

get real.

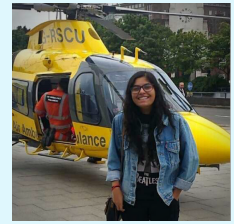
CUSU LGBT+. Easter 2019.



RETROSPECT

Editors' Note:

Welcome to the 2019 Easter Term issue of Get Real. This edition is full of art, poetry, stories and articles about what it means to be LGBT+ in Cambridge the past, present and future. Following the theme of RETROSPECT, these pieces explore LGBT+ lives in Cambridge past, the stories of our own times here in Cambridge as well as hopes and dreams for times yet to come. We would love to take this opportunity to thank all of our super talented contributors! If you want to get involved with Get Real. in the future (or CUSU LGBT+ in general!) get in touch with Cambridge University LGBT+ on Facebook.



— *Jess Sharpe and Sona Popat*

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Front cover image by Ollie Banks

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Maurice and I: Finding Comfort in Age-old Queerness at Cambridge

Once I really came to terms with the fact that I was queer, I did what any history student in my position would: I looked back. I tried to find glimpses of people-like-me in stories that I knew well and inside out. People who I'd fit myself amongst, who would have understood what it felt to love like I do.

The search was more fruitful than you might expect. The love letters of Vita and Victoria in early 20th Century Britain to the declaration of Sappho that 'someone will remember who we are' in 6th/7th Century BC Greece. Indeed, I generally find the most solace in accounts of women loving one another throughout time. Their stories are the ones that most reflect mine – in the way the stories of Alan Turing and Edward II never could.

Therefore, I was surprised at how affected I was by E. M. Forster's *Maurice*. A story of a fairly clunky, unlikeable rich boy who experiences two very different, neither particularly classically positive, relationships with men sounded like something that I would enjoy and appreciate, but not find comfort in.

I read most of it over the course of a day on four separate train journeys. It became the kind of book where the crowded underground's tendency to restrict your ability to read became beyond frustrating. I loved it so much that it got the highest of accolades: a complimentary tweet and a thread of over-analytic texts sent to my friends.

If you know the book it might be quite clear why. The first 'love story' is that between Maurice and his fellow student Durham, the university in question being our own Cambridge.

Of course, the Cambridge that Maurice and Durham are written into was very different to the Cambridge we now know. Also, their love story is different to what we're generally accustomed to. They don't engage in any sexual relations and don't particularly see themselves as partners – and in Durham's case he writes off his homosexual feelings to his youth. But I read about them eating in hall, relaxing in each other's rooms, taking a picnic to fields on the edge of the city and even Maurice getting in an argument with his DoS about not going to lectures and it felt familiar.

I've had the same chats they had about the appearance of same-sex partnerships in Greco-Roman literature and have overheard many philosophical rants not unlike Durham's. It sounds perhaps ridiculous, but I could imagine seeing the characters of Maurice and Durham around college. For some reason, despite the chasm of difference between Maurice's story and my own, the backdrop of this institution of a university managed to bridge the gap.

If anything, it's a reminder that there have always been queer people at this university. And even though Maurice and Durham were fictional, they came from the mind of E. M. Forster who himself was at King's. It's also reminds me that we're still fairly new in the cohort of these queer students who can be open and proud whilst studying at this university.

The dedication in the beginning of *Maurice* is 'to a happier year.' It was about the first world war. But I think it's a nice reminder that although the LGBT+ community is hardly out of the
4 woods, in terms of being queer in Cambridge, it's definitely a happier year.



Boy On Bus, On Trend

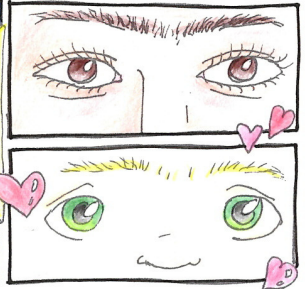
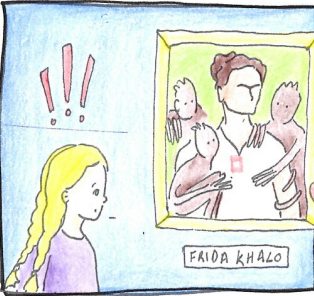
“So you, do you have a girlfriend?”
He seems nice enough, “No –
I’m just out of a long relationship with a boy”
“Oh, well I assumed so –
That you were... you know, gay.”
Endeared at the time, I’d say,
His fabric of etiquette troubles me today.

