CHELSEA STATION

EDITED BY JAMESON CURRIER

APRIL 2014
April 2014

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Jonathon Saia is a freelance writer/director/raconteur living in Los Angeles. His treatise on gay pride, “Far From Queer, More than a Fag” was published in Issue 4 of Chelsea Station and his poem, “The Forest for the Trees” can be found in the anthology Between. He is currently directing the upcoming Web series, Double Minority Report, written by and starring his hilarious, sexy husband, Julian Michael. For more on Jonathon, visit his blog, Cineaste.
The best part of marriage is the insular universe you create. The secret jokes. The unspoken understandings. The living-in-your-underwear-on-the-couch-ordering-take-out-watching-reality-TV-and-playing-with-the-dog nightly rituals. The characters you become during sex. And the comfort to actually be the most authentic version of yourself you are capable when another person is present.

But one of the downfalls of marriage is that same insular universe. The friendships you once had transform for the lesser if they don’t all but disappear. The feeling of self shifts from an “I” to a “We.” The what-should-we-do-tonight-I-don’t-care-what-do-you-want-to-do-tonight ping pong game that results in neither of you really doing what you want to do because you feel an obligation to hang out even though maybe you just want to read a book. The characters you become (in spite of yourself) during sex. And the old baggage you sometimes have to actively remember to forget.

*      *     *

Last night, my husband Julian’s basketball team had a game some two hours away and he wasn’t going to be home until late. Finally! This was my chance to be alone. To hang out with someone else! To not have to consult about what to do. To make the decision MYSELF. I was not going to waste this respite from married life. But what to do? And with whom?!

I knew I wanted to do something interactive. No wandering around the bookstore or going to the movies or listening to albums on The Rolling Stone 500 for me. This behavior was getting stale. Most of my days—Hell, most of my life—is spent inside my head, alone with my books, my movies, or my music. Or online “talking” with “friends.” Or with Julian. Or the ever adorable, yet silent Dodger, our dog. I needed some old fashioned human connection. A conversation. A face to face encounter.

But who the hell was I going to call? My longest friends, Joshua (the one with whom I volley relationship drama) and Trevor (the one with whom I trade texted quips), live hundreds of miles away. The smatterings of people I could imagine spending an evening with and not feeling like immense amounts of catch up would be involved were either busy or non-responsive (this is what you get trying to make plans the afternoon of...). Then there was the fear of the ever important balance of personalities and egos crucial to assembling a group of strangers. Would her loquacious nature be overpowering to his stoic grace? Do I assemble a group of burners or drunks? And if someone doesn’t do either, would that be awkward? Where do I want my own presence to situate? Center of attention? Or passive observer? And would people from the Valley really drive to LAX during rush hour? A very small list developed. And as usual, Maureen came to the rescue.

Maureen and I met back in my Party Staff days, catering to the stars for our measly $11 an hour. I was drawn to her bubbly personality that seemed to balance out my work persona of Fuck These People and This Party. She is the person I count on to bring me out of whatever funks I’m in because she is relentlessly chipper, borderline obnoxious. She reminds me that somewhere in here I am kind. And maybe I shouldn’t pretend so hard that I am not a nice person. When Maureen is sober, she reminds me of my mom when she is drunk, the good time Sally who wants everyone else to have a good time; when she is lifted, she plays like the sister I would beg Santa for, listening to my (drunken) bullshit with an attentive ear and opens up my heart to things I usually wouldn’t let in without inebriation. So naturally we got drunk as soon as possible last night.

Since I so rarely am around other people—and I mean really around other people; the niceties of water cooler conversation don’t count—there is usually this adjustment period. This jolt to remind myself, “Hey. Focus! Exist in the real world now.” I must find my way on how I want to relate, how I CAN relate, and how I probably should relate. Which is where booze and weed come into play.

This drunken relaxation, this sigh of relief, is not specific to my interactions with Maureen; they are indicative of my interactions with everyone. I would always choose to be drunk or high if I could. And when Julian and I are home alone, we are usually stoned. I can’t speak on what this does for him, but for me this helps box the ever-present anxiety into a corner and allows me to enjoy the moment in the moment instead of worrying about what the moment could mean. It helps expedite the aforementioned transition from Cerebral to Tangible and makes me a lot more willing and able to participate at a jovial level.

Maureen and I had a nice time, watching Rocky Horror complete with a running quotation commentary. Neither of us had seen the film for...
a long time, but some things just stick with you; we also tried to remember the Nicene Creed and actually got most of it—some things REALLY stick with you. We talked of family and work and it felt really nice to connect with someone who was not my husband. I wish we had had more time. Maybe next visit the transition will be shorter. Or the drinking will come sooner.

* * *

But quite early in the evening, almost from the moment I picked her up, I started wishing…that Julian was going to be home when we got there. All the excitement of having an evening to myself, a friend to myself, to momentarily enjoy the “I” instead of the “We” suddenly flew out the window and my full blown addiction to my husband started to creep into withdrawal stage. I needed my fix and I needed it now. Needed the way he pulls his green hoodie over his long hair. Needed the way he pauses the TV when a contestant says something incredulous. Needed the way he sings to himself with all those Lauryn Hillisms and I join in and change the key. Needed his “Breakfast Can Wait” dance.

It reminded me that he is indeed my best friend after years of scoffing at the idea that your lover is, could be, or even should be. But what is a best friend if not the friend you like the best? And if you are going to marry your friend, making a commitment to be friends until you die, you better like him more than everyone else. Julian is the one person that I need to talk to every day, the one person that has seen the incredibly ugly creases and is still around, the one person whose presence, even on the bad days, still fills the room with hope and wonder. The one person that can make me swoon and sweat and scratch and claw despite almost six years of looking at his face.

* * *

But it doesn’t mean that he should be my ONLY friend. The “We” is wonderful, but so often I feel like I am letting the “I” get away from me. That I need to make excuses for myself. To defend my dissenting opinions. For those who only know me as bold and brash, there is a very equal part that is timid and terrified. I need to remember to reassert Jonathon. To not get so lost in the bliss that I can’t find my own way. And this means making human connections with other people. Stopping to listen. Waiting to care. Allowing others to be flawed. To collect different styles of friends to enlighten and expand and energize my own journey. To be a better friend to myself.

And then to come home, stronger, to the arms of my best friend.

www.chelseastationmagazine.com
“Jameson Currier’s fifth novel, The Forever Marathon, is a compelling, brutally honest examination of two days in the life of a long term relationship between two men, who seem to have stayed together more out of habit than their desire for each other.”
—Christopher Verleger, Edge

What would you do if you realized you’d spent half your life with the same man and you weren’t sure if you loved him any longer? Enter Adam and Jesse, both 49. I found myself trying to predict the outcome throughout the book. The ending is honest and true to the characters, something that is not always the case in happily ever-after land.”
—Scott A. Drake, Philadelphia Gay News

“Currier has accomplished something truly remarkable: He has presented two highly unlikeable, self-absorbed, clichéd characters, and woven them into an interesting story that keeps the reader turning pages. This is a funny, exasperating, touching read.”
—Alan Chin, Examiner.com

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

Tricks and Treats

Jameson Currier

April 2, 2014

Jameson Currier is the author of nine works of fiction, most recently The Forever Marathon (Chelsea Station Editions).
After his doctor’s appointment, Jesse walked down Third Avenue to Bloomingdale’s. He hadn’t dismissed the idea of liposculpture, but he hadn’t embraced the prospect of surgery either. At the back of his mind was the fact that he wanted to love himself the way he was—flaws and all—and, most of all, he wanted someone else to love him for those exact same imperfections. Would he really feel better about himself if he were thinner? Had more hair? Had a perfect complexion or a perfect smile? Couldn’t he find himself a new lover—or a boyfriend or a date or a trick—on the sheer force and dynamics of his personality and not on looks?

“Not a chance,” he heard Adam’s throaty laugh mock him.

At a crosswalk, waiting for the light to change, he dialed his cellphone to reach Adam at his hospital office. Jesse worked his way out of the voicemail system until he reached Thea, Adam’s hard-toned nurse, and asked her to page him. “Not in yet, hon,” she said, as if she were a waitress cracking gum at the corner of her mouth. “What do you mean?”

“I mean he ain’t here. AWOL. Some kind of personal crisis.”

Jesse thanked her and said he would track Adam down on his cellphone. Jesse missed the change of lights, a panicky thought of Adam hurt or injured or lying unconscious beside the side of the road sweeping over him. He held a bloody, lifeless image in his mind until it fed a sweet thrill of release and freedom. He guiltily smiled. He held this pleasure secretly and tightly as he dialed Adam’s cellphone number and crossed the street. When the call jumped into voicemail, Jesse’s voice was soft and calm. “Adam, honey bee, I just spoke to Thea and she said you weren’t in yet. Are you all right? Anything wrong? Call me as soon as you get this.”

By the time he reached Bloomingdale’s, Jesse’s concern about Adam had evaporated. Adam was only posturing, as he always did. He was probably trying to use this stalling tactic to get an end-of-the-year bonus or raise. Only last week he had complained that his department budget was due and it meant him having to work extra hours to complete it.

In the ground-floor men’s department, Jesse sorted through shelves of sweaters, looking for the wider cuts which could camouflage his waistline and trying to ignore Adam’s mental taunts that Jesse should learn how to continue with a diet and not just start one. If Jesse did a rigorous diet program, kept to it, and went back to seeing his personal trainer—maybe he could resculpt his body without liposculpture. That would show Adam. Maybe he could out-Adam Adam, get down to seven percent body fat and steal Adam’s personal trainer from him. Big Donnie always adored Jesse’s jokes. He knew he could do it if he wanted. If he wanted.

A maroon crew-neck sweater held Jesse’s interest for a few minutes. He debated whether he wanted to buy it and carry a shopping bag for the rest of the day. He decided he would do a little more shopping first. He headed toward the escalator, remembering he needed wine glasses to replace the ones Adam had purposely knocked off the end table beside the bed (and which Jesse had dutifully mopped away and vacuumed up with a seething resentment that had boiled over into a fight).

On the escalator to the housewares department another memory returned: His first year in the city Jesse had called Clay and asked where the best place in Manhattan was to meet a guy. “The toilets at Bloomie’s,” Clay said, without hesitation. “I met a guy there last week who had a terrace overlooking Central Park.”

Clay had made it sound like a romantic encounter—the view of the skyline, classical music playing in the background, a line of coke to alleviate any uneasiness. The following weekend Jesse had staked out the Bloomingdale’s toilet on the fourth floor. It was Christmas season and the store was crowded. Jesse had tried not to look too suspicious or too full of intent as he wandered back and forth in front of the Christmas ornaments, his eyes pinned toward the hallway which led to the restrooms. When he noticed a good-looking man dressed in an expensive leather jacket headed toward the men’s bathroom, Jesse followed him inside and stood beside him at the adjacent urinal. His heart beat so loudly in his ears that he couldn’t urinate. Jesse stood at the urinal nervously flicking his hand at his crotch, hoping to catch the man’s attention. Jesse was never good at these sorts of hook-ups—he wanted to flirt and chat and show off his wit, not try to lower the tone of his voice to a sexy whisper and pretend...
he was a porn star looking for a fast trick. The man had left without even a passing glance at Jesse, and Jesse, in his nervousness, had darted his glance around the restroom. A tall, dark-haired man with sleepy eyes stared at him, trying to catch his attention.

Their eyes met but Jesse flicked his gaze away and zipped up, but not without looking back again at the dark-haired sleepy-eyed man. Jesse nervously left the restroom, but he wasn’t ready to give up on the possibility of a hook-up. He resumed his sentry post at the shelves of holiday ornaments. He was surprised when the sleepy-eyed giant circled him, pretending to study the figurines inside a crèche. The man approached Jesse and whispered, “How about it? Want to go somewhere?”

Jesse looked up, right into the sleepy-eyed man’s dark pupils, and saw something that made him uncomfortable. His body shook and he tossed his head back and forth—hoping it meant “no”—and he fled toward the escalators and the street. Years later in Pennsylvania, while waiting in the check-out line at the grocery store, Jesse had picked up one of those scandalous Hollywood tabloids and flipped through the pages. Beside the story of a serial killer’s capture somewhere in the mid-west, was a picture of a sleepy-eyed man Jesse was certain had been his Bloomingdale’s encounter. He had gone dizzy, as though he was about to faint, but later, rereading the article at home and looking harder at the photograph, Jesse was again certain about it. A dark depression hung over him for almost a week: he was unable to confide in Adam about his near-death encounter, and he no longer had a close friend like Clay to discuss it with. And he no more wanted to tell Adam about his potential hook-up with a serial killer as he wanted to hear about Adam’s continual infatuation with Big Donnie.

In the housewares department, Jesse headed toward the larger appliances. He wondered if Bloomingdale’s sold the latest state-of-the-art outdoor grills and might be running an off-season sale. He had never upgraded the small grill he had bought when he and Adam had moved into the house on Ingham Road. If they wanted to continue to throw their expensive outdoor soirees, Jesse was going to need a new grill sooner than later.

Instinctively, Jesse dialed Adam’s office number again, thinking he would ask Adam’s opinion about grills. He hung up as soon as he was dumped into voicemail, remembering Thea’s remark about Adam’s no-show at the hospital. A wave of fear rushed through his mind: What if something had happened to Adam? What would he do? Really?

As he put the cellphone in his pocket, a soft voice startled Jesse. “Would you like to try an omelet, sir?” Jesse was standing right beside a demonstration counter where a young man was cooking with a frying pan.

“This is the new Dream Coat skillet,” the young man said. “It’s no-stick and made without any plastic coatings. You’ll never cook with anything else after you’ve tried this.”

Jesse ate a tiny square cut of omelet that was pierced by a toothpick. “Hmmm,” he said, nodding at the young man. “The spices are divine.” The young man had dirty blond hair, blue eyes, and a barely detectable soul patch beneath his lower lip that gave Jesse the distinct urge to pluck it off his face. Jesse thought he must be an actor—a wannabe chorus boy barely out of college. He had the lithe, toned look of a triple threat—dancer, singer, seducer. When Jesse was this age, he had wanted to be such a fellow—the week he had started law school he skipped a civil procedures lecture to audition for the national tour of a Broadway musical, unabashedly singing an unrehearsed a cappella rendition of “The Man That Got Away.” Jesse had never grown out of his boyhood summers spent at musical theater camp. The impromptu audition was a dismal, embarrassing experience Jesse never attempted to repeat.

“I used oregano and thyme,” the young man said. Pinned to his chest was a name tag that read: “TODD.”

“But it’s the ginger that really makes all the herbs pop out.”

“You must be a fabulous chef, Todd,” Jesse said, looking for ways to continue the conversation. Jesse hoped he could turn the wannabe dancer into a wannabe lover—or perhaps a satisfying wannabe trick.

“Not yet,” Todd said. “Well, not officially. I’m paying my way through culinary school.”

“Culinary school?” Jesse repeated. “That sounds wonderful! So you get to sample everything?”

“Close to.”

“Any specialties?”
“Pastries,” Todd said. “I want to be a pastry chef.”
“I adore a good muffin,” Jesse said, blushing as his double-entendre failed to register with Todd. But Jesse pursued the flirtation. “Cupcakes, too. Lemon icing. My friend Michelle runs a small bakery—artisan cakes, breads, cookies—she’s quite good at it and everything is divine. If you start your own line they could be national favorites. Not just personal ones.”
“Are you looking for a gift?” Todd asked in a more business-like manner. He dramatically flipped the omelet as if he were starring in a stage show.
Jesse could not take his eyes off of Todd—or the food. He was starving; the little piece of omelet had set his stomach juices flowing and he wanted another piece. If he couldn’t charm this fellow into a dinner date, Jesse hoped at least to taste another piece of Todd’s yummy omelet.
Jesse understood enough about the retail business to know the young man was prepped and placed to steer customers toward purchases. “I’m always looking for the right gift to buy a certain someone,” Jesse said. “First, I have to find that certain someone.”
“Not easy in a big town like this,” Todd said.
“Couldn’t be too hard for you,” Jesse answered. “You must have hundreds of girls—or guys—lining up to sample your cooking.”
“Sampling’s not the problem,” Todd said. “Everyone wants to have a taste.”
“You should look for someone who has developed their palate,” Jesse said. “Knows what he likes. Someone who appreciates fine dining. Maybe an older fellow. A gourmet.”
“No way,” Todd said. “I want someone who can appreciate what I do. Not some guy who’s always gonna tell me how to do it better.”

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Desire, Lust, Passion Sex

short stories by

Jameson Currier

“Desire, Lust, Passion, Sex surpasses any expectations ten-fold. The characters speak with wisdom and understanding. Jameson Currier gives us people who are starving for attention and have an insatiable appetite for human contact. Readers will not only sympathize with his creations, but will imagine themselves there as well, among the wreckage.”

“Currier’s stories are all about sex and love and how they occasionally overlap; he writes eloquently and elegantly about the continuum of gay male sexuality, from the tickle of desire to the pull of lust to the power of passion to the satisfaction—though not always—of sex.”
—Richard Labonté, Books to Watch Out For

“Linking wit, heady sex, longing, and the agony of a hollow love life, Currier beautifully romanticizes the hope and the hunt for love, the rarest flower. At times this journey to find Mr. Right is agonizing, sometimes sad, and sometimes erotically titillating. But every scene is written with such beauty and poetic grace, it becomes an easy voyage to embrace, even though at times all the misfires and near-misses cut like a knife.”
—Jim Piechota, Bay Area Reporter

“Currier’s masterful command of language is demonstrated throughout the novel. His words are rich with the beauty of humanity, fully capturing the essence of the fragility of the hopeful heart.”
—David-Matthew Barnes, Lambda Literary

What Comes Around

a novel by

Jameson Currier

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BETWEEN
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connecting books and readers
The Musicmaker

Joel A. Nichols

April 3, 2014

Joel A. Nichols has recent stories in *With: New Gay Fiction* and the first issue of the weird fiction magazine *Phobos*, and has published more than 20 stories in anthologies. He is a library branch manager, and has also written two professional book for librarians, *iPads in the Library* (2013) and *Teaching Internet Basics* (forthcoming 2014), and is currently a member of the Stonewall Book Award jury. Joel studied German at Wesleyan University, Creative Writing at Temple University, and Library Science at Drexel. He lives in Philadelphia with his partner and their baby.
“Aaron!” Albert, the father, stood in the living room, in front of the wall with the family pictures and matte finished eight by ten school portraits of Aaron in metal and plastic frames lined the dark paneling. His wife was in the kitchen, cleaning out the food cupboard by packing cans, plastic boxes with paper envelopes of soup mix, and red plastic bottles of stale spices onto the counter. Albert had his back to the thumps of Connie’s dishrag against the side of the cupboard; he had been out in the garage, sweeping.

