

Kitchen Corridors

KOLE FULMINE

It might happen to be a zing. Let's call it that. Like – that feeling – you can't quite describe: you saw me looking and I saw you looking back and then I wonder if, across a room, we can be divided but also together. Or, maybe that you will disappear like everyone else before you. Just when we're getting comfortable, cosy, even. Like everyone else before you.

Sometimes. No. Actually, all the time. It feels as though that in between has taken forever ... when really it's about two years, which actually is the longest of times to be, not putting it off, more just being subjected to a waiting game that was entirely designed by their hand. To know what is needed, rather than ascribing to a social experiment, or being drawn into that delicious dialogue of desires. What is natural anyway? And what of this body as a project? That from the dawning of each new day begins a sway between this and what paradisiac imaginings? Crossing the midline; defines a different version. Their drawer contains a new them. Three boxed bottles line it. Tostran gel, to be dispensed on the top of the thigh or upper arm, where the skin is thinner, when good and ready. When cleansing has occurred: a consumption of well-balanced food, portals distended,

Kole Fulmine (they/them) is a queer – specifically non-binary – writer. They are a researcher at the University of Roehampton, just at the very beginning of a PhD journey, which will take them (hopefully) further towards understanding the queer body in the wellness industry – or towards a broader understanding of the neutral landscape that feels so elusive in such a binary environment. Kole is also a full-time personal trainer and works in a gym in Hackney Downs, where they try to provide a queer and inclusive service for clients and friends. Their research is currently focused on *The Neutral*, a lecture series delivered by Roland Barthes in 1977. Kole is attempting to re-write some of these lectures using a less binary, more creative, and autofictional approach to several of the themes Barthes discussed.

and of course, an imbibing of the correct proportions of detoxifying liquids. What will happen in that moment? When those new hormones smash into old ones, obliterating in their wake dystopic versions of that other.

So, shall we just return to the zing for a minute – can it be described as a ‘zing-zing’, maybe, two of them making it feel more exciting? The ‘flutters’ you would call it. But it’s also something more. Could it be emotional? You know what, maybe I’ll never be able to solve with enough tenacity what we felt that summer. The locked-down emotional landscape that felt as buoyant and chaotic as a hit from those poppers you tipped down me to see if we were inside out or upside around. And I ordered some chocolates, the special ones – of course. You couldn’t stay that night, or any other night actually. But I wish (on repeat) that you had.

Meaning, now: over and over again they think about how to not grab it and go. What are they waiting for? When falling, do they really know that gravity will do its thing? That in the long run their decisions will be ok? Or that in the wake of all that action, some firm, locked-out belief in a reality that once felt oh so real! – will have adjusted and in a simple-yet-elegant movement, the foot misplaced, or the ankle, not quite strong enough, caught off-guard, will twist and fuck it all up. Smacking flat on the cracked, splintered inversion of a self will do what exactly?

We’ve reached another place now. Belletristic intervention of all that prose, a beautiful summation of a sentence, constructed by that other, so that there is no longer abstraction. Only it feels the same when I’m alone and staring at my phone, summoning the dopamine release of connection. It’s a generational thing, I will tell my sister, when she asks again why every single relationship I have is built upon a web of words. A network of messages colliding, at times, but allowing a free-flow, a build-up of stickiness to develop between the two of us. Proprioception could mean a mixture of things really. Internal inspection of a process not yet understood. An MRI scan of all that bubbles beneath the surface of me, whether that’s energetically or maybe not. Anymore. For this body is no longer a ‘natural’ given, according to Chris Shilling.

There are of course reasons why they’re enforcing the waiting. It’s Christmas and they haven’t told their parents about this decision, and the substance they must apply to the top of the thigh (or upper arm) has to be refrigerated or at least cold. They won’t have a fridge in their room over the holidays and they cannot be bothered to hide the gel. So that, as much as they long to apply it, to apply the changes they have waited for, they make a sacrifice. One that maybe feels, potentially, cowardly. But, well, okay, there are other things as well.

So that, he asks himself again, is it okay to desire someone because you have body-positive sex? And, is it okay for him to admit that he hasn't had an orgasm yet? That he's eking it out for as long as possible. Because he's scared. Because he's scared that if he releases something, maybe he won't be able to take it back. Because he's scared he has the feeling she's almost done. And his sex drive feels supernatural, that's okay right? It was at first and now it's not. So he faked it every time and she did what? And he wonders what his dick will feel like when it's inside ... like, will it shatter and break? Because she lied. Because he lied? Because is anyone honest anymore?

