

HANDBASKET

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issue nine: 'tis the damn season



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HANDBASKET

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Handbasket is a free bimonthly literary zine dedicated to sharing LGBTQ+ narratives. Essays are accepted from LGBTQ+ writers of various backgrounds and intersections. POC submissions are encouraged. This publication is comprised of content some might not find suitable. It includes viewpoints and language some may consider offensive, vulgar, inappropriate, or a general waste of time. These opinions are imperfect, problematic, and may correspond or conflict with your worldview accordingly.

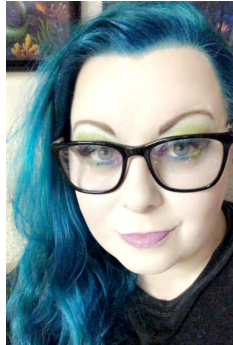
Don't take this zine too seriously; nobody involved does.

Handbasket — Issue #09 — December 2021 // handbasketzine.carrd.co // Happy Holidays!

MEET THE CONTRIBUTORS



Cortland Hunter is a freelance writer and photographer from North Carolina. He/Him/His



Jamie Wyatt is a queer poet born in Anaheim, but who has spent the last 25 years inspired by the Pacific Northwest. Many themes in Jamie's poetry involve loss, death, feminism, motherhood, & queer life. Her work has appeared in *Manastash Literary Journal* & *pour vida literary 'zine*.



Matthew Ablon is a journalist living in Charlotte, North Carolina. When he's not writing or at work, he's gallivanting around with his dog in a desperate search for a rich husband.



Jrayis Deyond, real name **Jerrick Thomas**, is a writer from Shreveport, Louisiana born & raised. He's looking forward to the future shining brightly and making all his dreams come true.



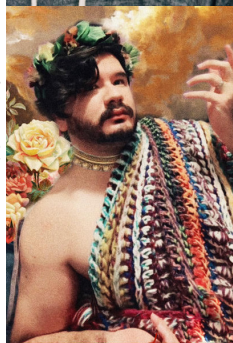
D. Núñez-Romero is a poet, angry feminist, and dog mom. Horny poetry and depressed essays are their forte. Incredibly sensitive and fantastically loud.



Skye Holloway is a 29 year old nonbinary embodiment of chaos currently residing in Pittsburgh, PA. They feel like both the tunnel and the light at the end of it.



Christopher Sommer is a tired dad and works in the dubious world of marketing and comms and *RuPaul's Drag Race* memes because he hasn't actually seen a full episode yet. For lukewarm takes and fun times: @mister_sommer on Twitter, and for max dad vibes, the same on IG.



Carlos Frank-Estrada is a proud Hapa, Cultural Anthropologist, poet, and local weightlifting cryptid. Currently residing in sunny Southern California with a Husband and two Bombay cats endlessly scrolling Zillow. Follow on IG: @TheFogCafe or Twitter: @KarlosTheFog

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



Hearing "it's the most wonderful time of the year" has slowly felt more like a coping mechanism than a declaration of joy for the holiday season. Every year in America since 2016 (at least) has felt overall worse than the one before it: from Covid to murder hornets (*remember that shit?!*) to vaccine hostility*, there seems to be a constant nationwide threat above our heads, Sword of Damocles-style. **(Handbasket is ardently pro-vaccine. Get yr shots, folks.)*

But locally, we have to remember that we have each other. This issue is all about the general concept of "what the holiday season means to me." Regardless of what (or if) you celebrate (whether Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, or something else), the holiday season isn't always wrapped up in ribbons and bows. Maybe you and I can enjoy our time; for others, this time of year is incredibly difficult. If you're able, please consider donating your time or money to your local queer-friendly shelter or charity. Sometimes the best gift is ourselves.

Warmth, - Taylor B.

SUBMISSION GUIDE

Thank you for your interest in contributing to *Handbasket*! Essays are accepted from LGBTQ+ writers. POC submissions are encouraged. 400-700 word essays on the issue's theme are preferred.

Include:

- your name/an alias
- a portrait of yourself, and
- a short bio (2-3 sentences).

Send your submissions to:
handbasketzine@gmail.com

Handbasket reserves the right to accept or reject any submissions for any reason whatsoever. No compensation is offered or available for unsolicited submissions.

