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ALTERNATE

A BARGAIN AT

3⁹⁵

**WALKING MY
BABY BACK
HOME**

NOEL RYAN'S

**HOUSE
OF BLUE
FLOWERS**

CONCLUSION!

THE CASE OF THE
BLOSSOMING

BOXER

BILL WARD'S
ADVENTURES OF

ZEKE!

ALL OF THE U.S.
ARMED FORCES

ARE LOOKING FOR
A FEW GOOD

BIGOTS!

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**THE
SWITCH**

THE PRIZE WINNING

STAVROGEN

**GOOD
ADVICE
FOR THE GAY
COMMUNITY**

**BLOOD
LOVERS**

**TYPHOON
SLAMMIN'**

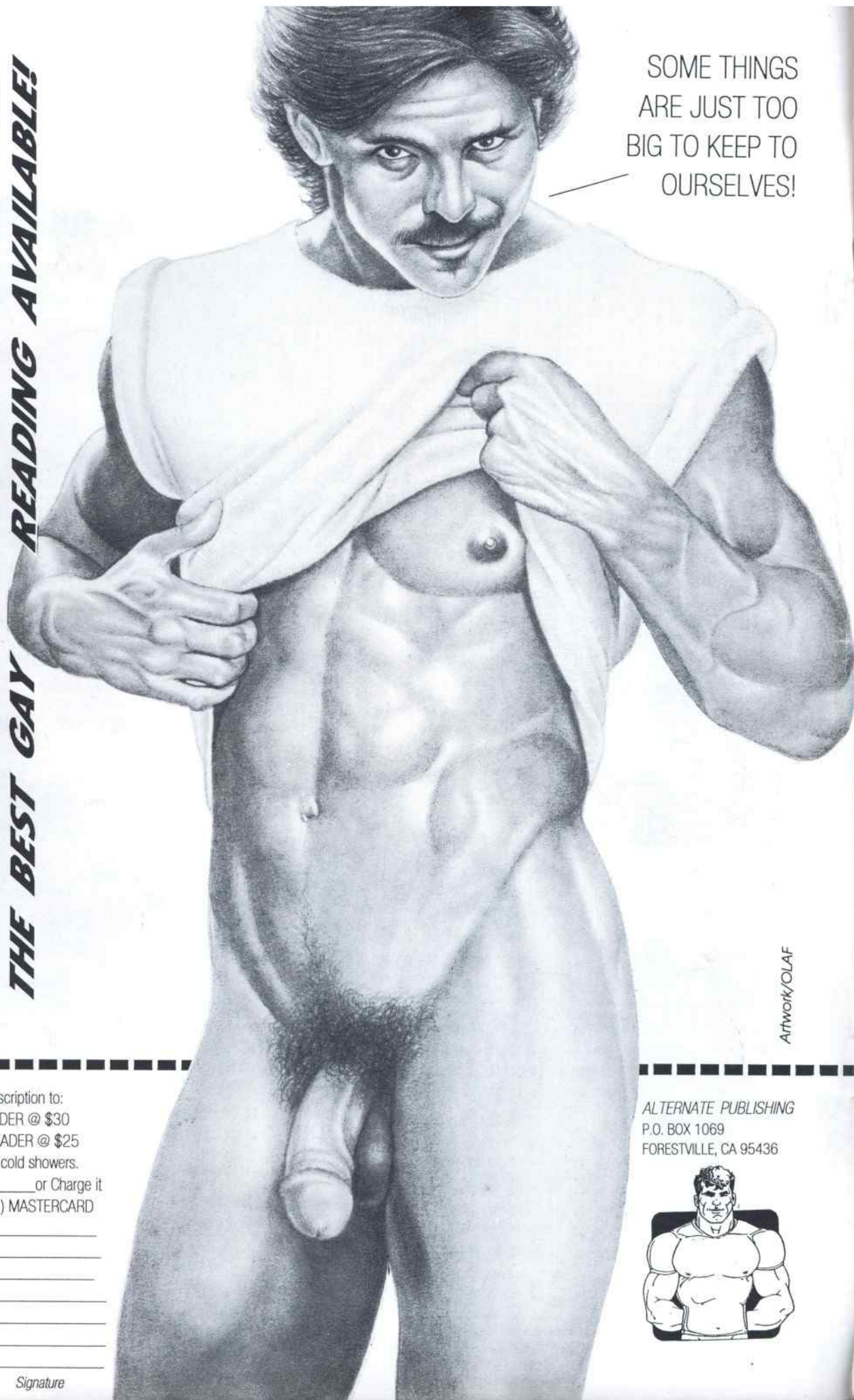
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GOLDEN
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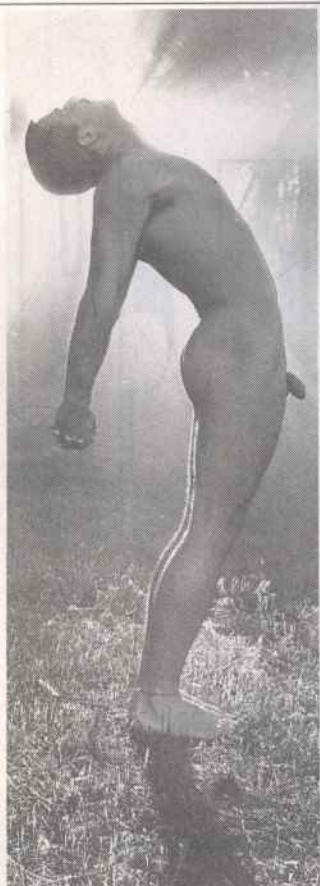
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ALTERNATE

THE BEST IN READING REQUIRES THE BEST IN WRITING.



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Among the various meanings of the word "switch" offered in *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, I find that all of them are strongly suggestive of the relationship between Louis Coyote and myself.

"Switch: (1) to strike or beat with, or, as if with a switch. WHISK. LASH. (2) a: to turn from one railroad track to another: SHUNT. b: to move (cars) to different positions on the same track within terminal areas. (3) to make a shift in or exchange of (—the talk to another subject). (4) to lash from side to side—switchable. switcher"

The last of the above was prophetic.

As it turned out, Louis and I were literally "switchable switchers."

I laughed uneasily after I said to Louie, "You know what we're doing, don't you?"

We're about to pull a *Prince and the Pauper*"

Louie didn't know what I was talking about. It was hard for me, at first, to remember that an intelligent man is not necessarily an educated man. I made a silent, firm resolve never to talk over his head again. The handsome, charming man I admired and envied had a painful inferiority complex about his lack of formal education. I wanted to make him understand that everything he was and everything lie was not added up to my passionate desire to switch places with him. It was no use my telling him that the pampered darlings I went to the fancy schools with were, compared to him, the dumbest, most predictable, most limited, and least sexy bore it was no use my telling envied every rotten break—every deprivation—every emotional agony he had endured in two years of living.

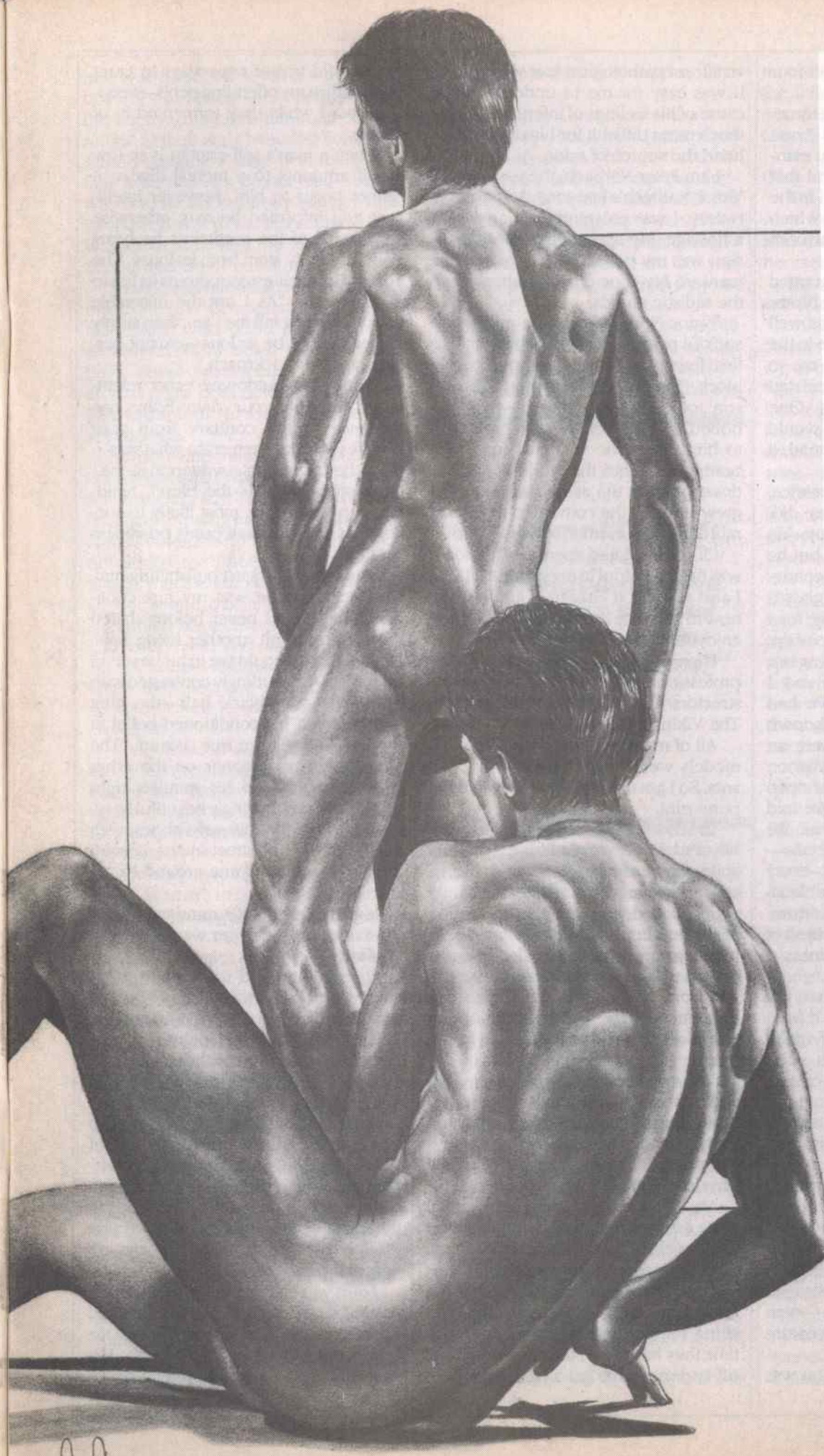
Because it made him what he was! What he was, in my crazy romantic view, was so beautiful, glamorous, and sexy that I hated my super rich, sterile, terminally boring existence all the more.

I didn't want to be like him. I wanted to become him—Louis Coyote—half Cherokee Indian, half German—son of an El Paso couple who had died as they had lived—dirt poor losers in a society that worshipped the values and the lifestyle epitomized by my family—the Norbachs of Long Island—the same *nouveaux riche* barbarians I was running away from when I literally collided with Coyote in a fog so dense that we couldn't see each other's faces clearly until we checked into that hotel room in the little town just ahead. All across the country there are hotels called "Terminal" simply because they are in the vicinity of a train or bus station—as if nobody ever considered another meaning of the word.

THE SWITCH

A Novel
by
TORSTEN BARRING

**(Peter Norbach
tells how he met
Louis Coyote,
and the
extraordinary
pact they made.)**



I always asked, "What man in his right mind would want to check into The Terminal Hotel?"

I thought of all those Tennessee Williams cafes and bars and hotels and streetcars: Desire, Tarantula Arms, Last Chance, and, of course, Terminal.

But in the Hotel Terminal, in that obscure little room, the dark innuendo of the word did a full one-hundred-and-eighty-degree turn. For there, something long-despised died, and something long-wanted was born.

The cars we had abandoned were literally joined at the heads like Siamese twins. We were driving very slowly because of zero visibility, so we escaped injury. But all our pushing, pulling, huffing, and puffing efforts to separate our two vehicles were in vain. We finally broke up, laughing, and started walking. Nobody in Tiny Town was going to do anything except stay comfortably indoors until that pea soup lifted. So we decided to do the same. We checked into a room that was not altogether uncomfortable, despite the exceptionally quaint custom of a "double room" turning out to be a rather large room with one double bed.

"I don't mind if you don't," said Mr. Coyote. I assured him that sleeping with another guy was nothing strange to me

having been raised in a house with four older brothers.

This, in fact, was not altogether true. I didn't mention that the house I was raised in was a seventy-five-room mansion with twenty guest rooms and that all my life I had slept all by myself in the smallest of the family bedrooms, which was five times larger than the hotel room Louie and I were in.

Not that having my own room granted me any rights of privacy. My four brothers considered it their privilege as well as their pleasure to burst in on me in the middle of the night and subject me to the kind of abuse usually associated with college fraternity hazings. One would suppose this sort of thing would go away as we all got older. Instead, it only got kinkier.

Louis and I called for room service, which they never heard of. They did, however, send up a young boy. He didn't resemble a bellhop at all, but he filled his Levis very well and condescended to get us some clean glasses and a bottle of Scotch in exchange for a lot of admiration and an enormous tip.

Only after we had started sipping our first drinks did Louis Coyote and I actually introduce ourselves. We had already been acting as if we had known each other all our lives. We were an extreme example of the phenomenon called "strangers on a train" or "two ships that pass in the night." We told each other the stories of our lives. We exchanged the most personal details—revealed every intimate secret—every ambition. Finally, with considerable alcoholic assistance—every broken dream.

When we got around to the subject of sex, we eased into a mood of sadness—gravity, even.

We tried to restore some levity by recalling how we had progressed from playing it very straight—the feigned macho routine about having to sleep together in the same bed—to openly flirting with the kid we sent out for booze—in less than three minutes!

Our sadness came from deprivation. "Depraved and Deprived" became the title of the song we crooned in a drunken duet.

To put in plainly, we were practically virgins. I was twenty. He was twenty-two. We were virgins not because we were afraid of our desires for other men but because we were uncertain—even mystified—regarding the exact nature of those desires.

Added to our sexual frustration was

an almost pathological low self-esteem. It was easy for me to understand the cause of his feelings of inferiority. It was much more difficult for him to comprehend the source of mine.

I am Peter Norbach, the youngest of Victor Norbach's five sons. At the age of twenty, I was escaping from my life as a hostage. My seventy-five-room mansion was my prison. My father was the warden. My four older brothers were the sadistic guards.

Victor Norbach was the millionaire son of a poor Norwegian fisherman. His first four sons were chips off the old block. The fifth son was not. The fifth son took after his mother—the fine-boned, elegant beauty who gave birth to him when she was past forty. She brought him into the world and abandoned him at the same moment. So I grew up with the conviction that I had murdered my mother by being born.

Of course, I had a sense of humor. It was the major tool in my survival kit. But I also read Scott Fitzgerald and learned how to play *The Poor Little Rich Girl* and enjoy high-class self-pity.

I learned the exquisite arts of the professional victim. I had superb instructors. Four of them! I called them *The Viking Goon Squad*.

All of my homemade masculine role models were huge, muscle-bound giants. So I got the idea that I was an ugly, puny runt.

In school, I took up swimming, tennis, and some weight-lifting, too. Despite the presence all around me of other slim, smooth-chested, elegantly proportioned boys on the swimming team, my thoroughly conditioned self-loathing, admirably concealed beneath a facade of fun-loving charm, prevented me from really connecting with my reputation as the best-looking jock in school. When my jock buddies in the course of our grab-ass rituals in the locker room kidded me about my big cock, I actually took it as a criticism. My enormous dangle was out of proportion to the rest of my regulation size thirty-eight physique—another proof of my physical inferiority.

My brothers, you may well guess, were not nearly so well hung, and their overdeveloped thunder thighs made their penises look even smaller.

So, they never stopped taunting me about my cock—that ugly, enlarged *thing* I should be ashamed of. Every time they hazed me, they tore my shorts off and made me get a hard-on. Then,

they would invent new ways to taunt and tantalize my offending penis—keeping it hard while they tormented it, of course.

When a man's self-esteem is so low that it amounts to a mental illness, it cannot occur to him, however intelligent and informed he may otherwise be, that all of the putdowns he hears from his family stem from jealousy. The noise of low self-esteem shouts its lies to the inner ear, "As I *am* the miserable cockroach they tell me I am, then surely nobody could be jealous—except perhaps another cockroach."

When the putdowns echo relentlessly through your own home, no evidence to the contrary from your buddies at school can erase what was—from the beginning—written in stone.

At school, I was the blond, handsome, popular jock most likely to succeed. At home, I was a puny, powerless hostage.

Louie knew I wasn't bullshitting him. He also knew he was my first confidant—that I had never before shared these things with another living soul. Nevertheless, I could see in his beautiful blue eyes—so startlingly contrasted with his almost blue-black hair—the glint that betrayed his conditioned belief in the trite and seldom true dictum: "The grass is always greener on the other side." I could read his mindset right through his devastatingly beautiful head. It said, "Were I in this guy's shoes, with my toughness and street smarts, I could, by God, turn the scene around to my own advantage."

My little frisbee of a mind was doing the same spin while he was telling me his story.

His parents died together in a car crash when Louis was eleven. The boy was asleep in the back seat and miraculously escaped serious injury.

Before his next birthday, he had many opportunities to wish he had escaped this world with his parents. The so-called "foster home" he was sent to was a medieval prison ruled by one of those Anglo-Germanic third generationists with cowboy clothes and a Texas accent who uphold the European traditions of their forefathers regarding discipline—with special emphasis on corporal punishment.

Louis was eager to know what that X-shaped wooden construction mounted upright in the courtyard was for. He found out before he had to ask. His suspicion that it might be Indian sculp-

ture was dispelled when a very pretty boy—about fifteen—was dragged into the courtyard by two muscular “counselors” in their early twenties. Someone started banging a large iron triangle—like a fieldhand’s dinner bell—but it wasn’t to summon hungry young males to chow. It was to alert them that a boy was about to receive the school’s sanctioned method of punishment.

Louis found himself maneuvered into the front row of spectators by older, taller boys who could look over the eleven-year-old’s head. One of these boys, about seventeen, put his arms around Louis from behind in a gesture that Louis took to be protective and affectionate.

At that same moment, the “counselors” began what was apparently a prescribed ceremony. They stripped the lad by literally ripping his shirt and jeans off. Louis couldn’t help noticing how well developed the fifteen-year-old’s body was. It was the kind of body Louis had already begun to admire and envy when he studied boys older than he was.

The boy was wearing only his thin, skimpy briefs—less than jockey shorts—when they tied him spread-eagled to what Louis now learned was The Whipping Post!

Louis noticed how freely the two men used their hands on the lad as they bound his wrists and ankles to the leather straps so that his body conformed to the Roman numeral shape of the post.

When the two men were satisfied—which seemed, to Louis, to be when the boy looked the way they wanted him to look—one of them uncoiled a whip which he wore, always, in his belt. Casually—almost as an afterthought—he reached out with one hand, ripped the boy’s shorts off, and proceeded to lash him completely naked.

Louis felt a more than usual kind of throbbing in his penis as he watched the lovely boy without a stitch of clothes on being whipped.

The tall boy with his arms around Louis tightened his embrace and pressed his groin hard against Louis’s back. Half squatting—half raising Louis up—he managed to rub his erection against the smaller boy’s buttocks as the flogging continued. This was startling enough, but Louis was forced to acknowledge a shockingly premature connection to something of which he literally had not dared to dream when the boy, breathing rapidly into his ear, started dry-humping

him in tempo to the steady rhythm of the whip.

That night, in a dormitory with about forty other boys, Louis heard whispered conversations around him in the dark. Everyone was talking about the flogging. He couldn’t quite make out if one of the boys was bragging or complaining when he said, “God damn! It made me get such a fuckin’ hard-on! Did you see the stripes on his butt when they cut him down?”

Later, the whispering stopped and all Louis could hear was a chorus of fists steadily whipping a platoon of hard boy cocks. It occurred to Louis, then, that the

***"God damn! It made
me get such a
fuckin' hard-on! Did
you see the stripes
on his butt when
they cut him down?"***

sounds of hands slapping cocks was not unlike the sounds the whip made lashing the boy’s bare flesh. And the violent gasps and grunts of boys approaching orgasm reminded him of the stifled screams that came from the tortured boy each time the whip sliced across his soft, tender buns.

Louis threw the scratchy army blanket off of his nude body and joined that gang. As he masturbated, he thought about how the naked boy looked—his position on the X-shaped post—how he writhed and twisted and pulled against the ropes that held him spread-eagled. How his tortured gyrations aroused the man who was whipping him and compelled him to wield the whip faster and harder. Why did the naked boy look so sexy while he was suffering? Why did all the boys watching press in together, almost humping each other?—jeans clad crotches and butts crushing and grinding in movements that were like a slow, tribal dance.

When Louis had his orgasm, it was

much bigger and more pleasurable than the little dry shudders he had experienced before, and, he was surprised, too, by the wetness and stickiness of it.

His puberty had arrived like everything else—violently and too soon.

But this was only his apprenticeship. After foster home came reform school, after that, penitentiary. All the result of his career as a cat burglar.

He had found his calling before he was fifteen. His various nicknames were The Cat, Surefoot, The Fly, Daredevil, Sticktoes, and The Bat. If you wanted anything that was buried, locked up, too high to reach, hidden out of sight, totally inaccessible to ordinary mortals, ask Louie and he could get it for you. Dig, crawl, climb, jump, pick, cling, balance—make himself bigger or smaller, swifter or still as a rock—get Louie to do it because he could do the impossible. Everyone admired Louie for his superhuman abilities except the Law. The Law put him in jail. The first prison chaplain who had a heart-to-heart talk with him asked Louis had he thought of a way to use his talents that wasn’t against the law. “The circus, I suppose,” answered Louie, matter-of-factly. “I could dress up in an Indian costume and walk the tightrope or jump through fiery hoops. But I’d rather be self-employed.”

“Which means being a thief,” responded the chaplain.

“I can’t argue with that. I end up in jail, but I don’t mind jail. I get along.”

And this was true. The only thing Louis didn’t like about jail was the sex. He didn’t want to bugger or be buggered in the simulated sexual role playing style that was all around him in prison. He learned to do his “Really Crazy Dangerous Indian” act effectively, and his would-be seducers, “Butch” and “Fem,” left him alone.

He fell in with a clique of very masculine-looking cons who shared a common enthusiasm for prison whippings, despite their protestations that they were “strictly one hundred per cent straight.” With the support and participation of some of the guards who were similarly inclined, they conducted Kangaroo Courts to “prosecute” fellow inmates accused of being troublemakers. The “trial” customarily ended with the offending con tied to the bars of his cell, stark naked, getting his ass whipped with belts, paddles, straps, rope and rubber hoses. Louis participated in these scenes strictly as an observer. He found it interesting as well as coincidental that

all the "troublemakers" who got their asses whipped happened to be young, good-looking and well hung.

It was with this band of prison-whipping enthusiasts that he escaped successfully one balmy summer night. He was trusted and well liked by these men, not only because of his charm and good looks, but for the astonishing aptitudes he seemed to have inherited from his father's side. Indeed, they couldn't have managed their escape without Louie's ability to scale a vertical wall as if he had suction cups on his hands and feet. This was in addition to being the best safe cracker and lock picker in business.

He was so good that the men wondered how he could have slipped up so many times and landed back in jail. They couldn't know that each time Louie got caught, it was because he wanted to. There was a lot about Louie even Louie didn't know!

The handsome black-haired, blue-eyed con and his jailhouse buddies thought they finally had it made when they were taken into the "family" of a powerful Mafia chief on the West Coast, known only as Lupo, whose political connections protected all his boys from the not-really-so-long arm of the law.

Most of the men took to their newfound affluence at once: the fancy clothes, the gourmet meals served in royal style, the parties attended by glamorous movie stars, the many idle hours around the swimming pool, the constant flow of expensive booze. As much as a month would go by before they were called to action for a heist. Then, afterwards, the rewards: "Anything you want! Anything you like! Name it! Nothing's too good for Lupo's boys!"

Some of the boys took a short-term interest in the women who were served up like snacks at any hour of the day or night.

Louie stuck close to his new friend, Manuel—a dark, handsome, gently melancholy man who, like Louis, showed no interest whatever in women. It was Manuel who introduced Louis to the pleasures of music. Manuel played recordings for him, and the twenty-two-year-old man who thought of himself as almost "terminally cool" found himself ravished to the point of weeping as he listened to the strains of Tchaikovsky and Puccini for the first time.

But as time went by, Louis became increasingly dissatisfied with his life. Because he lavished so many luxuries

on his men, Lupo felt he had a right to keep them "at home" twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. All requests to "get away for a while" were refused. "What you need to get away *for*? You got everything right here. What you need, my boy? Name it, and Lupo get it for you!"

Slowly, painfully, it began to dawn on Louis that he was still in jail! The richest, most luxurious of all possible jails—but jail nonetheless!

Also, his awareness of Manuel's feelings for him troubled Louis. He had never exchanged a single touch with

***It was touching how
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ment that he would
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another man—not even with the ones he was most drawn to. His sex life was all in his head—the fantasies of erotic violence he entertained when he masturbated.

Louis was a virgin!

If he and Manuel had shared their secrets, things might have been different.

Louis ran away from Lupo and his gang the same day I ran away from my father and my brothers. He was running west to east. I was running east to west. We ran into each other in a blinding fog somewhere in middle America.

There's no point saying we made our crazy romantic decision when we were drunk because we held to it and carried it out the next day when the fog lifted and we were cold sober.

When I mentioned to Louie how alike we looked, he was momentarily offended. He thought I didn't mean it—that I was kidding him for what he considered his "freakish, ethnic mix"—the blue eyes and fair skin from his mother's side, the extremely prominent

cheekbones, large nose, straight, thick, jet-black hair from his father's side. In addition to not grasping my point about our identical bone structure, he simply didn't know that he was beautiful. He thought my yellow hair was the only ideal of masculine beauty. He had told me so, around the fifth drink, with charmingly boozy bluntness. "You're the best-looking guy I've ever seen. If I had blond hair and looked like you, I'd fall in love with myself."

His opinion of his own looks was painfully familiar. He was convinced that beautiful could only be the exact opposite of what he was. But his negative image of himself was far from unbecoming. To the contrary, his total lack of narcissism, combined with his guileless sincerity, enhanced his beauty and endowed him with an aura that was, in my view, literally too good for this world. Had there been a normal touch of vanity or phoniness in his makeup, the effect would have been spoiled, but the same flaw that scarred his soul and made him desperately unhappy also made him incapable of vanity or phoniness. He was a criminal in the eyes of society, but to me he had a purity I wanted to protect at any cost. After an hour in his company, I knew I would give my life up for him without the slightest hesitation.

I thought of my brothers and their gross bodies as I gazed at the marble-smooth chest of the gorgeous brunette who had—so very slowly—unbuttoned his shirt as we drank and talked—one button for each drink—until, finally, I saw that bare chest down to his large, sexy navel. I continued to nurse my contempt for the four yellow-haired apes who had brought me up to feel physically inadequate as I unbuttoned my shirt all the way to show Louie my own hairless chest—huge, erect nipples—deep, wide bellybutton.

I pulled my shirt completely off and walked over to the full-length mirror.

"Take off your shirt and come over here, Louie."

It was touching how he obeyed me. "Yes, *sir*!" he said like a good soldier: chest out, belly in, stripped to the waist and standing at attention at his superior officer's command. I knew in that moment that he would do anything I told him to do. *Anything!*

I had called him over to the mirror for a purpose, but I was temporarily stunned by the way he looked wearing nothing but a pair of Levis—the kind of Levis

which, on that kind of body, ride low on the hips and emphasize the hard, flat belly down to the pubic hair. But Louie didn't have any pubic hair, and his bare belly was sleek down to the belt line of his Levis, which seemed to be held up only by the huge bulging basket and the round, firm buns. I wanted to see what would happen if I applied a little pain to those incredible tits! "I'm going to hurt you a little, Louie. How will you take that?"

"Sir. You can do anything to me you want—*SIR!*"

He stood at rigid military attention as I grasped his nipples with my thumbs and forefingers. I pulled his tits out from his chest and applied pressure. He gazed into my eyes and moaned with pleasure.

Then I kissed him. I sucked his tongue deep into my throat. I grabbed his buns through the tight denim of his Levis and ground his pelvis against mine.

Then, I had to let go of him because I was shaking and there was something I had to make him understand while I could still trust my voice—while I could still use my willpower to keep from crying. I had never been in love before, and the dizzy kind of pain it brought made me want to cry. Only a moment ago, when he obeyed me and took such pleasure in obeying me that he mimicked Army discipline, I had thought, "Wouldn't it be wonderful to have a brother like him—a brother that I could boss around?—bully and hug and whip and kiss and love half to death!"

I gently maneuvered him so that we were standing side by side facing the mirror.

"Take a good look, Louie. Our bodies are identical. So is the bone structure of our faces. Don't look at our hair—look at our noses—mouths—cheekbones. Scandinavians, too, have these high cheekbones and the almost Oriental set to the eye sockets and brow line. The only difference is the hair, and we're both blue-eyed!"

"I see it. I see what you mean, Pete. But what if they saw you in the nude? I—I don't wanna say nothin' out of place, but—I'm an Indian, Pete, and I got no hair on my body anywhere. I don't even have pubic hair. And—and—it's almost ridiculous how I'm hung. I mean it's too much—and—"

I stepped away from his half-embrace and deprived myself of his arm around my waist long enough to strip

off my pants and my bikini shorts. Then I undressed him. He stood still, like a sad little boy who knows he's going to be punished, as I unbuttoned his Levis and pulled them off.

"No shorts," I said.

He looked as if I were going to scold him for not wearing any shorts.

"I like that," I said.

"Do you?"

"Of course. It's sexy."

"It is?"

"You know it is. Levis with no shorts on. And a dork like this one!"

He shuddered as I took his gigantic cock in both of my hands. When his trembling was under control, he said, "So what? Look at yours."

I rubbed our twin big cocks together. "That's my point, sweetheart. And, look at *this*—feel it."

I took his hand and guided his fingers across my smoothly shaved crotch.

I left his hands on my sex as I raised my arms to let him see my shaved smooth underarms. Like Louie, the complexion of my skin was as smooth as velvet—all over—which threw into arch relief the "features" of the body—nipples, navel, genitalia, and ass crease. I gazed alternately at our twin bodies in the mirror and directed Louie to do likewise. The complete absence of body hair reminded me of the loving detail Michelangelo lavished on the statue of David. Not just the nipples, but the erect points of the nipples. Not just the navel, but the raised rim—the "crater" of the navel—the skin peeled back—the eroticism of the gaping hole! The marble flesh of the buttocks the same flawless complexion as the face—sculpted and polished. And here we were—light and dark counterparts of each other. Michelangelo would certainly have paid notice.

"I didn't know Norwegians had no body hair."

"I shave it off. A habit left over from my high school swimming days. We used to shave each other in the locker room. Lots of fun. Not nearly as much fun shaving myself, but I've kept it up."

"I get it, Pete. So—to switch places—all we gotta do is—is—"

"Say it, Louie! We only need one thing. Say it!"

"A bottle of hair dye!"

"Two. One black and one blond."

"I wanna make love with you, Pete. I never have. Not with anyone. But I'm dying to—with you."

"It'll be a first for both of us. I'm

trembling, too. I guess it's O.K. to be frightened. We're like a couple of little boys scaring each other to death. Let's go to bed. We have a busy day tomorrow. I hope the town has a drug store."

"I'm gonna be Peter Norbach and you're gonna be Louie Coyote. Then, we're gonna—we're gonna—I know. I feel it. But I can't put it in words."

"We're going to finish each other's unfinished business. Just for the hell of it!"

"And meet back here in this hotel in this town in—what?—a month?"

"Too long. I can't be parted from you that long."

"Me neither. I'm in love with you, Pete."

"Two weeks. No matter what happens, we meet back here in exactly two weeks. We don't tell each other too much about what to expect. Only what is absolutely necessary—like—your crime boss is Lupo—my control freak father is Victor. My brothers, in chronological order, are Eric, Kurt, Henrik, and Oskar. Your best friend is Manuel. But no fussy details. We gotta play it out—use our wits—live each other's moments on the edge. It's a dangerous game. It *should* be dangerous. Full of traps. This is our do-or-die challenge. Our ordeal by fire. It might destroy us. We might get set back so bad we'll never be able to get it together again. But I know this for certain: If we survive it, we'll be the better for it."

"Oh, my God—Louie—I'm in love with you, too!"

* * *

Two weeks later, I was sitting in the open window of that same hotel room, waiting for Louie. It was a clear, sunny day. I was seeing the little town and the hills beyond for the first time. I wasn't anxious. Louie wasn't late. I was early. I knew if he was alive, he would come.

I almost fell out of the window when I saw my blond-haired lover looking up and waving to me. I had almost grown accustomed to my black hair in two weeks. But I had seen Louie looking exactly like me only briefly before we said goodbye.

In another moment, he was in my arms, telling the story of his impersonation of me with a lucidity and language skill I had not noticed before. Had we absorbed so much of each other that we had become virtually interchangeable? Or was the switch we had pulled some kind of magic?

(Continued next issue)

TYPHOON SLAMMING

BOB VICKERY

It was my first day in Bali. As I walked down Monkey Forest Road, outside the town of Ubud, the air was so humid I felt like I was swimming through thick soup. No mystery how this road got its name; for the past forty minutes the monkeys had been scurrying along the branches overhead, tracking me.



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One of them had already swooped down a while ago and grabbed a granola bar from my hand. I hoped the little bastard choked on it. I'd been saving that bar for twenty-seven hours, since I had first bought it in the LA airport.

A storm was coming in from the east, I could see the clouds blowing in over the rice fields, but the sun still blazed overhead. My shirt was plastered against my back, my backpack seemed to be loaded with rocks, and my head felt like a Thanksgiving turkey ready to be pulled out of the oven and served. This was not fun anymore. I thought of the Stones' song "Gimme Shelter," and that pretty much summed up my needs right then.

Not many buildings around there, but eventually I passed a compound surrounded by a crumbling, paint-flecked concrete wall. There was a sign posted on it in English reading "Rooms To Let," and I didn't even think it over, I pushed open the gate and walked in. It's amazing how agreeable a little sunstroke can make you. I entered a courtyard shaded by coconut palms and one huge banyan tree, with a black and white checked cloth wrapped around its trunk. I dropped my pack with great relief, pulled out a water bottle and began chug-a-lugging it.

"Hot out there, isn't it?" a voice said behind me.

I turned and saw some guy, wearing nothing but shorts, sitting on a porch in front of a small, thatched hut. There was a table next to him, with a beer on it. He was a Westerner too, but in the dim light of the shade, all I got was quick impression of a head of shaggy hair, a close-cropped beard, a furry chest. As I got closer, the details started fleshing in. He was a little older than me, late twenties maybe, and he had a build like a bull terrier: broad shoulders, solid, muscular chest, narrow hips. His chest hair didn't hide the cut of his pecs, or his wide, nut-brown nipples. In fact, everything about this guy was a play on brown: sun-tanned skin, dark, sandy hair, eyes the color of deep chocolate. He was like earth and wood. As tired as I was, I felt my cock stir in my sweat-dampened shorts.

My fatigue made me unintentionally brusque. "Where's the guy who runs this place?"

A breeze moved through the palm leaves and across the courtyard. The

man closed his eyes as it ran over his body. He looked at me again. "Wayun's out somewhere running errands, I guess. Are you looking for a place to stay?"

I nodded. He waved his hand, indicating the surrounding buildings: three thatched huts, side by side, and, a little further off, what looked like an office. "I'm the only one staying here right now. Just throw your stuff into an empty hut and make yourself at home." He reached out his hand. "I'm Casey."

"I'm Paul." We shook hands. His grip was strong and dry.

"You thirsty?"

I laughed. "I'd slit my grandmother's throat for a beer right now."

"I don't think it'll have to come to that," Casey grinned. He had a wide, generous mouth that made for a friendly smile. I could fall in love with this guy, I thought. He got out of his chair and walked into the office, returning a few seconds later with a couple of beers in his hand. "We're on the honor system here. Just keep track of how many you've had and pay Wayun when you're ready to leave." He handed me one of the bottles and raised his beer in my direction. "Here's to high adventure in exotic places."

I clinked my bottle against his and took a deep drink. It was a bitter brew, darker than I normally like, but at the moment it tasted like the sweetest liquid on earth. "Have you had any?" I asked.

Casey looked at me. "Any what?"

"Adventures."

Casey shrugged. "It all depends on how you define the word."

We sat in silence for a few moments. "Have you been in Bali long?" I finally asked.

Casey shook his head. "Not very. Less than a week."

"Oh, yeah? Where were you before then?"

Casey settled back in his chair. "Well, I was in Sumatra before this, then Bangkok, the Angkor Wat temples in Cambodia, Phnom Penh, various parts of Burma, Singapore, a week in Laos. Those were the highlights."

"Jesus Christ!" I laughed. "You've been really trucking!"

Casey smiled. "About six months worth so far. After Bali, I want to go on to Australia, and then maybe India and Tibet."

I grinned. "What did you do, win a lottery? Or were you just born into money?"

Casey made a gesture of dismissal. "It

doesn't take much money to tramp around Asia. You learn how to cut your costs after a while. There are people all around here doing the same thing. Believe me, none of them are Rockefellers." He leaned back in his chair and stretched. Everything about him seemed relaxed and easy. There was something narcotic about sitting here talking with him. "How about you?" he asked. "What are your plans?"

I felt embarrassed. "Actually, I'm just here on a three week vacation from my job."

"Well, I hope you have a good time here." There was nothing in Casey's voice or attitude that was even remotely patronizing, but I felt patronized all the same. After a couple more minutes of conversation I got up and threw my pack in the hut next to his.

That night I was awakened by voices coming from the other side of the thin wall that separated me from Casey. The storm that had been threatening all day had finally arrived, and I could hear the hard patter of raindrops against the thatched roof. I rolled over and looked at my watch on the nightstand. Midnight. Casey's middle baritone was easy to identify. The other voice was a woman's. They were in bed, right against the wall next to where I was lying. With only an inch of bamboo separating us, I could hear every word.

"Yeah, that's it, baby," Casey murmured. "Take it all in, all the way down. Yeah, yeah." There was a silence and then Casey groaned, "Oh, jeez, that's good. You do that so nice. Yeah, right, the balls, too. That's right." There was a low laugh from the woman and Casey laughed too. By this time my cock was rock hard. "Turn around," Casey said. "I want to eat your pussy while you're doing that to me." I reached down and began making love to my fist, imagining the scene on the other side of the wall. Lucky lady. I hoped she appreciated what she had.

I heard the sound of flesh against flesh and figured that Casey had moved past foreplay. His bed springs creaked at quick, regular intervals, and I pictured the hard thrust of his hips with every squeak. Occasionally the woman let go with a little cry. Casey groaned too, low and guttural, with undertones of a snarl. It was hard to reconcile those wolf grunts with the easy-going guy I had shared a beer with that afternoon. This was hot stuff. I sped up my own tempo, pumping away with my hand. I closed

my eyes and imagined Casey's hard body, slippery with sweat, grinding against mine, our mouths fused together.

The bed springs creaked faster, the woman's cries got higher, spaced at quick, sharp intervals timed to Casey's thrusts. Casey's groans grew louder and more often; soon they blended into one long expulsion of air, a low moan that penetrated the thick, still air of my hut. He couldn't be far from dropping a load, and I was determined to shoot the same time that he did. He gave one sharp cry, and I pictured him sitting on my chest, his gizz raining down on my face. That image was enough to push me over the edge, and I blew my own load, felt the hot rain of sperm spurt across my torso. I bit down on my lip to stifle any noise that Casey could hear. The way he was carrying on, it was unlikely he would have noticed.

The bedsprings stopped their creaking and things quieted down. Casey murmured something I couldn't make out, the woman laughed. Then a long silence. After a while, I heard snoring. I rolled over, listening to the rain, feeling my come harden on my chest and fingers. I got up and stepped outside. The warm water pelted my body, washing away the sticky residue. My cock was soft, but I felt more unsatisfied than ever. I returned to my bed and eventually drifted off to sleep.

When I got up the next morning, Casey was already out on his porch, drinking coffee, a pot of it on his table. He was by himself. There was an empty cup on the other side, with lipstick stains on the rim. His lady friend must have been an early riser. It had stopped raining and the sun flickered between the fronds of the palm trees, throwing patterns of light on the courtyard. Casey made a gesture of invitation and I sat down across from him.

I nodded towards the pot. "Do you mind?"

"Not at all. You can get a clean cup in Wayun's office."

"That's okay." There was some kind of bucket on the porch by the doorway, half filled with rainwater. I swished the lipstick-stained cup around in it and then poured myself some coffee. "Did you sleep okay?" I asked.

Casey shot me a questioning look, and I returned his stare innocently. He gave a short laugh. "Eventually, I did. I met an Australian girl at one of the bars in Ubud and took her back here." He

glanced at me again. "We didn't disturb you, did we?"

"Not at all," I lied.

We drank our coffee in silence. A slender, Balinese man walked out of the office over to the banyan tree. In his hand was a banana leaf loosely wrapped around a couple of flowers and some kind of rice cakes. He smiled at us as he passed, and Casey nodded and smiled back.

"That's Wayun," Casey said.

Wayun knelt at the foot of the banyan and laid the leaf down in front of him. He began chanting softly, his voice fluid and monotonous.

"What's he doing?" I asked.

"He's making an offering. Banyan trees are considered holy in Bali. The Balinese believe that spirits inhabit them."

"Is that checked cloth around the trunk suppose to mean anything?"

"Yeah. It's the Balinese way of honoring both the dark and the light. Balinese spirituality is all about balance. They respect the demons, even consider them necessary." Casey gave a short laugh. "While in the West we launch moral crusades against them. That's one of the reasons why we're so fucked up. We think we're fighting for good, when actually we're only fighting for imbalance."

I watched Wayun. After a couple of minutes, he got up and returned to the office.

"There's a temple ceremony going on today in one of the neighboring towns," Casey said. "I'm going over to see it. You want to come along?"

I nodded. "Sure."

When it got time to leave, Casey disappeared into his hut and re-emerged wearing a red and white batik sarong, a yellow sash, and some kind of gold embroidered scarf around his head.

I laughed. "Jeez, did Halloween come early this year?"

Casey shrugged. "I'm just trying to go native, my friend. That's what being out here is all about, isn't it?"

His tone was mild, but I felt abashed. "What should I do? I don't have a costume like that."

"You look fine. You'll need a sash before they'll let you into the temple grounds, but you can rent one at the gate."

We walked the half mile into Ubud and caught a bemo out to the temple. The temple itself wasn't so much one building as an inner and outer courtyard, inhabited by small shrines and

pagodas. The place was thronged with people, many brilliantly decked out in silk costumes of blues, bright reds, yellows, every color imaginable. There were flower offerings everywhere, huge, elaborate structures intricately patterned with different blossoms, and plates stacked high with arrangements of fruits and colored rice cakes. A gamelan orchestra played in one corner of the inner courtyard, accompanying a dancing troupe of Balinese adolescent girls.

I stood to the side, next to Casey, watching the girls perform. I'd never seen such grace before. "They're amazing," I said, half to myself.

"It's the Balinese way of honoring both the dark and the light. Balinese spirituality is all about balance. They respect the demons, even consider them necessary."

"Aren't they great!" Casey grinned. He looked like a little boy. "They're telling a story, now. Every hand and foot gesture, every head movement means something. They're all code. If you knew the code, you'd know the story."

"Do you know the code?"

Casey shook his head. "Are you kidding? It'd take years to learn it."

I smiled. "You look like you're in Disneyland."

"I feel like it," Casey laughed. "This kind of stuff really gets my adrenaline pumping."

Later, we passed a shrine built around a rounded, stubby pillar of stone. Casey pointed to it. "That's a lingam, the Hindu symbol for the cock."

"No kidding! In a temple?"

"Well, I tell you, Paul. Folks out here have a little different attitude towards sex than we do in the West. They see it as sacred." His expression turned sly. "Go ahead, rub it. That's suppose to make you potent."

