

# QUEER magazine

VOLUME 1: ISSUE 3



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CREATOR'S NOTE



The background features a stylized sun with a dark blue outline and a light brown fill, set against a bright orange sky. Below the sun are rolling hills in shades of light green and yellow, with a thick black arc representing the horizon.

**Heyo!**

**We are so please to present you with this new issue. It has been a long time coming and is honestly a work of passion. Our team has worked tirelessly and I am so proud of them! We hope that you enjoy the articles and beautiful photos!**

**<3**

# Am I responsible for your Whiteness?

Syd Beausoleil (they/them)

*Dear White People,*

*Here is an example of what it's like for queerness and blackness to exist in a space where systems to support them aren't present. I'm not the first or the hundred thousandth person to say this. It can be really draining, a process of wearing people's self-esteem down. If you're someone who only gives a fuck about productivity, it can prevent work from getting done. People lose the morale to keep going. They don't want to stay, because they don't feel supported and they don't feel human.*

“Finance? Finance... Hun. I'm a Psych major. I say ‘Fuck Capitalism’ at least twice a day.” I was on the phone with a friend who had just offered me an internship for an amount of money I didn't think I'd ever see, and I would have to start the next day.

“Syd, you'll be great. You're smart, you're into crypto, and you know why the system is so fucked up. It'll be uncomfortable at first, but meeting you will be great for them. I think you'll be great, and I think you'll be able to change things up over there.”

I was flattered at the idea that I might be able to change something, but was that ever my responsibility? With all that I had going on? With all that was on my plate? Was it my responsibility to show a bunch of white men what it means to have a little bit of empathy?

I said yes.

My friend offered me an internship for her boyfriend's company: a small start-up in finance and data analysis. I thought, *Why not?* It was another thing to add to my resume, and definitely a sweeter paycheck than Post-mates.

I'm black, queer, non-binary, and femme-presenting (which is something I unfortunately was reminded of every day with constant misgendering). The space was full of cis-het white men, excluding one other person of color who was a man and one white woman. I was scared at first, but I came in with an open mind.

My boss introduced me to the team and let them know my pronouns before I arrived. They received a speech prior to my arrival, but nothing seemed to click for them. I was comfortable wearing more "masc" outfits for the first couple of days. I received glances so pointed that it felt like being stabbed over and over again. I tried to hide myself in the clothes that I was already being buried in, but it didn't save me from all the judgment I felt. The misgendering never stopped. I didn't want to validate them, but for the sake of comfortability, I stuck to dresses and heels and eventually make-up almost everyday. I got different stares then. It was attention. More conversation, more ugly misogyny

"This is Syd!" *she.her.her.her.* "Hey *deadname!*" "Let's get *deadname* on this project!" *she. she. she. she.*

Who the FUCK told the Chief of Staff to make my deadname my email and my slack name?

I was immediately discouraged from correcting people for misgendering after the first day. I was thanked by a higher-up for not being an asshole about "the whole gender thing" after he misgendered me and my boss corrected him. I didn't say anything when he did it again moments later.

I was the only black, non-binary person in the room. As you can imagine, it was so easy to feel like I didn't belong. Every single day was a struggle. I think I might have cried a solid four to five times a week.

Two of the men that continued to misgender me were queer. It was disheartening to watch them nod as one of the interns tried to argue with me about my experience with racism.

"Where are you from?"

"Long Island." I said. I hated follow-up questions because I couldn't stand

giving them more time to speak than they already did unprovoked.

“How is it down there?”

“Not my favorite.”

“Why?”

“Racism.”

“Racism? On Long Island? In 2021? I’ve never seen that. There’s *no* way!” said a white man from Vero Beach, Florida who had only ever gone to Long Island to visit the Hamptons and attend “bangers” in his words. My co-worker who was queer shrugged at him as if he didn’t know why I’d say that. I felt uncomfortable and left.

Did I want to fight them? Yes. But, I couldn’t ruin this opportunity for myself. It covered my summer tuition cost AND rent, and I knew nothing else would. There was no way out. I told myself I’d experienced worse. And I had! But the constant little ignorant things they would say were so infuriating in bulk. *Take the money and then you can leave Syd.*

The microaggressions happened so frequently that I could feel it wearing on my body. Alongside my chemistry course and the hours of research and chart-making I would try to fit in at the office, they tore at my pre-existing insecurities. No sleep from work and school. No support system. It was just me, my thoughts, and twenty white men, for six-weeks.

