

Formatting for readability:

When formatting this zine, I did my best to make it as easy as possible to read— especially for people with various reading difficulties:

- the paragraphs are as short as possible, with obvious paragraph breaks
- there are spaces before and after punctuation marks like (parentheses) and / slashes /
- while trying to use different fonts for different voices, I chose from fonts that people with dyslexia apparently find easier to read: Century Gothic, Trebuchet, Sasson, and the mono-spaced fonts of Consolas and Courier
(this is according to the British Dyslexia Association: <http://bdatech.org/what-technology/typefaces-for-dyslexia/> and a study that I've seen several dyslexia bloggers endorse: http://www.luzrello.com/Publications_files/assets2013.pdf)/

◦ I deliberately avoided Arial and Verdana because those fonts are difficult for *me*.

If you have any comments or suggestions for more accessible formatting, please let me know!

Rotten Zucchini: The Zine
Issue 1 (2014)

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Rotten Zucchini: The Zine Issue 1

starting a conversation—

even queerplatonic relationships *don't*
always end in happily ever after...

(it's *mostly* an asexual / ace thing)

This whole zine has a general Content Warning (cw) for violence, emotional abuse, verbal abuse, sexual harassment, sexual assault, acephobia.

Content warnings are a “heads up” about topics that some people find upsetting. If they seem like “overkill” to you, please respect that they're for someone else.

A bit about me:

cw: violence & trauma

I'm a queer asexual non-binary freak of the white person variety, and enough of a hard-hitting feminist to get regularly called a bitch. For the most part, my body does what I need it to do. And in my 30 years on this planet, I have never been raped.

I've spent a large chunk of my life in a significant relationship that was abusive, with a non-romantic partner who to this day very well known (and well-loved) in my own local communities: she's a role model. With all the violence that people in my life have experienced, I don't feel like I have any right to call myself a survivor of violence— afterall, what I experienced wasn't “real” violence.

(I'm still working on that part.)

I do non-normative relationships. They work for me. I don't date, the people I call friends don't play a huge role in my life, and community is hard for me, online and off.

My entire (teen and) adult life, my only significant relationships have been intense, non-normative ones with people who are friends (but “friendship” really doesn't cover it). And (with the exception of my early teen years) I always **have** had significant relationships— usually long-term, and one or two in my life at a time. These relationships have been good for me and continue to be.

With one major exception.

I was having trouble processing my experiences from that relationship, so I decided to make a zine... hoping to find other people dealing with similar things.

Putting this zine together really helped me in a lot of ways. I hope, dear reader, you can take something from it.

-- Omnes et Nihil

This is an *ongoing call for submissions*, trying to get a conversation going, slowly... and I expect it to take years— beginning now, in 2014.

Words, images... anything that can be printed on regular letter-sized printer paper.

If you're reading this and thinking that you have something to say about unhealthy non-normative or queerplatonic relationships, get in contact with me (even if you think it's been ages since the zine came out).

Please e-mail contributions or questions / comments to:

rotten.zucchinis@gmail.com

Rotten Zucchini: The Zine

Issue 2

Have you ever had a *relationship with your zucchini or a queerplatonic (QP) partnership* go horribly wrong?

So many of us in the ace world have been doing our important relationships without any road maps or “how-to” guides— these relationships aren't romantic relationships, but they aren't typical friendships either.

And we've been fighting for years to get our friends, families and communities to take these relationships seriously. (Especially when we're also queer, and / or trans* and / or non-binary and / or agender.)

We finally have some language to talk about these “non-normative” relationships existing... *queerplatonic* partners and *zucchini*s. What's more, we can make sense of them in a *polyaffectionate* framework if we want to. And we can resist *compulsory sexuality*, question why so many people use “enthusiastic consent” as a weapon, and recognise that *anti-asexual violence* is real.

But we don't have the tools to talk about when our “non-normative” relationships are unhealthy or go wrong. Too often we don't even have the space to admit that sometimes they do.

