



June 2026



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The Unexpected Comfort of a New Companion

In healthcare, long days and emotional demands are part of the job. Finding ways to decompress isn't always easy—and sometimes, the most meaningful support comes from unexpected places.

For me, that support arrived just a month ago, in the form of a small Yorkshire Terrier named Rosie.

Despite the short time we've had together, Rosie has already made a lasting impression on my daily life. After demanding shifts, walking through the door to her excited greeting creates an immediate shift—one that doesn't require words or effort. Her presence alone brings a sense of calm that's hard to replicate elsewhere.

There is something powerful about the simplicity she offers. Rosie doesn't know the details of my day, and she doesn't need to. Whether it's sitting beside me, nudging me for attention, or simply being near, she creates a space where I can unwind and reset.

Our walks have quickly become one of the most meaningful parts of my routine. Stepping outside, even briefly, helps me disconnect from the intensity of work. Watching Rosie explore her surroundings with curiosity and enthusiasm has reminded me to slow down and notice the world in a different way. In just a few weeks, those moments have become something I genuinely look forward to.

As someone who writes, I've also noticed how much she's already influencing my perspective. There's a certain clarity that comes from observing such uncomplicated joy and presence. It's a reminder that not everything needs to be complex to be meaningful.

What surprises me most is how quickly a bond can form. In just a month, Rosie has become more than a new addition—she's become part of the rhythm of my life. Her companionship, though still new, already feels significant.

In a profession that often focuses on caring for others, it's easy to overlook the importance of receiving comfort as well. Sometimes, that comfort comes quietly, on four small paws, reminding you—without saying a word—that even the smallest connections can make a meaningful difference.

By Jonathan Quinones

Gay Men 50+



If we, as older gay/bi men, want more age-positive narratives in 2SLGBTQIA+ culture, then it is up to us to start changing the narrative.

Queer Hive welcomes older gay men! Email us at queerhivemagazine@gmail.com.

The Room Isn't Against You

You're Just Invisible By Choice

By Rick Clemons



Walk into any gay social situation: A bar that still exists. A house party. A Pride mixer. A community fundraiser where everyone is standing around with a drink they're pretending to taste, pinky up.

Look around. Really look. Not cruise. Just look.

You will see men at the edges, scanning the room for exactly 30 seconds, deciding nobody wants to talk to them, and already internally GPS'ing their exit. Guys who got dressed, drove across town, paid a cover or brought a bottle of wine, and will leave having spoken to no one except the bartender or the host, if even that!

And then there is the phone. God, the phone.

Half the room is on one right now, thumbs moving with great purpose and urgency, as if a critical situation is unfolding that requires their immediate attention. Spoiler: it's not. They are scrolling the same three apps they scrolled in the car (Grindr, Scruff, Sniffies), checking emails that can wait until Monday, or

staring at a screen that they're pretending hasn't gone dark. The phone is not a distraction—it's a shield. It says, "I am busy, I am wanted elsewhere, I am not standing here alone, petrified that someone talks to me," even when that is exactly what is happening.

We have all done it. Some of us have it down to an art form that is ready to walk the Met Gala stairway. Walk in, feel the anxiety spike, reach for the phone, and suddenly, you are unreachable, occupied, protected. Safe from the rejection that has not even happened yet.

The problem is you cannot connect with anyone while hiding behind a screen. And everyone else in that room is doing the exact same thing: waiting for someone to put the damn phone down first.

This is the confidence trap that swallows gay men over 50 whole, and almost nobody calls it what it actually is. Not avoidance. Not shyness. Not being an introvert. It's a verdict that you passed yourself before you walked through the door. And the room never got a chance to tell

you that you were wrong

Here Is What Nobody Is Saying Out Loud:

Most of the other men in that room are just as terrified as you are.

Not performing scared. Actually scared. The guy who looks like he owns every room he walks into has a script he has rehearsed so many times it sounds natural. The man laughing too loudly in the corner is laughing too loudly because silence destroys him. The handsome one leaning against the wall, looking bored, has been in that exact spot for 45 minutes because he cannot figure out how to start a conversation without feeling desperate. Plus the wall would fall down if he moved . . . just sayin'!

Gay men are, as a population, genuinely terrible at casual social connections. And it's not a character flaw. We were trained out of it. Decades of hiding in straight spaces, reading rooms for safety, performing whomever we needed to be to get through the night without incident, left us with social skills built around

survival rather than actual contact. We got good at being charming when required and invisible when threatened.

Neither of those is the same as just being at ease in a room full of people.

Then we hit 50, and the gay community piled on with its own special brand of ageism, which is vicious and petty and wildly underreported. So now, you walk in carrying original social anxiety plus the fresh new story that you have aged out of anyone giving a damn.

You have not. But that story is loud, persuasive, and full of absolute bullshit with a capital “B.”

Buckle up, buttercup. We’re going to church with five ways to scoop that B.S. into the fertilizer bin of your life to grow some confidence and new truths.



1) Quit Fooling Yourself. You Are Not the Only Nervous Queen in the Room.

Read this part slowly because it’s the whole article in one idea.

The confidence you envy in other men is mostly performance. The ease that looks effortless has been practiced. The guy you watched work a room last month was not born with that skill. He just decided, at some point, to stop waiting until he felt ready and did it anyway. Scared and shaking in his Nasty Pig jock strap.

The story that you are uniquely, permanently, constitutionally bad at this is not a diagnosis; it’s a habit. A deeply grooved, well-rehearsed habit that you have been running for so long it feels like the personality that you were born with.

It’s not your personality; it’s your protection. And

protection that stops you from having a single genuine human interaction in a room full of people who want exactly what you want is not protecting you anymore. It’s just keeping you company while you stand alone.

2) Stop the Movie Running in Your Head Before You Even Arrive.

You know the one. It starts in the car: Nobody is going to talk to me. I’m too old for this crowd. I’m going to stand there looking like an idiot. I should have just stayed home and watched *Heated Rivalry* for the twentieth time.

By the time you walk through the door, you have already survived a humiliation that never happened, rehearsed a rejection that exists only in your imagination, and exhausted yourself with a social disaster that took place entirely in your own head. No wonder you need a cocktail.

That movie is not preparation—it’s sabotage wearing the costume of self-awareness.

Here is the only refrain worth trying: What if tonight I just let the room show me what it actually is instead of what I have already decided it will be?

Not toxic positivity. Not a hype-up session in the bathroom mirror. Just a genuine refusal to pass a verdict before the evidence is in. The story in your head is not prophecy but a pattern. Patterns can be interrupted, one conscious choice at a time.

3) Start a Conversation. Not a Seduction.

This will sound obvious and will still be the hardest thing on this list for most gay men over 50.

Talk to someone. No agenda. No destination. No performance of desirability. Just make contact with

another human being and mean it.

Say something genuine about the room. Ask how he knows the host. Comment on literally anything real that is happening around you. Get curious about him, his day, his life. That is the complete instruction set.

Gay men carry this deeply embedded assumption that every social interaction in gay spaces has a sexual undercurrent, which means every conversation carries the weight of potential rejection. It does not. That is the story again, dressed up as instinct.

Most of the men in that room want a real conversation with someone who sees them as an actual person, not just 'Furry, 7', bottom who likes to flip for the right guy!' Most guys crave real talk with real guys. That is it. That is what they came for. The same thing you came for.

Yes, someone might not respond warmly. That is survivable. What costs more, in the long run, is another night of standing at the edge of a room you wanted to be in, watching other people have the connection you drove across town to find.

Say something. Mean it. Own it. That is the whole move.

4) Stop Auditioning. Start Watching.

There are men who are genuinely good at walking into a room and making other people feel like the only person in it. Watch them. Not to steal their material, but to understand what they are actually doing underneath the charm.

Here is what you will find every time: They are not thinking about themselves. They are thinking about the person in front of them. They

are curious instead of self-conscious. They are paying attention instead of monitoring how they are being perceived.

The men who connect easily have one thing in common—they stopped making it about their own performance and got interested in other people instead.

Try it as an experiment with zero pressure attached. For one evening, make your only job genuine curiosity. Not working the room. Not positioning yourself. Just noticing what is actually interesting about the humans around you and occasionally saying so out loud.

You will be stunned how much the room shifts when you stop treating it like a stage and start treating it like a place where real people happen to be standing.

5) Find the Right Rooms For You.

A packed bar at midnight is not the only arena. It's also, for many gay men over 50, one of the least forgiving social environments ever invented.

Loud, dark, status-heavy, and designed for a kind of connection that does not actually suit most of us once we hit a certain age and run out of patience for it.

There is no rule that says it has to be your proving ground.

Gay hiking groups exist. Book clubs exist. Dinner parties where you can actually hear the person across from you exist. Volunteer organizations, sports leagues, travel groups, community boards—all of these exist and offer something the bar rarely does, which is a shared reason to be in them that has nothing to do with how you look or how young you are.

Shared activity is the great equalizer of social anxiety. When you have something to talk about besides yourself, the pressure drops, the conversation starts naturally, and connection happens without anyone having to perform their way into it.

This doesn't mean giving up on the bar. Go to the bar if you want. But your entire social life and sense of whether anyone wants to be around you does not have to rise and fall on whether a stranger noticed you across a crowded room at midnight. Be brutally honest with yourself. What worked in your 20s and 30s is not working now.

Find the rooms where you can actually breathe. Then show up in them consistently enough to matter.

Hey, Mister. Realize this:

The room is not against you. It never was.

It's full of men exactly like you, standing slightly too far from the center, waiting for someone to make the first move and make it feel safe enough to be a real person for five minutes.

Be that someone. Even when you don't feel like it. Especially then.

The only men who never connect are the ones who decided before they walked in that they already knew exactly how it was going to go. You don't know. And neither does anyone else in that room.

That isn't a threat. That is the whole damn point.

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Unveiling a Masterpiece

By Michael Shawn Sanders

I love the Leather community! I love Drag Queens! I love Gays being gay! I love every single letter clinking together in the alphabet soup of the 2SLGBTQIA+ family!

But why do we create these elaborate subcultures? Why the leather, the sequins, the paint, the armour? Historically, the queer community has had to build our own "sanctuaries." When the outside world told us we were broken, we did more than just survive; we became Architects of Identity.

The Leatherman and the Drag Queen are both high priests of self-determination. They externalize an internal power. It is the deliberate moulding of the physical self to reflect a truth that the world tried to erase. True internal power is the unshakeable awareness of one's own divine spark, a



Lauderdale, FL



Nome, AK

sovereign grace that no longer requires permission from the outside world to exist, to shine, or to rule.

I won my first drag contest at 16 years old, Miss Dandelion 1983. I've been the florist, the decorator, the hairdresser. I've been the Boystown boy, the club kid, the circuit queen, and gym-bunny. I've been a Broadway gay, the celebrity entourage gay, the New York gay, the San Francisco gay, and the Burning Man stoner gay.

I'm an Old Guard leatherman who's won a title and a medal, which makes me a sash queen. I've been the gay with HIV, the gay with AIDS, the grieving husband, and the doting son. I've been successful and I've been the hot mess that desperately needs rehab. All the way up and all the way down. I've reinvented myself time and time again. I used to think reinventing was about staying ahead of the game, but the real evolution began when I finally dropped the armour and learned to love the man underneath it all.

After decades of switching costumes and surviving the extremes, I finally had to face the one person I had truly never met: myself. Looking back, all I ever was doing was searching for love from the outside world. I now realize the only validation I ever really needed had to come from within.

How do I practice self-love? Is that like a mani pedi? How do I take off the drag? For me, it was about listening. Instead of putting all that energy into running to the next thing—the next scene, the next drama—I sat still. I prayed. I meditated. Maybe that isn't for everyone, but anyone can be still and listen to oneself. I believe that when you radically care for yourself, love yourself, you are helping your community and the world tenfold. Kindness, self-compassion, and grace start to show up. When you show up for yourself, the costumes, the clicks, the tea can all be just for fun. When I love myself, that's the most queerly radical love I can think of. As I evolve, so does my community. After all, the greatest revolution isn't out on the streets or under the club lights—it begins the moment we look in the mirror and finally embrace the masterpiece looking back.



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QUEER MARRIAGE

*Marriage Advice, Issues For &
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In the Game of Life . . .

Love Always Wins

By Revs. Michael and Jason,
The Marry Men Wedding Officiants

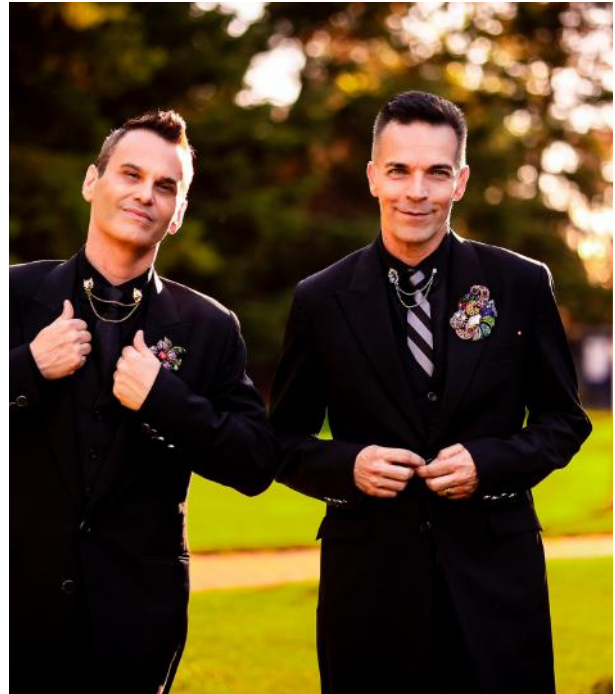
If “all the world’s a stage,” as Shakespeare posits, then “life is a cabaret” and marriage is a dance that requires rhythm, trust, and the ability to laugh when someone, inevitably, steps on your toes. It’s about knowing when to lead, when to follow, and when to just spin around dramatically because life and love should always have a little flair.

Barry and Melvin danced into each other's lives at a line dancing class back in 2018.

“Every time he got on the dance floor, I would try and sneak in behind and watch him move his body,” Melvin admitted. “He can really sway those hips.”

Barry’s “Cowboy Style” clearly got Melvin’s boots-a-tappin’. “I assumed Barry was straight,” Melvin confessed, “because he kept bringing the same female friend to different line dance functions . . . so I gave up.”

But love didn’t, because LOVE always WINS! On May 4, 2025, seven lucky years after their debut dance, Barry and Melvin became “footloose and fiancé free”



Rev. Jason and Rev. Michael

as they took the ultimate two-step together down the aisle and began a lifelong journey of side-by-side shuffles and hand-in-hand spins.

Every marriage is a living testament to the enduring power of love and makes the sentiment “LOVE WINS” resonate in the daily lives of countless couples who choose to build their futures together. And while it’s absolutely true that “LOVE WINS,” the reality is that love doesn’t always triumph over every obstacle. Life can, and often does, present challenges, injustices, and circumstances that test the resilience of our relationships. External factors—such as discrimination, the pressure of living up to societal norms, or unforeseen hardships—can create formidable barriers.



THE MARRY MEN

"It definitely has felt like the world was trying to keep us apart," Katie confided to us prior to her marriage to Harman on October 26, 2025. "We have had to be really strong in our love to get to where we are today, and through our love, we are healing together."

Acknowledging the complexities of love's journey emphasizes the need for empathy, understanding, and a collective effort to address the systemic issues that can impede love's path. That is why celebrating our PRIDE is paramount in this pursuit and why we joined forces with the PopUp Chapel to officiate the marriages of four fabulous couples on a float during the Toronto Pride Parade. We became "married men" on June 30, 2016 in a private civil ceremony with close friends; so, on June 30, 2024, we decided to celebrate our wedding anniversary with 1,000,000 people.



Michael and Jason, PopUp Pride 2024, photo by Alicia Thurston Photography



Melvin and Barry with Rev. Michael

When we first met Joelle and Drew before their Toronto Pride nuptials, they were both wearing homemade t-shirts, and we immediately fell in love with them. Their paths crossed back in 2015 on the first day of Grade 10 Science class, and in no time, the forces of gravity and love were pulling them into each other's orbits.

"We were the only 'out' couple at school," Joelle acknowledged. "And we were loud about it."

In June 2024, these Pride Brides got to be loud, proud, and vowed when we had the honour to tell their story to a massive crowd of Pride Parade partygoers.

"Jason and Michael touched our hearts and brought our wedding to the next level," Drew shared. "We could have never imagined how special they would make us feel on our big day."