“He’s in his room,” Connie said. She was in the cupboard up to her elbow and didn’t turn around. Her sister-in-law always helped in the kitchen when Albert’s brother and she came over for dinner. And Connie wanted clean cupboards and to switch the litter boxes so her sister-in-law’s nose wouldn’t twitch condescendingly. She never went into the cattery, but Connie didn’t want to give her any reason to complain.

“He’s practicing.”

Albert muttered and walked down the hallway towards Aaron’s bedroom door. It was closed, and muffled music twanged and picked on the other side. Albert rapped his knuckles on the dark wood. “Aaron! Come on, I need your help in the yard.” He knocked again, with the heel of his hand. Then he twisted open the knob. “I’m sick of asking. Get out here.” There were piles of clothes on the floor like dots of mold, both darks and lights blooming in small piles. Tiny plastic data sticks loaded with compressed video and music lay scattered on top of the TV monitor, and Aaron was sitting on the far side of his bed, on the floor, in front of the Musicmaker, with the control board he held slung across his chest and lap. Aaron was small, like Albert, but thin. He had lean arms, toned from holding the control board during hours of stand up practice. It was metal and shiny gray plastic, about the size of a skateboard. At one end it was thicker, where the key and string input sensors lay like rows of teeth and baleen. In the middle the board flattened out and narrowed like the bridge of a guitar. There was a digital display panel and seven toggles where you picked the instrument modes.

Aaron switched one of the toggles and adjusted two or three knobs at the narrow end with his left hand. There were two mouthpieces, one with a flat spout for a woodwind and the other a brass circle with a lip. One of the reasons why Aaron was so good at playing the Musicmaker was that he could use three or four inputs at once: he could be in violin, in viola, in cello; or in piano and in guitar at the same time.

Three plastic coated cords spiraled from the end of the control board into the Musicmaker itself, which looked like a shiny twenty-five gallon trashcan balanced on a three-toed orchestra stand. A globular speaker sat on top, for three-sixty sound production. Just under and to the right of the speaker head snaked in the cords from the control board, next to a small shiny nameplate that said “The Musicmaker” in cursive script. Aaron had markered in his own name next to the nameplate. He was sitting with his head close to the speaker globe, coaxing soft strings from the machine.

“I’m practicing. Mr. Marden said that—,”

“You’re uncle is going to be here in a few hours, and I need you to help me clean up the leaves.”

“Can’t I have a half-hour more? Because—,”

Albert squared off and put his hands on his hips. “No, Goddammit. Put that thing down and get your ass outside. Now!” Aaron bent and swung the control board’s strap over his head and laid it down on the bed with two hands, the way Connie handled her show cats: up under the neck and low across the hips. He reached around the Musicmaker as if to hug it goodbye, slinging his arm around the body of the machine underneath the speakers to switch it off. He hooked the control board to the front of it, then walked by his father, who flattened against the door frame to give Aaron just enough room to pass by.

Up the street the neighbors had a stand of maples planted too close together. Late in the fall, when papery leaves blow away from their branches, the breeze coming down the hill eddied and swirled the brown, yellow, red, and orange leaves into Albert and Connie’s yard. And then when the fussy December rains wet the leaves into gooey black masses and rot like dog shit.

Albert had petitioned the town to force these neighbors to cut down the trees, at a select board meeting. But the neighbor, a hippie, who’d moved up here in the Seventies, and had talked about his “forty-year commitment to Vermont” at the select board meeting and convinced them that, “in this time of environmental instability, nobody should kill hundred-year-old trees.”
The town Selectmen had agreed. Albert threw Aaron a pair leather work gloves that were worn hard and brown on the fingers, but whose backs were soft as suede and golden. He had an outdoor vacuum cleaner that was good for sucking up water and sand. It could get most of the leaves, but the stringier ones got caught in the nozzle, where a tiny plastic beak focused the suction. He had two of these shopvacs, but the other wasn’t cordless. Both were presents from Connie, one on his birthday two years ago and one for father’s day last summer. Albert took the old one, which still worked fine, and gave Aaron the cordless one, and sent him to the edge of the lawn.

“Remember, if it gets clogged, you’ve got to switch it off and clear the nozzle. Don’t just keep sucking or you’ll fuck the air pump. Got it?”

He pulled his shopvac as far as he could from its tether in the garage electric socket. Across the yard, Aaron had attacked a pile of leaves and was easing the nozzle into the leaves at different angles, jiggling the portable shopvac around. He was slapping his foot against the lawn in time.

Albert looked over, saw how the boy was dancing around the pile of leaves and scattering more of the damp pulp than he was sucking up. He turned his head side to side to see if any of their neighbors were out, wanting to yell at Aaron to cut it out. But both shopvacs were buzzing extra loud, and he would have had to switch off his and walk over to the boy. And then Aaron would complain that, even when he did chores, Albert was never satisfied. And it would get Connie on his case.

She was already on his case about the school play: the music and theater teacher, Mr. Marden, had noticed Aaron fooling around with the Musicmaker during a band practice, playing a string quartet with an electric guitar added in and he wanted Aaron to play the Musicmaker on stage in the school play, “The Children’s Crusade.” Albert didn’t want him to do it, since he thought Aaron should be spending more time practicing for his driver’s test.

A car sped down the hill, and Albert whipped his head to follow it: those Flood boys and their friends always slingshotting through the neighborhood. He’d removed the largest clumps of leaf mash, and wheeled the shopvac back into the garage to empty it out. He grabbed up a rake and went after some of the spots he’d missed. Aaron was still vacuuming away and the air was cool and filled with the ripping, slurping noise of the shopvac. Albert bent over a fist-sized scoop of rusty leaves and through the noise heard the flap of the front door as it banged against the house. Connie ran towards him, waving her arms. Can’t you hear the sirens? she mouthed. Terror raid. He dropped the nozzle end and ran towards Connie, who pivoted when she saw that he understood. They ran towards Aaron, waving their arms.

He saw them, switched off the shopvac, and ran with his parents into the garage and pulled shut the doors. “Damn drills,” Albert said. They moved towards the reinforced wall between the garage and the house, where Albert had poured a concrete box with space for two cots. They squeezed inside. Aaron’s back was pressed up against a case of dusty tin cans.

“You never know, though,” Connie said, thinking about 9-11. She didn’t remember anything about that day, just what she had learned since.

“You never know,” Albert said as he clapped a hand on Connie’s shoulder and reached towards Aaron with the other. The boy shrugged away and took a step back. The siren roiled through the neighborhood, up and down the hill. The fire department, where the central siren bell sat vibrating, was a brick building planted at the foot of the hill. It wailed for two minutes full, then stopped. Many families ignored these regular drills, but Albert and Connie insisted on preparing themselves, because you never know.

*     *     *

Albert’s brother slammed shut his car door and trudged across the driveway towards the house, where Connie stood waiting with Albert. “Howard!” she said, and moved to peck his cheek. He slipped past her and shook Albert’s hand. Behind him walked his wife, Nora, and daughter, Jenny. Nora was a slim brown skinned woman who walked with her shoulders back. He’d met her when he was in the service, at a sports bar in Kuwait City, and married her there. As soon as she could, she wore too much lipstick and eyeliner, and pulled her hair tight across the sides of her head and pinned it in place with Kahloesque barrettes, and never talked to her family again.

She kissed Connie on both cheeks. “Jenny,” Connie
said as she smacked a kiss on her niece's cheek, “don't you look wonderful!” She had Nora's skin color and Howard’s everything else, even pimples. She was wearing a long skirt patterned with yellow and white flowers, and her legs sprouted thin pale bristles in between her hemline and the white socks bunched at the top and scuffed basketball sneakers. The sneakers were part of the deal she had made with her mother about wearing the dress.

Connie sat Albert, Howard, and Jenny in the living room and went into the kitchen to fix drinks. Nora followed her in. She was wearing a white blouse and fashion jeans, with rhinestones set in for the rivets. “Where’s Aaron?”

“In his room. He must not have heard you come in.” She’d said it with her back to her sister-in-law, bustling around between the freezer and the cabinet with eight or ten half-filled bottles of brown and clear liquors. Nora’s eyes were flashing between Connie’s blonde curls and the countertops.

“Can I help you at all?” She pointed towards a wire napkin basket with a bag of tortilla chips on top. Her fingernails were acrylic, and painted thick with a gummy burgundy polish. “Open those chips?” On a wooden tray she held with both hands, Connie had packed four sweating cocktails and a coke that she had poured into a champagne flute, for Jenny.

“Sure.” Nora tore the plastic top from the chips package, which came in its own hard plastic serving bowl. The serving size was smaller than a normal bag and they were more expensive, but it was a good idea for a party so you didn't have to wash a big greasy bowl after. She walked back into the living room and set the chips on the coffee table. Connie came through with the tray and passed out drinks, then sat next to Albert on the love seat.

Everybody took long sips. Howard leaned forward on the couch, hands on his knees. “Where’s Aaron, Al?”

“Jenny, why don’t you go find him,” Connie said. “Dinner’ll be ready in about half an hour.” Jenny poured herself to her feet, using her long arm to push off the couch. Jenny trotted down the hallway towards her cousin’s room.

Howard and Albert looked nothing alike, but held themselves the same way, hunched forward and bent necked. Albert stooped just like his older brother even though Albert was four or five inches shorter, and wiry where Howard was fleshy. They smiled and frowned with the same shaped lips. Their difference in size had split their interests in sports, though, with Howard running basketball lay-ups and Albert playing second base in high school and then shortstop on the police academy team. Howard had gotten fat in Kuwait, working first in the Army but then in private security for an American technologies bank. Albert still had a flat stomach from sit-ups and pushups every morning.

Two glasses with shrunken ice cubes and a thumb of alcoholic water stood on the coffee table, next to the coke fizzing up the long flute. Nora held hers with both hands, one cupping it and the other making a ring around the thin rim. Connie’s was almost empty but she was cradling it in her lap. “How much is gas running you?”

“Three fifty,” Howard said. Albert whistled. “We’re back and forth from three forty to sixty. On Tuesdays the station down in town has fifteen cents off a gallon.” Connie put down her glass, and the three of them looked at Nora out of the corners of their eyes.

“How’s Jenny doing in school?”

Nora looked over at Connie and said, “Just great. She’s made varsity again and her grades are spectacular, especially in math.”

“Still a forward?” Albert asked.

“Yup, and starts every single game,” Howard sipped the ice water from his glass. “And highest scorer in the last four. She’ll make the all-state team this spring.”

“And what about Aaron?” said Nora. “Is he still in the band?”

Connie nodded, and finished her drink. “Did you know there’s marching band scholarships? The music teacher thinks that Aaron would get a pretty good package at UVM or the University of Maine.”

Howard slapped his knee. “I can’t believe we forgot to tell you. You remember Jenny’s friend Leisha? Used to play on the team with her?”

Albert and Connie had driven over to Albany last year during the state championships, to see Jenny’s team make it to the finals, and after they had all eaten at a Pizza Hut in Glens Falls. Leisha had come along. Connie cocked her head. “Was she that tall girl? Kind of homely?” Nora nodded. “You remember, Al, that
girl who went to Pizza Hut with us.”

“Well she got recruited full boat at UCONN—they’ve got full sponsorship from ThirstQuencher and gave her a car! A brand new hybrid jobbie, with a fucking solar panel across the hood. Incredible, but she says it won’t go fast unless she’s on gas!”

“Shes must come home a lot, that Leisha. Usually freshmen get so wrapped up in their new friends away at school.”

Nora tipped the end of her drink to her lips and then set it down on the coffee table. “Well Jenny’s been to UCONN a few times, to visit the team and meet with the coach. And Leisha’s really close to her family—,”

“Any chance we could have another round, Connie? That drive made me thirsty!” Howard said, and they laughed.

“Of course,” said Connie, getting to her feet. Nora stood up. “Let me help.”

* * *

Jenny knocked and pushed open her cousin’s door. He sat sitting cross-legged on the floor with his back up against the bed. He looked up. “Hey.”

“Hey. They wanted to booze in peace so they sent me to find you.”

“Right.” He had the Musicmaker control board across his knees, his face inches from the speaker, which was humming as his fingers milked the keys. Then the sound bent and chimed bells. Spittle glistened on the metal mouthpiece. Aaron kept reaching out towards the machine and adjusting levels.

“What are you playing?” Jenny sat down on the bed, to Aaron’s left. She wanted to pull her white sneaker up under her body, but remembered her skirt and that it was his bed, and lay her feet on the floor, heels up against the comforter.

Aaron pursed his lips and blew through the reed in the flat mouthpiece and stroked the keys. Bells chimed and burst in quick succession, and there came a low pitched pipe groan that could either have come from a flute or an organ.

“Sounds sort of like Halloween... like a leaves rustling in a creepy wind.”

Aaron smiled. The note melted away but he kept playing the bells. “That’s what I’m going for. I’m doing the music for the spring musical—well, they want me to. And it’s a war story.”

“Cool.”

“Yeah. But my Dad said I couldn’t do it if I don’t get my license.”

“When are you taking the test?”

“I already did, twice. I just can’t get it.” He had reached over and turned the Musicmaker, grasping it where shoulders would be, on a person, and then lowered the control board. Jenny pulled her knees together and then pushed them apart again. She drummed on her knee.

“You don’t have to stop. You can keep practicing.”

“How’s school? Basketball?”

“Great. I’ve been going down to UCONN a lot, to see my friend Leisha who plays there. I think the coach wants to recruit me, too.”

“Cool.”

“Yeah. But I don’t get to play softball anymore, because of basketball camp. But at least Leisha’s going to the same camp this summer.”

Aaron toggled more of the switches and lifted the Musicmaker up to his face so he could peer at the display. Then he lowered it to his lap and started playing slow strokes of viola. “How’d you get to do the music, for the play?”

“The director saw me play the Musicmaker, at band practice. And decided that I could do the work of a whole band, and be on stage the whole time.”

“Do you play your regular instruments anymore?”

Aaron shook his head. “No. Well my clarinet sometimes. But only when the battery’s recharging. Otherwise, I use the Musicmaker. The synthesizers inside sound better than most instruments unless you get a really really expensive one. Do you ever play the drums anymore?”

“No,” she said. “Not since eighth grade. No time, with basketball.”

“You didn’t like the drums?” Aaron was looking at the Musicmaker, letting his fingers tap the plastic hand-holds on the back with cascading thumps.

Jenny sat up and hunched forward, with her palms on her thighs. “I liked it, but band was everyday at seven. I couldn’t get up that much earlier every day and still be able to run at practice.” She turned her over her wrist and looked at her jagged nails. “Does
your mom still have all those cats? My mom always says she can smell them but I can’t.”

A rich viola wait bent its way from the speaker grills of the Musicmaker. Aaron nodded. “Yup. They’re in the cattery—this room she had Dad build down in the cellar. All genmodPersians.” He fiddled with the controls, quickening the pace of the down stroke. He hadn’t looked Jenny in the eye once. “They don’t even breed non genmodPersians anymore, because they all get urinary cancer. Isn’t that gross?”

She shook her head up and down. “Can we go see?”

Aaron nodded again. As he stood up he kept a grasp on the Musicmaker and the control board slung over his shoulder, reaching forward to balance his body weight without putting down the instrument. He tucked it under his arm and walked out into the hallway with the rows of his school portraits. Jenny followed him out.

When they walked past the living room, Connie said, “Kids? Where you going? Why don’t you come in and have a coke. We’re about to start dinner, anyway.” The kids drifted into the doorway and saw the adults sitting still around the coffee table, which was covered in little puddles from sweating glasses.

“I was going to show Jenny the cattery,” Nora set down her drink. Connie looked in her direction, then down at the pile carpet. “Oh no, I don’t want you to get dander on your clothes, Jenny. I’ll sneeze the whole way home.” She reached out and placed her hand on Connie’s knee. “You don’t mind, do you Connie? If they don’t go and open up the cats?”

“Of course not. They shouldn’t get riled up anyway. Wakemeupbeforeyougogo is getting a little lady friend tomorrow from over in New Hampshire. Did you know that he and one of my other toms are the most requested genmodPersian squires in the whole state? Nobody even wants non genmods anymore, at all”

“Maybe it’ll pay for Aaron to go to college!” Howard said, and chuckled. Everyone went quiet for a moment, then Albert returned the chuckle.

“Except all the profits go back into making my cellar a goddamn cat hotel. She had me build a special enclosure for this breeding.”

“It’s a bachelor pad, Al. My toms need their space. You know what I mean, right Nora?”

Nora smiled, forcing her lips to stay together over her teeth. Howard took a gulp from his cocktail. “I never did like cats,” he said, and Albert nodded, “Always slinking around like they’re better. You know? Give me a dog—”

An electronic rooster call crowed through the house. “That’s the oven! Kids,” Connie said, looking back and forth between Aaron and Jenny, who were still hovering in the doorway. “Why don’t you go and get yourselves something to drink. We’ll be right behind you in the dining room. Aaron, will you switch off the buzzer?”

*     *     *

Dinner was chicken breasts with broccoli and mashed potatoes made from potato flakes. Each hunk of breast covered almost the whole dinner plate and the piles of potato and broccoli competed for space underneath and along the edges. There was a cheesy sauce that Connie zapped still in the plastic bottle from the store, and then passed around the table so everybody could drizzle as much as they wanted.

