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"Where do old gays go?"

THE COMING OF AGE IN THE GAY WORLD

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**The Other Side
of T. S. Eliot**


**Martin Duberman on
an Early American
Psychiatrist**

**Andrea Dworkin:
The Simple Story of
a Lesbian Childhood**

**Richard Hall
on the
Wedding
Boycott**



How did you ever make it through 1977 without it?



Noel Coward:
Whom Coward kissed his valet never told.

January

8 Sunday
A New York Times Book Review subject Cole Lacey, head Coward's valet and biographer. He took his revenge by name which "made work, California Governor office, actor, or" ... later with "numbered among Coward's best." 1977.

9 Monday
Ottavio Thurner (aka Alice French), a well-set-off, 200-pound American woman, who lived for almost fifty years with James Earl Ray, Creator of the "Mojave planarian." "Thurner" (after Thurner and Crawford), Dec. 1934.

10 Tuesday
John L. gay, American writer, whose national letters worked for the magazine, "Times" (American for "red men"), Dec. in Constantinople, 1916. In New York, Elton John, British, an awarded Nelson, is adopted as an homosexual, 1976.

11 Wednesday
Alexander Hatcher, whose gay letters to pastor John Larkin suggest more than mere eighteenth-century literary conversation of "Tuesday" from in New York, 1833. In Gay, which beyond Taylor, who eventually became United States Ambassador to Berlin, 1821.

12 Thursday
An indictment against Elton Thurner, Governor of New York, 1825.

13 Friday
Howard Thurner Jefferson, death, 1777.

14 Saturday
Calvinist Drew J. Joseph, McGowan.

The Gay
Engage-
ment
Calendar
1978

Compiled by Martin Grief

SD
STERN AND DAY/Publishers/New York

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The 1978 Gay Engagement Calendar.

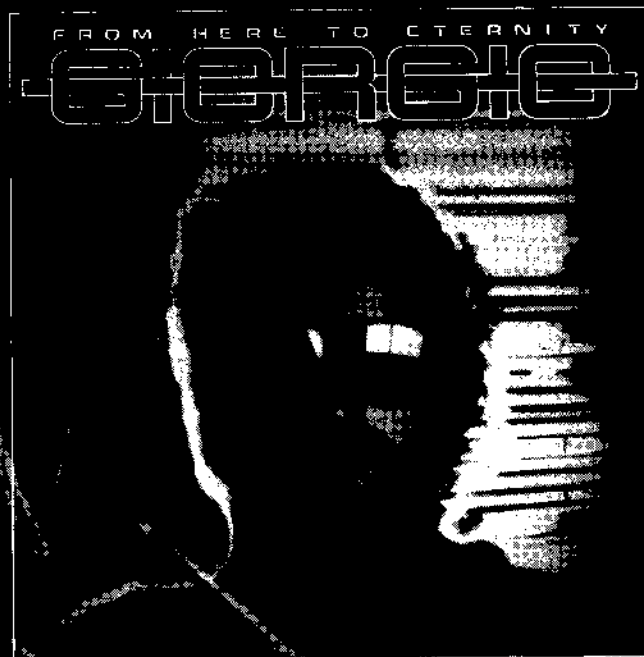
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NOVEMBER 1977

Out & Around

Robert Lowell 1917-1977

A Personal Epic

BY RICHARD HOWARD

Each of Lowell's many books—more than 14 when he died last month, 60 years old and at the height as well as the depth of his convulsive powers—was a departure, the first the greatest embarkation of all, for in *Land of Unlikeness* (1944) he broke with silence to mourn the "fact" that when the soul has lost its likeness to God it is no longer like itself. The character of that unobtainable book (10 of its 21 poems were reprinted, much revised, in Lowell's next, *Lord Weary's Castle* which won him a Pulitzer Prize in 1946) was fractiously vindictive, and the hallucinations offered as Revelation were indeed just one damned thing after another. Since then Lowell left behind many other things, enormous as the Catholic Church and Boston, and his arrivals, too, have led him to the end of so many lines that the astonishing suddenness of his death seemed but one more restlessness to the many readers (as many, probably, as any poet in this country has today) who could scarcely determine whether this too was an arrival or a departure—a survival or a sinking.

With a remarkable consistency ("What Lowell says could not have been said, guessed at or tolerated before," as Randall Jarrell, the poet's friend and, until recently, his best critic once said), these volumes have illustrated a dialectic of revolution and reaction, mistrust and disgust, raid and retreat. The claustal Christian dooms of *Lord Weary's Castle*, charged with motionless emblems and the terrible apparatus of anathema and execration, yielded (though not without a struggle) to the more responsibly projected dramas, the otherness of *The Mills of the Kavanaughs* (1951), which for all its "confusion," as Lowell himself later called it, engaged with operatic zest in narrative and in the abrasion of one character by another. And then this tragic series, too, fell before the painfully anatomized selfishness, snapshots rather than pen-and-ink, of *Life Studies* (1959), with its prose of little runs and gushes set between the magisterial rise of "Beyond the Alps" and what one might call the lying fall of "Man and Wife." Then elapsed a didactic interval ("When I finished *Life Studies* I

was left hanging on a question mark . . . I don't know whether it is a death-rope or a lifeline"), years of imitations and translations. Therapy—"written from time to time, when I was unable to do anything of my own"—extension of means, method acting, *Imitations* (1961) was often attacked, nearly as often defended (notably by Edmund Wilson) and ultimately proved something of an influential discovery, for if it failed to show how to write translations it showed how they must be read—if translations were not poems on their own they were pointless, and Lowell's imitations were always poems. They were also an attempt to explore and exploit what was *not* as well as what *was* Robert Lowell, who by then ("Cured, I am frizzled, stale and small") had become what he was to remain till his death, the most commanding poet in America.

The resources Lowell had come to command were shrewdly assessed, at the very start, by Santayana: "It is hard for me to make it all out, and I find a lot of words I have to look up in the dictionary and don't always find

there; but gradually I am learning to understand, and it is worth the trouble . . . he is a sort of Voice Crying in the Wilderness, but at the same time thoroughly American, in themes and allegiance. *Moby Dick* is in the background." And five years later: "Lowell is a good deal like Rimbaud, or like what Rimbaud might have become if he had remained devoted to his poetic genius. There are dark and troubled depths in them both, with the same gift for lurid and mysterious images. But Lowell has had more tragic experiences and a more realistic background, strongly characterized . . . Although he is not a person about whose future we can be entirely confident, it may well turn out to be brilliant."

So brilliant, indeed, that by the time Lowell had thanked Eliot and Hannah Arendt for correcting his French and German, accepted "general stylistic suggestions" from Mary McCarthy and I. A. Richards, taken dictation from Ford Maddox Ford, advice from Frost and comfort from Allen Tate, it might be wondered how there could be much self left to celebrate or deplore—how, as Lowell once said of Hart Crane, "all the chaos of his life missed getting sidetracked the way other poets' did." But it is wrong to wonder—there has been chaos to spare. "The kind of contradiction I am familiar with, a mush of obscurity and impossibility nailed to one by necessity": when *that* is the burden of a man's poetry, it is not surprising to find him attending to the sinuosities of his career with programmatic diligence. "Almost the whole problem of writing poetry," Lowell has said, "is to bring it back to what you really feel, and that takes an awful lot of maneuvering."

Our literary pantheon abounds in exemplary calamities—from Crane to Plath, we revere our fallen saints, the whiskey priests of American poetry. But Lowell, one feels after reading his later

books, from *For the Union Dead* (1964) and *Near the Ocean* (1967, in which the title poem remains the great poem of the Sixties, one of those devastating texts in which the torment of the poet's private history and the convulsive terror of our public life mirror and enact each other) to the topiary muddle of *Notebooks* (1969, 1970) and their resolution in *History* (1973) and the final *Day by Day* published the month of his death—Lowell differs crucially from his suicidal friends Schwartz and Jarrell and Sexton, as well as from his scruffy survivor Ginsberg and his scrupulous contemporaries Wilbur and Bishop, by accounting for his failures not in his biography but in his poems. For Lowell the poem is not a privileged terrain where everything comes out all right, while life goes down the drain; instead the poem is a kind of condemned site where the bruised self reconnoiters its frontiers and maps a campaign of survival. "Sterility howls through the scenery, but I try to give a tone of tolerance, humor and randomness to the sad prospect"—tolerance, humor and randomness! What could be further from the qualities of "The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket"? Only the sad prospect remains the same, the perception that success involves and enforces failure, that achievement on one plane implies collapse on another, and that in degradation and despair there is a vision of life not available to the triumphant and the happy. Waste is seen as the terrible necessity of survival, overlooked to our cost. "I hope this jumble or jungle is cleared—that I have cut the marble from the figure": characteristic here is the violence involved, the pain and the energy required to make a monument out of "mere" experience.

If Lowell's "voice in the wilderness" was calmer in the last books, and all the more compelling for being so, it was hollow still with dreadful nostalgias (marriages, af-

fairs, public protest and private submission); the poet evokes the loss, the longing for a buried life, all the wreckage on which he has shored himself up in order to *make*, as the poet's character bids; there is an ultimate knowledge in the accents—somatic and psychological, private and political—which anatomize the cost of surcease: "Each drug that numbs alerts another nerve to pain." Such knowledge, with the release it brings in the poems, is of the highest order of sanity, of ripeness, of detachment from the destructive element in which this convulsive, cauterizing career has been so dutifully immersed. We recognize in the "epilogue" to his last book, in these lines on all his poems:

Those blessed structures, plot
and rhyme—
why are they no help to me now
I want to make
something imagined, not
recalled?
I hear the noise of my own voice:
*The painter's vision is not a
lens,
it trembles to caress the light.*
But sometimes everything I
write
with the threadbare art of my
eye
seems a snapshot,
lurid, rapid, garish, grouped,
heightened from life,
yet paralyzed by fact.
All's misalliance.
Yet why not say what happened?
Pray for the grace of accuracy
Vermeer gave to the sun's
illumination
stealing like the tide across
a map
to his girl solid with yearning.
We are poor passing facts,
warned by that to give
each figure in the photograph
his living name.


—we recognize in that not only the glow of a terrible radiance, as from coals, quenched, maybe, by an equally terrible compassion, but chiefly the accents not only of truth but of conviction, not only of sentencing but of execution. ■



The Dying Generations
Harry His

By Seymour Kleinberg

That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees
—Those dying generations—at their song,
The salmon falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unageing intellect.
—William Butler Yeats,
“Sailing to Byzantium”



Poets see things earlier than ordinary men; poets like Yeats see them more clearly and tell us more movingly what we may expect from the present. In 1928, when he published his tragic lyric about the expendability of old men, Western society had not grown as callous and phobic toward old age as it has become in the last decades. One cliché claims that old age is more difficult in youth-mad America than elsewhere. True, America is the advance guard of all those forces which seem to provoke and promote social decline, but the condition of the aged is as bad in Europe and in socialist societies as it is here—if the old men or women happen to be gay.

When one is old and gay, one acquires a universal burden of social indifference or contempt to add to a lifelong oppression as a homosexual man or lesbian. In exploring the subject with the men I interviewed, one question was central: Has being gay made aging more difficult? Hearteningly, the answer seems to be, “no, not especially,” even given the notoriously exaggerated investment in youthfulness among gays. In some cases it has made it easier. For men in their late sixties and seventies, living gay in this century and surviving those miseries has alleviated the traumas of aging. The long closeted life has often hardened the men; some are even more fortunate than their heterosexual counterparts, for whom widowhood and loneliness and

loss of social place are terminal griefs. The men I interviewed, despite the diversity of their lives, are more than literal survivors.

I began to explore this subject accidentally. I intended to write about the instability of romantic sexuality—having recently been rejected by my lover of three years for a passing, pretty face. Depressed and obsessive, I hoped to exorcise the bitterness by documenting similar injustices among acquaintances, since sources for this particular sad story are everywhere. When I found that the bars and baths and organizations I had once been active in were dead ends as far as finding someone to be serious about is concerned, I decided to join a small consciousness-raising group and answered an ad in *Gay Community News* directed to men forty or older. Although, as one friend later put it, “You should have known that any fag admitting to forty is really sixty,” I was not prepared for the group I entered: Ted is sixty-seven, Bert sixty-nine, Michael seventy-two, Harry seventy-five, Rudi seventy-nine, and Alex eighty-two. Six other men were in their fifties, but at forty-four, I was the baby.

When that day's leader calmly announced that the subject of the session was “Attitudes toward Dying,” I felt slammed with a double wave of anxiety. I had recently been experiencing some totally irrational fears and fantasies about dying and was generally eager to avoid a serious look at the



"I don't want casual sex—I want a nexus."

subject (promising myself every day to stop smoking). But the idea of discussing death with men who might possibly keel over from natural causes during the hour was more than I'd bargained for.

As one might expect, only the younger men in the group seemed burdened by the subject, because the issue for them was not dying but its corollary: not living. Those men in their old age who had "lived," whether their lives were shadowed with regrets or not, regarded the subject as somehow irrelevant. They were going to die; none really denied that or seemed to find the idea horrifying, although all were concerned with the manner of their deaths and hoped they would not be cursed with senility or agony. But all of the men, including one presently in remission from cancer, agreed that they lived almost exclusively in the present. Tomorrow is Monday or Tuesday; the fantasy future of younger people had finally disappeared.

As I listened, I was struck with the richness of their collective pasts. These men had been homosexual in the Twenties and the

Depression, in libertine New York of World War II; their pasts were an invaluable document of my history as a gay man. Like others who are working to record that past, I understood that here was a subject of great immediacy. At the next meeting I asked if I could interview them. They seemed surprised at the idea and consented with varying degrees of willingness, since I was a stranger. This, then, is about how five of those men live now. One day the fuller story of their lives should be told.



Harry

No one would believe that Harry is nearly seventy-six. Not only is his face almost unlined, but he moves with vigor and ease; he is tanned and firm, sweet and outgoing. An Englishman, he has an accent, which does not define his class (it is neither Cockney nor Oxbridge). When Harry agrees to an interview, he gives me a small card from his wallet identifying his career field as industrial electron-

ics, which I later translate to mean he is a highly skilled electrician. The card is a bit stained and yellow; the business address is inked out and in one corner he has pasted his home address. Harry retired at sixty-four, a year earlier than necessary, because he feared losing his pension when his union voted to strike. When I suggested this was a strike-breaking tactic, he looked pained and agreed that perhaps it was, but he chose to exercise his accumulated sick days to retire early.

Harry attributes his physical fitness to a "lucky" constitution, but he is also an avid hiker and walker, a nature lover, and a devotee of nude sunbathing. He spends as much time as he can with old friends in the country, where he combines his taste for nature and exercise with what he calls "having a party." When I ask him if that is a euphemism for fucking, he pauses and admits that he and his friends have always described casual sex as "having a party." Since I recently edited an anthology of gay short stories including Tennessee Williams's "Two on a Party," without paying particular attention to the title, I got my first hint of how unexpectedly informative my research was going to be.

Harry's English background also comes out in his small, trimmed, gray moustache and in the Bermuda shorts he wears daily in the summer—with forest-green knee socks, sensible wing-tip shoes that I haven't seen outside Brooks Brothers for twenty years, and freshly-pressed button-down shirts. It only takes a moment to figure out that the shoes and shirts *are* twenty years old, still meticulously polished and darned.

Harry is special in other ways... his mother was a lesbian. He is not sure when he learned this, but by his teens he seems to have been certain. Harry says his mother knew *he* was gay, though the subject was not discussed openly. His father and mother separated before the First World War. When

Harry was seventeen, he had his first love affair, in the Boy Scouts with a twenty-three-year-old Swiss living in England. When his lover left, Harry confided his grief to his scoutmaster, who counseled discretion and then seduced him.

In 1922, Harry's mother sent him to New York City to live with his father, a jeweler who had emigrated here earlier. Whether she desired her freedom or thought he would do better professionally under his father's care is not clear. At first, Harry lived in the East Fifties, then a working-class neighborhood, and in the 1930's on West 97th Street. His sexual adventures were sporadic, limited mostly to pick-ups in Central and Riverside Parks. Harry sometimes cruised the West Seventies, which he claims was the gayest neighborhood in the city, though not as bohemian as the Village. It was not until the Depression that Harry discovered gay bars and baths.

Early in the interview he confesses that he is beginning to worry about sex: he is having too much and perhaps it isn't good for his health.

"What is 'too much' at seventy-five, Harry?"

"Well, since my lover died, I've been having some wild parties. I feel I'm oversexed. But perhaps it's good for my longevity?"

I hope so also. Harry usually has sex twice a week, almost always with men he knows well. Dave, a librarian in New Haven, Connecticut, is a boyfriend of fifty-eight whom Harry visits twice a month for long weekends. He also pays a monthly visit to Norman, a long-standing friend whom he most enjoys sleeping with, now retired from active service in the Mattachine Society and living in the country. His friend Rudi, who lives in Queens, is seventy-nine, and he visits him weekly for dinner and partying. Then there is the young thirty-eight-year-old hospital worker, whom Harry describes as "hard of

hearing, and he slurs when he speaks. He's very self-conscious, but he feels comfortable with me. He's very affectionate." He drops by regularly at Harry's North Bronx apartment on his way home. Finally, there is the occasional adventure that develops from an early evening at Carr's Bar or an afternoon at the baths.

Harry has not merely blurted out his erotic schedule. He does not brag about his virility though he knows he is unusual. As I solicit answers, I wonder how coarse I can get, for I am consumed with curiosity. Harry appears forthright and he talks easily, but he is also decorous, unflirtatious, and genuinely friendly. His sex life seems extravagant for a man of

seventy-five; perhaps he and his friends simply cuddle a lot. But as we talk it is apparent that he enjoys discussing it, even if he is unused to doing so with a stranger. Our terms have to be clarified. Harry doesn't say "fuck"; he says "brown" or "up the back." When he says he has sex, he takes for granted that we mean oral sex and that being affectionate implies oral reciprocation. Though my vocabulary is blunter, Harry doesn't shy when I say fuck or suck or rim; he simply responds in his own idiom.

Later, I understand that while Harry has no sexual prudery, the subject is just not as fascinating to him as it is to me. It wasn't sleeping with Dave, but going to



"I don't know what it is, but we'd better keep it away from the California electorate!"

the Trolley Museum that he relishes from his recent weekend in New Haven. It is not the party with Norman that is memorable, but sunbathing nude in Norman's isolated back yard with only an occasional cow meandering by. Harry's need for civilized, affectionate sexuality is not rare, but as he talks about the erotic life, it is clear he finds sexual encounters disassociated from friendliness and emotional responsiveness less exciting. Even when he speaks of the young man of thirty-eight who drops by occasionally, whom he describes as somewhat clumsy and inexperienced, he denies that the man is selfish or unemotional.

"Yes, it's true, I usually blow him, or sometimes he browns me, though I don't particularly care for that, but he's not a quickie. He likes to stay in bed a long time. Once, he stayed overnight."

Though Harry is no stranger to the baths, having discovered them forty years ago, he finds men his own age more satisfying, even if their activities are less exotic. What they do—mutual masturbation, oral sex, or dry fucking—is

have my thighs bit. Norman bites me and it turns me on. I guess I love men's thighs. I go to soccer games to watch the players with their muscular thighs. A few years ago when I was seventy-three, my lover had just died and I went to Everard's. I came four times! It never happened before, but this young fellow knew just what to do. My legs were very red the next day."

Harry draws the lines at drugs. He says they seem alien to him, and he won't sleep with anyone who uses poppers. He sometimes feels self-conscious about his age at the baths since it's obvious people want younger men, but it doesn't bother him terribly. He also thinks himself more fastidious than younger men. He has never had any form of VD, never contracted a sexually-related disease, never experienced impotence. For a moment, the expression on my face must be peculiar, for he hastens to add, "Well, it takes me longer to come now . . . sometimes."

Harry's lover Bob died in 1973 when he was sixty-one, of diabetic complications. Talking of his

near the George Washington Bridge to make love: "We did it on the rocks, but we never *went* on the rocks." When they could afford it, they'd rent a room in one of the small hotels in the West Thirties, since they both lived at home with parents. Though they made their emotional commitment gradually, it was solid enough to exclude jealousy and accommodate a mutual if mild promiscuity. Both would go together to the tiny, raunchy, very wild steam room in the basement of the Penn Post Hotel (now a parking lot). Occasionally Harry would spend the night with Norman or another man, and though Bob clearly did not like this very much, it was not a serious issue.

It was Bob who first interested Harry in gay issues, in Mattachine, and in a community of gay friends. Bob wrote as an avocation; his special interest was vaudeville, which they went to regularly. Harry, in turn, introduced Bob to the ballet, which he'd always liked. He tells of seeing Martha Graham in the 1932 American premier of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps*, for which "I squandered all my money."

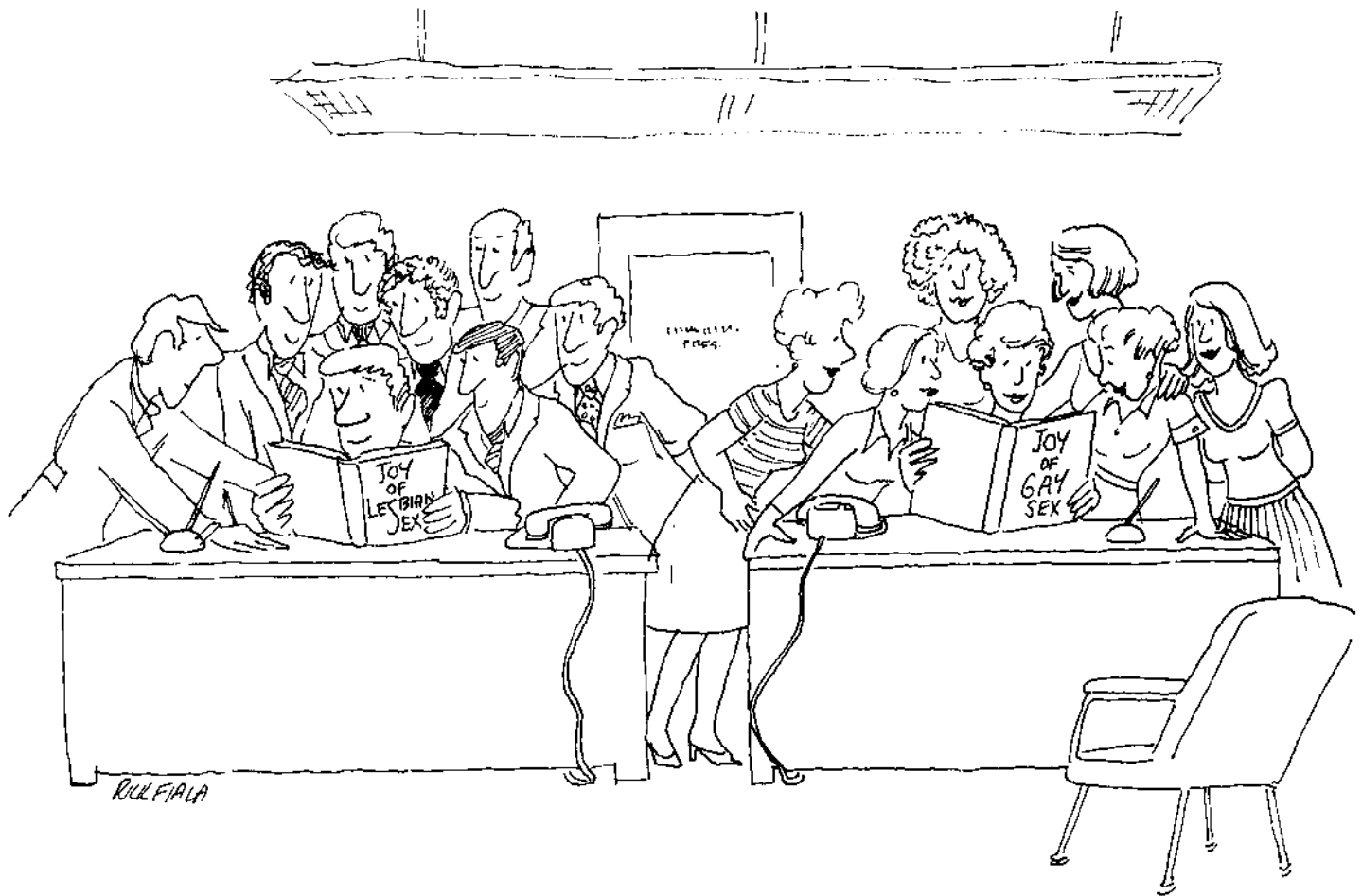
Bob died intestate. His only surviving relative, a sister who had cut off all communications when he and Harry began living together, took all Bob's assets. . .

not an important issue. When I ask if there are things he does not do or disapproves of, he says, surprisingly, that he never enjoyed 69'ing. "It's too distracting." Concerning the apparent sexual excesses and novel tastes of the younger generation, Harry showed a puzzled disinterest, confessing that he could not understand the blatant interest in scatology or sadism. However, he admitted, giggling, to "perhaps a slight fetish you might call sadistic—I love to

lover, he loses his customary cheer, but otherwise betrays little of what that loss means. Harry and Bob were together twenty-seven years. During World War II, both men were employed in essential industries (and were thus draft-exempt). Bob was the dispatcher for a fleet of trucks. They had known each other nearly a year before they became friends, and waited almost as long before they became lovers. At first, they would meet at Riverside Drive

Bob's other interest was drag. He wrote about American vaudeville for British trade journals, and about drag for some early homosexual newspapers. Drag was one of Bob's delights even though photographs show him to have been wiry and craggy faced, and by the late 1950's he had grown a beard. The pictures of Bob in drag, with blond teased hair, sequin shift, long white gloves, gold purse, etc., grinning broadly, indicate that for him drag was mostly a lark. Harry said that no matter how carefully *he* tried, in drag he always looked like Mrs. Roosevelt, so he gave it up.