*I heard from a co-worker that my “friend” said I was here as a form of reparations. Well, I’m definitely here to be tokenized. I’m here to diversify the space. I don’t know anything about finance. I’ve never used Excel. I took Statistics during Spring 2020 (and we all know none of us were truly present for our classes at that time). I’m not smart enough to do this project. I’m not smart enough to present this to the team. I don’t deserve to be here.*

A lot of my coworkers came from wealthy families and they weren’t afraid to allude to it. They had uncles and cousins in finance that knew our boss. Despite obvious nepotism and their shameless acknowledgement of it, they talked like THEY deserved to be here.

I got talked over too often to feel confident. My ideas were shut down be-

fore I spoke. I could tell they didn't value me or my opinion. I would rework graphs that I'd already finished a hundred times to put something perfect out. I didn't want them to see a flaw or pick me apart. I didn't want them to think I wasn't smart enough. This resulted in me making over a dozen graphs and starting over a dozen projects that I never submitted.

There were too many layers to that experience for me to get out in just an article. Misogyny, homophobia, racism, classism. All came up everyday. All affected my ability to work and exist comfortably in the space.

I made no lasting connections in that space. No one seemed interested in that, and the feelings were reciprocated.

What did that experience do for them? Was it "great for them," like my friend had said? Did I change anything? Were they able to see that black people and queer people exist?

I can tell you I felt like they weren't learning anything from the interactions they were having with me. I was taking constant shots at my identity and staying silent, because I didn't have the mental capacity to deal with it. I couldn't be expected to defend the same identity that led me to be rejected by some of my family, in an unwelcoming setting with an obvious power dynamic.

Getting them to see me was not my responsibility. It was theirs.





TEN BY: MIL

ARTER WRAT

THE AMERICAN  
BALLET THEATER  
PREMEIRS ITS FIRST  
HOMOEROTIC BALLET

AN CARTER

MILAN CA

Ballet is often considered one of the purest, most sophisticated historical forms of art. Yet, with that comes a history of being constructed to represent and please traditional white audiences. After almost five hundred years of existence and evolution, it has only been in the past fifty years that the ballet world has become more tolerant of people of

color, that it has celebrated them as talented ballet dancers. Acceptance of queer performers, mostly those who are cisgender gay men, is even more recent, with a prominent amount of male ballet dancers now openly identifying as gay. While this openness has not yet been extended to feminine-presenting ballerinas, leaps of progress are still being made.

Ballet companies are not excluded from a recent onslaught of organizations looking to capitalize on social justice movements and appeal to a younger, more liberal audience. While some may see the queering of ballet - with more elements of the art going against its traditional white and upper-class roots - as the destruction of a centuries-old discipline, many companies are leaning into this new era of ballet and introducing modern stories and happily-ever-afters.

American Ballet Theater (ABT) is one of these companies, and as one of the country's most prestigious ballet companies, their decision to premiere a homoerotic work starring two men of color is both historic and ground-breaking. In October 2021, choreographer Christopher Rudd's ballet *Touché* had its stage premiere in New York City's famous Metropolitan Opera House. While *Touché* had its world premiere with ABT in November 2020, its debut was limited to a virtual gala due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly a year later, the ballet was enjoyed by a live audience and earned critical acclaim.

Rudd—a Black gay man—said in an interview with *Vogue* that he wanted to make a distinctly “gay work” and “wanted to make sure that everyone in the cast was also gay.” While those not particularly aware of the intricacies of ballet politics may not see these comments as overly suggestive, to declare that a ballet is specifically supposed to be read as homoerotic is far removed from the traditional, fairytale-esque fantasies that ballet is supposed to represent. Further, Rudd's decision to cast

two dancers of color, one Black American and the other Brazilian, accelerates this recent queering of ballet.

There are a vast number of social and political implications that come from Rudd's decision to cast Calvin Royal III and João Menegussi, who are also both openly gay, in his ballet. First, ballet has historically excluded Black and other non-white passing people from performing for a number of reasons. On the basis of skin color, dancers of color were told that they distracted from a lily-white corps of dancers. For Black men and women in particular, their exclusion was on the basis that the generally more muscular or curvaceous Black body was not suitable for creating soft, long lines. With this in mind, Rudd deliberately chose Royal and Menegussi because their presence on stage and exquisite techniques defy all these stereotypes.

Looking beyond the ballet sphere, toxic masculinity is a raging issue in Western societies that often prevents queer people from being able to present themselves or their love authentically. Through *Touché*, Rudd and the performers are communicating that men, especially men of color, can be caring, loving, and not a constant threat. In a society that demonizes men for showing emotions, especially romantic or sexual feelings for another man, Rudd's decision to celebrate these emotions between two men of color in one of the most white, heteronormative spaces is a beautiful act of defiance and a deliberate push to queer the notion of what love, joy, longing, and beauty can look like.