“Delicious, Connie,” Nora said and Howard murmured the same. “Remember those tiny, meatless little birds everybody ate when we were kids? I had these cousins who lived out in the desert in a tiny village, and they’d eat these stringy, bony chickens... It’s amazing they could live like that.”

Everyone was quiet while they chewed their first several bites. Aaron took a big gulp of coke to wash down some dry strings of chicken and then scooped a snail trace of the cheesy sauce with his fork and spread it across the back of his chicken breast. His elbows rested on top of the Musicmaker control board, which he’d laid over his knees. The Musicmaker was switched off on the floor next to him, with its metal leg folded inside itself. Aaron kept tapping it with his foot.

“Jenny, isn’t your junior prom coming up? Have you got a date?” Connie said. Jenny was still chewing, and before she could swallow, Howard answered. “No time for boys when there’s basketball. Right, Jen?” He sliced a wedge of chicken and pinned in underneath a limp branch of broccoli and forked it into his mouth.

“It’s not like it was when we were girls, is it, Nora? Nobody seems to date anymore. They’re so busy planning for college, doing sports or music or...”
Nora looked up at the ceiling, and said, “What I wouldn’t have given for a prom! I used to sit in our living room while my father and mother sang prayers and dream of painting my toenails to go to the prom with John Stamos. I used to sneak magazines out of the store, for pictures of him.”

Aaron said, “Who’s John Stamos?”

Connie and Nora laughed. “A teen heartthrob, when we were little. I don’t even know who the girls are into now,” Connie said, looking over at Jenny.

“What about the ones who call here day and night for Aaron? He’s got a little harem going on,” Albert said, looking in Aaron’s direction. Then he mugged towards Howard. “A harem!”

Nora coughed to hold back a laugh. Aaron blushed and looked down at his plate. With his left hand he started to tweak the string sensors. He’d remembered to mute the speaker, and as long as he didn’t make any noise, Albert pretended he couldn’t see the control board.

“So who’s the lucky girl?” said Howard.

Aaron’s cheeks were still pink. “It’s—my dad is exagger—I’m friends with a lot of girls who are in band.”

“How is band?” Howard said.

Aaron started to lift up the Musicmaker’s control board, when Albert clanked his fork, and said, “You should have seen this guy I picked up for speeding the other day! He was doing eighty down Route 7, and at first I thought he wasn’t going to stop at all. I go up to the car and it’s an Asian guy—fattish Asian, not Chinese or anything, and he’s in this shiny diesel euro-jobbie. I ask him first if he speaks English, we have to you know, ask first.

“Then I say, ‘you know how much extra gas you use running eighty instead of the posted sixty-five’ and he says, ‘I don’t give a shit. Do I get a ticket or what?’ Can you believe that? In our day you wouldn’t talk to a state trooper like that.”

“No, no you wouldn’t,” said Howard. He was a state police officer, too, but a captain with a desk job. “But my guys get that lip all the time. Just the other day, over the radio comes a call for a 31—,” he looked at the wives and corrected himself, “for a driving under the influence. Immigrants, you know? Well, my officer pops open the trunk and there’s a—;” he paused again, looking at Jenny and Aaron, “a body. Can you believe it? These two guys had killed their buddy, some gang thing or something, then gotten drunk and were joyriding around Albany.”

Connie and Albert shook their heads. Nobody said anything. The hunks of chicken breast were disappearing from everybody’s plate except Aaron’s. Jenny, Howard and Albert had already finished theirs, signaled by the empty scrape of the flat butter knife blades against the ceramic plates, chewing their last bites.

Nora had eaten the mashed potatoes and was still working on her last hunk of chicken. She edged the plate closer to herself. “Aaron, your mom said that you’ve been practicing a lot with the Musicmaker.”

He lifted the control board out of his lap and set it down again. The Musicmaker was on the floor, sitting at his knees. “Yeah, it’s better than the regular instruments. You can play more than one and you get purer tones. You can even mix right in the machine, and the head speaker produces amazing sound quality for performance.”

“Aaron, you shouldn’t bring it to the dinner table,” Albert said. He sat with his arms crossed.

“Jenny’s the same way, Al. She’d dribble during dinner if she could,” said Howard.

“Can you play something for us?” said Nora. “I’d love to hear you.”

Connie started stacking up empty plates. “I don’t think we’d better just yet—,”

“Come on, Connie,” said Howard. “If he spends so much time with that thing, I’d like to hear it, too.” She didn’t respond, but stood up and collected the empty plates from the other side of the table. “I’m going to go get dessert. Just be a minute.” Albert got up and followed her into the kitchen, with his lips in a hard smile.

Aaron switched on the speakers, and started to play a New Orleans fiddle. He let it go a few bars and then toggled switches and blew into the round mouthpiece. Flute notes eddied between the swells of the jaunty bow. Aaron had pushed back his chair and was sitting ramrod straight, holding the Musicmaker frozen in a military pose. As he played, his closed his eyes and tapped the toe of his shoe against the linoleum of the dining room floor. The fiddle faded out and up started an accordion. Aaron’s smile grew
until he was holding the Musicmaker almost like a real accordion, pumping his elbows in and out and swaying slightly back and forth.

The door to the kitchen was shut, and behind it Albert and Connie hushed each other. “I don’t want him sashaying around when Howard’s here!” Albert hissed. Connie set a stack of dessert bowls down on the counter too hard and the glass crunched.

Nora, Howard, and Jenny were watching Aaron. He brought the song to an end and relaxed his posture. His fingers still played at the controls, but he muted the speakers again. Nora clapped. Howard was looking at the floor. “They’ve asked me to play for the school musical,” Aaron started as Connie came back through the doors, with a plastic salad bowl of chocolate swirl pudding in one hand and the dessert bowls in the other, with Albert following. “The director wants me to play on stage.”

“That’s wonderful,” said Nora. “Isn’t that wonderful? You two must be so proud.”

“About what?” said Albert.

“That Aaron’s doing all the music for the play. It’s impressive.”

“Oh. He’s not going to be able to do it,” said Albert. Aaron stared at his father. “Getting a driver’s license is his top priority.”

Aaron swallowed. “But I really want to do the play.”

“Not going to happen, Aaron. So go put away that stupid instrument and come back and have dessert. And we’re not going fight about it right now.”

“No,” he said and his voice started to crack. “I don’t see why—”

Albert put down his fork. “Aaron, stop mouthing off. We can talk about this later.”

“I don’t want to. I’m playing in the musical, and I don’t care if you like it or not.”

“I’m not going to have you prancing around for some fag teacher when we could be practicing. End of discussion. Go to your room and put that thing away.”

Aaron didn’t move. He sat there, staring at the table, cradling the Musicmaker. Then he sat up straight, and opened his mouth to say something. Albert stood up and reached over Jenny. He wrenched the Musicmaker’s control board out of Aaron’s hands and pulled it towards his chest. The spiral cords stretched almost straight and the Musicmaker listed towards Albert on his metal toes. Aaron let out a wail.

“Give me that back!”

“Go to your room, Aaron.”

“Give me it!” Aaron shouted back. His face boiled red and his voice broke. “Give it to me now!” Howard, Nora and Jenny stared into the tablecloth. Connie was stirring the pudding.

Albert tugged and ripped the cords out of the music maker with a pop. The globe speakers sputtered as Albert tossed the control board against the wall. Aaron yelled and rushed over to where it landed. He gathered it up, tucked the Musicmaker under his arm, and rushed out of the room.

Albert sat down at the table again and Connie started passing out dishes of chocolate pudding. Albert was breathing heavy and his face was red.

Nora said, “You’ve got to let him live his own life, Al.”

Howard said, “It’s not any of our business, Nora. But Al, she’s right, even if it does disappoint you. Remember when Dad wanted you to play basketball?”

“That’s not the same thing. And it isn’t really any of your business.”

Silence fell again. Then Connie said, “Let’s not ruin the whole night. Weren’t you going to tell us about your prom plans, Jenny? Are you going to get your hair done with all your girlfriends? That’s what I did. It was like being a model.”

Jenny put her spoon down into the pudding and watched it sink. She hiked up the side of her skirt and scratched her leg. “I, uh, I’m not sure who I’m going with yet.” The four of them sat in a long pause. Howard changed the subject, and the four adults chatted until Nora started yawning and Connie and Albert saw them out to their car.

“Tell Aaron we said goodbye,” Howard said.

* * *

Albert found him on his bed, lying with his feet up against the headboard. The Musicmaker stood at the foot of the bed, the speaker globe at Aaron’s eye level. In the crook of his arm he’d tucked the control board. Its cords trailed off the edge, and the ends: frayed purple, blue, red and green curlicues of tiny wire like
the split ends of Jenny’s ponytail, if you looked close enough. He looked up when he came in. His cheeks boiled with red blotches and he snorted away a smear of snot. Albert reached out and fingered the kinky tangle of wires.

Aaron’s face was planted face in his mattress. His chest heaved. After several of his swallowed sobs, Albert stood up and gathered the broken control board under one arm and took hold of the Musicmaker’s handles. He carried the two pieces out of Aaron’s room and down the narrow plank steps to the cellar. Connie was sitting inside the cattery, stroking one of her Persians, one of the spotted ones, and didn’t look up as he passed by the open door.

In the dusty space at the far end of the cement basement, Albert hunted for the box the Musicmaker had come in from the store. Inside the box, packed in a plastic sleeve, was a trouble shooting manual and a drawing of the components, which Albert set down on his worktable in between the control board and the Musicmaker. He considered at the ragged hole he’d torn down the front of the machine’s shiny body and the rainbow of wires, comparing it to the schematics in the manual. He swore at himself, switched on the solder gun, and set to work.

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A Visit with Michael Rowe
Interview by Jeffrey Luscombe

On a snowy winter day, Canadian author Michael Rowe opened up his home in Toronto to discuss his new book, *Wild Fell*, a novel Lambda Literary described as “the highest order of literary ghost story, easily on par with Peter Straub’s seminal *Ghost Story*.” Over the course of the afternoon, our conversation touched upon subjects such as family, being a gay writer, choosing to work in horror fiction as well as Rowe’s own personal ghosts.

With no hint of the sinister about him and looking serene in his easy chair with Becket, his black lab, by his side, Rowe, may not initially strike one as the new Canadian King of Horror, he is fast becoming.

Born in Ottawa, Rowe was a seasoned traveller (having lived in Europe and the Middle East) even before being sent to St. John’s Cathedral Boy’s School, a strict Anglican boarding school in
the wilds of Manitoba as a boy. It was here that Rowe would find early inspiration as writer. “For me, boarding school was a time of being lonely. I was a skinny little femmy boy, but loneliness provides introspection essential for a literary mind. It was also the landscape of Enter Night. St. John’s was a very rugged, purely masculine landscape one to which I was probably singularly ill suited. But it also provided me with an incredible gift of beauty—the prairies, the snow, the rugged northern Ontario bush as experienced during nine hundred-mile canoe trips from Thunder Bay to Lake Winnipeg.”

At this time Rowe was published for the first time, a piece of poetry entitled “A Taste of Hurt,” about the pain of loneliness, in Teen Magazine. “I was definitely a burgeoning queer teenager, but not really aware of it,” says Rowe. “I believed I was the only person like me in the world. And society was just starting to look at gays and gay liberation then. But the media was showing the most unflattering image of us possible. It was rough. It leaves indelible impressions.”

After a stint as a male model in Paris, Rowe returned to Canada. “It was at The University of Toronto where I began writing in earnest,” Rowe says. “I was writing mostly poetry at U of T and I was published in my first year at university in Canadian Runner, a running magazine. It was a rush. And it gave me a sense of what could be.”

Soon after, Rowe began writing for the Body Politic, a gay liberation magazine in Toronto. “I just called them up and told them I wanted to write the article,” Rowe said. His first piece was on the parole of Dan White, the man who assassinated Harvey Milk, from jail in 1984. For the article, Rowe interviewed Randy Shilts, author of The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk and The Band Played On (in 2008 Rowe would thank Shilts posthumously when he won the Randy Shilts Award for his book of essays, Other Men’s Sons). “The Body Politic was put together by a very special group of queer people—fantastic Canadian gay and lesbian writers and artists—with a dynamic that has never since been replicated. It was passionate, committed, old-school queer liberation. There was no cynical slickness you find now. I am honored to have been a part of it.”

After writing five or six cover stories for The Advocate, Rowe chose to go on hiatus from journalism to try his hand at fiction. And his genre of choice was horror. “I wanted to tell my own stories,” says Rowe. “And horror is a great love of mine; it was what I grew up with. And horror is a wonderful way to tell stories. There are none of the constraints or boundaries of realism. Now I still love realism, but I also love the liberation I have with horror.”

Having edited the Queer Fear anologies, Rowe’s first foray into writing horror was the novella In October, published in the Triptych of Terror: Chilling Tales from the Masters of Gay Horror. Next was his critically-acclaimed Canadian vampire novel, Enter Night, published in 2011. “With Enter Night,” Rowe explained. “I wanted to tell the story about a gay man and his sister-in-law returning to northern town to face their past. All the themes of Enter Night, religious colonialism, residential schools, rape of environment, all of these were all forms of vampirism. The fact that the actual vampire was a resurrected Jesuit priest made sense.”
Though, *Enter Night* was not the kind of vampire story that was hot or popular at the time it Rowe was successful finding a publisher. “There was no twinkly stuff,” says Rowe. “It was scary. It was about the effects of depravation.”

However, the terror found in *Enter Night* was not exclusively from vampires. “I wanted to write about 1970s and homophobia,” Rowe says. “I wanted to write about what it was like in 1972 to be sent away for gay aversion therapy. I researched it. What happened to Jeremy in *Enter Night* was taken from an actual case file. This was a different kind of vampire. They take away what we are and replace it with what they are.”

For his new novel, *Wild Fell*, Rowe turned to ghosts. “The genesis of *Wild Fell* occurred one winter afternoon. We were living in an old Victorian house in the small town of Milton, Ontario.” Rowe recalls. “I had a very, very bad flu and a fever. I was alone in the house, in bed. I woke up hearing someone call my name. I got up and walked through the house but no one was there. The house was completely empty, but I distinctly heard my name, not like you do in a dream, but like you do when someone whispers it in your ear. I thought about that night for twenty years before writing *Wild Fell*. Among other things, it’s a ghost story about memory. Not only the power of memory but also the enduring power of the removal of memory. The past never dies.”

In both *Enter Night* and *Wild Fell*, Rowe explores the dynamics of family. “I am obsessed with families,” says Rowe. “Mine wasn’t unique. We did not always get along. I don’t think there is any such thing as a perfect family. Families not set up to produce perfection. Though I am fascinated when I am taken into those families that seem perfect. It’s euphoric being around them. It’s like listening to perfectly spoken Arabic or a beautiful piece of music. When you’ve had a past like mine, you tend to always feel like a bit of an outsider in the company of families like that.”

And each novel has a differing interpretation of motherhood, another theme in Rowe’s writing. “My mother wasn’t cold and distant like Jamie’s in *Wild Fell* or devouring like Jamie’s mother in *Enter Night*. My mother was a complex woman,” Rowe says. “And I loved her very much. We often had a hard time communicating but she was a great support with my writing. It was my mother who gave me my first typewriter--the one she had in college. I found her poetry after she died, some of it written while she was at Bread Loaf studying with Robert Frost. It was quite beautiful. I think she could have been a gifted writer if she’d wanted to pursue it as a career, but like a lot of women of her generation, she subsumed that into making a family and home life.”

However *Wild Fell* obscures more than the lines demarking life and death, gender is also malleable in the novel. “Jamie is not a masculine man,” Rowe says. “And his best friend, Hank, is a masculine woman who may be transgender. I could have went deeper into Hank’s story but I didn’t want too much of the story to be on Hank.”

Still, Rowe does not consider himself a ‘gay writer.’ “It’s cliché to say I’m not a gay writer, I’m writer who is gay,” Rowe says. “But I actually prefer the term ‘queer writer.’ My sexual identity is complex so I find the term “gay man” too constraining for me personally at this stage in my life. My work filters through my life experience. It has a queer sensibility. So what we’re doing is telling stories. And just like we don’t choose where are books are shelved in the bookstore, under LGBT or horror or whatever, it’s ultimately up to readers to decide if we are queer writers,
or gay and lesbian writers, or trans writers, or just writers. I mean to say, we are what we are, but readers will also make up their own minds about what we are, or rather what our books are.”

But Rowe does see some difference between fans of gay literature and horror fiction fans. “What’s interesting is my new horror readers just accepted gay content,” says Rowe. “They never said this book is too gay for me. Many gay readers tend to expect gay characters doing gay things. But most of best gay writing includes interaction with non-gay people and doing non-gay things. Horror readers tend to just expect scary shit but the run the spectrum. Some are satisfied with blood and guts and there are writers that do that. Then there are readers that want something more complex and like the stuff I do, where stories evolve from the characters.”

And if Rowe still has ghosts, they are phantoms of the past. “My ghosts are my memories growing up,” says Rowe. “The reason I set two books in the 1970s was to make sense of what life was like; that sense of loneliness when there was nobody else like me. That is the theme of Wild Fell, the terror of being alone. It is those moments in your childhood when you are by yourself and your parents seem miles away, even though they may be just outside the borders of your bedroom. It’s then everything become misty and indistinct. It feels as if no one is there to protect you. That’s the origin of monster in closet, it waits until your parent are asleep.”

Today, Rowe is lonely no more. “I have been married thirty years,” he says. “I have lots of friends, and my husband and I have had a total of six dogs over years.”

However, Rowe does think that ghosts still may be close by. “I think this house is haunted,” he says. “I had an experience when we first moved in. I came out of bedroom one evening, and I had a sudden impression of deep menace. I was at the top of the stairs and the entire downstairs was pitch black. It was night, and there were no lights on. But this feeling…I’d not felt anything like that before. And our dog, Harper, who was then just a puppy, looked as if he’d seen something horrific. I tried to shake it but I just could not lose that chill. Finally, I called up the husband and asked him to come home.”