When the men traveled to Europe, Bob got in touch with the newspaper correspondent Oscar Weibel, founder of *Der Kreis* (the Circle), a homophile organization in Zurich that dated from the



TWO NEW BOOKS FIND THEIR MARKETS.

Thirties. Through him and Bob's interest in drag, they became friends of Quentin Crisp, whose autobiography, *The Naked Civil Servant*, has just been printed here. Bob was planning to write a book about drag that he had been researching for years when he became diabetic, and Harry still has the notes carefully stored in his apartment.

Harry assures me that while there were squabbles and ups and downs, it was a very "smooth" relationship and essentially monogamous. Only when Bob's health began to fail and emotional stress forced a kind of permanent withdrawal from an active social life did he become possessive or jealous. In the early years, Bob worked nights and Harry days, so they saw each other only on weekends, and in the hectic last year of the war, they worked even then. When they would meet,

their favorite places were Beckman's Bar on Third Avenue and 34th Street or The Pepper Pot on West 4th, where I gather a MacDonald's now stands.

In the seventh year of their relationship, they decided to live together. Bob's parents had died, his father of cancer and his mother a suicide, and he asked Harry to live with him. They then became "officially" a couple, sharing household duties, entertaining, meeting other couples, both gay men and lesbians. Bob's fondness for drag and his hobby of writing about it brought occasional glitter to their Washington Heights home. After a piece on Francis Renault, Bob and the famous female impersonator became friends. Renault would turn up at their gatherings with exotic celebrities like Nita Naldi in tow.

They became close friends with another gay couple, especially

Eddie, a Puerto Rican. Eddie introduced them to gay life in New Jersey and to bars that catered to working-class couples like themselves. In the 1960's, however, Bob became mysteriously withdrawn and despondent. "He was always touchy, but now he began to lose his friends." Easily offended by them, he became more reclusive and decided to stop working. "He suddenly became a housewife." Their sexual life diminished and became more role-defined, Bob insisting that Harry always be dominant. Gradually, they stopped seeing Eddie and lost contact with their other friends. They gave up working for the Mattachine library and stopped helping with the mail and newsletter.

Bob became insomniac, and so they stopped sleeping in the same bed. In the middle of the night, Harry would discover Bob

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eating bread and butter thickly spread with sugar. Increasingly, Bob turned to masturbation, "to help him sleep, he said." Then he collapsed and was rushed to Fordham Hospital, where he was diagnosed as diabetic. After being under observation in a public ward for a month, he begged Harry to take him home. But once he was released and housebound, Harry discovered he was alcoholic. He would drink till he became sick and rage if he could not drink. Two months later, Bob collapsed again and died in the emergency room. I suggested that Bob's reclusiveness might mean that he had been drinking far longer than Harry suspected; though the idea seemed plausible, Harry regards Bob's behavior in his last months as an ugly mystery.

Bob died intestate. His only surviving relative, a sister who had cut off all communications when he and Harry began living together, took all Bob's assets, some \$10,000—"though she paid the funeral expenses," Harry adds generously. However, there was a complication. Harry had bonds in Bob's safe deposit box that he was able to claim only after much red tape cluttered his life and his mourning for his lover of twenty-seven years. Since Harry had named Bob *his* beneficiary, he thought it strange that Bob never made out a will, but inasmuch as he was ten years the elder it had seemed an academic as well as a tactless issue.

After Bob's death, Harry tried to find Eddie but his only lead was a straight brother who refused him any information. Mattachine was finished. It was at the West Side Discussion Group the following year that Harry met Dave and through West Side last fall that he heard of the CR group where I met him. Dave has invited Harry to live with him in New Haven, but Harry is ambivalent about such a move. He likes the freedom his pension and Social Security give him to travel, usually

returning to Europe every year. He likes his inveterate walks all over the city or sunning at Orchard Beach when he can't get to the country. He likes meeting friends at Carr's, where the clientele is friendly and older than those at the usual Village bar. He does not cruise: "If I go to a bar, I'm not so concerned with meeting someone. I just like to be with gay people and talk." His complaint about the CR group is that it is too unsocial. He needs sociability; his consciousness is already raised. Like most men his age, he admires the openness of younger men and women, but fears we are heading for a "backlash; things are going too fast, too quick." He means, of course, for straight people.

I ask him finally if he has serious regrets about the past, about never marrying or having children as some gay men in his generation have done. "I guess I once did seriously consider it, but no—I never have regrets about the past. And I don't look back, I'm not nostalgic."



Rudi

Rudi, one of Harry's steadies, is seventy-nine. He came out when he was sixty-four. Married for over thirty years, he became a widower with a grown son when he was sixty-three. The following year at the race track, one of his favorite haunts, he struck up an acquaintance with a Cuban refugee, John, a man of his own age. For the next fourteen years they were lovers, until John died in 1976. John was not only Rudi's first gay lover, but also his first gay experience. Rudi did not think of himself as homosexual nor did he experience closeted yearnings before he met John.

Rudi was obviously a beauty; photographs of him over the years document his sustained handsomeness. He is still goodlooking, a small man with an innocent smile

and a well-shaped youthful body. His health is still remarkably intact. In the pictures, especially those from the 1920's and 1930's, he looks very dapper, sporting boutonnieres in his well-cut lapels. He shows me a pair of white kid gloves folded in a fine yellowing silk handkerchief that he wore on his wedding day. He is fond of looking fashionable. A recent snapshot of him at Acapulco in a bikini shows he has little to be self-conscious about and not much to hide. It isn't clear what Rudi looks like ethnically, though somehow he does not look American. In fact, he was born—to "real illiterate peasants," he says with some contempt—one of fourteen children, somewhere near Zemplin in modern Czechoslovakia. When he was nine, with eleven surviving siblings living in near serfdom, he left home with his parents' indifferent blessing. He was hired as a servant by a middle-class couple who took charge of his welfare and schooling, virtually adopting him.

At fifteen, he went to work as a clerk for the railroads, where his adoptive father held a somewhat important position. When the First World War broke out, sixteen-year-old Rudi volunteered to serve the Hapsburg Empire. He became a hero accidentally when he and another cavalryman captured a hundred Russian deserters lost in the Carpathian Mountains. Though they were outnumbered nearly fifty to one, their offer of bread induced the starving, freezing, practically unarmed Russians to surrender.

Shortly after the war, in Budapest, he struck up an acquaintance with a captain in the Imperial Horse Guards—"such a beautiful man," he sighs. Rudi says he was not aware of any sexual attraction on either of their parts; he was just struck by the beauty of the man, who, it seems, had other intentions. He took Rudi into his home and soon arranged an engagement with his unmarried daughter.



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Rudi decided to work in America for a few years to save a nest egg, and through Hungarian émigrés he became a waiter in one of the posh beachfront hotels in Atlantic City. Two years later, on the night of his departure for Europe, he was mugged, robbed of everything including his passport, and left unconscious in the streets of New York while his ship sailed. He was taken to a hospital, and the police found a translator (after fifty years, Rudi still speaks English with a thick accent) and located his boss. When he returned to work, the staff and guests had raised \$1,000 for him. Ironically, an anonymous letter he wouldn't have received had he sailed earlier informed him that his bride-to-be had just given birth to an illegitimate child. Rudi returned to Europe to hire a detective and confront his handsome Hussar father-in-law, a story he tells with a mixture of scorn and mild incredulity. Soon after, he met the woman he married and emigrated permanently.

Rudi describes his marriage as uneventful. He praises his wife as a good woman. Rudi's son, a bachelor in his early forties who teaches in New Jersey, keeps a room in his father's house, but owns a house somewhere in the Hamptons. Naturally, I ask if his son is gay and if he knows that Rudi is. Emphatic and politely outraged denials follow both questions.

Rudi's son and John seem to have tolerated each other, but there was little affection between them. When John came to live with Rudi, he ostensibly rented a studio apartment in the basement of the small two-family house Rudi owns in Astoria. They did not decide to live together immediately; Rudi was cautious, if not suspicious. From their initial meeting, John was aggressively ardent. At first, Rudi refused to give him his last name or telephone number, thinking him a race-track sort, someone to be wary of. When they met again a

few days later, John invited Rudi to visit him at his rooming house on West 14th Street. Rudi describes his seduction laconically. John, who was experienced, was active, Rudi passive. The sex was exclusively oral.

Rudi is a pragmatic and compassionate man. Working forty years as a waiter (he retired as head-waiter from a prominent midtown hotel), he is careful about money. After two years of meeting at John's shabby, expensive room, the move was made. Rudi says he needed that length of time to accommodate himself to being gay. By the time of the move, the sexual adjustment had also been made. When I ask Rudi to describe the experience of learning to be homosexual after sixty-four years

became very smitten with him. After the gift of an expensive diamond ring (which Rudi now wears), John considered himself engaged, quit his job and kept house near Monmouth while his lover ran a successful antique and decorating business. Two years later when the lover died suddenly of a heart attack at the age of forty-five, also intestate, John returned penniless to the garment industry, from which he retired with Social Security and some small savings.

As Rudi neared seventy, he found the northern winters too trying and decided to spend the harshest months in Acapulco. John, who was unable to swing such a vacation financially, agreed to stay in New York to take care

. . . Rudi's plea: "John, if you love me, you want me to live longer, to stretch my life, so I must get away from the winter."

as a heterosexual man, he brushes aside the question; he was awkward at first, but always responsive to John's tenderness. As he grew more adept, he found he could reciprocate fully. John slept in his own room, but the rest of their routine was spent together. Both liked to bet on horses or play cards and dominoes at a Spanish club in Manhattan that John belonged to. Their gambling was petty; Rudi's prudence and John's small income, if nothing else, kept it a reasonable pastime.

John was born in Spain; when his parents emigrated to Cuba, he became a grocer. In New York, he found work as a pants-cutter in the garment district. He met an interior decorator from New Jersey, a younger man, who

of Rudi's house. Although consistently jealous and possessive, he succumbed to Rudi's plea: "John, if you love me, you want me to live longer, to stretch my life, so I must get away from the winter." For nearly ten years now, Rudi has taken a small apartment where he is free to bring boys at night and enjoy the Mexican sun all day.

In the winter of 1975-76, John fell ill and went to relatives in Miami to recuperate. He was a poor letter writer, but as the winter drew on, his silence from Florida grew foreboding. Rudi cut short his vacation; at Kennedy Airport his son met him and he demanded to know what was happening to John. His son evaded answering until Rudi made a

scene. He then learned that John was dead, had in fact died six weeks earlier. Rudi says his son kept silent fearing that the news would shock his father, endangering his health. All Rudi's unopened letters to John had been forwarded to New York at his son's request to sustain the conspiracy. I suggest that this behavior indicates that his son was aware of the nature of the relationship, but Rudi again impatiently denies it. John died of cirrhosis of the liver. He had always been a heavy drinker, and in Rudi's absence he'd return to his boozing buddies at the club. When Rudi speaks of John, he shows much feeling. The grief is still fresh, and he is not sure he will return to Mexico this winter. There are complications, including his fear of leaving his house empty.

Just last spring, it seemed that there might be a solution. At the Church of the Beloved Disciple on 14th Street, he met Bill. They hit it off, and Bill moved in with Rudi almost immediately, sharing Rudi's bedroom rather than the old studio. At fifty-nine, Bill was just coming out. Aside from one furtive experience in a porno movie house, Rudi is his first gay relationship.

Bill is still married, though his wife threw him out, after thirty-five years of marriage, in the fall of 1976. She simply said it was over for her, their two daughters and son are on their own, and she wished to be free. Bill claims he was totally unprepared for her decision; he thought he had a good marriage. His wife's behavior is inexplicable to him. Even more puzzling to me is Bill's response: he signed away his house and all his assets to her for one dollar, and then had what he describes as a slight nervous breakdown. He resigned his position as music teacher in the New Jersey high school where he had worked for many years (but not long enough for him to retire).

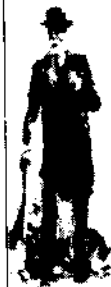
Bill is a medium-sized man, well-

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PROFILE As a feminist activist, Kay has traveled extensively throughout the country, speaking, writing, and conducting workshops. She's been involved in lesbian-gay civil rights efforts at local, state and federal levels. Among her other tasks in NOW

has been coordination of NOW's support efforts for the Mary Jo Fisher lesbian mother child custody case

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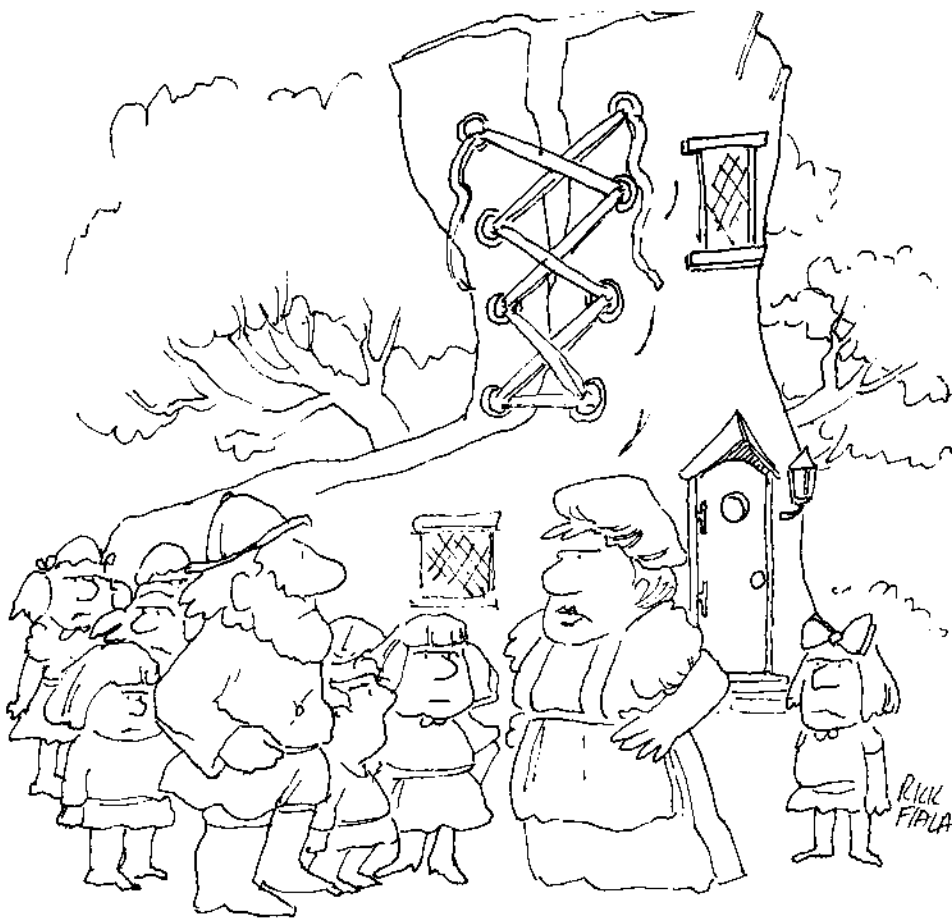
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"I said, you keep the kids -- I want the shoe!"

built and cordial, eager to talk about his many problems; but he is also what most people would call homely. He looks his fifty-nine years, and his face and eyes are ravaged with sadness. When I said he was overgenerous to his wife and that he might have suggested she leave instead of him, he said that he wanted to leave the way open for a reconciliation. Rudi looked at me skeptically. When we are alone, he tells me he thinks he can love Bill, if only he will forget the past and face where he is. I cannot discover why Bill went to the Ramrod immediately upon arriving in New York, since he insists that he was straight until the breakup.

At this point, Rudi and I, who have been sitting on his porch, go inside the house, where a third man is quietly watching the evening news. He is Ernie, who worked under Rudi for thirty years. He is recovering from a severe heart attack and looks it. He now lives in John's old studio apartment, and Rudi nurses him,

cooks his meals, shops for him, and generally shares his life with his old friend. Ernie wants me to see his room; he is proud of his collection of pinups of Hispanic wrestlers and his pornography.

Ernie is also seventy-nine. He was born in New Zealand, but his mother left for Australia when her husband deserted her. Like Harry, Ernie has a British accent, a typical Australian drawl to which he adds his own campy intonations. I would like to interview Ernie at length, but his illness, which has left him infirm, pallid, and slow to speak and move, has also jumbled his memory. He listens carefully and answers slowly, but seems perpetually preoccupied. He prefers to show me his collection of pictures and chatter, and I decide to postpone the interview.

I revisit Rudi and Ernie and Bill a week later. At the first visit, Rudi would not let me use my tape recorder and showed alarm every time I took notes, but now I am invited to dinner along with

Harry, allowed to use my tape, and kissed paternally when I enter. Rudi takes time from his cooking to talk to me, and Ernie is contentedly watching an old movie with Harry, but Bill is absent. He has packed up and returned to New Jersey. Rudi is saddened but not overwhelmed when he tells me that Bill has decided that the gay life is too difficult, and that returning to his married daughter promises the best chance of resuming his own marriage. He has taken temporary work and promises to keep in touch. Rudi shakes his head pessimistically and asks if I think Bill was truthful. He confides that Bill was impotent. "He would get hard in a minute, but he would never come! I even asked Harry, who's so good, you know, to . . . see if he could help Bill, but, well, it didn't work out. He said to me, 'Rudi, I'm still young, I have to try.'" I agree that Bill is relatively young and that I do not think we got the whole picture.

Rudi is cooking goulash, which Ernie tells me is one of his specialties. While I sip a rum and Coke, bringing back memories of Cherry Grove in 1950, Rudi calmly chats about his daily routine. He likes to bet if there's a race. During the four months that Bill was there, they would drive to Riis Park if the weather was good. Rudi had arranged to leave Bill in the apartment when he went to Acapulco, but now his winter plans are uncertain. He is also worried about Ernie. Just yesterday, Ernie foolishly went to Manhattan to visit an old trick whom Rudi dislikes. Ernie has always favored proletarian Hispanics and black men who mistreat him. Rudi has patiently listened to stories of Ernie's affairs of stolen money, beatings, scenes, neglect, and he is impatient with his friend's lack of self-esteem.

"John never liked Ernie. He was anti-gay. He would say, 'How can you walk down the street with him? He's such a fairy, aren't you ashamed to be seen with him?'"

John never could tolerate effeminacy, and while Ernie is not flamboyant, he is soft-spoken, mild, a bit limp and campy. The contrast between John's Hispanic machismo and Ernie's willowness amused Rudi, who would always defend Ernie against John's antipathy, which he thought peculiar. While he has known that Ernie was gay for thirty years, he had not known that Ernie was effeminate until he was told.

Rudi sighs again over Bill's departure; he is hurt but by no means distraught. He thinks of John more than Bill. We talk of the contemporary world, which Rudi regards as a great mistake. "We need another flood—wipe out everything and start again." Rudi finds conventional religious beliefs ridiculous. "If there's a heaven, it's not up there on the moon." I ask him to suppose there is; what will he do if both John and his wife are waiting for him when he dies? "Introduce them of course. I'll explain to her that she left me first, so I had to console myself." John apparently has the stronger, more recent claim.

Impatient to attend his goulash, Rudi says he will send Ernie to me, but warns me that Ernie has had a bad week: his black friend was unfriendly, he has been feeling sick, and, worst of all, his brother arrived from California at Rudi's behest and the reconciliation flopped. Ernie has not seen or had much contact with his brother in the twenty-two years since their mother died. Rudi felt that Ernie's poor health called for the family reunion, and he phoned the brother, who is eighty-four. I ask Ernie about the meeting.

"Oh, he was so nasty. All he said was 'Why do you have pictures of those men all over your walls? It's disgusting.'" Ernie and his brother, neither of whom have ever married, never discuss their private lives.

I ask him when he came out, and he laughs as his memory is jogged. "It was awful really, then. I was waiting tables in Australia,



*"I'm glad we met at the bar last night.
In case we never meet again, May the Force Be With You."*

and I had just moved to this boarding house. The lady gave me a room for the night; it was very crowded in the city, and rooms were scarce. This was 1915, and Australia wasn't so built up then. Well, in the middle of the night, this man comes into my room and says, 'What are you doing here? This is my room.' I told him the landlady put me here and it was *my* room, but he was drunk and big, and I didn't want to argue, I was only seventeen. 'All right, we'll straighten it out in the morning, shove over.' Well, when he got into bed, he suddenly said to me, 'I'm gonna fuck you.' I didn't know men even did that."

"Well, what happened?"

"Oh, he fucked me. I didn't like it at first," he smiles. Harry announces that dinner is on the table. It is 5:30, and I'm glad I skipped lunch. The kitchen table is carefully set. Rudi has cut long stems of Rose of Sharon from his back yard and arrayed them all over the tablecloth. When he pours Cherry Kijafa for us all,

Ernie winks at me, remarking that it is indeed a special occasion. The goulash is good, but Rudi takes very little. He explains that for some years now he has been a vegetarian, and I note his plate contains only stew vegetables. Dinner proceeds amiably and quietly. I am a little sloshed on rum and Coke and worried about how cherry liqueur mixes with paprika. But as I watch Harry eating heartily, Ernie secure in his friend's beneficence, and Rudi serenely mothering us all, I am reminded of the calm of my own childhood meals. It seems there are kitchen tables to gather round again.

□

Bert

Bert, who is sixty-nine, and Michael, seventy-two, have lived together for the last few years. They describe their relationship as a friendship. They began living together, after each had lived

good experience, and he implies that he wishes it had been possible sooner.

Being out at work was partly the result of some activism in the Mattachine Society, which he joined when he and his wife divorced. In the Sixties, he was the corresponding secretary, and with the demise of the organization, he began working with the Gay Academic Union, particularly with their speaker's bureau. Bert has spoken seven times to a class on human sexuality at C. W. Post College, though that was arranged by Mattachine rather than the GAU. He likes to serve on panels about homosexuality at high schools and colleges, though he claims his interest is more a social than a political service. Bert organized the CR group where I met these men, but he now finds it unsatisfactory, too unintellectual for his needs, and he no longer attends meetings even when they are held in his own home. He wants to organize a group of "college men" whose interests would be less exclusively social. He spends a great deal of time answering ads in *Gay Community News*, for pen pals for prisoners, and in *Holiday Bulletin*, a magazine devoted to relationships between older men and boys. He claims he has made good friends through the ads, perhaps a half dozen, and "not all of them are youngsters, some are middle-aged men in their forties."

Writing is a pleasure for him. He has been writing poetry for many years, and before I leave he gives me a small volume of his verse as well as an article on pederasty he has written for a journal devoted to the subject. He describes his poems as metaphysical or mystical. On the covers of the eight-page booklet are idealized drawings of pre-pubescent boys. He complains about the history of the article. He had submitted it to Mattachine's newsletter a year before it ceased publication, but it never appeared nor was it ever

returned. He is sure it was suppressed or destroyed.

He is not naïve about the political volatility of pederasty. On a gay panel at a college lecture, he answered "Yes" when a member of the audience asked whether he slept with his students. Later a woman acquaintance representing Lesbian Feminist Liberation "hit the ceiling," berating him for his tactlessness in times when just such admissions were so welcome to reactionary forces. The distinction between "political" and "social" that Bert makes is now clearer. He is not interested in what is politically wise; he is very concerned that people understand what he and men like him have been and still are.

