

CIRCLES

THYME

Elnur

“Okay, so. My dad and I—not Papa, Dad—found this old box of stuff in the attic, and it was all from when he was a couple of years older than I am now. We were looking through it, and I found this old, kind of battered looking rainbow bracelet.

“I saw it and thought ‘may as well tell him now’, so I made a joke about how the bracelet was almost as gay as me, and he laughed a bit—a lot, actually, he found it way funnier than it was. Then, he asked if I’d like to know how he came to have that bracelet. I obviously said yes, because he never talks about his ‘youthful years’ much.

“Apparently, when he started dating his first boyfriend, they were both 19, and pretty new to the concept of being openly queer and proud. It was kind of a rough relationship; they fought a lot, and both had some pretty serious mental health problems. As Dad said, they were both ‘young, dumb, and gay’. It wasn’t really working, but a little while before they broke up, his boyfriend—Jasper, I think he was called—got interested in jewelry making. So one day, they sat down together to make some bracelets for themselves and their friends, and, naturally, they made some gay flag bracelets. They eventually broke up, but Dad kept this bracelet as a reminder of his first experience of pride.

He said I could have it, as a ‘congratulations, you’re queer!’ present, which is pretty cool. He also told me to ‘smash those homophobes’, which is now my life’s mission (although honestly, wasn’t it always?).

“My parents actually knew what panromantic and asexual means, which I shouldn’t be surprised about (they’re gay, after all), but I was. I really love this bracelet, because it makes me feel connected to my queer history. Maybe one day it will make another queer kid feel the same way. Circles never end, I suppose. So that’s my coming out story. Sorry, I got kind of carried away.

I look down awkwardly at my feet, realising how long I had been talking for. Had I annoyed my friends? Was I too intense? Did anyone else even care about the random story of how I got my pride bracelet?

I look up to find everyone staring at me. Leelah opened her mouth to talk—she found it annoying, I can just tell. She’s going to laugh, I just know.

“Wow. Elnur. That. Was. AWESOME.” She leans over and whacks me on the back (too hard Leelah, too hard). My friends break out into cries of agreement. A grin splits over my face. They’re my friends. Of course they care.



The world
Is
Shifting
Twisting round like
Spinning tops.
(GROOMERS
THEY'RE RUINING OUR COUNTRY
UNNATURAL STUPID QUEERS)

NonononononononoNO
Panic fills bubbles boils
OVER

Until it's so much more
Than the usual
Rivulets down my
Spine.

This is an ocean
In the middle
Of a storm
And I am drowning.

Everything is wrong and bad and heart pounding breath hitching nonono-

A calm voice
Cuts through the
Crashing
Waves

And my father's voice
(PEDOPHILES)
Screaming inside my head.

"Can you
Breath with me?

In
Hold
Out
Hold
In
Hold
Out
Hold.



Can you count the
Beads on my bracelet
As you breathe?
How many
Are there?"

Life ring thumps against
Churning sea
My hand reaches out
And latches
Onto it.
Coloured beads.
What an unusual
Saviour.

Again the stranger repeats
Their words
Slow, measured syllables
(In
Hold
Out
Hold)
Pushing down the
Storm swept swells.
My hands continue counting
The beads (or they try to
At least)
And the sea
Calms
Waves shrinking
Shouts more
Sporadic.
Until I can breathe
Again.
"You feeling
Okay?"
I nod.
(Not completely
A lie).
"I don't think
You are



So I'm going to sit with you
For a bit, is that
Okay?

I work here, I promise I'm not
A dangerous stranger.

My name's Elnur,
By the way. He/they
Pronouns."

For the first time,
I look up
At the stranger

(Coast guard
Throwing life rings
Man overboard!)

Who saved me.

Their face is warm brown
And their eyes
Are smiling.

Around his neck is
A librarian's lanyard
And his

Arms are lined
With bracelets. So many
Bracelets.

References my panic-addled brain doesn't
Understand.

The one I am
Holding
Is warm and flexible
And only now I notice

Its colours are all
Too
Familiar.

