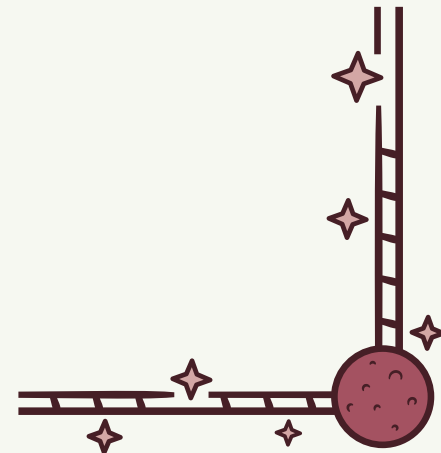
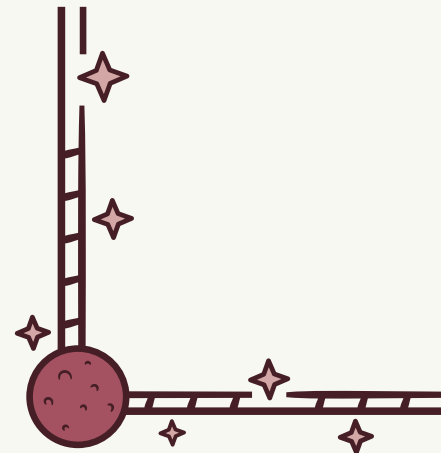
If anything, I think the term love is used too commonly. I think it’s upsetting. I’ve been reading romance novels for as long as I remember, and my interpretation of love is the typical Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth kind of love. So, for me, hearing ‘I love you’ so commonly feels damaging to the phrase. I’ll say it to my partner over and over again, and the same with family and close friends, but I feel we have overused the term to become futile. Love is meant to be rare and cherished, and as a society, we’ve made it so common to be in love. The romance novels taught me different.

So, if you were to ask me after all these rambles:

“What is love?”

I couldn’t answer that for you; that’s for you to experience for yourself. I’m just here to keep the love we read about in romance novels alive. That’s love to me.

by Gabrielle Stones



from Exquisite Presence

Allow me just a moment to peruse his consciousness, deeming all things consequent, dull, failing continuously at modesty, unless my attitude changed sprawling recklessly in his presence, showing off rare forms of weakness one seldom sees or begins to realize.

It is his ignorance of love that keeps him there, the rare beauties concealed, things still uncertain which, over hours and bergamot, begin slowly to clarify though only by the smallest increments.

Exquisite presence yet unconsummated, or consummated then immediately lost, the barest things were lazing in the sun, dreaming in some private place, given to afternoons as the clouds took shape.

by Matthew James Hodgson



Commitment is Spooky: Ghosting, Tarot Cards, Love Spells - Galore!

Hello friends, fiends, and fellow frog enthusiasts! In honour of Spooky Season this weekend, I wanted this piece to focus in on one of the scariest, most ominous dating experiences one may ever live to encounter: **Ghosting**.

Ghosting / **goh**-sting /
(verb)

The act of cutting off communication with the person you're dating, often with zero warning or notice beforehand. Not cool, dude.

Whether you've been the ghoster or the ghostee, both parties involved end at a loss - even if it doesn't always seem like it. Many moons ago, I experienced a relationship that changed my perception of ghosting, forever. I had just gotten out of a long-term relationship and felt this burning need to dive deep into the dating pool à la Bumble. Unfortunately, a person I ended up matching with left me feeling truly spooked. To this day, their intentions remain a mystery.

For nearly three months of my life, I dated M - a retired competitive snowboarder and current cocktail connoisseur, almost double my age and socioeconomic class. They had a chiselled jawline, liked Japanese Breakfast, knew how to cook, and owned a cute Sharpei named Mary Jane (in honour of you-know-what). Living in close proximity, it wasn't unusual for us to meet around twice a week at a dive bar, only to end the night with an adult slumber party at theirs. But what M had in style and status, they sorely lacked in depth (or maybe I just couldn't attain it)! Nonetheless, I continued to see them, knowing we had little in common besides an addiction to serial dating. Before I knew it, months had passed. And still, I knew little about M.

Lesson #1: Your eyes aren't broken; the red flags wave blaringly in front of you.

After a couple of scheduling conflicts and a friend's wedding that called me out of town for a weekend, I shot M a message to say Happy Thanksgiving. But by then, it was far too late.

