



FLIRT:

# THE FUTURE IS FLUID





# AI

History is a carousel. Our fears manifest predictably with the arrival of what threatens change. We've seen this before; The Gutenberg Press didn't replace authors, it made literature more widespread. It is unlikely that AI will replace artists; but perhaps it'll widen the canvas. Worrying that AI will replace us the way cars replaced horses presupposes that the purpose of horses was to pull our carriages.

None of this is to say that we shouldn't be scared. When the QT Team considered AI art for an issue, we immediately discussed the ethics. What would we be saying about art? About queerness, the fear of it, the unknowability of it, and the beauty of it? But, after introducing our art director, Vanida, to the world of generative AI one thing became clear: AI didn't design this issue. An artist designed this issue using AI.

The future is fluid. It's in flux.  
It's unknowable.

But isn't that what art is? An attempt, however impossible, to know the unknowable?

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# HEY CUTIE

SEPTEMBER 23, 2023

Happy Bi+ Visibility Day!

Flirt. Flirt? Flirt! What does it mean to look across a room at someone and catch their eye? How does it feel when you flirt? What does it look like?

In the queer community, flirting isn't always straightforward. We create spaces and symbols and aesthetics to communicate but those are often co-opted or misread. What do you do, to get flirty?

"Flirt" is issue no. 12 for QT and the zine for the 7th annual Bi+ Arts Festival. This issue showcases artists and writers who identify as bi, pan, fluid, queer, or otherwise non-monosexual.

-Pax Santos,  
QT Founding Editor

# LATE NIGHT IN A FIELD OF LILLIES

Coated in moonlight  
the lilies orbit us in violet flares.  
The breeze steers the smell of your perfume into  
my body.  
I take a deep breath  
as your fingers reach for mine.  
And, although all I hear  
is the sound of our breathing,  
for us,  
the lilies,  
hum a nocturne  
in harmony with the stars  
around our heads.

# TIKTOK VIRGIN

The person in the video wears purple lipstick. Crushed purple. Bruised purple on full lips. It isn't until the third time Ava watches the video that she notices the eyes: a velvet brown. A kind of fathomless brown.

A kind of spongy warmth between her legs.

Ava also realizes that even though the video shows up in her Instagram feed, it's originally from TikTok—a platform she's always thought of being for people her daughter's age. Young people with nothing better to do. But she downloads the app, because of those eyes.

Signs up for an account. Those lips.

Follows the creator. That jaw.

And Ava's not shocked by the images that flash through her mind: smashing her mouth against those lips, tracing a chiseled mandible with her tongue, biting the diaphanous silk off a shoulder and running her hands down a smooth muscular back. But, she registers she should be shocked. Ashamed.

Jendeh. Whore.

A gold earring dangling against the pulsing heat of a neck.

Ava bites her lip. Her parents would disown her. She considers this: the absurdity of fearing censure from her parents, at her age.



And these feelings—natural as bodies folding into each other—may mean nothing.

Nasar slams through the front door and plops onto the couch beside her, dropping his head back and rubbing his eyes with a thumb and forefinger.

Ava puts her phone face down on her lap. It's just a phase. Maybe. As fleeting as the taste of salt licked from the inside of an elbow. The initial shock of sweetness sucked from a plum. It doesn't have to make sense. She puts a hand on Nasar's thigh and tries to absorb his familiar static. Her other hand, which hovers lightly over her phone, twitches.

But it doesn't have to mean anything at all.

BI'S





# ORANGE

My favourite smell is a freshly peeled orange  
My favourite feeling is your mouth on my neck  
Your hand between my legs  
Your fingertips grazing my skin

Touch me again  
And, after, I'll bring you an orange  
And we can suck the sweet nectar together

You'll tell me it's your favourite fruit  
And I won't tell you I already knew

The smell of fresh citrus will envelope the room,  
Sticking to your fingers and your tongue

Kiss me, wrap me in orange  
Peel away my worries  
And burn them with cinnamon  
Fill my senses until there is only you



# THE FOUR ACT STORY OF YOU AND ME

## I. EUPHORIA

hands the  
same size  
names the  
same sound  
so familiar  
speech  
so tender  
touch

mirror of my  
subtle  
organic  
movements

*don't run  
rush, my love  
rush my blood*

## II. SERENDIPITY

i like how you make  
me feel when  
we rest under  
the shadow  
of a pear tree  
when we  
drink a cup  
of tea  
at midnight  
eat freshly  
peeled oranges  
while  
winter surrenders  
into spring  
playing hide and seek  
with the sun  
i like how you  
make me feel