Rotten Zucchini is a zine for people's stories about QPs, Zucchini and “non-normative” relationships that don't end in happily ever after— the not-so-pretty stories I don't see people sharing yet. And yes, that's political.

Some optional guiding questions:

- What does zucchini violence or QP abuse look like, and what are your stories?
- How do the problems we have with our zucchini play out with other parts of our identities and lives? How do things like power, oppression and social expectations matter?
- *When it comes to zucchini, QPs and non-normative relationships, what do we still need to keep quiet about... and why?*

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What is this zine all about?

cw: violence & abuse

I wanted to put together a zine about when queerplatonic relationships *ena* or *go horribly wrong*. I figured I couldn't be the only dealing with that experience.

It turns out that people didn't have a lot to say about zucchini violence and a lot of people were confused about what queerplatonic relationships and zucchinis were all about. Initially, nobody submitted anything, and a couple people got annoyed that the call for submission was taking up space.

Eventually, I did end up with some pieces of writing so I decided to put together a first issue of this zine, explaining about queerplatonic relationships, including what I have so far.

But this is just the beginning of a conversation that needs to happen. I want to create a safe-ish place for people to talk about violence / abuse in significant, non-normative relationships. This zine is very limited: it's just a starting point.

This is a zine focused on unhealthy and abusive non-normative relationships. I've added some main content warnings (cw) to the topics, but the whole zine should have a content warning for *violence, emotional abuse, verbal abuse, sexual harassment, sexual assault, acephobia*.

I plan to put out a second issue of Rotten Zucchinis when I've collected some submissions. As I write this, it's 2014. I expect this project to take **years**.

Conversations like this are often a long time coming, but that doesn't make them less important. Maybe people will start talking about these things in asexual / ace community spaces over the next few years: that would be wonderful, but I'm not holding my breathe.

So, there's an open call for submissions (on the inside back cover): if you're reading this and thinking that you have something to say about unhealthy non-normative or queerplatonic relationships, please get in contact with me: rotten.zucchinis@gmail.com (even if you think it's been ages since the zine came out).

Because of the topic, the personal stuff in this zine is anonymous, including mine.

(And please don't try to guess which words are mine.)

good-bye

After years of tears in paradox,
the coffee spoons acquainted with the night
stir inspiration lost from kitchen talks,
expatiating silent wrongs and rites.

And I wonder do I dare and do I dare?
Turn a phone off and return a steadfast glare—
eyeing contradictions on the wall...
But that wasn't what I meant at all.

I can hear the Klingons screaming each to each
I do not think their poetry's for me.

In the rooms the monsters come and gawk
at quarrels interrupted, and in fright
proclaim anew reality, with shock--
polarity-reversing second sight.

The part who acted out her sexual agenda without consent on someone I love.

She's **not** someone I want in my life.

But I'm the only conscience she's ever known—and even now that it isn't *me* anymore, my voice is still there in her head telling her right from wrong. I feel like that means when she hurts people it's on me, because I failed as her conscience. I couldn't make her stop.

And from years of arguing with me, she's learned to camouflage better and to not stick out as the exploitative predator she often is. I've made her more dangerous. How is she not my responsibility? How can I not try to pick up the pieces of the wreckage she leaves behind?

It was simple when she didn't want to have anything to do with me. But now that she wants me back, I don't get to just walk away.

No matter where or how this ends up going, I can't just walk away.

Or maybe I'm just not quite ready to do that yet.

Part 1:
Setting the stage: zucchinis, queerplatonic relationships
& why this conversation needs to happen

What's queer about zucchini?

I planned to start off by defining zucchinis and queerplatonic relationships.

I also wanted to make it clear there was nothing phallic about them... seriously—I don't think the potential phallic interpretation occurred to anyone who was part of (or witnessed) the early zucchini conversations, at least not until other people pointed it out.

That's what happens when you have a bunch of asexual people who aren't into penis-shaped body parts: we don't think about penis-shaped body parts.