So you, I presume you didn’t want to offend.
I get it, to assume the homo isn’t on trend.
But break it down a bit, straight
Inoffensive; the inoffensive the straight.
Flip that: to presume, accuse me to be
Into men is rude, and cause for offense.
In effect, gay is thought of as something less.

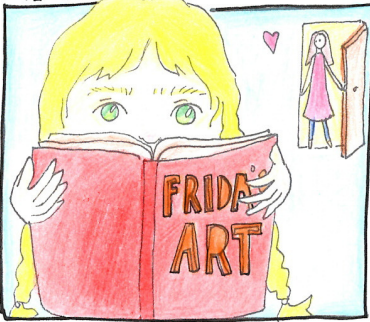


A (QUEER) (LEFTY) HOMAGE TO FRIDA KHALO

10 YEARS OLD



12 YEARS OLD

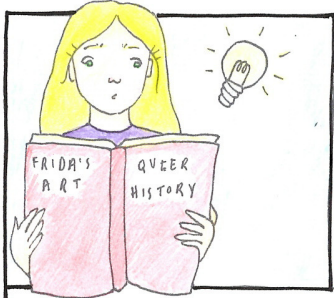
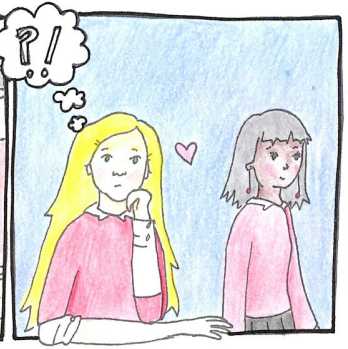
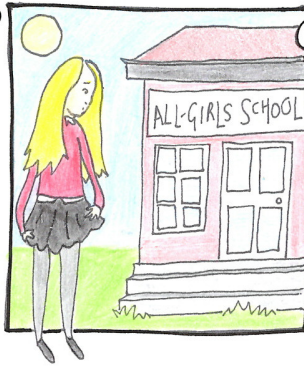
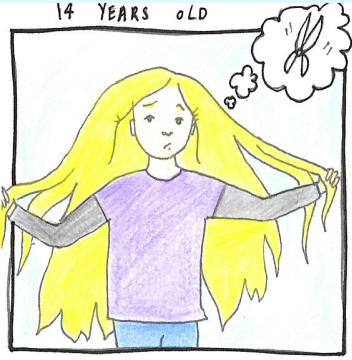


FRIDA KHALO HAS CONTINUED TO INSPIRE ME IN MANY DIFFERENT STAGES OF MY LIFE, FROM AN ARTIST CHILD WITH QUESTIONABLE FACIAL HAIR, TO THE PASSIONATE TRANSGENDER SOCIALIST I AM TODAY. WE MUST CONTINUE TO CHERISH FRIDA NOT JUST FOR HER IMAGE BUT AS A RADICAL ARTIST & A COMMITTED ACTIVIST-UPHOLDING HER TRUE REVOLUTIONARY LEGACY AS A QUEER, DISABLED SOCIALIST IS MORE CRUCIAL NOW THAN EVER.

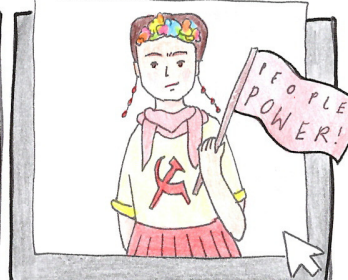
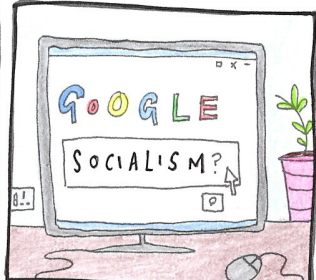