THE
MARRY
MEN

LOUD! PROUD! VOWED and WOWED!



PopUp Pride 2024, photo by Alicia Thurston
Photography

The theme for Toronto Pride 2024 revolved around unity, resilience, and celebration. According to Pride Toronto, it was part of a bigger narrative: “Our right to Be. United, we fight to exist without adversity. Our place to Be. Holding space for one another, we create safety in the communities we build. Our time to Be. We celebrate the triumphs of generations before us. We continue their legacy for a future that allows us to be ourselves. BE is to proclaim our existence. To say, ‘we are here and always will be.’ Our call to simply Be.”

And “Be Married!” was our contribution to the festivities because we recognized that annual international PRIDE celebrations should Be a reminder that our collective efforts to promote love, kindness, and unity can contribute to addressing the

pressing issues that humanity faces. Whether on a personal or societal level, the notion of “LOVE WINS” becomes a call to action, encouraging individuals to strive for connection, empathy, and cooperation in the face of adversity. And what better way to win than to marry the one you love?!

In a world that often seeks to divide us, a marriage is an affirmation that love knows no boundaries. It is a force that transcends gender, sexuality, and every other label that attempts to hold us back or tells us we don’t belong.

“They come for our books. They come for our ballots. They come for our bodies. But they forget one thing—we have each other! If your freedom doesn’t set someone else free, then really, it’s just another cage.”

— Pattie Gonia, drag performer

Marriage: What’s Love Got To Do With It?

Marriages, built on love and commitment, embody the triumph of shared bonds, mutual respect, and the decision to navigate life’s challenges together. Each union is a testament to the victory of love over adversity, as couples embark on a journey of growth, understanding, and shared experiences. The late American poet and queer activist Andrea Gibson wrote, “Lately I’ve been thinking about who I want to love, and how I want to love, and why I want to love the way I want to love, and what I need to learn to love that way, and how I need to become to become the kind of love I want to be.”

“We were still learning what being in love meant,” Stacy confided when we asked about her growing relationship with Rylee. “We had lessons to learn. We have been preparing for each other for a long time



THE MARRY MEN

and met exactly when we were suppose to.”

Both Stacy and Rylee are convinced that they ran into each other several times over the years before their fateful meeting. “We remember being introduced outside an event in our early twenties, brushed shoulders at Toronto Pride, and spent a lot of time with the same people over the last 10 years. But our memories of each other are blurry.”

But time has a way of putting things into focus, because time is both a teacher and a companion that guides us through the seasons of our lives. They took it as a sign that the universe knew they were destined for one another but weren’t quite ready for each other yet. They took the time that was necessary for each of them to grow into themselves first and to realize just how tenacious and brave each of them was and how much love they both had to give. It was a win for love when Rylee and Stacy were married on October 12, 2025.



Stacy and Rylee, photo by Timeless Tree Weddings

As the Marry Men, we recognizing the unique journey of each marriage—its ups and downs, twists and turns. Every couple’s story reinforces the idea that love can endure and flourish despite the inevitable trials that may arise. In a world that may not always understand or accept all love, we are fortunate to have met couples who have remained steadfast in their commitment to each other and choose to reaffirm their commitment by living authentically and supporting each other in being true to who they are.

“I knew I had to tell her everything,” Jamie told us when we first met her and her partner, Rekhah. “I had pretty much given up on the idea of finding love, given the complexity of dating as a gender-fluid trans woman.”

It was during one of their BBQ dinners early in their relationship that Jamie told Rekhah about her authentic self.

“I laid it all out for her and told her who I was,” Jamie confirmed. “I had honestly expected that to be the end of it all. I figured she would run for the hills. Instead, she hugged me and kissed me.”

“I felt my heart open for her in a way my heart has never felt before,” Rekhah confided. “I knew she was my person.”

We were honoured to officiate their marriage in the company of their friends and favourite faces during Pride Month 2024, just a few weeks before our Toronto Pride extravaganza.

Love, in its various forms, has the potential to bridge gaps, inspire positive change, and bring people together.

“I never thought I was worthy of love,” Robert spoke





Adam and Robert with Rev. Jason

in his vows to Adam on September 9, 2023. "I never thought I would really know the feeling of being complete. That all changed when we met. Every day you tell me you love me and that you are lucky to be with me. The truth is, I am the lucky one to have someone like you in my life."

Considering the complexities and challenges present in today's world, it is evident that love needs to play a more decisive role and do some more winning.

The Power of Love

In our own marriage, we have been sure to recognize and emphasize the transformative potential of love and how it can foster empathy, understanding, and connection. Amidst the challenges that define our era, prioritizing love as a guiding force can serve as a catalyst for positive change.

The mantra "LOVE WINS" underscores the importance of intentional efforts towards building

strong, supportive relationships and promoting a culture of empathy that can, in turn, influence broader societal change. "LOVE WINS" is a powerful call to action that aims to create a world where love can overcome barriers and thrive.

"We didn't just start a revolution; we are the revolution!"

— Alexandra Billings, actor, author, activist

It's crucial to recognize that fostering love is not only a personal endeavour but also a collective responsibility. By embracing the principles of kindness, compassion, and unity, couples and communities alike can contribute to a more harmonious and fulfilling existence.



Michael and Jason, PopUp Pride 2024, photo by Alicia Thurston Photography

*"[L]ove is a dangerous drug
You have to receive it and you still can't get enough of
the stuff...!"*

— The Eurythmics

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THIS IS HAPPILY EVER AFTER?

By Benjamin Lopez-White

At the end of my last article, “The Road to Happily Ever After,” Darren and I had just left California. We were driving 2,000 miles to Chicago to move in together.

The trip back to Chicago was torturous! Mixed emotions filled the vehicle: we were elated to be moving in together, but Darren was devastated to leave behind his 16-year-old dachshund, Pookie. Guilt made my stomach flip. I felt so bad that he had to choose and couldn't have both of us simultaneously. We had

never considered the idea that we would be leaving without her.

On the trip home, we stayed in a couple of hotels and I didn't have to dig deep to find my hidden road rage. I have quite the talent of subtly flipping people off without them realizing. I figure that maybe the universe will see that I am not actively harassing anyone (to their knowledge) and will take pity on me.

After an eternity—and lots of lower back pain—we arrived at my apartment, moved Darren's possessions in, and

made it our little home. It was amazing to be able to discuss ideas and decorate with him. We mixed together his love of horror and vinyls with my Zen vibe of Buddhas and crystals. The bloody-vintage-Zen aesthetic worked quite well together.

When we first met on TikTok, Darren had replied to my DM partially because I had a framed Britney Spears poster behind me in my videos, and my username was “ its_benji_bitch .

 We are both pretty obsessed with Britney (in a non-creepy way)! Between the two of us, we have

17 t-shirts, a hat, a custom doll, five Funko Pops (plus two minis), her vinyls and cassettes, her released singles box set, glasses, an unopened soda can from her Pepsi commercials, original art I made of her for Darren, three birthday cards, two copies of her memoir, numerous posters . . . Do I need to go on?

Darren's phone wallpaper has been a photo of Britney's 2016 Billboard Music Award medley since way before we met. I have had a framed picture of her during that same performance for years. Only hardcore fans would know about this specific Britney moment. We had so many framed posters and photos of Britney that we decided to make a collage wall with every



album era represented. Afterwards we made a horror wall for Darren. Mixing and overlapping our styles has been quite enjoyable, and I hope it has made my husband feel like this is our home and not just my apartment.

During this visit, we laughed hysterically. It's always my goal to make him crack up so hard that he says, "Oh my gosh!" in the cutest voice; I feel privileged to be one of the only people that hears him say this. We also played many games, cooked and cleaned together, and watched movies. Darren caught me up on the *Halloween* and *Texas Chainsaw* franchises because it was before Halloween. I enjoyed my horror movie education and learning about the various sub-genres.

Closer to Halloween, we carved pumpkins together. Being raised a Jehovah's Witness, I had only done this one other time. It was special to me. We dressed up as Eeyore and Winnie the Pooh and danced around for fun and some TikTok content. It felt like we had always lived together. In the past, I couldn't cuddle for long with anyone and fall asleep, but with him, it was perfection. I could hold him all night long and fall deep into my slumber.



Time flew by, and eventually, it was time for us to say goodbye once again. He needed to go back to Pookie and his other responsibilities. Every time we have to part, it feels worse. This time put me into a deep depression for months. It was made worse by my lower back pain, which was now shooting throughout my body.

I went to the chiropractor, but after the visit I was in even worse pain. I went to an urgent care clinic and found out I had slipped discs in my back from the road trips and the negligent chiropractic adjustment. It was a really hard time to be without Darren. We were apart for his birthday, Thanksgiving, my birthday, Fiona's birthday, Christmas, and Pookie's birthday. I was in a dark place, but he understood and kept me grounded and as positive as I could be.

We talked a lot more about marriage, and I figured out what kind of ring he would want—he said nothing too expensive and that he loved onyx because it's black and held spiritual properties including protection, grounding, and inner strength. I decided to buy the ring way ahead of our reunion so I could stretch my budget slowly and save as time went on. I had our onyx engagement

rings handmade in India and engraved lyrics from Britney's song "Unusual You" inside the bands. I bought perfect, plain wedding bands as a surprise for the eventual ceremony. They stacked over our engagement rings and were also engraved. I keep the engravings secret so they are a secret between us.

We were supposed to be apart for five months, and then I would propose to him in person and we would get married a year later, but the universe had other plans.

In December, my car was totaled after I turned a corner. A tie rod had broken and shot into the car's wheel well. There was some rust in there, so it completely broke the passenger side of the car apart.

Darren's sister happened to be selling her car at that time because she had married a man from British Columbia and had recently moved to Canada. She gave me a great deal, and I was going to fly to California almost two months before we had originally planned. Afterward, we were going to drive his sister's car back to Chicago.

I mentioned to Darren that we would be driving through Vegas on the way home and maybe we should get married



then because it would save a lot of funds and we wouldn't have to wait. I also mentioned other options for our engagement and wedding to try to throw him off. I'm a blabber-mouth, especially to my husband, so it was difficult to keep things a secret.

Darren had mentioned that he wanted to have me surprise him with the wedding. He wanted me to plan it all when we were ready. Since our time apart had been shortened, I went into overdrive to get the wedding planned. I booked the chapel where we had fallen in love when we had toured it one summer (obviously, it was the chapel where Britney Spears had been married). I made a gift registry, booked hotels, and more.

I was proud of what a good job I was at keeping this secret, but unbeknownst to me, the wedding planner had gotten

Darren's email when we had toured the chapel, so she sent the contract and all the details to both of us. I told him not to look at the emails, and he didn't. He's so honest that I knew he really wouldn't open the messages. I could hardly wait to propose to him! I was really happy it would happen with Pookie present because her being there would mean a lot to him.

On January 28, 2026, I got off the plane, nervous but ready to ask him to marry me. Darren and his dad, Juan, picked me up, and Juan took us to get something to eat. We were grateful for the meal, but so impatient to be alone. We arrived at Juan's house and went to the bedroom. After lots of making out and other reacquainting, I got down on one knee. I choked up as I told

Darren that he was my best friend and I loved him so much that I couldn't live without him. I'm a writer and a published poet, but all I could think to say were these few sentences because my emotions were so intense.

I opened the box with the ring in it. I had ordered a special LED light box, so the onyx ring shone brightly. He was shocked, and he said yes, he would marry me!

I tried to put the ring on his finger, but it didn't fit. He had told me his ring size, but the ring was way too small—that was my biggest fear in proposing! I contacted the jewelry shop and had them send a different sized ring. It arrived with little time to spare, but this time it was too big! Eventually, we had it resized. This was one of the small mishaps that had stressed me out, but now makes me laugh.

Sometime after the proposal, Darren mentioned that we should make an OnlyFans because we were so poor due to all the traveling and because I had paid for the wedding in advance and was buying the new car. I was surprised because he had mentioned it before, but I always thought he was joking—I'm the one who is usually more spicy on social

media, while he is modest and a bit shy. We are also monogamous, so it added another layer to the situation. But I agreed with him, and we decided that if we felt it was affecting our relationship, we would stop right away. It was exciting, nerve-racking, and so strange. (I will discuss more about our OnlyFans and monogamy in an upcoming article!)

We were to get married on February 20, 2026, which happened to be my parents' 44th wedding anniversary. It was odd that it landed on the same date, but I decided it must be good luck since they had been married for so long. Soon enough, it was time to start our road trip.

I had been having extreme anxiety for a couple of months about us making the trip again because we are an interracial gay couple and the militant presence of ICE was particularly strong at that time. People were getting murdered in the streets, being dragged out through their smashed car windows, and a lot more abuse was going on. It felt like we were driving halfway across the country with the Nazis all around us. I wouldn't let Darren go alone anywhere when we stopped or gas. I had promised Juan I'd keep him safe and I took this



oath very seriously. The United States has become a scary country to live in. I wish Darren and I were able to move to Canada; I worry about our safety and livelihood almost every day.

We had to get to Vegas on the first night of our trip because I had a hotel reserved that was within walking distance of the Little White Wedding Chapel. Along the way, we got caught in a blizzard in the Tehachapi Mountains, southeast of Bakersfield, California. The whiteout conditions came out of nowhere. It was scary because we couldn't see anything at all and the elevation was 7,000 feet.

Suddenly, there were police lights behind us. I managed to pull over to the narrow shoulder of the highway. The cop came over and said that my back lights weren't on. He looked at my license and I explained that I had just bought the car and I hadn't realized about the lights. He let us go. This was the first time Darren had ever seen snow and the first time he had ever gotten pulled over. It was stressful at the time, but it's another funny mishap to tell now.

We checked into our hotel in

Vegas late that night. The wedding chapel was in sight from where we were staying. We were both exhausted and stressed. I remember a lot of hugging and crying before we fell asleep.

In the morning, we went to the courthouse, got our decorative wedding license and signed our paperwork. We went back to the hotel room, put on our matching Britney t-shirts and walked to the Little White Wedding Chapel.

At 11:39 a.m. on February 20th, we were officially Mr. and Mr. Lopez-White!

Getting married is a much more moving and emotional situation than I had imagined. I can't put into words how much love I felt in that moment or the love that I still feel for my husband. He is the most honest and loyal man I have ever met. He doesn't drink and has never done any drugs, which is important for me since I'm a recovering addict. He is patient when it comes to my mental illnesses, and he is just as sassy as he is beautiful. We balance each other out and communicate openly about our issues and work hard to grow together. He makes me feel like I got a fresh start in my traumatic life. I

was delighted to call him my husband. That excitement is still alive in the present.



Right after the ceremony, we got into my new car and drove off into the desert, and we lived happily ever after . . .

WAIT! This isn't a fairy tale! This is real life, and our story doesn't end perfectly. Don't get me wrong, my husband and I are very in love, and marrying him is the best choice I've made in my life, but marriage is hard work. It's a choice made daily to stay with the person you love, especially in those time when things aren't going well.

From a young age, we are all conditioned to want to find "the one," get married, and have kids. We grow up seeing this modeled everywhere: on TV, in movies, in person, and on social media. This conditioning leads to the false sense that once we find the person meant for us, everything in our life will be perfect. We believe that if we aren't in a relationship or married, we can't be happy. I can't even count how many queer men I have conversed with who are extremely lonely and have lost hope because of how difficult the queer male community can be to navigate. I was one of them. I had given up on ever finding a husband.

I believe that this loneliness ends up making people fall

into the gay male hookup scene that can be toxic, filled with meaningless sex and emptiness for so many men. I'm not slut shaming anyone though—if this community makes you feel fulfilled, then by all means, keep doing what feels is best for you! But if you are looking for a relationship, I personally have found that searching for a husband through hookup apps is usually futile.

Believing that you will meet your perfect partner and everything in your life will fall into place without effort is simply not true. It's been stated so many times that social media is a highlight reel of people's live and most of the time not the full truth. It's a curated image we want to portray to the outside world and it's easy to get sucked into a cycle of self-pity, insecurity, and self-doubt. Many wonder what is wrong with them and why they are alone when it seems like everyone else has a perfect life. We need to remember that we don't know what is happening in people's lives and a marriage that looks like a dream from the outside might actually be a nightmare on the inside.

I'm not speaking about my relationship. Darren and I have a healthy marriage and

our love for one another has definitely never been in short supply, but we do have our issues. We're both moody and have a lot of anxiety. The biggest issue is that for part of the year, he goes back to California and we have to be apart for months. It will be this way for the foreseeable future and is extremely difficult.

