CHELSEA STATION

EDITED BY JAMESON CURRIER

JULY 2014
Jameson Currier’s debut novel, Where the Rainbow Ends, moved me to tears more than once and, simply put, is one of the best pieces of gay literature I have ever read. Rather than focusing on and wallowing in the heavy melodrama that the AIDS epidemic seems to produce in most writers, Currier shows both the highs and lows. The lives of these incredibly well-drawn, three-dimensional people encompass all of the emotion that is found in gay/lesbian life. The book is about creating a sense of family, and most of all, it is about hope. In Robbie, Currier has created a gay Everyman we can all identify with, love, and root for. This is one novel that I was sorry to see end. With this work, Currier has established himself as one of the preeminent gay novelists, not just of the 1990s, but of all time. This book should be required reading for every gay man, period.”
—Greg Herren, Impact

“Defiant and elegaic.”
The Village Voice

“Courageous.”
Edge
July 2014

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Design by Peachboy Distillery & Design.
Anthony Zedan is a native San Franciscan poet who spent ten years teaching English in Kyoto and Kobe, Japan. He earned his Master of Arts degree in English from the College of Notre Dame in Belmont, California. He spends his days daydreaming of a better, kinder world. He owes his active imagination to hours of play alone as a child and loving parents and many other mother and father figures who all encouraged the best in him.
Ocean Beach

The ocean has an education to offer, after raining hard this morning, the cold wind off the coast whips around concrete corners ruffling silk neckties and toppling baseball caps.

The Pacific educates us in infinite waves of incremental particles, knowledge perpetually playing out among schools of silver and blue fins in formation, seaweed and jellyfish sway and extended tentacles gaining briny leverage.

Old timbers from a lost clipper ship coming through the beach, reburied overnight.

Museums molded my immature teenage brain, unmanageable mind, but the fresh breeze of the expansive bay awakened my longing for a mystery only the body could grasp.

My eyes have mapped out your hands and lips, charted out your waist, your legs and circumnavigated your naked hips with my lips; my mind reels like sand imprinted with the curve of your every finger and toe.

Young men run and leap from cliffs and fly on nylon wings, soar and land as adept as tireless seabirds, among baked beach strollers in windbreakers. City streetlights behind the fog burn otherworldly and guide us up and down her steep slopes and harrowing hills.

Sandy steps lead down to Ocean Beach and a howling wind exposes faces, old graffiti, screeching seagulls, empty green beer bottles and opened colorful wrappers, the sun sets on this world and all evidence of desire washes away.

—Anthony Zedan
Are you there God? It's me, the Sodomite
Joshua Aaron Jones

God, are you listening? It’s me, the Sodomite.
You probably only remember me as Joshua. Not the one with the trumpet and the quasi-marching band in Jericho. I’m the one with a music degree, a law degree, and no marching band (a little bitter about that one this time of year) in Florida. I know it’s been a while, unless you count my little short prayers every time I miss a practice question for the bar exam, but I was hoping you could help me out.

See, Hubby and I have to go to my hometown this weekend in north Alabama because my brother is getting married. We didn’t think this day would ever come. He had, after all, already sprayed litters of non-marital children all over the county. Well, actually just four. I guess the Christian right finally convinced him of the importance of the sanctity of marriage, albeit four
babies too late. It probably would've been easier if they urged the sanctity of condoms, or at least the common sense of prophylactics, but I digress. He and my soon-to-be sister-in-law (and her three kids from her three previous marriages) will certainly be a shining example of how precious and pure the martial institution should be. I’m so glad the very fabric upon which our great Christian nation was founded, the family, will be strengthened by yet another heterosexual marriage. It might be dysfunctional from the get-go, but I just know that their heterosexual practices will cleanse any problems away, like the blood of Jesus Christ himself. Blessed be.

And this additional sacred marriage comes just in time! I feared anarchy was upon us, what with all this gay marriage business and the collapse of the Defense of Marriage Act, the President following the gay agenda to a T. Democracy is hanging by a thread! I just know, God, that with every heterosexual marriage in the United States, our place as your chosen people is ensured. Not like Iraq—HA! It must be full of sodomites! Bless US God, in the United States, not those homosexual Iraqis! I can feel the Shekhina Glory beaming upon us with the affirmation of penile and vaginal union! Hallelujah for heterosexuality and the sanctity of marriage! Yesss, Lord, hallelujah for heterosexuality! Hallelujah!! Amen! Ummmhmmm, that’s right!

Anyway, I’m the best man. I’m not sure if I’m the best man because my brother and his fiancée wanted to incorporate family into the wedding (my other brother is in the wedding as well) or if it’s just because having me do it meant one less tuxedo to rent, as I own one. My guess is: probably a little of both. For an Alabama redneck, he’s incredibly supportive of my less sanctimonious and abominable union with Hubby. My duty as best man very well could be a sincere sentiment. I mean, after his fiancée reminded him to do so, he bluntly and unemotionally asked me five seconds before he walked out the door at the end of his weekend visit here last month. I guess that was machoman redneck speak for, “I love you. It would really mean a lot to me if you would be my best man.” Never-the-less, thank you, Heavenly Father, for fulfilling the false prophecy my mother holds that my brother and I will one day be the best of friends and call each other every five minutes, like she and her sister.

So, I have to wear my tuxedo, the one I haven’t tried on since last year when I sang with the Gay Men’s Chorus. You remember? When I wasn’t nearly as fat-assed as now? And God, I’m afraid. I just pray, God, that you will surround everyone at the ceremony with an invisible shield to protect their eyes from the buttons that could ricochet from my waistband at any moment. I ask, Heavenly Father, that you’ll let my cummerbund be a satin barrier, in case I should not be able to hold my breath through the entire ceremony and reception. I can fit into it today, but I can’t guarantee tomorrow. Eating one carb or grain of salt could change everything. I just thank you, God, that it’s part of Americana for a wedding party to be ill-fitted in its formal wear and that my jacket, which due to your wonder-working powers still fits perfectly, will partially cover the bulging seam and cloak my ass crack from the summer breeze. Oh, and please don’t let my three-year-old nephew drop the wedding ring from that little pillow, because the sound of my ripping pants, as I bend down to retrieve it, might burst the ear drums of the dearly beloved heterosexuals gathered there together.

And God, when I’m standing beside my partner of eight years, who my family clearly knows I'm "gay together" with and who they’ve already met on a number of occasions, and they ask me, “you ain’t got-chew no girl-frand yit,” that you’ll give me the patience to not hurl myself or any of their NASCAR memorabilia over the waterfall nearby. I know it will be hard for them to recall the reality of my refusal to give up sodomy while they are still blinded from the dazzling
perfection of the heterosexual wedding they just witnessed. It will only be with your firm hand that I will be able to restrain myself from angering Charlton Heston and breaking about six commandments all at once.

Well, that's all, God. Thanks for listening to a Sodomite like me. Bless Hubby, the kitties, my family, all of our friends, my readers, and anyone who votes against Republicans.

In Sandi Patty’s name, I pray. Amen.

Joshua Aaron Jones is a music educator turned lawyer who resides in Pensacola, Florida. When he's not writing or solving others' legal woes, he is out for adventure with his husband, two old cats, and a puppy.
“William Sterling Walker is a wonderful writer, fluent, warm, intelligent, and real. His stories about gay life in New Orleans are firmly rooted in place, and all his characters, gay and straight, are observed with a wise heart and a deep soul.”
—Christopher Bram, author of Gods and Monsters and Eminent Outlaws: The Gay Writers Who Changed America

“Desire is a sensuous, nostalgic, and evocative collection of stories set in sultry New Orleans before that dreamy dream got washed away.”
—Valerie Martin, winner of the Orange Prize for Property

“These are stories that ask to be lived in—gorgeous, moody, sophisticated—not unlike the vividly conjured New Orleans that William Sterling Walker’s haunted characters inhabit, flee from, inevitably return to. Walker is a brilliant guide through the labyrinth of this city and these seething lives, fluent in the mutually reinforcing tropes of desire and regret.”
—Paul Russell, author of The Unreal Life of Sergey Nabokov

“This beautiful collection is not so much a set of stories as an intricate song cycle, one that arranges and rearranges recurrent fragments of memory and sensation—light, fragrance, and music—like the tesserae of a mosaic, the shifting patterns converging into a haunting panorama of the life of our ecstatic, fated generation of gay men.”
—Mark Merlis, author of American Studies and An Arrow’s Flight

“Desire is dreamy and affecting, stories of a New Orleans that was gone before Katrina ever got there. It’s been a while since I’ve read a collection so well written, so intricately composed, with such beautiful and evocative descriptions of a time and a place.”
—Caroline Fraser, author of God’s Perfect Child and Rewilding the World: Dispatches from the Conservation Revolution

“William Sterling Walker’s Desire feels to me like a welcome heir to Ethan Mordden’s classic Buddies—picking up perhaps where he left off and setting us down amid the lives, loves, and sexual adventures of a community of gay men in New Orleans. These linked stories are alternately poignant and seductive, and the structure is elegant and deceptively casual—they build in force until you feel like they belong to you, or you to them.”
—Alexander Chee, author of Edinburgh

“Full of vivid characters, Desire serves up a delicious slice of gay life in pre-Katrina New Orleans with plenty of nostalgia and heart, with stories as steamy and sassy as the city itself.”
—Jameson Fitzpatrick, Next

“A wonderful book. Walker’s characters are very real and he writes of them from his heart and he imbues his stories with sophistication that is truly a New Orleans characteristic.”
—Amos Lassen, Reviews by Amos Lassen

“This compilation of short stories stands to prove that gay men are not always the exuberant, funloving queens portrayed on TV. Each story looks at how New Orleans has played into the characters’ identities, how the city has shaped them, how it has sucked them in.”
—Katie Abate, Edge

“Desire is a guilty pleasure of a read, conversational and conspiratorial. It’s almost as if these people are welcoming you into their private chats, dishing out the latest neighborhood gossip about who picked up whom, whose ex is now someone else’s current.”
—Sandy Leonard, Lambda Literary

“Equal doses of wit, longing, poignancy, hope, seduction and loss, all woven together by this talented author. I give it a full five stars out of five.”
—Bob Lind, Echo Magazine

Desire: Tales of New Orleans
by William Sterling Walker
978-1-937627-02-7
$18
Also available in digital editions
Set in the 1980’s, *Dirty One* follows a pack of adolescent characters who live in the acid-drenched, suburban town known as Leominster, Massachusetts—the plastics capital of America, as well as the birthplace of Johnny Appleseed.

Praise for *Dirty One*

“The young adults that populate Graves’ fiction are skewed, skittering through their adolescence with a drug- and demon-fueled intensity that leaves the reader breathless and aching to sit down with these poor kids to let them know that things do, indeed, get better. Still, the kids are only following the examples of their even more fucked up parents, most of whom have no business having kids in the first place. But the drama… The drama is delicious and makes for some of the finest reading I’ve had in months. Graves is one of the most original young voices writing for our community today—so pick up a copy of *Dirty One* and you can tell your friends that you were a fan from the beginning.”
—Jerry Wheeler, *Out in Print*

“As debuts go, they don’t get much better than this. Graves, a child of the ’80s, draws diligently on the banal pop culture totems of his adolescence—cassette tapes, pastel recliners, roller rinks, Walkmans, Mario Lopez in Tiger Beat. His characters, however, are far from banal. They are antsy, angsty kids, some in their teens, some younger, consumed by jarring desires they can’t resist but don’t quite comprehend, anxious to shed their everyday skins but with barely any sense of the world beyond their suburban existence. And, boy, do they transgress. These stories brand Graves as a next-generation master of prose that is at once remorseless and refreshing.”
—Richard Labonté, *Bookmarks*

“A nostalgic saga of pre-teen drama. It’s like a Wham video with a polymorphous perverse underbelly and a Flock of Seagulls hairdo.”
—Sam Baltrusis, *Boston Spirit*

AVAILABLE FROM CHELSEA STATION EDITIONS
“A brilliant debut novel by Canadian writer Jeffrey Luscombe that explores the inner and outer life of a ‘latent homosexual,’ Joshua Moore. Luscombe revitalizes the over-romanticized ‘coming out’ novel by subjecting it to a cold shower of literary realism.”
—Dick Smart, Lambda Literary

“Shirts and Skins is a novel that will speak to anyone who has ever felt the inextricable bonds of the past, or felt the long shadow of family and home places as they strive towards the light of wholeness of identity and self-ownership. A first novel deeply felt and skillfully told, by a writer with insight, compassion, and talent to burn.”
—Michael Rowe, author of Enter, Night and Other Men’s Sons

“Shirts and Skins is authentic in its pathos, eloquent in its delivery, and well worth the read.”
—Kyle Thomas Smith, Edge

“Each story brilliantly captures a mood and paints a vivid picture... I’m not a huge fan of coming out stories, but this one I can highly recommend, because I feel it is more about overcoming a lifetime of bad choices to finally savor that sweet wine of triumph. It is about battling one’s culture and past, to find one’s identity. Shirts and Skins is a story that, I feel, everyone can relate to.”
—Alan Chin, Examiner.com

“An intriguing, at times disturbing, peek into the mind of a character who is only half aware of his own feelings. Luscombe is clearly after something different in this book: it is less about coming out than it is about going in. Josh’s repression is far more interesting than his liberation, which is a much more familiar story. In his adherence to the closet, as in his father’s depression-fueled withdrawal from the world, we see the tragedy of self-denial. Unlike his father, though, Josh eventually finds the strength to pull himself out of denial and embrace his truth. It’s a journey that still resonates for us all.”
—Lewis DeSimone, Lambda Literary

“In the depths of despair, standing outside looking in, Josh touches the hearts of those who have lost their way to their dreams and aspirations. His inability to find himself finally leads to an epiphany of his hidden, yet acknowledged, desires.”
—American Library Association GLBTRT Newsletter
Lee Houck was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee and now lives in Brooklyn, NY. His stories, essays, poems, and interviews have appeared in numerous chapbooks anthologies, and journals in the U.S. and Australia, online at The Nervous Breakdown, and in his almost-monthly old-school zine, “Crying Frodo.” His debut novel, *Yield* was published by Kensington Books in 2010. More at LeeHouck.com.
This Nightlife

It’s 100 degrees in New York City, and the only thing that saves you, is the insane sparkling explosion of Dr. Brown’s Black Cherry Soda on your tongue, like the future’s version of what a cherry used to taste like, before the absence of bees eliminated them not only from our mouths, but from our memory. Then a stranger, a boy with cutoff jeans and a string of red plastic beads says, “Where is fashion in a time like this?”

—Acidic light, laid over the walls and floors, a bright blanket of paisley laser beams.

—You holding onto me, attaching yourself, saying, “This nightlife,” letting the idea hold in the air.

—Then, “I can’t do this anymore.”

—Lee Houck
OK. There’s something that you need to understand right away, before I go any further. We cars and trucks and vehicles have a certain ethic amongst ourselves. We call it Proper Vehicular Behavior or PVB. In our world, it is considered the greatest breach of etiquette to go against these principles of integrity. And first and foremost on the list is loyalty to one’s master, one’s owner, or, as set forth in the official Manual of Ethics, one’s driver.
It is my duty to explain these principles to you before I go any further with my story, so that you will understand the outrage I felt toward that...monster...the night of the full moon in Viagra’s driveway. At first I thought it would be pleasant to have a nice visit with a vehicle from another class, a class that most of my fellow sports cars look down upon. But I’m not that way. I have received from my master, Micky, the highest regard for all classes of people, animals, and vehicles.

But now I understand why this elitism prevails among my peers, as I experienced first-hand the vulgarity of the lower vehicles.

At first I thought it amusing to be conversing with this sort of uneducated, highway type; and I was more than willing to learn from the experience—and perhaps, to even have a few laughs. But apparently, they do not teach these vehicles any sort of proper manners or appropriate behavior for conversing with members of a higher class.

