



SL

STEPHENS LIFE

The
Supernova
Issue

Content Warning

Intrusive Thoughts 17-22

Mental Hospitalization, Mental Illness and Suicidal Ideation 37-42

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Letter From the Editor

The first time I stepped onto the Stephens College campus, it immediately felt like a place I wanted to be. That same day, I was introduced to Stephens Life Magazine, an award-winning student-run publication. Despite my doubts that I'd be good enough for a magazine as captivating as Stephens Life, I joined as soon as my courses allowed. Five semesters later, I am now Editor-in-Chief introducing you to our 24th issue.

In an issue about the explosion of a star with content that doesn't shy away from the dark and destruction, it's no surprise that I was compelled to write a story about my impending graduation. This semester, I put my pen to paper (really finger to keys) one last time to discuss The Fig Tree analogy from the perspective of a graduating senior. These past four years have been fruitful and an experience middle school me would've never dreamt of. Though this may come as a shock to some, college wasn't always a goal of mine. I wanted to be a makeup artist and fashion stylist and, occasionally, I wanted nothing more than to travel for the rest of my life. Then, at some point, 13-year-old me decided she wanted more and boy did she get it. Everything that has happened to me was once a goal that at 18 I was afraid I'd never achieve. And yet, somehow I did. So here I am in my senior year, in a position I once again never thought I'd hold. Despite having chosen the right school, the right major and all the "right" extracurriculars, the next step keeps me up at night tossing and turning about the rapidly approaching date. I have the answers to many things, but this is one I haven't quite figured out—maybe I will by May 4th at 11 am.

The creative freedom and rawness that is true to Stephens Life is one we chose to hone in on this semester. You know those stories you write in a journal in hopes of clearing your mind? Or the thoughts and feelings you keep to yourself that leave you lying awake at night? Or even those evenings when you're out with friends and you stop to think, "This will be a story that I tell my kids one day." These are the stories we unfold in The Supernova Issue. Though dark, at its core, The Supernova Issue is what Stephens Life has always been and what makes it such a compelling magazine that many people love. Authentic, relatable and a snapshot in time.

Whether you're a student counting down the days until graduation, an alum reminiscing or a person full of thoughts who just wants to be understood, I hope that by the time you reach the end you not only appreciate the hard work and dedication, but that you also get to know each of us a little more through the stories we've finally chosen to share.

Please be sure to take care of yourself, take a moment to read our content warning and enjoy the beautiful explosion that is The Supernova Issue.

Your Editor-in-Chief,

Ryann Jenkins-LeFlore

Ryann Jenkins-LeFlore

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student-run magazine of
Stephens College.**

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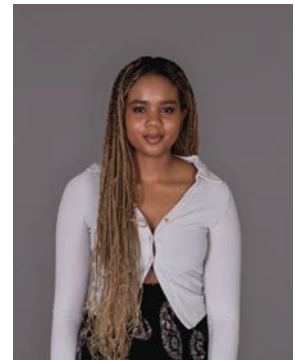
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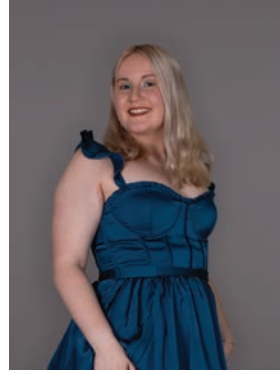
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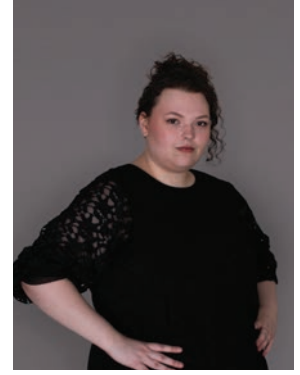
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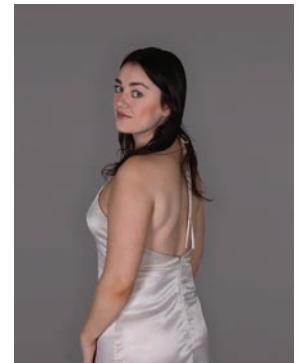
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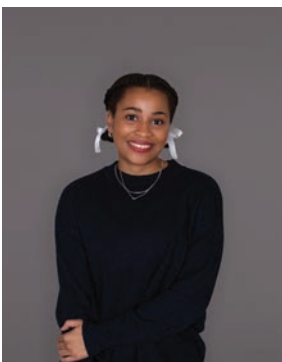
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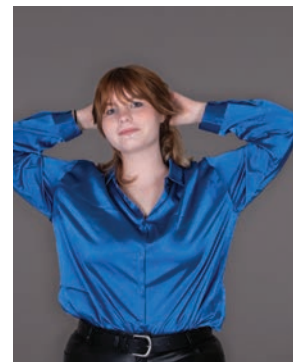
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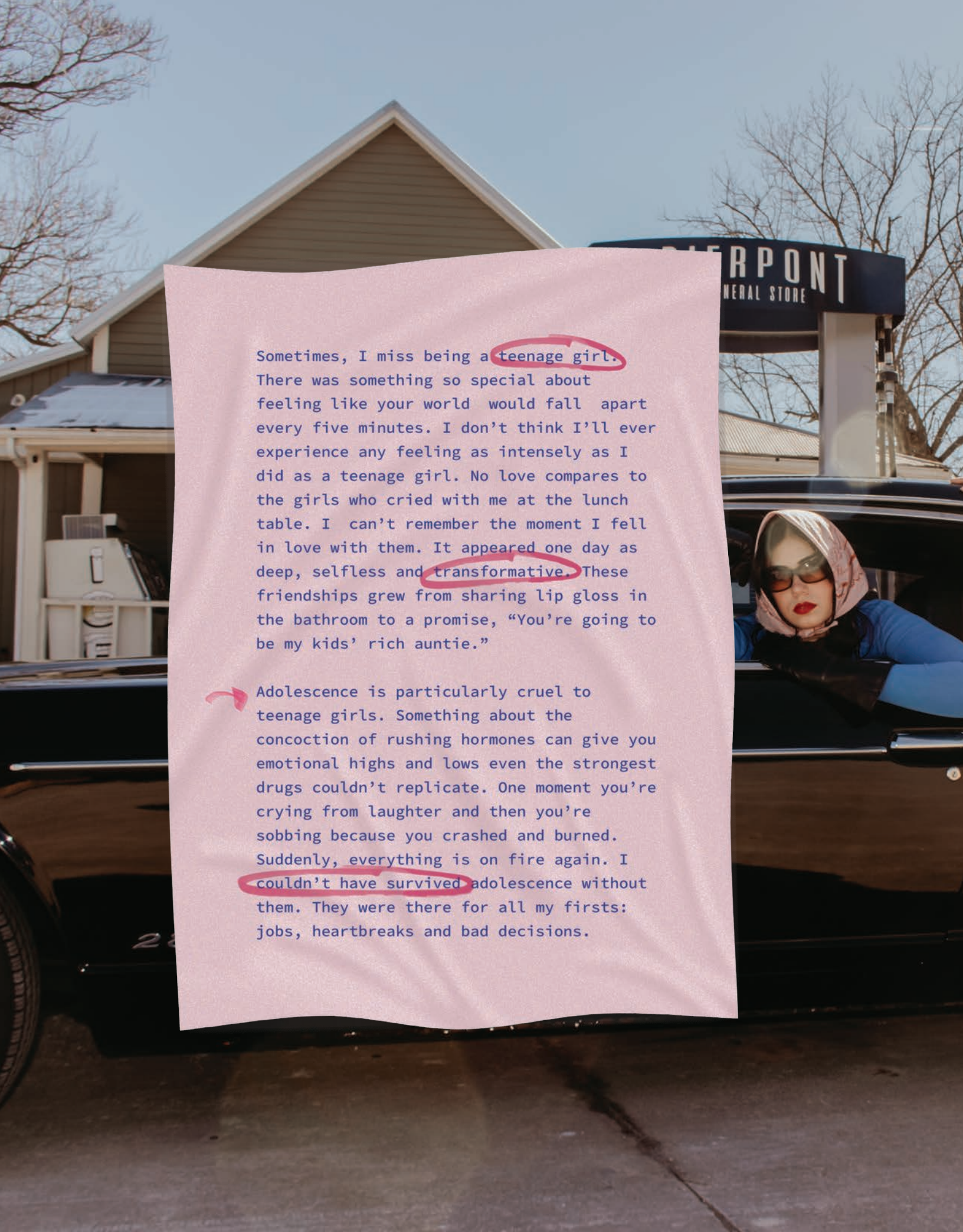
A woman with long blonde hair and dark sunglasses is driving a car. She is wearing a red shirt and a blue jacket. The car's interior, including the steering wheel and dashboard, is visible. In the background, a gas station with green pumps is visible through the car window. The text "we were girls" is overlaid on the image in a white, serif font.

we were
girls



together

*Story by Daniela Saenz-Quintana
Photography by Amanda Coppeti
Styling by Emilee Frasier*



Sometimes, I miss being a teenage girl. There was something so special about feeling like your world would fall apart every five minutes. I don't think I'll ever experience any feeling as intensely as I did as a teenage girl. No love compares to the girls who cried with me at the lunch table. I can't remember the moment I fell in love with them. It appeared one day as deep, selfless and transformative. These friendships grew from sharing lip gloss in the bathroom to a promise, "You're going to be my kids' rich auntie."

Adolescence is particularly cruel to teenage girls. Something about the concoction of rushing hormones can give you emotional highs and lows even the strongest drugs couldn't replicate. One moment you're crying from laughter and then you're sobbing because you crashed and burned. Suddenly, everything is on fire again. I couldn't have survived adolescence without them. They were there for all my firsts: jobs, heartbreaks and bad decisions.



Facing the painful rituals of initiation into adulthood created unbreakable soul ties between us. We sat in the high school parking lot. In her mom's car scream-singing "The One That Got Away" when those boys didn't text us back for a few weeks. When I told her that the boy who was supposed to be my soulmate said he never loved me, she cried harder than I did. We bought matching non-slip shoes and faced the customers screaming over orange chicken. How could I not love them more than I love myself? Everyday, we were together from 7:04 a.m. to 10 p.m. I woke up and chose them.

I learned from them. We taught each other everything we thought we knew about the world. Reflecting, I laugh at how we were experts who didn't know a single thing. Nevertheless, their unwavering love empowered me to become who I wanted to be. These girls taught me how to laugh way too loudly, speak my mind and dance whenever my heart desires.