"Thanks, but I got no problems in

that department."

That night, Casey and I went to what passed for nightlife in Ubud, a handful of hole-in-the-wall bars taken over by the army of Westerners: Americans, Europeans, Australians all doing the South Pacific circuit. It was a group easy to pick out: young, tanned, with faded T-shirts and jeans. Not exactly the Bali Hilton crowd. For someone who had only been here a few days, Casey knew a lot of people. We moved from bar to bar, and in every new place he was welcomed by some crowd. The women in particular seemed drawn to him. Afterwards, as we staggered back to Wayun's, Casey suggested that we move in together and share a room, cut our expenses in half. I agreed immediately.

After a few days, my infatuation with Casey began to border on the obsessive. Our room was small and our beds were separated by only a couple of feet. The nights were muggy, and both of us slept in the nude, usually without any sheets or blankets. Sometimes, at night, when the light of the full tropical moon streamed in through the window, I propped myself up on my elbow and watched Casey as he slept. I couldn't stop marvelling how beautiful his body was. He lay there, inches from me, his arm resting against his forehead, his chest rising and falling as he lightly snored. The night was filled with the sound of crickets chirping, punctuated from time to time by the croak of a gecko who had taken up residency in the thatching of our roof.

I was not disappointed by Casey's cock. It rested against his belly like some thick snake; the light was bright enough for me to trace the veins along its length, the swelling of the cockhead beneath the uncut foreskin. The warm, still air made his balls hang low and sweaty. Occasionally the hot nights aroused Casey as he dreamt, and I would watch his dick grow long and hard. One night he even began stroking himself in his sleep. When he moved his hand away, I couldn't stop myself; I reached over and gently pulled the loose skin over the shaft, feeling the pulse of his cock in my hand. Casey sighed and stirred, and I quickly pulled back. He turned over on his stomach, and the moonlight gleamed on an ass that was perfection in flesh, two half moons of firm smoothness. I lay there in bed, staring at his naked body, my cock hard and urgent. I felt miserable. I began to wonder if I'd be better off alone.

Casey seemed to enjoy my company. He was a great buddy, funny, affectionate, full of ideas about what to do next. But he was also relentlessly straight. There were always new women showing up in the bars of Ubud, and Casey always hit on them. A few drinks, a few jokes, and he would soon be straying out into the night, his arm around a girl's waist; I wouldn't see him again until he slipped back into bed at one or two in the morning. A couple of times he tried to set me up with friends of the women he picked up. I'm not a bad looking guy, and the women involved seemed to go for the idea. But my lack of interest was obvious, and after a while, Casey gave it up.

A week went by. One night, while I was sleeping, a hand on my shoulder shook me awake. It was Casey, leaning over me urgently.

I sat up, dazed, blinking my eyes. "What is it?" I mumbled. I wondered if the hut was on fire.

"Paul, I just had this great idea tonight. Why don't we fly down to Fiji?" Casey was obviously excited. He was also a few sheets to the wind.

I rubbed my eyes. "What time is it?"

Casey made an impatient gesture. "I don't know. It's late. Did you hear what I said? I was talking to these two Australians and they told me about this little resort in Fiji, isolated, thirty kilometers outside of Suva City, with a great beach overlooking a beautiful, shallow lagoon. Cheap too. I want to check it out."

I fumbled for my watch on the nightstand. It was one-thirty in the morning. I fell back into bed. "Go away."

Casey shook me again. "Damn it, Paul. This is important."

"Casey, if you shake me one more time, I'll punch your goddamn headlights out."

Casey didn't move from my bed. "Will you just listen to me?"

"Hey, give me a break, will you? We'll talk about it in the morning." I turned my back to him and shut my eyes. After a long moment, I felt the bed move as Casey stood up. I drifted back to sleep.

When I got up the next morning, I thought about Casey's idea. It sounded pretty lame, something that would seem brilliant in a bar with friends, but wouldn't survive the cold light of reality the next day.

But Casey surprised me. "Have you thought about what I said?" were the first words he greeted me with. I was drinking a cup of coffee out on the porch.

"You mean about Fiji?" He nodded. "You're still serious?"

"More than ever."

"I don't know, Casey. It wasn't what I originally planned."

"So what? Plans can change, can't they?" I didn't say anything. "Look," he pushed on. "It's too bad you couldn't have heard these guys last night, talking about this place in Fiji. It really sounds great. Secluded. Great snorkeling. A beautiful beach."

"There are beaches here in Bali, Casey."

"It's not the same, man. We're talking about a different culture, a different geography."

"I thought you liked it here."

Casey looked exasperated. "I do. Bali's fucking beautiful. But we've seen it. It's time to push on."

In the end, I agreed to go, though with misgivings. It was nice to view Casey as a free spirit giving in to the whim of the moment. But it was unsettling to be actually caught up in his outbursts of spontaneity. I felt like he was pushing me into a larger game that I wasn't sure I wanted to play.

We flew into Suva City the next day and took a bus out to the resort. The sky was overcast, and looking out of my window towards the ocean, I could see whitecaps forming. "This doesn't look very promising," I said.

Casey shrugged. "These tropical storms blow in and blow out in a few hours. By tomorrow it'll be sunny again."

The resort was modest to the point of being run down: one squat, two-story concrete building, with a kitchen and communal dining hall on the first floor and bedrooms on the second, branching off from a central corridor. But Casey's Australian friends had been right about both the isolation and the beach. A hundred steps away from the dining terrace was the most glorious expanse of open sand I'd ever seen. It stretched out into a long, white crescent ending on each side in a palm-covered horn of land extending into the sea. The tide was out, and rows of coral reefs jutted up from the water's surface. The snorkeling was going to be great.

A teenage Fijian boy, the son of the proprietor, led us to our room. The wind seemed to have picked up some force; we could hear it gusting outside the window. "Looks like we're in for a bit of a storm," Casey said.

The boy nodded. "There's a typhoon blowing in." He saw the look on my face

and grinned. "Nothing to worry about. The Suva weather station said over the radio that it's going to pass us by. This is just the edge of it." He walked out of the room.

I looked at Casey. "That's just great," I muttered.

Casey made a gesture of dismissal. "You heard what he said. The typhoon will just brush by. Don't make a big deal of it."

That night, as we ate in the dining hall, we could hear the wind howling and the rain beating against the windows. The other guests were all young, the same type of crowd that inhabited the bars in Ubud. There was a lot of joking about being caught in a tropical typhoon. I didn't laugh at the cracks about tidal waves sweeping over us.

I confronted Casey later in our room. "Maybe we should pull out of here while we can. Get a room in Suva City."

To my surprise, Casey seemed to consider this. "We can't do anything tonight," he says. "Let's just see what it's like tomorrow morning."

"I didn't expect you to agree with me so quickly."

Casey grimaced. "I'm not. At least not yet. But I don't like the look of this storm either."

I lay in bed listening to the storm rage outside. After a long time, I fell asleep. I was awakened the next morning by the feel of water splashing on my face. One of the small panes in the window next to my bed was broken, and rain was pouring in. I got up and stuffed a towel in the hole. Looking out, I could see that the storm had gotten much worse. Huge waves were crashing on the beach and the palm trees are bent over nearly horizontally by the force of the wind.

Casey was still sleeping. I woke him up. "We got to get out of here," I said. Casey looked out the window and nodded in agreement.

We went downstairs and found the proprietor. "If we pay you, will you drive us to Suva City?" Casey asked.

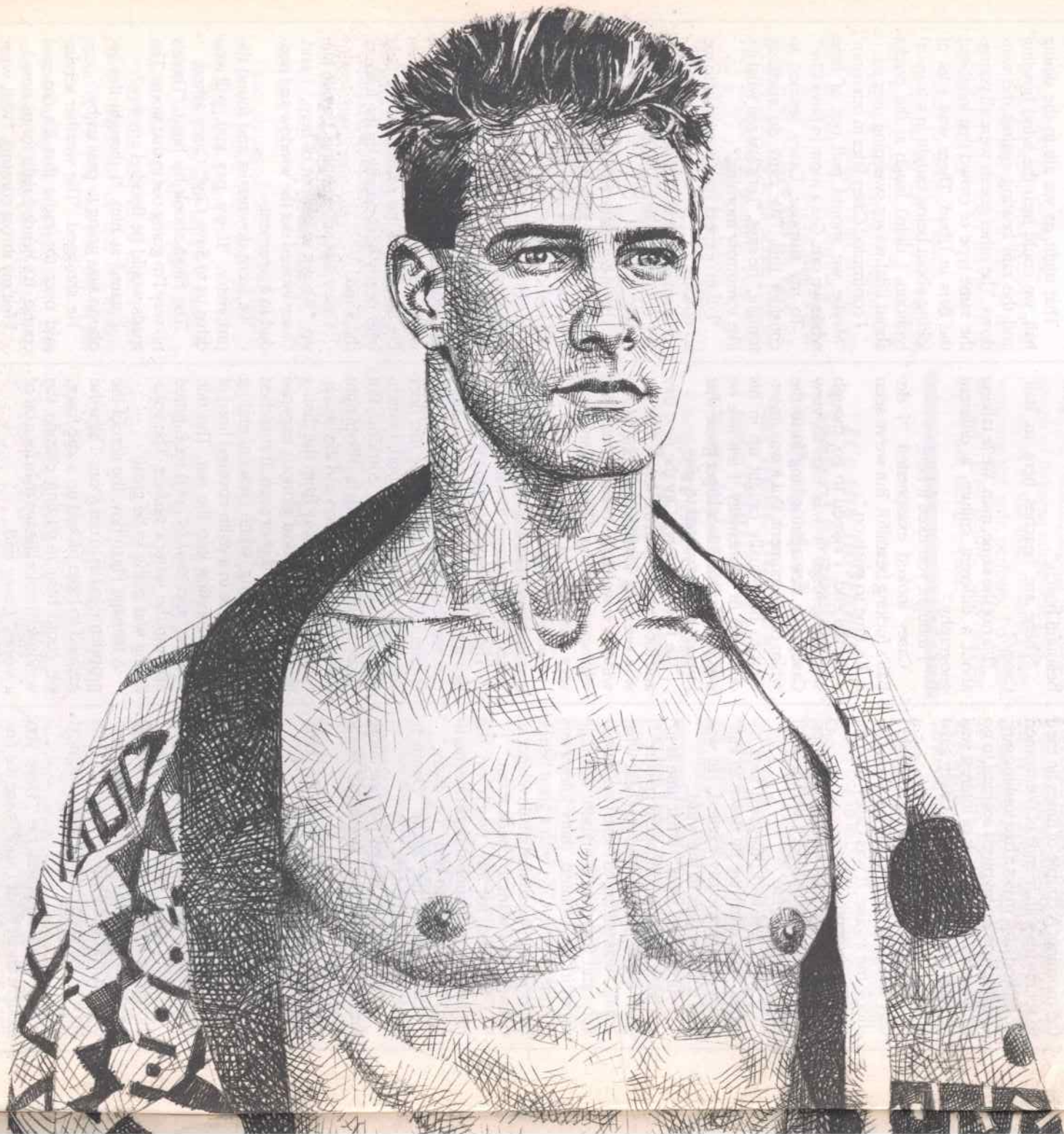
The Fijian shook his head. "There's no way I'm going out in that storm. The roads would be flooded anyway."

I stared at him. "I thought this typhoon was going to pass us by."

He shrugged. "The weather service said over the radio that it's changed course. It's headed right for us now."

I felt my throat constrict. "Well, what the hell are we suppose to do?"

When the proprietor didn't say any-





Simons

thing, I really began getting scared. Finally he cleared his throat. "If things get too bad, we should all gather in the upstairs corridor. There are no windows there, and it'll be the safest place from the storm."

Casey and I stayed down in the dining room, sitting at one of the tables and watching the storm outside. Most of the other guests were there too. There was a frightened tension in the air, quite a contrast from the joviality of last night. A couple of hours later, the proprietor walked in and announced that it was best if we all moved upstairs. We all meekly submitted to this plan, dragging our mattresses into the corridor and bringing up supplies of food and water from the kitchen. I didn't hear any jokes this time. The proprietor hauled out a box filled with candles and old oil lanterns. They got put to use a couple of hours later, after the electricity suddenly died.

I sat next to Casey. Neither one of us said anything. From beyond the corridor walls came the sound of howling wind and an occasional tinkle of broken glass as another bedroom window shattered. Every particularly violent blast of wind made the whole building shudder, and each time that happened, I wondered if the walls were going to collapse on us like a house of cards.

One of the guys looked down the stairwell into the dining hall. "There's water flooding in!" he exclaimed. We all rushed over to look. Sure enough, the floor below was under a foot of water, pouring in through the now-broken sliding glass doors that faced the ocean. We sat down again, listening to the water slosh around below. Every now and then someone got up and checked; each time the level was higher. I looked at Casey. Even in the dim glow of the candles, his face was pale. He stared straight ahead, flexing and unflexing his fists. I'd never seen him scared before. This was more unsettling than the wind howling outside.

One of the girls started crying softly. Another joined her. "Oh, Christ, we're going to die," one of the guys moaned. "We're going to fucking die."

Casey stood up. "I can't take this shit anymore," he muttered. He started walking away.

I grabbed his pant leg. "Where the hell are you going?"

He looked down at me. "Back to our room. You want to come along?"

I stood up too. "Yeah, why not?"

Most of the windows were shattered. We upended the beds and used them to form a barrier between us and the rain pouring in. It was wet and chilly, but an improvement over that living tomb out there in the corridor. We sat down and huddled together for warmth. I put my arm around Casey, feeling his hard body beneath his wet shirt. He leaned against me, pressing his thigh and torso against mine.

A furious blast of wind, worse than any felt before, slammed into the building. The walls shook violently. This is it, I'm going to die now, I thought. I looked

Another window shattered, and more rain poured in over us. We stretched out full length on the floor, our bodies pressed tightly together.

at Casey, he looked at me, and I could see the same thought in his eyes. Without thinking, I leaned over and kissed him hard on the mouth. He pulled back, his expression startled. I kissed him again and this time, after the beat of a second, he returned the kiss. I slipped my tongue between his lips and frenched him for all that I was worth.

Another window shattered, and more rain poured in over us. We stretched out full length on the floor, our bodies pressed tightly together. Whatever hesitation Casey might have felt at first was long gone now. His tongue pushed deep into my throat, moving like a live thing inside my mouth. He ground his crotch against mine and I could feel his hard cock underneath the denim of his jeans. I ripped off Casey's shirt and yanked down his pants; he did the same to me. In a matter of seconds we were naked, Casey's thick dick dry humping my stomach, as we squirmed around in the debris. Casey stopped just long enough to shove the broken glass away and then pulled me tight against him again.

With the building ready to come down on our heads, I was not about to waste any time on foreplay. I broke free of Casey's embrace, and slid my tongue down the length of his hard belly, across the dark pubic bush. I wrapped my lips around his cockhead, gently nipping it. Casey may have been new to gay sex, but he was no stranger to getting blown. He thrust his hips up, and his meaty shaft slid into my mouth, all the way, until I felt his balls grinding into my chin. For an instance I forgot about the typhoon with the thrill of realizing this was Casey's cock crammed in my mouth, that it was his cockhead pushing against the back of my throat. What I had been fantasizing about all these days was actually happening. I wrapped my tongue around his dick and twisted my head from side to side. Casey groaned. He held my head with both hands and started fucking my face with long, quick strokes.

I pulled back and came up for air. For an instance my glance met Casey's. There was a wild cast to his eyes, they were opened so wide I could see the whites all around the irises. The guy almost looked deranged. This was both unsettling and exciting. I descended again, burying my face in his balls, bathing them with my tongue, as my hand slid up and down his spit-slicked dick. His nut sac was drawn up against his body, whether from fear or the cold, but the balls themselves were heavy and completely filled my mouth. My tongue gave them a good washing and then descended below them. Casey saw what was on my mind, he spread his legs apart and thrust his hips up, exposing the pucker of his asshole. I lapped it up greedily, probing the sphincter with my tongue. Casey was going wild; his body bucked and heaved like a bronco. My mouth retraced the wet path back to Casey's dickmeat and swallowed it again.

Casey swiveled his body around so that his face was level with my crotch. He took my dick in his mouth and began sucking voraciously, sliding his lips up and down my hard shaft. I was so amazed I quit my own cocksucking for a moment and watched. Casey was caught up in a veritable feeding frenzy; the guy couldn't get enough. I felt his tongue slide over my dick, my balls, the crack of my ass. I had never seriously pictured Casey sucking cock, and watching my dick disappear down his throat excited the hell out of me. I continued sucking Casey's cock with even greater

ferocity. I grabbed hold of Casey's ass cheeks with both hands and squeezed hard. They clenched and relaxed with each hard thrust of his dick down my throat. The building shuddered again. If I was going to die, this was how I wanted to go, with my mouth crammed full of Casey's dick.

Casey began to moan and pump faster. I felt his cock harden in my mouth and knew he was ready to shoot. One more savage thrust pushed him over the edge; his body shuddered violently and a thick load of jizz splattered against the roof of my mouth. I sucked as hard as I could in an effort to milk his dickmeat dry. Load after spermy load gushed down my throat.

The sweet taste of Casey's cum was enough to get me to bust my nut. "I'm going to shoot!" I cried out, to give Casey warning in case he didn't want to swallow my jizz. But Casey didn't slow down, and soon my load was squirting into the warm, wet confines of his mouth. I fell back on the floor, my arms stretched out, and let the sensations sweep over me. Rain pelted my face. This might be the last load I ever blow, I thought. Casey sucked greedily, draining every drop out of my softening dick. I propped myself up and kissed Casey hard, tasting my own jism as my tongue probed into his mouth.

We lay together in each other's arms, listening to the wind howl outside, feeling the rain pour down on us through the broken windows. "I wonder how high the water is now, downstairs," Casey said. I didn't say anything. I had been wondering the same thing myself. He pulled me to him, and we kissed again. I felt his stiff cock rub against my belly.

"Why don't you just fuck the hell out of me right now," I growled.

"You got it, buddy." Casey's eyes still had that manic, half-terrified, half-excited gleam to them. He spit in his hand and stroked his cock a couple of times, slicking it up. I spread my legs wide, offering up my asshole to him. He probed it tentatively with his cockhead, and then plunged in. His hips pumped with a quick, fierce rhythm; I felt his balls slap against my ass each time he impaled me. Sometimes he left his hard dick all the way up my chute and ground his hips. Casey stared at me, his teeth bared, his eyes wild. I pulled him down to me and kissed him hard, biting his lips.

We rolled around on the floor, amid the debris, our bodies fused tightly

together. I could feel his muscular torso squirm against mine, that thick dick shoved deep within my ass. My cock was rock-hard too, and I stroked it furiously. Each time Casey slammed my ass, he grunted. His grunts got louder; soon they turned into steady moaning. I reached up with my free hand and twisted his nipple hard. That did the trick. He cried out loudly. Pulling out his cock, he began dry-humping my belly. A load of jism burst from his cockhead, squirting onto my chest and face. I shot too, arching my back and squeezing my asshole tight. My cum arced across the air onto my body, mixing in spermy

"Why don't you just fuck the hell out of me right now,"

I growled.

"You got it, buddy." Casey's eyes still had that manic, half-terrified, half-excited gleam to them.

puddles with Casey's load. Casey collapsed on top of me and held me tight.

We lay together in each others arms for a long time. The dim light in the room got even dimmer as evening came on. Casey finally raised his head and looked at me. "Is it my imagination, or is the wind dying down?"

I listened. I felt my heart quicken with excitement. "I think you're right."

We got dressed and returned to the corridor. One of the guys told us that the water had stopped rising an hour ago. It was halfway up the stairwell. Casey grinned. "We just might make it through this after all."

For two days we lived on bread, canned tuna fish, and bananas, all the food that had been originally brought up from the kitchen. The water finally dropped low enough for us to slosh out to the highway. Casey and I flagged down a car to Suva City. I had to get back to the States. Casey had enough of Fiji and wanted to push on to Australia.

The airport was pure chaos. Since the typhoon had disrupted all earlier flights, there was a mob of people, milling around or sleeping on the benches, waiting to snag any available flight out. Casey and I stood in a corner and waited. Neither one of us could think of anything to say.

Finally, Casey smiled, but it was not quite the familiar, easy smile that I had gotten to know so well in Bali. There was something subdued about it. "Remember the first day we met, when you asked me if I had had any adventures? I guess the last few days would qualify as one."

I nodded. "No argument here."

There was another pause. "I always wondered why you never wanted me to set you up with women," he finally said.

I looked at him. "Are you embarrassed about what happened?"

Casey shook his head. "No." He gave a little explosion of laughter, unexpectedly loud. "If it hadn't been for you, buddy, I don't think I could have gotten through that typhoon."

I gave a weak grin. "I know. It was the same for me."

A little while later, I got a chance at a flight to Honolulu. I quickly grabbed it. Casey and I shook hands. "You can write to me through American Express," Casey said. "And I have your address. Let's stay in touch."

"Okay."

He pulled me towards him, and we embraced. I made a motion to separate, but Casey held on and gave me an extra squeeze. We broke apart. "Have a good flight back, my friend," he said. I could see nothing but affection in his face.

Later, on the plane, I looked down on the island. The sand gleamed whitely and the ocean sparkled in the sun. No one would ever have thought that there'd been a typhoon raging just a few days ago. My thoughts were full of Casey, his friendship and good humor, his unfailing affection. And the feel of his body against mine, his hot, wet mouth, the taste of his hard dick. I missed him already, I could already feel the emptiness brought on by his absence.

I would never forget that beautiful fucker. I leaned back in my seat and thought about what it had been like making love to the sound of howling wind and breaking glass.

Strangely, Australia seemed more appealing to me right then than anywhere else on the face of the planet. □

NO PLACE TO HIDE

ROBERT LEONE

The palm trees go by slower than before. "I told you about Steve's photography, remember?" I say. "He sold some stuff last week, the shots he took at the AIDS Conference demonstration."

"Oh, that must be nice for you Steve," Mom says sweetly. "Tony, please remind me to pick up some orange juice at the Winn Dixie on the way home, we're almost out and...."

"Mom, you're not playing the game right. You're supposed to show a little more interest, then you can talk about orange juice."

"I'm sorry dear I thought you were finished, but I certainly do appreciate your unique way of telling me otherwise."

"I'm finished now Mom."

"Well, that's certainly very interesting Steve, you must be excited about this. Perhaps it will lead to some serious photography work."

Steve nods enthusiastically at Mom, then turns and rolls his eyes at me. I love him for not blasting her out of the seat.

In Mom's eyes Steve is an obstacle to our Mother-Son relationship, an obstacle she does her best to ignore kind of like a steamroller ignores a small rock in its path. As far as she's concerned, the fact that it is two males has very little to do with it; she would have treated a female the same way.

Worse than Mom's cheery attitude were the red-necked fag-haters I swore were swaggering behind every other palm tree. One oversized specimen hissed the "F" word at Steve and me in the produce department of Winn Dixie. He was big and he was ugly, he didn't have a lot of brain cells. We ignored him. This was not a fun trip. I wanted to go home to San Francisco but the plane tickets were non-refundable.

We arrive at Audrey's place without a traffic fatality en route. New Years' Eve with a bunch of strangers; I search my mind in vain for a more unappealing prospect. It's 8:05. Four more hours until we can leave with out arousing suspicion.

"Whad'yuz drinkin?" Audrey asks, once our coats were off.

"I'll have a beer" I reply.

"Me too," says Steve.

"I'd like a coke," Mom chirps brightly, "with ice — maybe I'll have a little champagne when the ball drops."

I reached over and squeeze her shoulder. "A glass of champagne at midnight! Now Mom, let's not overdo it."

"My son likes to make fun of me because I don't drink. But that's alright, I don't mind." She hugs me back before I can escape.

"So are you two friends, or what?" Audrey asks, referring to me and Steve.

"We're friends," I stammer. "Roommates actually. Well friends and roommates. That is we kind of knew each other for a while then we got this place together to save money and...." I want to die.

"Well I'm real glad yuz could come," Audrey says, smiling at us. "And yuz can drink whatever yuh want. Have some food too. There's sausage and peppzi, cold cuts, whatever yuz want. Don't be shy." Then she waddles off into the kitchen.

Steve heads for the toilet and Mom falls into conversation with one of her cronies about supermarket prices and the relative merits of the bakery departments at Winn Dixie and Publix.

"You get a real nice coconut custard pie at Publix, but the muffins at Winn Dixie can't be beat," we learn.

Thoroughly mortified by my lame reply to Audrey's question, I wander alone to the buffet table and check out the spread. It's all there, just like Audrey promised, laid out on a plastic tablecloth plastered over with Christmas trees and fat, red little Santa faces. I grab a paper plate, some plastic utensils and shovel on cole slaw, sliced roast beef, salami, peppers. I check my watch. Still three hours and forty-five minutes to go before the drunks in Times Square started pounding each other on the head.

A happening conversation at this event seems unlikely. At least I have Audrey's food to keep me company. Desperate for some small talk, I grab a chair near Sal, Audrey's father-in-law. At least I know him slightly. The problem with Sal, conversationally speaking, is his deafness.

"How have you been, Sal?" I screech as we shake hands. It would be a while before I figure out the optimum voice power needed to get the message across without bringing everyone in the room into our conversation.

Sal stares at me a couple of long, grueling seconds before answering. "Ahhh, not too good. I got this cold, plugs up my ears."

Bullshit, I think, you're deaf as a stone, always have been. "Mmmmm," I reply.

"I'm glad you guys came," Sal says, "I'm usually the only man at these things, have to sit and talk with the ladies about shopping and clothes."

Oh God, I think, would he bring up football in a minute, or worse, ask me about Steve?

"Well I'm glad we came," I lie, hacking at the roast beef with a plastic imitation knife. "Seems like quite a lively crowd here... So when was the last time you and Millie were up in New York?"

"Oh, the beginning of July. Stayed three weeks with my sister and brother-in-law on First Street. It was hot as hell, we coulda stayed down here and roasted just the same."

"Whoof, it gets pretty hot in Brooklyn in the summer, doesn't it?" I respond. "At least down here you got the beach."

"It's no good," Sal agrees. "You got nice weather in 'Frisco, though. Me and Millie wuz there, let's see, the summer of '78. Saw everything. Fisherman's Wharf, Chinatown, Alcatraz, everything. It was nice and cool, needed a jacket at night I remember."

"Yeah, it never gets too hot, or too cold," I reply, wondering how long we could stretch out this East Coast/West Coast weather line of conversation.

"How does yuh friend like it down here?" Sal asks. "He ever been to Florida before?"

"This is Steve's first visit."

"You boys live together?"

Oh shit, here we go again. What a nosy crowd, I think, gritting my teeth and looking for a way out. Everybody else was already engaged in conversation. Andy the next-door neighbor with the small nose and unlikely blond hair was bullying a leathery redhead. "Now this is what you gotta do," I overhear him say, "Invest in CD's now and later on...." He brays and she nods. Then he brays some more and she nods some more. The poor thing even manages to look interested, as if Andy's words were more than just noise from a drunk. Audrey was on the phone, Steve had taken over as bartender, and my dear mother was involved in a conversation with Millie and another woman and looked like it could go on for hours. There was no place to hide, it was Sal or the toilet.

"Steve likes it here just fine," I say tightly. "Hey how about that Joe Montana," I blurt. "Some- hell of a quarterback isn't he? He was really great in that game last week against...who was that other team, anyway?"

"Don't follow football," Sal says, "bowling's my game. What does yuh friend do in Frisco?"

He was going in for the kill. I looked at my watch—only nine o'clock. They'll be puking on each other's shoes in Times Square pretty soon.

"Steve's a teacher, high school English."

"A teacher." Sal says. "That's nice and steady, good city pension too, I'll bet. My sister's boy Pete teaches music at Erasmus High in Brooklyn, he's a good kid too, not like his wiseguy brother always getting hisself into trouble. If he woulda paid more attention...."

"Teaching's a lousy profession," says Andy the drunk as he plops down next to me on the couch. He had finished browbeating the redhead and was ready to move on. "You couldn't get me in a classroom. The pay is bad, you got loudmouth kids giving you trouble all the time...."

"What do you do, Andy?" I interrupt.

"Telemarketing." Andy let the word hang in the air for a full five seconds.

"Have my own company. You've probably seen us on TV. We're pushing Oriental Pearl Cream this month."

"No, I don't believe I have," I reply.

"Oh sure you have. Remember this? 'If your friends don't actually accuse you of having a face lift, we'll refund double your money,'" he says, mimicking the high-pitched tones of a well-known, if fading actress. Stopping suddenly, he looks across the room at Steve, who is fixing Millie a drink, and then back at me. I can almost see a dull little light click on in his brain.

Our eyes lock in a look of pure hate.

***"Your sister's boy,
Pete. He's queer too,
isn't he?"***

***"He's my nephew
and I love him.
Whatever else he is
don't mean nothing
to me."***

"How fascinating," I exclaim, leaning forward and gripping Andy's forearm. "Confidentially, I was thinking of having a facelift myself. I'm really starting to get concerned about these tiny little lines around my eyes," I continue, fluttering my lashes. "Could your product help me?"

Andy tenses like a coiled bedspring at my touch—finally at a loss for words. "Come on," I continue, leaning closer and tightening my grip. "You can tell me. Do you think that Oriental Pearl Cream will make me—you know—more attractive, more desirable?"

Andy's mouth drops open. "Whaddya nuts, it's just for women," he finally replies. "Men don't use that kind of stuff."

"Such a pity," I continue, giving his arm an extra quarter turn, and pushing my face to within an inch of his little pug nose, "Are you absolutely sure? I was so hoping to have my friends actually accuse me of having a facelift. Can you

imagine their utter amazement when I told them it was this divine new cream. You sure it won't work for me?" Pausing, I lick my lips like a sex-starved ingenue.

"Do you think if I rubbed some on my dick I would get a lift out of it?" I ask sweetly. "Maybe I could come by your place tomorrow and get the full treatment."

That was enough for Andy. Snarling, he pulls away and gets to his feet. Speechless once again, he wobbles off in the direction of the vodka.

"Wouldn't even have asked for double my money back," I coo to Sal, hoping he will clear out too now that I let my hair down and the roots are showing. I want to be alone with my roast beef and peppers.

"That was some show you put on there," Sal chuckles, between huge bites of a sausage, peppers and onion sandwich, "I think you scared the pants off poor old Andy."

"Yeah, well he deserved every bit of it," I say. "And what about you Sal, how come you're not inching over to the other end of the couch. I guess fags don't scare the pants off you do they?"

"Nah Tony, they don't."

"Oh yeah, I almost forgot about your sister's boy, Pete, the music teacher from Brooklyn. He's queer too isn't he?"

"He's my nephew and I love him. Whatever else he is don't mean nothing to me."

"Well Sal, I hate to admit it, but compared to good old Andy, you're practically a goddamn breath of fresh air. But that doesn't mean I'm not counting the hours til we're on a plane back to San Francisco."

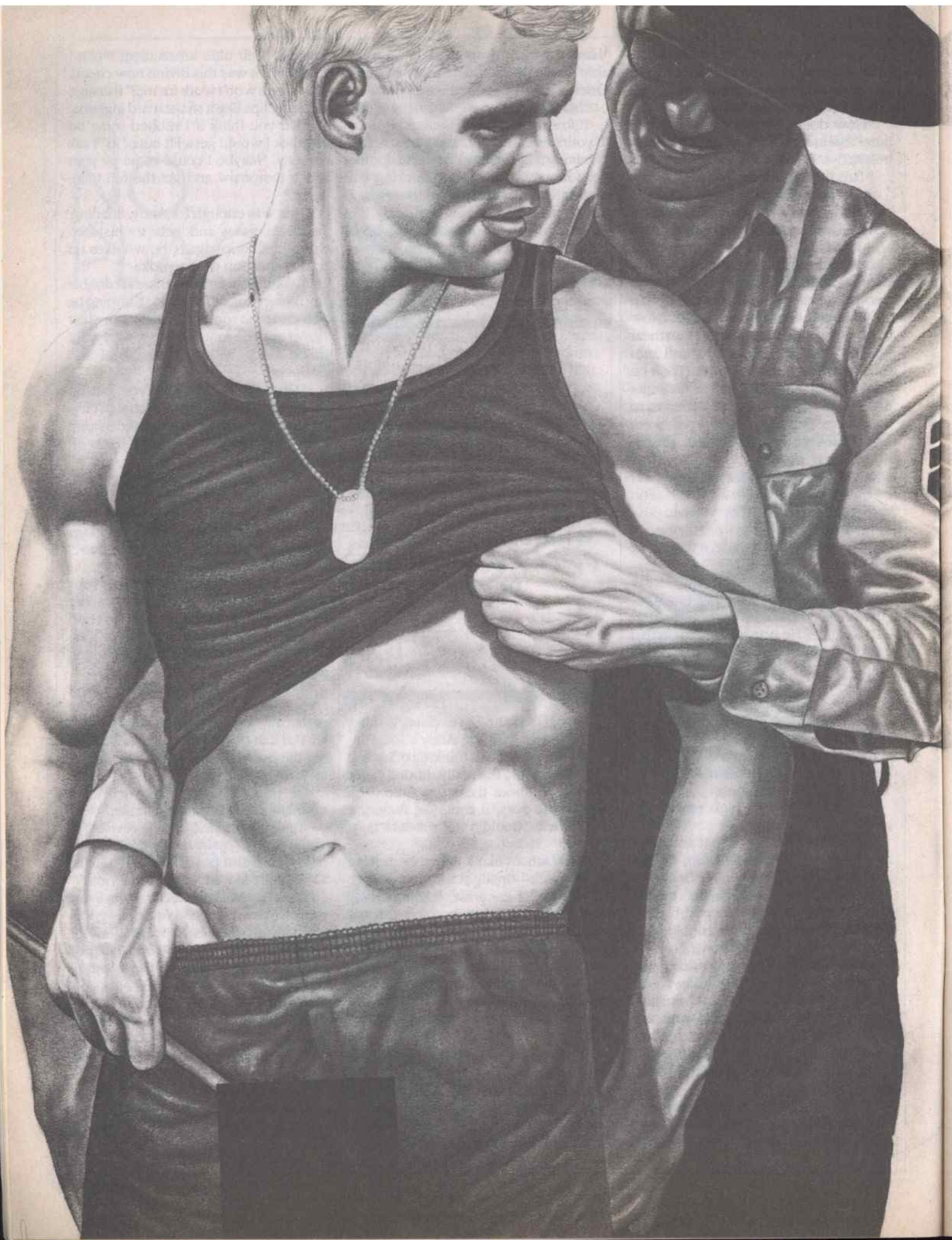
Sal puts down his sandwich for a moment and shoots me a smile.

It's almost midnight. The revelers in Times Square reach their frenzied peak of joy, love and peace on earth. On the TV it looks like footage from a riot.

Back in Audrey's cozy little living room a more restrained version of goodwill toward men is happening as the silver ball drops in New York. Sal and I get up as the rest of the room is smooching and hugging. He sticks out his hand, I grab it and pull him toward me, planting a kiss on his surprised mouth.

"Thanks for a swell time Sal, let's do it again next year."

Roast beef sandwich still in hand, I go in search of my family. It's time to pick up some orange juice at Winn Dixie and drive home. □



DO REAL MEN EAT QUICHE?

STEPHEN D. GROSS

CHIPPED BEEF

Today we have not one, but two riddles with which to tease the normal brain.

The first is: What do Alexander the Great, Lawrence of Arabia, Leonard Matlovich, and Richard the Lionhearted have in common?

The second is: Why does the U.S. Supreme Court continue to uphold a long-time ban on homosexuals being part of the Military?

The (historically correct) answer to the first riddle is, Alex, Larry, Dick and Lenny were all not just happy warriors, but Gay warriors as well. In fact, in Classical Greece, homosexuality which sometimes resulted in strong alliances forming between Greek fighting men was deemed an asset in terms of dedication and loyalty to the State.

The answer to the second could involve a lengthy dissection of a psychosis underlying a frightening percentage of American Society, but we'll leave the heavy forensics to those trained in such matters. Instead, we'll say the 'reason' is probably ignorance and fear.

We may well surmise that not everyone is comfortable with the knowledge that the world-conquering Kid from Macedonia was into leather and cabin boys. Further, the fact that the widely-revered and militarily successful Lawrence once wrote, "men's bodies, in repose or in movement...appeal to me directly," may not sit well with others. But consider the impact on world history had Alex's and Larry's peers

chosen to drum them out of the corps solely because of their sexual preferences.

Yet, America's Military Establishment continues to be a club of Good Ol' Boys where qualifications, merit, and skills have less to do with membership than skin color, gender, who you sleep with, and which God you believe in.

Until President Truman initiated integration of the armed services in 1948, Blacks were made to sleep in separate barracks, were never considered for positions of authority, and were treated as potential disciplinary and security risks. It never mattered that the blood they shed in the fields and trenches was the same color as the Crackers behind them. The fact that 5,000 Blacks distinguished themselves fighting in the American Revolutionary Army and that some 200,000 displayed, according to Abe Lincoln, 'effective conduct' as part of the Union's forces held no merit in the backrooms where Cronyism ruled. Why it was considered a Giant Leap Forward when two Blacks were admitted to the Air Force Academy in 1959!

But then (with few exceptions) there never was a closet for those wishing to escape this unimpeded bigotry to duck into. For Gays, however, it's different.

At the beginning of WWII, the Military had all-black battalions. The Japanese-American squads distinguished themselves in spite of rampant prejudice. Now both groups are assimilated. So what's wrong with all-gay battalions?

In his book, *"Coming Out Under Fire"*, author Allan Berube claims the number of lesbian, gay, or bisexual members of the two million U.S. armed forces may be as high as 200,000, or ten percent. Obviously, rather than risk persecution, intimidation or discharge, many of this number find it's more to their advantage to act with discretion and lie about their sexual preferences. Not a few find that faking marriage (some don't have to fake it!) is an effective way to dull suspicion, and considering how unfair and how zealously enforced the military's discriminatory policies against gays and lesbians is, a few guerrilla tactics and a bit of fabrication are, by most, easily justified.

Consider the alternatives:

Army Colonel Margarethe Cammermeyer armed with the skills and experience she gained as a nurse, invested 23 years of her life serving her country in the military. Proving her merit in Vietnam and other theaters earned the Colonel a Veterans' Administration Nurse of the Year award (she was selected from a pool of 34,000 nurses), along with a prestigious Silver Star. Her exemplary leadership qualities won her official praise as well as the respect and admiration of her troops. In fact, she was the Washington National Guard's chief nurse. But when she candidly admitted to being a lesbian during a security clearance interview, she found herself standing outside, looking in with a fist full of discharge papers. This despite her commander's pleas that she be allowed to remain at her post.

Former-Midshipman Joe Steffan considered himself lucky to win a coveted appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy. Working hard to distinguish himself in such a competitive arena, Steffan won the praise of his peers and was considered an

excellent student. Then in 1987, only two weeks before he was to take his final examinations, word leaked out that Steffan was Gay. Rather than risk condemnation by the cadre and a situation that might potentially be embarrassing to his family, Steffan chose to resign his commission.

Captain Dusty Pruitt, a thirteen-year veteran of the Army and Army Reserve, was counted among those expert in what the Pentagon calls CBR (Chemical, biological,

The Pentagon policy of allowing gays to remain in the service as long as they were needed during "Desert Storm", then forcing them out after it was over was reprehensible.

and radioactive weaponry.) With Hussein threatening to unleash chemical horrors upon the Middle East, Pruitt's expertise could have helped provide valuable information to the allied troops in the Persian Gulf. But the untimely admission, during a 1986 newspaper interview, that she was a lesbian, forced her instead to expend energy trying to overturn her expulsion in a California Circuit Court.

And consider the late Air Force Sergeant Leonard Matlovich. Receiving numerous decorations, including the Purple Heart, Matlovich was honored for his bravery and loyal dedication. During one of his three tours of duty in Vietnam, Matlovich was almost killed by a land mine. Despite testimony by Air Force psychiatrist, Dr. D.H. Chessen that after four interviews with Matlovich he found him 'fully capable of performing his military duties', and despite receiving the high praise and ratings from

some 1,500 former students, Matlovich was drummed out of the Air Force. What bitter irony that after twelve years of dedicated, unblemished service to his country, he stood before a Langley (CA) Field Administrative Discharge Board in October, 1975, his body still carrying shrapnel from that exploding landmine, and heard recommendations that he be given a General (less than Honorable) discharge. Eulogizing Matlovich at the Congressional Cemetery in Washington, D.C. Perry J. Watkins, (U.S. Army, 1968-83), summed up his tragedy by stating, 'For those of us who chose to make our contribution within the ranks of its military, it was truly heartbreaking to learn that the enemies encountered on the beaches of Europe, in the islands of the Pacific, or even in the jungles of Vietnam, were not nearly as threatening and destructive to this nation as the bigotry, hatred, lack of love, understanding, and lack of compassion in the heart of this country for the American citizens who were willing to give their lives for its defense.' The inscription on Matlovich's tombstone decrees, 'When I was in the military they gave me a medal for killing two men and a discharge for loving one.'

How did this miserable state of affairs come about?

Believing homosexual tendencies to be a medical problem, a board of military psychiatrists in 1943 found this non-hetero inclination ample justification for dismissal from the armed services. Whether the victims of insidious witchhunts or malicious innuendos, some 100,000 individuals have found themselves discharged from the military over the last 48 years solely on that basis.

Local police in towns near military bases relentlessly prowl gay bars and hangouts along with military cops rooting out 'offenders' and subjecting them to vigorous interrogations. Using threats, coercion, and intimidation, army investigators pressure both men and women to reveal the names of associates and sympathizers.

THE FREEDOM OUR MILITARY IS SUPPOSEDLY DEFENDING IS DENIED ITS MEN AND WOMEN!

Because a female presence has always left the Military Establishment feeling threatened and uncomfortable, lesbians are more likely to be harassed than gay men. Archaic, unfounded beliefs that gays are sex fiends or would pose a threat to national security because of their supposed vulnerability to blackmailers are notions that die hard, even though a 1989 investigation by the Pentagon-appointed Defense Personnel Security Research and Education Center in Monterey, California has published findings to the contrary. To wit:

Homosexuals are like heterosexuals in being selective in choice of partners, in observing rules of privacy, in considering appropriateness of time and place, in connecting sexuality with the tender sentiments, and so on. To be sure, some homosexuals are like some heterosexuals in not observing privacy and priority rules. In fact, the manifold criteria that govern sexual interests are identical for homosexuals and heterosexuals, save for only one criterion, the gender of the sexual partner. Therefore, those who resist changing the traditional policies support their positions with statements of the negative aspects of discipline, morale, and other abstract values of military life. Buried deep in the supporting conceptual structure is the fearful imagery of homosexuals polluting the social environment with unrestrained and wanton expressions of deviant sexuality. It is as if a person with non-conforming sexual orientation will always indiscriminately and aggressively seek sexual outlets.

Even though the study determined that the anti-gay phobia clung to by the armed services had no rational basis in fact, (a position that Defense Secretary, Dick Cheney ultimately agreed with), the Pentagon continued to pooh-pooh the research commission's evidence which also indicated gay soldiers were less inclined to pose disciplinary problems, or use alcohol or drugs than their non-gay counterparts. A parliamentary investigative group last year recommended that Britain, too, reconsider

its long-standing ban on gays serving in Merrie England's armed forces. They felt the talents of too many invaluable people - of undoubted competence and good character' were remaining untapped.

Although the governments of Japan and France have no laws excluding gays from their armed forces, the Soviets retain laws on their (military and civilian) books which provide for a five-year jail term for men who have sexual relations with other men.

The U.S. Armed Forces have historically been at the forefront of bigotry in American life.

When President Bush decided to shield and then storm those distant dunes last Spring, American man and woman power was at a premium. Several ongoing investigations were shelved and gay empathizers had visions of the half-century old policy being suspended or perhaps even eradicated. After all, lesbian and gay troops were needed too and their subsequent loyalty, efficiency and performance in the Royal Sandbox clearly proved their mettle. Never known for their logical behavior, the Army's Pansy Pogrom has instead been thrown into fifth gear.