@alex.pc.art

14 YEARS OLD



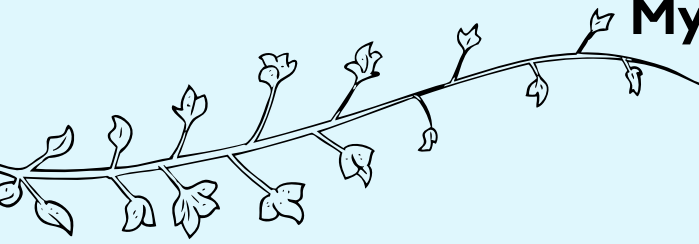
16 YEARS OLD



18 YEARS OLD



@alex.p.c.art



My Debt and My Tribute

In a movement so recent and relevant as the LGBT+ one, the future is bright, alluring and seductive.

We envisage equal rights everywhere, more social acceptance for all, more representation. If we have a hard path to walk, the only reason it is a recognisable path at all is those who came before us and paved the way, buffing the rough rocks with their sweat, blood and tears until they became soft, smooth and shiny like we see them today.

Every queer person today who walks that path, however long, owes so much to those who came before.

Just like on Remembrance Day, we must recognise that our veterans are not all elders from a bygone age of conflict, but people living, serving and dying in other countries. They don't live, serve and die to protect people in the same way military veterans do and did, but this doesn't make their sacrifice (or our debt) one bit less important.

Every single queer person today owes so much to those who came before.

My debt and my tribute is my visibility. The closet is not only despicable and dehumanizing; it is shameful to our veterans and devalues the brave sacrifices they made for us; their future, their children. It is hard to come out and be out, but it is necessary.

For me, this is my duty. This is what I owe our veterans; refusal to be shamed, refusal to be subtle. The closet is cowardice. I acknowledge but refuse to bow to people's reasons for staying in. If you feel strongly enough about the community and your duty, your debt, your tribute, nothing will keep you silent.

It is a duty; in this country, we have legal rights and protections – we must claim them, use them and be bold in honour of those who cannot. Your refusal to hold their hand in public hurts – we are protected here.

It is a debt; why can't you see that we owe? Nothing comes for free, not even our own identities.

It is a tribute; among our forebearers people died of hatred and wilful ignorance. They sacrificed their chances of peaceful lives to agitate and strive.

I cannot, I must not hide. The closet is a self-enforced set of shackles. It is self-limitation, for as much as we tell ourselves society imposes it on us, we each have the power to come out and stay out.

I refuse cowardice. I choose conflict. People are the most accepting they have ever been; I do not accept worry about public opinion as an excuse. The opinions and esteem of those close to us are more valued. But this is not an excuse. We owe our veterans more than cautious concern.

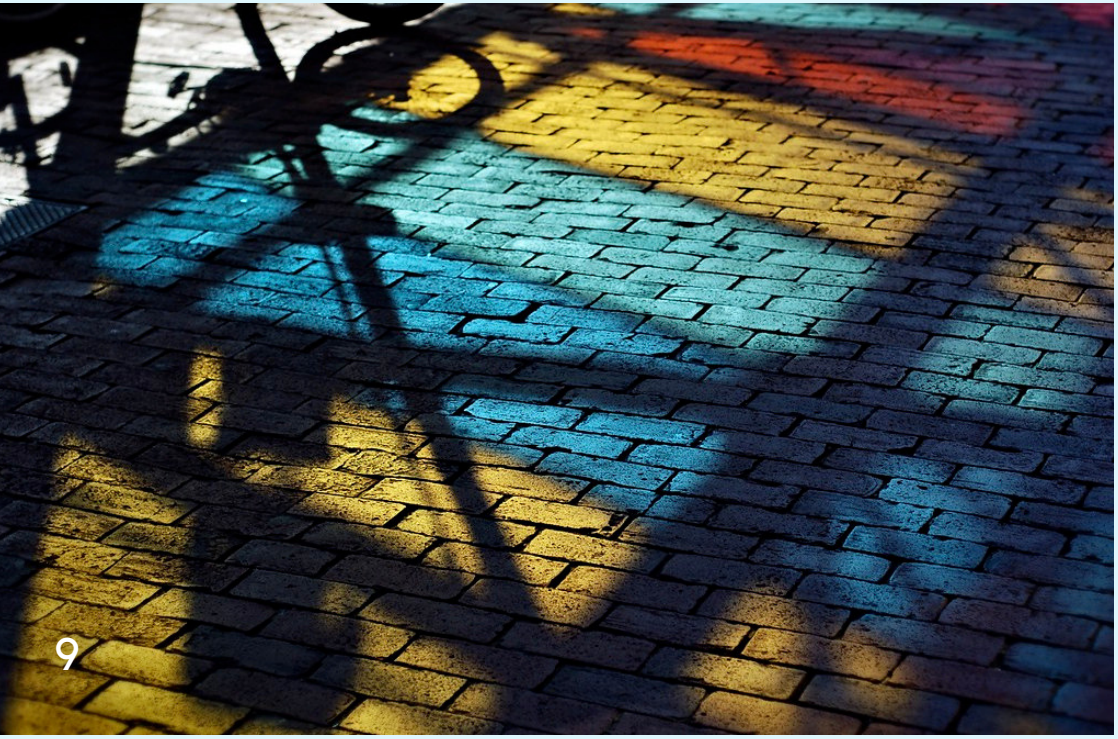
Every single queer person today owes a debt.

