

Issue 0

The Spectrum Spark

CSM's Queer-Focused Literary and Art Journal

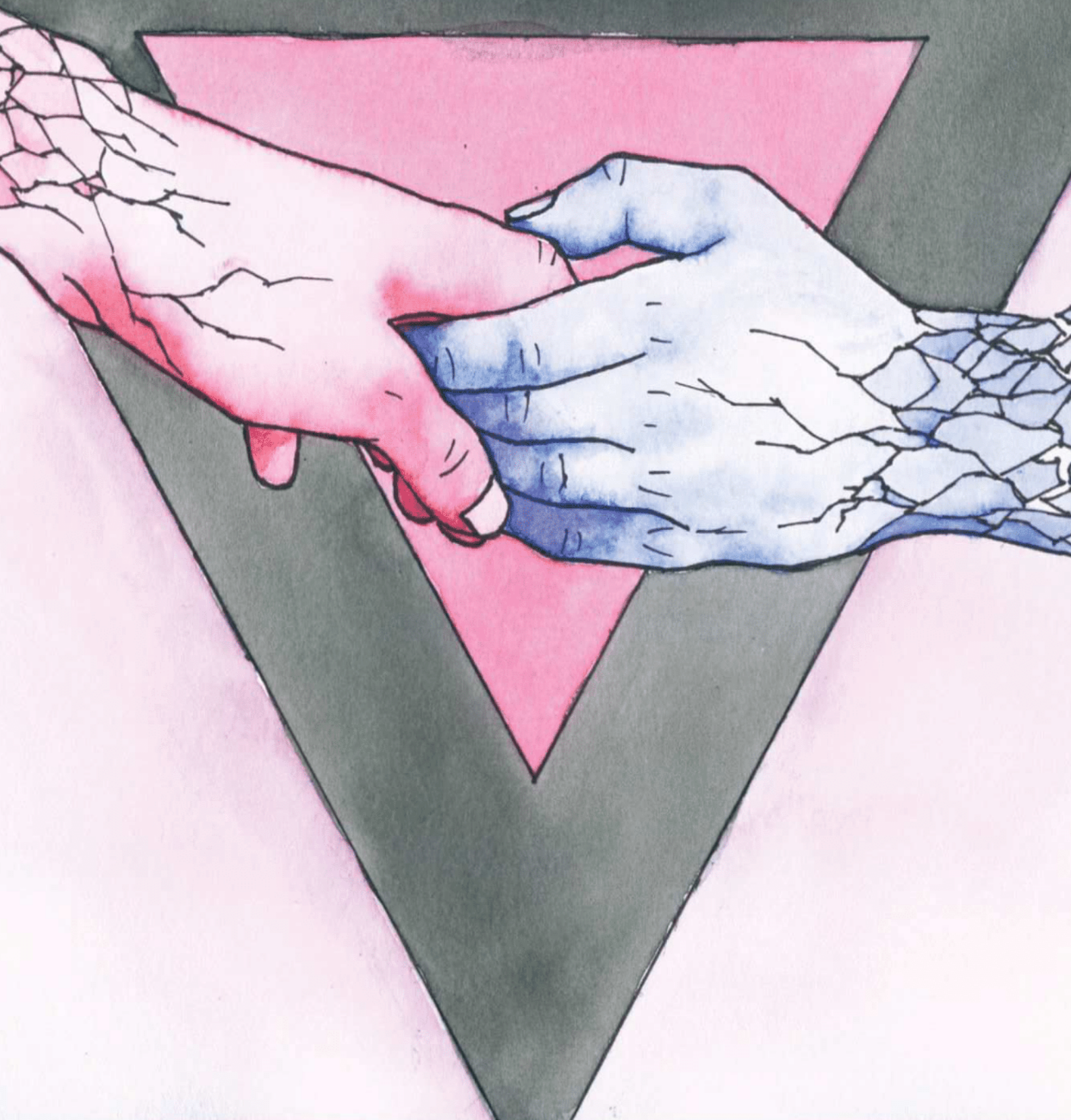


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Nikolai Hadacek *transmasculine nonbinary, demisexual, white*

Our Ghosts

TW: Gore, Violence, Death

I'm so angry
For all of my people yours have killed
For those last brief moments, in pain and afraid and alone
For that last shallow breath, where all they wanted was comfort
For the comfort they were punished for seeking

I'm so angry I can't breathe
For all my people who are plagued by fear
For the sick feeling of loss that lodged in our chests
For the knowledge that if we stand with them, we'll be next

There's no fixing this
Nothing will bring back my siblings
They've been broken beyond repair
Bones broken, lungs clogged with blood, throats mangled and wrung

They won't come back
Thousands of lives ended rashly
Worldwide, their ghosts howl in the night
And my heart, it howls in rage with them

If I could take their pain I would
Take the bruises and bashings and the spit in their wounds
But most of these ghosts died decades before I was born
How can I shield those long gone?

If you haven't heard our voices, it's because they're beyond the veil
Done in with fists and pipes and negligence
With sterile hospitals and a quiet condemnation
A whole generation of ghosts

I am a privileged sort
Not having to see every man as a murderer
Every whispered word not a banishment
Every stone just a stone, not a weapon

We can move forward
And wave goodbye to the ghosts of our sisters, brothers, siblings
Keep fighting, come back to them bloody and bruised
If we are triumphant, will that bring them justice?