It turns out that dispelling phallocentric perceptions of zucchinis is a lot easier than coming up with a simple definition of one.

Don't get me wrong— definitions are important, and I will get there eventually. I'm sure many readers will have never met these words, and I want this zine to be as accessible as possible.

And definitions help us stay on the same page, even people who are already using the same familiar words, because words are tricky creatures that can mean and do so many different things.

You can google asexual zucchini or queerplatonic partner. There definitions abound, but many of them don't make a lot of sense.

From the AVENwiki (with my emphasis):

“A **zucchini** is a partner in a queerplatonic relationship. The commitment level between partners is often considered to be *similar to that of a romantic relationship*, but with *platonic love*. They may be of any romantic or sexual orientation.”

“A **queerplatonic** relationship is a relationship that is not romantic but involves a *close emotional connection (platonic) beyond what most people consider friendship*. The commitment level in a queerplatonic relationship is often considered to be *similar to that of a romantic relationship*. People in a queerplatonic relationship may be of any romantic or sexual orientation. A partner in a queer platonic relationship is called a zucchini.”

** beat **

When I told you I wasn't afraid of her anymore, I meant that I wasn't afraid anymore that she would try to hurt someone specific I love. But I still know who she is and I'm still afraid of that— rationally or not, and I don't know how much is which.

When you joked about giving her a good ass-kicking, that scared me because if you did something like that, she would come after you. Not physically but there are other ways. I would never want to put you in her path.

I'm glad you were willing to be upfront about how you feel about her. I wouldn't want anything else. When you were talking though, I'm not sure you realised that I still love her. I will probably always love her. After all she's done to hurt people, especially a certain person I love, I still love her for the monster that she is. I hate myself a bit for that, but that's just how I'm built. My story isn't going to make sense to you without that piece.

** beat **

About a month ago she contacted me and said she was ready to talk. I brought her keys and a letter. She didn't bring my books. She didn't ask me there to say goodbye.

Part of me wants my best friend back— the person who says things that make me laugh about firetrucks and limes, and gave me space to be me when everyone else was haides-bent on trying to make me into a nice, deferential straight girl. But that part of her doesn't come without the rest of her.

It comes with the part who does stuff she knows seriously triggers her roommate and then gets annoyed with her roommate for being upset.

The part who tells me that she was emotionally abusive to me in the same breath as she tells me I'm “aggrandising” how she hurt me.

**To the person who named her as “abusive”
(before I was ready to hear it)**

cw: fear of violence / retaliation, general discussion of abusive behaviour

It's been about six months since, for all practical purposes, she's been out of my life. I'm starting to miss her— I don't want to talk to her or interact with her now, but I miss what we were, in a nostalgic kind of way. And I have no idea where I go from here after more than a decade, but time as they say marches forward anyway.

I don't know if I ever would have left her but it didn't play out that way. She decided that I betrayed her and have ridiculous ideas about consent. (I believe power exists and matters even when people don't have weapons or aren't threatening violence... and to her that's believing in invisible pixies.) And for the first time, this disagreement went further than theory.

She assaulted someone I love and I called her out on it. She went off to see if she could get over it, and to decide if she still wants me in her life, now that she can't trust me or respect my judgement.

(And I haven't been her conscience since then: she hasn't had one.) In her story, I've done a horrible thing and she's trying to decide if she can take me back. I don't think it's occurred to her that's not my story too.

The relationship isn't over yet— it's punctuated by an ellipsis: I still have her keys and she still has my books. But quite literally over one night, we went from everything to nothing. And I don't know how to talk about it...

And now, I'm left alone with my paranoia, wondering what will happen when the decision is finally made that the two of us are done: she would never come after me, but I'm not the only person I care about.