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what the holidays mean to me

by Cortland Hunter



When I was growing up, the holidays always meant traditions and celebrations. As a child, I enjoyed decorating, writing out a wish list, and a waking up early to see what was under the tree for me. I also celebrated the holidays for religious reasons. My favorite tradition was and is Christmas Eve candlelight worship services.

As I became more aware of my identity as a gay person, I would wrestle with some of the religious ideals I had been taught.

I am an only child who was born and raised in the South. My parents are very family oriented and never hid their modest background from me. Both parents always emphasized the value of family. Growing up I participated in large family gatherings in warm, inviting houses and church basements. At first glance, it looked ideal. There has always been more underneath that couldn't be seen at the surface. My paternal grandmother was the glue that held the family together for the brief time that I had with her. Once she was gone, things fell apart. The first Christmas or Thanksgiving without someone can be painful. Sometimes the pain does not quite go away.

Seasonal depression is something that I have begun to experience in recent years. The holidays can be a reminder of pain that I have experienced in holidays past. As an adult, my estranged grandfather died on the day after Christmas. I have memories of the emotional outbursts, trauma, and anger that came with this loss. There were things that I wanted people to

know, but couldn't say. There were signs that I wish those around me at the time had noticed. Among the losses that I accumulated up during this time in years past, I almost lost myself.

I describe myself as a pariah. I do not fit into just one category. I find my religious side at war with my gay side; who I was taught to be conflicting with who I learned I am. I. It has taken many ups and downs for me to realize that not everything has to be picture perfect. Families come in all shapes and sizes. We have the families that we were born into, and then we have our chosen families. I can still look back fondly on the days when my grandmother was still here, and everything felt complete. I can also move forward.

I would say now the holiday season is more than practicing traditions. It also means looking back on how far I have come as the year nears its end. In fall and winter things can wither, turn brown, and die. For me these seasons are also times for renewed beauty that is waiting to be seen.



the road not taken

by Jamie Wyatt



The holiday season is known for being festive: Christmas lights strung from garage doors and windows; blue spruce, pine, and evergreen trees turn parking lots into forests; and orange and cinnamon scents wafting through the air while perusing the grocery store shelves for the ingredients for holiday feasts. But for myself, those things are difficult to enjoy.

Two years ago, just days before Thanksgiving, my best friend passed quietly in the morning after a two and half year battle with Stage 4 Lymphoma. I remember the little red circular notification in the top of my Facebook Messenger, the beginning of the message scrolling past my screen: Amanda passed just a couple minutes ago. 12:11pm. I had been standing in the humid kitchen at the senior home where I worked, grabbing my belongings at the end of my shift. My knees hit the cement floor, though I didn't feel the impact. I was too distracted by the fragile glass pieces, reflecting my heart, scattered around me.

Thanksgiving and Christmas turned from happy reasons—to celebrate and share joy with loved ones—into a living nightmare, unable to grasp my own feelings in the dark. Our Christmas tree reminded me of several Christmas seasons spent driving to a random parking lot forest to pick out the perfect tree, to spend hours drinking hot chocolate and decorating it with round glass colorful ornaments. I remember you yelling at me, “Jamie, you’re giving my tree bad hair.” If you knew Amanda, bad hair is akin to a cardinal sin.

For months I felt as if I was wading through the thick waters of a bayou swamp, barely processing the words said by loved ones or affected by the dance of bodies around me while I stood in the middle, still as a statue, words deflecting from my stone surface. The first holiday season without you might as well have been spent six feet deep, fast asleep beside you, for all I remember. Only one moment from that holiday

season stands out, it's significance emphasized by the last oath I gave you.

I held your hand, wrinkled by the IV hospital tape, as you made me swear to marry her. You made me promise I wouldn't let life slip by and to cherish all the moments with my loved ones. I would have agreed to anything at that moment. I did marry her, almost three months to the day after losing you. On our trip to get married, I felt your presence as I walked past Betsey Johnson in Downtown Disney as a thousand shopping trips to Macy's for her jewelry flooded my eyes with tears.

Last Christmas I cuddled up on the couch beside my wife, and Ty, your nephew. I watched the first holiday movie, Happiest Season, I had ever seen with a lesbian couple in it. Those were the first happy tears I shed in 11 months, holding the hand of the woman you told me I should make my wife. I know you didn't beam the movie idea down from heaven into the writer's mind, but it felt a little like a gift you left me. The last one I would ever get, letting me know the world sees me, truly, after all this time.

