



~~LOVE~~

STORIES

a zine by ace/aro/aspec writers



# LOVE STORIES





# CONTENTS

1

FOREWARD: LOVE STORIES

2

FAIRYTALE, ISN'T IT?

*Isobel Hamilton*

5

THE MOON

*Tucker Smith*

11

LIFEVEST

*Amelia Burton*

12

IMAGINE

*Sara Garfield Sebert*

14

LEARNING TO LOVE

a story in three parts

*Maddie McAllister*



# LOVE STORIES

are difficult to quantify. The right words don't always exist, or if they do, they're all out of order. I admire anyone brave enough to pull those words onto the page, to try to put them one in front of the other, and have them say something new. Something ace/aro/queer/me/you.

This zine celebrates asexual, aromantic, ace spectrum, and/or aro spectrum writers at Smith College. This zine believes ace/aro/aspec identity is about creation, not absence. This zine loves you, because reading and writing are acts of love, too.

This zine wants to explode the idea of Love. Things might get a little messy. That's just part of the process.

- Amelia Burton  
*Editor, Organizer, and Designer*

# FAIRYTALE, ISN'T IT?

*Isobel Hamilton*

I live in a tall tower,  
that I found some time ago.  
I spend my time busily,  
pleased that it is my own.  
I knit, and I wander, and I play solitaire,  
and I bake, and I ponder, and I also stay aware  
of politics, and sums, and agriculture, and fresh air  
And I'm grateful to be living  
And to be grateful, and to be free.

One afternoon, I am napping by the window.  
An unfamiliar sound—I open my eye  
and what do I spy?  
Approaching with haste—a prince,  
on a tall, spotted horse.

Getting up with a groan,  
I ready some tea.  
He's come here to save me,  
and get married.  
....of course.

I wonder what he's thinking.  
If he thinks that he is brave.  
Gallantly arriving—  
I offer him a wave.

I don't think he sees it, but he might.

He's saying something now,  
Down at the foot of my tower.  
I invite him up for tea,  
And he delivers me a flower.



(Although I know what he's here for,  
It doesn't make him uninteresting.  
Maybe I'll learn something—  
maybe I'll go to town and meet the king!)

He says, "Damsel, marry me, and leave behind this tower."  
What on earth are they telling people? That I came out here to cower?

Sir, I say, kindly, yet forcefully, but not imprudently,  
I'm really not interested.  
Who am I? Where do I come from? And who is anyone to say?  
All I know is that I am here, and I am living a life that is still  
    considered rare;  
I have choices—So Many Choices; life is good, beyond compare.  
I know myself well,  
And I know that I am good company  
And merry to be unaccompanied.

We sit and drink tea,  
and I tell him, not unmerrily,

That maybe someday I'll find  
A man that I like,  
And I'll be a mother of some little tyke  
and maybe I'll love it, and be in love.

But today, you, (I say), strange man at my door,  
you are not what I am looking for.

I stir my tea.  
I add a sugar cube. He adds two.  
I say,  
"Prince,  
I cannot marry you.  
Because, I would not like to."

I'm sorry to disappoint you,  
But never to announce it.  
Come, say it with me,  
I'll help you to pronounce it:

**My life is full and happy, with or without romance, or sex,  
or a prince on a horse. It's a lovely word called asexual, darling.  
Now find another tower!**

Is that too explicit for a poem? Had to get the point across.

My prince nods his head,  
and says he can be on his way.

“But for now, just as your friend,  
would it be okay if I could stay?”

As it turns out, he's facing a lot of societal pressure too, to go and  
find a damsel in distress to save and marry—and his father the King  
saved a girl from a giant—I mean that's a lot to live up to, man.  
Maybe a change of pace is in store! I'll allow it.

I live with my friend The Prince  
in a tower, from some time ago.  
We spend our time busily,  
Pleased that it is our own.