On the surface, these common definitions seem like fine and dandy ways of explaining important non-normative relationships. But there are 2 problems:

- 1) they are based on a taken-for-granted hierarchy of relationship significance— where romantic relationships are presumed (or defined as) more intimate and more important than “just” friendship
- 2) they are centred around romantic relationships— are expressed as “similar to, but somehow different-from- or not-quite-” romantic relationships

I want to scream a little when I read definitions like that, because they're missing the point. They're so far-removed from why we needed those words in the first place.

I guess that's part of the process of assimilation into mainstream discourse— or in this case assimilation into mainstream *asexual* discourse— the necessity is gone (and when it goes, the politics often go along with it). But that's not where this zine is starting from.

To situate this conversation, I need to explain why it matters when queerplatonic relationships go wrong, or why it's so important for us to be able to recognise when our zucchinis hurt us... and how we don't yet have the space to talk about those things.

But before I can get there, I need to explain why zucchinis and queerplatonic relationships are so important in the first place. And to do *that*, I need to explain, where these words came from... and what they really mean.

What are zucchinis and queerplatonic relationships?

Around these parts, almost everyone has at least *witnessed* friendship and romantic relationships. I hazard to say that people around the world are familiar with these category-boxes (even if they mean different things in different places).

But some personal relationships don't fit these boxes. There are "non-normative" relationships that don't work via existing norms— and that means we don't have set expectations or guidebooks to help us navigate them. But it also means that we don't have set expectations or guidebooks to limit them. They can be so many different things and they come in different flavours.

"Queerplatonic" is an umbrella term for a whole range of "non-normative" relationships

- that involve some significant kind of intimacy that doesn't fit well in the "romantic" box
- that don't really fit the "friendship" box properly— even if the relationship is or includes friendship, the word / concept of "friendship" doesn't express it properly.

Zucchinis are the people in our lives we have and do these relationships with. Zucchinis are our people, in the many ways we have people. And zucchinis don't need to be zucchini. Sometimes they're eggplant¹ (or for me right now, a kind of squash).

Queerplatonic relationships are all different from each other. They *usually* go along with some or all of these things:

- the relationship is important (and deserves recognition / respect from people's communities)
- zucchinis share physical and / or emotional intimacy and high levels of commitment
- zucchinis are intimately involved in each others' lives — family— and / or function as a unit
- the relationship raises *questions* of monogamy and polyaffection (whether people have one or multiple zucchinis and / or dating partners)

The point is, these relationships matter and they aren't *like* anything. Zucchini-vegetable people matter.

But apparently that's not an option anymore— that's not what respectable adults do: they get married and they have sex and **those** are the relationships that matter. Suddenly she's changed the rules and I'm not allowed to have a problem with that.

So now, she's started putting her boyfriend above me, and giving me ultimatums (like have sex with her) about what I need to do if I want our relationship back the way it was.

But it can never be back the way it was.

And anyway, having sex with her isn't going to put anything back the way it was. I've never had sex with anyone and I never ever want to in my life and she knows that... she just doesn't respect it. She used to respect that. She just doesn't anymore.

I was afraid that things would change if she got married. But she's already changed them anyway.

The writing is on the wall. I think we're done.

¹ <http://se-smith.tumblr.com/post/2868581031/word-of-the-day-queerplatonic>

So with two partners, when she started talking about marriage, it was the beginning of the end.

She wants to get married because it gives her status from having *The One Very Important Relationship...* and she believes that marriage is *The One Very Important Relationship*. If she gets married, she will put me second.

I'm willing to share the top spot— I always have and that works for us— but I'm not willing to play second fiddle. And she can't expect that she can start treating me like that— fundamentally change our relationship— *while denying she's doing that* AND have that be okay. It's not okay.

If she gets married, it will affect us. Her decision to get married involves me whether or not she marries *me*— because ours is a primary relationship— and marriage to her means the top of the hierarchy.

Her solution was that I should marry her and let her other partner(s) be secondary.

But I can't participate in marriage when I object to it so strongly. Marriage as a lie. Marriage as submission. I can't and I won't. And I won't do anything that means there can only be room for 1 at the top even if it is me— or a subdued, dominated version of me.

