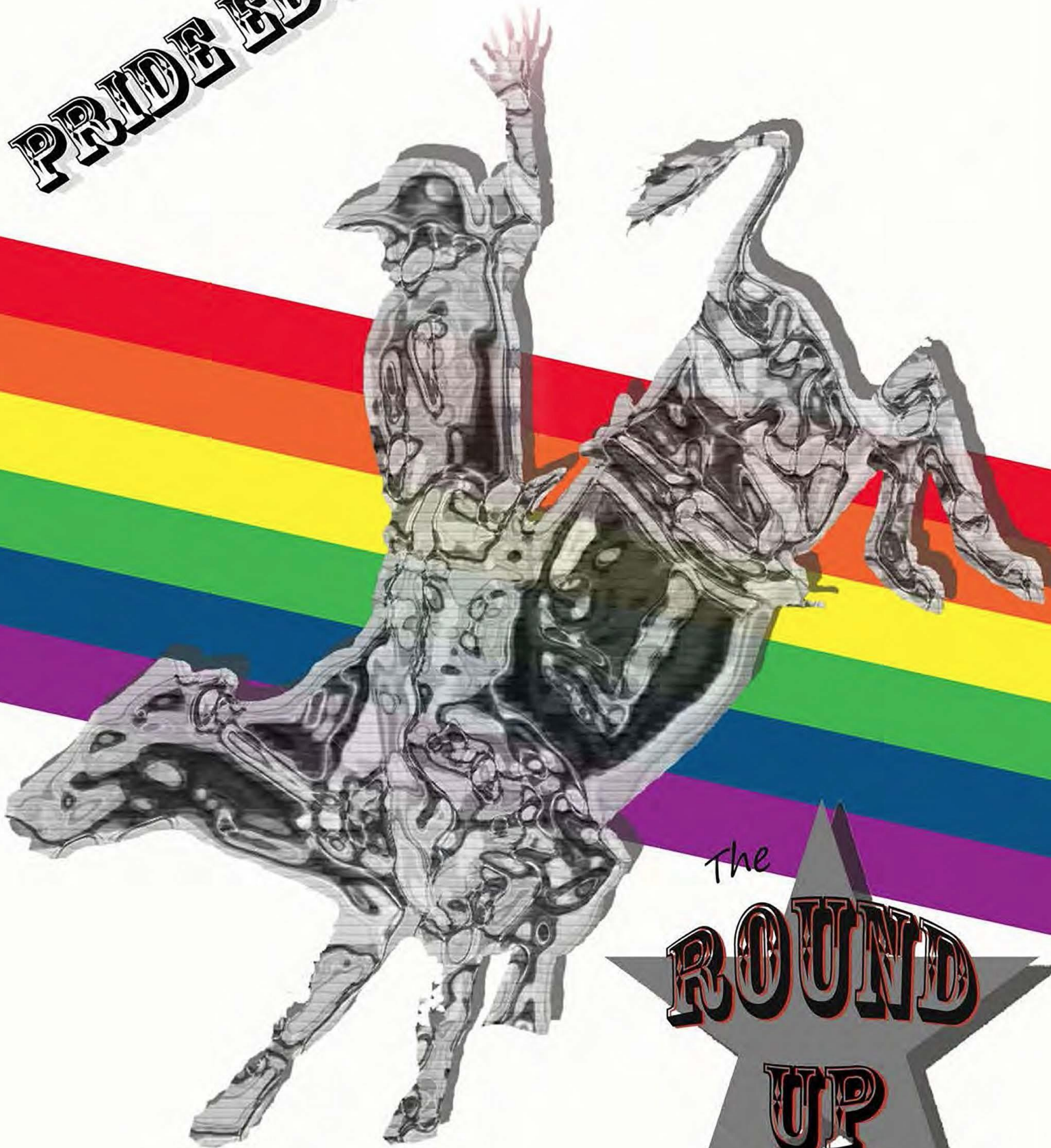


the
PRIDE EDITION



The
**ROUND
UP**
writer's zine!