# THE MOON

Tucker Smith

The moon is a bitch, and I am in love with her. It's the kind of one-sided, worshipful, toxic love I always thought I was immune to—but the feminist Instagram infographics don't warn about what the moon can do to a girl. Is it anti-feminist to call her a bitch?

I've been caught multiple times standing in the middle of a sidewalk staring at the moon like a pervert. I like to think of myself as a pervert. It feels progressive—an asexual pervert. That's the gay agenda.

"I think," said Aaron, in that slightly-too-loud voice he always uses over the phone, as if he doesn't trust technology to effectively transfer his voice over the 96 miles that separates us, "that you think too highly of people who aren't ace."

I prodded a chicken nugget with a frown. I had set my phone to the side and put it on speaker while I ate, because I was alone in the room and I didn't want to torture Aaron with the crunching of my dinner. We were discussing a TV show we both liked—specifically, the most recent episode, in which two characters in a group of friends shared a passionate kiss. "Allo people can be friends with each other. You have friends who you don't fall in love with."

After a brief interlude during which I defined *allo* to him, Aaron agreed. "But, I mean—you really couldn't see the sexual tension?"

"I just thought they were good friends!" I said. "I thought, 'Oh, how refreshing, a well-developed friendship between a male and female character. Oh, what happy days.'"

"*Oh, what happy days,*" he echoed.

I took a bite of chicken nugget and said with my mouth full, "But now the days are sad and full of sex."

Aaron didn't magnify his laugh the way he did his voice, so it came through the speaker tinny and hoarse. "I wish I didn't think about sex. I would have so much time for my music."

"I imagine your girlfriend would be less than pleased," I pointed out.

“She would manage. Have you forgotten Mrs. McWilliams?” Mrs. McWilliams was our high school health teacher. She had granted entirely too much class time to the practicalities of female masturbation, which had made everyone uncomfortable and didn’t even have the benefit of being helpful, because all the girls were old enough to know how to masturbate if they wanted to and I was old enough to know that I didn’t. Want to, that is. Whenever I saw ace pride posts on Instagram that said things like, *Asexuals can enjoy sex! Asexuals can masturbate!*, I thought to myself, *Great, so I’m a prude even among other aces.*

I am, of course, a deeply insecure and anxious person, as any wannabe-intellectual should be, but I usually like being asexual. Sex disgusts me so intensely that I can’t even want to want it the way I sometimes do romance. Also, sex is just so absurd. I can’t fathom what my sense of humor would look like if I had to take sex seriously.

In Mrs. McWilliams’s class, though, I didn’t love being asexual. It rendered most of her lessons moot. “Some day soon,” she declared on the first day of class, “if not already, you will start having sex.”

I grimaced. “I hope not,” I whispered to Aaron. He stifled a laugh.

My high school required two hours of mandatory extracurriculars a day, so I was usually still on campus when the sun set. I would wander the square of sidewalks that connected the science building, the main building, the gym, and the dining hall (often I would do this after paying a visit to the dining hall, so I would have a cookie in my hand, or, if they were out of cookies, a plain untoasted bagel), and I would stare up at the moon. Most nights, I tried to take a picture of her, but the moon is a tease. She won’t let just anyone take her picture; she obscures herself, rendering any replication grainy and unfocused. I don’t mind—my lack of good pictures makes the time I spend with her more special.

The moon rose above the gym, directly parallel to the Tappan Zee Bridge in the distance. (They can rename it whatever they want. It’s still the Tappan Zee.) Its blinking electric lights thrust their nightly challenge to the stars, and the stars, petty as they are, took up the challenge without remembering how light pollution and airplanes have distracted from their beauty. The moon, though, didn’t

give a shit. I would give everything but the moon to be like that. What a thing. (You're not supposed to describe things as *things*. It's too vague. But how else can I say it?) What a *thing*, to envy someone you love.

The moon escorted me home on the bus. I tried to lean my head against the window, but the bus buzzed and jostled too violently, so I made a pillow out of my backpack and angled myself to watch the moon skip between the buildings as it slid easily along the horizon. The moon is never in a hurry.