## III. SEE-SAW

your missing footsteps  
they follow  
they move  
they follow  
me back to the kitchen:  
spoiled orange juice

i liked how  
you made me feel:  
*playing*  
*hiding*  
*seeking*  
how you made  
me feel  
you made  
me

## IV. EPIPHANY

in front of  
our mirror i am  
praying  
dancing  
crying  
laughing  
singing  
kissing  
touching  
mourning all i ever was

i am still  
in the rooftop:  
drink white wine  
eat a peach  
smell daisies  
and let my body  
drench with sunlight  
holding on to  
*letting you go*  
letting you  
go




# THE BIG TOP

What's the difference between flirting and a joke? I'm not so sure I know the difference. Not when it comes to you. Both of them evoke similar emotions that make me feel uneasy. The feelings grow too big for my chest, like an overfilled balloon about to erupt with a loud bang, sending shards of colourful latex in all directions. I don't think I flirted, not seriously, at least; it's a joke. *Boys will be boys, homies but no homo.* Yet, the question, "Are you two together?" loomed over us like a wretched spectre, following every interaction, making me realize I'm not sure I know the difference between a joke and a flirt. Not with you, at least.

Was it always this way? When did it change? It must've happened when my eyes were closed, my body sinking into the soft mattress where I longed for more than our inescapable game of cat and mouse. I must not have noticed; too busy trying to enjoy the circus for all its revelry. Distracted by the ringmaster's cries and the chatter of others nearby. Shielding myself from getting scorched by the fire breathers that dared step too close. I would only half-heartedly draw back, daring the flames to lick my skin and leave their mark. I hadn't even realized the words that usually dripped with droll had evolved into something more titillating.

Nothing about this is clear. A joke shouldn't make my heart race or leave butterflies fluttering in



my stomach. And it shouldn't leave me staring at my popcorn ceiling in the depths of the night, attempting to read between the lines of our latest performance. You kissed me like it was slapstick, closed mouth and quick. Your lips were chapped, faintly tasting of tobacco and left over menthol lip balm while the chilled metal of my lip ring bumped against your flushed skin. I clung to every millisecond of that closeness, wishing I knew the difference between flirting and joking to understand what this meant. Though, in hindsight, I'm uncertain if you could distinguish between the two, either.

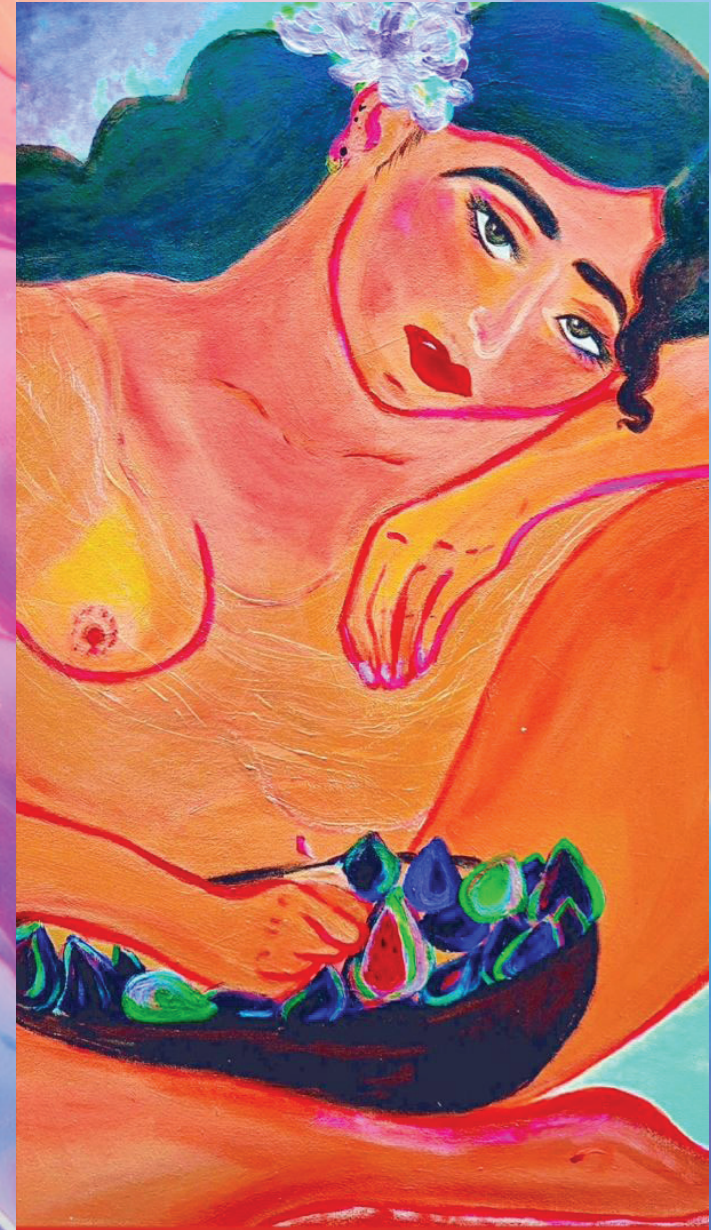
The joke ends abruptly with utterings of our future life. We were sipping on cups of hot coffee while seated in the comfort of a shaded porch. Envisioning a life together that made both our lips curve into dreamy smiles. Hypothetical, of course. At least, at first. A scene being painted of our newest bit. I think this is where we began to notice the difference. The circus tent crumples as the beams give way, but we don't try to escape. Instead, we seem resigned to suffocating under the heavy red and yellow canvas. I'm not sure if this was flirting, but I know for sure that it wasn't a joke. There were no sly grins with waggling brows or raunchy solicitation that died the moment the words rolled off the tongue. Yet, the feeling is similar to when we joke or flirt; I'm not sure what we even do anymore.