I wake up queer. I get dressed queer. I go to lectures queer. I speak to my friends queer, I walk down the street queer. I delight in walking past kids and families, looking queer, seeing the widening of eyes. Queer people that can pass for straight (and do) leave me with a bitter aftertaste, something bittersweet – hiding, even passively, for me is abhorrent. I know there is no definitive way to be queer. But I am out here being honest – being more than honest, being obvious. Each to their own expression, I tell myself.

I respect you, choosing to remain in the closet. I respect you, but you have not taken up the burden, you are not doing your duty, paying your debt, or making your tribute. So I respect you, as a fellow queer person, but my own responsibilities and debts are clear to me, and come first.

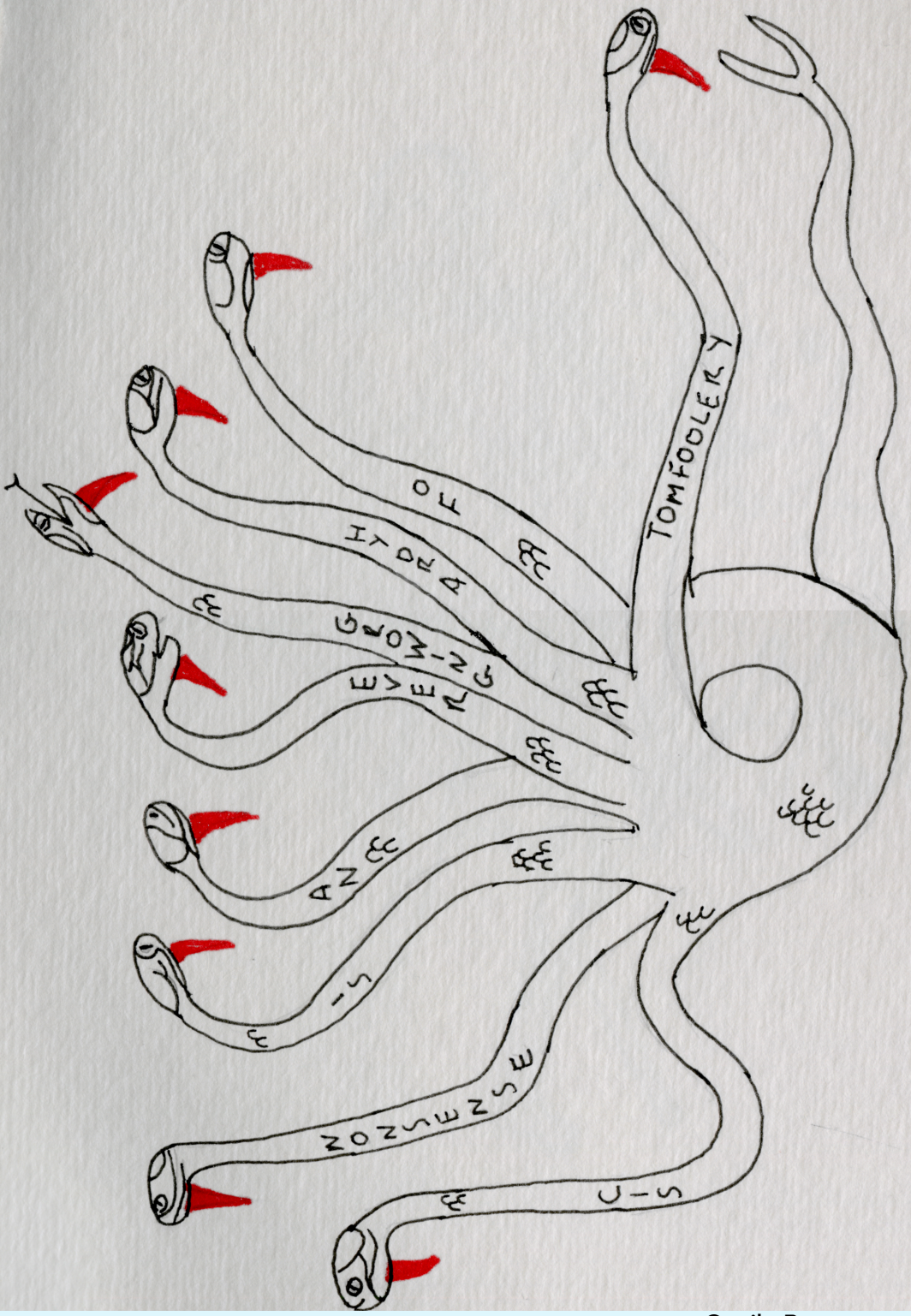
Every single queer person today owes a debt. How are you paying yours?

