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

Chelsea Station
Edited by Jameson Currier

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Gregg Shapiro is the author of the chapbook GREGG SHAPIRO: 77 (2012) and the poetry collection Protection (2008). His debut collection of short stories, Lincoln Avenue, will be published in September 2014. An entertainment journalist whose interviews and reviews run in a variety of regional LGBT and mainstream publications and websites, Shapiro lives in Fort Lauderdale, Florida with his husband Rick Karlin and their dog kd.
The City Where I Miss You

This is the city where I miss you, like a favorite tooth or a flattering piece of clothing, suddenly or mysteriously missing from my gums or wardrobe. This is the city, older than the country, whose lengthy history briefly intertwined with mine, twisted like a strand of DNA left behind on skin or furniture. This is the city where I was reborn at 21, no more closets or secrets, only discovery, delight and dancing. This is the city whose hill and shoreline, cobblestone streets and parks, Freedom Trail and river, bridges and cemetery-dotted landscape, accent and fragrance, challenged and rewarded my senses. In this city where I miss you, I mastered the subway, experimented with illicit substances, survived a plague and a relationship plagued by illicit substances. This is the city in which I chose a family that filled in the spaces left blank by my own. Without the imprint of this city, this inner tattoo, would you even recognize me? Without it, how different our laughter, our intimacy, our dialogue, our attraction might have been. Such counterproductive speculation only dulls the patina of this city where I miss you, where I picture us walking hand in hand on Tremont Street in the South End, eating lobster on the waterfront, floating in the Swan Boats in the Public Garden, at the Gardner Museum, posing in front of the statues on Commonwealth Avenue. Imagining what our lives might have been like, had we lived under the same roof in the city where I miss you.

—Gregg Shapiro
Craig Cotter was born in 1960 in New York and has lived in California since 1986. New poems have appeared in *Hawai‘i Review, Poems-For-All, Poetry New Zealand, Assaracus, Court Green, Eleven Eleven, Euphony, theBicycle Review, Caliban Online* and *Otoliths*. His poetry is featured in the anthology *Between* and he has a short story in the anthology *Foolish Hearts*. His fourth book, *After Lunch with Frank O’Hara*, will be published this year by Chelsea Station Editions. He can be found on the Web at [www.craigcotter.com](http://www.craigcotter.com).
I Need To Dream About You

You grew during the 5 summers we were together. I borrowed my dad’s Nikon when you were 16 I sometimes wonder that I still think & dream about you. You didn’t mind me taking photos and never posed 6-1, 130 pounds of toned muscle & soft skin, oily hair made your forehead oily sometimes red pimples beautiful.

My shift would end an hour before yours I’d watch you fix swimming pool pumps in the shop we were going out to a diner for burgers and then to Lake Ontario so you could swim at night. I’d pull up a stool and watch you take apart, repair, & reassemble pumps. You’d find the broken or worn part. Often a seal, bearing or impellor.

When your shift was over You’d wash your hands with the green gunk that came in cans over a large, deep, white enameled steel sink.

But enough of me. Enough of Alex. How’s your day going? As you hold this book I hope—even

during my oblation— you’re content, even in love with a few people.

My dream of you Thursday morning— exactly like you were— no years aging us. Know it’s all right to still fixate on you. Know love for me is retrospective.

—Craig Cotter
Fredericksburg Battlefield

The night before the battlefield, our bivouac's
the campus guesthouse. Too much burgundy,
a few poems, a little piano. No soldier's
sick clutch beneath the breastbone this morning.

Hungover sinuses are my only discomfort,
and the regret a four-poster unused by love
engenders. I have not slept on the earth in years.

Despite all my petty rages, the only blood
I've ever drawn has been my own.
On this slaughtering ground shriveled
into park, we watch a movie, stare at still-life
exhibits, among the other tourists or pilgrims
or scholars. Sad to feel so little, so safe,
dull and detached. What is history

but a few copied pages of Catton
in my gray backpack? From the visitor's
center we wander out, beneath
the sifting topaz of willow oaks,
down orderly paths, past numbered
relics on the walking tour, past blinding
yellows of Norway maple seized by sun.

Behind this pocked stone wall,
I stand where the defenders stood.
I want to think two lovers or brothers were here,
watching that blue surf smash the breakwater,

then roll back repelled, beaching husks in its wake.
Gray as morning mist my Rebels gasp,
side by side in the Sunken Road, gray

as winter sky. This is how heroism sparks,
how it flames like gun barrels, Norway maples
in November. One man steadies the other's
elbow like honor, calming the other's fear,

defending the land as if it were kin.
Survival is one gift they pray for, their mutter
inaudible beneath gunfire and frosted beards.

That, and the grace of falling together,
as maple seeds unspool, fused shoulder to shoulder,
a helix of wings. From twig-ends they break loose
above bloodless stone, slip slanting along a modern breeze.

—Jeff Mann
Physique

A history of homoerotica
from Von Gloeden to Platt Lynes
the male form
lifted from physique magazines
of the fifties
how their images filled our imaginations
in excess
in black or white the imprint
of desire
held in or repressed. Boy with
an arrow
or man with his barbells, or
the tough detective
of the pulps,
the conflicted dreams of the decades
on a glossy page.
Eye candy for the sensitive
set, or the loud
garrulous laughter of the queen.
And later the glossy
spread of stroke magazines,
sexy “Blueboy” and
“Mandate”, later porn sites
on the net. The wet dreams
of many a fearful boy,
hook-ups for the younger
generation. All starting with the Greeks
or that representation
of male anatomy in marble
smoothness or on an urn
how we learned to lust
for what we thought we could not have
the glimpse of the forbidden.

—Walter Holland
The Teacher

When I was nine or ten, I attended school in Massachusetts. Constantly competing with California for the most liberal state in the Union, it’s no surprise we had an openly gay teacher. As a child I did not truly understand what gay meant. I knew it wasn’t the norm but the only gay person I knew was that teacher. He was a flamboyant man, wearing tight clothes, high-pitched voice, and feminine mannerisms. I also knew the older students insulted him for being gay. Up until the point where I myself came out, this would be my only experience and knowledge of what being gay was. Funny that the memories of him would cause me to fear myself, but now his actions are so un-important that I can’t remember his name or what subject he taught.
**The Bedroom**

By fourteen I was positive I was gay, and this realization scared the hell out of me. I didn’t want to be a different person and I wanted a family some day and so many other things I thought I would never be able to do as a gay man. I decided the best thing to do would be talk to my sister. So one night I waited in her room for her and when she got off work, we sat on her bed and I explained to her what I was feeling and what I thought and all my fears and worries about liking other men. That I would turn out like that teacher and everyone would know who I was and mock me, that I could never have kids if I didn’t have a wife, that my family would look down on me and be disappointed in me, that I would change into something I didn’t like. She wasn’t able to see my tears because I was too embarrassed to let her turn on the lights, but she could hear me trying to choke them back. I was confused enough about what was happening that I thought my sister, and a lesbian, would feel differently about me because I was gay. After I was done talking my sister wrapped me in a hug and started to speak. She told me, “Whether you’re gay or straight, you’re you. Nothing can change that, only add to it. Being gay doesn’t define you as a person.” It was the best thing she could have said to me and for the last nine years has held true.

**The Talk**

At fifteen I decided it was time to fully admit to myself who I was and to tell my family. I remember standing in the kitchen with my mom while she washed some pots and pans in the sink. I thought coming out to her first would be the easiest since at this point my eldest brother and my only sister had been out for years. I was wrong. Although to this day she denies the conversation, the first words out of her mouth when I told her were the most heartbreaking she has ever said to me. The conversation was short and simple.

“Mom, we need to talk, it’s important.”

“What’s wrong Brad?”

“Nothing’s wrong, Mom, I just want to let you know I’m gay.”

I don’t know if it was the silence and look of disappointment or the next words that hurt more.

“My god, what did I do wrong?”

I couldn’t handle that; I had disappointed my mother and she thought something that I was starting to accept as a big part of me was wrong. I spent that night at a friend’s house and when I came home the next day my mom acted like she never said that and that I had never left the house in tears.

**The Off-Season**

My junior year of high school I gathered the courage to do something I wanted to do for years, join the wrestling team. Although I ended my regular season with a losing record, I loved wrestling. To me, it was, and still is, the epitome of sports, a one-on-one match of skill and strength, no one else to blame if you lose and no one else to share your victories with. I loved this sport so much that I separated my shoulder and then ignored doctor’s orders in order to compete in the last home match of the season. Even as I write this I can feel a throb starting in my shoulder that I know will soon turn to pain. After the regular season I started to compete in the off-season. Now, instead of facing off against other schools, I was competing in open matches, wrestling people of all ages and experiences as long as they were in my weight class.
However, it was also around this time that I decided to come out at school as well. About three weeks after coming out to my fellow classmates, I competed in the ISU Redbird Open. I wrestled against eleven other men, the oldest being a thirty-year-old coach. I took third place in that meet, was awarded a medal which I still have, and never wrestled again. The Monday after the meet, I was stopped by my coach heading to practice. He explained to me that he didn’t care that I was gay and that most people on the team didn’t either. He also explained that he heard word from other coaches that their athletes didn’t feel the same. Since wrestling is, by its very nature, a violent sport, the risk of accidental injury is high, and the possibility of intentional injury easy. My coach informed me that other wrestlers were talking about intentionally hurting me, breaking bones, trying to concuss me and various other injuries if they got on the mat with me. Although my coach couldn’t kick me off the team for being gay, he strongly advised I stopped wrestling, advice I reluctantly took. That night I grabbed my medal I was so proud of and put it in a drawer.

The Recruiter

My senior year, my friend convinced me to come along while he spoke to a National Guard recruiter. Although he was almost immediately turned off by the idea of the military, I was fascinated by the Guard. Every generation of my family has served since coming to the country during the Civil War, and it was always something I had thought about but never strongly considered. After several meetings with the recruiter, taking a test and securing my MOS, I was ready to enlist. One thing was in the way though, a nagging worry that I had to bring up with him, how can I be a soldier and a gay man? At this time DADT was still in full force and thousands were being discharged every year for being homosexual. My recruiter’s answer to my question made me almost not join the Guard. “You can’t.” He explained that I could either be gay or I could be a soldier but that in today’s military there was no room for both. Would I hide who was and pretend for the next six years at least, probably twenty, to be something I wasn’t in order to serve the country I love or would I decide that being true to myself was more important. This debate caused many sleepless nights until finally I decided that first and foremost I am an American, and I would happily put everything else on the side to serve my country. Six years later and a re-enlistment for six more years and I still think about that decision. I truly love being a soldier and cannot see a day in my life where I will wake up and no longer be one, but is pretending really worth it?

The Road to War

Immediately after basic training, I volunteered and was transferred to my sister company to go to Iraq. For the eight months I would be training closely with these people preparing for a long and dangerous deployment, at times spending a month cooped up in a barracks and out in the field with them. Although the mission was eventually cancelled and we were told to stand down, it wasn’t before I truly realized the decision I had made. There is a common saying in the Army, one I heard multiple times while in basic and have heard plenty of times since, but none with such meaning as when I heard it that day on the drill floor, “It’s better for a gay to die than a soldier to live.” Simply put being gay is bigger than being a soldier and if we know you’re gay we’ll let you die for it rather than try and save you for being our brother. I had put up with the gay jokes, even made some myself, the mocking and the homophobia, but that statement was like a knife in the back. These were men I was about to deploy with, willing to risk my life for to keep them alive and trusting that they’d do the same for me. Now however, I saw that that wasn’t the case. That if they found out one part of my life the rest of it wouldn’t matter and they wouldn’t have my back. Part of being a soldier is a sense of brotherhood, I can go anywhere in
the world, find a US soldier, and automatically have a connection and bond with them, but at that moment, I had never felt more alone.