It can be assumed that some

of ABT's older, more conservative patrons were not enthused by this boundary-breaking performance. Touché has been positioned as what the next generation of ballet could become. As a young ballerina, if I would have had the opportunity to see Touché performed, I believe I would have felt much more secure in my queer identity both on and off stage. However, it brings me much joy to know that young dancers will see this as a reminder that it is possible for the ballet world to love them as much as they love ballet. I hope that the success of Touché signals to other ballet companies that its audiences are not only ready for change, but they are willing to wholeheartedly support a new era of ballet. One can only hope that in the future, Touché will not be an anomaly, but the standard for representation in ballet.

YOUR

AD

HERE

:)









BY: LEE FITZGERALD

I changed my name in the backyard of the Pike annex at 1:00 AM during orientation week. The party had been almost impossible to get into and now I found myself standing stagnant in a churning cesspool of bodies that crushed me. It became clear that this was not an environment where I was comfortable. While I plan to never find myself in that backyard again, every time I walk past the house I'm drawn to the sense of inner clarity I had that night. I distinctly remember the

top 100s pop music that played in the background after I had just been aggressively shoved against two guys that towered above me.

I turned to my friend and I said,

“I should change my name. I’m gonna change my name.

I’d been thinking about it for months, but it was always some far-off plan in the future. Maybe I thought I needed to hold off until I saw myself fulfilling the gender expression for my chosen name and pronouns just a little better. It seemed like there was some larger commitment that came with changing my name and, perhaps, I didn’t fit the bill. But now, I was surrounded by over 100 people who didn’t know who the fuck I was, and honestly didn’t care to know. What was I waiting for? Why was I holding off? If I had wanted to change my name for so long, why didn’t I do it sooner?

When I was younger, I didn’t like my face. I thought my jaw was too broad, my chin too long, and, with my hair pulled back, I looked like my father. I wouldn’t be considered “pretty,” and as a young girl all I wanted was to look pretty. As I got older, I shaped my gender expression to better fit with the female gender identity I was expected to present. I wore heavy makeup to school and dressed in tight fitting or revealing clothing. I also felt like a great deal of my identity as a woman was based on attraction. My gender presentation was tailored to appeal to the gaze and categorizations of other people. I embodied one extreme of a spectrum. So, when I began to come to terms with my gender and distanced myself from womanhood, I flung myself to the opposite end of the spectrum. I wanted so badly to not be seen as a woman that I carefully designed and constructed a more masculine appearance. If I bind my chest, wear loose and boxy clothing, and cut my hair short, I can look “male.” If I stray so far from femininity, I can prevent people from immediately assuming, and thus invalidating, my gender.


Over the course of a year, I’ve changed my pronouns three times and my name twice. I cut my hair shorter and shorter every successive month until I stood in a Loving House bathroom as my close friend ran a trimmer directly over the sides of my head. I started dressing more masculine, which involved a complete turnover of my entire wardrobe. I wore makeup, stopped wearing makeup, and then settled on waterline eyeliner as an acceptable inbetween. I tried to use these different aspects of physical presentation to feel more internally comfortable with my gender identity. I know that gender identity and gender expression are unique and disparate: they do not necessitate similarity and one is not intended to always reflect the other. However, operating within the social structures that I have, it is

impossible for me to isolate one from the other. I often feel nostalgia or longing when I look back on pictures of myself from last year. I really enjoyed presenting feminine and I felt really comfortable in myself. It isn't that I don't want to be feminine, I just don't want people to see me as a woman. I am dressing and acting a certain way to satisfy the general understanding of the way nonbinary people are supposed to dress and act. As a nonbinary afab person, masculinity feels expected of me.

In the past, I've worried that my queerness is performative. Or, that I am playing up a character that doesn't quite fit. When I changed my pronouns but not the way I looked or interacted with people, I felt like I was falsifying something. I felt like I needed proof to substantiate my claims. Last semester, I was recognized as a queer individual and I used she/they or they/she pronouns, But as long as I continued presenting in a feminine manner, I felt that my nonbinary identity was not paid much attention to. I was a woman. A queer woman but, a woman. Even when I dressed in a more masculine way, people had a tendency to look for identifying gender features, and their internal thought process marked me as female. Then, I went home this summer with a "boy's haircut" and a binder and baggy jeans. I worked at Home Depot. People called me "sir" more often than "ma'am" or "miss" for the first time in my life. That felt really good. So, maybe I needed to present masculine: to force my voice lower, change the way I recline when I sit down. Maybe I needed to be a man in order not to be a woman.