Erin Hudson



(in)visibly queer

this pride i celebrate
people who are brave and out and visible, yes
but pride is also for
the child who won't have a home
to come home to if they come out
the bi husband whose family
wouldn't understand if they knew
the person who knows the doors of their place of worship
would close to them if they were open
the couple who pass for straight because you refuse to consider that
anyone who is not "visibly queer" could belong here
the straight trans man because pride is for him
as much as it is for you
the femme girl who refuses to conform to your ideas of what a real
queer should look like
the queer people of colour who are alienated
from mainstream white queerness
the stealth employee who cannot afford
the risk of losing their job
the elder who fears to speak their truth
as they enter care
the man who is out and proud in the uk
but cannot be open in the country of his birth
the person who never left the closet
because they were never in it
the ace girl who you refuse to recognise as part of our family
this pride i stand with them
know that you owe nothing
and to all those who would gatekeep
we'll knock down your walls



Gaydentities

Search, search, search for an identity
In this fucking heteronormative entity.
Film, book, conversation, the dinner table:
Any representation is the exception
Or confined – a lesbian book; the film is gay:
All I'm asking for is to be in the everyday.
Five years of internal repression –
Maybe that's what's triggered intermittent
depression.
Deny, deny, deny – 'Oh, don't say that!'
'They might think you're gay!'
Oh, why didn't you say that you love that show
'Because of tits and dragons!' Manly.
Manly is straight. Straight is manly.
Stir up some rasp and deep in a low-expression
sauce
To homogenise the man voice we endorse.
But cook to a playlist of my, oh my God! gay voice
And the dish is ruined, lumps of self-
dissatisfaction
As I become irritating, vulgar and insincere;
Ingredients of the external make the internal
smear
The anatomies who don't even know the meaning
of gay.
Conform your thoughts, appropriate manly
thoughts.
Conform your voice, fucking conform your voice



Where is identity when every thought
Is scanned, considered and delivered
In a this-is-what-a-male-would-say way?
Less to offer, no originality, fear
Fear to express: repress, repress, repress!

Then one day I unleashed: "He's so hot!"
Now I bathed in a 'gay'dentity
With self-care, emotions and glitter;
And crop tops made me so much fitter.
My skin cleared, and wardrobe turned pink
As I found daddy issues and refuge as a twink
But, 'why do you let gay define you?'

