

## ***Square-Free* by Ciara McIntyre**

A square. I don't exactly fit into one, so I think I'd like to perhaps consider myself a parakeet, unsure of any one shape, dimension, or color. A yellow and green creature of flight with a complicated history regarding domestication and ensnaring nets, that's what I am. Boxed into an edgeless realm of both leisurely and sophisticated identities. Reader, writer, future C-lister, dancer, actor, advocate, thinker – seemingly edgeless realms and roles that somehow seep in and ooze out of me effortlessly. Yes, I inhabit positions that allow me freedom from the shackles of a life's narrative that I find stifling, domesticated, ensnaring.

I was a parakeet baby. When my mother arrived at the hospital anticipating my delivery, she was told she was having a parakeet. The nurses called the babies whose parents wanted to be what they probably considered gender-surprised “parakeets”, as they only had yellow and green clothes for the journey home. It is fitting that I grew up affectionately being called “my parakeet baby” by my mother, because now at 19 I find myself defying the constructs of pink and blue. No role or sphere has ever struck me as something that can be unblended or neatly packaged. I'm a parakeet, baby!

For as long as I can remember, I have wrapped myself up in a multi-genre-patched quilt of books. I'd like to annoyingly ask, 'Who wouldn't love a book?' You can really go anywhere in a story - you travel to faraway places, meet amazing people, laugh, cry, all while nestled in your favorite chair, or savoring those last few precious minutes before the school bell rings or dance practice begins or tech week for a show commences. All of these experiences... contained in a square, well, maybe a rectangle - but despite its physical border, there are no borders to where a great story can take you.

It feels like as soon as I could talk, I could read, which is for certain untrue because I recall staying after school in first grade for phonics help. However, as far as memory goes, I can't pinpoint a time in my life when I couldn't read the words scattered throughout my days. Throughout my world.

I was about 7 or 8 and just a few years away from being diagnosed with social anxiety when I started writing short stories and illustrating them. My series was called *Nerd of the World*. Did I know that maybe I was writing my own story? Of course now as a liberal arts student and deadhead I do.

My fondest childhood memory is waking up at 4am to read the *Judy Moody* series, pretending to be asleep when my dad would eventually come in to wake me for school. No, wait, that might not be quite as relished as my memory of devouring *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* by candlelight during Super Storm Sandy. I have evolved from Judy,

certainly, but am thankful for all the joy and sense of autonomy she gave me. Harry, well, he and his wondrous world complexly remain a favorite.

Now, reading rouses my thought process. Eventually, Jane Austen would go on to challenge and infuriate me to no end. Ok, I admit finding her period's chick flick vocabulary-filled masterpieces immensely pleasurable. Yet I also find her formulaic marriage plot, tea time, and hip-amplifying undergarments exceedingly beautiful, too easy to romanticize, too rigid... too SQUARE. I wonder if Jane will ever realize who *we* are or what *we* will become, as the postmodern audience.

Because we are not square, we are not confined by four corners of a book. And this ideology does not distinguish us from others. Rather, what makes us a bit unique are the respective vantage points through which we gain access to realms and roles beyond ourselves. We are not shut out or narrowly accepted by boundaries of the page. We are open to learning and experiencing and thinking about things differently. Ironically, the symmetrical book with all its symmetrical boundaries has left *this* fiery, curious, mildly spicy spirit in search of the next plot, script, dance, cause, and question to embrace.

Reader. Writer. Dancer. Actor. Advocate. Thinker...*Parakeet*. Am I yellow? Green? Do I read my own narrative? Compose my own masterpiece? Dance my own jig? Perform my own drama? Fight my own cause? Ponder the meaning of a square-free existence? We shall see. *I* shall see.