I didn’t mind so much that this red, vulgar monstrosity was trying to make the moves on me; I rather expected this and found it quite touching actually. But when she tried to reveal—and get me to actually see—the contents of what was hidden inside her derrière, I had to firmly bring the conversation to a halt. You see, this is just not done. I was profoundly appalled. First and foremost, we are loyal to our masters—and never, without exception, do we ever reveal the private contents of our masters’ belongings in any part of our vehicles: front seat, glove compartment, back seat or trunk. It is considered the highest breach of loyalty and etiquette.

Do you think I would ever reveal to another vehicle the contents of my trunk? I would rather have my carburetor replaced (and believe me, it is a very painful procedure) than tell any other vehicle such a thing. But this is just what the truck was trying to do, perhaps as a ploy to cozy up to me.

I had to say, “Stop it! Stop it! I’m going to put wax in my gears! I’m not interested in what lies inside your long behind—so stop telling me how important it is.”

We spent the rest of our visit in silence; and every time she made another attempt, I just ignored it. Thank the God of Junkyards that she never actually revealed it. I would have been mortified, just mortified. This is how I was brought up.

Now the reason why I’m telling you this is because, after such a beautiful drive with my master Micky, whom I love and respect and adore, we pulled into this parking lot type of place—and who should be there but this vulgar monstrosity whose name I will never repeat to you. And it was my cruel fate that night—in fact, two nights in a row—to have to sit next to her again and bear her improprieties and lack of education.

I decided that the best way to deal with the situation was with total silence, which is just what I did. Not a word to that mongrel.

Instead, I focused my attention on the two men standing between us, Micky and the driver of the cretin, who seemed like a perfect gentleman to me. Let me explain to you how our car-senses work, as you probably have no knowledge of them. We can see everything in front of us, but we cannot hear it; and conversely, we can hear everything that goes on inside us, but we cannot see it.

So at first I observed Micky approaching the gentleman man, a very handsome fellow indeed, and just the sort I’d had in mind for my master, after he finally dropped that whore of a girl he’d
been seeing. I simply refused to drive her anywhere; I simply refused. She was extremely vulgar too; a human version of our brazen friend over there.

By the way, do you prefer hearing this account in the past or the present? We vehicles are very versatile with such things, as we can’t quite comprehend the concept of tense; and past, present and future are all one to us. But I believe I’ve heard it said that humans need to be there in the moment or some such hogwash, so let me tell you this account as if you were actually there and watching it through my headlights.

Micky, with his adorable curly hair, is going over and shaking hands with the handsome man. They’re looking very serious. The handsome man doesn’t look happy at all. He almost looks like he could start a fight with Micky. But Micky is doing a lot of talking; he seems to be explaining something. The handsome man is listening. And now what’s happening is very strange: it almost looks like the handsome man is ready to punch Micky; but instead he starts to cry. It’s a very tender sight, this sturdy, strong man starting to cry. He quickly stops himself, though, and reaches for his red handkerchief in his back, left pocket.

Right now they don’t seem to be saying anything, and Micky is gently patting him on the back. They’re coming toward me. I’m ready. They’re coming my way. I think they’re coming inside. I’m very glad. I would very much like to offer a seat or a ride to this man. And I would love for us all to drive away and leave that vulgar vehicle alone by itself.

The doors are opening and now I can hear:

“Have a seat. Here, I’ll put on some music. What do you like?”

“All sorts of stuff, thanks. But I really don’t need music now. I’m just trying to get together what you told me. It’s a little bit of a shock.”

“Well, I thought it was important that you knew.”

“Yeah, I guess I’m glad that you told me. I don’t really know what to do about it, though.”

“Think it through and make the right decision. I just thought you should be informed.”

“Well, thanks, I’m a little blown away.”

“It’s OK. That’s perfectly natural. Would you like a beer? I’ve got some in my cooler here.”

“Sure, that’d be great.”

Micky is getting the beer and turns on my radio.

“Here you are, sir. Something seems to be wrong with my radio. I’ve put on the rock station but can only get classical. Hope that’s all right.”

I have been manipulating the circuitry of my radio, which I’ll tell you more about later. I want to set a certain kind of mood.

“Oh, fine, I like classical,” says the man.

“Do you? Well, do you know what this is? I can’t believe they’re playing this.”

“Sounds familiar.”

“Really?”

“Not sure.”
“It’s a work by Menotti about the Children’s Crusades. I know it because I sang in the children’s chorus when I was a boy—I got to be in it once. It was one of the highlights of my childhood.”

“Sounds like a great experience.”

“Oh, it was. And when I hear it as an adult, I realize how deep it is. But it’s very obscure; they hardly ever play it. It’s very sad too, about a bishop who gave the children permission to go on the Crusade—and then they all drowned. But he still hears their voices. I cry every time I hear it.”

“I guess we both cry, then.”

“Yeah, but I’m never ashamed of my tears. I’m never ashamed of anything I choose to do.”

Micky sounds really intense when he says this. And now there is a long silence. I think I can hear the sound of someone’s hand sliding across someone’s clothes. It’s a nice, massaging kind of sound.

The handsome man says, “Ahhhh.”

And Micky says, “Yeah, you just need to relax.”

And I hear the sound of a zipper being unzipped…and the handsome man says a longer “Ahhhhhh.” I love it when people feel good together on my seats.

The handsome man is starting to breathe harder…and now he’s starting to moan; but I know from past experience with Micky that it’s a good kind of moaning—not a painful kind at all. And now he says, “Oh, man, oh, man”—and he’s yelling a little, nice yelling—loud….

Everything has gotten very quiet suddenly.

Finally, Micky says, “Thank you, sir.”

And the man says, “No, thank you, sir!”

And now they’re laughing together.

After a few moments, Micky asks, “Who are you, Dave? The man who comes out of the sky to save our souls?” So that’s his name, Dave. A good name.

“Who am I?” he laughs. “I’m just a guy who likes to make people feel good. If I can make someone feel good, if I can make someone happy, then I’m happy.”

“What a philosophy!”

“Yeah, well, it’s a philosophy that works pretty good for me.”

“Oh, it works pretty good for me, too,” says my master. I can tell he is smiling.

“Listen,” says Dave, “I’ve been driving all day and I need to get some shut-eye. Next time I’m up your way, I’ll give you a buzz.”

“That’d be great; I’ll look forward to that.”

And they open my doors and get out. They’re shaking hands in a very macho, masculine way…and now Micky is coming back inside and starting me up.

“Raven!” he shouts. “Let’s go home, boy!”
And he presses my pedal down real hard and strong all the way back on Route 99.

*     *     *

The first light is starting to rise out of the east as I sit in our driveway, awaiting the new day. I’m preparing a special treat for my master when he wakes up. I’ve only done it a few times, but I know he loves it. It’s a chance for us to communicate together. They never put a clock inside me, but luckily a tiny computer chip fell in when I was on the assembly line, which enables me to show the time when I so desire. And I’m making the radio say 2:38, the time when the high peak of happiness between Micky and Dave seemed to occur.

I hope that when Micky sees 2:38, he’ll remember that time of great joy, because I love Micky and want him to be happy. I know that too often he has a troubled soul. And I care for him in the deepest way a car can care for his master. OK, 2:38 it is. Done.

It’s getting brighter now; and the dawning sunlight is making a nice reflection on my shiny, black hood. As the sun comes up and I wait here in the driveway for my master to take us on our first exciting ride of the day, I must confess, in spite of my previous antagonism, that I can’t help but wonder: What could be hidden in the back of that big red truck? What is back there that could possibly be so important?

What could it be?

I wonder.

Kyler James has led an unusual life. As an actor, he studied with the great Stella Adler and played a number of little parts in major films and soaps. But Kyler is best known for his work as a psychic counselor, which he’s been doing for twenty-three years. A graduate of NYU, his stories and columns have appeared in several magazines and journals, and he is the author of a novel, *The Secret of the Red Truck*, which was published this year. His short story, “The Loneliest Man on Earth,” appears in the current issue of *Ashé Journal*. You can visit him at [www.kylerjames.com](http://www.kylerjames.com).
The Secret of the Red Truck

a novel by
kyler james
Three Brothers
by Peter Ackroyd
Nan A. Talese
978-0-385-53861-9
244 pp., hardcover, $26.95

Reviewed by Keith Glaeske

Three Brothers tells the intertwined stories of Harry, Daniel, and Sam Hanway, born on a postwar council estate in Camden Town, London. Their lives begin with a curious coincidence: each brother is born on the same date, over three consecutive years. When the boys are ten, nine, and eight years old, their mother vanishes; their father, who spends more time at work than at home, effectively disappears as well from the boys' lives. From that point on, they each carve out a separate, and distinct, life-path: Harry becomes a journalist, Daniel an academic, and Sam a ne'er-do-well.

As much as it is about the three Hanway brothers, this novel is equally about 1960s London; it begins in Camden Town, but soon it follows the three brothers to the newspapers of Fleet Street, to London publishing houses, from the shadowy slums of Limehouse and Hackney to the decadence of Chelsea. Sam especially, after losing his first job, begins wandering the streets and parks of London; the reader joins the brothers as they walk the London streets, ride the Underground, and eat and drink in a variety of pubs. Even Daniel, who manages to escape to Cambridge, returns regularly to tryst with the petty thief and hustler Sparkler, and eventually begins writing a book about the writers of London. Although the novel is firmly rooted in place, it seems to drift through time. Few dates are given in the novel, aside from 8 May (the boys' birthday), and 22 October 1957, after which Sally Hanway disappears. This surreal quality is heightened by the nuns of the convent of Our Mother of Sorrows, who disappear and reappear throughout the novel.

I noted above that the novel begins with a coincidence, and coincidence abounds throughout the narrative, where each brother ostensibly chooses a radically different life-path, and yet the threads of their lives are continually interwoven, typically through the connections brought about by the secondary characters. For example: Asher Rupta, who becomes Sam's employer, is also the landlord of Sparkler (Daniel's lover), and is found murdered by Harry; eventually, Harry, then Sam, discover connections between Rupta and Sally Hanway, their long-absent mother. Although the brothers do not directly intervene in each others' lives, still the connections created by the secondary characters continually affect each of them, as does the City of London itself, as described in the following quote:

“Daniel was surprised by this coincidence with Sparkler's sickness in the same neighbourhood—or perhaps it was not coincidence at all. Could this dear young friend also be Daniel's friend? One of the themes of Daniel's book concerned the patterns of association that linked the people
of the city; he had found in the work of the novelists a preoccupation with the image of London as a web so taut and tightly drawn that the slightest movement of any part sent reverberations through the whole. A chance encounter might lead to terrible consequences, and a misheard word bring unintended good fortune. An impromptu answer to a sudden question might cause death.”

Anyone who has read any of Ackroyd's writings (either fiction or nonfiction) will recognize the theme of connections between people and the places they inhabit, a common thread through much of his writing. One also detects a potential autobiographical element in *Three Brothers*, for one can easily assume that Daniel Hanway is a stand-in for the author: gay, an academic, and writing a book about the writers of London—which could stand-in for most of Ackroyd's oeuvre, possibly even this novel.

Keith Glaeske is a medievalist and collector of speculative fiction currently living in Washington, DC. His articles about medieval literature have been published in *Medieval Perspectives, Traditio, and Ériu*. 
Hidden Identity  
by Adam Carpenter  
MLR Press  
ISBN 978-1608209392  
198 pp., paperback, $14.99

Review by Anthony R. Cardno

With Hidden Identity, Adam Christopher kicks off a new crime/mystery series featuring a twenty-eight year old openly gay New York City private investigator named Jimmy McSwain. While the book does contain a few sex scenes, it is far closer to traditional crime fiction than it is to Carpenter’s main body of work in the gay erotica short-fiction field. The author makes the transition to longer works capably, eschewing the classic porn “plot, what plot?” sensibility in favor of a ton of world-building that shows this might be the first McSwain File but won’t be the last.

Jimmy McSwain is a bit of rough-trade, his only concession to the familiar stereotype being a respect of, if not love for, Broadway. We know he likes Broadway (dramas and musicals alike) because he visits a local gay club on “Musicals Monday” right near the start of the book and is just as comfortable there as he was in a hot club just a few scenes earlier. We know he’s rugged because several characters (male and female, gay and straight) comment on how just how rugged he is and how hot that makes him. He’s confident but conflicted—which will make him an attractive character to follow for a lot of readers, this reviewer included. The conflict comes from his main reason for being a private eye rather than a cop: the still unsolved shooting of his father, an off-duty NYC cop, which Jimmy witnessed when he was fourteen.

The supporting cast, always important in a series such as this, is pretty well-rounded. It includes his strong-willed mother (the head of the house for the family, and also for a Broadway theater, hence Jimmy’s knowledge of and interest in Broadway), his older sister (a lawyer, and the reason Jimmy takes on this book’s main case), his younger sister (who feels a bit like a stereotypical teen right now, the least well-drawn character in the book), and new boyfriend Barry, a Brit in the publishing field. At the “recurring character” level there’s Jimmy’s Uncle Paddy (who owns the nearest Irish pub), several cops (one a childhood friend of Jimmy’s, the other a grizzled and possibly homophobic older guy), and a new precinct chief, all of whom are likely to be developed better in later books.

The case itself is actually three cases: Jimmy is finishing up a classic “follow the philandering husband” case when he is hired by his sister’s rich boss to locate said boss’s missing, and yes gay, son. The missing son case leads into a murder investigation. The author plays pretty fair with the reader in terms of dropping hints about the identity of the murderer, although to be honest Jimmy’s detective skills (which were on full display in the first half of the book) don’t have much to do with the reveal. That, and the constant repetition of how rugged Jimmy is,
might be my largest complaint about the book. The murder is solved, and the resolution feels satisfactory, but I hope future books will have Jimmy actually solving the case rather than being in the right place at the right time.

There is one other aspect of the book to note: the missing gay son, Harris Rothschild, and his mentor Terry, are drag queens. In a lot of traditional crime fiction, this would be played for heavy laughs and the characters would be caricatures. Carpenter makes an obvious effort to make these two characters real people, perhaps more detailed and well-rounded than some of the other supporting cast. There is a very poignant moment late in the book between Jimmy and Harris that expertly describes the tension between the gay community and the transgender community. I think it’s important to recognize that while Jimmy clearly does not understand gender fluidity / trans*, he makes an effort to learn; I also think it’s important to recognize that Jimmy’s initial discomfort/ignorance is not the author’s. I look forward to Harris and Terry being recurring characters and growing further. I don’t think their story, or their effect on Jimmy’s growth, is done yet.

Anthony R. Cardno’s book reviews have appeared in Chelsea Station and Icarus. His short story “Invisible Me” was published in Willard & Maple magazine and his children’s book The Firflake is available through online booksellers. He can be found on the web at anthonycardno.com and on Twitter as @talekyn.
Richard Fox has contributed work to many literary journals. *Swagger & Remorse*, his first book of poetry, was published in December, 2007. He recorded a CD of his work in 2001. In 2006, he contributed the text for the exhibition *Shared: Blue Bikes* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. In spring, 2007, his video installation for the 800 square-foot video screen at Hyde Park Art Center in Chicago was exhibited. He was recipient of a full poetry fellowship from the Illinois Arts Council. He holds a BFA in Photography from Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia, and lives in Chicago.
Every Church in Rome

To get to know me
doesn’t mean
you’ll ever know me:
standing on the apron
of the Pacific,
mindless but full of mind
or dancing in a loft
in Philadelphia,
not speaking but not speechless,
embarrassed by cliché talk
of money. Nothing much
was all I ever cared about.
You were the one
taking clandestine snapshots
of the Sistine Chapel ceiling.
You said every church in Rome
is a museum
& I was thinking about the dust motes
in the sunbeams
under St Peter’s dome—
how anyone might steal them.

—Richard Fox
I’ve been teaching Writing and Literature in New York City’s public schools for ten years. Last spring, my former building graduated its final class just shy of reaching the century mark. Thousands of students have passed through the building over the decades, many of their pictures still lining the school’s hallways and trophy cases. It’s impossible to contemplate them all. So I’ll focus on just one.