The Sandbox

A few years later the orders finally came through. I was going to Afghanistan. This time with my home company, soldiers I’d served alongside for five years. Being in a warzone is an experience that can’t be described to those who haven’t been there and to those who have it needs no description. But for me it was different. You place your full and complete trust in these people and they know every aspect of your life. They know your personal problems, your home life, your goals and your fears. But for me there was still one thing I was afraid to tell them. I could put my life in their hands and was willing to die for them and to kill for them but even still, I couldn’t tell them I was gay. About halfway through the deployment I was checking my email when a soldier got behind me and read my inbox. In there was an email from a gay dating website. Although I hate him for reading my email and finding out about me, I am also incredibly thankful. He didn’t care that I was gay, I was still the same person, and he agreed to keep my secret. It was his indifference to the situation that gave me the courage to come out to two other soldiers, friends I had developed a closer than usual bond with. Again their indifference, and the fact that they treated me exactly the same, has given me a new hope in the Army. It allows me to look at the next six years of service and realize that, although it won’t happen soon, I may one day be able to be completely honest with the men and women I call my family.

The Tattoo

While talking to a friend the other day, one of the soldiers I deployed with and came out to, I realized something about being gay. Something my sister had explained years ago and I accepted it, but I suppose I never fully understood. For me being gay is like my tattoos. When looking at me you can see one tattoo and that’s it. The rest are covered, not hidden, because I didn’t get tattoos for other people, I got them for me and me alone. Just like being gay, sure people have guessed sometimes that I might be gay, and like my tattoos, I won’t deny it if asked, but being gay is for me. It’s a part of me and it influences my life and my decisions but at the end of the day it isn’t everything I am. The world doesn’t need to see it because I know it’s there and that’s good enough.

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Bradley Burgess is a twenty-three year old freshman studying History with a minor in secondary education at Western Illinois University. In addition to his studies, he works part time at a bar during the day as a janitor and at a different club on the weekends as a bouncer. He was born in raised in Tyngborough, MA and moved to Illinois when he was thirteen, living in central, northern, and western Illinois in that time. He enlisted in the Army National Guard when he was seventeen and has served six years, including a deployment to Afghanistan, and recently re-enlisted for another six years.
Can art, at times, predict the path an artist’s life might take without even the artist realizing it? Can art be a voice for the collective unconscious? I ask these very subjective questions like an anthropologist looking for the empirical. I ask them in retrospect already knowing the answers personally, but still not entirely convinced.

Years ago I recall reading an article about the esoteric musical iconoclast Captain Beefheart. According to this Musician Magazine piece, Captain Beefheart felt a terrible pain in his head and began shouting, “No, No,” in front of friends at the same time that, unbeknownst to all present, John Lennon was shot. Were the two musicians linked by some energy of spectral intuition that those of hypersensitive nervous systems share; some wavelength reverberating through the
musical cosmos? Or is such psychic synchronicity actually mumbo jumbo better explained by random coincidence?

My own experience with hypersensitivity being tied to a larger event outside of myself is far murkier and far less immediate. It is in fact something which I forgot about until last year when I had some time on my hands and found myself going through one of my weathered manila envelopes of old poetry drafts. In that envelope I came across remnants of a journal with an entry dated July 31, '90, 2 A.M. To paraphrase:Yesterday I finished the “Sides (Catch, Catch the Angels Falling)” painting & for the most part, I’m pretty pleased with it. It is not at all as somber as I 1st envisioned, but…earthy in tone, & a religious connotation…somehow crept in. So why has fear, a howling vacuum of doubt appeared? This feeling is akin to a dream I had while painting “Sides.” The dream is jumbled but I remember quite clearly… a friendly stranger standing in my room & his voice suddenly becoming that of a radio news announcer giving the news that a bomb had been dropped here in America by a terrorist from, I think, Libya or Iran. In my dream... I responded —Oh God, why am I not surprised, really, deep down…

The journal entry goes on where I describe waking and, without my glasses, looking at this large painting from my bed. I wrote about seeing it as being a gigantic skull, but the more I gazed the more I knew how the painting was taking me on a journey, a journey described by the images on the canvas but also a journey which, unfortunately, the journal charted as a twenty-something year-old artist’s circuitous drivel. To be or not to be, many of us would-be Hamlets knew Shakespeare’s Hamlet had nothing on us. Luckily, about a decade ago I threw out all of my journals with something akin to relief. Occasionally I just come across these stray pages stuck in some dusty envelope.

As far as “Sides (Catch, Catch the Angels Falling)” goes, oddly enough, over the years I’ve been asked if the painting and, later, the short collage-film Hold Ups, resulting from it, was my reaction to 9-11, but of course how could it be when the painting was done more than a decade before? Still, I can see some correlation. At the top of the painting are the faces of two women in traditional Muslim garb, their veils trailing down to African figures, obviously impoverished, anchoring the bottom of the canvas. Throughout the painting there are people who may be either falling or floating, and one of them, a dancer, is stretching his arms out very wide as if to hold, to catch them. But I intended “Sides” to be a spiritual painting, not one to promote us vs. them. No, just the opposite; the intention of the painting was and is to convey how as humans we must at some point, swap the pain occurring on both sides of a conflict; that only through empathy and understanding can we begin to heal.

Yes, murkiness. I’ve tried to live an intelligent and aware life, but there are times I realize that I exist and function more as a lighthouse beam illuminating mainly the shimmer of fog.

There are other cases in point I could bring up though I think to do so would be more the case of a mental block in search of its subject matter: a case with a broken handle and a false bottom, the point dry of ink.

Wet the tip then. Pry out the false bottom.
At the tail-end of this past summer I looked out the living room’s large picture window and had a sudden sense of déjà vu. Something about the late afternoon light falling on the jade green of a patio table’s umbrella, a host of magenta and blue morning glories climbing behind, triggered a bell inside of me. *Summer on the Seine,* I thought, *the painting is here. How about that?*

“Summer on the Seine” is a lush romantic watercolor done on canvas more than a decade ago, the impetus for it coming from a period of personal grief, a period which, like the preceding journal fragment, I mention against my better judgment. I was working in healthcare at the time the painting was done, working as a Patient Care Associate on an HIV hospital unit. Having worked in the healthcare field for many years prior, I was well aware of the importance of keeping a professional boundary line between myself and patients; how to cross it was a big No no. As a gay man, however, to work on an HIV unit in the 1990s was very important to me, a personal stake of bone-marrow essence even though I was not HIV positive myself.

As there is infuriatingly yet today, in the 1990s a certain amount of stigma was attached not only to those who are HIV positive, but sometimes those who associate with them, an ignorance which did and does set my teeth on edge. Fortunately alternative forms of family can develop in the face of such adversity and the hospital unit I worked on had that sort of bonding. Not necessarily all, but most of the staff had a passion and conviction while working on the unit, a sense of being part of a larger cause, almost but not quite, as if being on the frontlines. It was the patients who were (and are) on the frontlines. We who worked on the unit were witnesses quite often not just to their suffering, but the manifold facets of their human spirits. These ranged from desperation to courage, often running up and down, back and forth the fever chart between. This was the time before the disease became better medically managed in this country, and many patients would be on the floor for weeks or longer. Most, depending on new infections, would return time and again, and many died there.

I worked on the unit for five years.

I left maybe a year after “Summer on the Seine” was completed. I left yes, not only because I had crossed a line with a patient, though not in any way sexual, but because that crossing was an indication of how far over the edge I was in my own personal life quite outside of the hospital realm. No wonder prime time melodramas like *Grey’s Anatomy* or *Chicago Hope* have been so popular. They present the personalities and passions behind the scenes of what can transpire in life or death settings. They hint that those who may have a vocation, an investment in making better the lives of others, might be falling apart themselves.

My personal plight was a far less Nielsen polls high-ratings block buster. It was a very private not too unusual scenario of being in an unhealthy relationship and not knowing how to get out. In a way I am empathic by nature and found my compassion could be channeled more constructively by bandaging a patient’s Kaposi’s or holding ice chips to the lips of a woman whose radiation nerve damage prevented her from lifting her arm, rather than, say, listening to my then-partner of seven years cry over his vodka about the latest robbery to our apartment by a trick he swore he never brought home in the first place.

Not that I am making excuses for myself. I was in my mid-thirties. I tended to and listened to both the physical and emotional soliloquies of countless others and many times did care about, even love, them, without falling in love, so I take responsibility for that. I (as the therapists out there might applaud), I own the fact that when a patient I’d been caring on and off for five years whispered to me, “Stephen, you are my own dearest love,” I found myself thinking the same of

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him right back. Furthermore, I’d been in a fog about this. It was a revelation to me as well. I mean it’s not like we had a prior set of circumstances outside of the hospital which could even be construed as friendship. What we had was five years of him combating an illness and I sharing in his often spiraling anxiety about it. What we held between us as our fingers touched, was five years of him sharing with me ever-widening glimpses into his private world: the places he’d traveled, the business he did, the house he designed and had built, his dreams, fears, humor, pride, kindness and hopes. It’s not as if I opened up about my own life likewise, except with some sort of philosophical gentleness and laughter, nothing of great detail because he was a patient.

How odd to be remembering all of this and so much more about that actually brief interval, yet even as I write of it I know what I am choosing not to share about that man, and about myself. I still feel protective of him you see. I realize what intimacy we shared may not ever have occurred if not for the knowledge that he was running out of time. I still have a sense of anguish over that, anguish that an aberration to his HIV status caused a strain of fungal infection to go out of control and eventually take over, anguish that on the evening he died I ran through the rainy streets to again be by his side but was too late.

He went and I was not there.

I believe however that my not being there was another sort of wake up call, a recognition that due to my own neediness borne from my torturous relationship with my partner at the time, I made too much of my own importance in that other man’s life whereas his life, in and of itself, quite apart from me, was so big. Even the word torturous creates the concept of a saga, some tempestuous Latin triangle, when I know in reality AIDS has torn many a long-term lover from the arms of his beloved. I know in reality that it is gladiator lovers like that which paintings such as “Summer on the Seine” should truly be painted for and perhaps even by.

In other words, like my grief, I did a work of art out of an unintentional pathology, albeit not a particularly stalker one. Indeed I felt I was doing it out of homage, love and respect, and a way to still feel close to someone I loved, but what if that was all illusion? Can real art come from such a quixotic experience as opposed to truth? I ask this because I know when I gazed out the living room window and saw the jade umbrella, the morning glories twining up, I finally was existing in that truth, and lucky to do so. It was as if the umbrella and morning glories I painted on canvas years before, the watercolor washes of the cloud-suited lovers “Summer on the Seine” depicts, was somehow superimposed upon the actual outdoor scene.

Did the intention of that earlier painting summon the future actuality? Were the brushstrokes calling for it to come into my life in a different time, place and partner? Don’t the majority of us in our collective unconscious feel that as not just a want but as a need?

The questions I started this essay with flow into the questions I end this essay with. Are you out there? Can you read me? Are words typed out like questioning brushstrokes on a quest to be known and do they shape destiny? Is it mine? Is it yours’?

