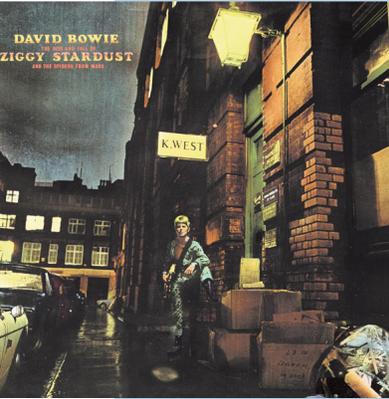


In the Cold Months

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David Bowie

“Rock and Roll Suicide”

The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars

06/1972

RCA Records

I wouldn't remember the morning of January 10th, 2016, except that I woke up in a bed, next to my then-partner, in an apartment that wasn't ours, where they were dog-sitting, reached for my phone, and searched Spotify for a song I hadn't listened to in years. It had been in the dream I'd been having just before waking. The song had been my favorite when my still-teenaged friends and I first moved to New York City years before, lived in a dirty loft in Bushwick, Brooklyn that cost us a total of \$1,200 a month, and adopted the album *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* as the official anthem of our apartment. I used to dance around that apartment when no one was home, singing into one of my roommate's microphones, pretending to be David Bowie. I couldn't, then, admit to myself that I was transgender, but who didn't want to be like David Bowie? A divine, androgynous, rock-star of a figure—not someone who the world couldn't handle or embrace or even accept the existence of.

That cold morning years later in the apartment we didn't live in, I played “Rock and Roll Suicide” for my partner, singing along. We sat there, marveling at how sweet and gentle the song was, what a promise it was to people like us, from David Bowie, that we were “not alone,” and that “the knives seem to lacerate your brain” but he was there to help us “with the pain.” A crooked-toothed, painfully scrawny, weirdo of a man using metaphorical space aliens to send this message, to make anyone who was ever on the outside know that there were so many more of us waiting there for them, that we just had to find each other. That we were not alone.

Later the calls and text messages started. Old friends were reaching out with condolences. Bowie was gone. Everyone I knew knew what he meant to me.

It was my mom, oddly, who turned me on to David Bowie when I was in first grade. She had an avowed hatred for his more rock 'n' roll songs, and swore that Ziggy Stardust really had “God-given eyes,” but she loved sad songs (a trait I have inherited), and the melodrama of an early version of “Space Oddity” that she'd found on a soundtrack in the cassette bargain bin was on repeat in our house for months. When I got older, I diligently purchased *Changesbowie* from a subscription CD club, and listened to it over and over.

When I fought with my mother as a teenager about the ties I wore, about the skull belt that she proclaimed, “Not very feminine!” and about my pushing towards gender nonconformity, she would say, “Sometimes I think you want to be a man,” with utter disdain. And I would reply, pacifying her, “No, I want to be androgynous like David Bowie.” Bowie was my armor.

Since 2016, the year Bowie died, the year Trump was elected president, life has become fraught. I watch the news and see my rights as a transgender person erode. I've stockpiled Testosterone. I've spent a lot of time thinking about which guns to buy, and if my chronically depressed nature combined with them would make me safer or more in danger.

And, slowly, I buy the clothes I've always wanted, men's dress clothes: button-down shirts; jackets I wear over t-shirts; chukka boots, loafers, patent leather dress shoes that I keep in pristine condition, shined, polished; sparkling, shimmering, sequined booty shorts and rainbow chest-binders that I wear underneath my clothes.

I won't be ashamed of who I am. On the bag I carry my books and notebooks in everywhere, I made a patch with a color splattered background and a pink star in which I stenciled the words "Oh, no, love! You're not alone!" While I've officially changed my name from my super-feminine one to Alessandro, I'm planning on going back to court to make my middle name Stardust. It's something I'll never use formally, but will keep with me like a super-hero's leotard worn under a suit. Bowie is still my armor, even more so now that he's gone.

It's so much more important now than it ever was that we outsiders, we flamboyantly shimmery weirdos, be visible, that we take pride in ourselves, that we walk down the street or scream Bowie in karaoke in our patent leather shoes, that we be sure we can find each other.

As the dream about Bowie reminded me the morning he went back to whatever sparkling universe he came from, we are most certainly not alone.