Some of these women are still in my life and they have become my family. I walk into their homes without knocking. When I'm not home, they make themselves comfortable in my room. My mom expects them at Thanksgiving. Some of those women only exist in my world as distant memories from previous lives. We grew, changed and lost contact. Now, I watch their lives unfold through Instagram pictures. It's been three years since we last saw each other but I teared up a little when she announced her pregnancy. I remember her laugh when she did something she wasn't supposed to and the way she screamed in excitement. Knowing her, she's going to be the best mom. I couldn't be prouder.

Some of those women hurt me in a way that still stings when I think about it too hard. When asked, I claim not to remember exactly what happened, but the truth is that I do. I remember what she said, the lies she spread, the feeling of being betrayed and alone. I'll never forget what I said, the grudges I held and the mistakes I threw in her face. Perhaps we were too immature to handle things correctly. I believe our time was up. I have grown and forgiven. Weirdly, a stranger knows a version of myself that no longer exists. I learned a lot from her. Pieces of her are still part of me; the good, the bad and the ugly. The biggest lesson she taught me was that not everyone is meant to be in our life forever. She taught me how some people will choose to keep loving me, others won't. That's okay. We deserve to love people who choose to love us. I have those people.

The women who surround me are the greatest support system I could ask for. Our group chat is a history book about our lives. Countless chats about "What are we wearing?", "Guess what I just did" and voice memos that make the best podcasts. They're the first people I tell about anything in my life; crises, good news and embarrassing moments. They've heard it all. Female friendships offer a unique form of trust and understanding, allowing space for vulnerability. In moments of adversity, they have offered me solace through compassion and unconditional support. My friends have encouraged me to grow as a woman by believing in me when I struggled to believe in myself. We've watched each other change and embraced one another's growth. I'm not who I used to be. I often see the woman I've become and wonder where certain pieces of myself have gone. I love who I am but sometimes I miss the girl I used to be.



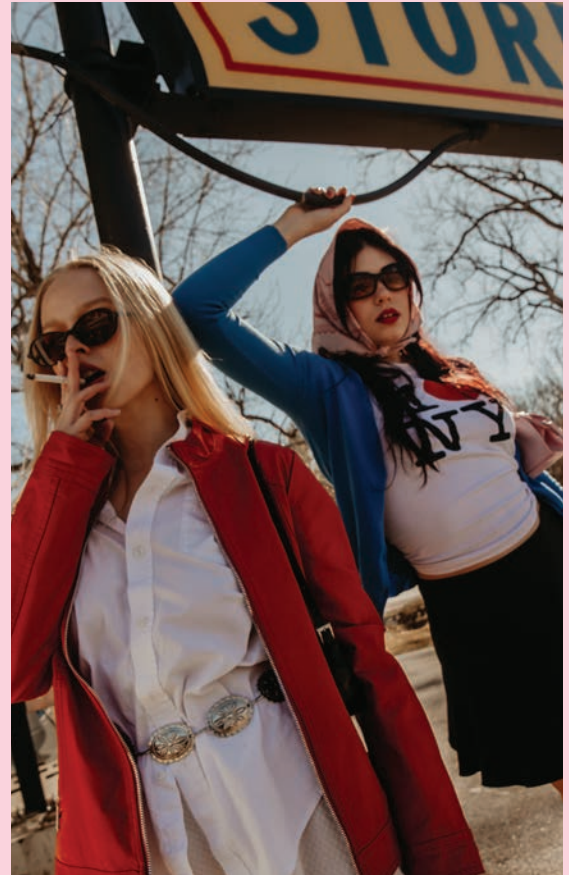
I sit in the discomfort of knowing I will never be the sixteen-year-old girl who chose to skip her math final to paint a mural on her door. Was that irresponsible or carefree? What happened to me? I've become so much more anxious yet a lot more confident.

I miss the way I sat in my room doing my makeup for three hours only to take a few pictures and wipe it all off fifteen minutes later. I was so much more trusting. Was I burned one too many times? I used to blast music to sing and dance in my room nearly every day. I'm much quieter now, worried about disturbing the peace. Do I miss being sixteen or am I romanticizing a time when the world felt black and white?

The life I have is one I dreamed of. I have an apartment with pink pots and pans. The friends in my life know me inside and out. Sixteen-year-old Daniela would think that it's so cool that on the weekends, I wake up at noon on my best friend's couch surrounded by Whataburger wrappers from our 4 a.m. fast food run. She would be so proud that I can finally drive on the highway without crying or she would roll her eyes, wondering why on earth I still live in Missouri. I romanticized my girlhood without realizing that I didn't know what was going on.

I love being twenty-one. I've traveled, loved and gotten in lots of trouble. My world gets bigger every day. I no longer have the comfortable confines I used to claim to hate. I may mourn my girlhood, but I get to keep some special pieces. My friends and I still talk in circles about the same old stories, but we get to throw some new ones in the mix. We're still cutting and dying each other's hair but at least now one of us has the license to do it. We still do our makeup and go to the bathroom together. I hope that never changes.

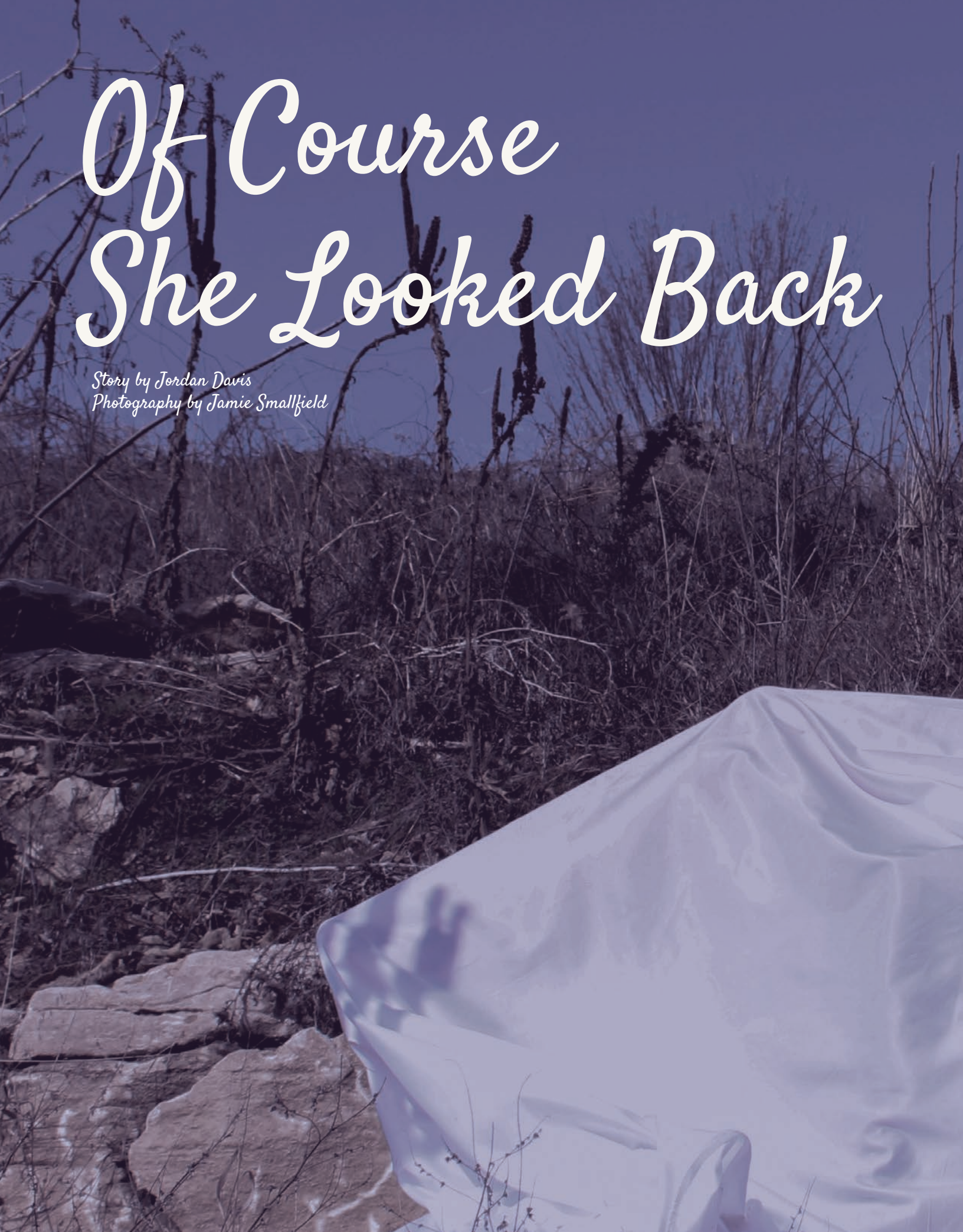
Young naivete becomes wisdom – at least that's what I used to think. I didn't know a thing at sixteen. I don't know a thing at twenty-one. I probably won't know a thing at sixty-two. Hopefully, the answer to life shows up the day I turn 110. Though, I highly doubt it. The young girl in the pictures feels more like an old friend than the woman in the mirror but she taught me everything I don't know. I cry for my girlhood. I know it's still there. The messiness lives inside of me. The love lives in the women who surround me. We were girls together and that will never change. **SL**



“Young naivete becomes wisdom – at least that’s what I used to think. I didn’t know a thing at sixteen. I don’t know a thing at twenty-one. I probably won’t know a thing at sixty-two.”

Of Course She Looked Back

*Story by Jordan Davis
Photography by Jamie Smallfield*





Overview of the Story

The woman followed her husband and children out of the burning city. At dawn, they left behind ruined rooftops and burning neighbors, and they kissed the city goodbye. Burning sulfur poured from the sky. Raging fires lit up the heavens and engulfed the neighboring cities, Sodom and Gomorrah. The woman did not look at the begging hands of bodies drowning in flames. The Abrahamic God ordered the family not to look at the burning city. Why couldn't they look back? Well, the Bible says that those who strive to follow God cannot be merely consumed with what is behind them. The woman played the Lord's command like a broken record in her head. She followed behind her husband and kids.

"Baby, forget about it." Her husband Lot yelled among the cries and screaming fire alarms.

She meant to look away. But the sting in her eye called her to look back. The woman was hit by the raging inferno. Her body turned into a pillar of salt; God's monument for the consequence of disobedience. The unnamed woman stood lifeless, looking back at the burning city. Her husband and children continued on the path ahead, never regarding her death.





Moral of the Story

In the book Genesis 19, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah unfolds. In the Abrahamic religions, this story is told as a lesson for hesitance and defiance. Looking back meant subscribing to the city's wickedness. What exactly was the city's wickedness? Despite the Bible's elusive reasoning, several evangelical Christians believe that a factor of this "wickedness" was connected to sexual orientation and same-sex relations. Sodom and Gomorrah is on the east side of the Jordan River, in the modern-day Kingdom of Jordan.