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.
“Every essay is gripping, exciting, fun to read, and, yes, entertaining. No wonder Picano is such a popular writer. True Stories is a masterpiece. Buy it and enjoy it.”
—James D. Anderson, Professor Emeritus, Rutgers University, ALA Newsletter, GLBT Reviews

“Telling truths is something that popular, prolific author and memoirist Felice Picano does extremely well. This is most evident in True Stories: Portraits from My Past, his latest collection of expanded personal essays and life reflections. Picano’s memory is impeccable, and his ear for dialogue just as distinctive and richly realized. Appealing and wonderfully anecdotal, the essays shared here harken back to a cloudless era when fun was freewheeling and the consequences of that fun were overcast at best. With this collection, Picano pays tribute to the many unsung heroes of his past who have long since fallen, forever etched both in memory and the occasional bout of inexplicable laughter and tears.”
—Jim Piechota, Bay Area Reporter
“An intensely personal collection centered on the survivor of a fascinating, chaotic time. Picano’s writing is most moving when he’s reflecting on AIDS and HIV, a theme that connects each story and has affected so many people in his life.”
—Kirkus Reviews

“Felice Picano, as his name suggests, is both a happy and piquant memoirist. Gifted with a prodigious memory and an inexhaustible curiosity, Picano observes everything—Japan, Berlin, his own family—in a fresh and indelible way.”
—Edmund White
Jameson Frame was a collector. He bought and sold, as others do. But what he collected, what he bought with greed and sold with cunning were words. He had had no small success as a writer, had won his prizes and taught enough classes to sell his own books and acquire the first editions of others. More than the books, though, more than the chafed leather covers, the brittle pages, the faded ink, he collected the words themselves. The meanings of them, yes, but also their rhythms, their colors, the taste of them as they rolled on his tongue. They resonated with him, echoed inside his heart.

Weeks before, while walking from his apartment on the Upper East Side on what had been yet another cold, gray morning in a long string of cold, gray mornings in New York, he had suddenly thought of some pointed words from Melville: *Whenever I find myself growing grim about the
mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet... It went on from there, playing out in his mind, unspooling verbatim from the text. But the ending, the ending of the thought was this: *I quietly take to the sea.*

Reaching the end of this memory play, his eyes cast up and left in recall, he realized that he had been somewhat somnambulant while considering Melville’s advice on this greasy, cold, gray New York day that registered such a deep November in his soul. He found that he stood quite near the door of a coffee shop on a busy corner. The wind cut into his bones; the noise, his ears. He stood for a moment, his cold, red face close to the pink laminated menu that hung on the inside of the window, his breath fogging the glass. He scanned from Today’s Special Tomato Soup to Chef’s Salad to Baklava.

Entering, he swam through the warmth of the place, past the counter, past the glass case in which lemon pies with foot-high meringues endlessly spun, past the continual dull hum of conversation, to a small table from which a strip of wood-tinted plastic was peeling, away from the window. As he went, he unreeled the soft scarf from around his neck. He disengaged his hands from their gloves and unbuttoned his coat, all the while keeping his eyes fixed ahead on that small table. As he sat, a pink laminated menu appeared, along with a small glass of water with a few ice chips floating on the top. The glass was in fact, he noted, plastic.

Frame sat at the small table, facing front toward the counter, alert, as if taking notes.

To his left, two women sat away from the wall, toward the middle of the room. They talked of shopping, rustled their bags as they flipped through them, shifting tissue away from cheap cashmere from China. One slipped off her shoe under the table to rub at her heel while talking to her friend. He saw lipstick marks on her plastic glass. The other laughed and laughed and, because of her laughter, began to cough from some lingering remnant of flu.

Staring ahead, he saw a young man sitting at the counter, with legs dangling in a jingle-jangle manner, the right one in near constant motion. On the stool beside him was a backpack, whose strap he caressed with the tip of his fingers, again and again, making sure, always sure that it was there. On the floor below was a blue down-filled parka, left to fend for itself. The youth’s hair was brown, in need of a cut. It had grown down to cover his collar. His shoulders were broad under a frayed wool sweater. He slumped forward as he circled his food, Today’s Special Tomato Soup. Jameson ordered the same when asked. Ordered soup and a hot cup of coffee, as he kept watch on the young man, as he saw him crumple crackers into his bowl, as if the boy were sitting in his mother’s kitchen. There was something touching, tender, in the simple action.

The fingers again grazed the backpack before the boy again lifted the spoon.

*It is important to him,* thought Jameson. *There is everything in there that matters to him.*

*Who is he?* Jameson wondered. A student? A fugitive? A traveler going to and fro upon the face of the earth?

He conjured Melville: *Almost all men in their degree, some time or other, cherish very nearly the same feelings towards the ocean with me.*

Was that it, then? Was this boy some fellow Ishmael in a gray November all his own?

He looked into the boy’s face, through the mirror that hung in a sharp angle above the counter that would have showed a row of faces chewing in busier times, but now reflected only the slight
movement of the boy’s jaw, the vacant soft focus of his eyes as soup rose up and slid down, rose
up and slid down with the occasional cud of a soggy fragment of cracker.

Frame could not quite bring himself to crumble the crackers into his own soup when it arrived in
its heavy white bowl balanced on a plate, onto which had bled droplets of tomato. He studied his
 crackers, weighed them in his hand, then opened them, and bit off a corner of the hard, salty
 square before lowering it to the plate.

He considered the coffee, which he moved from the left of the soup to the right. Considered
 cream and sugar before leaving it black.

Things in place, he looked again into the mirror above the counter.

The boy ate, contented, his legs continuing their dance.

Looking down once more, Frame slowly wrapped his fingers around the base of the bowl. Felt
the heat of it. Felt the heft of it as he lifted it from the plate. He slid it carefully across the side of
the plate to scrape away any errant droplet of spilled soup. He brought his elbows out and then
pressed them down onto the tabletop as he lifted the bowl up to his lips, as he looked into the
steam, inhaled the scent of canned soup. As he took a small sip, he looked across the diameter of
the bowl, again into the mirror above the counter.

His lips curled as he did this, perhaps from the heat of the soup.

In the mirror, he saw not the expected reflection of callow youth in repose, but, instead, the face,
eyes, and jawline of the boy, all focused on him. Saw the taut neck, wary. Saw the eyes fixed,
challenging, if not altogether angry, as if the boy had somehow realized himself the subject of
surveillance.

Did the boy again finger the straps of the backpack?

The surface of the soup in his bowl shimmied as he set it down onto the plate and turned his
sudden full attention to the wall to his right. To the Parthenon, to the Aegean, to the Isle of Crete,
all of which were mashed together, without regard for specific geography or relative size, in blue
on white, within the ever-present border of the Greek key, all on the plasticized wallpaper.

He lifted the coffee to his lips, and studied the Aegean, the Bosporus, the Dardanelles. He
dreamed for a moment of the Colossus of Rhodes. The sea again, the sea.

At that particular moment, Frame considered simple perpendicularity to be perhaps his chief
accomplishment. He remained rigidly seated in the overheated restaurant.

In the front, the young man’s legs jumbled. Trembled. Jumbled. He continued to glare at Frame
in the mirror. Both faced front, the younger man looking backward.

Then, using his already moving legs as a means of propulsion, the boy leapt up, his hair flying
out and around his face.

He allowed the weight of his body to carry him downward, nearly to the floor, so that he could,
with one sweeping movement, gather his puffed coat and backpack close to him as he arose
again. He looked a character in a farce standing there, his hair a vast cumulus, his eyes wide, his
upper hand cupping the top zipper and the mesh of his backpack, his coat and pack’s leather
straps flopping outward.
He stood, glaring again. Some suddenness in his movement had dislodged his soup bowl, leaving blood on the counter. Frame saw the chunks of wet cracker. Felt a wave of nausea at the sight of it.

He raised his right hand to his throat, clutched the lump of his Adam’s apple, as the boy suddenly made a movement toward him.

All the eyes in the place were on him, them, on the boy, who moved like a child on a lake who was just learning to skate, trembling toward him and at him, the tidy man, seated, who pressed what weight he had against the Aegean wall: pressing, pressing as if to disappear within the wet darkness of the sea.

The young man stopped five or six feet away from Frame’s table. Stopped as if some force, some fear, had stopped him.

“No!” He said simply. Loudly. But his body trembled, his left hand extending in front of him, finger pointed like the barrel of a gun, thumb cocked to the side. With his other hand, he held his possessions as best he could, the slippery coat making its way to the floor.

By then his shirt had pulled up to his chest. Frame could see the line of soft down that led from his navel to his beltline and beyond. Could see the fine peppering of hair on the boy’s thick chest, the rubbering of the angry muscles in his neck twisting as he stood snorting like a bull.

Having stood his ground and said what he had to say, the young man awkwardly began to back away. In a step or two, he turned his back on the older man.

Looking at him again in the mirror, Frame saw the boy shove his shirt down in his pants, saw him look again in the mirror and saw him again seeing Jameson watching him.

The boy’s head slowly turned. He met Frame eye-to-eye, and looked at him, incredulous. There was almost a smile on his face as he stood by his stool, placed his goods on it and took his time, moving slowly, as if to say, “This is how I neaten up.” He smoothed his shirt with flattened fingers, slowly putting on his puffed jacket; he carefully fitted his arms into the straps of the backpack and hefted it off the stool and onto his back.

Once more he looked Frame directly in the eye. Then he went quickly to the cashier stand, where the Greek woman who ran the place was only too glad to take his money. And off he went without a backward glance, the side of his puffed jacket smearing against the back of the door as it pushed him out.

Frame waved a hand in the air rather delicately and gave the waitress his uneaten bowl of soup. She accepted it without comment, and without comment brought him the lemon pie he ordered instead. She refilled his cup of coffee with an air of indifference, her expression a blank, as if wanting him to know that she refused to take sides.

His dessert at the ready with fresh fork and paper napkin, his coffee refilled, she retired to behind the counter and ignored him.

Vinton Rafe McCabe started his career as an award-winning poet and a produced playwright before he began what would turn out to be a twenty-five year detour from his life’s path by becoming a journalist, a radio talk show host, and a television producer. During that time, he published ten works of nonfiction. After what he describes as “a doozy of a mid-life crisis,” he
returned to his first love, fiction. *Death in Venice, California* was created in something akin to a fever dream, in that the author completed the work in just twenty-eight days as part of the National Novel Writing Month annual challenge. He has just completed a second novel, *Glossolalia*, and works as a literary critic for the *New York Journal of Books*.

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“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.”
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—Edmund White, author of City Boy and Sacred Monsters

For the Ferryman
A Personal History
Charles Silverstein
www.chelseastationeditions.com
How do you answer the question “Where are you from?” when you’ve lived in half a dozen places, some of them longer than in the place where you were born?

My boyfriend, Michael, always teases me about being “from everywhere.” You see, he’s from New York. He was born in New York. He grew up in New York. He lives in New York. Both his parents and all three of his siblings were born and raised in New York. It’s pretty straightforward—even taking into account a year he spent in Miami Beach. (But don’t all New Yorkers eventually move to Miami?)

With me, well, I guess where I’m from depends on who else is in the room.
You’re from Detroit? So am I! I was born just outside, in Royal Oak, and lived in neighboring Madison Heights until I was nearly twelve. After my family left the Motor City, I went back every summer to visit friends until I graduated from college. (Needed to squeeze in a few extra trips to Boblo!) From Korvettes and Little Caesars to Vernors and Town Club pop, I’m a Michigander through and through. And I can add an apostrophe s to the end of proper nouns for no reason with the best of them. (“Who wants to go to Kmart’s?”)

