

a queer literary and art e-magazine



**2nd
edition**
2025



Cover Art

DREAMER by Andrea Linares

CREDITS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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We would like to thank all contributors for sending their work to us. Thank you for believing in us. Thank you for sharing it with us. But most of all, thank you for allowing us to share it with the rest of the world.

Cover art credit: “DREAMER” by Andrea Linares

A special thank you to Andrea for giving us permission to use your art as the cover of the second edition. We are so honored that we were able to use one of our own contributor’s work as our front page. Thank you so much.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Welcome all to the second edition of Project.Elixir! This is a queer literary and art journal/e-magazine. The purpose of this project is to showcase LGBTQ+ artists and writers.

This edition is filled with captivating art and stories that embody queer experiences across different cultures and languages. Some of these stories may make you smile, confused, angry, or make you cry. Regardless of the emotion, we assure you these stories will evoke something from within.

Through writing and art, we continue to make our voices heard in a world that tells us that we don't deserve that.



ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS



Andrea Linares (They/Them/She/Her)

Artist | Educator

[@andieisdandy](#)

I'm a first-generation Peruvian Queer visual artist born and raised in Queens, NY. I have 10+ years of experience in the art field, specializing in working with watercolors, acrylics, and other forms of mixed media. My concentration tends to be creating fantastical landscapes and portraits based on things I've dreamt in the past, as well as works relating back to the body and human experience. I wouldn't say I have one specific style as my work ranges from different styles, but I guess you could say I make many illustrative contemporary pieces.

I'm currently looking to better my use of Procreate and hone my digital art skills. My

dream is to create graphic novels and comics for kids and young adults filled with all sorts of representation. Aside from being an artist, I'm also an educator for immigrant youths, aiding them in their transition from their country to the US, while they wait to be reunited with their families. I'm deeply passionate about education and serving different communities. A future goal of mine is to become an art therapist, and provide aid to those communities through the power of art. I believe that anything is possible with the help of your community.

Everette (He/They)

I'm 24 years old. I'm a trans man and non-binary so I guess you could say I'm a little fluid in that sense. I'm Middle Eastern and a part of that for me means being just as obsessed with American pop music as I am with Arabic pop music, with a hint of some more traditional songs. I sing for fun and I've even done a handful of small open mics and I will gladly always break out into song for fun. I'm hoping that by sharing a piece of my story that I can make other middle eastern queer people feel seen because I know how much it meant to me in high school when I found a website called Coptic Queer Stories (the website is no longer up). Reading stories about people like me made me feel like less alone and like I was allowed to take up space. If I can make someone else feel like they're allowed to take up space as a fellow middle eastern queer person or even just make any other queer person of color seen in their journey, it's really all I could ask for.



Tiffany L. Hendrix

[@originalgeotrix](#)

Tiffany L. Hendrix teaches five classes in two different languages in rural Colorado, where she lives with her smoldering anger and about a million burning questions, not the least of which is why her Google Translate defaults to Dutch. She promotes translanguaging with an special fondness for franglaispañol.



Kitty Canarsie

Kitty Canarsie is a socialite and philanthropist living in the heart of Washington DC. When she's not doing tarot readings, she loves spending time with queer family and going to the beach.



Aaron Leventman (He/Him/His)
[@aaronleventman](#)

Aaron Leventman has received over 30 productions of his plays, many of which are award winners and continue to be published. He was the producer of a monthly online LGBTQ+ short play series through his company Almost Adults Productions. This brought together talent and audiences from all over the world and was invited to participate in the South by Southwest virtual conference. Aaron has performed in industrials, commercials, short films, and features and is currently represented by Phirgun Mair Worldwide in New Mexico. He was recently chosen as a fan guest host on Turner Classic Movies. Aaron is also a playwriting, screenwriting, acting, and film history instructor.

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Ximena Montes de Oca Cárdenas
[@ximmoca](#)

Originally from Zacatecas, Mexico, currently based in Alphabet City. Making myself at home amongst the ancient hills with veins of silver, as well as the skyscrapers inhabited by city rats and corporate workers. Raised playing with chickens, pigeons, and bourgeoisie kids who were always shocked about the first two.

I defend our human rights under my many labels. Amongst them:

Nonbinary, Bisexual, Polyamorous, Disabled, Migrant, Psychiatric, Whore, Queer, Indigenist, "Woman".