To me, nonbinary still exists within the binary. I feel that it is impossible for people to consider a nonbinary identity without comparing it against male or female presentations. Or without assuming that the end goal is "fully transitioning," with nonbinary as a stepping stone along a set path. I hadn't changed my name because I didn't feel like I deserved to. I didn't qualify yet. I hadn't ticked off the right boxes or finished the tasks on the to-do list. I had this idea in my head that I needed to be more queer before I could change it. Otherwise who would take me seriously.

I'm still working on figuring out some inbetween. I'm not sure I know what my gender is, or what it will be in a year from now. But I know that carving out a space between masculinity and femininity is incredibly important to me. It takes a lot of mental work to avoid falling into what seems easier: following the binaries, categorizations, labels, and boxes that are set out for me.



Then, I went home this summer with a “boy’s haircut” and a binder and baggier jeans. I worked at Home Depot. People called me “sir” more often than “ma’am” or “miss” for the first time in my life. That felt really good.





Hope

Hope is fragile  
It stands on the thin line  
that cautions despair.  
It appears before you with a  
smile,  
And gives you love and care.  
Hope knows comfort,  
Yet knows nothing of tragedy  
Hope has never known hurt,  
But is a step away from agony  
Hope has never shed a tear  
But is the child of fear.

Christopher  
Moy-Lopez  
2021



# We made a Haiku about Nosebleeds.

Syd Beausoleil (they/them)

*"Let's write a haiku!"*

*"Great distraction! About what?"*

*"Nostalgic Nosebleeds"*

I was driving. My partner and I had just left Houston and were on our way to Marfa, Texas. Nosebleeds brought me back to childhood, and childhood is something I'm still trying to sort out. While making our haiku, at some point "girlhood" came up. I thought about it again later when I made my way to the passenger seat. Girlhood.

Did I have one? I don't ever think I was a girl, but did I live that baby pink, fluffy, frivolous fantasy that people talk about? In reality I don't think many have, but I also don't think I would have been allowed to have it if I wanted to.

My experience is best described by a diary entry I made while on the road:

I wasn't allowed to be a "girl."  
Instead they forced me to be a woman.

Not that I particularly liked being a girl anyway. Pink pretty barettes in my hair. Frilly skirts and dresses. "No, mommy. I don't like it!" Each week my mom would spend hours meticulously washing, detangling, and plaiting my hair. She would always finish

with bows and barettes. I would take the clips out of my hair, slowly as the week went on, hoping she didn't notice. She always noticed.

Then I saw the pride my family took in my cousin who wanted to be a model. So girly. So responsible. So young but so womanly.

"Syd, let's see your model strut!," my aunts said. My cousin had just put on a show for my family, and now it was my turn. At seven, I fumbled. So uncomfortable with how to move my body. Where do I put my hand? Do I put one foot in front of the other? And my hips. My hips! How do I move them?

My family laughed at me.

The pressure to be feminine, the pressure to strive for womanhood was so intense. I didn't want it, and it didn't fit.

Even before this, I was robbed of the innocence and frivolousness that we often associate with girlhood. I experienced my girlhood with the womanhood that was forced into my body. That was just the nature of my experience during the years of which I would have experienced it.

A mixture of trauma and the intense application of gender roles ruined me.

My rejection of it was a manifestation of boyishness, and a rambunctiousness that got me in trouble at home and at school.

Early on, womanhood was thrust into me but my peers made it easy for me to strip away my femininity with racism and name-calling. I knew I didn't fit in, so why try? In elementary school my identity was already decided. I knew I was gender non-conforming before I even knew what that meant. I was a proud "tom-boy."

It wasn't until middle school when pressure began to

build. No more bullying, I thought to myself. It was time for me to be normal and fit in.

Uniforms made it easy to get around getting bullied for my style of dress, but I needed something to wear for playdates. A friend introduced me to Justice. I joined the JV volleyball team in 6th grade to keep up with the varsity girls and stay "cool." They introduced me to make-up, and inspired me to try Forever 21 instead.

I was twelve, but forever twenty-one from then on.

I talked to the boys on the varsity soccer team that were way too old for me. They make you feel like a woman, I told myself. I tried to please them. They made me seem normal. No more bullying.

Make-up, skirts, and heels. Hyperfemininity! Stay pretty. Stay cool. A full face of makeup everyday will keep me safe. Undetectable. Normal. I carried that into high school. No more bullying.

