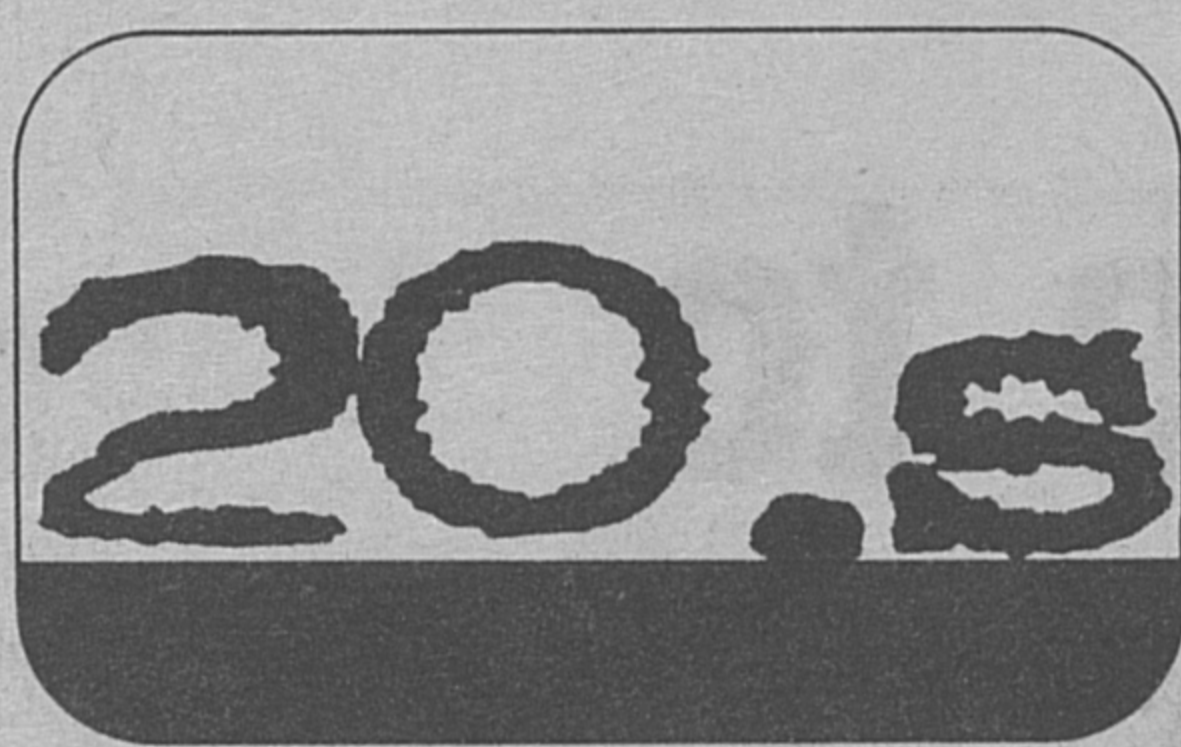


TWENTY SOMETHING
by thomas henning



Friends and Lovers

I have seen a lot of movies where romance was the driving force. I have watched as the perfect situations unfold to create just the right touch of magic and mayhem for stories you know will be retold again and again at anniversary parties and funerals.

I watched with a bit of envy as these Hollywood moments took place. Occasionally, I would wonder what my moment would look like. How would my love story unfold?

It is no secret that I have an immense aversion to romance. My intimacy issues are almost an urban legend, and pumpkins, I don't know the last time I have left the scene of a romantic event with butterflies in my stomach.

The irony is I am a hopeless romantic. I want the entire Julia Roberts movie with the soundtrack, flowers, and quirky tender moments. I want it so bad that I fight every opportunity it comes my way.

Valentine's Day made me think. I had some twenty of my favorite people over for a Valentine Brunch. It was wonderful. There were food and drinks, but most importantly, there were my friends, people I have known for times ranging from 10 months to 10 years, who enrich my life more than I

think I could describe. They are funny, strong, loyal friends who aren't afraid to let their hair down, roll up their sleeves, and jump right into life.

There were a few times that afternoon that I had to just stop and take everything in. Surrounded by love and laughter, I realized that nothing was missing. But I also realized what would enhance this moment: a lover who had the same magic my friends possess; a person I could enjoy as much and be as drawn to as the friends that bless my life.

Later that week, I went to see a couple of movies with my best friend and soulmate. She and I critiqued the semi-syrupy movies and their lovebird heroes. We laughed and held each other's hands when emotional moments arose; a gentle squeeze to let the other know it was okay and we were glad the other was there to share the moment.