However, Michael Rowe has found a way to placate any lingering specters he may have had in his home. “I painted the living room pink and I’ve felt nothing like that since,” he says. “If there are ghosts here now, they’re happy ghosts.”

Michael Rowe was born in Ottawa in 1962 and has lived in Beirut, Havana, Geneva, and Paris. An award-winning journalist, and literary nonfiction writer, he is the author of Writing Below the Belt, a critically-acclaimed study of censorship, erotica and popular culture, as well as the essay collections Looking for Brothers and Other Men’s Sons. His essays, articles, and reviews have appeared in the Globe & Mail, National Post, The Advocate, and The Huffington Post, as well as CFQ, The Scream Factory, All-Hallows, among many others. For 17 years he was the first-tier Canadian correspondent for Fangoria. He has won the Lambda Literary Award, the Randy Shilts Award, and the Spectrum Award, and has been a finalist for the National Magazine Award, the Associated Church Press Award, and the International Horror Guild Award. As the creator and editor of the critically acclaimed horror anthologies Queer Fear and Queer Fear 2, he was hailed by Clive Barker in 2002 as having "changed forever the shape of horror fiction." He is married and lives in Toronto. Enter, Night was his first novel. His second, Wild Fell, was published in December 2013 by ChiZine Publications. For more information on Michael Rowe, visit his Web site at www.michaelrowefiction.com.
Born in Hamilton, Ontario Canada, Jeffrey Luscombe is the author of the novel *Shirts and Skins*. He holds a BA and MA in English from the University of Toronto. He attended The Humber College School for Writers where he was mentored by writers Nino Ricci and Lauren B. Davis. He has had fiction published in *Chelsea Station, Tupperware Sandpiper, Zeugma Literary Journal*, and *filling Station Magazine*, and nonfiction published in *Xtra* and *Pink Play*. In 2010 he was shortlisted for the Prism International Fiction Prize and in 2013 was a finalist for the The Kerry Schooley Award sponsored by Hamilton Arts Council. He lives in Toronto with his husband Sean. For more information on Jeffrey Luscombe, visit his Web site at www.jeffreyluscombe.com.
“A delightfully spooky, often kooky, gay vision quest. Currier’s Avery Dalyrymple is larger-than-life and intrinsically flawed, and the fact that he just can’t seem to get out of his own way makes him primed for misadventure and gay mayhem. One of Currier’s strengths has always been the ability to soak his narrative in a rich, authentic ambiance and _The Wolf at the Door_ is no exception, with sentences that resonate with the decadent rhythms of the French Quarter and paragraphs that positively drip with Southern gothic moodiness. Genre fans will find plenty to appreciate in Currier’s otherworldly version of _It’s a Wonderful Life_ fused with all the ensemble wit of _Tales of the City_ and the regional gothic texture of Anne Rice’s _Interview with the Vampire_. Savor this one like a bowlful of spicy jambalaya and a snifter of fine aged bourbon on a hot, humid night.”

—Vince Liaguno, _Dark Scribe Magazine_

**Praise for _The Wolf at the Door_**

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

—Richard Labonté, _Bookmarks_

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

—Bob Lind, _Echo Magazine_

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

—Craig Gidney, _Lambda Literary_

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

—Jim Gladstone, _Passport_

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

Praise for The Haunted Heart and Other Tales

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

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

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

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

“Jameson Currier’s The Haunted Heart and Other Tales expands upon the usual ghost story tropes by imbuing them with deep metaphorical resonance to the queer experience. Infused with flawed, three-dimensional characters, this first-rate collection strikes all the right chords in just the right places. Equal parts unnerving and heartrending, these chilling tales are testament to Currier’s literary prowess and the profound humanity at the core of his writing. Gay, straight, twisted like a pretzel...his writing is simply not to be missed by any reader with a taste for good fiction.”
—Vince Liaguno, Dark Scribe Magazine

AVAILABLE FROM CHELSEA STATION EDITIONS
The Unwanted

Keith Glaeske

April 5, 2014

Keith Glaeske is a medievalist and collector of speculative fiction currently living in Washington, DC. His articles about medieval literature have been published in Medieval Perspectives, Traditio, and Ériu.
Jamie Thomas is your typical gay, American teenager: short, awkward, and tormented by bully Billy Stratton, he just wants to survive high school for another year and a half before escaping Athens, MO. Typical, that is, if typical means that your presumed long-dead mother turns out to be alive—and a member of a mythical tribe of immortal Greek warrior women. Abandoned by his mother as an infant on his father’s doorstep, she returns sixteen years later to ask his help: a curse has been laid on her tribe, so that they bear only male children. Although immortal, Amazons can be killed, and if they fail to produce female children, they will eventually die out. According to a prophecy from their Oracle, the only hope for the Amazons lies in one of these abandoned male offspring—specifically, Jamie.

Such is the premise behind this fast-paced novel, full of plot twists and unexpected turns. Readers of Ricker’s first novel, Detours, will already be aware of Ricker’s penchant for blending genres, and the same holds true in The Unwanted, which incorporates elements of myth, fantasy, drama, and even romance. The mythical and the modern worlds are juxtaposed throughout, both in “man’s world” where a pegasus and a cerebus make appearances and in the Amazon home city of Penthesiliopolis, where some of the Amazons wear jeans and have access to computers and modern security systems. Ricker’s novel contains several narrative strands: the quest to save the cursed Amazons, the attempt of a rogue Amazon to build a female army and conquer “man’s world,” and the developing relationship between Jamie and Billy, who, it turns out, is another of the Unwanted. He deftly weaves these separate stories together, which come together in a very classical way at the end.

By far the most daring subplot that Ricker develops throughout the larger narrative is the change in relationship between Jamie and Billy. Initially adversaries (the novel begins with Billy beating up Jamie at school), by the time the final battle arrives at Penthesiliopolis, they are lovers. Here Ricker has the greatest chance of a misstep, thereby threatening the reader’s willing suspension of disbelief, but to his credit he presents their evolving relationship in a straightforward, believable manner.

The Unwanted is not a typical coming-of-age novel (see above RE: mythical mothers); neither is it a standard Greek myth. Several Greek deities appear, but the Greek preoccupation with one’s predetermined destiny (especially avoiding it) is not apparent: when he discovers that his life is governed by an obscure prophecy, Jamie does not try to evade it, even when the goddess Athena tells him the price of fulfilling it is death (his? Billy’s? The god Ares? His mother’s? Or the entire tribe of Amazons?). Instead of being a meditation on the futility of trying to avoid one’s fate, or the effects of hubris (another favorite classical theme), the novel explores such themes as fulfilling one’s duty, being true to oneself, the cost of lies, and redemption.

That being said, readers familiar with the Greek myths will enjoy this re-imagining of them in our world, as will anyone who enjoys a well-crafted story.
Review

The Tooth Fairy

Vinton Rafe McCabe

April 5, 2014

Vinton Rafe McCabe is the author of ten nonfiction books on subjects related to health and healing, and is the author of the novel Death in Venice, California. He has also reviewed restaurants for New England Monthly, theater and film for PBS and books and fashion for the New Haven Advocate. A member of the National Book Critics Circle, he now reviews books for The New York Journal of Books and Chelsea Station Magazine.
In his novel *Winkie*, author Clifford Chase showed first a great degree of imagination in his tale of a teddy bear who comes to life (importantly, a bear that had once been the companion to the boy’s mother and had now been handed down to him), and then a good bit of authorial courage as the tale began to morph before the reader’s eyes and ended up with our little bear on trial for terrorism.

But those were the times when it seemed all-important that we never, never let terrorists win—to the point of renaming our French fries with some sense of deep fried patriotism.

*Winkie* ended up a flawed experiment. With the reader feeling very much as if the whole thing had been made up on the spot, as if, through some magic, the writer were staying just enough ahead of the reader that the next page was always filled with type, even if the reader had the suspicion that the one after that was still in the process of being filled.

It made the reader wonder just what the story had set out to be and at what point it began to shift into the confused thing it turned out to be. The reader also attempted to identify the moment as which his own attention began to wane as histrionics replaced an actual narrative.

In his new work, *The Tooth Fairy: Parent, Lovers, and Other Wayward Deities (A Memoir)*, Clifford Chase is again at play in his field of words. With the result that he has here taken the whole crystalline mass of memory, shaken it, dropped it, and shattered it into bits and then glued the individual shards (with a somewhat cum-se-cum-saw interest in meaning or clarity) onto the blank pages.

The results look a bit like stanzas, and, at other times, not unlike the printing that comes baked in in Chinese fortune cookies.

As author Clifford Chase puts it:

“I write this in the hope that aphorism-like statements, when added one to another, might accrue to make some larger statement that will placate despair.”

About which the reader asks: *Whose despair? The author’s? Or the reader’s—the one trying to make sense of this whole thing?*

Granted, some of the aphorisms are clever (“In the Vatican Museums, just after the Sistine Chapel, there was a small wooden box marked ‘Suggestions.’) but most are the stuff of sparkling table conversation and/or Seinfeld observations.

What’s missing is a guiding reason for presenting a memoir in this manner.

We are given great masses of details heaped on the page for us to play with ourselves, as if they were the mass of mashed potatoes focused on in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, with Richard Dreyfus dragging his fork through them and muttering, “This is important. I means something.”

Ah, yes. But what?

The reader sits, first intrigued, then bewildered, and finally impatient sifting through events like these:

“For as long as I can remember, I have castigated myself for not properly enjoying things, first toys, later people, moments, and landscapes.

“No record or memory of what I did over spring break.

“Patch of pale blue ocean in the distance, which I always tried to appreciate as lovely and serene, but which mostly seemed to disappear in my mind.

“The stoners sat shirtless in front of the dorms; constant snickering and hacking and mulling over ‘buds’ and ‘sinsemilla’; continual drone of Pink Floyd, speakers pointed out the window.

“I was completely lost to myself and on myself and yet I was also completely myself, as much as any weird prehistoric creature was itself, if doomed, if purely traditional on the evolutionary ladder, completely itself and utterly unseen, except for the fossil, a kind of shadow across time.

“Chris and I jumped over the four-foot wall that everyone jumped over to get to the mailboxes.

“It was beautiful everywhere you looked: bright gold poppies appeared in all the fields, and wisteria draped the walkways of the college next to mine.

“I sat on a bench in the sunshine reading my evaluations.

“My Chaucer professor praised my ‘detailed familiarity with the text’ as well as my ‘hard work and keen intelligence.’

“I enrolled in his course on Spenser’s *Faerie Queene.*”

All of which seems as pretentiously both over and under-written a thing as has been seen since Auntie Mame’s ghost rewrote to her say “How bleak was my
puberty,” which is, after all, a somewhat analogous quote, excepting the glories of the California poppies.

And what is missing from Mr. Chase’s subtitle, that which promises tales of parents and lovers and “other wayward deities” is the single most important ingredient in the mix, that which both flour and yeast in this particular loaf: me. Me me me me me.

At certain moments, when the aphorisms involving navel gazing stack up like flights over O’Hare, the reader cannot help but feel that he has learned all he needs to know about Mr. Chase, author, and Mr. Chase, human being. Things learned include a certain degree of hypochondria, a long-term self-determined need for introspection that seemingly has fueled decades of regular therapy, and a certain cruelty on our author’s part when he is asked to enter into relationships with other people. Or as the author snippets it:

“As the reader may have noticed, I like to mingle love with panic, self-doubt, and conjecture.”

The reader, of course, had noticed. And thought the author let himself off rather too easily.

Let it be noted, however, that this work is in one important way the anti-Winkie, as here the author seems to give up (to some degree or other) on tossing his life’s aphorisms as us like the individual pieces of a jigsaw puzzle and, ultimately, chooses coherence.

As the book unfolds, the pieces are presented in an increasingly organized manner, until, near the end, we are given some near-essays in which several paragraphs are actually linked in the telling of tales. And the sections of the book dedicated to Mr. Chase’s search for the owner of some misplaced luggage and, especially, his memories of his dead brother are both moving and indications of how good this book might have been.

It would be too easy perhaps to dismiss The Tooth Fairy as just another failed experiment, or, worse, a memoir comprised of First World Problems of little interest, dressed up and churned out in a manner that is meant to seem more creative than it is. The frustrating thing is that the reader comes back again to Mr. Chase’s writing because of his obvious talent, always wishing to be blown away by the results of his labors, only to be again put off, not by the writing, but by the ornaments hung on his words.

But, hopefully, there will be a next book from Clifford Chase, and another and another, in which, de-cluttered, de-ornamented, controlled and simply structured, we will have the chance to see how sublime his work can be.
"An engaging allegorical pursuit of the mirage that is beauty’s transcendence."
-Kirkus
Awake

Steven Rydman

April 7, 2014

Steven Rydman completed his Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing at Antioch University Los Angeles. His poetry and short fiction have appeared in Rattle, Bellingham Review, The Los Angeles Review, and Narrative. Recently, his poem “Anniversary” was published in Between: New Gay Poetry, and his piece “Vacuum” was picked by Robert Olen Butler as the 2006 World’s Best Short Short Story in The Southeast Review. For five years, he served as the Poetry Editor for Gertrude Press. He lives in a suburb of Detroit with his partner.
Years it took me to learn how to sleep with this lover, when it clicked, he left me, now, I can’t sleep again, so I walk in the woods, my legs buckle, grief like a backpack of rocks pulls me under a pine’s shady patch, the grass prickles, I feel the sizz of his stubble on my neck, how I cringe at the tickle of chest hair spooned against my back, eyes close, snap open, a horse fly nuzzles its spotted head at my wrist, the buzz of its wings like his breath hissing in my ear, I turn on my side, the one I couldn’t sleep on with him, facing each other, knees boxing for space, now it feels good, feels right, until a leaf-footed nymph starts to sip at my ankles for sap, its scarlet tail cocked like it could sting, I sit up, nerves alert, I swat and flinch at the sweep of my hair lifted by a breeze, did our bodies ever lock together, did our heat ever lull us into sleep? Like this, I’ve been awake for weeks.
Two Trees

James Hodgson

April 7, 2014

James Hodgson writes about gay life, studies queer culture, and lives in Manchester, UK. He has recently completed a PhD in Brazilian Cultural Studies. His poem “Lavender” was recently published in *Between: New Gay Poetry* and he has published poems in *Kaffeeklatsch* magazine and other student writing magazines.
two trees, who
have bound their roots so tight that division is imperceptible.
They are old and near identical.
The wind, and the guy
who rests and smokes through a joint, and the various parliaments
of arrowhead birds that hang on the branches
couldn't tell you
how it happened like this.

Hell, I don't know myself. Geography
stipulates that minerals are collected and held
along with the other remains of the hillside.
Chalk, old pots, molehills and whatnot.
All these items
are maintained by the trees as they wind
root in to root, like they're saving up for something.
Who saves the world up like that?

The guy doesn't want
much from them. Just to sit, and smoke, and
feel the buzz of the wind on the hill. The
two trees frame everything, but don't
know how they do this—

—innocence that makes
for an uncomplicated view.
I remember when I knew that I was gay: I was in eighth grade and I was thankful I got to change in the guys’ locker room. I knew I loved being with girls, but I knew I didn’t want to make love to them. I knew I liked painting and acting, and that I also enjoyed baseball, fishing, and basketball.

In the town of 600 in the North Dakota where I grew up there were two women, retired school teachers who were “roommates.” One of the ladies spent her career teaching high school history and the other was the former physical education instructor. I found it odd that the people in my community would place extra emphasis on the word “roommates.” This was a clue that the language I used mattered, and that the language I use to speak about people still matters.

Growing up, I was taught how to dance, how to properly invite girls onto the dance floor, and how to look like I was having fun the entire time. Vivid images stick in my memory like a piece of pull candy in your teeth: I can see myself at the age of four learning how to polka with my
grandmother, thinking we were having great fun as her pots and pans grew feet and walked along her countertop; and there’s the memory of me in a suit at the age of seven, learning to waltz with my mother. I loved—and still love—dancing, finding myself teaching straight men the basics, knowing that they won’t have nearly as much fun as I do with their girlfriends. As the late writer David Rakoff said, “I danced a lot through my childhood bedroom; it’s a generic trait for a certain type of boy. Like a straight boy being obsessed with baseball, except it’s better.”

I also did other things growing up—like worship Julie Andrews, wear my mother’s high heels, and love the feeling of silk. I did all the, well let’s just call it what it was, faggy things that little gay boys do.

I’ve had those other, typical gay experiences, too—like being called a girl, getting made fun of; that whole gamut. That’s the not so gay part of being gay.

But I also—and sometimes sadly so—have found that being gay isn’t controversial. Like when I told both of my grandfathers that I am gay. My father’s father immediately said, “Taylor, you’re my grandson and that’s all I know.” My mother’s father was a little more outspoken saying, “Taylor, the priests tell us it’s against our religion,”—he’s Catholic—“but you’re my grandson; screw what the priests say.” I didn’t fully think through the risk of telling my grandfather, a World War II vet, on Veteran’s Day in Denny’s where all the other veterans get their meals for free. After his comment he told me to have a bite of his pumpkin pancakes because they were fabulous. It was that easy to tell my grandfather that I am gay.

Being gay has been challenging for me; it’s made me have to confront my own homophobia. I’ve wrestled with people that I perceive to be “overly gay,” which really means that I find them threatening because they’re so comfortable in who they are. I’ve tried to cultivate the stereotypically manly side of my personality—whatever that is—like trying to be able to do more push-ups than you, shoot my 20 gauge shotgun better than you, or knowing how to change a flat tire. In being gay I’ve also worried about my own relationship with straight men: What if I like them? Is it possible to be friends with another man and not be attracted to him? What if he thinks it’s “weird” that I like other men? This has usually resulted in me becoming even more awkward than I already am by flat out saying, “You realize I’m not going to make out with you just because you’re a man, right?” But this mentality has also led me to ask questions that, for some reason, feel to me like they diminish my humanity, like I can’t admit that people can just be friends. I ask questions like this, “What do you think about having a gay friend?” Which is the equivalent of saying, “What do you think of having a friend who likes Twinkies?” The answer is that it is silly question to begin with, and really doesn’t matter.