"I've never had any moral doubts about myself. I don't think I've ever done anyone any harm. I see nothing wrong with any act when there has been love and consent." He illustrates by telling me of his current relation-

he says he was deeply infatuated a number of times. Bert is clear that his impulse to teach and his attraction to young boys are parts of the same gestalt. Teaching has always had an erotic quality for him, and he has always preferred to teach in an all-male world. When Bert talks of this mixture of pedagogy and eroticism and when he talks of his metaphysical poetry, he invokes Plato's *Symposium*. He regards himself as the descendant of the Greek teacher-lovers, a Romantic whose love of beauty has expressed itself as pederasty. His preference for oral intercourse is part of his philosophy. "If a man's semen is the divine part, the life-giving part, then when I swallow it, it becomes part of me . . . it's wholesome. I'm not sure what happens to it if it goes up my ass."

Though he has had anal experiences, they are less satisfying in either role, active or passive. He smiles as he tells me that in this

"If a man's semen is the divine part, the life-giving part, then when I swallow it, it becomes part of me . . ."

ship with a newsboy. After becoming friends, Bert and the boy had sex. Some months later, on Christmas Eve, the boy showed up with a modest gift and asked if he could spend the evening. Bert tried to send him home, pointing out that this was a family holiday, but the boy refused. "You see, he wanted *me*, it wasn't a matter of sex."

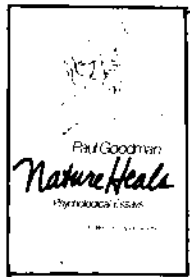
Except during his marriage, Bert has had relations with young boys his entire sexual life. He actually came out when he was twenty-six, just before World War II. He was aware of his homosexual feelings in his teens, but he "smothered them," though

respect he departs from Greek custom. With young men, his sexual relationships invariably develop out of social ones, as with the newsboy whom he befriended for months before he took him to bed. He talks of another Michael whom he met when the boy was seventeen, a heavy drinker and already a delinquent and unemployed. Four years later, they are "dear friends," and while Michael only drops by once a month for sporadic sex, they speak to each other a few times a week. Bert, who introduced Michael to his present lover, a man in his thirties, advises his protégé about his romantic problems.

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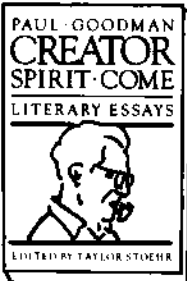
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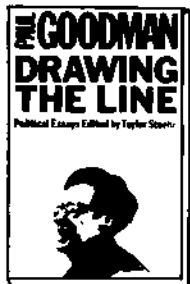
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The major relationship in Bert's life began when he was thirty-two, with a student nearly twenty years younger. When the boy was sixteen and Bert thirty-six, they became lovers. He emphasizes the mentor-student nurturing character of the relationship. He does not feel that the boy was really gay. "He just fell in love with me." When they began to sleep together, they slowly advanced from masturbation to Bert's blowing him, to the boy fucking him, and after two years, to mutual oral sex. Altogether, they were involved eight years. They broke up when the boy went to California. Though Bert had the option of resigning his job and following, he thought that unwise.

Not long after, the boy married. Bert was then forty, and soon after he also married. His wife was teaching at Mt. Holyoke and continued her career as a teacher and librarian. Bert has never considered himself bisexual. Heterosexual marriage was an important experience, but it was not satisfying sexually. By the time Bert was forty-five, he and his wife agreed to "go their own ways" when their two daughters were old enough. Divorced now for almost fifteen years, he has little contact with his former wife, who retired to Vermont on a sizable inheritance. Bert himself lives frugally on Social Security and a small pension. He assumes his daughters know of his homosexuality, but it has never been discussed. However, when he writes them, he tells them of his activities in the GAU, as he told them of his work for Mattachine. He confesses that he has never wished for a more open dialogue with them. He hopes they will always regard him as their father and that categories or labels will not impose themselves. He feels he has been a good parent; he was virtually monogamous during his marriage, though he fell in love with a man when he was forty-five. He says his one regret is that he did not pursue that feeling, for he might have

found the durable relationship of his life. But his commitment to his paternity and his responsibilities as a husband precluded it.

After the divorce, Bert was depressed and unable to deal with his freedom constructively. He began to drink heavily and spend most of his private time pursuing one-night stands. While his tastes had not altered, he now took up with men in their twenties. He thinks he may have become an alcoholic, for he is still completely unable to control drinking and usually abstains. This period, which lasted until he returned to prep-school teaching, is described with the most remorse. Though he was sexually more active than at any other period of his life, he was also lonelier. Once he was beaten up. He picked up a young man, and when he took him home, three of his friends followed, forcing their way into the apartment. They made no attempt to rob him; it was "beat up a queer" time. He pleaded with them, and after an ugly roughing-up they left. During the incident and after, no neighbor made inquiries. Of course, Bert did not call the police.

The only other incident that Bert reports with equal distaste happened when he was teaching in a prep school and his affection for a sick boy was misunderstood. One of his students fell ill, and Bert visited him in his room. In a reassuring gesture, he squeezed the boy's shoulder before he left. The next day he was called in to the headmaster's office for his "version." The boy had complained to his mother that Bert made sexual advances. Bert says that the headmaster may have suspected that the mother was a crank, for after he explained what happened he heard no more about it, at least from the headmaster. He did suddenly find that other housemasters were reluctant to let him visit boys in their houses.

When Bert retired five years ago, he eagerly came to New York to

pursue the theater and the arts. But he found he was lonely for the relationships with boys that had dominated his life. Through Mattachine, he began to offer his apartment to runaways and boys who had arrived in New York without much resources. This worked well enough for a time until one robbed him and fled. The boy was arrested when he landed in Los Angeles; he had forged Bert's name to a check to buy his airplane ticket.

Though Bert has said he is low sexed, the inactivity of his present sexual life is not satisfying. He is not driven, but he is not content. He sees his old age as qualitatively no different in its problems than his past. "Old age is a suffering time. I feel things as strongly now as I ever did."



Michael

Michael disagrees. Old age for him means the end of his sexuality, and he is relieved. For him, being old and discarded isn't as bad as being young and unhappy. "One feels the pain less." For Michael, being discarded was forced retirement at sixty-five from a job he loved, as a writer on interior decoration for the *New York Times*. Retirement has forced Michael to come out, to join Dignity and attend West Side and CR groups, though he would have preferred to absorb himself in his occupation. For seven years he has been searching for ways to fill his time meaningfully. Michael was closeted his entire professional life, but he says everyone must have known; after all, he was an interior decorator. He is in some ways the most old-fashioned of the men. He would not, if he were young, be an activist. He claims not to like lesbians or the company of women. Bert interrupts to tell me that two of Michael's closest friends are women.

There is a contradiction about Michael that is difficult to explain. He characterizes himself as "ex-

tremely shy, very reserved . . . I hate giving interviews. If Bert hadn't broken the ice, I don't think I could say anything now." But he acknowledges that his lifelong shyness and his shame at being gay, his fear of public exposure, may be tied together. He has never been enraged by his shame; he has tried to live a "normal" looking life. Though he has passed as heterosexual in his social life, he does not regret it. It was a way of protecting his privacy, and he regards himself as a very private person.

Despite these attitudes, he says, "I love being a homosexual. I love men. I love being in gay groups, at Mattachine or West Side or at the CR group. I have never regretted being gay; I can't imagine being anything else." When pressed, he says that he enjoys the company of gay men because "we all share the same weakness."

Michael says, "I'm very low sexed, and I always have been. I have simple sexual tastes, mostly masturbation and some oral sex, but physical sex has never been very important to me, and I don't think it was to my lovers." Michael has been in love three times. He became aware that he was a homosexual in his early twenties, but he does not discuss his early experiences, which apparently were abortive.

In 1936, at thirty-one, he fell in love for the first time. Louis was half Italian and half Irish, "and you can imagine how beautiful a combination that was." They were together four years until Louis married. They did not live together, and Louis worried a great deal about being "queer." When Michael went into the army in 1942, he met Lenny, who had been a dancer, and they became lovers. With peacetime, Lenny went to Juilliard, so they did not live together. At school, Michael snorts, "He met this homely oboe player; she was really very plain. I guess Lenny preferred to be normal," for he

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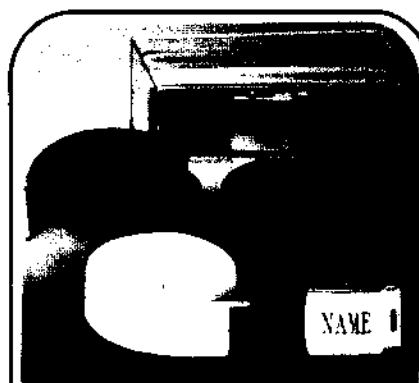
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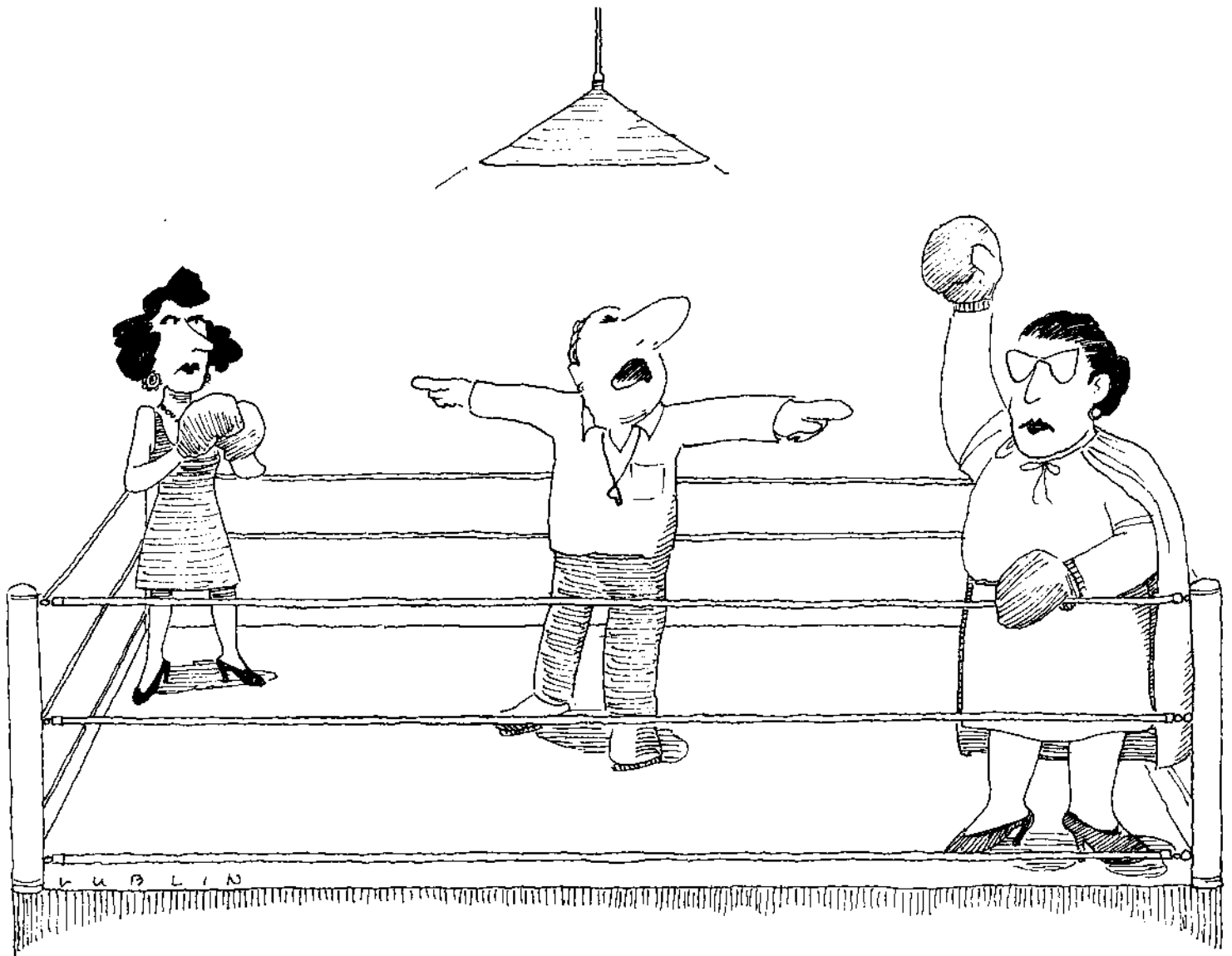
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"In this corner, representing Park Avenue, Regine. And in this corner, representing literary New York, Elaine."

soon married.

I am not sure if the third love Michael refers to is Bert, but I suspect it is; somehow I do not ask. Michael would have liked a gay "marriage," but he knows these relationships cannot last, and he has never had much hope for one. "They always become roommates. It's then a matter of convenience, pleasant but unexciting." After Lenny, Michael had no relationships and little sex for twenty years. Though he went to the baths sometimes, it was mostly "to be there; [just] to see the beautiful men was enough." He jokingly refers to himself as

a voyeur, for he has a fondness for pornography and gay burlesque, but Bert contradicts him: "When I have a boy over, Michael takes a walk."

The organization Michael is most active in is Dignity. He is still a practicing Catholic, and I ask how he felt during the war when his relationship with Lenny put him in mortal sin as he risked his life every day. Did he feel angry at his special bind, caught between his feelings and his faith? He admits that spiritual risks were greater when he was in his more enduring relationships. He thinks of himself as a sinner, but

he is optimistic about forgiveness. He patiently explains that for Catholics, forgiveness is easily available if one is contrite, and Michael has lived in a state of constant contrition.

□

Ted

Ted: At sixty-seven, Ted is in remission from lymphatic cancer. He takes chemotherapy regularly and suspects that he may have to do so permanently, though the dosage is steadily decreasing. He is well informed

about the disease, having been for fourteen years a practical nurse specializing in cancer care. Because he found his work with terminal patients depressing, when he was thirty-four he took the civil-service exams and became a payroll auditor, a dull job he held for the next thirty-one years. He would have liked to be a costume designer, and his present plans include designing and making some of his own clothes. He sews well, and on a recent trip to England he bought woolens and cottons at a bargain. He is going to design a suit and make his own shirts. He would like to learn fine tailoring, but has not found a teacher.

Ted is a little late for the interview, which is held in my apartment. He underestimated the traveling time, and the appointment was fixed so that he would not have to miss his favorite soap opera, to which he confesses he is addicted. When Ted retired four years ago, he thought he could immediately pursue something creative, but the adjustment period took longer than he thought, and then the cancer pre-empted all other concerns.

To say he is casual talking about cancer is accurate, but inadequate. He is not resigned or bitter, nor is he overly optimistic. He feels he is lucky; the disease is arrested and he has not been immobilized by it. His routine accommodates the condition, but it is not mitigated by it. The drug he takes, cytoxin, is readily available in Europe, so he can travel whenever he wishes.

He is worried about his weight. "I'm so fat now from the treatment. The therapy seems to have increased my appetite, and I eat all the time." Otherwise, he says he feels fine. And indeed he looks healthy enough, agile and alert despite his cumbersome weight. Ted's style is laconic, and I'm unsure whether he feels more than he shows. His demeanor is calm and thoughtful. When I ask questions, he takes a few seconds

to think about his answers, which often are witty and astute.


Ted is financially comfortable. With his civil service pension, Social Security, and bank interest on savings, he is free of money worries. His apartment costs \$230 a month including utilities (he likes to be precise about costs), in a large complex where half the tenants are senior citizens.

"That's such an awful term, 'senior citizens.' No one I know likes it. Some of the people call themselves 'oldies'; I think that's much better, don't you?" Ted is very clear about his tastes and his dislikes. He likes to read and listen to music, watch old movies on television, and see new ones at the East Side houses, where he is entitled to a half-priced ticket for matinees. He is an avid movie fan. When he retired, he went on a binge, going nearly every day for a year to the Museum of Modern Art's Hollywood retrospective. "But it was living in the past, going every day. I was sort of living for the movies. I lost all track of time. The days just disappeared."

Ted complains a bit about the West Side Discussion Group: he usually finds the talks tedious, and he doesn't go to the dances since he doesn't dance. But it's a night out. Sometimes he and Harry will meet in the afternoon for a matinee, then have an early dinner before ending the day at West Side. He has met no new friends there, though he does see some of the men from the CR group. Ted learned about West Side from a resident social worker, a lesbian, whom he describes as pushy, always wanting him to be militant, to march in parades, to tell people he is gay. Ted thinks that for him telling and marching are unimportant.

He says some of the younger men in the group who are obsessive about their loneliness and their bad luck with lovers are "injustice collectors." He is not sympathetic to those men his own age who find the search for sex humil-

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iating, haunting the baths and the porno houses, always exposed to rejection. The search for sex always bothered Ted, and he simply stopped looking in his mid-fifties. He became celibate.

"I just dropped out. After all, I was treating men as if they were sex objects; there was very little emotional involvement. Besides, I got syphilis at the baths and it took a year to get rid of." Ted was an habitu e of the baths all his sexual life; though he sometimes went to bars, they never worked for him. "I never picked up anyone or even met anyone. And I don't like to drink. The only time I was every really involved with anyone, it didn't work out because he was an alcoholic." Ted talks of his affair with a promiscuous black lover, which lasted a year in 1949, with a faint sadness. He describes a period in his life when he was especially attracted to black men. He says his sexual drive is low, calling himself undersexed, "but there was enough to keep getting me in trouble." Of all these men, his sexual history seems the most impoverished. Though he says he never wanted to be straight, he accuses the gay world of being "too narrow, too

expectations. He is emphatically not interested in casual sex. He tells of two men, both widowers with long gay histories, who live together and favor threesomes, and while he thought their offer flattering, it was irrelevant.

Though Ted has never had a sustained sexual relationship, he has had a gay friendship for fifty-two years. When his mother died, his friend wanted them to live together in a newly opened project at Rockaway Beach. But Ted stayed on in his home until the building was demolished. In 1967 he took an apartment down the hall from his friend. But in 1975, the year after his retirement, he moved to Manhattan since he was traveling to the city every day for the movies at the Museum. He has begun to find his friend trying. "He's become a pathological liar. I can never tell what happens to him anymore. He exaggerates so much."

When I ask Ted how he came out, he describes the friendly neighborhood cop who seduced him when he was fifteen and then took him to the Village bars. Ever since, he has preferred anal sex; in fact, he says he has never really enjoyed oral sex no matter

The past, its inadequacies and pains, are very distant to Ted, as they are to the others. He sees little of his two sisters, although he recuperated from his bout with cancer with the younger of them and her husband in West Palm Beach. "That's when I got hooked on the soap opera. There was nothing else to do." He has never discussed his homosexuality with his family, but he suspects his Florida sister may know since she sent him all the clippings on the Anita Bryant campaign. Ted was close to his mother, whom he lived with until her death in 1957. She was Catholic and "a really good person." His father was a Jewish alcoholic who passed as gentile in the Irish bars he liked to get drunk in. I comment that an intermarriage in 1910 was fairly rare, and ask how he regards himself, since he bears his father's Jewish-sounding name. But Ted has no interest in conventional religion. His mother's Catholicism was alien to him, especially after he recognized himself as homosexual, and he feels his father's relations, who changed their name in order to pass, are hypocritical.

His one sustained interest is theosophy, which centers on the belief in reincarnation. "It's the only thing that seems to make any sense. Otherwise, life is meaningless. When I had cancer, I was worried about suicide because if you kill yourself, you have to do it all over again." Ted has no intention of doing it again.

□

Recently, over after-dinner drinks, Carol, a lesbian-feminist lawyer, asked me what I thought of an idea she had about retirement homes for gays. "It would be complicated, buying land in Florida or the Hamptons or Hawaii; it would have to be covered by a single individual's name. But it's the coming thing. Now is the time to start." Her motives are certainly as pragmatic as they

The search for sex always bothered Ted, and he simply stopped looking in his mid-fifties. He became celibate.

closed." When I ask him what gayness means to him, since he is not interested in sex and finds gay sensibility very limited, he replies that it doesn't mean much to him at all.

He would have liked "a serious relationship," which he clarifies to mean a monogamous marriage, but he does not particularly regret not having had one, and at his age he has no further

which end he was on.

Ted was the only one of the men rejected for service during World War II for being homosexual. "I was a CPI: it means Constitutional Psychopathic Inferiority," I tell him that I don't think that particular designation is still in use. How did he feel about the term? Had he wanted to go into the army? He looks at me wryly and indicates that the questions are pointless.

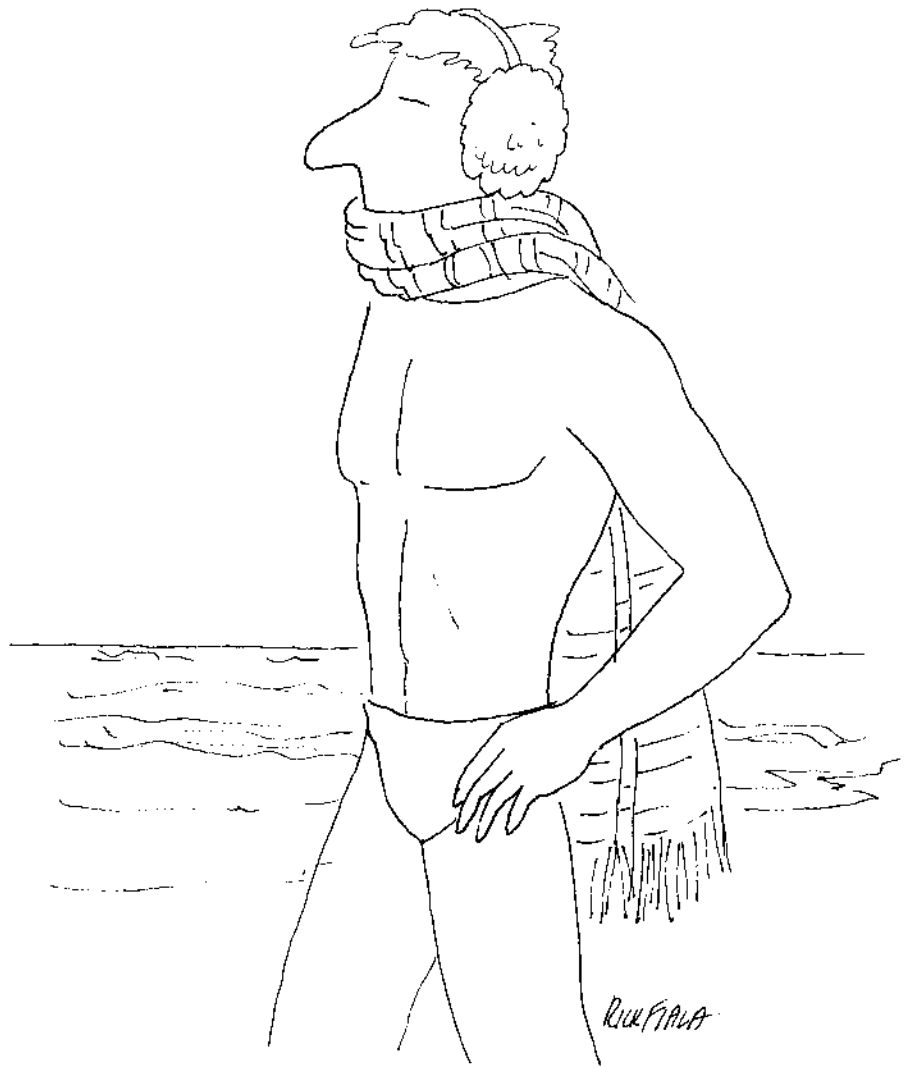
are social; if she is right, the first entrepreneurs who succeed in organizing attractive retirement communities for gays will get very rich. I agree that the idea is marvelous; no doubt others are thinking of it as well. But my gut feelings remind me of other utopian enthusiasms I have flung myself into.

It is not unfeasible. There are gay men and women in law, medicine, politics, social work, clinical psychology, architecture, every profession needed to make a retirement community successful. The question is about the clientele. If the usual statistics about population distribution are true for gays, there must be well over a million old gay men and women scattered across the nation. Why does the idea strike me as a fantasy when the evidence clearly indicates that it is reasonable? After all, where *are* they? One sees a negligible number of older men and women in the Hamptons, and a few older men at Cherry Grove, but where do old gays go when they retire?

Would Harry and his friends retire together? Would I want to retire to a gay community? Carol insists the facilities would have to be segregated, lesbian/gay male, with perhaps some impersonal territory for both. I start to argue: surely, by that time gay men and women will have a dialogue that will make such arrangements superfluous. But we look at each other, and it is difficult to imagine that time. We are both suddenly pessimistic. I grimly venture that by the time we're retired, perhaps Anita will take care of it for us: segregated gay concentration camps.