So, she's started pressuring me for sex. If I won't marry her, maybe she can still value me highly if we have sex. She gets drunk and puts her hands in places I don't want her hands.

She tells me I should kiss her if I love her, even though we've **never** been romantically involved. She tells me she doesn't want to have to worry about **not** touching me sexually because she touches **everyone** sexually and that shouldn't make me uncomfortable.

If I don't have sex with her, and if I don't marry her, we're done.

She could just keep valuing me without those things like she always has— she has for years!

Where do zucchinis come from?

A little bit of asexual history

It's 2014— AVEN has been around for 13 years, and the asexual community a bit longer than that. Academics have acknowledged our existence for a decade and newspaper articles about asexuality have stopped mentioning rats and sheep.

And it's been at least 5 years since the original asexual-community-condemning popular-psychologist stopped accusing us of hurting unsuspecting “normal” people with our acceptance and public visibility.²

(Now we have Dan Savage telling us we're hurting unsuspecting “normal” people if our asexuality isn't sufficiently clearly tattooed on our foreheads or marked with purple A's across our chests.)

Some of us started wearing black rings on our right middle fingers in 2005, and in 2010 we created our own pride flag. Between those years, a lot of the the hip asexual conversations were happening on blogs, and since then, people on tumblr have joined in. And through it all— right from the beginning— we've been talking about relationships.

Asexy folks were talking about romantic attraction long before I found the asexual community (back in 2005 when we were still *amoeba* and not yet *ace*)— and one of our in-community historians dates that idea to late 2001.³

Back then, the idea of not-ever-sexual romantic relationships was a pretty big thing, and that opened up a lot of possibilities for romantic aces (even if it didn't rock everyone's world).

But it took us a lot longer to move beyond our confusion with relationships that didn't really fit well in either the “friendship” or “romance” box. Looking back, that doesn't surprise me: it can take a long time for people to talk their way out of their collective confusion.

² You can find that discussion here:

<http://asexualcuriosities.blogspot.ca/2009/12/q-with-joy-davidson-part-1.html>

³ Andrew Hinderliter looked into the history of the asexual community and posted the story he put together on his Asexual Explorations website: http://www.asexualexplorations.net/home/history_of_definition.html

A lot of talk in the mid-2000s focused on blurred boundaries of friendship and romance, and that was part of the journey here.

Maybe we needed the “romance” box to be fully asexualised before we could be confident that we really needed something else. And, especially for those of us on the aromantic end of the spectrum, we really did need something else. And then, it just sort of happened.

“Ok I am now referring to these kinds of relationships as zucchini. This is official, and so shall it be.”⁴ (And just like that, it kind of was.)

In some dark, remote corner of the internet, history was being made the way history usually is, haphazardly, and quite by accident.

Kaz was reflecting about all those boxes of romantic orientations and relationships and normative relationship hierarchies that just weren't working out— not for everyone— because the words some of us needed just didn't exist:

kaz: “Sometimes I want to just invent a word, totally randomly, and then point at it and go THERE, THIS IS MY WORD FOR THIS THING because English is INSUFFICIENT.”⁵

meloukhia (aka: s.e. smith): “Ok I am now referring to these kinds of relationships as zucchini. This is official, and so shall it be.”

And, riffing off kaz's mention of a “platonic life partner” the Q was added to the P:

“I kind of like queerplatonic as a definer for the attraction I feel to my zucchini; it neatly avoids discussing the gender of either party involved, while emphasizing the idea that it is a deep (almost symbiotic in some ways) emotional connection that transcends what I think of as friendship.”⁶

kaz: “It's clear, it's about queering platonic relationships.”⁷

⁴ That fateful declaration from December 25, 2010 and the conversation that sparked it can be found here: <http://kaz.dreamwidth.org/238564.html>

⁵ <http://kaz.dreamwidth.org/238564.html?thread=1342180#cmt1342180>

⁶ <http://kaz.dreamwidth.org/238564.html?thread=1342436#cmt1342436>

⁷ <http://kaz.dreamwidth.org/238564.html?thread=1343972#cmt1343972>

Marriage?

cw: mention of sex, child abuse, emotional abuse & unwanted touching

The writing was on the wall when she started talking about marriage. I don't care how many people she's having sex with, if she wants that recognition for a monogamous relationship from a heteronormative, patriarchal system and all the power that comes from that, we're doomed.