Despite Defense Department spokespersons vehemently denying-awareness' of any directive, M.P.'s acting in concert with local lawfolk have been doing more ferreting in more towns than they ever have before. Gays and non-gays alike are indiscriminately rounded up and subjected to extensive interrogations, and club owners are

advised that their establishments are considered a hazard (if not an outright security risk!) and that they may be in danger of being shut down. At last count, seven gay veterans of the Desert Storm conflict have been discharged.

Although the Secretary of Defense is empowered by law to overturn this discriminatory and irrelevant policy, the current cabinet post holder, Dick Cheney, has not yet chosen to do so.

With an eye toward exposing inconsistencies in the Defense Department's policies, a Los Angeles-based magazine, *The Advocate*, decided to reveal their findings regarding a highly-placed Defense Department official.

Confronted with the information that a high-ranking Pentagon civilian had allegedly been a regular customer at a Washington, D.C. bar which is known to be a predominantly gay watering place, Cheney contended that different rules applied to the uniformed (as opposed to non-uniformed) military. And besides, *The Advocate's* 'evidence' was mostly hearsay, and not everyone who frequents gay-oriented establishments is necessarily a homosexual. Claiming to simply be heir to 'an old chestnut' that was grown by prior administrations, Cheney has made no immediate decision to dump this particular property.

However, as media coverage of the latest rash of arrests and discharges broadens and intensifies, public sentiment swings evermore strongly in the direction of common sense. And Cheney is not the only one empowered to effect a policy change. A Supreme Court ruling could set a precedent, or a caucus of sensible (and somewhat courageous) Congresspersons could overturn the ban with an Act of their own. Let us also not forget that '92 is an election year and each Prez gets to pick his (or her) own cabinet members.

Sometimes cabinets even get dragged out of closets where they've been getting moldy for years! □

Privates go public Privates go public

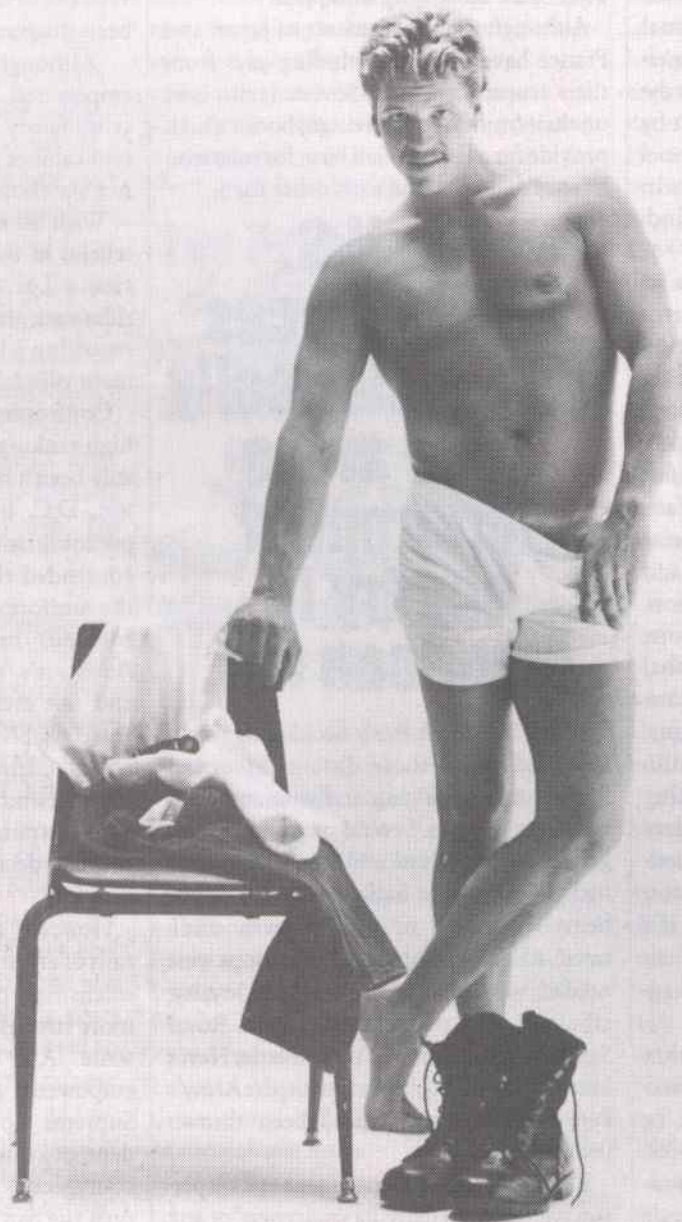
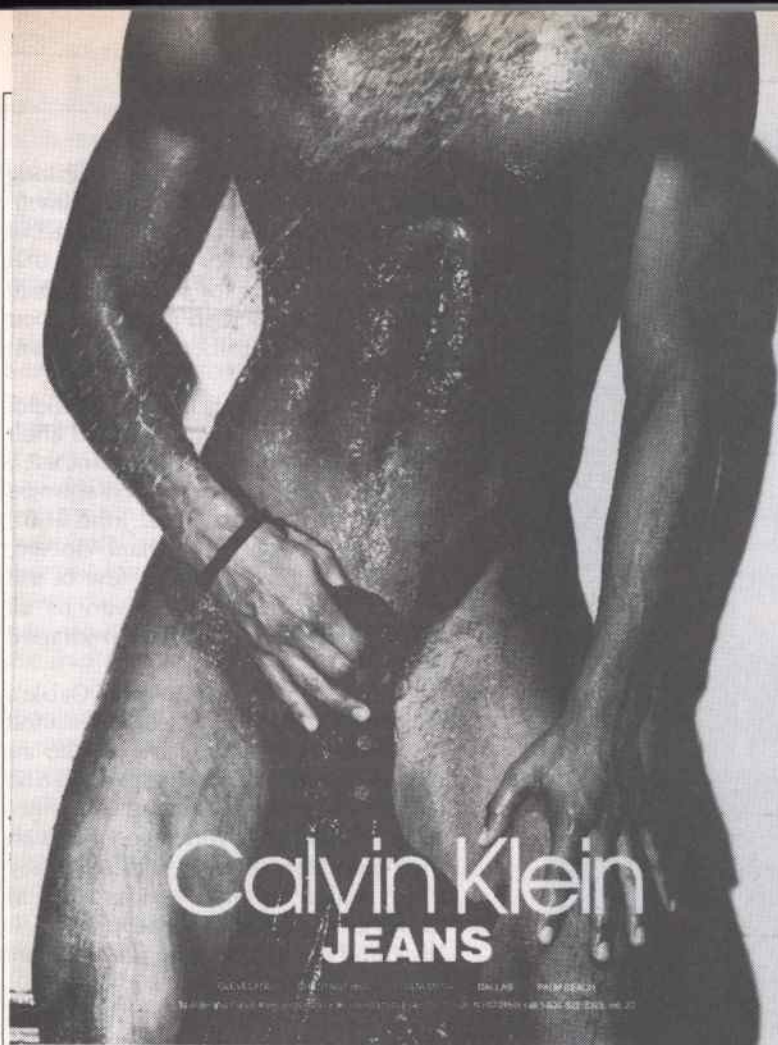


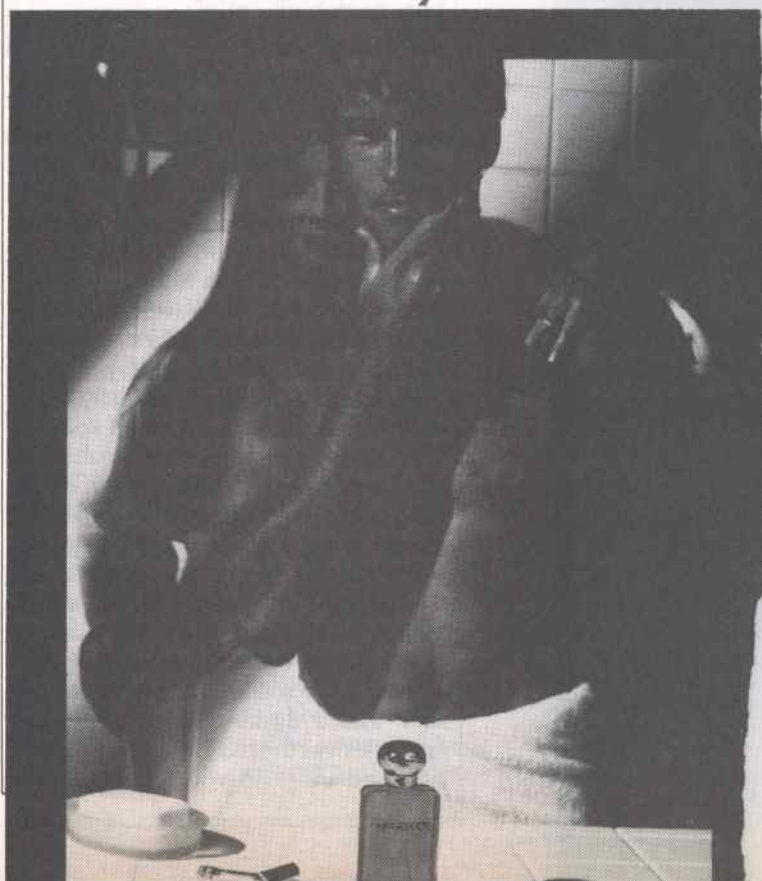
Photo / SATYR

Beefcake is taking the sacred place the public used to hold for Cheesecake. And , amazingly, its audience is both male and female!

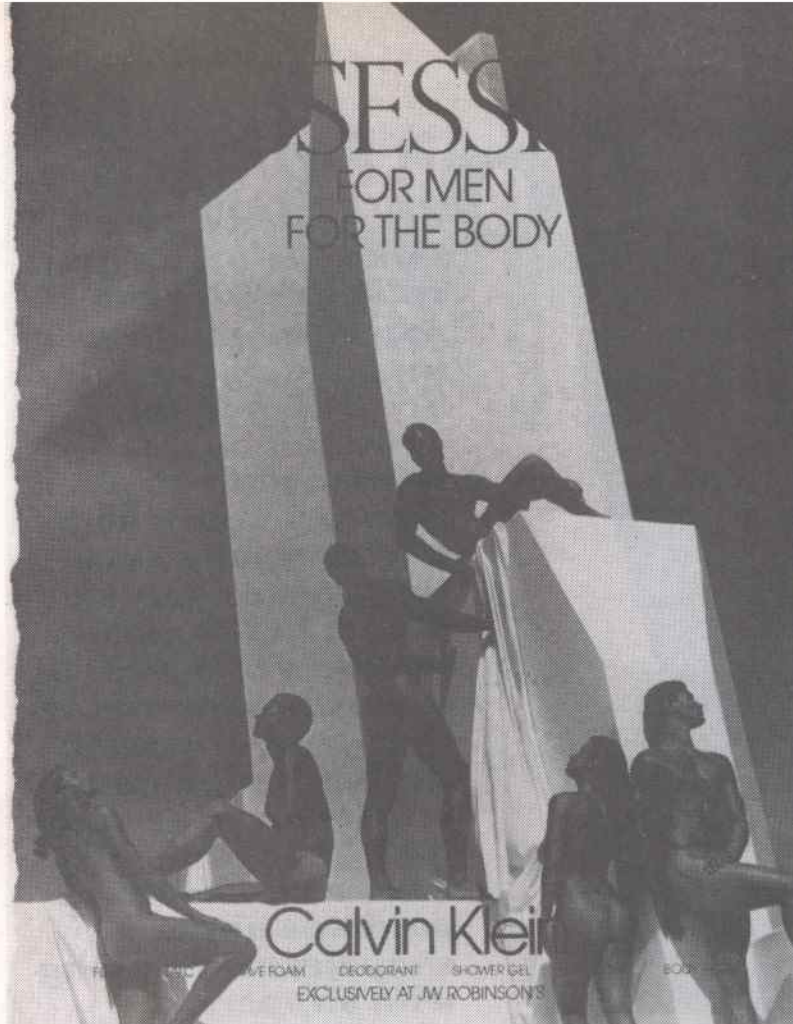


Once upon a time all things which theoretically titillated the American public were undeniably feminine. According to the opinionmakers, women paid no attention to a man's body and everyone knew that men certainly didn't. In the movies the two sexes slept in separate beds and in that general area a woman's nightgown might show a certain fortified bosom, the men wore shapeless pajamas under a shapeless robe along with slippers.

For the male, a new kind of moral frankness.



Any scene of a male getting into (his own) bed was done so flawlessly that not one inch of his bare anything showed itself to the audience. Overlooking the early biblical epics, the first break for the uncovered male was probably "It Happened One Night" in which Clark Gable bared his chest and supposedly almost destroyed the male undershirt industry.



MEN'S PRIVATES GO PUBLIC

Various loinclothed Tarzans (along with the natives), then some cosmetically-enhanced Indians came along, but nothing happened for a generation that would prepare us for seeing the bare rumps of our screen heros in their technicolor altogether on the giant screen.

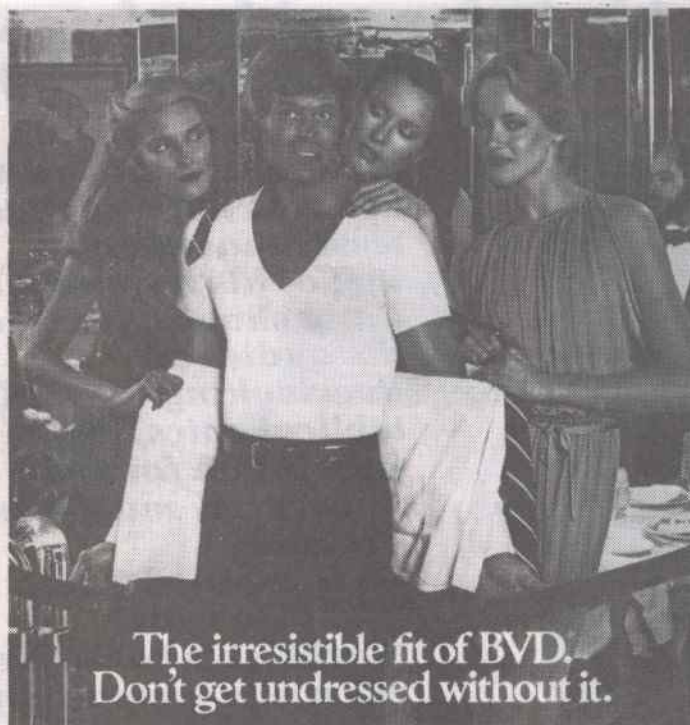
While Gable, Flynn, Garfield, Holden, etc. occasionally bared their chests, Weissmuller, Heston, Lancaster, Douglas and a myriad of others showed a bit more. Richard Gere, John Hurt, Steve Gutenberg, Jan Michael Vincent, Sylvester Stalone are but a few of the current studs who have given us all that—plus their completely undraped derrieres.

It was a long time after Gable's exposure that Burt Reynolds jump-started his career by posing coyly in the au naturel for a *Cosmopolitan* magazine layout. Playgirl has established something or another beyond even that with their male frontal nudes, although they once pulled up their underpants in hopes of attracting more advertising. It backfired circulation-wise and drawers were dropped again.

The greeting card industry, led originally by gay practitioners, has discovered the appeal of the nude male. Even Hallmark has a line of them, tastefully and to a point.

Baseball pitcher Jim Palmer made history when he first stood out on the nation's billboards in Jockey briefs and was followed by another sports cast in Munsingwear's version. Calvin Klein has left very little to the imagination. Theirs has been a top-rated print ad campaign, according to surveys by Video Storyboard Tests, a New York advertising research company. Macy's in San Francisco stopped traffic with a full page ad of a S.F. Forty-Niner in his advertised undershorts so spectacularly they made the ad into a poster. Macy's glossy Sunday magazine sections have partially-bared males in the most unexpected spots; in between or on bathtowels, mattresses and bedsheets. Perhaps it dawned on somebody somewhere that women are the most likely buyers of these items.

Strangely enough, commercials for the big three of mach beers, Budweiser, Millers and Coors, all show hunk camaradering with hunk in various stages of undress to sell their brews on television. Those flashing images show as much flesh as the old Jantzen swimwear ads used to. Did you know that for



Nothing fits, feels or appeals like BVD underwear. Every time you put on a BVD tee shirt or brief you look great. Thanks to our reinforced neckband, tapered sleeves and reinforced Lycra® spandex leg bands.

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City _____ State _____ Zip _____

billboards, Jantzen's nipples were airbrushed out during those years? And at that time in New York City it was illegal for a man to appear naked above the waist in public? (Probably even moreso below the waist).

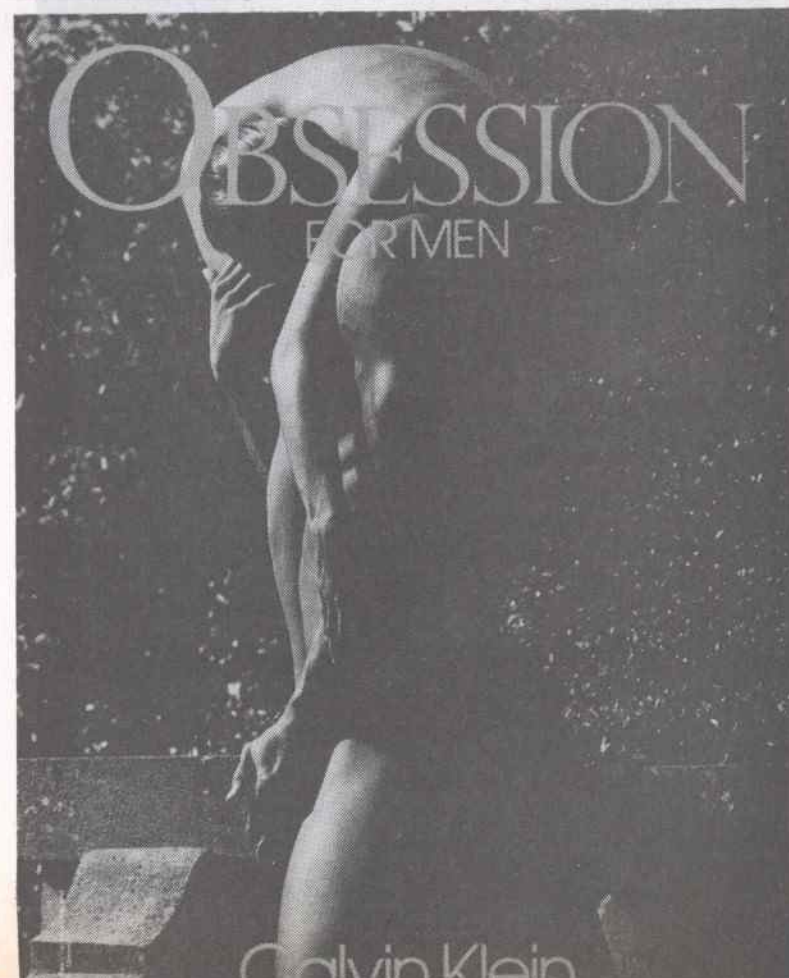
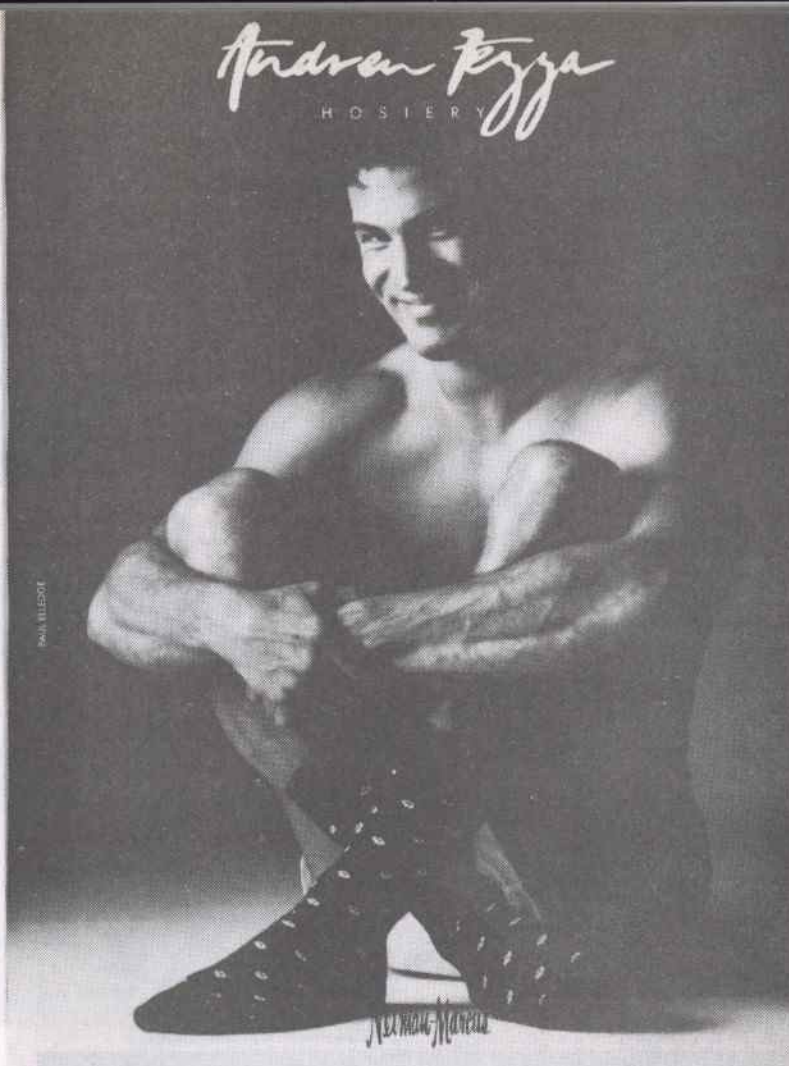
A wayward basket (gay slang for crotch bulge) in a pair of trousers in a Sears Roebuck catalog was enough to get it airbrushed out and the whole thing reprinted. Now they are all over the place. GQ shows pants on men who are shirtless and vice-versa, tuxedos being worn by men who are sockless or even barefoot. Topcoats—fur and otherwise—are photographed on bare-chested models, and perfume/cologne ads featuring men who are wearing only the fragrance itself.

Children's dolls, with which not too long ago no self-respecting male youngster would be seen dead, are currently collected with economic mega-enthusiasm. Except that these dolls are stripped-to-the-waist bare legged and chested He Man and GI Joes, wrestlers and TV heroes. They might have no more indication of genitalia than a thirties department store mannequin, although even that is changing. Male mannequins, on the other hand now have built-in bulges. Fostered, no doubt, by those displaymen who are cognizant of such things.

Each day and evening's television images are filled with well-stacked bare young men applying deodorants and deodorant soaps, shampooing, spraying themselves with one thing and another, wearing Fruit of the Loom briefs (while being ogled by fully-dressed ladies) and drinking with bare gusto almost anything carbonated that comes out of a can.

Male strippers are certainly here to stay. The Chippendales and the Playboy Channel gave them some class and notoriety. Daytime and nighttime Soap Operas have one or more resident hunks who appear between the sheets and/or step out of the shower to titillate their housewife audience. ABC's "General Hospital" even picked one of it's hunks from the Chippendales. It's most current one came from Fox's "Werewolf" where, after being transformed from being a werewolf, it required he inevitably show up without clothing.

Even the unlovely Camels cigarette camel is considered by experts and laypersons alike to be deliberately suggestive of male genitals. The same could be said for various perfume and after-

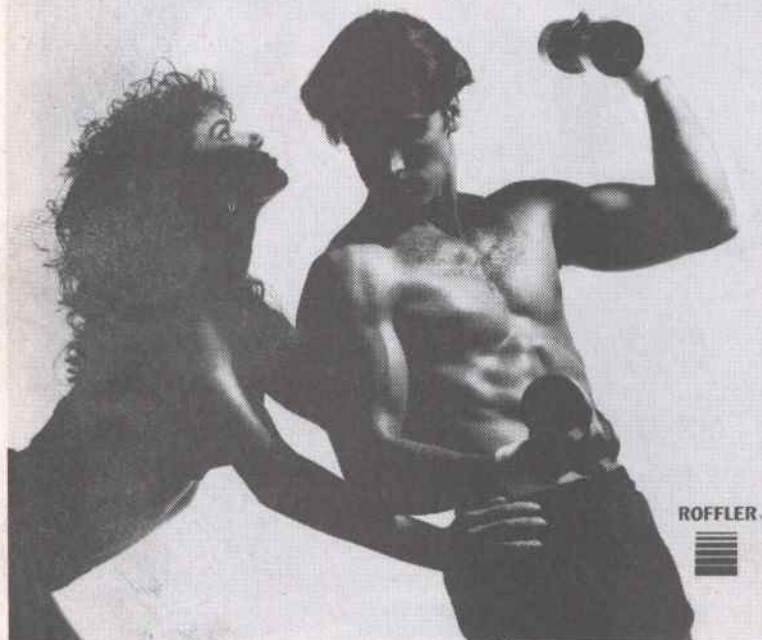


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line that persists.

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ROFFLER



"I like a store that makes house calls."

"He looked so cute with his little red nose.
So helpless. So bored. How could I let him
stay home alone? Now, while Brad is number
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Thanks to Spiegel, I don't have to choose
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pride in their exclusive value books through-
out the year."

"So, while no one has the cure for the
common cold, Spiegel has the cure for the
common way of shopping."

The new Spiegel Fall Catalog is yours
for just \$3, applicable to your first purchase.
Call 1-800-345-4500, ask for Catalog 497
and charge it.



Photo: Peter Lindbergh. Styling: David LaChapelle. Hair: Johnnie Penn. Makeup: Johnnie Penn.

shave packaging.

Ads designed to increase public awareness of AIDS have helped bring the topic of men's genitals out in the open. There have been strong objections, of course, but the posters have gone up on buses and in subways across the country.

Pop singers have shocked or amused their audiences and covered up a lot of bad music by uncovering bits of their anatomy. Sometimes one wonders if any of them ever wear shirts or at least wear a shirt with buttons. A trademark of the pop group Cameo is the varicolored codpieces worn by its lead singer. We all know the name of the lead singer who has been hauled in more than once for going through the motions of masturbating on stage.

Pin-ups are no longer exclusively female. Most poster shops stock plenty of blowups of bare chested musicians, sports or entertainment stars.

St. Martin's Press will soon publish "Facts and Phalluses" by Alexandria Paron, described as a humorous account of the penis through history.

"It's indicative of a new attitude," says Charles Spicer, St. Martin's senior editor.

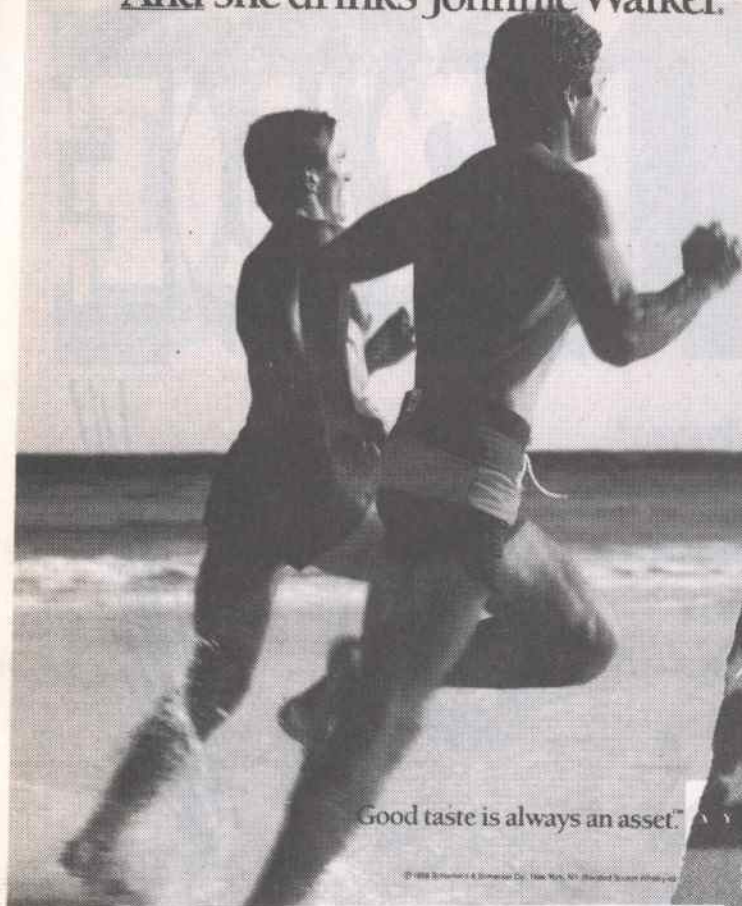
Professor of sociology at the University of California at Berkeley Todd Gitlin, who has written numerous books on the mass media and popular culture, said the change is beneficial.

"Taboos preserve the sense of special mystery of one gender as opposed to another," he said, and thus "contribute to equality." With taboos about discussing and displaying female sexuality falling, he said, an openness about men is probably needed to correct the balance.

According to Lena Williams in the New York Times, "There is a combination of demographic and social factors: the coming of age of a generation for whom sex is viewed as a right even as their parents—the soldiers of America's sexual revolution—face middle age; the fitness craze of the 1980's complete with fashions for both sexes that leave little to the imagination and the influence of gay styles that celebrate the male physique."

□

"She loves my cooking.
And she drinks Johnnie Walker."



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Men don't have to be
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to enjoy the comforts of
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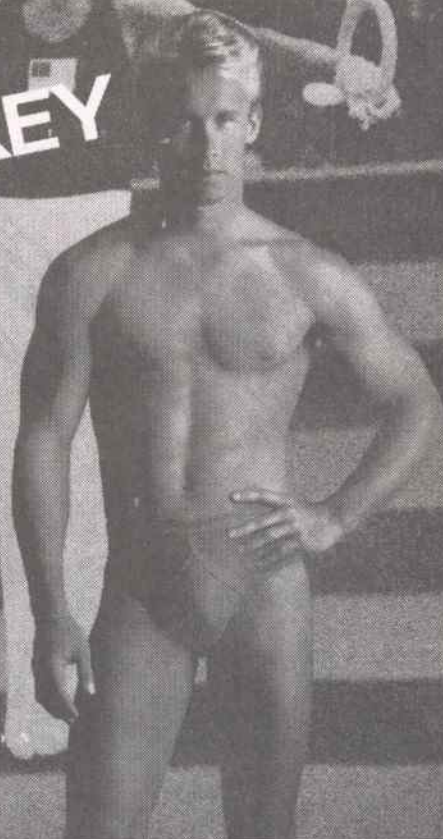
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Art Conner

Good taste is always an asset. **AYTON D H**

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Before.

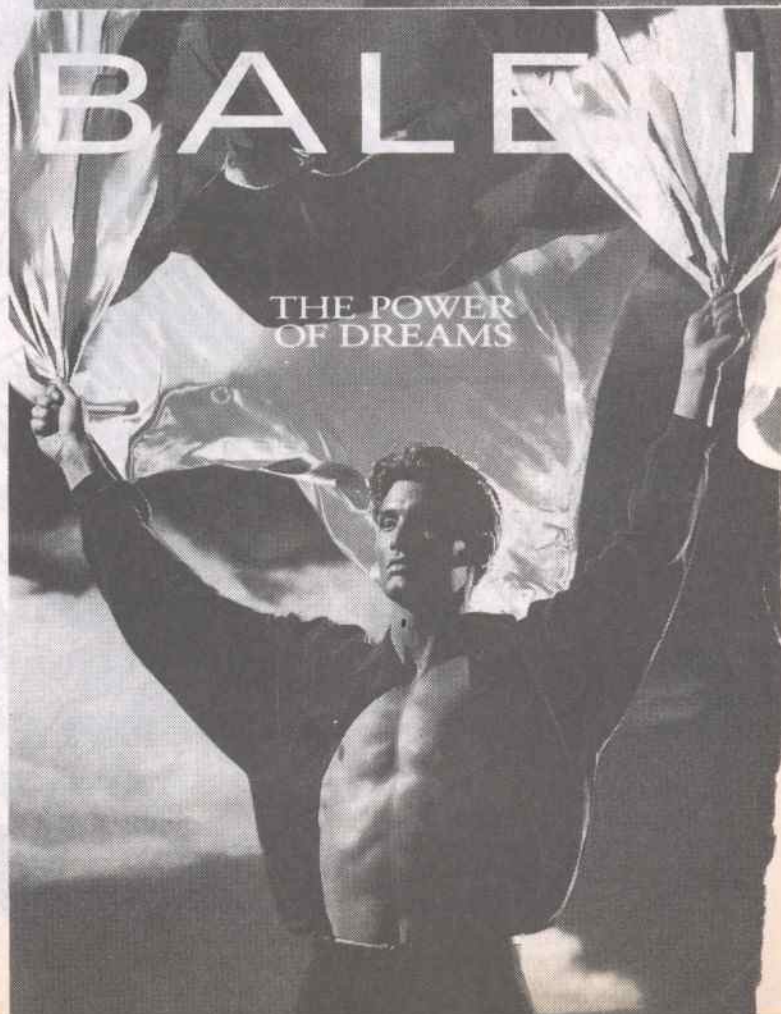


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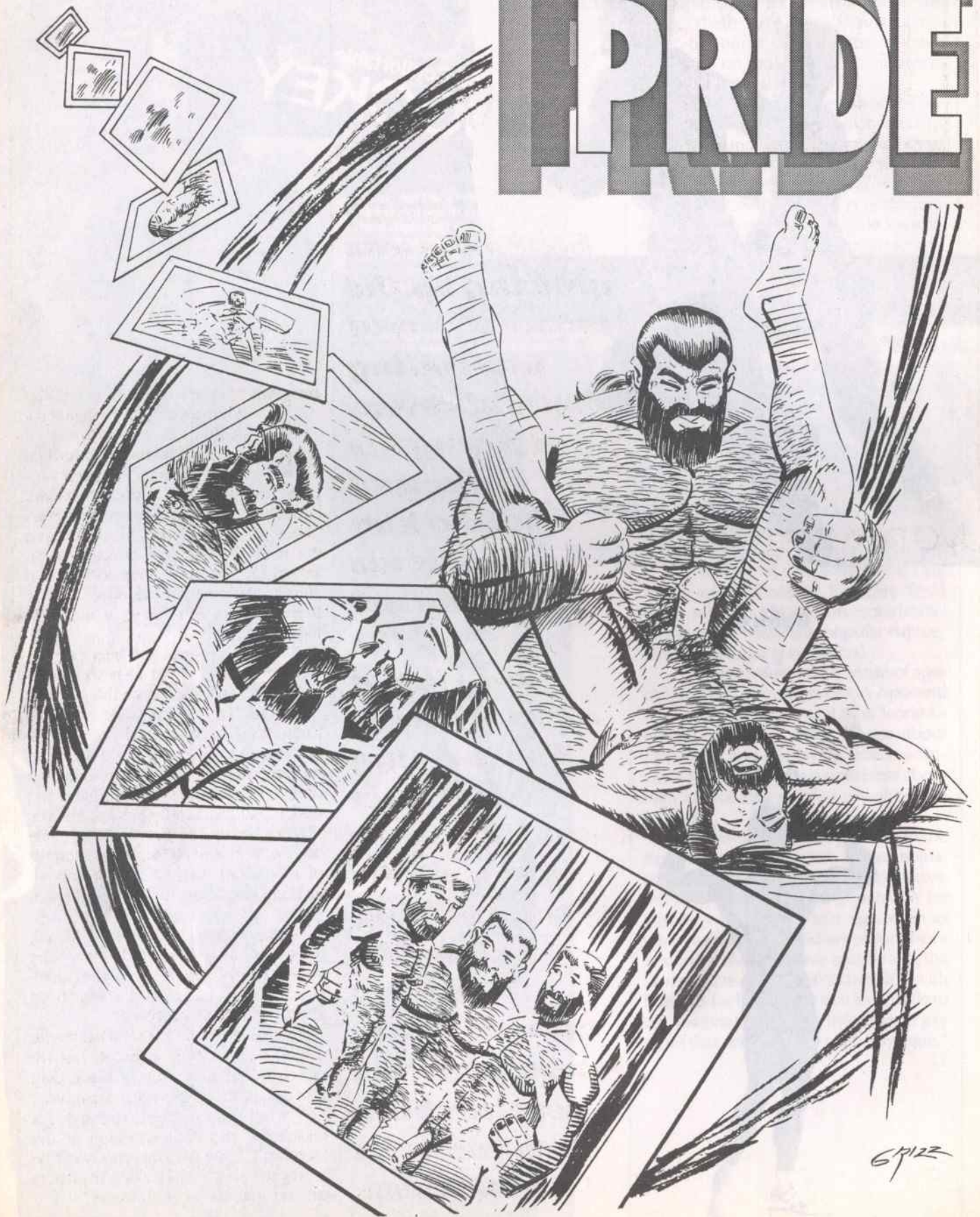


BALE

THE POWER
OF DREAMS



PRIDE



DAY

IVO DOMINGUEZ, JR.

**Craig's
headache was
growing by the
moment. Sweat
was rolling
down his brow,
stinging his
eyes, and
making him
wish that his
vanity had not
required the
wearing of
contact lenses.
The meeting
had been
stumbling along
(you couldn't
say running
along he
thought to
himself) since
noon, and was
now lurching
towards its
conclusion.**

The oppressive buzz of the fluorescent lights had started a debate on the balance of tradeoffs involved in turning the light off. One such proposal was using an incandescent desk lamp that would add light, but also heat. There was a secondary discussion on the need for the Gay, Lesbian, & Bisexual Community Center to invest in air conditioning for which of course there were no funds in sight and none likely.

"Can we please get back to the agenda. I have to get to work soon," bellowed Madeline above the growing racket of the disintegrating meeting. Craig was always amazed by how a thin, just over five foot, wisp of a dyke could produce that voice. He'd commented on it to her—she'd patted his hand and said, in her best Mr. Rogers impression, "There, there, I won't hurt you little boy." At 6' 2", and 200 and some pounds of man flesh, Craig Gallucci was an unlikely candidate for the appellation, "little boy."

"Yes, Madeline!" answered Thom, the other co-chair for Pride Day. "The last item on the agenda cannot be put off any longer. What are we going to do about the *image* problem?"

"Image problem? Is that what you're calling it. I'd call it a fascist, fashion police state," said Leon, a black drag persona of the glitter-rasta persuasion. "We wouldn't even be marching if it wasn't for the drag rebellion at the Stonewall. I can tell you, you won't be seeing my black heels leaving any marks on your parade route this year."

"This isn't New York or San Francisco. This is my home town and I can tell *you* that we don't make progress by alienating people. Last year was our first Pride Day and what was the film-at-eleven coverage?...drag queens and leather freaks. This year I want no drag, no leather, and no radical tinkerbelle to turn this into a media spectacle." Thom was adamant when it came to this issue. No compromise seemed possible or palatable to him.

"As I have repeated several times at several meetings, I don't agree!" said Madeline. "I didn't come out to be told what's acceptable by you or anyone else. Thom, why don't you just call the question. I don't think any more talk will change anyone's opinion."

"Very well. All those in favor of a dress code for the march signify so by raising your hand." Most of the hands in the room went up. Thom was not quite successful at suppressing a smile. "All those against?" Pointing with his pencil Thom counted out Leon, Madeline, and three others. "Abstentions?" A single hand, Craig's, went up. Madeline rolled her eyes and patted Craig on the other hand. "The motion is approved. Craig, as the chief for the parade marshals you will be responsible for making sure that they carry out this directive."

* * *

Friday night buffet at *Much Ado* was the place to be, the tradition du jour, enjoying the fifteen days of fame granted to newly renovated gay establishments in small towns. And in that giddy surge of popularity, of increased market share, food and drink was actually reasonably priced. Craig's plate was an artfully mounded pile of pasta displaying several of the cuisines of Italy in miniature. The tables were all full so he claimed a space at the end of the bar, next to the dance floor, and hoped that he'd finish his dinner before the DJ started his shift. Craig had discovered earlier that strobes were bad for his digestion. His meal was interrupted several times by a string of quick hellos, questions from committee members that could've waited until Pride Day, and a cruisy over-attentive bartender. His meal was getting cold and Craig concluded that being active in the community was also bad for his digestion.

Much Ado had first opened in the 70s, and despite all its face-lifts still had an excess number of mirrors retained from its disco days, mirrors which long time residents used to their advantage.

From where he sat Craig knew which mirror would show him the clock, the length of the line to the bathroom, and a preview of who was coming in the door. They had been especially useful in the pre-plague days of heavy cruising and regular police raids. Being hungrier than he was horny, Craig kept checking the time hoping he'd get to eat before the music started, and as a result of this he wasn't watching the door. It'd been a while since he'd met anyone he found attractive. He should have been checking the door.

"Craig, how are you doing? All ready for Sunday?" said Thom as he clapped Craig on the back. Craig resigned himself to not finishing his dinner, swiveled on the barstool to greet Thom, and put on his most affable gee-I'm-happy-to-see-you face. He'd learned that happy face in his days as a real estate agent, and always marveled that Thom never thought it anything but sincere.

"Just about. There are a couple of bus loads coming in from out in the county so there'll be quick training for parade marshals Sunday morning."

"Great, great, and no word on any problems?" said Thom in a conspiratorial tone.

"No word." Craig pointed over at the tables and said, "I think that's Ken and Hector over there. Shouldn't you check in with them about the balloons?"

"Right." Thom touched Craig's shoulder, and headed on to make the rounds. Craig had gotten two mouthfuls of fettucine down when the music, the strobes, and the stampede to the dance floor started. He'd skipped lunch so he was determined to eat dinner, and continued eating in a slow determined fashion. The garlic bread was a bit dry so he ordered a club soda; he'd been 12-stepping it for five years, and had managed to stay sober despite long hours at the bars. Craig heard a squeal from the dance floor that could only be Leon's, and glanced up at a mirror behind the bar to catch a reflection of what diversion his favorite drag diva was concocting. It was a good thing that Craig was eating. Those that looked on, no doubt, assumed the dropped jaw and the saliva were a response to the food before him. They were wrong. The response was to the man Leon was dancing with. The response was to eyes like coal above a mustache and cleft chin thick, plain, and substantial like a sculpture in richly colored wood burnished with sweat, luminous. As the man danced his leather

vest swung around him hiding, revealing, and hiding the hard smooth pecs, a glint of steel at the nipples, and part of a tattoo. His chaps strained and stretched with the bulging of muscles pumping to the beat of the music. The sight of the man seized Craig as surely as if he'd been grabbed by the collar, grabbed by the balls, and held right in the man's face.

Craig had fantasized about leathermen, had driven out of town to buy the magazines and videos he hid under his bed, the ones local stores wouldn't or couldn't carry. He had jerked off until he chafed, rubbed himself raw like some kind of Alladin trying to coax the genie of orgasm into transporting him to another reality. Sadly, he still lived where he lived, the leather fantasy hadn't happened, and the magic, if there was any left in the world, hadn't come to him. There were a handful of men that would occasionally wear leather to the bars that Craig frequented, but he'd never tried to connect with them. There were no leather bars in town, most leathermen went to private events or out of town. Craig was caught between the conflicting images and identities that he thought his own. He was a successful businessman, a well-liked community activist, and yet he felt awkward, unsure, and sometimes even afraid of what he truly wanted. In his fifteen or so years of being out there'd always been something missing, perhaps hidden rather than missing. This train of thought had worn deep grooves in his mind as it circled around a center point of clarity that he never reached. His mind kept circling until a voice derailed his train of thought.

"Craig, I'd like you to meet someone," said Leon in a high loud voice that cut through the disco din. Craig turned on the barstool and nearly bumped into the damn-he's-hot man Leon had been dancing with. Leon smiled, relishing the reaction, the stunned expression on Craig's face as he continued, "This is Roberto Molina."

"Pleased to meet you. I'm Craig Gallucci." Craig was relieved that his voice hadn't wavered appreciably.

"You look better in person than in pictures," said Roberto.

"Pictures?" said Craig.

"In the *Gay/Lesbian Weekly*, the article about Pride Day." Roberto had a slight accent that spoke of Texas and of Mexico.

"Well, my work is done," said Leon as

he snapped open a fan with practiced ease. "You'll get along just fine. No doubt my *services* in this tired bar are needed elsewhere." Leon walked off towards the DJ's booth, pausing once, with drama, in mid-stride to look side-long over his shoulder to smile at Roberto and Craig.

