

Handbasket



PARENTAL
ADVISORY
EXPLICIT CONTENT

ENJOY THE RIDE

ISSUE #01



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We are also online at facebook.com/handbasketzine.

HANDBASKET: Enjoy the Ride. Tales of hedonism, debauchery, and sin.

No prisoners. No apologies.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dearest Reader,



Welcome to the first official issue of *Handbasket*! This zine will be a collection of essays and other content that will prove to Saint Peter why I'm going straight to Hell. I've joked around for so long that I have a condo reserved facing the Lake of Fire that I'm starting to believe it. Fuck it, may as well get in some more sin and go for a duplex. No roommates.

This project was conceived several years ago under the working title *Killer Wave*, which would have a focus in essays, poems, and modern art. *Killer Wave* was the original title of what would eventually become the album *World of Fantasy* by the Japanese dance group Capsule. It was a great title—until the Tohoku earthquake hit. Then it became tasteless. Of course the title would have to be changed. I kept *Killer Wave* as the working title for what would eventually become this zine because it was only an idea then. I had other priorities at the time, namely trying to figure out how to keep my rent paid, my stomach fed, and my addictions satisfied. A zine would have to go on the backburner.

The dream never died. I would talk about *Killer Wave* with my closest friends and writer friends whom I trusted. It's been said countless times of those who talk about their dreams and those who achieve them. Those so eager to dismiss the dreamers often neglect those without the means to do much. Certainly, there are those who only want to hear themselves speak, never actually doing anything. Then there are those who can make their dreams happen; good on them. Further, there are those who have to be patient. I was in the third group for years. I'm grateful I can make this happen now.

TL;DR: Never give up on your dreams. Enjoy these bullshit essays.

We're all going to Hell in a *Handbasket*. *Enjoy the Ride*.

xo, The Editor

BINGO

BY JOHNDOE



Bingo was the best friend I didn't deserve. She was my first dog, a ferocious protector, and the first time I understood what it meant to love a pet.

When I was a little kid, I begged and pleaded with my mom to let me have a dog for a pet. She refused for the longest time. We were already doing our best to get by as a family and a pet would be more responsibility than I knew at that point. At last, we adopted an Australian Shepherd and I was adamant on naming her Bingo. We had just learned that old children's song at school and "Bingo" would be my dog's name-o.

Bingo was average sized for her breed. We adopted her when she was young and she spent some great years with us. I loved the different colors in her coat and I thought her blue eyes were the best. My brother and I played with her often when we first got her. She would run around our large yard, tackle us, lick us, and was everything a little boy could want in a dog.

She was an outside dog and the East Texas climate wasn't often kind. There were some days the news warned people about going outside because it would be too hot. We would make sure Bingo had enough water but left her outside. I felt guilty initially for leaving her out there while I stayed indoors but my grandparents told me she would be OK. She was. She had a place to stay both at my home and at my grandparents' house. Winter always seemed as harsh as summer, but we made sure she was cared for.

Bingo guarded us and me like it was her purpose. She would bark at unfamiliar faces and I would have to hold her back by her collar whenever people would come visit. Of course, once she became familiar with the neighbors and family members who came over most often, she would recognize them and not be as tough. She loved me fiercely and I loved her. Her protective nature led to her end.

One afternoon of a fall weekend, some of the neighborhood kids, my brother, and I were playing around in the yard. I don't remember exactly what happened but one of the boys and I ended up falling out of the treehouse my brother and I had. Bingo lept off the porch, started barking, and attacked the boy. I was scared and screamed for my parents. My friend was hurt and bleeding from his forehead. Bingo had drawn blood.

I wasn't injured, certainly not by Bingo, but she must have felt I needed defending. My parents were horrified, as we all were. My mom tried explaining to me that, because Bingo had drawn and tasted blood, she would be more vicious, we couldn't keep her tamed anymore, and she would have to be put down.

I didn't want to lose Bingo. She was *my dog*. I tried protesting; it took a long time before I understood why my parents did what they had to do, about as long as I took grieving her. I was given one last chance to hug Bingo. It took my dad's full strength to pry me from her. I cried and let her know how much I loved her. Before she was put down, I was taken to my grandparents' house. I remember crying into my grandmother's shoulder while she put Nickelodeon on the TV. Nothing could console me. I had lost my first best friend.