Clare Lane was in a hurry. I liked her name; it sounded like a street sign. I wasn't overly keen on Clare herself, though, because she was too eager to grow up, and I liked being a kid. Our parents were friends (this was before her dad started collecting guns and even my libertarian father had to admit Mark Lane was going too far), and every Thanksgiving memory I have from before seventh grade takes place at the Lanes' house.

We were eleven, and she was practicing the application of eyeliner while I sat on her bed, reading her copy of *Divergent*. (I still don't know how to apply eyeliner.) Her room was small but full of unusual angles and niches, which gave the impression that despite its size, it held secrets to explore.

Clare turned down the volume on her iPod, which was currently playing Hannah Montana's modern classic "Nobody's Perfect." A dim streak of moonlight coming through the window caught the iPod's metallic back, and the glint of light turned my attention to Clare. "When do you want to lose your virginity?" she asked.

I coughed. "Um." I coughed again. "I don't know." I tried to cough a third time, to buy myself a few more seconds, but my throat was too dry and I made a sort of wheezing sound that earned me a look of genuine concern from Clare. I waved a hand, and she quickly resumed her practiced expression of preteen apathy. *I don't* did not seem like an acceptable answer to this question, so I cast my mind as far into the future as I could imagine: "College, maybe."

"College?" Clare wrinkled her nose. "So you want to graduate high school a virgin?"

I scraped the bottom of my tongue against my teeth in an attempt to spread some of its moisture to the rest of my mouth. "I guess

not. I don't know." I fell back across her quilt and dangled my upper body off the bed so I could get a clear view of the moon. Even then, I understood that the moon could provide what the world around me could not. She was mysterious and divine and alien and miles away from Westchester County. Westchester is to New York City as fondant is to a cake: a pastel and flavorless decoration perched on the edge of something far more interesting. And the moon is to the earth what baked Alaska is to a cake: a strange but desirable sister, an escalation of its nature in every conceivable way. There's a reason each culture has its own legends about the moon. We love the unattainable.

Clare snapped her fingers. "Sit up. I want to braid your hair."

Loving the moon is easier than loving a person because I don't need to define what "in love" means. I can let my feeling flood my heart until it overflows into my lungs, and it won't drown me. The moon expects nothing more from me than my gaze and admiration. There is none of that subversive joy in staring at a beautiful woman. I see a girl, and I think, *what a perfectly round face; I wish my hips were like hers; her tits look great in that shirt*, and I think, *I'm objectifying other women*. I think, *fuck*. I think, *the only scenario in which it wouldn't be creepy to stare at her is if we were dating*. And I think, *there's a reason nobody's ever asked me out, I don't have a body people fall in love with, and I think, does wanting to look at this woman count as romantic attraction? is this what the poems are about? And I think, am I even asexual, or am I just unloveable? And I think, is it anti-feminist to hate myself? And I think, stop wallowing, the moon is coming out*.

Do I profane the moon with my love for her? In the days when the moon took human form, she was bathing in Greece when a hunter stumbled upon her. He, like me, was transfixed by her, but she did not see his witnessing as worship. The enraged, violated moon transformed the hunter into a stag, and the man was torn to pieces by his own dogs. It's not so harmless, then, to be a pervert infatuated with the moon.

On the last day of the sex education unit in Mrs. McWilliams's health class, she passed around index cards and instructed us each to write down one anonymous question about sex. Then she collected the index cards in a box, read them out loud, and answered

them. The questions were, for the most part, pretty mature, which impressed and surprised me, especially considering Henry S. was in that class, and he was an idiot. *Good for you, Henry S.*, I thought, but my congratulations were cut short when Mrs. McWilliams read out my question: “Could you talk a little bit about the asexual spectrum?”

Looking back, I really was just opening a can of worms for myself. Just popping that can wide open, posting a sign beside it that said *Big Can of Worms Here!*, and jumping in with both feet. But—I don’t know. I was tired of lesson after lesson that had no bearing on my life. It was the same way I felt about calculus, but at least that had some abstract beauty in it. Sex was just gross. And, more than anything, it was boring. So I thought, if Mrs. McWilliams wanted us to make the class relevant, I would make it relevant to myself, even if it was *only* relevant to myself.