The holidays are still hard, the rain tracks on the windows always remind me of my unshed tears for you, but I have to believe that you're hovering in the foggy edges of the window frame, watching.



weighted blanket

by Matthew Ablon



October 2007: after a battle with lung cancer, my mother's mother passed away. Despite the cancer being removed, the war left her worse for wear. My grandfather's world shattered. The love of his life had passed on, and he was the one to find her.

December 2009: he, too, would pass on. He didn't have lung cancer, but being a smoker like his wife, my grandfather dealt with COPD and emphysema. My mother would find him on her lunch break, and it was mere weeks before Christmas.

November 2019: just days before my birthday and after a months-long, losing fight to lung cancer, my mother finally passed on. Less than ten years after her father passed. It would mean the first birthday, Thanksgiving, and Christmas without her, all before I turned 26 years old.

Holiday season 2021: the second one in the middle of a pandemic. Another holiday season spent on the other side of the United States, away from most of my family. Just me, my dog Walter, and a new apartment in a new city.

The final three months of the year always carry plenty of weight with them, like a weighted blanket wrapped around my back. It's heavy, it holds you down, and you can't forget that it's there. You can certainly get up while wearing it; you can move, but even basic movement is more difficult when that blanket is still on you.

That weight, of course, has grief in it. But there's more to it. There is anger and loneliness and stillness, all mixed in and making the weight not just effective, but unique.

The grief of losing my maternal lineage in my teens and mid-20s means navigating a world without additional ears who understood me, means I've done so much in my life I wish they could've seen.

The anger that cigarettes killed them all, and they all knew better. The only one, though, to still breathe in the tobacco was my mother. The one who found her father dead, sitting in a chair in his house in Paris, Texas, should have surely burned all of her remaining cartons that very day, right?

The loneliness of having to cook a Thanksgiving meal for one alone, and trying to figure out how to be festive without family bustling about. Wishing I could bring new recipes home in a slow cooker, but being hundreds of miles away.

Then comes the stillness. Filling the air with music or finding something to watch or do when I'm not trying to feel like I'm at home again. This, despite the reality that my childhood home is no longer mine to return to, that the people I'd return to have changed even more in the last two years than in the last decade.

That's a lot of weight to carry. You want to just sit a minute, or two, or five, or ten, before you try to force yourself to get up. You ask why you can't just shed the blanket like any other blanket. Then you remember this isn't even your typical weighted blanket. It's more like a weighted Snuggie. It grants you enough freedom to do some things, but it's wrapped around you. And it's a bearcat to get out of.

But maybe you aren't supposed to get out of it. You're not supposed to try to escape or just drop it entirely.

Maybe the weighted blanket of the holiday season for many of us comes with a message, embedded within the weighted down and stitching. The message: sit by something warm, with a warm drink, and remember.

I find myself doing this already. Reminiscing on memories past, thinking about the laughter at Thanksgiving card games and the tradition of seeing a movie the day after our lunch. Wearing fun socks in front of a heater at my last apartment while cooking good treats indoors. Sipping on a deep red wine with friends who wanted to make sure the first season without my mother wasn't spent alone.

So I sip. I sit in a warm spot with a warm dog at my feet. And the weight becomes lighter.



a love story

by Jerrick Thomas



That night I met you is still unpredictable and unforgettable, I was home studying for the weekend unbothered

I went hanging out with my friend at the time as a third wheel and saw you at thought what's the deal

We talked for a moment and I started feeling cold and you surprisingly lent me wear your coat

I ran into you again at your friend's house, me timid and you shy, it was electric when we locked eyes

From then on it was date nights, late after work phone calls, Christmas, New Year's and Valentine's living out our dreams me as yours and you as mines

We spent some much time in my dorms you sleeping over watching the snow, sharing breakfast from the same plate, I knew no one else could feel that space

Our first time we made love time stood still, the heavens sing, you held me as we slept so peacefully drifting on a memories of a love story beginning

Fast forward 10 years and so much has changed, I've developed a thicker skin and you cut hair I loved playing in

We've shared secrets between spaces and times of wanting to be where you are and I'm losing my mind.