Bingo was buried on the far side of our property, with a wooden cross and a section of sheet metal marking her grave. It was unbearable to see for a while. When my parents sold our property there, they made an agreement with the new owners that I could visit Bingo's grave whenever we were back in town. I never did; I didn't want to go through the heartbreak again and it would feel weird intruding on strangers.

I regret not spending more time with Bingo while I still had her. I should have given her more love and attention because that's what she gave me. Because of Bingo, I tried to give more attention to the dogs I had after her. Nothing compares to the first of anything, especially a boy's dog.

OLIVER & CO.

BY JOHNDOE



Editor's Note: The following contains spoilers for the first season of How To Get Away With Murder.

Like most people last year, I became hooked onto one of the TV season's breakout shows, *How to Get Away With Murder*. The first season was filled with unstable characters and unpredictable plot twists but what kept me tuning in was the relationship that developed between Connor Walsh, a law student, and Oliver Hampton, an IT developer and genius Connor seduces.

In the pilot episode, Connor (played by Jack Falahee) joins four other students in his Criminal Law 101 course to work in the law office of their instructor, Annalise Keating (played by Viola Davis). He is tasked with obtaining confidential information on the case of the day, which leads him to meeting Oliver (played by Conrad Ricamora). Connor goes to a bar, intentionally seeking out someone from the IT crowd within. Oliver is confused at first, believing Connor to be out of his league (which is ludicrous, because Conrad Ricamora is unbelievably handsome). Oliver sees through Connor's scheme but Connor manipulates Oliver's emotions into not only procuring the desired information but sleeping with him. The scene that proceeds is one of the

most risqué sex scenes aired on network TV: it's heavily implied that Connor rims (performs anilingus on) Oliver, with the scene cutting away seconds after Oliver's silhouetted profile jerks up when Connor makes his way down there.

Connor continues his affair with Oliver after their first encounter, seeing both Oliver's usefulness as a technology wiz and for steady sex. Oliver, meanwhile, is insecure, shy, and doubts Connor's true intentions. Although a steady relationship, the two don't define the relationship, with Connor sleeping around either using sex as a tool in his legal job or for, as Oliver suspects, his nymphomania. The two openly discuss their sex lives in a way not heard from gay men on network TV before.

Oliver eventually throws Connor out of his apartment when they were to spend the night together. Oliver heard a recording of Connor sleeping with another target in his job, as Connor did with him, and breaks off the relationship. Connor is distraught, as he was beginning to develop genuine feelings for Oliver. He stalks Oliver's social media and tries to make amends at Oliver's apartment again, only to be stopped by a rather buff man in underwear who knows all about Connor breaking Oliver's heart.

The climax of the first half of the season comes when Connor and three of the other students are involved in the murder of a major character. After the students disperse, Connor goes directly to Oliver. Oliver is annoyed by Connor's presence until Connor has a mental meltdown in the hallway. Connor blames his behavior on coming down from a non-existent drug problem, presumably to keep Oliver from being complicit in his crime.

Oliver resumes doing favors for Connor, with Oliver maintaining firm boundaries as the two repair their relationship. The two eventually explode in confessing their true feelings for each other. Oliver demands to meet Connor's friends; he meets the other law students at a bar the next night. Connor helps a drunk Oliver back to his apartment. Oliver, in his intoxication, wants to be physical with Connor again, but Connor wouldn't while Oliver was drunk. Just before Connor leaves, Oliver says "I love you."

In the season finale, the two decide to get tested for STDs before having sex again, to be responsible with each other. They call each other with the negative results. After a harrowing day for Connor, he returns home to Oliver, finding him crying into his pillow. While the promiscuous Connor truly tested negative for STDs, Oliver reveals he tested as HIV+. The fate of the relationship is left as a cliffhanger.

Fans of the couple on *HTGAWM* erupted online for weeks after the finale. Both Falahee and Ricamora used their social media accounts to raise awareness for HIV/AIDS and encouraged fans to know their status. Many feared that, it being a *Shondaland* series, Oliver's HIV status would mean he would be killed off or that Connor would dump him, effectively signaling Oliver's end on the show. As Ricamora is a guest actor on the show and currently starring in Broadway's revival of *The King and I*, and no details for Season 2 have been announced besides the September 24 premiere date, nothing is certain about the story going forward.