"Leon fancies himself our local love goddess and queer mother. He's really nice when you get to know him," said Craig, a bit apprehensive about leather's reaction to lace.

"I like him already. He's the only one in this bar that had the balls to ask me to dance, besides I have a brother that makes Leon look butch."

"I don't think I've seen you before. Are you new in town?" asked Craig.

"Been here a few weeks, and this is my second time at this place." Roberto carefully appraised Craig, the bulge in his crotch, the black chest hair curling over the t-shirt collar, and the look in his eyes. "Look, how about we cut through the small talk. I wanna play with you. It'll be safe, sane, and consensual. Yes or no?"

"Yes."

* * *

Craig lay naked in his bed wondering how suburbia would cope. Several of his neighbors had been awake when they got home from *Much Ado*, and had peeked to see who, if anyone, Craig had brought home. The sight of a man clad head to toe in leather going into Mr. Galluci's house would be juicy gossip for weeks. Roberto had taken a quick survey of Craig's bedroom, decided that the sex supplies were lacking, and asked for permission to see what he might find around the house. Craig had given a sheepish yes and Roberto told him to get naked and wait in bed for him. The clatter, thud, rattle, and slam of doors and drawers being opened, perused and shut sent his imagination racing. He couldn't quite picture what sadistic plans Roberto was trying to fulfill, but the apprehension was a strong aphrodisiac. This was going to be quite a night. Craig heard his screen door creak open, and sat bolt upright in bed. Was Roberto ripping him off, walking out the door, and leaving him naked in bed? He took a breath and told himself to calm down; Roberto seemed like an honest man. Craig looked out the window, and saw that Roberto was in the backyard taking down the clothesline. Roberto waved at a nosy neighbor that was peering past tasteful vertical blinds. Craig sank back

into bed wondering how he and suburbia would cope.

Roberto came back into the bedroom carrying a paper bag, with a tangle of clothesline sticking out the top, that he put on the dresser. Craig could scarcely believe that this hot, Latin man in vest and chaps was interested in him, let alone that he had come home with him. Roberto sat on the edge of the bed and bent down onto Craig, grabbing his head and pulling him into a long sensual kiss. Craig shivered under the rough tickle of his mustache and the smoothness of his leather vest, punctuated with

He ruffled the thick black tangle of hair between Craig's pecs and ran his hand down the line of fur to the soft curve of a beer belly, and beyond to a cock that stood pulsing at attention.

the cold scratch of run pins. He released Craig from the kiss and said, "I think it's show time!" He ruffled the thick black tangle of hair between Craig's pecs and ran his hand down the line of fur to the soft curve of a beer belly, and beyond to a cock that stood pulsing at attention. He grabbed the cock and stroked it in rhythm with its throbbing. Craig squeezed his legs together, relaxed them, and squeezed them again sending the warm waves of pleasure riding down from his cock lapping across his body. Roberto said, "You're a novice at this aren't you?" while he continued to slowly pump Craig's cock.

"I've been out a long time, but yeah, I've never been with a leatherman." Craig felt a little odd, looking up at a guy that was half his age and definitely the senior partner in this situation.

"Anything you're looking for in particular out of tonight? Anything that's a real turn-off or a limit I should know about?" asked Roberto.

"I'm willing to try anything—Ouch, that hurt!" yelped Craig as Roberto

squeezed hard on his cock.

"Wrong answer. Bad idea." He let his grip loosen. "You could get yourself in trouble that way." He put a finger on Craig's parted lips. "Don't speak yet, just listen. I'm willing to play this one by ear. You trust me, I'll trust you, and we'll find your limits on the way. What do you want to use as a safe word?"

"Safe word?"

"Yeah, a word that really means *no*, that really means *stop* or *I can't take it*." He smiled evilly and continued, "I'll give you a safe word. One you're not likely to use unless you mean it. The word is *Jesse Helms*. Got that?"

"I got it, but I don't like it."

"Tough shit. You're the beginner, and either you play by my rules or out the door I go. Let's keep it real simple—you don't say anything until I tell you to. You've got a safe word and you're intelligent, you'll cope. Make noises. Use gestures. OK?" Roberto looked into Craig's brown eyes, scrutinizing them for clues to choose his next move.

"Uh huh." Craig grunted. He stretched back into the bed, lay his arms above his head, crossing them at the wrists, fingers limp, as an invitation to bondage. Roberto placed his hand on the wrists pinning them back into the pillows and leaned over and took one of Craig's nipples in his mouth. He ran his tongue around the boundary between nipple and pec, relishing the change in texture from one flesh to another. His tongue was beginning to feel the paradox of sensitivity and numbness created by the repetitive brush of coarse hair against the nubby softness of his tongue. Craig was breathing harder, and periodically his pulsing cock would tap against Roberto as if demanding his attentions. Roberto began to suck, pulling the air from his mouth, calling the blood to fill the engorged nipple. The rush and crash of Craig's breath in Roberto's ear pushed him into the next phase of transition to Top headspace. He could feel vitality, authority, and raw sexual force rising up from their dark resting places in his genitals, his heart, and his mind. He started to chew on the nipple, slowly, but progressively harder. He put more of his weight on Craig's wrists and skewered the nipple on an eyetooth, boring into the flesh. He bit harder until he heard Craig gasp. He pulled back for a second to look at the reddened, swollen nipple, then bit again. He chewed harder and harder each time, waiting longer and longer after each gasp before

relenting in his attack on the nipple. Finally Craig gave a little cry and a shudder that told Roberto he was ready.

Roberto stood up and grabbed the bag off the dresser. He pulled out a wooden handle from a broken hammer and slipped a length of foam pipe insulation over it. He whacked his palm with a few times, feeling its heft and its sting. He pointed this make-shift nightstick at Craig, who looked as if he were about to speak then changed his mind. He turned over, went on all fours, and raised his butt, offering it to Roberto, who waited, taking in the sight of pale buns framed in curls of black hair. He liked the look of Craig's low slung balls, echoing the curve of the belly, and the bulk of sturdy arms and legs supporting this posture of submission. Within his apprehension and fear, Craig was growing annoyed and impatient as he waited for the first blow to land on his ass. Roberto spit several times on the foam covered handle. He pushed the handle between the buns and slid it up and down, pressing firmly into the crack so the foam would rub against the butt hole. It felt like a snake slithering past his butt hole. Roberto grabbed those low slung balls and pulled down slowly and strongly as he continued massaging Craig's crack. Roberto spit on the crack and pressed harder, grinding the handle against Craig's butt hole. Roberto tugged rhythmically on the balls while Craig swayed and moaned. He stopped sliding the handle. He took the handle and tapped on the buns with increasing force while he tugged on the balls timing the fall of his blows to coincide the gentle slap of Craig's cock against his hand.

"Ahh. Ahh. Unhh—Oh! huh." Craig grew louder as Roberto's blows landed with greater drive. His butt was getting hotter; waves of pain, like scalding water, splashed across his butt. His butt hole, wet and abraded, itched and tickled under the cool air. The pull on his nut sack was incredible. It felt like strings of pain ran all through his body, and converged on the fist around his balls. The pleasure in his cock was like honey, a sweetness he almost couldn't bear as it melted into the heat of the pain. He was getting dizzy, gulping air too fast.

"Hold your breath!" barked Roberto. Craig seemed not to hear him. Roberto stopped the beating on his butt and said coldly "I said hold your breath." Craig held his breath. "You're hyperventilating.

Breathe when I say so." The handle started to land on his buns again. With his breath held, he could feel/hear the pounding of his heart and the pounding on his butt like drums talking across an inner nightscape. "Breathe....Hold it!" Craig was getting closer to orgasm with every sensation. "Breathe....Hold it!" Craig didn't want to come yet, but should he stop Roberto, could he stop him? He needed to come. "Breathe....Hold it!" The beating was reaching the limit of what he could stand. "It's going to get worse now. The only way out is shooting your load." Roberto started to squeeze the balls as he jerked on them, as he banged away with the hammer handle, as he said, "Now boy. Now."

"Whuhh. Ohh. Shhhh. uhh. AHH!" Craig spewed his cum across the sheets, hit the headboard, and shuddered as the last of his cum puddled beneath him. Roberto let go of his balls, gave him a little push on the back, and Craig collapsed onto the bed. Roberto lay down next to him, throwing an arm across his back. Quiet, the two lay quiet together for a time. Craig rolled over and said, "That was great. How do you want to come?" Roberto's fingers found Craig's nipple, the one that was tender from chewing, and squeezed it.

"Did I say you could speak yet? No I didn't." He shook his head. "I'll let you off easy this time." The pressure on the nipple tripled.

"Youch." As soon as Craig yelped, Roberto let go of his nipple and got off the bed. He unsnapped, unzipped his chaps with the sensual precision of a tea ceremony, and placed them on a chair. He shucked his boots and jeans, then put the boots and the chaps back on slowly so that he could bask in the worshipful glow of Craig's gaze. His thick uncut cock grew larger and harder.

"Put a condom on my cock and grease it up." Craig took a condom and the lube off the night stand and went to Roberto. He knelt at Roberto's feet, his eyes level with the cock that he desperately wanted. The musky smell of leather and manhood intermingled was a potent drug that made him tremble as he rolled the condom onto the cock. As he spread the lube, the solid feel of the cock in his hands sent shivers of excitement through his body. Roberto took Craig's hand and helped him to stand. They kissed, tongues, lips, and teeth thrusting, parting, meeting, retreating, sucking, and nibbling in a chaotic frenzy of passion. Although taller and broader,

Craig felt small and engulfed, completely in Roberto's dominion. As they continued to kiss, Roberto led them back to the bed. "Get yourself greased and ready to get fucked." Craig lay back into the bed and started to stick lube covered fingers up his ass. "Yeah, that's right. Look up at me while you do that. Yeah, get ready for this cock that's gonna plow your ass." Three of Craig's fingers were up to the knuckles in his ass. "You're ready."

Roberto knelt between Craig's parted legs, and threw them over his shoulders. His cock poked at the pink starburst of Craig's anus tracing each line of taut skin that radiated from the center, teasing him. He pulled back, then pushed straight into Craig's butt hole, sliding the full length of his cock into him with one smooth stroke. He held still, feeling Craig's ass contract and jerk until it adjusted to his cock. He fucked, only moving his pelvis, not throwing the weight of his body into it, with rolling, luxuriant motions. Craig moaned softly; his cock, still spent from the earlier orgasm, was gradually inching towards fullness. Roberto pumped faster, letting his pleasure build at its own pace, unhindered by the demands of his mind. Craig was moving his hips, smacking them into Roberto's pubic bone with every stroke. The texture of the leather chaps brushing against his thighs sent flutters of gooseflesh across his body. Roberto took Craig's hands and placed them on his nipple rings, showing how he wanted them pulled. "That's it. Keep doing it," he rasped. The fucking became a slamming fury. Roberto rushed towards orgasm with wild abandon, no holding back, no waiting. Craig's prostate howled for deliverance from the cock that thrashed against it. Craig jacked his cock in self defense, but it was still too soon since his last orgasm. Roberto gave a low gurgling cry, his face red, his eyes nearly rolling back into his head. He shook as the torrent of cum flowed from his cock, feeling as if it flowed from his whole body. He took deep, voluminous breaths and shook his head. He smiled down at Craig who looked confused and frustrated, his cock half-erect, bobbing about. Playfully, he slapped Craig's cock back and forth between his hands. "The night's still young Craig."

Roberto held on to the rubber, pulled out, and cleaned himself up. Craig stared dreamily at the ceiling, savoring the hunger and the satisfaction in his ass. Roberto grabbed the clothesline and

scissors out of the bag and cut several lengths of line. He tied gray hankies around Craig's wrists then looped clotheslines through the hanky fetters and tied them back to the bedposts. The smell of fresh sweat rising from Craig's pits was irresistible. Roberto paused to lick, with care to remain on the thin line between tickling and pure sensuality. After this interlude, he returned to the labor of bondage. He tied each of Craig's feet to a line and to the bed frame. He took a strip of rawhide from his vest pocket and tied up the balls, separating them, and leaving a loop as a pull ring. "Everything OK?" asked Roberto.

"Uh huh!" said Craig with a vigorous nod. Craig was getting turned on by the solid, methodical way that Roberto lay claim on his body. Roberto reached into the top drawer of the night stand and pulled out an enormous dildo. Craig's eyes bulged and he laughed. The dildo had been a gag gift, and was not a toy he'd ever imagined putting up his ass. Roberto dumped the contents of the bag of scavenged play materials onto the bed. He greased up the latex pecker and jiggled it up into Craig's relaxed, receptive butt. Craig was so turned on by Roberto that it felt like his body could do anything. Within the limits of motion enforced by his fetters, Craig wriggled his butt until it had taken the whole dildo. Roberto rummaged through the pile of stuff on the bed, grabbed an aquarium air pump, and duct taped it across the base of the dildo. He plugged it in.

"You didn't have a vibrating butt plug — so I improvised," said Roberto. Craig was moaning softly. The rapid buzzing ran up his butt and down his throbbing cock. He pulled at his restraints; his hands wanted to grab his cock, and bring himself to orgasm. The urgency to come was overwhelming. "Well. I'm thirsty. I'll be back in a while." Roberto left the room. Craig growled with frustration, the sound of the growl so animal-like that it scared him to hear it issue from his throat. He pulled frantically at his bonds, but could not pull free. He rolled his hips back and forth making his cock sway like a buoy in a storm. He could not make himself come. He growled again.

After what seemed hours to Craig, Roberto walked back into the room, sipping a glass of ice water, that he placed on the night stand. He took another piece of clothesline, tied it to

the loop of rawhide on Craig's balls, ran the line under the bed frame, and back up to below the crotch. He climbed into bed and straddled Craig. He took the line and pulled, stretching the nut sac, and then pinned the line down under a knee. He lit a candle and began to drip wax on Craig's balls, his body jerked with the fall of each drop. "Now my friend, I do intend to let you come...but not until I have said a few things." He put a clothespin on Craig's nipples and continued, "What gives your fucking committee the right to ban leatherfolk

***"Jesse Helms, Jesse-Fucking-Helms!"
cried Craig,
tears streaming
down his face.
Roberto
released his balls.***

from a pride march?" He dripped hot wax onto the head of Craig's cock. "You're a coward. You know that?" He pulled on the line, increasing the pressure on the tightly stretched balls.

"Cut this shit. I'm not playing this game," yelled Craig, the unsteadiness of fear underlining each word. Roberto eyes flashed with anger.

"I didn't give you permission to speak. You have a safe word — nothing more." Craig's mind was spinning out of control in a swirl of fear, anger and an onslaught of pleasurable and painful sensations. Roberto caught the loose skin around the head of Craig's cock between his fingers and drew it out far enough to clamp it with a clothespin. He repeated this procedure until four more clothespins circled the head, like the petals of a flower of pain. Who do you remind yourself of on that scum sucking *Pride* committee?" Roberto dripped more wax on his cock and balls. He started to slap Craig's balls. "So who the fuck do you think you are?" He slapped harder. "So who the fuck do you think you are?" He

spit in Craig's face then gripped his balls and squeezed. Craig gasped, his eyes grew watery, his face red, he bit at his tongue. "So who the fuck do you think you are?" Roberto screamed as he closed his fist.

"Jesse Helms, Jesse-Fucking-Helms!" cried Craig, tears streaming down his face. Roberto released his balls.

"Yes, that's honest." Roberto lay down next to Craig and brushed away the tears. He kissed him gently. He took Craig's cock and stroked it as he said, "You can come Boy. Just let it come now." They kissed, Roberto jacked him slowly, and Craig came with a soft moan that he whimpered into Roberto's mouth. The bonds, clothespins, and dildo were removed with delicacy and care. "The scene's over. You're free."

They slept curled together, Craig's larger body curving around Roberto, clutching him as he were the only solid thing in the world.

* * *

The memory of the phone call from Madeline still made him shake. Madeline was on duty as an Emergency Room nurse when they brought Roberto in. He'd been gay bashed. He'd put up a ferocious fight until he passed out. One of his attackers was brought into the ER with him. When he woke up asking for Craig, Madeline made an educated guess and called Craig Gallucci. Roberto was going to be alright, but the sight of his bruised face and broken leg was now a permanent part of Craig's memories. Madeline's kindness and her warm hands holding his and Roberto's would also never be forgotten.

That sleepless night led to Pride Day. Craig Gallucci stood before his closet. He'd put on his jeans and Parade Marshal t-shirt. He reached for the shelf above the hangers and brought down a pair of chaps. He'd never worn them outside of the bedroom, in fact no one had ever seen him wearing them. He felt the weight of the leather in his hands. He smelled them and thought of Roberto. Craig put them on. He went to his phone, he dialed, it rang, and he said, "Leon, what're you wearing?"

"Since when has phone sex been your thing?" Leon laughed.

"I'm wearing leather to the march. You I hope will wear lace. Wanna help me make a few phone calls about the revised dress code?"

"But Sir, this is mutiny!" he said with mock horror.

"You bet!" □

COURT FIGHT WITH GOD SQUAD COST HIM HIS LAND AND HIS PRIVACY

Newman Grove, Nebraska

The news had swept through this little town like a twister on the Great Plains. Keith Jacobson, a 56 year-old farmer, had been charged with receiving child pornography. In his heart, Jacobson said later, he believed that he had been framed. But who would believe him? Deeply ashamed, he secluded himself in his small gray farmhouse in the cornfields of central Nebraska. When he needed groceries, he would drive to a town 40 miles away. An uncle would pick up his mail at the post office.

Now, five years later, the 61 year-old Jacobson has won vindication from the Supreme Court, which ruled last month that he had been entrapped by U.S. postal inspectors.

"I knew I wasn't a child pornographer," said Jacobson, a white-haired bachelor in suspenders and jeans, sitting in his farmhouse living room a few days after the verdict. "But when the government charges you with something like that, what are people going to think?"

The agents had pursued him for more than two years before he finally subscribed to a pornographic magazine, "Boys Who Love Boys." In the raid on his farmhouse, agents found only the pornography that they had sent him.

While the ruling brought relief to Jacobson, the personal costs of the case were enormous.

He lost his job as a school bus driver. He sold forty acres of his family farm to his sister to pay his legal costs.

And now everyone in this town of 800 knows that he is gay. "I guess I don't have any privacy anymore," he said.

Jacobson was one of 161 men arrested in 1987 by federal inspectors in the U.S. Postal Service's covert investigation, named Operation Looking Glass.

The inspectors operated under the Child Protection Act, which outlaws the purchase or acceptance of child pornography. The law was intended to

break the underground network of people who make and trade child pornography.

The Supreme Court's majority opinion, written by Justice Byron White, said the government could not target an "otherwise law-abiding citizen", and then "induce commission of the crime."

The dissent in the 5-4 opinion was written by Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who said the court had expanded the entrapment defense by making it harder to show the required "predisposition" to commit a crime.

When the charges were brought, they stunned the conservative town of Newman Grove, where the novel "Jaws" was banned from the school library in the 1970s because it contained profanity. Everyone knew Jacobson, a veteran of the Korean and Vietnam wars who had never caused any problems.

During the darkest days, Jacobson won the support of his pastor, the Rev. LeRoy Hobbe.

"He's always been an honorable person and we supported him," the pastor said. Jacobson was treasurer of the church at the time of his arrest, and still serves in that post.

While people in Newman Grove do not support pornography, they also do not brook intrusion from the government.

Velma Price, a woman in her seventies who ran the weekly Newman Grove Reporter, defended Jacobson in print. Price, now dead, said Jacobson fell victim to a natural curiosity. "Most any of

us could be set up for such a sting," she wrote.

Jacobson also won the support of the head of the local veterans' organization and the new superintendent of schools. The superintendent, Luther Heller, said Jacobson would not be offered his job back but could apply for other openings.

Jacobson's lawyer, George Moyer Jr., who persuaded him to appeal his conviction, was incensed by some of the language in the investigators' solicitations. In one case, the sham organization said it stood for "freedom of choice."

Since the Supreme Court verdict, Moyer has received calls from other targets whose cases "were even more outrageous than this one."

Jacobson first came to the attention of government agents in 1984, when they raided a pornographic distributor and confiscated the subscription list. Jacobson had ordered a magazine that included photographs of naked boys, but did not depict sexual activity. The magazine was legal when Jacobson ordered it, but a law passed by Congress a few years later broadened the definition of pornography to include such a magazine.

Over the course of more than two years, the government sent sexual questionnaires to Jacobson under the names of nonexistent organizations such as the Midlands Data Research.

One of them stated, "If you believe in the joys of sex and the complete aware-

ness of those lusty and youthful lads and lasses" then "we would like to hear from you."

After eight solicitations, Jacobson in 1987 ordered the magazine "Boys Who Love Boys." He said he did not know the magazine was illegal.

When it arrived at the post office, Jacobson said he took it home, looked through it, found it "distasteful," and put it in a drawer. He went to the town's cafe for coffee, then returned home to find the sheriff and four federal agents waiting.

Daniel Mihalko, a postal inspector who supervised the investigation, said the agents "would have been remiss not to pursue the case of a man who was around children daily" as a school bus driver.

He said the operation was "very successful," resulting in 147 convictions and turning up evidence that 35 men had sexually abused children.

Postal authorities say at least four men committed suicide after being charged.

One of them, a 34-year-old farmer who lived 50 miles from Jacobson, was married and had two small children. The day before his arraignment, he

drove a pickup truck along a country road, pointed a gun at his head and pulled the trigger.

Tom Maul, the dead man's lawyer, said, "His life is gone. This was a hard-working man just trying to make an honest living on the plains. He never even had so much as a speeding ticket."

A Wisconsin lawyer who committed suicide after being charged left a note that he had been "cursed with a sexual preference."

Mihalko said the investigators could hardly be blamed for the suicides. "It is not unusual for people to commit suicide after some kind of arrest or charge," he said. "With child pornography, it can be doubly or triply traumatic."

Jacobson has been working at the farmer's coop in Newman Grove, a farmer-owned fuel and supply outlet, trying to put it all behind him.

But Jacobson knows that some residents still whisper and snicker about him. He had come to terms with his sexuality during mid-life, he said, but had chosen to remain "in the closet." Our government has changed all that.

"Doesn't the government realize," he asked, "that they can destroy a man's life?"

□ New York Times

DIRK JOHNSON

TOUGHING IT IN TIJUANA

BILL MANSON

MARY MCCARTHY IS MOONLIGHTING in Mexico. This Tuesday night, as on every Tuesday, she scoots out of her Chula Vista canyon driveway, and by about six o'clock she's across the border, on Constitucion opposite the Tijuana jail. She turns up a narrow alley and into a shadowy courtyard. She parks the car and climbs steps to a first-floor office.

This is an AIDS clinic—her AIDS clinic, in the sense that it was her idea. By day, McCarthy is a nurse practitioner up at UC San Diego's Owen Clinic for AIDS sufferers. But this once-a-week nighttime clinic is her pride and joy, the culmination of a private crusade.

It is also Tijuana's only recognition that there is an AIDS crisis here. McCarthy got involved after Emilio Velasquez, a Tijuana gay leader, traveled up and asked San Diego Visiting Nurses' Association for help. After more than two years of hellish night trips with Velasquez into the barrios, where she found men dying like lepers, it struck McCarthy that she'd see a lot more people if a clinic could be set up.

Since last October, a small bi-national group composed of McCarthy, three or so other American volunteers, Dr. Carlos Diaz and Tijuana's gay activists has had a place to run a clinic—even if Tijuana's health authorities won't always cooperate.

"Kaposi's sarcoma," she mutters as she feels around purple spots on a patient's back. She touches farther up. "That feels like a lipoma." Diaz listens. McCarthy's just a nurse practitioner, but here she's the teacher. She brings down years of experience with AIDS to a doctor who (like the vast majority of his Mexican colleagues) has had none.

The door opens. In from the night, a terribly wasted face appears, helped by another.

"Ah, Max," says McCarthy "Sit him down here. Momentito, Max."

Max's brother sits him down on a row of flats.

At this moment, an elderly man in a suit enters. Two younger acolytes are at his side. A sudden silence comes over the room. The guy just looks like a powerful official.

"Is there a doctor here?" he asks in Spanish.

Diaz emerges. "I am a doctor," he says.

The older man speaks to him in low tones. Diaz remonstrates. The man speaks to him again.

Diaz turns to the waiting group. "This is Dr. Ismael Uamas Amaya," he announces after a pause. "He is the new director of Health—jurisdiction Number Two—Tijuana. He has just told me he is closing this clinic down."

"What?" says McCarthy.

"Nobody asked for my permission to use

these offices," says Amaya, in a mix of English and Spanish. "You do not have permission . . . Women and children come here for care in the daytime . . . It is dangerous to have this type of AIDS clinic here."

"We had permission from your predecessor—" McCarthy says.

"We have Mexican programs. We won't accept American money. I think some people are coming down here to Tijuana just to earn extra dollars for doing it. Besides, the need is exaggerated. There are only thirty cases of AIDS in this area."

A young gay Mexican comes up to Amaya. He speaks, shouts, in English:

"BULLSHIT!"

The word rings out and stops everyone in their tracks.

"I have worked for this program for three years," says the young man, Sergio Carlos, who is near tears. "We started it. And no money. See! These fliers. We distribute them around the city. Education! See! We've done all this with NO help from our Mexican government. Seven thousand flyers. Free! We pay for these. We are all volunteers. Us and the Americans who come down. And this clinic—all the materials came from the United States! Not from you. You are doing nothing about AIDS, and now you want to stop us, the only people responsible enough to do something about it!"

Amaya avoids Carlos' stare. "We don't want charity from the United States," he says finally. "It is propaganda! This is our public health department. You must leave."

It is a pathetic sort of convoy that crosses town. The American helpers, the Mexican activists, the diagnosed and the dying—all are crammed into three or four cars. They are headed for Emilio's cafe, in the bowels of a parking building near the downtown cathedral.

Emilio's belongs to McCarthy's friend Emilio Velasquez. It is one of the intellectual and gay meeting places of the city. The downstairs is a small bar divided into band and dance areas. Upstairs is all red-velvet curtain, and intimate red-vinyl booths.

But tonight, the upstairs quickly becomes a jumble of boxes and tubes and syringes. Worried young men arrive, waiting to have their blood drawn. Others wait to be told if they have SIDA (the Spanish acronym for AIDS). Volunteers haul up medical supplies, nurses yell, "Have we any Ivs? Or did we leave them at the clinic?" There are mumbles of, "Be careful now. I'm drawing blood." There are the whispers of the dying.

Max is one of the dying.

"I'm very concerned with our little friend here," says McCarthy. She's holding Max's face in her hands. "He is wasting away. He's lost 20 to 30 pounds since I saw him two

weeks ago. If we were in the U.S., we could have run tests and hit these things before they hit him. But down here, if you've got AIDS, the first opportunistic disease is your last disease."

Max whispers that he can't swallow because of the cankers in his mouth. "Ah, fungus," she says, shining a flashlight in, "and hairy leukoplakia. We might have something for that, Max dear."

She looks up.

"Do you know how I get the only drugs I have down here?"

From my dying patients up in San Diego. They bequeath them to me. But you can't give AZT without proper analysis. It's very toxic. So we do nothing. Here's the result."

She feels Max's sticklike arms and legs, the hugely swollen lymph glands on his neck and under his arms.

"Can you believe it? We're, like, twenty miles from the most sophisticated diagnostic equipment and AIDS expertise in the world, and here at 'Emilio's Cafe Clinic' we just have no way of knowing what's killing Max. No diagnostic equipment. And even if we could diagnose, we have no radiation, no chemotherapy—and now no goddamn clinic! It's frontier medicine all over again."

Another hour, and the clinic is over. There are lots of hugs and cries of "Hasta la proxima semana!" Then McCarthy is in the car again, bouncing up and down dark, pocked roads, going to see the unmovables: people dying where they live, in the barrios.

"And that," says McCarthy, finally, "is just the tip of the iceberg. Amaya says 30? Come on! If San Diego has 30,000 HIV-positive people and 1,800 actually sick with AIDS, Tijuana—hey, gimme a break."

It's around eleven. A horned moon is mellowing over the bull-ring and Las Playas. It's time to head for the frontier.

"This wasn't your usual Tuesday evening," mutters McCarthy.

"Citizenship?" asks the officer.

"American."

"What were you doing down there?"

"I'm an AIDS nurse. They have an AIDS problem down there. I've been helping."

The man looks suspiciously through the window. He doesn't blink.

"I'll believe you this time."

McCarthy bites her tongue, guns the car and heads for home.

Max died two weeks later unable to leave his home in Rosarito. And two weeks later, Dr. Ismael Llamas Amaya, under pressure from his own medical community allowed McCarthy's group to use the health department's offices again, on a temporary basis, until they could find somewhere else to operate. He has since been fired from his position. Mary McCarthy still goes down every Tuesday night. □

California magazine

SANS PEUR ET SANS REPROCHE ...

Adventures on the road with the irrepressible **TR Witomski**

It was a dark and stormy night. I remember that rain streaked the windows of the airport bar. It was fitting that I would meet TR Witomski in a tropical airport bar although at the time I had no idea how appropriate or metaphorical that first chance encounter would prove to be. "Personally I don't frequent airport bars very often," TR lied. "You never know who you might run into." TR was drinking bourbon. It was the fuel that fed the fire. I first met Theodore Robert Witomski at one of those Caribbean island puddle-jumping airplane take-off places, the kind of bayside place where small, sea-going planes land and leave, picking up and discharging passengers on their way from one tropical island to another. It was hot. It was insanely humid. It was raining and the rain cooled nothing. It was midnight and our flight to St. Thomas had been delayed by the storm.

The islands of the Caribbean are all more or less quite similar. As are the English-speaking anglos who make a cultural habit out of exploring one island after another in search of mainly themselves.

Margueritaville come to life. Airport bars. Sailboats and sunburns. TR and I would end up sailing around and around and around more proverbial islands in the midnight stream than Ernest Hemingway had cats. It would be a relationship that would last well over a decade. A decade of sunsets and storm and sailboats and airport bars and bearing up the town a thousand times in a thousand different places and the Mineshaft and the Eagle and the Spike and the Ambush and egos bigger than the moon and generosity and don't call her she and denunciation and love and midnight corrosive sting.

TR was like the ocean we sailed on. One day he could be intense light and warm and a brilliant blueness would flood his eyes. The next day he could be gnarled rapprochement, black with contempt, disdain, scorn; filled with eulogy and rage. This was no ordinary soul. This was no ordinary writer. This was no ordinary anything whatsoever. This was TR Witomski. TR's typewriter never typed. It smoldered. It showered sparks. No homo sapien will ever be quite like him. TR broke the mold. I note that other writers try but TR cannot be duplicated, copied, or reproduced. TR was demented. TR was dangerous. TR was indefatigable, possessed, resilient, exacting, relentless, dynamic, intrusive, unruly, a live wire, seductive, acceleration, and destroyed. He was as unique (and filled with a talent that haunted him) as much as he valued, treasured uniqueness.

There were no satellite forecasts that could predict TR Witomski. You never really knew when a hurricane of gigantic force might unleash itself. All you knew was that from time to time it was inevitable. If you knew him (if you did not run the other way) you took your chances. Sailing from island to island with him was an enigmatic mixture of sweat, hard work, luck, skill at braving turbulent seas you perhaps should not have braved, and languid, naked, lucid, inebriated days spent mainly in the bourbon sun.

I had no idea who he was. Obviously, he was someone. Or at least he was convinced that he was someone. It was in his eyes, his voice, his sense of internal authority. This "someoneness" set TR immediately apart from most of the paradise lost types that sail the waters of the Caribbean. Most of these people were at one time someone. Yet most of them migrate to Margueritaville in order to become no one. In order to escape the inherent demands of intimacy, the sociological rules of relationships and civilization, most of the people you meet in this setting (the ones who are not tourists) are refugees.

I had never heard of him. This bugged TR Witomski something considerable. It quietly ate at him. TR came from that sixties generation of lost souls who truly believed that poets and writers and rock stars were cultural heroes. It offended him that I did not know who

he was. The night we met he was wearing a T-shirt with printed words on it that said: BEAM ME UP SCOTTY, THERE'S NO INTELLIGENT LIFE HERE. This violated the #1 native rule of the Caribbean which dictates that no one will engage you in a philosophical or political or religious or literary or an academic dialogue nor will anyone wear a T-shirt that actually makes a statement outside of declaring the various glories of Club Med. Not only was I completely unaware of who he was I was utterly in the dark as to the many publications he was famous (infamous) for contributing to.

"You mean," he said (more than slightly appalled at my ignorance), "that you've never heard of DRUMMER?" I had never heard of DRUMMER. "You mean you've never heard of MANDATE?" I had never heard of MANDATE. "Well, surely you've heard of FIRSTHAND? Everyone's read FIRSTHAND." I had never read FIRSTHAND. I was busy sailing the Caribbean not reading the latest academic, literary publications. I was a philistine. TR needed a cigarette and a drink. More bourbon. "Are you positive that you're gay?" he asked. In fact, I was not positive about that at all. It was something I was in the middle of exploring. Little did I know that I would spend more than ten years intellectually exploring it with TR Witomski who was more than convinced that I was not only gay but that I was what he termed: gay gay gay.

"Think of me as your close, kissing cousin," TR explained. "Sort of like Miss Scarlett and Miss Melanie. You know, the good one and the bad one. The slut and the virtuous. You're the one who is slightly retiring. Very demure. A lady ..."

"And what will you be," I asked.

TR smoked an entire cigarette and just looked at me with that sardonic look he had. "Darling," he said. "I am no lady."

From that point on in our relationship TR referred to me as Melanie and to himself as Scarlett. It was our private (gay) stupid, stereotypical joke. TR loved satirizing any cliché she could get her literary hands on with a chokehold that resembled masturbation. What I didn't understand (and what TR understood perfectly) was that within the context of GONE WITH THE WIND there would always be a civil war. Even today when I think of TR I can smell Tara burning like a bitch in the background.

It was TR Witomski who declared that someday I would be a writer. I had no idea what he was talking about. "Oh, it's very gay," he swore. "Gay gay gay. Melanie, I will teach you how to write sex."

"Sex?" I asked.

"Sex," he said.

TR assured me that writing porn would illuminate my tropical, boring life and that he would gently lead me by the hand, guiding me down the literary path to moral and psychological transformation. "And fame," he said.

"Fame?" I asked.

"Fame," he said. "Just look at me. I am very famous to all the wrong people." There was another one of our long silences. TR sighed. "Trust me," she said. And it was true. About three days out of Freeport we took a skiff to what we thought was a totally deserted (it looked deserted) island with a perfectly stunning beach. We would sit for hours (nude) on the beach writing porn because TR swore that in a few years (when the publishers paid us) we could actually afford to return to the real world. Which meant Florida. No one really understood or had any concept in those days about how poor (there is nothing worse than writer poor) we really were. "We are," TR would dryly observe, "unable to afford poppers. Not even the cheap kind." I had no idea what poppers were.

The particular island we were currently marooned on turned out to be inhabited by drug smugglers who had a hidden air-strip and who were less than amused to find us (impoverished writer-types) using their beach. At some point in the ensuing dialogue TR Witomski informed these ignorant (armed) gentlemen just who they were dealing with.

I thought our lives were over. I thought we were shark bait. It's slightly difficult to be really arrogant when you're naked (and they're not) but TR managed to succeed at arrogance effortlessly. It came with the territory of who he was. In TR's case it was not the clothes that made the man. It was the man who made the man. Smuggling in the Caribbean is a very serious, big-girl business. "Don't call her she," she advised me regarding our chief (armed) interrogator. "Don't call her her either."

The smuggling gentlemen conducted a somewhat confused conversation amongst themselves in what sounded like a combination of Spanish, French, Haitian and Creole. "The TR Witomski who wrote WHY I DON'T HAVE A LOVER in DRUMMER," TR was asked in English.

"The one and only," she said. From that point on I would never doubt the rabid validity of her fame. If she personally didn't know all the wrong people they certainly knew of her.

The first collection of DRUMMER magazines I ever saw was onboard an obscenely luxurious yacht (complete with little Bahamian boys) that had been moored in a most remote lagoon. It's true. No one ever throws

a copy of DRUMMER away. In this respect TR remains immortal. We were treated to chilled champagne (Dom Perignon 1959), caviar, and tastefully grilled Red Snapper. The next morning we sailed away (much to my eternal relief) with a case of the champagne for which TR came to develop an incorrigible taste. Miss Scarlett was many things. Incorrigible was definitely one of those things. She was now the latest hot reading for drug smugglers. Fame (or her version of it) usually just made her shrug.

We eventually moved to a house on a lake in Florida and I eventually tried my hand at writing because Scarlett O'Hara bugged me about it day and night. TR did not let up. "Alright already!" I told her, "I'll write an article on shit." Being new to being gay gay the whole issue of how gay men dealt with the undeniable reality of shit (which turns most straight men off in the extreme) intrigued me. TR was not enthusiastic. There was no tasteful way he was going to allow a neophyte writer such as myself to write the very first (and perhaps the very last) article that neophyte writer might ever attempt to write utilizing the markedly bizarre subject of erotic feces. Yet I honestly thought that if I could write something on shit I could write anything. I saw it as something of a test, a challenge to see if I could stretch myself at my very first stab at publication. What I was going to write and how I should write it remained a tug-of-war between us that never faded.

"Shit," I told him, is perfect."

"Shit," he advised, "does not sell."

TR would hate me for saying this (she hated me anyway so what the hell) but he was as much of a salesman as he was a writer. Witomski could sell anything. "If you can write it I can sell it," she bragged. It was not an exaggeration. He could charm the tar off the blacktop. TR sold the piece to DRUMMER which much to my chagrin published the article on the joys of scat under the pseudonym, Vincent Zeno. Vincent Zeno (the invention of John Rowberry) would rise again. As would Valerie St. John, Vivien Keysley Brown, Rebecca Lane, Corey Flint, Lois Finger, Howard Hooter, Larry Leatherette, Veronica Veronica and a host of other pseudonyms long since (and best left) forgotten. Pen names that TR and I spent our days and nights inventing for the gay and straight porno we were cranking out like a greased windmill spins in the wind.

We spent our days on our dock writing porn and our nights discussing ways in which we might invent more porn and our late nights at a bar called the Green Parrot. TR

Witomski had visited (some more than others) most of the bars in the gay world. But TR Witomski had never fathomed a bar quite like this.

The first night we discovered the Green Parrot (which is in the middle of rural Florida and at least three hundred miles from any other gay bar) they locked us in the bar as it seemed that the performing drag queens became quite upset and annoyed in the extreme whenever the bar completely emptied during the middle of a performance. "Melanie," Miss Scarlett said, "I don't think I've ever been locked inside a gay bar before." When TR was around there was always a first time for everything. She was a devout devotee of the strange, the twisted, the illegal, the semi-literate, the post-literate, and the absolutely impossible.

The Green Parrot was the first gay bar we had ever encountered that had its own school bus and made class trips to places like New York City. Since there were no other bars around for light years it was fitting that a certain section of the bar was reserved for the Lesbians, another section was roped off for the pool hall boys, the leathermen all stood (and glared) in their very own corner, the disco bunnies danced, the cowboys all drank together at the bar (the chairs were reserved for the Lesbians; as TR enjoyed observing, "The girls like to sit ...") The drag queens had taken over the stage and the chief drag queen was an ancient midget by the name of Twiggy Stardust who also worked as a dishwasher at the local Holiday Inn.

That all the various appendages of the gay community could exist (segregated) under the same roof because there was literally no where else to go fascinated TR Witomski with all the microscopic possibilities. There were a thousand short stories here and at least a hundred novels. "Writers," TR observed, "are scum. Everything and everyone they see becomes fair game for material."

"Does this mean I can write about you?" I asked him (we were both drinking bourbon at the Green Parrot).

"If you ever use me as material," she swore, "I will chew off your goddamn tits."

The Green Parrot became our second home. I was even tempted ("... don't you dare," TR threatened) to take one of the school bus trips to wherever the school bus was going next. Indeed, the place was a microcosm of something if only we could get a "take" on whatever it was that this strange, dream-ridden abstraction represented. Whatever it was the Green Parrot intrigued us although not a soul there knew who TR Witomski was.

Now, at the Mineshaft everyone who could

read knew who she was. And everyone who could not read knew who she was. But at the Green Parrot she was just another leatherqueen who annoyed the Lesbians.

TR swore that the Green Parrot had been designed by Fellini. TR was the only person in that part of Florida who could even spell Fellini. The resident midget at the Green Parrot took his job as chief drag queen very seriously. "You may," TR advised, "call her she. You may call her her, too." Twiggy was so bad she always forgot the words to the songs she would lip synch. The music would be playing Diana Ross and Twiggy would be lip synching something from Rocky Horror while she guzzled what was left in the bottoms of the beer bottles she found on the tables of stunned (sitting) Lesbians.

This was better than the Swedish bar we once discover (again in the middle of absolutely nowhere) with Divine where all the customers were midget drag queens. At 6'4" TR tended to tower over the crowd. Reality with TR could become post-weird real fast.

The Green Parrot became his favorite watering hole. TR was totally psyched-out with what he joyously proclaimed as: "the bar from hell." We spent an entire night once interviewing Twiggy and published the piece as: AN INTERVIEW WITH THE OLDEST (AND THE SHORTEST) LIVING DRAG QUEEN IN THE UNIVERSE.

Witomski and I were never really lovers. He was the only person I knew (at the time) who I could sit down with and discuss a piece of porn I had written and its implicit relationship to the work of DH Lawrence. No one else I knew had ever read anything by DH Lawrence. I was obsessed with SONS AND LOVERS. This lead to long, intense verbal late, late night explorations as to the nature of sexuality and the nature of being male. TR Witomski and I disagreed on many things. And TR Witomski was many, complicated things. But TR was no fool and he did not suffer fools lightly. Her ice-water clear contempt for most

editors was legendary in the small world of gay publishing. As the years went on and writing porn became less and less fun and less and less lucrative, TR's esteem for editorial input fell to the level of the rootworm.

If an editor rejected a piece of pornography that was one thing. But if an editor rejected a piece that TR had put his heart and his soul—and more importantly his brain which was formidable—into that was another thing altogether.

Everyone I knew who didn't really know him always used to wonder what the initials stood for. Totalitarian Riposte is what I would tell them. The truth represented the more human and the more hidden side to who he was. The truth was that some (much) of the porn he wrote embarrassed him. Since his name and his father's name were the same it was decided by the family (Stella and Ted Witomski are two of the most normal, caring, kind people you could ever hope to meet) that TR would simply go her public, published way with her initials so the good folks of New Jersey would not assume that it was TR's father (who drove a truck) who was responsible for: HOW I SPENT MY NEW YEAR'S EVE AT THE MINESHAFT GETTING FUCKED BY GENTLEMEN WITH SPURS ON THEIR BOOTS.

Living with TR Witomski one got to see the private side which at times conflicted painfully with the public TR. In public (or in print) TR would swear that writing porn was beautifully synonymous with a certain sort of poetic, sexual liberation. TR was a product of that generation of gay men who maintained that having sex with another male was not only an interpersonal obligation it was also an individual and a collective act of political rebellion. We had spent several hours in our writing room doing what we did best—writing—once when suddenly out of the blue TR had one of those inevitable "bourbon hurricanes." With no warning whatsoever he suddenly hurled his typewriter against the wall. And then he screamed. "Do you think I like writing this stuff!" he asked no one in particular.

I understood immediately that this outburst would have occurred whether I had been there or not. It had very little or nothing to do with moi. I just looked at him and hoped that he wouldn't throw the marijuana plant at me because it and I were fragile.

"This stuff makes me sick!"

"Someone has to pay the rent," I reminded her.

"Or what?" she demanded to know. Snow White could have been in that room and Snow White would have gotten an earful.

"You can write the porn here in this room with me and this marijuana plant which we can smoke if you insist or you can write the porn alone in some abandoned doorway in some abandoned storefront not far from the Salvation Army with the rest of the homeless. You decide ..."

She looked at me bourbon-stricken. I could always remind him of the impossible (but likely) possibility of homelessness. This usually worked better than reminding her that her (frequent) fits were not ladylike.

We decided to smoke the plant.