We've fussed, cussed, argued and fought but I never wanted to be without you, tossing and turning like we would when you were there before and now I'm wait for your knock on my door

You're my lover, my friend, my song, my inspiration and I couldn't replace you no matter how I've tried they don't come close to you my favourite sensation

Your kisses are honeydew, your hands strong as an ox, your smile fills me up and I never wanted that feeling to stop

I've crashed, smashed falling in love with you and that's the truth and I see deep inside you are so beautiful

Your so sweet like my granny's banana nut bread I'm craving for you right now and I know that feeling for someone else I cant find it

So come home to me already and kill these tears falling for you on my face

Give me your kisses, your touch again, let me wake up to you drooling on my pillow and your warm embrace because right now I miss that sunshine in my eyes when I saw your loving Sweetface



THE HANDBASKET **INTERVIEW**



Name - A/S/L - Pronouns

Lourdes - 31/F/Buffalo, NY - She/They

What are three words that summarize you?

Uninhibited, foggy, stretchy

How would your friends describe you?

Weird, swole, inteligente

What is a big goal you're working towards (or have already achieved)?

I'm almost done with my PhD in sociology! And I have a job lined up as a professor. Life is good.

Do you collect anything?

Some rocks, tears from mean ex-lovers, and PDF articles/books that are neatly indexed in my Zotero library.

Your idea of happiness is?

Being around people who I love and love me back; traveling to new or old places and trying new things.

Describe your aesthetic?

Former-hipster crunchy health Goth

What is a topic you're always up to talk about?

Colonialism and CrossFit (do the two intersect? Maybe...)

What is a pet peeve of yours?

I have too many. Tall people who stand front and center at shows and when people interrupt then talk over me.

Recommend three songs?

Green-House - Sunflower Dance | Container - Peppered | The Notwist - Kong

Good advice to give?

In order for people to take you seriously, you have to take yourself seriously. In order to take yourself seriously, you don't have to lose yourself or your humor.

it's beginning to look a lot like fuck this!

by D. Núñez-Romero



I am the Christmas queen. I live, breathe, eat, sweat, and dream Christmas. I listen to Christmas music all year long. If it were up to me, I'd forever have a tree in the living room, bedecked with lights and ornaments, changing decorations with the seasons. I'm perpetually searching for the perfect shade of Christmas green nail polish. Christmas is forever;

Christmas is a state of being; Christmas is my heart, my very soul. This is a very whimsical way of saying I love Christmas more than the average person.

This year is a special one! I get to spend it with my wonderful boyfriend and family in my favorite place in the world: Joshua Tree, California. Unfortunately, my younger brother and I had... a falling out, to put it mildly. We're not on speaking terms. Quick version: friends of his laughed at my pronouns (they/them, if you're wondering) and referred to me as "it" over a holiday weekend. I stood up for myself as best I could, then I cried every night for a week when I came home. When I told him, he laughed it off. Called them stupid. When the matter was pushed in our family group chat, he lashed out. Words were said, none of them kind.

So. It's been a few months. He's spoken to everyone else in the family, but not me. Not yet. My sister says he's softening, that he may come around soon. At this point, I'm not sure if I care if he does. I want an apology for a start. All the weed he has on his person would be next. Then, I'd like to talk to him and make him watch me sob all the tears I've cried over these past few months. After that, maybe we could start again. Until then, I am here. Waiting.

Christmas is growing closer by the day and you'd think I'd be

a big buzzing bundle of joy, blasting Christmas songs and wearing my coziest sweaters. I am the farthest thing from it. I may have turned my bedroom into a colorful sanctuary, but I can't do the same to the inside of my brain. It is perpetual gloom and doom in there. Occasional flashes of bright blue sky. I'm trying to be happy, trying to find some semblance of the holiday joy I am possessed by this time of year. If the Christmas spirit is out there, it's possessing someone else this year, not me. I may as well be the Grinch, only Mexican and less mischievous. At least I have a cute outfit planned for our Christmas dinner. I may not be screaming with cheer but I will at least shine with it.

It won't be that bad, I think. Well, I hope. That's what Christmas is about, in the end. Hope. All things merry and bright. Sure, my brother may have broken my heart by choosing his friends over me but my heart has suffered through worse and come out all the better. I'll bring a book for the drive over and focus on the beauty of Joshua Tree over the next few days. I will hold my partner's hand, focus on the heat between us and thank my lucky stars I have unconditional love, even if it isn't from one sibling. I will smile, I will laugh, and I will sing all the Christmas songs I know, even if I forget the lines.



christmas memories

by Skye Holloway



Growing up as an Air Force kid that was also in a cult, the only two things I could always count on to be good during the holidays were A) the traditions my little sister and I had with each other, and B) the Alabama Christmas album.