June 20 4-V, 1-- 3.S



The Pride Edition

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Angelina Lim – *Editor*

Ed Jessup – *Editor*

Gisselle Ramirez-Guest Editor

Social Media Administrators

Angelina Lim

Ed Jessup

Website Administrator & Design

Ed Jessup

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SUPERMAN'S

Forest

by Andrew L. Huerta

“Her name is Melanie Monroe,” I say to Steve, my partner, as he stares at the short, curvy blonde making her way toward us. “God. She was the biggest bitch in high school. Typical rich girl who went to Catholic school cuz Mom and Dad made her. Not a Madonna or a whore, but somewhere right in between.”

“Diego Martinez,” Melanie says as she stops right next to my chair at the bar. “How the hell are ya?” She makes this odd snorting noise as she looks me up and down. After the once-over, she stares down at my feet and purses her lips at the sight of my leather sandals. She plops her designer, oversized purse on the bar, right in the bartender’s serving area. “I gotta go pee,” she announces. “Watch my stuff.” She doesn’t wait for any response. She deserts her purse on the bar and heads toward the ladies room.

“What is she doing here?” Steve asks.

“I have no idea.” I wait and watch as she enters the bathroom. “But I have a feeling she came here to specifically see me.”

“Were you friends in high school?”

“Fuck no. Hated the *bitch*, and she hated me. Used to call me *faggot* all the time.”

“But she came here to see you?”

“Let’s just say we had a mutual boyfriend in high school.”

“Oh yeah. You told me about him. Your first?”

“Yeah. Sixteen year old David Sunderson. He was something else. Star running back on the football team. Let’s just say he had beautiful eyes.” I stick out my two index fingers and hold them about ten inches apart. Steve laughs because he knows I’m not talking about David’s eyes.

“Whatever happened to him?”

“Went to college on a football scholarship and now I think he’s a lawyer. Lives in town. I think. I think he actually married Melanie. He married someone from high school and I always thought it was her.”

Melanie emerges from the bathroom. As she walks back toward us, she stares me directly in the eyes. Her gaze doesn’t break mine. Her head is tilted forward and her lips are still pursed together tightly. She appears as unfriendly as a cheetah stalking her prey, and I again wonder what the hell she wants from me.

“Melanie Monroe, this is my partner, Steve.” I lean back in my chair so Steve can lean closer and shake her hand.

“Nice. You have a partner,” Melanie replies, shakes Steve’s hand, and adds, “I’m actually Melanie Sunderson.”

“Nice,” I reply. “So you must have married David Sunderson.”

“Yeah, married. Past tense. We just divorced last year.”



“Wow. Sorry,” I say. “You should take back your last name. Become Melanie Monroe again. I always loved your name.”

“Yeah, I know I should. But we have two kids and I want to keep us all well.” She looks away. Her unfriendly stare is gone, and she stands next to me with both hands holding her large heavy purse down in front of her.

After a few seconds of silence, I ask, “Melanie, why are you here?”

“I don’t know.” She raises her right hand and pushes back the front of her hair. She holds her hair back, just over her forehead, and stares at me. “I heard that you hang out here. I guess I just wanted to talk to you and see what this place was like.” She looks around the bar unimpressed. “I really wanted to see what you were like now, and see what the people here were like.” She sighs heavily, lets go of her hair, and it all falls back perfectly into place.

“Melanie?” I wait for her to look at me again. “Are you here to see what gay people are like? And what it’s like in a gay bar?”

“That’s part of it.” She nods her head in agreement. Her unfriendly look has now been replaced by a look of guilt mixed with a large dose of curiosity.

“Part of what?”

Melanie’s phone rings. It’s in her large, ugly purse and it’s one of those ring tones that sounds like an old land-line phone with the push button dials. “Wait,” she says, as she opens her purse and rummages out her cell phone. “Shit. It’s David. He has the kids, so I need to take this. I’m gonna go out to the parking lot, but I’ll be back. Buy me a drink.”