They know, they're jumping about a bit but they haven't spoken to anyone IRL, like In Real Life, for days, and to be honest they can feel this maddening sense of free-falling. As though they could actually just disappear. They've turned their phone off because they can't be bothered to see that they don't have any new messages. They're counting down the hours to turn it back on. But the real reason they want to increase their T is actually very much about this moment. The grief feels heavier today, more than any other day. Change feels as though it could be the only way out.

But it's interesting isn't it, if we return to Chris Shilling, just for a minute, as he writes a little bit about how we creatures don't live within the confines of our skin. In fact we seek to fulfil our needs in conjunction with the environment around us. So, we're more than bodies, we're more than skin and organs and things, we're more than this vessel that has become a project of destruction to live in. I didn't know that much about structuralism but now that I know a bit, well, it makes sense. It makes so much sense that what I'm feeling isn't loneliness without one, it's more than that; tribal. To be forced away, a jut, a rut, a complete disconnect from a way of being I was just getting into, back then. As I rubbed shoulders with my queer family on dancefloors or football pitches. When we would lock into a D+M about just what it means to be a softboi or a plant daddy. I stopped, when we stopped.

They've been thinking a lot about mushrooms and blanket truths, and how rooted in their healing they are, and about *Fantastic Fungi*, and how interconnected with the wood wide web they feel after watching it. They've been thinking about challenging molecular structures. About feelings of fracture that they have when they think about the fleshy madness that exists under this epidermis covered in inky markings. The tattoos that cover their skin, offer a direct and expressive means to understanding identity. They think about how paradoxical it is to be scared of putting something inside them that will jiggle about and

encourage even more difference than those they carve into their surface. And about whether that surface is just a reflection of the other surfaces they see only online, and if the surface is a reflection, then what of the sub-surfaces' reflections?

Pinballing procrastination / oscillating extremes / meandering kaleidoscopically – into walls of silence he has erected – vividly believing he wants her to break through. Forcing hand down throat, ejaculating loyalty from where? He falls, on repeat, because he knows that it's just the dopamine release of her response that makes him crave her. So, it becomes fundamental: the wobble. Why does she keep checking his stories? Why not delete herself from the group? Leave the table awkwardly, not loop arm around his. Only to tread carefully in fields that sway under the weight of their footsteps. What really happened when he said the words? Why did it feel like an episode of *The L Word* afterwards? Why did he not cry, maintaining stoicism only to write his anger out later? When really all he feels is a deep rooted panic imposed by the severity of his mouth. Words, language, that forced him into this place again. Collecting heartbreaks like well-played songs, timely lyrics that reverberate through him.

The bag containing the future scrunches around in her underwear drawer, and, as she moves it around from left to right, swirling it up, locking it down, spinning it around, between random sports socks and boxers, as she swings, searching fervently for something else, she knows what she is actually doing. She knows that she is subconsciously figuring out its weight, the shape of the package in her hands. She knows she's fingering the edges, without actually opening it up. Imagining what the bottle looks like inside the Superdrug paper bag. She knows she's thinking about how much this prescription cost and how she can't fuck it up. Must not fuck it up. Must not let this pass. Not this time. She's here, back in the same space. Only not, because she's different now. Right? And maybe she doesn't necessarily need difference to be listed, to be a rolling accumulation of accolades. Maybe, just maybe, her internal compass knows, that the time it takes, is the time it takes.

I am defined by the idea of someone other. A gnawing sensation hits the back of my stomach, acidic reverberation every time you mis-pronoun me, and I cower and apologise to myself, for ignoring your indiscretion. But you see, our habits define us, says Shilling. And so I wonder how you refer to me when I'm not around. When you're reading my text out loud. Trying to decipher what I could possibly mean at this juncture, what could I possibly mean?

There were a bunch of things he wanted to do, to smooth out the roughened outlines of his life in order to complete this final phase of integration. And yet

now he's spun out on what maybe could have been a grand finale of another possibility. He leaves nothing behind. Taking whatever feels okay, good, even, and bottling it up in a different sensation. Hope. Hope for a new beginning. One entirely devoted to T.

I remember when she sent me that Seal song about getting a little bit crazy and we went to the barber the next day. And I wasn't ready but because she said "We're never gonna survive" I felt okay about loss. I remember it so vividly because she wrote it in a card and then she told me about a couple of FTM meetings I could go to if I wanted to and how if I went along she would come and pick me up. I don't think I've ever loved harder than I did in that moment. I remember that time when I went and I was in between names and I panicked because I hadn't found who I wanted to be but she told me not to worry and to retain anonymity. And how it didn't matter. Only it did. I remember after the buzzcut how light I felt and how even though I was exposed I felt as though she was the only person I wanted to be my witness. And I used her, as a shield, again. So that, I think, if only she could see me now. If only she could see me now.