M had chosen to haunt my DMs, forevermore. All I had as our last exchange was an eggplant emoji (from me) and a passive heart reaction (from them) - nothing more and nothing less. Years later, the event seemed comical. But in hindsight, I probably could have prevented the short-term heartache. Had I paid attention to the warning signs, things could've been different. M and I had no spark. We were also both recovering from recent traumatic break-ups. M liked me because I "WaSn't LIKe OtHer gIrlS" and because, in their opinion, younger women had 'kinkier' intentions. Starved of attention and devoid of self-esteem, I used M as a placeholder for what should've been my self-respect. When they eventually said "BOO!" and disappeared from my life entirely, I insisted that it was my fault and spiraled into a half-year long weed bender - just to avoid dealing with the stickyness of it all. What if I had been more attractive - or did my hair the way they liked when they saw me last? If I had done weirder sex shit, would that have enticed them? Or would it all have ended the same? What I've learned after many hours of late night overthinking and periods of feeling bad for myself, is that my tears were wasted. And I'll tell you exactly why.

We listen to what we want to hear and wear earplugs when the music stops.

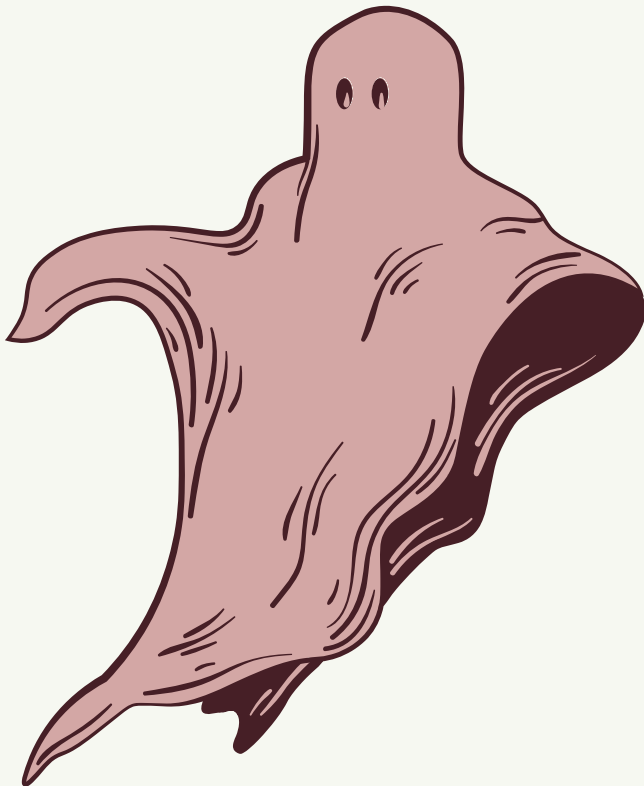
I've been a professional Tarot card reader for the last year and a half and I'd be lying if I said the story I just relayed didn't play a part in my desire to begin reading. Since Tarot entered my life, I've received valuable messages I've stubbornly refused to accept. Take, for example, the witchy Groupon date I had with an ex a couple of years back: For \$40, a sketchy lady at a random cafe promised us each a comprehensive 15 minute reading on all things romance. Out of the fear of hearing something unsavoury, we chose to take our readings separately. When it came to my turn, unsavoury is exactly what I got. The first card placed basically said everything I needed to know about the relationship I'd come to endure. In bold black letters, "The Tower" laid in front of me, depicting a seemingly beautiful stone tower built upon a faulty foundation. Atop the tower, bolts of lightning strike in the midst of a gloomy storm. People within the building manically jump out, plummeting to their painful deaths. After all, defenestration is superior to waiting for something eroding to inevitably perish. In a love spread, this card is a huge red flag. The reader, three years ago, looked at me warily as soon as the card was dealt. She warned me of the dangers of staying for something that's been doomed from the start, and told me I'd be better off staying committed to myself. In the end, I chose not to listen. But if I had - if I had listened to my gut and accepted the fundamental incompatibility of my ex and I - I would've saved myself from the world of emotional pain that came soon after.

All of this to say, bad things can and do happen to us in the pursuit of love. I like to believe in some ways that it's part of the human experience. But as we accept the natural ebbs and flows of romantic relationships throughout our lives, it's also important to note that we still have some agency in these situations - even if you're the one being ghosted!