She's started valuing these institutions that devalue our relationship and she wants to participate in them and get the rewards that come from that. Nothing good can come of this.

Marriage as access to social privilege even if it comes at the expense of delegitimizing all other forms of relationships, setting up a system of nuclear families that's dangerous and destructive because it pathologizes community outside of religious institutions and leaves children at risk for abuse and neglect by being raised by only one or two adults...

Marriage as a way of claiming another human being as property. Marriage as a way of upholding the authority of the state. Marriage as a tool in my country for leading women away from financial independence under the guise of protection— and throwing women and children (but not men) into poverty when they break up. Marriage as a haven for sexual violence and abuse that all passes for “normal” as long as there aren't any bruises.

Now that it's legal, marriage as making the gays and lesbians (and sometimes bi folks) less scary because they look just like the straight folks, as as an excuse to marginalize all the rest who don't. Marriage as assimilation.

Marriage as a way of institutionalizing monogamy... Marriage as accepting the twisted relationship hierarchy based in relationship type and not significance. Marriage as the reason people have never recognized **our** relationship properly in the first place.

Marriage as a way of declaring to the world that “this is the one most important relationship in my life and that nothing else can come close to mattering.” Marriage is about exclusion.

Year 5: July

For all the words and moments and questions and ink... I don't know who ever decided that love was a good thing. It is. But I can only love destructively. And since I've tried so hard to avoid hurting other people, I end up hurting myself.

I almost wish I harboured masochistic tendencies. Then I wouldn't need to worry that I'd lose my head one day... and in that instant of spontaneity, unleash upon the world some epic force of annihilation.

That's the other difference between me and him. His destruction is deliberate. In very cold blood. And not quite as evil. Maybe I am the supervillain of us. There's always one hero, one villain.

Year 5: September

He's the one person that I will make time to see... whenever is humanly possible, and who is willing to make time to see me. Love is the power to make time. But for what? I'm not seventeen. We were seventeen together, once. A long time ago.

I can't do that again, and more to the point, I don't want to. I don't want to learn to deal with politics that make me sick and that I can't ignore. I have my comic book style counterpart: we are bound by cosmic forces, and repelled by reality and what we make of them.

Year 5: November

These are the sounds of my solitude. I've been alone for weeks— more so than usual but I haven't lived these moments of solitude in them.

Year 6: June

It's the end of one era in my life, and so I must assume it's the beginning of another. This is a time when he's best friend, but no longer my other half. And where the wave functions of indefinite potential and communion have collapsed and been resolved. He's picked coupledness over me. Maybe I should have seen it coming. I never did.

That's right: the *queering* part was there from day one.

I would never have known that history myself, if Sciatrix hadn't included it in her blog post about the word zucchini.⁸ But I think it matters. As Sciatrix pointed out, zucchini started out as a *joke* AND as something *seriously necessary*— words are important:

“Words shape our thoughts. If no word exists in a language to describe a thing, it's almost impossible to discuss that concept, at least not without convoluted circumlocutions. Lack of words becomes a way to silence minority viewpoints.

“Right now, 'zucchini' is the only word I can use to describe these kinds of relationships, except possibly the unwieldy 'person I am in a queerplatonic relationship with.' I'm attached to 'zucchini' because these discussions are very, very important for me to have. It's a silly word on the surface-but under that surface, I'm deadly serious when I use it.”