Writers are like that.

TR understood (although he never accepted it and more power to him) that his was a talent that far exceeded the ephemeral boundaries of porn. Although writers were supposed to be cultural heroes, TR understood that he did not have a trust fund. TR understood that he lived in a time and a place where the kind of fiction he created—while truly magnificent in a cynical sort of way—was also the kind of fiction that explored gay SM relationships more poignantly and pointedly than anyone published alive or dead. Gay SM fiction that explores gay SM relationships is the kind of fiction that does not pay for ice-cream bars much less the rent.

TR understood that what all of us gay writer types really needed was something as sublime as health insurance and so he put hours and hours and hours and hours into making some kind of a liaison or inroads into a national writer's union—he firmly believed that we needed to get what unions do exist to accept gay members—yet he achieved absolutely nothing because the mean, stark reality to it is that most gay writers (who have jobs and health insurance elsewhere) are willing to write for nothing at all much less health insurance.

All the hours and the hours and the hours and the trying to find some justice in any of it left him numb.

Thank god for the plant.

We once took another one of our trips (we needed the mental vacation) and spent a winter's week in a cabin (so I could ostensibly begin a novel which I finished six years later) where we were totally snowed in. We created a column together called ASK MR. MANNERS (sold to FIRSTHAND) which was a gay satire on MISS MANNERS. I thought up the questions and TR supplied (what else) the answers. Being snowed in with Miss Scarlett for an entire week (she had fortunately remembered to bring the bourbon) meant that I had to listen to her theatrical renditions (she

played all the theatrical renditions flawlessly) of SWEENEY TODD, IRMA LA DUCE, CARMEN, and DIE FLEDERMAUS. I took long, thoughtful walks in the snow. She never even saw the snow. Once, she asked me if wolves were real. I yearned to write more than pornography. TR saw this as inappropriate ambition. TR hated inappropriate ambition more than he hated himself or me. We moved to New York (but did not live together) where TR introduced me to the Mineshaft. TR loved being rode by men with spurs on the roof of the Mineshaft and had the scars on his butt to prove it. She swore there was no better way to see the sunrise over Manhattan. TR lived at home (in Toms River) but frequently came into the city where he often slept on my couch. The first night he took me to the Mineshaft was the first night I had ever seen so many naked males all together in the same place since the swimming team in junior high school. My imagination overflowed. I wrote a novel called (what else) MINESHAFT which TR hated perhaps more than he had ever hated anything. Writers are scum. She wrote long, entangled, anguished reviews of the book to every editor she knew (not one of whom printed any of the reviews). Instead, the editors were more apt to write their own reviews of MINESHAFT.

This infuriated TR. What he knew and what they could not possibly have known was that not just one of the characters in the book was based on the character TR Witomski. What royally pissed him off was that all of the characters in the book were TR Witomski who taught me everything I know today.

We took another trip down to Key West once and found ourselves at the same picnic table with our portable typewriters—pounding away. "I'm writing a novel," I informed her.

"I know," she said. "I'm writing the review."

From that point forward TR hated everything I wrote or published. Nothing pleased him. At a party I gave I introduced TR to Jerry Robinson who was the editor of THE CONNECTION which at the time was attempting (and doing a pretty good job of it) to give THE NEW YORK NATIVE a run for its gay yuppie money. Jerry hired TR to write basically anything TR wanted to write and TR Witomski was emblazoned on the front page of THE CONNECTION on the streets of New York on a consistent basis. In your face. On literally every corner. T was denounced repeatedly as were Felice Picano, Edmund

White, George Stambolian, Ethan Mordden, Michael Denenny, Charles Ortleb, and a certain agent in the Bronx which is really Manhattan who had once represented TR (and myself) who went by the name of Bliss. How I became a member of this club was more than I could bring myself to understand. What I understood perfectly was that TR was finally reaping the attention she so richly deserved.

I would publish three other novels. TR hated them, too. "Ugly people having ugly sex," he would rant on more than one occasion. The problem with my work, he explained, was that I wrote about sex outside of the context of sexuality. This meant that if you're going to write about sex or paint it with words you owe it to the reader to confine the construct of those words to the established perimeters of the genre. Sex does not belong outside of sexual situations. Porn was porn and I owed it to TR's politics to keep it porn. Or something. According to TR I wrote about sex and then intruded into the situation with issues that were not sexual in nature. I agreed that that was, indeed, my intent. I maintained that it was the very interpersonalized, human issues that revolved around sex and sexuality that made the sexual act more than zoological, ritualized, mating behavior. I wanted it to be about bonding. TR simply wanted it to be.

TR and I were standing (it looked like we were standing when in fact we were having an argument and drinking bourbon) in Michael's bar one night in Key West when a young gentleman approached me and inquired politely as to whether I might be interested in having a sexual experience him for a certain amount of gross financial enumeration. This had never happened to me before. Actually, I was sort of stunned. TR was more than sort of stunned. TR was livid. With me. As if I had paid this person to come up to me and offer to pay me for a fuck. When it came to TR Witomski it was impossible to win. No one has ever on the spur of the moment offered to pay me for sex ever again. The fact that it happened (accidentally) in front of TR Witomski made her lose her literary marbles.

"You don't even like these men," she screamed. In public. In the bar.

"So," I said.

"And I love them," she smashed her fist against the bar. "I love them and you just think they're scum."

I said nothing. Once again she was right. In death I will give her that. You were right.

You were right.

TR believed (and he was right) that we live in an age where what is real is stuff that presents itself to what we see and what we visualize as so much depersonalization. Sex can therefore be removed from the private arena of grief, loneliness, humiliation, guilt, agony, dominance and submission where it must be displayed clearly and publically in a sort of graphic purity. Sex was not the stuff of abstraction. TR burned out on the writing biz and turned his juice loose of the video biz. He started Katsam Productions. It was appropriate. It was funny. It was something of a satire on pornography itself. He made a shit video, sent me a copy, along with a note which said: I blame you for everything.

Knowing TR was knowing the light and the darkness. He could trash me in his book KVETCH and then send me outrageously extravagant Christmas gifts all in the same breath. KVETCH was exactly what it said it was. It was TR selling TR short. He could give his friends the world in his arms (he made countless contributions to GMHC in my name and I made not one of them) but he was the one who gave himself less than nothing. Knowing TR was late calls in the night when he had been arrested—cars and drugs and alcohol do not mix—versus calling a lawyer when what he needed was a lawyer. But no. With his one phone call he calls (who else) Melanie. “But, Melanie,” he would say as he wept, “I need you when I need you. And I need you now.” Sex like friendship was never a post-modern concept to this difficult, brilliant man. They were absolutes.

I wrote a novel once called, BOURBON, COCAINE, AND THE ANGELS OF SIN. TR swore on his grandmother’s grave that it would never find a publisher. It never did. It was about us.

Knowing TR was knowing all the conflicts that existed in myself. I was there when he burned out on publishing, fell to his knees, and tore up the earth, swearing to God and anyone who cared to listen that he would never go hungry again. Knowing TR was knowing the challenge of stretching my own limits to creativity. Knowing TR was knowing someone you could write long, insane letters to every single day for literally years. Letters where both of us spilled our uncensored guts and set the stage for what would later turn out to be published articles and fiction. Knowing TR was knowing a side to life I would never have explored or pondered on my own. Knowing TR was knowing the fear of being alone. Knowing TR was knowing the fear of being connected. I worked for a brief, ignorant, ill-fated moment for DRUMMER—TR refused to send me anything.

If TR symbolized anything to me he symbolized my own relationship to what he insisted was a community. A gay community. Once again I had no idea what he was talking about. He kept talking about this thing as if it real, live, breathing entity. To him it was hope. To me it was a fantasy. It wasn’t real. Any more than TR’s hope was real. I had never met a male of the species who was capable of any real emotional commitment or bonding. This included TR Witomski. I met a female. It was simple. We fell in love. We married. We are still together. Today I crave that simplicity in my life the way TR craved the kind of complicated, entangled, intense misfortunes that he demanded from the life he lived.

The life he lived believed in the cultural sanctity of poets as heros and writers as visionaries yet when I sit down today with the whole body of his work I see no vision. I see no sanctity. I feel no struggle and have to wonder if it was about anything at all in the final analysis. I read sex but it’s simply words and those words have no focus beyond the immediate focus of tongue-in-cheek construction. Again, there’s something there, it’s more like a suggestion, an ill-defined idea, a kvetch lost in the visceral entrails of its own self-defeating prophecy.

In the imploding twilight of TR’s death I feel like a wet, naked fetus. I am sad—not because he’s gone—that was inevitable. I am sad because TR deserved better from TR. In the final analysis he cheated all of us including himself. In the final analysis he could no longer blame all the editors, all the agents all the publishers, or me. Toward the end of our relationship we fought viciously (the scum editors understood that our literary fights gave their lifeless publications life) in every conceivable faggot paper worth fighting in: the ADVOCATE, GAY COMMUNITY NEWS, the BOSTON PHOENIX, BAY WINDOWS, (they loved us in Boston), the NEW YORK NATIVE, the BAY AREA REPORTER, the CONNECTION, WINDY CITY TIMES, ad infinitum. The words we used as ammunition had nothing to do with us. And everything to do with gay publishing. And everything to do with us.

Us.

Toward the end of our relationship he hated my fucking guts. He could not and did not understand my decision to return to a life that included the female of the species. His letters to me grew increasingly bitter and vindictive. One of the last times I saw him was with San Francisco photographer, Mark I. Chester. We spent the afternoon together discussing what was wrong with the world

and how to fix it. Then we went to Chester’s studio. TR had never been there. Chester wanted us to pose together, perhaps naked, perhaps in some kind of sexually suggestive imagery. We tried but it came out as satire, it was not who we were, it was not really what we were about. What we were about had to do with words, with using those words to paint an image, usually an illusion, which is what we did best when given the all-too-rare opportunity.

As time went on I no longer seemed to fit into the “community” that TR insisted I was a part of. For a while I was a part of something. I do not now nor will I ever really understand TR’s definition of community. I never saw it. I never felt it. I never fathomed its reach—or his reach—toward me. I was eventually kicked the hell out of gay publishing. This should have pleased TR. That my work, the stuff that supposedly caused him so much literary pain, would never again be allowed to appear in the gay press, this should have been the cause of unmitigated joy. Yet it made TR worse. He really hated me. Now, I really hate you, his letters said.

Now that he is gone I miss him although I do not miss his anguish nor do I miss his obsession with trashing me in print anywhere and everywhere. I miss him. There was a difference. It was a dark and stormy night. Rain streaked the windows of the airport bar. I just never realized how stormy or how anonymous or how alone the night could be. Drinking bourbon. What I remember best about Theodore Robert Witomski was dancing with him at midnight onboard a boat that was attempting to sail through heavy Caribbean seas. Twenty-foot waves sent us careening up and screaming down but then incontrovertible ups and downs was what we were about. Where anyone else would have gone below decks into comfort and safety and sanity, we preferred the storm. The waves would crash and thunder onto the deck and soak us. But we danced...

Jack Fritscher was right. Some dance to remember. Some dance to forget. And now that TR is gone I wish I could say, frankly, my dear, I don’t give a damn. But I do. And I still can see him and hear that voice as this ship sails labyrinthine circles around and around and around the midnight islands of my impossible life. □

—Tim Barrus is the author of the novels MINESHAFT, MY BROTHER MY LOVER, ANYWHERE, ANYWHERE and GENOCIDE, THE ANTHOLOGY.

THE GAY COMMUNITY HAS COME A LONG WAY. THERE ARE TIMES WHEN IT BECOMES

ON A CLEAR DAY YOU CAN SEE...

APPARENT WE HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO. THE TIME HAS COME FOR SOME SMARTS.

It was Gay Pride Day in San Francisco and while similar scenes might be happening across the country, this was the really big one. Nowhere, not even in New York, was there anything comparable. Everybody in the world seemed to be lined up the length of Market Street. We stood there on the curb, waiting for the parade itself, first on one foot, then the other. Everybody around us was doing pretty much the same thing. One could feel the crowd's enthusiasm mount as we heard an approaching band. Except for the summer sunshine the scene looked like New Year's Eve on Market Street, which is another exciting prospect.

An entrepreneur was passing among us with trays of Budweisers, of which the two guys in front of me had already partaken too liberally. I looked out to the horizon filled with theatrically oversized rainbow banners waving majestically in the cool San Francisco breeze. From our vantage point one could see the giant rows of the banners all the way past United Nations Plaza to City Hall.

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AS OFTEN AS
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At the same moment, the sun came out and here came the parade.

To anyone who remembers the beginning of San Francisco liberation, this was a particularly uplifting sight. A little over twenty years before, S.F.P.D. cars had been lined up Polk Street along the block that contained California Hall. The cops had nothing better to do that night than take pictures of the people attending a gay-sponsored function there. However, also attending were some non-gays, including some first-class citizens with more clout than us "deviates." And when it all hit the fan the next day, city officials had something other than fairies to contend with at the same city hall that was

today surrounded by almost more humanity at one time than at any other event in the city's history.

This was the first time the mayor himself rode in the procession—the first mayor to do so—followed by several supervisors and The Man with the power from Sacramento, Willie Brown (whose bill made being gay legal, so to speak). The Grand Marshals were three gay judges. The procession took four hours to pass and while the Budweiser never gave out, my legs began to, so we walked on up to the main grounds in front of City Hall and investigated the expanding mixture of organizations and enterprises that covered several street blocks. It was a splendid experience being among one's own, and the temper and conviviality were overwhelming on this beautiful day in this beautiful city.

But while I was feeling the intoxication of the moment and observing what we had accomplished in the couple of decades I'd personally been exposed to, I had private thoughts...

Each of us finds different things to like in such an assemblage, and then there are things of which we are not quite so fond. It varies with the person and the point of view. Since it is my point of view I am stuck with, I tried to see us through the eyes of outsiders. Not friends or allies or enemies, but just the public in general. How would all this play in Peoria?

It has long been a concept of gays that, in the case of the outside world, it is good to "blow their minds" as often as possible. And even in this subdued year there was plenty to do that. The "Dykes On Bikes" are always good for a double take. Jesus Christ painted purple, wearing pink pumps and carrying his cross (which for some reason or another I thought was extremely on the mark) as a "Martyr for Art" and the highly visible degree of nudity (not 'close to' but the real

thing) of all the sexes were sure to make great foil for the crews bearing video recorders. Even the more objective San Francisco television stations usually focus in on the drag queens who drag out their egos and boas. For a hostile media, screaming queens are better copy than the armies of AIDS support groups who make up the bulk of the parade.

And 'Nuns' with beards in sequined habits on roller skates have always been crowd pleasers, along with muscled nymphettes showing as much of what they possess as possible. After all it's our day and it should be about us, shouldn't it?

Back in the early days when a valiant little group marched down Hollywood Boulevard to a tired carnival lot on Sunset near Las Palmas, that might have been the whole story. Do whatever you could get away with, including giant dancing jars of Vaseline and a marching Mr. Penis. It seemed at the time that nobody was paying an awful lot of attention to a first-time parade presenting itself to a startled populace. When and if it appeared in the newspapers the police count would be sure to be an underestimate.

But now, fifteen years later in San Francisco, with an attendance that is as large as the city's entire population, with network news picking up the local stations' videotaping and newspapers all over the nation giving their version of the events—not only in San Francisco, but in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles—our day has become an honest-to-god media event.

Our national holiday is no longer Halloween. Mardi Gras drag is one thing, San Francisco's Gay Pride parade is another. Everyone from Jerry Falwell and Lou Sheldon to the local Network outlets are there with their Betamax waiting for the most outlandish examples. And how does it play in Peoria?

Ask Pat Buchanan's backers who used their parade footage to take a swipe at Bush in the Florida primary.

It has taken a long time, our exiting from the closet. Here we are united under the gay banner; shouldn't we leave our lame, ruby red slippers and ostrich feathers behind hanging in that otherwise empty closet—for our private amusement? Gay Pride Day is our Super-Bowl-World-Series-Oscars-and-Emmys. This one should show us at our best, at our strongest with the bands blasting, our numbers out there to be seen, our political power unleashed.

Is this being superficial? Are we to pretend

to be something we aren't, or worse yet, hide our less attractive features from the world? During the Sixties the late David Goodstein, who brought The Advocate up from a local sheet to a national phenomena of sorts, was criticized for what was observed as his myopic view of the gay community. According to his critics, David saw the community's effectiveness powered by our upper middle class, the well-heeled and with higher-level political and economic strength. His critics were mostly none of the above. I know. I sat in the H.E.L.P. auditorium in Los Angeles while they trashed his Whitman Radcliffe organization's Sexual Freedom Forum during a period when it was badly needed. David was right. There is a lot to be said for respectability.

**But worst of all, the
gay/lesbian,
lesbian/gay label
creates and
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divisions we tried to
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indicating to anyone
and everyone,
particularly our
enemies, that we are
not in the least united.**

As I stood there watching our numbers passing by, I knew it is time we abandoned amateur night and joined the mainstream from which real political and economic power comes.

We are gay for a sexual reason. Many times it is about all we have in common. But even sexually we are changing. We have changed. It was within everyone's memory that we were chasing and encountering each other in baths and whorehouses and bars and back alleys. Perhaps at times we still are but not as frantically and certainly not as thoughtlessly. The big HIV percentage points have moved over to the non-gays and their offspring—teenagers and swinging singles. AIDS really isn't a gay disease any more—it never was—although we have had and still have more than our share of it. Any Gay who runs around knowingly spreading it should be drummed out of the club—and out of sexual circulation.

The rest of us, HIV positive or negative,

owe it to ourselves, to one another and to the cause itself to strengthen ourselves. Along with unsafe sex, we should lead the way toward knocking off the drugs, the booze, the smokes—all the ways we tear down our bodies and minds. (The proudest advertising in that same aforementioned Advocate are full-color ads for vodka and beer.) We have lost too many to the plague already. There are those among us who must be ready to rise up to take their places of creativity and leadership.

It is time to examine a basic. Who the hell are we, anyway? The term "gay" was coined somewhere between Oscar Wilde and Franklin Pangborn. Short and to the point, it replaced "left handed," "one of the fraternity," "light on their feet," "fairy," "pansy" and "fruit." It meant "homosexual" but somehow somewhat later, in our political-correctness, it suddenly didn't apply to the female of the species who were "lesbian," indicating somehow they were from the island of Lesbos.

Somebody then saddled the movement with the politically correct "gay/lesbian" or "lesbian/gay" depending on one's bent. It is as awkward as "Southern Democrat" or "Middle-of-the-Road-Republican." Of course there are other categories as well: bisexual, transsexual, asexual, transvestite and even hermaphrodite. In such a scheme of correctness, when do they get some billing too? Worst of all, the G/L, L/G label creates and perpetuates the divisions we try to avoid in the first place; indicating to anyone and everyone, particularly our enemies, that we are not in the least united. Politically correctly speaking, there are now no gay women.

The attractive, well-dressed, professional woman standing next to me after a debate on the subject of gay/lesbian at what was the Gay Press Association told me, "I don't know what she thinks she is but I am a gay woman." She had just accepted the office of secretary to the association. One of the men who seconded her nomination shot himself in the foot when he concluded his well-intentioned speech with, "She's such a together person, you wouldn't know she's a lesbian." After the gasp from the audience passed, he realized he was too far from the microphone to correct himself. His resentment of the separatist term had slipped through the thin veneer of acceptance. And this was from our side of the gay/non-gay division.

We have to stop dividing ourselves. We

have to be mature enough to recognize that we go beyond diversification. There are the butches and fems, the drags on either end of the spectrum, the street people and the people who "live up on the hill," the closeted and the up-front. We even have conservatives, Evangelicals and Republicans among us. So much the better. But essentially there are men and there are women. That is the BIG division, and for reasons that defy rationale, we are not to mention them in the same word. Who prohibited women from being gay? Who set them apart? Not only is the term "lesbian" awkward; it is divisive and destructive and the sooner we get rid of it, the better for all of us.

Gays have made great strides, more than ever before in modern history—and in a very short time. Anyone out there want to go back twenty years (which means back into the closet for most of us)? There are plenty of people out there who are working for just that. And I am not just talking about the Helms and Dannemeyers, the Eddie Murphys, Falwells and Swaggerts. These people make their living with their hate attitudes. But there are plenty of nameless, faceless everyday people out there, from rednecks to the country club set who are either negative or (to put it tactfully) antagonistic toward gays. They sit on juries, work in newspapers, run companies who hire, are police or elected officials. They help determine the quality of all our lives. It is time we help determine their attitude toward us. They don't have to like us but they must respect us. And respect our rights.

In the seventies there was a saying going around in this group: "In driving, run over anyone you want but don't hit a black!" There was a newfound respect for black power and its allies.

I'm all for the same advice about mugging and bashing: anyone out there—except gays. (Not gay men and lesbians. GAYS! Black, white, nelly, butch, old, young, male or female.)

After we decide just who we are and what to call ourselves we perhaps then can face the onslaught of who the others out there are. If we are gay, why are they "straight"? The antithesis of straight being, according to my thesaurus, as "crooked," "askew," "wily," interrupted," "mixed" and "dishonest." How about burying the term 'straight' and substituting 'non-gay'? It makes a hell of a lot more sense. Maybe the world will follow our lead.

So I am thinking to myself, who says there can't be an openly gay president? Or gover-

nor? Or mayor? The nation as a whole is as much at a crossroads as it has ever been in this century. The media is wallowing in every bit of it, mostly the negative. On the plus side, the "Evil Empire" has come apart leaving the conservatives with one major bogey-man to rally their troops against. On the minus side, now the conservatives have to look for other scapegoats and gays are becoming more and more one of their favorites.

The good news is there are more women and minorities, including gays, in political office than ever before with more openings waiting than anyone ever dreamt would exist. The Good Old Boy network is obviously out of ideas and the public's patience is growing short.

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Even the U.S. economy being in shambles, while not completely on the good side, diminishes greatly the Reagan-Bush administration's chances for self-perpetuation. Unfortunately it takes a worthy opponent, which has been lacking the past three national elections.

As some of the more radical elements march by, namely the splinter group from ACT UP, one has to admire their boisterous energy and *chutzpa*. These are the foot soldiers who get themselves in the evening news most often. But if you or I really want to be a political candidate—for anything from city council to president—ask those high-priced advisers how important image is. The kooks and the oddballs of yesteryear are as dead as the dodo. The winners are with us always, fortunately or unfortunately, for better or for worse. The losers are among the very few who remember the highs and lows of their own campaigns.

What would you think of any political

candidate running as a "nigger," as "spick," a "wop"—even any reputable organization labeling itself with such a label? How overcome would you have to be to vote for such a candidate or support such an organization? So what do we do? Label ourselves "queer" this or that. I am not discussing here what such organizations do under that banner. We are merely talking about labels. Believe me, I can wait to see energetic young men with "Cocksuckers United" on their t-shirts, representing our cause on the six o'clock news or the front pages. Fortunately, most stations or papers won't run them, anyway.

For the most part we're not degenerates or kooks. I'm not necessarily talking about looking like the white bread people shown attending Republican conventions. But neither should we come across like ornaments to be freeze-framed on MTV at that very moment.

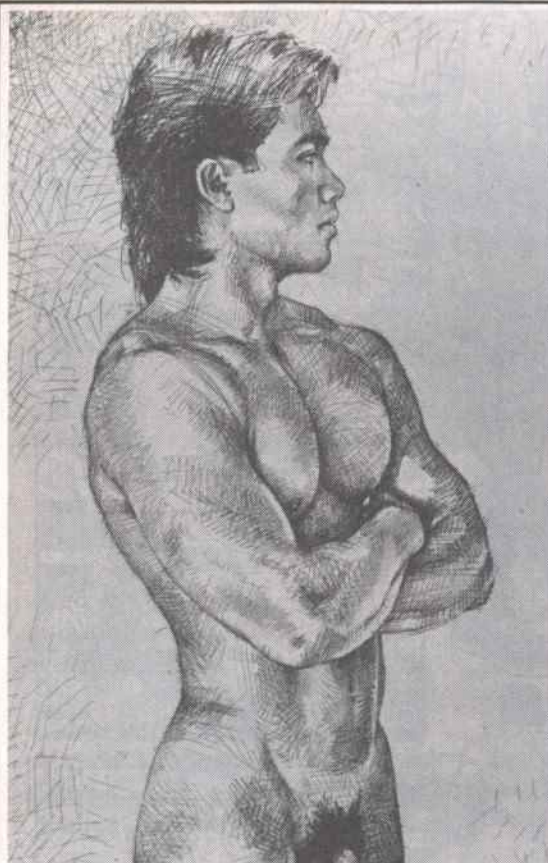
Stop to think that, in spite of the AIDS plague, the gay community has never been stronger, with more allies and more progress than any time in the twentieth century. If ever there was a time to grab an opportunity, the nineties are it.

It was a spectacular day, good to be alive and to be there. From all accounts it was spectacular, not just in San Francisco but, all over the country. For gays—closeted and uncloseted, respectable, semi and not-so—it was May Day.

I found myself looking for faces no longer among us, martyrs to their own ignorance or bad judgment; friends too young to die and for whom their memorial is in a quilt rather than a hero's official white cross or a twenty-one gun salute. Those who have fallen in the battle for sexual freedom were marching today too.

Remembering one of the nicest things I read about the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus triumphant tour across the country several years ago was the account of an older man who traveled quite a few miles from a neighboring state to attend the group's initial performance in Lincoln, Nebraska. All his life he had been in the closet, isolated by society, geography and circumstance from his own kind. The stage and the auditorium that night in Lincoln, Nebraska were filled with hundreds of gays just like him.

And like the tear or two running down his cheek, mine, as I stood this hopeful day on Market Street, were far and away from any kind of sorrow. □



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ZEKE

1

Without much fanfare Bill Ward's comic strip "ZEKE" was introduced in *MANIFEST READER* some time back. We should have known what its impact might be. After all, we induced Bill to invent "Drum" which has run in *Drummer* for years.

We told Mr. Ward we wanted a latter day Lil' Abner with a touch of Little Annie Fanny maybe; a wide-eyed hunk whose innocence and purity would forever remain unsullied, no matter how assaulted.

Then poor Zeke got pulled out of *MR* and replaced by Bill Ward's more leathery "The Exchange". But no matter, Zeke and his wonderful innocence and physical properties will have *ALTERNATE* all to themselves.

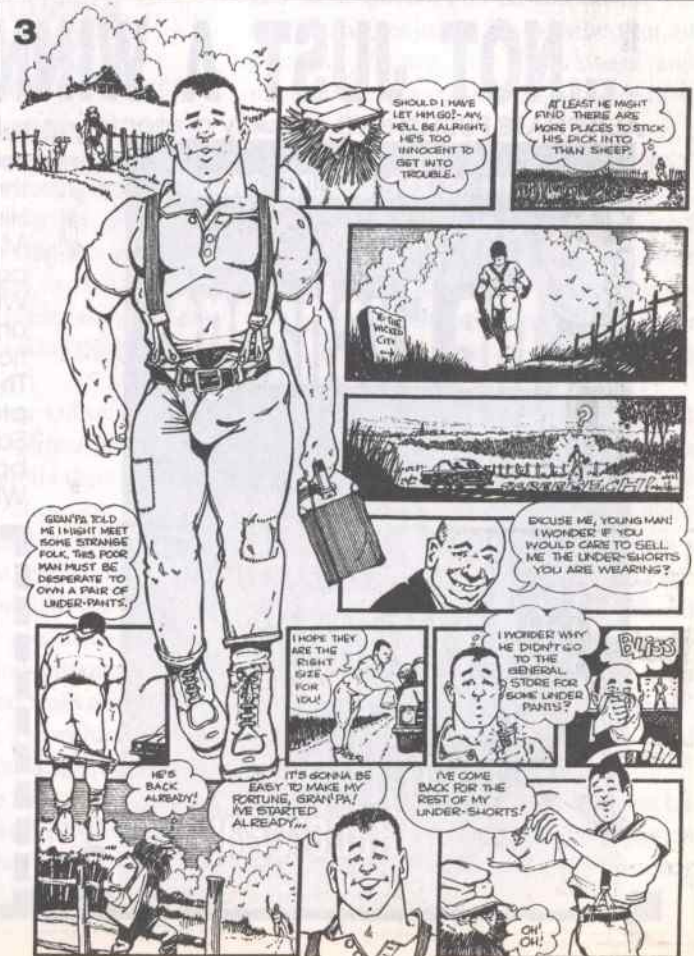
In case you missed anything after the premise of Zeke's existence was explained to you in *MR*, we are reintroducing Zeke along with the story thus far. We hope you are paying the kind of attention you should have been.



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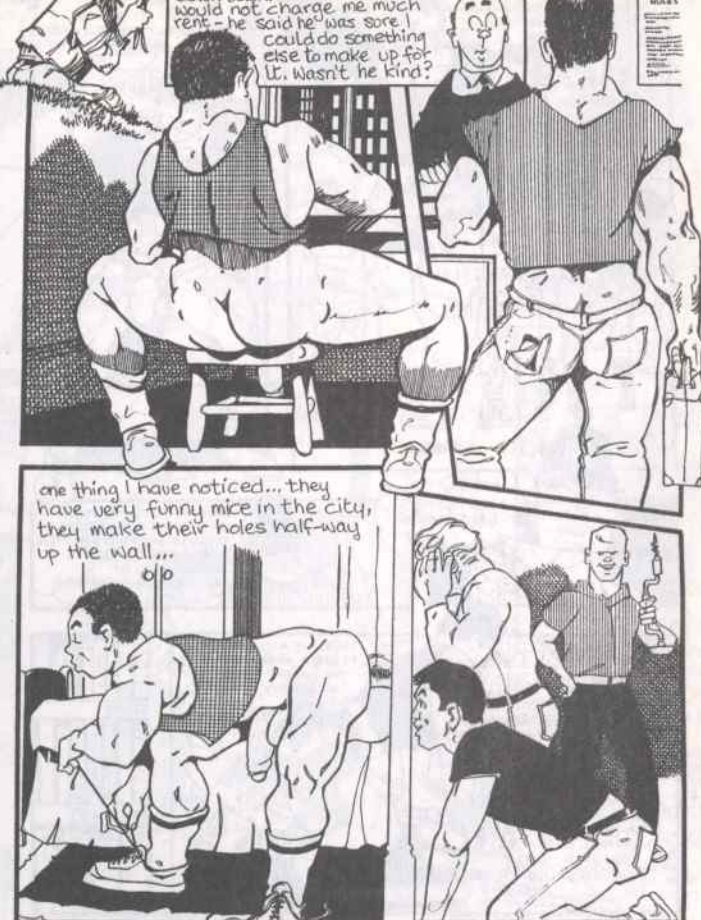
4 ZEKE



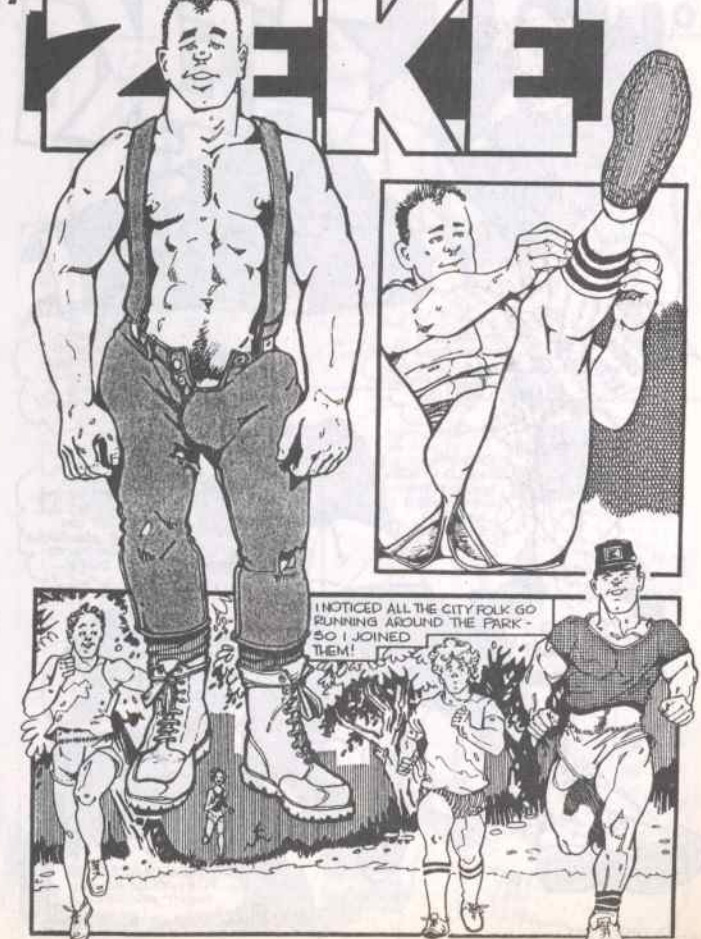
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7







THE CASE OF THE BLOSSOMING BOXER

FROM THE SONNY SKYLAR SERIES

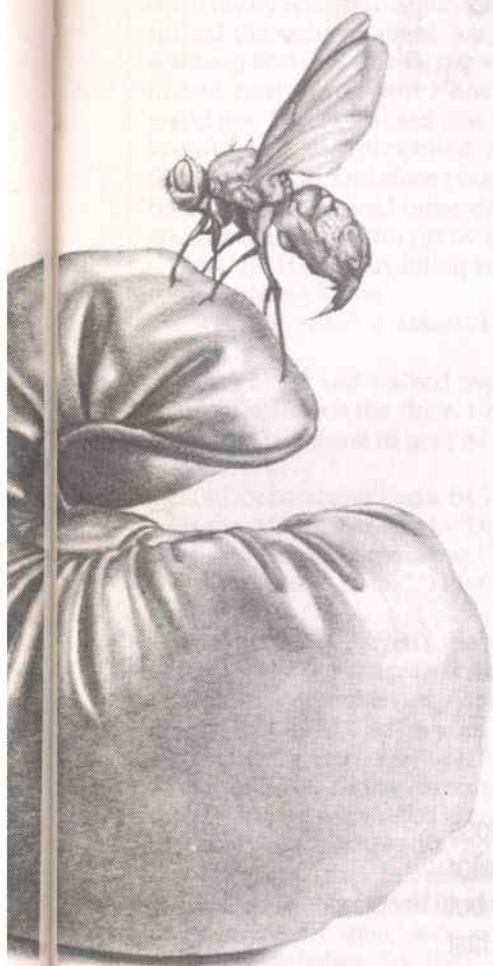
WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY

OLAF ODEGAARD



Los Angeles was covered with early morning fog. It was chilly. Everything was overcast with shades of blues and grays. I sat beside the swimming pool and watched without really seeing Bugsy's great golden body floating in the pool. I sensed that someone was standing next to me. I looked up and saw the disheveled figure of my friend, the honest Hollywood cop, Harry Stone.

Art/OLAF



CONCLUSION

His face betrayed the grief that he shared with me. He took my hand and knelt down beside me.

"I'm so goddamned sorry, Sonny," he said. "You know I'm your friend."

I nodded my head.

"Then you know that I have to be a cop right now?"

"I know, Harry."

"Have you touched anything?" he asked.

"No!!"

"I'm glad that you didn't try to remove the body from the pool."

"I know the rules, Harry."

"Did you kill him?"

"You know better than that!" I snapped back.

"I don't know better than that. Not as a cop, I don't. All I know is that anything is possible with anyone if there's a big enough reason."

"I loved him, Harry," I said. All of a

sudden, as I listened to my own words, I was crying. But I couldn't move. "I've never really loved like this before. How am I supposed to live with this?"

"If you didn't kill him, who did?"

"I doubt if he had an enemy in the world."

"Was your front gate open last night?"

"Ask Yuki. He checks those things."

"We'll probably have to take you down to the station for questioning, you know that?"

I nodded.

"There's going to be a lot of press. This guy's as popular as Jesus in Hollywood right now.... You don't have to run around and tell the world that you were lovers. Deny everything. Otherwise it'll be worse for you than if you did kill him. This would be worse than Arbuckle."

"Who appointed you my press agent, Harry?"

"Right now I'm your friend, Sonny. In a few minutes when the uniforms arrive, I won't know you."

They pulled his body out of the pool with hooks. I tried looking away from it. It was after they had pulled the body out that I noticed a sense of excitement among the cops. Harry walked quickly over to me.

"I think that you should go inside," He said.

"Why? What in hell's going on?" I started to stand up and walk toward the body. Harry grabbed my arm.

"Get the hell inside the house, Sonny," he ordered.

I pulled myself away from him and shoved my way through the crowd of uniformed men. I saw why their faces looked so pale.

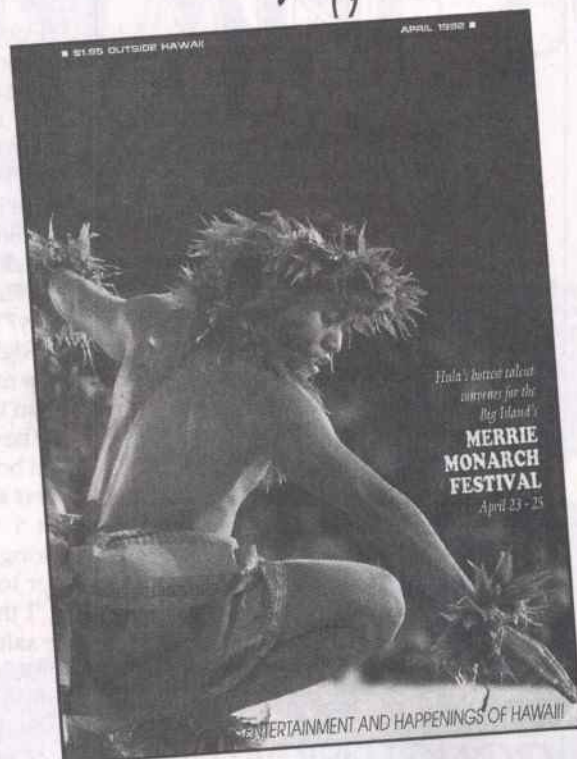
Someone had cut off Bugsy's genitals and stuffed them in his mouth. I reeled backward and puked all over an officer's shiny black shoes. Harry grabbed me and, with a strong-armed cop, pulled me back into the house. Harry slammed the French doors of the den shut and pulled the drapes.

A cop poked his head in through the door. "There's a dame on the phone who claims she's Hedda Hopper," he yelled at Harry.

"Tell her to go to..." he stopped and checked my phone book on the desk. "Tell her to call Sunset 5-9838." He looked at me. "That's Louella Parson's number," he said.

Nothing was registering. I just stood there in the middle of the room. I felt very cold. I started to shake. Harry

What's doing in Paradise, you ask?



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grabbed an Afghan off the couch and wrapped it around me. "Come on, fella, sit down," he said, softly, and pushed me down into a leather wing-back chair. "Get the doctor in here," he yelled at a young cop near the French doors.

I remember someone sticking me with a needle. Then nothing. Nothing at all. Not even dreams.

I woke up in my bed. I didn't want to open my eyes as the events, still surreal, rushed through my mind. I wanted to wake up and find that Bugsy was lying in bed next to me. But I knew that I could not. Then I realized that I did not know what had happened to Yuki. Being Japanese, and since people were behaving so paranoid these days, they could have strung him up by now.

I sat up. Harry was sitting across the room, looking at me.

"Where's Yuki?" I asked. I still felt groggy.

Harry arose and walked over to me. "He just went out the door. Unless I'm mistaken, he's gone to get you a cup of coffee."

"I've been acting like a baby..."

Harry shook his head. "Don't start getting macho on me now," he said. "Save it for the public. How are you feeling?"

"Better, I think. What's the status on things? Are you still here to take me in?"

"No. You're in the clear. And I think that we can keep a lid on your relationship with Petronski. We think that it was a hit job. It has all the markings of the mob. What we uncovered is apparently that Petronski was 'asked' to go down in the fight and that he refused. They insisted, so he threatened to rat on them about some of their, let's say, more nefarious activities. So, they knocked him off."

"Harry, that doesn't make any sense."

"Why?"

"Bugsy never said a word to me about any of this."

"Look, do you think that he wanted you to get involved? Has it occurred to you that he might have wanted to protect you? Those are mean mothers he was running around with. Was he aware of that?"

"Yes, he was."

Yuki, in a clean white jacket, came in with a breakfast tray and a pot of coffee, placed the tray on my lap and turned to Harry.

"Coffee, Harry-san?" he asked.

Harry nodded. Yuki poured two coffees, then stood next to the bed as if

he was trying to protect me. "You eat something now, Skyler-san. Then you must be a detective again."

I smiled. Yuki bowed, then left the room.

Harry continued. "It looks like Lippy Luchino has left town. I suspect that he's gone back to Chicago. We've issued a warrant for his arrest. Did you know that he works for Frank Nitti?"

"I figured that, one way or the other, there was some connection."

"Nitti is moving in on the unions in a big way. And gambling. They're trying to move in on Las Vegas, build casinos there. It's the gambling connection I'm focusing in on. The odds are always with the house, but the house does even better if it knows the outcome ahead of time. Petronski was an odds-on favorite to take the belt. Which means that some people could really clean up if he lost."

"I know how it works, Harry, but it doesn't make any sense."

"You're too close, Sonny. It's the only thing that does make sense. The only alternative is that you did it, and I don't buy that. Not for a second." Harry leaned over and kissed me on the forehead.

"Get some rest. I would say let me do the detective work, but I know you too well." I grabbed his head and kissed him on the lips.

"You're going to be all right," he said, backing toward the door.

Yuki had drained the pool while I was sleeping. It stared at me like nothing more than a big hole in the ground. Max and a couple of his boys were picking up gear near the sparring ring. I walked over to them.

"There's no hurry to pack up," I said to Max, who was working with his shirt off. Except for his white body hair, no one would have taken him for a man in his sixties. His body was strong, massive.

"It's all right, Mr. Skyler," he replied, wiping the sweat off of his forehead. I guess I really need something to keep me busy." I noticed that he would not look directly at me.

"I understand. You felt very close to Bugsy, didn't you?"

His face tightened up and he turned away from me picking up a pair of boxing gloves that hung, their strings tied, over the ropes of the ring. "Like a son, sir," he muttered. "I practically raised that boy. I got him into the golden gloves competition before his voice changed. He was meant to be a cham-

pion."

"I know he was and I'm very sorry about what happened. He told me how much he cared for you." His fists were drawn so tight that his knuckles were white. He picked up a couple of towels and threw them into a water pail.

"Did you know that Luchino had left town?" I asked.

Max nodded. "So they tell me," he muttered.

"I also heard," I continued, "that someone wanted Bugsy to throw this fight."

Max spun around and I thought there were sparks flying from his eyes as he glared at me. "There's no fucking way in the world that that boy would ever do such a thing, Mister!"

"I didn't say he would. In fact, I know that he wouldn't. But, do you know if anyone wanted him to throw the fight?"

"Wanting it don't make it so." I have seldom seen such anger in a man. Every muscle in his body looked like it was ready to explode.

Yuki shouted from the house, "Telephone, Skyler-san." I excused myself and walked toward the house. I could feel Max's glaring eyes burning holes in me.

Among the moles that I have cultivated in the underworld of Los Angeles was a little weasel called Tito. He owed me. I had kept him out of the slammer three times because he knew things that other people might have wished he didn't know. Because he owed me, I had access to information.

"You were trying to get hold of me?" he asked.

"Yeah. Have you been following the odds on the Petronski fight?"

"Petronski got himself knocked off," he replied. "Unless I am mistaken, at your little villa in the hills."

"Keep your poetic descriptions to yourself, slime-bag," I replied.

"What were the odds?"

"Hey, señor, are you trying to nip a poetic genius in the bud?"

"I'll kick it in the ass, man."

"Amigo," he said, like the oily snake he was, "I was just trying to bring some beauty into what must be a very difficult day for you?"

The odds were heavy for him to win. Close to seven to one."

"Were there any heavy bets against him?"

"Not really, not at those odds. But, there have been some very unusual rumors since the kid hit the dust."

"What kind of rumors?"

"Señor, I know that you are my friend. That you have my best interests at heart, no matter how badly you talk to me. We are simpatico, are we not? But, I do not trust this pay phone that I am talking into. I do all the paying of coins into the slots in order to talk to you.