Through ghosting, I learnt that ghosters are more fearful of authentic connection than anyone else. In some ways, it's a privilege to be the ghosted because you don't have to reconcile with being a person unwilling to be present in a connection. In the end, M is the one left haunted by their crappy actions, not me. But I also learnt through this harrowing experience that relationships that don't leave you feeling intrigued are not really worth the risk of rejection. A strong sense of self respect and awareness, however, is.

XOXO,

Joce



Clever men survive wars, but not *love*

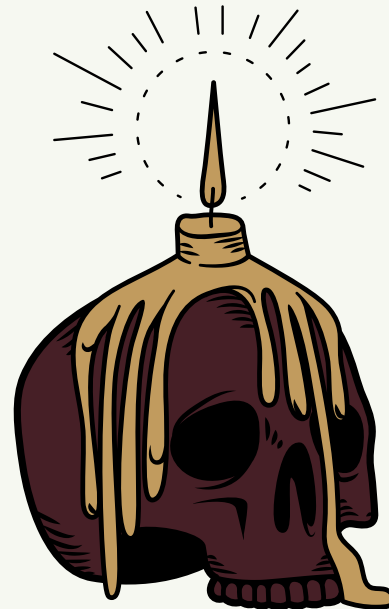
The girl you loved,
had her throat studded with victory anthems
and her skin simmered with explosives
On the edge of boutades.
Clever men know how to play with fire
so you dared to look away from your gin
and into her soul, that had machine guns
hidden under white flags
and her smile that reminded you
of the life before a dawn's war cry,
and the life after, of paper rolls
tucked under blouses that came off too easily
and handgun holsters shrouded under
the pandemonium of cigarette smoke.

She called you a war hero,
but all you wanted was to forget the war.
After you'd make love with another woman,
you'd douse your head with narcotics
that'd make you dig out graves in churchyards
and gape long at the settling mist
before your eyes
till you saw her face again.

But you'd know it wasn't her
but your grief, staring back at you
with bloodshot eyes and damned corundums
that'd look good on any dying body
and waning soul.

Whenever you'd lose yourself
you'd look for her
dressed as a day's innocence,
the calm before a battle's call,
In the cobwebs decorated on the headboard
but not
as the reason of your bereavement.
But, the last time you looked at your lover's
eyes,
you saw regret.
And then one day
You realize that,
she was the battle
that made you fall in love with itself,
because clever men can escape wars
but not love.
Never,
love.

by Tanushree Gogoi



surgery is an artist gone wrong

TRANSCRIPT: SUNDAY MORNINGS WITH COLT HANSEN - AN INTERVIEW WITH LEAH CHANG

Hansen: So, what does it mean to be an artist?

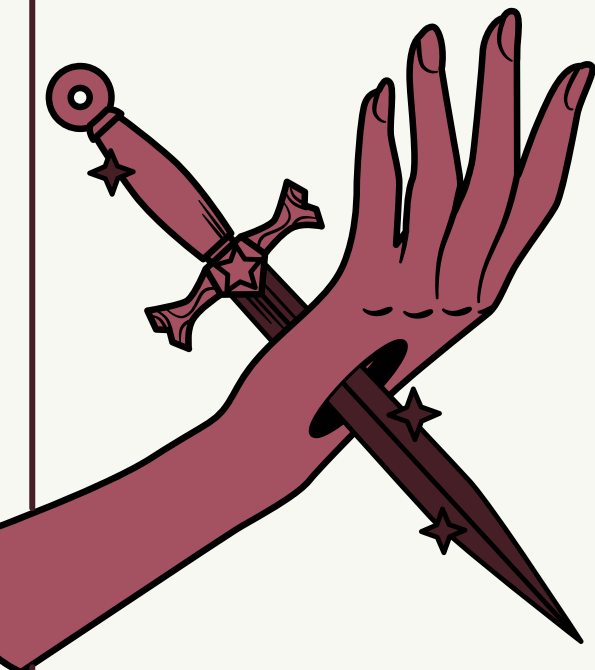
Leah: My freshman year in college, the first thing my professor told me was that, in order to become an artist, one must experience a violent regurgitation of the self first. That there's a need to let your body become collateral damage in order to become one of the greats. Sort of like Theseus' Artist if you will.

Hansen: Would you agree with that?

Leah: (Laughs) No, I think that's all pretentious garbage.