I'm moving forward
I use the rage to keep fighting for my people
We will never get justice for those you killed
But maybe one day we'll have no new ghosts to mourn

Malcolm Johnston *gray ace, aro, deminonbinary, white*

The Sun



Mary Amsler *queer cis woman*

Greetings From Limbo

Dear Anna,

I've been thinking about the tarot reading you gave me. Maybe next time we'll cut out all the shadow work and we can just look at all the women illustrated on the cards... and we'll just take a good look and assign them each a sexuality. Queen of Swords will be lesbian, Four of Cups will be bi, Five of Pentacles will be straight, and Six of Swords will be ace. And then you'll shuffle those cards and tell me to *pick a card, any card* and then that'll be my answer and I can move on with my life. I'm sick of limbo, you know? Saying that sexuality is fluid and labels are restricting is all well and good until you're trying to communicate to other people who you are... or until people ask...and there's no words to express who you are. How absolutely lonely to sit here and grasp for obscure vocabulary.

Next time, let's just let the tarot cards decide.

Did I tell you about the time my sophomore year of high school, in the middle of a mental breakdown, I employed the same technique? I was so desperate, I took out a penny, and I just told the penny, *ok, if you land tails up, it means I'm screwed. And if you land heads up, it means everything is going to be okay.* And I let the penny decide.

And it landed heads up! So I picked myself up off the floor. And everything was okay.

I mean, I'll admit, it's a dangerous game to play. Sometimes I wonder how I would have felt if the penny had landed tails up. Would I have thought the exercise was worth it?

Up until now, I've thought, *I'll never play that game again...it's too risky.* But now, I can't help but think...maybe even being told you're screwed is better than living in limbo where you're never sure. After all, a heads-up penny would be such a relief, and if it's a tails-up penny...I think there's something comforting about just accepting that you're screwed and moving on with your life.

To be clear, Five of Pentacles would be equivalent to a tails-up penny.

It's not like chance could ever really tell me the wrong answer. The penny could never be wrong, no matter how it lands. No one is ever completely okay or completely screwed. And the tarot cards couldn't be wrong either. I mean, am I even anything right now? Let's just throw a label at me and see if it sticks. Like how we used to throw boiled spaghetti at the wall to see if it was done cooking. It's messy, but it's reliable.

Well anyway, maybe I'd rather just let the universe decide for me. And I can rest easy until I've got all the evidence I need to come to the conclusion that that wasn't the universe speaking. It was just dumb luck.

You know what? Forget the tarot deck. This is a job for a Magic 8 Ball. And Amazon has one on sale. Problem solved.

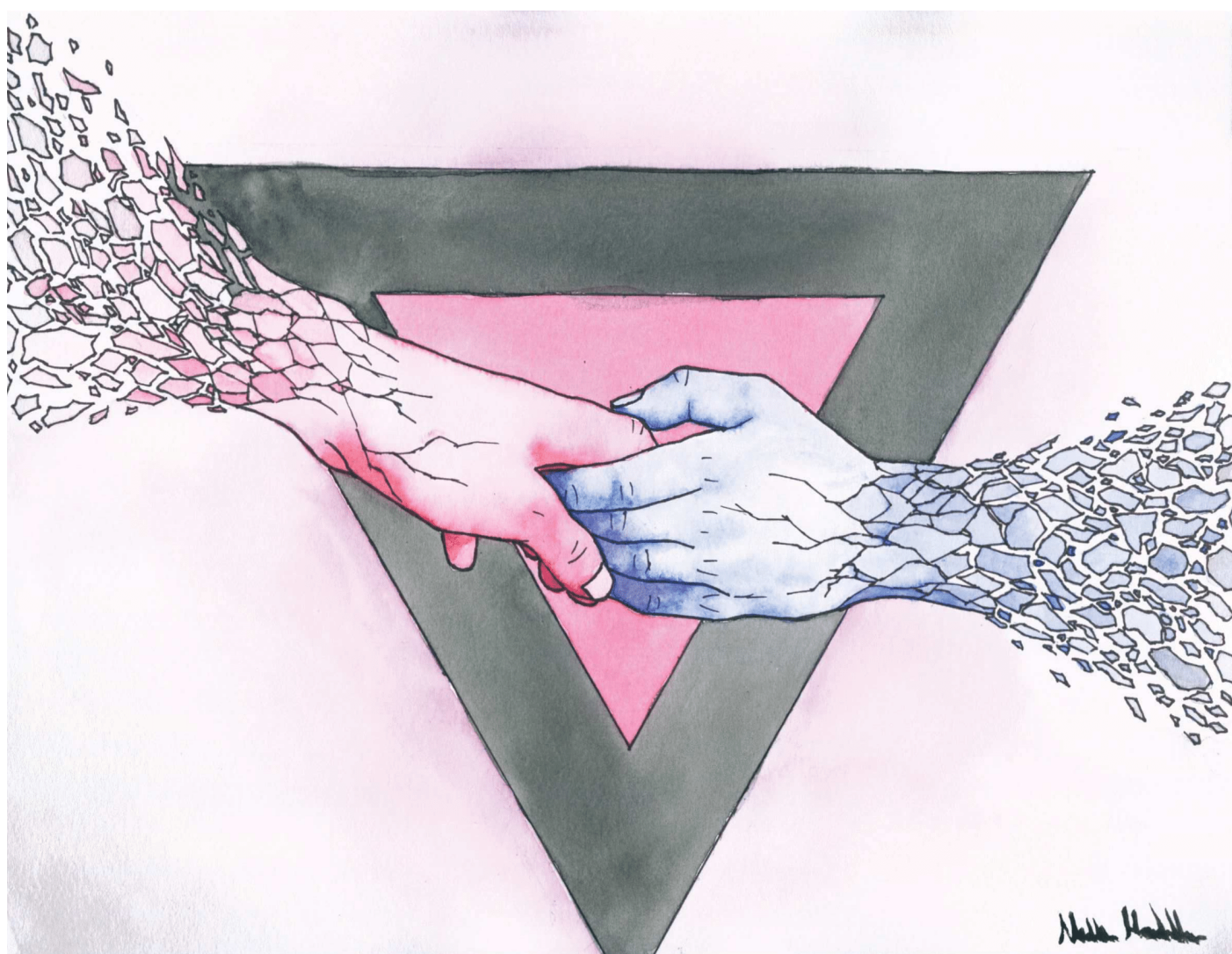
I'll let you know which way the penny comes up.