Near the ruins, a giant pillar of salt is recognized as Lot's wife. Tourists come to see the statue, frozen in defiance. Before the chaos erupted, Lot's wife prepared a dinner for her family and the angels delivered God's infernal message. On that night, she slaved away preparing a feast. Her tired feet walked to the neighbor's requesting some salt. She then ran back to the house to finish her duties. She plated her labor, receiving the smallest loaf of bread.



Theology and Theory

The root of homophobia in the United States often stems from the condemnation of homosexuality in the Bible and church. The name Sodom and Gomorrah is attributed to the sexual acts performed by the Sodomites which created the contemporary term sodomy. This infamous story continues to be told from a place of bigotry and hatred. However, historians and progressive Christians are salvaging the reputation of Lot's wife and refocusing the story on the casualty and normalization of homophobia. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah is rather a tale of injustice.

In a research journal, *Reclaiming Christianity for the LGBT Community*, Kelly Kraus states, "The queer community needs to be liberated from the heterosexism latent in Christian theology." She continues, "Heterosexist Christian theology has taught that the story of Sodom and Gomorrah is about homosexuality and so gay people were given the label sodomites." Kelly Kraus, a former student at Chapman University, challenges the patriarchal and heterosexist culture of Western Christianity.

Natalie Diaz, a Pulitzer Prize-winning Mojave American poet is the author of the poem, *Of Course She Looked Back*. This poem sparks a conversation. While Natalie Diaz does not excuse Lot's wife's defiance, she emphasizes that anyone would've looked back. Instead of categorizing Lot's wife as a trope, Diaz interrupts the narrative and turns her into a symbol of protest.

Lot's Wife's Perspective

The unnamed woman stuck on the east side of Jordan is now ready for her story to be told. No longer does she want her story to be written by men, translated by men and preached by men. She's been waiting for a voice of understanding. So, I am here to tell you.

Lot's wife hated that others addressed her as Lot's wife. The tall, burly angels sent from God barged into her home. Lot awoke her from a deep slumber, ordering her to prepare a feast for God's messengers. So, she did. Without fuss, she placed crushed grains underneath hot stones and seared fish on an open fire. She served her labor on a leaf plate. Once the men had finished their feast, she scarfed down the scraps. Dawn arrived. Despite her sagging eyelids, she prepared to leave the city, her friends and her belongings. Once their feet touched the outskirts of the city, God poured his wrath over Sodom and Gomorrah. Dogs wept. Children cried.

"Baby, forget about it." Her husband yelled among the screams from their neighbors.

Lot and her children ran from the fiery massacre. Lot's wife stopped in her tracks, hearing familiar shrieks among screaming alarms. Did she forget to unplug the toaster? Was the oven still on? She meant to look away, but condolence screamed her name.

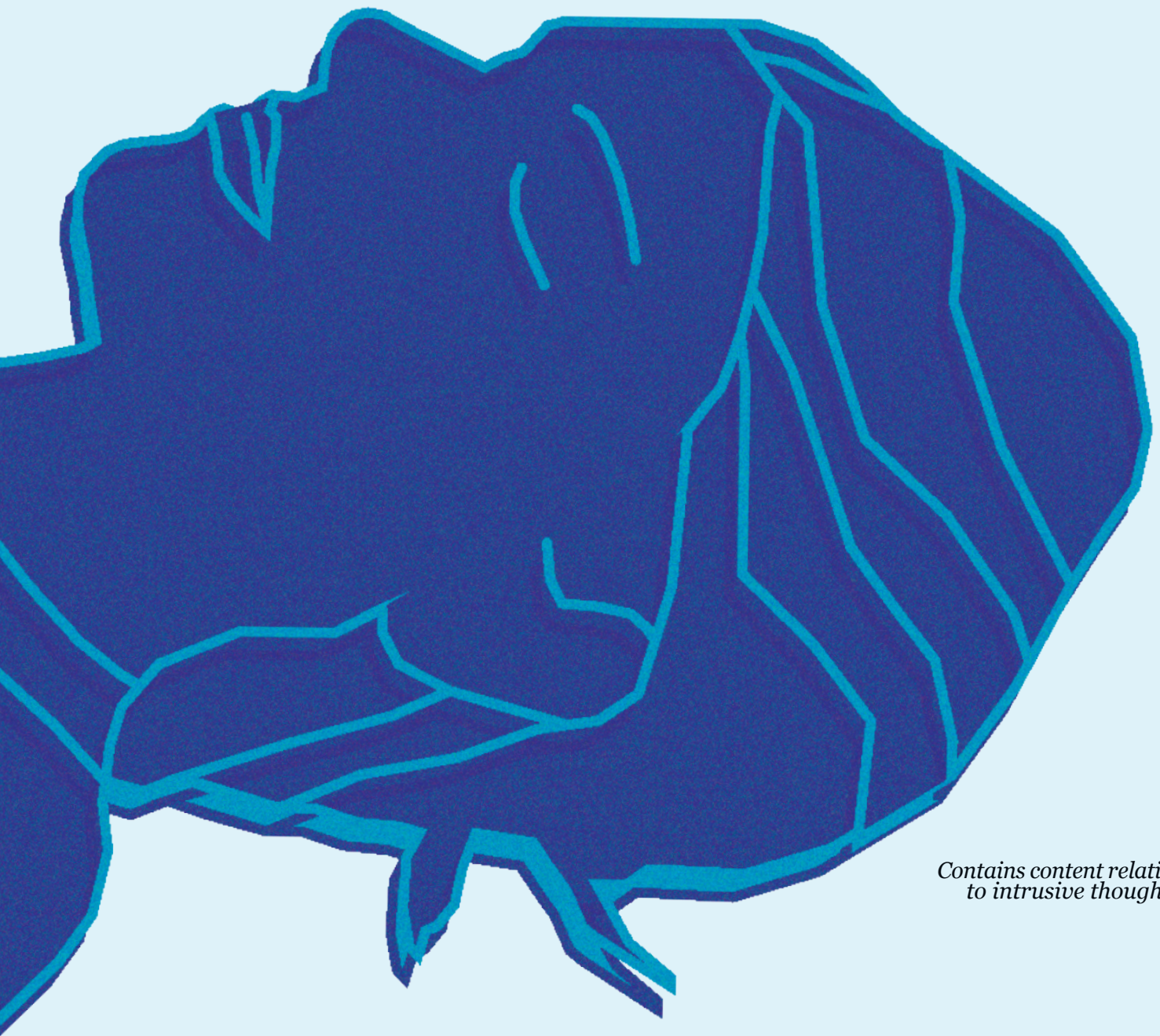
This centuries-old story is told to impressionable children drifting to sleep in bed at night. It follows them to adulthood while they sit in stodgy church pews, hearing the same tale but harsher. While the story condemns Lot's wife, they refuse to call her by her name, people are starting to revere this unnamed and unnarrated woman. She looked back at the city defying God's orders. To defy God's orders meant to consider the lives swallowed and spit out by flames.

Lot's wife may never have a name. Yet, she'll always be a reminder to look back. **SL**



AS I LAY DYING

Written + Illustrated by Kya Nilges



*Contains content relating
to intrusive thoughts.*



**"It ain't so much what a fellow does,
but it's the way the majority of folks
is looking at him when he does it."
William Faulkner, "As I Lay Dying."**

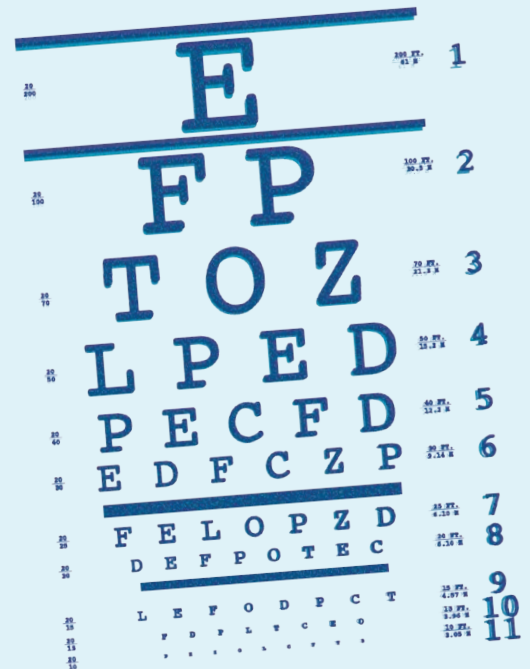
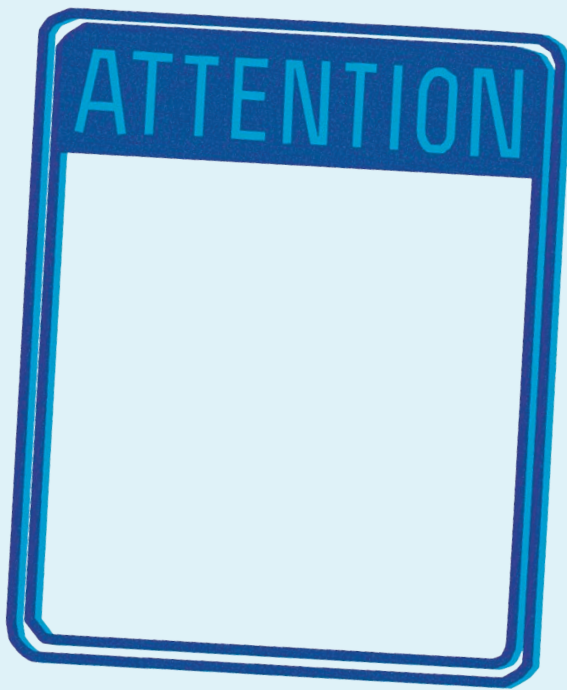
I'm seeking comfort nearing the end of my life. As I lay dying, I wonder, "How many people are sad for me?" I wish I could see my funeral, which is probably going to be my most popular party. Okay, okay, I'm just kidding. Kind of. I hope I have your attention because I need to talk about something. I need constant attention.

It's out now. I've said it. I crave attention like a thirsty person craves water. That glass is just waiting for you to drink it up. Of course, I don't like drinking water. If we've ever met, you probably know that. It's a great conversation starter. I hope you're enjoying this so far. Please don't stop reading because the longer you read, the longer I feel **seen.** I've been this way for as long as I can remember. Maybe I'll be this way until the day I really am lying on my deathbed.