Hansen: Wouldn't expect anything less from you, Leah. Now, tell me, what's the idea behind your newest collection - Mind's Eye?

As winter comes to a still, languorous end, the sculpture's mold sets with tender obedience, a deformed mirror of Leah's image laying luxuriously over the counter. Her rheumy eyes part a smidgen, slender fingers curved over the length of her lips. Her skin, luminescent with the pale, yellowish glow of the studio lights, hides under a cloak of glass, faintly translucent.



Leah sets a pointed chisel down on the tray, swiping through her notifications with her free hand. Between swipes, she glances at the sculpture before her, careful not to let her gaze fix on its body, plagued with an air of discomfort. Its eyes are blank, glazed only with a thick mist of silver paint.

Leah, the marble Leah, that is, has been a long-running project for years now. Having started sculpting in her later years of high school, "Leah" was her first. As the artist herself has metamorphosed into a semi-functional artist over the course of several years, "Leah" has never once stayed the same, being built and rebuilt from the ground up over and over again, clay, meat, and bone ripped mercilessly from her fragile mold, only to be made anew.

Now that Leah's finally finished her, a hollow sting is swelling in her chest.

This "Leah", once finished, will be immortalised. This is the "Leah" that stays frozen in time. This "Leah", in all her venomous, naked glory, has been, and always will be, a reflection of her.

Is she finished?

Leah hops off her stool, running her hands over the curves of her sculpture's figure. She plants a kiss on her forehead, a violent saudade washing over her as cold, tasteless stone meets her lips. "You're so beautiful," Leah mutters, letting the empty echoes of her studio act as a response, "I just think you'd look so much more...beautiful, if you just..."

Her chisel digs into the pale-gray cartilage of "Leah"'s eyes, carving a pin-sized hole in each eye.

"Perfect!" She throws the chisel mindlessly on a workbench, reaching to grab her cellphone. Her agent would likely have had her neck if she didn't finish with "Leah" by the end of the month. She couldn't wait to hear back—she imagines that there's nothing more cathartic than putting the last stroke on a near-15-year-long project. Just before she sends out the message, she opens her phone camera to snap a photo of the evidence, and—

"What?"

She leaves her phone on the concrete, hands stubbornly roaming "Leah"'s frame in search of her mistake. It's faulty. All of it's faulty. Leah grabs a metal tray, carving away at a small patch of marble below her bottom lip.

And again.

And again.

And again.

With every blink, something about "Leah" changes. The skin above her jawbone, the curve of her ear, the joints of her leftmost finger - perfection seems so close, yet so far.

The piercing sting of metal lurks on the roof of her mouth. Piece after piece of "Leah" comes apart under the coarse valley of her palms, marble crumbling on the edge of her chisel. Leah's abrasions leave "Leah" naked, a specimen under the blinding radiance of the lights hanging above her. "Leah" is religion under her hands.

By the time that Leah collapses with exhaustion, hands stinging with wounds of imperfection, “Leah” is no longer “Leah.” Her ribs stretch against the thin wrap of marble, blood-pinched horrors etched across her sides - minced carvings reaching all the way up to the hollow cavity of her eyes - irises staring straight through her, searching for salvation.

Leah can't stand to look at the woman on the counter. The mangled corpse on the counter is the “Leah” that she is now, and it's the “Leah” that she'll be forevermore. As her phone lights up with a message from her agent, her reflection flickers on the screen for a second. Just a second. Just long enough for her to see “Leah” in her brief respite.

The echoes of her studio respond in discordant screams.

-

Hansen: Would you say that you love your art? I mean, becoming an artist had to have been your dream career.

Leah: Of course. My art defines me, in the same way that cruelty defines artists, and artists define misery. There's some truth in the unraveling of an artist in the search of perfection, after all.

By Natalie Chan



from a distance

when will i see you again?
 can't i just reach through the ?!@=&%
 scoop you up, place you in my cupped palm
 carry you like a ladybird across the distance
 keep you in a jar in my room

i know you're not gone forever
 but i can't help feeling alone

don't tell me how many days are left
 of sighs crackling over the phone

but *oh!* the sunflowers
 golden and bright
 gently peaking out through black treacle
 make me dream of you
 and a woman with rings worn on every finger
come close
 and flowers bursting through my window
 and you
right here

by Laura Kirkwood





Q&A

with Ruth Niemic

How do I deal with losing my best friends when I get into a relationship?