But being gay is even more risky in comparison to how it affects my personal relationships. Recently, both Arizona and Kansas put forth legislation that would allow business owners the right to deny service to gay people based on the owner’s religious beliefs. Both Uganda and Nigeria have recently put into place anti-homosexuality laws. It angers me. But it angers me in a way you might not suspect. I believe same-sex marriage and being gay is not an important issue. It is only an important issue because the conversation has been hijacked in this country and abroad, and that conversation has been watered-down with fear. So now we will spend millions of dollars to secure my right to marry and my right to shop at certain stores when there are far more important issues to be working on, like global climate change. I am not an issue; I am a human being.
In a recent essay on *The Guardian*’s Web site the British author Julian Barnes had this to say about Liberty, which I think can help us think through these anti-homosexuality laws: “Those who wish to deprive us of freedoms rarely do so at one go, and are skilled at assuring us that loss of freedom is really something else, something necessary and advantageous, like greater safety. As soon as a politician tells you that decent, law-abiding citizens have nothing to fear from a particular measure, you can be certain that someone, somewhere, is losing a small or larger part of his or her freedom. So we need a constant, committed, cogent defence of our freedoms: in other words, liberty needs Liberty.”

So how does it feel to be gay me? It feels like I’m always on my toes, mindful of how “gay” I’m being, which really means, How much am I acting like myself? It feels better and better each day, because I have supportive friends and family members, and I’ve had a number of people tell me that I was the first person that they told they were gay. That feels like getting told you get to go to a Beyonce concert for free. It feels like I’m growing more and more into the person that’s comfortable with himself, which makes me hope that the same is true for you.

___________

Taylor Brorby is a writer living in the North Cascade Mountains. He writes for *The Huffington Post* and *The EcoTheo Review*. He is currently at work on a commissioned book and his first vespers service.
"One reads Love, Christopher Street to see how other people, like and unlike yourself, encountered and endured and learned from New York, and that's why this extremely varied anthology is always interesting, even when tangential, and why it's often moving."
—Andrew Holleran, *The Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide*

"No matter what your relationship is with New York City, you're bound to find something here to make you smile, laugh or be homesick. And if you are one of those few people who have no relationship with the Big Apple, maybe this will spark your desire to establish one."
—Jerry Wheeler, *Out in Print*

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a novel by
Jameson Currier

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a novel
Jameson Currier

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“Jameson Currier’s debut novel, Where the Rainbow Ends, moved me to tears more than once and, simply put, is one of the best pieces of gay literature I have ever read. Rather than focusing on and wallowing in the heavy melodrama that the AIDS epidemic seems to produce in most writers, Currier shows both the highs and lows. The lives of these incredibly well-drawn, three-dimensional people encompass all of the emotion that is found in gay/lesbian life. The book is about creating a sense of family, and most of all, it is about hope. In Robbie, Currier has created a gay Everyman we can all identify with, love, and root for. This is one novel that I was sorry to see end. With this work, Currier has established himself as one of the preeminent gay novelists, not just of the 1990s, but of all time. This book should be required reading for every gay man, period.”
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—Kirkus Reviews
Stephen Mead is a creatively-frustrated secretary who works for a very nice university in New York. Much can be learned of his multi-media work (done outside the day job), by placing his name in any search engine. His latest Amazon release is entitled *Our Spirit Life*, a poetry/art meditation of family heritage and the evanescence of time.
My Eyes

At 27
On my father
In the mirror
Standing behind me
Tying my tie…

Funny to be learning this ritual now,
Getting the trick of it, how the longer end
Wraps double, loops through an opening
The shorter end tightens.

He has this down pretty well,
Though not much of a tie man himself,
Only on special occasions, only in the way
An extremely unspoken bond pulls at us,
The knot holding while not being a noose.

Father, despite years of many small strung-
Together words, despite times unavailable
& privacy gestures freeze, there’s certainly
A larger time, a given, no photo has ever cramped

For we weren’t snatching at closeness then.
It lived on its own with the knowledge
We could not possibly fail
In our strange love territory.

It is this knot my eyes find in this mirror
Tying us in the trusted distance
Locked finger firm.

—Stephen Mead
A Letter from the Air
Lee Houck

Dearest:

I’m writing this from somewhere between Toyko and Vancouver. I’m speaking at a Canadian biology conference on recessive gene expression in Buffy-headed marmosets. Had you told me thirteen years ago that my studies would lead me to be the foremost expert in something that required me to fly to nearly every continent and visit only the insides of hotel rooms and conference centers, I would have hopefully adjusted course. (I seem to also know planes about as well as I know marmosets.) I was home in Brooklyn for three days two weeks ago. Then I was in Texas for almost 36 hours for my grandmother’s funeral. Japan has been lovely—it’s not as quiet as I had imagined, and I guess I’m silly (and racist?) for thinking that it would be quiet. The screen in the seat back in front of me, which lights the faces of the still-awake (as well as the ones who seem to be able to sleep through anything,) would indicate that we are somewhere
above the Bering Sea. I am looking out the window, but there is not enough moonlight to see the water. All this is to say that I am missing you and only you will understand what’s been on my mind lately.

Those two weeks ago in Brooklyn: I stood on Wednesday morning at the corner of East 2nd Street and Cortelyou Road, looking north toward Avenue C, you know by that awful grocery store? There was a crush of crime unit trucks, strings of slick yellow tape, the busy movement of officials with telephones. Like an afterthought, there were two quiet ambulances parked near the sidewalk. There were also five or six people in… hazmat suits? Medical and frightening, their faces covered with surgical masks. I wondered if there had been an alien landing. (Remember E.T.?) I looked to the south. Small clutches of women, most of them with baby strollers and other small children, some talking, some not talking, some holding each other. All of them in tears.

On his walk home from day camp, a seven year-old Hasidic boy became lost, and outside of the dentist office on 18th Avenue, stopped a stranger to ask for directions.

Signs began appearing on my block. “Missing under unknown circumstances.” “$100,000 Reward.” But, would you believe me if I told you that they were also blank? No height, no weight, no last-seen-wearing. There was information, and yet there was no information. The signs were revised every day, newer versions up every morning, more desperate language, finally a picture. It was as if what would happen next—the unthinkable—was increasingly thought to be possible, already passing into narrative: an innocent boy taken, smothered with a towel, dismembered. Here and then suddenly gone.

Texas was strange and meaningful. The hand soap in the bathroom at the funeral home was the exact same cherry-almond as the Jergen’s lotion that my grandmother smeared across my face and hands when I was either fresh out of the bathtub (green tile, the shower curtain pulled halfway closed) or just before we went to church—all of this when I was a young child. Maybe it was the proximity of everything, but that smell catapulted me back to her big dresser, her hairbrush, her bony fingers running through mine. She was 92 years old. Some second cousin of mine wrote a generous remembrance which I read only after he posted it on Facebook. I disagree only with his assessment that “She was a great cook.” She wasn’t. She was, in fact, an awful cook. Do you recall that one Thanksgiving meal she made on the weekend following the big Thursday event? You knocked over a glass of water and after the hubbub, everyone pretended not to notice that it had sloshed right into the carrots. What she was in the kitchen was loving, steadfast, and hard-working. It was only when I was older—perhaps when her physical and mental skills were failing—did I really try to avoid having to eat what she made. (Do you remember the turkey? Did you know that she let it thaw inside the oven for two days before turning it on the morning of the meal? Would you have believed me?)

Despite all this, she is tied to many of my childhood food memories: the bacon frying on Saturday mornings, three crinkled pieces on each plate, cold by the time we sat down to eat it. The grainy paper cup of apricot nectar at the top of the plate, like a shot of horrible medicine. Fried cauliflower. Waffles. Sweet potatoes with mini marshmallows burnt on the top. Sometimes the things you detest become the things you suddenly miss. The startling pop of biscuits from a can.
I have a photograph of her on my desk at the office. She isn’t really in the picture, though. Or so it seems that way. She is performing what she thinks a photograph is supposed to look like. She is stiff, only half-committing to the smile.

She lost her first child, Eve, who was 19, to polio in 1960. There was one picture of Eve in a frame somewhere in her house, I can’t place where, but I remember it clearly. Strong jawed, bare shoulders, big almond eyes. I always thought there was something odd about her expression, as if she lived in another era, some kind of petticoats and horse-drawn carriage kind of time. Maybe a photograph does that, denies time. Re-orders it. Eve was a myth in my family—at least to me, no one spoke of her, or rather, of who she was, what she was like. There was only the brief marking of time in conversation: “When Eve died” and “After Eve died.” I have always wondered who my grandmother was during the before, and if any of that person was left at the end. At the end, she was loud, insane, screaming, frustrating, complicated, demanding, accusing, confused and combative. Every day I miss her.

I have been thinking—oh, how a long flight can get a person thinking—about when I was a young teenager. The neighborhood kids and I bought fireworks, shot them like guns at each other as we ran across the fields, firing the Roman Candles from our hands. We lay stomach-down on the sled, racing down the hill, inches from the ice, rolling off at the last instant, to watch the sled slip underneath an oncoming car. We climbed sideways down the mountain to Little Pigeon Falls, off the trail, where there wasn’t even an idea of a trail, crept ourselves across the fallen tree to the swimming hole. Kristi Walton brought a bottle of Alizé once, we swallowed gulps of it—sweet, thick, burning my stomach and throat—I only needed to try that once. We drove as fast as we could down Hillcrest Drive, shooting out over the hills like a roller coaster, like insane reckless hoodlums. We hiked down the stream at Cloudland Canyon, laying flat against the rock, our heads sticking out over the waterfall, singing some invented song, when the rangers caught us, asked me if I wanted to “sing at your own funeral?” We drove from New Orleans to Birmingham, some of us on acid—not me, of course—driving all night, the flashing white paint on the road, the glaring white light of truck stops. We swam across the lake to the small island where there was a rope swing, the shore eaten away by too many summers of too many kids climbing back out of the water and up onto it. We swung out, dove into too shallow water, cut our feet open on rocks, bled. Walked home. All of this, and more. 100 close calls. 1000. We survived.

When I was leaving Narita, one of the Japan Airlines employees asked me if I was making any “correspondence” with flights in Vancouver. I think she meant “connection,” and I like that the two got mixed up. As if what we’re doing is actually communicating, not just moving our bodies from one place to another. Sometimes when the plane flies over small bits of land, there are buildings below, large warehouses with their logos painted on the rooftops. Another thing I keep thinking—instead of logos they should write encouraging messages to those of us in the air:

“Hang in there.”

“Good Luck.”

“We Believe in You.”

This may sound crazy, but: When I heard that the Hasidic boy’s body had been discovered in two separate places—part in someone’s refrigerator, part in a suitcase in a dumpster a few miles away—I thought first of Eve, and then of my own stupid adventures. I thought of the millions of
trajectories passing through the universe—objects and souls—and the billions of intersections. They were playing American CNN in the airport as we were boarding. They said that at that time (it was 8:00 a.m. in America) there were already 1900 planes above the United States. Can you imagine?

That kid, he got in that car, or was put in the car, we’ll never know exactly. Eve contracted polio. My Uncle Henry was cutting wood, a tree fell on him, and he died. Ginny Belcher’s brother fell into a combine. There are too many unanswerable questions when you start thinking of the chaos of the universe. And time erodes the layer of protection that you used to feel from the world.

I’m not sure when you’ll get this, or what time it is where you are. You are probably sleeping. Look up, dearest love. Look to the west.

I am here.

L

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Lee Houck was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee and now lives in Brooklyn, NY. His stories, essays, poems, and interviews have appeared in numerous chapbooks anthologies, and journals in the U.S. and Australia, online at The Nervous Breakdown, and in his almost-monthly old-school zine, “Crying Frodo.” His debut novel, Yield was published by Kensington Books in 2010. More at LeeHouck.com
A Conversation with Steve Berman
Interview by Will Ludwigsen

Author Will Ludwigsen recently spoke with author/editor/publisher Steve Berman about his many projects, including his new collection of short fiction, Red Caps, as well as running Lethe Press, an independent press focusing primarily on gay and speculation fiction.

Will Ludwigsen: So you have this exciting new collection Red Caps! Congratulations, of course, for the book and the good notice it has already earned! When you were curating the stories for it, what was your unifying principle? What made a story a "Red Caps" story?

Steve Berman: I’m hopeful that the book continues to get noticed. While the original premise was quirky stories for gay teens, I honed the notion to collecting what I saw as original fairy tales for the same audience. By the time we’re adolescents we’re so familiar with many fairy tales—actually, our perception is an odd conglomeration of these tales with elements of their original
“authors” (arguably Grimm and Perrault) and more contemporary renditions (alas, often Disney). What fairy tale can a gay or lesbian kid identify with? Cinderella? Who sweeps ashes anymore? Or wears glass slippers? I wanted to tell stories that could happen now that dealt with cell phones and yearbooks and still have elements of the fantastical.

**Ludwigsen:** For that matter, what makes a story a "Steve Berman" story? You seem to orbit mostly around fantasy and horror, both with a literary sensibility—subtle genre tropes that serve mostly to illuminate character. Do you see yourself tinkering with, say, mystery or science fiction more in the future? Does the genre even matter?

**Berman:** My genre roots in the eerie, the supernatural, and the weird are because of what I loved as a child. I adored the John Bellairs books when I was a kid. Also Lloyd Alexander’s Chronicles of Prydain series. Yet, both authors destroyed magic (as did Tolkien) by the end of their books. I found this to be a tragedy that left me emotionally scarred by the time I turned the last page. Magic and wonder gone from the world? What person in their right mind would want to live a mundane life, especially after they had a glimpse of the strange. I suppose the adolescent Steve understood Lovecraft’s writings as the reverse of this: the real world was merely a tender, if not rotting, skin that could slough off at any moment and leave the reader stranded in a world consumed by the weird.

I prefer not to worry about genre while writing. I’ve written stories that could be classified as science fiction and have never been content with the tropes. I don’t want to know how the magician performed the trick; I’d rather just watch and be amazed.

**Ludwigsen:** This question is almost de rigueur, so I'd better ask it: what is it about writing for young audiences that appeals to you?

**Berman:** Yes, my last interview asked me this question. I’ll do us both the benefit trying to express myself differently than I did then, because it’s not simply one reason I tend to write young adult fiction.

When I was fourteen, could I find a book about a gay teenager in my library? No. I remember at eighteen being so excited after discovering Clive Barker’s short story “In the Hills, the Cities.” And discover is an apt term, as it felt like a whole new landscape had been laid bare before me: a famous author had dared to write a thrilling and imaginative story featuring two gay men! I was in college and shared Barker’s collection with another freshman on my dorm floor who liked horror and he was aghast at what he read. I was in the closet at the time, so I had to swallow my excitement because I had nowhere to safely release my feelings.

I want to provide those same thrills on the page for gay teens in this day where they can shout for joy even if it’s only in a tweet.

**Ludwigsen:** In addition to writing great stories like the ones in *Red Caps*, you're also a highly-respected publisher of gay speculative fiction through the press you founded, Lethe. Work from Lethe appears frequently on the major awards ballots and in places like *Kirkus*. I'm guessing the question many of us are wanting to ask is how the hell do you write and run a publishing house at the same time?
**Berman:** I grew up wanting to be an author and not a publisher. But, as I’ve learned, around the turn of the 21st century, the hole in publishing for queer speculative fiction widened. Actually, the hole swallowed a lot of gay authors who found themselves without a publisher who would treat them and their work with respect. I’ve always been an “idea man”—I leapt into the fray without realizing how much of my time running a small press would consume.

I would like to write more. I think others want me to write more. I have several freelancers that assist in the day-to-day Lethe work. I would love to find more that I could afford to empower so I could one day finish another novel.

**Ludwigsen:** And now, the big question: do you see yourself as a writer who happens to publish other work or a publisher who happens to write? Is it a 50/50 split of your creative mind or some other proportion?

**Berman:** In 2001, I would have said the former. Thirteen years later and the answer is clear: I’m a publisher (and editor) who happens to write. I daydream my own stories but I actualize other writers’ fiction.

**Ludwigsen:** When you started Lethe, who was your perfect audience? Has that changed over the years?

**Berman:** The early years of Lethe were without much thought to a business model. I took on many projects without conceiving who the reader might be. These days I tend to focus on certain fields: queer speculative fiction is our main product, and I think our most critical success; historical gay fiction is a genre that thrives and so we have expanded our output in that field; we have invested in authors for our imprints, Bear Bones Books (for Bear culture, which is oft-ignored in all media) and Tincture (for queer people of color). I am thrilled at how Lethe has grown.

**Ludwigsen:** As a reader and publisher, how do you know gay speculative fiction when you see it? Is it simply a matter of gay characters or gay authors, or are you looking for a deeper gay consciousness in a work?

**Berman:** I think you’re really asking me “how do I know good gay speculative fiction when I see it”—there are a great many books published these days that are really gay erotica or romance with the trappings of fantasy or science fiction. Most of those I find impossible to read.

When I open a book, I don’t care about the author—not gender, not skin color, not ethnicity, not faith. I care about story. I want complex gay characters. And I need for the story to address some of these issues you could term “gay consciousness”: being an outsider; being a minority often abused and mistreated; questioning whether an appreciation of aesthetics makes one part of the “talented tenth”; the need to create an artificial family because a reliance on the biological may be impossible; awareness of the obsession with youth, beauty, and ideas of masculinity versus femininity. By incorporating these themes into the story, a writer transcends the commonplace and can create a good, perhaps great, book.
Ludwigsen: There's a small but significant history of speculative fiction addressing issues of gender, preference, and sexual equality through writers like James Tiptree, Jr., Samuel R. Delany, Joanna Russ, Poppy Z. Brite, and more than a few others. Would you say that Lethe is in any kind of literary conversation with that tradition? Is it an argument, do you think, or a matter of going further?