Matthew was the star writer of the literary club, where I served as advisor. When he wasn’t editing the school’s newspaper or acting in a play, he would submit essays equivalent to that of a seasoned adult. His writing was smooth and polished. It possessed insight, integrity, and showed great potential. Since many of the students attended the club for pizza and socializing, Matthew would stop by to drop off new stories and be on his way. He could have stayed to show off his superior skills, but he had no interest in that.
So we began to edit his work privately, sometimes in person, often through the margins of papers handed back and forth through busy hallways. I wanted to show him the power of editing, rooting out those enticing adjectives and adverbs that seduced many young writers. I told him about a professor I once had in grad school, a brilliant essayist who edited students’ work by simply closing his eyes and listening. The man’s sonorous voice remains with me to this day. I wanted Matthew to hear someone’s voice when he wrote. For the first time in my writing life I wasn’t absorbed in my own work. I was delighted in Matthew’s development and his efforts came to inspire me.

The years went by and the boy only got better. We combed over advanced placement essays, college applications, and new material for the magazine. In his junior year he sat down to take the English Regents exam and recorded one of the highest scores in the state.

By senior year Matthew was so immersed in extracurricular activities that I saw him only in passing. One day I handed him a flyer from one of the city’s many teen writing contests. It was sponsored by a gay and lesbian organization that wanted themes specifically geared to their community. I presumed Matthew would write something about marriage equality or gays in the military. I remember the way he turned in his finished piece. He was neither tense nor overtly dramatic. He handed it to me with the same matter of fact confidence as all the others, the fierce self-assurance of the truly talented.

Matthew’s essay was about growing up in a strict, first generation American family and what it was like to openly discuss his sexuality with his father for the first time. He wrote about his initial trepidation. He wrote about the understanding and acceptance they eventually came to share. Matthew had discovered his own voice and he was proud of it. He won that contest then published it in a well known anthology for teens.

We lost touch after that, although I drive by the school occasionally to admire its architecture and reflect on my old classroom. It’s just a high school of the mind now, receding into memory as I head for my new building and a fresh crop of students. I still read Matthew’s essay from time to time; recalling him and those countless others, their spirits soaring over the school’s hallowed bell tower forever.

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JB McGeever is writing a novel about the closing of a New York City high school.
Vinton Rafe McCabe started his career as an award-winning poet and a produced playwright before he began what would turn out to be a twenty-five year detour from his life's path by becoming a journalist, a radio talk show host, and a television producer. During that time, he published ten works of nonfiction. After what he describes as “a doozy of a mid-life crisis,” he returned to his first love, fiction. *Death in Venice, California* was created in something akin to a fever dream, in that the author completed the work in just twenty-eight days as part of the National Novel Writing Month annual challenge. He has just completed a second novel, *Glossolalia*, and works as a literary critic for the *New York Journal of Books*. 
Make no mistake about it, Mother,
We are coming for your boy.
We will lure him, like Peter Pan,
From his warm, urine-stained sheets
With tales of skullduggery.
We will teach him to stand like he’s never stood:
Feet wide, hands on hips, elbows akimbo.
And the look on his face will be suddenly knowing.
We will sprinkle him with fairy dust and teach him to fly
Right out the window under the light of the honey moon.
Then, in a brownstone in the fashionable center of town,
We will kiss him daintily on his forehead
And teach a new word: choreography.
Then with tiny spike heels fitted to his sweaty feet, balancing on the hard wood,
He will learn of Fosse, Champion and Agnes DeMille.
Thrusted hips and pouty lips.
And when he cries for you, Mother, we will show him pictures
Of Beyonce. Of Cher and Madonna and Judy at the Palace,
Her face bewildered in rapture, her arms flung high and wide,
And say to him: “This is your mother now, boy.”
And we teach him a new vocabulary: “Shante.” “Sashay.” “Fellatio.”
We give him a new haircut, new name, new wardrobe so fitted that every bulge shows.
We teach him to contour his face and of the subtle wonders of blush.
And in a seminar held just in the darkest moments of the dark dark night,
A bald man with a wig and teeth discolored by age and promiscuity
Will answer all his questions. Teach him of Adam and Steve.
And then, finally, he will learn new ways: The swish. The lisp.
The limp wrist. And then we unbind his feet
And suck his toes one by one before giving him back his slippers.
And as we fly once more, against the setting moon, the rising sun, Mother, know this:
That when he recognizes his home from the air, when he sees it approaching fast,
It will seem to him to be so small. So drab that,
Inevitably,
Your boy will close his eyes against the sight, issue a quiet “ugh,” and shudder.
We then will tuck him in again, tongue kiss him, and sprinkle again with
Fairy dust to lock in the spell. And then we flash a final picture:
Garland again, in her Kansas childhood, and we hiss to the boy, “Remember.”
As your boy slips to his secret dreams, we drape a pink boa at the foot of the bed
And steal away, leaving you to wonder what happened to your Little Billy.

—Vinton Rafe McCabe
"A delightfully spooky, often kooky, gay vision quest. Currier’s Avery Dalyrymple is larger-than-life and intricately flawed, and the fact that he just can’t seem to get out of his own way makes him primed for misadventure and gay mayhem. One of Currier’s strengths has always been the ability to soak his narrative in a rich, authentic ambiance and *The Wolf at the Door* is no exception, with sentences that resonate with the decadent rhythms of the French Quarter and paragraphs that positively drip with Southern gothic moodiness. Genre fans will find plenty to appreciate in Currier’s otherworldly version of *It’s a Wonderful Life* fused with all the ensemble wit of *Tales of the City* and the regional gothic texture of Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire*. Savor this one like a bowlful of spicy jambalaya and a snifter of fine aged bourbon on a hot, humid night."

—Vince Liaguno, *Dark Scribe Magazine*

Praise for *The Wolf at the Door*

"It’s not easy to classify Currier’s novel. The New Orleans setting leads naturally to spirited spookiness, with supernatural proceedings and ghostly manifestations, including that of a gorgeous young man, the late partner of Mack, who is dying of HIV in an upstairs apartment—adding a touch of realistic melancholy to the tale. And the story is also infused with erotic passages. So let’s just classify the novel as really good—a masterful blend of genres that comes together like succulent literary gumbo. Currier’s crew of querulous aging queens, offbeat beautiful boys and assorted oddball friends constitute an endearing found family of queers, while the author’s historical flashbacks conjure the Big Easy’s atmospheric past."

—Richard Labonté, *Bookmarks*

"Currier is a master storyteller of speculative fiction, and this novel is unique in that it takes a group of unbelievers (whom I can identify with) and gradually forces them to accept the reality of what they are experiencing. Very creative story, told with a dry wit by a group of highly diverse, realistic, flawed individuals who become links to the past and instrumental in helping some tortured souls find their rest. Outstanding for those who appreciate this genre of fiction. Five ghostly stars out of five."

—Bob Lind, *Echo Magazine*

"Refreshingly light and witty.... The chatty first person narrative is augmented by historically accurate journals, diaries, and slave narratives. The bright, hopeful tone of the prose and Currier’s love for his imperfect characters makes this a charming read."

—Craig Gidney, Lambda Literary

"Stirring a gumbo pot of characters and subplots, Currier keeps his unlikely mix of ingredients at a perfect simmer as they meld into a singularly delectable story with a sense of place so rich, readers may be enticed to head to Louisiana and experience the novel’s setting firsthand."

—Jim Gladstone, *Passport*

AVAILABLE FROM CHELSEA STATION EDITIONS
“In his introduction, James Currier writes of forming the desire a number of years ago to move beyond his reputation as an AIDS writer. In reinventing himself, he remained concerned as ever with issues relevant to the lives of contemporary gay men. Setting down a list of topics to address, he included—substance abuse, gay marriage, serving in the military, domestic abuse in gay relationships, hate crimes, homophobia, and living outside of urban areas—all represented here. At the same time, Currier began a study of classic ghost stories, a genre that had fascinated him since boyhood. (Favorites mentioned are the works of M. R. James, Henry James, E. F. Benson, Edith Wharton, and Ambrose Bierce.) The best of the resulting collection draws upon the past in observing the present, and in doing so never fails to disturb and entertain.”

—Joyce Meggett, ALA GLBTRT Newsletter

Praise for *The Haunted Heart and Other Tales*

“I am completely amazed by the range of ghost stories in this collection. These are awesome ghost stories, and the literary connections to gay life are deep and complex.”
—Chad Helder, *Unspeakable Horror* and *The Pop-Up Book of Death*

“Currier’s characters are sumptuous, his plots are freshly twisted and his prose magnificent. A perfectly chilling collection of tales from one of the modern masters of the genre. Powerful stuff, indeed.”
—Jerry Wheeler, *Out in Print*

“Currier’s writing is flawless and his knack for conveying emotion, with both the spoken words and thoughts of his characters, is unparalleled. Fans of the author have come to expect that his work isn’t exactly light or escapist, which makes it all the more affecting.”
—Chris Verleger, *Edge*

“I found each of these stories just as satisfying and unique as a full length novel, so much so that, as I often do with longer stories, I thought about each story for days after I finished reading it. Give it five twisted stars out of five.”
—Bob Lind, *Echo Magazine*

“Jameson Currier’s *The Haunted Heart and Other Tales* expands upon the usual ghost story tropes by imbuing them with deep metaphorical resonance to the queer experience. Infused with flawed, three-dimensional characters, this first-rate collection strikes all the right chords in just the right places. Equal parts unnerving and heartrending, these chilling tales are testament to Currier’s literary prowess and the profound humanity at the core of his writing. Gay, straight, twisted like a pretzel...his writing is simply not to be missed by any reader with a taste for good fiction.”
—Vince Liaguno, *Dark Scribe Magazine*
The aisles were cluttered but not as much as the counters. Lamps, books, and all manner of things elbowed for space across them. It was like being in someone’s attic or garage, rather than an antiques store. Everything was secondhand. Very little was antique.

I found a box of photos and began to sift through them. Too new: nothing older than the 50’s. I tried the box next to it. Bingo! Women in long skirts and high collars looked back at me from the late 19th Century. Men playing croquet or tennis batted balls and eyes at me, but they were not the men I wanted. And then, across the years and lives in between, they came to me.

Two men, one dark and thick, the other pale and thin so they could not be brothers, sat shoulder to shoulder and thigh to thigh so they could not be just friends either. The dark one looked stern; his partner laughed. They wore dark suits. Black? I wondered. Good for photos and funerals.

I wished I could know them. I wished I were there. And then, as usual, I was.
“Just a few seconds more, gentlemen,” I said, speaking from under the camera shroud, holding the flash powder high. They were nervous. “Oh, give him a kiss, love,” I said to make them relax. The dark one looked stern but the pale one laughed. I took the shot.

“See here, mister,” the dark one said, striding towards me and the camera. “I didn’t ‘preciate that comment. No sir, I did not.”

I shrugged and replied, “You’ll have your photos tomorrow.”

“Gee,” the pale one said, like it was a sigh.

“Ten copies, mind,” the dark one added, still frowning.

I nodded and waited for them to leave but they dillydallied, whispering at each other, looking at me. The dark one cleared his throat and came close again.

“Uh, my friend here wonders…”

“Go on, George. Ask,” the wondering friend insisted.

“Well, he wonders ifn you could take another one a us.”

“Certainly. But it will cost extra.”

“Course. We got the money,” the asking friend said. He really was handsome, with his frowning dark looks and thick red lips. They both were. I could see what they saw in one another.

“May I suggest the pose?”

“Sure,” the pale one answered before his friend could disagree.

I stood them back to back and butt to butt. They felt uncomfortable I could tell. Too close to reality perhaps. I gave them time to relax, pretending to adjust the focus.

When they had settled more easily against each other, I inserted the plate and filled the powder caddy with magnesium. I ducked under the shroud and studied them in the lens. What would their family and friends think if they saw this photo? No worries, I thought. They never will. The order on this one will only be for two copies.

“All right then. Fold your arms across your chest. Look at the camera. Don’t smile.” I waited until the pale one stopped laughing and took the shot. Exiting the shroud, I removed the glass.

“Would you like to see it now?” I asked them. I knew I did. I took the plate into the darkroom.

It didn’t take long to develop. It was a great photograph, one I would want to exhibit if I were really the photographer and lived in this time. Would he remember he took it? I inhabited his body, including his mind. I wondered what he would think when he saw this one, after I left.

I showed the boys the glass plate back in the studio.

“Oooh, that’s good, aint it, George?” George just stared at it until the pale one nudged him. “George?”

The dark man came back to life. “Yeah, John, it is. Real good.” He looked at me with his film star handsomeness, before there were even films. “Thanks mister.”

“No problem,” I said in 21st Century English. They looked confused. “I mean, there will be no problem. They’ll be done by 5 tomorrow.”
They looked at each other. “We work til 6.”

I started to say no problem again but caught myself. “Come the next day then, during your lunch.”

George looked at his friend. “John, you will have to come. You know ol’ Williams aint gonna let me off.” John nodded.

“I’ll be here, mister, as close to noon as I can get it.”

He looked so angelic. They were both better looking than their photo.

“What do you both work at then?” I asked, as idly as I could, trying to keep them with me. I fiddled with the photographic equipment, hoping I wasn’t messing anything up.

“I’m a clerk at Dawson’s,” John said. “George carries hods.” I vaguely knew what they were. Something to do with bricks. Heavy. No wonder George seemed to have muscles inside his suit. An idea came to mind.

“How about one more photo, boys. For my private collection.” They looked at each other doubtfully. “No charge,” I assured them.

“Depends,” George said, ignoring John tugging at his sleeve. “What do we gotta do?”

“Take off your shirts and pretend to box.” I thought I might as well get it all out with one breath.

“What?” John yelped. George just looked at me, steely eyed and focused.

“How much?” he asked.

“No charge. Free.”

“No, how much you gonna pay us?”

George’s muscles, it seemed, had already led him into mercantile adventures.

I reached in my pocket, confirming I still had my wallet. “$20 each.” John gasped and George frowned.

“That’s a lot of money, mister. You say all we hafta do is strip off our shirts and pretend to box?”

I nodded and he grinned like he’d hooked a big one.

It was a lot of money for those times but I didn’t think I had change. I distinctly remembered going to the ATM just before I went into the “antiques” store.

George talked John into accepting the offer and helped him take off his shirt after he removed his own. I was pretty sure I was seeing a scene they often repeated in private. Perhaps I should have asked for more for my twenties.

George put up his dukes in a good imitation of John L. Sullivan but John’s arms hung awkwardly. “George,” I asked. “Could you reposition John’s arms?” They looked at me like I’d asked them to have sex. “Like a boxer?”

I demonstrated and George bent and raised John’s arms properly. When he resumed his stance, I took a look through the lens.

“Move closer. Touch knuckles,” I instructed from under the shroud. “Great!” Hold it!” I counted the seconds and took the shot.
They followed me into the darkroom this time. With us in the dark and them with their shirts off, other ideas came to my mind but there was no time, even if they were willing, which I doubted. I developed the third plate.

The photo was good. I’d take it with me.

“You’re some photographer, mister. How’d you think to take such a picture?”

“Art,” I answered but they didn’t understand. We left the darkroom.

They put on their shirts and tied their ties again, helped each other into their jackets, and stood, waiting for their twenties. I handed them both to George and he passed John his. “Thanks,” they chimed together, like choir boys.

“Oh, no. Thank you. See you day after tomorrow.” Only I wouldn’t. I’d be back in my time with a new photo for my collection. I waved them out the door and watched them walk away. I felt a little sentimental but pulled myself together, wished I was back in New York and then I was.

I took the two photos of George and John to the man behind the register, paid him $20 and slipped the photos into my pocket. I noticed then the store walls were exposed brick. I took a closer look.

“Good job, George,” I said to myself and took the boys home.

______________

Richard May writes gay short stories. His work has appeared in several literary journals, short story anthologies, and his book *Ginger Snaps: Photos & Stories of Redheaded Queer People*. Rick also organizes literary readings and events, including the annual Word Week literary festival, Noe Valley Authors Festival, and Magnet San Francisco author events. He lives in San Francisco, in exile from Brooklyn, New York.
**Bob the Book**

by David Pratt
Chelsea Station Editions
ISBN: 978-0-9844707-1-6
paperback, $16.00

Now available through bookstores and Web retailers
also available in digital formats

“David Pratt takes a classic device from children’s literature, the humanized object, and uses it not for a toysail or lighthouse or valentine rabbit but for a book on gay erotica. His voice is pitch-perfect as he follows his hero out into the world, creating a panoramic epic about books and bookstores, readers and collectors, conferences and bonfires. There’s even a love story. Bob the Book is smart, funny, learned and, like the best bibliographies, just a little crazy.”