You’re from Phoenix? So am I! We moved to nearby Mesa just before my twelfth birthday, and I went to junior high, high school, and college there. From Dillard’s and Broadway Southwest to Peter Piper Pizza and Wallace and Ladmo, I’m a Phoenician through and through. It’s also where I’ve called “home” the last thirty years because my parents and my sister still live there, along with my sister’s husband and my niece and nephew.

You’re from Southern California? So am I! Orange County? Sure. After college I crashed at a friend’s apartment in Huntington Beach for a while and then lived even closer to the ocean for a year while working at the Orange County Register. From the Boom Boom Room and Newport Station to South Coast Plaza and Fashion Island, I’m an Orange County guy. More of a Los Angeles type? So am I! Orange County was as boring as Phoenix, so I moved to the Westside of Los Angeles for a year, living in an apartment on South Bundy Drive just a stone’s throw from where Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman met their fate. I also lived there during the L.A. riots, after the cops who beat Rodney King were acquitted of all charges. I chose an apartment on Bundy because I thought West Hollywood would seem “too gay,” but it didn’t take long for me to realize my decision was just queer. All that living in West Los Angeles instead of West Hollywood did was ensure I’d have to drink and drive every night, because my roommate and I were entirely too gay not to go out every night in West Hollywood. A 1920s bungalow in West Hollywood was the solution, on a tree-lined street between Santa Monica Boulevard and Melrose Avenue just off La Cienega. Where else could a twenty-three-year-old suburbanite end up involved with a tattooed muscle-bound model on a Harley Davidson?

Oh, but you’re from San Diego? My roommate in Orange County and I used to head down there all the time to go bar-hopping at Flick’s, Rich’s, and the West Coast Production Company. I later spent even more time down the coast when my stepfather’s work took my parents to Carlsbad, where they bought a house in the La Costa area, one of the most beautiful communities I’ve seen.

You’re from Pottsville, Pennsylvania? I’ve never lived there, but that’s where my dad was born and raised—and it’s the town a whole portion of the Walsh clan still calls home. My brother Bill was born there, too. And it’s just obscure enough that if someone mentions it, of course I’m going to claim it as my own. Nothing but the dead and dying in that little town, but my grandfather made a name for himself as a boxer, boxing promoter, and a sports writer at the Pottsville Republican, so it’s a source of great pride for Walshes around the region.

You’re from Washington? Funny thing, Washington’s my “other home”! My mother lived in Takoma Park, Maryland, in the late 1950s and attended high school in nearby Silver Spring at the Academy of the Holy Names. She met and married my father in the D.C. area, and her aunt and uncle—Dorothy and Ernie—lived in Silver Spring and later in Potomac. We used to visit them a lot when I was a kid, going out to their little place in Rehoboth Beach in the summertime, before “the gays” took over, as Aunt Dorothy later explained it. When I was in college in the ’80s, I interned on Capitol Hill and immediately felt at home in D.C.—then I moved there
officially in 1993 and stayed five years. My brothers moved there as well. My oldest brother, Bill, and his clan are still there, and after returning to Phoenix for a number of years, my brother Terence is back in the Washington area, as are a big group of my closest friends (Ken, Jean, Kandy, Kristen, Paula). For many years after I arrived in New York, Washington was the go-to location for holidays when I couldn’t be with my family in Arizona.

Oh, but you’re from Virginia? I’m actually a former Virginian, too! I wasn’t going to bring it up, but I did live in Arlington for a number of years with my Colombian boyfriend, Rafael. While many people think Northern Virginia is the same thing as living in Washington, it’s really not. I can talk the Metro Orange Line and Rio Grande Mexican food with the best of them, and I got to know the countryside pretty well too, even though I wanted to live in the District.

So the next time somebody asks me where I’m “from” and I can’t give them a straight answer, would someone please tell my guy to leave me alone? I think of myself as a New Yorker now—and I’ve heard it said that once you’ve lived here ten years, you become one—but if I dare tell people I’m from New York, Michael scoffs at a non-native claiming such rights. So until I figure out a better response, I guess it’s true: I’m from everywhere.

Kenneth M. Walsh is a writer, editor, and blogger based in New York City. His popular site—Kenneth in the (212)—has been featured on the New York Post’s famed Page Six, Gawker, Romensko, BuzzFeed, New York magazine’s Daily Intel, Advocate.com, Out.com, and VH1’s Best Week Ever. In 2012 it was nominated for About.com’s Best Gay Blog Readers’ Choice award. A graduate of the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, Walsh has a career in media that spans two decades, with reporting and editing gigs at the New York Times, the New York Post, the Orange County Register, and the Arizona Republic. He is currently a contributor to the Huffington Post and the Wall Street Journal’s Speakeasy blog. Wasn’t Tomorrow Wonderful is his first book.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Desire: Tales of New Orleans
by William Sterling Walker
978-1-937627-02-7
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Also available in digital editions
Javonte’s Dream
Ronald M. Gauthier

Javonte Brown always hated courtrooms, especially after driving on an expired license got him hauled into one of the most packed ones he had ever seen. He had a learner’s permit then, but drove solo, and when the cops carted him off to jail, weeks later, the judge admonished him for not being with a licensed driver. With fines imposed and a shoddy record on file, he swore to never end up in place like this again, where people ordered and jerked you about without impunity. But today was worse because he was back in court, had to be here, in fact, and the pressure was worse than that traffic snafu, more serious.

And at twenty-three, finally recovering small swatches of his other self, the person he was over seven years ago before his world collapsed, he was back at a crossroads. How could he be black, young, attend school and the church unswervingly all of those years, listen devoutly to his parents and teachers, actually get a scholarship to college, and still end up in so much trouble?
He managed to keep himself off the mean streets, his body bullet woundless, drug-free, his careful choices making it almost disease repellent, and his mind clear and uncluttered, until today and this miserable courtroom.

He watched the lawyer from where he sat hemmed in between his mother and grandmother, his slight frame tucked immobile like folded towels, his mind trying to think of something else, race away from the nervousness, the fear, that tore at the rest of his body. But that lawyer’s voice was controlling, commanding, at times magnificently articulate but unmistakably adversarial, its rich, deep cadence rolling across the stifled silence in the compact courtroom.

“So, have you ever been arrested, convicted of a crime, Damar?”

“No, sir. I never have.”

“Have you even been suspended from school, say, because of a fight, problems with teachers, disobeying the coach or anything like that?”

“No sir.”

“And you completed high school, of course elementary and middle school, and within those twelve years, you never had a suspension because of gang involvement, fights, and so on?”

“No, sir. I never been suspended from school in my life.”

“Damar, have you ever been associated with a gang called the Ninth Ward Killas, participated with that gang in any activities?”

“No, sir. I heard of ‘em, but I wasn’t never a part of ‘em.”

The lawyer paused, stood directly before the solemn-looking young man, and pondered something that they both seemed to know, and then tossed a glance at the spellbound jury, those folks pulled from work to settle this matter once and for all. The lawyer smiled, mirthlessly, his lips curling slightly, knowingly, then he backslid a few paces, taking in everything around him. He was one of those corporate types who exuded power and prestige: middle-aged with that softness in the midsection that purred under his shirt like meringue, hair bright and spongy, sculpted and dyed the color of Riesling, cut short and tucked neatly above the earlobe. His suit was expensive, a staunchly tailored midnight blue that made the brightness of the shirt, translucent and impeccably ironed, shimmer even in the dullness of the courtroom.

Damar, his client, stared on nonplussed, the thick, statuesque features of his robust face relaxed, and a confident glint darting from his doughy brown eyes. He softened his demeanor today, wearing a fitted shirt and tie, the stiff white collar transcending the smooth leather-thick darkness of his unsmiling face. He could be a graduate student out at Tulane, an entry-level manager trainee over at Kinko’s or a clever thug; his appearance lent itself to anything. And Javonte hated the charade, the neat appearance all bullshit and this stuffy lawyer to him even more loathsome for representing a guy like this.

“Did you know the defendant, sitting here in this courtroom, Javonte Brown?” The lawyer plowed forward, his mood positive, methodical. He pointed an innocuous finger at Javonte.

“No, sir.”

“Did you, with a gang called the Ninth Ward Killas, assault Javonte Brown?”

“No, sir. I never touched him.”
“Damar, could you tell us where you were on December 24th of 2006?”

“Yes, sir. I was in Houston with my family. I wasn’t nowhere in New Orleans where the police say all that stuff happened.”

“So, your family relocated to Houston after Hurricane Katrina, is that correct?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And when did you return to New Orleans?”

“It wasn’t until February, around Mardi Gras, and we just came here for that. We ain’t come back here to live until that summer.”

“The summer of 2007?”

“Yes, sir.”

Javonte smirked and huffed, his grandmother pinching him gently to silence him. He caught her admonitory glance and calmed himself, stilling the anger seeping deep inside his chest and throbbing inside his head. He stole at look at his grandmother; pitying her, the lines of worry etched indelibly in her face and making her appear so much older, mournful, all making him angrier. He hated what happened to him, but he had a deeper regret for dragging her into his misery, burdening her with problems he couldn’t avoid. Both she and his mother, dominant figures and heads of households, experienced their own share of misfortune, missed opportunities, and episodes of dreary days that turned even worse before the sun rose the next morning.

“Don’t you worry none, baby, cause everything gonna work out alright.” She said that with rigid confidence, her brown oval face beaming, eyes sparkling wittingly. “God gonna make sure this all turn out right.”

They were out in the lobby during recess, Javonte watching other folks moving about the wide, dusky corridors of the courthouse, their own faces marred with problems that brought them to such a place.

“Yeah, that prosecutor they got is good, son. She gonna make they worthless asses do some time; you betta believe that.”

His mother uttered that with force, fury forcing her to frown, strain her face as though she were in pain. And she was. Her son was hurt, the violence that took away his brothers finally visited upon him. Her eyes were larger, richer, and sadder than his grandmother’s, but the fear was there, buried beneath the bravery and rage. The kind of fear that lodged deep into the consciousness and stayed embedded for years.

“I’m so sick of all of this crime, how it done come back to the city,” she lamented, shaking her head in disgust. She twisted her lips tightly, her own face already hardened and blotted and giving her the appearance of toughness, intemperance. She thrust her large arms across her buxom figure and stood with a daring, readying herself to take on the world. Again.

Javonte watched her snuff-colored face crinkle, break away from the firmness, even smile benignly at him, her only surviving son then regroup its doggedness. He searched for some residue of disappointment, shame, any hint that she regretted what happened to him and blamed him in part but he only saw that hardness, the expression she wore for everything in her life.
“I just sometimes wish we just stayed out there in Atlanta after the storm.”

“Atlanta got crime, too,” his grandmother groaned. “It ain’t too much better out there and you know that place was just too spread out.”

You couldn’t run away from crime just like there was no way to elude disaster, Javonte mused. He remembered the tornadoes blowing through Georgia, tearing neighborhood homes off their foundations, leaving folks bewildered and wide-eyed just like the ones in New Orleans. His family felt the impact, ran and hid in basements of apartments out there in Smyrna and Stone Mountain, but the raging, ravaging tornadoes couldn’t match the sheer brutality of the hurricane that almost destroyed them. It had decimated their home in New Orlean’s Lower Ninth Ward and fragmented the family after it hurled out of the Gulf, leaving them humble, hot, and humiliated in the redolence and isolation of the Superdome.

Javonte wanted to protect them when he watched the radar on the news, saw projected images of Katrina kicking through the waters and headed for New Orleans. He was the sole male in the house with his mother and grandmother and wished, then, that he heeded his father’s warning to “learn the duties of a man,” even though he spat it as a disappointment that Javonte didn’t measure up to some manly, macho standard.

