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A Tale of Two Sapphics

by Katie Fouks

All conversation at the table stops when the waitress appears to take their order. Aubrey attempts to stare surreptitiously. Julie gawks openly. Jada tries not to laugh at the two of them.

The waitress smiles as she hands out menus. Maybe she doesn't notice any of it. "Hi, I'm May. Can I get you guys started with drinks?" Her voice is lower than Aubrey expected, smooth like her brown skin. Her uniform hugs her generous curves in a way she kind of finds herself envying – Aubrey rarely manages to look that good even in plus-sized clothes that aren't directly related to a job.

At Jada's prodding, they manage to put themselves together enough to order. (Mountain Dew for Aubrey, a colorful mocktail for Julie, water with lemon for Jada – the usual.)

"I'll be right back with those for you." May smiles again and walks away, dark brown ringlets bouncing with every step.

Once she's gone, Jada lets out the laugh. "I'd swear you guys are starving dogs who just saw a bone for the first time in ages."

Julie sighs, eyes still on the door where the waitress disappeared. "You act like you didn't see her."

"Straight, remember?" Jada deadpans.

“Our token allocishet,” Aubrey says fondly.

“I almost feel left out.” Jada chuckles. “It’s funny. I know you’re both feeling different things, different kinds of attraction, but you reacted exactly the same. You’d never know from the outside.”

“It’s simple,” Julie explains. “I want to pin that girl to a wall in a sexy way, and Aubrey wants to pin her to a wall in a pretty painting way.”

“Or just paint a picture of her prettiness.” Aubrey shakes her head ruefully. “I hate how accurate that description is though.”

“You could ask if you can paint her,” Jada suggests.

Julie bursts out laughing as Aubrey groans and hides her face, pale cheeks burning.

“What did I say?”

“Our dear Aubrey found out the hard way once upon a time that when you ask girls to let you paint them” – Julie pauses dramatically – “well, they don’t usually think that’s literally what you want.”

“In my defense,” Aubrey mutters from between her fingers, “aroaces, oriented or otherwise, aren’t exactly known to have a firm grasp on what counts as flirting or not.”

“I see.” Jada raises her eyebrows. “I think I need to hear the whole story.”

Julie is only too happy to tell it.



Replenish

by Alfie

New Skin

by Alfie

I wish you hadn't lent me your eager hands,
Your lips, your thighs, and your cunning words.
I always feel the need to exfoliate my skin,
To scrub all the way down to the bones
Until the blood overcomes my fears
Of what could occur the next time I see you.

Craving to reach some level of purity
Away from your touch.
I find myself drowning in body wash,
Incapable of losing sight of the trauma
Built and stained on my skin.

I feel a pit at the bottom of my stomach,
Tugging at my guts like
Guilt whenever I think of you.
The remaining lust and desire
Can only derive from the need
To cleanse and rinse you out
Of my mind like a tattered towel.

I tell myself, the skin will replenish itself.
In fourteen days,
Or twenty-seven?
Maybe if I peel the dead skin cells
One by one.

Miss Cued

by Allison Fradkin

The first time we kiss, we are
wearing playbill-patterned pajamas,
blaring the soundtrack to *Starlight Express*,
and swearing off guys, all of whom
we've never cast an eyeball at in the first place.

We've been too busy making eyes at each other:
root beer float-brown
gazing at gumball-green.
Except now we're looking at each other
just enough but not too much,
like actresses cheating out
to deliver dialogue.
Only we've both
gone up on our lines.
Or maybe we just haven't
learned them yet.

Eventually, we pick up our LGBT-cues
and the distance between us starts to dwindle,
until your sugared grapefruit scent
and piggybank-pink pucker
are kissably close—
closer than a checker on a square.

I just can't wait to be kinged.
So I don't.
I lean in and latch on.
When it comes to kissing you,
there's no business like slow business.
Everything about it is appealing:
the overture
that relevés into the opening number,
with its thoroughly modern melody;
the up-tempo standard
that grapevines into the introspective piece,
rendered with restrained longing.

And when the power ballad pivots
into the emotional climax,
with its harmonically-held high notes,
one singularly sensational
kick line starts inside my heart.

From the stereo, the cast launches into
"A Lotta Locomotion,"
and even though it's not
the locomotion,
we are definitely doing
a brand new dance now:
experiencing something wonderful,
lovely, and truly scrumptious.

Afterwards, we huddle in a cuddle
of ingénue giggles,
stage whispers,
and bass clef-style smiles.
We share the lyrical sentiments
that inspired our introductory intimacy:
I'm the bravest individual I have ever met,
Sweet Charity contributed.
I'd be surprisingly good for you,
evoked Evita.
I think I'm gonna like it here,
Annie averred.

“We’re gay and thespian,”
you remind me,
threading your fuchsia-frosted fingers
through my theatre curtain-colored ones.
“So what she really warbled was:
I think I’m gonna like it queer.”

I try to reply, but the intermission
between our first kiss
and our second kiss
has ended on a high note.
The skate-shod *Starlight* singers
may be on a roll,
but this lip-locked lesbian is in a role:
your leading lady.