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**My Movie**

by David Pratt
Chelsea Station Editions
ISBN: 978-0-9832851-7-5
paperback, $18.00

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“My Movie is absolutely essential reading.”

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“David Pratt is an amazing writer, and this is a showcase of his varied talents—artistic but never pretentious, disturbing but never gratuitous, sentimental but never maudlin. Highly, highly recommended.”

—Jerry Wheeler, Out in Print

“Pratt’s greatest talent lies in creating lovably insular, separate worlds that exist inside our own, then blurring their boundaries just enough so that we can peek inside, see what awaits us, then scurry back to our own safe spaces. Those worlds are dark, unsettlingly truthful places that we can only stay in long enough to find the answers we seek before we return to reality and try to apply what we’ve learned. David Pratt is an amazing writer, and this is a showcase of his varied talents—artistic but never pretentious, disturbing but never gratuitous, sentimental but never maudlin. Highly, highly recommended.”

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A PERSONAL HISTORY

Charles Silverstein

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—Edmund White, author of City Boy and Sacred Monsters

For the Ferryman
A Personal History

Charles Silverstein

www.chelseastationeditions.com
Yesterday was the final race of the Southwest Harbor Fleet’s July series. I skippered a beautiful 26-foot sloop in the Luders class—which was revived last summer after a hiatus of some 30 years. These exquisite, sleek racing boats are especially pleasing to the eye. The Mount Desert fleet traces its origins back to 1946 when most of the original Luders were purchased new for island summer residents. At one time the two fleets, Bar Harbor and Northeast Harbor, numbered some 36 boats. When competition ceased about 1973, a number of Luders were sold away, though perhaps a dozen remained in local waters. Several of the boats have continued under the ownership of their original families and, almost without exception, most have been professionally maintained in extraordinarily fine condition. Over this winter, a number of

Red and Silver

Sturgis Haskin

July 26, 2003

from Sturge: A Memoir by Sanford Phippen
remaining boats were refurbished; and others snatched from very distant places (i.e., two from Mississippi).

Last Friday, the owner of the boat I race—a wonderful woman—invited an old friend who was a major racing skipper in two of America’s Cup efforts and who had won a bronze medal in the Olympics; to skipper her boat—which had been purchased over the winter from the Greenwich, CT Luders fleet. Because of an accumulation of postponed races (due to foul weather), three races were sailed that day. In the series, I managed a first and a second (I was leading when I hit a marker buoy and had to pay a penalty) and he a first and two seconds. No other Luders did this well and we won the series.

This was due in part to our efficient crew which consisted of the owner and a handsome local man, a welder and former professional boatman (for Admiral Samuel Eliot Morison, the U.S. Naval Historian); Malcolm Forbes, (the late business magnate), etc. At the end of today’s race, at our mooring, his handsome son, perhaps 20, tanned and shirtless, sped up in his Boston Whaler and ferried us to our dock. For the past several years he has worked as a fisherman on Isle au Haut, but now will attend college in Portland. His father gently chided him for not landing on our boat’s starboard side—according to yachting etiquette the owner and guests are always debarked from the starboard side of a boat. We are a rather spiffy crew as our host provided us with red crew shirts with the name of our boat embroidered on the left front. From time to time I crew for Ms. Rockefeller aboard her racing boat (in another class on other days)—there are no coordinated tee shirts there, only custom caps of the boat’s colors with the name of the boat emblazoned on the front. It seemed indiscreet to wear this hat on another’s boat. And besides, the bold red shirts clashed with the muted lavender and green pastel of the hat. There are standards!

The Southwest Harbor Fleet sponsors four racing classes: two divisions of Bullseye (junior and senior) and something called a Tempest. Races are followed at 4 by teas at members’ homes. Today’s tea was held at the home of two Hinckley women (of the famous Hinckley Boat Company) who summer on a quiet side street in a delightful old 19th century cottage.

On the other side of their wooded street were several winding driveways leading to waterfront properties. These teas, which are well attended, are favored largely by older members of the club. The format is the same: a dining room table laden with tiny tea sandwiches, simple cookies or cakes and someone at the further end presiding over the tea pot. There is also lemonade. It is all quite genteel and fun and there is much lively conversation. After an interim of mixing, the Commodore urged us to the porch and adjacent shaded lawn for the weekly announcements and race results. We were, he confirmed, the winners of both the day’s race and the July series. Later, at next week’s tea, we will be presented with a silver bowl. The name of our boat will be engraved on the cup, and it will be returned next summer to be awarded to that season’s winner. It was purchased over the winter by the Luders’ fleet captain, a gay man, who could not race this day because of a leg operation several days ago in Boston. This local Luders fleet is perhaps unique in that both the class captain and the secretary (me) are gay. Of course, this is irrelevant—though probably known—to other club members. Another Luders member, a Gaynet subscriber, is also gay. Alas, he has failed to enter his boat in any of our races this season.

The owner of the Luders 1 boat owns a relatively new, very nice, waterfront house—complete with private dock and especially lovely gardens. She fronts a panorama of Southwest Harbor with the full range of Mount Desert mountains rising blue and dark immediately beyond. Greenings Island, punctuated with a small white c1800 cape is slightly to the right. It is a much
painted and photographed view. After each race, our crew assembles on our host’s front porch and indulges in a bit of Mt. Gay rum before traipsing off to the club tea. We muse and sip and delight with our good fortune. We also watch the comings and goings about the harbor. A small Coast Guard station lies directly on the other side. Yesterday, after tea we returned for a boiled lobster dinner, with our host’s house guests—who consisted of a lesbian niece, her partner and their new tiny son. It was wonderful and the latter proved a diverting presence. The niece leaves today (she works at Harvard) and her sister, also a lesbian and a mother of two, arrives for the weekend. This is a very gay-friendly household!

As I left after dinner (which ended with locally made ginger ice cream and coffee), I turned on my car radio. Beethoven’s great and glorious 7th Symphony was just beginning, and it accompanied me right to my town line—by which time I was so euphoric I wonder now how I managed to stay on course. But it was hard, too, arriving home to a dark and silent house. My mother died unexpectedly two weeks ago. Always, no matter how late I returned, she had been there to greet me, make hot cocoa, and ask how my day went. Now, I sit alone in the dark. Missing my mom. Wanting her to be there, wanting to share the highlights of the day. The silence is deafening and now, quiet and immobile, I sit for half an hour staring out at the faint twinkle of Bar Harbor’s lights across Frenchman’s Bay. Slowly, calmed and sad, I leave for my bedroom. Strangely, I have developed an odd little habit since her death—bidding her good night as I pass her room.

But it was a nice day. Mother would have been pleased for me. And I am appreciative for all that happened—even my sadness at the end.

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_Sturge: A Memoir_ is a compendium of writings, reminiscences, articles, and photographs written by or relating to Sturgis Haskins, the Maine State sailing champ and instructor who died in September 2012. Haskins was also a photographer and pioneer in gay rights. In 1974 he co-founded the Wilde Stein Club at the University of Maine, which received national attention in _Newsweek_, the _Washington Post_, and across the country. “Hiding our Heroes” was an op-ed submission to _Ellsworth American_.

Sanford Phippen, editor, was born in White Plains, NY and raised in Hancock, Maine where he was educated in the local schools, graduating from Sumner Memorial High School in 1960. He earned his B.A. in English from the University of Maine and his M.A. in English Education from Syracuse University. An English teacher for 50 years at both the high school and college levels, he has received the Distinguished Teacher Award from Bowdoin College and Teacher of the Year from Orono High School. He was also a finalist in the Maine Teacher of the Year program in 2004. As a writer he has published one novel, _Kitchen Boy_, and two books of short stories: _The Police Know Everything_ and _People Trying To Be Good_. He is also the editor of _The Best Maine Stories_ and _High Clouds Soaring, Storms Driving Low: The Letters of Ruth Moore_, as well as _The Sun Never Sets on Hancock Point_. He served on the Maine Humanities Council (1984-1990) and the Maine Arts Commission (1990-1994).

For information on ordering _Sturge: A Memoir_ contact Sanford Phippen at sanphip@aol.com.
Anthony Zedan is a native San Franciscan poet who spent ten years teaching English in Kyoto and Kobe, Japan. He earned his Master of Arts degree in English from the College of Notre Dame in Belmont, California. He spends his days daydreaming of a better, kinder world. He owes his active imagination to hours of play alone as a child and loving parents and many other mother and father figures who all encouraged the best in him.
Exhausted In My Arms, He Slept

A white plastic horse with light blue eyes, strong legs and a contoured body, its billowy white mane to hold on to, as the horse grew in my hands, I mounted and rode it, tamed it and held on, raced across the noisy vinyl runners over carpet in my grandparents’ house.

My horse had a handsome but hollow head that could swivel from side to side to scan the prairie horizon for enemies and fat orange wheels below its hooves allowed it to glide over stairs and chair peaks and sun-lit valleys.

My only toy horse had the biggest and the most beautiful plastic eyes, an innocent calmness and depth about them, full of possibilities, pools of untouched Pacific rarely seen outside of glossy magazine covers.

I pulled him by his string and raced in front of him, too fast for him, for minutes, for hours, for days, as he panted to keep up, lost in that love of play, all forgotten…

until many years later, I stumbled upon a pasty-white young man with long flowing hair and my horse’s eyes, that big and that blue and felt the love once more that I had long ago given up on, the selfish love a boy has for his favorite toy, so complete, blinding, myself lost in play, a glimpse of that laughter.

The young man must have thought it queer to be stopped by a stranger’s stare, our eyes lock momentarily in mystery and joy and a sudden glimmer of recognition as if he himself remembers our hours of fun together before he fell asleep exhausted in my arms.

—Anthony Zedan
I Was There Too
Frank Pizzoli

My pace slowed as I noticed on a friend’s bookcase I Was There, a bound collection of Walter Terry’s dance reviews from the New York Herald Tribune. A domino of memory fell forward and my recollections fell down in a curly wave. There I was thirty-six years ago forming a perfect third position. I had desperately wanted to be a dancer, studying as much about the history of dance as the technique required to perform it.

* * *

In 1978 I was twenty-six years-old, a gay man living in central Pennsylvania and hosting a New Year’s Eve Party. I’d assembled a handful of longtime friends: a fine artist, a political science professor, one trendy restaurateur, a photographer, and a pair of editors, one of whom had squired along his holiday house guest, Elliot Cohan, of Charles Street, New York City.
In New York, Elliot maintained his grandfather’s profession of using a nearly extinct method to print Chinese menus. On the windowless sixth floor of the shop’s original Lower East Side location, he pressed onto thick paper ink so black it summoned evil. At the precise moment he added the brilliant red coloring to the vertical rows tradition was preserved.

Elliot lived in New York City during the time joints were smoked as often as cigarettes. That night at my dinner party, he was praising his older brother Robert’s incredible creative energy. In the fall of 1947, upon returning from the war, Robert had found his way to Martha Graham’s school at 66 Fifth Avenue. With Stuart Hodes and Bertram Ross, Robert joined what became Graham’s third company and surfaced as one of her senior dancers. Eventually, Cohan and Ross were listed as Graham Company co-directors. Later, Robert moved to The Royal Ballet of London as artistic advisor, chief teacher, and choreographer.

I knew all about Robert Cohan by then. Stripping pretense (but not my clothes) before Elliot’s entire chorus of contacts in the dance world, I had seated him next to me at dinner. By New Year’s Eve that year, I had already exhausted the meager dance resources available in Columbia County, Pennsylvania, home of the North American Train Committee, a John Birch-like group. On both occasions when George Wallace ran for president, he carried one Pennsylvania county—Columbia. I was eager to see myself dancing on a bigger stage but also worried that I was already too old to give it a try.

My dinner with Elliot led to correspondence with his brother, Robert, who graciously suggested that he send word of my interest in classes to three Manhattan dance studios. In his final letter, Robert dropped three business cards for me to present upon making my calls. To an otherwise jaded New Yorker, my enthusiasm at this opportunity sparked Elliot to act: he offered me use of his apartment and his British sports car (which cost as much to stow as the rent on his apartment).

I was touched by the untethered kindness of both brothers. Unlike so many other older gay men I’d encountered, he didn’t expect anything in return from a young buck. Now I’m old and find it sad that we’ve yet to find a way for younger and older queers to have decent conversations about life, liberty, and the pursuit of our happiness.

With six weeks paid summer leave to liberate me, I leaped away from Pennsylvania to find Elliot’s Greenwich Village walk up. I landed on the pavement in front of a skinny, brick building. Pendulous bags swung from my shoulders. The bus station smell lingered in my nostrils. New York City had a distinct smell back then; pre-Gulliani, it was stale, greasy, slick, and exciting. Right across the street from the steps of Eliot’s apartment building stood the entrance to the 6th Precinct where a cadre of city’s finest were buttoning up uniforms as they began an afternoon shift. Two blocks over was Christopher Street and I wondered how many stripped out of their sweaty uniforms and made their way over there.

Invigorated the next morning by Elliot’s walking tour of the neighborhood, I set out to find the three studios Robert had forewarned of my arrival. Against Times Square’s blaring din, I scanned mosaics of window signs on skyscrapers’ upper floors, growing confused over where I’d already searched since the buildings were identical at eye level. Windows full of electronic goodies were separated by portals of entry into the erotic, a Las Vegas of porn.

Having eventually figured out the anti-logic of Manhattan signage, I excitedly ran up a dark stairwell making so many consecutive right turns that I was dizzy when I reached my destination.
Unlike Vaslav Nijinsky, who told his wife, Romola, that he liked the quickness of New York elevators, I was reporting to less well-appointed haunts. Eventually, a dingy sign directed me through a door with so many layers of paint colors peeling off it that it resembled an artist’s palette. Once through the main door, I could hear the familiar cadence of barre work underway marked by light tinks on piano keys. “And one and two, and three and four...yes?” a choreographer’s standard question to straining minions. Well-honed “yeses” were often croaked with phony Russian or French accents. I’d been warned.

I slowly opened the door sealing off the instruction room and stretched my head in for a look. The studio was an enormous black hole with barely visible wisps of movement flashing here and there. “Like the pianist’s fingers find the keys, your feet find the floor...yes?” the choreographer asked. Nope, no way. I sleep in the dark, not dance in it.

Trying to find the second studio Robert had suggested was hopeless.

The third address, Merce Cunningham Studio, at Westbeth, put me back near where I began my search. I hadn’t realized until charting my longitude and latitude with Elliot that evening that Cunningham’s studio was a ten-minute walk from Charles Street. Promptly at 9 a.m. the following morning, class auditions would commence.

Dancers’ class auditions require that you report to a huge studio where a company’s senior members, with perverse glee, run you through gauntlets of movement phrases. After they have you near clinical exhaustion, they calculate your level of experience onto a clipboard. Early the next morning, you limp back to collect a tiny white envelop which contains scant notes on your recommended level of instruction and specific classes you are invited to attend. Lemming-like, you proceed to the desk where you pay every cent of tuition, or no classes. Those not invited into class are waved on to the dance master’s chapel for a slow lowering to reality about their dance skills or perhaps a quiet return to Iowa with what remains of grandma’s egg money.

I entered two classes at second and third level. There are, varyingly, about nine levels of study in a legitimate dance studio: one through six is like passing through school grades, seven is preparation for the junior company, eight is understudy, and nine is bingo, corn on all four corners. When you reach level nine, you’re in, if you’re not crippled by then. Cunningham’s movement theory is based on the principles of quantum mechanics, reflecting his career as a dancer with The Martha Graham Company. Complicated beyond my experience, these classes established confidences I’d not yet felt, although I was, as dance critic Walter Terry wrote in 1940 of Cunningham’s performance in *El Penitente*, “simple and naive.”

But finding myself in New York with a free apartment and a sports car was better than hitting the lottery. And there was more than dance classes at my fingertips.