Love ya lots,

Mary

Nikolai Hadacek *transmasculine nonbinary, demisexual, white*

Holding Together Breaking Apart



Lanie Breckenridge *demibisexual, genderqueer, woman*

Photo credit: Kiersten Cowlshaw

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Nikolai Hadacek *transmasculine nonbinary, demisexual, white*

Safe Space

They say that it's magical, finding a queer space to just be yourself, but I never really believed them. I'd been out for as long as I knew what I was, a good five years as bi and half a year as trans before I ever even got to Mines. I never got that experience of stepping from a world where I was wearing a mask into a room where I could finally take it off and breathe. I never had the option to choose or agonize over coming out, so to me it seemed like having a place just for queer people to be queer seemed like it should be just like any other.

The night I first went to Tracks, I was terrified. I'd never been to a bar before, and I thought clubs were some sort of den of depravity where every girl was preyed upon, half of them were high on ecstasy, and people started bar fights on the regular. But I liked dancing and oSTEM had a group going, and someone whom I'd just reconnected with from high school said she'd go if I went with her. So I went.

This was the semester right after the Pulse shooting, so everyone was getting pat-downs at the door. We stood in a long line to remove our keys and wallet like this was the TSA, then have some random person glare at our IDs and pat us down. I was low-key terrified by the time I got past the entrance and plastered my Mines ID on the ticket window for free entry. I was on edge, I was pumped with adrenaline, and I probably looked like a polyp attached to my high school friend by the hip. I was wearing a brand new binder and could hardly breathe under a stupid plaid short sleeved button up. I had class at 9 am the next day. I looked like a dweeb and I felt out of place, but the second we rounded the corner I felt the whole world open up around me.

A throng of people was on the dance floor already, the floor was shaking with the base of some trap number that made me want to gyrate in embarrassing ways. There were already people, of all shapes, sizes, and genders, pressed up against one another. Most were my age but some were older, most wore street clothes but some were showing skin in creative and interesting ways I didn't know were possible.

Every single one of them, I knew, would not complain about who or what I was. If I hit on a girl here, if she turned me away it wouldn't be because of what I had between my legs. If I hit on a guy, he couldn't complain because of who I was. For the first time I realized that I wasn't in danger of being ostracized or attacked by anyone there, and that if I was I had a whole club full of people who would stand up for me. That feeling, more than the music or the crowd or my friends, is what made me feel high that night.

I danced with abandon. We probably got there around 10, but I went until 12 with no breaks. The others of our group came and went, my driver ended up making out with a stranger five feet from us on the dance floor but I didn't care. My friend grinded on me and we made up stupid dance moves that I probably unearthed from half-remembered middle school dances. Half the time I just swayed and bounced, singing along to distorted remixes of Lady Gaga songs, edging away from other people in a constant ebb to maintain my personal space.

My chest tried its damndest to bounce itself free of its confines and I made a couple trips to the bathroom just to grope it back into flatness. All of me was damp with sweat and I had to sweep my hair out of my sticky forehead every so often. It was hot and hard to breathe and I didn't think at all about the world outside. For those hours, there was no one in the world who hated or dismissed me because of what and who I am.

After we grabbed water from the sketchy water cooler in the alley next to another bar and another hundred people smoking, we lost our momentum. When we finally limped out of the building it was one in the morning. My ears rang with the sudden lack of music. The whole world, the early morning cold and the gritty asphalt beneath my feet, it all felt muted. Part of it was the sudden lack of stimulation, part of it was the realization that I had left that world behind. We were back in the real world, where any cop who might pull us over for a sobriety check or any late-night Denny's waitress might snub or discriminate against us for who we were.

When I snuck into my dorm room that night, I couldn't believe what I had done. I had class in the morning, and if my parents found out that I'd gone clubbing on a school night they'd lecture me for sure. But I couldn't shake that feeling, the freedom of that high and that space surrounded by people like me. For just a few hours, for just the time I was in that place, I was free. I was safe. And I was loved.