The putting off has felt, for the longest of times, to be a protective mechanism. When he really digs into the stalling and what it could mean, he thinks mostly it's a fear of loss. A different her, a different they, a different he. One without the glue that makes all the blood-soaked mess acceptable behaviour to decipher, one without the hair in new places that makes living simpler, one without the depth of voice, the growth of muscles and the silence.

Time has that forgotten feeling. You know that feeling of *I don't know when I'm supposed to eat or when I'm supposed to sleep*. But perhaps we can never truly know who we're going to be on any given day, can only steer the ship indifferently – or maybe sometimes passionately. Dislodging the socially constructed ideal, when a body stops being put back together, when choosing not to look at images anymore becomes a means for survival, erasing the internal narrative that chastises the self into being someone it could have been if only it had started back then. Why add something that aligns biological perceptions so that they can be misinterpreted even further on repeat? Without witness does the body truly need? And after this, what next? How far does the trans body go seeking serenity in the edifying churn of the theoretical fluid?

His swagger has gone, the husky lilt he was faking, curves have returned to the places he worked hard to expel them. Christmas is done, New Year approaches, and he recognises the steady pounding of indeterminacy once again. Somatically he knows this to be the middle of the beginning. Will he know what part to

question when he is done? Really, all he can think about is sprinting into the headlights of the next three hundred and whatever days — l'appel du vide, on repeat. Considering the only excuse, the actual excuse, the one we haven't mentioned yet, is the fear of what he would have been taking away from her.

CRITICAL METHODOLOGY

What does the between represent? The middle bit, where all the action happens, the 'kitchen' of the life-party, one that everyone you know is invited to. Being trapped in limbo, however, can be decidedly less seductive, less wholesome, less connective, because, perhaps in a facile way, we know limbo to be less actively a choice. But what if there were something else, an alternate narrative to the despair surrounding transiency? There are spaces that render limbo determinate, where the between becomes a conveyor belt of very important information, a long line from A to B that could be neither, nor, and, most certainly both. A corridor, a gangway, a passage that we assumed had to be followed to reach where exactly?

Suppose that the corridor were the destination. That the corridor were the person – not the stunt double but the synopsis of this moving part. And that corridor pushes. Pushes the walls with bold knees and in doing so scrapes the ceiling with defiant fingernails. What else could happen in this space? A colliding, a headbutting, an unruly biting, a thrusting, a bursting towards or away from other corridors? Here is where the messengers meet: a synergy occurs. Communicating via collision. The corridor, no longer ashamed of existence, is a space that allows drinks to be spilt, IG stories to be spun, and snaps to be enacted in drag – if it wants. All proof, hard and solid facts that physical and social change is occurring. Every now and again, opening a door to a room, or a subsection: a kitchen. And right here in the peripatetic, there exists a renewal. Limbo can be generative and has birthed a perspective that could be read as queer; instead of a flattened world of genetic misunderstanding, for discovery is constantly taking place here. One which may prove limitless in its complexity. And all of this running – all of this to and fro – to say that Adrian Bridget, Lisa Blackman, and Chris Shilling have assisted what follows along. That their words have helped other words formulate in new and old ways, excavating.

'Kitchen Corridors' could be read as a conversation between corridors, or between lover and corridor, or between lover and no one other. A dialogue that has helped to alter the psychic space of the corridor. The once naturalistic focus

experienced, biased by a lifetime of Darwinian error, means a certain amount of working out or pulling through must occur, for some time has passed under this burden, plagued by questions of ideology and symbology. Now, in an attempt to find something out about itself, without informing anyone else, it – the corridor – becomes a palimpsest. Braver, bolder, forcing a removal from whomever it thought it once was. We meet it where it least expects – in the decision-making process towards the taking of hormones: a synergy occurs.

“The view of the body as open to seemingly constant reinterpretation appeared a much more plausible starting point” (Shilling 74).

When meandering, much can be garnered. Identity can be negated and churned, sexuality defined, and an oscillating madness incurred. The cacophony of chatter can inebriate and loosen the bowels of understanding, so that ‘Kitchen Corridors’ becomes a document for the corridor itself before anything else. Whatever the interpretation, debating nature takes centre stage so that, here on this platform of porous questioning, the corridor butts up against affect theory, sociology, and anthropology, attempting to align itself to the notion that characteristics of a body, its body, are constantly being debunked. And that the reinterpretation will go on for as long as it is navigating what it means to be an “unfinished entity” (Blackman 17).

WORKS CITED

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