“Buy your own fucking drink,” I reply.

“Buy me a drink, *faggot!*” she yells. As her phone continues to ring, she looks around at the five other people at the bar who are now staring back at her.

“She’s kidding,” I say.

Melanie stands silent with the loud phone in her hand. After a second she answers it. “David. Just give me a second. I need to go somewhere where it’s quiet. Hold on.” She holds the phone to her side and makes her way to the door.

“What do you want to drink?” I yell back at her.

“Vodka martini, straight up, with a twist.”

Ben, our favorite bartender begins making her drink.

“Did you get that?” I ask Ben.

“Oh, yeah. I got it, *faggot!*” Ben replies.

“So what’s her deal?” Steve asks, as we both watch Ben make her martini and place it down in front of me.

“I don’t know. We never really talked that much in high school. She was part of the uber popular crowd, while I was part of the middle crowd. You know? There were always more of us. We took up most of the school, but no one ever wanted to be us, and we all paid more attention to them. Besides. I was always drunk in high school. How do you think I was able to stay in the closet for so long?”

“So she divorces this David Sunderson over a year ago, and now comes here to see you, and talk to you about it. Strange chick,” Steve adds, as we both stare at the back door of the bar.

Steve and I are sitting in “our corner” of the bar. Two tall stools at the end of a long metal bar. Away from other people, but right next to the bartender’s service area and usually surrounded by everyone else who works at the bar. A safe place where we can watch people, make comments, and sit in judgment. We’re on the back patio of our friendly neighborhood gay bar, IBT’s on 4th Avenue. We hang out here every Saturday



afterschool for happy hour and karaoke. After a few drinks at happy hour, our singing gets a little bit better. But then, after a few more drinks at the end of happy hour, our singing quickly gets a little worse. Melanie took her phone and walked out the back door of the patio. I know she's in the parking lot talking with David, and I wonder if I have time to tell Steve much about David Sunderson.

"So. David's gay," I begin. "I bet he divorced Melanie cuz he's finally come out of the closet."

"Or got caught with another guy's dick in his mouth," Ben adds, as he leans in to hear more of my story.

"He and Melanie started dating in high school."

"When did you start seeing him?" Steve asks.

"He was never my boyfriend. He was always Melanie's boyfriend. He and I just used to meet every now and then and mess around."

"Every now and then?" Ben asks.

"Yeah," I say, trying to remember as much as I can about that year. "He was a senior when I was a junior in high school. He'd always been really friendly with me. He knew I was gay, and I knew he was curious. Really curious. So we ended up hooking up at the beginning of my junior year. You know. it was the mid-eighties. Nobody talked about being gay. I knew I could never come out of the closet, especially in high school, cuz I'd get the shit kicked out of me. Even in Catholic school I knew someone would beat me up even if I mentioned the word gay. And then all of the priests and teachers would just look the other way."

"So how did you guys finally hook up?" Steve asks.

"Is this exciting to you?"

"Kinda," he replies.

"High school sex is so cool," Ben adds.

"So next to. you know. our little Catholic school there was this vacant lot. It was kinda in the middle of the neighborhood, in between all of these big houses, and it was filled with oleanders and these big mesquite trees. We called it Superman's Forest. It's where all the couples would go to make out and be alone. I think there was even an old mattress in the back of the lot, and there were a lot of rumors about that, but David and I never used the mattress. It was really gross."

"So you and David would hook up in Superman's Forest?" I could tell Steve's excitement is growing and I just smile.

"Yeah." I place my left hand over my mouth and think. "I used to live by the school and one day David followed me when I was walking home. Before I got to my house, I ducked into Superman's Forest and he followed me in. I didn't know if he would or not. But once he was there with me, he went for it. He went down on his knees and we started meeting in Superman's Forest at least once a week. Let's just say. that was a very good year."

"So it was a vacant lot surrounded by big houses?" Steve asks.