Maybe I did steer into our stereotype too hard,
Maybe I do search for others like me more than you
But you don't have to fucking search.
'You'll make a great husband to a wife one day'
The language we speak is designed
The images we see are so set
Heterosexuality is the unconscious
The easy, the normal, the unseen.
Heterosexuality is the air, the water –
Why search when your eyes know it is there?

'Your mum told me you have a new girlfriend!'
'Oh, no? I've really stepped my foot in it this time.'
I came out to her in this kitchen and she said, it's fine.
As soon as I left, she jarred the glittered air where I spoke
And shoved it into that draw of junk so hard that it broke.
Another wall constructed to box in an identity.
The lie is her insecurity and it infringes on my security.

I hear it now, 'They're very religious people.'
Lies are sin, homosexuality sin – latter murkier, dirtier.
Lies are choice: this sin to cover an ugly sin.
Sin is okay if it's rife in the privileged.

'That's so AIDS thrown round the dinner table.
It's funny, your essay dead-
lines equated to the dead –
Wasn't/ isn't the issue with AIDS visibility?
But then I get it, the essay deadline is in your view.
Never heard of the aids epidemic, did you?
I, you, he, she, it, we, you, they speak hetero-language.
Homophobia bad, adjectiving gay death is just being a lad.

My gay friends tell stories of torment and abuse
So why would I repress if I don't have that excuse?
'That's so gay' – it has a second meaning.
Yes, but before second comes first.
Homo-terminology used to describe the bad
Drains into the public supply of water
And nourishes homophobia
Making possible hate-fuelled gay slaughter.

I have nothing to suggest, though one request:
Don't think you have the same experience:
Your identity was breathed in,
Your identity was drunk in,
Slowly accumulating in your body.
Your external matched your internal.

A gayidentity might be accepted, even praised
But this is my point to be raised:
Society told me gay was different, watched,
The air it offered only served to fragment me
Where tastes of glitter-air rebuilt and understood me
I had to search and find it where I could –
Terrified of the onlooking eyes, which I couldn't see.
I reproach my young me for hiding, repressing
But most, I love my young me for searching, finding
The external one day is so fucking bleak
The next it can be a space of unique expression.
The young me's aren't mad, I mean us we's
We all felt that stifling external of straight.
So 'Why do you let gay define you?' they inquire.
It is not a definition I choose or desire.
It is the hetero-normal that constructs that definition of who I am,
Who I should be,
It pushed me to search for traces of my truth elsewhere
Away from the external of comfortableness –
That deafening shout for straightness
Masking whispers that homosexuality
Is something less.
Some nights I hate myself and the pain I
Feel as I toss and turn trying to sleep.
Tonight I hate heteronormativity –
Any oppression into conformity.
Because you've really fucked me up.

come forward Beautiful people with quirky questions

we have a lot of unanswered questions.

We were told to expect MOTHERCARE mother and baby mornings.

to discover romance with a relevant body to turn into LADIES and gents

to be an actress

you will need adjustment to use our system.

Oxford has undergone a radical transformation but boundaries have remained the same.

He
She



I think I've built on the foundations

the whole outfit was pretty crazy

naturally beautiful

satisfying.

I was just dressed up

I've always wanted WANTED

Instead, delete it from your system to avoid

Strange, medical and emotional conditions

found guilty

A First, A Blue or A Spouse?

Something about Cambridge whispers the promise of silver-screen romance. This is especially true in the autumn, when each day is shorter than the last and the gaps between bright, sunny days grow longer and longer; when frost like icing sugar powders college lawns with 'don't walk on the grass' signs forbidding footprints from falling. The grey stone buildings are dimly lit by few-and-far streetlights, wraiths of mist bedimming the orange glow. You can feel the chill in the tips of your nose and fingers, in the shiver that tells you to wear a scarf next time. It's the perfect time for holding hands and coffee shop dates, while your mind turns cartwheels imagining dancing through claustrophobic courts and kissing on the Bridge of Sighs.

It's easy to imagine electrifying glances stolen across library desks, glances over books later discarded in the corner of a room with a bureau instead of a chest of drawers, in a room older than your great-great-grandparents' memories which has borne witness to many such moments. These are rooms with single-glazed windows that become opaque with condensation over icy winter nights, where you can see the tips of King's chapel reaching to the sky like a preacher stretching their hands to heaven.