I still don't know the difference between flirting and a joke, not when it comes to you. But, I think I know what this is. And I think you do too.

# CRESH BAAZI

*Between sweet flesh, the fig eater tells you:  
"They call our eyes ghazal."  
Deer like. Divine. Animal. An invitation.  
Be good and she'll ask you in.  
Be kind and she will give your hunger a name.*

Chesh Baazi depicts a nude woman draped in a transparent, silk shawl enjoying a basket of assorted figs at her leisure and comfort. She looks at her companion lazily and with hidden mirth. Chesh baazi translates from Farsi into "eye play" and is based on the ancient, controversial act of Shāhid-bāzī. This ritual of flirtation between the archetypes of the lover and the beloved would often begin the acts of 'ishq-bāzī, which translates from Farsi and Arabic to "love play" or "lovemaking."





# ALTERNATE REALITY

*Write me a romance.*

On her way to work, a shy girl spills her latte on the guy she secretly admires...

*Stop! Write me a lesbian romance. My last boyfriend was, well, a boy, and I'm ready for a change. Wink.*

On her way to work, a shy girl spills her latte on the sporty girl she secretly admires. I say sporty because we don't use that other word in romances. But you know she's, ahem, sporty, because she has narrow hips and plays rugby. Shy girl is too shy to tell her best friend about sporty girl. She drinks a bottle of wine alone every night. She is silent in situations where Mr. Bean could give a TED Talk. The most incorrigible introvert you've ever met is Anne of Green Gables by comparison. She reaches her lowest point and learns an important lesson about taking risks. Sporty girl engulfs her in a hug, and they live happily ever after.

*Write me a romance where the protagonist's shyness is plausible.*

On the first day of grade 10, a shy girl spills her root beer all over the sporty girl she secretly admires...

*Write me a romance where the protagonist isn't shy!*

What?

*You heard me!*

Um... okay... On her way to work, a Type A girl gets Gatorade spilled on her by an annoyingly cute girl in a rugby uniform. She says "whom" because she's Type A. She drinks a bottle of wine alone every night. She gets angry in situations where Bruce Banner would just sip his tea. The crankiest person you've ever met is Yoda by comparison. She reaches her lowest point and learns an important lesson about letting go. Rugby girl ruffles her hair, and they live happily ever after.

*Write me a romance where the protagonist is butch.*

Sorry, I'm not familiar with that term.

*Bitch please.*

Oh, you mean sporty!

*I'm waiting.*

On her way to rugby practice, a girl with narrow hips spills her Gatorade on an impeccably coiffed brunette. The brunette says "whom," so we know she's annoyed. She drinks a bottle of wine alone every night.

*Wait, which one drinks?*

Sporty girl.

*Are you sure?*

Yes. The coiffed brunette also drinks, but the narrative focalization doesn't permit me to depict it.

*Wouldn't sporty girl prefer beer?*

Fine! ... she goes to a sports bar alone and drinks six beers every night. She avoids her emotions

in situations where Han Solo would be crying in his therapist's office. The most repressed person you've ever met is Carrie Bradshaw by comparison. She reaches her lowest point and learns an important lesson about opening up. The coiffed brunette plans their impeccable wedding and sporty girl's rugby teammates dress up for the occasion. Everyone lives happily ever after.