Malcolm Johnston *gray ace, aro, deminonbinary, white*

The Moon



Nikolai Hadacek *transmasculine nonbinary, demisexual, white*

Hero Worship

You're so strong, they say
As my fragile smile cracks these fragile lips
And my fragile heart beats 'neath fragile ribs
My legs bend 'neath the weight of expectation

You're so brave, they say
Though my lungs are too weak to lift my chest
And my hands tremble as I paint my nails
I cannot bear to meet a strange man's eyes

You inspire me, they say
Like I don't just stay quiet and keep moving
I don't keep my head down to keep living
I'm not just loud enough not to suffocate

But my brother, he's brave
He shouts from the rooftops who he is
He stands tall in protests for his people
And he screams loud for all of those like him

And my sister, she's strong
She turns her back to those who scorn her
And she keeps going to spite those who'd harm her
She fights for every scrap they allow her

And my sibling, they inspire me
They stare down every glare they are given
And they fight for the space no one'd give them
They're the only one out where we can see them

But they are so different than me
They have sharp smiles, sharp tempers, sharp wits
They're louder than the crowd, they use their fists
They pound at the ceiling, make themselves fit

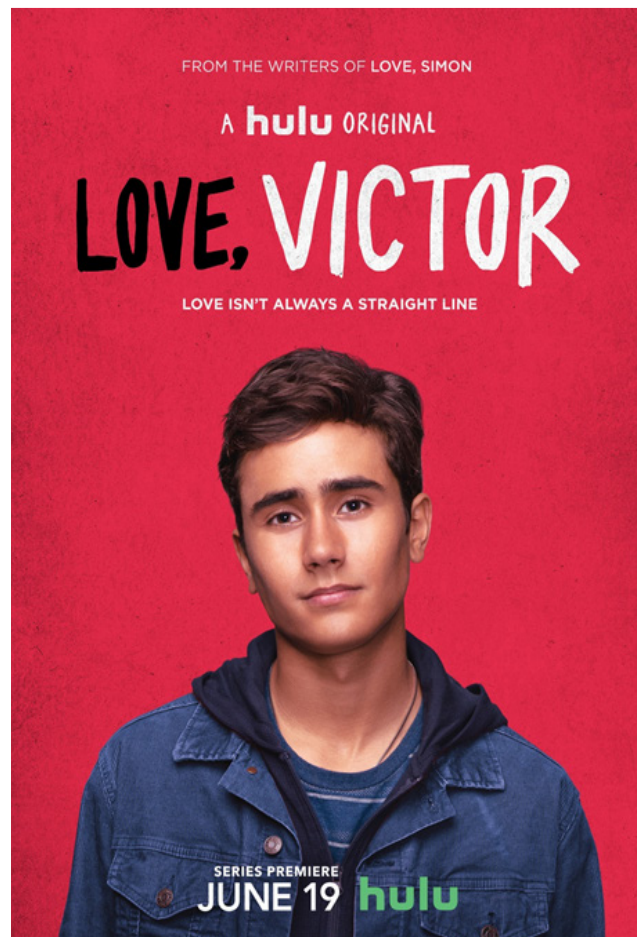
You can tell heroes by looking
The set of his jaw, he's determined

And the clench of her fists, she's so brave
The speed of their steps, they're emboldened
You can see what they stand for

But me, I'm no hero
Anxiety in the set of my jaw
See the fear in the clench of my fists
See the shame in the speed of my steps
What kind of hero am I?

Mary Amsler *queer cis woman*

Why Season 1 of *Love, Victor* Is Actually Really Good



I'm not going to lie: the first time I saw the TV show poster for *Love, Victor* on Hulu, my first reaction was to roll my eyes and huff with exasperation. Maybe it was the way they “uncreatively” mirrored the title of *Love, Simon*, or that familiar jean jacket and red background, or maybe it was just my own internalized homophobia, but I honestly anticipated that *Love, Victor* would be nothing more than a shameless corporate money grab. My first impression before watching the show was that Disney had taken *Love, Simon*, and just repackaged the same story into TV show form in order to seem “woke” enough to make more money.

I could not have been more wrong.

First of all, let me preface all this by saying that I really did like the movie *Love, Simon* on which the TV show *Love, Victor* is based. I like almost any movie with LGBTQ representation in it, just because there's so little LGBTQ representation in modern media. And I appreciated that LGBTQ people finally got a slightly-sappy teen romance movie of our own.

But *Love, Simon* is far from perfect. Despite being a movie about a gay teen, the movie still managed to exude privilege. Like, the fact that the cast of *Love, Simon* was so white.

Or the friggin enormous house that Simon lives in. Or Simon's incredibly liberal parents. Even *I* found it a bit off-putting, and that's saying a lot, considering that I benefit from a lot of privilege: I'm a white, cisgender, able-bodied, US citizen from a well-off liberal family. Of course that privilege biases my perception of LGBTQ media, but I recognize that while my privilege makes it easy for me to relate to *Love, Simon*, I'm almost certain that most LGBTQ+ youth would not find the movie so relatable. *Love, Simon* focuses on only one form of identity: being gay. There's no room in the movie to discuss other identities that a lot of LGBTQ people also have to juggle.