Body by Len Johnson

Author's note: This poem is an equality rally dedicated to Stormé DeLarverie, a lesbian hero who is possibly the fabled Stonewall Lesbian.

Stormé Give Me Strength

by Chris Heizer

Oh, Stormé please give me strength,
to survive another day.
We're at our darkest hour,
Our humanity is on the line.

Stormé give me courage,
The courage to stand and fight,
To resist hatred,
And get up each horrid morning.

Stormé give me hope,
Tell me this is not the end.
Tell me I'm not gonna lose everything.

Stormé give me light,
Show us the way to our promised land of Pride.
Empower us to keep the torch flaming.

Stormé give me love,
Give love to all the queer kids who are so alone,
Give love to all who need it, but are denied it.

Stormé, please deliver us from oppression,
Keep us safe and breathing.

Stormé help everyone see,
See our beauty, humanity and radiance.
Help everyone see past the hate.

Oh, Stormé please give me strength,
to survive another day.
To keep hoping, praying, fighting, embracing, battling,
until we get to the breaking of dawn on that day of dreams,
When we are ALL free at last.

Fairy Circles For Broken Hearts

by Charles Payseur

The trees blur as you run. Away—you need to get away.

There you were, confessing your feelings to Thomas and expecting to walk away with your heart intact. After listening to him yearn for Abigail Dwyer for three years. But surely all that talk had just been smoke, the necessary transference of his feelings for you, who he had no trouble talking to and confiding in, who he called “my little imp” and “my muse.”

And yet...

“Careful where you step, friend.”

You freeze, your body locking somewhere between flight and fight. Around you, nothing is familiar. You look down, and just a few steps before you is a circle of mushrooms. Toadstools. Bright among the muted browns and greens of the forest. Red. A warning.

The voice continues. “The forest is hardly the best place to be running without looking where you’re going.”

You force a laugh.

“You don’t really believe the old stories about fairy circles?” you ask, trying to suppress the shiver that works its way up your spine. Because you do believe—always have. The stories of the thin places where magic seeps through into the world. Where unwary children might step into a place of wonders... and dangers. Regardless of how they made you pull the blankets up and keep a suspicious eye on the night-darkened windows, you could never resist the allure of fairy stories.

You turn at movement out of the corner of your eye.

“What do you think?”

What steps out from behind a tree... isn’t human. Small antlers sprout from a wave of sandy hair, and piercing green eyes fix you where you stand. He’s shirtless, hard muscles covered in a soft fur. A kilt prevents him from being completely naked, and beneath that... hooves.

“S-sorry,” you manage, but you’re not sure what you’re apologizing for. For staring, perhaps. For trespassing where you obviously shouldn’t be. For thinking he’s the most beautiful person you’ve ever seen.

“Careful. Apologies are nearly promises, and those are dangerous in the wrong hands.”

He moves closer, and you forget to breath for a moment.

“I...”

“... look like someone needing to get away. I noticed. But I didn’t tell you not to step forward. I just wanted to make sure you didn’t do it by accident.”

He smiles, moving so that the ring of toadstools is between you.

“Those stories don’t tend to end well for those who step through fairy circles,” you say.

His smile widens into an almost unnatural grin, wolfish and exhilarating. Your pulse pounds.

“Those stories are written by people desperate to convince people like you that people like you shouldn’t exist. We can write better stories.”

“That sounded like a promise,” you say.

He licks his lips, revealing sharp teeth.

“It was.”

You look down at the circle in front of you. Behind you, the fear and the anguish are already fading. A hand reaches out. Shoed feet step into the circle of toadstools. There is magic everywhere.



When Henry

by G. V.

When Henry sat on the bank next to him, Xander was watching the logs float down the river. The noon air was just a little too warm, the smell of wet, fresh wood just a little too heavy.

“Join you?” Henry unwrapped a simple sandwich and took a bite.

Xander couldn't look at him. He'd known the moment he'd bumped into Henry days ago the man had noted something about him others didn't, and he still wasn't sure how to navigate it in this era.

“You're not from here, are you?”

Relief. This, Xander could handle.

“No.”

“But it's more than that, isn't it?” Henry's eyes glimmered like the sunlight dancing off the water between the logs. Like he knew a secret. “You're not from here, are you?”

“No idea what you mean,” said Xander, too fast.

Henry leaned in, the excitement in his eyes traveling to his mouth, turning the corner up. His hand hovered over Xander's for a moment, giving him an opportunity to move. Xander didn't take it. He watched as Henry pulled back Xander's shirt cuff to reveal the time device, as Henry's fingertips brushed against the back of Xander's hand before tapping the screen.

“This. Not a watch, is it?”

Xander's heart pounded. He wanted, desperately, after so many years wandering through time but never in it, to tell someone. Anyone. Henry. Yes, he wanted to tell Henry.

He couldn't.

"I'm afraid you wouldn't believe me."

"You'd be surprised what I'd believe."

"I—" Xander wasn't certain where he was in the nineteenth century, or what terms he should use. "I created this device. I'm a...natural philosopher."