The first day I arrived at Elliot’s apartment he stopped in his tracks, looked me right in the eyes and said, “No bringing anyone back to my apartment. I know you’ve been around but this is New York City. People come back later and steal your stuff.” That did it. I was dutifully warned and officially afraid. In six weeks I broke Elliot’s rule only once, while he was away visiting his parents near Rockaway Beach.

He lived only two blocks from Christopher Street so I had an entire sexual smorgasbord of enticements. The Christopher Street Pier, officially Pier 45, was right nearby. Sunday afternoon walks with Elliott along Christopher Street and down to the pier were interesting and disorienting to a young man from Pennsylvania’s Anthracite coal region.
Starting at Sheridan Square both sides of Christopher Street were busy with long lines of men dutifully moving like ants, so close to one another noses nearly bumped between shoulder blades, crunches practically rubbed asses in front of them. On the left side of the street, the long line cruised its way toward the pier. Once there you either entered to continue your adventure or cut around and made your way back up the other side of Christopher Street.

Once back at Sheridan Square you turned around and did it all over again. If you continued in line into the pier, you had to perfect the art of keeping your swing, sway and bounce going while navigating plaster droppings, nails, and sharp edges on rusty pieces of metal. With your movements perfected to second nature, you would look left and right into spaces that might accommodate two or more men involved in public action. You could also follow someone with whom you made eye contact to a dingy sex space that everyone else could see. Or you could find a private spot in the nether reaches of the crumbling structure. Holes in the floor and shaky beams were a buzz kill. There is a famous photograph of one man who fell to his death in the Hudson River through holes in the pier’s floor. Others met the same fate.

The weird part is that public cruising had become such a commonplace event in Greenwich Village, and especially Christopher Street as Gay Ground Zero. One was expected to perform his Public Cruise as if it were casual when it was anything but that. I was never sure that I had properly acquired the ability to casually cruise in broad daylight with literally hundreds of other men doing the same thing around me. One behavior that differed from the dimly lit bath houses is that guys actually talked to one another. The Code of Silence normally in play inside a bathhouse was lifted on the streets.

And then there was the familiar face of a pudgy Mediterranean guy, about twenty-five, with a violin case bouncing around on his belly. His mean looking black dog in toe. A leather strap around his neck balanced the open instrument case right below his chest horizontally. The case held thinly rolled joints which sold openly for a buck apiece or six for $5. You made your own selection. The smaller space that held string replacements was the cash register where customers made their own change under his watchful eye. I’d never seen the canine called into action.

Right around the corner from Christopher Street was the Ramrod, a leather, S/M bar, where two years later a homophobic misfit opened fire with an Uzi into a crowd hanging in front of the place. He killed the twenty-two year-old doorman (Jorg Wen), another patron and injured others.

And then of course there was The Mineshaft and my introduction to the place by Elliot, who favored Sunday evenings because then the venue was less intense than other nights. Media often referred to it as the world’s most famous S/M men’s bar. Whatever it was the place sure as hell scared me. When looking back I’ve often said that I was never a prude and I didn’t miss much. I never confused that with participating in everything I saw.

And besides all the sex candy, Elliot seemed to know everyone. Greenwich Village was indeed a place crawling with creative types from every conceivable form of expression. No pretense either. One Sunday on our sidewalk tour, we moved toward Doric Wilson, credited as the father of Off-Off Broadway with a rag-tag collection of theater diehards at Cornelia Street’s Caffé Cino. “Those plays you found on my bookcase?” Elliot said to me. “That’s him.” I looked up into his nostrils as he looked down into mine. We shook hands, we hugged, we chatted. He was real. That same summer, Elliot and I had seen Wilson’s A Perfect Relationship at a Chelsea Theatre. In the audience was Bertram Ross, a former principle dancer with The Martha Graham Company and longtime friend of Elliot’s brother Robert. After the show, we huddled on the
sidewalk outside the theatre. Afraid of saying the wrong thing in such august company, I smiled a lot. By the look in his eyes, Wilson could see my bashfulness coming through and asked what I thought about his play.

In contrast to Wilson’s warmth, I was confounded by the reluctance of the dancers I encountered in class to actually talk about dance. For me, to dance was “to breathe,” as Cunningham said. Then one day Gianna, a studio veteran, pulled me aside for lunch one day. “Sure, the others have had more work; they started in the hospital nursery. But you have desire, nerve, you learn. You’re not afraid of what you don’t know. That makes you competition,” she explained. I was in a trance. Me, competition? I felt betrayed for not following what Robert wrote in one of his letters: “Dancers never think something’s too hard. They’re always ready to take the next step.”

I shared with Elliot Gianna’s thoughts on my naiveté about the whole dance experience. He was comforting as we soaked our parched mouths with cold beers. “They’re not a school of fish darting here and there in unison,” he explained. “Are they working on anything special?” he asked.

“Yes, an old Graham piece called Every Soul Is a Circus,” I answered.

“The one where the lead is thwarted in all her attempts at star turns?” he asked.

“That’s it,” I said.

“Robert would love this!” he shrieked. And he scrambled down the hall.

* * *

Years later I encountered Bertram Ross and his longtime companion, John Wallowitch, in Philadelphia, John’s hometown, for a premiere of their biopic “Wallowitch and Ross.” It was 1999. I was forty-eight and they, well, were much older. I’d given up dance about a decade before when I was forty and felt the strain on my body.

“You’re Elliot’s friend?” Bert asked, now afflicted by Parkinson’s disease.

“Yes, it’s a pleasure to see you again,” I said, my hand trembling. He was a hero to me since I first got over thinking at age twenty-five that men taking dance classes was a fag thing. Whoever said ballet was for sissies never took a class themselves. Twenty-one years later, there I sat with Ross who danced with the bohemian art world’s most eccentric choreographer, departing audience members waving to him, some shaking his hand, others coming up to leave kind words. When the last of the crowd left, we were alone.

“What’s this about Walter Terry’s book and the other one about Graham?” Bert asked. I had written a piece about Terry’s book and sent it to his partner John.

“Terry collected his dance reviews from his days with the New York Herald Tribune. Called it I Was There. You’re noted throughout,” I explained.

“I didn’t realize his reviews were collected. What about the other book?” Bert quizzed.

“By Don McDonagh, simply called Martha Graham, full of her history, and yours, of course, and all your colleagues from those early years,” I said.

“Marvelous. Didn’t know that either!” Bert said. We looked at each other silently for a brief moment.

“I’m old now,” Bert said.
“You’re my hero,” I said back, adding that I’d wished I’d started to dance earlier and not waited until I was twenty-five, as if I were apologizing.

He was still looking at me, silent; one eye squinted up, his head cocked to one side. “I started when I was twenty-seven, right out of the Navy,” he said quietly.

Stunned, I sat there until he smiled and ran his hand through my hair and pulled me toward him for a hug. Full of energy, his partner John came along with his arms sweeping us up and away to a hotel dining room around the corner. “It’s show time gentlemen,” he said.

Lots of gay men start their show time later in life.

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Frank Pizzoli’s work has appeared in Lambda Literary Review, White Crane Review, Instinct, Windy City Times (Chicago) Huffington Post, ABC.com, Q Syndicate, Press Pass Q, AlterNet Syndication, POZ, Positively Aware, and HIV Plus. He is former editor of Central Penn Business Journal and is founding publisher/editor of Central Voice (LGBT) newspaper.
“Felice Picano, as his name suggests, is both a happy and piquant memoirist. Gifted with a prodigious memory and an inexhaustible curiosity, Picano observes everything—Japan, Berlin, his own family—in a fresh and indelible way.”
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“This engrossing three-character drama addresses the struggle for many to accept their homosexuality while adhering to their religious beliefs, in this case those of Orthodox Judaism… the play explores intriguing questions and yields affecting observations as it considers the courage required to make waves in any environment, from the synagogue to the New York State Legislature.”
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“Temperamental” was code for “homosexual” in the early 1950s, part of a secret language gay men used to communicate. *The Temperamentals*, Jon Marans’ hit off-Broadway play, tells the story of two men—the communist Harry Hay and the Viennese refugee and designer Rudi Gernreich—as they fall in love while building the Mattachine Society, the first gay rights organization in the pre-Stonewall United States. This special edition includes Marans’ script and production photos from the off-Broadway production of the play, along with a foreword by actor Michael Urie; an introduction by activist David Mixner; a look at Gernreich’s fashion career by journalist Joel Nikolaou; and an afterword on Harry Hay by journalist Michael Bronski.

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If you are interested in guest editing an issue of Chelsea Station magazine, please email us at info@chelseastationeditions.com to request the guidelines for guest editing.
A native of Chicago, Richard Johns now lives, with his boyfriend of many years, in a small town on the far western fringe of that lovely city’s metropolitan sprawl. Three widely unavailable chapbooks bear his name: *2000 Poems*, *Hollywood Beach*, and *Explicit Lyrics: Poems*. He sometimes checks his inbox at: richardmjohns@hotmail.com.
Hollywood Beach

The lake is calm today. The sky-blue sky, so prodigal of clouds, is having one of its lovelier moments. You can hear the listless waves, again and again, as they moisten and cool the shore. No wind to speak of; and given the blistering heat, the bodies strewn on the sand appear etherized by the sun. Ever so briefly, my eco-frets subside as—hemmed in with high-rises—the littoral clings to its marginal life. For this I give thanks, —and for the forces of Nature that are staging a rally: the bacteria levels are low enough today that the beach is open and the boys are here. Is it intrepidity or just carelessness that allows us to venture in? Noting the lakewater’s filmy appearance, one wag was heard to ask about its T-cell count today. Really, I can’t believe how blissfully I plunge into this infected body of water!—Not after my first trip here, when just for wading in I came away with a sore that blemished my shin for weeks. When I rolled up my pant leg and showed it to Scott he blanched, then audibly shuddered. “Come time,” I pretended to snivel, “I hope you’ll enliven my hospital room…” At this he drew himself up, and affecting
the tone of a North Shore matron—“I do not have sick friends.’—delivered his reply. We’d never laugh at all these days were it not for our gallows humor…