"Yeah," I reply. "You know the old neighborhood around the school? There was just this one piece of land between the houses. I mean, it had a lot of trees and bushes, and it really looked like a small forest. The main thing was that you had a lot of privacy once you were in it. I mean, no one could see you from the road or the surrounding houses. It was dense and kinda scary. I remember. you know. when David was servicing me. I'd stare up into the mesquite trees. I mean the mesquites were pretty big, but they had these really long thorns. I mean long. about three



or four inches long. These things looked like wooden dowels sticking out all over the branches and they were really sharp at the tips. David and I always called them the deadly mesquite trees. And then there were white oleanders all around. David always said how poisonous the flowers were and then he'd pick a bunch and take them to Melanie. Nice, huh?"

"What a good gay boyfriend," Steve adds.

We all watch as Melanie walks back into the patio. She seems irritated and angry, but then again, as far as I know, she always looks like that.

Steve gets down from his bar stool and pulls it out for Melanie. "Here. Take my chair. I'm gonna go inside and see Richard. Let you two talk." With that he makes his way to the inside bar.

"So here's your martini," I say, as I push the drink in front of Melanie.
"Thanks," she replies.

Ben appears in front of us again and notices my empty beer bottle. "And you?" he asks. "Would you like another beer, Superman?"

"Fuck you," I say.

"I'll take that as a yes."

"Yeah, and make it a double."

"How bout I just give you this one," Ben places a new cold bottle down on the white napkin in front of me, "and back you up for the next one." He then places an upside down shot glass next to my beer.

"Thanks," I say.

When Ben is standing at the opposite side of the bar, Melanie seems a bit more relaxed. She holds onto the stem of her martini glass, but doesn't drink it. She slowly twirls the

glass in front of her, by its long stem, and stares over at Ben intently watching his every move. Again, she purses her lips together and says, "I know about you and David. In high school."

Her eyes are still fixed on the opposite side of the bar. She stares at nothing with her lips pushed tightly together.

"What do you know about me and David?"

"That you used to blow him in Superman's Forest." She stops and watches her martini glass as she continues to slowly spin it in her hand. With a deep breath, Melanie picks up the glass and drinks down most of it.

I stop for a second and think about the approach I'm gonna take. I could lie to Melanie. Tell her that everyone always made up rumors about me because I was different. Or tell her bits of the truth that I've never told anyone before. How in the second grade everyone started calling me "*Fag*" and how the name calling only stopped when I was in college. How my aunts and uncles even called me "sissy" or "weak" or "joto" when I was a little boy. Or how I had never kissed or even touched anyone until David followed me into Superman's Forest that one day. In high school, I was afraid all the time. Fear filled my life and suppression became my greatest talent. I would have never come onto David, or talked to him about being gay, because I was too afraid of getting caught. I was afraid of people finding out about me and letting everyone know that what they were saying about me was true. That Diego was a faggot. That I was a *faggot* who was messing around with the most popular guy in high school, and I was loving every minute of it.

I pick up my beer and take a big swig. "Actually, Mel," I say. I know she hates it when people call her Mel, but I don't care. "My first time in Superman's Forest with David. He blew me. And he was really good at it."



Melanie looks up from her drink and stares me in the eyes. “*Faggot*,” she says.

“*Bitch*,” I reply.

“I knew it.”

“What? That you’re a *bitch*.”

“No,” she says. I can see tears in her eyes but she starts to laugh. “Well, yes, I’m a bitch. I’m a bitch, Diego! Is that what you want to hear? I don’t know what the fuck I’m doing here, and I feel like a total *bitch* because I had to see you and find out the truth. Hear it from you directly.”

“Well, the truth is. What? Twenty seven years ago I messed around with your ex-husband in high school.”

“No,” she says. She wipes the tears from her eyes but still continues to smile. “I guess. that twenty seven years ago you knew the truth about David, and I just found out about it two years ago.”

“Melanie, I’m sorry. I don’t know what to say.”