Henry laughed.

"Just what year do you think this is? The term is 'scientist' now."

"Late in the century then."

"And what year are you from?"

Xander reminded himself who Henry was.

"I'm not giving your newspaper a free article."

"I'm not writing one on you. Would call too much attention to you and I want you for myself."

Xander looked Henry in the eye as he said it.

"I'm from 2104."

A pause.

“That’s it?” There was no disbelief in Henry’s gaze. Instead, Xander thought he could see hope there.

“It’s not good there. The oceans burn. Disease, starvation. Constant wars. I was working on this device to pull a person through time when they announced the missiles were launched. So, I just...I tested it.”

“And came here. To me.”

“I’ve been going place to place, time to time, for years.”

“You’re clearly lonely. Why not go home?”

“I don’t know if I can. If there’s anything there.”

Henry stood, offered a hand.

“Get up.”

Xander didn’t know why, but he took it. He held on.

“Henry...”

“Can it do two?”

Xander stared at him.

“You don’t have to face it alone.” Henry leaned in much, much too close. “Besides, we’ll both have to leave this town after what I’m about to do.”

When Henry kissed him, Xander was already setting the device for the future.



just know, you are missed

by El Morgen

Not Today, But Hopefully Soon

by Matthew Morgan

I haven't met my soulmate
And I spend practically every weekend without a date
I don't engage in casual hookups since I'm a prude
Which makes me feel ashamed since our community is active
(albeit sometimes crude)

I try my best to feel like I belong
But since I try too hard, my efforts feel wrong
I can't help but feel like I'm an outsider that's out of place
Even though I yearn for an LGBTQIA+ safe space

Ultimately, no matter how hard I try,
I have not fully accepted my identity as a gay guy

However, despite my current feelings, I refuse to believe
That there isn't more love for me to give out and receive

I know I can have more room in my heart to accept more and judge
less
And to celebrate all identities rather than looking at differences as a
reason to stress
I hope to connect with this community rather than keep to myself
out of fear
Because I want to contribute kindness to LGTBQIA+ communities
far and near
I want to find a guy who loves me for me
I also want to reciprocate those feelings by loving my partner
unconditionally

My current inability to accept my identity and communicate makes
me feel like a like goon
But I believe I can contribute so much to my community and
myself; if not today, then hopefully soon

JJ's Honeys and Jams

by Cheyenne Nardin

On the day Janice Joyce moved into the apartment across the hall, I saw only her shoes. I lay supine on my carpeted floor, an ache developing in my lower back. I had been studying the popcorn ceiling, feeling the reverberations of every shuffle of whatever furniture she was trying to squeeze through the hallway. I turned my head, only her shadow and a glimpse of Timberland boots visible in the crack between the bottom of my door and the cheap wood floor, a crack that let in spiders in the summer and a draft in the winter.

On the day I met Janice Joyce, I was clearing my mailbox of envelopes I had neglected to retrieve in the past several weeks. The open and close of the door to the outside let loose a gust, shaking loose an envelope—a bill, no doubt—and sending it fluttering to the floor. I crouched to swipe it back into the pile in my arms and was met with a pair of Timberlands.

“Oh, sorry about that,” she said, slipping her own mailbox key into the adjacent keyhole. I paused entirely too long before answering, rising quickly.

“No worries.” I shuffled the bundle of mail in my hands, my eyes landing upon her forearm as she reached into her mailbox. A tattoo.

She spied where my gaze had fallen. “It’s a bee. A western honeybee, to be more specific.”

“I’ve always been afraid of bees,” I said dumbly.

On the day I first kissed Janice Joyce, she told me about her dream. “JJ’s Honeys and Jams, I’d call it,” she said, eyes bright. “Just a little something for me. Just enough to be sustainable.” I told her it was a lovely dream—an aspiring apiarist—and pushed away a curl, dyed berry pink, to catch her lips with mine.

On the day after Janice Joyce broke up with me, I lay on the floor of my apartment, staring up at my ceiling. There I was again. There I would always be, I thought. And I was, long after Janice Joyce moved out of the apartment across the hall.

Today, however, there is no carpet beneath my skin. Just the slightly sticky vinyl floor beneath my shoes. I deserved a treat, I had decided, a breakfast out. I scan the diner menu, my eyes landing on a flash of color stuck to the laminated sheet.

“Locally sourced spreads,” the sticker reads, “from JJ’s Honeys and Jams.”

The waitress brings me my side of sourdough, smothered in raspberry. I ignore my eggs, the toast consuming my thoughts completely. It gnaws within me, within my head, my chest, and I take a bite to push it to my stomach instead.

The jam is a sting on my tongue. Sweet and tart. Like a last kiss.

The waitress returns, slowed by my expression. “How is everything, sugar?” she asks uncertainly.

I exhale, tears stuck to the corners of my eyes like honey, and say with a smile, “It’s divine.”



The Zine will return next year, and we hope you consider submitting your fiction, nonfiction, poetry, or art! Updates and news can be found at cvlgbt.org/library or email questions, queries, or submissions to library@cvlgbt.org.