I've never read the book *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* on which *Love, Simon* is based, so I can't speak to how many of these issues stem from the book itself. But suffice it to say, *Love, Simon* seems to lack a lot of the complexity of what it's like to be an LGBTQ person out in the real world.

But the creators of *Love, Victor*... dare I say it... actually learned from – and incorporated – this critique into *Love, Victor*.

If you watch the first minute and a half of *Love, Victor*, it's clear that the TV show intends to be something wholly new while still paying homage to *Love, Simon* -- and boy, does it deliver. The TV show opens with Victor, a new student at Simon's now-former high school, messaging Simon for the first time:

Dear Simon, you don't know me, but my family just moved to Atlanta, and today was my first day at Creekwood High, and I heard all about you....And I just want to say...

Screw you. *Screw you for having the world's most perfect, accepting parents. The world's most supportive friends. Because for some of us, it's not that easy. (Aptaker)*

I wouldn't be surprised if this message was just copied and pasted straight from a piece of fan mail (or nonfan mail) that the creators of *Love, Simon* received. Right from the beginning, *Love, Victor* is diving into some of the struggles and themes that *Love, Simon* doesn't. These themes include:

- How does someone explore their sexual identity when their home life is falling apart?
- How might religion, race, and economic status impact someone's coming out journey?
- What do LGBTQ microaggressions look like? How can someone grapple with these microaggressions when they come from beloved friends and family?
- To what extent is sexuality a spectrum? To what extent is sexuality fluid?
- How are sexual identities impacted by heteronormativity or coercive heterosexuality?

It's good stuff. And part of what makes it so good is the show's ability to handle these complex and heavy topics with a certain cheesy lightheartedness. While these topics are certainly explored with care and compassion, they're also presented in a way that's uplifting rather than depressing.

So why does *Love, Victor* succeed where *Love, Simon* fails? I think it's a combination of three factors: first, the creators of *Love, Victor* had more creative freedom than *Love, Simon*, because they didn't have to follow the general plot of a book. Second, the creators of *Love,*

Victor learned from the critiques of *Love, Simon* that the LGBTQ community raised. And third, the TV show format was far more conducive to discussing the nuance of sexual identity than a movie format. I think it was intentional that the sequel to *Love, Simon* is a TV show instead of a movie, and the TV show format ended up working out beautifully. As a TV show, *Love, Victor* has way more screen time to dive deep into a lot of the complexities surrounding sexual identity.

These factors allow *Love, Victor* to discuss the nuance of sexual identity with depth, compassion, and humor. And the payoff was incredibly satisfying to watch. As someone questioning my sexual identity, *Love, Victor* touches on some of my questions that even Google had a hard time answering. For example: what does attraction feel like? How do I know if a feeling is “real” attraction or compulsory heterosexuality?

When I came to Google with this question, the most it could give me was pictures of conventionally attractive people: “Here you go. Attraction is what you feel when you see these people.” This answer is laughably inadequate. But where do you go when even Google doesn’t know the answer?

There’s one line that’s stuck with me months after watching *Love, Victor*. It comes at the very end of episode 3. Victor has written to Simon about how Victor kissed a girl and feels pretty okay about it: “I even got those little butterflies in my stomach people are always talking about.” And Simon writes back with this:

..Kissing is pretty great. But for me, it’s more than just butterflies. It’s like those jet fighters that fly over the Super Bowl. Or like, getting hit by a huge wave. (Aptaker)

Jet fighters. Huge waves. After all this time, no one had ever attempted to describe to me what attraction *feels* like. And now, finally, I had an answer. Of course, this is only one perspective of what attraction feels like. But hey, I’ll take what I can get.

Look, *Love, Victor* is good, but it’s still not perfect. There’s always room for growth. For one thing, none of the main characters are trans or non-binary. It’s disheartening when most movies and TV shows categorized as LGBTQIA+ on streaming services actually only include the “G.” It’s also unrealistic. As many people have pointed out, the “single gay person in a group of straight friends” dynamic is actually not so common as movies would have people believe, even among high school students who may still be discovering their gender identity and sexuality. For another thing, even though *Love, Victor* is a show that centers around a gay teen discovering his sexual identity, it depicts straight relationships and mixed-gender kissing far more than gay relationships or same-gender kissing.

And Disney isn’t perfect either. I’m reluctant to praise Disney for simply doing the bare minimum. Let’s not forget that Disney decided at the last minute that *Love, Victor* was “too mature for Disney+” due to its depiction of “alcohol consumption, marital issues, and sexual exploration,” and therefore put the show on Hulu instead (White) (Haguenauer). I find this a little hard to swallow, considering that Disney put *Hamilton* on Disney+ with no problem. *Hamilton*. You know, the hit musical with copious references to drinking and adultery?

However, despite these issues, I honestly believe that *Love, Victor* is a step forward for LGBTQ media. It tackled a lot of topics that LGBTQ teens are usually left to grapple with

in isolation, and it wasn't afraid to explore how multiple identities can intersect to create unique forms of adversity.