“Boy, you better learn how to fix shit around this house,” his father grunted once, a hammer in his hand and surly look on his sharp face. He went back to working on his project, repairing a broken door, ignoring his son and muttering, “That woman gonna make all of you boys weak with that overprotective shit she be doing.”

Then, standing dumbfounded in the modest, old house out in the Ninth Ward, his father long gone, his brothers both peacefully buried, he hated himself for not knowing what to do, how to board the house, protect the property, and ensure his mother and grandmother’s safety. He could see his father’s sullen face vividly, exerted and nodding despicably while he remained helpless, the way he was now. He hated him then, his rudeness, the tough way he exported his manliness, always criticizing the way his son walked and talked, ridiculing the velvety texture of his voice, demanding him to man up, speak forcefully, and walk with dignity and absolute masculinity.

“Those other two gonna be in jail before they turn twenty, you watch and see,” he menaced then, about his own sons, stepsons that came unwanted with the relationship. But then he abandoned them, his wife, and his blood son, and started his life anew with someone younger, obedient, and without the baggage of children with problems.

“We betta git to higher ground,” his grandmother said then, watching the murkiness of the sky, dark and broad like the clouds got wacked and bruised. “That water might rise, chile, and drown us out here in this Ninth Ward.”

And they assembled a few belongings in tattered luggage and hailed a ride from a neighbor with a decrepit, sluggish truck. Riding on the back while his mother and grandmother got squeezed into the carport, Javonte bristled at his own inadequacy, the house left behind barely boarded, the slipshod work done by a neighbor but better than what he could do, and now, another dose of help from yet another man. He couldn’t transport them, chip in on the driving even, since his learners’ permit was snatched away, so somebody else hastened them toward safety while he felt useless, unmanly, forcing him to bar his teeth in the swooping rush of the changing wind, watching the aging clapboard houses, eerily empty, disappear into the distance. He saw his father’s face again, bursting large and darker than the dimness of the sky, his eyes radiant,
brighter than the lightening streaks cutting holes into the universe and then the crackles of laughter reverberating like thunder, protrusive, piercing, forcing him to cover his ears until the sounds of everything droned.

The Superdome became the massive site of refuge and the place that vitiated Javonte, wrenched any conceivable power he imagined he had, miring thousands in insulated poverty for seven days. He watched the stubborn days unfold, misery permeate and conquer, while helicopters roared and roamed in the iniquitous heat outside and no help came to the thousands now trapped in a ruined city suddenly unrecognizable.

“It’s gonna be alright, chile,” his grandmother said, her own voice unconvincing. He watched the wads of sweat soak her face, drip on her clothes, the heat intensifying and not merciful even during the deep recesses of the night.

“God gonna make a way. He brought us this far, and we surely ain’t drowned or nothing like that.”

Javonte peered deep into the past, seven years ago, his mind wandering from the courtroom excitement and back to the day when the buses arrived, seven days later, and took his battered family out of New Orleans and into the unknown world of Georgia. He thought about the intensity of that day, then the lawyer’s voice, booming, recess over and the trial in active swing brought him back to focus.

“Damar, I find it curious that you lived in the Ninth Ward your entire life, and now you tell the court that you never met Javonte. The Lower Ninth Ward is, or was before Katrina, a tract of land encompassing eighteen blocks. How could you, only a year older than Javonte, living in that same area your entire life, not have encountered him?”

It was the prosecutor this time, questioning with dagger-point meticulousness, a petite but ruthless brunette with experience shoving rapists, murderers, and lowlifes in prison. She boded into Damar, her flashy blue eyes blazing, her questions, harsh and in snappy succession, uttered firmly and dripping with sarcasm.

“I ain’t never saw ‘em.”

“How could that be?” She scoffed, the seriousness never leaving her tight face. “We have school records, Damar, which show you attended the same middle and high school as Javonte, and you were just one grade behind him. And you expect us to believe that you never knew him, never saw him?”

Damar’s eyes twinkled; a thought or something coursing through his mind, then he shook it away and screwed the blank, consistent expression back on his face. He smiled ruefully, glanced at his lawyer, who looked disapprovingly, then shook away what was turning into a grin. This was much too serious to show off.

“Like I say, ya know, they had a lotta people at school I ain’t never seen. I just be minding my business, ya know. So, I just don’t know ‘em.”

The prosecutor walked in closer, eyeing him with needle-sharp thrust, then relaxed her stance, as though talking to a friend, her thin face, smooth and alabaster, edged close to his like a silky moon crusting through midnight.
“You’re a liar, Damar, and you know it,” she said plainly, hunching her shoulders and throwing an amazed glance at the jury.

She walked a few paces away from him, sauntered toward the jury, shot another glance and turned back on Damar, shaking her head at what she wanted to convince was his duplicity. Her eyes narrowed and this time she peered at Javonte, feeling the heaviness of his spirit, pitying him. She thrust her head forward, assertively shaking it with a decided righteousness.

“I ain’t lying. I don’t know ‘em, ain’t never seen him.”

Damar’s eyes flared contempt, the first time he was visibly moved into an emotion. Next, he unleashed a sadistic smirk that made his own lawyer become tense and throw him another disapproving glare. For a moment he was unmasked in front of the jury, their own deadpan eyes boding into him, some stealing glances at his victim in the corner.

“Do you find this amusing?” The prosecutor asked, clasping her hands and dropping them in front of her.

“No, I don’t think none of this is funny. In fact, I think all of this is the way y’all always do out here, ya know?”

“Pardon me?”

“You know what I mean; you know what I’m talking about,” he squawked. He clenched his teeth, vented particles of rage, his eyes glowering, his face mocking the courtroom. He continued, “Everybody trying to blame the crime on us, ya know, black men and shit, especially after Katrina. Well, yeah the crime went up, but nobody talking about all of those cops kilt innocent people while Katrina was going on, and them vigilantes, or whatever you call ’em shooting at black folks just trying to get to dry ground. Yeah, now everything supposed to be about scary looking black men, black bogeymen and stuff causing all the problems. Ain’t nobody done nuthin’ about them police in Gretna pointing guns at people and turning them back from crossing the bridge. No, y’all wanna focus everything on black men. We ain’t nuthin but criminals to ya’ll anyway.”

He stopped, abruptly, completely, the emotion drained out of his face, that block of ice stare, the stoicism, back within seconds.

“While we have been re-educated by your views and geopolitics, and you’re certainly entitled to them, our concern today, inside this courtroom, is about you Damar, and the crimes you committed against Javonte Brown.”

Javonte shuddered at the mention of his name; for a moment he was, like others, mesmerized by the animated tirade, forcing him to marvel, seven year later, at how Katrina’s aftermath was more than the flooded neighborhoods, houses filled with muck, and inept city officials that couldn’t even get the lights back on, but how it wounded a people, made them turn on each other in an inexplicable frenzy. He remembered the mistrust, the darting, menacing eyes of cops patrolling neighborhoods, the army and national guardsmen plowing through the streets in tanks, and looters with the viciousness of wild dogs roaming and roving, all converging on what was left of a drowning city. It wasn’t the same. It wasn’t safe.

And seven years away from the storm, the guardsmen gone, the cops back to fighting inexhaustible crime, the city slowly, painstakingly rebuilding, he and his family made it back to the Lower Ninth Ward, their old house splintered and washed away, and a new one built on a
small patch of land, thanks to Brad Pitt’s Making it Right program. Javonte’s hope got renewed, his dreams, once deferred, were now undeterred; he had a college degree and his family had an adorable house with a garden blooming and blazing in the sun. He felt the euphoria of the recovery, till one day when he strolled to the edge of his neighborhood, away from the plots of land with vibrant, freshly built houses, into the weedy, scrabbled patches of ground with rotting dwellings abandoned since the storm.

The teenagers converged out of the shadows of mildewed wood and wild, rising grass the dingy color of rust, crusted by the glare of the sun. As they formed closer, bolder, their bodies tense and preparatory of something sinister, Javonte noticed that they were older than teens, their faces mannish and harsh, frighteningly focused. He recognized two from his former high school, one who was in a grade before him, the other, a basic dropout, always hanging around the school.

“Hey, man, ya got a coupla dollars on ya?”

A mean grin sprouted from a hairy face, and then it turned into a snarl, casting reptilian eyes on Javonte. All four hostile men, faces grotesquely chilled in animus, swinging thin and muscular arms precariously with bulging fists at their sides stood menacingly ready. But those eyes, evil and boding, alighted with mischief, bordering on madness, forecasted violence on the air of the Ninth Ward.

“I don’t have money, man,” Javonte spurted, his voice husky with fright.

“You hear this bullshit, bruh,” a tall, angular man with a cut, curvaceous jaw said, his eyes bouncing from the others and landing back on Javonte. “This fag say he ain’t got no money. Stuck-up fag out here in that nice house them white folks gave ‘em, and he ain’t got no money.”

Javonte turned, quickly without being curt, trying not to offend and walked toward the broad, beckoning houses sitting almost a mile away, picturesque and iridescent in the warmth of the sun. A blow caught him across the face, hammer-like, ricocheting inside his head before the other two came slamming and bending him over knocking him down. He tried to get up, his body folded in pain, his ears droning with the harsh voices of the men, cutting through the air.

“Ya never shoulda come over this way, fag, where the rest of us ain’t got nuthin,” Javonte heard someone muttered, amid the pummeling blows and kicks now with raging feet, crashing into his ribs, arms, and back. The minutes lugged so long, tortuous, he thought hours passed before the beating subsided, replaced by laughter, fiendish and reverberating, worse than those gazes that lodged deeply into his memory.

He felt the itchy sting of grass on his face, the pungent stench of dog shit, but he couldn’t move, was too afraid to budge. He felt someone rummaging through his pockets, taking his wallet, his keys, then kicking him with a final, contemptuous thrust.

“Stay away from back here, faggot. Next time you gonna get kilt.”

He rolled himself over, excruciated, humiliated, his body weighty like a sack, and watched the men walking away in that jaunty, profane stroll, the laughter cascading and caressing the corners of the block.

He hated them then and his own ineptness, and now, sitting ramrod still in the courtroom, watching Jaqueim, the tall brute who initiated the attack, Javonte’s anger intensified. It was Jaqueim’s turn on the stand and his attorney, the same one representing Damar, was steady in front of him, clearing his throat.
“Jaqueim, did you ever use the word, faggot?”

Javonte heard whispering in the courtroom, or he thought he did. Or was it the buzzing inside his head after the attack months ago, those haggard voices still taunting, threatening?

“I don’t use it, much, sir.”

“Not much? Can you explain to us what you mean?”

Jaqueim jutted his massive, chiseled face forward, as though letting loose a great secret, his thin eyes glowing through slits.

“If we playing ball or sumthin, ya know, I might use it when one of the playas ain’t on top of his game. Ya know, not scoring and making stupid mistakes.”

“So, you call your friends, presumably straight men, faggots sometimes?”

“Yes, sir.”

“So, when you use that term, it doesn’t necessarily mean somebody’s gay, but is a shoddy player or inept in sports?”

“Yeah, ya know, it’s like they be playin ball like girls and stuff.”

The lawyer nodded appreciatively, stroked his chin while eyeing Jaquiem closely, then thrust his hands into his pocket. He did a cursory glance at the jury and moved ahead.

“Jaquiem, do you know any gay people in New Orleans?”

“No, I don’t think so.”

“You don’t think so?”

“I mean, ya know, some dudes might be on that DL trip, but, like I say whatever ya flavor is, that’s cool, long is you don’t bring it to me.”

He snickered, and someone, lost in the depth of spectators, laughed lightly, causing a few nervous glances.