We had planned to have Pookie and my husband come live full time in Chicago soon after our wedding, but this wasn't what the future held for us. Juan let Darren know that Pookie was going to stay with him. This really complicated everything, but we were sure that we could get through it.

A week later, Darren's insurance told him he could only get his prescription sent to a different state one time; he needs it every three months. He hasn't changed his address and is still officially a California resident because we don't get to live together full-time. When we do, we will both lose part of our health insurance. Even if he became a resident in my state now, he wouldn't be covered in California.

We are now in an almost impossible situation where we

will either have to be apart eight or nine months a year for a few years or have to move in with his dad in California until we can come back to Chicago. Me moving there is complicated because I am on nine medications and it would take a lot of effort finding a new psychiatrist, therapists, and insurance without my meds running out. We also have an apartment that is an extremely good deal and my work is in Chicago.



Darren's 91-year-old grandpa recently moved in with Juan, and he also has a close friend called "Cowboy" living there to help out with everything. If I moved, I would bring my dog Fiona Bean Spears too, so it would be five men and two dogs in a four bedroom house. It also means my parents won't get to regularly see their grand puppy.

Darren's grandpa only speaks Portuguese and Spanish and "Cowboy" only speaks Spanish, so communication would be difficult for us (though I would love to learn their languages so we could all feel more comfortable). My bipolar disorder and anxiety disorder also make it extremely difficult for me to be around people that I don't know and to adjust to new living situations.

Every plan we come up with has one or two major reasons as to why it wouldn't work out. The thought of being away from my husband for eight or nine months a year seems as equally impossible as moving to California.

Our situation is complex, unique, and the most cherished relationship I've ever had, but it isn't a fairy-tale or a cliché "happily ever after" from a romantic comedy (although Darren leaving his plane to stay with me does fit that criteria).

It takes mental and emotional adjustment and growth to realize that there isn't some utopian relationship out there that will complete your life, but you CAN find your soulmate and be deeply in love if you're willing to work hard

for it. I have to remind myself continually that all relationships have ups and downs and take effort.

I know in my heart that no matter what decisions Darren and I have to make in the future, we will come through these temporary situations stronger than yesterday. Fighting for our marriage, missing each other, and having full trust in the other person is our somewhat unconventional "happily ever after." Even with all of our mishaps, complications, and tearful goodbyes, I wouldn't change our story for anything because it is the most authentic relationship I've ever had and that is absolutely worth holding on to.

They Spa

Private 1:1 Location by appointment only

**Muse Beauty Bar in Wortley Village
130 Briscoe St E, London, On**

Instagram: @they.spa

BOOKING APP: Link in IG Bio

Facebook: They Spa

Email: hannah.theyspa@gmail.com



(Some examples of my custom press-on nail sets)

- Eyelash Lift & Tint
- Eyebrow Wax, Tint, Lamination
- Full Body Waxing (no bikini areas at this time)
- Full Body Massage
- Facials
- Builder Gel Manicures
- Pedicures
- Our favorite service: Custom Handmade Press-On Nail Sets!!



(Photo taken at this year's Wortley Pride Spring Bazaar, as a vendor selling my custom press-on nail sets)



They Spa was founded in 2020 during Aesthetician school here in London, Ontario. I fell in love with helping folks feel at home in their body, and found there was a lack of safe spaces for fellow queers to go to for aesthetics. Six years later I am still loving this journey and look forward to meeting more wonderful clients!



Love, Asexually

By Val J. Prime

Imagine being in a relationship with someone who accepts you exactly as you are and loves you without trying to change you.

A partner who prioritizes commitment, and who would rather see you grow, even if that means letting you go when you're ready to fly.

It sounds idyllic.
It almost is.

Until the moment you hear they're asexual . . . and something quietly shifts.

"Oh, so you're frigid . . . Don't worry! I'll change that."

Funny how some people suddenly discover superpowers when it comes to others.

"It's okay. It's just a phase. When you find the right person . . ." — meaning: them.
As if I were a draft waiting to be validated.

"Don't worry! Low desire is just a symptom."
It's fascinating, this ability to turn an identity into a temporary anomaly.

"Wait . . . you're asexual?"
Did you really think you could share your life with a houseplant?
Sometimes, that's exactly what I become in their eyes.



Asexual, not asexué(e).

One ending changes, and apparently, so does everything else with it.

In French, one ending changes everything. In English, it's the opposite. One word stretches too far, and no one questions it.

We almost need a glossary: "Asexuality for Dummies." Illustrated, while we're at it. Sometimes, an image hits harder than a whole explanation.

What makes people uncomfortable gets smoothed out.

What escapes understanding gets corrected.

And suddenly, I'm no longer a person but a problem to solve.

Feeling loved takes a brutal hit when there's no understanding.

What I hear isn't an attempt to meet me. It's an attempt to rewrite me. Sometimes, even a denial.

Who listens once they realize you don't spark physical desire in them?



Maybe it's a defense mechanism.
I still try to make sense of it.

My own path.

On paper, everything was there.
A life together, a child, reassuring stability.
Normality, Instagram version.

But behind the filters and the posts, reality shifts.

When my lack of desire became undeniable, I took on a role:
The gentle, adaptable partner.

There are plenty of people who ask for nothing.
But when it comes to intimacy, silence quickly becomes expectation.

We searched, explored, experimented.
Because yes, it became a subject.
A quiet tension.
A slow shift in the way I was seen.

Stepping out of our comfort zone felt like a solution.
And I was genuinely curious to discover myself.

We tried:
Wild nights out
Alcohol, sometimes more
Flirting with others
Borrowed fantasies and staged desires
Swingers clubs
Sex shops . . .
Even girls' *Upperware* nights that felt like slightly unhinged "home parties."

A kind of living laboratory.
I almost became fluent in trial and error.
But nothing ever "fixed" anything, because there was nothing to fix.

It's an orientation.
Not a problem to solve.

After so much searching, I lost myself.
Believed I simply wasn't enough.
Not enough. Never quite enough to fit.

Because feeling loved and desired . . . that balance is powerful.
And I could see we didn't share it.

So, I suggested he find it elsewhere.
Out of love.
Out of guilt, too.

The idea broke me quietly, but I wanted him to feel fulfilled. And the more that idea took shape, the clearer the fracture became.

So, I left.
Because he was looking for more than I could offer.
And eventually, I wondered if I even deserved to be loved.

It took time.
A lot of time.

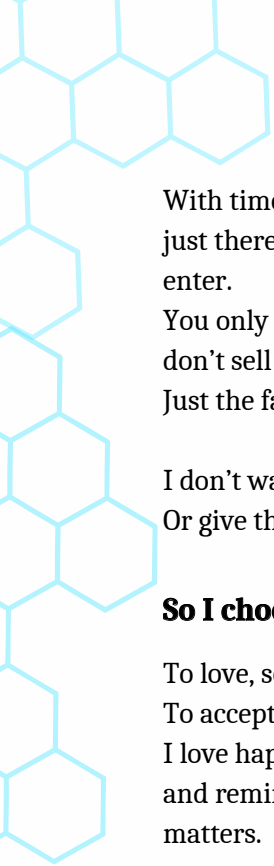
And unlikely conversations, sometimes even with AIs, to untangle it all.

When I discovered the asexual spectrum, I felt an unexpected relief.
Like finding a missing piece.

But understanding doesn't always bring peace.
The word that fits me best today is aegosexual.

Imagination moves me.
Soft, romantic dramas where a brushed hand feels like a confession . . . They speak to me.
Whereas reality can sometimes feel too direct.





With time, the preludes disappear. Desire is just there, assumed. Almost a condition to enter.

You only have to look at certain apps. They don't sell relationships. Just the fast-track version.

I don't want to feel out of sync anymore. Or give the impression of leading someone on.

So I choose.

To love, sometimes, in silence.
To accept that small ache when I see someone I love happy elsewhere,
and remind myself that their happiness still matters.

And when I need to feel something? It's not my body asking.
It's my mind.

So, a good novel with an outrageously charismatic alpha werewolf is enough.
Imagination never asks for compromise.
And honestly . . .
Who could compete with that?

Especially when just feeling you're not broken is enough.
And chasing a climax often isn't.

I enjoy creating, exploring, talking about sexuality with those who don't dare to put it into words.
I feel connected. Alive, differently.

I love my characters.
My chaotic druid in BG3.
My hairless cat with an alien gaze.
Beauty, wherever it hides.

I don't wait anymore. I don't chase what doesn't call me.

But my heart hasn't learned to close.
It stays slightly open, like a door you don't quite slam but don't fully walk through either.

And then there is that love.
The one I live as a mother.

Unconditional.
Non-negotiable.
A love that doesn't ask me to be anything other than myself.

My daughter looks at me . . .
and she doesn't try to fix anything.

She sees everything.
And she chooses me.

Maybe I've already met the purest form of what I was looking for. Not the one I was promised.
But the one that doesn't leave me in pieces.

And the rest?
I leave it to stories.
To those worlds where love exists without expectations.
Without comparison.
Without being made to feel incomplete.

Because deep down . . . I'm not missing something.

I'm a different version of desire.

And most of the time, that's enough.



Love, Chosen Family, and the Quiet Revolution of Being Seen



By Scott Gregory Bell



There is something quietly revolutionary happening in queer relationships right now.

Not the kind that trends online for a weekend. Not the polished version built for algorithms and vacation photos. Something deeper. Softer. More honest.

Queer people are letting themselves be loved without apology.”

For generations, 2SLGBTQIA+ relationships were often forced into extremes—hidden in secrecy, performed for survival, or hypersexualized because society refused to recognize tenderness between us as real love. Many of us learned early on that safety

could disappear overnight. Family could become conditional. Churches could turn cold. Community could vanish the moment we became inconvenient to someone else’s comfort.

Despite all of that, queer people kept building lives anyway.

Real ones.

For Scott and Steve, love didn’t arrive polished and cinematic. It arrived human.

It showed up in difficult conversations. In healing old fears. In learning how to trust transparency over performance. In quiet nights at home, choosing peace over chaos. In realizing that intimacy is not about perfection—it’s about finally exhaling around another person.

Our relationship reflects something many queer couples are discovering right now: love becomes powerful when it stops trying to imitate heteronormative scripts and instead becomes honest.

Sometimes that honesty looks romantic. Sometimes it looks messy. Sometimes it looks like laughter in the

kitchen, gym selfies, awkward vulnerability, grief, rebuilding spirituality, or simply creating a home where your nervous system can finally rest.

That matters more than people realize.

Queer relationships have always carried an invisible weight. Many 2SLGBTQIA+ people grew up without roadmaps for healthy love that actually reflected who they were. We inherited fragments:

- coded affection,
- survival humour,
- secret crushes,
- longing disguised as friendship,
- and the constant feeling that happiness might be temporary.

But something is changing.

More queer people are allowing themselves to imagine stability without shame. Marriage without irony. Domesticity without losing identity. Spirituality without self-hatred. Community without pretending.

That shift is profound.

And maybe queer love has something unique to teach the world because of what it survived to become.

Chosen family teaches intentionality. Queer friendships teach resilience. Queer partnerships often require conversations about identity, vulnerability, gender roles, communication, and emotional honesty that many straight couples are never socially pushed to examine. There is depth forged through survival.

That doesn't make queer relationships magically better. But it does make them deeply conscious.

For Scott and Steve, home is not about perfection or performance. It's about building a life where both

people can finally be fully seen. Sometimes that looks glamorous. Sometimes it looks ordinary. And honestly, the ordinary moments may be the most sacred part.

A quiet room. Shared routines. A hand reaching across the couch. A husband saying, "I'm here."

That is queer love too.

Not just Pride parades and politics.
Not just trauma and struggle.
Not just visibility.

But tenderness.
Safety.
Rest.
Joy.

Maybe that is the real revolution: queer people no longer merely surviving the world, but learning how to belong inside it.

And maybe, for many of us, being truly "queerly beloved" means discovering that love was never the impossible thing we were taught to fear.

Maybe it was always waiting for us on the other side of honesty.



BEYOND PERMISSION



THE RADICAL POWER OF QUEER LOVE

By Tyson Pete,
Award Winning Author of *Courageous
Love: A Self Help Guide for Gay Fathers*

Before queer people were allowed to marry, many of us
were not even allowed grief.

We could lose partners and be excluded from funerals.

Lose homes after breakups because our relationships
carried no legal protection.

Lose children.

Lose jobs.

Lose safety.

Lose family.

Lose entire versions of ourselves trying to survive in a
world that treated heterosexuality as not merely normal,
but moral.

That history matters.

Because when queer people speak about love, we are not
speaking from theory.

We are speaking from survival.

The world often discusses 2SLGBTQIA+ existence through
politics, legislation, morality debates, or identity wars.

Rarely does it pause long enough to acknowledge the
emotional genius queer communities have cultivated for





generations. Long before the world adopted phrases like “safe spaces,” “mental wellness,” or “authentic living,” queer people were building emotional ecosystems in basements, beauty salons, bookstores, ballroom halls, support groups, cramped apartments, and dimly lit kitchens where somebody always made enough food for one more person.

We made homes out of each other because many of us had nowhere else to go. That is the untold architecture of queer love.

Not merely romance and sexuality, but community as survival.

Tenderness as resistance.

Belonging as liberation.

For centuries, society has handed humanity a narrow script for what love was supposed to look like: a man, a woman, marriage, children, tradition, conformity. Everything outside of that framework was treated as dangerous deviation instead of natural human variation.

But queer life has always exposed a deeper truth: Love was never meant to be standardized. Love is not holy because it is heterosexual. Love is holy because it is honest.

And queer people, perhaps more than anyone, understand the cost of honesty.

There is something transformative about having to

choose authenticity over approval. Many queer people learn early on that visibility comes with consequences. Some lose families. Some lose churches. Some lose friendships. Some lose safety. Many learn to perform survival before they ever learn to experience peace.

Yet even through rejection, queer communities kept creating beauty.

We turned friendship into family.

We turned survival into culture.

We turned abandonment into artistry.

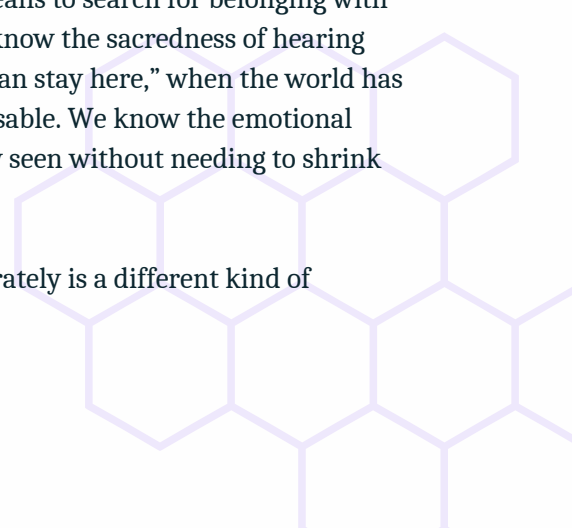
Chosen family may be one of the most revolutionary social concepts queer communities ever offered the world because it challenges one of society’s oldest assumptions: that blood automatically equals love.

It does not.

Some people are born into safety. Others must build it by hand. Queer people know this intimately.

We know what it means to search for belonging with bruised hearts. We know the sacredness of hearing someone say, “You can stay here,” when the world has made you feel disposable. We know the emotional weight of being fully seen without needing to shrink ourselves first.

To be chosen deliberately is a different kind of miracle.





And perhaps that is why queer love often carries such emotional depth. It is frequently intentional in ways traditional systems take for granted. Many queer relationships are built through conscious communication, negotiated identity, emotional transparency, and shared reinvention. We often have to create relationship models without templates. There is no universal handbook for navigating queerness, intimacy, masculinity, femininity, parenting, spirituality, race, trauma, or survival all at once.

So, queer people improvise.

Adapt.

Imagine.

Evolve.

And in doing so, we often create forms of connection that are radically human.

This matters because the world is changing.

Younger generations are increasingly questioning rigid gender roles, outdated relationship expectations, performative masculinity, and inherited emotional dysfunction. Many people are understanding that love cannot thrive where control dominates. They are realizing that emotional intelligence matters more than appearances, that vulnerability is not weakness, and that family should feel safe, not obligatory.

Ironically, many of these conversations have existed inside queer communities for decades.

Queer people have long understood that identity is layered.

That healing is nonlinear.

That masculinity can be soft.