For me personally, watching *Love, Victor* while questioning my sexuality has provided me with a sense of comfort and community that's otherwise hard to find in the COVID era. While I've been in the closet and away from friends for months, watching someone struggle with exploring their sexuality has made me feel less alone, and has been a truly powerful balm for my queer soul. *Love, Victor* is a flashlight in the dark cave of questioning my sexuality in the COVID era.

Here's to hoping that the second season of *Love, Victor* is even better than the first. Now if you'll excuse me, I have to go knock on some wood.

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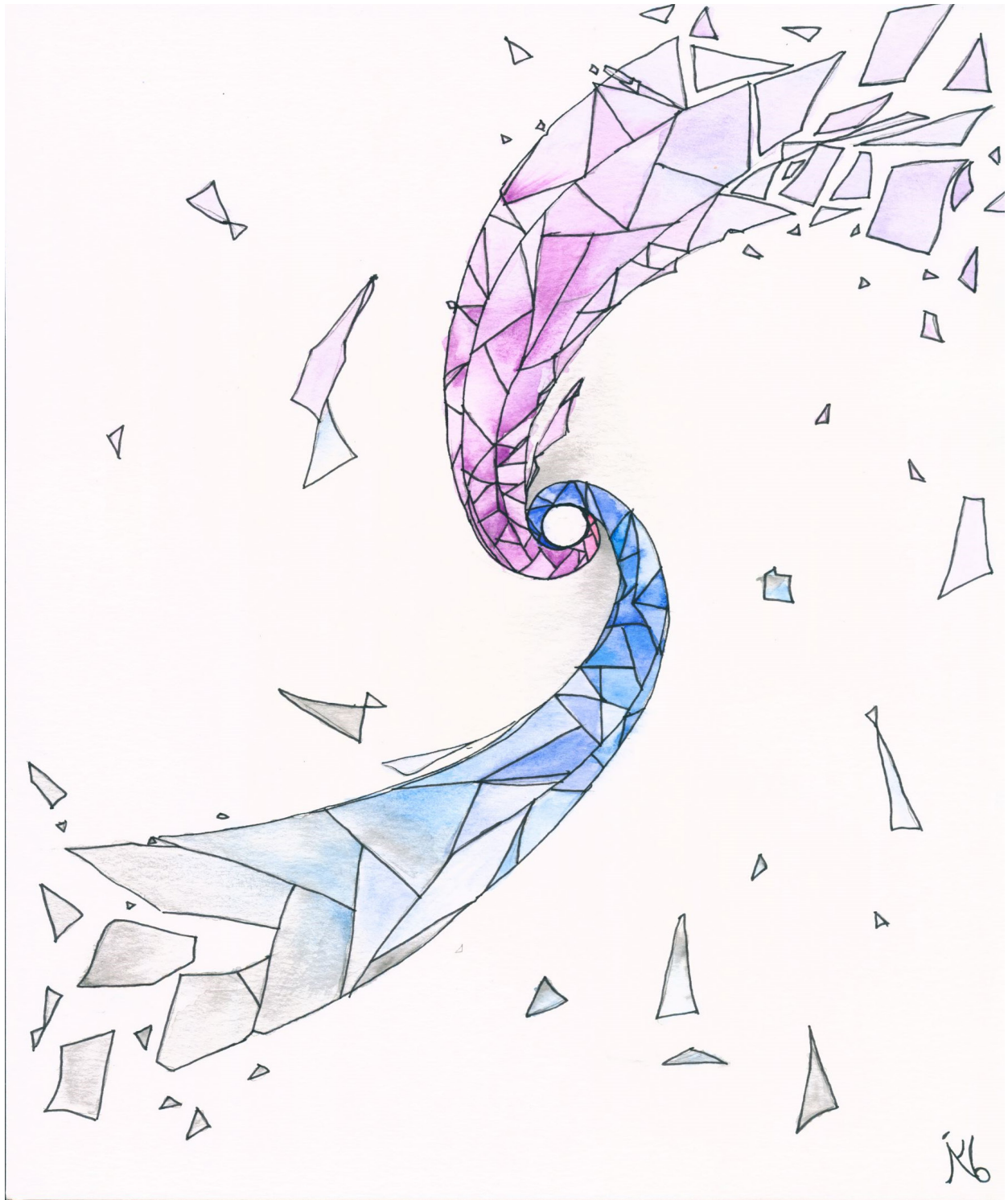
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Nikolai Hadacek *transmasculine nonbinary, demisexual, white*

DemiGender



Mary Amsler *queer cis woman*

Nothing So Electric

It was synthetically perfect.
The stars, each arranged with haphazard intent.
The pines, too symmetrical, with too sweet of a scent.
The jagged silhouette of a mountain
Sculpted from the blur of city lights below.
And every hopeful phrase rushed in from the depths of every story:
Bells will ring
Birds will sing
For true love's kiss.

And yet.
Here was a flimsy feeling.
Something thin and fragile--
A sticky veneer, a shaky façade.
Like where were all the sparks? When would they fly?
There was nothing so electric in the sky.
I expected something magical to grip me in my heart.
It hadn't come before, why did I think that it would start?
No, the stars were just the stars,
And the air was just the air.
The mountain was a mountain.

Bells were still.

Birds didn't care.