Berman: Lethe has released books that I feel further the discussion. *Beyond Binary*, an anthology of speculative fiction that deals with gender queerness, comes to mind. So too the mystery *How to Meet Strangers*, which has an African-American gay man who has female/drag personas that are very separate identities without it being an issue of mental illness (the book is also written by a cis-gendered white woman). I always strive to encourage the polemic; after all, there is no single defining aspect to being “queer” and “gay culture” is a media-manufactured notion that’s rarely applicable to most homosexuals.

Ludwigsen: We're making some small—all too small—steps forward in the acceptance of gay fiction, gay culture, and gay political power in our culture as a whole. How do you see Lethe's role changing in the coming years?

Berman: I would prefer Lethe’s role—to produce quality books that engage the imagination and linger long after they are put back on the shelf—not to change. If a gay lobbyist wishes to indulge in the mad course of action of sending every member of the Tea Party a copy of *Red Caps*, I would not stop him/her. But, I fear, fiction and culture and politics are spheres that do not overlap in easy Venn Diagrams. I’m far more concerned that a gay man or woman in some small Wyoming or Mississippi town, who feels alone except for social networking sites, can discover and order a book that features a protagonist with whom he or she can identify, thereby stoking a smoldering sense of hope and romance and wonder.

Ludwigsen: What's the current pulse of gay spec fic? Is it healthy? Is it growing in proportion to "mainstream" spec fic?

Berman: I would say that it is certainly easier to find quality gay spec fic stories today than it was twenty-five years ago. But Clive Barker’s still only written two gay short stories that come to mind, and Stephen King none, so maybe I am too embedded in the niche to see that there has been little growth. I edit (or co-edit) two annual anthologies reprinting the best gay and lesbian speculative fiction stories published the prior year: *Wilde Stories* and *Heiresses of Russ*. To fill each book I cannot rely solely on stories published by venues that pay a professional-level fee to authors. I have to hunt through print and online periodicals or small press anthologies. At times I worry the same names appear year after year—and hope that is due to an author’s devotion to the field rather than a lack of appeal to new writers.

I also worry that there is a vast schism between writers who identify as gay who are working on a speculative fiction story and those individuals who consider themselves spec fic authors who happen to be gay. I’ve been to spec fic conventions like Readercon and Arisia. I’ve gone to gay literary conferences like Saints & Sinners. The attendees of one are almost always ignorant of the work of the other. I could count the names of “cross-pollinators” who share recommendations, share books, share ideas and theories, between the two fields on one hand and my name would be the middle finger. That is unhealthy.
Ludwigsen: What's next for Lethe in the near term? What about the long term?

Berman: Near term, we’ll publish books like *Wilde Stories 2014* and collections by Scottish sodomite Hal Duncan and Canadian surrealist Peter Dubè. Long term, I do not know. Small presses can never really envision past two years because they are run on slim profit margins.

Ludwigsen: And, perhaps more importantly, what's next for you? What are you working on right now independent of the press?

Berman: I fool myself on a weekly basis with new ideas. I chase the novel like it’s a comet…no, a Roman candle. And after starting a few hundred words I can feel my fingertips stinging from catching sparks. So I stop. But I would like to complete this ridiculous heavily-illustrated faux reference book, *The Guide to Lost Gay Cinematic Characters, vol. 3*. I write an entry, agonize over it like a poet must do over a single verse.

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Will Ludwigsen's short fiction has been called "hauntingly beautiful" by *Publishers Weekly* and "glimmering with whimsy and horror that leaks around the edges" by *Kirkus Reviews*. His collection *In Search Of and Others* includes stories that originally appeared in *Asimov's Science Fiction, Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, Cemetery Dance*, and many other places. He teaches creative writing at the University of North Florida, specializing in genre fiction. You can find out more about him at [http://www.will-ludwigsen.com/](http://www.will-ludwigsen.com/).

Steve Berman might have been born in Philadelphia but was deported to New Jersey, the only state with an official devil. He has walked The Great Wall of China. He has slept on the Mongolian Steppes. He has survived several Mardi Gras. He founded Lethe Press in 2001 He believes in the power of quality gay speculative fiction and encourages such writing.
Five fascinating tales linked by the sea. An aging architect must decide to give up his grief, even if it means losing the vestiges of a lover’s memory. An object of erotic fixation galvanizes men against the isolation of exile on a cruise liner. As he watches the disintegration of his picket-fence fantasy, an ex-soldier looks to the sea for absolution.

Praise for *Part the Hawser, Limn the Sea*

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

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

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

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

AVAILABLE FROM CHELSEA STATION EDITIONS
Review by Jonathan Harper

**Part the Hawser, Limn the Sea.** The title for Dan Lopez’s debut collection reads like instructions. Step One: part the hawser, the hawser being a rope that binds, the cable used to tow or anchor a ship in port. He tells us to set sail. Step Two: limn the sea. To limn is to artistically portray, to paint or sculpt or describe and ultimately preserve. There are no other instructions. The command is simple: Start a journey and remember its importance.

The title story begins with stagnation. Two men meet in a grief center, one a gay soldier turned widower and the other a straight divorcee. It’s a character driven piece that quietly drifts in self-reflection rather than dramatic action. They meet outside of their support group, they confide in each other, they bond. Eventually the narrator sneaks the soldier aboard a harbor ferry and leads him to the engine room where the lyric phrase is written on the walls:

“So it was still here--knowing that brought a smile to my face … Nobody remembered who had written it, or what it was supposed to mean. There were plenty of theories, but no consensus. One thing was certain: Whenever we painted down here we always took care not to paint over the words.”

A scene like this can define an entire book. The narrator has brought his friend here because, “I couldn’t sit there and pretend everything was going to work out,” and “because I wanted to show him something hopeful…” even if that something isn’t clearly defined. Instead, they share a brief moment of intimacy. However, it’s bittersweet. There is no future romance or tidy ending. And the cryptic title, despite all its beauty, feels more like a warning. The boat will return to dock shortly and the journey will end before anything is accomplished.

Lopez’s collection is deceptively thin, just five stories in fifty-one pages. But its brevity works in its favor. Each story is so delicately layered with tension that it’s worth multiple reads. I found it reminiscent of short story writer Laura van den Berg’s brilliant chapbook, *There Will Be No More Good Nights Without Good Nights*. Both writers excel at choosing the specific moments, the eye of the storm so to speak, where characters are confronted with change and consequence. The drama is in the details. However, it seems inappropriate to label *Part the Hawser* as a chapbook. Despite its length, each story is so layered that it has the impact of a much larger work.

While the collection is linked through the common setting of water, it feels like an aesthetic choice. The real impact comes from the characters’ needs for connection and intimacy. The most urban of the stories takes place on a cruise ship. A group of friends each experience the desire and underwhelming pleasure of obtaining the unattainable deckhand who in turn clings to the
unattainable dream of captaining his own boat. In “Andrew Barbee,” a fishing trip turns into a tender moment for a man to realize he has turned into his older ex-lover by taking on a younger boyfriend.

While the setting doesn’t define these stories, the sea maintains a constant presence. It is both serene and treacherous. And the characters of these stories are too distracted with their own intimacies to notice it.

Jonathan Harper received his MFA from American University in 2010. His work has appeared in places like The Nervous Breakdown, Chelsea Station Issue 2, Best Gay Stories 2013, and The Lost Library: Gay Fiction Rediscovered. His debut collection of short fiction will be published by Lethe Press in March 2015.
**Fortune’s Bastard**
a novel by  
**Gil Cole**

“Hold onto your codpiece—Shakespeare has never been hotter. Gil Cole’s lusty yet literate *Fortune’s Bastard* is a thrilling, imaginative, and above all romantic homage to the great bard.”
—Wayne Hoffman, author of *Sweet Like Sugar and Hard*

“Gil Cole’s adventure is epic, operatic, and Shakespearean. He writes with complete confidence as he rolls out a grand pageant of heroism and love on the fifteenth century Mediterranean. On every page I found fresh surprises that kept my pulse racing.”
—David Pratt, author of *Bob the Book and My Movie*

—from the torrid depths of the Manhattan gay club scene, Cardamone snatches the precious jewel of wisdom that Blake prophesied could only be found in excess. You’ll find no political correctness, smugness or marriage activism in Cardamone’s gay universe: this is the visceral underbelly of gay life, and his language makes it shimmer like paradise.”
—Trebor Healey, author of *A Horse Named Sorrow and Faun*

“Exhilarating! Pacific Rimming is an eloquent, gorgeous reminder of why, when it comes to the mystery of desire, we persist in doing all the abject, crazy, beautiful things we do.”
—Paul Russell, author of *The Unreal Life of Sergey Nabokov*

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**Pacific Rimming**
a novella by  
**Tom Cardamone**

—from the torrid depths of the Manhattan gay club scene, Cardamone snatches the precious jewel of wisdom that Blake prophesied could only be found in excess. You’ll find no political correctness, smugness or marriage activism in Cardamone’s gay universe: this is the visceral underbelly of gay life, and his language makes it shimmer like paradise.”
—Trebor Healey, author of *A Horse Named Sorrow and Faun*

“Exhilarating! Pacific Rimming is an eloquent, gorgeous reminder of why, when it comes to the mystery of desire, we persist in doing all the abject, crazy, beautiful things we do.”
—Paul Russell, author of *The Unreal Life of Sergey Nabokov*
“Craig Moreau’s Chelsea Boy is a true original, in many senses of the word. It’s simultaneously a serious collection, and a book of poetry intended for readers who don’t usually read poetry at all. Moreau is a passionate, gifted poet, and with Chelsea Boy he enters terrain far too seldom poetically traversed.”

—Michael Cunningham

“The same accessible, conversational, gay-as-a-box-of-birds approach that O’Hara championed, though Cotter’s poetry is not at all an imitation or a parody of O’Hara’s style.”

—Roberto Friedman, Bay Area Reporter

“Holland’s major achievement here is to build a persona that is as unabashedly gay as it is charmingly decorous. I never thought about how much I tend to worry about the speakers of gay poems—how damaged and endangered our speakers tend to be. You never worry about Holland. He seems refreshingly adult... These are the poems of a healthy, well-adjusted happy man.”

—Lambda Literary

“Dennis Rhodes’ poems show a deep love of the natural world, they also show a strong empathy with human frailty.”

—Provincetown Banner
Easter in Your Home(town)

Bryan Borland

Bryan Borland is publisher of Sibling Rivalry Press and editor of Assaracus: A Journal of Gay Poetry. He lives in Arkansas with his husband and fellow SRP editor, Seth Pennington.
I've married into religion, mothered
by your Pentecostal ma who calls us the boys,
who prayed so hard for a son she made a god
who made you. We know there will be gossip
between the pews, you straighten my tie,
she no longer cooks breakfast for your father

who lives in the rental house across town.
We wipe the dirt from her good church shoes
the morning after your brother sleeps on the couch
so we can share his bed in your old room.

After the service, she asks my birthday,
writes it on the calendar nailed to the kitchen wall.

This is resurrection, I know. The end of one
faith, the beginning of another.
Holding my suspicions in check, I went to the Alachua County Psychic Fair with my coupon for a free reading. I tucked away my reservations that you get what you pay for and hoped the man or woman I’d encounter would have some insight into which future I’d best prepare for. My lover was dying. I had a handful of grad school applications for colleges in other states that I didn’t know if I should complete. I wasn’t living in my apartment, but staying at either the hospital or my in-laws’ house. I’d experienced meaningful revelations in the past—from psychics renown and recommended—but I’d never attended something so flippantly commercial and New Age as this psychic fair. Nevertheless I’d clipped the offer out of the weekly environmental tabloid and drove to the fairgrounds.
Inside the large tin-roofed livestock pavilion (of course, emptied of the livestock) booths were set up offering the gamut of metaphysical services: light spectrum readings and healings, spectral aura interpretations, aura spectrum photography, color radiography readings, and a host of other therapies and discoveries that weren’t directly related to aura or spectrum. The personalities and appearances of many of the practitioners were as colorful as the services they offered. Wild curly redheads with pentagram pendants and bearded Merlins in purple capes and wizard caps, middle-aged hipsters and healers in turquoise from all ilks and backgrounds meandered the labyrinth of the large exposition.

The traditional psychic advisors manned and womyned tables lining the perimeter, and I walked among them, hoping for an otherworldly sign or signal of magnetism that would lead me to the psychic best to read for me. I looked at their signup sheets, trying both to determine how popular each might be as well as how long I’d have to wait for whoever would next be available. I made a full lap before I zeroed in on Patricia P.

Patricia P. advertised herself as an international energy healer and card reader. An advisor of presidents, her sign purported. Used by the FBI in missing persons cases – *Found*, an enlarged newspaper clipping proclaimed. *Verified.* Her short blonde hair was naturally graying and cut in one of those boyish, free and easy styles that reminded me of my seventh-grade teacher, who was one of the first psychics I ever met. I remember Mrs. Reeves astral traveling to our houses and describing our bedrooms. Needless to say no one ever cheated in Mrs. Reeves’ class.

I overheard Patricia P. saying to the young woman sitting before her at the card table, “That shock is a normal reaction. I vibrate at a very high frequency.” Her hands were atop her client’s, the skin as loose and spotted as my grandmother’s. Patricia P.’s signup sheet suggested she’d be available in twenty minutes. We made eye contact. I smiled and penciled my name into the 11:40 a.m. slot.

*    *    *

When I sit down in the metal folding chair before her card table, I see a slender package of cigars in Patricia P.’s black leather purse. It gapes open on the cement floor beside her more solid, more comfortable wooden chair. I think about the strewn hay that must carpet the pavilion when it’s filled with sheep and cattle.

I have been in the homes and offices of psychics on more personal and professional occasions and have been overcome with fragrant incense, lavender candle wax, and smoldering sage, but as I sit in front of Patricia P., I smell her makeup. I think about allergies, ambient awareness. Her thin fingers are lousy with costume jewelry. They look like they’d be cold, but when she clasps my hands, they are surprisingly warm and, when we touch, there is a visible spark like we’ve met after dragging our feet across a shag carpet. She does not tell me about her vibrating frequency, but she pinches my fingers more tightly to keep me from pulling away at the static shock. She scrutinizes my face, seems to scan the near boundaries of my body’s outline, nods and smiles as if I’m easy to read.

“This relationship you’re in now is temporary,” she says to start the reading, “but you already know that it’s about to end.”

I try not to react to this brutality. I don’t want her interpreting my body language, but I am sure my left eye betrays me, folding and darting off to the periphery even as I keep my shoulder muscles still. My fingers don’t pull away from her hands, don’t shake, but I am sure she saw that
weak eye trigger. I mean, if she’s a good advisor she has to incorporate the physiological signals of the parishioner.

“I’m being told you already knew this,” she says. “I’m being told you are already planning your way out.”

Patricia P. does have an investigative look in her eyes now, as if she’s imploring me not to break down at the news of her forecasted breakup.

I take a deep breath, nodding as I exhale. I want to explain that I’m not planning a way out but just planning for the “What if?” But I don’t want to say anything because I really want a pure interpretation of what Patricia sees.

“She’s not being faithful to you,” Patricia P. says.

“Pardon me?” I ask.

“I just repeat it how I get it,” Patricia says. “I don’t sugarcoat anything. This isn’t a bakery.” Her breath is sour with tobacco.

“You said she’s not being faithful?” Even though I’m breaking a personal rule by speaking or asking a question so soon into a reading, I emphasize “not” instead of the pronoun.

Patricia is quick to jump in. “But it looks like you already have your eyes on another girl. And this new girlfriend is there in the woodwork. She may be a coworker. I see really good things for you in this coming relationship.”

My look is so unforgiving that Patricia P. lets go of my fingers, and I’m angry enough that I flip my hands over with a thud, disturbing the stack of Tarot cards we haven’t even shuffled yet.

“There is no girlfriend,” I say, standing up from the table. “I’m gay!”

“Oh,” she says, clamping her mouth shut and withdrawing her head to her shoulders. “I would’ve never guessed.”

I shake my hands toward the ceiling and then I look at Patricia P. and I almost yell—but I collect myself and quietly lean in and put my index finger on one of the Tarot cards. I flip it over and, to my delight, place The Fool card before her.

I unfold my coupon for the free reading from my back pocket and toss it beside the Tarot cards. I raise my voice a little and, just to be dramatic, I say, “If you were a psychic worth paying for, you would have seen me coming.”

“William Sterling Walker is a wonderful writer, fluent, warm, intelligent, and real. His stories about gay life in New Orleans are firmly rooted in place, and all his characters, gay and straight, are observed with a wise heart and a deep soul.”
—Christopher Bram, author of Gods and Monsters and Eminent Outlaws: The Gay Writers Who Changed America

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Poetry

On A Night When Nothing Happened

Wayne Courtois

Wayne Courtois writes fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. His books include the erotic novels *My Name Is Rand* and *In the Time of Solution 9*, the novel *Tales My Body Told Me*, and the award-winning memoir *A Report from Winter*. Wayne and his husbear of 25 years, Ralph Seligman, who were married in New York in October 2013, live in Kansas City, Missouri.
Two bulky men on a winter sidewalk,
taking leave of one another,

the night so cold they kept their hands in their pockets,
the words they might have said only clouds of vapor,

the kiss they might have shared in that public spot
so unthinkable, even the stars were laughing.

Two men facing each other, that was all.
Yet here we are, twenty-three years later,
still facing each other, remembering that first goodnight.
“J.R. Greenwell does a lovely job of relaying the comic as well as tragicomic aspects of the over-the-top dramatic world of drag queens, and he nails it exactly.”
—Felice Picano, author of True Stories

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

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

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

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

“Who the Hell is Rachel Wells? is a collection of eleven short stories about being gay in the South and I loved each of them... Greenwell gives us a wonderful cast of characters with heart and we laugh and cry with them. Written with wit and emotion, we are taken into the world of Southern drag queens and feel what they feel as they navigate life.”
—Amos Lassen, Reviews by Amos Lassen
Set in the 1980’s, Dirty One follows a pack of adolescent characters who live in the acid-drenched, suburban town known as Leominster, Massachusetts—the plastics capital of America, as well as the birthplace of Johnny Appleseed.