“So, you don’t have anything against gays and lesbians?”

“No, sir. Like I said, whatever they like is they own business. I be seeing them in the French Quarter and stuff, and I don’t bother ‘em or nuthin.”

Javonte bristled and his mother nudged him soothingly, whispered for him to stay calm. He sighed but obeyed, his eyes tight on Jaqueim, detesting him.

“Jaqueim, did you ever use the word nigger?”

The lawyer was blunt, tactical, his face darkly serious, and his eyes searching his client intently.

“Yes, sir. A few times. Well, uh, many times.”

“When you used this word, which is racist and very offensive, would you say you hate the people you’re referring to?”

“No, sir. I use it, ya know, when I’m talking to my boyz; we call each other nigga all the time, but we don’t mean nuthin by it. It’s just an expression, ya know, just like ‘my boy’ or something like that.”
“And your friends, when you address them using this word, are they black, white?”

“Black, uh, I mean African American.”

“Would you say you hate African Americans?”

Jaqueim’s face curled incredulously, and his eyes narrowed, dark and gleamy. He leaned in his seat, his back towering, his head huge and pointed forward, like a Rottweiler.

“No, man. I love my peoples, ya know? I’m black and I don’t hate own self.”

“So, when you call your friends faggots, when they miss a field goal kick, get sloppy and miss a few hoops, and so on, you don’t hate gays and lesbians. It’s just an expression.”

“Yes, sir. I don’t know no gay people enough to hate ‘em.”

“Did you know if Javonte, the person you’re accused of attacking, was gay or perceived as being gay?”

“No, sir. I don’t know nuthin about his personal buz’ness.”

The trial, much like the assault, traumatized Javonte, the viral, self-assured and cocky young men appearing so superior, like stuffy athletes on a team constantly beating and winning against another, consistently ineffectual team. And that was the one Javonte played on: the weaker team that lost embarrassingly and stood with head bowed shamefully in front of the world. They beat him the way some dirty drunkard would abuse his wife, who, if she didn’t stab him in her own rage, whimpered and suffered and was properly pitied by the worked, but for Javonte, it was all so emasculating because he was a man, perceived now, in the courtroom and newspapers and television, as less than the defenseless spouse. He was supposed to defend himself, emerge from the assault bloody, scarred a bit, but proud, able to show the incredible whipping he also dispensed to thugs thinking he was easy prey. After all, he was a man, from the Ninth Ward, bred in the same neighborhood toughness as a kid, mired in a brazen place where boys cussed like puffing cigar smoke, fought in the streets young, pivoting and jabbing with precision.

He was supposed to be one of them, even with a fancy college degree and a head full of dreams, and the expectation was he could survive. Should survive. That same night, after the grueling trial with the barrage of sniggering faces was over, he found himself lying awake in the stillness of the night, staring into the darkness of the quietude. He lay bare-chested, his small angular body sweating, even though the new house had solid central air and heat, and his mind sponged thousands of thoughts that splintered inside his head, overwhelming and intoxicating and brutally relentless. He dreamed hard that night, a reversed narrative in his mind where he slashed two of his attackers, then shouted, cursed, and laughed uproariously as they ran off clutching their blood-stained arms and chests.

He was the victor in that fascinating world of dreams, heroic and strong, a gay man, more of a force, really, to be reckoned with, turning perceptions and prejudices upside down and redefining masculinity, utterly confusing the bullying macho types. He hated waking up to the dullness of the night with dawn on the hinges dragging in its uncertainties and peculiarities. He pulled himself out of bed, pranced carefully through the house so as not to awaken his mother and grandmother, and went out to the porch and stared into the sleeping neighborhood. His body still ached from the assault, and he recently went back to his job as a manager at a restaurant after being on leave for several weeks, his life slowly recovering amid the devastation the hoodlums had reduced it to.
He peered deeply into nothingness, seeing everything, trying to feel whole again. The silhouette of somnolent houses, tinged with the grayness of dawn, whispered something wholesome, reassuring, like precious voices fluttering on a soft wind. He stared harder into the neighborhood and the rows of rebuilt houses and finely manicured gardens and lawns, even in the darkness the land snug and neat, seemingly unblemished by the torrential waters that plowed through years ago. They had an uncanny way of recovering, stronger and more vibrant than before, and he sniffed in the night air, filling his lungs with the scent of the neighborhood, fortifying him.

After a grueling question-and-answer session with the prosecutor, then the defiant, pugnacious defense attorney, who wanted to characterize the victim as a man who had endured a normal assault, not unlike so many that occur among black men in rough areas of town, the verdict came back resoundingly from the jury, convicting all four men of battery. All four men were acquitted of hate crimes and the aggravated battery charges against two were dropped since Javonte couldn’t fully identify if a weapon was used while as the victim he sprawled in agony, to fearful to view the attackers.

“It’s not what we wanted, but we got good enough in that these perpetrators will do time for attacking an unsuspecting citizen.” The prosecutor pounded these points, her face pointed firmly in front of cameras and microphones, while Javonte stood next to her, draped by his mother and grandmother and other activist supporters.

“While we couldn’t get the hate crimes to stick, we got the other charges to stand. The hate crimes, which everybody knows was the motivating factors of this violence, are virtually authenticated by this conviction. This case sends a message out to the community that violence against anybody, irrespective of race, gender, or sexual orientation, will not be tolerated here in New Orleans.”

Javonte stood resolute, dignified, while the cameras and microphones stormed into a frenzy, his face devoid of emotion, his eyes deep, penetrating, sparking with something meaningful, some powerful, wordless message flashing like a wildfire. He hoped he ignited the cameras with his speechless passion and, as he turned he felt the buzzing, burning lights flicker more madly, the hurling questions land forcefully on his back, which was, now, a boulder that pivoted with a special grace.

Ronald M. Gauthier is an author and librarian living in Atlanta. He has short fiction and nonfiction published in the Witness Literary Journal, Cigale Literary Journal, the Times-Picayune, the Atlanta Journal Constitution, the Atlanta Voice, Library Journal, the BCALA Journal, Quarterly Black Books Review, Deep South Magazine, the Journal of Black Masculinity, AAUNDA Literary Journal, South Loop Journal of Creative Nonfiction and Art, and J-Journal of the John Jay School of Criminal Justice. His short story, Modern Black Boy, a finalist in the Glimmer Train Short Story Contest, was published in the March, 2013 issue of the Long Story. His collection of short stories was a finalist in the Flannery ‘O Connor Short Fiction Contest. He is the author of Killing Time: an 18 Year Odyssey from Death Row to Freedom that won the Innocence Project Media Award, the Indie Award for Best Fiction, and it was selected by the Chicago Sun Times as one of the best books of 2010.
“A delightfully spooky, often kooky, gay vision quest. Currier’s Avery Dalyrymple is larger-than-life and intricately flawed, and the fact that he just can’t seem to get out of his own way makes him primed for misadventure and gay mayhem. One of Currier’s strengths has always been the ability to soak his narrative in a rich, authentic ambiance and *The Wolf at the Door* is no exception, with sentences that resonate with the decadent rhythms of the French Quarter and paragraphs that positively drip with Southern gothic moodiness. Genre fans will find plenty to appreciate in Currier’s otherworldly version of *It’s a Wonderful Life* fused with all the ensemble wit of *Tales of the City* and the regional gothic texture of Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire*. Savor this one like a bowlful of spicy jambalaya and a snifter of fine aged bourbon on a hot, humid night.”

—Vince Liaguno, *Dark Scribe Magazine*

**Praise for The Wolf at the Door**

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

—Richard Labonté, *Bookmarks*

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

—Bob Lind, *Echo Magazine*

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

—Craig Gidney, Lambda Literary

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

—Jim Gladstone, *Passport*

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

Praise for The Haunted Heart and Other Tales

“I am completely amazed by the range of ghost stories in this collection. These are awesome ghost stories, and the literary connections to gay life are deep and complex.”
—Chad Helder, Unspakable 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
This is why I was late, Jesse.

You’d said maybe you’d come, but I couldn’t blame you when you didn’t. There was nothing to do in this town. There was only one decent place even open after midnight, and I went there sometimes, mostly just to imagine I might turn to see your elbow next to mine at the bar, or your grin turning up toward me in the candlelight from one of the booths. I could get anything I wanted in this place but you, Jesse, and I always left a little wasted because of it. Within two weeks I’d gone home with a bartender, the busboy, and Star Westwood, hostess of the Friday night drag show.

Star and I never did anything, though. We just sat up late in his apartment bleaching her arm hair, testing bottles of self-tanning lotion and, one night, snorting something left behind by a guy who’d been sleeping on her couch. Something wonderful happened that one night, though, Jesse. Standing up from Star’s couch, I felt your posture in my bones. For the first few steps across her carpet to the door, I had your walk, and felt your smile on my lips as I said goodnight. You quit cocaine, Jesse, but you still had that walk. And now I knew where it came from.
After that, Star called every Friday to make sure I was coming to her show, and was usually waiting by the door studying the clock with a scowl when I got there. Before I could say hello she’d announce me as her escort to the doorman and maneuver my arm around her waist while whispering violently into my ear to lead her to the bar, because Star had a bad leg which got worse in high heels, especially after tequila.

This became a habit on Fridays. It was really my only habit. Sometimes, on nights when you called before I went out, I would look up from the dance floor, sure I could see your head floating in the crowd. I almost had enough money to get back to you at this point, Jesse, and Star always paid for the drinks. “Sex on the beach” and “Stoplight” were the ones she ordered most. Others came in glowing layers of neon color that made the bartenders pause thoughtfully to lick their fingers between pourings.

One night this guy John was in the bar. John didn’t trust his own judgment, or was too vain to wear glasses, so here is how he worked. John would drive into a town and walk into a bar, ask the bartender to point out the best-looking men, check his wallet, and go after them. That night, after the lights had come up and everyone had left, Star leaned into her drink, raised an eyebrow and said, “That guy John offered us our own a bag of coke and a hundred dollars if we go to his motel.” Star sat back a minute, pausing to see what I’d say, but, as it turned out, she’d already taken the money and the drugs, so we drove down the road and parked outside the motel, taking turns dipping Star’s car keys into the bag. Star said he’d split the hundred dollars with me. I said I wanted sixty. Given coke and money, I was a gangster in a gangster film. The obnoxious gangster. John Travolta. The one the audience is just waiting to get blown away.

“Just for that you get forty,” said Star.

**Holiday Inn Five Points, room 238**

“Are you sure you want to put that in your pocket?” Star was asking, as I folded the bills into my wallet. The air around us vibrated blue under the streetlights as we looked up at the motel. I wanted it in my pocket where I could touch it. Inside the warm blue hum of cocaine, the thickness of those two bills was bringing me that much closer to you. At the top of the stairs Star handed me John’s key, and I fitted it into the lock. Inside, it was dark and no one in the room said anything for a minute. Then we heard John say, “Hey, what’s your name?”

“Jeffrey,” I said. There was a silence as we all waited.

“Come over here, Jesse,” John said from the bed, and I stepped back, breathless, until I could feel the wall at my back.

“Or Jeffrey, then,” John said. “Why don’t you come over here?”

I felt my way along the wall until I came against the television.

“What are you waiting for?”

“A ‘please,’ I guess,” I said. From the other side of the bed a second voice laughed.

“So please,” John said. I went to the bed, leaning over until I felt my own breath against his cheek.

“You don’t smoke,” I whispered, smelling his breath against mine.

“No . . .” he cooed.
“Do your parents smoke?”

“No.”

“So you’re Mormon.”