Do you understand?"

"Yes, Tito, I understand. How much do you think this information is going to cost me?"

"Well, my old lady just lost her job and here we are, sunk in the middle of this great depression and I have these children at home who are unhappy because they are hungry. Fifty dollars would get us through another week."

"Your wife left you six months ago, Tito. She took the kids with her. You need a fix, badly. You've been betting three aces against four kings. I keep an eye on things."

"But now you need me, señor."

"Where are you?"

"The pool hall at the corner of Hollywood and Western."

"I'll be there in one hour," I said.

Tito was short and wiry. He wore his hair greased back and had a pencil thin moustache. He wore pegged pants and a greasy undershirt. He never looked anybody straight in the eye.

When I entered he was leaning over a table, about to take a shot at the six ball. His hand was shaking. He missed. He tried to be the essence of cool, standing up straight, chalking the tip of his cue stick, while a stocky young blond cleared the table. The place was heavy with smoke.

I moved behind Tito and said, "You went for the wrong pocket." He spun around as if he were ready to hit me, then grinned.

"Amigo, you look like you need to buy me a drink." He waved at someone behind the bar and held up two fingers. "I have a nice quiet booth in the back corner, Señor Sonny."

After we were seated a waiter brought us two Mexican beers. I paid.

Tito leaned over the table. His needle-scarred, tattooed arm was a mass of tense, hard muscles. He aimed a cigarette at my face. "There is talk that you were queer for the boxer," he said.

I started to stand up. He grabbed my arm and pulled me back down. "Hey man," he said, "take it easy. Drink this very fine beer. We have important things to talk about."

"O.K., Tito, I will give you five minutes. If you tell me something that makes sense, I'll give you your fifty bucks. If you give me the runaround, I'll see you back in the joint."

"You gringos are too much in a hurry. You do not savor the moments of life, how precious they are. I don't give a damn about your love life, man." He shrugged his shoulders. "I have had my mariçons. There are times in every man's life when he has to stick it in something to bring peace and harmony. We both know, compadre, that a warm wet hole is a warm wet hole."

"...But he has a body that doesn't ever seem to quit, especially when he needs a fix."

I wanted to slug the little bastard in the face, but I held back.

I had a feeling in the back of my head that he did know something.

"The little girls are always so Catholic, señor, and always remind men of their mothers, who are angels. But the niños..."

"Can it, Tito. I don't like this talk." I laid five ten dollar bills on the table between us. Then placed my hand over them. It was not particularly hot but he was sweating hard.

He leaned back and grinned. It was very hard to figure how his perfect teeth had lasted so perfectly.

"I got a friend, you know, Señor Skyler. He, well, he sticks needles in himself. And that is an expensive hobby. A couple of days ago he comes by, flying in the clouds. He buys drinks for everyone. Tequila. He brings in a tray of tamales. I ask him where he gets the pesos.

He says that he is going to bump off a celebrity. Well, señor, you can believe

that I was truly shocked. So, I start to ask him questions and he says that it was a queer boxer. I don't know any queer boxers, I don't know that such a phenomena can exist. So I don't make a connection between you and your friend, although I see your pictures in the papers almost every day. Everyone says that you are a patron of the many arts. Then, after I see the papers today and I see that your friend is dead and when I think of the rumors I have heard, I went over to my friend's house. He is not home. His lady says that he has split for Mexico."

"What's his name, Tito?"

"This is a collect call, Señor Skyler." He gathered the five ten dollar bills under my hand.

I reached into my jacket and pulled out a fifty dollar bill. His eyes lit up. I waved it in front of his face so that he could smell it.

"I love this amigo like a brother," he said, reaching for the bill. I pulled it back.

"We agreed upon fifty," I said.

"His name is Jose Rodriguez," he said as he pulled a piece of greasy paper out of his pocket and wrote down an address on it and handed it to me.

"One more thing," I added. "I heard that Lippy Luchino left town."

"I heard that."

"Did he buy the contract?"

"Jose is not a mob man. He is an independent contractor. He is too unstable for the mob. They sell him the junk he pumps into his arms. They would never trust him."

A sudden splash of sorrow flashed over Tito's eyes, I placed my hand over his needle-scarred arm. When he finally looked up at me, he said, through dim eyes, "There's a bogey man around."

"Where is Jose now?" I asked.

"In Tijuana. He's not at that address I gave you. That's here in Los Angeles, where his lady lives. Sonny, I've got to find my man real quick..." His hand was shaking, he was sweating. His eyes were glazed into another dimension entirely. "All I can tell you is to find a bar called 'The Spider's Web.' He makes his connections there. Ask for the Spider." He jumped up, I handed him the fifty dollar bill.

The Spider's Web was a filthy, run-down cantina in one of the poorer sections of Tijuana. The shiny black Packard Phaeton seemed ominously out of place as Yuki parked it in front. Drunken bodies and trash were indis-

criminally littered outside it. A woman of the night, far past her prime, was leaning in the doorway. She stared hungrily at me as I stepped out of the car. I had to pass closer to her in order to enter the bar and she moved her body so that I had to brush her swollen breasts. She stank of sweat, cheap perfume and alcohol.

The interior of the cantina reeked of odors of beer, urine, sweat and something sweet and cloying that I could not identify. It was dark. A few dim lamps behind the bar cast the only illumination. The floor was covered with dirt and sawdust. Several men and women leaned against the bar. Perhaps a dozen tables filled the rest of the space, only half of which had patrons. The bartender was a pot-bellied, balding man whose white shirt looked filthy even in the dim light. Everyone in the place looked at me as if I was an apparition. I ambled over to the bar and leaned over it. I flicked my wrist toward the bartender.

"Barkeep, could I have your attention?" I called out. He poured someone a drink, then slowly moved toward me. "Si, señor?"

I held out a twenty dollar bill in my hand. "I need some directions, if you can help."

He was staring at me incredulously. I heard someone at one of the tables muttering something about "the gringo mariçon."

"Si..." the bartender suddenly grinned, now staring at the bill in my hand.

I bent forward and whispered in his ear, "I was told that I might be able to find an hombre here called 'The Spider.' Could you point him out?"

The bartender laughed. "This is telaraña, señor. You are standing in the Spider's Web. And si, señor, I know where this *hombre* is. See those stairs over in the corner? Well, señor, you walk up those stairs and, at the top, there is a door. Knock on the door and behind it you will find the Spider."

He took the bill out of my hand. I nodded and said "Gracias."

A bare light bulb hung from a wire at the top of the stairs. I knocked on the door and faintly heard a voice bid me to enter. The heavy door creaked as I opened it. The room, like the rest of the place was dark. A door leading to what I presumed was a head, opened.

I saw her in silhouette against the bright bathroom light, standing like Dorothy Lamour, wearing a low-cut, floor-

length black gown.

"I was looking, looking for the Spider," I stuttered.

"Well...? She moved forward toward me. I suddenly wondered if my strategy of being a mariçon in evening clothes had really been the best strategy. I had thought that I would have to deal with a macho dope dealer. This was not the man I thought he'd be. I can only describe her movement as sinuous and, were I another kind of man than I am, seductive.

"The Black Widow Spider?" I asked, giving her body the once-over.

***"You need a fix,
badly.
You've been betting
three aces against
four kings."***

She stood in front of me and began toying with the lapel of my jacket. There was something marvelously ecumenical in her features, as if she were a combination of Latina, Black and Oriental. But her eyes! A chill ran up and down my back. As if they were illuminated by some secret source of light, they almost glowed in the dark, like lights on the dashboard of my Hispana-Suiza, perfect orbs of lime green. A color I had seen in eyes only once before.

I was suddenly reminded of that scene by the pool when Bugsy had been lying in the middle of the uniformed cops and people were trying to keep me from him. I saw the mutilation the killer had done on his body, but I also saw that the light had passed from his open eyes. They were flat, covered with a white mist. Dead.

She put her hand under my jacket, over my chest. "Well, I can see there's a big, big man under that monkey sui., Is everything on you big?"

I stiffened as her hand began to travel across my abdominals and even lower.

"I think, madam, that I should tell you that I didn't come here for...whatever reasons you might think."

She cupped her hand over my genitals. "Oh, you are big," she whispered.

I felt myself trying to shrivel somehow. Then, without even thinking, I blurted out, "I'm gay!"

She slapped my face.

"It's not my fault," I idiotically replied.

She moved backward and pulled a chain on a banker's lamp on her desk. I saw the room for the first time, a tawdry black-painted chamber with a brass day bed in a corner and macabre mementos of the Mexican Day of the Dead scattered around the room. Skulls and skeletons. I saw now that her gown was a thin black velvet. And the light only heightened her beauty.

"You're staring at me," she said, reaching toward the top of her desk and taking a cigarette from a lacquered box. She placed it in an ebony holder and stood with it in her hand until I stepped forward and lit it. Her eyes were ablaze with light.

"Something about you reminds me of someone," I said.

"Oh?" she asked, blowing smoke in my face, "And who might that be?"

"Joan Crawford," I replied. She started to laugh. "I see her films perhaps a dozen times," she said.

Suddenly, in this new persona, I liked her.

I am not a misogynist. I prefer a world of men. But, from that moment on we got along swell. I told her about Bugsy, what Tito had told me, about Jose Rodriguez. At first she was reticent to say anything. Then we made a deal.

"The point is," she explained, "I don't really like the little bastard, Rodriguez. He's conned me out of money, out of heroin. That's not something I ever allow, but he has a body that doesn't ever seem to quit, especially when he needs a fix. I knew that he was a bum, but I didn't know that he was a hit man." Her body shuddered. "That, somehow, makes me feel contaminated."

"You're not Mexican," I interjected. "Where do you come from?"

"It's not important," she answered, "but it is a Micronesian island in the Pacific. My grandparents were Chinese capitalists. My father, their son, was a rebel. My mother was an Irish Maori Filipino. I was raised a bastard. That's it. Why should you be interested?"

"It was your eyes," I said, and then explained to her how Bugsy's eyes had

affected me.

"Look," she said, "I hate the little son-of-a-bitch, Rodriguez. He did something to me, I'm not going to tell you what it was, but I hate him. But I don't like trouble. I pay the federales to keep a blind eye on what I'm doing here. But, uh, I think that Rodriguez is a loose cannon. Loose cannons can blow in any direction. When he's desperate enough he blows his loose cannon inside me. I've kept him on a loose string. Are you certain he killed your man?"

"He killed him. He was paid by someone else. I have to know who that person was."

"You see that bathroom door over there?" she said. I nodded.

"When he gets here, go in there. Turn out the lights. There's a two-way mirror. You can watch it. I'll get you what you want. But I want something in return. How much are you willing to pay?"

I pulled my check book out of my pocket. "Anything it takes," I said.

She shook her head. "I don't want money. I have lots of money. I want your body after I have disposed of Rodriguez. I want you to watch me with him, then I want to have sex with you. In my web."

"I've heard things about black widow spiders..." I said.

"All I want is your seed in me, not your life," she replied.

I was disturbed because I had never had sex with a woman, had never wanted to have sex with a woman, had nightmares about having sex with a woman. And this woman seemed to be a female version of Count Dracula. But I wanted Rodriguez even more. I struck a bargain with the devil.

She sent a boy to get him. She seemed to understand the hour, even the minute of his need for another fix. I knew, when I saw him enter the now-dimmed room, that this man was a schizophrenic. And I also saw what she saw in him. He was magnificent. His body was that of a body-builder, but a body-builder who had studied the art of graceful macho movement. Like a cat. His body was a mass of muscles piled on top of muscles, connected by thick arteries, all male hard flesh. And his face was that of an angel, a dark-skinned, long-lashed Latino angel. His lips were thick and open, revealing sparkling white teeth. He had what Hollywood scripts call 'dark, bedroom eyes.' He didn't walk, he swaggered. He was wearing only wide trousers, drawn closely around

his narrow waist, and an incongruous wide-brimmed hat. He had, on the crowns on his chest, the most voluptuously rich nipples I have ever seen on a man, emerging out of a thick, silken blanket of hair. Every strand seemed oiled, reflecting the light. The Spider Woman was reclined on the day bed, voluptuous in the dim room. Rodriguez removed his belt, then lowered his trousers. He wore no underwear.

Most Latinos I have known are not overly-endowed. One is impressed by them because of their beauty or their attitudes. Not their genitals. Rodriguez was as sexually developed as any man I have ever seen. I watched the immense veins on his arms and wondered what it was like when he injected them with junk. His cock was gigantic. His balls were like Texan oranges swinging between his legs. I understood what the Spider felt. He leaned over her and tore the black velvet gown off her body. He kissed her on the lips, then placed his gigantic body on top of her. In one fell swoop he entered her. She almost swooned from the penetration, then became a biological machine as she took the entry and aroused it even further.

The Spider was aware that I was watching. She used her body to present him to me behind the mirror, as if she were a substitute for me, offering me a chance to watch myself in an act of sex. Not love. For I did not love Rodriguez. As magnificent as he was physically, as perfect a sex machine, I did not doubt that he would fuck me as wonderfully as he did the Spider, if he needed a fix.

Then it was over and he fell down on top of her, exhausted. She waited until he began to recover before she pulled herself from under him, pushing him over on his back. His cock, dripping with spent sperm and her female juices, was still stiffly erect. She crouched over him, her breasts falling down upon his hard, tight pectorals. He reached up and squeezed them. "Hi, Lady," he said. His voice was deep and rusty. "Nigo says that you have something for me. More than your body, which is nice. Something I need right now, you know. A little packet of something?"

She sat up, rubbing her long nailed fingers across his chest. Their tips were as sharp as stilettos. I noticed that, instead of being relaxed after sex, as most men were, his body was tense, the muscles and tendons gnarled. He jerked slightly every time she touched him. He

was sweating profusely. "I just received a new shipment of some very good stuff. I have a double packet of it for you."

"I am a little low on money right now, Tela. I had some but I wasted it all up norte. I could give you more of my body in sex, if you want."

"I don't pay for sex, Jose. I don't want money from you. I want you to meet someone and answer his questions, that is all." He shrugged his shoulders. I had my cue and entered the room. He sat up suddenly, terrified. I thought, for a moment, that he was ready to attack me, but the Spider suddenly produced a small, sharp knife and placed it at his neck.

"You've got a choice, Jose. Heaven or hell. I think that you know who this man is, although you have never met."

"I don't know nothing, nada, nada..." He was acting like a trapped rat, the veins on his neck throbbing beneath the tip of the knife.

"If you talk to this man, I shall give you what you need so badly right now. If you do not talk, or if you lie, I shall sting you."

"He'll kill me."

"I will kill you if you do not talk."

He closed his eyes. She drove the knife harder against his throat. Then the words seemed to float out of him, as if they came from some place other than his mouth, as if they detached from him. I was shaking as I listened to the litany of betrayal and murder. Now everything made sense.

The Spider looked at me. I nodded. She pulled the knife away from his neck and reached over and took a cellophane packet out of an enameled box on her desk. He took it, watching me every moment, grabbed his pants and hat and raced from the room.

"You look very hurt," she said to me.

"I had suspicions about who bought the killing," I replied. Then I added, "What will happen to Rodriguez now?"

"He will soon be in Heaven. What I gave him is pure, unadulterated heroin," she answered. "He will be in Heaven but this time he will never come back. He will never kill anyone again."

She walked over to me. She pressed her breasts against me and groped my genitals. "Now, my friend, I must have payment from you, as you promised. You can begin by drinking his sperm out of me..."

Harry Stone was uncomfortable in formal dress, but the evening was black

tie. Rex was showing a preview of his next film in his private theater. It was important to him, as it was one of the few pictures he'd been able to make which wasn't a western. He had invited mostly close friends.

We had cocktails in the garden before the showing. Rex would probably have never admitted it publicly, but he had a deep passion for gardening. His roses were his special pride. He had planned every detail of the garden, even commissioning an Italian sculptor to carve the Greek-style nudes that stood, ghostly real, punctuating certain points of interest among the hedges and flower beds. I was pointing out to Harry the new youth who had recently been added to the collection, when he bent toward me and examined a hickey on my neck. "I sense that you haven't gone celibate," he stated.

"No," I replied, "it's just a spider bite."

"There was a time when we didn't mind biting each other a little," he said wistfully.

"That was a long time ago, Harry."

Rex walked over to us, martini in hand. He leaned over and kissed me on the cheek. "How are you feeling, love?"

"Lonely. I really miss him. Something wonderful was happening. Bugsy was growing, blossoming right in front of me. He was incredibly beautiful."

Rex smiled. "You were doing that for him, Sonny."

"I tried."

"No," Rex said, "You succeeded." He turned to Harry. "Are you enjoying yourself, Captain Stone?"

"I'm used to beer bashes and Sunday picnics in Echo Park with the other cops and their families," he answered. "God, this collar is stiff."

Yuki came up to us. "Max-san is here. He said that you asked him," he said to me.

"Tell him to come on out here," I said.

"He isn't dressed," Yuki stated.

Rex suggested that I meet him in the game room. I looked over at Harry who was suddenly grim.

"What does he know?" he asked me.

"I don't know. He can't suspect anything. He's here."

"Good hunting," Rex said.

Max stood awkwardly in the center of the room dressed in a sports jacket over an open shirt.

"You said you had something for me?" he asked.

I reached into my pocket and pulled

out a key chain.

"Bugsy left this behind." I removed a pair of miniature golden gloves from the ring. "I thought that you might have wanted them." I handed them to him. His big, gnarled hand was shaking slightly as he took them from me and held them tight.

"He was only seventeen years old when he won them."

"How long had you been training him?"

"Since he was eleven. He was a real street scrapper then."

"He loved you like a father, Max."

***"I really miss him.
Something wonderful
was happening.
Bugsy was growing,
blossoming right in
front of me."***

He nodded, then looked up at me. "I'm sorry that I spoke so harshly to you, Mr. Skyler."

I shook my head. "No, you're not, Max. You meant it."

He walked over to the bar and sat down. "Can I have something to drink?" he asked me. I went behind it and poured him a scotch neat.

"You didn't know him when he was a kid," he began. "He wasn't like the other punks in the streets. The kid had class. And he was a natural in the ring. I hardly had to teach him. His old man was a worthless drunk. His old lady was a slut. They didn't know and didn't care where he was or what he was doing. So I took care of him, I raised him, I gave him his values, I made a winner out of that boy. I bought him his first pair of gloves, I paid his gym fees. I even took him to church on Sundays and made sure he went to school. He was on his way to being a champion."

"Did you sell his contract to the mob?"

"You don't know Chicago, mister."

You don't have any choice there if they want something, and they wanted him. So they got him. Otherwise he would have been dead a long time ago."

"And then they asked him to take a fall and he refused, is that what happened?"

Max seemed shaky. He poured himself another drink. "You said it, mister."

"No, I didn't say it. I asked."

"That's what it looks like."

"Does it? It doesn't look like that to me."

"That's what the cops think," he said, staring into my eyes.

"No, Max. That's not what the cops think. You see, I went down to Tijuana yesterday. I found the man who murdered Bugsy. He was a junkie named Jose Rodriguez."

Max's hand was really shaking. He was spilling scotch all over the bar.

"He told me who hired him, Max."

He started to say something, then gave me a look that was both hard and sad and filled with recrimination. "I didn't do anything," he said bitterly, "It was you who killed him!" He spat at me. "He could have been a champion until he met you. It was you who turned him queer."

"Did you think you had lost him, Max?"

"After you got done with him there wasn't anything left to lose. I had made him dead in my heart. I asked him to stop. He said he loved you." Max was sobbing violently. "I couldn't believe he could say filthy things like that, after everything that I taught him. Oh God! I should have had you killed, too. Up in that bed of yours where you were doing those filthy things to him..."

"You watched...!" I asked.

"From that upstairs porch. I saw...I saw..."

"You created him, so you destroyed him." I was crying.

"I didn't create him for somebody else to come and pervert..."

"Bugsy chose me out of the crowd. I didn't seek him out."

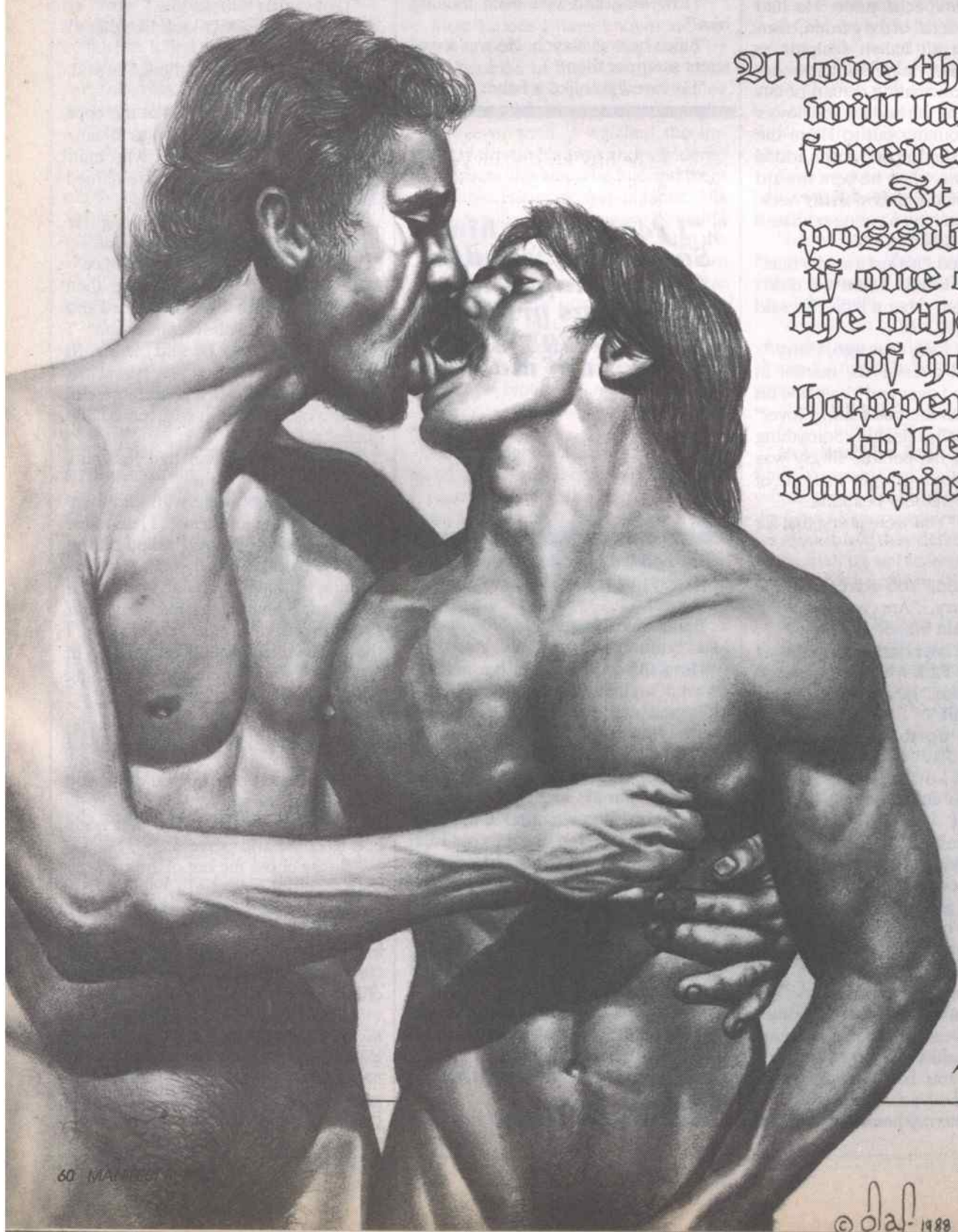
Harry Stone walked into the room. He took the older man by the arm and led him away. Max stumbled once, then stood tall and straight. He pulled his chin up.

I felt Rex's arm around me. I buried my head in his chest. "What kind of world...?" I sobbed.

"Maybe it's all a dream," he whispered in my ear, "just like Hollywood." □

Blood Lovers

Will love that
will last
forever?
It is
possible
if one or
the other
of you
happens
to be a
vampire.



Art / OLAF

BLAKE ELLSWORTH

The author is grateful to the anonymous sender of the following manuscript, whoever that sender might be. The author received it in the midst of a time spent studying the vampire myth, and especially that of Count Dracula.

One may imagine my excitement upon receiving what was clearly a missing scene from Bram Stoker's book, doubtless excised by some editor with Victorian scruples. The scene immediately before it (which I have briefly excerpted to show how the missing scene fits in) is certainly erotically charged enough to offend (or titillate) even the least prudish Victorian. Why that scene was left in and the scene I received was censored, I can only attribute to some misguided sense of propriety. It is my great pleasure to bring at last to public view a scene which I feel is the most powerful in the book. We come into the scene having just read how the female vampires have tried to seduce Harker; one is just about to bite his neck when the Count interposes, in a white-hot rage:

"How dare you touch him, any of you? How dare you cast eyes on him when I had forbidden it? Back, I tell you all! This man belongs to me! Beware how you meddle with him, or you'll have to deal with me."

The fair girl, with a laugh of ribald coquetry, turned to answer him: "You yourself never loved; you never love!"

On this the other women joined, and such a mirthless, hard, soulless laughter rang through the room that it almost made me faint to hear; it seemed like the pleasure of fiends. Then the Count turned, after looking at my face attentively, and said in a soft whisper: "Yes, I too can love; you yourselves can tell it from the past. Is it not so? Well, now I promise you that when I am done with him you shall kiss him at your will. Now go! Go! I must awaken him, for there is work to be done." At this point, the Count gives the women a child to feed on, and they literally disappear. The

paragraph ends, "Then the horror overcame me, and I sank down unconscious." This sentence, undoubtedly inserted by the editor for the sake of continuity with the beginning of the subsequent chapter, is most surely a poor substitute for the following:

The Count turned to me, with the intent look of before, and said: "Indeed, I am wrong to be angry with them. How can they not have desired you, Harker Jonathan? But you are mine, as I have said." His voice grew low, and the fire behind his dark eyes seemed to blaze up. "Indeed, why should I not possess you now?"

He bent down to me where I lay on the couch, and with swift, long-fingered hands, opened my shirt. And as for me? I lay as one paralyzed while he stripped me of my clothes with no more ado than might my nanny have done when as a boy I might have fallen in the mud. He stepped back, and commanded me:

"Rise, my young friend, rise up that I may look upon you." And against my will, my body did indeed move of itself to stand before the Count in all its nakedness. He walked slowly around me, gazing with the consideration of the horse-buyer, and behind me I heard him move the couch back whence I had shifted it.

"Such smooth flesh," his voice said suddenly by my ear, and my heart leapt though my body stayed still. "So soft and fair." I felt his fingers touch the skin of my back, his long nails barely brushing, and my skin pebbled under them. He came once again to face me, saying:

"It is only right and just that you should see my nakedness, as I see yours." And with this, he drew off his rich, old-style clothes, folding them neatly and laying them on the desk where I had penned my diary entry only a few hours before.

Then he turned and stood before me, and I could see that the iron grey of his hair did not reflect the age of his body. His skin was dark, and the muscle under it firm as that of a man in his prime. Black hairs with a sprinkling of white lightly covered his chest, and the triangle they made, pointing downward across his belly, drew my eyes downward also.

I can scarcely write of what I saw there, standing at the point of that triangle, but I must, if only to assure myself that all I saw was real. His great member was surely the circumference of Mina's forearm, long and dark and hard as a club of wood, curving slightly

upward. My mind shrank from thinking what he might do, but I could not help but know his intent. He moved around behind me and murmured in my ear:

"My ancestor impaled his enemies upon stakes of wood. Upon this stake of flesh shall I impale you, my beloved." I felt his hands grip me by the upper arms, and he lifted me off my feet as though I had been no more than a child. Slowly, inexorably, he lowered me onto that awful stake, and as I felt the head of it spread my nether cheeks and then stretch open my arsehole I could only whimper, though my mind was shrieking. I thought I would go mad with the pain and terror, and then my feet touched the floor, his arms slipped across my chest, hugging me to him, and all that great length was inside me. God help me.

My head was spinning, and I realized that my own manhood had responded and was now standing forth; I felt his belly shake gently with his laughter. "You see, my good young friend, that your body knows what your mind cannot contemplate. Move with me now, beloved. Your body knows the measure of this dance of love."

His right hand slipped down, pressing on my belly, and his thrusts sent pulses through my body like electrical shock. I am no student of physiology, but I am now sure that some organ lies in the belly of a man that from within can give to him as much pleasure and more as that of his organ without. It was just this inner organ that the Count touched with each thrust, and though I could feel control of my body gradually return to my mind, I now had no wish to disengage myself from his embrace, nor from the waves of pleasure which rocked me to the marrow.

I reached behind me and grasped his nether cheeks in my hands, feeling the muscles there clench and release. His laugh rang with triumph as our bodies moved together, and moans of pleasure came on my every breath. His thrusts grew stronger, and I could no longer keep my feet, but his supernaturally powerful arms held me pinned to him as firmly as any bond. My head fell back onto his shoulder and my moans became more frantic as I felt myself approaching climax.

Then I felt the brush of his moustache upon my neck, as thrilling as the lips of the woman had been, and a sudden stabbing pain—his gleaming teeth piercing my vein even as his member pierced

my body. A scream ripped free of my throat as my blood pulsed into his mouth and the white jism spurted far in front of me with the force of my orgasm.

I must have fainted then, for I was next aware of lying cradled in his arms. I was sobbing, trembling in every limb. Again I felt the touch of his lips and tongue, once on my tear-stained cheek, once on the tip of my quivering member. "Behold," his deep voice murmured, "all the liquids of your body are precious to me, my lover. And now—" here he took one of the sharp, strong nails of his fingers and ran it across his nipple so that blood welled in the cut—"drink.

***I screamed and
cursed, I implored
and prayed, I
struggled with all
my strength, but all
in vain.***

Drink the elixir of your blood, transformed in the crucible of my body." He bent down, and I opened my mouth—God help me!—and suckled as though at my mother's breast. He groaned, low and softly, and I felt his organ throb as I lay in his lap.

"Yes, drink!" he said, half-commanding, half-imploring. The fluid burned in my throat like strong whisky, turning to fire my own blood, and suddenly I was a man possessed, chewing on his nipple, sucking the dark fluid until he was the one who shook, and an animal howl burst, it seemed, from the very core of his being. His spend touched the flesh of my back like molten metal and instinct drove my body, rolling, away from him.

He got to his feet, swaying slightly. "Here," he said, "taste me; kiss this rod and you too shall become as I am. You shall be immortal, and we shall love until the end of time." His voice hypnotized me; I dropped to my knees and took that weapon in my hands. "Taste," he murmured, "and from now until

eternity we will live together, sustaining ourselves upon each other, and upon the blood of the fools who can have no knowledge of the true life!"

"No!" I shrieked, throwing myself back from him, stumbling and scrambling across the rugs to get away. "I will not drink the blood of the living! Am I to be like you, unable to climax without my blood being drawn? Never, I say! I would rather die!"

In three strides he was looming over me, laughing. He took me by the shoulders and shook me. "Do not be a fool, Harker Jonathan! Of what use are you to me dead? Do you spurn me? Then your punishment must be to live, indeed, to live a mortal life.

"But because I love you, I will possess you again, to try if you will not perhaps change your mind."

He took me once again in those arms, and struggle though I might, I could not escape them. With one arm holding my arms to my body and the other binding my legs, the Count hefted me like a bundle of wood.

"My ancestor was very much fond of observing human suffering, and there are chambers for that purpose on nearly every floor of this castle. Let me show you just one such."

I screamed and cursed, I implored and prayed, I struggled with all my strength, but all in vain. The Count only laughed, saying:

"Dear boy, your mouth may say anything it will, but I have seen the word of your body, and know that for the true word. I would see what else your body has to say!"

He moved up to the room's hearth and pressed against one of the stones with his knee; with a grinding of stone against stone, the whole hearth sank into the wall, revealing a narrow passage through which the Count maneuvered before pressing another stone in the back of the hearth that sent it to its place again. The chamber was utterly dark, but the Count moved with the sure step of an ordinary man in broad daylight. He set me on my feet, and before I could decide where in the darkness I might run he had grasped my wrists and clamped them in iron manacles. Then, even as I fought the chill iron, each of my ankles was snatched in the darkness and chained, so that I stood, spread like Da Vinci's drawing of the proportions of man within a circle. Out of the dank blackness came the voice of the Count:

"But surely my friend will wish to see

as well as I do, and for that we must have light." With a snapping sound and the acrid smell of brimstone, a match flared, and presently the room was lit by a bank of oil lamps by the wall. I was chained in the open air, between two stone pillars.

I do not wish to remember what horrible instruments that wavering light revealed to me, the cruel fruits of thousands of years' study in the inflicting of pain. Indeed, I turned my head from the sight, squeezing my eyes tight shut, hoping perhaps, in the way of a child, that I might next open them in my own bed. But it was not so. The Count stood close to me, so that I felt the brush of his body hair against me, and the pressure of his member against my thigh. "This is the room where my ancestor kept his collection of whips," he said, in the tone of voice one takes when showing a guest the family portrait. "Let me show you but a few. 'With such a scourge as this was made to bleed the one you call God's Son;' you can see that the hollow tips contain lead shot.

"Here is a gift from America, where I may someday go: it is called 'black-snake.' A droll name, is it not so? Observe." He uncoiled the awful thing, and as fully five feet of its length swished on the floor like a deadly cobra I knew whence it was named, and I trembled. My voice trembled, too, for all my brave words:

"Flog me if you will, Count, I will not take your horrid bargain!"

He laughed again, casting aside the whip. "Foolish boy," he said, "I have no need of whips to draw your blood, as you have learned! But my bite is only for those whom I love. Feel now my claw!" And with this, he raked those long nails across my chest, leaving four red furrows in their wake. I gasped, and hearing me he said:

"But come, we must have more satisfying sounds than that." So saying, he knelt and drew one hand's nails down each of my thighs, slowly and deeply. Agony like fire flowed through me, increasing with every inch, and a sound rose in my throat that began as a groan and ended as a shriek.

My warm blood oozed onto my skin and began to cool there, and as I panted, trying to control my voice, the Count stepped back and with great deliberation put his lips around each fingertip to lick the blood from under his nails. He smiled slowly, the smile of the wolf who sees his prey.

He moved to the table which held the lamps, and, still smiling, poured out oil from a refilling vessel onto his great organ as pagan Romans must have poured libation to their gods. Then, in one swift motion he was behind me, his hands parted my buttocks and he slammed his member into my body with such force that I was flung forward against the chains. The chamber echoed with the ringing of iron and my own screams.

Amazing to tell! My flesh again responded to him. Despite the bite of the iron, the cold flagstones under my feet, the force of his thrusts if anything increased my desire. I writhed and strained in the chains, my head whipping back and forth uncontrollably, my shrieks of pain gradually transforming to passion.

Suddenly I stood alone; he had withdrawn, and I felt bereft.

I howled and my body thrashed vainly against the iron. It was only for a moment, however; then he was kneeling before me and my throbbing manhood slipped between those red lips and those sharp white teeth, into a mouth moist and hot.

Never have I felt such sensations, neither before nor since! The pressure and movement of his tongue, the occasional thrilling touch of those carnivore teeth! Part of my mind may have feared that he would bite the organ off, but that was overcome by my desire that he continue, come what might. Indeed, all my pleading now was for him to keep on—to suck there as he had on my throat. Again! Again—!

Spent and shaking, I hung from the chains, unconscious of the strain on my shoulders. He looked at me, licking his lips, and said:

"Well?"

I could barely speak. "I cannot... Please... I must no...."

He took my stones in his hand and pressed gently, then harder. "You will, Harker Jonathan," he said, as unimaginable sensations flooded me. "You will one day. I have changed you; I have swallowed your essences, and you will some day be unable to resist me."

"Please..." I could only whisper. "Please...."

"Please what?" he said mockingly. Then he rose and ran an inexpressibly gentle hand through my hair, his voice now low and tender. "What would you, beloved?"

What possessed me then, I do not

know, for I heard my own voice, as from a great distance, say:

"Please, drink my blood again."

He looked long into my eyes, his own face unreadable. Finally, "I will," he said. "I will."

First he pressed his mouth upon mine, looking always into my eyes, and I myself was lost in the dark tarns of his eyes. Timidly I slipped my tongue between his lips. The taste of his mouth was sharp, sweet and bitter as blood, and feeling my tongue in his mouth he closed his eyes. He moved his face gently away, saying:

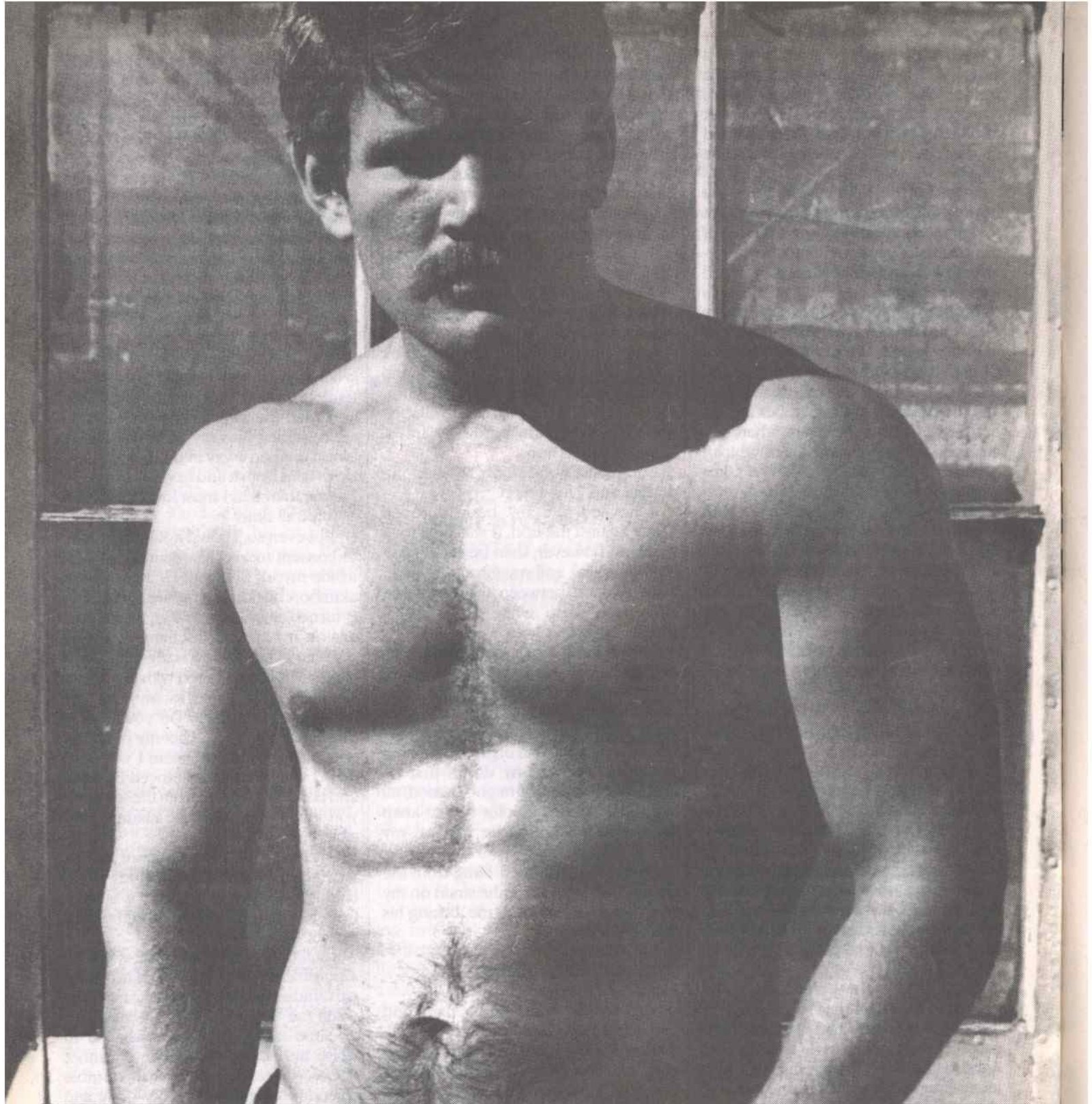
"Could my eyes produce tears, I would give them you now, beautiful, tender beloved." Then he bent his head and I felt the sweet agony of his long teeth sinking into my flesh. My heart's blood drained away into his mouth and I was faint from it and from ecstasy. And I knew then that I must love and desire him for all time.

But even so, I could not bring myself to consent to kiss his member, to take inside myself his seed. He stood, arms akimbo, chuckling at my weakness, and I turned my face away, pressing it against my arm. At last the Count took my chin in his hand, forcing me to look at him. His lips were red with my blood, his teeth pearl-white as my jism. He laughed low, saying: "Do you think it matters to me where I get my pleasure? Spiritless boy, I take where I will! And now I will go to your beloved England and take my pleasure from those whom you love—and you have made it possible!"

And then I knew little more, save a welling up of darkness, and his awful laughter, though whether I was faint from loss of blood or from the horror I cannot know.

I still cannot but pray that it was only a horrible nightmare, though my rational mind—and the evidence of my body—tell me that yes, it was so. May God give me strength! Though whether to resist him or to surrender, I cannot decide—I desire him! For all his terrible splendour, I desire him! My body and soul desire him, and all that he can do to me! Yet, for now I shall seal up these pages—nay, I will tear them out, though I must keep them. I will try to forget—forget!

But I must follow him to the ends of the earth, and God only knows what will happen then. One or the other of us will die to the life we had known, of that only am I sure. □



HOUSE OF BLUE FLOWERS

THE CONCLUSION OF THE PRIZE WINNING STORY BY NOEL RYAN

For many years I was simply half of something, the Irving half of Kostandis and Irving. The 'K' and I. Irving et ux. For years along the Castro we were a phrase, an item, a cliché--like Gilbert and Sullivan, Yin and Yang, Abbott and Costello.

Kosta and Mildred. He of the night and I of the morning. We did not cease being lovers though we had long before ceased being friends. Our financial Gordian knot precluded any further friendship. We fought like cats in heat. At night we drank and forgave and slept together but in the morning we would be out here perched on the fence, yowling and spitting at one another. Years ago I moved downstairs into your apartment, away but not too far away from him. After that Kostandis gravitated towards Folsom Street while I soon found Polk Street and its laddies to my taste. So it has been.

Early on, you see, with a prescience that is mine own special talent, plus Kostandis' greed, which borders on

genius, we bought rental properties here in the Castro. Kostandis is very wise in regards to building structure, that is, wiring and foundations and secure roofs and that sort of thing. Termites. Kostandis knows termites. I am all aesthetic and poofy and fussy. Kosta is structure and I, beauty and taste. Behold these tapered fingers, this aquiline eye, this nose placed in trust for me by some stark but humorous ancestor, the relic of an ancient family saint, all inquisitorial and bony accusation fortifying the monastic nostrils. This is not the physiognomy of a laborer. I suffered as a child. 'Ichabod Crane' the dirty beasts in school shouted at me. I would draw myself up and reply, 'My name is Mildred!' But the name-calling hurt. It injured me into the aesthetic and there I have remained, gingerbread and porticoes and Edith Wharton gardens and the occasional Watteau and Fragonard horror and we have made a bundle, have Kostandis and I. But the mingling of our monies has become like the mingling of the waters and what navigator could track such mingling to its source?

When we split up Kostandis and I called a truce. At first we did not inquire into one another's night guests. But night after night they arrived at Kostandis' door, kallipygidious and clad in cowhide, and the jangling of their brutish jewelry in the night like the arrival of Santa's sleigh and reindeer overhead. And for a time Kostandis experimented with cocaine until I caught him embezzling our mutual funds and I threatened him with prison or a 28-day stay in a rehabilitation program. He chose the latter. The roughhousing had to stop. He was bankrupting us. Oh, I have *always* been the strong one.

But, then, I too had my visitors, not all of them pretty saints. I had no illusions and only threadbare fantasies. I knew that these youths could and would never be sexually attracted to me. I accepted that. They were sexually attracted to my money. I am generous but not foolish. I paid the going price for whatever they had to offer. A few I even helped get started, get off the streets. Not all of them disappointed me. Not all. I have helped many young people. Many. Has Kostandis, I wonder, ever helped anyone? No. Kostandis consumes people. He has nothing to give of himself.