I am a passionate believer in community based, unacademic, linguistics. Jitanjáforas, albures, and spanglish being my favorite tools for self expression and joyous resistance.



Genesis L. Becerra Navas a.k.a Izzie
(Ella/Elle)
[@midnighttesla](#)

Mi nombre, allá en mi tierra, es Génesis, pero las personas que quiero acá en America me llaman Izzie. Tengo 27 años y soy de la costa de Ecuador, océano Pacífico.

Todos los días de mi vida he despertado preguntándome qué cara voy a poner al mundo, pero desde que descubrí el DRAG entendí que ser Izzie es la cara que pongo en este lugar, para protegerme, pero sobretodo para ser libre.

Me he preparado para hablar del luto, de cómo las personas crecen sin padres, sin guardianes, de los adultos huérfanos. A representar a mis sudamericanos en el norte y pelear contra todos los que me digan que

no pertenezco aquí, aunque haya vivido 14 de mis 27 años en este país.

Mientras tanto seguirán viendo a Izzie poner la otra mejilla y navegar las calles de Nueva York como una orgullosa Queer Latinx Huérfanx.

Another One

Tiffany L. Hendrix

They took the 'T' out of the LGBTQ+ at Stonewall, did they?
My loves: Stephen Mather, John Muir, I expected more from you.
I expect, in fact, that you are doing backflips in your plots
as Marsha P. Johnson must be doing in that river.
Eternal shame if you are not.

Not so long ago, those of us not technically a people
nonetheless a set/of/cultures couldn't count ourselves
as anybody's ancestors. No legal adoption then, no IVF.
Almost an entire generation fallen to a government/Church-sanctioned Plague.
Who knows now if our dead would even have wanted the moniker.
Maybe not.

And yet. Ancestors whether they would've sought out the title or not. Guiding
spirits, we offer these bricks that the first ones might not be forgotten. We will
honor your memories in the streets, in full daylight.
We will rebuild, and you will not have suffered in vain.

Maybe they will have suffered in vain.
Strap in, folx, it's about to get worse.
As the structures our ancestors fought and died for
Crumble, there are bricks everywhere.
Luckily for us, my siblings, we have hands.





BIG BLUE
Andrea Linares

Paula
Capítulo 6
Genesis L. Becerra Navas

Se veía correr por los pasillos, en su habitación, en las misas de tarde los domingos; siempre fingiendo estar bien, siempre siendo una dulzura de mujer. Vistiendo de flores que le obsequiaban a su paso para llegar a casa y olerlas, exhalándolas después convertidas en humo negro para recomponerse así de un mal día. Escribía cartas con rencor y firmaba con un “Mientras estemos juntxs está bien no tener dónde dormir o qué comer.”, las rociaba con olor a lluvia y llanto y las tiraba luego a la chimenea preguntándose por qué, por qué.

-¿Por qué?

Por cada mes siguiente que pasó me aleje una milla más y fue peor; soñé con ella casi todas las noches del mes. Ahora la escuchaba en esta estación de radio que encontré y que me hacía pensar en ella riéndose de mi y aún así le ponía repetir, **repetir**. La veía en cada esquina de la casa guiñándome el ojo hasta quedarme dormida. La sentía suspirar en mi cama en todas y cada una de esas noches que construimos para decirnos cosas que no se mencionan en la mañana.

Efervescente en mis entrañas por la madrugada.

Como una estrella fugaz que pasa un día cada 80 años, dejó de alumbrar.

Los meses después, la escuchaba gritar mi nombre por los pasillos que ya no recorría y romper los platos que ya no teníamos en la cocina. Levantarme a las 6 cada día siguiente a limpiar la sangre que derramaba por seguir cortándome los pies con sus lágrimas de esa noche esparcidas alrededor de la habitación. Cerré puertas y clausuré ventanas pues aún quedaba el olor al último café que se preparo aquella mañana...

-¿El problema?

-Es que ella ya no estaba.

Habría pasado ya un año y yo seguía escribiéndole cartas, mandándolas al correo y recibéndolas de vuelta en mi apartamento, firmandolas con rencor, como ella lo hacía y agregándole un “Te quiero” al final de cada párrafo, luego de cada línea y

luego de cada palabra.

-Te quiero.

-...

Ya habían pasado dos años y aún me sangraban las venas por tratar de sentirla, me punzaban los dedos por buscarla al tacto y no sentía los ojos de llorarla tanto.

