

ILINIX

ISSUE 1.5 : *Pride* | June 2022

Prose and poetry
focused on the
intricacies of humanity
and emotion.

NYC Pride 2013 - SERENA PICCOLI
<http://serenapiccoli.com/>
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EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome back to Ilinix, hooray! I hope you enjoy our pride issue, it's a small but powerful one. This June, as well as every other month of the year, we here at Ilinix are dedicated to appreciating the diverse identities of the LGBTQ community. All members of the community have a story to tell, so let this magazine be your guide to their experiences.

Feel free to leave your comments on twitter by @ing us and the creator of the work.

Please note, we have included all the pieces together with no distinction by which is poem or short story as it's so short.

- Your editors, Ash, Mariam, Nikolaus, Hilary, and Rory

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The Lake Where Poets Went To Die

Kevin M. Casin

Jaime wandered down to the lake with his best friend, who claimed he had found a dead body.

“Its face was all green and slimy. Moss came out its nose and crabs were picking at its eyes,” said Jake, hands disheveling his loose, black hair, smearing his pasty cheeks to paint the picture. “It was fucking awesome!”

Jaime collapsed his arms into his body as Jake recounted what he saw—subtly, of course; Jake didn’t need to see Jaime cringe. He didn’t want to be afraid all the time. He had to face up to something. He figured the body might help him gather the courage to do what he really wanted.

“It was here I swear,” said Jake, rushing to smooth stones lining the shore and crashing into the dark blue water.

He searched frantically, scooping aside the water like it was sand. Jaime laughed. Jake always made him laugh by doing silly things, and making bold claims about his brave adventures. Maybe it’s why he loved him so much.

He let the waves Jake was causing tickle over his tanned feet. Jaime grinned as Jake grew tired. He set one hand on his hip, and with the other, pried the forest green t-shirt clinging to his love handles away from his gray jeans and turned to face Jaime. He tried to keep his eyes on the sweeping mountains in the distance, on the enclosing gray clouds threatening a storm, on anything other than studying Jake’s body again.

He knew too much about it anyway. With puberty, the weight he carried all went to his sides. His abdomen only hardened, but kept gentle by his excessive eating and hair growing below his navel. It trailed into an enormous bush...Jaime thought about it all the time...he wished he'd never seen it. None of this would have happened.

"Sorry man," said Jake as he rubbed his body. "It was right here."

He stood there for a while, eyes focused on me, and a smirk. Like this was all some kind of ruse. Or maybe he knew how hard Jaime had to work not to look and was giving him a free glimpse, a nod to say it was okay. Maybe he liked it. But it wasn't a chance Jaime was willing to take.

"It's okay." Jaime hung his head. His chance to be brave was gone. Jake would never know the truth.

"Wait! There it is!"

Jake ran passed me flailing his legs like a lizard to the brush that lined the shore. He bent over, swatted away crisp brown leaves and sand that blended with dirt. He recoiled as flies buzzed around him. All Jake saw were the orbs of black flies. It was enough for him.

"Don't be a pussy, come look," said Jake, gesturing with his firm hand. Jaime hated being called a pussy. Why was it so bad to be afraid?

"I'm good." Jaime held himself. He imagined white worms writhing and sticking to dead flesh; flies picking at blackened organs; gray eyes staring at him over a gapping, pleading mouth. He wasn't ready. It was too soon.

"Get over here!"

Jake jogged to Jaime, set a hand on his shoulder, and offered the warmest curl of his lips Jaime had ever seen.

“It’s okay,” he said gently. “I’ve got you.”

Jaime smiled back. It may have been for only a second, but when Jake placed a thumb on Jaime’s cheek, time stretched to its breaking point. His lips were so close. He could feel their breaths mixing. All it took was a quick motion and he could have everything. One brave moment, one little chance of courage, and everything could change.

The moment was ending. He could feel time pulling back, relaxing. It was the closest he’d ever been. He couldn’t give up now. No. Not yet.

The lips were so soft. He didn’t pluck them like he saw in the movies, it didn’t occur to him. Once he had them, he couldn’t let them go. Not even for a second. He just held them. What else was he supposed to do with them?

Jake was the one who pulled away. Jaime wouldn’t have dared. He tried to follow them, but Jake’s hand fell between them. He shook his head like a bird had shit on his hair and he was trying to fling it away. He walked backwards, fingers touching his lips.

And Jaime’s stomach sank. Every organ fell out of place, melting into his gut. It would be his sacrifice, his offering of forgiveness.

“I’m sorry, Jake. I don’t know what came over me,” Jaime said. He held out his hands, hoping Jake would welcome him back, but Jake stepped back. He didn’t say anything. Just stared at the stones and the sand.

“Jake...”

He strolled back into the water. He dipped beneath the surface, casting bubbles. Maybe to let Jaime know he was still alive. It was over. Jaime knew that much. But he needed the words. All these years of friendship couldn’t end in silence.