That femininity can be powerful.

That parenting is not gender-locked.

That love is expansive.

That community care saves lives.

And yes, it literally does.

Research consistently shows that 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals with affirming support systems experience significantly lower rates of suicide, homelessness, depression, and substance abuse. Acceptance impacts mental health. Visibility impacts survival. Human connection alters biology. The nervous system responds to safety.

Love is not abstract.

Love is neurological.

Love is medical.

Love is infrastructure.

Despite all this, queer love continues to be politicized in ways heterosexual love rarely is.

A straight couple holding hands is ordinary.

A queer couple holding hands, in many places, is considered a statement.

That alone tells us how deeply society still struggles



with queer humanity.

Because beneath many anti-2SLGBTQIA+ narratives is a deeper discomfort: the fear of people living authentically outside prescribed systems. Queerness disrupts the illusion that there is only one acceptable way to exist. It exposes how much of society has been built on performance rather than truth.

And truth unsettles people who built identities around conformity.

But queer existence has never merely been about disruption. It has also been about imagination.

We imagine beyond binaries.
Beyond hierarchy.
Beyond ownership-based love.
Beyond the transactional nature of many traditional systems.

Queer love asks:
What if partnership looked like mutual liberation instead of possession?
What if family was defined by care instead of obligation?
What if vulnerability became strength?
What if community mattered as much as romance?
What if people were allowed to evolve without punishment?

Those are not dangerous questions. Those are

evolutionary ones.

Perhaps that is why queer culture continues influencing the broader world far, beyond fashion, entertainment, or aesthetics. Beneath the surface, queer communities have been modeling emotional reinvention for generations.

Not without wounds.

Not without internal struggles of our own. But meaningfully.

Because queer people are still human. We still battle loneliness, ego, insecurity, trauma, addiction, heartbreak and fear. Visibility did not magically heal us. Marriage equality did not erase wounds of abandonment. Social media and representation did not suddenly teach people how to love themselves.

Many queer people are still trying to unlearn survival mode while simultaneously building meaningful lives. And that deserves compassion too. Especially now.

We are witnessing a historic shift in queer existence. 2SLGBTQIA+ people are no longer surviving quietly at the margins alone. We are becoming visible architects of families, businesses, nonprofits, schools, movements, ministries, art, policy, and culture itself.

We are not merely asking permission to exist anymore.

We are building a legacy.





As a gay father, I often think about what it means for children to witness authentic love instead of performative love. I think about the power of raising young people around emotional honesty instead of emotional suppression. I think about what happens when children grow up seeing tenderness in men, accountability in parents, softness in leadership, and truth without shame.

That kind of visibility changes generations, because children do not only inherit genetics. They inherit emotional patterns.

Silences.

Fears.

Coping mechanisms.

Definitions of worth.

Definitions of masculinity.

Definitions of love.

And many queer people are courageously interrupting cycles that existed long before we arrived.

That is sacred work.

I am speaking about the friend who answered the phone at 2 a.m.

The trans elder who mentors rejected youth.

The lesbian couple who foster children no one else would talk.

The ballroom mother who protected kids abandoned by society.

The gay fathers teaching their sons that masculinity

does not require emotional starvation.

The communities that kept people alive during the AIDS epidemic while governments looked away.

The countless queer people who became homes for others while still searching for home themselves.

That is love too. Perhaps the purest form of it.

Maybe history will eventually recognize what queer communities have always known:

Love was never supposed to make us smaller.

Real love expands human possibility.

Real love creates safety.

Real love tells the truth.

Real love makes room.

Real love does not demand self-erasure as proof of loyalty.

And queer people, despite centuries of rejection, ridicule, criminalization, violence, and misunderstanding, have continued loving anyway.

Openly.

Creatively.

Brilliantly.

Against all odds.

There is nothing unnatural about that. In fact, it may be the most human thing imaginable.

Now, my babies, our time has come to an end.

Remember to Love Out Loud, Treat people with kindness, and Live your best life with and on purpose.

www.TysonPete.com

[@authorTysonPete](https://twitter.com/authorTysonPete)



2SLGBTQIA+ MENTAL HEALTH

Key Mental Health Factors & Statistics:

- **High Prevalence:** 2SLGBTQIA+ people are over twice as likely to experience a mental health condition, with transgender individuals nearly four times as likely.
- **Youth Vulnerability:** 2SLGBTQIA+ youth are at elevated risk for self-harm and suicidal ideation, with trans/nonbinary youth 2-2.5 times more likely to consider suicide than cisgender LGBTQ peers.
- **Minority Stress:** Chronic stress from stigma, discrimination, bullying, and fear of violence contributes heavily to these disparities.
- **Intersectionality:** 2SLGBTQIA+ youth of colour, particularly Indigenous and Black youth, report higher rates of suicide attempts compared to their white LGBTQIA+ peers.
- **Access Barriers:** Fear of discrimination or receiving inappropriate care can prevent individuals from seeking help.



Raven Hearth is a Certified Recovery Mentor and Death Doula/Death Worker based in Oregon, USA. Identifying as non-binary and queer, they are passionate about supporting the mental health of LGBTQIA2S+ communities. When not engaging in activism or writing, Raven enjoys reading, listening to music, baking, photographing nature's wonders, and interacting with local wildlife, always encouraging it to flourish. Their commitment to mental health advocacy is vital in fostering a supportive and inclusive environment for all.





QUEER WITCHES

Queer Hive is now accepting submissions for gay witch content! If you have a passion for exploring the intersection of queer identity and modern witchcraft, we want to hear from you. Whether it's spells, rituals, or personal stories, we are eager to showcase the diverse voices within the queer witch community.

If you're interested in contributing, please email us at queerhivemagazine@gmail.com.

A QUEER LOVE ALTAR

BUILDING SACRED SPACE FOR THE BONDS THAT CHOSE YOU

By Kenneth Cunningham



Not all love comes from the family you were born into.

Some of it finds you later—quiet at first, then undeniable. It shows up in borrowed time, in long drives down winding roads, in the kind of conversations that stretch past midnight without you noticing. It comes in sideways, through friendship, through shared struggle, through the simple, radical act of someone seeing you clearly and deciding to stay.

In queer life—especially in Appalachia, where the land is old, and the expectations can be older—those bonds carry weight. Not because they are fragile, but because they are forged with intention. Chosen, again and again.

That kind of love deserves a place to live.

A queer love altar is not about perfection. It is not

something you stage for appearances or build out of obligation. It is a working space. A lived-in space. The kind of thing that can sit just as easily beside a mason jar of wildflowers as beside a stack of unpaid bills.

Start where you are. A corner of a dresser. A nightstand. A shelf cleared off between everyday things. In Appalachian practice, sacred space has never needed to be separate from daily life—it weaves right through it. Right there beside the coffee cup, the porch dust, the dishes waiting in the sink.

Begin with what holds memory.

Not the prettiest objects, but the truest ones. A chipped mug you always reach for when they are around. A lighter from a night that mattered. A photograph that caught something real, not posed. A scrap of fabric, a concert ticket, a note written in a hand you would recognize anywhere.

These are your anchors. These are the bones of the altar.

From there, bring in the land.

Love does not exist separate from place—it roots itself whether you mean it to or not. Gather what feels honest: a small jar of creek water, cloudy with silt; a stone picked up on a shared walk; dirt from a yard where laughter once echoed; dried herbs hung up and saved—rosemary for remembrance, yarrow for protection, lavender for the softer edges of care.

Let it smell like something. Let it feel like somewhere.

Add flame, if that is part of your practice. A single candle will do, or several. You might light one for each person, or for each kind of love that holds you together—romantic, platonic, communal, the kind that does not have a clean name but shows up all the same.

If you work with deities or spirits, call on those who understand that love is rarely simple: Brigid, who tends both hearth and transformation. The Morrigan, who holds loyalty and sovereignty in the same hand. Local spirits, too—the ones who have watched you grow, who have seen who comes and goes, who know the difference between what is surface-level and what is real.

When you tend the altar, do not perform. Just be honest.

Speak names out loud. There is power in that, especially in places where names like yours have not always been spoken with care. Thank the people who have chosen you, and acknowledge what that choice costs sometimes—the effort, the patience, the showing up when it would be easier not to.

Leave offerings that make sense for your life, not someone else's idea of ritual. A splash of coffee before you drink it. A piece of bread. A little whiskey. Something you cooked and shared. Something you wish you could share again.

Let it be familiar. Let it be real.

And do not avoid the hard parts.

Not every bond is easy. Not every love stays. You can bring that truth here too. A strained connection, a drifting friendship, a love that changed shape or ended—none of that disqualifies



it from being sacred. If anything, it proves it was.

This altar is not just for celebration. It is for witnessing.

Over time, it becomes a record of your life as it was actually lived—not the version that fit expectations, but the one you built with your own hands. A map of who stood beside you, who still does, and how those connections remade you. In a place where blood ties have long been treated as the only ties that matter, there is something quietly defiant about this.

To build a shrine not to obligation, but to choice.

To say: this is my family.

Not the one I was handed, but the one that held me, made room for me, and stayed when it mattered.

And that kind of love—the kind you choose and are chosen by—is worth tending like a fire. Slow. Steady. Never taken for granted.

Merry Meet, Witches!

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The Crones Cave Metaphysical Shop is a premier metaphysical store in London, ON, conveniently located at 232 Dundas St. We offer a wide selection of spiritual and witchcraft supplies, including crystals, tarot and divination tools, ritual items, cleansing products, and handcrafted goods from over 20 local artisans.

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BASIC SPELLS: PURIFICATION MAGIC

By Adrien Clarke

Purification, in the magical sense, is about returning things to their original state with an added blessing, and about removal. We talk about cleansing when we talk about purification, because in many ways, they are interchangeable. What follows will be a series of suggestions and advice. You are free to explore this topic further to gain a better understanding as well. Draw your own conclusions.

Ritual purification involves first, physically cleaning a space, object, or person; second, spoken exorcism along with sound (generally a bell, sistrum, rattle, or clapping); and lastly, a spoken blessing and consecration along with more sound. Depending on the subject, this can involve sprinkling or asperging an object with liquid or salt. Salt is a unique substance because it is said to be one of the alchemical Tria Prima (three primes) and does not need to be exorcised. If asserting with blessed water (which has been exorcised), a blessing should be placed upon the salt beforehand.

To continue, I should speak about burning, fumigating, suffusing, bathing, baptizing, and submerging or burying something as a ritual act. All these acts use one of the four elements to affect a change on something. This principle can be adapted to a target depending on what step in the process you are interested in changing. Combining as many methods as possible is the surest way to success here. Each elemental type affects change at



different time intervals as well, so be sure to choose a process that speaks to all elemental types

Here is an example: I want to ritually purify a golden ankh necklace. To do this, I must light white or gold candles (fire), burn incense and herbs (air), asperge the jewellery with Florida Water (water), and finally, bury it in a box of salt for a month (earth). To make sure the jewellery isn't damaged, I keep it in a cloth bag within the salt inside the box. As a part of the consecration process, I may have consecrated this object (dedicated) to a particular God, asking for its power and strength for the target by first reciting a hymn and a prayer. To finalize consecrating it, I would have dressed the object in ritual spell oil (water) prepared beforehand (probably something

SOLAR). I would choose the appropriate day (Sunday) and hour (dawn) to perform this spell to gain maximum effect.

Another example: I want to ritually purify a person. To do this, I must light white candles, which represent fire (although any colour will do); burn incense and herbs (air) to fumigate the surrounding area and smoke cleanse the body before and after; take a cleansing shower or bath (water) and scrub the body with mineral salts (Epsom salt, sea salt, baking soda), which represent earth, or add it to the bath water. After the salt bath, I would bathe the person in milk or buttermilk, then gently pat them dry. I would dress the body in spell oil (water) for purification—something like sesame oil and dry herbs and spices suspended in the oil, and a few drops of essential oil for aroma—and spiritual cologne to seal the magic within and pat dry again.

Last example: I want to ritually purify a space. To do this, I must light white and red candles (fire), burn incense and herbs (air) to fumigate the surrounding area as much as possible, wash the walls and floor with spell water (water), and sprinkle and sweep dry herbs and spices across the floor or carpet (earth). Please be sure to open windows, or doors if necessary, to properly ventilate all smoke! Afterwards, you could sprinkle sea salt and black salt onto the baseboards and floor, in small amounts, to seal the area in question. Be sure to incorporate sound cleansing into this model as well. Singing, praying, clapping, and playing bells (water) or drums (earth) will aid the purification process. Woodwinds (air) and string instruments (fire) are excellent for white light meditations, which will purify through visualization and energy work. You could draw sigils and different symbols of power on the walls and floor using the spell oil as well. If the place is destined to serve a particular spirit, you may also burn a handwritten petition to them, asking for purification.

As with any good spell work, divination must occur before and after. Reserve a journal and test yourself for short increments. Intense spellwork should be done in swift succession over planned intervals to avoid burnout. Running out of energy during the spellwork will tamper results, so work within your limits and adapt. Through time, your reserves of magic supply will increase: it's like any muscle that way. Practice this weekly, in some form, for best results. Take the time to magically reset and pause.



Witches High Tea Fundraiser



Sunday June 28
2026. 1pm - 4pm.

Performing at the Witches High Tea:
Maya Back &
Amazon Jar the drag king.



\$40.00
to attend.

After the main
event there
will be tea leaf
readings
available
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The Ravens
Parlor.
Anita



All proceeds going to PFLAG and we are going
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bank. can drop off here in store.

We have limited spots available for the high
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If you want to register to join the tea you can
etransfer to thecronescave.53@gmail.com
or register in store 232 Dundas Street

Registration ends June 10 2026.





Photo credit
Hanns Solo Photo

WHO IS SUGA CUBE?

Are you ready for a sickly sweet performer? Introducing me: Suga Cube! I am an alternative Drag Queen dwelling in London, ON. I came out as transgender in seventh grade and found myself in drag artistry. I was young when I went to my first drag show, and I LOVED IT! I loved the makeup, the hair, the outfits—don't even get me started on the performances! It took me a few years to feel comfortable enough to hit the stage myself, as there was limited representation for AFAB drag. When I saw Maple Queef perform on the stage for the first time, I was inspired! So, at just 15, my drag journey began! You can find me on Instagram @The.Suga.Cube, and you can find me on stage all across Southwestern Ontario!



WHO IS MAPLE QUEEF?

Serving sticky, sweet, sexy, and silly, you'll smell them before you see them, it's me: Maple Queef! Born and raised in the conservative town of Dorchester, ON, I always felt out of place. As I grew up and started going to school in London, ON, I realized that the world was much bigger than my small town. In high school, I made friends who were part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. They helped me to grow, learn, and explore my identity in ways I probably wouldn't have had a chance to if I'd gone to high school in Dorchester. One of my friends made the mistake (kidding) of telling me about a little show called RuPaul's Drag Race, and baby, I was hooked! However, as an AFAB (Assigned Female at Birth) person, I didn't know whether there was a place for me in the drag community. Even though I'm non-binary, there is still a lot of stigmatization around AFAB people doing drag (but that is a whole other article). I spent months going back and forth about whether I was "allowed" to do drag, unsure whether the local community would accept me. One day, I finally worked up the nerve to put on a wig and give it a go, and the rest is her-story!



Photo credit
Hanns Solo Photo



WHY DO YOU DO DRAG?

SC: Why does an artist paint? Why does a chef cook? Because it's what they're passionate about. If I'm being honest, drag is the perfect blend of everything I love. I've always been creative, a lover to my core of the weird and wonderful. Being able to sit down and curate an experience is a joy unlike any other. If I can make even one other person in a room feel a fraction of that feeling, I've done my job.

MQ: For the joy. I know it sounds cheesy, but drag has genuinely changed (and saved) my life. It's taught me to love my body for the way it is (all bodies are good bodies!), and it's given me the confidence to embrace the parts of myself I kept hidden away because I didn't want to take up too much space. What I know now is that I haven't forced myself into anyone else's space; I've carved my own spot, my own legacy, within my community and I know now that I have worked for the place I have. I have fought for our community's safety.

Alongside multiple London Legacy Performers, I have helped to create a wonderful and thriving community at Open Stage London, held bi-weekly at Poacher's Arms. It's not just drag either! We accept most forms of talent, including comedy, live music, puppetry, and more. You can DM @OpenStageLondonON to inquire about sign-ups!

WHAT DOES "DRAG FAMILY" MEAN TO YOU?

SC: It means community, togetherness. To me, drag family means that no matter what I need, I have people to go to that get me, all of me.