I've seen some of the animosity against the ridiculousness of “zucchini” recently, people wanting the word to die. But it can't. We don't have anything else. Even “queerplatonic partner” isn't enough— because queerplatonic was always about *a relationship in progress*... we can actively *queer* our relationships, but we're not queering the people in them.

How is calling someone a QPP any less ridiculous than calling someone a zucchini? (I've heard similar arguments targeting gender neutral pronouns like “ze”... mostly from cis people who don't *need* them.)

Fortunately, I think I've seen more people eagerly adopting these words, taking them home and curling up with them for some non-sexual cuddles. But it still surprises me how many people in the asexual / ace community have never heard of them at all.

⁸ “My Thoughts on the Word 'Zucchini” (July 11, 2011), on *Writing From Factor X*: <http://writingfromfactorx.wordpress.com/2011/07/11/my-thoughts-on-the-word-zucchini/>

Fighting for our relationships

The language of zucchinis and queerplatonic relationships has been around for more than 3 years... letting us make sense of the relationships some of us built our lives around, and giving us space to declare what we are to each other.

That's important.

We spend so much time and energy fighting for our existence against people refusing to recognise or accept us. And fighting for our communities to recognise our relationships — to recognise them for what they are and to value them as is. That's political. Surviving erasure always is. The tools to help us do that are important.

We need our societies to recognise our non-normative relationships, queered beyond social acceptability (regardless of the zucchinis' genders). We need people to stop treating them as second-rate or pathological.

We need our communities to welcome our zucchinis *because they matter to us*, and to start valuing relationships because they're important to people and not because they fit into some relationship category-box.

We spend so much time fighting for our queerplatonic relationships to be accepted as healthy and valuable— because our people *should* accept our relationships, and they usually are healthy and valuable.

But because we spend so much time fighting, we don't have room to acknowledge that (just like every other kind of relationship), sometimes they're not.

Zucchinis aren't immune to violence and queerplatonic relationships can be abusive or exploitative. But if we pause long enough to admit this, there's a risk that we could undermine our whole struggle for diverse non-normative relationships to be accepted.

I know that's kept me quiet about a lot of things. But it shouldn't have to be that way.

Year 4: January

I was reading some poems from a time when I trusted him. We need to open the lines of communication. He says he's ready to listen. I don't think he knows how, but he can learn.

I just have difficulty telling the truth to someone I don't trust. And I don't trust him. The trust is gone, and won't be back any time soon.

Year 4: March

He has been different recently. Less dismissive of me, friendlier. Sort of like he was several years ago— except both older and younger, and more gay.

Year 4: July 5

What I don't understand is why I always end up alone, talking to myself. I have no trouble getting close to people. It's simply that the world keeps its distance from me. Partially, granted, because I'm clumsy and take up too much space. Partially because I don't demand that anyone care about me.

I do like being on the sidelines. I just hope I'm not there by default... because that's where relationships eventually go if they aren't going to romance. It shouldn't have to be that way.

Year 4: September

I miss you. I know I haven't been gone very long. And that I heard your voice mixed with mine in inane conversation yesterday. I probably shouldn't feel this way. But then when do I ever feel or act the way I should? There shouldn't be a "should".

I miss you. It isn't because I love you [though of course I do]. And it isn't because I need you— I won't spontaneously combust without you. You are such a large part of me. You are my best quarter and my worst quarter.

I do know who I am without you, though sometimes I need to think about it. But so many people don't know who I am without you. Very few people really know me at all. Few I wish to.

And most of the time, he doesn't see me. And if he chances to, he doesn't care enough to give me the respect that is due to any and every human being. I'm not asking for special status here... even though we do have a special relationship.

I do love him of course. And that's enough.

Year 3: May

He keeps apologizing about being rude or being a hassle... or an inconvenience. Which of course he is not.

But then he'll go and say a bunch of hurtful things, deliberately and sometimes not, continuously. And gets angry because I don't remember things visually the way he does.