Praise for Dirty One

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

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

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

AVAILABLE FROM CHELSEA STATION EDITIONS
Claire called Parker at 7:30 to make sure he was awake and wouldn’t oversleep. It was the morning after Kevin’s memorial service.

“Parker, are you there? Yoo hoo.”

Parker was already awake but pretended not to be. He answered with a sleepy mumble, “Gimme a minute.” He switched off the answering machine and placed the telephone on the table. He rolled onto his side and carefully lowered his feet to the floor just as he had learned from the nurses when he was in the hospital. He squared himself upright and pulled Kevin’s jacket across his shoulders as he reached for the telephone again.

Claire was still talking. “Today is another gift and the message for the day is—are you ready?”
Parker’s ear began to itch. He rubbed the telephone against it as Claire babbled on. His ear tingled as he scratched at it and Parker felt the strangeness—the pressure of the telephone against his ear as it began to swell, pushing slowly outwards.

Claire was rattling on, “And with that kind of a message for the day why we just cannot let it go by without celebrating with lunch. I’m free so it’s my treat at the Atrium on Third. I’ll stop by the shop for you. 12:30 sharp.”

Parker looked at the telephone. The little holes were spreading wider as the receiver slowly enlarged.

“Parker?”

Parker’s scalp felt all tight and a bead of sweat rolled down his forehead. The telephone was beginning to slowly pulsate—the holes in the receiver were like little mouths with their lips pursed in round O’s. Out. In. Out. In. Parker slipped his right hand around his left wrist and carefully guiding his hand he placed the telephone on the night table.

Claire’s voice continued. “Parker, are you all right? Answer me, Parker.”

He moistened his lips. His mouth was dry and his voice cracked as he leaned to the night table and whispered into the telephone. “Claire. It’s okay. I’ll have to call you back.”

“What is it, honey? Do you need help? I’ll send Andy. He hasn’t left for the office yet.”


The telephone was growing larger and now covered half of the night table and through the little holes, pieces of Claire were oozing through. First Parker saw various fingers, one with the twinkling, opal ring. Then he could see the edge of her gold-framed glasses and tips of her red hair curling through the pulsating holes of the disc.

Parker knelt, lifted the heavy telephone and edged in into its cradle. He tried to swallow, to rid himself of the dry, metallic taste in his mouth. He cupped his palms to his eyes and then, as he pressed his fingers across his forehead and back along his scalp, he was surprised to see that the telephone looked just like it always did. Same size. Same phone. No swelling. No Claire.

That was the first time. The first time anyone had tried to climb through the telephone.

That same morning, Kevin’s brother, Richard, appeared at the apartment with papers he wanted Parker to sign. Richard refused Parker’s hospitality—the offer of tea and a plain bagel. Parker sipped his tea as Richard explained his mission; the apartment belonged to Parker but any claim on any other property would be contested by Kevin’s family.

Parker listened quietly as he finished his tea, picked up Kevin’s jacket and said, “We settled all that. Now I have to go to work. I have to finish the chair.”

Parker’s response took Richard by surprise and he fumbled the papers he was trying to sort and in the process dropped his briefcase.

Parker watched as Richard, on his hands and knees, picked up the contents of the briefcase. Then Parker gestured at the offered papers. “Where do I sign?”

Richard pushed a pen toward Parker and pointed to the signature lines.
Parker quickly signed his name and turned to leave. “Please pull the door closed when you go. It’s self-locking.”

*     *     *

There was still some work to be done on the rocking chair. Parker had started to work on the chair after Kevin said he felt better when he could rock. The old chair in their apartment was falling apart so Parker began from scratch with scraps of cherry wood from the shop. When Tony, the burly, Italian shop owner, found out about Parker’s project, he called all over the city to find good, unblemished cherry wood and gave it to Parker. Then, when Kevin had died, Parker explained to Tony that the rocking chair would be for the kids at the school. “That would be what Kevin would want,” Parker explained.

Tony gladly gave Parker all the time he needed to work on the chair. And that was every time Parker had a spare minute and now it was close to being finished.

Parker hurried to the shop. He needed to get to work, to be away from the apartment. On the way he put on and took off Kevin’s jacket a half a dozen times or more. He wanted to feel its warmth, but then, when he had it on, he wanted to hold it. So, on and off it went—Kevin around him, Kevin in his arms.

*     *     *

That first morning, Parker had assumed it might be just Claire who seeped through the telephone. But then, a couple of days later, Tony called to see if he could be in early to finish up a cabinet and it began all over again. Big Tony, trying to force himself through the puffy receiver holes. Except Tony’s fingers had poked through all at once. All ten of them with the dark little hairs tufted at the knuckles like miniature eyebrows.

So Parker stopped answering the telephone. And he was terrified of it. Even in the dark, he was aware of its presence on the night table. It troubled his sleep and he would wake and turn on the light to look at it. What was happening? Parker covered it with a shopping bag but that didn’t help. The morning after Tony’s call, Parker rummaged through his dresser for winter gloves. Then he cut the telephone wire with a butcher knife. He scooped the telephone onto a newspaper and into a shopping bag, depositing it in a dumpster on Houston Street on his way to the shop. Parker felt better at once, relieved that he wouldn’t have to face it in the apartment any more.

Later that morning, Claire’s husband Andy called him on the shop’s pay phone to find out if his home phone in the apartment was broken. Kevin had been fraternity brothers with Andy and Doc in college twenty years earlier. Andy was concerned that Parker’s own health was deteriorating now that Kevin was gone. He wanted Parker to go see Doc. Andy was describing a new drug trial he had heard about when his fingers popped through the telephone and Parker banged the receiver down so hard he snapped it off the wall hook.

Parker fled to the back corner of the shop with Tony following him.

“Hey, Park. What is it?”

“It’s okay. I have to go see Doc.” Parker was sweating and his breath came in short bursts, as though he had run a long way.

“You’re wringing wet. You can’t go out like that.”

“Tony, please. I have to.” Parker grabbed Kevin’s jacket and raced out of the shop.
At Doc’s office, Parker paced the waiting room until the nurse indicated he could go in. Fortunately, there was only one person ahead of him.

“Doc, something’s wrong,” he blurted out before Doc could close the door of the examining room.

“Ease up. It’s been a rough go, but you’re doing just fine.”

“I’m okay, it’s the telephone. When people call, I can see them.”

“You’re still upset—that’s natural. Just give it a little space. This sort of thing can happen. Your imagination, the medication—a little hallucination. Something is obviously bothering you. We can handle that, so tell me about it.”

“I know about dementia.” Parker drew away as Doc gripped his shoulder.

“That’s not it. Don’t make it any harder on yourself.”

“But the telephone. When someone calls ... the telephone—I can see them. Part of them. It—”

Doc interrupted, “It’s only natural you miss Kevin.”

Why wouldn’t Doc listen to him? Parker wondered. Perched uneasily on the examining table, he banged his heels against the plastic cover and tried to dry his sweaty palms as he rubbed them down the side of his painter’s pants. He took a deep breath, then calmly tried again, “The telephone. People try to ooze through the little holes.”

Doc was slamming things about in the white metal and glass cabinet. When he turned, Parker saw the needle in his hand and scrambled up on top of the examination table to get further away.

“No. I don’t need that.”

Doc moved toward the table, the needle poised, “Come down from there. You’re upset.”

“Put that down. Put that away.” Parker was bunched into the corner at the far end of the table. “Please. Please listen to me. I’m okay. I’m not forgetting things and I’m fine at work. It’s just the telephone...”

“Dammit, calm down.” Doc carefully placed the needle on the white metal table beside the door.

Parker didn’t move from his corner on the table.

“It’s okay. See. I put the needle away.”

“It’s the telephone. Everyone who calls. I see bits of them pushing though the receiver. Why?”

“Something is bothering you. Of course you must miss Kevin so let’s just give it some time.” Doc reached to touch Parker’s shoulder.

Parker had lost more weight since his last visit to see Doc. Doc weighed him on the scales, listened to his heartbeat. Doc had been with Kevin the hot July night they met. It had been the Seventies, Pines, Fire Island. Parker was dancing alone in front of the DJ booth, spinning in a tight little circle. He was stripped to the waist, his tie-dyed, ripped undershirt hanging by one strap around his neck. As he turned about, dripping wet from the heat and the booze and the non-stop dancing, he softly chanted "Doesn't anyone want to fuck a vanishing American?" over and

CHELSEA STATION
over again. Parker suddenly paused, halted by the sight of Kevin. With a wide grin lighting up his face, Parker stretched his arms wide in an invitation for Kevin to join him.

Kevin had turned to Doc and said, “Well, lookee what I found.” And that was it. Kevin, the unattainable, copper-haired cover boy, and Parker, the part-Mohawk carpenter became an item. Kevin had curbed Parker’s roaring binges. He had never lost control of himself again for the entire fifteen years they were together. Now it felt like all was unraveling. Something had shifted. He was losing his balance.

As Doc shone a light into his eyes, Parker pictured the cedar, summer house at the Pines in a grove of black cherry trees which he and Kevin had shared for years. He had fit in quickly with Kevin’s friends. The next summer, another bedroom, bath and deck had been added to the house, pushing further into the dense forest. Parker remembered it was like sleeping in the tree tops.

“We can do some tests,” Doc said.

“Tests?”

The intercom bell sounded two short pings, paused and then pinged again. It was the signal from Doc’s nurse that something or someone needed his immediate attention. Doc guided Parker through the door and down the hallway to the bathroom. “Wash your face, Park. I’ll be back in a couple of minutes and we can talk. Okay? And lock the door.” Parker couldn’t leave the office without exiting through the reception room which Doc could see from his office. He would alert Pam, his nurse, as well.

*     *     *

Parker had waited for Doc to disappear down the hall, then closed the door. He was confused, muddled in his thoughts. Kevin was gone. But now Parker knew, without knowing how he knew, that he could find Kevin at the Rumsey Playground. He had to explain to Kevin, what he had tried to tell him in the hospital. It was Doc’s statement about something bothering him that triggered Parker’s thought of the playground.

He tied the arms of Kevin’s jacket about his waist and crossed to the small window and raised the blind. He unlocked the window, raised the sash and hoisted himself up onto the narrow sill. The building was pre-war, made of brick, and the outside sills were great blocks of gray slate. The sill was still wet from the morning rain and Parker inhaled the autumn aroma of Central Park a block away as he pulled himself through the window. He slowly lowered himself, his fingers grasping the slate sill. He stretched toward the sidewalk, lifted himself slightly and then dropped lithely, sinking into a body-roll as he hit the pavement. A year ago it would have been a snap for him. Now he banged his knees and ended up in a jumbled heap, amazingly with no broken bones. He stood up too quickly and steadied himself against the building before lurching toward the park. He crossed the street to avoid a telephone booth and slipped into the bright foliage of the park at 59th Street.

*     *     *

The playground where Kevin usually took his students was back of the Mother Goose statue at 69th Street and the East Drive. The Plaza itself was surrounded by a tall ring of London Plane trees, each tree trunk wound about with English Ivy. Kevin always said the trees looked like they wore great, green, leg warmers. It was a favorite spot for outings with the children from his
school. Kevin had told him, “It’s a magic spot, you know. And the magic is from all the kids’ laughter.” Now, the Plaza drew Parker like a magnet.

* * *

Just north of the zoo Parker cut west so he could pass through the memorial grove that sheltered the company markers honoring the men of the 307th Infantry who were lost in World War I. Kevin’s grandfather’s name was there, etched into the brass marker on the boulder centered in the memorial grove.

Parker brushed his fingers lightly over the letters of Kevin’s family name, Trumbull. The two of them had visited the marker so many times over the years. Now he remembered how Kevin had explained that it was a name that spelled big banking and a town house in the East 70s. It meant a summer cottage at Newport and race horses in Kentucky and power politics. Yet, in the Argonne, it had offered no protection from the lethal gas as it crept through the shattered forest and seeped through the muddy trenches into the officer’s mess.

For Kevin, the name provided privilege and private schools, Harvard and, finally, Columbia Law School. But when he started modeling, the family asked him not to use their name. Later, the family rift widened when Kevin, although passing the bar exam, chose to work with handicapped children at the little school in Yorkville.

Kevin had said, “Now I’m like you. An orphan.”

Parker had looked quickly away, taking a deep breath. Slowly turning back to Kevin, giving himself enough time to put a smile in his reply, he said, “Not quite. You don’t ever want to see the inside of an orphanage. Don’t you understand, you’re my family now.”

* * *

Parker was suddenly tired again and shivered as his sweat-streaked shirt dried in a damp chill against his skin. He untied Kevin’s jacket from his waist and pulled it around his shoulders. He tried to remember exactly what Doc had said about his medications. There was something else. Something about being worried and missing Kevin. Then Parker remembered, he had to talk to Kevin. Tell him what he had tried to say in the hospital when Kevin was so ill. Parker was certain that when he explained to Kevin, that would stop the people from oozing through the telephone. Somehow the two were connected.

Parker walked quickly up the slight rise toward the Mother Goose statue. He could rest now, and he sat and leaned back against the statue. He was so tired and his eyes closed as he slipped into sleep.

He dreamed that Kevin was there and then, suddenly, he felt Kevin’s warm embrace. Parker squinted, trying to focus more clearly. Everything was so hazy.

“I’m sorry I’m late.”

“Not to worry, I waited for you.” Kevin continued by quoting a favorite old saying just the way Parker knew he would. “In a hundred years, we’ll never know the difference.”

“You know, I waited for you, too. Lots of times.” Parker hated that he had just blurted it out. He’d meant to soften it, not to sound as though it was an issue over which they had argued. “I told you in the hospital, but you were so drugged. I wanted you to know.” That was better, he thought. It was important to tell Kevin this, to get it off his mind.
“What? Tell me what?”

“Our adventure nights. When we took our Saturday night away from each other every month.”
Parker hesitated. He didn’t want to sound petulant. “I always waited for you.” There. He’d said it. It hadn’t been so bad. He felt all right.

Parker watched as Kevin hunkered down on the top of the slate steps, his arms clasped around his knees.

Parker continued. “When we’d go our separate ways, I’d just wander around. Go to a movie maybe. Bars don’t make it since I quit drinking. Sometimes I’d sit on the waterfront at Christopher Street or take long walks if it wasn’t too rainy or cold. Or I’d take the subways or buses. All over the city. Clear out to Coney Island or up to Pelham Bay.”

“You’re telling me you didn’t go out to the bars?”

“Un huh. I followed you once into one of those back rooms and I watched you. I stood close to you and watched your face and I heard you call my name. You were with some guy but you called my name in your excitement.”

“What?” Kevin had moved along the playground wall to stand with his arm around the pedestal topped by the statue of the little girl.

“But that was wrong. My watching you. It was your privacy and so after that I just waited for you. Killing time around the city. Waiting.”

“You watched me? Come on.”

“I saw you in a cubicle—down the steps from the pool table.”

“Where?”

“The Lair. I pretended you were with me. Then you called my name and I freaked. I knew you couldn’t see me but it scared the hell out of me. You must have been thinking of me to call out my name like that and—it made me feel ... so empty, not being with you. I just ran.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I was afraid you’d think I was spying on you. Afraid of losing you. You wanted your adventure nights, so I agreed.”

Parker felt dizzy again watching Kevin. He moved about so much. Now he was standing beside Mother Goose again.

“We should have talked. And why did you worry? I told you we’d never split. Never happen. Not with us.”

Parker leaned closer as he watched Kevin slowly trace the outline of Humpty Dumpty carved on the side of the statue. He felt dizzy and leaned back against the statue. Finally, he weakly managed, “But you went away.”

“Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.” Parker, his face so close, whispered, “And all the king’s horses and all the king’s men ... “

Parker reached to pull Kevin’s face closer but he had moved away to the top of the stairs leading to the playground. Parker started to get up but felt dizzy again and sank quickly back. He was so tired.
Kevin’s voice continued. “I miss the kids so much.” His voice sounded far away, barely audible. “I miss you, too, Parker.”

Parker sat up, “You do?”

“A lot. And you know that I’ll wait for you. Always.”

Parker watched as Kevin climbed astride the Mother Goose statue, his chin resting on the billowing cape, staring at the empty playground.

He flinched as Kevin jumped from the statue and landed, softly as a cat, on the steps beside him. He could feel Kevin’s warmth, pressing himself closer like he used to do, begging to be cuddled. Parker tried to raise his hand to pull Kevin closer. And then Kevin was leaning over him, their foreheads touching. Softly, Kevin kissed him, his golden hair falling in a gentle cover over Parker’s eyes. Parker moved his face slowly back and forth, letting Kevin’s hair caress him. He was happier than at any time since Kevin had gone away. He felt safe again. Unafraid. He wanted to tell Kevin about the telephone. Kevin would understand. Parker tried to speak of all the whirling thoughts, darting shadows in his mind. Instead, he only yawned. He was so tired. Parker pulled Kevin’s jacket close about him and curled up against the Mother Goose statue and slipped quietly into sleep again, happy that Kevin was with him.

*     *     *

Children’s laughter awakened him. Parker was stiff from sleeping in his cramped position and now he rubbed his legs to ease the spasm of pain as he tried to stand. He looked at the Mother Goose statue and she was still flying determinedly towards the East Drive but Kevin was gone. Parker slowly got to his feet and limped to the statue. He traced the outline of Humpty Dumpty just as Kevin had done, murmuring, “... Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.” Suddenly he smiled as he remembered Kevin’s words—“I’ll wait for you.” It was going to be okay and Parker began to smile and the smile broadened into a wild shout of joy. Kevin had not abandoned him. He was waiting. It was like a long Saturday adventure night. And Parker began to laugh, flooded with relief that Kevin had said he would wait for him. His laughter pushed him on his way as he careened wildly across the East Drive and along the walks toward Fifth Avenue. Kevin’s jacket flapped around him in his haste, as though it, too, was in a hurry.