*Write me a romance about a chubby butch girl.*

In the kingdom of Benifica on the island-studded planet of...

*That's not what I asked for!*

You said "write me a romance set in an alternate reality."

*No! I said write me a romance about a chubby butch girl! Set it in Manhattan or Vancouver or something.*

Look, I can't do this. Sporty girls have narrow hips. That's how you know they're sporty.

*For the love of... fine, I'll do it myself! ... On her way to graduate seminar, a chubby girl in a flannel shirt spills her half-price coffee on an introvert who stutters incomprehensibly but then jokes about Judith Butler ("you know, the whole 'coffee person' vs. 'tea person' thing is just a cultural construct..."). Both girls are stressed about school, but they don't drink alone, because flannel girl can't afford wine and shy girl is taking antidepressants, and also who the f\*\*\* drinks a bottle of wine alone every night? Flannel girl is bi and shy girl briefly worries that she'll leave her for a rugby-playing ex-boyfriend, but they talk it out over their respective cups of tea and coffee. Flannel girl reaches her lowest point,*



*wherein she has only \$12 in her bank account. She says "wherein" because she's been in graduate school too long. She drops out and works her way up to assistant manager of the local Pancake House franchise. Shy girl finishes her degree, but ends up working the reception desk at a spa, where her quietness is an asset and she makes \$3 more than minimum wage. In private, shy girl is a dominatrix, and flannel girl is into it, so now and then when they aren't too tired they have really hot sex. They are solvent and fond of each other, and live tolerably ever after.*

That's the worst romance I've ever read - no one would pay to read that. This is why you're wasting your PhD as a bank teller while I'm sitting on my private beach with my MacBook, cranking out six novels a year.

*Ugh. Fine. ... While on a run to get in shape for rugby season, a slightly chubby girl spills her Gatorade on a blonde advertising executive... You're catching on.*

*... in a pantsuit, who turns out to be on the same rugby team because they are equally sporty... Wait... what? No, they can't both be sporty.*

*Ugh!!! ... Tell me again about the Kingdom of Benifica. Can two rugby-playing dykes fall in love there? How about two shy types in frilly vintage dresses?*

I'd have to check with my editor...  
Really?!!

You know, for a bank teller, you're kind of a free spirit.

*Thanks! I'm thinking of quitting my job to travel. Oh, really? You must be at your low point! You may need to learn a lesson about accepting reality. Depends what you mean by reality...*

Well anyway, since you're such a quirky rebel, wanna come over to my beach house so we can swill wine and miscommunicate drunkenly, and maybe, ahem, hijinks will ensue?

*Sure, why not. Can you wear a rugby uniform?*

For you, babe? Anytime.



# I HATE THIS SONG BUT I HOPE YOU CALL ME

All the boys in Mrs. Lewis' class have a crush on Katniss Everdeen.

Except her name's not Katniss, even though everyone started calling her that. Her name's Riley. And she only wore her hair in a single braid down her back that one day in November, the day before Thanksgiving break started, and never again. And unlike Katniss, Riley is Filipino, which is oddly spelled as such even though the country she's from is spelled with a *Ph*. Mrs. Shelley at the library helped me look that one up. And Riley doesn't know how to use a bow and arrow. I overheard her say that to Luke when he asked before he invited her to the end of the year dance. She said, "no".

*Everyone's required to go to the dance since they're letting us skip fourth period*, Riley replied matter-of-factly. Instead of getting mad, Luke blushed and walked away with a smile on his face, as if he didn't understand or care that he was rejected.

That's the type of girl Riley is. One who isn't afraid to say no. One who says things like *required*, which isn't something typical thirteen year olds say.

But, clearly, she isn't typical.

Riley pushes her locker closed softly and passes by me without a second glance.

And, clearly, I am. *Typical.*

“Earth to Lana.” A hand waves in front of my face.  
“Is anyone there?”

I shake my head, neck straining past Oscar’s big head to get one last glance at Riley’s retreating back.

Her best friends, Ruth and Brittany, loop their arms through hers, and no one says a thing that the three of them take up the whole hallway walking side by side.

“This is just sad,” Oscar sighs. “We’ve come to the end of middle school with your crush not even knowing your name. Not even knowing you exist.”

“That’s not true.”

When Riley transferred to Howard Middle School last year, she sat at the only lunch table that was nearly empty, which happened to be mine and Oscar’s table. She took out her lunch box and ate rice with some kind of brown looking thing from a rectangular container with a fork and a spoon. And then she took out a book which she read *while* eating. I made a mental note to borrow *Divergent* from the library that day. *That smells good*, I thought I whispered. But she glanced at me for a moment with a small smile that made my stomach do funny things. I was excited to see what she would bring the next day, and I promised myself the night before that I’d comment about it out loud this time. But, of course, Riley already made friends with the cool girls and sat with them instead.