-Te vi un día en esa vieja misa de domingo,

Mas sabía que nos habíamos dejado, yo de ti y tu de ti también.

La siguiente noche apareció, elegante como no lo era, alta y peinada. No era ella y yo no sé quién era yo, tampoco. Esa noche me recogí el cabello, me pinte los labios y desempolve el vestido que tanto me gustaba; invitación a revivir. Me invitó un trago y me llamó un taxi después.

Lo entiendo.

La voz de Paula estaba cortante esa noche; susurró algo sin sentido y me dejó marcharme.

La última vez que la vi fue esa noche desde la ventana del automóvil; estaba ebria en su mesa, con el vestido manchado y su peinado deshecho; empañé el cristal cuando me di cuenta de lo que había sucedido. Era tarde ya.

“Seré breve” me dijo.

Desde esa noche supe que las siguientes palabras quedarían grabadas en mi tumba cuando fallezca.

“Estoy enamorada de....”

*Disparo al pecho.

My Mother's Head

Kitty Canarsie



Weaved from strands of black curls, I've recognized my mother's head is a center of magic. It glows and radiates a purple aura, while still warm like golden ribbons of sunlight. Her body curves and flows like a woman's. Legs of creamy cocoa, and eyes half open to receive the world. She is known, while loved; respected and dainty as ever. Giddy and excited, stern and serious. She is a tropical storm against the tide. A queen in her own right, but not above it all. I've observed her do insatiable and incredible things. She loves purely and fiercely. Her mind is a temple and her words are like scriptures.

Magic is a word to describe things out of the ordinary. Unexplainable and still understood in the known unknown. She is magical in a sense of control. Not over the circumstance of her life, but how she weaves a narrative. Threaded tightly with acknowledgement. Of past pain and guilt and suffering and love. A present of ambiguity and wonder. A future unreliable and unsecured. So, I call her magic. To wrap reality around a finely executed manicure is wondrous. To wind the world in a way to be secure. To fight freely and live and be excessive and moderate in one. She is a goddess, the keeper of a destiny that's not perfect. She is human but she's touched a side of reality that's surreal. An outlook, a mantra, a visage, a shelter. She is radiance for the sake of radiance. Beauty in my eye. A head of excellence.

I will be at her side one day. At a table as long as we can create. With a family of stunning creatures united under a simple belief. To be for the sake of being, without a need for permission. An allowance of free will and a meal of affirmation. The young ones might call my head magic someday too. When I sit on a throne of love and fulfillment, I know I'll see the real name for what my mother's head draws into life.



DREAMER
Andrea Linares

Featured on the cover



CONTENT WARNING: Mention of suicide

What does it mean to belong and have a community?

Being Middle Eastern, I look like the part and sound the part by speaking Arabic. I eat the same food, listen to the same music, and watch the same shows.

I've anticipated new Egyptian Mosalsalat (مسلسلات), Middle Eastern shows, every year Ramadan would come around. I'd wait for them early in anticipation, I'd count the days. I grew up watching classics like 3alet El Haj Metwali (متولي الحاج عائلة), Lan A3esh Fi Gelbab Abi (لن أعيش في جلباب أبي), Banat Dalaa (بنات دلعة), Sarab-Wal Hakika-Al (سراب والحققة والسراب), (كشري), Falafel (فالفل), Molokhia (ملوخية), Feseekh (فسیخ), Ma7shi (مسيح), (بسبوسة), and Basbousa (محشي). I grew up with singers like Moustafa Amar, Ehab Tawfik, Nancy Ajram, Fairouz, and Abd El Haleem Hafez. Yet here I am thinking about all of the times when I felt like I had no culture, not from a lack of it, but from feeling rejected and like I wasn't worthy of claiming it.

For years, I isolated myself from going to cultural events and religious events to feel safe. Most of my friends aren't Egyptian anymore because the ones I had either danced around my identity or tried to out me and in either instance, I'd feel like I wasn't allowed to take up space as my authentic self. When people from your culture feel like a threat to your safety, if you can't tell by appearance who would accept you, so you avoid them all, a personal paranoia of sorts. I felt not that I had abandoned culture, but that culture abandoned me. Culture felt like something to fight against rather than embrace, its presence that once felt like a comforting thing, now felt like it loomed over me like a dark cloud. It didn't serve its purpose of acting like home the way it used to once when I started realizing who I was and that I was different.