For four of my formative years in the nineties, I lived on an Air Force Base outside of North Pole, Alaska, a city where even the Wendy's lobby halls were perpetually decked. We often visited the Santa Claus House and got to pet and feed reindeer. Even as a cult kid that had never believed in Santa, something about the Endless Commercial Festivity of the town felt genuine. During the actual holiday season, it essentially turned into a Lifetime Movie: every building lit up with strings of lights, dark for up to twenty-three hours a day, under feet of unmelting snow, with ribbons of Aurora Borealis dancing across the intensely cold winter skies. I confess, I fell in love young with the aesthetic idealism of The Holidays.

As very sheltered kids, my little sister and I always loved the last month of the year. The night of Thanksgiving, after dishes were washed and put away, Mom would pull out the totes of Christmas decorations, and my heart would swell when I saw the bright red CD cover of *Alabama Christmas*: the only secular music we got to listen to all year long. The album opens to the song "Santa Claus (I Still Believe In You)." When we were four and five, my sister and I agreed after hearing it for the first time that we would pretend to believe in Santa until Christmas.

But my favorite part of the music was really the way Mom would almost dance to it, even the silly song she hated but we loved: "Thistlehair The Christmas Bear." We weren't allowed to dance, but we got to spin around and move, giggling while we listened to it, decorating the tree while she set up the Christmas village. It was the only music that gave me a glimpse into my mom's mysterious past, the first thing that made me understand that she had lived a whole life before we showed up: that maybe when she was younger, she had danced to country songs that made her glow. She so rarely glowed.

For the remainder of the year, we got to do numerous other things that were only permitted for the season: drinking sugary hot chocolate, staying up late to watch Christmas movies together, and choosing our favorite cookies to bake and take to church every week. Every year, my sister and I would make new traditions we shared only together. A small list of them: we would choose *kolaczki* and cream cheese spritzes for the same week, since they tasted so good together. We would make ‘reindeer food’ and sprinkle it on the snow outside to make sure Santa (who we totally believed in) could find us. On Christmas Eve, we would watch the movie *Buster and Chauncey’s Silent Night*, and whisper a gift we knew the other was getting. We continued those traditions, and making new ones, until we moved out.

As a young child, the holiday season felt like living in a magic bubble outside of real life, where the present didn’t feel constantly beholden to eternity. We got to be kids; we got to pretend; we got to glow a little. My experience of the holidays has changed a lot in the ensuing decades, but the coldest time of the year still conveys to me the feelings of that glowing warmth. I feel a catch in my throat when I listen to Alabama’s song “Christmas Memories” the last week of November. I get misty-eyed knowing that my sister’s kids are getting old enough to have traditions of their own. For my gift four years ago, my sister called me by my new name. Last year, my mom did. No matter how life has changed, my longest-lasting joys have always been found in the darkest days of the year with the people I love.

A large, stylized, metallic gold-colored wordmark for "ALABAMA" in a decorative, gothic-style font. The letters are thick and have a 3D effect with highlights and shadows. The word is set against a solid dark red background.

· C · H · R · I · S · T · M · A · S ·

holiday delight for sluts

by Christopher Sommer



Holidays? In THIS economy? This is not an essay about economics. It is simply a phrase I am annoyingly known for saying in any context. But, here we are! The gauntlet before the end of the year and the anxious feelings about what the hell 2022 will be like.

As a kid, school was going to be out. Presents, sweets and treats abound! And putting up the Christmas lights was always the best.

It was until I had to start doing all that. Man, I'm really tired, so can we just pass? Cooking? Pass. Decorating? Pass. Waking up early on one of the few days we have off of work? Pass. Watching the \$50 toy we bought get sidelined for a cardboard box? PASS.

America, we are tired. And as adults, especially those with life choices that resulted in children, doubly so. So what's the game plan to make the season bright? Easy, keep it simple. And if we're able, I have zero reservations to dine out, hire people, or do what it takes to preserve the energy we do have.

Everybody has a free pass to pass this year. No judgments if you just don't feel like it. No judgments

if there's not enough money or energy to share. This holiday season is your time to give yourself as much peace as possible. It's what baby Jesus would want. After all, he literally roomed with Wilbur and Charlotte on his birthday; why shouldn't we take the same approach? Not with a barn crashing, but low key! And even though he had a star and all that, we'll just count that as saving on the light bill by minimizing.