Thank god I came out. How fucking exhausting.

In my experience, as one would expect, girlhood was a preparation for womanhood. They prematurely sexualize you, they introduce you to motherhood, they pressure you and smush you into a box. They degrade you.

Luckily, we didn't include girlhood in the haiku. It's not as nostalgic as the previously consistent, moderately terrifying, and yet somewhat comforting occurrence of nosebleeds. It's rather a painful phenomena that I think about and pray fades away.





Because of this we are blessed with pre-21st century texts that explore female queerness and intimacy, but always fall just short of true acknowledgement. Experiencing this with other novels makes me appreciate *The Last September* all the more for how direct it is compared to other works from the same time period, how tightly queerness is woven into the heart of the book.





**PUSSY TALK**  
**WRITTEN BY: MILAN CARTER**

**“Once you’ve done some soul searching about which attributes of a partner are truly needs and not a combination of dreamy wants, sit back and trust the process.”**

Dear Pussy Talk,

I have been looking for a significant other for some time now, and I’m wondering if my lack of luck has to do with my being too picky. Is there even such a thing as being too picky when it comes to dating? How can I tell if I am?

Single on the Slope

Dear Single on the Slope,

I definitely understand where you are coming from with wondering if you’re too picky when it comes to dating. There’s a whole lot of power in knowing what you deserve and not settling for less! Although... there are a few attributes of a partner that I think can be separated into needs and wants.

When you think about your dream person, you have to find a balance between being general and too specific. I know, that isn't really groundbreaking advice, but hear me out. For example, you can say generally that you want someone who is: intelligent, more introverted, and into the same books as you—and those could also double as deal breakers! But, if you were to tell me that you will only date people who are exactly 5'11", have one green and one blue eye, and were born in Indiana... come on babe, you need a reality check.

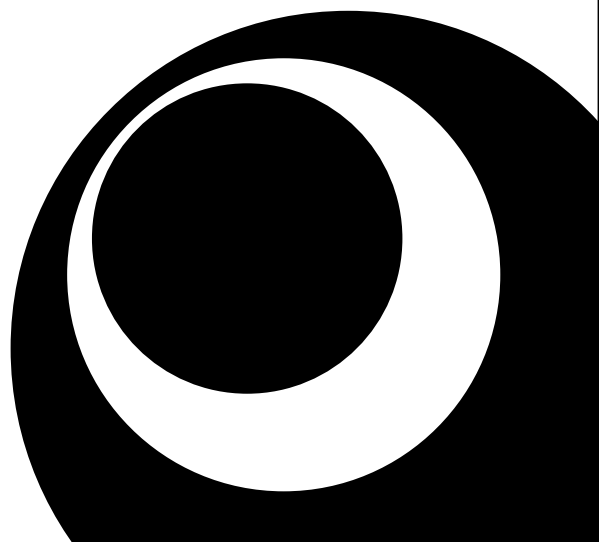
If you feel like you haven't met anyone that has even two or three of your must-have qualities, it might be time to reassess your strategy. Are you self-sabotaging your dating life and only picking people who clearly don't match what you're looking for? Are you quick to dump someone if they make a small misstep? If you're casting a wide net in the dating pool and coming up empty handed, try narrowing your search and be intentional about where you look for someone who has the qualities of your ideal partner. A frat party might not be the best place to meet someone if you're more of a homebody, you know? Once you've thought about this, making a 3N list (needs, nice to have, no way) could be a helpful way to organize your priorities. Describing your ideal partner to a friend is another great way to flesh out what you're looking for, and your friend could listen for qualities you repeatedly bring up—those are the ones you need to focus on when finding in a potential partner.

Once you've done some soul searching about which attributes of a partner are truly needs and not a combination of dreamy wants, sit back and trust the process. Don't rush into anything! I really can't stress that enough. If all you care about is having someone to call your partner and keep you company, it's

easy to ignore areas of incompatibility. But keep in mind that anything that doesn't fit what you are looking for isn't necessarily a red flag (although Tik Tok would want you to believe otherwise). There is such a thing as two people simply not having chemistry, and quickly recognizing that is a good use of your picky-ness.

I know it may seem like nowadays people either find incredible, fairytale partners or are stuck in the most ridiculously toxic relationships. If you haven't been caught up in an embarrassingly dysfunctional situation, I don't recommend starting that now. Everyone has a certain limit of what they are willing to tolerate in the name of love, and being picky about who you let into your life could save you from a lot of wasted time and heartbreak. So, embrace it! The bottom line is: if someone else thinks you're too picky or high maintenance, they're not the one for you. Happy dating!