Only money? Ah, I know what you are thinking. I, too, had only money to give? Oh no, sir, oh no. Here is the difference. I found my lads on Polk and Castro Streets and brought them home, poor, confused, defeated lads, and I did

not treat them like vendors or servants. Yes, they gave of their bodies to a lonely, aging man. But I, too, gave. I *cared* about them. To care is to give *all* of yourself. It is the finest gift you can give, to listen and to care. For many of them, no one ever had cared or listened. And they responded to that. Auntie Mildred I am to many. Consider the baffled youth, forced to lurk about the streets like jackals awaiting the score, the mark, the john, the sick and the lame and the halt. I cared for them. I put them to work at odd jobs, gave them a sense of pride, of self-worth. I transformed them from hunters to food-gatherers. I fed them and I listened to their pitiful tales of rejection, of violence, of abandonment, of injustice. With such intimate exposure to these castaways one could quickly come to the conclusion that the American home is little more than a charnel house, a repository for child molestation and brutality. Now and then I bailed my charges out of jail. I fathered them. I mothered them. Auntie Mildred.

For years now, Kostandis has been enraged at me. He cannot do with me or without me. He does not want what I have, yet he deeply resents my having anything. His motive is revenge on me, I assume, for simply being better than he is and for leaving him. What with his pride, I can understand his rage. Yet he cares for no one. He is a curious soup and a not altogether savory one. Now and then he makes attempts, occasionally successful, at luring my children up those stairs. Little odd jobs. A few of my boys robbed him. He blamed me, of course, claiming I put them up to it. Such rubbish! Eric, however, should have known better. Eric—you met Eric, I believe, seated on your floor, drinking your beer—Eric stole Kostandis' Rolex watch. Eric had no idea what the watch was worth and he got caught by a plainclothesman asking one hundred dollars for a ten thousand dollar watch. Oh, dear! Kostandis chose to prosecute, despite my best efforts. Poor Eric. He got six months. I frown on theft but I can do nothing to stop it. You can take the boy out of the gutter, etcetera, etcetera.

None of the boys stole from me. Ever. Because I cared for them and they needed my care, you see? Kosta abuses and humiliates his tricks because, in the end, he cares for no one. The score gets evened out now and then as all the money in the world does not vindicate humiliating another human being.

And then came Little Nell into my life. Little Nell and his blue flowers and his

string quartets. He adored Schubert. He walked around with one of those headsets on and his little tape machine attached to his little belt, Schubert pouring into his little ears. He adored Schubert. One of his gods.

Now, you must understand, I did not simply shoot my cuffs, twirl my cane and set off to Polk Street each morning in order to snare the hapless and defenseless youth of America. No. I had a more subtle and at the same time obvious method of attracting young men to my apartment. I advertised in the local street rags for houseboys. Houseboys to do the shopping and cleaning for a busy businessman. That was me, the busy businessman, but never too busy to take the time out to listen to my young employee's problems. Never too busy.

Ah, yes. They would find copious buckets of understanding available to them as this monomaniacal vulture, *moi*, sat next to them on the sofa, cradled them as they wept at their ruined possibilities, their futures already up in flames. I would stretch out my great white wing and encompass them and their pain. After I had bathed them, I would caress their silky oceans of hair with my manicured talons. They would curl into my embrace as if I were their teddy bear. Shameless, perhaps criminal, I agree, but where, I ask you, was the crime? And who, if not I, suffered remorse? I was certainly laboring under no deceptions as to my desirability. I gave what I had to give, that which Kostandis would never and could never accept from me—love, my dear, Love! I listened. I cared. Gratitude varied from incident to incident but this game was my life. Old leathern-winged Dracula needed new, young blood. That is hyperbole meant to amuse you, dear boy. Don't look so alarmed! This is not a horror story in the Castle Rackrent mode.

Kostandis was forever butting in with his insinuations and his propositions. My pleasures were his hell. His hell is that he knows not care, only need. And jealousy. Even as we sit here this morning—the Spanish moss is lovely there in the oak boughs, isn't it? Even as we sit here I care for *you*. Why? Because I recognize that vacancy in you that you by yourself, *alone*, cannot awaken into the realm of music and laughter. You sit out there in the solarium night after night and your yearning is as vast as the night. I know. I know. I, too. *Many* nights. You could have easily one day become one of my wards. I am glad you were not. I am glad it was not

necessary. Be grateful for what you have.

Little Nell. Then came Little Nell.

I had advertised for a housekeeper who also had a knack for gardening. This garden was as dry and wilted as Kostandis' hopes. Neither of us would come out and work in the garden for fear the other would pounce on the occasion and attack. We avoid one another absolutely. We are the despair of our attorneys.

Little Nell. Ah. Nell was short, five eight or so, and slender, that ashen blond of Vikings. His eyes were of the very lightest grey, like wolves' eyes without the insolence. Northern beings do not grow color, do they. His eyes were intriguing, that cool grey of them. But they were also the result of a genetic misprint. Little Nell was hopelessly colorblind and equally nearsighted, a fact about him that later on gave me the opportunity to engage in my greatest caper. Oh, Casanova would weep at my tale!

But Nell. He told me he was lucky to be born with sight at all. He wore those glasses that make you look like an owl and which enlarged the spectre of those eyes. I urged him to get modern lenses, even contacts, but he refused. He was hurt that I felt he could use a little improvement. Little Nell was twenty two and sensitive as a sore tooth. He was always, always twenty two. He will always be twenty two. Forever.

His name was actually Nelson. It was Kostandis who nicknamed him Little Nell. Nell hated that and Nell hated Kostandis. Nell thought Nelson was a proud old name, a premonitory name, a name that foretold fulfillment in grand ways. The allusion to Nelson Rockefeller and Lord Nelson was evident and a nice literary touch. I was most careful to call him Nelson. To his face, anyhow—*meeow*. I'm like that. I've struggled much of my life with my own hypocrisy and it's defeated me. Such a curse.

But nothing compared to the curse under which Little Nell labored so futilely. Poor, blind Little Nell.

Little Nell answered my advertisement. There he stood in the doorway with his hair up in golden flames and his lower lip sticking out, cherry red. The grey eyes looked mournfully at me through the thick lenses of those preposterous glasses of his. He had such a bland complexion I thought he might be ill. Anaemic or worse. His skin was lucid as the sheerest of silks. Underneath you could see the veins and

arteries and you had the feeling if you held his body up to the light you might see his heart thumping and his organs hard at work and an electric grid of nerves charging his body with impulses and sensations. He was a very aware lad. He seemed to absorb information directly into himself like the leaves, the sunlight.

He told me that he was more interested in the gardening than the housekeeping as he was getting his Bachelor's Degree in plant biology from the Jesuits at USF. He loved gardens, he said, and was not keen on housecleaning but would do his best. I told him that I entertained guests with an intensity that was absolutely suspicious and we all consumed tons of food and drink. I would require him only to go to the supermarket and do the shopping. I chose the liqueurs, of course. I would find some other lad for the oven and the windows. He accepted.

We sat out here, Nell and I, that first day. I was very surprised when he told me of his eyesight, of his colorblindness. I asked him how he could expect to be a plant biologist or even a common gardener if he couldn't tell one color from another.

He said his plant experiments were done in a laboratory and that a spectrum was used and that all of his data was spewed forth in numbers. He did not need to recognize colors, only their respective numbers on a spectrograph printout. And my garden? Did he expect to use a spectrometer while weeding and planting?

And he said to me—I shall give you a garden of blue, Irving, for I can recognize the color blue.

I fell in love with Little Nell that afternoon, that moment. Before he had gone he had explained his blue flowers to me, had explained his Schubert to me, and had explained God.

Now you see, I am a devout Catholic. Were you to run a spectrograph of my life you would find it predominantly devout with all the other tendencies in pale attendance to that one basic element. I have been a devoted son. Devoted. My parents died in my honor and in my care. They each, when their time came, died in my arms. Forgive me. I get a bit moist even now when I think of it. I was, at first, a devout lover of Kostandis. But he? No. I was merely an addition to his life, a new piece of furniture, a new toy. Kostandis, you see, lacks the capacity for risk. That is why he takes love for granted and now, at this late date, knows he has never possessed it, accepted it, known it,

lived it. His life of extravagant waste is simply his way of telling you that he does not need you. He is devout about nothing, you see, leastly himself. That he does not need is a lie. His toys have become his weapons. They defend him against the truth. He wants now to be loved for he is old and afraid and the darkness is at the doorstep and he realizes that he cannot love. He realizes that no one wants to love him. He realizes that he is lost. One night he shall climb those stairs but it will be up into final night he climbs. All the years of his life he thought he was winning. Only lately has he realized that love is the prize, not prestige, not wealth, not renown. Love, my young friend. Love. Do you understand that? You must, you know. You *must*. It is the lifelong devotion to love that finally redeems love from the abyss. He is in despair, is Kostandis. He was afraid to risk. Either you love or you become that abyss into which others plunge without hope. You become the proximate cause of evil, as St. Bernard of Clairvaux would say.

You might even say that because of my devotion to real estate values I am also a financial success. How vulgar. Yet, our business would have failed years ago were it not for my devotion. To my life and to the life of Kostandis. Why, you ask, have I not attempted to unmix the waters, unscramble the omelette that is Kostandis and me? Because, despite his deepening hatred of me, it is not, after all, bourgeois materialism, but that I am all Kostandis has in this world. I was taught recently what it means to have only one person in the world who cares for you. I am Kostandis' only relationship, do you see? It is love/hate, but a relationship all the same. I am no saint but I am finally devout to life. It was not Kostandis who taught me that, but my Little Nell. It is not the theologians and those psychotic television preachers who know of life, it is the scientists. They preach wonder and care and value. They *show* you. I have taken responsibility for Kostandis, even when I can ill-afford the pain. Kostandis, the emotional ruin, is a direct result of me. I have a responsibility there.

This, then, was the crux of my relationship with Little Nell. It was my choice, my devotion to him. If not him, who? He could not for the life of him understand my consistency in the face of virtually zero returns. In his mind, because we were not lovers, never lovers in the carnal sense, I was a fool to care for him. He was young. He did

not understand sacrifice. To sacrifice is not to throw away, it is not defeat. "Can't you find someone else?" he asked, "someone to sleep with you and live with you?" I could, I told him, but it was not necessary. I was in paroxysms of desire for him, naturally, but I was heroically controlled. The pain in his presence was intense but never uncontrollable, yet even now, in his absence, intense.

"The flowers and the music, they are what is true for me in this world...I do not have to vindicate myself to a blue flow..."

Little Nell came and went for some weeks before I could get any really solid information out of him. Prying is uncivilized. He was like some little animal that you bring home and let free on the rug and the little thing immediately runs beneath the couch or under a bed and you must let it come out in its own good time, when it feels safe. So it was with Little Nell. I observed those still waters.

He would hurry through the dusting and shopping and then head for the garden. Even in the rain he was down there in his yellow slicker and his headphones, spading and trimming, with Schubert, the *Quintet in C* stroking his mind as he so dreamily grazed amongst his bushes and flowers. He was utterly at peace down there. And the blue flowers began to appear, the burgeoning of the cornflowers, the bachelor's buttons, the fuschias, the lilacs.

For an hour or so, every afternoon, Little Nell and I sat here in the garden or up in my rooms during the rains, sipping wine and sharing our lives, such as they were.

We sat one afternoon here at this table, drinking beaujolais, I believe,

and Little Nell told me of God.

He said that early in his life, in the midst of a rather violent childhood his belief in a God, never deep or consoling, had left him. It went hand in hand, he said, with his more intense knowledge that he was alone in the world. Oh, bed and food and school were provided for, but no love, neither from man nor God. His faith in both had collapsed. "I am the rubble of my parents' love," he once defined himself.

For long years, he said, he simply lived day to day, hoping for nothing, expecting nothing. His eyesight was poor. He was gay and alone.

One day, he said, he was in the country somewhere and there were thousands of blue flowers. Deep blue was the only color he could truly see, in as far as he could tell, in its actual state, as you and I see it. All else blended into grey or harsh greenish garish. Unpleasant shades. But this blue of the flowers in such abundance that day was intense for him. He was having an experience he could finally trust.

And he said he bent over the blue flowers and looked deeply into their hearts and, he said, in the heart of the blue that day he sensed something deep and blue responding, co-responding, in his own depths, his own soul. He recognized himself, a recognition of beauty within himself. Something beautiful in the world was also, in its way, a reflection of what was beautiful within Little Nell. Quite a revelation. It was, he said, his connection. Something like God, he thought. Nothing had ever given him peace as those blue flowers that day. His feeling about the blue flowers was profound.

"They are what is truth," he said.

No, I argued, for beauty is neither true nor false. The eye of the beholder, etc.

He said, "The flowers and the music, they are what is true for me in this world. True because they are consistent and their beauty is open to me. I do not have to vindicate myself to a blue flower, to Schubert."

I realized, as he told me of the blue flowers, that I had never, until Nell, had such significance in my own life, nothing which spoke with such immediacy of that which is ultimate, immanent, true in me. I am Catholic, of course, but one does not receive or expect to receive in this life, one gives and hopes for the best. And one is always guilty and unvindicated. But what Little Nell was speaking about in his flowers, and what he was feeling as he spoke of his flowers, you see, became finally not to

be about flowers at all, or Schubert. What we have been speaking about here is love. He did not know that yet, but I did.

The blue flowers and Schubert were paving the way for his further revelation. That particular Quintet, it also swept him into the major currents of life and meaning. Those grave, splendid cello chords spoke directly into the grave, splendid chords of his sensitivities, drew their bow across the strings of his tautly-drawn expectations. More hyperbole, you groan, the plupurple aftershocks of Little Nell along the faultlines of my aged carcass. I know what you think. I have never quailed from ridicule. We can't afford to, now can we, we gay things.

The next surprise! He lived with a lover. What ho? Yes, I have painted a lonely sparrow for you, or perhaps a lonely loon. Have you ever heard the loon on a lake, amongst the reeds and rushes? It would pierce your heart, such a lonely sound.

He had told me he lived in the dormitory at USF. That lie, you see, allowed him to have all kinds of excuses why he could not be available in the evenings. But something in me sensed the lie and knew its cause was an important thing. He never mentioned this lover, not until the very end. I to this day do not know that lover's name. So why do I know he had a lover? Why, indeed, did I come to know nearly all there was about Little Nell?

Why, I followed him, of course. I spied on him. I traipsed around behind him. I was insane about him. I blazed with fires at the sight of him. My Little Nell was blind as a bat. I could have walked beside him down the street and he wouldn't have seen me. It was thrilling, my surveillance of him. And sensationally disgraceful, me, at nearly seventy years old. It had a style, a thrust, a wildness and an energy all of its own. Only sailing on the Bay in a high sea equals the drama of the tracking of my Little Nell. My dear Little Nell.

Nell was completing his bachelor's degree at USF and he planned to go on to graduate school at Berkeley. I gave him money for tuition and books at one point. I asked nothing. I questioned nothing. I achieved that great, final act of love of which the mystical fathers and poets attempted to describe but merely pointed the way. Dante went blind in the face of ultimate love. John of the Cross, Aquinas, they fell silent before it. What is that? It is to love wholly and completely for the love of another, for Nell's sake, for Nell's fu-

ture. It is utter annihilation. Complete. Total. I emptied myself for Nell. I ceased to exist but for his good. I expected nothing, indeed, would accept nothing. My love for Nell became the perfection of itself. To accept something in return for that love would have corrupted it. This love is perhaps to know something of God, I think. It is, perhaps, to know something of being a father.

Frequently, when Nell had finished his work here, he would leave, saying he had to return to campus. Regulations and all that, you know. The Jesuits are fiends for control. Nell told me he had night classes to attend. I knew he was lying but I never let on. He lied to avoid making me jealous.

No, Nell did not have night classes. Nor did Nell return immediately home to his nameless beloved. Nell went, instead, insatiably sexual as he was, as we all are at twenty two, to Valencia Street, to the baths. Nell, I think, preferred his sex only with strangers. His lover was a project, a cause. From his lover I believe he received a kind of confirmation, a certification that he was worth loving. At the baths he got the sex he needed.

How many nights did I stand in the shadows across the streets from the baths and watch him come and go so furtively. I did not fear him seeing me, I have told you, he was immensely nearsighted. At the corner of Valencia Street Nell would remove his glasses and tuck them into his pack. Anonymous Nell. And then, blind as a bat, he would enter the baths. I wonder what of the blue flowers he sought in the baths? The blue fogbanks in the steamrooms? I think not. The blue sun that rises in your mind during orgasm? Perhaps. More likely, it was the thrill and the anonymity and the freedom from responsibility. The being alone with that unconditional sex. Those moments at the bath were his only freedom. All else was duty.

At first it was beyond consideration that I follow him *into* the baths. That would have ended it between us. I had had some frank talks with Nell about safe sex. That was not the issue. He knew. He claimed he was in no danger. I believe that Nell felt that life had already been so harsh on him that God could not, would not deliver such a fresh and dreadful, brutal, final blow as AIDS upon him. But we all feel that way, don't we, we gay things.

No. I would not go into the baths after him. Somehow, knowing he was in there with all of that sex did not

wound me. It was his going home to his lover that was god-awful.

I jested with Nell about all of this. About the disease. I said to Nell: You don't believe in the Catholic God, in the conventional God, yet you believe that some God withholds his hand from the last, incoherent opportunity to laugh at you? You believe and you don't believe.

"Oh," he said. "I believe. God could come and laugh at me. But if so, at least I know it is God and no other." And he asked of me, "Is this Catholic God of yours not totally aware?" and I said of course, that is in the nature of God. Total awareness. Omniscience.

And he answered me, "Total awareness is also a definition of insanity, of psychosis. That is the God we both believe in. I do not subscribe to God's love, only to man's limited luck in escaping irrational fate. I do not believe in the efficacy of prayer," he told me, "but only in the efficacy of the odds. Einstein," he continued, "did not believe that God played dice with the universe. I do." And that was that with Little Nell. It was in the mystery of the blue flowers that he entered eternity. By the garden gate, so to speak.

One evening I could no longer hold myself back. I was drunk that evening. Very drunk. I stood up the street from the baths under the eave of a parking lot in the rain and I was miserable for him and in some moment of utter loss of reason and control, in abandon, I crossed the street and entered the baths. I repeat, I was quite drunk. Certainly it was the most terrifying moment in my life, for I risked everything with that stupid decision. There was a later, worse moment, with Nell, but by then I risked nothing. It was total awareness that final time.

And so I entered the baths.

I went quickly into a private room and closed the door and took off my clothing. I stood ridiculously in a towel, peeking out the door into those dark hallways of the baths. I dared go no further. I realized that I was trapped.

Little Nell would pass by the room now and then. He could see nothing, only those gauzy outlines one sees in the tubs. I knew he did not see me. Such a smooth body he had, thin and silken, he moved through those deep shadows, like Orpheus in search of Eurydice in the very bowels of Hell.

It was frightfully crowded that night. Many old men.

Finally, with the encouragement from a pint of brandy I had smuggled in under my coat, I slipped from the room and followed him, keeping far

behind should he turn. It was very dark and there were corridors and rooms and alleyways and nooks galore. I had only to turn aside to avoid him.

He went up a stairway and I followed. He went down a hallway in which there were numerous cubicles with glory holes at hip level. There were many men there jostling and passing to and fro. He entered one of those cubicles and pressed his hips against the wall. He leaned his head forward on to the wall and closed his eyes, waiting. And I saw my chance.

I went round the wall and knelt there, fearing every moment he would withdraw. He did not. I took him into my mouth. He was soft and limp and salty.

Oh, I drew him into my mouth and with my hand I reached up and cradled his soft testicles and then he responded and he was stiff and young and fecund and exquisite and onward I went, caressing him with my hand and my mouth and tongue and weeping, my friend, weeping in the majesty of it. I nursed him as if his milk were my mythic youth made palpable. And then I heard his sad cry. 'Oooh.' Brief. Painful. And he spilled himself into my mouth, sweetness, glory indeed. Oh, I thought, plant within me blue flowers by your seed. And I tell you, he did, he did.

And it was over. I fled the place. I went home and fell again to my knees and thanked God shamelessly for the gift that had come from that risk and that night. In a bathhouse.

Strange. Strange how Kostandis could read the feelings and portents in the air. He must have seen that love in my face for it was about this time he chose to make his move, first against Little Nell, then against me. He had been standing up there for months on that balcony, feeding Bouboulina and observing us.

One day when I was otherwise occupied, Kostandis descended into the garden. He was the serpent in Eden I tell you. He spoke softly to Little Nell, whispering promises and describing gifts and situations which no doubt both troubled and tantalized Little Nell. Nell was an explorer, a searcher, a voyager. Kosta also hissed and lisped certain defamations against my character and Nell kept his counsel and listened and recorded all of the evidence. Kostandis suggested that Nell might do a little work for him upstairs, perhaps make a selection of greenery for those lightfilled upper rooms. It is true, Kostandis could not keep a cactus alive. God knows how Bouboulina has sur-

vived as long as she has. On neighborhood cats?

Little Nell agreed to go upstairs. You can well imagine my horror, losing Nell to that ultimate horror, Kostandis. God only knows what Kostandis might have to offer. Anything, I knew, to wound and humiliate me.

They remained upstairs for some time, for a very long time, in fact. Time enough for my pain to unravel into rage, time enough for me to make a decision to murder Kostandis. Oh, I knew it would be an easy thing to accomplish. Everyone knew the kinds of creatures Kostandis brought to the house at night. Everyone knew of Kostandis and his drugs and drinking and his blackouts. I would simply go up one night and find him unconscious and cut his throat. That simple. The police would not bother to investigate. The police had all too frequently been summoned upstairs to rescue Kostandis, to investigate robberies, to listen to his drunken tirades and accusations against our neighbors and against me. I would simply kill him. It was that simple. I had no reservations about it and no feelings of guilt. His attempt to seduce my Little Nell had turned me into a mad thing, a killer.

But homicide was not necessary. Finally Little Nell came down the stairs, laughing. He said that Kostandis had spent an hour attempting to bribe him into sex and then . . . "Do you know what he has up there?" Nell asked me. I assumed it was the standard whips, chains, pulleys, levers and weights, leather gadgetry and presumably soundproof walls. But no. Nell told me that in the tower Kostandis had installed a high-powered telescope. And by means of the telescope Nell was shown the hundreds of bedrooms and kitchens and living rooms and toilets of the neighborhood. In at least two bedrooms he observed coitus, one standard heterosexual, which he thought exciting, and one homosexual, clumsy and ursine. Kostandis, of course, attempted to feel him up on these notes and Nell told him to buzz off. Not only that, Kostandis had in a notebook a very detailed schedule of who did what and at what time. It was *Rear Window*, my dear, but much more sinister. No wonder Kostandis knew every secret in the neighborhood. With that telescope you could read the labels on soup cans five blocks away! Can you imagine! Well, Nell couldn't and said as much. He told Kostandis the whole scheme was disgusting and probably, in fact, *certainly* illegal and he wanted no part

of it. And with that he returned downstairs, laughing uproariously, for he had scared the daylight out of Kostandis.

My dear, Kostandis was utterly dithered. That evening, waiting until Nell had gone away, of course, he thundered down the stairs and burst into my kitchen and announced that Nell had stolen a diamond ring from his dresser. I was furious. We were both furious. Were we not both old men we would have had a donnybrook right there on the kitchen floor. Instead I grabbed him by his lapels and *physically* threw him out on the landing. He strode right back in my apartment, accusing Nell of all manner of hideous things and I was left with naught but the supreme insult, I threw a glass of wine in his face. Such an uproar! He of course called the police and they came and shook their heads and threatened both of us with arrest if we didn't pipe down and that was that except that from that moment on all communication between us ceased *glia panda*, which in Greek is 'forever.'

Since then we speak only through our attorneys, and we speak frequently, which costs both of us a fortune, but such is warfare. Kostandis sued me for a dissolution of our business contract, citing irreconcilable differences, but, other than his lust for my Nell, he could not cite one other irreconcilability and was chided by the judge for bringing a frivolous suit. Now *that* was Mildred's day to hoot. He tried to sue me again over some piffly thing and I shut him down over that also. I have Kostandis legally chained like Samson to the millwheel of our contract.

I do not for a moment believe Nell could have stolen his diamond ring or anything else, for the simple reason Nell did not seem to have the slightest idea of the worth of things. He was wholly and utterly abstract. He would have made a wonderful Catholic for he thought in universals and classical proofs and had this sense of vast historical forces and events, all of which sort of reduced him to a grain of sand on the beach, a zero, that which the moving hand for one moment wrote and then moved on. His parents had a lot to do with that—they told him he was shit and worthless and threw him into the street. Therefore he looked to ultimate sources for strength and enlightenment. The law of gravity was much more holy to him than the laws of God, simply because he could prove the law of gravity and it worked universally. He had no such faith in the laws of God. For good reason. No, Little Nell

was honest. *He did not steal.* Others of my brood did indeed rip Kostandis off and good enough for Kostandis. Kostandis' motives have always been his undoing, mine my vindication.

Oh dear, we now approach the last of Little Nell. Dickens would shrivel with horror at the drama.

For nearly a year Little Nell and I were companions. I was exclusively his, though he did not know it. I was superficially a man of business, rents, loans, real estate deals, mortgages, that sort of thing. I must have appeared to Nell as a busy, preoccupied but generous old Auntie. Perhaps Nell felt slight guilt, knowing that I was in such superb passion for him, and him incapable of response, physical response. O, for an extraordinary moment in those bleak tubs I had tasted the heavenly, forbidden fruit. It is no small wonder that Adam preferred *that* to walks with God in the cool of the evening. But never again. I knew all there was to know of him. Except for his lover, whom he did not suspect I knew about. He never mentioned the lover. I appreciated his consideration.

But, like Aschenbach, I prowled behind his life like a Federal tax penalty—an unseen menace. Such a busy man! How shameful! My every waking hour was spent in tracking this boy who would never, could never love me.

My relationship with Kostandis was madness incarnadine. Every day the accusations! I was ruining his property values, his business contacts, his physical, emotional and mental health. He rained lawsuits upon me again. He shouted obscenities and threats at Little Nell from his porch on high. He even coached that filthy bird to shout obscenities. Thief—whore—liar—criminal. You would not have believed the language. There was no stopping him. The man was as obsessed as I, I tell you. This whole house was half seas over.

I decided to retaliate. I brought a court order against Kostandis, a restraining order. That shut him up briefly. But, alas, it soon proved unnecessary.

Little Nell disappeared without a trace, without a word, without a warning. For months no calls, no letter. Nothing. Gone.

I went to USF and they told me he had simply disappeared and no longer showed up for his classes. He had been given a blanket incomplete for grades. I could not endure that pain. Fear. Terror. With the same horror I felt upon approaching the entrance to the baths

that night, I approached the apartment house where he lived with his lover. Gone. They were gone. Little Nell's name gone from the directory. The building manager would tell me nothing. He also lied, saying he had never learned the name of Nell's lover. He did not pry into his tenant's affairs. No forwarding address, no notice. One morning—Poof!—Gone.

***As I walked I felt
naked to everyone on
the street. I walked in
the truth of myself—
a foolish, old man
bereft of any pride,
who had allowed
himself the latitude
one last massive
passion. And it had
destroyed me.***

I imagined that the two of them had committed some intricate, clever crime—a bank robbery, perhaps a swindle. But no such crime was reported in the papers. Where could they have gone? I went to the police. They shrugged. No trace of Nelson.

Imagine for a moment if you will my loss, my sense of betrayal, of abandonment, of grief, of despair. Once again I considered murder. I could have murdered Nell for the hell he had caused me. I hated the boy then, for mocking me. I did not want to be *nothing* to him. *But Something!* Somehow, *something!*

And then the moment of ultimate recognition. Finally, I saw myself mirrored by my frenzy and my despair, I saw myself as I truly was. It was one of those pivotal moments about which your whole life gathers and the sheer force of it, the utter density of your life, its mass and energy simply explode and thrust you beyond all illusion, all doubt, all hope, all fear. Finally and forever you are beyond a point of no return and you are cleansed and you are who you are. Heaven? Hell? It is for you to decide that. For God answered Moses *I AM WHO AM!* Certitude! The end of fear.

You, sir, have such fear in your eyes. It is the one constant I perceive in you.

You smile, you frown, you are concerned, your attention drifts, yet all of it, all I see and note of you, I see as passing beneath a sheet of ice, as if I were kneeling upon a frozen river and far below the ice I see the waters rushing on. Fear. Fear. Oh yes, we gay things, we have stood up to society and we have overcome. We have overcome our fear of being *strange*. We no longer fear life. We no longer fear *them*. And yet a darker fear has spread upon us. All of us. The gay and the straight and the rich and the poor and the powerful and the weak. No, I do not speak of that disease, that virus, but of something worse. We are at last united by one, vast, unfathomable fear, universal, incomprehensible—fear of who and what we truly are. *For we have no more lies to tell one another!* The falsification of our lives is no longer possible. Our every footfall, our every word is noted somewhere by someone. For good or for ill we are left with lives demanding a very careful and thorough truth. The mighty are falling, sir, and the humble know precisely what they always knew. The quotidian is upon us and at last, my fiend, we are one and we are naked. Dear Auden said it. *We must love one another or die.* But we must love the truth in each other and cease our lust for the lie.

I walked slowly home from Nell's empty apartment, from that doorway I had so sneakily observed for so many months in rains and in moonlight. As I walked I felt naked to everyone on the street. I walked in the truth of myself—a foolish, old man bereft of any pride, who had allowed himself the latitude of one last massive passion. And it had destroyed me. *I Am Who Am.* An utter fool. And so what. I accepted myself totally as a fool. I will not hate myself any longer. I never hated Little Nell. I bled for him.

Only in the loss of Little Nell did I finally reveal to myself the long loss of my life, how I had followed the forking paths again and again down into self-indulgence and self-deception and that is why I had never found in myself what Little Nell discovered. Never had I in life come upon a voice that spoke the truth to me and me alone, as those blue flowers and that Schubert spoke to Little Nell. Irving, you are good; Irving, you are decent; Irving, you are loved. I returned to the garden that day and sat alone here. Loss. Loss. Loss.

And yet, Nell had led me into a mystical experience. Is that word too fraught with betrayal for you? *Chacun a son gout, m'sieur.* My soul is no larger

than this wine glass. Nell filled it up. I returned to this garden to accept the total loss of Nell but what I knew, as only one can know a mystical experience, without doubt and without any use for the experience, I knew that finally I *had* known love. My love for Nell. If that isn't a mystical experience, then 10,000 years of worshiping rocks is down the drain.

Now you, sir, are a man of contracts. What was the contract between the god of the blue flowers and the god in the blue heart of Nell? Is love the contract between Man and God? "I have set a bow in the clouds..." thus sayeth crazy God to poor old soaked Noah. Answer me, sir, why is God free to break that contract and why is man condemned should he do so? The law of love is a contract, is it not? The law of God is a contract, is it not? It had been broken, my friend of prudence, broken. Breached.

How quickly had I pointed out the mote in Kostandis' eye and ignored the beam in mine own. Kostandis and I are alike as peas in a pod. And like peas in a pod we lay beside one another in a bed for twenty five years. Through the years of our greatest promise and potential we lay there facing upwards, waiting for love, facing the passing clouds. Identical. But for that moment of Nell. Now I know who I am and Kostandis does not know who he is. Whatever I say of Kostandis I say of myself, yet I now accept the truth that I am an unsalvageable old fool. Kostandis accepts nothing. He continues to destroy. Yet it is Kostandis, not I, who has the capacity for further happiness. Kostandis can yet dream. I am left with truth. There's no room for fancy in that.

Yet, some good has come of Little Nell. I have made a pact with myself and this unfaithful God I go on believing in out of fear. I have sworn I would never again make use of another human being for my own pleasure. I would never again trade on the misfortunes of others to buttress those walls I had erected against death. I would not run away from myself. Does not all of this loss, I ask you, all of this fear, I ask of you, does it not, all of it, spell Death? I ask you?

My blue flowers are now my life. My blue flowers have enlightened me. My blue flowers have given me the courage to accept peace, which is death. What, after all, is Christendom, but the commerce of death?

Months and months went by. I sat alone here in the garden. Even Kostandis knew better than to intrude on my

solitude. Even his filthy bird cowered at my glance. I lifted my heart to a God I did not understand and prayed for Little Nell. I did not pray for his return, but only that he be safe and happy wherever he was. For many months I prayed like a saint for Little Nell. I sought my answers in 'Ecclesiastes.' *For in much wisdom is much grief. And he that increaseth in knowledge increaseth in sorrows.* 'The Book of Job.' *I place my hand upon my mouth. I shall say no more forever.* I decided then to move away, to get as far away as I could from the reminders of my life, my whole, foolish life. *Atque in perpetuum, frater.*

And then one evening, a lovely, quiet evening last spring, my phone rang. I answered. A familiar voice, slight and distant, sweet, simple, said "Go into the garden." Then that person hung up.

If stones could of themselves lift and soar like hawks it would have been no less a miracle than that supreme joy that flooded my grey heart. I took champagne and glasses, and some little chocolate truffles I had stashed away for a moment of sudden delight and went down into the garden. I sat beneath the clear, moonlit sky among the subtle blue of the garden lights, among these cornflowers, this lilac. I waited and before too long of a time I heard a key, *his* key, Little Nell's key, turn in the lock of the garden gate.

He had returned!

He stood quietly, over there, near the gate. He did not come closer. I believe he was afraid.

"I thought you were dead," I said to him, or rather, at his shadow there.

"It is my friend who is dead," he replied. "I had this friend. He died. I had to attend to that. My friend was sick for a year. AIDS. I stuck by him. It took a year. And then it just took one night." That is how he put it. And still he stood by the garden gate, unwilling to approach me, unwilling to come into the light. He went on talking. "I went home with my friend's body, to his funeral. Hannibal, Missouri. Isn't that something? I stayed for a while. I saw the fence that Tom Sawyer painted. It is still there. I saw Huck Finn's Mississippi. I saw a steamboat. I walked and walked through fields of waving grain. Oh beautiful for spacious skies. America, America. God bless America." That was what he said, standing there in the shadows. I thought he might be drunk. His voice was awful and vacant and haunted.

"You may come and live with me," I said to him. "As a friend. We will live

in a house with a yard, far away from Kostandis and the past. I want to help you. You should not be alone now."

"I wouldn't be a burden for long," he said. "Not too long. Thank you for being my friend. I have no one now but you and I am sorry I am not the friend you need. Loving is not an easy thing for me. I am a beginner. I only know a few chords."

And I said, "Come here. Have a glass of champagne. Talk to me and tell me of it. I may not understand, but I care." I wanted him to know that. "I care."

"I have learned to care," he responded. "That is why I returned. It was to *that*."

"Come and sit," I once again pleaded with him. "Have some champagne. You are home now."

It was that word, sir, that turned in his lock. For is it not home we forever seek, you and I, that from which we go forth upon the planet to sow and to sing, to draw many-colored veils across our shoulders and to understand that our brother has mountains in his heart and that upon him, too, frail being, are hurled the storms from out of the sea. A home for Little Nell. He took a step closer. To know there is some home for us, someone there who awaits us with joy banked up like careful fires, to return to that place, that person from the glowing sunsets, from lakes where that loon cries, to return home. It is our finest and fullest desire. There is no love that is not contained in that word—home.

Nell approached this table. I held out a glass of champagne to him. How defenseless and desirable he was then, how fragile there among his blue lights. His arms hung to his sides. He looked down at me through the shadows.

It was then I saw the bruise on his face. Lifting up from this very chair towards him, I saw that it was not a bruise.

Little Nell began to unbutton his shirt. His shoulders were also covered with the bruises, the lesions. Do you know what they are, those cancers? The sarcomas?

I said, No, please do not open your shirt. But he by this time had stripped the shirt down and it hung from his waist. The boyish body was that of a leopard. "Yes," he said, "yes, it is necessary I show you." The sarcomas covered that boy's body. Dark and deadly, the insufferable parasites, the notes of horror.

"God has come," said Little Nell to me. "God has come into me. God is upon me. See his blue flowers?" □

IN REVIEW

It's a cheap shot, I know, but if Abandon Pictures' *Knight Out With the Boys* is the great hope of porn its director represents it to be in its companion feature, a backstage look at the making of the video feature, then its producers have titled the company all too aptly—but with a verb, not an adjective.

It's not that the *Knight Out With the Boys* isn't sexy—I couldn't begin to count the ways it made me squirt. That's why I'm so exasperated—*Knight Out With the Boys* is simultaneously one of the best and one of the worst videos I've seen. The best, because its sex is unflagging and unfailingly good; sleazy and excessive. The worst, because of those damned dialogue scenes that have been almost randomly inserted within the video; extraneous and atrocious.

Still, *Knight Out* pushes enough buttons per minute, with enough finger, tongue, and dildo probed assholes, intricately novel intertwinings of lusty bodies, and bewitchingly imperious cocks, to rate high on a short list of flicks that encourage repeated viewings.

I'm especially fond of the boy who plays Randy (without mug shots accompanying their names in the credits, I can't identify most of the players). Even though Chad Knight gets his name in the title, he's only a cameo player. It's Randy's intense sexuality, unique physical skills, and overall screen time which should earn him the starring position.

In the opening scene alone, Randy proves his star quality by sitting repeatedly and with artful abandon on a large dildo. He tops that act by impaling himself with ecstatic mien on a Jeff Stryker-replica dildo that's been attached to the front end of a rowing machine. Imagine the Dionysian dimension this could add to your exercise program.



Rusty Rhodes, Mark Andrews, and Jon Vincent in Gino Colbert's "The Bi Analyst," from Stallion Video.



It's as fake on video as in this picture of Vladimir Correa and Ted Cox in Gino Colbert's "The Cherry," from Stallion Video

And imagine, after Randy has churned the oars to splinters in completion of his act, his body crumpling in divine bliss—with that overblown battering ram still clamped between his cheeks.

The subsequent scenes of *Knight Out* maintain this fervor, as well as the emphasis on butt play. Recent favorite Dallas Taylor is lovingly rimmed by Jason Ross before topping him, and is then plunged into a three way. A tall young man called Buddy makes a claim for stardom by revealing a firm and long cock he uses with long and mean strokes to top Taylor. Then all of the aforementioned invite everyone they know to an orgy.

This orgy occupies the rest of the video, with intercut footage of provocative dildo play, a crotch shaving, several strenuous group suck-and-fucks, and some thoroughly expert rimming. One scene is particularly memorable, and wonderfully shot—suspended overhead in a cage, a delicious blonde squats, his ass yawning to the slurping supplicant below.

So *Knight Out* gets high ratings for picturesque and nearly continuous sex. But the video is faulted by confused continuity, lack of multiple cameras for the taping, and, worst of all, a basic conception which wildly exceeds its need. There isn't a credit for the script writer—and who can blame whoever it was for wanting anonymity (although we can thank the faulty sound recording for not forcing us to hear most of the inane dialogue). Yet who wants or needs the intrusive, badly scripted scenes which interrupt this video.

What are we to make of the scene in which a facially disfigured gnome is refused entrance to the orgy? A departing orgy-goer agrees to go home with him, however, declaring he's through with casual excess, and will embrace true love—and the Hollywood home—offered by the troll. Has censorship gotten so bad that this was included as socially redeeming material? Inserted in the midst of the orgy footage, it's disruptive, badly written and self-consciously acted.

There's another scene, which at least comes after the final credits, in which the drag queen door person—attractive herself, though an unwanted diversion from the orgy—shoots and kills a robber. What's death got to do with it?

These wayward minutes can be dealt with in the heat of viewing—that's what your scanner button is for, after all. But

why were these blemishes conceived and filmed in the first place? Is the porn industry really the home of the brain dead?

These and other burning issues are addressed in the unusual companion feature to *Knight Out*, an hour long documentary about the making of the video called *Madness and Method*. So what's most amazing about *Knight Out With the Boys* isn't its high arousal quotient, but that it's the first, as far as I know, kiss and tell. A second video crew taped the taping of *Knight Out*, eavesdropping on the dishy backstage goings-on, and presenting brief yet revealing interviews with the director and some cast members.

It's fun to watch the feature first, and then compare its scenes with the documentary's peek at their filming. You'll see how hard porn performers work, how skilled at their trade the best of them are, and what they're thinking while their hips and the cameras are grinding.

But most revealing, and disconcerting, is the interview with director John Travis. During it, he confirms our worst fears about the industry. A porn veteran who began work in the field 28 years ago when loops were the thing, he's about as practiced and knowledgeable a pro as there is. Yet he seems sadly inadequate.

In explaining the time and budget restraints within which he's forced to work, Travis lets us see the numerous obstacles to his craft. But in narrating his practices, particularly the laissez-faire attitude he exhibits towards performance, Travis exposes his own limitations. He claims to be interested in making a product that will "endure." Yet he okayed the script's stupidities, accepted as chance the botched taping of a climactic moment, and must have supervised the dis-continuity of the editing.

Or am I too harsh? Travis' reputation and skill, he tells us, allow him to work only on big budget porno. This way he's assured his name will appear on a quality product. So what backfired on him here? Either he made this video or someone else took over after him, taping additional scenes and hatcheting the continuity. For it is only the way the final cut was put together that damages the show; without the plot scenes, *Knight Out* could have been a non-stop sexarama. As far as we can see in the campy, sadly revealing exposé of *Mad-*

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ness and Method, too many faulty executive decisions botched the art of this video.

In the end, these videos show us two things. The first I find kind of touching. That is that despite the plague, there's a continuity of gay male sexuality. It isn't the activities depicted in this video, but the age of the practitioners which surprises me in *Knight Out*. This is a sexuality I connected with older men, who have most usually been seen purveying it.

One of the performers in *Knight Out* acknowledges the educational value of video. That is confirmed here, in *Knight Out*, where we see a legacy of the Stonewall generation—sex pioneered by men now in their late 30s, celebrated in this video by boys in their early 20s.

The second thing we see in these videos is the hopelessness of commercial porno. If this is what they make when they're trying, it's no wonder most porno is so trying.

Now let me tell you the curious story of Gino Colbert, the lascivious porn star who recently began producing and directing his own erotic videos.

I eagerly looked forward to Colbert's directorial debut. Who better than a sex performer to understand, and capture on video, the performances of other sex stars? And who better than this most sleazy, abandoned, dirty talking, growling sex animal to encourage other performers to give their excited all to the video cameras?

Maybe I was wrong. Perhaps it was Colbert's effortful attempts at making really slick, professional video. But his first half-dozen videos all took place in the same room, an elaborately fake bedroom set with identity-less rented furniture. And no matter who was performing, or why they were having sex, it was the same routine. It might be okay for a couple of scenes in a video to repeat their make-out sequence identically; you'd never notice. But when every scene in six different shows is the same, you begin to wonder. What sort of Von Stroheim is barking out orders behind the camera? And why would he want this robotic uniformity?

Yet treated as individual scenes, the sex was invariably good. Colbert hires good people, and there's not a single sequence in any of the videos that let me down. You just can't watch them in succession.

Oh—you also can't listen to the plots.

Another attempt at classy porn? These videos—*Ram Man 3*, *Bi Spy*, *Horsemeat*, *The Cockeyed Eagle*, *Brotherly Love*—all feature amazingly convoluted plots about espionage, blackmail, jewel thieves and counterfeiters. And they're all played in high style, as if they were Noel Coward. But there have never been dialogue scenes in porn that lasted as long or were as stupidly scripted as these. I'm sorry to say it; I like Colbert. But these ideas and lines are too idiotic to be quoted. They're worth watching, particularly the spy titles, for the hilarity of their wretchedness.

Still, there's the sex. Colbert has a repertory company of players who show up in all his videos. Delicious red head Mark Andrews, with his washboard stomach, creamy complexion, seductive eyes and sensuous mouth, has never looked better than in *Busted* and other Colbert titles. Rod Garetto, with his flashing smile, warm skin and massive meat, is a throbber in several of the videos, especially taking a dildo from a hot dame in a bi feature, or getting deeply rimmed in *Horsemeat*.