I feel like I have all the cliché parts of the culture, the food, the shows, the language, but not the community to feel a part of, hell I stay closeted day to day for my safety. Sure I haven't been told directly the phrase if you're queer you're not truly Egyptian, but I feel it's been implied. It's how casual queerphobia is that sticks with me, it's the little moments that linger. One time I was in New York with one of my parents, and my mom saw either a trans woman or nonbinary femme person, and she turned to me and whispered in my ear, if that were my son I'd kill

them.

I just wanted a short haircut for myself, and my parents made it feel like an emotional war and fought with me, just because my short hair challenged societal norms and made me look more boyish. On the daily, I get told by a parent, that if I don't dress feminine I'll never get married off. When I want to appear more masculine or dress more casually, I get told by a parent that if someone were to show interest in me, they'd spit on me.

I think it's twofold in a sense, where if I don't come off as overtly feminine, I'm faced with both misogyny that overlaps with queerphobia because the message is that it's supposedly insulting to the womanhood I was born with if I blur the line with how I present, if I dare to look visibly queer, too masc or too tomboyish, it's too confusing, they can't put me in a box and it's a threat to all they've ever known and are comfortable with. I'm shamed for not looking like enough of a woman because the implication is that it's shameful to look visibly queer.

The quiet part that isn't said out loud can sometimes resonate the most is because it's a microaggression and you don't have to be out of the closet to deal with those, you just have to be different in some capacity and even when you present a diluted version of yourself, it's still different enough to make you the black sheep.

When I want to express myself, I have to water down my queer expression to what is palatable, even if compromise for my transness or queerness as a whole makes me feel suffocated. I remember growing up if a man slightly appeared feminine in appearance or demeanor, they became the butt of the joke and were called shaz (شاذ) which based on how it's been used in Egyptian Arabic seems like a slur for gay men/maybe queer people in general. In church, I remember two extremes, either queerness never being discussed or only ever being discussed to cast judgment upon, shame, and belittle. Talking about how one shouldn't be queer and that if they were, it was a moral and religious failing.

I've been given the impression that my culture thinks it's above queerness, that queerness isn't something they do, they don't do trans, they don't do gay, and if they refer to them, it's by shaz. I've been given the impression that if someone is open about their queerness they'll be considered a traitor to the culture, that they'll have tainted the good name/reputation of culture and everything it represents, the fear that by existing, you risk the sanctity and purity of the culture. I've been given the impression that you have to choose between culture and

sexuality, or culture and gender, if you're queer, or else you won't be claimed, as if my queerness and my Egyptian culture are two contradicting things that don't co-exist for me and many others like me.

A beautiful thing in my culture is the friendliness. One example of this is that if you share a meal with someone, if you share 3esh wi mal7 (bread and salt, ملح و عيش), you're considered family, one of them. Culturally everyone is considered family, everyone is aunty, uncle, brother, and sister, whether they're a close family friend, neighbor, or otherwise, they'd take their shirt off their back for you if you needed it. Though queerness seems to be the one exception that's not automatically considered family at first glance, let alone welcome to begin with.

To share a personal anecdote, one of the most isolating moments as a queer Egyptian was learning about Sarah Hazagi and her story after it came out that she had committed suicide while seeking asylum in Canada. To make a long story short about who Sarah Hagazi is, she was a queer Egyptian activist, who held the pride flag at a Mahsrou Leila concert in Egypt in 2017. She was detained by police for a couple of months, after being arrested and tortured, she was let go, she was rejected by everyone and Egypt made her seem like this big public threat so she left, but even with going to Canada, she carried those scars with her. I think for me a part of what made her death feel so tragic, was that all that went through my head, that could have been me. I'm nowhere as brave and nowhere as kind as her to forgive those who hurt and tortured her, but I felt represented by her. As I was first coming out, she was one of the first queer Egyptian people I learned of, and I only found out about her when she was gone too soon.

Maybe it's dark to say, but she felt like the only visible representation I had as I was first coming out, and seeing how the only people who discussed her were other queer Middle Eastern people online who would acknowledge and honor her, hurt. My first exposure to the queer Middle Eastern experience was one of pain and suffering. Seeing that for the most part, religious Egyptian people (which is most of them), either stayed silent or blamed her suffering on her queerness or lack of religion. Seeing that hurt me and it hurt because of the way the culture and religions within that culture treated her. It was that cultural stigma and traditionalism that led her to that point, that pain, that trauma, that rejection, and all they could do was stay silent. I was given the impression that she didn't matter like her cultural cisgender heterosexual counterparts. To me, the worst of all, was her not being given peace even in death, because they shamed her just as much as when she was alive.