He doesn't listen to anything I say, doesn't remember what I say when he does, doesn't even care that he doesn't listen or remember, and thinks it's funny that I do. He laughs at me. I just don't know about this sometimes.

Year 3: December

I guess I've taken everything life has been able to throw at me so far. I've gotten myself out of all the trouble I can land myself in. And I've never ever needed any help. I've stopped death in its tracks, and pulled on human suffering until it has begun to unravel.

But suicide and murder are totally different playing fields. A person's own life is all they have. It's theirs to dispose of as they see fit. It's tragedy if they want to end it, but certainly their right. Someone else's life is nobody else's business.

[ellipsis]

I don't know if he would kill me. He could if he tried. But I honestly don't know if he would. It doesn't scare me that my better half could potentially become literally a *mortal* enemy. Or rather that he could try to kill me.

It doesn't scare me that I can't put ending *my* life past him. But it scares me that this situation seems okay.

rotten zucchinis... and me

cw: mention of abuse & violence

I spent more than 13 years of my life in a significant, queerplatonic relationship. My now-ex zucchini never liked the vegetable words, so I used the term "co-conspirator in life." When that relationship "broke-up" I was at a loss for words, with no idea how to talk about these kinds of relationships ending, or even how to tell people in my community that it did.

How could I tell my family? And what would I even say? Is "break-up" the right word? What do I call this person now? And after more than a decade... where do I go from here?

My now-former co-conspirator in life was the most important person in my life for a long time. I was fighting for people to recognise that relationship years before my mother met her wife. Marriages break-up all the time without shattering the legitimacy of romantic relationships.

And for that matter romantic relationships are unhealthy and abusive all the time—and even if people notice, they still take those relationships seriously. But right until the end, my non-romantic intimate relationship was never really taken seriously... *because we weren't romantically involved.*

How can I tell people this relationship ended without them turning around and using that as "proof" that wacky-non-normative relationships really **don't** deserve to be recognised as legitimate? Or as "proof" they're "just a phase" or follies of youth? I can't. Or maybe I just haven't yet figured out how.

That's part of why I decided to do this zine. But it's not the most important part. I needed to open a space to talk about something else, something I still don't know how to reconcile.

For more than a decade, my zucchini was controlling and emotionally abusive, and for years, hurt me in ways I'm still trying to recognise— it's been months since this relationship ended, and the fear is only starting to go away.

I needed a space to talk about the violence I've experienced and to recognise that it is violence (even if I don't really believe that yet). I needed space to say I have experienced abuse from someone I loved, in an important non-normative relationship.

I'm sure I'm not the only one. (Am I?)

Years 3 to 6

cw: mention of death, potential murder, physical violence & fear of violence

Year 3: January

I've noticed for a while now that he's been getting more violent and more angry. At least now he knows it. The other day he punched a hole in his basement wall because he got angry. The indent of his rings is on the remainder of the drywall. He wasn't aiming at me— I know that. But he punched a hole in a wall six inches from my face. He scared me. Sometimes he scares me.

He's worried about his anger and asked me to fix it. He asked me what he's supposed to do.

I wish I could fix it. I wish I could fix everything.

Year 3: February

He wasn't like this when I met him. I miss talking to him— I mean really talking to him. I miss the days we had to cut short incredible conversations because the temporal pressures demanded that we sleep at night and get up in the morning.

I miss the days he really listened to what I had to say. That he would hear me out willingly. And I didn't have to put up a fight. At all. When he cared about what I had to say.

He doesn't see me anymore. He wants me and needs me for what I am— the rock, the best friend who is always there, the person who knows him better than any boyfriend ever could. He wants my presence. But he doesn't seem to get that I exist beyond him, for purposes beyond him. But I do.

Year 3: April

His greatest fear is that my love for him will run out. That is incredible power. Power I should not have, and I wish I didn't have. Because I am not perfect and I have the power to destroy him if I'm not careful enough. I hold his life in my hand. There is something seriously wrong here.

Part 2:

Up close and personal (and anonymous)