Parker had to get to work. All the way downtown on the bus, he held tightly to the metal bar resting on top of the seat in front of him. It was as though his very grip could make the bus go faster.

Parker paused outside the shop, eyeing the pay telephone on the wall. He didn’t trust getting close to the telephone even though the receiver dangled at the end of the cord from the broken cradle.

Tony saw him through the shop window and walked quickly to greet him.

“Hey, old buddy. You saw Doc, right?”

Embarrassed by his reluctance to enter the shop past the broken telephone, Parker began to trace his fingers over the shop letters painted in bright green and red on the window—‘Tony’s Cabinet and Woodworking.’ Then, breathing slowly and deeply, he answered, “Yeah. I saw Doc.”

Tony waved his hand toward the broken telephone. “I called the telephone company and they’re sending a guy to take it out.”
Parker stopped his tracing of the painted lettering and looked up at Tony in surprise.

“Claire and Andy were here looking for you. We talked it over so the telephone comes out for now.” Tony gestured toward the shop, “Everyone can use the phone in the office.”

Parker smiled. “You know it’s only when I answer that it happens. And, I’m okay. Doc says it’s probably just a reaction to my medication.” It was so much easier to talk about it now that he’d seen Kevin.

“We figured that. Doc called me. Now, you gotta get back to work. On the chair and the new cabinet orders.”

Parker smoothed the jacket as he hugged himself, waiting for the tension in his back to subside, remembering Kevin’s touch. He breathed deeply, relaxed his arms slightly and hugged the jacket about his shoulders again, stretching the tiredness from his back.

“Sunday you’re comin’ out to the beach for dinner. Claire and Andy and the kids will pick you up. Marie says to tell you to choose the menu.” Tony gently touched his hand to Parker’s shoulder.

“Oh, that’s great. Great. Tell Marie I’d love her spaghetti with the bacon and onion sauce.” Parker glanced quickly at Tony and then turned toward the doorway of the shop. “I guess I’d better get back to work.”

Parker sidled past the broken telephone but stopped inside the doorway. The telephone no longer seemed threatening. He reached to touch the cord and then the dangling receiver. He wasn’t afraid of it any longer and he heaved a deep sigh of relief. With a smile to Tony and a wave of his hand, he walked quickly back to his workbench. He smoothed the wood on the table, carefully aligned his work tools and then turned to look at the rocking chair. Parker moved slowly to caress the arms and the high, rounded back of the chair. He ran his hands across the spindles, touching them lightly as though playing a harp. He removed Kevin’s jacket and placed it carefully on the back of the chair, smoothing the jacket sleeves along the arms. Then Parker moved around the far side of the chair, a tiny smile curving his lips. He touched the rocker lightly with his foot to set the chair in motion. Parker watched it for a moment and then stepped to his work counter. He picked up a half-finished cabinet door frame and began to sand it vigorously, turning every so often to smile at the chair as it continued to rock gently back and forth.

Garrison Phillips is a Korean War Veteran, a graduate of WVU, and a retired actor. He writes a blog, *Everyday Strolls*, for Senior Planet of OATS (Older Adults Technology Services) which teaches the Internet free to senior citizens. He has had articles and letters published in the quarterly journal of the Allegheny Regional Family History Society, *The New York Native, The SAGE Newsletter*, monologues in *By Actors, For Actors*, and a short story in *Apalachee Review*. 
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LEAVING FLAT IRON CREEK

John S. Lloyd
Scruffians! Stories of Better Sodomites
by Hal Duncan
Lethe Press
978-1590211939
210 pages, paperback, $15

Review by Matt Cresswell

Hal Duncan's first two novels, Vellum and Ink, making up the duology The Book of All Hours, carved him something of a niche into fantasy fiction: a queer punk approach to speculative fiction that fuses layers of story on top of each other, built around a set of archetypes that he's elevated into his own iconic characters: Puck, Jack and the Fox. The conceit of The Book of All Hours neatly ensures that any story—and this anthology takes in everything from pirate gods to a gunslinger messiah—they're canon, because The Book of all Hours is *all stories*. Scruffians! collects together a scattered collection of short stories into one volume. Besides being canonically linked together, they all share the signature Hal Duncan style—this is a chain-smoking, straight-talking, mythology-munching, head-scratching right-hook of a book—that I'm coining, here and now, as 'Hal-punk.' And there really does have to be a word for it, because what makes all of Duncan's oeuvre worth reading is the giddy delight of watching him take a scalpel to genres and tropes and reassemble them into something that is always unmistakeably his own.

The jumping off point of the anthology is a teenage runaways induction into the Scruffians—think Dickensian rabble of urchins. But Hal-punked—so they're now a queer bunch of bioengineered queers and misfits, simultaneously contemporary and timeless as gods. The rest of the anthology is framed as their own version of campfire stories, most of them reiterations of the same characters. So *Vellum's* Jack Flash is recast as the faerie Flashjack, living out his life inside the mind of a boy as he grows up in The Behold of the Eye; in *Jack Scallywag* we have a Hal-punked Jack and the Beanstalk, and in *The Island of the Pirate Gods*, he's a deity of the sea, brandishing the twin pistols of the pirates.

The stories are often at their strongest when they have Jack at their centre. The opening stories that give a runaround of the Scruffians are stylistically superb—inventive, witty and dirty—but they're in the manner of snapshots, local colour. *The Behold of the Eye* is the first story that seems completely self-contained, and it is a beautiful story that takes all the trappings of Hal-punk and wraps it around what is actually a poignant coming of age story, that stands as my favourite of all of Duncan's writing. Other highlights are *The Disappearance of James H---*, which reinvents Peter Pan and Hook within the mise-en-scene of a boarding school, and is an elegant, bold story. *The Island of the Pirate Gods* is a riot, bristling with the kind of energy that a pirate story really should have (and, yes, Hal-punked pirates is exactly as good as it sounds.) A close runner behind *Behold* for highlight of the anthology, *Origin of the Fiend* uses the saga of a fictionalised superhero a sidestep away from Superman to tell a coming of age (or coming of
villainy) story in a way that (yes, I've coined it, so I'm going to get my money's worth) is Hal-punked as only Hal Duncan can.

Of course, any anthology inevitably has weak spots, and Scruffians' occurs where the signature style isn't matched by an emotional heart to the story: The Shoulder of Pelops, Bizarre Cubiques and The Angel of Gamblers are all stylish, well-constructed, but don't quite connect past the level of admiration of wordsmithery. Somewhere between the two camps is Sons of the Law, which recasts Jesus and the apostles as Wild West gunmen, an audacious feat of genre and language.

Overall though, Scruffians! is a superb collection of stories— inventive, rebellious and queer in a way that very little fiction, let alone speculative fiction, manages. It's the kind of collection that, if it's your first outing into Duncan's fiction, is liable to inspire a rabid devotion. If, instead, you've been eagerly salivating for this release to grace your bookshelves, then you should probably go for the Deluxe Edition instead, which is a hardcover with full-colour illustrations featuring some superb photography (and, if you're of that mind, some very pretty models with not a great deal of clothing) that sets off the prose like a charm. Highly recommended.

__________

Matt Cresswell is the editor of Glitterwolf Magazine, a literary and arts magazine for LGBT contributors. His short fiction has been published in various places, including Icarus Magazine and Shenanigans: Gay Men Mess With Genre. He is also the creator and co-illustrator of End of the Rainbow Web comic, with the print omnibus coming out in June 2014.
Lee Houck was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee and now lives in Brooklyn, NY. His stories, essays, poems, and interviews have appeared in numerous chapbooks anthologies, and journals in the U.S. and Australia, online at The Nervous Breakdown, and in his almost-monthly old-school zine, “Crying Frodo.” His debut novel, Yield was published by Kensington Books in 2010. More at LeeHouck.com.
Somewhere along I-95
I finally come to understand
this thing called road blindness,
having centered myself in deep thinking
about what some character would or wouldn't do,
some mystery of foggy logistics,
for an indeterminate sum of seconds,
coming out of it to
sudden swaths of cadmium forsythia
along the shoulder,
followed immediately by
a road sign for Glastonbury,
which is the hometown
of this one impossible love of mine,
you know the type,
who keeps appearing in my Facebook feed,
and Google Reader, and email inbox,
because people send me this shit not even thinking.
Gays in Fraternities
Daniel A. Carriveau

Smashing sorority girls, binge drinking, random hook-ups, dirty dancing, and wild parties are many things that people believe is part of the fraternity life. Where do gay people fit into this cluster fuck of preconceived notions? Being gay in a fraternity brings many positive outcomes but also does create negative issues that one will need to encounter straightforward.

In all honesty, there is a lot more to fraternities than what people have come to perceive over the years from the news exploiting cases, movies hamming up the scenes for effect, and stories/rumors that people tell. Each fraternity strives for something more than what these sources explain fraternity life to be like. My fraternity, Zeta Chi of Lakeland College, strives to fulfill our five cardinal virtues of service, strength, scholarship, spirituality, and mercury. This is our primary objectives, but none the less, as in any fraternity, we are connected very socially.
through the fraternity and develop strong relationships with our brothers. This is where many of the negative issues and positive effects of being gay in a fraternity stem from. I certainly have encountered many of these mainly because of my extreme involvement and the fact that fraternities are very tight-knit groups of people in the social elements the group offers.

My biggest concern was to be accepted by my fraternity brothers. I waited until the semester after I had pledged to come out to my fraternity. I remember being extremely nervous and would not come out to everyone without my big brother present to help combat any negative responses. Needless to say, my big brother was not needed for this purpose. My brothers were all happy that I could feel comfortable around them. They had only positive responses to me coming out. Afterwards, we had a small coming out party to help celebrate this acceptance.

Digging deeper into examining my fraternity brothers on the issue of accepting homosexuals, I have much hesitation and reservation as to if they really do. It can be extremely easy to tell someone to their face that they accept someone because they are homosexual, they are okay with it, nothing changes between us, and all the other cliché responses that people say. Based on the language and behavior from my brothers that I hear, a homosexual would be forced to question the validity of these responses. Many times I have heard distasteful comments involving gays from my brothers. Further, their actions prove my point even further. My brothers act very homophobic; intentionally not getting close to or touching another person. Who cares that in a tightly packed car, your leg is touching another person’s leg? On a trip, I had to sleep in a completely separate room by myself. Another time when I slept in the same room as everyone else, it was specifically stated that I was supposed to sleep in a different room, again by myself. One roommate that I had on the trip decided to sleep on the floor in another person’s room to avoid being in the same bed as me. I guess they are worried that I am going to hit on them or something just because I like other guys. The fact is, I am not attracted to them nor do I hit on them. After I restate the comment or describing the behavior I witnessed, a new light is shined on the issue and often clears the issue up.

Sometimes I feel singled out about issues of homophobia. What is okay for a straight person to do is not okay for a gay person to do. If the topic was not queer, my brothers would very intently listen. It seems like a one way street where I must listen to heterosexual topic conversations while I cannot have a homosexual topic conversation. My fraternity brothers can so quickly dismiss me in conversation because of the queer ideas that I bring into conversation, especially sex. There is only a select few people who I can talk to about relationships and my sexual profile. The others say that it makes them feel awkward, but how awkward do you think I feel listening to stories about slamming some girl’s vagina while I am eating my lunch?

What makes things even more awkward is the difference in activities between homosexuals and heterosexuals. I certainly do not want to go to a strip club but have gone for the bonding experience with some of my brothers. I have invited my brothers to go to the local gay bar on multiple occasions, but have been turned down every time. On my twenty-first birthday, I went to the gay bar, but many of my twenty-one year-old fraternity brothers decided not to attend because of the type of bar I was going to. I have even been dropped off by myself at a gay club while everyone else went to the local strip club.

There are a lot of internal pressure and issues that a gay fraternity boy must deal with. There needs to be some boundaries set to avoid having to deal with pledges feeling as if they are being hit on or being asked to do something that makes them feel uncomfortable and inappropriate.
Pledges cannot be looked upon as being attractive. Further, boundaries must exist as to not make current brothers feel pressured or awkward. It is kind of an unwritten rule for us that we should not date our fraternity brothers. The aftermath, if the relationship were not to work out, could affect the entire fraternity as a whole and destroy the success of the fraternity. If anything does happen between fraternity brothers, they are not really talked about and life continues. Any issues are dealt with between the two people. This can be extremely hard sometimes, as we all have great connections and don’t want this to happen. In time, hopefully after college, reconnections can occur and further options pursued. Dealing with many of the above issues can cause lots of mental stress. Personally, they have torn me apart staying up late thinking and dealing with these issues. I have beaten and battered myself into an unhealthy state of being trying to tend to the issues and just reach acceptance from my fraternity brothers, the people who mean the most to me in college.

All in all, there are not just negative issues to deal with from being gay in a fraternity. Despite my sexual orientation, I am still a brother. My fraternity will always have my back in any trouble or fights that I get into. My brothers will still be there to listen if I need to talk about important issue I am facing. I feel as if by having me in the fraternity, the group has become and continues to be more diversified and accepting of people, little by little. I am able to provide a different perspective on topics of the fraternity’s business. Most importantly, I am able to offer guidance and direction to people who have questions about homosexuality. I can answer many questions that my brothers may have about queer theory and homosexuality. This has helped a few of my fraternity brothers and allowed them to be more comfortable with themselves and truly discover who they are.

Considering the many challenges gays have already overcome before attending college, most will also be able to be prepared to face the additional challenges of life in a fraternity. They face more adversity dealing with the rest of society and life, in general. However, if I am able to make a difference within my fraternity, imagine the difference I could make in the future to the rest of society. I know that the task does not resolve over night, but much rather requires much time and effort to make happen in the future. It is a continual process and always will be. My fraternity brothers have taught me a lot about how to engage myself in future endeavors for fighting for equality. Furthermore, I believe that I have made and continue to make a different simply by being myself in an environment where I am not “natural.” Fighting the adversity straightforward is what makes the difference and develops a person and those around them into much better people.

Daniel A. Carriveau is a senior at Lakeland College in Sheboygan, WI. He is double majoring in resort management and accounting. At Lakeland he has been active in Campus Activities Board, Student Association, Habitat for Humanity, Resort Management Association, Mortarboard, and the Zeta Chi Fraternity. He also completes 200 service hours per semester for the local community. He is interested in employment in the hospitality field eventually leading to a position in resort management. Out and proud, he plans to continue making a positive contribution to the queer community.

“This impressive collection confirms David Pratt’s emergence as one of our most talented voices. Carnal and graphic as the best erotica and as elegiac as a finely rendered memoir, these stories vividly capture the palpable sense of isolation that haunted each of our lives. ‘The Addict’ is the best story I read last year—beautifully paced and harrowing. My Movie is absolutely essential reading.”
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—Jenifer Levin, author of Water Dancer and The Sea of Light

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

Rocco Russo

Rocco Russo is a family doctor whose husband is the editor of Hibernation.

April 30, 2014

art: Shutterstock.com
If I had the time, I would write you a poem
In between the vacuuming and the laundry
And walking the dogs, I consider you
Like a bright star in a clear dark summer sky
While a warm breeze forms to my
Cheek, no more a constellation,
My ursa major with your bright star pointing
To an emancipation of all dreams,
A drinking gourd filled with fresh sweet water
To quench all my desires and nurture my hopes to
Grow as morning glories surrounding the trellis of
Your body, opening up each flower in a triumph of
Morning light, a glorious daydream but—
There goes the buzzer on the dryer and
The bark of the dogs to walk and the towels
To press or was it the sheets to spread . . .
I had wanted to write you this poem
But alas I will navigate the terrain of
My household and wait to embrace you.
“Old-school theatrical storytelling meets gay liberation history in Marans’ off-Broadway play, based with emotional veracity, campy humor and provocative sexiness on the lives of the Mattachine pioneers who founded the first gay-rights organization in pre-Stonewall America. Introductions by political activist David Mixner and actor Michael Urie (of *Ugly Betty* fame)—he plays fashion designer Rudi Gernreich—provide cultural and theatrical context. Not every play translates well to the printed page, but *Temperamentals*—code for homosexual in the 1950s, it seems—reads like a good short story.”
—Richard Labonté, *Bookmarks*

“Temperamental” was code for “homosexual” in the early 1950s, part of a secret language gay men used to communicate. *The Temperamentals*, Jon Marans’ hit off-Broadway play, tells the story of two men—the communist Harry Hay and the Viennese refugee and designer Rudi Gernreich—as they fall in love while building the Mattachine Society, the first gay rights organization in the pre-Stonewall United States. This special edition includes Marans’ script and production photos from the off-Broadway production of the play, along with a foreword by actor Michael Urie; an introduction by activist David Mixner; a look at Gernreich’s fashion career by journalist Joel Nikolaou; and an afterword on Harry Hay by journalist Michael Bronski.

“The Intellectual, emotional and sexual.”
—*The New York Times*
A Strange and Separate People

978-0-9832851-5-1
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“A contemporary story of betrayal and new beginnings, A Strange and Separate People by Jon Marans is an emotionally rich new play about a young Manhattan couple who find their world shaken when a gay doctor’s passion for his new religious beliefs challenges theirs and questions the meaning of love. This special edition includes Marans’ script along with a foreword by the playwright, theatrical production photos, special selected material, and afterwords by LGBT activists Jayson Littman and Chaim Levin.

“This engrossing three-character drama addresses the struggle for many to accept their homosexuality while adhering to their religious beliefs, in this case those of Orthodox Judaism... the play explores intriguing questions and yields affecting observations as it considers the courage required to make waves in any environment, from the synagogue to the New York State Legislature.”
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“A brilliant and insightful play about the intersection of God’s law and man’s love. “A Strange and Separate People” is rich in drama and Jewish tradition. The title comes from comments supposedly made by the late Queen Mother, who said she liked the Jews ‘very much, but they were a separate people and a strange people’ — perhaps in more ways than she ever expected.”
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