“No,” she begins. “I wanted to hear it from you and now I have. But let me ask you this.” She tilts her head back and blinks away more tears. She exhales and breathes in again slowly. “I know you probably don’t want to talk about this. But. anyway. did you ever get married after high school?”

“You mean to a woman?”

“Yes! To a woman!”

“No. I never wanted to be with a woman, ever.”

“Then if David’s gay, and knew he was gay when he was fucking around with you in high school, why did he marry me?” Melanie laughs. It’s an uncomfortable laugh. Uncomfortable for her and really

uncomfortable for me. It’s a laugh that’s forced out of her, like that question that’s apparently been driving her crazy for quite some time. She exhales slowly and breathes in again. “Please, Diego. All I’m looking for is some kind of answer.”

“I don’t know.” I finish my beer and push the upside down shot glass forward. I know I need another one.

“Melanie, it was the eighties. He was in the closet. Everyone I knew was in the closet, especially in Catholic school. Come on.”

“But in high school, you were different. Everyone knew you were gay, but no one ever talked about it. And it was like you didn’t care.”

“I fucking hated high school, because I knew it was not for me. All that social shit in high school. I was terrible at all of that. I was lucky though, I knew my life would change in college, and I just worked my way through high school knowing that I would go away to college and leave all that shit behind me. And I drank a lot too, so that helped.” Ben places my next beer down in front of me. With a quick nod from me, he again places the upside down shot glass back on the bar next to my beer.

“So did your life change in college?”

“Yeah!” I stop myself because I know I’m starting to shout. “I didn’t need to fit in in college, I just needed to do well. And I did. I mean I got my bachelor’s and then went back for my master’s and I just finished my PhD last year. I liked college a lot, I guess. I did spend about fifteen years getting my degrees.”

“So you’re. . .”

“Yeah. On campus. I’m Doctor Martinez.”

“And what do you do for a living?”

“I teach over in the Graduate College at U of A.”



“You teach what?”

“I teach technical and professional writing. I’m mainly a writer. I write a bunch of fiction, stories and books, but my real job is teaching writing to undergraduate research students. I show them how to document their work in written reports and journal articles. You know, for presentation and publication.”

“Nice,” Melanie says and orders another martini.

“What about you, Melanie?” I sit up straight in my chair and lean closer to her. “What do you do when David’s not around?”

“I sell real estate.” She stops and watches Ben place a new martini in front of her. “And I’m a full-time mom. David’s good with the kids, but taking care of them is all my responsibility.”

I look away from Melanie and there’s another uncomfortable silence. I know she wants me to answer her question, but I’m just not quite sure what I want to say. I think about David and what he was like in high school, which again was twenty seven years ago. I try to imagine what David is like now, as a forty five year old man, just coming out of the closet, and starting his life as hopefully an out-and-proud-gay-man. I try, but I can’t remember anything about David’s family, or what his life was like away from school. We never talked about stuff like that. All we did was mess around. While David was considerate and affectionate while we were together in Superman’s Forest, I never really saw him, or spoke to him outside of the forest. David was a different person when we were together, behind the trees, and we always avoided seeing each other at school. David would do his thing, and I would do mine. And then we’d hook up in Superman’s Forest and that was our release. The forest was our safe place, where we could be gay boys who enjoyed each other’s company. We could be alone together. Away from the world and what we were expected to be. We could be young

homosexuals who really didn’t talk to each other but definitely knew how to please each other and have a good time together.

“Melanie,” I begin. “You’re the one who knows David best. My God, you just spent the last twenty seven years together. You know he must have married you because he loved you. Don’t you?”

“I don’t know,” she replies. “David loves himself and his perfect little life.”