Old age for gay men and women presents more complicated problems than we have begun to name. All the men I interviewed need a community. Most complain of the inadequacy of the West Side Discussion Group to deal with their problems, but they never mention any alternatives. West Side, however irrelevant its programs, at

UNABLE TO BRING HIMSELF TO LEAVE THE PINES AT THE END OF THE SEASON, CALVIN ZENDER WINTERIZES HIMSELF.



least acknowledges that old men and women are alive and in need. Perhaps West Side tries to do too much, but I doubt it. It is what it is, and one should be glad it is still there and able to continue in times when the life span of most gay organizations keeps shrinking. When there was practically nothing, Mattachine and Daughters of Bilitis tenaciously held on. Militancy made them superfluous, with its contempt for the old styles and ideas of the closeted timidities. Now there are enough gay organizations in America to fill a telephone book (albeit a thin one), but it can hardly be called an embarrassment of riches. As I write this, I feel the subject of gay aging slipping away. I notice

I am beginning to focus on my dissatisfaction with the movement, remembering the high hopes of the early GAA and the Gay Academic Union and my cynical relief when I no longer needed them, cocooned for a moment in a happy love affair.

Is it that one simply cannot imagine what it is like to live so exclusively in the present, with fantasies and rage alike burnt out? Perhaps the prejudices are more potent than one suspects, cutting one off from empathy and understanding. When I told a friend, a reasonably intelligent woman, what I was writing about, she grimaced.

"Why? It's disgusting."

"What is?"

"The whole thing. Dirty old men." She is a professor of humanities, no youngster herself, and generally concerned about social oppression. But for her, these issues are not real; they have no priority. Tacitly, it is understood that death will resolve the problems sooner than later. My colleague hastens to clarify that her response has nothing to do with the fact that the men are gay; she would feel the same way if they were straight.

Some of the difficulties are identical for people of whatever sexual persuasion. On August 8, 1977, the *New York Times* devoted two thirds of its Op-Ed page to "How Old Is Old?" by an enraged woman of sixty-six forced to retire last year. She catalogs her dismay and anger, the stupidity of wasting her professionalism when it is still invested with the authority of experience but without the bias of ambition. She is physically fit and has been educated to use her leisure in the richest possible ways; she has the money to do so. But she is immobilized with depression, with a sense of being unfit, rejected, sub-human. When she taught and had five sets of papers to mark over the weekend, she still found the time to tend to her family, bake bread, do a host of things: her energy was limitless. Now, completely free, she is imprisoned in fatigue and lassitude.

For those deprived of work "to make room for younger people," there may be no adequate compensation unless they find other work. Signs in Congress indicate that the extension of mandatory retirement is not far off. But those who would work longer if they could are a small minority, less than ten per cent of the elderly. Most welcome retirement. The quality of work in America is not so ideal that forty-five years on the job are insufficient.

More universal is the sense of being useless, whether one is active or not. In the July 16,

1977, issue of *Gay Community News*, the cover story was "Older Gays: Our Neglected Roots." Since Jonathan Katz's *Gay American History* appeared (Volume II is on the way), writers in gay journals everywhere have understood the need to become amateur historians of the past before it is irrevocably gone. Well and good. While I was interviewing Harry and Rudi and Ted, no doubt they were flattered to enter gay history. Perhaps they'll enjoy reading the article, and that will be another fleeting moment of esteem. However, the articles are *not* written for old men and women, but for the forty-four-year-old babies who don't want to be old and peripheral in twenty years and who frankly doubt they'll arrive at seventy-five virile and healthy.

When I asked the men what they would want *now* that they don't have, the question was too vague. Of course, they would like a gay center devoted primarily to social needs, a place to be comfortable in where sexual issues are secondary, but sexual opportunities still viable. They would like a place to go where they are the majority. But most would also like to leave such places at the end of the evening and return to their own lives. When I said earlier that I thought gays coped better with being old, I certainly had in mind the anonymous *Times* writer, who seems self-indulgent compared to those men and women who are old and never had a decent job in their lives. These gay men cope better because deprivation has been their daily fare: social contempt is such an old story. Like New York's bad weather, you just live with it. Unlike their heterosexual contemporaries, few expected relationships to last. Those like Harry and Rudi who were deeply involved for long periods are in the minority. Ironically, it is Harry and Rudi who seem the most self-reliant, the most vigorous, the least likely to want a

retirement home.

When I compare these men to my relatives of the same age, I understand that Harry and his friends had no wider choices than my father and mother did. Foremost was a job, sometimes any job in a Depression that marred their entire adult lives and made material values paramount. Then there was political survival in the Forties when the anxieties were even more nightmarish. But they have come to be who they are despite the bitterness and injustice and limitations they testify to. They are dignified, mostly serene, and remarkably free of self-pity. I think of my aunts and uncles lushly retired in Miami, still enmeshed in their lifelong hysterias, still trapped in their children's lives, and I am certain that the strength these men have is special. It is not like the fortitude of old black matriarchs whose lives were worse, harder and more bitter, filled with far greater injustices than lovers dying intestate. It is not like the strength of Jews I know who have survived the Holocaust only to relive it endlessly.

But these men, and lesbians like them, lived their lives as something else, as heterosexuals, and that duplicity created for them a sense of self and privacy that no interviewer and no loneliness can readily violate. Their experience is still typical for the majority of gays. No matter how many come out, one is not *born* out. One lives two lives until it is no longer tolerable. For many, "intolerable" is a luxury they can't yet afford. For some of the men, the duplicity was very expensive, but I think for all of them it was the foundation of a stoicism that sustains them. Without any help from straight society and with precious little from gay society today, they survive decently. If they ask little, it is because their experience tells them it is wisest to ask for no more than what one can expect. ■

THE GAY LIFE

(to be sung)

When there are two,
there will likely be
at least three:
the Mommy,
the Daddy,
the Ba-a-by.

Sometimes the Mommy
is the Baby—
sometimes it's the Daddy.
Baby can be Baby *and*
Daddy—in fact,
prefers to be.

Daddy can sometimes be
Mommy. But when
Mommy's Mommy, she's
not supposed to be
Ba-a-by.

Baby-Daddy prefers
Mommy to be Mommy,
although Mommy may
want to be
Daddy, or Baby, or
Daddy-Baby.
Daddy may let Mommy be
Baby-Mommy, but prefers
her not to be
only Ba-a-by.

Each can be,
in turn, Mommy, Daddy,
Baby—but not
simultaneously.
Two Mommies, two Daddies
or two Babies:
Misery!

Bad enough if Daddy
is Baby when Mommy
wants to be—
or wants Daddy to be

just Daddy, when he
isn't—or Daddy wants
Baby-Mommy to be
just Mommy, and she
isn't, or doesn't want to be.

Sometimes Mommy wants
Daddy to be
Baby, for now, for fun—
but then get up and be
BIG DADDY—and Daddy
won't be. That's bad.

Or sometimes Baby-Daddy
wants Mommy BIG—but not
TOO BIG. That's too bad.

Sometimes there's just
a Baby and a Mommy.
Or a Baby and a Daddy.
That's bad, too.
Two bad is too bad.

Suppose there's just
a Mommy and a Daddy?
Fine. If Mommy will be
Daddy, and Daddy
will be Mommy *sometimes*.
Likely each
will come to be
Baby sometimes,
and that's O.K.

When there's a Daddy-Mommy
and a Mommy-Daddy, and
each wants to be
Baby sometimes, but not
at the same time—
that's good. That's
the way to be. Because
when there are two,
there will likely be
at least three.

—R.R. Knudson



By Douglas C. Kimmel

Many gay people grow up without gay parent- and grandparent-figures. Unlike heterosexuals and persons in other minority groups, gay people may become adults without having any significant contact with people like themselves who are middle-aged or elderly.

As a result, gay people often may be uncertain about what to expect as they grow older and—without any positive role models in their lives—may expect the worst. Indeed, there are very bleak stereotypes about aging gay men and women in our society. But are these stereotypes possibly just part of those myths that instill in everyone fear of being homosexual and in gays self-hatred and contempt for other (especially older) homosexuals? Perhaps these stereotypes are only a manifestation of the general social stigma attached to homosexuality.

If the estimate that ten per cent of the adult population is gay also applies to people over 65, this would imply that there are approximately two million gay people over 65 in the United States. Yet until quite recently there has been almost no research on the characteristics and lifestyles of aging homosexual men and women.

To begin an exploration of the patterns of aging among gay people, we interviewed in 1975 and 1976 fourteen gay men between the ages of 55 and 81 (a parallel study of aging gay women needs to be done, but we did not have the resources for it). We located the respondents through organizations that attract gays of mixed ages, such as Dignity, Integrity, and the West Side Discussion Group, and a seminar on gay counseling. One respondent was contacted through a personal ad in a newspaper, in which he identified himself as gay and over 60. No respondents

were obtained from bars or baths and no respondent provided the names of other respondents. Average age of the respondents was 65 years; half were over 63.

It is probably impossible to find a sample that is representative of all older gay men, so our study does not necessarily reflect all of the lifestyles of aging gay men, or the actual proportions of gay men over 55 who live with lovers, have been married, and so on. The men were generally better educated and enjoyed a higher standard of living than elderly men in general (which may be because gay men have more opportunities for education and financial success than men with families to support). At best, these men may be seen as reflecting *some* of the patterns of aging to be found among "gay grandfathers."

There was considerable variation among these men in nearly every dimension we studied. This finding in itself suggests that any general stereotype about aging



Illustration by Robert Ein

gay men is at least an oversimplification. Since these men were each so different from the others, the notion that all gay men grow older in the same way is simply invalid.

Three of the respondents had a long-term lover and a consistent pattern of stable relationships that spanned nearly all of their adult lives. One had been with his lover for thirty years; although they did not share the same apartment, they lived near each other, shared dinner nearly every night, and spent weekends together. Another had a lover of forty years who had died; he had been with his current lover for five years. And the third had been with his deceased former lover for twenty-five, with his present lover for thirteen years. In one case, the two lovers were about the same age. In the other two, the lover is about twenty-five years younger than the respondent; both of these men had been the younger partner in the previous relation-

ships that had been ended by the death of their lovers. One described his experience this way:

When he first started getting ill he called me every five minutes at the office and I'd either have to run home and take an extra hour at lunch or something to keep him calmed down and quieted. . . He could remember things that had happened years ago, but couldn't remember that he had called me five minutes before. . . I didn't have any support during those months. . . I was sure I was going to lose my job. . . I couldn't go to the office and say, "I need time off, my wife is sick [like heterosexuals can]." . . He died December 1. So one cold January night I went out and went to the Yukon [bar]. I just sat in the back and watched the dancing. It wasn't until several months later that somebody approached me and wanted to be friendly. And that's how it all began. . . The way this fellow feels about it now, this is going to continue until the end—my end, I presume.

Four of the men had been married to women and two have children; one is a grandfather, but when his son found out he was gay, he beat him up and their relationship is very distant now. Three of the men were divorced and one had been widowed. All of these men knew they were gay when they were young and only one married before he had his first gay experience. One had a gay lover for eight years when he was in his twenties; but when the lover left for a distant job, he was very lonely and married about a year later. Only one formerly married man reported that he had been entirely heterosexual during his married life; he returned to homosexuality after his wife died.

Six of the men had lived alone nearly all of their adult lives, although four of them had experienced at least one homosexual affair. And one respondent was living with a roommate who had been his lover several years ago. One of these men had a series

of extended relationships with young men over the years and wanted very much to meet another man in his twenties to continue this pattern. Another had adopted a heterosexual son many years ago; the son is now married and the respondent is a grandfather who enjoys a close relationship with the family. And another long-term loner had been so sexually repressed that he reported that his "first really close sexual experience with anybody" occurred just three months before the interview—at the age of 59; his first sexual experience of any kind was when he was 56, although he had decided that he was homosexual many years earlier. He commented:

I felt that by the time of 50 you dried up. And, in a way, sex grips me more than it did years ago. Somehow I managed to get by without tremendous urges in that respect. . . . My 72-year-old friend can do it two or three times a day and not be bothered.

All of the men indicated that they were sexually active and that sexuality continued to be an important part of their lives. Although several reported that sex was less important than when they were younger, several also indicated that it was more satisfying now:

Sex is better now, less accent on the genitals and more on the total person. . . . One, two, three times a week now; my erections are not as hard as they were five years ago, but it's just as enjoyable.

It's never been as satisfying as it is now; I don't have sex as often as I did, but once a week at least.

Not as important, but important; erections are not as easy and I can't ejaculate as often; there's not as much drive and urge; but I enjoy it more than I did when I was young because I repressed it then.

As with many of the other characteristics, there was considerable variation in the preferred age

of the partner. Two reported a distinct preference for younger men and two indicated that they strongly preferred men who were not young ("young" meaning approximately 18 to 30). In one case, a person 40 years old was felt to be unattractive; in another, the most attractive men had always been about 45.

Because these men were born between 1895 and 1920, they had to deal with being homosexual during a very different time in history than for young people today. Some of their comments make this point:

I went to high school in the 1920's and that was a pretty lively time, too. There were all kinds of social revolutions going on around the world and one of them was sexual. People were being a lot more frank and honest about sex than they had been previously. But it was mainly heterosexual relationships that

picture theaters, or just eye contact on the street.

It was like living in the underground. . . . Everyone, when they came out, went into the closet, as the expression goes.

Not surprisingly, several of these men experienced considerable guilt about being homosexual. One had been in psychotherapy for most of his adult life in an attempt not to be gay. Another tried to take his own life after his divorce. At least two had a serious drinking problem a few years ago. Another had suffered a great deal of "religious guilt."

However, most of them overcame these serious problems and found much greater self-acceptance in recent years. At the time of the interview, only three of the fourteen seemed clearly depressed and lonely—primarily for reasons that had little to do with being gay: one had recently retired from

. . . gay men in their 60's often have a self-selected friendship network on which they can rely for social (and sexual) companionship . . .

were being much more free. . . . I was aware of [homosexuality] in me when I was about 14-15 years old. But I didn't know what to do about it. There was nobody to go to to get advice. I just sort of suffered along not knowing what to do.

Of course, my lover and I didn't meet in a gay bar. There were no bars then. It was Prohibition. . . . [Gay people] would meet at bath houses on the beach and [in] railway terminals, places where people could congregate and not be noticed; or motion

a very meaningful occupation, another felt he had been a failure in his career, and the third was in poor health, living on welfare in a single-room occupancy hotel. The others ranged upward from this extreme to three who were living happy, contented, fulfilling lives.

The respondents noted some of the special challenges for gay men as they grow older. These include lack of social support when a long-term lover dies, adjusting to not being able to

play the bar-cruising game the same way one did when younger, feelings about not having children or being the end of one's family line, and the tendency of some to withdraw into a circle of friends and no longer to have social contact with young people. Also, the stigma of being gay may make ordinary problems of aging more difficult, especially if it is combined with a belief in the stereotype that aging is a very bleak experience for gay men.

They also pointed out some of the advantages in aging for a gay person. There may be more awareness of one's responsibility for oneself, so that the preparation for aging does not rely on possibly unrealistic expectations about family or children. There is more continuity of life for gay men who do not have to deal with children leaving home, who have not been confined by the "male" or "female" roles in performing such necessary tasks of living as cooking, shopping, and managing finances, and who because they may have lived alone during earlier portions of their adult life do not face this experience for the first time. Also, gay men in their sixties often have a self-selected friendship network on which they can rely for social (and sexual) companionship, contacts, and support.

When asked what should be done to improve the quality of life for aging gay men, one respondent summed up the feelings of many:

Make the gay world aware of the potentials and value of older gay men—just the opposite of the way it is now. Now men of great intellectual stature are called "Old Auntie." There's a great deal of prejudice in the media—newspapers and magazines. The crux of the matter would be if young people could be educated that old age is not ugly. It's really a matter of tradition that this country doesn't have. . . . In this country straight people don't have it, and in gay life it's the worst. ■

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W.T.

Illustration by Bill McMahon

Most of the great manuscript libraries scattered around the country are woefully understaffed. Some of their richest collections are uncatalogued—still crated. Many archivists lament this condition as much as scholars do. But not all. Some—by temperament and training—prefer acquisition to information. A few are downright hoarders, guarding their treasures like ferocious stone lions fronting on some fabled monarch's tomb. When such archivists receive an inquiry from someone lacking "proper credentials," they dismiss it with hauteur. Should a "genuine" scholar—one with the "correct" number and kind of degrees, publications, and academic appointments—knock at the door, their reaction is fright. An invader has appeared, a potential enemy—someone who might disseminate and thus dilute the unique value of their "holdings" (that revealing term!).

I exaggerate, of course. But not by much. As I think Jonathan Katz, for one, will attest. As an independent scholar unaffiliated with any academic institution, Katz often met with overt hostility—when polite evasion failed—as he gathered material for his anthology, *Gay American*

History. Of course anyone looking for historical documents on sexual behavior, including the heterosexual variety, must be prepared for a substantial amount of resistance; even as someone with traditional credentials, I've run up against a fair share of it in my research travels around the country. But whereas all of us attempting to do research in this field face the double obstacle of puritanism and homophobia, Katz had to parry sheer academic snobbery as well. His book has been rightly hailed (in the gay press, at least) as a milestone, but it's not been sufficiently recognized that Katz had to struggle—and did so valiantly—against the stupefying self-importance of academia.

All of which is to describe the worst side of trying to locate and gain access to unpublished sources on sexual behavior. There's a brighter, perhaps more characteristic side, too, typified by my recent experience at The Countway Library of Medicine in Boston, one of the country's great manuscript depositories. Its chief archivist, Richard J. Wolfe, is a man whose good will is matched by enormous energy. I had barely arrived at The Countway when

Wolfe filled the table in front of me with cartons of documents—many of recent acquisition, never before researched. Torn between euphoria and incipient numbness (at the days of digging that lay ahead), I apprehensively mentioned that the feminist scholar, Barbara Sicherman, had suggested I also have a look at the L. Eugene Emerson papers. Wolfe's eyes lit up and off he raced. He was back within minutes. "Marvelous tip!" he said, dumping eleven more cartons in front of me. "Emerson was one of the first psychotherapists in Boston, worked at the Psychopathic Hospital, should be lots of stuff in there for you, nobody's ever really gone through it..."

Many days later, I got around to the Emerson papers. The tip had indeed been marvelous. Among other items, the collection contained hundreds of pages of handwritten notes the doctor had taken down while listening to his patients talk. For the pre-World War I period, this kind of documentation, nearly stenographic, is extremely rare. And—as it proved—extremely difficult to decipher. I battled for weeks with the Xerox copies of Emerson's notes that I carted home with me from The

The Therapy of C.M. Otis: 1911

By Martin Duberman

Countway, and I'm not entirely sure even now that I've accurately decoded all of his elliptical, abbreviated scrawl. Clearly he had written at top speed, trying to get down verbatim what the patient was saying. Thus the special value of the material.

But also its special limitations. Emerson had scant time (perhaps inclination as well) to record his own reactions. His notes contain only a few parenthetical remarks, the barest hints, of what he himself had thought, felt—and prescribed. Time and again, I longed to know how this 38-year-old New England therapist—during those tumultuous early days of the Freudian movement—had responded to the personal intimacies revealed to him.

That curiosity will never be satisfied. But at least we do have the case histories. Many are fragmentary, lacking the needed detail for reconstructing personalities and events. (One exception—which I'm preparing for publication—is extraordinary: 150 pages of notes, plus correspondence, about a "masochist" woman Emerson "treated" over a period of several years.) One reason for the brevity of most of the histories is that therapists at the turn of the century typically didn't see their patients for the long stretches of time that have since become commonplace. Even those few whom Emerson (in his words) "intensively studied and analyzed" were discharged after several months. And *not*—it should be added—with glib claims of "cure." In a summary Emerson wrote up on December 9, 1912, he conscientiously recorded that of the sixteen patients that year with whom he had attempted "psycho-analytic treatment for therapeutic purposes," seven had been "without much success."

Case No. 15" of the preceding year (1911) would surely have fallen into the "without much success" category. The "case" was a 33-year-old man

named C. M. Otis, a patient at the Psychopathic Hospital with whom Emerson held a total of six therapy sessions between April and August. He took thirty-three pages of notes on Otis—one of the fuller histories.

The initial session took place on April 26, 1911. Here are the very first words Emerson jotted down on his note pad (which doesn't necessarily mean, of course, the first words Otis spoke):

Reading a farm paper, about horse breeding, saw a picture of stallion, & had an erection—
Abt. [About] 13 [years old].

"Mmm," I thought, gliding into a slow canter in my chair at The Countway, "at last—a male Catharine the Great!" Wrong. But it took several more pages before C. M. Otis came into better focus. Switching into the third person (as they often do), Emerson's notes continue:

Remembers before he came to Michigan . . . had a girl . . . Never touched her—just adored her from afar . . .

Mother died when he was 10.

Played very intimately with brother.

Can't remember that he was especially loving towards his mother.

Never has had sexual intercourse.

First time masturbated abt. 17—Saw[?] a boy, they were lying on the ground[?], he took his penis out & showed how it was done—When he masturbated it gave him a very agreeable sensation . . . has masturbated off & on ever since. Stopped when he was abt. 30 and joined the Church (Congregationalist)—2½ yrs—When he was traveling in the south [as a salesman] for D. M. Ferry he got discouraged, location was so bad, roads so bad, was late & company called him down for being so slow . . . Then he began to masturbate again . . . Saturday night would report the week's work—supper time till 12—Would feel . . . tension inside & a dread

of starting the work, & before starting this report would masturbate. . . .

At this point in his notes Emerson suddenly indents and inscribes a single word in the middle of the page, as if entitling an essay. *I* hadn't yet gotten the message, but Dr. Emerson had. The single word?

Boys

(The notes shift back into the first person:)

The first experience that I had, didn't know anything abt. it then, had a class of boys [Otis was teaching Sunday School], it was when I joined the church . . . There was a boy . . . I used to like to have him come & go out walking . . . After I quit my work in the bank, this boy & my brother, wanted to go camping, so I arranged it. This chap & I slept together. Then this thing happened. I don't know why or how it happened. I used to sleep with my arm around him, & I awoke one night & instead of finding my hand where it ought to be, it was down on his private parts. He awoke . . . I took him aside & said I wouldn't want to do anything to you that [would harm you?]. Had him come out to see me at the farm but never touched him again.

The next paragraph is all but illegible. But the few words that can be deciphered give us some sense of Otis's subsequent experience. "Has slept with other boys, in the south—touched two . . . erections frequently . . . those two boys also had erections . . ."

Otis then started talking about his brother. The two often read poetry together—"Oliver Wendell Holmes, etc., we had our window open, it was cold, so we cuddled together." He hastened to add that "my brother never learned anything from me." It had simply been a matter of finding it cold when they got up—"so we'd hop back into bed and cuddle up close together naked."

Otis next touched briefly (at least Emerson's notes are brief) on

TIME



"Hi. I'm Agnes Withers. This is my freshman art class, and we've come to help you re-design Time."

several subjects—that he had once met “a nice young fellow” while traveling to Battle Creek one day “who came to sit beside me—he was musical & we talked abt. music”; that he feared the “men patients in the Psychopathic Hospital know,” and was apprehensive that they would persecute him; that his mother had been an invalid for two years (“She was one of the most nervous persons . . .”); that in 1905 he had attended a dental college for a year, but “when it came to examinations, I couldn’t satisfy . . . my professors.” Emerson’s notes on the first session conclude with Otis’s painful statement that he

dreads to see a boy with his hands in his pockets, hates to see pictures of boys in papers, in fact I wish the boys would get off the earth (laughs), or else I would.

In the second session, held the following day (April 27, 1911), Otis talked about his hopes, when younger, of becoming a market gardener. But his family “jumped

up & down & said it was impractical . . . just because I couldn’t plough . . . they were dead against me.” Having no money of his own, he had put aside his dream of becoming a farmer and in the intervening years had shuttled among a variety of unsatisfying jobs: ferry boat operator, bank clerk, salesman, gas-meter reader. He was worried, he told Emerson, about how his family would react to his hospitalization, formulating his concern in a revealing analogy. “Suppose nothing is done for me here . . . Suppose I’d committed a crime & had been sent to a state institution, they would have looked for some change when I came out—Well, they will look for some change now.”