**“Everyone has a certain limit of what they are willing to tolerate in the name of love, and being picky about who you let into your life could save you from a lot of wasted time and heartbreak.”**



# *Karen's corner*

All of these leftist wack jobs are pushing this conspiracy that we are in the middle of some sort of plague. The way that I know that it's fake is that they do not even have a real name for the sickness. On the television, they call it Covid-19, the coronavirus, and most recently omicron or something. If you ask me, they definitely have some sort of branding issue. If they wanted us to believe that some scary virus was upon us, the least they could do is give us a specific name for it. Personally, I believe that this charade has gone too far. It has gotten to the point where people are angry when you don't have a mask for some invisible virus that can apparently be spread through the air. Don't even get me started on this "vaccine" as they call it. Little Timmy's school is buying into this blasphemy too and is mandating that all the students get vaccinated so they can go to school. If I can give my two cents, it is probably the new government under Biden putting mind control devices inside of us. You know, I actually told Little Timmy's principal the same thing when she said Little Timmy couldn't return without the vaccine. Luckily, I have had arguments over vaccines all of Little Timmy's life: Mumps, Polio, Tetanus, and all those other shots he was "supposed" to get— he has none. It's not like they really make a difference anyway. I got the flu vaccine one year because this mom from PTA was doing some sort of fundraiser, and guess what? I still got the flu. Anyways, Little Timmy is calling me.

Xoxo,

Karen

**DONT BE A KAREN!  
GET VACCINATED  
AND WEAR UR MASK**







It wasn't a special night per se. The moon was at half-mast and the city was still awake. People were loitering around while exhaling plumes of smoke in Washington Square Park as the skateboarders milled about. However, for Sam, the night felt healing because he finally had a chance to breathe. Between his never-ending exams and prepping for the LSAT, Sam barely even drank enough water most days, let alone got a chance to sit in Washington Square Park and listen to the ocean within the breeze of the trees.

Around him were so many interesting faces, people with taste— it felt like a sanctuary. Sam was at the park waiting to meet a friend who was a park regular. Their name was Andy and they often came to the park to both sell and smoke weed. In case you were wondering, Andy had good prices and would normally sell an eighth for \$25 unless you looked like an ass; then, it was \$45. Sam got the sandbox discount though and almost never had to pay. Most nights Sam would have his nose in a book, but when he was with Andy he always felt at ease and enjoyed himself. Unfortunately, it had been a minute since they last talked. Yet, it still felt like nothing changed. It was just like high school; Sam and Andy were on a bench and Andy was folding the filter to a joint while Sam watched the people around him.

“Are you gonna talk to him today?” Andy said between pulls of a joint while their eyes darted between Sam and a skateboarder.

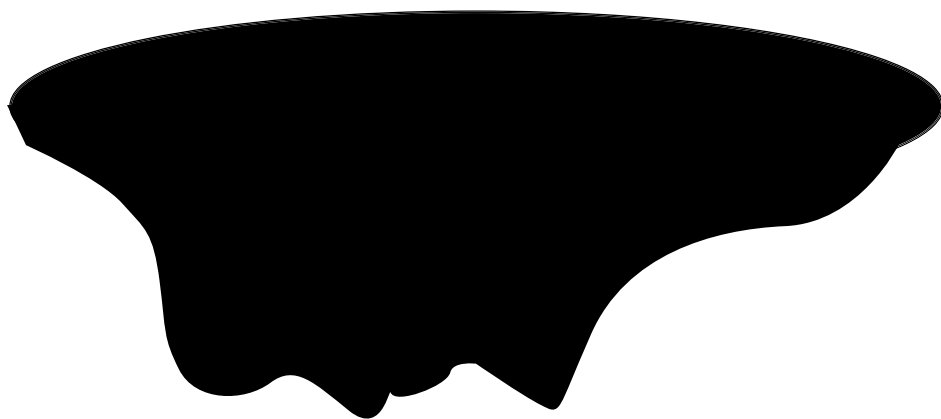
With the way Sam's brows touched the stars, Andy knew that no words would be exchanged. He did wish his friend would finally approach the skateboarder though. It was clear that the skateboarder was also interested in the way he would intentionally do tricks in front of Sam and occasionally walk past him while giving Sam a peek at his torso. Sam was shy and oblivious, not to mention always stuck in his head.