Butch Taylor shows up in a couple Colbert titles, most notably *Bi Spy*, where he makes out with a grizzled, butchly bearded man in a memorable scene. And Colbert comes through with porn's best new stars. B.J. Slater makes his debut in *Horsemeat*, unveiling a cock that's going to make history, and the technique to back it up. And Chance Caldwell—jees, help me. He's got a Gold's Gym kind of body, just slabs and slabs of muscle. Blond hair, bruiser buttocks, and a boner that's fat and solid. I love it when this mountain of a man bottoms out.

So Colbert's titles are worth checking out. Skip the plot, ignore the middle class settings, and don't watch too much at one time. Individually, the sex scenes are fine. Although I still would like to know why or how so many performers of wildly varying tastes and skills could be mashed into such conformity.

And give Colbert a chance to grow. Maybe he'll loosen up and produce videos that match his own low down performing style. He's getting closer to it in some recent titles from Stallion Video (1-800-874-8960). Foremost among these are *Male Taboo* and *A Scent of Man*.

There's a fine cast in *Male Taboo*. In two scenes, Chris Stone, sporting a tight cockring, plays with Aaron Scott and then whiskered Michael Parks. Scott is

losing his dewy-new look; he's sporting sideburns and a new tattoo of Oriental design. The boy's becoming a man, and a good one, at that. He gets to rim a writhing Rod Garetto to filth; Erich Lange and Lon Flex should be given an award for their turn-about double fuck; and several other combinations of men, unencumbered by plot considerations, keep the action rolling.

A Scent of Man is similar. If there's a plot, it's just enough to get us to the next scene. You just can't criticize a video that starts with a dude pulling a cute guy into his bedroom and saying, "This is my room, this is my bed, and this," (he pauses significantly to pat it) "is my cock." Chance Caldwell and B.J. Slater top the cast, and each other. Joey Stefano's in a scene or two, and there's a great four way.

Man Handler is almost as good, with furry Les Stine and fat-dicked Brett Winters launching the show. There's a touch too much plot, about lovers double crossing each other, but with Rappalo and Johnny Rahm sleazing around, I can endure it.

You might want to avoid *The Cherry*, with its cheap sets, lack of continuity, and surfeit of army plot (will that sergeant ever stop screaming?). Still, it does have a standout scene, with Colbert himself back on screen for a torrid tussle with Rod Garetto.

Those of you with a taste for the unusual should try *She Males Undercover*, which mistakenly bills itself as a transsexual show. These girls may have boobs, but they still have their dicks. They have sex with each other, with full-fledged boys (Roberto Arias), and with full-fledged girls (Sharon Kane). And don't miss Colbert as an undercover cop—he's a hoot in full drag! Especially smearing his lipsticked mouth across Arias' cock. There's an awful plot, with bad actors forced to mouth bad lines, and the underlying concept that transsexuals can only be hookers.

Colbert's turning out quite a lot of videos, and slowly letting his hair down. For a man who promises to loose control when he's having sex, he seems too much in control as a director. But as he loosens up, his performers look less like un-interested professionals, and more like turned on people caught in the act. He seems to be gaining confidence, and his videos are dumping their contrived stories and fake sets and beginning to just dish up the sex. And that's tasty.

—John F. Karr

BOOKS

Although announced as a joint reading of new works by novelist Steven Saylor and pornographer Aaron Travis, when the event transpired, there was only one author on hand. I don't mean that as a put down of either one, however. It's just that this reading and book signing was more signally a coming out party, at which it was finally, incontrovertibly demonstrated that Aaron Travis exists only as the *nom de porno* of the mischievous Saylor.

Boyishly handsome at 35, with fine-boned features and even finer, silky black hair just touched with graying temples, Saylor is currently gaining increased recognition as an essayist and novelist, whose specialty is a new series of mysteries set in ancient Rome. The first of these, *Roman Blood* (St. Martin's Press, \$19.95), was rapturously greeted by mystery fans, and is a sexy, fascinating visit to a Rome that is as tumultuously immediate as your favorite dancehall on a Saturday night. Saylor's essays have appeared in numerous gay and mainstream magazines, and his forthright memoir is a highlight of the outstanding anthology, *Hometowns: Gay Men Write About Where They Belong*.

But the works Saylor has written under the name Aaron Travis have been popular for a long time. Of Travis' various erotic writings, legend-in-his-own-lifetime Sam Steward said, "Travis writes with a golden pen;" John Preston called Travis "the bulwark of gay pornography for the past decade;" and in an earlier review in *Manifest* magazine, I proclaimed, "Aaron Travis is the best dick-stiffening author in the land."

Travis is the smut monger behind such hits as *Slaves of the Empire* (blond twin brothers endure the sex-slavery of Roman Masters) and two self-published chap books of *Wrestling Tales* (pro wrestlers pound their opponents' puds). Originally written over the period of a decade for *Drummer*, *Advocate Men*, *Malebox*, and other butch-guy rags, two of these classic cocktales are included in the just-published anthology of gay erotic writings, *Flesh and the Word* (Dutton/Plume, \$23 hardcover; \$13 paperback), and all of them have been gratefully and at long last collected

in a paperback called *The Flesh Fables* (Fire Island Press, \$9.95).

The scandalously sexy *Flesh and the Word*—if it had been funded by the NEA, the book's editor, authors and even publisher would be strung up by now—includes Travis' famous "Blue Light." In *The Flesh Fables*, this story is joined by the quintessential trucker novella "Eden," the brutal "Crown of Thorns," and four other stories.

"I feel a little odd about the prospect of reading material that's supposed to give you a hard-on while we're all sitting fully dressed in a room," Saylor confided when we talked shortly before his reading. "My porn is such a private experience for me, it's so intimate between me and the reader."

Then why, most people would wonder, the distancing shield of a pen name? After all, with his real name once listed at the top of the masthead as the editor of *Drummer*, you'd hardly think authorship of its fiction would call for secrecy.

"When I wrote about my hometown for *Hometowns*," Saylor explained, "I changed the town's name because I felt presumptuous talking about certain people in the town—it's so small anybody could recognize who they are. I was protecting them."

"Similarly, when I wrote my porn, I adopted a pseudonym as more of a convention, as part of a tradition. It has advantages, especially in helping to break through what a young filmmaker friend of mine calls 'the barrier of shame.' Travis, in my mind, can say and tell whatever stories he wants."

"I call a pseudonym, 'the lie that allows the truth.' I don't mind people knowing I'm Aaron Travis. But there's just something about that extra—I don't want to call it a shield. It's something that removes you a little from it so that you're able to tell more of the truth."

What is "the truth?"

"The wholesome forms have never interested me. The extreme, absolute, the censored forms are what interests me."

The extreme, to Saylor, means S/M. Yet in Travis' hands it's an unстереotypical, transformed S/M, marked by an absence of the usual props. There's never a whip, a hood or a handcuff, nary a gag or butt plug. Saylor is interested in a psychological place, "a gray nadir" where men are "enslaved and unsexed." His stories attain their overwhelming intensity specifically because they do not depend on the standard buzz words

FLESH AND THE WORD

AN ANTHOLOGY

OF EROTIC

WRITING

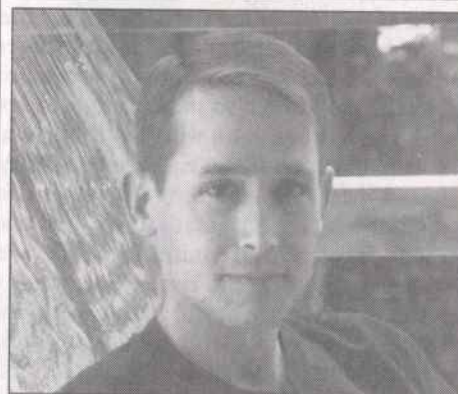
ANNE RICE,

EDMUND WHITE,

ALAN HOLLINGHURST,

AARON TRAVIS AND 29 OTHERS

EDITED BY JOHN PRESTON



"I've never lost my faith in the power of lust and the purifying flame of lust. Because what lust can do is to draw the drudgery out from inside of you and just burn it away."

Steven Saylor/Aaron Travis

The Flesh FABLES



the erotic fiction of
AARON TRAVIS

and props to signal our response. Instead, they infuse our being with a contagious haze of obsession and possession.

"Props aren't the focus," he says. "It's the dynamic. "And although themes can be found in hindsight, Saylor disavows them. "My writing is an internal monologue where I explore my fantasies. In many of my stories, there is a theme about sex being awesome, dangerous, powerful, and yet one is attracted to it. There are ways of being able to approach the very heart of that danger, and yet somehow get away from it.

"The characters face danger. They grow in some way. But most of all, they've had the visceral experience of lust. They have faced it and gone through it.

"I've never lost my faith in the power of lust and the purifying flame of lust. Because what lust can do is to draw the drudgery out from inside of you and just burn it away. And that's a wonderful thing, a wonderful experience."

In exploring his fantasies in print over the years, Saylor feels he has worked out many of his demons, submitting to them or banishing them.

"I haven't stopped writing porn," he said, "but I've slowed down. I used to do it because it was my muse. It was what I was interested in and it inspired me."

Yet the natural process of aging, coupled with the presence of AIDS, has wrought changes in the author's outlook. "I got a lot of that out of my system, to where the stories would yin-yang back and forth. I'd write some horrendous thing, and then I'd write a sweeter story, like one of the last 'Getting Timchenko,' which to me is a story of sexual healing."

It was a progression which also led to a greater interest in non-sexual fiction. An avid Roman history buff, when Saylor found the actual summing up which Cicero delivered at a murder trial, his imagination was fired and he wrote *Roman Blood*. Its success has committed him to a series which features its sleuth, the wise and risqué Gordianus the Finder.

But not to worry; Saylor hasn't abandoned gay sex. *Roman Blood* begins with a sentence sure to prick up the ears of gay readers, and although it unravels a basically heterosexual mystery, it wouldn't reflect Roman life as excitingly as it does without several strongly gay elements and a general appreciation of things masculine. And Saylor promises his second Roman mystery will feature more gay sex and relationships.

If your bookseller doesn't have *The Flesh Tables*, it's available by mail order from Mr. X Press at 1711 Addison Street, Berkeley, CA 94703. The impact of its stories—especially the pulverizing ritual of submission, "Blue Light"—is confirmed by the fact that only four authors included in *Flesh and the Word* are honored with the inclusion of more than one of their works—Sam Steward, Anne Rice, Edmund White, and Aaron Travis.

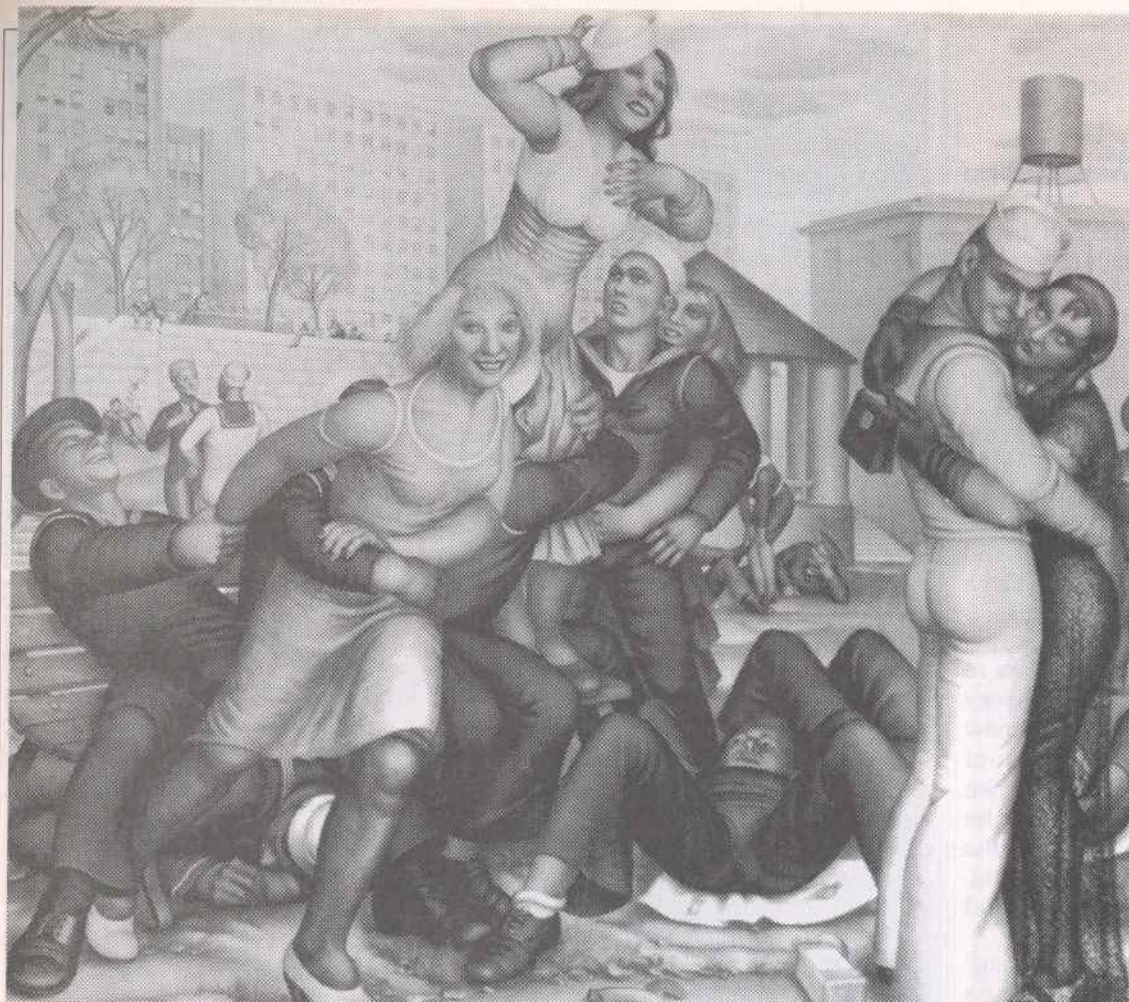
These few names demonstrate the range of *Flesh and the Word*, from the literately written porn of Steward to the porny lit of White. The contributions of Anne Rice and Pat Califia offer the unique experience of women writing gay porn and editor John Preston sees to it that pioneers in the field have pride of place, followed by cult figures of the underground and best sellers of the mainstream. The collection, bound together by the brief, cogent remarks of Preston, concludes with some strongly political post-AIDS writings.

Flesh and the Word is a fascinating look at the course of gay consciousness over a period of fifty years. It's also an arousingly hard-on, boldly right-on milestone in the continuing fight for the legitimacy of sexual expression.



The counterpoint of a pick-up
in Paul Cadmus' painting, *Bicyclists*.

Steven Saylor and Aaron Travis. What's remarkable about "their" work is the evenness of voice, the smartness of detail, the pleasure of good storytelling. Historic or contemporary, overtly erotic or contained—though his authorship is split between two names, he's hardly a split personality.



Paul Cadmus'
"SHORE LEAVE,"
something for everyone.

Here's an irreplaceable book you'll linger over through the years. Yet even though it's the last word in so many ways, there's one more thing that could be asked of the lavish career retrospective of the painter, **Paul Cadmus by Lincoln Kirstein** (Pomegranate Books, paperbound, \$30; Chameleon Books, hardbound, \$50).

The oversize volume reproduces in vibrantly true colors almost every one of Cadmus' paintings; includes chapters on his drawings and etchings; has a Complete Catalogue of Paintings, a lengthy biography and extensive bibliography; includes in the margins of its broad pages the hardly marginal, first hand recollections of the artist himself, along with selections from E.M. Forster's letters to the artist, and scores of excerpted reviews and the commentary by other artists and writers; and reprints Lincoln Kirstein's almost all-knowing essay on Cadmus' life and work. Originally published in 1984, it is here updated to cover all of Cadmus' work to date. What more could we ask?

That it be written by a homosexual. It's not that Kirstein is unsympathetic. A respected writer on the arts, and found-

ing director of The New York City Ballet, Kirstein was well acquainted with gay life. His essay sympathetically traces Cadmus' life and the development of his work, and offers a unique perspective on the artist and his *oeuvre* (Kirstein was married to Cadmus' sister and owns many of the works he describes). The essay is rich in observation about the social, cultural, literary and artistic influences that shaped Cadmus' work. But Kirstein's is a sensibility of the earlier part of this century, and he's noticeably reticent on the most important issue of all—the painter's pronounced, ever-present gaiety.

To be sure, in a phrase or two reminiscent of a sociology class textbook, Kirstein registers the fact and importance of the artist's homosexuality. In one or two instances, he's even rather sly about it. Describing the two hunky men in "Bicyclists," he coyly forgoes that after enquiring directions of one another, the pair's chance encounter is "perhaps leading to some brief partnership."

With their heavily muscled legs tight against one another, and the eyes of one longingly set on the lushness of the

other's butt, the painting may not be, as Cadmus says, a simple exercise in repeating the cyclist's query for directions in the point and counterpoint of its forms, as much as a revelation of the counterpoint of a pickup.

Kirstein also neglects to point out the painter's insistence—and the bravery of that stand—on including gay couples in nearly every one of his famed panoramas of daily life (not to mention the scores of paintings solely of men and gay incidents). For instance, in one of the most famous, the 1933 "Shore Leave," there's a pick up going on in the background, an obviously gay civilian resting one hand on a sailor's shoulder.

And even when it's not that overt, how could Kirstein neglect to point out the prevailing sensibility? While the focal point of "Shore Leave" seems to be a central pyramid of hussies, this structure is centered and secured on the crotches of two sailors, one dead center and the second in the pyramid's foundational lower corner, fully exposed as the reclining lad helpfully spreads his knees far apart. Next to that, and equal in importance to the central female figure, are the lovingly painted, sweetly full

orbs of a sailor's ass, cupped by his tight navy whites.

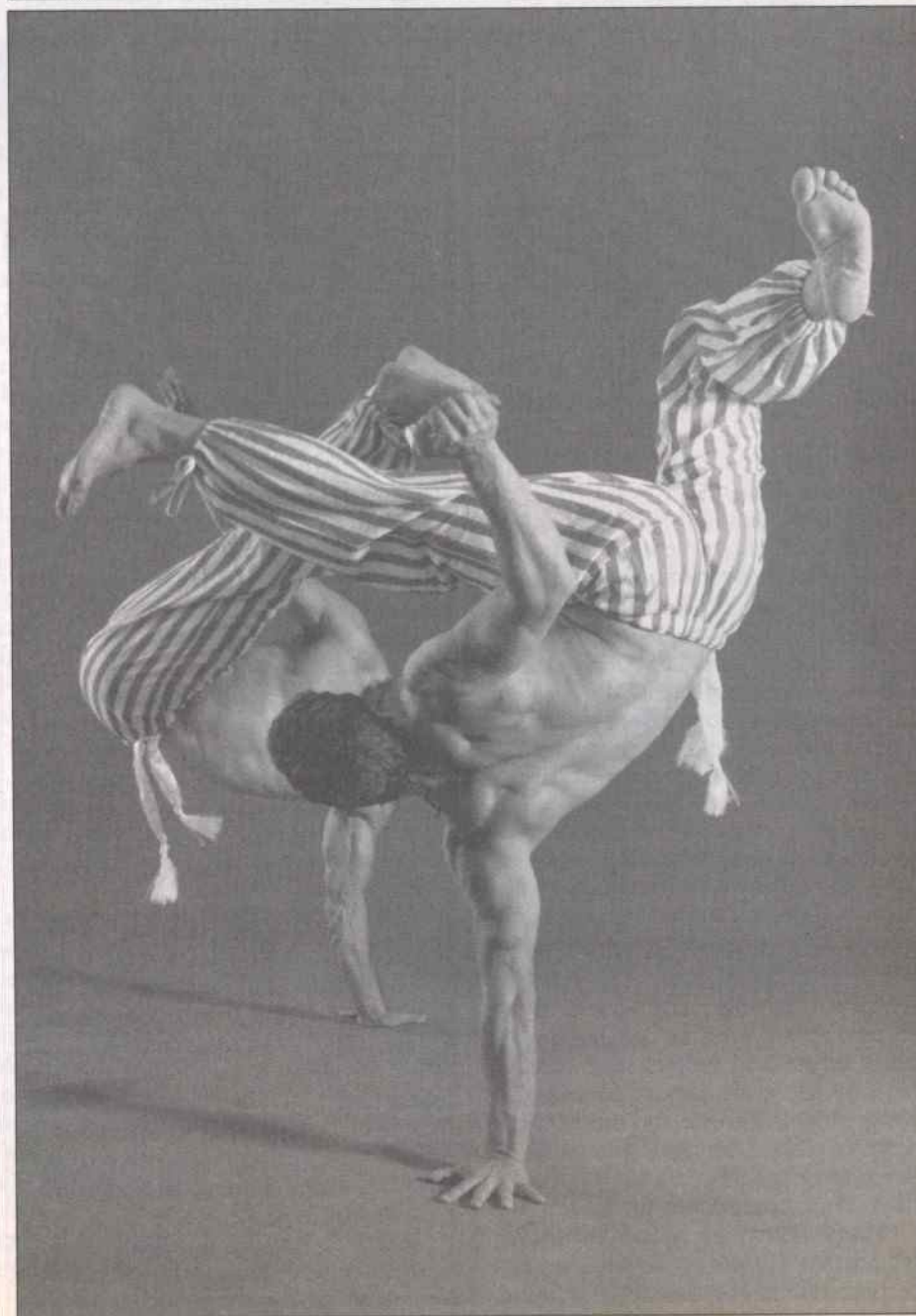
Kirstein's greatest moment of discretion arrives with the tumult of tourists, beggars, black market dealers, hustlers, socialites and assorted sundry Cadmus finds in an Italian café, "Bar Italia." Kirstein explains every presence *except* the table of screaming queens—one of them with his hands spread apart in the classic gesture of cock-recall, "It was *this* big!" Were these boys just too much for Kirstein?

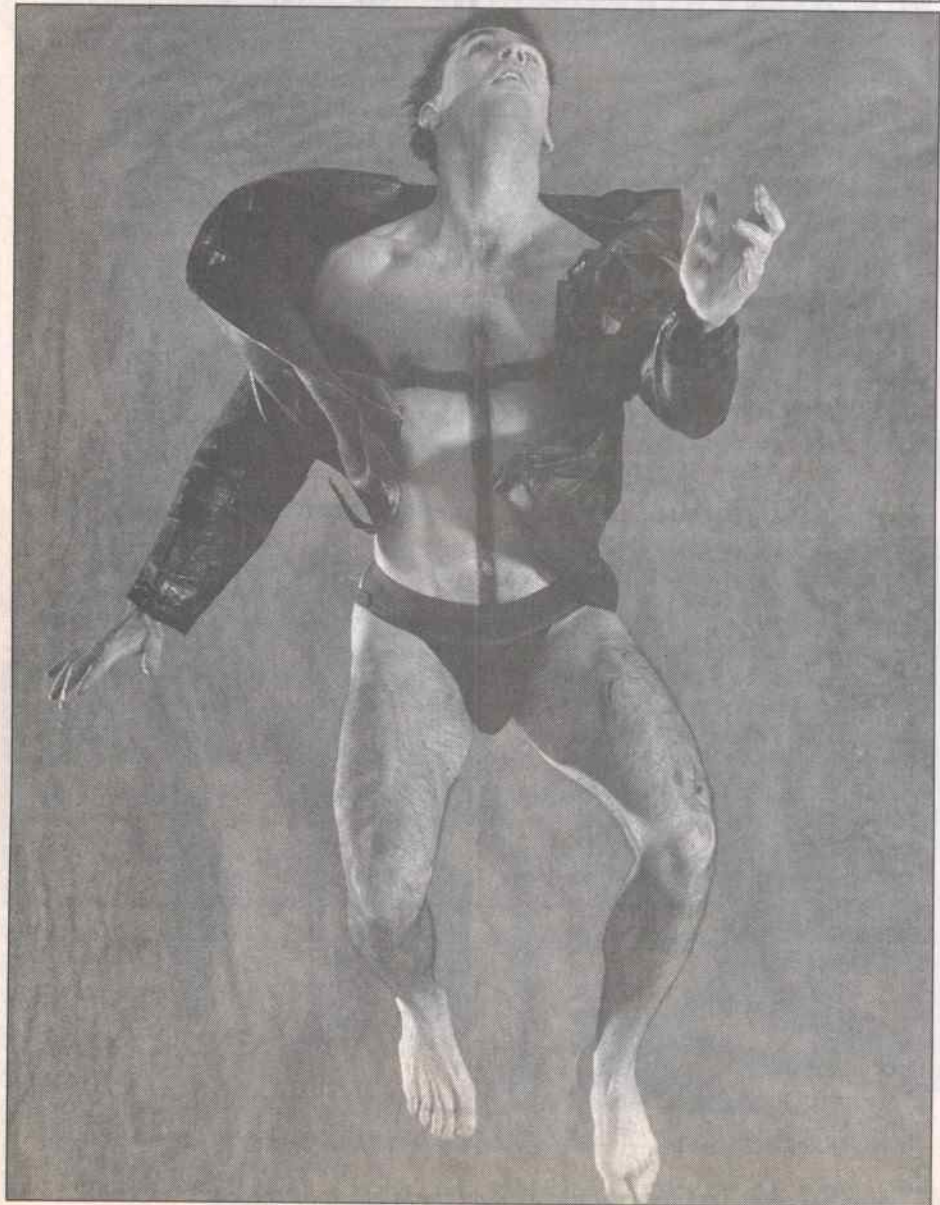
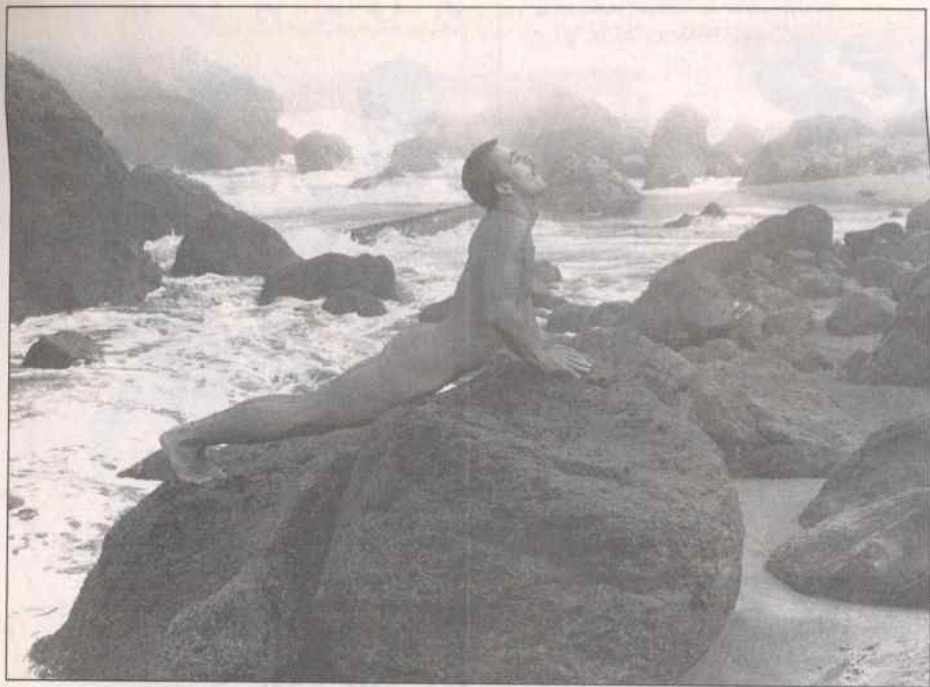
Oh, yes, despite the erudition and insight of Kirstein's text, it's time that a gay writer got to work on Cadmus.

The gay presence in Cadmus' paintings, constant from his earliest days to the most recent work, is not always sexy or camp. That is the real reason new commentary is needed. The depth of Cadmus' response compels it; how else can his friendship with E. M. Forster be revealed in its touching depth, or the deep realities of gay loving and living, so movingly depicted, be claimed and understood.

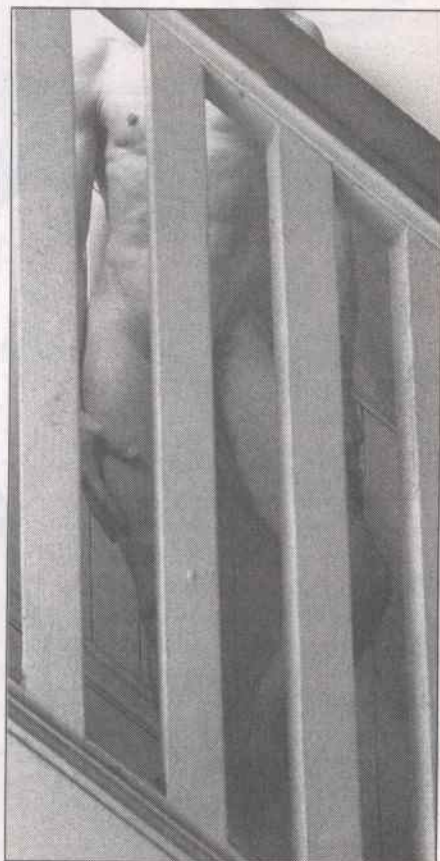
With wonder we come to Cadmus' recent work; finally, Kirstein must be seen as completely out of his element. Gay aspects can no longer be experienced incidentally; here, gay symbolism—the expression of gay soul and salvation—reaches inexpressible depths of feeling and mystery. As seen in the 1989 painting, "Rise and Fall," gay love is no longer a background element of Cadmus' art; it is all. And how are we to fathom the troubling images of "The Lid," a 1990 painting in which Cadmus, Forster, and a handful of loving couples, same-sex and mixed, are sealed in a coffin-like vessel by a fearsome monster. Is this a spectre of AIDS sending to their doom those oblivious innocents whose only guilt was loving?

Cadmus' career demonstrates an amazing, pioneering gay sensibility. He complements his skills in draftsmanship and composition with a moral vision unfettered by illusion, compassion unsullied by sentimentality, unceasing bravery, and an acid wit (the newspaper being read in one painting is "The Daily Nadir.") Brilliant, beautiful, and brutal, the artwork of Paul Cadmus captures a gay viewer within a permanently haunting grasp.





THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF STEVE SAVAGE



Steve Savage has become a favored photographer of San Francisco's gay community through a dozen-plus years of documenting its personalities and people, its theatre and dance. Portraiture is his specialty, and his favorite subject is dance—if you don't count the male figure. "The male body is always central in my work," he says. "It's very rare to see a picture of mine that doesn't have a male body in it." In statuesque representations of myths and archetypes, in the motion studies he favors for their release from the literal polish of his daily work, and especially in the portraiture and dance work that savors the body's beauty, Savage's work is characterized by its dynamic interaction between the male figure and its setting.

—John F. Karr

Contact Steve Savage at 493 Haight #4, San Francisco, Ca, 94117; (415) 626-2610



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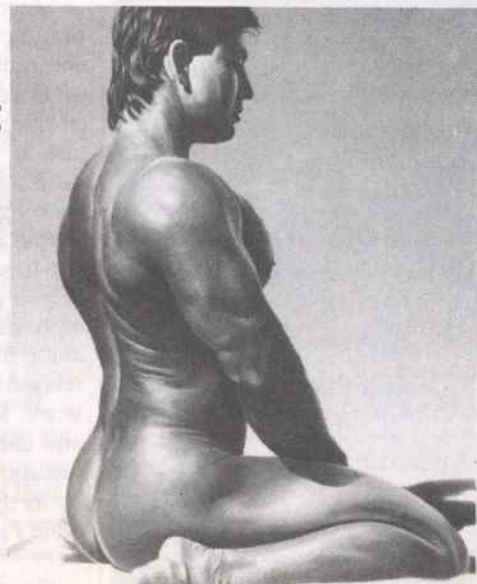
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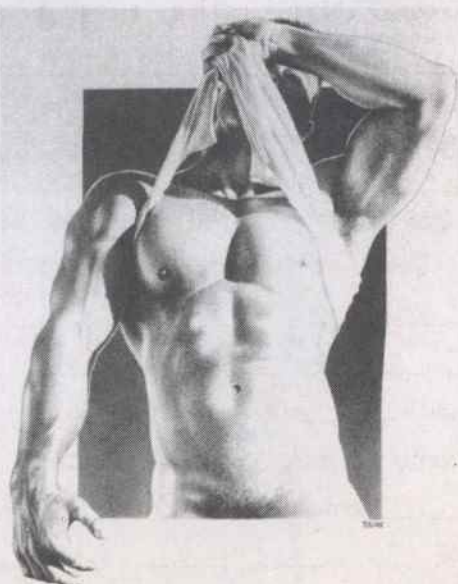
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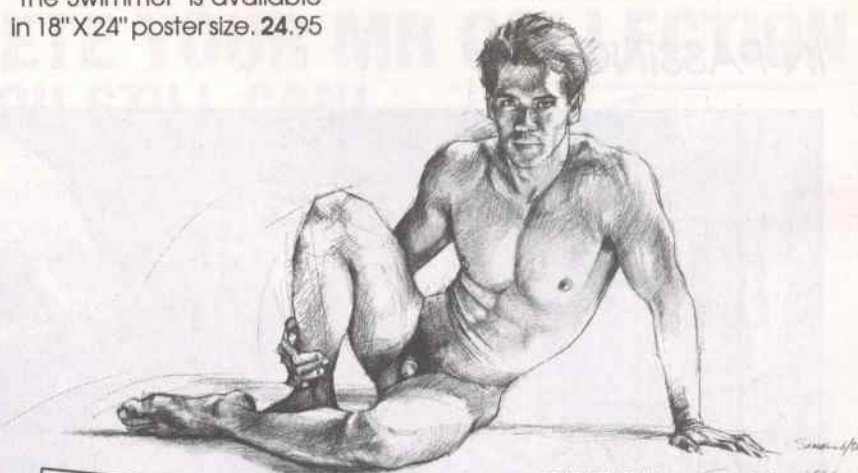


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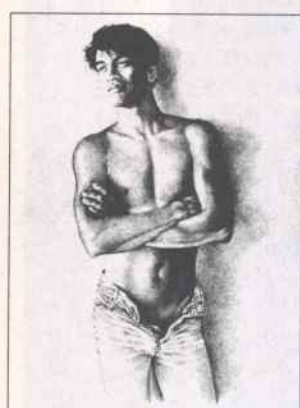
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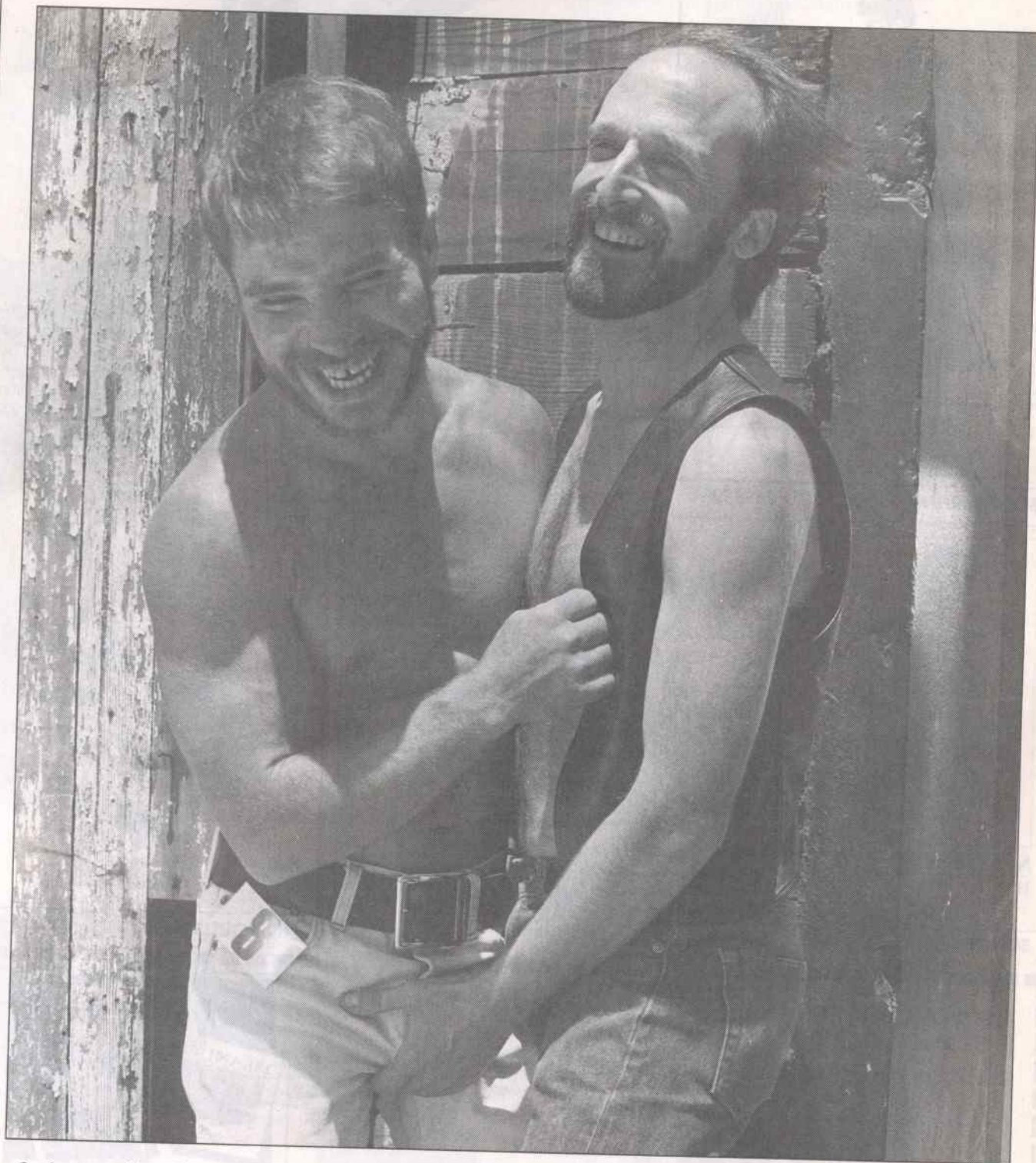
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IN PASSING



Saying goodbye should never have to be said with a heavy heart. As in the photo above, neither should saying hello. Robert Pruzon's photography has been at the top of his field for all the years we have been in the publishing business. This picture was taken during one of our Mr. Drummer contests and Robert is obviously sizing up a candidate.

Robert brightened these events with his camera work and his lighthearted presence. You were sure to run into him at most major events. His studio shots, under the name of "Satyr", were always sought after.

Robert Pruzon left us during the month of May. Things may never be the same again without him. Certainly not half as much fun.

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13 14 1+2

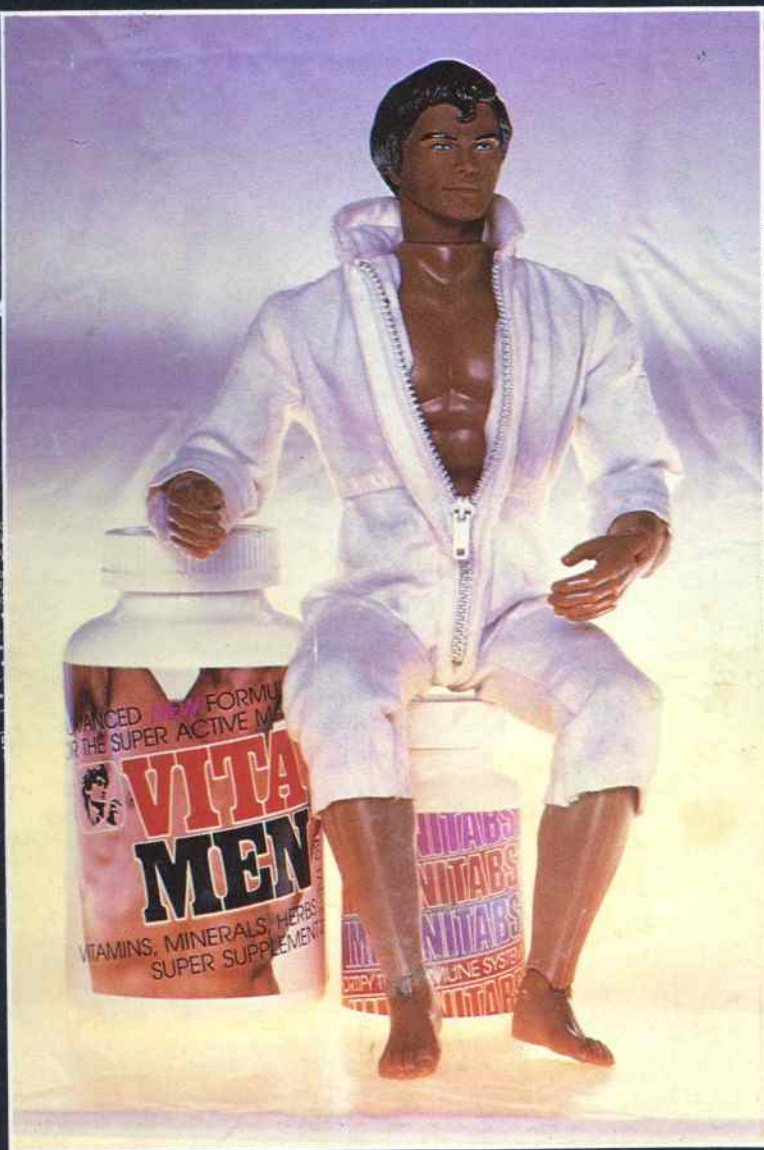
POWERHOUSE

IT'S HERE! THE MEGA IMMUNE FORMULA

VITA MEN

DOCTOR-FORMULA

	POTENCY	%RDA*
VITAMINS		
Vitamin A (Beta Carotene)	10,000IU	200%
Vitamin A (palmitate)	5,000IU	100%
Vitamin B1 (thiamine)	100 mg	6667%
Vitamin B2 (riboflavin)	100 mg	5882%
Vitamin B3 (niacinamide)	50 mg	250%
Vitamin B5 (pantothenic acid)	100 mg	1500%
Vitamin B6 (pyridoxine)	150 mg	5000%
Vitamin B12 (cobalamin concentrate)	100 mcg	3333%
Vitamin C (Sago Palm)	1000 mg	1667%
Vitamin E (d-alpha tocopherol)	400IU	1333%
Vitamin D3	100IU	25%
Folic Acid	400 mcg	100%
Biotin	100 mcg	333%
Choline (bitartrate)	200 mg	
Inositol	125 mg	
Bioflavonoids	200 mg	
Hesperidin	20 mg	
Rutin	75 mg	
Octacosanol	250 mcg	
MINERALS		
Calcium (Amino acid chelate)	500 mg	
Magnesium (Amino acid chelate)	350 mg	
Silica	500 mcg	
Vanadium	75 mcg	
Iodine	225 mcg	
Iron (Amino Acid Chelate)	20 mg	
Potassium aspartate	55 mg	
Selenium (Amino Acid Chelate)	150 mcg	
Molybdenum (Amino Acid Chelate)	50 mcg	



MEN LIKE YOU...

	POTENCY	%RDA*
Chromium	200 mcg	667%
Amino acid chelate	100 mg	100%
(Amino acid chelate)	2 mg	100%
anese (Amino Acid Chelate)	20 mg	
ALS		
Kola	25 mg	
eng	25 mg	
palmetto	150 mg	
aparilla	50 mg	
nacea	300 mg	
non Balm	125 mg	
axacum	20 mg	
orice	25 mg	
irulina	25 mg	
e Pollen	100 mg	
MINO ACIDS		
Lysine	750 mg	
Phenylalanine	25 mg	
Glutamine	25 mg	
Ornithine	25 mg	
Tyrosine	100 mg	
D-L Methionine	30 mg	
L-Cysteine	30 mg	
ACTIVATED GLANDULARS		
Prostate tissue	50 mg	
Thymus	10 mg	
Adrenal	50 mg	
DHEA Complex (Dioscorea Villosa)	200 mg	

THE MEGA
FORMULA
DESIGNED
FOR MEN
LIKE YOU!

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VITA MEN

You can buy vitamin products almost anywhere and at a variety of prices. But VITA-MEN was developed by doctors with men like you in mind. Not an assembled package, these tablets are self-contained. You

take two with each meal so your body supply is constant. No fillers, no oils, no sodium, no shellac for time-release. No fancy packaging. VITA-MEN costs more to make but your body is worth it.

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