Mrs. McWilliams frowned at the index card. “I’m not sure what that means.”

Several thoughts passed through my head in that instant. Most of them were to the tune of *oh god oh fuck oh Christ absolutely fuck me*. I was also focused on keeping my eyes on my desk, because I knew that Aaron knew I had submitted that question and with that knowledge I had inadvertently dragged him into this with me. I tried to send a telepathic apology for inflicting this second-hand embarrassment upon him, but my mind was too occupied running through every obscenity in my lexicon.

Objectively, I knew I had nothing to be ashamed of. Mrs. McWilliams had requested questions, and I had asked one. But somehow this tiny moment of active ignorance stung more sharply than weeks of passive assumption. It was like being a little kid and handing your parent an art project you spent hours on, only for them to assume it’s a piece of trash you found on the curb. Even in the moment, I chastised myself for the melodrama of my reaction—but it felt like I had offered a piece of myself to my teacher and seen it rejected.

The moon is perpetually misunderstood. Her nature doesn’t lend itself to comprehension. But that’s what gives her power. She spurns the human desire to have our innermost selves witnessed and validated by

others. She only ever shows us her most beautiful side. Is that feminist, in some way? Not forcing yourself into self-love, but crafting a self that other people can love for you?

I am looking at her now. She's a crescent—waxing, I think—but I can make out the rest of her shadowy figure against the blue-black sky. What does it mean for me, if even the moon can't erase the parts she wants to keep hidden?

I don't know if I can ever be as strong as the moon. I want to love. I want to be loved. And I know she can't teach me how to do that, just like I knew I didn't need to break that silence in health class to ask Mrs. McWilliams for a bathroom pass. But who else can I ask but the moon? So I sing it to her, like Haddaway and Shakespeare in their century-spanning duet: What is love?



# LIFEVEST

*Amelia Burton*

We went down to the pond, tightened vests pressed sacred to our breasts, soared off in slicing daggers for the river; you pulled loose a canoe jammed in mud, I called you *hero*, and we sped along through the gap in the dam, single file, our boats always bumping, until we reached muddy shore and wandered blind into freezing water; we shrieked with joy at the shock and shimmer on our skin, settled on slimy rocks, knees held to chests, sitting close as blush and breath, to watch tiny fish come nibble at our toes; sun warmed our shiver as we emerged to return, and you tipped over into shallow because you thought you saw a ring and misjudged the depth, and we laughed at the trash you held up, a proposal to no one. You shushed me as we neared shore and pointed to a turtle on twisted driftwood, and we stilled our boats to stare and I— I marveled that I was ever in love with you, for our friendship has tasted twice as sweet as the sun dappled on your cheek.

# IMAGINE

*Sara Garfield Sebert*

How do you write about love when love is a category that you have trouble imagining yourself in? Society has coded love so insidiously as a romantic category, as a sexual category, that even as an aroace, someone who believes love can be separate, it is hard to convince myself that other things are, in fact, love. For instance, my love of books and reading is an important part of me. And yet here I am, wondering if I can really write a story about my relationship with one of my favorite books, and if that would count as love.

So let me prove that it can.

Imagine.

A 13 year old girl, backstage at her dance recital dress rehearsal, only ten pages into the book she's reading, and already fascinated. She goes and dances, and then comes back to her book. She reads more. It is her first real initiation into sci-fi, and it is also the first time she reads a book about a character with a disabled experience that she can fully identify with.

She eats up the first book, and then the second one, but then the third book in the trilogy hasn't been published yet. Then when it comes out that summer, it's still not out in the US because of the publication arrangements. Her uncle gets her the book for Christmas. By this point, she has a new favorite series. When she gets an email address, one of the first things she does is sign up for the author's newsletter. The author writes more, starts other series, and she reads them too. Her favorite series by the author evolves as more books come out.