“Beaches Open: Death Toll Mounts!” To think we’re alive in an age when an innocent trip to the beach can put you in touch with your Maker…No wonder Ken was rebuked by that queen from Open Hand for the brief, refreshing dip he took the other day. Not to worry: he lived; and except that his hair is now bleached and his sun-bronzed skin is the darkest I’ve ever seen, he’s much the same as ever: the bombshell looks, the killer smile, and an attitude all his own that always abrades my desire. Thinner now, he complains that he can’t get laid, no matter how hard he tries. The second he left him alone his last trick cut to the chase and—dispensing with sex—split with a handful of cash and a shitload of pot. Cue in those listless waves as they bring, again and again, the eternal note of sadness in… “I love the man beside me. We love the open road.” “Make no mistake,” I want to say, “these lyrics truly are my feelings,” and adrift in the air they wash over me now as if sent from wherever you are on your journey of work and love, as if sent to me from you. Snug in the midst of your things, I
imagine you there in
your room surrounded
by shifting perspectives: soft
pink, bright white, the crinkled
petals in that painting of
roses, so patiently rendered,
layer on layer, by you;
your copy of (Somebody’s)
Christ, which your mother
calls the Crucifix Picture;
and that vigorous love-making
scene of a rough-looking
piece of flesh preparing
to plug the hole in the water-
colored body of a US
Grade A boy. Add one
bowl of your favorite
fuel for Art (is it Cocoa
Pebbles today, or Lucky
Charms?) and the image
(which is better by far
than a tattered old
wallet-size photo) is
complete. The last time
someone came on to me
and then asked the boyfriend
question, the incredulous
lover inside me wanted to
say: “Surely you can
look at me and see him!”
I’m such a queer
romantic that part of
me simply assumes you’re
always inherently there,
informing my sense of
the world, as of course you are;
and needless to say, to those
without eyes to see it
I avow what it is that we share.
By the way, the last boy
to ask me (since I’m speaking
here of avowals) hadn’t
even been born when we met
and then leapt into our affair
some twenty-odd years
ago. Remember the Sturm
und Drang of those days?
It’s dim in my
memory now… The Storm
was the bliss and passion,
of course, of we two together
clinging—repeatedly clinging
together in my little
rented room, and the audible
love that we made: our
scandalous success. And as
for the Stress—perhaps the
less said the better. Suffice
it to say that it all worked
out in the end, as it
usually does, and that
another kind of life took
shape—at once less turbulent,
and less intense—with that
dear, tormented man who
to this day I love. No point
in delving now into
the complex need I
felt for our three lives to
cleave at once together
and apart. Besides, I’m
going hot, and there’s
not enough beach in
this poem: I think I
need to go in. —Yes,
there, that’s better: I’m
back again, and my older
swimmer’s body is
refreshed. To swim
and cruise, to swim
and flirt, to swim just
swim far out and
be oblivious for a
while to the wavelets
of desire, letting
what weighs on the mind
dissolve and drift
away, leaving
the body to dwell
in a state of suspension,
of amniotic calm: I
need that now and then.
From time to time I also require that the city slip from view, which it frequently does when I focus in on what’s here: the natural, clouded-up sky, the cool, bottle-green water, and the hillocks of sand and men’s crotches. Not to forget the delicate, mud-loving presence of those denizens of the shore by virtue of whose bright blooms the Buttercup Family is here: I love to commune with the spearworts (so colorfully juxtaposed with the drab ebb and flow of the tearoom) whenever I go for a wizz. It must be the captive moisture that allows their bodies to flourish wherever the concrete has cracked. Given what real estate is here, things build wherever they can, and the crevices of the world have always been choice locations, much to be desired. Anyway, each to its habitat. I’m sure that some toothless old flora thrive in those fetid urinals, as doubtless they should. Thanks to the world there are all kinds of scenes; and each person, place and thing we’ve the luck or misfortune to cherish is a life-long, thrilling enigma. If only you were here now you’d feast your eyes, I’m sure, on the sorts of beef and flesh
that at home you have
videos of. Being the lover
I am, as a gauge
I use my disinterest,
and can tell, if it’s not
worth looking at,
then you’d probably
really be interested.
For you, the desireable
body has seemingly
milk-fed skin, and is—
how else can I say it?—
decidedly full-figured.
For me, it’s less that
means more, since the look I
most often cathect is of
toned emaciation.
What stirs the von Aschenbach
in me is someone who’s
Swiss watch thin
and—well, you’re the last one
in need (having slept
with me all these years)
of the skinny on my
lust. Such as they are, I
can hear the waves wash in.
They repeatedly wash in,
hurl themselves up on
the strand, unfurling
until they recede, leaving
a sheath of moisture
on the sand. Strange how
my brain is wired, but
this image brings to mind
the saliva-covered glans
of one of my recent
fidelities—uncut,
and Vietnamese—
who lives quite close to
here. Thoughts of him
build and linger, and I
find, with one eye
on the beach, that
I’m instantly turned
on by his soft and
caressable sand-
colored skin. One thing leads to another, of course, and after he’s indulged my particular fetish for briefs, he reveals how avid he is for my mouth to ravish his cock, which is now completely engorged. Listen: the waves wash in, and blent with their ongoing sound is the sound of his undulant breath as it rushes past his lips with the swell and collapse of his chest. He suddenly stiffens, comes: streams of semen pearling his boy-thin stomach. To prolong his intense sensation I lube his taut glans with some come, and begin, ever so slowly—gently, gently and slowly—to massage it with my thumb. Albeit (as pleasures go) excruciatingly brief, what is happening to his body now he suffers to endure. I pause, and begin again, then pause till the moment ends and his muscles deliquesce… Let me leave him then, spent and limp, his body exhausted and sprawled as-is in temporary love. As someone you taught once said, “I have learned to
hold with a more open feeling with the fingers.”
(Also: “The drawings were quick—only a minute or two long.”) Like everything drawn from life now—momentary, fleeting, gone—and which although we cherish we never really grasp, the image is what remains—indelibly, more or less—of whatever it is we find that love has not debarred. In the pulse and throb of the music that’s here now and the chatter of those who sunbathe and dish, I keep thinking of (hearing) those words that William said once, whose breath broke long ago: “I understand the pleasure of having what we need not keep.” Tropical scents of emollients and sun-blockers. Arturo’s package wrapped in a skin-tight Speedo. Gorgeous stands in wildflower alleys of hollyhock-pastel blooms. The phenomenal rush you impart when your arms enfold me in bed. Item: an image of David—unconscious, eyes-wide, then
dead—as he lay
in his ex-lover’s
arms. The abused
boy-runaway
hustler from a small
Rhode Island
town reaching the
end of his journey
high above North Lake
Shore Drive. Remember his
snobbish glee (although
“snobbish” is not the right
word, somehow) that he
“lived in a building by
Mies”? In love with
the stunning effect of
it all, evenings I’d
stand at his windows
and stare out into the
air at the tenements, if
not of the rich, at
least of the well-to-do
—like so many glittering
brilliants packed
with visible light.
To put buildings up
in the sky is a breath-
taking feat—balancing
tensions and spans ever
upward—and Chicago’s
gift to the world,
for which many give
thanks, myself among
them. No yellow goat’s-
beard, nor even
those creepers whose
brilliant abundance
I call (to quote
Lorine) “the little
yellows.” This is a place
of largely different
pleasures, more glass-
and-steel than of the
backyard kind, though
surely a tenant or
two potters about
an apartment where indigenous greenery thrives, or is made to—a sort of garden in a jar, only more. So much to dwell on here, so many things to think about and digest, what with all the congestion and domesticity piled up from block to block. Even so my thoughts drift back to you—"just you, or rather, us." What lovely endeavor are you focused on now, what deep and engrossing project? Perhaps Blade Thompson’s body of work calls out for a proper filmography—Buff Butts, I’ve Got What You Want, The Man With The Golden Rod, and so on and so on, ad nauseum—and you’re the man for the job. (No East European Bel-Ami slim-fest for you!)—Perhaps, and yet probably not. More likely the moment finds you attempting to come to grips with the lyrically intricate fingerings of one of Joni’s tunes. O tell me if you can, sweets, how much more we can drink of each other and still—after all of
these years, and case after case after case—be together on our feet. Caught up in a tangle of limbs as in one of your teen-meat novels where the long-playing boys, post-bliss, lie spent, awash in her music, may our bodies unblanket themselves to reciprocally love and delve for the unforeseeable future—as complex and sensuous, hopefully, as a heartfelt, run-on line. I’ve half a mind, just now, to swim toward the lifeboy there, but I do not think that he will row toward me… Better to cool off, perhaps, with some Spanish-language ice cream—guayaba, tamarindo, piña, limón—from one of Ayutla’s bicycle carts. Choose what I may, it will surely sweeten my fingers no matter how swiftly I lick it, for it’s one of those days—those “screaming, wrestling, boiling-hot days” that you love, when the air has a thermal-wear feel. But I probably shouldn’t indulge, since (Don’t dare laugh!) I’ve got to start watching my
weight. When most of
the body gets to
be luggage it’s
time to self-abhor
—at least so says
the fat man inside
me. With its usual
mix of gymbods,
trolls and calorie hogs,
this looks like my mind
laid bare, like my thoughts
turned inside out—as
seething with bodies
as that!—but it’s only
Hollywood Beach.
So lithe, so scantily-
clad, those volleyball
players there (among whom
the Chinese James and
that ink-lover’s heart-
throb: Michael, with a
mandala tatt on his
groin) are a total
pleasure to look at, and
that is what I do:
overtly feasting
my eyes as the hungry
body eats, albeit
from afar. Part of me
wants to join in, of
course, and indulge in
my taste for ephemeral
friendship. Alas, it
isn’t to be. The day
is getting on and
I need to start wrapping
things up here, I
need to think about
leaving. Besides which,
_Hollywood Beach_
is fast becoming its
own kind of Farewell
Work, where in sociable
groups of three or more,
or as couples, or
singly, one after one
after one, my audience departs. Who says that poetry makes nothing happen? Or that the world has really neither joy, nor love, nor light? Sad rhetoric, you are not deserving of this life, and so: begone! Or better still: correct yourself, and struggle to express the evidence of your senses. Our coupled pasts, this moment and this place (and hence, perhaps, this poem) could all be named, just like those seeds I planted back in spring: “Sensation Mixed,” the words are really all-applicable. Think of our yard, think of my weed garden: that manifestation of ineradicable urges, fragrant and lush, where so many styles vie for the pleasures of being. It is one of the bloom factories of the world in which I invest my attention—lavishly, day after day. And even in the darkness when the night air seems to scintillate with the uncoordinated burning force of countless fireflies that space transfixes and transfixes me. The full mysterium of the world hovers all around us with its gifts and
chances, and they are ours to take. Part of what draws me here is not what the water means but what it suggests: the endless gleaming fluency of things, and what that offers us. And now, the ever-present image pile with which my consciousness is laden adds this moment to itself, for everything we know is usable somehow: a sought-for link, perhaps, or itself an oracle, however odd or small. Consider the boy who departs: the underwear he leaves on your bedroom floor is, as Russ would have it, a kind of engagement ring, and ought to be cherished as such. Clearly, we need every connection we can make, and there are several brief proposals here that—were there time before I head home, and were they to come—I’d be tempted myself to accept. “But what does your boyfriend think…?” is what Russ will often ask me when I hold him in my arms. “Well, that I am overjoyed” (kissing his back as I kiss yours) “to be with you, and” (the nape of his neck as well as) “being true to my desires” (his inner thighs), which is to say: faithful
to an openness that allows each access of passion, no matter for whom it is felt. “And that I love him nevertheless.” Given the ebb of summer and the close of things—this day, its blazing light, this long and skinny poem—we have no time to waste, sweets. So much of what we know is merely paper-thin, and the pleasures of our bodies, just like our bodies themselves, completely evanesce. When I lie with you later tonight, love, moment by vanishing moment, and in silence attend to the sound of you sleeping, your breath, if I think of the beach it will be of its waves: of the sound that they make overlapping, attracted to shore. (The very same waves I dwell on now as if, for us, they were a kind of endless metaphor.) Blent hopefully forever in time with each other, let us take their example to heart, dear, and repeatedly coalesce, emerge and coalesce, blend further and break free—awash in the rhythm and breath of our bodies, our voices imbuing the air.

—Richard Johns
“J.R. Greenwell does a lovely job of relaying the comic as well as tragicomic aspects of the over-the-top dramatic world of drag queens, and he nails it exactly.”
—Felice Picano, author of True Stories

“Winning, witty, and wise. Greenwell has a talent for creating immediately recognizable yet slightly weird around the edges characters, and he puts them through some wonderfully silly paces as well as some heartbreaking ones. His prose is admirably restrained, conveying a great deal yet never sounding overwritten. But it’s his characters that shine and sparkle like sequins in the spotlight. If you’re looking for a light read that has some substance behind its humor, you’ll hardly go wrong with this collection.”
—Jerry Wheeler, Out in Print

“Eleven clever and engaging stories based in small Southern towns, some sweet and emotional, most amusing and often full of campy bitchiness! The stories are character-driven, with a diverse cast that includes drag queens with attitudes to reckon with, clueless parents trying to deal with their “fabulous” kids, criminals without a lick of common sense, and men “coming out” late in life. This is a home run for this first-time talented author, and a Southern-fried treat for his readers. Five stars out of five!”
—Bob Lind, Echo

“A slew of bizarre stories, some hilarious, some heartrending, and almost all of them as original as an Ionesco play with a good dose of David Lynch trompe l’oeil thrown in. Today’s gay literature needs more voices from Greenwell’s South, and here’s hoping Who the Hell is Rachel Wells? has called them out of the wilderness.”
—Kyle Thomas Smith, Edge

“If you haven’t picked up a copy of Who the Hell is Rachel Wells? yet, then allow me to tell you that you should.”
—’Nathan Burgoine, reviewer and author of Light

“Who the Hell is Rachel Wells? is a collection of eleven short stories about being gay in the South and I loved each of them... Greenwell gives us a wonderful cast of characters with heart and we laugh and cry with them. Written with wit and emotion, we are taken into the world of Southern drag queens and feel what they feel as they navigate life.”
—Amos Lassen, Reviews by Amos Lassen
Five fascinating tales linked by the sea. An aging architect must decide to give up his grief, even if it means losing the vestiges of a lover’s memory. An object of erotic fixation galvanizes men against the isolation of exile on a cruise liner. As he watches the disintegration of his picket-fence fantasy, an ex-soldier looks to the sea for absolution.

“In these stories, it isn’t necessarily the big events that are the most revelatory: it’s the glance, the nod, the two men sitting on a boat while ‘neither of them was making an attempt at conversation.’ Dan Lopez peoples his sea narratives with gay men, both white and of color, and in doing so reexamines the genre, not unlike Annie’s Proulx’s reexamination of the cowboy narrative in Brokeback Mountain. An impressive collection.”
—Ken Harvey, Lambda Literary

“Don’t be deceived by its diminutive size. Dan Lopez’s just released debut story collection Part the Hawser, Limn the Sea is a powerhouse of literary dexterity. There are five stories collected here, and all are linked by the sea, the seduction of water and tide, and the release of waves and surf. It takes immense skill and intuitive finesse to formulate such characterization and story development in the span of just a few pages. There is not a word wasted or a false note throughout this 60-page slice of gay fiction. Lopez demonstrates an artistry not often found in a debut collection; there is cohesion, passion, and searing pain in his writing.”
—Jim Piechota, Bay Area Reporter

“While the setting doesn’t define these stories, the sea maintains a constant presence. It is both serene and treacherous. And the characters of these stories are too distracted with their own intimacies to notice it. Each story is so delicately layered with tension that it’s worth multiple reads.”
—Jonathan Harper, Chelsea Station

“These stories are unique and powerful in their simplicity, and I found this to be an impressive collection I couldn’t stop thinking about once finished.”
—Jerry Wheeler, Out in Print

AVAILABLE FROM CHELSEA STATION EDITIONS
Derek Farris was the most stunningly handsome man I had ever met. He had his Lebanese father’s swarthy sensuality and his British-American mother’s vivid blue eyes. On top of that, his body was the product of hours in the gym and the best steroids that money can buy. The only faults that I could find, and believe me, I tried hard to find a few, were that his eyes were a tad too widely spaced and he had a hint of a brooding brow above those piercing eyes.

I ran into Derek on karaoke night at XES Lounge in Chelsea. He was wearing ass-hugging jeans and a tight baby blue tank top which wouldn’t stay on long. We were both contenders for the title of Karaoke King. I didn’t take the competition too seriously and neither did Derek, or so he claimed. He didn’t have a great voice, but with his looks and his hot body, the judges would probably give him the prize.
Derek rushed up to me and grabbed me by the shoulders. He must have been freaked about something because he wasn’t usually very physical with me.

“What’s wrong, man?”

“You remember that guy, Chris, the choker? He’s fucking stalking me.”

Of course I remembered the choker. It happened the night I met Derek. We were in one of those trendy nouvelle cuisine restaurants where they decorate the mostly empty plates with creative drizzles of sauce. I had been invited by the man I was dating at the time—a tall, exceptionally thin black man who specialized in Fire Island rentals. We were joined by Melissa, who was introduced to me as the heiress to the Ballantine Beer fortune, her accountant, Chris, and of course, Derek. Halfway through dinner Chris started choking on his lamb chop. We all started to get alarmed when his face turned bright red. Derek asked him if he could speak. He shook his head. In a flash Derek was behind him, muscular arms wrapped just below his chest. He gave Chris a sharp squeeze which sent the partially chewed wad of lamb sailing across the table and landing with a splat on Melissa’s plate. Nobody had the appetite to finish dinner.

“He’s got this fixation on me,” Derek continued. “He thinks that because I saved his life, there’s a psychic bond between us,”

“Come on, it couldn’t have been that bad.”

“He shows up wherever I go and starts hitting on me. What’s the matter with people like him? Can’t he see that I’m way out of his league?”

“You saved his life, remember?”

“If I’d known then what I know now, I would have let the fucker choke to death.”

Derek was called up to sing. He pulled his tank top off as he jumped up on the stage, revealing the eagle tattoo across his upper back. I swear he was flexing his muscles. A couple of his groupies idolized him from the front of the stage. He was in the habit of bringing along a few young ladies from wherever he downs vodka tonics prior to arriving on karaoke nights. He fancied himself as bisexual.

He sang, no, he crooned, “Walking After Midnight,” the same song he always sang.

“So I see Tom Cruise is still melting the girls with his famous impersonation of Patsy Cline.” One of our fellow karaoke singers nodded towards the stage.

“He may not be original but he sure is pretty,” I replied.

“Are you still panting after him? You know you can do a lot better.”

“Better than Derek the Hunk? I wish.”

“Mark, you’re a good looking man. You keep yourself in great shape. Stop selling yourself short.”

“I wish I could believe that. Derek doesn’t seem to think I’m so hot.”

“Stop idolizing him. He isn’t worth it. You know he got kicked out of G-Lounge last Saturday?”

“No, I hadn’t heard.”
“He was all liquored up as usual. Some guy grabbed his ass so he threw his drink on him. Uh-oh, he’s finishing his song. I’ll leave you to him, if that’s what you want.”

At the end of the song Derek went down on one knee and flung his arms wide. The ladies melted. Some of the guys also cheered too enthusiastically.

“I’m sick of this same old shit,” he complained when he returned to my table. “I need to get the hell out of New York.”

If I ever was going to move my relationship with Derek to something more than dueling ballad singers, now was as good a time as any to try.

“Derek, why don’t you come out to Fire Island for the weekend? I’m sure Kerry won’t mind.” Kerry was the owner of the house where I spent summer weekends. We called him Mother. I thought how delicious it would be to watch Mother salivate over Derek stretched out by the pool.

“Is his house in Cherry Grove or the Pines?”

“The Pines, of course.” I knew what he was up to. He was trying to figure out if I was inviting him to an A-list house. “It used to be Diane von Furstenberg’s place.”

“Oh yeah? I know her. She used to come to the salon from time to time.”

“We’re throwing a party on Saturday night. I think you’ll like the kind of people who show up at Kerry’s parties.”

“Who’s going to be there?”

“Oh, you know, the usual suspects—models, actors, kept boys, rich dudes, and me.”

“Scott’s not going to be there, is he? He hangs out on the island sometimes.” He was referring to his ex. There was a lot of bad blood between those two. I didn’t know all the details but I knew that they ran a salon together until they broke up. Hard to believe that rugged macho Derek was a hair burner.

“Derek, I don’t even know Scott. I’m sure he won’t be at the party.”

“He better not be. I don’t want to see that sick fucker.”

“Don’t worry. You’ll have fun. You haven’t been out on the island in ages. Lots of new faces.”

“I’ll see if I can make it. Hey, no strings attached, right?”

“No, man. You and I are karaoke buddies. That’s all.”

* * *

Kerry Mitchell’s house on Fire Island is set back off Lana Turner boardwalk (which everyone refers to as Lana Tuna boardwalk) on the western end of the Pines. It wraps around a spacious pool with bedrooms in one wing and a sprawling entertainment center with a gourmet kitchen in the other. Nobody was about when I arrived so I changed into Speedos, garnished a glass of Seltzer water with a lemon wedge, and curled up with my Kindle on a lounge chair by the pool.

“I didn’t know you were here,” Kerry gushed as he glided out of the house in a silk dressing gown embroidered with dragons.

“Mother! You look fabulous.”
He bent over to kiss me without spilling a drop from his over-sized martini glass. “I thought you were coming on the six o’clock ferry.”

“I managed to slip out of the office early.”

He pulled up a chair beside my chaise, eager for someone to chat with.

“Welcome to paradise,” he gestured grandly although I wasn’t sure if he meant the pool, the house, or all of Fire Island.

“Hey, Kerry, before you catch me up on all the gossip, I invited someone out for the weekend.”

“Oh, how juicy. A new beau?”

“I wish. He’s a hottie.”

Kerry tapped the edge of my plastic cup with his hand-painted glass. “So, tell me about your new conquest.”

“He’s not really a conquest. Just a guy I know from karaoke, but he’s recently single so hope springs eternal. His name is Derek. Isn’t that hot?”