Background

We all want to be seen— nay, to feel seen. Growing up, I never felt seen. At least not how I saw myself. I was an anxious kid, swallowing down the thought that I might be gay like a big ol' horse pill. I waited years for someone to ask me. That is, after I was finally able to face the truth myself. No one ever did. Years later, I would find out that no one even had the thought. So, I'm right, right? I wasn't seen.

It was worse with my dad. The picture I painted of him in my mind was 12 feet tall. I had to crane my neck back to meet his eyes. Maybe that's why he always seemed unattainable to me. Would I always be his number one? His little girl? If only I knew then that I'd spend my whole long life trying. I spent all of my days in his house trying to be what I thought was best. I wasn't trying to be the best version of myself. I was trying to be the best version of what I thought my parent's daughter could be. That meant doing everything just right. I got a job as soon as I could drive. I saved all of my money. I didn't date. I didn't drink or do drugs. I got straight As and I



never did anything I thought they would consider wrong.

Sure, I had my flaws. I'd always been "lazy." Maybe if we knew I was neurodivergent from a young age, my struggle to begin anything would've made more sense. One could say it's partly my fault. I was good at masking. I saw it as a game. I still do sometimes. I thought that if I could convince everyone that nothing was wrong, that I was never mad, that I was confident, and that I didn't need any help, I was winning. I was screaming on the inside, but no one ever knew. I didn't want them to. I totally won, you guys.

Growing up, I felt the residue of my parents sticking to who I used to be. The freckle-faced, funny, ornery kid who never meant any harm. She was a good kid. Their daughter was a good kid. Being viewed this way felt like I was being seen through a frosted glass window. You can make out the shape and hear the voice. You recognize who it is. You can never see them in full, though. If you did, you might realize how tall someone has gotten; how they've grown and changed. I changed so much.

But through it all, I kept the pale green of my grandmother's eyes. There's so much weight bearing down behind that gaze.

That's enough about my family. What is this, therapy?

Fantasies

I was jealous of kids who got any special attention and I had some pretty messed up fantasies about how I could get the attention I thought I deserved. When my brother was seven years old, he burned his feet. Third-degree. His feet were wrapped up and he needed a wheelchair at school. Of course, I was scared when it happened, but later I was thrilled about one aspect: I got to push the wheelchair. I would push him down the waxed, vinyl-floored hall, and everyone looked at us, asking how we were. It was legendary.

Please don't judge me too harshly. I hope you know I would never want something to happen to my brother. I did have other fantasies about people getting hurt, though. When your family members have accidents you get a lot of attention. I wouldn't dream

of it being a prominent family member, though. Maybe a distant cousin. When events like this happen everyone worries about you. Luckily, nothing I thought up ever happened. It's one thing to have fantasies, but if something had actually happened, I would have been crushed.

There were also fantasies where I was the one hurt. Maybe if I were in a minor car accident or broke my leg, people would care. Nothing too crazy, but bad enough that I would need crutches. That was the dream; a wrapped-up leg and crutches, the hospital band still on my arm. I had some creative fantasies about how I could get those coveted crutches, but that's a story for another day.

I had small fantasies as well. In second grade, I went to the nurse's office and faked an eye exam. If I got glasses, people would notice me. I would do anything to stand out. Unfortunately for me, my mom didn't buy it. She knew I could see. Years later, when I got an eye exam at the optometrist, they told me I had above-average eyesight. 20/10 vision. Isn't that ironic? I bring this up a lot in conversation. If I can't have glasses, I think people should know why.

I feel as though these recollections make it seem like I don't still have these fantasies— but I do. They aren't as grand as they used to be, though. Every once in a while, I would slip up and tell people the extent of the stories I would play through in my imagination. Somehow, I've never received positive responses.

I've been told I'm stubborn and I can see why. Sometimes I'm compelled to do something but I can't

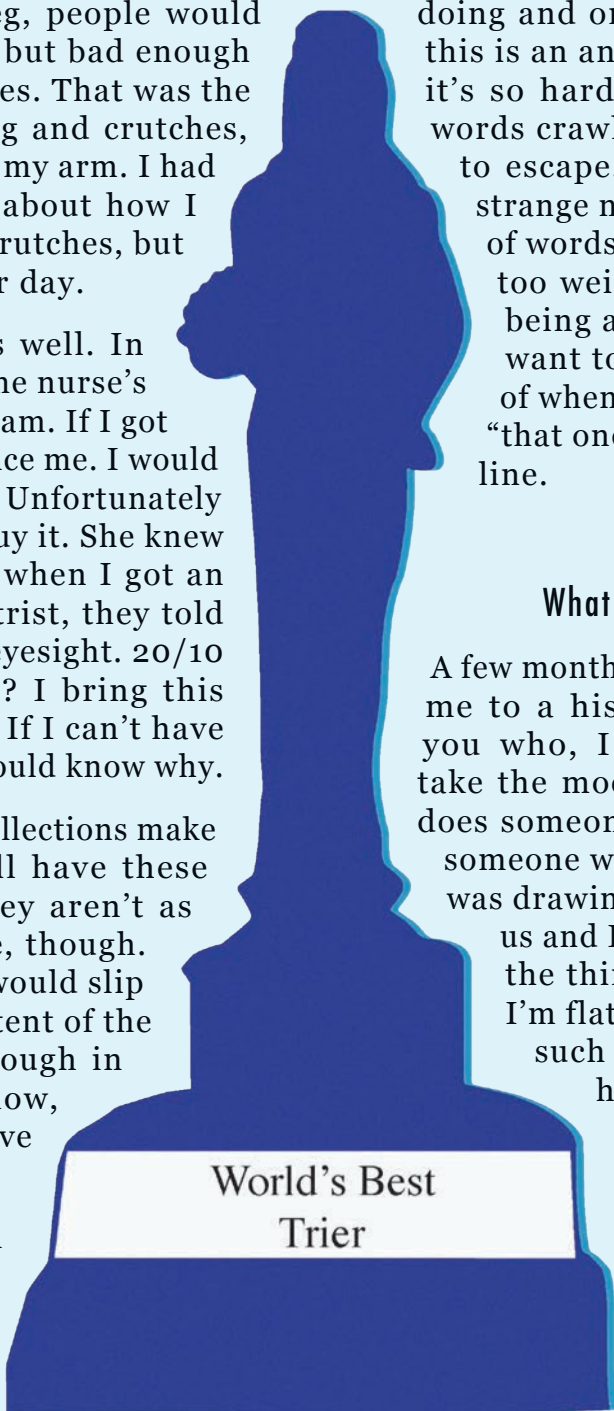
explain it. I annoy people to get attention. No such thing as bad attention, right? Maybe that only applies to publicity. There's this thought scratching at the back of my brain telling me to do something to attract attention.

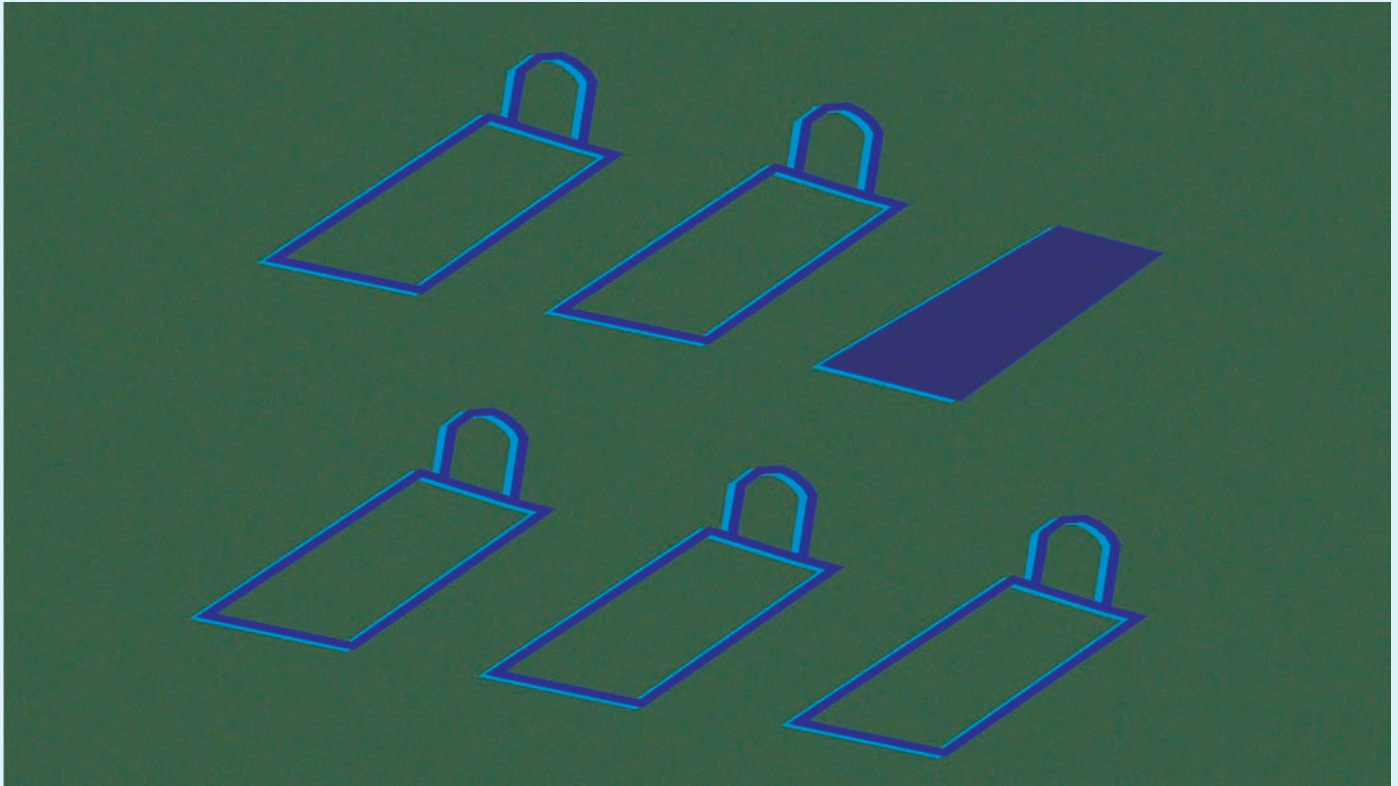
If I feel like I'm not getting enough attention, I'll make it happen. I'll poke and nudge and say hi and ask what you're doing and on and on and on. I know this is an annoying trait of mine, but it's so hard not to do it. I feel the words crawling up my throat, trying to escape. Maybe I'll just make a strange noise because I can't think of words to say. I don't want to be too weird, though. I can handle being a little quirky, but I don't want to be the girl people think of when someone is talking about "that one girl." I'm toeing a shaky line.