Her attachment to these books started as fascination with science fiction as a whole, and with a character who shares a certain experience she has not seen in books before, but it expands to the worldbuilding—and my, does she enjoy the worldbuilding. She finds little easter eggs and questions and intriguing what-ifs. She starts writing what she would later know to be fanfiction. Some of those

what-ifs turn out to be *what if these two characters weren't in a romantic and sexual relationship, but the first character was in a lesbian relationship with a third, and had some more-than-friend arrangement with the second.*

During the pandemic, she ventures out into online fandom spaces because she learns there are other people chatting about these books, and she is really excited to talk to people about her favorite books. They ask questions of each other, and answer them, and read the new books alongside each other, and speculate about what they think is going to happen and why the characters are certain ways, and *everything*. She stays up way too late some nights, messaging back and forth about the books with her friends. She is happy.

# LEARNING TO LOVE

## a story in three parts

*Maddie McAllister*

### **i. a poem for the boy who taught me how to love**

eleven years old and i stare at you from across the gym,  
you with the almond-shaped eyes and the boyish smile.  
i am the “boy-crazy” one, the hopeless romantic.  
i walk through the cafeteria in a pink hanna andersson skirt.  
no glasses;  
curled hair.  
i hope that you notice me.

twelve years old and *good night, sweet dreams*, you tell me you love me and i  
don't question it.  
i say it right back, because we are  
twelve and thirteen and on top of the fucking world,  
origami cranes made out of grease-stained receipts and  
holding hands in the dark on may 22nd and  
absolutely fucking unintelligible abbreviations on google hangouts and  
so much stupid shit—  
*(i can't decide if i want to remember it or not).*

fourteen, you get the dumbest frosted tips  
because you're on the varsity soccer team,  
*(fucking jock),*  
and you are on my bus on the way to lauren's house and i  
tell you i like them just to break the silence.

seventeen and i am back to staring from the other side of the room,  
because god, you're still gorgeous,  
and it occurs to me that you are the only boy i have ever  
actually wanted to have something with.

rachel told you what i was (*what i am*) the fall you broke up with me.  
i can't help but wonder if you still remember.

because i remember so much,  
the day you held out your hand to me at the last seventh grade dance  
(*may 5, 2017, your hands were shaky on my waist and i swore i could fly*),  
the movie that played when i first held your hand (*newsies 1992, in ms.  
budka's theater arts class after she turned out the lights*),  
your birthday (*july 26, 2004, one month and twenty-seven days after mine*),  
how you got your nickname (*short for tomodachi, 友達, friend*),  
the way your eyes lit up when you smiled.

i miss you in a way that i can't quite describe,  
aching and painful and longing and yet  
almost completely and utterly false,  
because you are not that person anymore.  
you are not that shiney boy and i am not that  
blindly loving little girl.

i haven't spoken to you since the eighth grade,  
and i think we've spent that time growing up.

you are taller than me now.  
you grew out your hair  
(*it looks really nice,  
not that i'll ever tell you that*).  
you traded out the neon polyester for  
blacks and whites and grays.  
(*the only eyesore i associate you with anymore is that yellow  
monstrosity of a jeep you and your friends ride around town in*).

you grow up and  
get drunk on the beach and  
commit to umass amherst and  
don't fucking follow me back on instagram,  
and i don't even really try not to be bitter about it.

i'm the same height as i was.  
my hair is also longer than it was.  
i've spent the years trying on labels that didn't quite fit,  
crying in the backseat of my best friend's car when they didn't,

trying and failing to love what i've turned out to be.

i got another boyfriend,  
which was probably a mistake on my part.  
*(i think you are the only boy i ever felt anything for,  
because back then dating meant hanging out,  
texting back and forth,  
maybe even holding hands.  
dating was soft smiles across the room  
and a simple acknowledgment that i liked you and you liked me).*

*(i think it's kind of fucked that it didn't stay that way forever.  
i think it's kind of fucked that i'm condemned to end up alone).*

i met the love of my life. in case you were wondering.  
she's kind and warm and beautiful,  
a smile like cinnamon,  
eyes that sparkle in the sunlight,  
and it's the *i love yous* i gave to you that feel the closest to what i give to her.  
*(soft, young, stupid love. it doesn't have to be romance. we're just a couple of dumb  
kids staring up at the stars).*

i hope you're happy?  
i think i really do.  
sometimes i wish you'd wave at me in the hallways. maybe just smile, but  
it's okay that you don't.

it's been a long time.