MQ: It means that in every sense of the word, they are family and I will go to bat for them if they need me. I have their back and they have mine. My drag family means the world to me, and not just my drag daughters, Suga Cube and Belle Bottoms. Haus of Hard Nox, Haus of Hazard, and my dear drag sisters Poison and Lavender Skyes are all a part of my extended drag family, and I would do anything for any one of them.

WHAT DO RELATIONSHIPS OUTSIDE OF THE HETERNORMATIVE ROMANCE MEAN TO YOU?

SC: To me, it means a deep bond. As somebody in a queer romantic relationship, the non -romantic relationships in my life feel so much more special. The closeness I can get to someone simply because of a shared internal experience, such as being queer or transgender, is something that transcends the mortal planes. I'm kidding! Kind of. It does sometimes feel like the people in my life are woven into my very being, like we just get each other in unique ways!

MQ: I feel like heteronormativity makes people feel like there's only one right way to be in a relationship, but there's so many different and wonderful ways to love someone and to be loved. I think relationships outside of the heteronormative means freedom from that pressure to conform to what we're told we're "supposed to do" when we love someone. Every relationship is different, so of course they're not all going to comply with what societal conditioning demands. That's like having one of those learning shape toys with the normal pieces but all the holes are squares. My advice, cut your own holes; life gets a hell of a lot better after you stop trying to making star shaped relationships fit into square holes.

Photo credit
Hanns Solo
Photo





ABOUT ME/THE BUSINESS/VISION:

Hann Solo Photos was created during Fine Art College in 2019 (Fanshawe, London, ON). I studied multiple art disciplines during that certificate program, and one class that I particularly loved was the photography program. I used to model, so it was refreshing to be on the other side of the lens. The business name comes from my drag performer name, Hann Solo, which is named after my name (Hannah) and gives a nod to Star Wars *cue light saber noise*

Services I Offer:

A lot of things!!!

I'm super flexible and love to work with fellow creatives. I love trying new skills and exploring new themes and concepts.

A few of my specialties & favourite styles are:

Portraits, Outdoor Photography, Indoor Backdrop Photography, Branding Photoshoots, Alternative, Activism, Art

Contact Info:

Please feel free to reach out for any inquiries at all! More of my portfolio can be viewed on my Instagram & Facebook

Email: hanncreates@gmail.com

Instagram: @hannsolophotos

Facebook: Hann Solo Photos

Thank you so much to those that have supported my journey so far and are staying tuned in for more!

Venus D-L



Wonder Tyts



Faedrawyn



Jerry Atrix



Richard Hopper



IZALEA DOES EVERYTHING

Volume 3

By Izalea Bradaigh



Today is about what it's like to be sick while trying to regain your life and continue transitioning into the person you always should have been. This means I will be talking about short- and long-term illnesses, frustration, transition, and dysphoria/dysmorphia.

This is going to be a little less fun than normal, so be aware before continuing and keep yourself safe. With that in mind, let's get started.

As I write this, it has been nearly two weeks since I felt okay. Whether it was some random person who breathed in my direction on the bus or one of my kids bringing one of the requisite school-borne diseases, it doesn't matter. I've been whiny and irritated and life has been butts.

But it did make me think of a couple things. And hey, I've got a monthly column to write. You can't see me, but I'm cracking my knuckles. Let's get into it.

Transitions, no matter which spot under the trans

umbrella you fall, are always unique to the individual. Were you already a femme-presenting human and then realized you were a trans-feminine person? Were you a tomboy and already masc but realized you were trans-masculine? Did you always enjoy bending gender into whatever you felt like on any given day?

No matter which way you are heading, it's always a unique experience. But I find there are some aspects that don't get talked about enough.

Yes, there are things like makeup, clothes, names, pronouns, and all sorts of details. There is one thing that underpins them all though: finances. The class struggle with transition can be extreme in some cases.

Case in point; me.

I have a fantastic community around me. Full of folks who support and love and want to help me be the me I feel inside. They have hand-me-down clothes, they take



me to the gym, they give me tips on makeup and fashion and all sorts of good stuff.

None of that changes the fact that my family is struggling to put food on the table and pay rent. And this isn't an expectation of more; it's simply a statement. Plus, I hate charity anyway. When I was a kid, help came with strings attached; it was never a good thing.

Reality is the problem here. Hand-me-downs are wonderful. The other day, I got a Citrus Dress in a bag of those hand-me-downs. I am excited to wear it, but it wasn't something I picked off the shelf that I knew was just for me. It was random luck, not firm direct control of my own clothing. It isn't the experience of going to a mall and trying on clothes for hours until me and my girlfriends are confident and dressed perfectly.

That costs money. Money that I don't have and couldn't spend if I did.

Eyeliner costs money. So does blush, lipstick, moisturizer, and damn near anything that the average person suggests when you transition from someone who barely cared at all into a woman who desperately wants and needs to be seen as herself after years of hiding.

I've been transitioning for two and a half years, my chest is DD, and I still can't afford a single bra that does anything for them. Every time I try to set aside the money, something comes up. Groceries or bills or something in the house breaks. Or a medication is needed. The reason changes from moment to moment; it's just always something.

Now, here's the thing: it sounds like I'm whining and complaining. And you know what? Yeah, maybe a little. However, I keep making progress. Every step I take toward becoming who I always should have been is a step I took fully under my own power.

Ultimately, class does affect a transition. Especially in places where surgeries aren't covered by the government. As much as Ontario has been heading in directions I don't

personally like, I am still covered for my hormones and my upcoming surgery. So, I can't entirely complain.

Aside from simply having the money, the true frustration comes from the suggestions and comments from people genuinely trying to help. People who I'm damn sure love and care for me and only want me to be happy and myself.

Those suggestions are remarkably simple and always meant to be helpful but there is a problem. I think the level of poverty my family lives in is shocking to a lot of folks. Trying things costs money and that is the specific thing we don't have.

I would love to try makeup, but have you seen the price of lipstick? Even the cheap ones at Shoppers Drug Mart are like eight bucks. I can use that same amount of money to buy a bag of pasta and some sauce to feed my kids.

Thrift shopping is equally impossible. I'd love to go and hunt for anything that might help me feel like myself, but second-hand stores have raised prices as well. Not to mention how hard it is to find clothes in my size. Stupid barrel chest; I hate it so much.

Having to balance becoming the woman I am against the health and safety of my kids is no contest. I am going to put myself last every time, and I shouldn't be praised for doing so. This is basic stuff.

For my transition though? It kind of sucks.

Am I going to let it stop me? No. I'm going to keep baking my treats for markets, keep hunting for a job, and keep moving forward. Transition is definitely affected by economic class, but I refuse to let it stop me.

I do, however, reserve the right to have bad months and then complain about it.

But we breathe, we reset, and we keep moving.

Let's fucking go.



ADVICE WITH A TAB OF ACID

Dear Tabitha,

I said something cruel during an argument with my best friend. I didn't mean it, but I can't take it back. I feel awful. What should I do?

Big Mouth, Bigger Regret

.....♥.....

Dear Regretful Little Darling,

I totally can relate to this. The mouth is faster than the brain, more uncontrollable than that man I was seeing last summer in that band, and sometimes deadlier than a stiletto heel in a dark club.

First things first, Big Mouth, the fact that you feel awful means you have a conscience. Congratulations! You are not a monster. You're a human who let your hurt drive the car.

Now it's time to apologize. Not the flimsy "I'm sorry you felt that way" nonsense. No one likes an inauthentic bitch like that. A true friend apologizes. A real one. Specific. Accountable. "I said X. It was wrong. I hurt you. I'm sorry."

Then? You give them space to decide what they need. Friendship is resilient, but it's not indestructible. Sometimes it heals stronger. Sometimes it shifts shape. Sometimes it ends, and often those endings are for the best.

But growth? Growth is taking that sharp-tongued moment and deciding you want to be softer next time. We have all been rotten rats during arguments. Even me! And I am usually as sweet as sugar. Repair what you can. Learn from what you can't. And next time, pause before you launch a Tabitha verbal hair-pulling catfight. You are allowed to grow beyond your worst moment. We all are. Now go be brave and humble. It's the most gorgeous look on us.

With rhinestones and redemption,

Tabitha Acidz 🍷



Dear Tabz,

I think I'm gay. I haven't told anyone. I'm terrified of what my family will say. How did you find the courage?

Closeted and Shaking

.....♥.....

Dear Closeted,

First of all, come here and sit by Auntie. Courage is not the absence of fear; it's moving while your knees are knocking all over the place like cheap press-on nails.

You don't owe anyone your truth on their timeline. Coming out is not a fire drill. It is a sacred unveiling. You try to do it when you're safe. Safe emotionally, physically, financially. Safety first, sequins second. That doesn't mean you still can't be fabulous now in the interim.

When I came out, I was scared too. I thought I'd lose everything. And yes, I lost many things. But I gained myself. And baby, that trade is always worth it.

Find one safe person. Just one. A friend, a cousin, an online community. Build your little glittery support raft before you sail into stormy waters.

And hear me clearly: there is nothing wrong with you. You are not broken. You are becoming.

Your family may surprise you. Or they may need time. Or they may not rise to the occasion. But there is a vast, loud, loving chosen family out here waiting with open arms and better dance music.

You are not alone. You are just early in your story.

I am so proud of you already.

Happy Pride,

Tabitha Acidz

Tabitha Acidz is a psychedelic drag queen who enjoys writing music, reciting poetry, telling stories, and playing dress up. She has graced the audiences of The Clinton Street Theater and The New Music Gathering, and has been awarded grants from both the Oregon Arts Commission and the Regional Arts & Culture Council. She is also a writer of the witty and heartwarming column, Advice with a Tab of Acid.

Out of drag, when she isn't drowning in makeup brushes and blush, Tabitha is the phenomenal composer, poet, and author Timothy Arliss O'Brien.

Send your questions to tabithaacidz@gmail.com.





Happy
Pride
Month!



THE DOOR WAS OPENED FOR US

By Noah “The Stigma Fighter”



So Why Are We Closing It On Each Other?

There is a particular kind of hurt that doesn't come from the outside world. It comes from the place you thought was finally home.

This week, a post moved through Threads: thousands of comments declaring it was time to separate the LGB from the TQ. Sexual orientation on one side, radical ideologies on the other, and a pair of scissors cutting the acronym in half. I want to address that post and everyone who quietly nodded along without

flinching.

I am a transgender and intersex person. I'm not going to spend this article convincing anyone of my humanity. This isn't a conversation I owe. What I will say is that this idea that gay, lesbian, and bisexual people have “nothing in common” with trans and queer people isn't just a betrayal; it's also historically false, politically suicidal, and morally hollow. I think a lot of people sharing it know that, somewhere underneath the certainty because the same sentence was once used against them.

**The door was opened by us.
All of us.**

Stonewall did not happen because cisgender gay men decided to riot. It happened because trans women—Black and Brown trans women, Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera among them—

fought back when the cops came in. The LGB community as a political force does not exist independently of trans labour. The acronym was not built by stitching us in as an afterthought; it was built because we were always in it together: in the bars and the marches and the funeral homes during AIDS, when the same trans women who started the movement were the ones still showing up when no one else would. To say that we have “nothing in common” is to erase the people who open the door you're standing inside of.

**The fantasy of
separation has never
worked.**

I understand the pull of it. Trans people are under unprecedented legislative assault, and there is a version of self-

preservation that whispers, “If we cut them loose, they’ll leave the rest of us alone.”

But they won’t.

The political project coming for trans people won’t stop at the T. Obergefell v. Hodges is still standing, but it is under sustained doctrinal and political attack. Lawrence v. Texas still bars criminal prosecution for private same-sex intimacy, yet over a dozen states keep zombified sodomy laws on the books, formerly unenforceable but still pulled out for arrest and harassment. Roughly half of Project 2025’s domestic agenda has already been put into motion through executive action and state legislation. IVF, contraception, no fault divorce—every right that depends on bodily autonomy and the freedom to form a family on your own terms is being relitigated. The forces coming for trans people are not a different team. They are the same one; they have always been the same. “Drop the T” is the gay version of “I’m one of the good ones,” and it has the same expiration date.

“We have nothing in common!”

That sentence is older than this discourse. It is the exact sentence used against every group ever expelled from belonging.

It was used against gay men in the 80s, when straight America decided AIDS was a moral problem and not a medical one. It was used against lesbians who didn’t perform femininity correctly. It was used against bisexuals by gay communities that decided they weren’t “really” queer.

Now, it’s being used by the same people against trans and non-binary people. It’s not a new argument or a brave one: it’s the oldest move in the book, just in new packaging.

The wound isn’t only coming from outside.



Something important to point out is that the hurt isn’t only coming from people calling for separation: it’s also coming from inside the trans community itself. I’ve watched people relocate to survive—trans women of colour, especially, who left the States that had become actively hostile to their existence. They packed up whatever they had and moved towards places that promised them something better. Not just protection from legislation, but also people. People who finally get it. Finally get them.

What some of them found instead was a different kind of wall.

Unspoken criteria for acceptance. Cliques that had already decided who mattered. A social landscape where if you didn’t know the right people, use the right language, or show up the right way, you were quietly (and sometimes not so quietly) pushed to the edges. Whisper campaigns, social freeze-outs, reputations dismantled before they even had a chance to build.

That is not how a liberation movement treats its own.

The irony is unbearable.

As I have mentioned earlier, the trans community exists, in large part because the World Gate kept us. The “Drop the T” crowd is doing that to us from the outside. Some of us are doing it to each other from the inside. When we replicate those dynamics at any scale, any direction, we

don’t just contradict our values; we also actively wound the people who came to us at their most vulnerable.

The person questioning their gender for the first time, who doesn’t have the vocabulary yet, and whose transness doesn’t look like yours—they deserve the same radical welcome many of us needed when we were first finding our way. Activism is not a credential. Visibility is not hierarchy. Community is not a clique. More importantly, sexual orientation is not a club with a velvet rope.

Everyone who belongs here should feel like they belong here.

This includes the person who just came out last week. The person whose transition doesn’t look like the template, who is still finding their words, who has felt this community’s coldness and walked back in anyway because they had nowhere else to go. They are not liabilities; they are us.

Our communities have always been at their strongest when we choose solidarity over gatekeeping, curiosity over judgment, and love. That can look like real, accountable, complicated love over the fall safe of exclusion. We deserve better from the world, but first, we have to decide to deserve better from each other.

The door was open for us by people who refused to be separated, and as we famously say, we keep us safe.

RAW & UNASHAMED

Pride is the Courage to Be Vulnerable

After nearly five decades of navigating life as a gay man, I have come to understand that Pride, for me, is not about validation. It is about the courage to be vulnerable.

I hit puberty at the same time the AIDS crisis hit the headlines. Fear, shame, religion, politics, and sexuality all collided at once. I tried very hard to be the good Christian boy, hoping God would change me. I went to Bible college believing that if I prayed enough, served enough, or denied myself enough, I could become someone else.

At the same time, I had another hidden life. I was a gay teenager desperately looking for validation in places where teenagers should not have been looking for it. I did not know how to have intimacy, vulnerability, or healthy relationships. I only knew

how to search for evidence that I mattered.

What followed was shame after almost every experience—not because I was gay, but because I had learned to hate myself for being gay.

I became bulimic by the age of 16. Looking back now, I realize bingeing and purging gave me a distorted sense of control over a body I felt ashamed of and disconnected from. I spent years trying to punish myself into becoming acceptable.

There were adults who should have recognized that I was a vulnerable teenager and redirected me toward safety instead of participating in my search for validation. There were also people who genuinely loved me, including my parents, who never really knew me. They couldn't know me. It was not uncommon for parents to send their children for shock therapy in those days. This is not about blaming them. They were operating within the understanding and beliefs they had been taught. But I knew what the church believed about someone like me. I believed it too. I thought I was sinful, broken, and deserving of rejection both on earth and in eternity.

I even went through conversion therapy my freshman year of Bible college after a professor threatened to expose me to my parents and have me removed from school.

Finally, at the age of 19, I chose authenticity and came out despite believing it could cost me everything. This is the core of why I celebrate Pride. Not because I am gay, but because of the courage it took to survive becoming whole and to live with the integrity of simply being myself.

I am forever grateful that I was born gay because the journey taught me firsthand about living in the face of homophobia and discrimination, about questioning what I was taught, and about finding a spirituality that works for me and includes everyone. I am proud that I survived the coming out process. I am proud that I learned to love myself after years of believing I shouldn't. I am proud that I learned how to experience real intimacy and vulnerability instead of constantly performing for approval.