Red
Orange
Yellow
Green
Blue



Purple.
 Could it be...?
 He sees me
 Staring and
 Smiles
 (No one I know
 Smiles this much).
 “Do you have a name?
 And
 What pronouns
 Do you use?”
 Waves creep up again
 Lapping at my toes.
 “I
 I
 I don’t know.
 I mean...
 Sorry.”
 I shrink back
 Twisting their bracelet
 Round and round
 (I did it all wrong
 I’m a bad person
 He’ll hate me
 I should run
 Hide
 Runrunrunrunrunrunrunrun-)
 Again
 He breaks through
 The growing swells
 (How?).
 “Hey hey hey
 Its okay
 You don’t need
 To know.”
 They glance down
 At my hands



(SUBNORMAL! STUPID BLOODY
QUEERS! WHY THE FUCK
IS THE GOVERNMENT PLAYING INTO
THEIR PATHETIC GAME?)

Holding the bracelet

“My dad gave that

To me.

Apparently (in his words)

He made it

With his boyfriend

When they were young,

Dumb, and gay.

He gave it to me

When I came out.

Told me to “smash those homophobes!”

Elnur laughs

Eyes crinkling

Mouth twisting

And

(For the first time in

I-don't-know-how-long)

I do too.

Worn, wooden beads

(57 in total)

Twisted into a never-ending circle

Suddenly seem to take on

A new life.

How many faces

Have looked down on them?

How many hands

Have counted these beads or

Absentmindedly twisted them

Around their wrist?

How many gay people

(SINNERS

FUCKING QUEERS

THEY'RE GONNA BURN IN HELL)

Own a bracelet



Like this?
Are they proud
(WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?)

To be the words
My father yells
In his rage?
Are they proud
To be queer?
Elnur sits with me
For a while.
And we talk. He tells me about
Their cat, and how
He is in year 13
And this is his first job.
I tell him about
My dad.

(WHAT THE FUCK
IS THE WORLD COMING TOO?)

And they tell me that
He's sorry and I'll be
Okay one day and
I'm stronger than
Him (my dad) and
Being queer isn't wrong its
Beautiful
And he gives me their phone number
And tells me to call
If I ever need anything-anything at all.
When I try to hand back
The bracelet
(Chipped paint on wooden beads-
This rainbow doesn't hide)
He smiles
"Keep it. If it will be
Safe
For you to have it
It's yours."
Salt water drips down



My spine.
I'm probably not
Actually Queer
I don't deserve this precious gift.
"But I don't know
If
If
If..."
Their oar catches
My hand
(Dragging me out
Of the water
Yet again).
"Pride is for
Everyone."
And as I leave the library
The smooth beads
Clink
Around my scarred wrist
Just like the thoughts
Clinking
Inside my head.
I think I know what I'll do
Next time my father
Starts to shout
(Circles never end,
After all).



Avis

Short hair brushing

My face

(It's so much

L i g h t e r,

now)

I skip down the

Hallway

Feet

fleeting

fleeing

flying

(Maybe I stole the wings

Of an albatross)

Happiness so big

It almost

Explodes.

My hands

Fling

Themselves out in front

Of me and I

Catch sight of

The bracelet

I found just

An hour

Ago

And the happy happy happy

A

I

i

g

h

t

s

Transforming into

Squeaking-flapping-running.

No one else

Is in the hall but

Even if they were



They could not
 Side eye
 This joy away.
 My winged feet are moving
 So fast
 (Almost fast enough
 fly!
 To)
 They can not stop
 When my darting swallow eyes
 Settle on a person
 And I
 Crash
 Right into them.
 “I’m so so so sorry!
 You okay?”
 My voice is more
 Unintelligible than usual
 (Happiness mixed with
 The salty feeling of
 Touch makes it
 Twisted-tilted bird-speech)
 As I try to
 Wipe away the feeling
 Of unexpected
 Skin-on-my-skin
 They nod
 (Strangely they understand
 My bird-speech)
 “Yeah I’m
 Okay, how about
 You?”
 I don’t register their
 Question
 Because I am s t a r i n g
 At what they are
 Holding



(Their hands and arms are
Scarred, like they've been in
A fight with a cassowary).
Pride bracelets.
So many pride
Bracelets.
All different flags
(rainbow lesbian gay bi trans non-binary pan
and moremoremore)
The bracelets don't appear
To be
For them, though
(They aren't wearing
Them, at least).
"What are you doing
With the bracelets?"
They look
 Surprised
That I noticed.
"Oh yeah! I
Make them and
Leave them around
School
To make people feel less



Alone.