Oscar rolls his eyes. “Oh and don’t tell me about that time.”

*That time* was when I heard Riley crying hysterically in the bathroom stall next to mine. We aren’t allowed to have cellphones but I overheard her on the phone with her mom.

*It’s okay, my mom said it’s normal for our age*, I muttered.

I passed her a pad under the stall, which she didn’t take from my hand until what seemed like an eternity. When we finally emerged from our stalls, I took off my sweatshirt and passed it to her, trying to cover the childish Donald Duck design on it.

*To wrap around your waist.*

Before she left, she touched my elbow. *Thank you, truly.*

I stayed in that bathroom until the next bell rang, vowing to never wash my arm again.

“I swear, there was *chemistry*,” I say.

“*There was chemistry*,” Oscar touches the back of his hand on his forehead pretending to faint.

We arrive at the gym where teachers stand around with rulers ready to measure how far apart kids of the opposite sex are while dancing. Mr. Jones is at the front with a big boombox and a handwritten sign that says “Accepting Song Requests.” Right now, he’s playing *Call Me Maybe*, which honestly is so

overplayed on the radio that it makes me want to bang my head against the wall.

“There she is,” Oscar gestures to the girls standing next to the snack table.

I take out my iPod and scroll through the list of songs. It’s my sister’s old one and she has okay taste in music. But, my neck threatens to break from the way I keep my head down to pretend I don’t see Luke and his minions swarm Riley and her friends. The earbuds only work a little bit in drowning out Carly Rae Jepsen and their laughter.

Not for the first time in my life, I wish it could be as easy for me to flirt with girls as it is for Luke. I wish it was as easy for me to even *talk* to them for that matter.

Trying to blink away the sudden sting in my eyes, I don’t notice Oscar whispering loudly in my ear.

“She’s co... She’s here,” he says, staring back at Riley standing in front of me.

I’m about to ask Oscar to pinch me but he runs away, taking away the small bit of confidence I had left with him.

“I still have your sweatshirt by the way,” Riley starts.

“Oh, that’s okay. You can keep that. I’ve had it since I was little.”

“All the more reason to give it back then. For sentimental reasons.”

I nod, making a mental note to add *sentimental* to my summer vocabulary list.

“I hate this song,” Riley groans.

“Me too,” I squeak out. And when she doesn’t turn away in horror, I hold out an earbud, “Want to listen to this instead?”

She moves closer to me, even though the cord is long enough. So close that I can smell raspberries in her hair. I try not to make it obvious that I’m inhaling as much of it as I can.

“What’s this?” Riley bops her head subtly.

“The Lumineers. It’s good right?”

I don’t say that I just learned of the band today. Or that it’s my sister’s music.

“It’s good,” Riley nods.

I hold my breath when the song is over, preparing for the thrill and loneliness that will overcome me once she leaves. But she doesn’t leave. She waits until the next song comes on, and again moves her head from side to side.

We look at each other from time to time, smiling with teeth and all. At what, who knows? Who cares?

We’re in a stinky old gym and everyone around us is sweating, dancing to the *Cha Cha Slide*. And I know I’m only thirteen, but I swear I know what I’m talking about. This is love and no one can tell me otherwise.

# ABOUT

Queer Toronto Literary Magazine is a non-profit dedicated to elevating and celebrating queer voices in Canada.

QT was started in response to the criminal shortage of Canadian queer literary magazines. There are so many LGBTQ2SIA+ artists out there! And in times of crisis, maintaining community and connection is vital.

QT brings together our collective projects to create that sense of shared space. QT celebrates the art queer individuals make for ourselves and for each other. We accept poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, book reviews, personal essays, reflections, memoirs, as well as artwork, drawings, comics, photographs, collages, and other visual media.

[www.qtmag.ca](http://www.qtmag.ca)  
[@qtlitmag](https://www.instagram.com/qtlitmag)



The Bi+ Arts Festival is an annual celebration of bisexual/ bi+ visibility, culture and history. We seek to connect bi+ audiences and artists/authors, to challenge bi-erasure and biphobia in the arts, and to create safe spaces for learning, imagination, and creative expression.

[@biartsfestival](https://www.instagram.com/biartsfestival)



Thank you to all the volunteers at QT and Bi+ Arts Festival, without whom neither organization could exist.

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