From there, Otis began to speculate about what had caused his “peculiar trouble.” It “had been brought on,” he thought, “by masturbation,” and also by the reading he’d done. In 1895, at age 17, he had followed the newspaper accounts of Oscar [Emerson spelled it “Oskar”]

Wilde’s trial: “reading that case of Oskar Wilde, didn’t help my case a bit.” He felt he had been further harmed by consulting “medical dictionaries abt. the habit I had, how it came abt.”—that material apparently having been suggested by a “medical doctor at the asylum” in Pontiac, Michigan, with whom Otis had once talked. “All this homosexuality,” Otis told Emerson at one point—momentarily shifting the blame off masturbation—“took its start in [my] study of abnormal psychology.” He may have meant—I’m guessing here—that the readings had simultaneously stimulated his desires and convinced him “that he could not change them.” What seems certain is that they enhanced his sense of persecution: while reading one day in the public library in Battle Creek, “I heard the telephone ring & after the librarian answered it, she couldn’t keep her eyes off [me]—a degenerate abroad! . . . the police called her up.”

Otis came back to the theme of persecution often during the re-

maining sessions. At one point he blamed his "notoriety" on having mistakenly confided in a dentist for whom he briefly worked; Otis was "positive" he had been overheard—"& now it is all over there, that I am what I am." At another point, Otis blamed the boy he had touched while on the camping trip: "he talked abt. it—& they watched to see if I was all right—He wouldn't talk abt. it would he? I think he would, & I think he did." Otis's fear of discovery and harassment sometimes became acute. During the fifth session (May 11, 1911), he told Emerson that there was an organized effort—"like the night-riders—to "do him harm." He was "afraid to leave & go to work . . . feels safe in the hospital." At another session, he confessed that he'd thought of suicide a good deal—how some people blew their brains out, others took chloroform.

Emerson was not the first doctor Otis had seen. Earlier he

had consulted two of the most famous medical figures of the day—Dr. John Duncan Quackenbos of Columbia University and Dr. Isador Coriat, twice (1924, 1937) elected to the presidency of the American Psychoanalytic Association. Coriat remained all his life a highly respected orthodox Freudian, but Quackenbos (so destined by his name?) was more on the fringes of respectability. Nathan G. Hale, Jr., in his invaluable book *Freud and the Americans*, recounts Quackenbos's widely publicized use of hypnosis in "curing" everything from "neurasthentic insanity" to "erotomania" to tea and coffee drinking. Hale describes the "nattily dressed, gorgeously moustached" doctor hypnotizing his patients "with a red carnelian [a variety of quartz] or a diamond mounted on the end of a gold pencil." Jonathan Katz, in *Gay American History*, has republished an 1899 paper by Quackenbos entitled "Hypnotic Suggestion in

the Treatment of Sexual Perversions and Moral Anaesthesia," in which the doctor records his successful treatment (in two visits) of "a gentleman of twenty-five." The "line of suggestion" Dr. Q. used was simplicity itself: he told the man to resist his "abnormal feeling" and acquire "a natural desire for the opposite sex properly directed and controlled." For good measure, Quackenbos depicted—doubtless while flashing that red carnelian—the "moral, mental, and financial ruin" consequent upon "indulging the unnatural lust." The patient at once responded with "exaltation of the will power and an acquired ability to resist."

Otis's consultation with Dr. Q. took quite a different turn when he started to tell the doctor about his fears of "being watched," Quackenbos quickly "pooh-poohed the idea" (later, Dr. Coriat did "the same") and showed him to the door. Otis told Emerson that he thought Quackenbos had

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"preconceived notions of how a neurasthenic ought to behave." Perhaps he had had to tell Quackenbos so at the time. More likely, because he did not "weep with mortification" (as had the "gentleman of twenty-five"); nor did he have that gentleman's financial resources (the anonymous earlier patient had held "a position of trust in the office of one of our great life-insurance companies"). Whatever the reason, Otis had "never had the chance to talk this thing out." He was therefore grateful to Dr. Emerson for at least listening to him—for the "thing" had "got [him] down."

The future concerned him especially. He had no job. He had no confidence that he could "change" (from age 16, "I can say that I seem to have noticed certain attractive younger boys much as others will have noticed girls"). He continued to dream of suicide. He continued to fear exposure and persecution. He wondered if his "symptoms" might signify some "serious mental trouble like paralysis or softening of the brain." He could conjure up only a plaintive vision of what lay ahead: "... if I can get my position [job], if I have the physical vigor to do the work, & I can get it, & everything else falls into line, I can work out my own salvation, I think, I don't know." Plaintive—yet not without a touch of dignity and self-reliance.

After five sessions spanning little more than two weeks (April 26-May 11, 1911), Dr. Emerson apparently terminated the "therapy." The last time he recorded in his notes for the final May 11 session seems, on its face, stern and bleak: Otis "shows no adequate emotional reaction to my suggestions." When I first read that sentence, it surprised me. Up to that point I'd gotten the impression that Emerson felt considerable compassion for Otis—though I could only defend it through negative evidence: nothing in Emerson's notes had suggested the self-congratulatory pos-

turing of a Dr. Quackenbos, or the rigid conformity of a Dr. Coriat. Perhaps Emerson's final note of May 11, I thought, had erupted out of his sense of helplessness in the face of misery. Abruptness—particularly in New Englanders—can sometimes substitute for concern.

That interpretation is tentatively confirmed in the additional two pages of notes Emerson appended some three months later. On August 4, he made his entry (recorded here almost in its entirety):

When I came home this afternoon, a little after 4, I found Otis waiting for me at the corner. He came back to the house with me & we sat a while in the piazza.

The reason he came to me was because I had not condemned him & he wanted some advice—I gave him some & think he will take it. He said I had helped him a good deal.

I told him of Leonardo da Vinci...

He has been on a farm helping the man who has charge of the baths. [?] at Hospital.

We don't know what "advice" Emerson gave. That he mentioned Leonardo suggests some effort at comfort and support—at the least, an effort to be non-judgmental. Otis apparently thought so, since he had made the special trip to Emerson's house to thank him for "not condemning [me]"—though the oppressed are not always able to distinguish condescension from acceptance.

Thus stands our knowledge of "Case No. 15." It is all we are ever likely to know of C. M. Otis—his fears and hopes, his experiences, his subsequent fate. The little we do know is the result of the chance preservation of a few dozen pages of notes. Only through that accident are we able to give a name and the bare outline of a personal history to one of millions of our anonymous predecessors who have suffered through time because of their attraction to the "wrong" sex. ■

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INTERVIEW WITH *Jaye P. Morgan* BY



PHILIP GERSON

I don't know if Beethoven was interested in politics, but he certainly changed the style of the court he was in—he was not treated as one of the rest of the court.”

On June 30, 1977, shortly after the Dade County vote and on the heels of state Senator John Brigg's introduction of an anti-gay bill into the California legislature, Jaye P. Morgan and the Protect the Rights Committee held a press conference in Hollywood to announce, simply, that “if Anita Bryant came to California and tried to promote the kind of votes she got in Dade County, we'd fight her.” While this doesn't seem extraordinary in light of the more recent public outcry, it was remarkable in that up until this point the silence from Hollywood had been deafening.

But then, J.P. Morgan has never been one of the rest of the court. She has acquired a reputation for being outspoken in a town and a business in which being unreserved has traditionally reserved a place in the unemployment line. Yet, she has been singing professionally for forty-two of her forty-five years. On a recent afternoon we discussed her career, her consistent public frankness, Hollywood, sexuality in popular culture, artists who attempt to affect social change, and other related topics.

“When we called the press conference, we invited several people from show business, and nobody accepted. I don't think that people out here are that secure.” While she deemed the coverage “excellent” and “very supportive” (except for the *Los Angeles Times*, who “have a rod up their ass anyway—they're not quite sure what they want to do”), she went on to say, “In New York, you don't have time, the pace is too fast to worry about if you're gay or whatever. Hollywood is the Mid-West of the United States—it deals with that

mentality and that's why it is functioning in that area. I think the rest of the country is a lot hipper than Hollywood. Hollywood catches on to a fad. If something's fashionable, then we'll do it; if it's not, we stay away from it. We're in the Fifties in Hollywood—it's a bandwagon town.”

“Being gay is still a very touchy subject. People are very tight-assed about it. The thing is that sexuality is simply irrelevant.” How will it arrive at this state in the minds of the majority? “If you're trying to get an idea across, it should be made popular, it needs good p.r. Being gay up to this point has not had very good public relations. It's now coming into an era where it will. Paul Lynde is a perfect example. He says many things that are very, very couched in being gay, and he says them with great humor.

“It's now becoming a popular cause and through that it's going to be acceptable. Eventually it will be irrelevant. I have a fourteen-year-old son, and I know that whatever choice he makes in his life, he's not going to be fucked over because of that. He's not going to have to wear a wedding ring to hide the fact that he's gay, if he's gay. And if he's in a room with gay men, he's not going to be grabbing his crotch in terror that he's going to be raped. It will one day be totally acceptable and very fashionable to be gay.”

We talked about the way in which sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular have been portrayed in popular culture, specifically in television and movies. “Audiences out there are a lot more sophisticated than they [the producers] say they are. The whole question is one of sophistication. Being gay should have nothing to do with playing a role. It's nothing but sexual preference anyway, which is not brought into most television, because according to TV you're not supposed to

The Bitterness of Kimon

I no longer frequent the swank cafes
where we sat at the choicest tables,
nor the scent shops and the riding stables
where we loitered away our idle days.

Our happiness lasted less than a year.
He was the handsomest youth in town,
so I had plenty of competition.
Legions of flatterers vied for his ear.

But he gave me no cause for jealousy.
We never had time to fall at odds
before the invidious, pitiless gods
disfigured his face with leprosy.

—Timothy Murphy

have sex. You're supposed to go to a blue waterfall or a bee in a flower—that's sex. Dinah Shore doesn't fuck anybody, Mary Tyler Moore never had an affair—there is no sex on television, and what there is is always played for a laugh. We will see that kind of television and those kind of roles portrayed as long as we deal with sex the way we do." Why is it portrayed that way? "It's all based on the white, male, Protestant, heterosexual concept of this country, in terms of sex, social comment, money, whatever. They're the ones who control what is being done." In movies, too? "Most movies that are being made are being made around a male hero, and it's just boring. I don't want to see Burt Reynolds again in a picture. It's limited to that concept."

But is it the "duty," or even the "place" of an artist to affect social change? "Artists are the ones who *do* effect social change. The artists effect it first, then it's picked up by the rest of the country, and then the political system picks it up. You have to be an example to effect any kind of a change. Otherwise, you're one

of the crowd, and that's not very interesting to watch. The individual effort is the thing that unites people. It also gives you a sense of really contributing. It's an example that really counts."

How would she respond to the argument that artists should only entertain and not attack or question? "Then I don't think you should even put William Shakespeare's works on a stage, you should never look at a Picasso or a Da Vinci. They forget about all of the great artists. Beethoven and Bach made a social change through music. You're selling an idea or an ideology, maybe not even on a conscious level."

We talked about artists who have clout, who have used their positions to take a stand. "Most of the people who have any clout are dead. Most people don't have very much in their lives, and they have very little excitement. If you're in any visible entertainment area, it gives you credibility. I love Jane Fonda, I think she's great. She had the guts to say something during a period in our history when it was very dangerous to say anything. She was banned from the networks, but

she did have clout. She had a direct channel to the public. She was part of a movement and caused change—the war was stopped and the President was taken out of office. She'll always be vocal and she'll always be an innovator, and that's the duty of an artist."

Lest the wrong impression be made, it should be pointed out that Ms. Morgan is a very funny lady, and is irreverent about everything, including herself. "If you realize what they're doing, you must never take it seriously, and you must never accept it. The minute you take yourself seriously, you go overboard. That damn *Gong Show* is great because it's so irreverent. We've blasted everybody and everything on that show. We've done religion, homosexuals, heterosexuals. Most people like to pop balloons—it's just that they're afraid to." Can't one go too far? "No, I don't think so. Nothing should be held in that kind of closet, and that's what you do when you try to be serious about an ideology. We've got Jimmy Carter as President, and before him we had Nixon. If we have to be serious in this country, then we've got to get rid of our leaders first. Then maybe we can get serious. Being irreverent is another way of saying, 'You're full of shit.'"

This outspoken bluntness has on occasion affected her career. "Yes, I did have trouble, but it doesn't matter. The trouble is a part of it. You don't feel it's trouble—it's something to be worked out. Most of the shows I do, I say what I want to and the censor stays very late to clip all that out. That's their job—I'm doing what I do. I've not been invited back, but that's simply not of any interest to me. That's their problem to deal with because there's always a place to work, to do what you do. And the shows that were saying, 'You can't say this, please don't say that,' are now saying, 'We'd like for you to be a little risqué.' It's all bullshit—you keep doing what you do and

they change around you.”

We both felt that change in the country as a whole seems inevitable. “I don’t know if it will happen in my lifetime, it’s very slow, but it will happen. Eventually you will be able to see anything on television, which is the way it should be because it’s a public meeting. It’s not here yet, because commercial television has had such a stranglehold.” Ms. Morgan feels that the change is going to come from the non-commercial, non-establishment areas in popular culture (i.e., educational television, cable television, independently made movies, etc.).

But will people pay to have their values questioned? “Unless they’re dead. The only thing that makes you sit up is something that you’re either afraid of, or that you don’t understand, and both of these things go hand in hand—fear and misunderstanding. So, if you want to lie in a stupor and not question, then you will; otherwise you’ll have the choice. You simply will not have to see the same old crap all the time, and the same people doing the same things again and again. I don’t want to see Liza Minelli in a picture again—it’s not interesting. I don’t want to see Barbra Streisand do *Funny Girl* again—she keeps doing the same movie over and over. Why? In her position, she has a great opportunity to play a gay woman, and to make it interesting and exciting. She can get the people in the theater, and why not do something when you get them there? You’ve got the power, you might as well use it. You might as well show people something that they’re not used to seeing.”

And what of her contribution, aside from her irreverence? Where does Jaye P. Morgan see herself going? “Everyplace, anyplace. It’s all an art form. You can record songs where you’re not a victim, where you don’t eat some guy’s socks. ‘Stand By Your Man’? That’s all bullshit and it should be

changed. You contribute in the areas you perform in, and I want to do it all.” Even to the extent of appearing on episodic television? “I can’t see anything very dramatic about the things they want you to do. Unless it could be just crazy. Rick Killard has a concept where I’d be a race-car driver in my forties, my age, and just be fucking crazy. That sounds like fun to me because it wouldn’t be a stereotype. It wouldn’t be Florence Henderson. None of these people get their period, there’s no reality, nothing related to what’s going on.”

We talked of the current climate in the country, the peculiar mixture of fear and bravery, and the conversation led, inevitably, to Anita Bryant and the question “Why?” “It’s her own fear of herself, and fear of not understanding the gay world. There are a lot of people who scream a lot of things, and they’re doing the things they’re screaming about. I’m not saying that Anita Bryant is a homosexual, because I don’t think she has the class or the sophistication to be a homosexual. She’s one of those white, Protestant heterosexuals.”

But if one is trying to effect change in society, can one afford to ignore anybody? “You don’t write off people. It’s simply that you do not bust your ass trying to convince somebody who’s not going to understand, that’s all. You can’t worry about the vast majority because you’ll kill yourself, you’ll wind up in a hospital room.

“You are on this planet to enjoy yourself, to enjoy other people, not to be guilty about whatever you’re thinking about. Not to harm anybody else as a result of that, but guilt brings on fear, and fear brings on anxiety which creates hostility which creates violence. It’s a lot more fun to deal with the job of being here.

“Most people really don’t have anything to say. In just being, you’ve caused a change.” ■

PETER JACKSON'S

POUFF

LE SACRE DU 'POUFF'

A spring-time check on the juiciest and most lavish club revue in town finds both show and cast in better shape than ever. The long-running "Pouff" (for "zany" — and the shoe fits) at La Vie En Rose, one of Manhattan's few surviving theater-cabarets of size, is still good, raunchy, sophisticated fun, now streamlined into a fast hour with few lulls.

At times it suggests a seasonal salute to nature, with the healthiest-looking array of near-nudes on the neon scene. The women are beauties, partnered by strapping specimens who double as club waiters. Leaping and bounding on stage and onto trapezes above the tables (you may duck), they all seem to be enjoying themselves, contagiously.

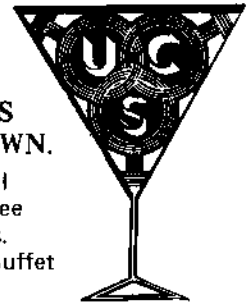
Their material rates a good-natured, harmless R-label.

"Pouff" gives a Monday-Saturday dinner show at 9:30 P.M. for \$19.50 plus tax (drinks extra). The late show at 11:45 P.M. has a \$9 cover charge; food if you like, or just drinks (averaging \$3). La Vie En Rose is at 227 East 56th Street (between Second and Third Ave.). Res.: 755-1820. Ask for Spiro.

HOWARD THOMPSON

N.Y. TIMES, MARCH 16, 1977

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Here is what I'll tell Joe: "Look, I'm sorry for what I said, and I know you're sorry for what you said, but let me explain why I know this won't work anymore, and then you can have your say, all right? . . .

"Opposites attract, yes, and therefore it was natural for us to be drawn to each other. But only for a time, I think. I think it was a mistake to push a relationship from just a pleasant interlude, and I suggest that the number of different living arrangements we've had are indication enough of incompatibility—we've tried the same bed, separate beds, separate bedrooms, separate apartments—and even though I've come back now, I'm very skeptical, especially in light of yesterday . . .

"So I think we should just forget it and accept the fact that we move in mutually exclusive worlds. I prefer to spend time pursuing the intellectual life and you couldn't care less—no, no, I mean to say that certainly I've

taught you a lot, and you've taught me a lot as well, and there has generally been reciprocity—but the strain to each of our systems—yes, your system too, though you probably aren't aware of it—the things we say and do to each other aren't gestures of two people who love each other, are they?

"Wait, that's rhetorical, don't say anything just yet—I just would like you to listen to a little story. No, you haven't heard it before, I'd forgotten it until last night, when I was trying to figure this out—and by the way, I think stories like this one are very useful, because they could potentially save us a lot of heartache if we'd only recall them when trying to . . . to catch hold of a current dilemma. That is, understanding five or six such childhood events—major events—is probably all the understanding one needs to get through life . . .

"But I want to explore just one of them now, which I think is

relevant to our situation, and it goes back to when I lived in Denver." (We'll both frown, intently.)

"There was this boy, Ricky, a kid my age, who lived a couple of blocks over—kind of short, wiry, with freckles and red hair in a brush cut, and he always wore sneakers—and from the start, subconsciously, you understand, we saw in each other precisely those qualities we each lacked. That is, he was a fair student, a leader, a good athlete, a scamp, an adventurer, while I was an outstanding student, a good musician, and the favorite of adults. Our respective qualities were really that clear-cut because, I suppose, we came naturally by them, and we'd also

What I'll

refined them to keep the words of approval coming . . .

"And I remember seeing him first at a Cub Scout meeting where he was attempting to recite a poem in front of the troop, and he had a memory lapse, and everyone began to giggle, though I was too polite to laugh or say anything. Then I proceeded to give a perfect rendition of "Invictus" or some such. I don't remember, and some grownup wanted me to repeat it in front of the Scout mucky-mucks . . . and, of course, when it came to building a fire, or climbing, or doing something clever with your hands, it was the other way around, I was the inept one.

"And this is the way things continued all through grade school. We didn't see each other every day because we were never in the same room—I was in the top group, and he was always somewhere below. But we collided occasionally—for instance, I was standing on the corner, comparing final report



cards with a group of other students. Mother had threatened to whip modesty into me if I ever boasted about my grades, but most everyone knew that I got all A's, and there was never any problem of being immodest, except this one day, and Ricky came up the street, and one of the girls asked him what he got, and he said, 'Never mind,' which made everyone suspect the worst, and this one girl, whose brother had just been on the losing end of a scrape with Ricky, said 'Well, Bigshot, he . . . '—points to me—'he got all A's!,' whereupon Ricky said, 'So big deal,' and someone else said, 'What's the matter, you jealous?,' and he said,

action going with a precise, sober reading of the lines. I merely provided the continuity for the set-pieces in which he and a few others hammed it up." (I'll smile.) "Naturally, when I do my sixth-form shows at school now, I cast kids like Ricky, because they put the whole thing over." (He'll smile.)

At any rate, winter came, and I went into my usual hibernation—quite unlike Ricky, who was always outside sledding, or skating, and, for a few years in there, cross-country skiing on the streets in the neighborhood. But one afternoon, I did venture out and began a friendly snowball fight with a boy from the same street. I was down behind one rock, and he behind another, and we'd agreed not to throw ice balls—you know, those very wet snowballs, very hard—and to play to fifteen; that is, whoever was hit fifteen times—well, that doesn't matter, but anyway, we were

having a good time when suddenly I was struck near the eye by an iceball. I looked up, screeching, and saw Ricky high-tailing it out of there. I was perfectly all right, with a little attention at home, but I was furious that he'd dared to enter our game like that, uninvited, and throw an iceball—I mean, that was just outrageous behavior, as far as I was concerned. In retrospect, I don't think he meant any real harm, he wasn't picking on me, I think he was simply out to have fun, and here was a fight in progress, and his great exuberance and good aim happened to spoil it for everybody . . .

"But the point of all this background material is to prepare for one particular situation, which connects to ours" (and he'll say he's listening). "We must have been eleven or twelve by this time, and one afternoon, Ricky and a friend, whom I didn't know, came up the street, tossing a football, and I was watering—no, cut-

Tell Joe

By Paul Lamar

'Not of a little sissy like him,' and I didn't pursue the matter . . .

"Then, in the fall of the next year—we must have been around nine—our classes joined up to do a play. I had the lead, the king—tall and correct, you see—and he was supposed to play my son, and naturally I memorized my lines practically overnight—two or three days after casting, very quickly, that's probably why the teacher chose me—but he had a terrible time, and finally even she began making comments about how he was slowing things down. And she repeatedly held me up as an example of dedication, which probably annoyed him and everybody else. But when he did get his lines down, he was sensational, and all the looseness and comedic ability Mrs. Davies had originally picked him for really blossomed, and the allegiance shifted to him, so that when the show went on, he received all the plaudits, and I was obviously not the star, I was merely a functionary, keeping the



Illustrations by Bruno Schmidt

ting—no, watering the lawn, that's right—and the ball slipped through the other boy's fingers and bounced into our yard. I looked at the ball, and looked at Ricky, and the friend started to come into the yard, but Ricky called him back. I was quite pleased that he respected the boundaries—and, you see, here was a real boundary between our worlds, no more metaphors—and he asked me to toss him the ball, figuring that was about as much as I would do. I didn't answer, but picked it up and nestled it awkwardly in my fingers, and I must admit that what I threw was not a pass in any sense of the word—it turned on its side and barely cleared the grass, and then it took a peculiar bounce, and the other boy looked over at me and laughed.

“What's wrong with you?” I asked.

“What's wrong with you, you mean?”

“Nothing,” I said.

“That's not the way to throw a football,” he said.

(And I'll wag my finger at Joe.) “And—just let me digress a moment, because this occurred to me before, when I was thinking about telling you all this—you see how close we came to . . . to . . . I guess the word is pleasantry—to pleasantry, instead of the inevitable argument? If only I could have said something like—when he said, ‘That's not the way to throw a football’—if only I could have said, ‘Well, show me,’ or ‘Yeah, I'm not very good,’ then the whole thing might have been a successful meeting. I just think that's interesting . . . not that I could have said that, because I was a typical, defensive kid, but I'm sure we're presented with moments like that all the time, as adults, and we just don't take advantage of them . . .

“Anyway, enough of that. He said, ‘That was not the way to throw a football,’ and Ricky

chimed in with, ‘That's the best he can do, Roger.’

“Yeah?” I said.

“Yeah,” he said.

“Well, I can beat you any day,” I said.

“In what—ugliness?” he said, which was a good line, but I didn't laugh—another missed opportunity.

“No, in badminton,” I said.

“They both laughed and said that it wasn't even a sport, and I said that it certainly was. I actually was good at it, and decided I could beat Ricky. Then he shrugged and said he'd kill me, even though he'd played only two or three times.

“I turned off the hose and led them around back. He picked up a racket and swung it around wildly—no finesse, but a lot of power. I explained the rules and said we should play best-of-three. His friend sat behind him, shaking his head, and chewing on some grass, like he was tough—real cocky kid. I won the serve and got ahead rather handily, something like 7-4, but I was annoyed by Ricky's manner—he was very casual, and kept up a light-hearted banter with this Roger, as if he didn't care. And sometime in the first game, Dad and Ellen came out to get me for dinner, and I pleaded with him to let me finish, so they sat down to watch, which added to the pressure, and soon Ricky did catch up, because he had such a natural ability, and we got to 17 or 18-all, and that was where his casualness actually didn't pay off, because he couldn't get serious in time for the last few points, and I won—which made me very confident.