*(i hope you still love like you used to)*

## ii. a poem for the boy who gave me too much

i hope you know that i write poetry about you, too.  
because *yes*, she is the girl i want to spend my life with,  
but you are the boy who spared me so much more kindness than i deserved.

i am *sorry* that i did what i did,  
but i really really *tried*  
to feel the right way about you.  
and i know this does not make it better,  
but i only really and truly know who i am because  
i was incapable of loving you.

*you*, with the blue eyes and the messy hair  
and the smile that used to make me feel some kind of way but now just  
kind of makes me want to cry,  
if i was ever going to feel it,  
it would have been with you.

and it's not that i didn't feel anything,  
that i am *cold* and *heartless* and  
*utterly incapable* of love.  
because i did have feelings for you.  
they weren't the right ones, but i promise i did.

i do not love her in the right way either,  
but i don't think she needs me to.  
what we have is simple and pure and  
completely unbounded by *should*,  
and i am sorry  
i am sorry  
i am *sorry*  
that i can write pages and pages for her  
and barely spare a single serious thought for you.

*(i swear i still write poetry about you)*

### iii. a poem for the girl i love in a way i don't know

it is somewhere around 9:00pm on a sunday and  
ethan is in the passenger's seat with  
norah in the back and  
they are talking about something i can't remember when i  
turn onto concord road, maya hawke on the stereo,  
*i want to love a boy the way i love the ocean,*  
and ethan asks me if it's an asexual song.

and obviously the answer is yes, because  
*i have a feeling, a terrible fear encroaching—*  
but then he says,  
*because loving something like the ocean sounds so pure.*  
and i'm paraphrasing because i can't quite remember, but i think he  
means  
that that's not what most people feel about their *person*. that he feels  
the ocean lapping at his calves and he sees  
evie-from-berklee-summer-camp's pretty smile and he feels  
two wholly and completely different things.

and it is probably 9:30 or so,  
i'm driving down concord road again on my way home from hanscom,  
and it occurs to me that this whole time i've been  
wanting to love a boy the way i love the ocean,  
it's really been you.  
it's always been you.

because you don't make me feel what ethan feels when  
evie sings like a nightingale.  
you make me feel like i feel when  
a fresh sea breeze blows through the upstairs window of the  
cottage on blueberry lane, like i feel when  
i walk down the beach with my flip-flops in one hand and  
an ever-growing collection of sand dollars in the other, like i feel when  
i sit on the side of my uncle's boat on the way to perkins cove,  
my legs hanging off the edge, the ocean spraying my feet with saltwater.



i didn't realize that romance wasn't like the ocean.  
(i guess that probably means that it's also not like outer space,  
shooting stars and  
supernovas,  
golden day and silver night,  
moonbeams illuminating your face,  
staring up at *alkaid, alcor, mizar*—)