Malcolm Johnston *gray ace, aro, deminonbinary, white*

The Moon and Mars



Nikolai Hadacek *transmasculine nonbinary, demisexual, white*

Road Noise

TW: Mention of Self-Harm

It took ten minutes before my mother broke through the road noise, interrupting the music of the suburbs filtering in through the closed-tight windows. “Did you get the email I sent you?”

I stared stoically at the car in front of us, wishing the miles between us and home would just disappear. “Yeah.” I wished my dad hadn’t stayed home and left us alone in the car, wished I’d never come home to visit in the first place.

“You didn’t reply, so I wasn’t sure.” The blinker clicked cheerily as we switched lanes on the sunlit two-lane road. “I just thought it might be helpful, to know that... well, sometimes kids grow up and realize that being transsexual—er, transitioning—wasn’t for them after all.”

The anger built in my throat. I tried to press back the worst of it, but I couldn’t just sit here. I knew too well that she’d take silence as agreement, and it’d just spiral down from there. “It’s not just kids that are trans, Mom. There are adults, people have been trans for thousands of years, this isn’t brand new—” My words came out more terse than I’d meant them to be, and she was quick to interrupt.

“I know that, I just meant, well...” She paused, and I could feel the wheels turning in her head as she tried to backpedal. “Being a teenager is rough, and sometimes you make decisions that you don’t quite know the consequences of.” Easy enough for her to say, considering that starting testosterone was the first decision I’d ever made without her say so. She didn’t know the half of the consequences, things I’d sat up late at night struggling with for years.

Tears prickled at my eyes, the first that I’d felt since I’d started T two months before, the first step in a long journey to top surgery. I hadn’t even told Mom and Dad I was on T until two weeks after my first injection. I knew they’d just pull something like this. But my voice had started getting lower and I’d had to tell them, despite all the shit I’d known it would start. I’d thought they’d be supportive, way back when. They were in a liberal church, had gay friends, they had all the good signs for being supportive parents. They’d told me before that they’d love me no matter what. I’d dared to hope back then that they’d support me, and a part of me thought they were trying. And yet...

“Mom, I’m not in high school anymore. It’s not like I’m cutting just to feel alright—” I had to swallow, unshed tears clogging my airways. “This isn’t self-destructive, it’s a medical treatment.”

“I just—” and when I looked over, there were tears in my mother’s eyes, too, locked dead ahead on the road before us. “It’s going to be so hard for you. So hard. In the news, all you see is—people do terrible things, honey. I just want you to have a good life.” She sniffed, blinking away the tears. The blinker went on again and for a second I thought we’d be turning around, but she pulled us into a parking lot. We were both silent as we pulled up next to an empty

church, and I handed her a tissue. For a moment I considered hopping out of the car and leaving this conversation behind, but I knew it would be right back in my face as soon as I Ubered home. As she wiped her face, I stared at my hands, wondering how to label the feeling constricting my chest.

"I know, Mom," I finally murmured. "It's—it's not an easy life. It's going to be hard and sometimes horrible, but..." I sniffed, rubbed at the tear that finally escaped my eye. "I tried living the other way, and it's not a life. I can't... every time someone called me that name or tried to shove me into a dress I wanted to die. I *wanted to die*." It wasn't an exaggeration. I swallowed thickly. "I still kinda do." My mother's thin fingers found mine over the console, taking my hand in hers and squeezing tight, as if she could keep me from drifting away just like that.

"I thought you were past all that."

I shook my head, thinking of all the layers I wore, rain or shine, the times I wanted to run from any eyes including my own, the hours staring in the mirror at my chest and wishing I could slice away my skin.

It had been a bad day, one of the worst I'd had in a long time. It was the start of a new semester, and I'd forgotten to send out an email to all my professors, so when three classes took attendance they used my birth name. I'd felt everyone's eyes on me when I corrected them, heard the whispers around me. One of my classes had scheduled a test the day I'd scheduled my hormone appointment, so I'd had to call the clinic and move it to their next opening two months away. By the time I made it back to my apartment for the night my fingers were itching for my blades. I'd sat on the corner of my bed, staring into my box of razors for ten minutes before I worked up the strength to pick them up and walk out the door.

When I shoved the box into my roommate's hands he'd stared at me like he had no idea who I was. "Just hide them," I'd told him, every tendon in my body taught with restraint and fear. "I'm afraid I might cut too deep."

He had taken my razors and left the room only for a minute. When he came back he'd taken my hand and ushered me into his room. He pressed me into the pillow fort at the corner of his bed and spent hours scrolling through Netflix with me. He plied me with water and popcorn and, when I had to pee, he sat outside the door and scrolled through Tik Toks to show me when I emerged. He made me laugh with his shitty memes even when I just wanted to cry.

"Not really," I told mother. I didn't know if I'd ever be able to move past the itch for my blades, the shame when someone called me something I was not. But every rare time a stranger called me 'sir' I was on top of the world, almost worth the times when a 'miss' would break down my day.

The day I had come home with a filled prescription and a bag full of needles, my roommate greeted me with a cake he'd made himself. He'd held up one of our cracked plates, an unsteady pile of Betty Crocker vanilla cake and vanilla icing with crumbs on top. I had cried then, staring at his shitty piping job, the 'TT'S A Boy!' lopsided and half crammed into too small a space. After we'd cut the cake and sat at the table, I could barely chew, the widest smile I'd worn since puberty splitting my face.