The other half of these fantasies is a rumpled academic type, with glasses and a deliberately unfashionable hairstyle who has a penchant for oversized woollen jumpers in ugly colours and an artfully curated bookshelf of books that are just obscure enough to reflect well on their owner. They may also be a rosy-cheeked sportsperson, puffing clouds into bitter air as they sprint over frozen fields or cut the water with strokes as clean and precise as a butcher's knife. They may be a musical type, leaning soulfully against a windowsill as they pluck out songs on an acoustic guitar; or perhaps a poet, with a preference for black leather-look notebooks with matching black ink.

It's easy to imagine these novelistic permutations, endowed with the glamour of flowing black gowns and an air of intellectualism pervading the entire city. Cambridge itself glows with mysticism and intrigue, so anyone with a modicum of imagination could extend that to hoping, cautiously, for their love lives to steep in the old-fashioned aura of tradition and sepia-tinted romance.



In reality, your love affairs are as likely to take place in brutalist cement-block buildings or nondescript accommodation blocks where the endless hotel-like corridors house thirty identical rooms, the one belonging to your lover identifiable only to your unfamiliar eyes by its fire warden label. The window, shaded by a poorly-made and near-transparent blind, looks across a narrow yard and into another identical room. The tiny ensuite has a plastic shower curtain which doesn't prevent the floor flooding, and your paramour's half-empty shelves are home to a collection of mediocre novels by nondescript authors. Instead of artful knitwear, they wear ugly branded athleisure. Their vision is the antithesis of myopic, but they suffer from a plethora of complaints, which number gluten intolerance, asthma, eczema, and left-handedness among others. There buds within you a plant of realisation downgrading long walks to Grantchester with short walks to the bike shed, making idle small talk rather than debating any points of politics or philosophy; your courtship takes place in overpriced pubs rather than across candlelit tables in halls where beams lower and portraits of bearded men line the walls. Love isn't declared under moonlight, overheard by ancient buildings, and often it isn't declared at all. Rather, you have to read between the lines like a live-action Practical Criticism exercise, learning to find glimmers of affection in commitments to cycle two miles across town to you and the sleep-dampened 'have fun' as you creep out of bed to cycle to the river and the boats with women's names that wait like mistresses in silent boathouses.

In fact, your most intimate and longstanding commitments in Cambridge aren't with the people who occasionally share your bed. Your academic work witnesses the complexities and idiosyncrasies of your brain, the river is the only entity guaranteed to demand your presence, and your understanding with the library is such that you make your own space here. It's the academic equivalent of leaving a toothbrush in someone else's bathroom.

Part of the mental allure of the fantasy is that it glamorises you. If your match is an elegant intellectual with interesting hobbies, it stands to reason that you will at least partially mirror their quirky and unique habits and personality. You, too, could be capable of quoting obscure poetry and looking tousled in sportswear emblazoned with crests, surname splashed across your shoulders. You, too, could have a future on the stage, whether it be political or theatrical or literary or sporting. The saying goes that you should leave Cambridge with a first, a Blue, or a spouse. What if you, and your lover, could encapsulate all three? Such is the tantalising promise. Instead, many leave with only the soft caress of a fluffy hood on their cheek; with the 2.i required to secure their next steps; without having participated in sports at all. Romance evaporates and the reality, as ever, disappoints.



over and out

throughout it all
your love keeps me steady
now my voice won't waver
now my heart won't stutter
now my hand won't slip from yours

i remember dancing
palm to palm
fingers twisting over slender
fingers
cradled
until they broke apart
as if they'd never met

and skipping stones
staccato over water
arrhythmia when you opened your
mouth
but instead of fighting back
i sank

i dream of standing my ground
voice making waves that lap
steadily
that don't break
not even over stones
still your love keeps me steady

R E A D E R .

E S C A P E

T I M E

R E C A L L

O U R

S T O R I E S

P I C T U R E

E A C H

C O L L E C T I V E

T R U T H



to get involved with our next issue, contact lgbt-editor@cusu.cam.ac.uk