

time, and the stars in-between

by rosario santiago

tw: suicide (pg 2), use of slurs (pg 2), death (pgs 6&7)

To be born a girl is to be born a bird.
To have the capability for endless flight, even on broken wings.



I was a writer before I could talk or hold a pencil.

I pretended, I lied, I manipulated, I invented. I wanted to create a world that was just for me.

I did anything I could to have it.
I screeched, I scratched, I bit, I fought for what I deserved.

Before I even knew my own name, I knew what justice was.



When I began to understand gender difference, I knew very early on that I did not like being near boys, being friends with boys, or playing house with boys. I didn't want a boy in my house. I didn't care to serve my dad or my brothers.

I wanted girl dolls and princess things and everything girl. When girl friends came over to play, we played imaginary games, where girls fell in love and had their dream life. We were happy.

At the end of the playdate, my girl friends left. The toys were put away.

That's what they were. Imaginations.



I am six years old and I am getting bullied by a boy at school. When I get home, my dad says it's because the boy has a crush on me; my mom agrees. I am disgusted, revolted, absolutely sick to my stomach.

I learn that love makes you ache.

I decide to like him back. That's what feels normal to me.



Was I a writer first, or a Lesbian? It seems like they are one in the same.



It's 2am, and I am eight years old. Somehow, our cable television gets the Sundance channel, and I set an alarm to watch all the pretentious indie movies. I liked watching a slender, manic pixie dream girl Zooey Deschanel be chased after the lanky, bird-brained Joseph Gordon Levitt.

Sometimes, I imagined myself a greeting-card maker, sharing headphones with a pretty girl in a New York City elevator.



When I wasn't watching the Sundance channel, I was flipping through the channels quickly to see if I could find *Girls Gone Wild! Spring Break Edition*. I only gave myself five seconds to watch the girls kiss each other under the spotlight of the male gaze.



I am in fourth grade. My teacher ends math class early to tell us a story she heard on the news: a twelve year old's killed himself after he was bullied for being gay.

I learn that this is something you can do when you're sad, when people hate you, when you feel like there is no way out.

It haunts me for the next ten years. I begin to wonder if I'll ever make it to twelve-years-old, much less eighteen.



My single mom starts to date again, a white man, seven years after my dad has passed.

My house begins to bleed the word faggot, queer, dyke. My mom is cooking, cleaning, waiting on a man.

I am twelve years old and I am not woman enough for my mom's boyfriend.

...

I've made it to twelve, but I still think of killing myself.



I am thirteen and I pretend that Sokka is my favorite Avatar character.

I can finally admit it: I was always more interested in Sokka's sister.



The first girl I ever loved didn't feel like love at all.

It felt like a puzzle piece, clicking together.



I imagine myself married to someone who loves me, but not enough. Someone who is nice to me, but not too much. A life where I am happy, but not too happy.

The dream always ends with a man's face.

My life always ends in compromise.



I read *Annie on My Mind* my freshman year of high school. I keep the book a secret, hide it at the bottom of my bookbag, wrap the front cover in construction paper.

It's the first Lesbian love-story I ever read.



Sappho was an ancient Greek poet born on the island of Lesbos. She was most known for her lyric poetry that expressed love and desire between women.

The word Lesbian derives from her place of origin, and the term "sapphic" describing anything to do with women-loving-women.



I am fifteen years old. I am a poet.



I wrote a fanfiction once where Annabeth from *Percy Jackson* was my girlfriend. We went to college together, and we sat underneath a tree, reading poems to one another.



Junior year. A boy and a girl transfer in to my high school. The boy shoots up the class ranks, and suddenly we are in competition for the number one spot. It was only natural that we started dating.

The girl sits besides me in my pre-calculus class. I always see her in the hallway with the boy.

She made art. She made me laugh. I wanted to be around her all the time.

She had a boyfriend. I had a boyfriend.



At that age, every poem I wrote was about her.



A recap of the ages 18-20:

i stop
writing

suicide attempt hospitalization dropout boyfriend working boyfriend art boyfriend poems about girls with blonde hair boyfriend poems about her boyfriend crying over her boyfriend wishing i was a boy boyfriend therapy therapy therapy boyfriend art art art and more art boyfriend

breakup.

I turned twenty on july eighth. I break-up with the one and only boyfriend I'll ever have on july 1st. I stopped crying after three days.

i am
writing
again.



So I asked a girl out. I date a girl. I think about kissing girls and loving girls. Shit, I go to a historically women's college!

There is the realization that you like girls.
and then there is the realization that you don't like boys.
These are two drastically different realizations.



Still, I'm kind of straight! I'll have a husband!

I can BE normal!



"Every woman I have ever loved has left her print upon me, where I loved some invaluable piece of myself apart from me-so different that I had to stretch and grow in order to recognize her. And in that growing, we came to separation, that place where work begins."

- *Zami*, Audre Lorde

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I read *Zami* when I'm twenty-one years old.
Here, I learn that loving women can be like loving myself.
True, delicious, liberating.



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I meet them, and it feels like the world splits itself in half.



I tell my mom I'm gay my senior year of college. i've fallen in love with someone and their sunset-colored hair. (I couldn't call myself a lesbian. The L is too hard, the S a rollercoaster on my tongue, the B puffy on my lips.) My mom says it's a phase, that I'll end up with a boyfriend someday.

(There is no boy or man that can ever give me the softness that the sunset has given me.)



I am twenty-two, dating the someone with the sunset-colored hair.
In an October-like spring, we meet on their college campus.

This is what it's supposed to feel like. Tender, lovely.

Like I'm in the right place.



And even amongst the greatest happiness I had ever felt,

I was still a first-gen, low-income, lesbian of color from an immigrant family.

There is always a sacrifice to be made.

Sometimes it lingers in the cracks

or is as bright as starfall.



I write my thesis on love-letters. Lesbian love-letters. The ones with pen-names and hints of perfume

sprayed on the pages.

Tiny poems written on the envelope.

Words with desire written in-between the lines.



One year. One long, excruciating, painful year. One skipped graduation. Multiple headaches.

Infinite amount of poems about octobers, sunsets, and first-loves.

...

and then I am twenty-three.



It's exhausting. The low-life expectancy. Tracing lineages and seeing how frail the lines are, how short
the thread is.

I want us to live and live and live.

No limits.



Sometimes, I want to bury my grave in a field of flowers and lay in it.
I am a Lesbian and I just want to smell the flowers.

I like the smell of flowers.

I can see that blue, blue sky from down here.



I am reading Audre Lorde, Cheryl Clarke, Qiu Miaojin, Amy Levy, Cherrie Moraga, Emily Dickinson.

I can look back in time and see tiny stars twinkling for me.



I am twenty-three.

I am a Lesbian.

I am a Lesbian.

I am a Lesbian Writer.