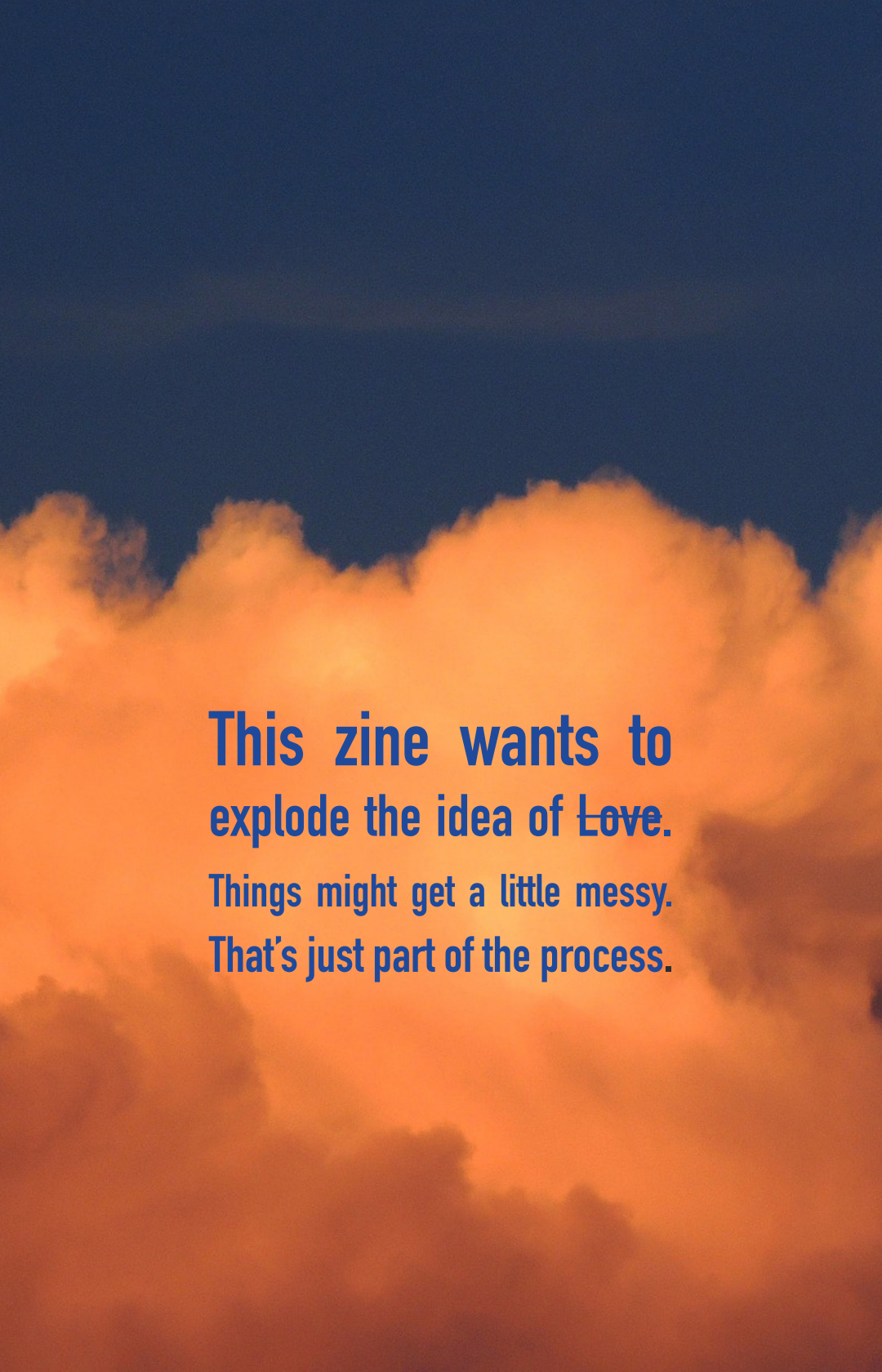
i didn't realize that romance wasn't like the ocean,  
but once i did,  
the only thing i could think of was you.

*(somehow, you manage to be icarus, the sun, and the ocean. you are every piece  
of an ancient grecian landscape, you are every song i hear. you are every way i  
will ever be able to think of to describe **love**).*



This zine was produced in partnership with the  
Asexual and Aromantic Community and Education club (AACE)  
at Smith College. For more information about asexuality and  
aromanticism, visit the Smith AACE website:  
<https://sites.smith.edu/aace/>





**This zine wants to  
explode the idea of Love.**

**Things might get a little messy.**

**That's just part of the process.**