What I'm Doing to Change

A few months back, a friend compared me to a historical figure. If I told you who, I don't know if I could take the mockery. How out of touch does someone have to be to relate to someone with so much tragedy? She was drawing these parallels between us and I could see it. I know all of the things said were a joke, but I'm flattered. Being compared to such an inspiring person is an honor. If we're alike, am I also inspiring?

Sometimes, I think saying things like this makes me unlikable. It becomes too obvious that I'm fishing for attention. I try to work





on it but always slip back into my lowly ways. Sometimes, I think it's what makes me so memorable. I use humor as a defense mechanism. If I'm funny and say out-of-pocket things, it becomes a great story for people to tell. It comes off as an awkward sort of charm that they associate with me. They see a confidence and an ego that I can only hope someday becomes half-real.

While talking to people on campus, I realized their idea of who I am is far from how I see myself. If everyone sees me a certain way, is that a more accurate depiction of who I am? My personal branding is failing me. I am not attracting my target audience. I need to reposition myself. I've done this before. Rebrands, repositions, reeverything. If I don't like my personality, I'll just change it.

Okay, that may sound crazy. We all do it though. Every time you start talking like one of your friends or wearing things just because they wear them, your personality is adapting to what they like. I read somewhere

that girls don't want to be unique. Girls want to be like other girls. I am an amalgamation of every girl I've admired. For the rest of my life, I'll continue to change who I am to be more like other people.

The End

As I lay undying, at the ripe old age of twenty-three, practically over-the-hill, I can't help but think back on my life. The decisions I've made and the bridges I've burned. All the people I met along the way shaped who I am today. And now I'm reflecting on a part of myself I've kept hidden. Maybe I'll work on accepting who I am and become self-satisfied. Or, maybe, I'll always struggle being in the background. I have theories about my constant need for attention, but I probably won't ever figure it out. How would I? Now, may we all mourn the girl I used to be; the girl that kept all of this a secret. **SL**

Right
Where you
Left
Me

Story by Madison Marlow

Photography by Dusty Autumn York





Unrequited love—a sharp melody that slashes its way through the chambers of our hearts, blaring our unfulfilled dreams and unspoken desires. A tale as old as time, it's a journey that many of us embark on, only to find ourselves lost in the haze of memories and feelings. Few experiences rival the raw intensity of unrequited love. You're marked by tumultuous waves of hope and despair. Yet, amidst the pain and loss, there are lessons to be learned from self-reflection and a shared experience, binding us together in our vulnerability. Here, we explore the multifaceted nature of unrequited love, diving deep to expose the darkness hidden beneath, embracing the lessons learned along the way.

The Pain

A dagger to the heart, a relentless ache refusing silence. It's the hollow feeling in the pit of your stomach, realizing your feelings were freely given only to never return. It's the sinking sensation of humiliation and crumbled dreams. It's the bittersweet symphony of emotions that play on repeat and the constant tug-of-war between holding on and letting go. The pain of not having your feelings returned manifests in different ways for every individual. It's a sharp pang of rejection that cuts deep into their sense of self-worth. For others, it's a slow and gnawing ache that eats away at their soul, leaving them hollow and empty inside. Regardless of its form, the pain is a universal experience that doesn't discriminate between gender, age or background.

The Loss

With the pain, there is also loss. A loss of dreams and expectations for the relationship, and of the future envisioned. Mourning what could have been, paired with the wistful longing for a love that was never meant to be. We mourn the loss of the connection we thought we had; the shared moments and memories that will never come to fruition. The person we believed them to be is gone; the image we constructed in our minds now lies shattered at our feet. Amid this grief, we grapple with the painful reality that we must let go of our hopes and learn to move forward without them.

The Lessons

There are invaluable lessons to be learned in those dark and murky depths. IN the face of rejection, we learn resilience as

we pick ourselves up and dust ourselves off after each heartbreak. As we come to realize that our value is not dependent on the validation of others, we practice self-care and relearn what our self-worth truly is. While we tend to show empathy and compassion easily towards others, it seems to be harder to treat ourselves with the same grace. A hard lesson to learn but paramount to heal and move forward. Unrequited love underscores the significance of boundaries and self-care, prompting us to prioritize our emotional well-being and establish healthy parameters within our relationships. Amidst the complexities of love's journey and our enduring optimism for better days ahead, it instills in us the virtues of patience and resilience. Ultimately, it teaches us acceptance and forgiveness, releasing the grip of resentment.



A Shared Experience

Perhaps most importantly, this is a shared experience; a universal thread that binds us together in our vulnerability. It's a reminder that we are not alone in our struggles and that many others have walked this path before us and emerged stronger on the other side. A testament to the resilience of the human spirit, to our ability to endure heartache and emerge with newfound strength and wisdom. In sharing our stories, we find solace in the knowledge that we are not alone and that there is comfort in the collective understanding of our shared experience. We find healing in the compassion of our friends who offer a listening ear and a shoulder to cry on. Friends who knew of the hopes for something more, wishing for the same thing for you. We find hope in the knowledge that, despite the experience, there is a beauty to be found in the journey of unrequited love; a beauty that lies in the lessons learned, the connections forged and the resilience of the human spirit.

Self-Discovery

With the seemingly endless sadness and heartache, there is still a ray of hope at the end of the tunnel. This journey often leads to profound self-discovery. A time of introspection and reflection, a chance to peel back the layers of our own hearts and uncover the truths that lie within. Our fears and insecurities are confronted and our vulnerabilities are embraced with care, finding the strength to slay this beast. And through this self-discovery, we emerge stronger, wiser and more resilient than before.

In The End

Unrequited love is a complex experience, unique to each person and heart. It tests our resilience, challenges our perceptions and ultimately aids in shaping who we are and how we approach love. And though the road may be charged with heartache and heavy truths, there is comfort in the knowledge that we are not alone. There is strength in our shared experiences and, in the end, love, whether requited or unanswered, is a universal force that binds us together in our vulnerability. **SL**



“We find hope in the knowledge that, despite the experience, there is a beauty to be found in the journey of unrequited love; a beauty that lies in the lessons learned, the connections forged and the resilience of the human spirit.”

Love Me.



TOWERS CRUMBLING

*Story by Maggie Lowery
Photography + Illustrations by Amanda Coppeti*



✦ ✨

WHEN MANY OF US GET OUR FORTUNE READ WITH TAROT, THE ONE CARD WE ALL DREAD THE MOST IS THE INFAMOUS TOWER CARD. WHAT IF, INSTEAD OF DREADING THE CHAOS AND CALAMITY THAT IS PREDICTED TO COME, WE STARTED VIEWING IT AS A FRESH START FROM THE GROUND UP IN THE REMAINS OF WHAT ONCE WAS?



THE ORIGIN OF TAROT

While tarot readings are a common practice today, its origins are speculated to be dated to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The Tarot had a presence in early Spain, Italy and Arabian cultures. Both then and now, these cards are used as a way for people to find guidance and answer their pondering questions. Today, we use two decks in mainstream tarot card readings, the Major Arcana and the Minor Arcana.

The main difference between these two decks is the Minor Arcana, which focuses on everyday events and smaller-sized events throughout someone's day. The Major Arcana focuses on life and course-altering events that could open and close doors for someone's path. The Minor Arcana resembles a modern-day playing card deck with fifty-two cards and ten numbered cards. The Minor deck contains Cups, Swords, Wands and Pentacles. Meanwhile, the Major deck consists of twenty-two cards, from zero to twenty-one. These cards consist of The Fool, The Wheel of Fortune, and the card we're focusing on, The Tower.



HOW DOES IT WORK?

How Tarot works is that, regardless of whether you are reading your own cards or if someone is reading them for you, you need to have a question in mind. Many people ask about their love life while others ask about finances. If you don't have anything specific in mind, you can always ask a general question about your future. After that, you or the reader will then shuffle the deck of cards to get a good reading. Sometimes, there will be cards that pop out during this shuffling process. These cards will not be returned to the deck. Instead, they will be left out on the side as these kinds of cards are seen as a sign from greater forces, urgently wanting to tell you something. After the cards have been shuffled, there are many different ways to go forward in terms of pulling out cards. One of the more popular methods is splitting the deck in half and picking a half, then doing the same thing to the half by splitting that one and picking a side. After picking a side for a second time, you will typically pick three cards that instinctively stand out to you. Once you pick your three cards, you will then flip the cards so that the image and the name of the card are facing upwards towards you. It's okay if the cards are upside-down or "reversed," which is completely normal. Once all the cards are flipped, you and the reader will typically interpret what these cards are trying to say based on what each card represents.

Tarot reading, like many other things, became popular due to its presence on the internet and social media. Both Adi Greening (she/they) and Abi Newman (she/they) have been practicing tarot reading for over four years now. Both discovered the practice from watching videos of people doing different kinds of readings on YouTube. Both practice tarot casually as a means to better understand themselves and to help others better understand themselves. Adi and Abi will be referenced throughout this story as people who work very closely with the Tower card as I listened to their thoughts and advice on interpreting the card.



WHAT EXACTLY IS THE TOWER CARD?

The Tower card is a part of the Major Arcana deck and is numbered as the sixteenth card. The image that is depicted in most if not all Tower cards is one of a large tower-like structure that has some type of fiery or destruction-like imagery at the top of it. Many Tarot reference guides describe the Tower card as representing a sign of upcoming sudden change in one's day-to-day life. Whether drawn upright or reversed, this card represents events that will likely disrupt the way that a person has been living.

When the card is placed upright, it's often interpreted as an issue or worn-out structure that you have been actively ignoring and now the consequences of your actions are catching up to you. The reversed meaning is described as an acknowledgment of stubbornness even though, internally, you know that you need to change your ways. One could interpret that while the Tower card does signify a disruption in day-to-day life, you can also say that you were the one who caused it and you are being held accountable for your actions. This is also something that both Greening and Newman emphasize in their interpretation of the Tower card. While they may not necessarily like the Tower card and what it represents, it holds you accountable.

The Tower has origins that closely tie into the story of the Tower of Babel in the biblical tale from Genesis 11:1-9. The premise of the story is that mankind wanted to build a tower so tall that they could reach God and the Heavens. In response to this, God then had man speak different languages from each other and scatter them in different places over the globe so they couldn't finish building this tower and eventually abandon it. While there is no direct mention of God destroying the tower they were building, it was implied through images.