Through a slurry of Sam's giggles, Andy was brought out of his thoughts and his attention began to focus on Sam. Sam was just as enthused by the bricks on the floor as he would by a stand-up routine at a comedy club. It made sense though: he was high, and so was Andy. They settled into a meditative state and enjoyed the waves within their bodies as Sam began to notice his skater. Their constant eye contact made it almost impossible not to notice the unspoken chemistry between them. It was magnetic and soon enough, the skateboarder was standing beside them asking Sam for a light. The transition was as fast as a blink of an eye to Andy, but Sam had an entire internal monologue going as he watched the skateboarder make his way toward him. He could feel his stomach knot and his heart rate began to pick up. He was scared, anxious, lustful, and enamored all at the same time. For a split second, he was almost in despair as he thought about how the skater could just be walking past him again, or even be on his way to talk to someone else. The mental gymnastics that happened at that moment should've warranted an Olympic medal. Sam quickly averted his gaze as the skater approached. He saw his shadow before he saw the man's face. A silk-toned voice that touched the end of words with a slight rasp brought his gaze back up to the face before him. Up close, the skater had remarkable features. His eyes were warm and his cheeks were full and blended beautifully into his squared jaw. The tendrils of hair on his face made him look disheveled in the best possible way. After watching this man for so long and then hearing his voice, Sam had not even registered what the man was asking. It only clicked when the skater gestured to the lighter in Sam's hand. Then the skater sat next to him and leaned in closer so Sam was able to light the joint that was clasped between his lips.

"Hey, my name is Devin. I use he/they pronouns," Devin said with an exhale as his eyes glinted under the golden street lights. "You?" Awestruck by Devin's boldness, Sam stared for a moment before replying. To a third-party viewer like Andy, the scene looked right out of an indie romance movie. Sam and Devin were also so wrapped up in each other that it looked like they were in their own serene landscape, floating on a cloud of love. Devin's locks were tied up and the

tiny bits that framed his face accentuated his sharp bone structure. Sam, on the other hand, reflected Devin in a way that could only be complementary. His curls brought out the softness in his features and the delicate look in his eyes. They looked like two sides of

*the same coin— wholly different but, in essence, the same.*





# WHAT'S MY LINE?

| Tilia Cordata

“I mean you’re a man that’s dressing up as a woman, right? So, you want to be a woman?”

I can’t tell you how many times I have heard this phrase or some permutation of it in the years I’ve worked in Drag. It often is a lead-in to a conversation that I didn’t plan on having: me spending time I don’t have to educate people about gender, performance, and presentation in a loud venue.

In Drag, gender and gender identity play an integral part of the art form. Many people that say they “understand drag,” believe that drag is “dressing as the opposite gender:” as in Men dress as Women (Queens). Sometimes they know about Women who dress as Men (Kings), but not as often. While sure, I know plenty of cis men and cis women who “switch genders” to perform, I often encounter a myriad of genders and identities and interesting intersections between the person behind the character and the character themselves. Even that statement sets up a strange dichotomy that the character and the person are two completely separate “alter egos” when often the story is much more interesting than that.

Drag inherently involves gender. It can be a heightened form of gender presentation, commentary on gender, destruction of gender lines and roles all shmushed together into one performance, and so much more. This openness to what drag performance is opens the door to folks with all sorts of understandings of their own gender identity to be let into the art. I have known many drag performers that have discovered their trans identity from performing in drag,

When I started doing drag in my cold apartment in Fargo, ND, I created Tilia’s personality as the person that I wished I could be in day-to-day life. Sharper, funnier, gayer, louder. Over the years I have become more like my performance character on and off stage, though I have been told I am more “polite” not in drag. My drag persona became a testing ground for me to see what I could do and what I might like. It allowed me to get used to wearing louder clothes, jewelry, nails, etc., day-to-day. More than that, it let me play with gender, let me see if I actually cared for one set of pronouns or not, let me see if I felt different when people assumed I was cis, trans, nonbinary—an enigma. I was granted the freedom to create and experiment since this being was fictional.