I'm sorry you have lost your best friends after getting into a relationship. That sucks and feels very familiar, I am sure, to many. Falling in love is so intoxicating, isn't it? All we want is to be with the person we have fallen head over heels in love with. Unfortunately, we do often lose touch with friends in the process. At least to some degree. Sometimes our friends become jealous that the time you used

to spend with them is now spent with your lover.

It is important to push through the haze of love chemicals and remember that your friends need love too. Remember what you have been through together and how much they mean to you. Take the time to call them or text them. It's important not to lose touch. Once you stop staring into your partner's eyes for five seconds, you should make time to hang out in a group – your friends and your partner. Sometimes it's awkward if it's a group of three, so organise a larger group outing in the park. Make your friends feel included. Tell them you love them and make them feel like you're still there.

How to navigate the tensions of choosing a partner that your family won't always approve of?

Sometimes our parents have specific hopes and dreams for us, and we are just trying to live our own damn lives and pave our own damn paths. It's rough.

It's tough letting your family down and it's tough when you feel that you can't freely be with the person you have fallen in love with because there is something about them your family doesn't approve of.

Listen, it's your life and you're free to choose whom you love. It's always good to talk to someone older in your family that you get along well with. Let them know how the disapproval of your partner is impacting you emotionally. Express that you love this person and tell your trusted relative why. Maybe they just can't see those magic qualities. Share a little bit of the great stuff they do for you or have to offer.

Tell your relative you are happy - if you are and hope that the message makes an impact. They will probably talk to some other members of your family and offer support, bringing down those tensions. Maybe they will even invite your partner to the next big family event and be happy about them being there!

On the other hand, if your partner is impacting you negatively and your family doesn't approve of them because of that, maybe it's time to listen to some of what they say.

Love can be blinding, and we are so often faithful even to those that hurt us.

If your partner isn't very nice to you or partakes in negative behaviour, maybe your family members are seeing something before you have seen it.

What makes for a good gift for a loved one?

We are coming up to Christmas so that is a great question!

Material items can be somewhat meaningful, but experiences are always more meaningful. I would suggest buying tickets to an event, museum, or fun park.

Make a day with the one or the ones you love! Think of something they enjoy doing and do that with them. Maybe they like riding a bike? why not plan a day to ride your bikes together on a trail you know they haven't cycled before. Buy them lunch at a cute café somewhere along the way. Take a lot of photos and make sure you plan it for a sunny day. It's guaranteed fun and something wonderful you can look back on.

If they can't go out, have accessibility issues, or live far away from you then dig up some photos of you together, have them framed, and write them a letter.

Something so affordable can be so meaningful. There is nothing quite like receiving a handwritten letter from a loved one that you can keep forever and ever.

How do I deal with a changing relationship with my parents?

It can be so hard dealing with a fluctuating relationship you have with your parent or parents. Parents will often see our future a certain way and this means that when we create our own path, tensions grow. We are moving away from their dream for us and following our own. It creates worry and panic in their mind. But believe it or not, it is very common to have issues with your parents. Most of the time things calm down in time.

The best way to deal with the tensions while you're living through them is to centre yourself when you talk to that parent. Try not to get upset and emotional. Listen to what they are saying and if you can, offer your side of the story in a calm way.

It's important to try and find a middle ground with your parents. If you can't, sometimes you need to weigh up what is more important - Keeping your parents happy or living your best life?

Remember though - if blackmail, manipulation, guilt and extreme criticism are at play - it could be that you're dealing with a toxic parent. If this is the case, there isn't much you can do but love them but know your boundaries.

Make a conscious decision to not be affected by the negativity. Step away and love yourself.

Remember that most of the time your parents aren't trying to ruin your life, but sometimes they aren't aware of their own behaviour. Make sure you know your own boundaries and look after your own psychological health. Look after yourself.