“Derek? Derek who?”

“Derek Farris.”

“Oh dear.”

“You know him?”

“I know of him. He’s rather volatile, I’m told.”

“What else have you been told?”

“Well,” Kerry sighed and set his drink on a side table. “He used to be a partner at a salon in the Upper East Side. They were business partners and lovers, never a good combination.”

“Yeah, I know. The partner’s name is Scott. Apparently he was cooking the books to make Derek think they weren’t making any money. But Derek found out what was happening so he left.”

“That’s not exactly the way it happened. They had a silent partner who got fed up with Derek’s drinking and missing appointments and generally being a pain in the ass. She decided Derek had to go. Scott tried to convince her to give Derek a second chance, but she wasn’t having any more of it.”

“So you’re telling me that Derek made up all that crap about Scott?”

“My dear fellow, if you know anything at all about Derek Farris, you know that first, he thinks the world revolves around himself, and second, he’s a drunk.”

“How do you know all this?”

“Because my dear friend Melissa told me the whole story and she should know. She’s the silent partner.” Kerry took a long sip from his Martini. “She owned the salon. Still does, in fact. And Scott still works for her.”

“Oh, man, maybe I should call and make up some excuse so he doesn’t come out tomorrow.”
“No, you can’t go back on an invitation. It’ll be alright as long as he behaves himself. You’ll see to that, won’t you?”

*   *   *

Derek wouldn’t arrive until tomorrow so I decided to head down to Sip-n-Twirl for tea dance. It was my favorite place on the Island, apart from Kerry’s house. The DJ, a six-foot-seven black drag queen, spun the best and most original discs of any tea dance I’ve ever been to. Everyone danced out on the deck which flexed and bounced but somehow never collapsed. It was a happy, friendly crowd.

As I watched the gyrating bodies, one guy stood out from all the rest. His dancing was relaxed, his movements fluid. He held a Heineken by the neck of the bottle, never sloshing a drop of beer on the floor or on his ironed dress shirt which was open by three buttons to reveal his toned, moderately hairy chest. He wore light plaid shorts with no belt. His sleeves were rolled up to the elbows. He was smiling as he danced. His teeth were perfect.

I was content just watching him, knowing that I would need to take a number and get to the rear of a very long line if I wanted to be with someone like him. He had dark features in the same way as Derek: jet black hair, olive skin, dark hairy arms and legs (but not unruly, perhaps he did some trimming).

I was taking all this in, when his steel blue eyes fell upon me. To my surprise, he flashed me a big smile. As I continued to watch him dance, he glanced at me several more times. Then abruptly he was off the dance floor and at the bar ordering a drink.

Like a moth to the flame, I followed. I stood just behind him, too timid to take the next step. He turned around and nearly collided with me.

“Oh, sorry, hope I didn’t spill on you.” His voice was silk and caramel mixed into a dreamy summer breeze.

“No, um—no.” I tried to collect myself.

“Can I buy you a drink?”

“Sure,” I answered lamely.

“What’s your poison?”

I was tempted to respond “you,” but I managed to recover enough to ask for a beer. Since he was drinking beer, it would have been unseemly to ask for an Absolute Cosmo, which is what I would normally have ordered.

With drinks in hand, he guided me to a tiny island of free space along the edge of the balcony. He lounged easily back against the railing, and, again holding his bottle by wrapping his fist around the very end of its long neck, he bumped his beer against mine in a toast.

The usual introductory small talk followed. His name was Ryan. He was an advertising rep for the Times. My voice was in auto-pilot as I savored his casual yet totally confident sexiness. He was stunning without pretentiousness. I couldn’t believe that he had chosen to spend time talking to me, of all people, in a sea of gorgeous, successful, manicured, pumped, and seductive men. So I reached deep inside for some courage and I took a risk.
“I don’t know if you’d be interested, but I’m having a party tomorrow night. Nothing grand, just cocktails before heading out to the Pavilion.”

“That sounds great. Where?”

I gave him Kerry’s address.

“I’m dating someone at the moment,” Ryan added casually. “He couldn’t get out here this afternoon, but he’ll be here tomorrow. Is that OK?”

So there it was. The crash after the high.

“Of course,” I answered too gushingly. “The more the merrier.”

“Fantastic. We’ll be there. What time?”

I told him any time after ten then made an excuse to dash off. I didn’t tell him it was so I could lick my wounds and try to get the good buzz going again.

*   *   *

Kerry hired a shirtless bartender for the party who was kept busy keeping vodka flowing into Derek’s glass. The guests were arriving in waves. I put some smooth jazz on the stereo instead of the usual dance music so people could talk to each other. The loud music could wait until we all headed out to the bars later.

Ryan arrived looking stunning in chino slacks and an open silk shirt with a pretty twenty-something blond at his side. He was introducing me at the same time that Derek sauntered out of the house.

“Mark, this is my friend, Scott.”

“Scott?” Not the Scott, Derek’s ex from the beauty shop. Please tell me it isn’t that Scott.

“Derek?” Scott gasped, as my slightly tipsy guest of honor came into view.

Derek whirled around to confront me. “How dare you set me up like this! I should have seen through your conniving plot. All that shit about being karaoke bros.”

“Derek, honestly, I had no idea.” I protested.

“First you invite me out here so you can show me off to your sad friends. Then you humiliate me by rubbing my face in the fact that my ex has a guy almost as hot as me.”

“I didn’t know Ryan’s boyfriend was Scott.”

“Like hell.”

“This is all my fault,” Ryan chimed into the escalating mess. “I should have told you who I was bringing.”

“Derek, simmer down. It was an accident.” Scott tried to reason with Derek.

“You son of a bitch, you’ve always been against me.” Derek charged aggressively towards Scott, but Ryan intercepted him. They started to scuffle, Derek being a little too drunk to cause any real harm.
At that moment, Chris, the choker, came charging up the walkway towards the house. “Leave him alone,” he cried out and threw himself into the melee. “Derek, darling, I won’t let them hurt you.”

“What the fuck?” Derek gasped.

Scott grabbed Chris around the waist and dragged him backwards. “Get the fuck off of him, you bastard. Haven’t you done enough damage already?”

“Him?” Derek sneered. “He’s the only one who hasn’t been plotting against me. Not like you and Melissa.”

“Derek, I’ve never said a word against you, ever. Melissa wanted you out. I begged her to keep you, man. I loved you Derek. I still do.”

“What about the cooked books?” Derek challenged.

“That was his doing,” Scott pointed at Chris. “Melissa told him to keep two sets of books so she had an excuse to force you out.”

“Don’t listen to him, Derek,” Chris the choker begged. “You and I are destined to be together.”

“Back off, psycho.” Derek gave Chris a firm push causing Chris to stagger backward and fall into the shallow end of the pool.

“Derek, save me!” Chris flailed around in two feet of water.

“Drown, motherfucker!” Derek yelled.

“You really must invite more of your friends, Mark.” Kerry cooed in my ear. “We haven’t had this much drama in years.”

“Please believe me, Derek. I’ll do whatever you want. We can start a new salon. Just come back to me.” Scott threw himself on Derek and kissed him. The rest of us stood in stunned silence as Derek drew Scott into his arms.

Ryan, my other non-date, eased his way to my side.

“Well, I guess that leaves us as the two odd men out,” I said.

“Two odd men out. What a great idea. Do you like to dance?” he asked.

“You bet I do. Let’s go.”

And that is how a karaoke singer, a co-dependent hair dresser, a six-foot-seven drag queen, and an accountant who can’t eat lamb chops led me to the man I am married to today.

__________

Bill Johnston is an emerging writer (that means yet-to-be-published but ever hopeful) who draws on years of experience of botched relationships to create romantic short stories that in no way resemble his own life. He has worked in communications technology and higher education for most of his adult life. He is a former New Yorker, now retired and living in Wilton Manors, FL.
Fortune’s Bastard

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Gil Cole

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“The opposite of love is not hate but rather indifference. Thanks to the talent of Jameson Currier, readers are never at risk for feeling indifferent to the couple at the heart of his *The Forever Marathon*. Adoration mingled with aversion at this pair’s antics ensures every page will be read with enthusiasm. We should all be grateful that Currier has not shied away from presenting an honest depiction of gay men in their late forties.”
—Steve Berman, editor of the *Best Gay Stories* annual series

AVAILABLE FROM CHELSEA STATION EDITIONS
It was seven o’clock on a Saturday night and I was in my bedroom taking a nap when Jonah woke me up. He did his knock-and-open-the-door-at-the-same-time routine that always left me startled and made me want to scream out: “What’s the purpose of even knocking?!!?” but then Jonah would always flash a sheepish apologetic smile as he stepped into the room and so I never did.

“Yo Daren,” Jonah spoke quietly in the darkness. He stared at me as I groggily sat up in bed and rubbed my eyes, trying to pretend I had only closed my eyes for a second. “I thought you said you weren’t going to take any naps this semester?” I was a compulsive napper, always preferring to sleep and escape the stress of the world over actually dealing with it.
I was caught. “I tried, I’m just really tired. I had a busy day. Plus Bobby’s gone and it was just so quiet so it was bound to happen.” Whenever my roommate Bobby left the awkward tension that roomed with us left with him too.

“Well get up,” Jonah said to me, as if it was an order. “I’m about to start watching United States of Tara and was wondering if you want to join me.”

I sat quiet for a beat, pretending I was mulling over the option.

“Sure,” I said in a faux-casual voice. I hoped off my bed and took off my shirt, which was soaked with sweat. I had had a nightmare. I dreamt that I had walked around New York City in shoes fill with shards of glass, moist blood soaking my Converse that made a squishing sound with each step I took. For some reason in the dream I never thought to just take off my shoes, which made me feel very foolish now.

Jonah leaned on my door frame, looking at me through the fluorescent light flooding in from the kitchen, and said to me: “You look like you have more muscle...”

“Yeah I think so too.” I held my arms up and flexed for him. “I guess going to the gym with you hasn’t been pointless.”

Jonah smiled and gave me a once over. “You should keep going with me.”

“Yeah, maybe,” I lied. I had stopped my tag-alongs to the gym with Jonah a week before because I couldn’t stand the out of place feeling I felt while there. I’d be the scrawny guy standing above Jonah, who’d be lustfully sweaty and straining, as he lifted the heavy weights rhythmically. I would spot Jonah even though we both knew if I was actually needed I would be of no use. But that was Jonah’s usual effect on me, driving me to do things I wouldn’t normally do just so I could please him.

I don’t know what it is about him.

I remember walking into my dorm for the first time on a sticky late August day and seeing two extremes for my roommates. One being scrawny, unimpressive, and socially awkward Bobby, who pushed his glasses up and looked up from his computer game and held out his limp long arm and simply said hi. That was the extent of conversation we had the first day. But then there was Jonah. He sauntered in with confidence and an infectious energy. “Yo,” Jonah said in a voice that sounded like Seinfeld’s. “I’m Jonah.” I was for some reasoned entranced by the short, muscular, tan guy with a five o’clock beard in worn plaid shorts and a baggy and faded polo that stood in front of me.

Jonah and I first bonded over photography. Jonah being the photographer and me, the model. One morning, during the first week of school, Jonah performed his knock-and-enter routine for the first time with a camera in his hand, snapping pictures of a, yet again, sleeping me. I enjoyed being studied by Jonah through a lense. Knowing that, even if for just a couple of seconds, I was his focus. Then we would print out the pictures sitting close to one another and admire them with him saying things like “Look at the boca in this one!” or “You see the way the shadow falls on your face!” or my favorite: “You look amazing here!”

One gray, winter day Jonah and I did a photo shoot in Central Park. I shivered inside Jonah’s warm fleece coat during most of it.
“When did you know?” Jonah asked after taking a picture of me standing on a giant rock with a dramatic hand in the air pose.

“Huh?” I asked through clattering teeth.

“When did you know you were gay?”

“I don’t know.” I grappled for a suitable answer while trying to figure out why Jonah was asking me this now. “That’s a hard question to answer. All I can say is the cliché ‘you just kinda always know.’”

“You were never confused or unsure? I mean everyone goes through that right?”

I was taken aback by why he was asking me such direct questions. “It’s different for everyone,” I said. “I just mean deep inside I always knew the truth. I just tried for a while to ignore the truth although the truth never goes away.”

“Huh,” Jonah said and for the rest of the time in the park he stayed painfully quiet. Once we were through taking pictures we stood above the ice skating rink looking down at the moving circle of smiling faces skating around. I looked over at Jonah, who stood looking down at the rink with clenched teeth and piercing eyes.

I walked into the living room in my changed clothes. I was wearing my pink baja hoodie, which was really hot and made my skin itchy, but I wore it a lot because Jonah said he liked it.

I sat on the couch next to Jonah and stared at the ridiculous fifty-inch flat screen Jonah bought for the dorm so he could watch his treasured movie collection. I sat awkwardly waiting for him to press play so I poured a shot of vodka into my red solo cup of orange juice and took a sip, the vile taste burning the back of my throat. Meanwhile a creaking sound filled the room as Jonah twisted his weed grinder back and forth.

Thirty minutes into the show I began to feel the alcohol drip into my brain. I cycled over the idea of reaching over to Jonah, placing my hand on the back of his head, clutching the curly strands of his bushy black hair and reaching in quickly to kiss him before he could even refuse. How I would feel the stubble on his chin rub against my face. The softness of his pink lips. Instead I tried to focus on the show we were watching. It was about a woman with multiple personality disorder, who commonly lost her shit and went bat-shit crazy yet her family was always there for her, especially her husband. No matter what she did, even when she changed into a toddler alter ego and peed on her son while he was sleeping, her family just shrugged their shoulders and forgave her. And most importantly, they always loved her. I wonder if I’d peed on Jonah would he just shrug his shoulders and say: “It’s cool man.”

I would if he did it to me.

Jonah then paused the movie for what seemed to be the twentieth time, pulling me out of my drunk reflective trance, and pulled his glass bong, which had turned a dirt brown color from constant use, up to his lips. He lit the bowl, inhaled, holding the harsh weed smoke in his chest for as long as he could and then exhaled. Then we sat in silence for a little while. It was annoying and I wished we could have just watch the show or talked, which I almost said every time Jonah pushed pause, it but I silenced myself by taking a sip of my drink.

“Hey Daren, you want a hit?” Jonah said to me, holding the bong out in my direction with a smile. “Come on, you know you want to.” The last time I smoked with Jonah I ended up lying
paralyzed in my bed because of the heavy laziness that crushed me and endured what felt like a psychotic panic attack in my head. The whole experience was traumatic yet Jonah laughed every time he thought about it.

“No,” I said resolute. Then I smiled playfully to make Jonah think he didn’t bother me with his jokes.

“Alrightttt, you don’t know what you’re missing out on,” Jonah said before lighting the bowl and placing his thick lips on the bong.

“That’s okay. I have this,” I said holding up my drink and taking a sip, noticing how drunk I was by how much mental concentration the action took. Way more than it should have.

Jonah’s vibrating phone broke the long resulting silence.

“Louis just texted me asking if I want to come downstairs to smoke with him and Ernest.”

I shook my head. “Don’t you get tired of smoking all day?”

Jonah looked up at me with dagger eyes. He spat out, “Well what else is there to do?”

“I don’t know,” I whined, stopping an argument before one started.

Jonah sighed. “Well I’m going down to Louis’ and Ernest’s,” he said while getting up in one fluid motion. “You can come down if you want.” Jonah went into his bedroom and closed the door behind him.

“Mmmmm,” I grumbled dissatisfied with the way the night was going. “Maybe.”

To be honest I didn’t want to go to Louis and Ernest’s room because I didn’t want to see Ernest. Two nights ago, while drunk, I had bluntly asked Ernest if he cut himself after hearing Bobby and Jonah talking in the kitchen that afternoon about seeing a flash of a red and black scar on Ernest’s wrist. Ernest slowly nodded his head and pulled up his black sleeves and showed me the deep scars covering his pale white arms. But somehow the night ended with me crying on Ernest’s shoulder, sobbing and saying: “I just wish Jonah was gay and loved me.” I was self-centered and embarrassed by the fact that I didn’t even want to change that fact about me.