“Then, in the second game, he opened with five straight points—fast and hard, and I countered with four more, but there was no contest after that, the tables were turned completely around. He stopped talking to his friend, because he saw there was work to be done, and he had to summon all his concentrative powers, which were considerable for this sort of thing, I think, and it paid

In the British Museum

A gold leaf olive wreath circled his head.
I still recall how those enormous eyes,
brimming with mingled sadness and surprise,
peered from the portrait on his coffin lid.

In fact, those eyes were too big for their brows,
the mouth too small, the lips too sensual
for me to think him very beautiful.
Moreover, he had much too large a nose.

Why then, I've asked myself repeatedly,
did I stand rooted there an hour alone?
Was it some subtle tremor at the bone
as though those painted eyes had searched for me
through many a dark, hostile century
and found the same desire as their own?

—Timothy Murphy

ely—he ran the score and won, finally, sided score, and in ame he overwhelmed and I quit—in tears— up 14-1. I ran up to and peeked out at and Ellen, picking up ts and the bird, and and his friend waving I was very angry, at course, and at my for having anything him, and at myself. . . .

which is by way of ying that I should never gotten involved with Ricky in the first place, I should never have given him the satisfaction of challenging him on his own territory, and getting beaten by him.

“And that’s by way of saying that even though he and I didn’t have any philosophy at the time, we were nevertheless developing two different lifestyles, and our confrontations were bound to be characterized by bewilderment, I think, and jealousy, and—ultimately—one always coming out a winner, the other a loser . . .

“And I think this should have suggested to me all along that, as adults, we waste a lot of time trying to figure each other out. We spend an inordinate amount of energy trying to get a handle on each other’s approach. And . . .

“Which is by way of saying that this argument with you has made you seem like Ricky to me; that is, you are the embodiment of all that I’m not, and don’t understand, and shouldn’t participate with . . . the childhood event as model, you see.

“And this is the strain to our systems I was referring to earlier, which we could avoid if we stuck to known quantities, you see? People we are like—stick to people we are like . . .

“Anyway” (I’ll fold my arms) “I hope I haven’t bored you, and I hope I’ve clarified some issues. . . . You probably have a response? If you want to say

something . . .”

This is what I’ll tell Joe.

And then Joe will lean forward, eagerly, and say—haltingly enough to make me initially impatient, as always—that his first thought is that I’m reading too much into this particular disagreement of ours, that it’ll blow over like all the others during the past thirteen years; that, on second thought, he’ll take my worry seriously that maybe all this analyzing comes from my anxiety about turning forty, and thinking I’ve missed some boat . . . (“What boat?” I’ll snap, and he’ll say it’s just a possibility, that I must know what it means when people say they miss the boat, and anyway nobody can take every boat, if I understand what he means by that). And he’ll say that he gets the connection between Ricky and himself, but that he isn’t Ricky, nobody is another person; that differences are what he feeds on, most of the time with delight and satisfaction, and that it’s certainly not a waste of time to get to know the different philosophies of other people, or to appreciate their styles (and I’ll frown). And he’ll say that we should talk specifically about what I felt I should have said to Ricky’s friend, that maybe this is the real significance of the story for me, this business of dealing with differences, not lamenting them, and feeling threatened and defensive (and I’ll look up, scowling, interrupting, and say, “Forster says that—that ‘differences are planted by God, in a single garden, so that there may always be color; sorrow, perhaps, but color in the daily grey,’” and he’ll say, “Well, there you are!”) . . .

And in the ensuing silence, he’ll get up to poke the fire, and I’ll rise from the desk chair and softly jiggle my change, and he’ll solemnly pick a piece of lint off his sock, noticing suddenly that the socks don’t match, and then he’ll move as if to go change them, and I, laughing, will grab his belt and arrest him. . . . ■

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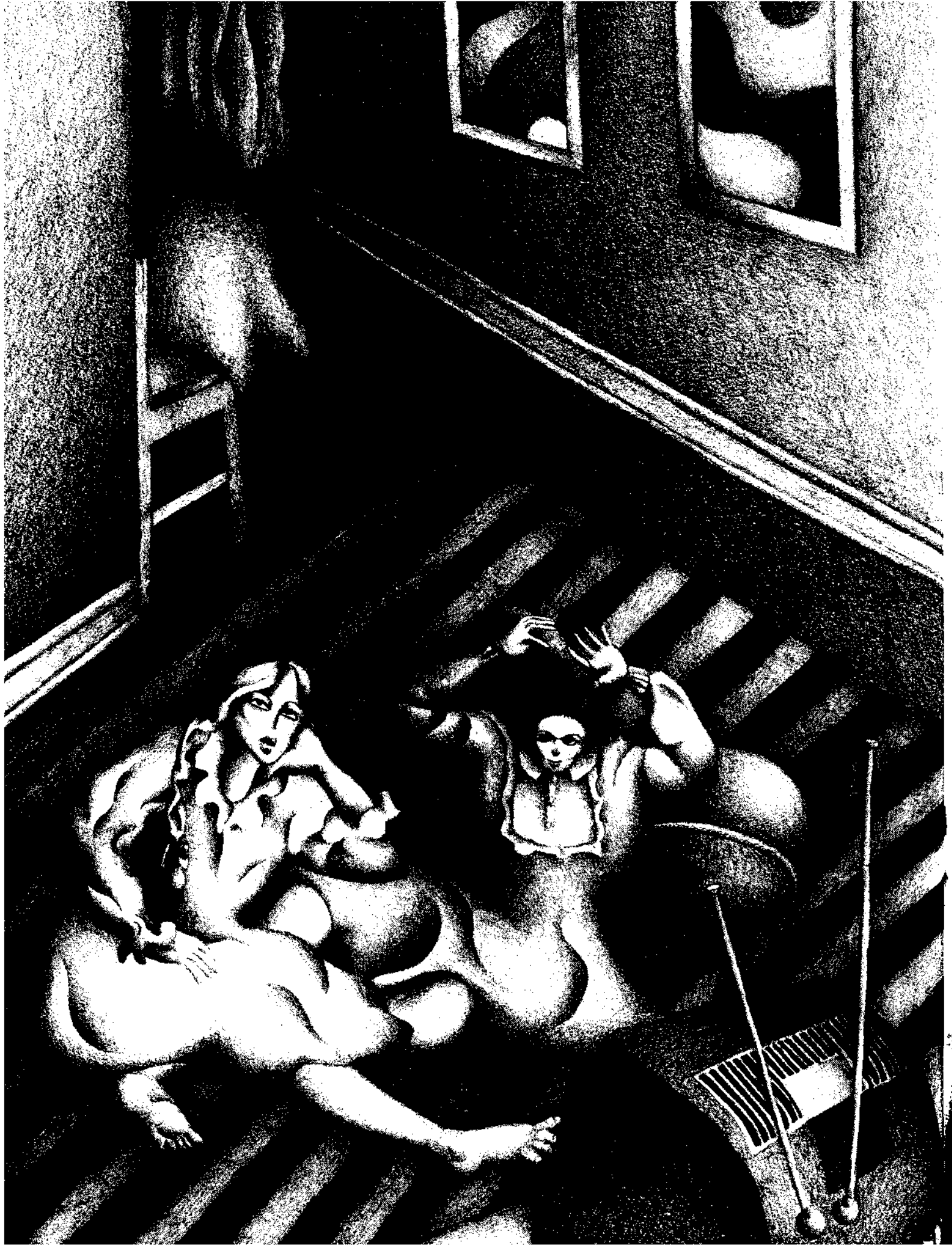
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The Simple Story of a Lesbian Childhood

By Andrea Dworkin

It began quite possibly with Nancy Drew.

There she was.

Her father Carson was a lawyer and her boyfriend Ned always wore a suit.

She solved mysteries.

In particular I remember *The Secret in the Old Attic*. There she was, her hands tied behind her back, her feet tied together, thrown on the floor of a deserted attic in the middle of the night. That was because she had single-handedly and against all odds discovered the murderous villain who had committed unspeakable crimes. I can't remember what they were but Nancy never underestimated or overestimated. He wanted to kill her so (it seemed absolutely logical then) he locked her in a pitch black attic with a black widow spider. There she was, on the floor, struggling and twisting, at any moment, any wrong move, she would be bitten by the black widow spider and die a lingering, agonizing death. She wasn't even afraid.

Me, I was terrified. I had learned to be terrified in the 2nd grade, Mrs. (as we said then) Jones's class, when we did a science project—the boys did theirs on spiders, we did ours on seashells. Every time the boys discovered a new poisonous or even a very ugly nonpoisonous spider they made creepy sounds. For about 8 years I always felt at the foot of my bed for spiders and wore socks. Naturally I was

relieved when, on the last page, Carson and Ned flung open the door to the attic, turned on the light, and stomped on the black widow which was just inches from her brave, abused body. She never even screamed or cried.

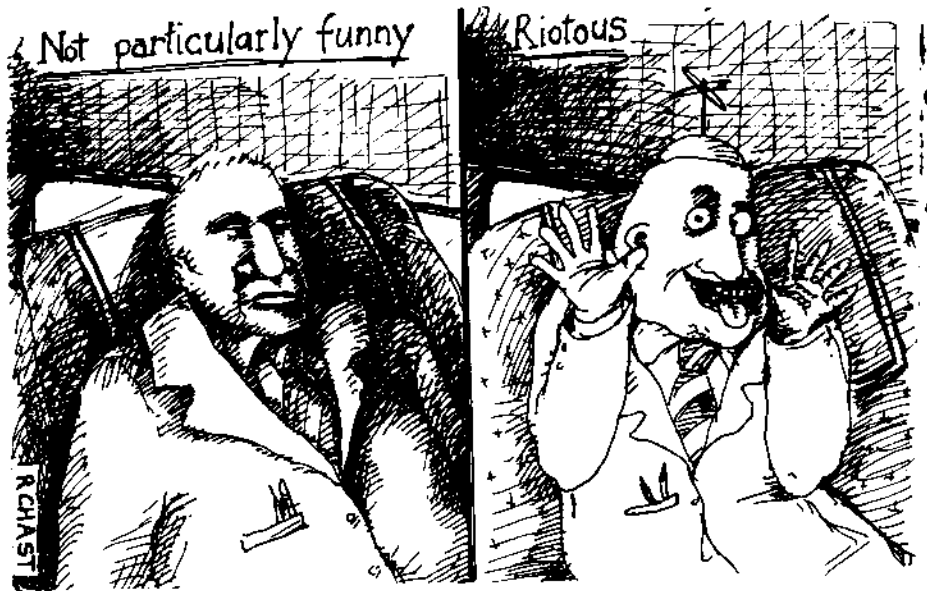
There were also, of course, Cherry Ames Student Nurse and Ginny Gordon Detective and Flossey of the Bobbsey Twins and Nan who was I think another Bobbsey Twin (there were 2 sets). They always had adventures and went out at night and had boyfriends and were rescued just in the nick of time. They weren't much as heroes go but they were all I had.

Sometime about the 6th grade I got into the heavy stuff. Scarlett O'Hara and Marjorie Morningstar. I read *Gone with the Wind* at least 22 times. I had total visual recall of every page. I could open it up at will to any episode and begin crying immediately. I would sit in my room, door locked, and cry—tears streaming down my cheeks, body racked in agony. But quietly so my mother wouldn't hear and take the book away. When Rhett carried her up those stairs. "My dear, I don't give a damn," he said when finally, at last, she begged. When Ashley died. When Tara was burned to the ground. How Scarlett suffered and how I suffered. We were the same really. Both women of greatness. I saw my grand white house in rubble, myself in ashes and sackcloth, destitute, humiliated. My slaves loved me (here I quivered,

knowing I was a jerk) and were forced to leave. Rhett. Rhett. I was her, and I was him, and I was her being cruel to him, and him being cruel to her, and all of us, suffering, heroic, driven. By History no less. Melanic, or Melody, or whatever her name was, pale, dull, and well-behaved under every circumstance, appalled me. I skipped all the parts she was in.

Marjorie. The thrill of eating bacon for the 1st time. Of course I had eaten bacon all my life. I just hadn't ever before known how dangerous it really was. Noel Airman. An Actor. Soon he would be balding, that's how old and evil he was. Danger. Sex. I could feel his creepy decadence. I looked for it everywhere. I couldn't find it in the grammar school I went to. He would corrupt her. He would corrupt me. Somewhere in the world there was a Noel Airman waiting to do some dirty thing to me—IT they called it—that would degrade me. I would never be able to be with decent people again. I might even go to Hell. I would be an artist. I would be able to feel. I would know everything. I ignored the 2nd part of the book where she married that jerk. None of that for me. Keeping kosher indeed.

Also that same year, A. F. fell in love with me. He gave me a wooden snake. I was supposed to scream in horror so I did even though I quite liked it and later named it Herman. He wouldn't let me play with the other boys.



He grabbed my arms and pulled me out of all the games. Also Joel Christian and Agnes. He was at least 19. They necked all the time. Everywhere. During recess. They expelled him but she got pregnant anyway.

The next year I went to camp. With my best friend S.

We were one year too young to be counselors-in-training. It was humiliating. We were above going on hikes and making beaded purses.

Barry Greenberg was a counselor-in-training. He was tall and thin and had a crew cut that stood up. He wore a bright red shirt that said SAM'S MEAT MARKET. He worked there after school in the winter.

We tried to follow him everywhere.

Finally we even went bowling to see him. He always hit the pins but we didn't dare. We always missed and giggled. We wore tight sweaters. He was pretty bored and above it all.

Then we went back to school. Desperate for Barry Greenberg. In love. Suffering. Rhett. Noel. Barry Greenberg.

A few months later I slept at her house or she slept at mine. We put on our pajamas and giggled for hours. We talked about Barry

Greenberg.

Then I said, I'll be Barry Greenberg and I climbed on top of her and I was Barry Greenberg. Then she said, I'll be Barry Greenberg and she climbed on top of me and she was Barry Greenberg. Then I was Barry Greenberg. Then she was Barry Greenberg. I might have been twice in a row when she got tired. Then the light broke and we lay together drenched in sweat and love of Barry Greenberg. Then we went to school and danced together during recess to "Chantilly Lace" and invented a new step where I swung her over me and she swung me over her and we both turned around.

Then we met Mary and everything changed.

Mary wasn't like us. We were both brilliant. Mary wasn't. We were both in fact, according to ourselves, prodigies. Mary wasn't. We were both Jewish. Mary wasn't. We were both too smart to be popular. Mary wasn't.

We loved Mary immediately.

Mary was a conservative. That meant that she wore only beige and blue and certain shades of green and Peter Pan collars and a circle pin on the correct side (one side meant virgin, the other meant whore, typically I never could remember which was which).

S. and I both wore sweaters and dark red neither of which was conservative.

We each wanted Mary to be our best friend.

So S. told Mary lies about me and Mary stopped speaking to me. I suffered. Rhett. Noel. Mary. Then I told Mary lies about S. and Mary stopped speaking to her.

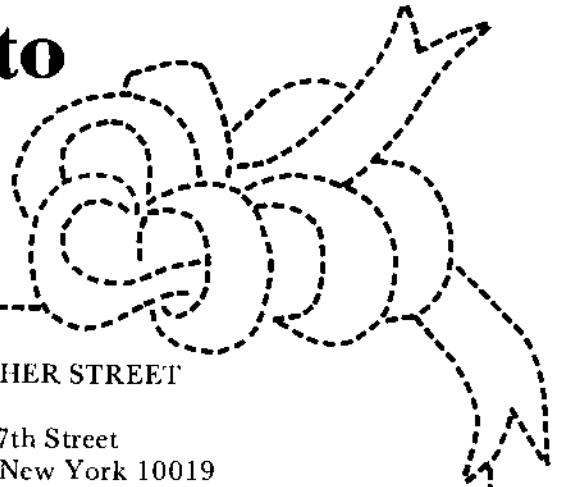
There was a confrontation. I won. I won Mary. It was strictly Platonic and ethereal. S. had a nervous breakdown and her mother sent her to school in another city. When she was 15 she had an affair with a painter. He fucked her and she became a woman. Then she became a Bunny in a Playboy Club. Then she disappeared. Once S. left Mary seemed kind of dull.

Then my best friend was Rona. She was afraid of me because by then I was angry as well as smart. I wore only black by then. She had read in Dear Abby that if you had a close friend and she didn't pluck her eyebrows and they were hairy you should take her aside and tell her to pluck her eyebrows. Rona and I had never spoke but since she wanted me to be her friend she took me aside anyway and told me to pluck my eyebrows. I did. Then she was my best friend.

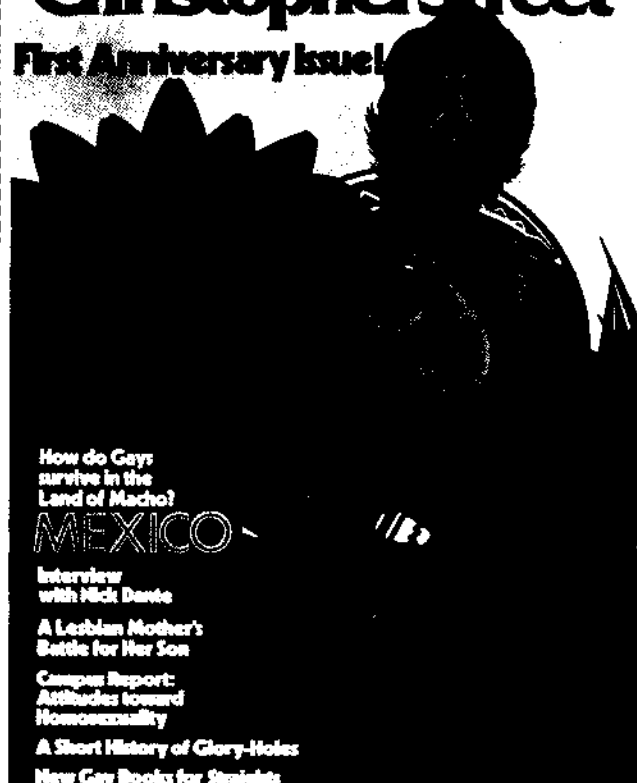
Because I wore black and we both emulated Holden Caulfield as much as possible we went to Rona's house every Wednesday night to drink her parent's booze. They went bowling. Rona had a boyfriend who had a boyfriend. Her boyfriend was tall, handsome, blond, broadshouldered, and had been in the Navy. She wasn't allowed to see him because her parents thought he was a creep and too mature for her. Her boyfriend's boyfriend was (as we said then) a fag. He said mean malicious things about everyone we knew and we thought he was very clever. Rona's boyfriend of course wasn't a fag since he was Rona's boyfriend, had been in the Navy, and was tall, handsome, blond, and broadshouldered. He had even, Rona whispered, made

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some girl pregnant and fucked a real whore.

The 4 of us would drink whatever we thought Rona's parents wouldn't miss (we drank mostly from heavily tinted bottles) and make lewd remarks to the best of our combined abilities and talk about the disgusting fact that Rona and I were virgins. It disgusted all of us but not equally. It particularly disgusted Rona's boyfriend and her boyfriend's boyfriend. They after all did everything. Whatever that was.

The next morning I would go to school wasted, superior, and dangerous, and shout in the hall: damn this damn school. An outlaw I was.

Then we met Johnny. He was a real outlaw. He had 7 brothers and sisters and was Catholic and went to a Catholic school. He made his tuition turning tricks in bars in Philadelphia, and he smoked grass, and he used morphine. He was our hero.

He came to visit us in school. Beer spilled out of his pockets and we hid him in the girls' room and he drank his beer while we smoked the grass he had brought for us.

Once he was in a car crash and went through the windshield and they took him to the hospital and shot him up with morphine and he loved it so much that he did it again.

He said that he turned tricks in the bars in Philadelphia to make his tuition so that he could go to Catholic school even though his family was poor. He said that in a Catholic school they couldn't touch his mind or fuck him up. He was our image of purity.

The night we graduated from high school Rona gave a party and one of our teachers fucked one of our friends and she had a nervous breakdown when he never called her again. Until 2 years later when he called her. Then it got worse because he made her suck his cock all the time and then would tell her if she ever did it to anyone else she could be a dis-

gusting slut.

He didn't call Rona until she got married.

He and I had an even stormier story. Before graduation he threatened to turn me into the FBI for smoking grass and to take me to a hospital to watch junkies scream and vomit and he made a list for me, he explained everything that would happen throughout life—

THERE'S ORAL INTERCOURSE THAT'S WHEN THE WOMAN SUCKS THE COCK OF THE MAN AND THERE'S ANAL INTERCOURSE THAT'S WHEN THE MAN FUCKS THE WOMAN IN THE ASS AND THEN THERE'S REGULAR INTERCOURSE THAT'S WHEN THE MAN FUCKS THE WOMAN IN THE VAGINA—

That's what sex is, he said. That's what happens. He drew pictures to illustrate his points.

He taught me everything I know.

I never believed a word he said.

He was, according to our unspoken mutual understanding, going to be my first lover but he turned into such a jerk, traitor, and villainous turncoat that I had to look elsewhere.

S. of course hadn't been.

Now the thing about this story is that, like life, it just goes on and on, or, like life as we know it, it did for about 8 years which was 250 or so men, women, and variations thereof later. Then I thought it time to reassess and perhaps invest.

At some point S. was.

At some point, in Amsterdam, or on Crete, in London, or maybe on a boat somewhere S. was.

At some point whenever I lay on some floor or bed or the back seat of some car drenched in sweat, watching the light break, it wasn't Barry Greenberg, or Rhett, or Noel, or some rotten high school teacher. It was S. pure and simple. Who had a nervous breakdown, got fucked by a painter, became a woman, then a Bunny, then disappeared. Vanished into thin air, which is here, there, and everywhere. ■

Member of the Wedding No More

By Richard Hall

I knew it was a wedding invitation right away. The paper was heavy, the script ornate, the envelope rigid. The engraved card inside informed me that my nephew was to be married in a town in southern New Jersey. The bride's father, a Presbyterian minister, would perform the ceremony.

As I walked up to my apartment, invitation in hand, I imagined the decisions that had gone into its selection. One of the better shops—Bonwit's perhaps—had been visited by Diana and her mother. They had sat with a wedding consultant while leafing through a book of gravure styles. There had been anguished little decisions over the paper (cream? sepia? buff?), minor *crises de nerfs* over the exact quantity to order. There had been promises of delivery and then—final touch—the saleswoman had taken Diana's hand and wished her great happiness. Diana had responded gracefully, pleased to share her karma as a bride, her numinous status as consort-to-be. Behind and above them hovered invisible legions of brides, whispering of wedding invitations purchased in this very salon, murmuring of social and economic benefits that would accrue from such a small outlay of cash.

Arrived upstairs, I slipped the invitation in a desk drawer, aware

of a mix of unpleasant feelings—dread, guilt, anger. Another wedding! How I hated them! I would be the skeleton at the feast, as usual. The openly gay



uncle, everybody being extra nice, avoiding the subject of my own romantic entanglements, inquiring about my career while hoping the answer would be brief, my sister and brother-in-law hovering nervously at my elbow fearful lest I say something embarrassing. Then the tired rituals—the cake, the toasts, the dancing, the send-off. Did I have the strength? Was my glazed smile, once so easily summoned, still available?

But these thoughts produced only minor discomfort compared to a deeper pain spreading through me, deriving not from the prospect of mere personal inconvenience but from conflict over a hard-won ideological position. What right did they have to require my participation in this

heterosexual rite? What assumptions underlay their casual conviction that I would take part? And— even more upsetting—by what old and out-dated process did I require myself to participate?

I thought of some of my own marital relationships, unsanctified by clergy, by the community and, I might add, by my own uncle, who despised me for being bad at sports. I remember taking my first lover, a Cuban exile, to my mother's farm in upstate New York twenty years ago. We had hardly stepped inside the door before my mother, with the elaborate nonchalance she affected in moments of sexual embarrassment, remarked, "I've put Tony in the corner bedroom, he'll love it there, the birds sing so nicely in the morning." "Yes," I caroled brightly, falling in with her nefarious plans, "he will."

Tony threw me a baffled look, surprised at my treachery, but I ignored him. I had promised myself—no sex this weekend. Sex, hell—I wasn't going to let fall the slightest hint that we had been living together for almost a year. He was hurt by my coldness but went along, except for Sunday morning when he pattered down the hall at 6 a.m. and got in my bed for twenty minutes of cuddling, until I heard my mother's toilet flush and decided, in a paranoid seizure, that she might patrol the



LOOKING FOR A STRAIGHT TABLE IN A GAY RESTAURANT.

halls for a bedcheck. I kicked Tony out at once.