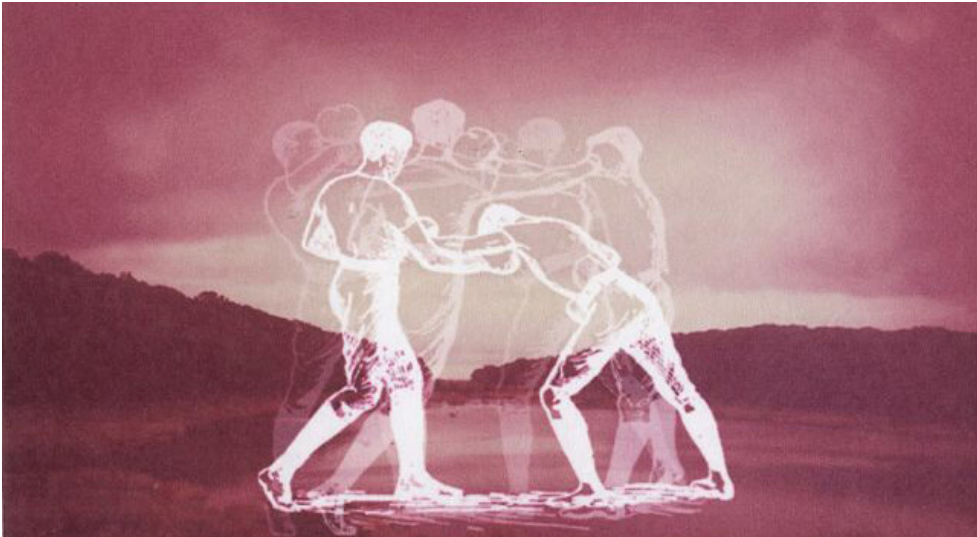
Oliver became a fan-favorite character (and mine) on the show for two reasons: Conrad Ricamora is ridiculously hot (more so than the average IT guy) and Oliver is the one character on the show with unfailingly solid morals. Every main character is shown to work in shades of grey, not completely lawful but not totally illegal either, and with plenty of personal failings. Oliver, however, is the show's moral equivalent of comic relief, even with the illegal hacking. His HIV status was seen as an unjust development to a good character. Ricamora, to his credit, used interviews after the finale to emphasize that *anyone* can have HIV.





SHADOWBOXER

BY ANONYMOUS



I'm not allowed to be depressed. It doesn't matter how many years I've had it or tried managing it. I can't be depressed. But I have depression and I have to cope with it.

All things considered, I have a *really* good life. My family couldn't be more loving or supportive. I was fortunate enough to have a good education. My closest friends genuinely care about me and my wellbeing. I don't have to worry about things like whether or not I eat today or where I'll sleep on any given night. My needs are met. I'm relatively privileged *and I get it*.

Yet my mind doesn't care. I haven't seen that movie *Inside Out* yet but I'll guess they don't depict a little girl having a self-destruct button on the control panel where her emotions reside. If it was me, the anthropomorphic raincloud of Depression would be flirting with that self-destruct button through the whole movie, no matter what the other emotions try doing.

You know what depression is and looks like, right? Your friend or family member is

crumpled on a couch in a dark room, covered in blankets while wearing sweats (always sweats), usually eating ice cream, moping because something dramatic recently happened (like a bad day at work or getting dumped by a lover). All it takes is one rousing speech from the hero at the moment, the depressed character finds joy once again, and everybody is happy as normal just before the credits roll.

That's *bullshit*. Depression can manifest in that stereotype, sure, but that's as exaggerated as most media depictions of mental illness. More commonly, depression symptoms are like indifference towards things once loved, irritability, and drastic changes in sleep patterns and appetite. It also includes negative thoughts like feeling empty, anxious, and hopeless. A lack of joy. There's more at play than feeling really sad and the symptoms manifest as they please.