All I could think was, wow this is how my culture treats people like me, they'll push people like us to death, wash their hands of blood, and shame us even in the grave, they have no real respect for us.

I don't want to end on a rather sad note, but it felt important to me to highlight Sarah Hegazi because it's important to me to highlight how people like me can be treated and viewed. I think a part of advocacy is acknowledging the difference between how people are treated when you don't fit a standard, especially a cultural one rarely discussed. While I don't mean to generalize Middle Eastern people, they tend not to be accepting of queer people and don't truly consider you one of them if you're queer. In my experience, the Middle Eastern people who are liberal and/or queer are rare to find. Also, the very few liberal Middle Eastern people I've come into contact with tend to be queer, and trying to search for their community wise, is like trying to search for a needle in a haystack.

That lack of acceptance towards queerness is why it's so hard to find community because when everyone is closeted for safety and you have many people who think they are the only ones. They don't realize there are more like them within the local community, but that stigma and hate place barriers to finding others like them.

One way I like to describe my queer experience is with a phrase I heard a queer Lebanese advocate online named Jad Jaber say, they labeled the collective Middle Eastern queer experience as **“wanting community, but not wanting to be found.”** This phrase has stuck with me because it's indicative of my lived experience, where even if I understood logically that I couldn't have been the only queer person in the room, I wasn't going to risk putting myself out there to find out if there were other middle eastern queer people, I had to choose isolation. This act leaves you at odds with the natural human desire of wanting community, of wanting acceptance, but that notion of not being found out meant safety.

I'm still navigating what culture means to me. I've known about my queerness for years, but culturally I'm still at a point where I'm trying to make peace with my culture when all I've been taught about it was through the lens of religious values, culture emphasized religious values so much that the lines between culture and religion feel blurred. That's not to say that I don't have my ways of enjoying or embracing culture, I do but in isolation, in a controlled environment where I don't feel people's eyes on me. The concept of home and belonging feels more nuanced and I don't embrace it with open arms but with hesitation. Culture is a collective experience, but it's so personal especially when you've felt othered within your own

culture. It's a personal experience to me because Egyptians aren't a monolith and being a queer Egyptian is a specific experience not every Egyptian can relate to since we're a minority.

Merely by the fact that I exist, I know I belong and that can't be taken away from me, even if I may be considered an anomaly by cultural standards. I strive for the day when I feel those words but until then, I'll be listening to [Moustafa Amar](#) in my headphones, creating my own safe space with all the nuances that come with it.

Riata

Ximena Montes de Oca Cárdenas

Me gustan los extremos.
Me gustan las mujeres bien mujeres,
súper machas y bien rabiosas.
Me gustan los hombres bien hombres,
de delineador y en la cocina.

Me gusta ser matriarca
sin tener que ser mujer-madre.
Me gusta ser patrón
bigotón, de a botín, sobre una yegua,
montándome a los hombres de la riata.

e

In the extremes I am found.
Fond of the womanliest women,
those like stallions, rough and rabid.
Fond of the manliest men,
winged eyeliner kitchen apron.

I am fond of being matriarch
childfree womanly-mother.
I am fond of being the master
a mustached, mare mounting, leathered boot.
Riding the phallic shaft of the riata.



PARADISE
Andrea Linares



Slow Launch Verbs

Tiffany L. Hendrix

August.

I introduce French beginners to être- to be or ne pas être - or not.

The concept: conjugation.

This is their most important day, I say.

Practice, practice, I beg.

Live, learn, love the conjugations. Do it by heart.

When you're waiting in line at the grocery store, conjugate.

When you feel stressed, conjugate.

It is orderly and comforting and evergreen.

With September comes the First Group: regular verbs with -er endings.

After that, we have avoir - to have - some-time in October.

Again I say practice, practice.

Eat, sleep, breathe the conjugations.

January is finally ending. Along comes the Second Group: -ir endings.

The learners stare as if I've never mentioned, translated, spoken the word, "conjugation" before.

They have not practiced. It is, in fact, the final day of January.

The bell sounds and with an A+ to the grands débutants, the English learners come. "I can't believe," one notices, "tomorrow is already February."

"That's right! The first day of Black - I FORGOT TO MAKE A BLACK HISTORY PROJECT" Es que we've been worried so much about ICE, the little red cards, updating contacts, and safety plans.

