

Moonlit Lemons

The street was sunny and green with a pinkish-red hue due to the blossoming spring flowers. Stella walked briskly down the stone-paved path leading to her best friends' door. The afternoon sun glistened on her damp cheeks.

Ding-Dong! Exclaimed the doorbell as Stella checked her watch.

"Oh, hi, La. What's up?" asked Cindy, pretending she hadn't known who it was when really she'd known all along. Many of Stella's friends called her La. For one, it was the last syllable of her name; the second was that her soprano voice was so amazing that she was in the church choir, the chamber choir, and had won many awards throughout her sixteen years of existence.

"May I come in?" La asked urgently.

"No. You just have to stand there all day." Cindy replied sarcastically, opening the door to admit Stella, and closing it behind her. Cindy directed her to the couch and they sat down.

Stella told her how her boyfriend, Franz, had dumped her. Cindy sympathized with her and they hugged. Cindy's twin brother, Tom, was in the kitchen making tea for her.

"Tom, La needs something to drink, please provide it for her." Tom brought out two glasses of ice with a slice of lemon in each, as well as Cindy's tea, sitting in the chair opposite the girls.

Tom had had a crush on Stella ever since the second grade. He never told her this, though, because she didn't seem to like him as more than a friend.

"Thanks, Tom." Stella sniffed into her lemoned ice. Stella was glad that her two best friends were there to comfort her. They always were, but she was glad, just the same.

"I don't know how you two can drink that stuff!" Cindy cried in disgust. Her two best friends chuckled, they always did. *Good, she thought, La needs a laugh right now.*

Cindy knew her brother had a crush on Stella, but it hadn't ruined their friendship yet, so she didn't mind. She actually thought they'd make a cute couple, but she was -surprisingly- afraid to meddle, for fear of losing two best friends. If La went away, and Tom became just an annoying brother, she would be very sad and lonely. So she didn't meddle with them – she had to content herself with playing match-maker for the rest of the students in their school.

"Come on, give it a try!" teased Tom as he waved his lemon slice in Cindy's face.

"I have," she grunted, pulling back so she wouldn't smell its sour odor. The taste of the lemon would have made her sick.

Stella giggled a little, though her voice felt ragged. "Oh, come on, be nice, Tom."

She smiled, leaning forward and gently slapped his hand, which he withdrew. Stella knew that she and Tom both liked the glasses of ice and lemon because they could either let the ice melt or suck on the flavored ice cubes. Stella, for one, liked having options.

Stella had only been in three romantic relationship – two of which didn't count. When she was six she had “married” Steven Pink because he was cute and he was nice to her on the playground, despite her awkward clumsiness. That lasted about a month. Then, in fifth grade, she had gone out with Tony McPhat because he had asked her to and she was single. Seven months later he had dumped her for Cecelia-Merideth Jinx who had stunning blue eyes and glittering blonde hair. However, neither of those counted.

When Stella turned fifteen, she fell deeply in love, as much as a fifteen-year-old can understand love, with Franz Coax, the pitcher for the school's baseball team. They had gone to dinner and a movie many times; he had even taken her to a drive-in movie, which was romantic because Stella was obsessed with the 1950s. Their first kiss had been magical.

However, on their one year anniversary, which he had forgotten, he had reluctantly dumped her. He claimed it was because his dad wanted him to get a college scholarship, which he couldn't do if he kept skipping practice to spend time with her. She'd felt his interest slipping for a month, though, so she wasn't sure she really believed his story. Besides, if he truly loved his sport, why would he skip practice? She'd never asked him to do that and he'd never told her he had.

Stella had liked him a lot, so it was painful that he didn't feel the same. She healed quickly from these sorts of things, though she couldn't explain why. She still felt that something was missing in her romantic life.

Cindy suggested a sleepover, since Tom didn't get home from work until eleven.

“Oh! Speaking of which, I've gotta run. Bye girls! See you in the morning!” he drained his glass of lemoned-ice and grabbed his coat as he rushed out the door.

“As I was saying, tomorrow night Mom and Dad are having a fancy ball type party. I thought that maybe you could stay overnight and come to the party tomorrow. They said Tom and I could each invite a friend, and we both want you,” Cindy explained.

“I'd love to, but....I'll have to ask my mom first.”

“Okay, well we already cleared it with our parents. Obviously Tom can't be part of our sleepover because he's a boy – ew.”

Stella guffawed. “Aw come on, it's not like it would be like that. He's Tom!”

“Maybe he changes during the witching hour?” Cindy wiggled her fingers at Stella's face, making her laugh harder.

“Yeah, right!”

“Still, rules are rules,” Cindy said soberly.

Stella nodded as she looked through her bag for her cellphone, but realized she must have left it at home. Cindy handed the landline to Stella, who dialed her mother's work number.