We paid a few social calls that weekend, Tony invariably being introduced as "a friend from Cuba"—an obvious attempt to establish him as a visitor from the Caribbean (outer space in those days), rather than as a resident of New York. This social iniquity hardly caused me a tremor; I was an old hand at such things. Tony and I drove back to the city Sunday night with an unresolved tension between us. Perhaps it stemmed from matters other than the deceptions of the weekend. But

making our relationship invisible certainly hadn't helped.

My nephew called me a few days after the invitation to his wedding arrived. He was his usual breezy self. "You're coming to the wedding, aren't ya?" he asked. My heart tripped unpleasantly. "Well, I haven't decided yet." "Whaddya mean you haven't decided? You gotta come! I'm only getting married once!" Some statistics on divorce came rapidly to mind but I replied only, "I may be out of town then." I could hear the amazement in his silence and noted that my palms

were sweating against the handset. Something more was required. "You know I wish you all the best, Paul. It's just that I don't like weddings." "Why not?" The genuine puzzlement in his voice pained me. Why would anyone, much less an affectionate and comradely uncle, not want to celebrate his happiness?

What could I say? That I disapproved of heterosexuality? Not true. That I detested the rituals that accompanied heterosexual matings? How petty. That I was jealous of his luck, his life so apparently free of obstacles to

sexual consummation? How mean-spirited. But he saved me from having to say anything at all. He moaned and laughed awkwardly. "Oh . . . I get it." "You do?" "Yeah, for gosh sakes." There was a long pause, then he said, somewhat lamely, "If that's the way you feel about it." We spent the rest of the time talking about his honeymoon trip. He hadn't been able to get a reservation at Lake Louise, where he and Diana wanted to go.

After hanging up, I reflected on some of the ironies involved. Diana is a nurse at one of the big New York hospitals; Paul works in the marketing division of a major chemical corporation. They met four years ago at a social club for tall people (each is well over six feet) and immediately began to spend weekends together. Diana goes to Paul's apartment on Friday nights and stays until Monday. Both families have known about their light housekeeping but have withheld approval. For years, neither partner was introduced to the family of the other, and no visits were made to them as a pair.

At first glance, the situation was not unlike my live-in arrangement with Tony. Both couples sought the relative anonymity of the city. Both kept to a small circle of friends. Both suffered outcast status with their families, which were highly conventional.

But there the similarity ended. Paul and Diana could terminate their seclusion, their exclusion, at any time. Their pariahdom—if that isn't too strong a word—was a matter of choice. In fact, they were pseudo-outcasts, just as Marie Antoinette was a pseudo-milkmaid. They merely played at being déclassé. The seal of approval depended merely on a decision to step up to the altar.

I came much closer to that seal of approval with my second lover, Dan. He was well-educated, a teacher, and from the same southern state as my mother. By the time we met (1960), my fam-

ily had been informed that I was gay. The first time we turned up at my mother's farm, she hugged Dan and welcomed him warmly, having understood through my letters how important he was to me. Nevertheless, it was made clear that the guest bedroom, the one with the birdsong, was waiting. He moved in with a graceful shrug and I did not object. But we shared our closeness publicly, sitting side by side on the sofa, talking freely about our life together, making clear the depth of our bond without giving it a name. This time the friends and relatives to whom Dan was introduced sensed the way things were. I could see it in the little acknowledgements of our pairdom—seating us side-by-side at the table, asking about our plans for the future, making us promise to come back and visit. In spite of all this, a middle mist of invisibility clung to us. We were a couple in our own minds, in an espousal that would (as it turned out) last most of the decade, yet the seriousness of our pledge was not fully mirrored in these casual protocols. I wanted more.

I reminded myself that I might be seeking official validation merely to compensate for my own lack of inner certitude. Wasn't I too eager to play by *their* rules, lusting for an imprimatur based on received morality rather my own knowledge of the worth of our relationship? Wasn't a more radical analysis of our status required? Yes, yes, I told myself, but it didn't ease the ache nor the secret yearning for total acceptance.

In all unofficial ways, however, Dan was accepted as a member of the family. No visit, no letter, no phone conversation excluded him. If we were outcasts, then we were outcasts together.

The most poignant episode in this period of my life occurred at my mother's funeral, which was held in a cemetery chapel in Westchester County in 1968. Dan

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and I had split up a short time before, and he was living in Boston. The funeral occurred on a bleak and snowy day in December. Since the cemetery was a good hour's drive from my mother's farmhouse, her friends had, almost without exception, stayed home. I had called Dan in Boston to tell him of her death but had urged him not to come to the funeral. It was too far, his schedule was heavy, the weather forbidding. I wasn't surprised, then, to find he was not among the few mourners at the cemetery chapel on that miserable morning. But as we filed out, heading for the gravesite, a familiar brown Rambler barreled onto the cemetery drive. It was caked with snow and the windshield wipers were stuck. Hunched over the wheel was a dear and familiar figure. He parked and ran toward me, wrapping me in a fierce hug. "I thought I could make it in time if I left at six," he muttered. He had been driving for five hours and had arrived too late for the service. Still, he stood at my side as the coffin was lowered into the frozen ground, his presence giving off waves of love and support. It seemed at that moment, as we bowed our heads under a cast-iron sky that was hurling snow across the world, that we had never been closer, never been more deeply attuned, flesh to flesh and spirit to spirit. His long drive seemed like the final loop in our bond, the last link in our pairing, that I now realized would last as long as we did.

Dan only had time for a quick cup of coffee before he had to start the long drive back. "I had to come," he said when my sister asked him about the drive. "I wasn't going to, but last night I just knew. I had to be here even for a few minutes." He looked at me and said no more. At parting my sister hugged him as warmly as my mother had when she met him so many years before. My last sight of him was at the wheel of

his battered Rambler, which slowly dwindled into a brown speck in a world that looked as if it had been sewn into an endless white shroud.

I had several ideas for a wedding gift for my nephew and his fiancée, but decided eventually on a gift certificate from George Jensen. The amount gave me some pause until I settled on \$100, recognizing that the sum, relatively generous, was a means of assuaging guilt. Because I had decided not to go to the wedding. Or rather, the dim desire had refined and shaped itself into an absolute determination to boycott the proceedings. I had come to see that to assent to the ceremony would be an act of negation toward myself, a denial of my own forms of fidelity and of my partners', and that to co-operate with the family would be to conspire against myself.

I knew I would have to go through another round of assurances, however—an unpleasant prospect. But my nephew seemed less bothered this time around. Maybe he'd gotten used to the idea, or didn't really care, or was getting bored with the wedding itself. At any rate, there were no further recriminations over my defection.

It was different when I called my sister. "Can you tell me exactly why you aren't coming to the wedding?" Her voice, snappish at the best of times, seemed downright strident over the wire from Minneapolis. Once again the old dilemma. What could I say? "When civil or religious rites are available for gay marriages, I'll attend a straight one"? "Dan drove four hundred miles in a snowstorm to spend ten minutes at Mother's funeral, but nobody ever gave us a fancy wedding or a shower or a bachelor dinner"? "I have a lover named Arthur now, and we have made promises to each other, but neither you nor the children have done anything but look vague when I mention him"?

I'm afraid I said none of these. I

merely remarked that I objected to weddings. No doubt she caught my meaning—she isn't stupid—and didn't push me too hard. For all I know, she was secretly relieved. After hanging up, I felt quite marvelous. Although I hadn't spelled out my reasons, I had stuck to my guns. I had drawn a line and said No Farther. I was no longer a member of the wedding. They were no longer the we of me.

The payoff, as it usually does, came in an unexpected way. Ever since this latest wedding flap, I have been after Arthur to agree to a wedding ceremony for us at the Church of the Beloved Disciple. I have in mind a spacious ceremony with double rings and a reading of Spencer's *Epithalamion*, several stanzas of which I once set to music. It will be high-minded and inspiring. There will be a photographer and, later, champagne.

When I first suggested this, Arthur snorted and said, "What the fuck do you want a wedding for?" I gave the usual answers, to which he replied, "You must be crazy." I understood his feelings in a way. He had been married for twenty years and gotten free of his wife only fourteen months before we met. When I brought up the subject again, a week later, he remarked, "There's no better way to kill the way we feel about each other than to make it obligatory. You haven't been married. You don't realize—marriage is a *prison*." I recognized the truth of this, but my nostalgia persisted. "The best thing about us," he added, "is that we continue to choose each other freely." As far as he is concerned, that closed the subject.

But not quite. On our next anniversary we're going to start wearing gold rings. He doesn't know it yet, but I've already picked them out at a jeweler's on 47th Street. They're expensive but, as I see it, absolutely essential to my continued peace of mind.

April Was the Gayest Month?

T.S. Eliot's Personal Waste Land:

Exorcism of the Demons.

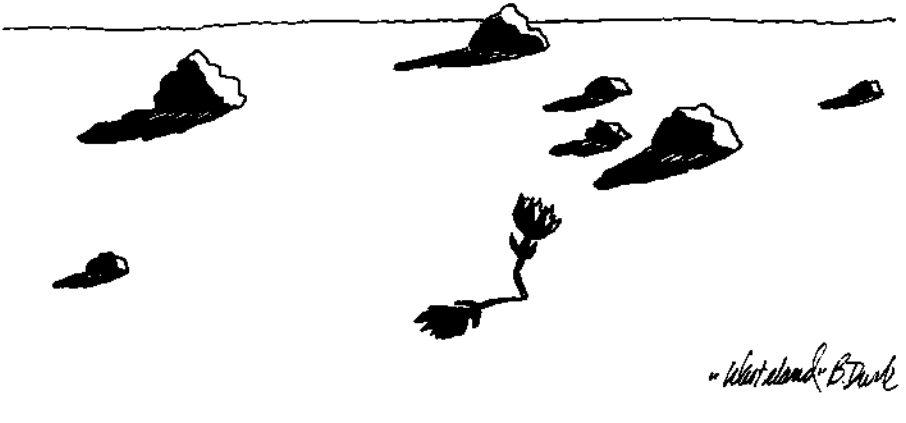
By James E. Miller, Jr.

(University Park and London:
Pennsylvania State University Press)

By Robert K. Martin

TS. Eliot's star has been falling of late. Twenty years or so ago Eliot seemed assured of his place as the greatest English-language poet of the century. He had produced not merely an important corpus of poetry and drama, but his critical writings formed the cornerstone of modern academic criticism, the "New Criticism," with its emphasis on form and irony and its insistence that the work of art is entirely independent of biographical or historical context. As these critical views have passed out of fashion — to be replaced, say, by the intensely personal and psychoanalytically based work of Harold Bloom, now America's most distinguished critic — so too the poetry has fallen from favor. Young poets no longer imitate Eliot, as the young Hart Crane or Robert Duncan once did. Stevens and Auden instead seem much more significant models, and even Robert Frost is in the process of a critical revision upward — Richard Poirier's new book is on Frost and Harold Bloom is reported to be working on his Frost volume. Does anybody read *The Waste Land* anymore?

With the current interest in the confessional mode of poetry, it was, perhaps, inevitable that an attempt would be made to bring Eliot in line with the fashion, to demonstrate that his poetry was also "confessional." Certainly Eliot's own comments on the



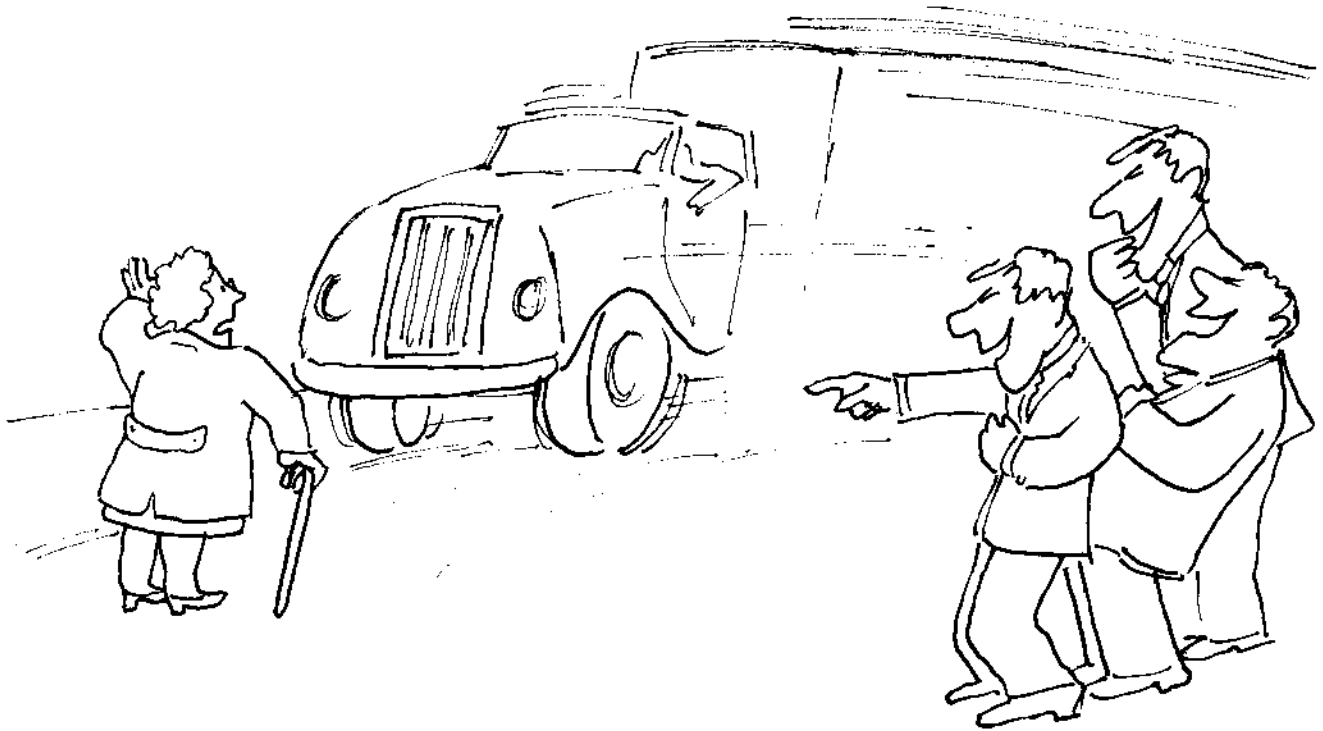
matter were ambiguous: he repeatedly insisted that *The Waste Land* was not a piece of social criticism but a highly personal poem. His comment was disregarded, and "the waste land" became a metaphor for the spiritual alienation of contemporary society. But, as Professor Miller shows convincingly in the present study, *The Waste Land* arose out of a short-lived love affair, cut down by World War I, between Eliot and a French medical student, Jean Verdenal.

The exact nature of the relationship between Eliot and Verdenal will probably never be known (seven letters from Verdenal to Eliot exist, at Harvard, but have not yet been published, and Eliot's widow will not allow them to be read) and is in any case beside the point. Verdenal is important to us because he was important to Eliot, and a record of that significance is preserved in Eliot's poetry of the period from Verdenal's death through Eliot's

breakdown (in 1921). The major evidence is, of course, *The Waste Land*, completed during Eliot's recovery from his breakdown, which records the despair into which Eliot was cast by the death of his friend as well as a sense of guilt, the continuing (perhaps unconscious) feeling that his friend's death was in some sense retribution for the forbiddenness of their friendship. I think one may suggest that *The Waste Land* is a vision of the Cities of the Plain destroyed by the wrath of God.

The critical reaction to Miller's book has been the predictable wrath — where it has not met with complete silence. The *New York Times* attacked in full force, its reviewer complaining of argument by innuendo. Later he complained that the poems were "spoiled" by the new reading—as the "beautifully portrayed" hyacinth girl is revealed to be a boy. It is not the first time, however, that Miller's main point has been made, and the reaction the first time was at

THE CREATORS OF ABC'S
"SOAP" ENJOY A GOOD LAUGH.



least as severe. In 1952 (fully twenty-five years ago) John Peter published his "New Interpretation of *The Waste Land*" in *Essays in Criticism*. If one looks for his article now, one is unlikely to find it in that volume, for copies of the issue were *confiscated and destroyed* at the insistence of Eliot's solicitors. It was only after Eliot's death that Peter was able to reprint the essay, together with a lengthy "Postscript" in which he proposed a personal reading of the poem based on an identification of Jean Verdenal as Phlebas the Phoenician. But neither of Peter's essays has entered into the canon of Eliot scholarship; most bibliographies simply omit them. As Miller has put it (far too kindly), "If what prevails is not exactly a conspiracy of silence, it certainly is not an open discussion of interesting interpretive ideas."

My own experience bears witness to this strange situation in which the Eliot criticism has taken on some of the characteristics of a

cult: nothing can be said that will detract from the sanctity of the Poet. Several years ago I prepared a brief essay (with no biographical evidence or suggestion) that pointed out the traditional homosexual associations of the hyacinth (Hyacinth was a beautiful boy whom Apollo loved) and suggested that the "hyacinth girl" of *The Waste Land* must be related to the lines from "Portrait of a Lady" ("the smell of hyacinth across the garden/ Recalling things that other people have desired"). Needless to say, no one was prepared to publish my essay.

Miller's study has the advantage of a careful consideration of *The Waste Land* manuscripts, which were published in 1971, as well as of a little-known "Ode" published in 1920 in London in a limited edition and never included in the *Collected Poems*. It is extremely revealing, however, which may explain Eliot's "suppression" of it. The first stanza includes the

lines, "Misunderstood/The accents of the now retired/Profession of the calamus." Certain problems surround these lines, but there can be no doubt that the last line refers to Whitman's Calamus poems, the group of homosexual poems in *Leaves of Grass* ("To tell the secret of my nights and days,/ To celebrate the need of comrades"). Eliot had, we may assume, professed the calamus, but this gesture of homosexual love, because "misunderstood," is now withdrawn ("retired"). Another relevant but little-known poem is the "Death of St. Narcissus," which was accepted by *Poetry* magazine in 1915, several months after the death of Verdenal, but for some reason never printed. Parts of this poem ("Come under the shadow of this grey rock") were later revised and used in *The Waste Land*, just prior to the famous "hyacinth girl" passage. It is an extraordinary poem, highly erotic, mixing sexuality and religious feeling in the manner of

the traditional homosexual cult of St. Sebastian ("Because his flesh was in love with the penetrant arrows/He danced on the hot sand/Until the arrows came"). It also includes a wonderful celebration of masturbation, borrowed, I believe, from Beardsley's *Under the Hill*:

Then he wished that he had been
a fish
With slippery white belly caught
between his own fingers
To have writhed in his own clutch,
his beauty caught in the net of his
own beauty

(I quote from the manuscript version).

Miller's hypothesis is that Eliot was severely affected by the death of Verdenal (on May 2, 1915) and that it was the shock of this loss that led him to his hasty and ill-considered marriage with Vivien Haigh-Wood in June. The poems in the *Prufrock* volume as well as in *The Waste Land* testify to a distaste for heterosexuality and a hatred and fear of women. In Miller's reading, each spring ("April is the cruellest month") brings "Memory and desire," restoring both the memory of the dead friend and the realization of his loss. The lilacs almost certainly refer to Verdenal, as we have all known for a long time, for recalling Verdenal Eliot wrote in 1934 of "the memory of a lost friend coming across the Luxembourg Gardens in the later afternoon, waving a branch of lilac, a friend who was later (so far as I could find out) to be mixed with the mud of Gallipoli." They may also recall Whitman's elegy, "When Lilacs Last in the Door-yard Bloom'd," written for the death of Lincoln but turned into a magnificent tribute to all the dead comrades, Whitman's "perfume . . . for the grave of him I love." In contrast to that beloved memory there is the monstrous world of "A Game of Chess," which, according to Miller, is to be taken "not so much as a commentary on

modern marriage as a personal revulsion on the part of the poet-protagonist toward sexuality in marriage, a revulsion springing from his emotional paralysis caused by the death of his friend, whose memory haunts him and affects his every perception of the world."

Perhaps the most crucial lines of *The Waste Land* are those from the last section addressed to "my friend":

The awful daring of a moment's
surrender
Which an age of prudence can never
retract
By this, and this only, we have
existed

So long as the impersonal T.S. Eliot prevailed, so long as Eliot remained a spokesman for an almost monastic withdrawal from the world, these lines were a stumbling-block to the poem. Now that we can see them in their proper context as a tribute to Eliot's love

for Verdenal, they take their place as an important statement of faith. Eliot indeed lived "an age of prudence," but at least he appears to have had his moment of "awful daring." Recognizing this also enables us to see him much more clearly in a literary context. It has often been pointed out how like Henry James Eliot was, and now we can place the early Eliot poet-narrators next to John Marcher and the others of James's heroes who sit on "the bench of desolation," cut off from life by their recognition of the failure of their love. And we are reminded as well of Forster in his Italian stories, who created those memorable British characters remembering for a lifetime a single affair years before.

It is sad to think of all those professors busily trying to "protect" the reputation of their beloved Eliot. Eliot is in fact, if anything, rendered infinitely more interesting and more human by these new revelations. *The Waste Land* read as an attempt to

The Temple of Attis

On Cybele's holy hill
they danced in a whirling throng
and thrilled to the shrill of flutes,
the clash of brazen gongs
and the slashing off of flesh
when a priest disrobed the next
ecstatic youth who rushed
forward to be unsexed.

They devoured the sacred fruit
and hanged an effigy
smeared with fresh bull's blood
on the sacrificial tree.
Then weeping the hours away
they prayed and broke no bread
until on Easter Day
Attis rose from the dead.

Today, on the very hill
where frenzied eunuchs spilled
the blood of the boy and bull
onto the spattered sands,
the Vatican now stands.

—Timothy Murphy

"exorcise" the demons, as an interior drama of psychic conflict, is far more fascinating than the study in anthropology that was once presented to us. I am delighted to learn that Eliot had a "secret life" even if I find it deeply sad that he preferred to keep the memory of that one lost love alive rather than to attempt to love again. That Eliot's love was for a man rather than a woman would not be of any particular interest, of course, except that it was this fact which kept Eliot from recognizing it and which drove him to believe, with Dante, that a special place in Hell was reserved for sodomites. The very special drama of *The Waste Land* may now be seen to derive from the way Eliot half-revealed and half-concealed the evidence. Had he wanted us to know nothing about Jean Verdenal, he would hardly have dedicated *Prufrock* to him. Like many late-Victorian pornographers, Eliot left the evidence lying around, preserved a record for the future. He had to, of course. For in the end, his poetry was the final tribute and testimony to his love for Jean Verdenal. ■

On the Pubic Front

*Carnivorous Saint:
Gay Poems 1941-1976*
By Harold Norse.

Gay Sunshine Press, San Francisco.
1977. 240 pp., softcover, \$5.95.
(Available from Gay Sunshine Press,
P.O. Box 40397, S.F., Calif. 94140;
include \$0.50 postage and handling.)

By Rudy Kikel

Naked, his hands clasped in what looks like an appeal, Harold Norse strides, swims, oozes towards us from the cover of *Carnivorous Saint*, the volume of his "gay poems 1941-1976" just published by Gay Sunshine Press. The photograph, produced by trickery of some sort—taken underwater or with the aid of a distorting lens or mirror—is entirely appropriate to a book and to a poet without, as it were, perimeters, who can be "licked into

shape" in an orgy room in which distinction of the self is mostly foregone, for whom conviction of presence comes only in relinquishment of personality: "my soul comes when I lose myself / when I plunge into an ocean of touch." The experience of fluidity for Norse ("Bodies pass through me and I through them") is more than a merely private delight; it becomes his public—his public *pubic*—recommendation: "go naked freeflowing / drop all jargon no more lingo / slip off our clothes / act out our fantasies / live out our dreams." Harold Norse's solution in *Carnivorous Saint* translates into utter *dis*-solution.