"Heroes and Holidays" has been stale for years now. No new design ideas come

until

I spend the premier of February grading conjugations.

Seventeen papers in, a splendid project lights my brain.

All I need is an instruction sheet, a word bank, and a U.S. map.

And just one source.

And maybe letters we will use for the display

which we will hang up in a high-traffic hallway

without asking anyone if it's okay. JK. We'll ask.

Now, I have something fresh to say when débutants ask why we conjugate.

Repeated practice builds our neural pathways.

The math of changing endings births our inspiration,

and we can navigate the unknown by revisiting the known.

My Friends

Kitty Canarsie

My friends are my blessing.

In the darkest recesses of my mind, they are the light of reason, of warmth, of sanity.

Evil monsters chase me in my dreams. They seep into me and pour out of hollowed out eye sockets. Out of the crevices of my soul.

The reprieve, the peace, the weapon is friendship. The bond of sisterhood. The gift of togetherness. Bright warm love beams through the treacherous poison and heals our collective aura. It covers us in grace. Majestic glory sounds like a trumpet on high. Triumphant beauty breaks the dawn and rescues us from being alone.

When all is said and done, we are united. To battle the demons of strife and pain. Wrapped in ribbons of love, the promise of a new tomorrow smiles back at teary, grateful eyes.





Stuff

Tiffany L. Hendrix

The apartment could be cleaner.

You eye the broken pieces of the ashtray stolen from a London restaurant thirty years ago, dragged in boxes, bags, and backseats: Indiana to Pennsylvania to Nevada to Indiana to Nebraska. Finally, Colorado. Always intact.

“Made in Italy,” tattooed on its bottom, you always wondered if you owned anything else made in Italy.

Receptacle: tobacco ash, resin, roaches, seeds, candy wrappers, lately paper clips and likely more.

It was fine on the patio table until a crack ran through the middle of the wild flower design. When you picked it up, it fell into four pieces, cardinal directions. You cradled the bits in your hands, noticed terra cotta guts the same color as Utah.

You were on your way out, so there lay north and south, east and west in a pile on the kitchen counter. Months passed.

Today, puzzling the ashtray back together is more interesting than sweeping the floor.

At first, the Krazy Glue seems not to work and you stand there, gloved hands stuck to “Italy.” You remember that your souvenir was pilfered during the year you met your Elder Gay.

He is dead now. You pull your hands tentatively away.

Good job, Krazy Glue. The ashtray will not go outside again.

You have purged your life so many times that everything you have has been carefully curated. You know that it is all expendable. You can put it down, throw it out, cast it off if you need to. You are less willing to now than you were thirty or even three years ago.

You sweep the floor anyway, and you think about sweeping it twice.

You’ll meditate tonight as you always do.

On track 12 of your Tibetan Healing Music Playlist, the sound of the sacred syllable will scare you, as it always does.

The Transformative Nature of Love

Aaron Leventman

A Dramatic Monologue

It was a month before Y2K in December of 1999 when the world was supposed to change forever, but it didn't. For the last 10 years, my life had been in a rut. When I realized that I had no plan B when becoming a famous writer hadn't worked out, I spent the decade working at various entertainment industry jobs that I hated. I was working at a top-notch talent agency in the talent payment department which was one step away from a collection officer. I had to make sure that the actors got their commission from whether it was Liza Minelli's Dristan commercial "Dristan is for temporary relief of nasal congestion caused by allergies or the common cold", or Mr. T.'s voice over on a Sprint ad "Hey! It's not just another phone company." I kept thinking that the glamor from these clients would somehow wear off on me as a struggling screenwriter. I was wrong.

I was required to attend the annual Christmas office party held at a ballroom in the Hilton on Park Avenue. When I arrived I could immediately smell the cheap cheese fondue that had been sitting out too long mixed with gender specific cologne and new sweat. Forced fun was at play. I saw people I knew from the office trying to cut the rug and it was almost like seeing them naked, a side of them I'd rather not have seen. I got there too early as I frequently did for social events, always being the early guy. My date, Rob Resnik, a wannabe actor, was supposed to meet me there but was nowhere to be found. I learned later that he was mad at me for dissing a project he was working on. It was a play he wanted to write about a woman who yelled at him at work and I was harsh in my critique. Now he was pulling a passive-aggressive move by standing me up. I probably deserved it. I was seated at a table where there was dull chit-chatting with those who worked in Human Resources. They were nice people but I had nothing in common with anyone. I was bored and despondent, a usual state for me at that time, playing the frequent part of a petulant teenager. So I pulled a French goodbye and snuck out of the back exit.

