

2022 Wind & Water Writing Contest  
First Prize Winner  
FICTION/NON-FICTION

Love Every Inch

By Arwyn Carpenter (Fiction)

“Love every inch of yourself,” said D when I asked them if they thought I should get top surgery. If it weren’t for Charlie’s transition a few years ago I might not even know what top surgery was. It means plastic surgery to remove the breasts and re-shape the chest to resemble that of a man.

What a marvel this surgery is for the 27 thousand members of the Top Surgery Support Facebook Group I’ve just joined. The surgery is a liberating freedom for people who’ve felt their breasts didn’t belong on their bodies. They post proud shirtless videos of their hard-won joy, and for this they are showered with hundreds of hearts and thumbs up and messages like, “You look so great, I hope one day I get to feel as happy as you look.”

“Love every inch of yourself,” says D.

They were giving me a Thai massage, a very intimate full body manipulation, where the massager might rest all their weight against you or pull your pelvis up onto their lap. We were on my bedroom carpet, swimming in cream plush and dog hair. I knew their hands would feel the binding around my chest when it was time to move up from my hips to my back.

My breasts had fed my mountain of a child. They’d bonded us. While I worried they might not have enough milk, my boy’s steady and considerate suckling made me feel sure he would lead his life in a good way. My breasts had served a mighty purpose.

But now I want to dance with a body that doesn’t say woman before it says anything else. I want to dance with a body that says *artist-at-work* and *fuck off with your fatphobia and fear of women with loud voices and your fear of me*. I am the sun. I am the womb.

I revisit the scars from the breast reduction that was forced upon my younger self. My mother wanted me thinner. I know, despite her trans terror, she’ll accept my trans self before she accepts my fat self. Fat is worse. She’ll encourage testosterone if it will melt fat from my hips.

My trans man crush from Drag Race was Gottmik. The funny thing was, after his face masculinization surgery, he lost his appeal for me. It was the blend of girl and boy that made me squirm.

At last night’s dark November back yard party there were other queers, other weirdos: folks with hair dyed neon, facial piercings and buttons on their jackets stating their politics and pronouns. Kat stood by the fire: men’s shirt, men’s jacket, chest bound, face gorgeous. We glanced at each other and away and then for a moment, held smiling eye contact and I looked at the eyes of someone who was me except twenty years old, no wait: they’re a legal assistant, twenty-five maybe?

I was wearing men's clothes too, along with pearls and my eyebrows painted teal. I liked how Kat seemed to be using a forced lower voice. I'd heard Jules do this when chatting with his teen buddies, boys whose voices had dropped before his. He used the low sounds in his chest to press away his child voice.

I tried it too, with Kat, to sound more like a man. When I laughed it came out as a marvelous sound: a deep, booming, fatherly laugh and I thought, *When did I lose that voice?* How great to have found it again.

D's massage was unexpected perfection. I was shaking with trepidation when I lay down for them, my kneecaps jittering. D is two-spirit. They told me they call upon the divine male and the divine female as needed. They were adopted and raised by a white family, but they always knew they were queer and that they would fall in love with a person, they tell me, with no mind to their gender. I want them to fall in love with me. Why not?

They are also younger than me by a whole generation. They might think of me as a colleague or a mentor. I'm flat on my back, eyes closed, while they kneel by my feet, and firmly grasp my heels. They shake my whole legs with utter surety. I want to be in love with them. I am in love with them. Why not?

I'm wearing leggings. When their karate chop hand presses my psoas (at the front of my hip), I imagine I feel a searing on my skin, hot metal. This is a professional massage, gifted to me by another colleague who knows of D's phenomenal skill. I tell myself to put the sex thoughts away.

It's hard. I think about sex non-stop for ten consecutive days a month. Every month I think, *this is it. I've reached menopause. My period won't come.* And then it comes, with all its pissery. A week after it's done, I'm turned on by a rustle of leaves. I give in to ten days of raging imaginings. I picture getting fucked hard against a garage door in the alleyway or in a stall of a restaurant bathroom. I want it constantly. I take breaks in my day to masturbate.

Poor D. I try to think of anything else. *Grant writing, budget drafting.* They've reached my neck now. I can smell their toothpaste breath. I want it closer to my mouth. Why not?

They're at the top of my head. The massage is done. They're tapping a goodbye into my scalp. Unexpected perfection needn't be complicated. An excellent massage, nothing more. But another of D's skills is reading peoples thoughts and energies. Surely, they know I saw us making love behind my spasming eyelids.

D leaves the room to allow me space to get up, professional and polite. This feels absurd after what I've just been through in my mind. The sex spell that I conjured evaporates. We stand as friends in the kitchen eating chips. We hug goodbye. I feel their thin, muscular back through their coat. They hug hard.

Whatever they know, they know. As I hear their steps echo down the stairs, I get to work on loving every inch of myself.