Shows like Heartstopper make me emotional because I wonder what could have been different if I had seen honest portrayals like that when I was young. What if I had known it was possible to have a relationship instead of hiding in shame? What if I had learned that authenticity and love were not mutually exclusive?

That is why representation matters. That is why visibility matters. And that is why the attempts to silence 2SLGBTQIA+ voices in schools and public life are so dangerous—shame grows best in silence.

We have come so far in the last 40 years, and lately it feels like some people are trying to drag us back toward silence, secrecy, and shame. We are told not to be proud. But Pride, at least for me, is not about superiority, rebellion, or demanding applause.



Pride is about the courage to stop hiding.

It is about the courage to be vulnerable after years of believing vulnerability would destroy your life.

And maybe the real question is not whether someone is gay or straight, religious or secular, masculine or feminine. Maybe the real question is this:

What parts of yourself have you spent your life hiding to feel safe, accepted, or loved?

And what might become possible if you finally gave yourself permission to be fully seen?

Because sometimes the greatest act of Pride is simply allowing yourself to be known.

Skip Sams is a creative self-development coach, composer, and speaker whose work explores authenticity, vulnerability, identity, and personal transformation. You can reach him at skip@skipsams.com.

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THE ARCHITECTURE OF BELONGING

Designing a 2SLGBTQIA+ Sanctuary

By Daniel Cayer

For many, interior design is an exercise in aesthetics; for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, it is often an exercise in survival. My own path to this field was not linear. Having navigated homelessness and the weight of being left with no one to depend upon at a very young age, I learned early on that a "home" is far more than four walls and a roof. It is the boundary between the self and a world that often feels indifferent. As a 2SLGBTQIA+ designer, this lived experience of instability has become my greatest tool, allowing me to understand that a truly inclusive home must serve as a radical act of self-assertion and a permanent, intentional sanctuary.

The Home as a Soft Landing

The foundational pillar of my design approach is the creation of a "soft landing." For those who have spent



time without a door to lock or a space to call their own, the sensory security of a home is a priority, not an afterthought. We use design to counter minority stress through sensory regulation. By prioritizing tactile comfort—oversized velvet textures, weighted textiles, and dimmable, warm-spectrum lighting—we create an environment that signals the nervous system to finally disarm. In this context, a plush rug or a deep armchair isn't just furniture; it's a tool for emotional grounding for those who have spent too long feeling adrift.





Coded History and Visual Narrative

A decorator serves as a curator of identity, helping clients weave coded historical nods into their modern aesthetic. For decades, the 2SLGBTQIA+ community used subtle symbols—specific floral arrangements or hidden colour palettes—to identify one another safely. Modern design allows us to reclaim these motifs. Whether it's through a gallery wall featuring queer pioneers or the subtle use of historical "Pride" tones reimaged in sophisticated finishes, the home becomes a narrative of resilience. This ensures that the walls do not just shelter the inhabitant, but also actively reflect and validate a history that society has often tried to erase.

Gender Euphoria and Spatial Fluidity

For transgender and non-binary individuals, interior design is a powerful instrument for gender affirmation. We intentionally deconstruct traditional primary suite layouts rooted in binary heteronormativity. Instead, we pivot toward Gender-Affirming Design. This might involve creating a ritualized dressing area that celebrates the act of self-expression or reconsidering mirror placements to maximize gender euphoria. The goal is to ensure that every corner of the home supports the inhabitant's journey of self-discovery rather than imposing outdated societal expectations.

The Chosen Family Floor Plan

Queer domesticity is uniquely defined by the "chosen family"—the support networks we build when biological ones falter. Having learned to rely on these unconventional structures from a young age, I design with this social architecture in mind. I prioritize flexibility: formal dining rooms might be reimaged as modular communal spaces, and guest rooms are designed as versatile "landing pads" for community members in transition. The home becomes a hub where the layout facilitates connection, communal care, and the celebration of shared survival.

Beyond the Rainbow

Ultimately, designing for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community is about moving beyond "rainbow-washing" and into the realm of authentic liberation. My journey from the instability of the streets to the intentionality of the studio allows me to see a room for what it truly is: a fortress of authenticity. When a home is designed with this level of empathy and history, it ceases to be a mere collection of objects. It becomes the one place where the armour can finally come off and the true self can flourish in safety.



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The Pool Queen Diaries

Steam, Scenery, and the Naked Truth about Nature's Hot Tubs

Hey there, my beautiful Hive family! Grab a coffee (or a mimosa, no judgment here) and get comfortable, because today we are embarking on a global journey to explore Mother Nature's very own wellness retreats.

While the rest of the world is out here stressing over "bikini bodies" and lawn maintenance, I'm over here mapping out itineraries focused on a good, long, mineral-heavy soak. In my travel playbook, hot springs hit the ultimate reset button on your soul. Whether you are trekking through remote wilderness or flying into a high-end destination, structuring a trip around a geothermal oasis is the ultimate travel hack for deep relaxation.

The Geography of a Soak: What Makes Hot Springs Travel Unique?

From a traveler's perspective, hot springs are an incredible destination anchor. Geothermally heated groundwater rises from the Earth's crust, heavily packed with minerals like sulfur, silica, and calcium.

Now, let's be real for a second: sulfur smells a bit



like a deviled egg that's been sitting in the sun for a weekend. But look past the scent! It's basically nature's version of an expensive luxury skin serum. Your skin will thank you, even if your nose has serious questions about your navigation choices.

When planning a geothermal getaway in Canada, you have two major travel styles to choose from:

- **The Wilderness Trek:** Many natural springs are located deep in provincial parks. It requires a bit of an expedition mindset—navigating winding trails, packing in your gear, and setting up camp under the stars. It's the ultimate way to connect directly with the raw terrain, ending your day in 40°C natural pools.
- **The Luxury Wellness Resort:** If roughing it isn't your vibe, places like the **Fairmont Banff Springs** or **Harrison Hot Springs Resort** offer the classic "robe and slippers" travel experience. This is my natural habitat. You get all the glorious mineral benefits alongside world-class hospitality, fine dining, and zero bear encounters.

*By Tasha Morrison,
Travel Consultant*

The Featured Canadian Stop: Liard River Hot Springs, BC

If you want to plan the absolute "Grand Daddy" of Canadian road trips, you *have* to add **Liard River Hot Springs** in Northern BC to your bucket list. Located along the iconic Alaska Highway, this isn't just a basic hole in the ground; it's a lush, sub-tropical oasis nestled right in the middle of a boreal forest.



Liard River Hot Springs, BC

The geothermal activity creates a microclimate so warm that unique plants normally found much further south thrive here year-round. The park features a beautifully maintained boardwalk that lets you navigate safely over the marshland (and keep an eye out for resident moose) directly to the massive, crystal-clear "Alpha Pool." It's the perfect target destination for a cross-country driving itinerary.

The "Naked" Truth: A Tiny Dissertation on Nudist Travel Culture

All right, let's get into the logistical "bare" necessities of geothermal travel. Nudism—or Naturism—is a massive part of global hot spring culture, and it's a wonderful sub-sector of the travel world. In wild springs, swimsuits are often entirely optional. Far from being provocative, it's an ancient, respectful approach to wellness that enhances the travel experience in three major ways:



Harrison Hot Springs Resort, BC

- **Total Sensory Integration:** Part of the joy of travel is fully experiencing a new environment. Feeling the natural current and temperature shifts of the water against your skin is a grounding, therapeutic experience that a synthetic Spandex blend simply blocks out.
- **Radical Body Positivity:** Geothermal pools are a global meeting ground. In the wild, there are no filters or luxury wardrobes to hide behind. You see real human bodies of every shape, size, age, and background. It serves as a profound equalizer, breaking down social barriers and allowing travelers to connect in their rawest, most authentic forms.
- **The Authentic Mineral Rinse:** From a wellness perspective, geothermal minerals work best when they have direct, uninhibited access to your skin. Going natural ensures you actually get your money's worth from the earth's natural properties.



Naturism

The Journey to Sloquet: That Time I Was "Detained" by the "Cult"

Of course, every great travel itinerary comes with unpredictable detours. Years ago, I planned an excursion to **Sloquet Hot Springs**, about two and a half hours away from Whistler. Sloquet is rugged, beautiful, and reaching it involves navigating a deeply rutted logging road that will make your vehicle—and your insurance—sob. I went there looking for a peaceful soak, but the universe booked me into a completely different kind of experience.

Picture this: I am relaxing in the natural thermal tub, minding my own Pool Queen business, when a bottle of Jack Daniel's gets passed to me by a friendly traveler. A few social swigs later, the steam thickens and I find myself being gently guided out of the water and straight into a massive, hand-made style tent. Before I know it, I've been made the guest of honour in an intense drum circle led by a group of local free spirits who start chanting about aligning my "Torontonion aura."

Meanwhile, out in the pitch-black wilderness, the friends I had arrived with realized I had vanished from the pools. The woods were dark, the mountain air was freezing, and a frantic search was underway—sort of. You see, my primary travel companion on this trip had two very distinct priorities: finding me, and protecting our premium bottle of wine.

Armed with a flashlight, she started stumbling through the campsite, accosting random campers in the dark with the greatest missing-persons description in Canadian history: "Excuse me, has anyone seen a bottle of wine and a Black chick?!" When she questioned some local nomads packing up a truck, one looked blankly into the night and whispered, "Oh, her? Yeah, she left in a caravan."

Just like that, I was upgraded to an official missing entity, and a high-stakes rescue mission was deployed.

Back in "Camp Cult," the fog was wearing off, the drums were fading, and I suddenly realized my wardrobe was entirely missing. Fleeing the tent into the chilly night air, I scrambled into the bushes, desperately gathering giant fern leaves to fashion a makeshift botanical loincloth. Just as I was trying to figure out if Douglas fir needles could be woven into a functional sports bra, my friends burst through like an elite tactical squad fueled by sheer panic and Pinot Grigio.

My friend dropped to her knees, weeping tears of pure joy, and shouted, "You're alive! And thank god, I found the wine!" She hoisted the bottle into the air like Simba on Pride Rock while I stood there draped in local flora like a high-end centrepiece. They wrapped me in a spare flannel, successfully rescuing me from the eco-warriors. I was missing for almost seven hours.

The Travel Lesson: Never accept unverified beverages in a public pool, always memorize exactly where you left your clothes, and make sure your travel companions value your life at least slightly more than a good vintage.

A World of Warmth: International Geothermal Hotspots

If you've already checked Canada off your map, the globe is full of spectacular geothermal wonderlands that offer completely unique cultural spins on the classic soak:

- **The Blue Lagoon vs. The Secret Lagoon, Iceland:** The Blue Lagoon is the undisputed



The Secret Lagoon, Iceland

celebrity of international hot springs, famous for its otherworldly, milky-cyan water rich in silica. It's a stunning bucket-list stop, but it can feel crowded. For a more authentic, historic Icelandic itinerary, head to the Secret Lagoon (Gamla Laugin) in Flúðir. Built in 1891, it is the oldest swimming pool in Iceland, surrounded by a mossy landscape of active little geysers that erupt while you soak.

- **The Historic Onsen of Hakone, Japan:** In Japan, thermal bathing is raised to a spiritual art form. Hakone is a gorgeous mountainous region near Mount Fuji famous for its traditional inns (*ryokans*). Traveling here offers a lesson in serene bathing culture and strict etiquette—you must wash meticulously *before* entering the water, and baths are traditionally separated by gender. Soaking in an outdoor bath (*rotenburo*) while staring out at a mist-covered bamboo forest is the definition of travel zen.



Cascade del Mulino, Italy



Onsen of Hakone, Japan

- **Cascade del Mulino (Saturnia), Italy:** Tucked away in the rolling Tuscan countryside, this site features a series of natural, cascading thermal waterfalls carving out smooth, sulfurous stone pools. The water sits at a perfect 37.5°C year-round. Best of all, it is completely free and open to the public, making it the perfect romantic detour for a driving tour through Italy.

Coming Up Next in the Hive...

Next month, we are leaving the mountains behind and heading straight to the tropics! I'll be giving you the absolute travel scoop on my upcoming trip to Barbados and sharing my ultimate vision for a Global Queen event—a travel takeover for the ages. Think massive scale, incredible luxury, and a curated community that actually meets our standards.

Until next time, keep chasing the sunshine, pack your passport, and find your flow!

Tasha Morrison is the TICO-registered and ACTA-certified founder of Global Queen Getaways, specializing in luxury, high-impact travel for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. A self-proclaimed "Pool Queen" with 20 years of leadership experience and an active member of the IGLTA (International LGBTQ+ Travel Association), she ensures you are celebrated, not just tolerated. Follow her adventures or make your own here:



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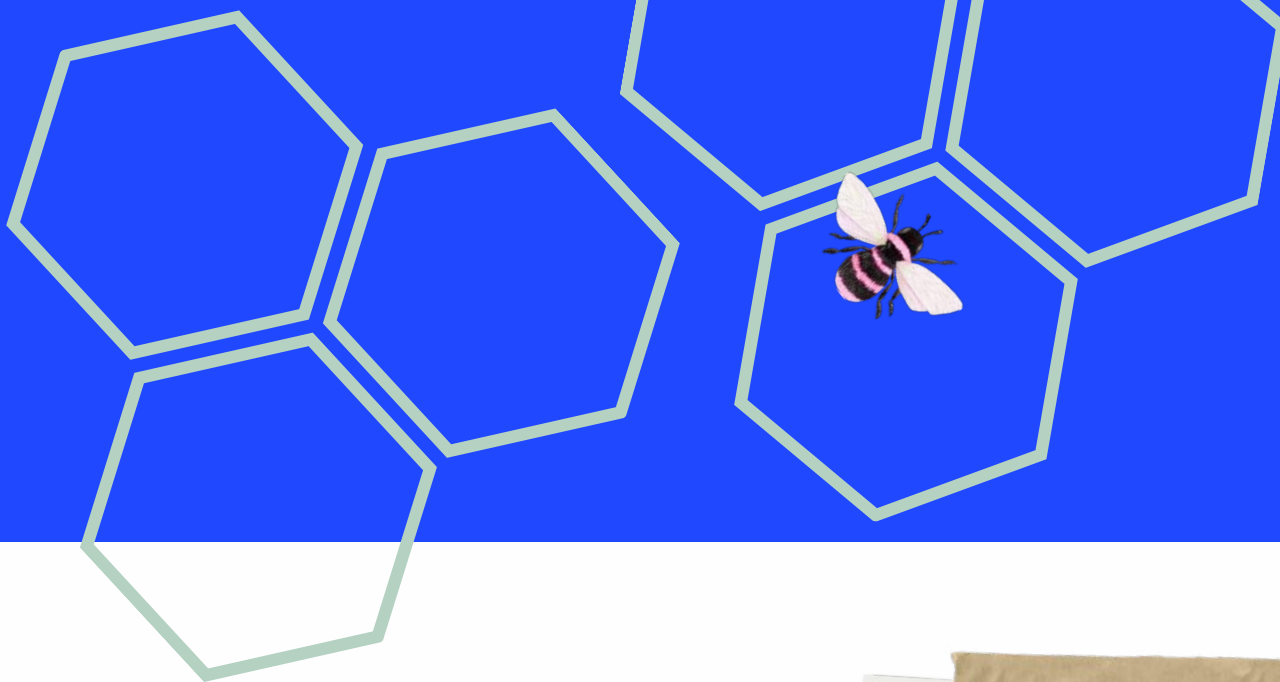
FINDING LOVE IN A WORLD THAT CAN FEEL LONELY

By Stalin Fernandez Gil

When I hear the words “Dearly Beloved,” I usually think of a traditional wedding, something that often feels like it was built for someone else’s life, not mine. But for me, being “Queerly Beloved” is about something much bigger. It’s about the many different ways we show up for each other when the world feels a little too quiet.

I will be honest, I have spent a lot of nights feeling like just another lonely guy in this world. I have looked for connections in all the usual places: the apps, the bars, the quick hookups. I always hope to find something that will last. But along the way, I have realized that love doesn’t always have to look like a “Happily Ever After” script.

For a long time, I thought love was something I had to go out and get from someone else. But I’m learning that the most important thing I can have is with myself.



Self-love isn't just about bubble baths or treating yourself to a nice cake; for me, it's about being okay with the silence when I'm alone in my house. It's about realizing that even if I don't have a partner right now, I am still worth taking care of myself.