Jake lifted his head. Water spilled from his hair and he turned to face Jaime. He was ready for the words. It would no doubt destroy him, but he was prepared for their sting. He was brave enough now.

“Get your ass in here,” Jake said.

“Jake, I’m sorry.”

“I said get your fucking ass in here.” His voice roared and crashed over the mountains. Not even the thunder in the distance dared to reply—too defiant.

Jake pried the t-shirt from his body and threw it at Jaime. “Do as I fucking say.”

Jaime crept into the lake.

“Take off your fucking shirt. You can’t swim with your shirt on dumb ass.”

“Jake, we have to talk about this.” Jaime crossed his arms, fingers tucked under his blue t-shirt.

Jake rose out of the water, tall and ominous, finger pointed at Jaime. “I’m not going to fucking tell you again. We’re swimming.”

Jaime did as he was told. He tossed the shirt on top of Jake’s. He laid on the dark waters and paddled to Jake.

“Jake,” was all Jaime had a chance to say.

Jake swept Jaime up in his arms, held him so tight all the air left his body. And when he let Jaime go, he grabbed Jaime's face and gave him a deep kiss. Love poured into his soul. With each pluck, Jaime felt it. Everything had ended as dead as the body resting on the shore. Because it had to.

Jake pushed Jaime back. He crashed into the water and when he came out, Jake was smiling.

“And when we're done here, you're going to look at that dead body, you pussy.”

Kevin is a gay, Latine fiction writer and cardiovascular scientist.

You can find Kevin @kevinthedruid on Twitter.

Queen Mary's Rose Garden

Charlie Bowden

I saw a psychic today.
Her neon purple shop was bustling (it's bank holiday Monday),
her mayflower curtain constantly swishing back and forth.
She sat me down, her canopied room thick with elderberry perfume,
and asked what I was scared of.

I said, being all alone in the place I love,
without you.
Well, I didn't say you, I said your name.
So now a woman who overcharges for mind games knows about us.
I think our secret's still safe though.
I paid more than enough for a little privacy, I hope.

I followed her advice,
went to a place belonging to someone else.
Wound up in Queen Mary's rose garden;
me, the man of a thousand words, had nothing to say.
I picture that this is how it's always been,
that it sprung from the Roman soil fully formed.
Love shouldn't have to grow.

That's how I picture us:
statues in a rose garden, facing each other.
Nobody dies from lack of love
but I need you frozen, pupils dilated,
petrified pleasure to be observed
by lovers sharing a rope swing,
water washing over us, our world locked in flood,
all alone in the place we love.

I Was Starstruck

Charlie Bowden

I was starstruck,
the stroke of a lucky pen on my skin,
my body a canvas for your blue ink.
We sit amongst bubbles of rain
as I explain everything,
the weather in suspended animation
for me to make my case.

One month later,
the flush of winter and hard seltzer on your face,
we signed a contract, skin to skin contact,
the echo of your smile still on my hand.
We all got up to dance:
you, me, the bubbles,
the marching band in my head
that pounds always, prevents me from being subtle.
You laughed; you always preferred the obvious.

I can't see how it wasn't clear before;
I feel my love glimmering from my skin,
shining from my pores,
putting the crystal blue ocean to shame.
The beach is where I'll call you that noun,
that prefix to your perfect name meant only for me
so that when it's sundown
and I stare into the brown of your eyes
I know the star that struck me
was meant to be mine.

Charlie Bowden is a student from Hampshire, England, who discovered a love for writing poetry in lockdown after spending years studying it at school.

You can find Charlie @charliebpoetry on Twitter.

My Pride

Leslie Cairns

My pride is defined in rainbows of my own creation,
not flags in stores,
but the way the grass grows
on my fingers when we kiss. The greens
in your irises, as they fleck to devour mine.
Wholly,
Unbidden.
I am angel cake and masculine shoulders
I am dresses laced with shimmer that cannot be found
inside roygbiv, a newfound shade,
Undiscovered,
unmemorized, between the indigo and the violet
of my innermost interior. I decide the way, and
How the colors arrange themselves on the silhouette. Near the almost
glazed, frosted icy thistle blue
of the windowpane; the edge of where we met.

*Leslie Cairns holds an MA degree in English from SUNY Fredonia,
and writes about the mental health community.*

*You can find Leslie @GilmoreGquotes or @starbucksgirly on
Twitter.*

once more with feeling

Elliot Lee

we found refuge in moth-ridden sheets
and lumpy beds.
dim lights & faded blackout curtains.
a bathroom with navajo white tile,
missing shower curtain.
this is our place, the little lamplighter inn,
and we make it our home when we can.
we meet twice a week, sundays after church
and fridays at two. your claim: you have weekly staff meetings
and i of course have yoga.
one day, we'll be found out. the
sheets will be torn from the bed,
casting our naked bodies to the sun, but
until then,
we shall stay embraced, conjoined, together.

*Elliot Lee is a creative writing & poetry teacher from Memphis,
Tennessee who sometimes writes poems about things.*

You can find Elliott @@ceannfort on Twitter.