His poetry is of a piece with this solution—or in pieces on account of it: "My mind is oceanic," he tells us, "follows twisted waves of words, to-fro tides of all-night sleepless tape recording of words / till light of dawn breaks. . . ." Grateful for being "part of the flow," he aims to facilitate not identification of the situations he finds himself in but displacement of himself from *all* defining situations. *Instead* of poetry, then ("This isn't poetry, it's Nepalese bhang. / One toke you're in your right mind, two tokes you're in Danang"), we are offered cut-ups and catalogues, journal jottings and erotic travelogues, segmentations all of them, snatches out of "the flow," naïve expression and raw "feeling" that have little or no relation to the formal embarkations or conclusions of poems. The book is a long chat, an anecdotal riff, a gay-male beatnik *schtick* or spiel that shifts, that *makes* shift from satisfaction ("let the age hang itself! we've had / four marvelous days together") to fury ("oh put them in wheelchairs! / push them over the roofs! / pull down the office buildings!"), from affected outrage (André "has the nerve to charge / 100 francs. Demented bitch!") to rapture ("o unreachable bird of smoke / black swan of sad jazz landscapes"), from desperation

Bagoas in Alexandria

He was once the consort of a conqueror,
and when they stood at last on the Indian shore
his lover ruled the known world from their tent.
But now he struggles to maintain the rent
of a cheap room that he really can't afford
in this city named after his dead young lord.

—Timothy Murphy

("I chase male flesh / as that dog chases / the pine cone") to delight ("I tell you, it was great! / everybody kissing and hugging everybody"), and in which we return periodically to the comic mockery of its intentionally self-obliterating—and usually self-obsessed—speaker:

Well this is your friendly old poet
speaking
The Good Gay Poet H. Norse who
should know better
who's been around
and around
and . . .

Opting to "throw the City wide open to Love," Norse is hit of course by "the unspeakable thud of the world / on my head"; he finds that dropping "the stinking cloak of the western world" only engages him "in the endless pipe dream of Arabia" and that although "TV is a kind of death," death can also be "by beautiful boys." Relinquishing cultural definitions for the devastations of the self and because of what he calls the "barrier of global unlove," the poet finally locates himself "between horrors"—on the international map ("The West decays and crumbles. / The East destroys the Soul") as well as on that of the private mind: "i am a war between two madmen who never win," he tells us, at an impasse due to "a wierd nervous system" which would prefer to see change but which cannot alter "time or pain / or memory" and "a lunatic wailing love love / with all the evidence shored against me." The shards of that shoring up constitute the tragic testimony of *Carnivorous Saint*.

One of Norse's "madmen" seems, at first, to be against what many of us are against: warfare, a "polluted century," economic class distinctions ("a god of adding machines . . . a dream of envy"); his opposition extends to "manliness," the police, vice squads, homophobia, and sexual repression of all kinds—the shutting down of Parisian pissoirs,

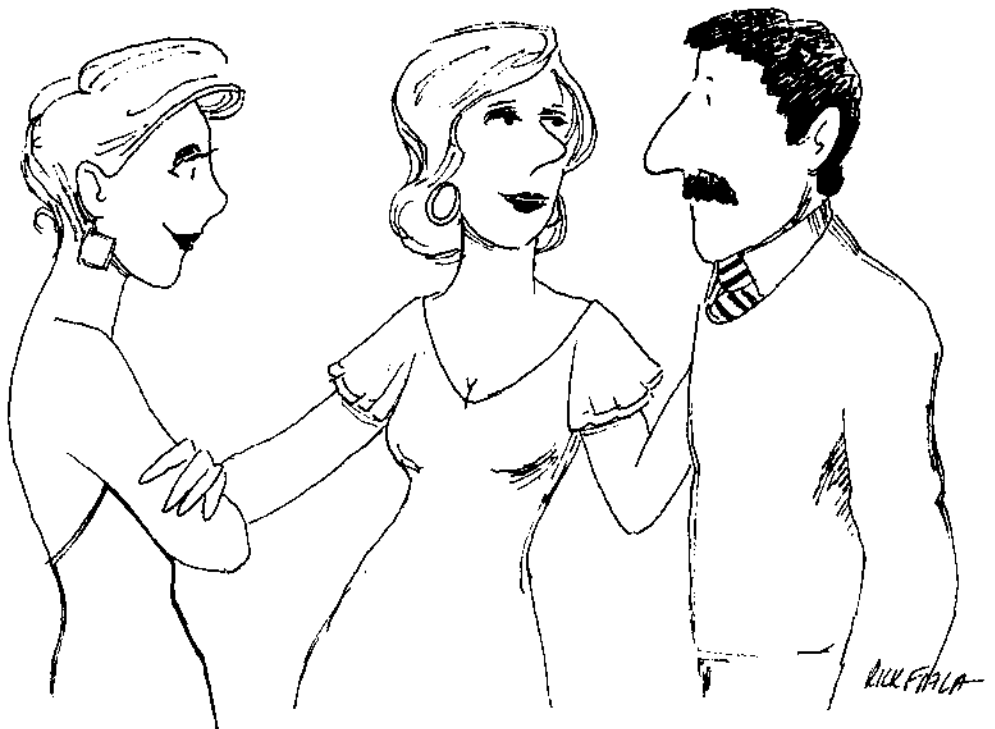
for instance, as well as the murder of Lorca and the imprisonment of poet Paul Mariah "for making love / to a boy of 18 / who wanted it." Soon, however, Norse is fulminating against "real estate pigs," hard-hearted city fathers, "straight suited exec types" looking mindless and sexually constrained in their "money uniforms," and "creepy flocks" of picture-taking tourists ("outlandish lumps" stinking "of imbecility"). In the most virulent (and sexist) of his ravings, the poet exclaims:

burn the frigid bitches
digging ancient sculpture
their stony loves
inflexible patterns
hardened by habit.

As he is aware ("Dickensian solitudes of jails and basement kitchens!"), Norse seems positively—or negatively!—Dickensian at times in the simplicity with which he estimates the western world. He deplors "the humdrum / externals," "the unseeing / statue state

of senselessness," "grayness," the "sharp tempered weapons / of those who force life / into corners," "the dull puke of everyday 'reality'"—this from a poet, the conventional role of whom has been precisely to transform "external 'reality'"! It is Norse's "madman" who is in the corner here—dislocated by drugs, panicky with paranoia, with words his only weapons and his targets as imprecise as his aim is wild, flailing against all "reason / right or / wrong" and against the intellect itself because "Thought will never fathom the smell of the groin!"

The poet's *other* madman, the love lunatic, is a physician of sorts, a mad one of course: "I'm an astral doctor, my musical stethoscope diagnosing Earth's ills—it's cancer I tell you! badlands virus of greed! dollar sick and shrunken! terminal greenback infection!" Rx? Ecstasy, perpetual and uninterrupted. In debt to an erotic adhesiveness that he must have acquired from or found sanction for in Whitman ("in the



"Elliot, I'd like you to meet Mrs. Fremont Nelson.
Mrs. Nelson is a gay people buff."

closet I make love to America. my love is bigger than the Atlantic Ocean”), Norse’s placebo against the bitter pill he insists reality has made him swallow is the random caress, touching, without which, he avers, “my feelings are twisted my spinal cord shrivels up.” Unmindful of how this remedy can create as much dependency as the disease—

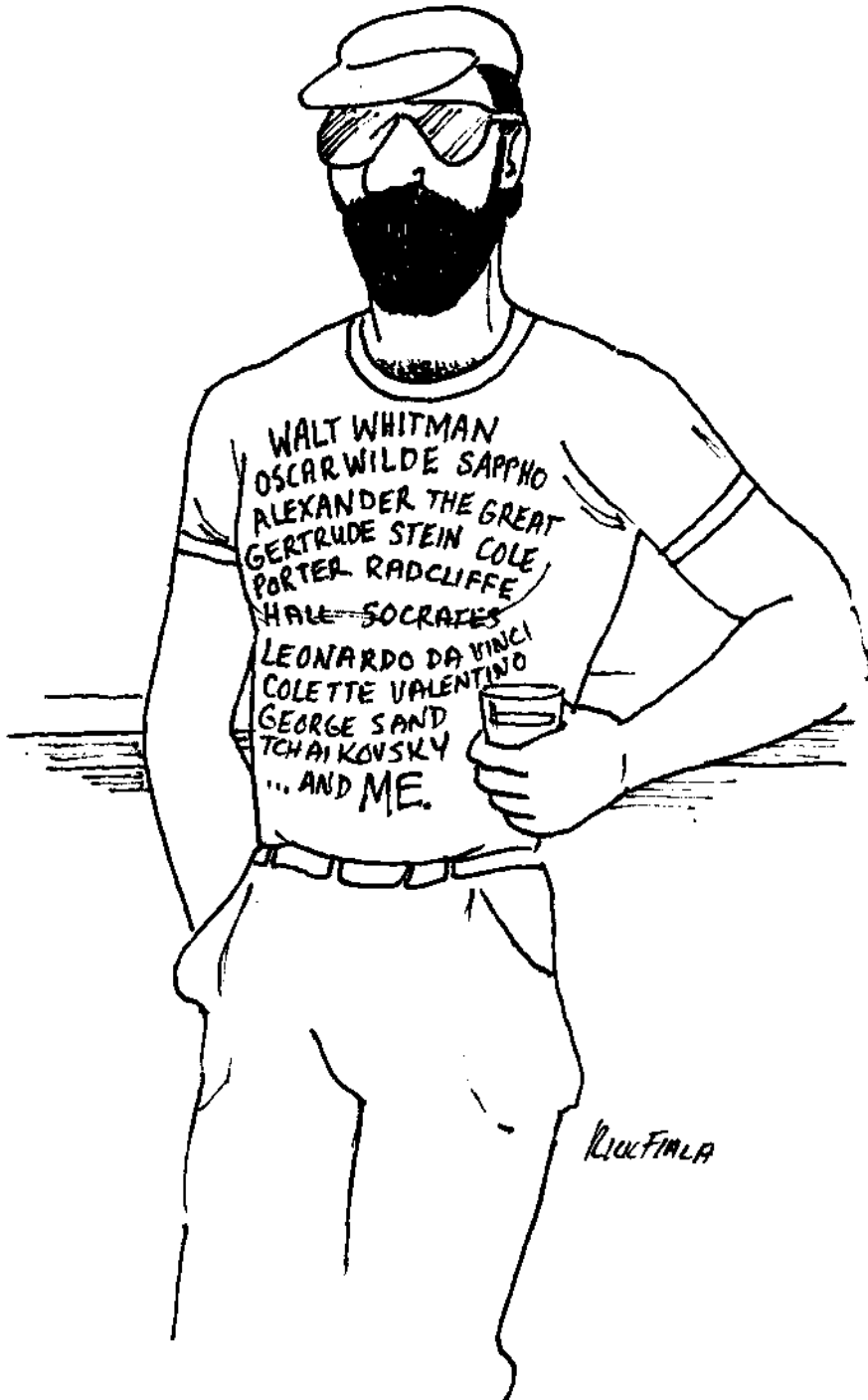
Cock in the ass 3X daily
and some good hot cum before
bedtime
was his prescription for good
health.
If he missed one injection
he’d grow tense and irritable

—Norse calls us to a perhaps
peculiarly Sixties brand of sensual
surrender: “make lips available
down on each other in final

Twentieth / Century gasp of
delight.”

The mad doctor is also a divinity scholar. Rejecting conventional religion as oppressive, or being rejected by it for his active homosexuality, and presumably possessed by a desire to yield himself to some force or other, Norse follows those counter-culture figures who find a new dispensation in sensation. The profane passages of *Carnivorous Saint* are rife with religious imagery: Norse sniffs “paradise cottons,” latrines are called “sacred,” a French urinal is a “shrine,” there is “no god more precious than this throne of youth.” Furthermore, in the country-hopping that constitutes the structure of *Carnivorous Saint*, Norse dredges up traces of the divinity whose presence he discerns but in honor of whom there is no available ritual—except for the amorous “ballet” provided for itself by the “international / underground of love.” In Pompeii, in 1958, he finds devotional mementos of Priapus, “the deity nobody can forget”; in Northern Africa, in 1962, he attends the dance of the goat boy and hears the “Pan Pipes of Bou Jeloud”; he yearns in Greece, in 1964, for the return of “the anti-Christ,” “a sweet boy / who used to be called Eros.” Then, back in the States, having completed his theological investigations, Norse’s sacrilegious secularism is codified: “God is Come.” The aphoristic “Nocturnal Emissions” constitutes his Sermon on the Mount: “A limp cock is like a phone off the hook.” And from this (precisely) cockeyed consciousness, his parody of the decalogue (“Thou shalt have no other bananas before me”) and his comic or caustic allusion to the egalitarian “gospel” issue forth: young truck-drivers

look up grinning
groping themselves
& carrying their load
as I carry mine

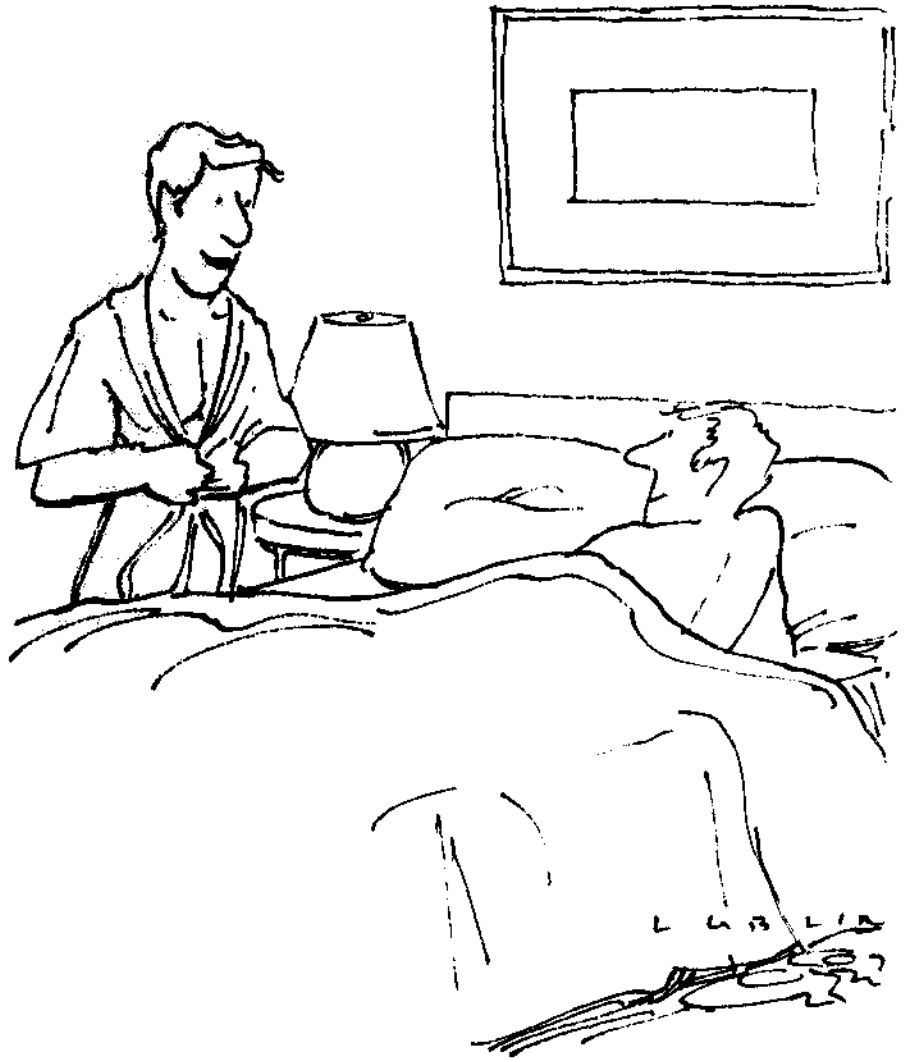


when clearly it should be
distributed
from each according to his
ability
to each according to his needs—

the true brotherhood
foretold in prophecy
from ancient days!

The world has its way with the practitioner-priest, however—or time, pain, and memory have. Setting himself up as a kind of anti-Christ only ensures Norse's suffering the usual fate of anti-Christ, assuming for himself the persona a homophobic straight society has always felt most comfortable *projecting* upon its homosexual—indeed, any of its sexual-dissidents: that of the eternal, yearning "other." The poet finds himself "underground! made to sneak!" He is a freak "of the western wilderness / between the bughouse & the bar," an "addict of lips and genitals," a "slave to the monarch of flesh," an "agonized" or "bastard angel," Gypsy, Wandering Jew, Elijah, Tantalus, Prometheus ("none of them know anything / of the fire that I have stolen"), and Christ himself ("my head feels stabbed / by a crown of thorns"). Norse speaks of "this nowhere Universe / I call my Self": he sees himself as we see him, without confirmation, even, of his own reality. He finds himself, moreover, "in the hub of the fiery force / the red heart of the conflagration," surviving "flames of sinew and joint"—finds himself, in short, in hell.

In his introduction to *Carnivorous Saint*, Harold Norse tells us that "when love appears and then disappears—mostly because of pressures from outside internalized by gay men and women—the gay person becomes a disaster area (like most people in a destructive society)." A disaster area Norse certainly seems: his history is awash with fugitive affairs and "broken vows." In retrospect, we can see what the poet himself probably does, that his



"Last night I dreamed that Johnny Carson stopped asking gay performers when they were getting married."

failure to liberate himself through the love quest stems from a failure to abandon the *form* as well as the *substance* of convention, to discard the pattern of dominance and submission along with allegiances to the Family, State, and Father God—if he cannot find himself served *by* Them. To say that Norse failed in this way, however, is perhaps only to say that he was a forerunner, an impassioned man *out* of as well as *of* his time, who found no way to exercise his passions constructively except in this autobiographical record, to which we need turn for its evocation of a

gay man deprived of country, love, a movement, institutional affirmation, and even the security of a self—

I'm running running
like hell from city to city
thru freezing streets
of shut-in faces & garbage cans
& the latest news full of chaos
& futility
& love is a punch in the mouth
no attempt to communicate
words rasp like a scratch
tearing skin from bone
raw meat torn
cut off from the self

--for its poignant acknowledge-

ment of catastrophic choice. He is reminded, he tells us in "Love-Junk", of

something that once held a
little truth
in it
something I let slip
out of my life
& has now become a long-distance
call
ending
in silence

When Norse views his amorous misadventures from a natural ("Green Ballet," "Violet Lemon Sun"), a tragic ("Love-Junk"), or a comic perspective ("Paper Bodies," "The Maximus Gluteus Poems"), and in those stretches of the record wherein self-pity, phallic obsessiveness, and his disturbingly low feminist consciousness recede for a while, *Carnivorous Saint* seems more than merely informing, seems *expressive*. The book is handsomely produced by Winston Leyland and

lovingly illustrated—often by Norse himself.

But something more needs to be said, for the record, about Norse's record. His work is part—indeed, one of the foundations—of a post-World War II tradition of blasted poetic forms and scapegoat heroes in exile, a tradition of Sexual Outlawry that also includes, but is not limited to, work by John Wieners in Boston, E.A. Lacey of Canada (now in South America) and that might be extended to include the prose art of John Rechy (hence the name I give it) and Jean Genet (Norse calls himself a "small-time Genet"). What emerges from these writings is an image of the gay male's furtive hungers and futile loves that some of us may find it difficult to identify with. Indeed, there is a hope abroad that with our human rights secured, what was once called "the twilight world" will cease to exist—or at

least its immolating grip. Writing in the tradition of Sexual Outlawry may be interrupted, but will what has already been written cease to be of interest? I think not. Just as we profess our debt to the street people who liberated Stonewall in 1969, so should we continue to acknowledge the "bacchanalian roots" of liberation that linger on in the writing of our sexual outlaws—and that may have to send forth shoots again. It may be that our current efforts to secure power for ourselves—in the religious, legal, educational, and social spheres—will prove less effective or our success less satisfying than it is hoped. In which case, we will *need* a Norse, a Wieners, a Lacey, will need to know that it is possible to experience near total alienation from a culture and still, somehow, erotically endure:

I am fighting on the pubic front
for my everloving sexuality

■

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LETTER HOME

BY DAVID ROTHENBERG

Dear Mother,

Thanks for your recent letter, which posed a good question and one which is not exclusively yours. You wrote "I'm curious. Maybe I don't understand, but what is the purpose of a special newspaper for gay people?" *Gaysweek*, which I sent you, is one of many publications which now exist within the gay community.

Your question is fair and one which has often been asked by gay people themselves. Why, indeed, do gay people have newspapers or magazines, such as *Gaysweek* or *Christopher Street*?

Of course, from your perspective, homosexuality is a private sexual act which we were taught not to discuss in public. But one's affectional orientation does determine a lifestyle. I'm sure that all of those movies which we loved from *It Happened One Night* through *The Way We Were*, wouldn't be described as heterosexual movies. They were merely movies about people who were in love and whose heterosexuality affected the social pattern of their lives. The gay lifestyle might run parallel to the mainstream, and it often intertwines, but it has its own inherent and exclusive ingredients.

Consequently, the places where we gather to socialize are voluntarily segregated. Gay people have their own private clubs, dinner parties, discos, bars, political clubs, summer resorts, etc. It is a thriving, burgeoning sub-culture. We have not been segregated by choice but by the straight world's inability to understand and accept us.

Yet, as recently as seven years ago, all of our news was transmitted by rumour. Data which affected our safety and freedom was not reported in the daily press or on radio and TV talk shows. Our network of information was similar to that of tribal villages. We sent metaphorical smoke

signals from bathhouse to bar-room, passing on half-truths and incomplete tales about ourselves.

Our news and our concerns have always been interpreted by people who disapprove of us. We have been mocked, ridiculed and distorted in publications from the *National Enquirer* to the *New York Times*. The latter still has a policy of describing us as "homosexual," refusing to acknowledge "gay" as a lifestyle, rather than just a sexual act between persons of the same gender.

Privately and, often in agonizing solitude, we knew we were not all those adjectives attributed to us. We were cognizant of talented and successful men and lesbians but never read of them in that context. Their sexuality was their shame and was never considered a contributing factor in their skill or achievements. The media provided a network of negative untruths.

There were always whispers about police entrapments, hepatitis epidemics, murders of gays . . . none of which could be identified. We had no role models, no cultural or political models, no organizational digest.

As the gay movement spiraled, we began to communicate. Decades of silenced passions surfaced on mimeographed papers and eventually professional newspapers and magazines emerged.

Curiously, the gay community is not quick to recognize the correlation between a responsible, free gay press and the attainment and maintenance of our basic freedoms. Historically, no movement for social change has been able to prosper without a means of communication. Is that not why Tom Paine has been enshrined in American history?

There are many economic, as well as political, ramifications to having a gay press. In our society that is nearly one and the same thing. You see, the gay market has

been discovered. Fashion designers and theatrical producers have always known that the gay consumer was a vital part of their industry. Yet, there was no visible catering to this particular consumer. For years, the people who made money off us were also contemptuous of us. Until recently, gay bars treated their customers with hostility, and the baths were famous for their indifference and mistreatment.

Much of the business world still has an exploitative attitude toward the gay consumer. Gay publications hardly get their share of advertising to attract gay purchases.

Many stores profit from gays and are openly antagonistic to us at the same time. One large New York City department store, famous for decades as a place where homosexual men gather and purchase, has refused to let a gay publication take fashion photos within its walls.

I, for one, am going to scan the ads in my favorite gay publications. I will give preferred patronization to the restaurants and stores that support the gay media. Ten years ago, before there was a movement, we were closeted and frightened people. We had no sense of community or of ourselves. There was no healing for our wounds.

We won't accept the back of the bus any longer.

A free and responsible press is at the heart of it. We must recognize the arteries and the links which give us a political position of strength. We must know that it is connected to our personal liberties.

Since you asked, I told you. I hope that all is okay in Florida. Did I tell you that I am proud of the fact that you withdrew your money from the bank that used Anita Bryant as a television spokeswoman? Thanks and love.

—David

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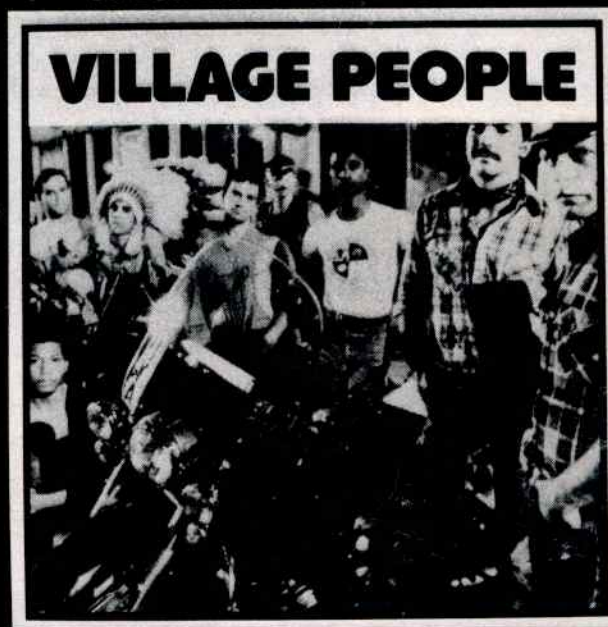
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