I was wearing my only suit and suddenly was dressed up with nowhere to go. Or so I thought. I walked back to the subway thinking I would just make an early night out of it when I ran into Martin. He was a tiny little man, a very gay comedian

who had made local guest spots on various talk shows and I used to see him at the gym. We had a casual flirt in the locker room once and I knew he liked me. In those days, I always tried to work that notion to my benefit.

Martin always spoke with a lilt in his voice like Susan Hayward in one of her most lurid melodramas, "Why don't you come with me to a Christmas party, Aaron? Then you can be a part of my holiday season, too." Wanting to still salvage the night, I went with him. After a short cab ride, I stepped into the party at a tiny one-bedroom in the West Village wildly overdressed. Martin seemed to enjoy making me take off my jacket and tie down to my t-shirt. The air was a sea of pot smoke for which I never got the smell out of my suit. Martin's other comedian friends were there, laughing, chatting, bitching and cajoling. They did Joan Rivers imitations. They did Bette Davis impressions. They did Joan Rivers doing Bette Davis impressions. We laughed and laughed and laughed and laughed and I was afraid I was getting a contact high. The party had no food there and almost nothing to drink but everyone was so into the animated surroundings that no one even noticed. Then a man in his 40s walked in the door who looked like Steve Martin. Not the white haired, distinguished Steve Martin of today but the goofy-cute one from "The Jerk and Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid." He clearly wasn't one of Martin's comedian friends and sat down on the couch next to me which was the only available space in the cramped room. We gave each other that exchanging look that gay men are known for and do so well. It was a look as if to say "Maybe? What do you think? Should we?" "Yes." It was a look I had given to a million men before, so why so why did it seem different this time? He told me that his name was Peter and he was a real estate investor who now lived in Cape Cod. Most people would have been impressed by this but I just cared about his bright green eyes and messy auburn hair. Martin liked him, too. I had the feeling that in case Martin didn't get me that night he was looking for a backup since he ditched me the moment we entered the party. When Martin learned that Peter was a meditator he asked him to join him in his bedroom to chant. Sure, to chant. However, I didn't hear any strange sounds coming out of the bedroom, and the fact that they emerged minutes later I breathed a sigh of relief that nothing happened. It was late and I realized that because I left the office party early, I probably shouldn't show up for work too late without an excuse. I left the apartment building and realized that it was 0 degrees outside and I had left my hat and gloves inside. I buzzed the

apartment to get back in and Martin and Peter were the only ones left. Was I interrupting something? The host had since passed out on the sofa which is where I left my hat and gloves. I pried them from underneath his body and just as I was about to leave, Peter uttered the fateful words “Are you heading uptown on the A Train? I’ll ride with you.” We left together as Martin’s mouth dropped open knowing that he had lost out on both accounts.

We walked to the A-Train on 8th Avenue chatting about holiday movies. Which was better, “Meet Me in St. Louis” or “Miracle on 34th Street”? Then, Peter spontaneously grabbed my hand and suddenly it felt like we had known each other forever even though we had just met. After all, isn’t holding hands the most intimate thing you can do? We got on the A-Train and sat down. The train was less than half full as it was 2 in the morning on a Thursday. Within minutes, we were wildly making out. Given that this was New York, no one batted an eye. He got off at 45 Street as he was staying at his friend’s and I headed up to my dirty one bedroom in Queens. When I got home I decided to check my email. This was in the days of when home computers were the stuff of novelty. There was already a message from him in my inbox. The subject read “I have a hard-on with your name on it.” I giggled like I was back in junior high watching a dirty movie on late night cable. In his email, he invited me to spend the next weekend with him at his home in Wellfleet, Cape Cod. Even though I barely knew him I booked my plane ticket right away. Before I went to the airport the next weekend, I left a message on the voice mail of my supervisor saying that I had terrible food poisoning from sushi and wouldn’t be in on Monday so I could take a nice long weekend with this friendly stranger. This led to dirty looks in the office when I got back on Tuesday.