All my love,

Ruth x





I nudge all my loves into a line, count them like hens in a coop. They squirm, not used to such trained eyes. I hide my love in every nook and cranny, in all the spots you wouldn't think to look. It's the perfect strategy — they lay in wait, unnoticed, and therefore, do their job well. We love in different ways, and the love that keeps to itself is not wasted, not useless — it helps the loves that crackle and flash burn even brighter. I hide my love in the roll of my eyes, in the headache that seeps in when it's 3 AM and we're still sort-of texting. I hide my love in my glances at her when she's not looking — too busy, of course. I hide my love in my less than three's, the emojis with big eyes, every giggle over FaceTime or keyboard smash of multi-colored hearts. It's so easy to love, and so I keep doing it. It's a game, a drug, something that keeps me up even past when I'm ready to sleep (not very often) and makes me wonder, makes me dance, makes me write. Love lifts me up. All my loves — my loud ones (the fateful three words), my soft ones (a satisfying embrace), the ones nobody else ever realizes (the way I think about you, all the time), all my loves are just as warm and buoyant as each other. And all my loves make up me.

by Shivani Verma

Meeting in the middle

by Violet Payne

I've always struggled to express platonic love. My friends and family tell me they love me, and I absolutely cringe. I know that I'm so lucky to be loved by the people in my life, but I can't help that my entire being wants to be swallowed into the ground when the love that's shown to me isn't from a romantic partner.

I think it has something to do with my experiences during my formative years. I remember that when I was around fourteen, I found myself thinking that I would never find love – nobody would ever have romantic feelings for me and why should they? Then, I somehow found myself in a toxic relationship for the ages, and when that ended it was like something turned in my brain. If I couldn't have romantic love, then I didn't want anything. Nothing would compare or could replace what I craved so badly. Something that felt like a temporary punishment for myself has followed me to the person I am today, and it's a constant battle with my instincts so that I don't end up alone.

I have friends that I really care about and couldn't bear to be without, and I find it extremely difficult to let them know.

I had a friend that liked to hold my hand around school, and not wanting to upset her I let it happen, all the while feeling insanely uncomfortable and wishing it would stop. I've had friends think it helped to tell me even more how much they loved me because they thought it would show how they could love for the both of us. However, just like in a romantic relationship, it's not enough for one person to carry all the weight.



I feel bad for my friends, it's not fair on them. I've lost multiple people in my life because they felt I couldn't give the energy back that they gave me. A girl that claimed to be the closest person by constantly saying "babe... I'm your best friend" couldn't seem to comprehend my inherent inability to return that feeling as consistently as she needed. This forced me to confront whether it was my fault that I was losing a friend because I couldn't match her vibe, or because that just wasn't the kind of friend I needed in my life.

It confuses me that people I work with can leave for the day and shout "love you!" before they leave when I've only known them for a few weeks. I feel trapped between wanting to reciprocate so that they aren't hurt and staying true to myself by not giving away platonic love to someone I don't even feel that way with.

Honestly, I don't even make sense to myself because I'm the type of person that asks, "are you mad at me?" when I perceive anything to be even remotely off, yet I'm so aware that I've been blunt with people when nothing is wrong but me trying to compensate for accidentally having shown too much emotion. I know you can get through life with low-level friends, friends that don't share secrets or express what you owe to each other, but I don't want that. I want the people I choose to be in my life to have significance and feel like they can rely on me in the same way.

Eventually, you must learn to compromise or you're going to lose those close to you. My "all or nothing" attitude towards love didn't cut it and it had to change – it still is changing. Part of learning was communicating, telling my friends that I have a hard time expressing my love toward them. Something that worked for me was emailing my best friend what was going on in my brain because it felt like I was easing myself in with a more professional boundary, giving myself space and my friend an explanation. I have very compassionate friends, and the ones who weren't... well, they aren't my friends anymore. I learned that when I'm in a good mood and on an emotional high, it's slightly easier to show this platonic love, so I've made note to remind myself to do exactly that during those times. My friends don't deserve to feel unappreciated, and I don't deserve to have my boundaries crossed or be something that I'm not. I'm more than happy to meet them in the middle if they'll have me.



Perfect affections

I suspend my reality just long enough to appreciate him and his old efforts, but I confess that I wish I cared more for splitting the truth, or unlearning the barest things of little consequence.

Let me be plain; I use his lovely words and quote him from the memory to say,

Perfect affections can't be found, or if in your decadence and travels you find some solution to this issue then please do tell next time we meet. I'm not one for idle theories so prone to gimmickry. See you, you don't care about honesty; I don't really either, but I won't admit it knowing that somewhere, somehow, the day is crippling the heart of another. In a world that's so severe and careless you must pretend to worship the truths, —or else the universe will punish you.

BY MATTHEW JAMES HODGSON



Bottomless pit, love revolution

“What followed that phone call was a howl of sheer distress, rising from the pit of my heart, up into my throat, and out of my mouth. Then a sleepless night and a tear-soaked pillow. Star-crossed lovers, truly.”