If you asked me who the most important people in my life are, I would point to my friends.

In our community, we don't just have friends; we have Chosen Family. These are the people who sat with me through the heartbreaks and the lonely nights. They are the ones who check in when I go quiet. We celebrate holidays together, we share precious moments, and we show up for each other when our biological families can't or won't.

Being "Queerly Beloved" means acknowledging that my life is full of love, even if it doesn't look like a movie. It's in the text from a friend, the laugh at the bar, and the quiet moments where I finally feel okay in my own skin.



Love doesn't have to follow a script to be real. It just has to be honest. And even on the days when I feel like a lonely guy in a big world, I know I'm part of a community that's built on something much stronger than a "Match."

Stalin Fernandez Gil: Just another lonely guy in this world, learning to love the life I've built.



I'M COMING OUT!



By Skyler Fury

Everyone has their own story. In honour of Pride month, I want to share mine.

First, I want to say that I can appreciate everyone's need and desire to be seen as who they are and who they want to be. We create labels and titles to ensure that people have a way to identify or address us in a way we appreciate and approve. Many of us spent years with people projecting the identity they wanted onto us. Usually with a gender or a sexuality they saw as acceptable. I was not immune to the labels. Personally, I prefer not to label

myself. I feel it's better just to try and be the human I can be. I figure most people are going to label me however they want, no matter what labels I choose. This mindset isn't widely accepted. People tend to break down when they hear or see something they don't understand, so to make things easier, I would use labels people can comprehend.

How did I get here? Let me start from the beginning.

I grew up in a home where we were allowed to

find out and decide who we were on our own. We didn't talk about sexuality or religion, and we didn't really talk about family history or culture. Before my parents' divorce, my sister and I were exposed to porn by accident. We had been watching my parents wedding video the night before, and when we went to finish the video the next morning, my father had switched the tapes in the VCR and left his porn in there by mistake. From that moment on, the human body became very interesting to me; especially my own.



My parents separated when I was seven. I was raised by my mother and grandparents. Mostly my grandparents. My mom worked all day and most nights; we only saw her for a couple hours, if we were lucky.

In school, I always felt different. I struggled in the beginning to make friends and had to have my teachers help me. As I grew, other parents would talk about me under their breath and teach their kids to taunt me.

When I was seven, I heard the word "gay" for the first time. It was thrown at me like an old phonebook at the front door. I didn't know what it meant or what it was. All I knew was the other kids would use it to try and hurt me. I didn't learn what it meant until I was about

nine, when my mom brought us to work and had her gay work friend Lee take us to lunch. He never talked to us about it; he never pushed any agenda. It was my mom who explained it to us. I was still too young to really understand. I had never thought of another boy that way, or at least, I thought I didn't.

When I was 10, the school taught us about male and female reproductive systems. Nothing about the opposite sex; just about our own bodies.

When I was 11, I became interested in girls—I even had my first girlfriend—but I also began to explore the idea of men. My mom went through many moments of interest in fitness and subscribed to magazines, which I sometimes would sneak away with and touch myself to the men in them. Through middle school, I continued having girlfriends and experienced rejection because of what others perceived me to be. The other kids had learned more words to sling at me to bring me down. Words like Faggot, Fairy, Homo.



I decided to come out as bisexual. I first came out to my friend and my sister. I wasn't comfortable with it due to the trauma of the teasing I had already endured. Once my sister knew, it was all over. She outed me to my mom one day on a car ride to a restaurant. I was lucky. My mom never had any issue with it, but I still had a lot of growing to do.

By high school, I really wanted to know what it would be like to date a guy. The only problem



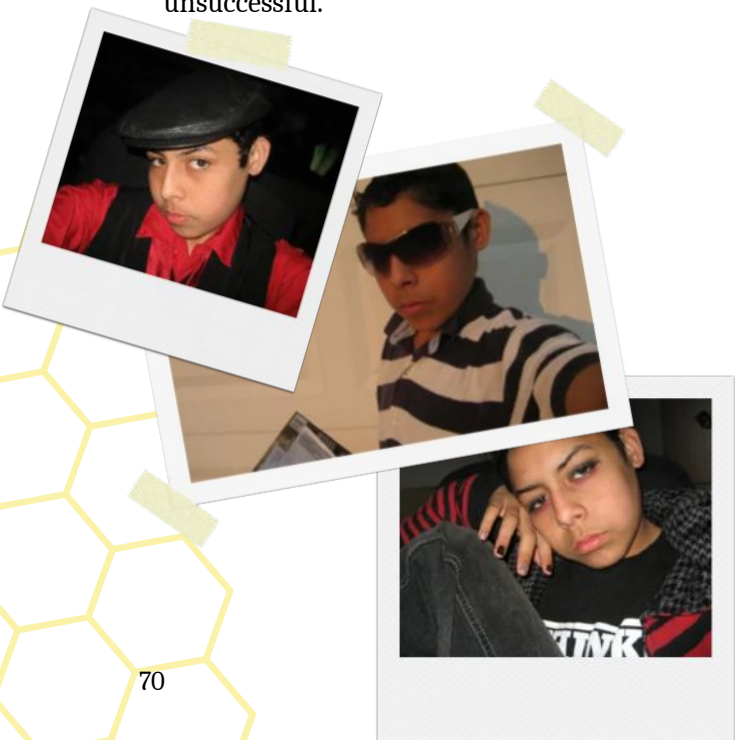
was my body hadn't matured and I still looked like a short fifth grader. I tried to join the gay club at school, hoping I would meet some other LGBTQ+ people in the community, but it was one of the worst experiences I have ever had with our community. Back then, the club was called the Gay-Straight Alliance and the only identities recognized were lesbian, gay, and bisexual. The trans community, at least where I was from, hadn't been accepted, and bisexuals were fighting constantly for acceptance. Everyone in the club used the same phrases most anti-LGBTQ+ people would use. Things like "oh, you're just confused," or "you're just looking for attention." They tried to push me into choosing, and I quickly decided that the club was not for me. From then on, I never really felt welcome in my own community. I continued my search for a boyfriend but was unsuccessful.

Sophomore year came, and I decided to switch up my look. I felt maybe the reason no one was interested in me was because of my lack of sex appeal. I went through so many different looks until I stopped at one that resonated with me.

I went through an emo/scene kid phase. I really fell into these looks when my grandmother passed; I felt like my whole world fell apart. It took me a while to feel like I could move on. I ended up with my first couple of boyfriends after switching up my look. I even was lucky enough to attend senior prom that year with my boyfriend. Something that wasn't widely accepted at the time.



I finally grew into myself during my junior year. I grew five inches, thinned out, and grew out my hair, which really pulled together the scene look I continued with through the remainder of high school. The teasing never stopped, and in fact, I started to get attacked. People would throw rocks at my head. By this time, Myspace and Facebook ruled social media, and I had a cyberbully who refused to leave me alone. This was when I learned the bigots were afraid of me. I exuded too much confidence, and they felt they needed to bring me down. When the words came my way, I would turn to the person and blow them a kiss. That would really disgust them and they would walk away. It felt powerful, like I finally had the control others felt they had over me for years.



Senior year was huge for me. I grew another nine inches. I was now 6'2", and my twink era had begun. I dated my last girlfriend that year. We dated off and on all year. She came from a religious family. The first time we broke up, her parents convinced her that she should dump me because I was gay; I convinced her that she should make up her own mind. We were fine, for the most part, until I finally got fed up with fighting what everyone else was pushing me to be. The drama wasn't worth it, and no disrespect to the women in my life, but I found my experience with men a lot less difficult.

My senior year was also the start of my true first sexual experiences. Oral was all it was. It wasn't until I was 19 that I experienced anything else. After high school, life drastically changed for me: I got my first car, started college, got my first job. I joined dating apps. Titles and sexual preferences I never had to think about before were now required to fill out a profile.



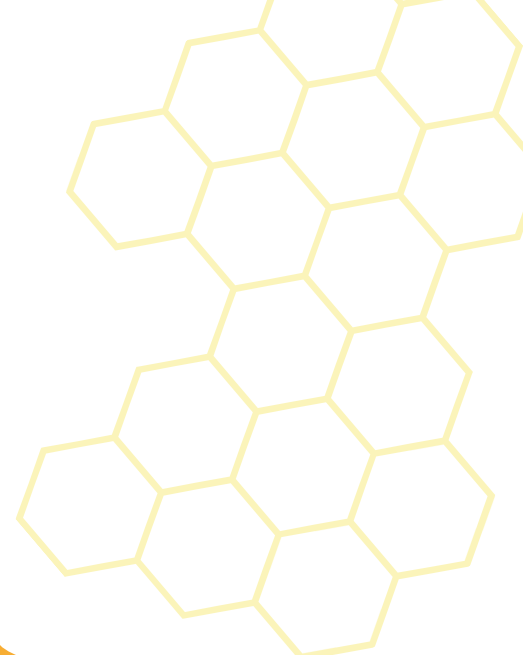
I had, at this point, practiced some things on myself and decided that trying to bottom hurt too much, so I strictly topped. This made dating difficult, as people assumed, based on my looks, that I was a fem bottom. If I thought women

were judgmental, gay men were 10 times worse. Guys I was interested in wouldn't even give me the time of day. When I did get responses, they would say things like "I want a man honey, not a sissy or fem boy," or "You aren't man enough for me." People would say I was too gay or skinny or tall.



From that moment on, I decided to lean into my femininity. I dressed in drag just for fun, and I even got to hang out with some performing drag queens. Man, they were entertaining both on and off the stage! The only thing was, I never felt that friend-level of connection with any of them. They all loved the drama and would talk about each other behind their backs. I knew how it felt to be judged my entire life, and I knew that they were just not the people I wanted to hang out with.

After a while, I got tired of feeling unsuccessful with my dating life and decided to try and become sexually versatile. I found a hot air force man, who was more than happy to help me out. He was so gentle, and things felt so sensual and passionate. I was hooked. This was probably one of the best sexual encounters of my life. I kept messaging him until I ended up with an STI—I was sick for weeks, and the doctor's visits couldn't come fast enough. That was a huge wake-up call for me. I became more selective with the guys I would sleep with after



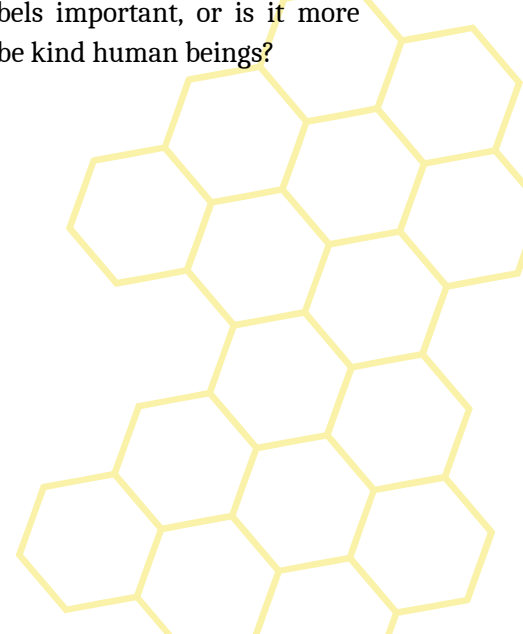
that. This started my IDGAF era..

By the time I was 24, I was so tired of trying to be a person others wanted me to be. I spent the next decade realizing I could be both masculine and feminine. I could wear male and female clothing. I could be a top and a bottom. These are things I could do but did not define me, because we as humans created language and definition. We are the ones who get to decide what things mean to us. At the end of the day, it doesn't matter how other people perceive us but how we perceive ourselves. They can call you whatever they want; it doesn't make it true.

I realized that I don't need others' recognition to feel a part of something. Based on the world's definition, I am part of the LGBTQ+ community whether I feel welcome or not. I prefer romantic connections with men. I am genetically male, and I love the body I've been

given. By definition, I'm a gay male, but I personally don't care about my pronouns or gender labels. That would make me gender fluid or gender non-conforming. None of these titles mean anything to me, but they seem to make others more comfortable. The real things that matter to me are how I treat others, how I perceive myself, and if I am doing my best. I think all of us should look deep inside and ask ourselves: Are labels important, or is it more important to just be kind human beings?

Don't you agree?





Love Was Never Supposed to Fit Inside Their Tiny Box Anyway

By Axton N.O. Mitchell

Part One: Romance

Do any other queer individuals feel that society has always had a narrow idea of love? While the reasons behind such a specific love story remain deeply fascinating and slightly concerning, it seems as if one day humanity collectively decided to treat that idea as if it were an unquestionable law of nature rather than what it actually is: an outdated social script.

I am sure you have heard one variation of it or another at least a dozen times over. It goes something like this: Meet someone of the opposite biological sex, typically at an “appropriate” age. Fall in love in some preset “appropriate” way. Get married in a giant church or field while surrounded mostly by people you aren’t close to. Buy a large house with a white picket fence and

probably red shutters—assuming rent hasn’t already consumed your soul. Have a bunch of children, not just one or two—at minimum, you should have four. Smile through all of the holiday photos while your growing family dons matching pajamas in every single one. Grow old together. Credits roll. The audience claps in unison. Wait, did I just hear someone yell “encore”?

This script doesn't feel realistic to many people in the twenty-first century. While it has changed costumes over time, the basic message has remained stubbornly consistent: there is a correct sequence for love, and your success is supposedly reliant on you adhering to it.

Queer people have long had a much different relationship with that narrative. Some looked at the script and immediately recognized themselves nowhere near being able to fit inside it. Others still tried forcing themselves into roles that they would never fit. Many simply wound up discovering that life had already pushed them beyond society's neat little categories before they even had a chance to decide whether they wanted to be there.

When you are forced to grow up with the understanding that parts of your existence fall outside what people insist is "normal," you become familiar with questioning the assumptions of others. You are left with no other option, outside of noticing things other people take for granted.

This is where a lot of us began to not only ask uncomfortable questions but also be comfortable asking them. Who decided romance exists only between members of the opposite biological sex? Why is marriage treated as the highest form of commitment? Why do we speak about blood relationships and loyalty as though biology automatically guarantees care, trust, or love?

Those questions are among those that matter most to a queer community that has spent generations building love, family, and belonging in the spaces society refused to make room for them. Queer people did not go out and create a new version of traditional relationships. We challenged the idea that there should only be one version at all.

Part Two: Chosen Family

Love has never been only about romance. The 2SLGBTQIA+ community has known this all along. Love has also been about survival, community, protection, respect, and the act of finding people who choose one another repeatedly.

Long before social media discovered the phrase "chosen family" and transformed it into a trendy caption beneath group selfies and brunch photos, queer communities were building chosen families out of necessity. Your chosen family was not just a quirky aesthetic or decorative language. It was a part of the queer community's infrastructure.

Researchers studying 2SLGBTQIA+ communities have repeatedly found that chosen family structures become essential support systems, particularly when an individual faces family rejection, discrimination, housing instability, or social isolation. These networks provide emotional support, caregiving, financial assistance, mutual aid, and practical help during crises. Many queer people were left to build our own systems of collective care—and the gaps in existing systems were large enough to make clear that the oversight was not accidental. It was an act of violence.

If you ask enough queer people about family and love, certain tropes will appear again and again. Family can easily come from the friend turned roommate after they offered up their couch or spare room when home stopped feeling safe. Family can easily be seen in the friend who sat beside you while you legally changed your name, waited at the doctor's office for your appointment to finally transition medically, stuck by you while you came out, or helped you rebuild your life after everything fell apart.

Family becomes the people or person who remembers your chosen name, learned your pronouns without making it a big deal, defended you in rooms when you were not present, and picked up their phone at two in the morning because they knew something in your text sounded off.

Funny enough, family often arrives without sharing parts of your face, your last name, or your genetics. Society talks about blood being thicker than water, but many queer people quietly learned the real lesson here: that love tends to reveal itself through consistency rather than biology. DNA may tell us who we are related to, but it does



not tell us who will stay. We have also heard that the saying in full is “The blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb.” Which would mean that the bonds we form by choice hold more weight than those based solely on biology.

Even history carries countless examples of communities creating care where society failed to provide it. During the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and early 1990s, the 2SLGBTQIA+ community faced devastating loss. While we were forced to confront extraordinary stigma and institutional neglect, many people living with AIDS experienced rejection from relatives, discrimination within healthcare systems, and widespread public hostility. Entire communities stepped into the void to provide support.