I had time to jump back against the wall again as John inhaled one long, slow deep breath before he started yelling, “How did you know that? How did you know that? How did you know that?”

“Because you don’t smoke and your parents don’t smoke and you live in Kentucky,” I blurted out, still pressed against the wall, and the second voice from the bed laughed again. “Where did you do your mission?”

“Right here,” said John. I sat down beside Star and some other boys on a couch by the TV and everything got quiet for a while.

“I want to get fucked,” John started saying, quietly at first, then louder. He was offering each of us on the couch a hundred dollars if we came and took turns.

The guy on one side of me started talking about his girlfriend, then got a stomach ache and left, and Star went with him, saying his parents were driving in in a few hours. The other guy sitting next to me on the couch said to give him a minute, he’d be just fine in just a minute. He was sniffing this spray John had, with a cloth held to his nose. “My ears are going ‘wawawa,’” he said, smiling as if slightly embarrassed, when he noticed me staring.

“Maybe you should put that stuff down,” I said.

“Why? Is it bad for you?” He held the canister back from his nose for a moment, squinting in the dark as if to read the contents off its side.

From the bed, John laughed.

“What’s in it?” he asked. Curious suddenly, you could see in his posture that he sensed all the evening’s ambiguity might be resolved by an elaboration of the canister’s contents.

“Aerosol,” I said, suddenly energized, standing to explain in sweeping gestures how aerosol is what’s eating through the shores of Antarctica, but instead taking the bottle and throwing it over and behind the television, at which John laughed again, in a way so encouraging of action that I went back over and climbed into the bed.

After a while John was breathing really hard. Then he didn’t seem to be breathing at all. “He’ll be all right,” said the aerosol guy, pulling on his pants and shoes and handing me his phone number, before stepping outside.

An ear to his breastplate, I couldn’t feel John’s heartbeat now, so I straddled his chest, slapping his cheeks, while reaching to pull open the curtains. Beyond their giving sway, it was full daylight in the parking lot, and outside a warm green haze was coming up over the mall and the highway. I saw the telephone by the bed, realizing that in some other, more likely story, I would be picking it up to call an ambulance.

But then John suddenly opened his eyes. Looking at me absently, he pushed his forehead up against mine. I asked him how he spelled his name.

“With an H,” John said.

“That’s better,” I said.
“Better than what?”
“Than without one.”
“Of course it is.” John laughed. “It’s a hell of a lot better.”
“So,” I said, relaxing into the sheets beside him. The image of a hundred dollar bill appeared as I dozed. Abstractedly, I pictured it sliding out of his wallet, floating magically in the air, then folded into the leather of mine. Then I pictured five of them, slipping out of his wallet one after the other, and folded into mine.
“So,” John said, waking me by pushing his forehead against mine again.
“Do you still believe in God?”
“Yes,” he answered, “Do you?”
“Hold me,” I said. “Hold me for a while. It’s a complicated question for me. And miracles? Do you believe in miracles?”
“Sure,” John said.
“But are you sentimental?”
“I’m holding you, aren’t I?”
So we lay there like that for a while, me thinking how good it would be to be lying in a hotel bed at ten in the morning with you, Jesse, the curtains half open, talking about God and miracles.
“What do you do?” I asked him.
“I’m a manager.”
“Doing any hiring?”
“What,” John laughed. “Are you asking me for a job?”
“I have to find five hundred dollars in five days,” I said. I couldn’t have told you where this came from if you asked, Jesse. But suddenly, at ten in the morning, with John’s warmth beside me in the bed, it was clear that I needed five hundred dollars and that I was leaving in five days.
“Why five days?” he asked.
“I have to get to San Francisco.”
“What for?”
“Don’t go to Frisco,” John said, pulling me closer. “Stay here.”
So I lay in his arms for a while, looking out the gap in the curtains until finally, after a long pause, John said, “Don’t worry about the five hundred dollars.”
“What do I have to do?”
“Nothing. Just hang out with me until you leave.”
I dozed. There were muted sounds of showering, then John was standing over me pulling on a suit. “You’ll drive the car,” he was saying. “You’ll drive me to work and then you can have the car all day.” He didn’t actually say, “the car,” though. He had some brand of car he was proud of
renting or owning, and called it by its manufacturer’s name, as if the name had a meaning I should understand. Once we were standing outside, sun radiating up from the asphalt, I realized he wasn’t talking about today, of course, but about some future morning when we lived together in the house he didn’t have time to show me now.

“Call me,” he said, dropping me off at my own car outside the bar where I’d left it the night before.

“You have nice eyes,” I said.

He was blinking them at me like accessories now. “Call me.”

“I might.”

“You’ve got to call me.”

“I’ll think about it.”

“Call me call me call me,” John said, putting the passenger window up and driving off.

I wanted a guy to give something up for me. Remember that afternoon you took off work just because I asked you to, Jesse, and we walked around doing nothing, and even just buying orange juice and chocolate in a supermarket together was funny? I wanted to feel that way again.

You called late that afternoon, to say, “Your voice sounds strange.”

“I just woke up,” I said. “I was just making coffee.”

“Me, too!” you said. You always admired any minor synchronicity between our lives. I did, too, though not necessarily the temporal kind. “When are you coming to San Francisco?” you asked.

“I’m coming,” I said. Things were coming together, I wanted to say. But instead I asked, “Remember that millionaire you said you dated once? The one who offered you a thousand dollars to ride down the coast with him, and when he dropped you off he wanted to give you less than he promised? What did you say to him?”

“Say? There was nothing to say. He stopped the car and I sat there until he reached in the glove compartment and gave it to me.” You paused. “What time is it there, anyway?”

All afternoon I sat in the back yard trying to figure out what had happened. Love, as Flaubert wrote, if it makes any difference now, is nothing but plain simple curiosity in its purest form. Which was it you had liked, Jesse? Someone giving you money, just for being yourself? Or drugs? Or had there been love, too? I couldn’t tease the three apart that afternoon, and didn’t want to come back until I knew. Until I understood what you knew. Love’s fiercest desire, Ford Madox Ford once wrote, is to see with the same eyes, to touch with the same sense of touch, to hear with the same ears, to lose one’s identity.

**Ramada Plaza, room 350**

“How would you like to make half your money tonight?” John asked when I answered the phone. Even over the phone, I could tell exactly when his eyelids blinked.

Each step of my shoes on that ridiculous carpet going down the hall was bringing me closer to you.
John opened the door halfway. “Go get some sodas,” he said, dumping a handful of change into my palms. When I came back with the sodas he said, “This is Daniel. Sit down. You two do a line while I take a shower.” He waved a finger. “And no fooling around till I get back.”

“I wonder,” I asked Daniel, “If it comes out if you have to blow your nose?”

“Just sniff,” Daniel said, taking my hand. “Hold one side of your nose closed, pull down on your other cheek and sniff.” He showed me how. He was very young. You couldn’t see it, but you could hear it in his voice. We sat on the couch, where you knew if you didn’t do what you were thinking about, you would sit there forever wondering why not.

“Can you drive?” John asked.

“Yes,” I said.

“So drive over to the video store. Go pick up another guy.”

“Right now?”

“You just said you could drive.”

“I meant as in principle, as a general rule.”

“So go down to the lobby. Come back in an hour. Surprise me.”

Descending, in the elevator mirror, I held one nostril closed and pulled down on my other cheek. I looked like a 1980s guy checking his nostrils in an elevator, and wasn’t entirely displeased with the effect.

There were other men in the lobby, but I didn’t feel like talking to anyone else, so I got some stationary from the desk and sat down to write you what was happening.

When I knocked on the door, Daniel opened, frantic, almost jumping up and down, the room behind him darkened. “He’s breathing really hard,” he said. “Do you think we should do something?”

I mutely took his hand and, reluctantly, with a dog’s patience, led him back to the bed.

At five in the morning, sun coming in through the curtains, John handed us our money. I watched Daniel counting his, stuffing it into his bag with a child’s gleeful elation.

**Extended Stay America, room 312**

“Want to make the rest of your money tonight?” John asked.

Just like I’d said on the phone, I was leaving that night, Jesse. The car stood in the driveway packed. But I stopped along the highway at the motel. The lights in John’s room were on, but no one answered the door, so I went back to the bar to wait. It was still early. “There’s a party tonight,” I said to the guy sitting next to me at the bar. By now something about your smile played easily on my lips, telling him to follow me back to John’s hotel.

“My dealer took all my money,” John said, when the two of us knocked. “That’s why I didn’t answer the door before. Take all you want,” he said, gesturing toward what the dealer had left in exchange, on the kitchen counter’s chopping block.

I left the two of them, to stand under the shower for ten minutes, or maybe ten hours, staring at the shower curtain and wondering if I was dead. Looking for clues to indicate I wasn’t, I couldn’t
find anything in particular, until the other guy knocked on the door, saying he wanted me to join him outside for a smoke.

We walked down the stairs to the edge of the parking lot. The sun was up, a green, yellow glare that seemed both healthy and not lingering on the asphalt between the cars. We sat on the asphalt. “Will you be my brother?” I asked him.

He noticed a man walking around the parking lot behind the trees, so we sat watching. “What’s that man doing?” he asked. I didn’t see a man, but we sat there in the parking lot looking for a man between the pine trunks that seemed to drift below us anyway, until after a while I remembered that he wasn’t my brother, and that my shoes were still somewhere inside John’s room.

Inside, I lay beside John on the bed, looking at the ceiling.

“I’ll give you three hundred dollars Thursday,” he was saying. “To make up for it. I’ll mail you a check. Just stay a little longer. Stay.”

“But I’m leaving today.”

“I’m falling,” he said, turning to me.

“What?”

“Head over heels.” His eyes flashed, and from the light at the curtains’ edges, I could tell I was going to be at least a day late, and sick when I got there.

“Can I have twenty dollars for breakfast?”

“Twenty dollars for breakfast,” John chuckled to himself, pulling his wallet out of the drawer, where it lay on top of a bible. “I’ve got forty-five to last me all week.” He gave me ten.

After that his gestures were funny again, and the way he walked me to the door seemed almost gallant. There was something touching about the blue of his unshaved neck, his hands’ movements as he closed the door behind me.

I had coffee across the parking lot, a couple of scones and a couple of newspapers. Ten dollars hardly covered the bill, but I felt extravagant. In the car on that long drive back, I thought about how he had wanted something from me so much that he had paid for it, if partly only out of kindness, and that I had wanted something from him, and paid for it, partly out of kindness, and knew that even if I really was the only guy you had ever really loved, Jesse, you must have felt the same thing for other men, maybe dozens of times. Of course, I pretty much lost you after that, so instead of learning the rest of your story, I only learned this one.

But this is why I was late, Jesse. Because sometimes you chase after a man by trying to learn what he’s lived, instead of just showing up on time.

J.M. Parker has moved between Seattle, Paris, Berlin and Istanbul as a student, foreign correspondent and academic for the past twenty years. He currently holds a postdoctoral fellowship in Austria, where he teaches creative writing and American literature. His fiction has appeared in Frank, Gertrude, ISLE, Harrington Fiction Quarterly, Segue, Intellectual Refuge, and other journals, including Chelsea Station 3.
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Highly, highly recommended.”

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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
A Conversation with Dan Lopez
Interview by Michael Graves

San Francisco author Dan Lopez recently spoke to fellow short story writer Michael Graves about *Part the Hawser, Limn the Sea*, his debut collection of short fiction featuring five gay-themed short stories linked by nautical themes.