When I got home, my mind drifted to when we first met. I remember her abrasive manner, and I would venture to say that my haughty nature left an impression on her. We connected almost instantly. We fought like dogs and laughed like school children. We had a special language, literally, full of code words and body language.

Through trial and tribulation, we could almost read the other's mind, finish sentences, and not only listen but hear what the other was saying. As friends go, she is my Julia Roberts movie, and she is part of what is special about my life.

Now if only I could find that in the color of lover.

Pumpkins, am I crazy? Is it crazy to want to meet someone with whom I feel a spark the moment I look into his eyes, or to feel butterflies the moment that his hand brushes mine? Is that expecting too much?

Don't get me wrong, I have had my share of special moments. There have been love letters under my pillow and three dozen roses sent to me on one day by one person. I've been skydiving with someone I loved for the first time so I would never forget him or that moment, and had phone conversations that touched me. I've not just shared, but created dreams over dinners.

I have been showered with affection only to turn it away because it was too scary or not the exact fit. My fears helped me justify every reason I had fabricated to let the person go or push them away. Too this and not enough of that. I have loved only one man. He broke my heart, but that love was one

I will always remember. It was how I pictured love, sans the dysfunctional quirks that kept us from being together, and how I want love to be in my life.

Growing up a little closeted queer, Greek boy, I didn't dream of Mr. Right, and I barely let myself think of a future that involved anyone other than my family. I wasn't encouraged to think about what I wanted out of a partner, or what I had to give. I just closed myself off to all of that and never let myself want it. I silently decided that I didn't deserve to be loved and that maybe I wasn't supposed to love at all. Keep your heart closed and your will strong, and you will be able to conquer anything. But the thing about conquering is that, sooner or later, you are left standing alone.

I have had my share of bad experiences. I have gone to the drive-thru of Skank-In-The-Box more times than I would like to remember, sweet peas, and my membership to Kennel Ken's Connection has expired. I don't have time for Rats, and I have lost my tolerance for Super Rats. I went through the dark era of believing that I had no worth and that I was fortunate enough to receive attention from whoever showed it to me.

I have said it before, I am truly blessed. I am truly blessed not only because I have such a wonderful cast of characters in my life, but also because I understand just how

amazing these treasures are. I am blessed because I have finally reached a point where I can look in the mirror and see what is looking back at me: Fanny Bryce, Holly GoLightly, and Maggie the Cat all rolled into a Greek country boy who just wants someone to love him and let him love him back.

Well, maybe he has a few more wants than that, but that is a whole other article. ▼

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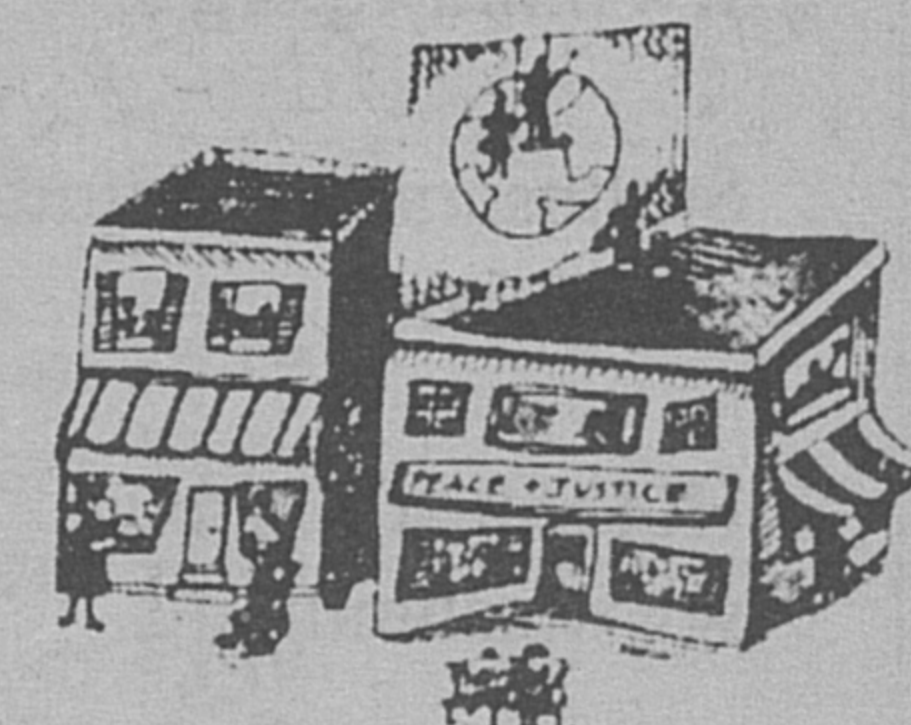
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