Last week my partner and I were talking about breaking up.

We weren't breaking up or arguing. We had just been chatting about breakups and how they feel at various stages throughout your life. I offered that no breakup could cause the same amount of distress as the end of a puppy love relationship.

Some of us, albeit very few, stay with the person they first fall into that kind of love with forever. They are lucky in a way. They take puppy love and shape it into true, lasting love. Do these people possess magical powers?

Before I fell in love for the first time, I had hoped that would be my story. I wanted to fall in love early, never experience heartbreak, fulfil my teenage dreams of finding the one.

These days I am grateful for the colourful love life I have had. A rich patchwork of experience.

The types of people I have fallen in love with, their different ways of loving have taught me to be human. Importantly with each person. I was vulnerable and I received the immeasurable gift of experiencing and navigating their vulnerabilities too. With each person, I grew and I hope that they did too.

I sat quietly beside my partner, stirring my tea and reflecting on my experience of puppy love.

Glances exchanged for months across the park. The apple of my eye was framed by the meaningless blur of everything else around him whenever he came into my view. Then there were messages exchanged from morning to midnight. I would be waking up and checking my phone, which was often resting right beside my head on my pillow. The rush of seeing a message, “What are you up to? Thinking of you.” Then came the day he asked me if I wanted to be official. “Yes,” I said, smiling so hard it hurt. I felt like I was spinning. Ah, the heady intoxication of teenage love.

The day he told me it was over and he wanted to breakup came completely out of the blue.

One moment we were sitting on the beach together in the rain, his arms wrapped around me, kissing me softly on the back of my neck. The next minute he was calling to tell me it was “over” because – simply – he “didn't like me anymore”.

What followed that phone call was a howl of sheer distress, rising from the pit of my heart, up into my throat and out of my mouth. Then a sleepless night and a tear-soaked pillow. Star-crossed lovers, truly.

My blinds had been up all night and the morning came with the harshest sunlight I ever felt.

My head throbbed; the skin of my cheeks was raw from twenty-four-hour tears.



My mom opened the door to my bedroom and slowly walked in. She sat beside me as I lay in foetal position, shivering, my stomach churning, ribs aching. She told me not to cry and that there would be other people, many more break-ups and better relationships than the one which had just ended. I cried even harder.

I told my partner about that stinging break-up, just how bad it felt to be dumped. Taking a sip of his beer, he agreed that first break-ups were particularly tough, “yeah, nothing compares to the... sinking feeling. Like a bottomless pit..” and he told me of a sleepless night, much like the one I had. His first ex had written a break-up letter. “Harsh” I said as I imagined him going through what I had, around the same time.

Our memories connected to painful events begin to fade over time, but some things stay with you.

by Ruth Niemiec



Playing house

BY JOCELYN WONG

Mud-stained, sweat-laden and rampant with hormones we couldn't yet name, every inch of our beings stunk with the excitement of unbridled forbidden fun.

Our routine was set down-pact, each recess fifteen. Whenever you asked me who I wanted to be, I'd choose as if the role were written on the back of my hand.

You? The mom. Me? The dad. I look back longingly now and wonder in grief:

What ever happened to my sandbox lover?

Wrapped in tender, sweet-girl-love, we created elaborate fake lives together. We indulged on soft kisses and blue raspberry gushers, all the while prancing to made up songs with gibberish as lyrics.

Like yin and yang, like a warm summer's night, we on the playground radiated something we hadn't yet understood:

The tenderness of young queer affection.

soda bottle snakes

Airea Johnson

Miss you & the way smoke curled around your head like a halo.
We could listen to Metallica and Nirvana, sing "Lake of Fire"
& where bad folks go to die. Where did you go?

I never said you could leave, but here I am
rolling pennies into logs. Remember the treehouse
you never built? Wish you could come back.

Make something, anything. Better yet,
I'll make you a drink & we can laugh again.
You always got my jokes and now

my life is one big punchline &
your absence is the chorus of our songs.
My life without you is every song

ever written about death and yet
I don't know the words,
never learned the words

so car horns are symphonies and
yelling on the street reminds me of home.
& I forgive you

for coming home to cold dinner,
falling asleep to Andy Griffith
without telling me goodnight.