"But I'm doing better."

When I looked up, my mother's eyes were glued to mine. I wondered how much she saw

there, from her sad smile. Did she see the weariness in my eyes, the half-swallowed hope in the line of my mouth, the ache for her support in my bones? “You’re not going back, are you?” Back to crying in the bathroom, fighting back nausea every time I had to see my powdered face in the mirror, to wanting to crawl into a hole every time an old church friend called me ‘darling’ or ‘sweet young lady’.

I bit my lip, fighting back more tears, and shook my head. “I don’t think I’d survive the trip, to be honest.”

I could see the very moment her last string of hope broke. Fresh tears sprung to her eyes, but she only let go of my hand when I handed her another tissue. “You were such a bright little girl.” And yes, I could see the little girl she was thinking of; little me, with my hair done in pigtails, overalls pulled up high and my dad’s baseball cap flopped over my eyes. I had been too young to understand that little girls didn’t get to be men when they grew up, and happy in my ignorance.

“I guess.” I shrugged one shoulder, all my tension gone in the rush of tears. I sat there, listening as my mother mourned someone who had never existed, watching the cars rush by.

Lanie Breckenridge *demibisexual, genderqueer, woman*

Lost + Found



Mary Amsler *queer cis woman*

Thoughts on a Bike Ride

From a bicycle at the bottom of South Table Mountain
I could see all the vibrant colors of my future
Bleeding into each other,
And narrowing into one gray stroke.

I could see years settle neatly on my shoulders,
Celebrations slip by with dull expectancy,
Templates filled in effortlessly,
Bold lines slicing through a hundred thousand lifetimes.

All the masks I would wear,
All the smiles I would plaster on my face,
Until my cheeks would twitch with fatigue--
And what then?

A curve of a hip melting into sharp angles,
The moon waning in a burning blue sky,
And for just that moment the flash of a future
I should be reaching for,

So why wasn't I?

Malcolm Johnston *gray ace, aro, deminonbinary, white*

Vindication

TW: death

“history will judge the complicit”
cool

so, uh, when’s it going to get around
to that?

it’s not like we’re living through history
every second of our waking lives
or something

it’s not like we can all decide
to tear down their statues,
burn down their buildings,
write their legacies
out of the books
right now
and walk away
with barely a scratch
on us

no, we’ve got to wait
after the last cannon shot
and after the last few bodies have fallen down
for a group of old wizened survivors
to settle around the campfire,
point to their journals and say
“they did right,
and they did it wrong
[it’s never we because
why would it ever be we because
like with radicals in a chemical reaction
the only survivors are the ones
hiding in the corners]”

Mary Amsler *queer cis woman*

Kaleidoscope



Mary Amsler *queer cis woman*

Kaleidoscope

I've sucked my mother tongue dry,
And still I gasp for words,
Holding out my cupped hands
For vocabulary cures.
Nothing seems to pacify;
This chasm always severs
The place where my affections lie
From the language it deserves.

I'm combing books for something--
For what, I can't confide--
My lips can't form the feeling,
And my keyboard can't describe
This drunken lens of longing
Refracting in my eyes,
Slurring all the colors
'Til I cannot recognize...
Who are all the faces?
The outlines cleave and splay.
My love is a kaleidoscope
I cannot pull away.

Shall I fall asleep defeated?
Lie awake and strategize?
Are there feelings even metaphor
Cannot verbalize?

Just abstractions of abstractions.
Shadows thrown upon the wall.

The true form is a fire
That I cannot name at all.

The Staff

Nikolai Hadacek *(He/They)*

Niko is a demimasculine trans-man who's gone by many labels in his life, but now sticks to bisexual and demisexual in addition to his trans identity. He is an engineering physicist, artist, author, singer, and leather worker whose hands are rarely still. He's been out as one thing or another since he was twelve and has been active in the queer community since he came out as trans in 2016. He has served as oSTEM's President, Vice President of Campus Events, and Social Chair.



Mary Amsler *(She/Her/Hers)*

Mary is a junior in civil engineering at the Colorado School of Mines and is interested in pursuing water resources engineering. Mary is new to oSTEM and identifies as a queer cis woman. Since she is not out yet, she has chosen to use the pseudonym Mary Amsler. In her free time, Mary enjoys playing the ukulele, violin, and piano.



Lanie Breckenridge *(She/They)*

Lanie Breckenridge is a Junior in Metallurgical and Materials engineering at the Colorado School of Mines. They identify as genderqueer and demi-bisexual and serve as the Treasurer for the Mines oSTEM chapter. They are also involved with the humanitarian engineering department and are involved in a program aiding Colombian mining communities, as well as serving as the Editor-in-Chief for the Spectrum Spark.



Malcolm Johnston *(They/He)*

Malcolm is an amateur writer, poet, pianist, swimmer, and whatever-they're-interested-in-at-the-moment-er. A junior in chemistry, they're also part of the McBride Honors Program and are currently serving as the secretary of the Colorado School of Mines' oSTEM chapter and as this journal's layout designer. Deminonbinary, gray ace, aro, and gay, they've slowly come to terms with their sexuality and have become a more active member of the queer community. over the last several years. They spend their free time writing detailed scripts for novels they're never actually going to write.