Wow, that was a terrible analogy. But you're not here for sound exegesis, are you? Baby Jesus aside, I hope everyone really takes care of themselves. Despite things faking to appear as if it's all back to normal, we know it's not. And it's been hard for all of us in our own respective ways. Perhaps the best gift we can give this year is to pass on what will only drain you and focus on what fulfills you. For me, it's a low key time with family on a tighter budget. I am not putting up no lights on this house.



i'll be home for christmas

by Carlos Frank-Estrada



I'm not going to sugar coat it. The holiday season has too many things I wish to recover from. Especially if you are a frontline worker. Working in retail, service, and tourism industry for fifteen years, worked through the Great Recession; the season is unforgiving. No amount of training will ever prepare you for the grueling hours and thankless work that lasted three solid months. That burnout is real and you will constantly seasons guess yourself as to why other humans would treat you. Having to work around family schedules because there no chance I'll have the actual holiday off. The only real day I'd have for rest would be Christmas Day.

I've left all of it. The planograms, the gift sets, gift card pushing, hearing the in-store Muzak players shift to the Christmas playlist where you go into a blind rage when *Jingle Bell Rock* plays for the fifth time that hour. Finding ways to celebrate like joining a secret Santa, even organized a secret Santa. Went to holiday concerts, holiday markets, made seasonal treats, watched holiday movies with the people close to me, even tried a wine advent calendar. Just throwing on the wall to what sticks.

My hesitancy lingers because many of what we celebrate for the season brings me back to that constant struggle to meet demands, barely having a respite. The only chance I would have that rest would be on the actual holiday, when everything was closed.

They never really felt like a rest day because of the dread of coming back to the mess that was left on its eve. It shouldn't have felt restless. The day of never felt genuine.

Now, despite my work that does have me work through the holiday, the stress and the urgency are no longer there. I can be in my office, reassure people contacting me that it's going to be OK, everything has been handled, and go home to spend a quiet evening, actually enjoying the rest that has been long overdue in a place I call home.

Looking back, not all of it was dark, I did have many glimmers of hope during my rough time with the season. People opening up their homes because I would have been alone when they found out I came to Southern California, alone, many years ago.

I've come to a realization that I want to be in a point of my life where I open my house to those unable to return home for the holidays. To return that favor. Having guests only expect to bring themselves. Where we dance, eat, drink, and tell stories by the fire. Even if it just a quiet hearth to get away from it all to give you some peace you've been wanting.

For now, I'm OK with a silent night at home, still learning how to make it my own.



es wird scho glei dumpa

by Taylor B.



Weihnachtszeit in Deutschland was so different from how I grew up celebrating Christmas: surrounded by my extended family in my grandparents' cabin, everyone dressed in our holiday best, hot wassail ready to go, and songs around the piano. I looked forward to seeing everyone every year, and got sad when I realized we wouldn't be able to fly back for it once we relocated to Germany.

My family and I went across the country and visited every *Christkindlmarkt* we could find, and tried to stay warm in the bitter cold with hot crêpes or *Glühwein* (hot mulled wine). Mom and I would duck into various shops along the way to thaw out. Yet, our funniest and arguably most memorable German Christmas moment came thanks to a throwaway joke.

On our way across the Atlantic, I thought it would be hilarious if, on Christmas morning, MTV Germany played Rammstein instead of regular holiday music. My family dismissed it. We'd soon learn about actual German Christmas traditions, like leaving our shoes out for St. Nicholas on 5 December so he'd fill them with chocolates and other sweets.

Then Christmas morning came. My family and I opened presents and double-checked the time zone differences before calling people. After, we decided to turn on the TV to find some holiday programming. Of course, I clamored for MTV Germany and changed the channel. Guess what was on.

FEUER FREI!!! A LIVE RAMMSTEIN CONCERT!!!

My brother and I literally rolled on the living room floor from laughing so hard. Our parents laughed harder. We couldn't believe it: a real Christmas miracle.





BEST FUCKING ALBUM OF 2021



*I need not find purpose, but will it.
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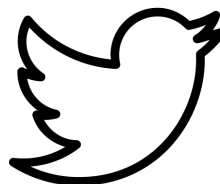
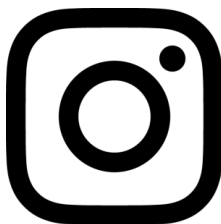
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SCAN ME

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