And yes, depression can create suicidal thoughts. The depression some people feel cause them to follow through on that. I've felt like the proverbial blind leading the blind when I've had to talk others I know who have it worse than me away from the edge. That level of darkness is nearly unbearable. When your mind tries convincing you that life is and always has been meaningless, nobody gives a shit, it's not going to get better, so you may as well get it over with already. Trying to get through that is *rough*.

Generally, I can tell whenever I'm feeling depressed or having an episode. My depression isn't as bad as others have it. I have ways of dealing with my depression that have been working so far. When the hobbies I love the most lack all appeal, sometimes I try forcing myself into doing them again. (They made me happy once, so it has to work again, right?) Sometimes it's a matter of going outside for a while and simply taking in nature. As an absolute last resort, I have a prescription. It's a temporary solution for balancing things out but the side-effects are awful.

One of the prevention/coping methods commonly advocated in every suicide prevention PSA is talking to somebody you trust about what's bothering you. That is always hard for me because nobody likes a whiner. I never want to feel like a burden to those I care about and my dealing with depression always seems trivial. "*Hey love, how are you? Oh, I feel like throwing myself off a bridge, no big deal.*" I don't want the people I care about thinking I'm a drama queen or a needy basket case.

The general societal attitude toward mental illness also tends to vary depending on the lens: it's something to pity, something that makes people brilliantly artistic "tortured souls," or something that creates homicidal maniacs. Nobody wants to hire the mentally ill either.

There's been a push in recent years of treating mental illness like any other ailment, like a broken leg. People tend to understand that having a broken leg sucks and it requires time to heal, but it will heal. Sometimes when the raincloud lingers, things feel as though recovery is impossible. Then the depressive symptoms clear up and life starts to seem better again.

When all else fails—well, I hope I'm never *that* far into the darkness.

OUT

BY MAX MUSTERMANN



June 26, 2015: the day gay marriage became legalized across the United States. If I was told ten years ago that this day would come, I wouldn't have believed you. The very idea of gay marriage – or simply *marriage* as it is now – seemed like a fantasy at best, something that could never happen.

###

I knew I was gay before I realized it. Around the time when puberty started to kick in, I noticed there was something different with my friends. My male friends seemed more interesting but nothing changed about my female friends. About fifteen years ago, I was living in a time and place within Oklahoma where gay was one of the worst things anybody could be, and we were warned constantly about gangs and drug dealers. *Gay* didn't happen to good boys and girls.

Then when the hormones really started to kick in, I started attending a private Christian school. My parents weren't satisfied with the public schools in our area and sacrificed so my siblings

and I could have the best education possible. This came with a hyper-right-wing, evangelical Christian environment. *Gay* was seen as a curse; to be gay was a personal, moral failing to abide by Christ's teachings and a rejection of His Word. I disagreed and they all knew. I was introduced to a new student in my last year there and greeted with "oh, *you're* that boy who's for *gay marriage*." I didn't have many friends back then (mostly because I'm an asshole, orientation notwithstanding).

I was once invited to a Sunday service of the big First Assembly church in town, the largest denomination represented at my school. It was around 2004, when Oklahoma's constitutional ban on gay marriage was on the ballot. That Sunday morning, I heard nothing of Christ's love and every bit of vitriol, fear, and outright condemnation of gay people from the bully pulpit. The congregation laughed as the head pastor shared offensive jokes and retched as horrible stereotypes were presented as fact, all presented as though *gay* would be mandatory if God's children didn't defend themselves against the impending sinful hordes. I watched as my supposed friends joined right in. I should have left. I have never spent another Sunday there.

###

My family, largely, has never had an issue with gay people, as gay people have been in our family longer than I have. Mom and Dad raised me with the value that people should be loved and treated equally, period. A close family friend whom I consider family has been like a mentor and inspiration to me, especially as I was first coming out. Some of my extended relatives have been in relationships with same-sex partners for decades, even some with adopted children.

I came out to my family gradually, as I felt comfortable with it, then eventually outed myself via social media. The worst part: when I finally came out to my grandmother.

Several years ago, I brought the guy I was dating at the time home for Thanksgiving. He helped around the kitchen, played games with us, and helped make the holiday pleasant. As I escorted my grandmother to her room as the night closed, when it was the two of us, she asked, "why didn't you tell me?"

Then she put her hands to my face, quivering: "Did you think I was gonna judge you, baby?"