“You’re a part of his perfect little life. You’re the wife who helped him get to where he is today. Look, Melanie.” I lean forward and place both of my elbows on the bar. I try to look her in the face but she’s still staring forward, watching Ben’s every move. “As men. as American men, we’re raised with this expectation of who and what we are to be in life. Everyone, especially back in the eighties, expects a young man to marry the perfect young woman, get a job, buy a house, pop out a few kids, and mow his fucking lawn the rest of his life. I think for David it was just a lot easier for him to give into that life and those expectations. I mean, that’s what he’s achieved with you, right? You’re the perfect wife, he’s got the perfect job, and I’m thinking he’s got perfect kids. But now. what kind of life does he have now? He still has you as his perfect first wife with his perfect little family. And he still has you to help him maintain that part of his life. But also. now he’s out of the closet, and he’s still able to enjoy a great deal of that life. That life that you helped him establish.” Melanie stares forward and begins to slowly spin her martini again. “A lot of married couples divorce and go on to have separate lives, but lives they still seem to share with their first spouses. Especially if there are children involved. What makes you and David and your relationship any different now that he’s admitted to being gay? Did he cheat on you? Or are you upset that he lied to you and pretended to be something he’s not?”

“He never cheated on me,” Melanie replies, oddly calm. She looks away from Ben.



She turns her head toward me but stares away from my face. “At least he said he never cheated on me. He said the only man he’s ever been with is you.”

“Wow,” I reply. I didn’t mean to say anything. The word just slipped out of my mouth and I’m kinda regretting it now. “Anyway. go on.”

“He told me, Diego.” She lifts her head, now staring me directly in the eyes. She purses her lips together again, and I can see that hungry and determined look on her face. “He said he knew that he was going to be okay. I mean. be okay coming out of the closet now, because he knows that there are gay men like you in the world. Somehow. he knows that you’re in a relationship. He knows about you and Steve, and that you’ve been together a long time. He said he didn’t want to come and find you, and try and start a relationship with you, but that he wants to find someone just like you. And have a relationship like you and Steve.”

“Wow.” There it is again. I clench my teeth together not knowing what else to say.

“That’s also why I wanted to come and find you. I wanted to know what you are like now, and I wanted to meet Steve. I guess I wanted to have a better understanding of what’s happening to David, and what he’s looking for now.”

“Wow.” I’m dumbfounded, and literally can’t think of anything else to say. I just look down and drink my beer.

After a few more seconds of silence, Melanie adds, “Yeah. so that’s all I really wanted to say. I can see now that you’re all freaked out, so I’m gonna go back to my perfectly fucked-up-little-life and leave you alone.”

“Wow.” This time I say it in a long, drawn out tone.


“Great, Diego. Thanks, you’ve been

really helpful.” She leans forward on the bar and pulls her heavy purse closer to her. “Yeah. good luck with the teaching and the writing. Maybe you can even write a little story about you, me, and David. That is. if you get hard up for something to write about.” I continue to stare forward.

“Just do me a favor.” She stops and waits for some kind of a reply from me. I turn and stare at her. “Just don’t make me out to be a big *bitch*, okay? You know. like how you used to always call me a bitch in high school.”

“Oh, honey,” I reply. I purse my lips together tightly, trying to hold back my smile. I step down from my bar stool and swig the rest of my beer. “I’m a writer, and I’m good, but I ain’t that good.” I pick up my upside down shot glass, smile, and head for the inside bar. I need to find Steve and tell him the rest of the story.

Andrew L. Huerta lives in Tucson, Arizona where he has spent the past 15 years in higher education teaching/advising students who are the first in their families to attend college. After completing his MA in Creative Writing and PhD in Education, he is now finishing up a collection of short stories entitled, *A Different Man*. His short stories have appeared in such publications as *Creating Iris*, *The Storyteller*, *The Portable Wall*, and *evernight*. For more information please visit: www.andrewluerta.com





Happy Pr i de!

From
The
Round Up

Hi Rainbow Blowers,

Thanks to everyone who submitted to The Roundup's Pride edition! Hope everyone has enjoyed the celebration between these covers and continue celebrating with a fierce drink and fiercer people. Now go have an extra drink for the editors.

Cheers!
The Roundup