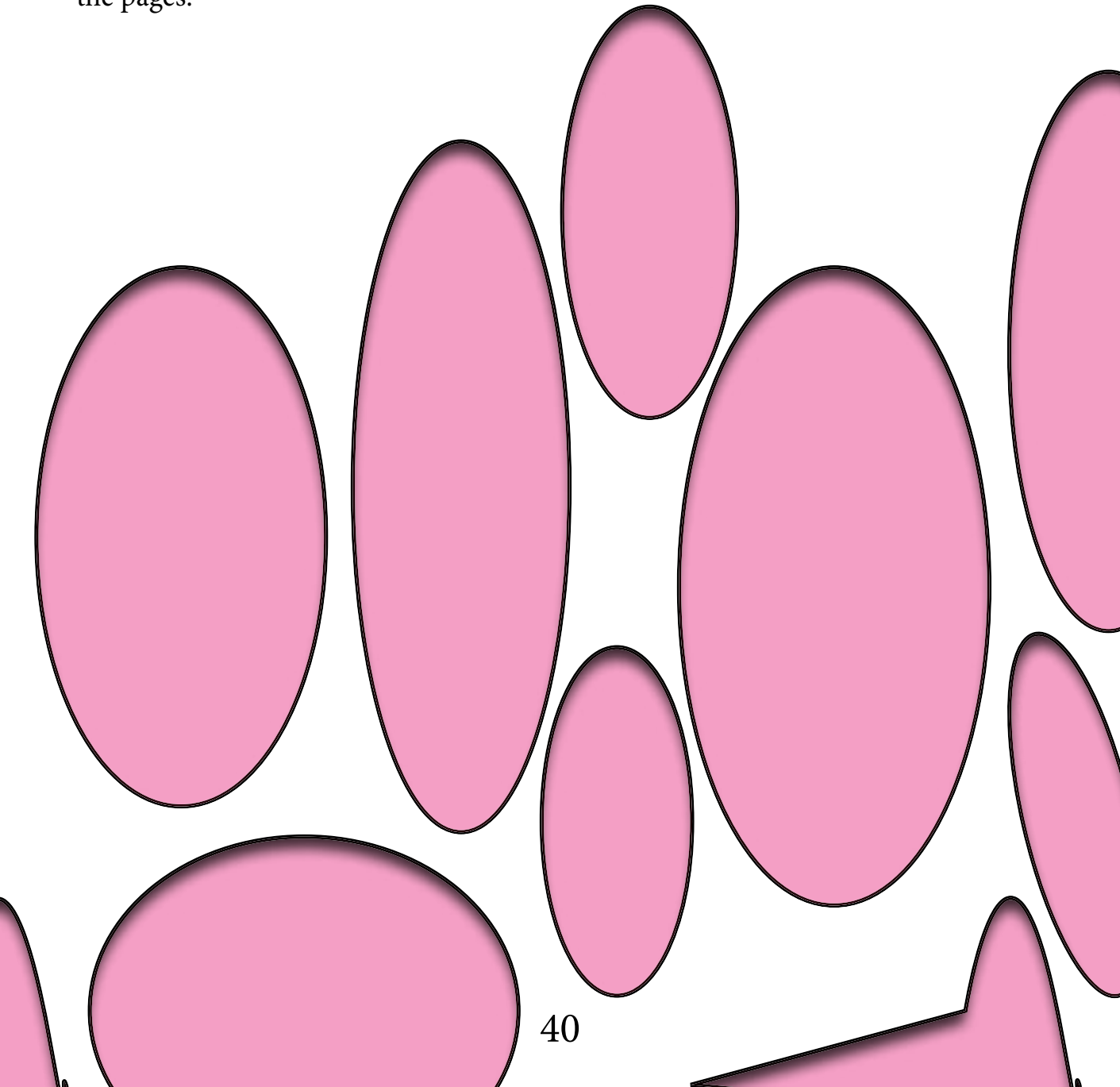
Tilia might be fictional but the soul behind the makeup, wigs, and costume is not. As much as the outside is affected by the soul, the soul can also be affected by how others react to its appearance. I have learned that the public often gets confused about drag because it can be well, confusing—hard to define or categorize. Drag performers are not all cis men dressing as women, or cis women dressing as men. We are nonbinary folks dressing as women and men, or genderless beings. We are cis men appearing as bearded gender-tastic goddesses, women appearing as hunky hunky men with their breasts fully on display. We both exaggerate and

mock gender. At times, this has led me to the dizzying experience of realizing that things that seem essential to a gender really...aren't. That we are all performing and acting in a very long and stretched-out play where we can each determine not only our costumes but our lines.

“So, it’s more complicated than that?”

Oftentimes, after I’ve given my crash course in gender, transness, and drag, I leave the person asking the question with a somewhat concerned and baffled look on their face. I’ve probably confronted too many of the rules that they live by. They might be feeling worried about the sudden realization that not everyone sees the world and experiences it the same way that they do. Is their red the same as my red?

But from experience, they often simply order another drink and forget much of what I told them. Comfortable with their assumptions and their assigned part to play while others throw the scripts out the window or make paper airplanes from the pages.



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