Then, Jonah came out of his room in just his grey boxers.

“What are you doing in your underwear?” I squealed. I crossed my legs.

“Calm down, don’t get too excited. I got the munchies.” Jonah ravaged through the kitchen cabin and pulled out a bag of potato chips that were mine. I didn’t say anything.

“You couldn’t wait until you put pants on?”

Jonah looked at me, throwing a sheepish smile, and shrugged and then filled his mouth with a handful of chips.

“You’re torturing me,” I said.

“I know.”

“And you like it?”

Jonah shrugged again. “It’s fun.”

“Yeah for you, not for me.”
“Eh, you get to look at me and I get attention. Win-Win.” Jonah flashed a full out unapologetic smile at me.

I wanted to say: “No, Win-Lose.” but again I reached for my solo cup instead and imagined what I would do if I woke up to a crazy Jonah peeing on me.

In Louis and Ernest’s room I sat on Ernest’s bed scrolling through Facebook on my phone, trying to block out the sound of the blaring music and Jonah and Louis’ voices struggling to talk over each other.

“P.T. Anderson didn’t write The Master to be about scientology!” Jonah yelled.

Louis finished taking a hit from the bong and passed it to Jonah. “Come on it was about a cult!” Louis shouted, egging Jonah on.

“Yes, but it wasn’t about scientology specifically. And the movie was about so much more. Freddie and Lancaster’s relationship…” Jonah stopped and took a hit and signaled to Louis for the smoke-buddy to blow into. Jonah exhaled and began to rapidly talk again while passing the bong back to Louis, “was actually the central focus, I mean look at Joaquin Phoenix…”

I laid on Ernest’s bed exhausted from just listening to the conversation.

“You okay Daren?” Ernest asked, who sat at the foot of his bed and looked down at me worriedly.

“Yeah,” I croaked out. “I just can’t take any more of this conversation.”

“I know, they’re bickering like old women, right?” Ernest said with a laugh. He made a dramatic face of exhaustion that made me laugh with him.

“How are you feeling?” I asked, sitting up to show Ernest that I cared about him. “I’m sorry about the other night. I didn’t mean to trouble you with my silly problems.”

“No, it’s no problem,” Ernest said, waving his hand, “It’s good to let it all out sometimes, y’know? It was a nice therapy session.” I believed him. Ernest had a likable Midwestern accent that made everything he said sound genuine. “So how it’s going with him?” Ernest raised his eyebrows and pointed quickly to Jonah. “Any luck jumping into that car?”

I pouted. “Sadly, no.”

“Well one day huh? We all have our hopes and dreams.”

“Yeah one day,” I said looking over at Jonah, who was still arguing with Louis over the central theme within P.T. Anderson’s The Master.

Ernest shoved my shoulder. “I’m sure you’ll find the right guy.”

I shook my head. “Just promise me this,” Ernest said seriously now, “don’t let him be the only guy you spend your time thinking about. He doesn’t deserve that. Don’t give him that much.” Ernest suddenly turned joyful again. “Hey, maybe you could get with Louis?”

Louis was also gay but I never could force up the same feelings of crazed affection that I had for Jonah on to Louis. I don’t know. Louis had a nice smile that always appeared when he saw me. He shared the same deep love for pop music as I did, always playing new tracks that he think I’d like while I sat back and watched Jonah and him smoke. He had a likable personality, becoming
friends with almost everybody. And I liked his curly brown hair. Louis was a good friend and just that.

“No, no, no, not Louis,” I slurred.

I turned my head and noticed the wonderful separation I felt between my mind and body. Before I could stop myself I felt the rush of events of Jonah saying to me: “Come on take a hit.” Then I felt the wet glass pipe touch my lips. Then burning smoke entered my chest and I wanted to blow it all out as if I were a fire breathing dragon and then cough out my heart. Then I was on the bed crushed with laziness. My mouth felt as dry as sand. I laid spread eagle on the bed, my body dead other than the occasional violent shiver that would pass through it, but inside I was fighting a mental war. A tidal wave of vivid memories crashed down upon me as if they were actually taking place again. I was trapped in the memory of a fifteen-year-old me crying alone in my dark room at night, as if I was lying in the same bed and crying the same tears over the same heartache.

I tried to keep it all together and make Louis, Ernest, and Jonah think I was asleep but tears began to fall down my cheeks.

“Is he okay?” I heard Ernest ask, his voice had a heavy echo to it.

“Yeah he’s fine.” A deep chuckle. It was Jonah. “This is so ridiculously funny.”

I sat up slowly. I needed it all to end. So I laboriously reached for my cup and took a big gulp. The normally vile vodka tasted refreshing to my dry, scratchy mouth.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea Daren,” Jonah said.

And I closed my eyes, hoping my mind and heart would do the same.

I woke up in the dark, disoriented, still in Ernest’s bed. I still felt the schizo frenzy from the weed in my head and I sat up while violently shivering. I looked around to see Ernest sleeping at the foot of the bed and Louis snoring in his own. No Jonah around.

“Ernest,” I whispered into the darkness. “Help me.”

“Huh,” Ernest said while rubbing his eyes and trying to see me through the darkness. “What’s wrong?

“Nothing.” I lied. “Just, can you help me back to my room?”

“Yeah, sure.”

I leaned on Ernest’s warm shoulder as we walked up the stairs and down the hallway. I tried to keep it all in but every now and then a tear would betray me by falling down my cheek or a sob would quiver in my chest.

“Are you sure you’re okay?”

“Yeah,” I whispered slowly.

Finally we ended up at my dorm and I turned around to look at Ernest, clenching my teeth to keep my tears in and for my body to stop shaking. “Bye…” I said. “Thanks.” I started to close my door.

“Wait. What happened? Do you want me to stay with you for a while?”
“No.” And I closed the door behind me with a bang.

“If you need me just call me,” Ernest shouted through the door.

Many times I have run through that night and I can never understand or remember much after I closed the front door and was alone in the pitch black of my dorm. I look back and all I can remember are the feelings but not the cause behind them. I laid myself down on the cold tile floor of the common room and sang to myself in a slurred voice. I just remember feeling alone. I had come to an acceptance that this beating sadness laced with anger and self-hate would be how I felt forever and that there was nothing I could do about that. I had decided that Jonah just viewed me as an amusing joke and I never would matter to him as much as he did to me. I remember feeling I didn’t belong here in the city and that it was time I stopped pretending I did. All of the self-hate bubbled inside of me and I needed it to leave me, for the first time tears, sobs, and wails weren’t enough. I crawled my way to the kitchen shrilling “Why Me?” repeatedly in a voice that sounded too broken to be mine. Who I was asking the question to to this day I don’t know, maybe Jonah, maybe myself, maybe to God but I’m not sure.

I grabbed onto the kitchen counter and stood up. I wobbled over to the light switch and flicked the lights on. Then I remember the sound of glass hitting the floor and how it gave me pleasure. Then another, and another, and another, and another. It was all fluid and quick. It all played out in less than thirty seconds and I sat down beaten and shaken but relieved.

I pulled out my phone, my hand no longer shaking, and texted Ernest: “Come.” The glass crystals on the floor sparkled from the light that hit them and I was mesmerized. That amongst all of those broken pieces the light could touch them and make beauty. I looked up, my head heavy and my body still tingling with numbness, and stared at the light.

I woke up the next morning in bed with my clothes still on. My mouth bitterly tasted of vodka and I felt groggy and submerged in a thick cloud of confusion. As I sat up, my body heavy with exhaustion, I remembered the foolish things I had done. My stomach felt empty and my body felt prepared to run away until my problems were so far away I could say they didn’t exist anymore.

I sat up and stared at the beige wall thinking that I could stay like this for the rest of my life. But then I did what I’ve done many times since my blow outs occur after trying to ignore my problems: I went into a state of auto pilot, as the only way I can deal with the aftermath of my blow outs is if I deal with what caused them as little as possible.

I tip-toed to my door, swaying a little along the way, and immediately saw the mess of my emotions beautifully materialized on the kitchen floor. Cherry red pieces of dish-ware sprinkled the kitchen floor and even spread out to the common room. The trash can laid defeated on the ground, spilling out near it were smashed cans of beer and plastic bottles, browned banana peels, and crumpled stained brown napkins. It all had a beauty to it like Hiroshima after the bomb when its landscape laid as if it had been freed and the destroyed materials that coated it were just sheddings of a past time of error. The trash just needed to be swept up and things would be rebuilt, better this time. But Jonah and Bobby wouldn’t see it that way. I closed the door, locking it, and pulled my blankets over me, pretending they were my castle walls.

turned onto my side and stared at the beige wall and tried to make figures out of the random stucco blobs. *Boom. Boom. Boom.* “Daren, please.”

I heard a tense voice. “It’s whatever I’ll just get my stuff later. This is ridiculous. He’s not gonna get away with this.” It was an angry Bobby.

“No, no, no. I’m going to get him to open up.” *Boom. Boom. Boom.*“Daren, Bobby just needs to come in and get something real quick, that’s all.” I sighed, Jonah wasn’t going to give up. I inhaled like I did before the doctor stuck a needle in me and prepared for the pain. I opened the door, leaped back into my bed, and pulled my castle wall blankets back over me, all in one fluid sequence. I peeked out and saw Bobby with a clenched jaw and daggers eyes swoop in and grab his backpack. He flashed me a quick glance of judgment that I’m sure he relished and slammed the door behind him.

After an hour of laying in bed shaking from my hangover and fear I finally got up. I kneeled down on the kitchen’s tile floor and endured the small pain it drove in my knees because I thought it was a beautiful punishment for what I had done. Jonah came out of his room and sat in a chair facing me. He just sat there. His head was in his hand, his face was blank and his eyes were locked on to me. For fifteen long minutes we just stayed like that: me violently shaking on my knees, in my sweat soaked green sweater and jeans from the previous night, cleaning up my emotions and Jonah in his grey boxers staring at me for God knows what reason. I felt as if he was watching me pee and I just wanted him to stop. Finally Jonah broke the silence by rising out of his chair with a sigh and saying: “Here, let me help you clean up.” I looked up at Jonah. It felt like he was risen over me like the sun over dirt, but maybe that was because his intense stare made me feel hot. I was confused. He should have been angry with me, not helping me.

“No. It’s fine,” I whispered, averting my eyes to a streak of rainbow inside a piece of broken glass.

“No,” Jonah said resolute. “Let me help. It’ll be much quicker this way.” He wasn’t going to run away.

I obliged and handed him the broom and dust pan and started scrubbing crusted patches of dried food off the floor.

“I think this is the best thing to happen to the dorm,” Jonah said to me after some minutes of silence. “We’re actually cleaning up for once.” He looked at me expecting a laugh. I did nothing.

After Jonah cleaned up there were still pieces of glass--small like sand--that I had to clean up myself. I wished he would have just let me do it myself, because then I wouldn’t have had to clean up after him, but I guess it was nice just to have him there.

When I was done, I laid lifeless on my bed. My left arm limply hung off of my bed and my face was blank as I stared at stucco blobs again. Jonah knocked and walked into the room and snapped above my head while saying “Yo.”

“Yes?” I asked, not moving. I don’t know why he insisted on talking, it felt like he was dumping whole salt containers on my open wounds.

“So I’m just trying to understand,” Jonah said while sitting on Bobby’s bed. “What exactly happened last night.”
I lied by saying, “I don’t know.” I put my hand over my eyes hoping it looked like I was trying to think when really I just didn’t want to look at Jonah. “It was just everything. I think it was the weed plus the alcohol. I’m fine. I don’t know... I think I was just stressed out... I’m fine now. I am.” I looked at Jonah to see if any of my lies stuck.

“Did something happen when you came back here? Everything was alright before then.”

“I don’t know. I don’t really remember much.”

“Was it something I did?”

“No, no, no. I don’t know what happened.”

Jonah sighed and looked at me suspiciously. “Well once you figure it out let me know.”

Jonah started walking out of the room and then he stopped.

He turned back around towards me. “Are you going to be okay?”

“Yes. I will be,” I said, telling the truth for the first time.

“Alright,” Jonah said with a sigh and started to slowly walk out of the room again.

He stopped again.

“Oh, Ernest and Louis came by while you were sleeping. Ernest wanted to make sure you were okay.”

“Okay,” I simply said. After I texted him Ernest came up and sat by me on the cold kitchen floor and rubbed my back as I sobbed into his soft cotton T-shirt until I fell asleep. I probably should have texted Ernest to thank him and let him know I was fine but I didn’t see much purpose in it.

Jonah slowly closed the door behind him while throwing glances at me. He opened the door again. “I’m sorry,” he said.

I suddenly came to life. “For what?” I asked while sitting up.

“Just everything. I feel like I’ve been an asshole to you sometimes. We’re cool right?” Jonah asked, his eyes searching my face for the true answer.

I nodded rapidly. “Yeah, why wouldn’t we be cool?” I asked, pulling my voice down a couple octaves to sound cool.

“I don’t know,” Jonah said shrugging his broad shoulders. “I can never tell if you really hate me or like me. I feel like it’s a back and forth kind of thing.” He grinned a small sheepish smile at me and I realized he did it because he was anxious.

“No we’re fine. We’re cool. Really.”

After that I emerged from my room and sat on the common room couch with Jonah. We sat in silence for a couple of minutes until Jonah asked me if I wanted to watch something.

“Yeah, sure,” I mumbled and Jonah threw me the remote. I put on the show about the crazy woman who peed on the people who always loved her.

Jonah and I sat in silence as we stared ahead at the T.V. I sat on the couch balled up, trying to pull in every limb of my body to become as small as I felt. Jonah sat tense, staring blankly ahead. I stared at him from the corner of my eye and I could see the confusion on his face in the way his
mouth sat slightly open and his brow in a deep furrow. I thought to myself, *He probably thinks I’m crazy.* That thought made me want to burst into tears but I stopped myself because then Jonah would have definitely thought I was crazy. For thirty minutes we sat in silence, attempting to put on some air of normalcy, and I wanted to say thank you to Jonah for it but I never did.

I moved out of the dorm two days after that since Bobby never got over what I did and complained to the RA that he didn’t feel safe living with me. I guess I understand it. I guess he wouldn’t let me pee on him. Ernest helped me move out. Jonah and Louis were too busy smoking to help.

My new roommate, Justyn was gay and we got along well. I didn’t hang out with him like I did with Jonah but we didn’t passively hate each other like Bobby and me did.

I messaged Jonah this when he asked me how things were going in my dorm a week after I moved out. Then he asked me: “Do you think you’re going to have sex with him?”

I joked and messaged Jonah no, but that I would be sure to message him if I did it.

Jonah never messaged me again.

The rest of the school year I tried to hang out with them again but Ernest and Louis would always say they were busy or simply not text me back.

It took six months before I talked to Jonah again.

It was when I ran into him on the 6 train.

I sat next to him.

When I asked him how his life was going Jonah simply said: “Good.” and stared out the window.

I tried joke about how the turtleneck sweater he was wearing was a major step up from his old style of baggy polos but Jonah just sat stone faced and said: “No, I still dress the same.”

As I followed him out of the train station Jonah randomly complained about how for the rest of the previous school year he kept stepping on small pieces of glass in the kitchen. “I could never walk barefooted thanks to you.”

When he said this I stopped walking. Jonah looked back, threw his hand up once, and kept walking.

Andre Wheeler is a nineteen-year-old Texas native currently studying Journalism at New York University. His work has been featured on *Mr. Beller’s Neighborhood*. You can find him on twitter @andre_daren or on tumblr @andrenaquian. He spends his free time reading, dancing to Beyonce, and chasing his dreams.
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Paul Hostovsky is the author of four books of poetry. His poems have won a Pushcart Prize and been featured on Poetry Daily, Verse Daily, The Writer’s Almanac, Best of the Net, and Chelsea Station. He works in Boston as a sign language interpreter.
Half Moon

The two chairs
that we sat in
this morning
in our pajamas
in the sunny kitchen
kissing
are still in the same position
this evening
when I get home
in the dark
I sit in
one
then the other

—Paul Hostovsky
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