I started to cry. "It just wasn't the right time yet."

"I love you no matter what."

That's been my family's refrain to me from the very beginning. Not many kids, regardless of orientation, get that. I was lucky enough to have a family that always loves and supports me, no matter what.

###

My brother called as the Supreme Court ruling came down that Friday. When the decision was made, 5-4, I cried for a good minute. With the animus I'd faced, the hatred I knew existed, and the hardships I knew so many had fought against, I truly thought a thing like legal same-sex marriage - "marriage equality," as it'd been coined recently - would maybe come in old age. That day came. Fantasy became reality. As the saying went that day, *love won*.

BLACKBERRIES

BY MAX MUSTERMANN



Growing up on the lake in East Texas, my grandparents' cabin and the lot surrounding it was full of places for my five-year-old self to explore and enjoy, including the blackberry vines along the fence. When they were ready for picking, my grandmother, my little brother, and I would pick the blackberries for Grandma to make sweet things with later. The biggest problem, according to her, was that we wound up eating more blackberries from the vines than we collected. Our hands and mouths were sticky and stained by the juice. It was one of the few times my brother and I got along back then.

###

“Will this work?”

The slightly-used BlackBerry phone fit the palm of my hand. The flip phone I'd relied on for nearly three years was practically dead, as the battery was steadily losing the charge. Neither I nor my family had any means of replacing it with a new one any time soon, so my boyfriend at the time gave me his older BlackBerry. Nathan had since upgraded to a smartphone - a luxury item at the time - and didn't

want me to go without being in touch, especially with him.

I was attached to my phone in a way news pundits get off on describing “millennials” stereotypically. Let’s not forget that I was highly involved on my campus, regularly conducting phone calls for interviews as my journalism degree demanded, or had a family with an equally busy schedule who wanted to stay in touch. No, I was notorious for being virtually attached to my phone, always in touch.

My then-boyfriend was generous with his gifts, as I wish I could have been. Nathan worked for his dad’s real estate company at the time, managing property in Southern California. We were long-distance for the most part and routinely stayed in touch. He would call me on my “new” BlackBerry every night around the time the fireworks at Disneyland filled the sky nearby his house. Nathan thought it was a magical way to keep track of time. He insisted the phone wasn’t a loan, but a gift. It was mine.

The BlackBerry made me feel like an executive until it also started going kaput. My family eventually replaced my phone with a smartphone of my own, when they became more prevalent. In the breakup, my ex demanded I return the BlackBerry to him, insisting now that it had been his all along for me to borrow. Never mind he’d found work at an electronics recycling center. He insisted the phone wasn’t a gift, but a loan. It was his.

###

“How was your week?” “Fine.” ...

“Anything new happening?” “No, not really.” ...

“Do you want to talk about anything?” “No.” ...

This was Tyler’s *modus operandi*. He required at least an hour to begin speaking more than a few syllables at a time. Maybe his mind needed to thaw out or he truly was the embodiment of those “don’t talk to me before coffee” bumper stickers.

His favorite place to eat in town was Cracker Barrel, as Wisconsin had nothing like it and he loved a good, hearty meal. We would go there for breakfast almost every weekend, where we would most often be seated along a wall with a creepy portrait of a toddler and a framed *Felix the Cat* comic strip. Tyler loved to get strong coffee; I liked the free biscuits and the eye candy sitting across from me.

Before every meal, the waiter would offer a complementary plate of biscuits and cornbread muffins with jelly. Tyler, the stocky beast he was, justified the extra carbs as fuel for cardio later that day. I, not being physically active, wasn’t picky. I always called dibs on the blackberry jam the waiter would bring. It was never as fresh as the blackberries I used to pick with my grandmother and brother but almost as sweet.

###

“Grandma, whatever happened to the blackberries at your house?”

After Grandpa died, Grandma had been cared for by family elsewhere in Texas, though the cabin remained. Being alone in a once shared house after decades of marriage is never the best situation, after all. One of my relatives had maintained the property in her absence but there was no telling about the blackberry vines.

“I think they died off. I hadn’t been there in a while to water them. There weren’t as many last year and I didn’t know how long I would be there so I let them go.” Well.

HOLD ON, WE'RE GOING HOME