You can see how friends easily become caregivers and partners become our biggest advocates. Community members took action that led directly to functional mutual aid through organized meal deliveries, housing support, transportation, fundraising efforts, and bedside care. Lesbian activists are known for the critical roles they

held when it came to caring for gay men dying during the AIDS crisis.

Imagine someone referring to you and other individuals attending the funerals of people whose relatives refused to claim them as anything other than their family. These people sat in their hospital rooms, held their hands, and mourned their loss. Their chosen family made sure they did not have to pass on alone.

We know that large headlines and famous names get preferable treatment, as they fit neatly into textbooks. Though we know from our own lived experiences that some of the most important stories live far beneath those headlines.

We have seen more profound acts of love than any included in a storybook and have borne witness to the most unfaltering and remarkable instances of loyalty between people with no shared biological lineage.

So please tell me, what happens when your closest friend becomes your emergency contact?

Part Three: Community

Support overlaps.

More often than not, communities function through networks rather than pairs. We all have seen a group of friends that carried more emotional weight than any romantic partnership could. It seems the people who save your life are not typically your romantic interests at all.

Community itself may be one of the most overlooked forms of love. We often imagine love as private and individual.

Two people. One relationship. One story.

Yet queer communities repeatedly demonstrate something larger. Community care can itself become an act of devotion. Mutual aid projects, 2SLGBTQIA+ youth organizations, support groups, trans fundraising networks, housing initiatives, and grassroots activism all reveal versions of love extending beyond individual relationships. These ask people to care about one another not because of obligation but because humanity itself creates a shared responsibility.

That kind of care matters deeply in a world that increasingly encourages isolation. Modern culture

frequently tells people independence is the highest goal and self-sufficiency the greatest achievement. Yet queer communities often answer with a quieter and perhaps wiser truth: nobody survives entirely alone.

Not every queer person experiences rejection to the same extent. Just like not every one of us builds a chosen family from pain. Many 2SLGBTQIA+ community members have supportive relatives and come from loving homes. A chosen family may not replace biological family for everyone, nor does it always need to. Still, queer communities have offered something quietly radical to the broader world: the reminder that love does not require anyone's permission to be real.

Love can be platonic and communal. It is also found in mentors, friends, neighbors, drag parents, non-monogamous partners, and the people who quietly pull out an empty chair and say, "Come sit with us."

For generations, queer people have built homes in places where doors were closed. Perhaps that is why so many queer communities understand that home was never a place, family was not meant to be confined to bloodlines, and community spaces were made from love.

Maybe this has always been the truest love story.





Fiction & Poetry

Unleash Your Creativity

To Sum It All Up

By Tiff Ambrose



This is my world,
The one you created;
One with too much hate,
One with so much pain.
Can't run,
Can't hide.
Can only take a deep breath
And dive right in,
Take as much as I can.
There's too much for me alone.
So, tell me this,
Can you handle someone
Who's always on the edge?
One who walks through the darkness?
One who travels through light?
One who runs with the shadows?
The world isn't dark and light,
White and black, or shades of grey.
It's everything,
It's anything.
So, take my hand and I'll show you
Worlds you may never understand.

My world is the one
Created out of pain,
Created out of hate.
I admit I make my own contributes,
But this world started at the beginning of time
When humans first walked
And gained comprehension.
They fought each other,
They hated each other,
They wanted what others had.
But it's the bloodshed the earth holds close;
It's the pain that stains this land
And maybe a few others too
Can feel it all.



Where was the love in the beginning?
Maybe if there had been more, we wouldn't
Be in a world that holds so much anger,
So much pain,
So much agony.
Then maybe there wouldn't be a need
For people like me.
Maybe then it would be easy
To live our lives without interference.
But this is our world
And all one can do is accept it.
That's why there are people like me:
People who can take the hurt and
Maybe heal the pain.
But some scars can't be healed,
And this is the world we live in
The world most are blind too,
The worlds I feel every day.



Secrets

By Tiff Ambrose

You may be lost right now,
But a new day always dawns.
The darkness is thick right now,
But the light always finds a way.
While shadows may draw ever near,
You're not as alone as you might feel.
Something is always there to guide you
Even when everything seems hopeless,
Even when you think you have
Only yourself to count on.
People may surprise you
Even when all faith is gone

Singing softly in the moonlight
Has the shadows draw ever near,
Dancing where the day meets night;
You can always find me there.
Whisper secrets in my ear.
Don't worry, I'll hold them tight.
Won't tell a single soul, you hear?
I should give you fair warning:
There's always a price to pay—
Take my hand and dance with me,
While away the passing hours
Sit and chat for endless days.
For I am spirit everlasting,
Keeper of secret desires.
I'll draw out the things you hide,
So, you may set aside your pride.
Let the chaos in, so hopefully
The healing can begin.



Tiffany Ambrose is a Queer, Neurodivergent, writer and stay-at-home parent living in Ontario. They prefer to be called Tiff and per is also polyamorous. Per writes from the heart when it comes to poetry and from life experience, letting the thoughts flow out raw and often untouched same with when writing other pieces. Other genres per enjoys writing are fantasy, romance, and a little hint of mystery woven in.

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Wild Wilderness Adventure

A tale of two friends

By Timotheus Arlys

Author's Note:

This is a story about one of my favourite things: camping with a friend.

I hope you enjoy my writing.

Your favourite camboy, photographer, and erotic writer.

The first time I went camping with my best friend, Mark, I had no idea what to expect. The thought of spending two nights in the wilderness was a good planned break from our day jobs at the guitar shop. Mark and I had started working there around the same time and bonded over our love for Midwest emo music and backpacking to our favorite forest retreats all around the pacific northwest. I was assured that this trip would be a great adventure.

We arrived at the campsite late in the afternoon, just as the sun began to cast long shadows over the trees. The air was crisp and filled with the earthy scent of pine. Mark and I set up our tent near a small clearing, the sounds of nature surrounding us as we worked. By the time we finished, the sky had turned a deep shade of purple, and the first stars were twinkling overhead.

After a quick dinner of hot dogs and s'mores cooked over the campfire, we let the fire die out to save wood and retreated to our tent. The small, enclosed space felt cozy and intimate. We unrolled our sleeping bags and lay down, the fabric crinkling beneath us. That first night, we spent hours talking and laughing, our voices mingling with the sounds of the forest outside.

Mark and I had always shared a special bond, but there was something about being out there, away from the distractions of everyday life, that made our connection feel even stronger.

We gossiped about the store, the people we worked with, and their respective music projects.

Especially the terrible ones. We shared stories from our days being in bands and all the shenanigans us and our mates got into. At one point, we started a mock wrestling match, our movements shaking the tent and filling the air with our playful banter.

The second night was much the same, but with an added sense of familiarity. We had spent the day hiking and exploring, our legs tired but our spirits high. As darkness fell, we returned to our tent, our little haven in the vast wilderness. We snuggled into our sleeping bags, the warmth of the day still lingering in our bodies.

Again, we found ourselves engaged in silly antics, poking fun and playfully shoving each other. At one point, Mark tried to tell a ghost story, but his attempts were so over-the-top that we both burst out laughing. The sound echoed through the tent into the stillness of the night.

There was a moment, though, when the laughter subsided, and we lay there in a comfortable silence. The only sounds were the wind through the trees and the distant call of an owl. Then the silence was broken by an all too familiar rustling sound coming from Mark's sleeping bag: he was masturbating. Instantly, my dick grew hard.

I tried to shift my focus back to the serenity of our surroundings, but Mark's rhythm persisted, drawing my attention unwillingly. I could feel a warmth spreading through me, a mix of embarrassment and excitement that I couldn't quite control. Mark's breathing grew heavier,

more deliberate, and I found myself synchronizing my breaths with his, as if caught in a forbidden dance.

The moonlight filtering through the canopy above cast long, dancing shadows, adding a surreal edge to the moment. I wanted to look over, to see the expression on Mark's face, and I strained my eyes to try and get a better view without turning my head; fear and uncertainty kept me rooted in place. The silence between us now felt charged, electric, as if the very air was alive with our shared secret.

I tried to shift quietly, not wanting to alert Mark to the effect he was having on me. The intimacy of the moment was almost unbearable, yet I couldn't bring myself to interrupt him. So, I moved my hand down to my crotch and decided to join in on the fun.

I let my fingers trail lightly down my chest and stomach, feeling the heat and dampness that had gathered there. It was a bold move, one that I never would have considered in any other circumstance; but in that moment, with Mark beside me, it felt inevitable. As my own breathing quickened, I risked a glance in his direction.

His eyes were closed, lashes casting delicate shadows on his flushed cheeks, and his lips were slightly parted. It was clear that he was lost in his own world of pleasure, completely unaware of my own actions. Emboldened by his distraction, I allowed my hand to dip lower, seeking out the source of my own desire.

I could feel my heart pounding in my chest, a steady drumbeat that seemed to echo through the quiet night. I tried to stifle a gasp as my fingertips made contact with the sensitive skin beneath my clothes. The sensation shot through me like a bolt of lightning as I lightly gripped my cock and squeezed the head. I decided just to go

for it, and I pumped my fist around my dick.

Pretty soon, I was lost in the pleasure, even with the fear that I would get caught. But he was jerking off too, so what did I have to be ashamed of? Before I knew it, my breathing was heavier and my hand steadily rustled under my sleeping bag.

If I wasn't so lost in my own rhythm, I would have noticed that Mark's rustling had stopped and heard his head turn towards me. What broke my concentration was a forced little sigh coming from him.

I froze.

It felt like forever but I decided to open my eyes and turn my head in his direction because I assumed he had fallen back asleep.

I was instantly met with his direct gaze. A sly little grin appeared on his face as he asked, "Dude are you jerking off?"

His voice was barely above a whisper, but it might as well have been a shout. I felt my face flush. I didn't move, didn't speak, didn't even breathe. I was a deer in headlights, caught red-handed in the most literal way possible.

Mark's grin didn't fade. If anything, it grew wider, more amused. He propped himself up on one elbow, his sleeping bag rustling with the movement. I was suddenly very aware of his proximity, of the fact that his face was mere inches from mine. I could see the glint of the moonlight in his eyes, the freckles scattered across his nose.

"It's okay, you know," he said, his voice still low. "I won't tell anyone."

"I thought I heard you doing it," I explained. "So, I thought I would too. I'm sorry. I just haven't

had a moment to jerk off this whole trip, and when I thought I heard you doing it, I just couldn't help myself."

"It's okay, dude." He said. "I was also jerking off." And as he spoke, he slowly pulled open his sleeping bag until the full length of his torso was exposed, including his almost fully hard eight-inch cock shining in the stencilled moonlight.

I averted my eyes, feeling my cheeks flush with embarrassment. This was definitely not how I had imagined this camping trip going. Mark's nonchalant attitude somehow made me feel even more awkward. I cleared my throat, searching for something to say to break the tension that had settled between us like a heavy fog.

"Um, yeah," I stammered, trying to sound casual. "Camping does strange things to people, I guess."

Mark chuckled softly, the sound sending shivers down my spine. "Yeah, it does," he agreed, his voice warm and teasing. "But hey, at least now we know we both have impeccable timing at something other than the drums." He reached his hand toward his cock and started rhythmically palming himself off.

I couldn't help but laugh, the tension easing slightly as I met his gaze with a small smile. In that moment, bathed in the soft moonlight filtering through the tent walls, I felt a strange sense of connection with Mark. Despite the awkwardness of the situation, there was an undeniable safety I felt in the moment.

My heart pounded as I tried to find the right words to respond. The air in the tent felt charged with something unspoken, a silent agreement that we were both indulging in a secret act. And yet, there was a strange sense of liberation in that moment, as if we had both shed all our inhibitions.

I found myself mirroring Mark's actions, slowly peeling back the sleeping bag. The cool night air kissed my skin as I exposed my own erection to him, as he had done to me.

Mark's eyes flickered downwards, his expression unreadable. I felt a flush creep up my neck, but I didn't look away. Instead, I watched as his gaze traced the lines of my body, pausing at the evidence of my arousal. The silence between us was thick, but it wasn't uncomfortable. It was expectant, like the pause before a storm breaks.

He looked up at me then, his eyes reflecting the moonlight, and I felt a shiver run down my spine. There was a question in his gaze, a silent askance. I knew what he was asking, and I knew my answer. I nodded slightly, a barely perceptible movement, but it was enough.

Mark moved slowly, as if giving a last invitation to change my mind before writing this moment in stone in our memories. He reached out, his hand wrapping around my length with a gentleness that surprised me. I drew in a sharp breath.

His touch was cool from the night air, but it sent a wave of heat through me. I could see the rise and fall of his chest quicken, matching my own hurried breaths. His grip was tentative at first, but it grew more confident with each gentle stroke.

I reached out, mirroring his actions, my hand wrapping around him. He was warm and smooth, and I could feel his pulse quicken against my palm. His eyes fluttered closed, and a soft sigh escaped his lips. The sound sent a shiver down my spine, and I felt a tug in my chest as he grew thicker and stronger in my hand.

He leaned closer, his forehead resting against

mine. I could feel his breath on my lips, could see the faint dusting of freckles on his nose. His hand still moved in a steady rhythm, and I matched his pace, our bodies moving in sync.

"Is this okay?" he panted.

"Yeah," I choked out. "Don't stop."

I could now feel him inhale as our pace quickened; it felt like there was mere electricity existing between us. Then his lips touched mine. I froze for a moment, then decided to give in. I parted my lips and let my tongue explore.

We were lost in the moment, our bodies pressed close together as our kiss deepened. The world around us faded away, and all that existed was the sensation of his lips moving against mine. He continued his movements as I thrust back into his hand.

With a soft moan, I leaned into him, my fingers curling harder around his cock as our kiss grew more urgent. I could feel the heat of his body against mine, the rhythm of our movements becoming more frenzied as desire took hold.

I knew I was getting close so I broke off the kiss and urgently looked into his eyes.

"I'm gonna . . ."

His pupils were dilated, reflecting my own desperation back at me. "Me too," he gasped, his voice ragged. Our hands moved faster, gripping tighter as we both chased our release.

His forehead pressed against mine again, our eyes locked in a gaze that was equal parts intense and vulnerable. I could see the pleasure building in his expression, mirroring my own. Our bodies were slick with sweat, our muscles tensing as we climbed higher and higher.

"Close," he grunted, his hand working me faster, his hips jerking into my grip. I could feel the tension in his body, the coiling of his muscles as he neared the edge. I was right there with him, my own body trembling with need.

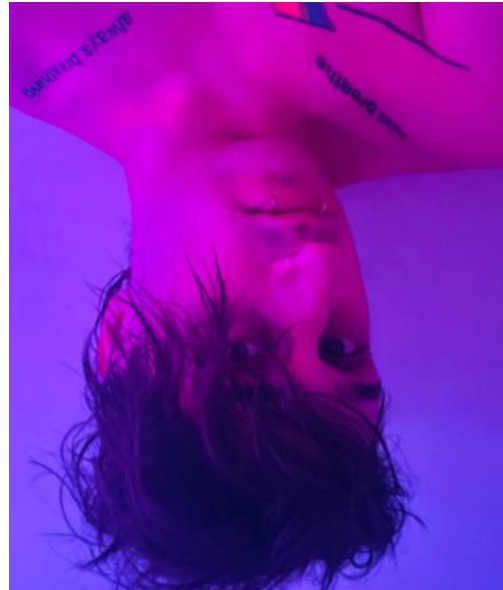
And then I felt it. His spasm and his squirt.

His release triggered my own, a wave of ecstasy crashing over me as I followed him into oblivion. Our bodies shuddered together, gripping each other tightly as we rode out the storm with both of our hands covered in each other's cum. His breath was hot and ragged against my neck, his heart pounding in sync with mine.

We stayed like that, entwined and breathless, as the waves of pleasure slowly ebbed away. His forehead remained pressed against mine, our eyes locked in a silent conversation. A small smile played on his lips, a reflection of the satisfaction and contentment that coursed through both of us.

As our breathing slowly returned to normal, he brushed a damp strand of hair away from my face, his touch tender and gentle. "That was . . ." he started, but words seemed to fail him. I knew the feeling; some things were beyond words, existing only in the realm of sensation and emotion.

I nodded, giving him a soft smile.



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Photo by Hann Solo Photos

Belle outside Poacher's Arms (Drag Open Stage)



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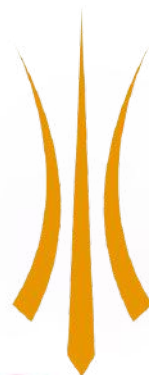
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