Someone gave me one and
I want to continue the circle."
That's sweet
(Almost as sweet
As back-up dancing
Birds for another's
Mating dance)
And my fingers tingle-
They want to hug
This small kind person.
Wait
Waitwaitwait
"Did you make
This one?"



I push my wrist towards them
(Not too fast,

I don't want to scare

The

m

u p

J y bird)

And tap-tap-tap the

Non-binary bracelet

(yellow white purple black beads).

They

Jolt back

Ever-so-slightly

m

u p

(J y bird,

I told you)

Before tipping forwards to

Examine it.

"Yes, I did.

Do you

Like it?"

The happy wings take

F

l

i

g

h

t

Again and

My voice squeaks through

My throat.

"Hug?"

Their face spl its into

A smile

(like a birds beak

Cawing open)

And they open their arms

So I run

leap

fly

Into them



(Hugs are the only time
Touch is okay).
They remind me of a
Crow
So I tell them
“Thank you, little Crow,”
(They still understand my
Strange bird-speech
Tilting liltling syllables

p
Tri ping and lolloping
Over over over)
And they squeeze me
A little bit tighter,
Their small crow voice
F l i c k e r i n g out
“Circles never end.”



Yaretzi

“Hey, my beautiful friend, can you come over here please?”

My head tilts

Up

At the sound of my
Best friend's voice.

Ever since I came

Out,

She has never

Once

Called me by

My birth name or

Male terms or

He/him pronouns

(Too-wrong sounds

Making me feel like

I'm not really there

At all)–

When she wasn't near

My grandparents

At least.

I stand up and move towards her

Bare feet

Shush-shushing

Across

The floor.



Leelah beckons me
Towards where she's sitting
On the floor
Surrounded by remnants
Of early-evening crafts
I sit down beside her
Tuck my legs
Up underneath the
Skirt
I borrowed from her
(It's blue and
Green,
Twisting leaf patterns
Slipping over
Liquid-smooth fabric)
And tilt my head
As if to say
Go on.

"I've been thinking and you know how you want a new name? I remembered something my auntie's friend is called and-you don't have to use it or even like it at all-her name was Yaretzi, and it means 'you will always be loved', and its Nahua like you, and it seems like you and-"

I cut off her
Worry tangent
(This means a lot to her
I can tell)
By grabbing her
Hand.

"Leelah
I love it
So
Much.
Thank you.

I
I think
I think that's
My name."
(The sounds of
Y a r e t z i
Are so much more
Right
To me).
She visibly
Relaxes



“I am so glad you like it and you will always be loved so, if you ever need a reminder, I made you something. I got the idea from Avis’s bracelet.”

She reaches into

Her pocket

And pulls out

A bracelet.

It is blue pink white pink blue

Over and over and over

And in the middle

There it is.

My name.

Yaretzi.

I take it from her

Open hands and

Pull it onto

My wrist.

That’s my name.

Surrounded by the

Trans flag colours.

Happy tears

Pinprick sharp

Stab at

My eyes.

“Leelah, I

Love it.

Thank you so

Much.”

She lets out a short

Bark

Of laughter.

“I’m so glad because I had already made it, and if you didn’t like it—the name—I would have had to give my aunty’s friend a trans bracelet.”

I laugh at that

(So very like Leelah)

And even while

She talks like a forest

Fire

(Using my new

name more



Than probably necessary)
 I don't take my
 Eyes
 Off the line
 Of blue-pink-white
 Encircling
 My wrist.
 (I would need to thank
 Avis
 For giving Leelah the idea
 At the next QSA
 meeting)
 I never really thought
 About circles
 Before
 And how similar they are
 To love but
 I do now.
 Just like love, circles never end.
 They just go
 Around and around and around
 Never stopping
 Or slowing
 Always there
 Curving through
 Space and time.
 I want to tell
 Leelah this
 So I do
 (She knows what I
 Mean.
 That's the nature
 Of circles).