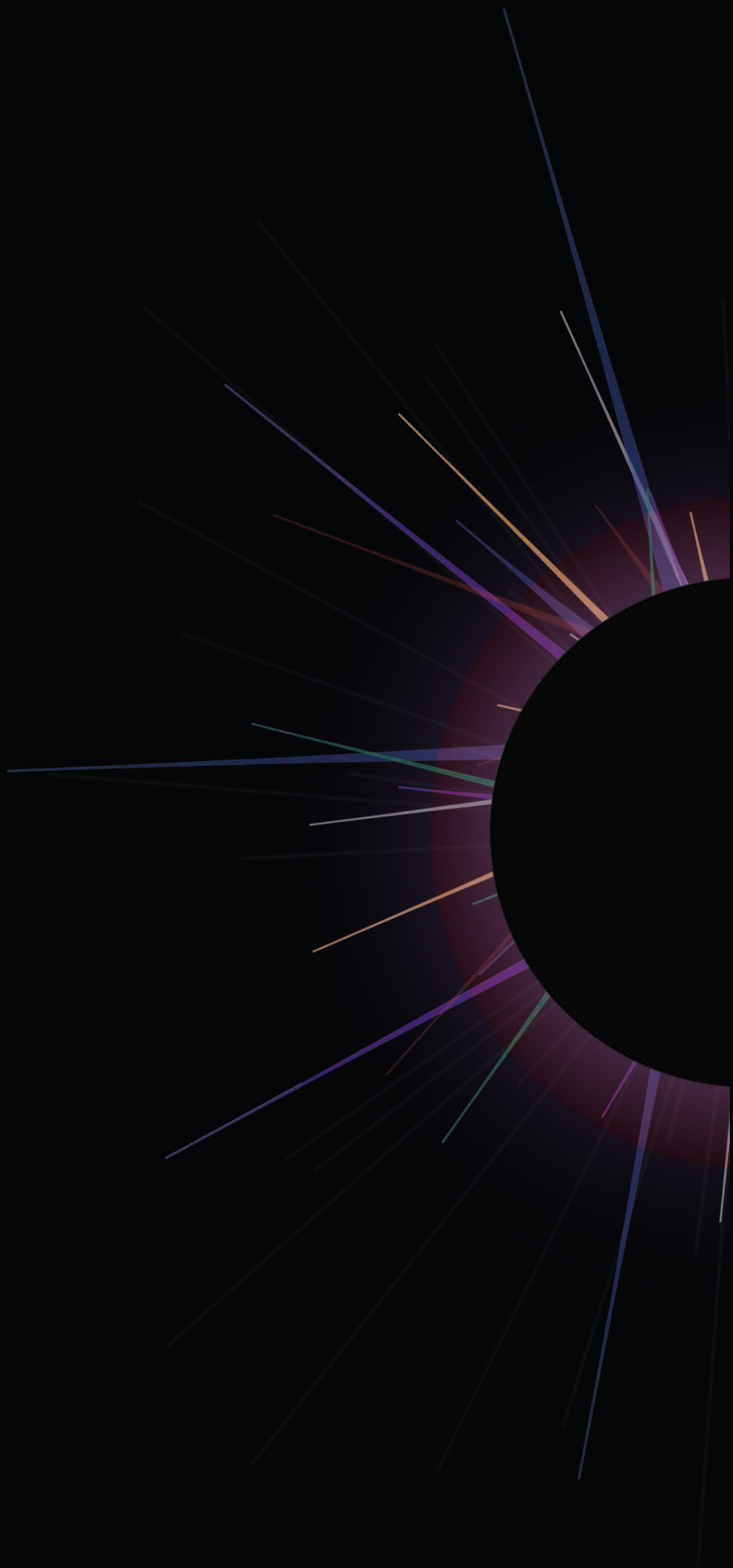
While the Tower represents throwing us into a sudden change in our lives, it can be seen as a impetus for the betterment of ourselves and both Greening and Newman agree. Newman admitted to a strong and open dislike of the Tower card but she recognized that the purpose of the card is for an acknowledgment of one's actions and consequences. While Greening didn't necessarily have a negative or positive opinion of the card, she can understand the stigma around it. She also expressed similar thinking of the card being needed to call attention to the card's purpose and that the card can help ground us and keep us in check. They both also agree that the Tower card does allow us to have a clean start to begin anew.

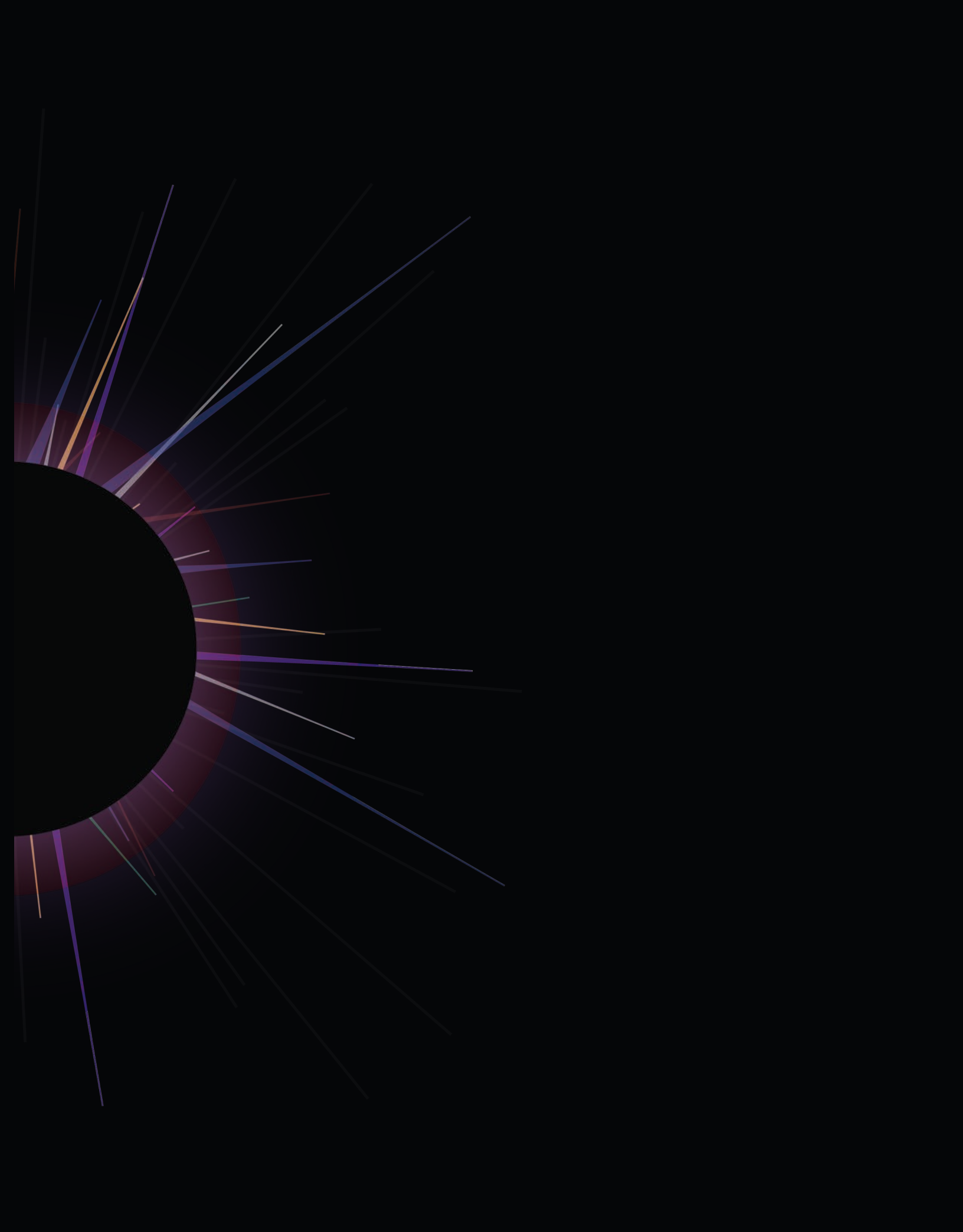
I do agree that, while the card may be seen in a negative light, there is a deeper meaning behind what the card is truly trying to convey. While the

card indeed represents impending, drastic change, it also reminds us to take a moment to consider how this might be a change for the better. The Tower card can represent events that may seem bad in the moment, but in the long run, can help us pinpoint the moment that we were able to start things over and allow us to pivot in a new direction for the better

From a physiological view, we naturally fear what we may classify as "the unknown." So it makes sense for us to fear the uncertain change predicted by the Tower, making us develop this fear by association. It's not the changes that the card is predicting that we fear, it's the internalized fear of not knowing what's going to happen next.

While it's only human of us to fear the unknown, what if we instead learned to embrace it with open arms? SL





SUPERMASSIVE BLACK HOLE

Story by Jo Douglas Photography by Emilee Frasier



The following story contains themes of mental health and trauma. Be wary!

Every person is like a galaxy; the colorful exterior of dust and light our persona, twirling planets our personality traits and blazing stars our hobbies. Spiral or irregular, blue or yellow, differences make us interesting and similarities bring us together. We're all unique in our own way. We glitter and glow throughout our existence, even if a disaster happens. Galaxies are not often impacted by the death of a single star or the collision of two planets – they have billions of extras!

But sometimes they are affected. Sometimes galaxies are torn apart from the inside out. Sometimes there's a relentless pull of our greatest faults, fears and trauma. There's that looming supermassive black hole in the pit of your stomach, the back of your head and the center of your world. It is inescapable. For me, it is the mental health struggles I've had since an early age. I cannot erase these experiences, just as a galaxy cannot help if a planet or two or fifty get swallowed up by its insatiable core. Life isn't about vanquishing your black hole; it is resisting the pull and learning how to keep your little galaxy in check.

THE SCIENCE

What even is a supermassive black hole? It sounds like my five-year-old sister scrawled a black circle on paper and named it, not a scientific classification. Personally, I would've given them a badass name like "Herculean black holes" to fit the mythology theme. Alas, even astronomers get lazy.

Black holes themselves are nightmarish. Described by NASA (America's home of all things space) as "an astronomical object with a gravitational pull so strong that nothing, not even light, can escape it." How could they get worse? By getting bigger.

Supermassive black holes are between ten thousand to a billion times the mass of our sun. Most large galaxies have one at their center, the Milky Way included! Scientists have no idea how these colossal voids came to be but know they can grow even larger by "feeding" on smaller objects. Even more horrifically, they can merge into each other and cause a collision of galaxies.

Monstrous voids of gravity wait at the center of galaxies to devour anything that comes near. Peachy.

BLACK HOLEOLOGIST

Enter Jenni Earp. She graduated from John Brown University with her master's in counseling and currently works in Northwest Arkansas. She has had years of experience, specifically with young people and families. Not only is she a professional, but she is also my therapist.

Trauma and mental illness are genuine threats. Earp knows this better than anyone. They are all-enveloping, physical, mental and emotional.