Would give anything to hear you
whistle a theme song while we're fishing.
Let's catch catfish and let them go,

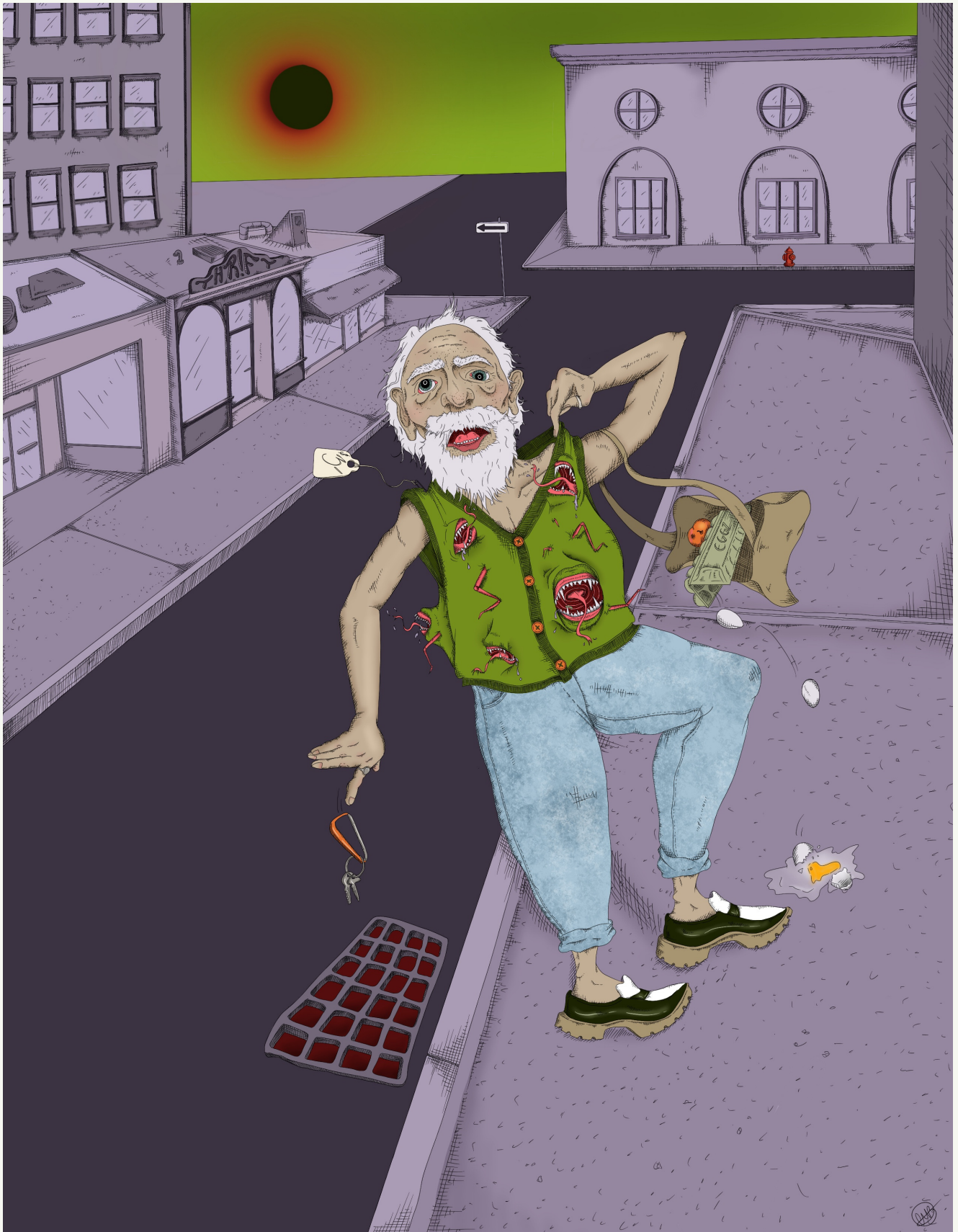
let's bait hooks with dried hotdogs.
I'll grab my Scooby Doo pole;
I'll sit still this time.

I won't squirm when you trap
snakes in soda bottles.
Would love to hold a garden snake with you.



I still watch where I walk
in case a copperhead lurks on the sidewalk.
Without you everything is scary, & I'm stuck

listening to our songs just trying to hear the words



BY ELLA BREUNIG

Until next time...

....ANTICIPATION.