

The Balcony to Wonder

By Mitch Wisniewski

Otto St. Orville hurried up the stairs, he could hear Jasper calling to him, his melodious baritone floating down the sloping marble staircase of the old stately Albany mansion.

“Otto my dear, I believe I’ve done it!” Jasper Havemeyer bellowed.

Otto pushed open the thick mahogany door to Jasper’s invention room. He took in the deep wood floors and bookshelves, strewn with gears, cogs, powders, and precious metals. Jasper was a neo-chemist and his workspace showed the very depths of his fascination with the science of magic.

“November 14th, 1923. The day the great alchemist Jasper Havemeyer transcends the veils between this world and that of the faie. Mark your calendar, my darling.”

Otto cringed. Jasper was quite overly familiar with him, always calling him darling or dear, sometimes even sweetheart after a bottle or two of smuggled red wine. Nothing was really illegal for someone as well connected as a Havemeyer. Jasper was unmarried, a relative oddity given his family's massive fortune and status within the New York society scene He had rejected it though. Fleeing Manhattan for the relative peace and quiet of the Albany country estate.

Society life was stifling, was what he had once told Otto, he needed a place to exhale.

“There you go, Jasper,” Otto said, placing the vials of noxious liquids that had been requested from the cellar storeroom onto the exquisite marble workbench.

“Good. I’m glad you’ve done away with that ‘sir’ business, my dear,”

Otto blushed. He had tried to maintain a sense of formality when he had first started working with Jasper, after graduating top of his class from Cornell. But the long nights

translating ancient texts, days spent sunning themselves by the grand pool, and bottles upon bottles of good single malt whiskey had worn him down. ‘Mr. Havemeyer’ had eventually become ‘sir’ and was now just ‘Jasper’ or ‘Jas’ when Otto was feeling particularly casual.

“The portal will be strongest at the solstice but I simply cannot wait. We must see their world darling. This is the new frontier!” Jasper was practically glowing.

They had spent months tirelessly etching symbols, runes, and spells on the french doors that led to the grand balcony. They had coated the glass with tinctures, oils, and potions. All that was left was to supply it with an electric current strong enough to open the doorway into the faie world, which resided right under their noses. Otto had always wanted to explore, to document, to take samples, to bring their art and culture to a new society, and be astounded by the innovations of that new world. They had cracked the key with the addition of electricity, a mistranslated symbol that actually meant “power” had sent them into high gear last month, and it was finally time for the two to put their theory to the test.

“Are you ready, darling?” Jasper said, his muscled and tanned arm resting firmly on the power lever, deep brown eyes gleaming.

“Let’s go to the faie world.”

Otto placed his hand on the accompanying lever and together they pulled down. The room whirred to life, thick copper coils shooting sparks, the acrid smell of burning solutions sharp in the air. Jasper flipped the final switch. The room hummed and buzzed, the electricity was palpable, coursing through the air in waves of energy. The glass door buzzed and glowed red, the white-painted mahogany catching fire now. The energy built, the room grew hotter than they had anticipated, the ear-splitting whine of the gears crescendoed and the room exploded in a

bright light and a shower of sparks. Jasper's tall, muscular silhouette was thrown to the ground and Otto was almost catapulted back with the surprising force.

“Did we do it?” Jasper asked, deep voice raspy from the smoke.

Otto blinked, his vision blurry and a knot already forming on his head from where he had hit the bookshelf. The glass door lay shattered before them. No sign of the faie world on the other side.

“I'm sorry, dear,” Otto said, pulling his lean frame up from the ground.

He walked over to Jasper and brushed his thick black hair out of his eyes. A tear slid down Jasper's cheek.

“It didn't work,”

The hurt in Jasper's voice made Otto's heart shatter into more pieces than the door which lay before them. Jasper got up and walked out onto the balcony, feet crunching on shimmery broken glass. His tears almost froze in the bitter chill of November in Albany. They had just gotten the first snow of the season and powdery drifts covered the massive grounds of the estate, obscuring everything in a thick white blanket. Otto walked up behind Jasper slowly, placing a warm knit blanket around the slightly older man's broad shoulders.

“We will begin again tomorrow,” Otto said.

“And what do we do tonight?” Jasper said, turning to Otto and locking his brown eyes with Otto's blue ones.

An unspoken jolt of electricity passed through them, propelling Otto's lips up to Jasper's. He had expected Jasper to pull away, disgusted as he had been that first time during one of their late-night swims. But Jasper didn't pull away, he pushed forward, lips meeting with a passionate

intensity that Otto had never felt before. They stayed that way for a while, arms and bodies intertwined until Otto finally pulled away, distracted by a bright flash below.

“Jasper! Look,” he exclaimed.

The snowbank under the balcony had become a shimmering puddle, waves of iridescent energy offering flashes of a technicolor gardenscape on the other side of the portal.

“Well darling, away we go,” Jasper said.

Otto slipped his hand into Jasper’s and they climbed up on the banister, locked eyes once more, and jumped.