“Okay. So, I brought *Grease*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Oklahoma*, *Anastasia*, and *Hercules* – the animated version,” listed Stella.

“Great! I can make popcorn, we have lemons and ice -ugh- and, obviously, Reese’s cups,” Cindy replied enthusiastically.

Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups were the all-time favorite candy of both girls. It had brought them together in Kindergarten and whenever they had sleepovers, it was their tradition to watch romantic movies and eat at least a dozen packages of the chocolatey-peanut butter candy, each.

“I propose a toast,” suggested Cindy solemnly.

“Yes - to Cindy - the best friend a girl could ask for!” Stella exclaimed.

“No – to La – the sweetest girl in the galaxy!” Cindy chimed.

“A compromise – to being best friends forever,” La supplied.

“Here! Here!” Cindy agreed in her deepest voice. They started laughing as they gently bumped their Reese’s cups together and took a bite.

Cindy pressed PLAY on the DVD remote and the theme song to *Grease* began to play. They sang along to all the words. At certain points they jumped up and began to dance, it’s just that kind of song.

After they had watched every movie and eaten all of the candy and popcorn, they headed into Cindy’s room for a pillow fight and a game of Truth or Dare, during which they eventually fell asleep. Eventually happened to come at about two in the morning.

“So, how did you sleep last night, Tom?” Stella asked when Tom came down the stairs at ten o’clock the next morning.

“Well, it was really hard to sleep at all, what with all the shouting,” he teased, winking at her.

“Oh. Yeah, well, sorry about that. It’s just that Cindy wouldn’t let me sleep with her pink teddy bear,” she joked, laughing as Cindy stumbled zombie-like down the stairs.

“Huh?” she mumbled incoherently. Unlike Stella and Tom, she wasn’t a morning person. She yawned. “What’s fur brk-uh-breakfast, Tm, uh Tom?” she asked sleepily.

“Hot, hot oatmeal. Just the way you like it. With a side of charcoal biscuit and blazing coffee,” Tom replied, placing the blackened biscuit on her plate and the mug in her outstretched hand.

As he served Stella he asked, “Hey, La, you want a biscuit?” She eyed it reproachfully.

“Uh – no thanks. I’m on a diet. A charcoal biscuit free diet,” she teased.

They sat down beside Cindy, each holding a glass of lemoned ice that was rapidly melting. Tom turned on the *Justice League* Saturday morning cartoon in their DVD player.

As they put their dishes in the sink, Stella asked, “So. You excited for the party? I always love dressing up fancy.”

Tom replied, "Um. A little. It'll be weird though, 'cause Mom and Dad's work friends'll be there, you know?"

Stella nodded.

Cindy didn't answer, because, as was observed previously, she was not a morning person.

"You girls take forever to get ready for a party!" Tom jokingly admonished Cindy as she stepped down the stairs in her glittering red dress and high heels, her short hair in a red hairband.

"Forever and then some, for La," Cindy pointed out.

"Or at least forever and fifteen minutes," she added when Stella finally exited Cindy's room and gracefully strode down the staircase.

Tom didn't say anything, except for a muttered "wow" of awe, since his mouth was open anyway.

The bodice of Stella's turquoise dress was tight, but the skirt was loose and flowing. The skirt dipped just below her ankles, so that only the tips of the sea green high heels she wore could be seen. Her hair was done up in a tight knot behind her head. She wore an opal necklace with a set of earrings to match.

Stella smiled at her best friends. "Sorry I took so long," she apologized, waving her hand in front of Tom's eyes.

Tom blinked and closed his mouth, then he blushed. "Uh – you look, um, really pretty."

"Yeah, you totally do," agreed Cindy, jumping to cover for her brother.

"Uh, thanks." Stella blushed, unsure how to take such a compliment.

Ding-Dong! Mr. and Mrs. Blakefield rushed to admit their guests.

Stella watched the moon from her position on the back deck that overlooked the sea.

"Beautiful, isn't it?"

Stella jumped. Then she nodded, seeing that it was only Tom. They stood for a while and watched how it shimmered upon the waves.

Stella broke the silence. "Pretty dull in there, huh?"

"Yeah," Tom replied absentmindedly. "Stella, you want to know what's prettier than that moon up there?" he asked in a whisper.

Stella doubted there could be anything. "What?"

"You."

They were quiet for a while, each looking into the other's eyes.

"Hey, Stella?" Tom spoke eventually.

"Yeah?" she whispered.

"Will you dance with me?"

She nodded.

They didn't seem to notice the chill of the air or that the guests were leaving as they spun around and around on the deck.

They had left their lemoned ice on the edge of the deck and the wet lemons glowed slightly under the brilliantly beautiful moon.