Peter picked me up at the airport with the unbridled energy of a teenager. Being that Wellfleet was a place I used to frequent as a child with my family, it felt like going home. When we got to his arts and crafts bungalow, we had coffee in his old-fashioned coffee pot heated up on his stove that was previously owned by a Portuguese family for many generations for whom he bought the property. He introduced me to his cat, Boo Carter, named after a bohemian artist and underground film star in the east village around the time of Andy Warhol’s factory that Peter knew. We spent the weekend eating popcorn, watching old movies, and telling stories from our lives. We had a predilection for the same old movie

characters whether it was Jennifer Jones in "Portrait of Jenny" or Miss Lonely Hearts from "Rear Window". It felt like we had talked for 3 days nonstop and time had stood still. Then Monday morning came around and it was time for me to go. Before we left for the airport I burst into tears, "I don't want to leave you! I don't want to go back to New York! WAAAAAAAAAAAA!" I cried worse than when my dog died. I didn't know what was happening to me. It was like an alien force entered my body. Except for a few sad movies, I wasn't much of a crier. What's going on? Why do I feel this way? Is this what it's like to be in love?

Peter was touched by this show of emotion "My darling..." He called me. We got into his Audi and started the car and he put a cassette in his stereo. Dido sang from the car speakers "I can't breathe until you're resting here with me." When we said our tearful goodbyes at the terminal he gave me a big, wet, sloppy, nasty kiss with tongues much to the chagrin of the TSA officer. Before I had to board the puddle jumper plane at the Cape Air Airport, a middle-aged woman was similarly saying goodbye to her much younger girlfriend. The girlfriend was crying so badly that she sat by herself with sunglasses in the back of the plane and looked down the whole time. This was too bad as we could have commiserated together on the flight. As the plane was taking off, I looked out the airplane window and saw that Peter and the older woman had bonded. They now had their arms around each other as they waved goodbye to us as the ones left behind. Dido's lyrics played in my head "I don't want to call my friends. They might wake me from this dream." As the plane entered the clouds, I sensed that my life was about to change forever.

When the plane landed I wasn't the same person stepping off the plane as I was when I boarded. This would be the beginning of a season with many taken chances and risks for me. See, love isn't just about the person that you're with. It's about how it changes the entire direction of your life. After a year of doing a shamelessly romantic long distance relationship, I left my secure job, my rent controlled apartment, and moved in with Peter to a small town in Cape Cod where I reconnected with my first love of theatre and found my center once again. At the age of 32, I was finally an adult.

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

We are looking for all kinds of queer writers and artists. The point of this is to showcase queer people and help their work be seen.

You can submit up to **4 works** per edition. If you have more than one to submit, you may submit them all at once.

Submit your work(s) to us at **projectdotelixir@gmail.com** as a .docx or pdf file. Subject the email: Submission
In the same email, be sure to include your name and titles. Feel free to tell us about yourself and your work!

Do not forget to title, spell check and grammar check your work before submitting it.

Short Stories

Genres include, but are not limited to: Fiction, Non-Fiction, Comedy, Drama, and Magical Realism.
5 pages long, double-spaced.

Poems and lyrics

All forms of poetry and lyrics are eligible.
2 pages long, double-spaced.

Artwork

Art such as paintings, photographs, sculptures (submission by photograph), and digital art are eligible.

If you aren't sure if your work is eligible for Project Elixir, email us and ask!

**All works have to be original. No A.I. work of any kind will be accepted.*

**Hate speech or violence will not be accepted.*

Visit our website <https://projectdotelixir.com/>

Follow our Instagram [@project.elixir](https://www.instagram.com/project.elixir)

LGBTQ+ RESOURCES

If you are struggling or know someone who is struggling and needs help, please, see the resources below. You are not alone. You are loved and you matter.

Here are some links to outside support. Whether you are interested in therapy, are looking for community, or simply want to know how to support an LGBTQ+ person, there is assistance for you (on these topics and others) out there. Click below to find what you may need. *Some are NYC based.*

<https://gaycenter.org/resources/>

<https://glaad.org/resourcelist/>

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/>

<https://pflag.org/find-resources/>

HOTLINE PHONE NUMBERS TO CALL

The Network/La Red (domestic violence)

<https://www.tnlr.org/en/24-hour-hotline/>

24 hour hotline 800-832-1901 (Toll-Free)

Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

https://988lifeline.org/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=web&utm_campaign=onebox

24 hour hotline dial 988

RAINN

National Sexual Assault Telephone Hotline

<https://rainn.org/resources>

800-656-4673