Like how the black hole devours, trauma seeps into a person's entire life. Don't just take my word for it. Earp details what she has observed.

"Trauma can make a person more vulnerable to developing mental health problems. It can also cause some people to misuse drugs, alcohol and self-harm as ways to cope with difficult memories/emotions or flashbacks from the trauma.

On a physical level, trauma can cause hyperarousal (hypervigilance). The body constantly stays on guard or on the lookout for danger, even when there is no risk of anything bad happening."



This isn't even mentioning the most basic symptoms associated with mental illness: nausea, trouble breathing, change in appetite, stomach issues and the list only continues. Can this get better?

Earp believes so. Although mental illness and trauma will never disappear, they can be managed. She describes her opinion on the fixity of trauma and mental illness.

"In my experience, mental illness/trauma never fully goes away. There is no permanent cure. Some people can reduce their symptoms to a manageable level to keep it from controlling their lives by utilizing positive coping skills learned in therapy or medication provided by a doctor."

Much like the supermassive black holes we have discussed, trauma and mental illness do not simply fade away. There is a fight to keep it contained, not destroyed. Planets may not be swallowed, but that does not mean the threat is gone. The void is still there.

TELESCOPES READY?

1:12 pm. August 18, 2005. Fort Smith, Arkansas. Feel free to read my chart, astrology lovers. That's my exact time and place of birth. I weighed 7 pounds and 11 ounces. Welcome to the formation of my galaxy.

Mom and Dad divorced when I was three. Dad was a drug addict and mom was at her limit. Even still, Nina (his mother) would drive us up to visit him at whichever 'big-boy timeout' (jail or rehab) he was at.

I didn't understand. He was away but sent me letters and drawings of my favorite characters. That was all I needed. It takes a village to raise a headstrong little girl. While Mom was working her ass off, raising me, going to college, going on dates and holding a job, I spent my weekends with

Nina and PawPaw, not to mention Gigi and aunts and uncles. Arkansas is the kind of place where blood is blood and you don't abandon or ignore it.

All of this is meant to give you a brief idea of how I grew up. It wasn't awful. Dad was absent for the most part, but he still did his best. Go-Karts and piggyback rides. Maybe I already had abandonment issues. But who's to say? I was happy.

ENVELOPING DARKNESS

But nothing lasts forever. The older I got, the more things happened. Mom gave me a little brother in 2013 and a little sister in 2015 from the evil man we have dubbed "sperm donor." Dad moved to California with my future stepmom in the interim. I got two little sisters from them in 2015 and 2019. I was now an older sister and a budding pre-teen.

Middle school came, and I was all numbed out. I had perfected the art of taking all of those big feelings and trapping them.

Not just bad ones, either.

I felt nothing but extremes. It was hard to be happy. For a while, I thought I was broken. I even considered the option that I was secretly an unfeeling psychopath.

My only saving grace from that psychopathy diagnosis was my people-pleasing behavior. I was at prime exploitation. Emotionally unstable, insecure and needy. It was all too easy to manipulate me. People don't do that in elementary school but they sure as hell do when the hormones kick in.

Toxic relationships formed the brunt of my adolescence and teenage years. I spent these years of my life at the will of others.

Like a moth to the flame, I attracted people who sought only to take advantage. Instead of being just a teenager, I was a therapist, mother and survivor. My existence was to please and serve. From middle school to high school, I suffered through experiences and people full of poison. In the midst of everything, I broke.

TRIP TO THE MOON (MENTAL INSTITUTION)

I was fifteen. Dad was sober and back in from California. He took me to my annual pediatrician appointment as an act of true fatherhood. Neither of us was expecting me to admit to her that I had suicidal thoughts. I just wanted validation. My supermassive black hole was engulfing me.

Instead, I was sent to my local mental institution and got labeled as “troubled.” Yay!

I spent three days there. Mostly, I cried, but I also played card games: bullshit, trash and Uno.

The girls in there were some of the kindest, funniest people I had ever met.

They made me laugh when tears threatened to spill. They made me smile when all I was thinking about was home. Only they knew how I felt.

When I was released, I vowed to never tell anyone about those thoughts again, but I would finally be going to real therapy. Before the intake, I was attending sessions for cheap with a college student.

Now, insurance would shoulder the bill. My galaxy was irregular; one to watch from a distance with a little telescope.

That task fell upon Jenni Earp. Remember her? I still attend sessions with her to this day.

CONCLUSION

Although I started medication and therapy, I am not free of my trauma. I still struggle every day. There’s the tugging in the back of my mind telling me the worst possible scenarios, like that my friends all hate me and my peers think I’m disgusting. Some days, it’s a struggle to get out of bed for morning classes or work. I still survey every room I enter like a guard dog; where are the exits, who are these people, is there any danger?

Most of all, I stumble and relapse. Small comments or images can remind me of a painful part of my past. I am full of anger and guilt for the parts of my childhood and teen years that I lost.

Life sucks sometimes. Every time you have a high, you’re bound to hit a low. Conflict is unavoidable, and running away won’t help. This article is a warning: you’d do best to not forget about that gluttonous void inside of you, lest it swallow you whole. All it takes is one supernova to incite carnage among the stars. So arrange your space dust, organize your planets and brighten your stars.

You have a black hole to tame! **SL**



Queen of the Night

Story by Maggie Lowery
Photography + Illustrations by Naya Goodman



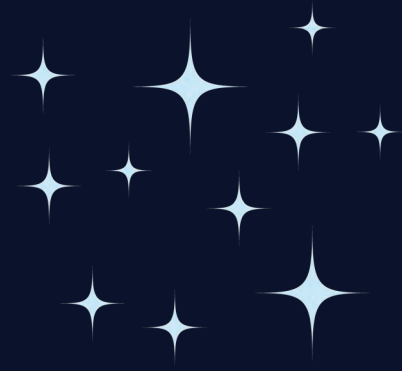
We've all heard of the big three in Greek Mythology: Zeus, Hades, and Poseidon. We've also heard of their predecessors, the Titans, and their father, Kronos. But there was also a time before the Titans, what the Greeks called Chaos. Born from Chaos was Nyx.

Who is Nyx?

Chaos is commonly referred to in Greek mythology as an abyss or a void, not a god. Those born from Chaos are a part of the first generation of primordial deities, which include Nyx alongside Gaia, Eros and Erebus. Nyx is the Greek goddess of the night and the mother of everything mysterious, such as sleep, death and dreams. She is the wife and sister of Erebus, who was dubbed the god of the dark and darkness. She and her brother reside and rule from the Underworld alongside other gods such as Hades and Hecate.

Nyx is often depicted as naked or with a robe of pure darkness encasing her body. Flowing over her shoulders, along veil of stars. She drives a carriage pulled by horses across the night sky. Nyx is the mother of many personified gods, such as Aether of the air, Hemera of daylight, and the twin gods Thanatos and Hypnos, who are the Gods of Death and Sleep. Because Nyx is the literal mother of these gods of personified things, she has earned the title, mother of all mysterious things.

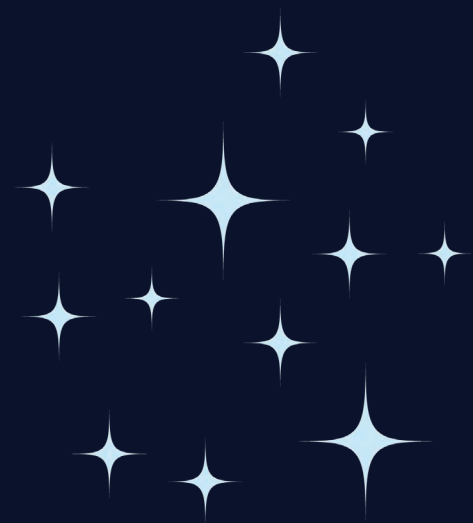
If we listen or pay attention to the order in which the gods come in, we would notice that Nyx came into creation at the same time the Titans came about. Because of this, we can assume that she had similar, if not more substantial, power and status than other Titans such as Gaia and Kronos. This also means she was more powerful and higher in status than her nephews Zeus, Hades and Poseidon. This would place all her children and offspring at the same level as the primary gods and goddesses we know.



Nyx Appearing in Other Tales

We don't often see Nyx make an appearance in most mythological tales. When she does, there are a lot of mentions of her presence evoking intimidation and fear of her powers, so much so that Zeus fears confirmation with Nyx. She doesn't make appearances or references in stories often; that's primarily because she's a part of the "Primordial Deities." This is mainly because when she came into creation, there was no passage of time. Because of that, there weren't many significant historical events similar to the common myths and tales we associate with other gods.

She does make appearances with the myths and tales of her fellow Primordial Deities, such as her husband, and brief mentions of Gaia. Still, she doesn't commonly make appearances in the younger generations of god and goddess tales because she is a part of the Primordial Deities. When mentioned or referenced by those who aren't primordial deities, she is often described as someone with high power and stature; feared and worshiped simultaneously. Meanwhile, the other deities describe her as very reserved and quiet around them, but there is also mention of her power and the combined power between her and her husband. Aside from her children, who likely see a much softer side, many gods, such as the previously mentioned Zeus, avoid conflict and possibly upset the goddess to not invoke her wrath upon them.



Unfortunately, many of the Greek mythological tales were initially passed down orally for generations before. Eventually, these tales of triumphs and tribulations were written down, and other people followed suit. This means there could be stories of gods that we rarely mention or know very little about besides who they were and what they looked like. With this in mind, we can only assume that this story about our goddess of the night is true since there aren't any documented stories that are solely dedicated to just her. All that we really know is how she looks based on her visual depictions and stories of her being feared by the ruler of Mount Olympus. However, due to her mysterious nature and our lack of excessive knowledge about her, she has started to gain interest in modern society. Her power as a woman has a great deal of importance and it's a tragedy that we have lost all knowledge of her.

Conclusion

While we may not hear Nyx's name often in Greek mythology, that doesn't mean she's insignificant. If anything, she was not put under the same spotlight as the gods were simply because of her gender and the fact that she didn't actively stir up as much drama. We should not cast aside her story just because she's a woman in a heavily male-dominated era. **SL**



The Unplugged Coffee Pot





*Story by Jordan Davis
Photography by Daniela Saenz-Quintana*

My grandmother forgot to unplug the coffee pot. I remember her bending over the kitchen sink, struggling to remove the burnt residue from cracked glass. As a child, I did not think her forgetting to remove the plug from the outlet was a big deal until she forgot my name. Before she died, she forgot who she was. Before my grandmother forgot who she was, she went to church every Sunday. Outside of that brick building, I'd wait hours for her to finish conversing with each person she came across. We would grab lunch. On weekdays, I sat in a dance studio while she did jazzercise. Despite the other dancers being decades younger, my grandmother did not care. Her spirit was ageless. In the morning, she made the best pancakes and drowned them with maple syrup. She reflected back on her childhood, working cotton fields while the other children went to school. She spoke highly of my great aunt who raised her when their parents died at the start of their childhood. With the decline of her mind and the disease of dementia, the core of who my grandmother was had evaporated. She did not remember her sister who took on the role of a mother. She couldn't drive to church on Sundays nor could she jazzercise on Tuesdays. I don't remember the last time I had her pancakes. If I did, I'd savor each bite. My grandmother did not forget to unplug the coffee pot, she no longer knew how to use one. A spirit once ageless, regressed to one rather childlike that could never develop. The

foundation of what I believed my grandmother to be had died before her. If a stroke, dementia

or any brain damaging factor can wipe away our perceived self, then who are we?



What is Consciousness?

Consciousness is the state of being awake. Consciousness allows awareness of experiences and life events in our day-to-day living. Consciousness is not the experience itself. In metaphorical terms, consciousness acts as a television on which shows are played. The shows may differ with the themes and overall plot. However, the television itself does not change. Therefore, our thoughts, opinions and feelings occur in consciousness just like diverse storylines, actors and settings shown on that T V .

While your feelings, opinions and thoughts of yourself remain temporary, consciousness is constant. Consciousness is the "I am," an observer of all your experiences. The events that occur in life are filtered through this television screen known as consciousness. Nondual lecturer Rupert Spira states, "Everything that is known is filtered through the medium with which it is known, and appears in accordance with its limitations."

This quote illustrates my experience of wearing prescription glasses. Until I turned seventeen, my mother took me to the eye doctor. In order to legally drive, I had to wear prescription glasses. Through those lenses, my surroundings looked sharper and clearer. As I slowly evolved into these new lenses, I forgot I even had glasses on. I forgot my prior perspective. Similarly, our consciousness perceives all of our experiences. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, the neuroscience of consciousness is a combination of two things which are the sensory information from the environment and the brain's foretelling about the cause of those signals. Therefore, our perception of the world is personalized, rather false. Once receiving the sensory information, our brain resorts to past experiences to foresee what that certain configuration of stimuli means. Stimuli and prediction produce a personalized three-dimensional mental manifestation of our reality. In the words of English writer Alan Watts, "In a world where there are no eyes, the sun would not be light, and in a world where there were no soft skins, rocks would not be hard, nor in a world where there were no muscles would they be heavy. Existence is a relationship, and you are smack in the middle of it."



Nonduality

Nonduality is the philosophy that the personal self which we identify through the lens of our thoughts and our experiences is merely a fictional manifestation of “Brahman” or pure awareness which is often in the nondual sphere known as consciousness as well. The term “nondual” is essentially the belief that everything is one or that one is everything. In conclusion, any idea of the self is merely a manifestation of delusion. On a philosophical level, nonduality is reminding ourselves that our individuality is an appearance built in ignorance. If lightning struck a tree to fall from its stature with no one around to hear it, did it even make a sound? If there were no eardrums to convert vibrations into sound, would the concept of noise exist? To the nondual understanding, we are co-creating the world.





What Makes Us Human?

So, if I were to ask who you were, what would be your answer? Without using the confines of personality traits manifested from our perception of the world and past experiences, who are you? This is a question I am still trying to find the answer to. All I know is my grandma lost all power of self to dementia. Despite the disintegration of her mind, all she had left was the physical form, her purgatorial existence before death. In essence, my grandmother was not defined by her extroversion or ageless spirit. She was merely a witness of her thoughts, actions and experiences. In life, she may have lost the perception of herself. However, she remained a helpless spectator, at the mercy of her mind. SL

The Withering Fruit



Story by Ryann Jenkins-LeFlore
Photography by Mollie Davidson



Bakery owner, florist, barista, journalist, stylist and interior designer. Colorado, New York, London and the countryside of France. These are all the things I aspire to be and all the places I want to live. Ambitious, right? I have Pinterest boards dedicated to each life I desire to live and daydream about; afternoons spent on the vineyard I own with my partner sipping the decadent wine we crafted. Sylvia Plath would describe this as my fig tree.

The *Bell Jar* is either a story you've heard of, you know and love or you've found on TikTok. The classic novel is semi-autobiographical, following the life of Esther Greenwood with names and places changed. In it, you follow the crippling life of Greenwood in the 1950's as she faces the perils of being a woman in America with a debilitating mental health issue. The *Bell Jar* analogy, one of the most popular passages, is revealed when Greenwood has to choose a career path.

"I saw my life branching out before me like the green fig tree in the story. From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future beckoned and winked. One fig was a husband and a happy home and children, and another fig was a famous poet and another fig was a brilliant professor, and another fig was Ee Gee, the amazing editor, and another fig was Europe and Africa and South America, and another fig was Constantin and Socrates and Attila and a pack of other lovers with queer names and offbeat professions, and another fig was an Olympic lady crew champion, and beyond and above these figs were many more figs I couldn't quite make out. I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this fig tree, starving to death, just because I couldn't make up my mind which of the figs I would choose. I wanted every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest, and, as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and, one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet."

Though Plath's life was much different from my own, the line illustrating how difficult it is to choose—starving to death just because she couldn't make her mind up— is the one many of us resonate with. The act of choosing.

As a Pisces, I'm an avid daydreamer. There isn't anything I find more pleasing than my mind wandering off to another world or space in time, so the fig tree is something I'm very familiar with. My mind is the root of my fig tree, constantly supplying it with oxygen and the necessary nutrients it needs to grow. For as long as I can remember, I've sat for minutes, hours and days on end, daydreaming about my ideal life. As a kid, I wanted to be a fashion designer. I am now a fashion communicator. Even though I chose this major, my path isn't solidified in stone. I want to be an American writer who moved abroad to London. I yearn to be an interior designer based in New York. I Want to be a queer author who lives by the sea. I want to open a bakery that's part coffee shop and bookstore and yell: "We sell flowers every Wednesday in Spring." I want to own a vineyard and live a lush life. I want summers in Greece, Brighton, Italy, France and Barcelona. I want Colorado, Chicago and Portland. All of these wants, and you're probably wondering, "hell, when will it end?" It won't.

As a senior in college, I'm constantly asked the inevitable dreadful question of "What do you want to do?" or "What's next?" Despite my immediate reaction being "leave me the hell alone," I tell them that I have plans to move to Colorado upon graduating and pursuing a career in writing and journalism. While this is the truth, in the back of my mind I think about all the other fig trees and feel guilty for not including them, for watching them wither and dry out. I feel guilty for neglecting the very things I supply oxygen to because I so desperately need them. The act of choosing how to respond to what I'm going to do with my life once I enter the "real world" is much easier to say than it is to actualize.





I know where I'm moving to. However, I don't know what job I want. Graphic designer. Writer. Journalist. Social media manager. Content creator. "The possibilities are endless" and "the world is your oyster." That is the scariest part of making a decision. Not only do you begin to question what decision is the right one, but you wonder what happens if you don't pursue this other dream. You also start to doubt that it's a passion but, instead, a distraction keeping you from making a decision, a cop-out from being afraid that you're going to make the wrong decision. I don't know which is the answer but I do know this paralyzing cycle is one many people are familiar with. Not just students or children, but parents, teachers, lawyers and beyond. We're all people with hopes and dreams in the shape of a plump purple fruit. Though this is a human experience, at what point do we ask ourselves what will make us the happiest? When will we stop thinking about what was or could be and what is? When do we take it one day at a time, one dream at a time, one fig at a time and fucking breathe?

For months, I've been writing "apply for post-graduation jobs" on my calendar and that has turned into "research jobs to apply for" and is now "make time to apply for jobs." This is, in part, due to my tendency to procrastinate but also due to uncertainty. My journey here at Stephens has led me down many different paths and allowed me to experience all I've wished for in my college career. Because of this, I can go into many fields and take the necessary skills and then some. The world is my oyster, and the possibilities are endless, but where do I begin? I don't. I sit in my bed, couch or the lap of a friend supporting me while I spiral about what to do and what's best.

A type A person or a realist may argue that simply making a pro and con list or writing about your options may solve paralyzing decision-making. But for people who struggle with this, you know it isn't so simple. According

to "Datanami," a news outlet for insight, in a study by "Oracle," access to more information doesn't make decision-making easier. 83% of participants said that access to more data should make decision-making easier and 86% stated that more data has led to less confidence and even more decisions to make.

Everyday decisions are easy to make. What do I want for breakfast? How do I want to wear my hair? What do I want to do over the weekend? Give me thirty minutes, I'll have it all planned out hour by hour. It's the life-altering decisions that leave you wondering: "What if I'd chosen a different career path?" The decisions that Google can't even give you terrible advice for. Those are the ones that leave you at the very bottom drowning in dried-up figs, the warm, sweet and earthy nature of them comforting you, allowing you to romanticize and idealize until you've waited until the very last second to pick a fig, bite it and live.

The Fig Tree analogy provides comfort to some who feel seen and enjoy relating to other people, giving them a reason to make dreamy TikToks with ethereal audios behind them. While for others, it is a brutal realization and wake-up call.

So, here lies my fig tree. There's no fixing it. Truth be told, after writing this, I'm going to find another life to live, another cool place to stay. I'm going to make a new Pinterest board for the person I hope to be in another five years and I'll feel an immense amount of dissatisfaction when I achieve that and want to do something else again. It's an endless cycle of wanting, striving and achieving, and that not being enough. When will it be enough? SL

"I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this fig tree, starving to death, just because I couldn't make up my mind which of the figs I would choose."

-Sylvia Plath



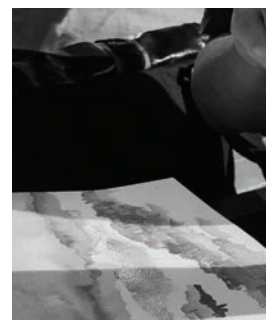
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Photography by Mollie Davidson



HUMAN



REALITY SURPASSES
REASON - SUM
OF EXISTENCE

NEGATIVE SPACE
PARALLEL TO
A BLACK HOLE.....



REALITY



Dear Reader

Thank you for reading The Supernova Issue and for your continuous support of Stephens Life. If you've made it this far, that means you've read and seen all the hard work each of us has poured into this issue and you've probably noticed the darker feel this one poses. We hope that after reading, you walk away feeling seen and connected with the writers and feel empowered to share the story you've been holding inside.

STEPHENS LIFE MAGAZINE

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Calamity

[ca-lam-i-ty]

(n.)

An event causing great and often sudden damage or distress; a disaster.