**Michael Graves:** Congratulations on your debut collection of stories, *Part the Hawser, Limn the Sea!* It’s absolutely terrific. Please tell us about it.

**Dan Lopez:** Well, thank you! I’m glad you like it. I wrote these stories over several years as a way to work through the feelings of being in a long-distance relationship. At the time my husband and I were still dating and trying to figure out if we were the kind of people who could pull off a long-distance relationship. Turns out we are. It also turns out that we must like it because we’re currently doing long-distance again. I didn’t set out with the intention of putting the stories all on boats, but as I wrestled with the way to best express what I wanted to say I kept coming back to boats. The setting felt right for stories that explore isolation and those critical...
moments in relationships. The setting also allowed me to make something creative out of a lot of knowledge I was gaining about sailing at the time. I may never run away to sea on a tall ship, but at least my characters get out on the water with some regularity.

Graves: Do you have a favorite selection you’re drawn or connected to?

Lopez: That’s a tough one. I have a complicated relationship with each of these stories. Some I didn’t like for a long time, and some I probably like more than I should. I guess my favorite moments are the quiet, reflective ones. I find myself coming back to one line in particular from the eponymous story. The narrator has gone through a lot of trauma and is struggling with the question of whether or not he even wants to start over. I think for a lot of us that’s a daily struggle. Life requires full participation and often that’s difficult to give. Sometimes it’s hard enough to get out of bed in the morning, let alone to fully engage with the world around you. The sentiment is echoed in the final story in the collection as well, so it’s something I was clearly working out at the time.

Graves: Short story collections, in terms of form, don’t always have a desirable reputation. Audiences seem to gravitate more toward novels. Why do you think this is?

Lopez: They may not be the most fashionable, but I think there’s still a lot of love for the form. People like newly-minted Nobel Laureate Alice Munro are proving that every day. Why do readers tend to gravitate more to the novel than to the short story? Readers are looking to get lost in a story for an extended period of time. Since novels are longer they naturally appear to be a better fit. I would argue that a good short story collection can provide the same kind of experience—just look at writers like Dan Chaon and George Saunders—it just might require a little more faith on the part of the reader approaching the work for the first time. I suspect that as reading becomes more digital we’re going to see a resurgence of shorter form writing in all genres. You’re not going to read a novel at the DMV, but you might read a story or a long article on your phone.

Graves: Tell us some more about your background. Where did you grow up?

Lopez: I grew up in West Palm Beach. It's about an hour north of Miami. I really loved Florida as a kid, but after I moved to New York following college I realized that I could find all the things I liked about Florida—the zaniness and the easy access to nature, for instance—elsewhere. I didn't need to make excuses for all the things I didn't like about the state—I'm thinking about the overarching conservative nature of the place and its suburban sprawl run amok. I could choose to move away. I actually haven't been back since I got married. I'm curious to see what that would feel like, actually, to go from a place where I'm legally married to a place where I'm explicitly not.

Graves: How long did you live in NYC?

Lopez: I lived in Brooklyn for a little over five years. I would probably still be there if my husband wasn't getting his PhD in LA. I followed him out west, and then my job relocated to San
Francisco. Moving up felt like the right thing to do and since we had experience with long-distance and knew how to do it successfully we decided to give it a shot. I've been here for a year now, and I'm loving it.

**Graves:** Who are you reading now? Any recommendations?

**Lopez:** Oof, that’s a loaded question. I’m always reading a bunch of stuff! Currently, I’m working my way through *Ulysses*, though I don’t know if I’d recommend it. It’s more a stamina thing for me really to see if I can even get through it. I read Renata Adler’s *Speedboat* recently and I loved it. The way she builds a kind of emotional narrative instead of a traditional plot-based one is breathtaking. I’m also always recommending Haruki Murakami to people who haven’t read him. His particular brand of approachable surrealism is hugely satisfying. Naturally, I would also recommend your book, Michael. *Dirty One* is definitely one of my favorite story collections.

**Graves:** Are there any projects you’re currently focused on?

**Lopez:** I don’t really like talking about new things I’m working on. It tends to kill the magic. I will say that while I was writing the stories in this book I was also writing a novel about a family in crisis in Central Florida. The grandfather hasn’t spoken with his son in three years and he’s never met his granddaughter. Everyone is finally getting together to bury the hatchet. Naturally, things don’t go according to plan. There’s an abduction and a serial killer in that one so it has a little bit of a thriller element, but I’m less concerned with the suspense and more concerned with the relationships. Anyway, that’s currently sitting on my shelf. I plan on dusting it off and seeing if there’s something I can do with it soon.

**Graves:** San Francisco has a great arts scene: lots of queer writers and poets. How does it feel to be a part of that experience?

**Lopez:** In general, I'm really enjoying how queer San Francisco is. When I lived in New York I always felt like every other person on the street was gay, but in San Francisco that's actually true! Well, not really, but it's definitely a lot gayer. And right now feels like an important time to be here. The city has an energy that I've heard compared to Gold Rush days. It's definitely inspiring.

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Michael Graves is the author of *Dirty One*. This debut collection of stories was a Lambda Literary Award finalist and an American Library Association honoree. His work has appeared in numerous literary journals, including *Post Road, Blithe House Quarterly, Chelsea Station*, and *With: New Gay Fiction*. Currently, he is completing his novel *Parade*. Connect with Michael at [www.facebook.com/MichaelGravesAuthor](http://www.facebook.com/MichaelGravesAuthor).

Set in the 1980’s, *Dirty One* follows a pack of adolescent characters who live in the acid-drenched, suburban town known as Leominster, Massachusetts—the plastics capital of America, as well as the birthplace of Johnny Appleseed.

Praise for *Dirty One*

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

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

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

AVAILABLE FROM CHELSEA STATION EDITIONS
A Conversation with John Rechy
Interview by Eric Andrews-Katz

John Rechy is part of gay literary history, whether he chose to be or not. Growing up in a poor family of Depression Era Texas, John left for the city life of New York and Columbia University only to find a completely different life waiting for him. His life as a street hustler is well documented in his debut 1963 published novel, City of Night. *City of Night* is hailed as a gay classic documenting a darker, seedier world of gay liberation. John Rechy spoke with author Eric Andrews-Katz in honor of 50th anniversary celebration of the publication of his first novel.

**Eric Andrews-Katz:** You were born in El Paso, Texas in 1931 as Juan Francisco Rechy. Please describe your family life growing up.
**John Rechy:** I was born during the height of the Depression so everyone was poor; we were no exception. I was the youngest of two brothers and two sisters, a mother and a father. My father had once been prominent (Scottish decent) in Mexican theater and the political circuit. During the Mexican Revolution my family fled to El Paso. It was very difficult to get along there, for my father, going from prosperity to being very poor. I went to school there and eventually a newspaper scholarship at, what is now, The University of Texas-El Paso. I got my degree and willingly got drafted into the army for two years. I was in the First Airborne Infantry Division. I spent time in Germany and traveled around the country.

**Andrews-Katz:** Who were your first inspirations as a child?

**Rechy:** The Catholic Church profoundly influenced me, believe it or not. I’m fond of saying ‘A lapsed Catholic lapses every day.’ The influence was basically unavoidable with the Mexican background, that’s pretty profound. That accounts for the religious imagery in my books. I like to say, ‘I write in Catholic.’

**Andrews-Katz:** At what point were you aware of your sexuality?

**Rechy:** I was a late bloomer I think as part of the Catholicism. Sex was not mentioned, and didn’t exist. I learned about sex from best selling novels like *Gone With the Wind* and *Forever Amber*. When I was about 15 the sexual urges started coming but without direction. I didn’t know what sexual direction I was going, whether it was men or women. My first (willing) male sexual contact was in the army when I was about 20 in Paris. There was a lot of sexual conflict that came into play, a lot of ambiguity. I was aware of sex before then, but it was ambiguous if I liked male or female. Finally, one led to the other and finally I identified completely as a gay man.

**Andrews-Katz:** Describe what existed of the homosexual world in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s.

**Rechy:** In the 1950’s, I would say it was about that time, that I became quite active. They were very repressive times back then. One of the things that upset me about our history is that our history is quite long, and yet our memories are quite short about it. I walk around West Hollywood today and see young [gay] people holding hands and stuff like that, and I have to wonder if they know what we had to go through so there would be a time when they could do all that. And now we’re thinking about gay marriage… the changes that occurred between 1950 and now are cataclysmic.

Today, our history is either not being recorded or it’s not being grasped. That is something I feel keenly about, our history is being shoved into a can as it were. The raids back then, the police making arrests, people today don’t think about that. I talk about what it was like and younger gay people just gasp at the thought that here in American in the 50’s and 60’s and even into the 70’s, cops could break into your home if they suspected you of gay sexual activities, and they could arrest you for it. In your home! Gay folks don’t want to know what it was like, and yet things haven’t changed a whole lot. Today still, in New York, there are waves of gays being murdered, and then there’s the fucking Pope! and especially from the religious arena, they are still creating
the atmosphere that we [GLBT] are evil and despised, and that just continues. For me it’s sacred to remember our background and resistance, long before Stonewall. For me, people who say ‘Everything changed after Stonewall’, is just plain nonsense. There were a lot of writers in New York then and happened to report it. There were other places that had riots. I really resent the business that everything prior to Stonewall was repressive. That’s nonsense. Even for Queens to go out in drag, they were still being defiant. Just being gay was defiant.

Andrews-Katz: You’ve discussed your life as a hustler before, but how were you first approached and how did you initially react to the proposition?

Rechy: There are so many things in life that are mysterious, and never get solved. As I scribed in City of Night, I went to New York not knowing what I was going to do. I was going to Columbia but instead went to Times Square. It’s so strange, like knowing something and not wanting to know it at the same time. I found myself that first day at the YMCA, and a man propositioned me. I was broke and he mentioned something about money and Times Square… That very night I was out in Times Square standing around. A man came up to me and it was all instinct; a very strange thing what drew me there in the first place, it had to be some kind of instinct. I saw other people like me there. One day a Mr. Klein (called Mr. King in the book) said the memorable to me: “I’ll give you $10 buck and I don’t give a damn about you!” He was a kind, loving man but I knew it was wrong for me to stay with one person. There are all of those wonderful joys out there being along, and all the horrors as well. There’s a group recently that contacted me called “Rent Boys,” and asked if I would write something for the new generation of Rent Boys since I apparently influenced so many. It was funny and kind of wonderful to be asked to do that. I didn’t take it up, but what I would say would be very honest about the experiences. So much of it is glamorized, and so much is demonized. It’s partly both, and that’s what I experienced and what I wrote about.

Andrews-Katz: You’ve said that City of Night first started out as letters from New Orleans about your life hustling. How did the idea manifest to write the epistolary novel?

Rechy: I never intended to do it. I wrote all the adventures while I was still hustling, but I was still hustling. I started of couple of other novels that had nothing to do with hustling, but what happened is I went to Mardi Gras. It was kind of a nightmarish experience with the drugs and liquor, and all the people in costumes. I was surfing on sex, drugs and hustling, and it was all too much. I just couldn’t cope with it all anymore. That’s when I went back home to El Paso, and wrote a letter to a guy who was my friend. I wrote about what happened to me. I originally sent an excerpt called Mardi Gras to two literary quarterlies. Both accepted it and asked if it were part of a novel. I said yes, because I thought it would help my chances getting it published, and said half of it was written. I hadn’t written a single word. They asked me to send it. Then I started to think that this really wasn’t written about, and it should be written about. I always wanted to be a writer, and so it eventually became City of Night. I think about the people I knew that were hustling at the same time I was, and wonder if they are still alive. That’s what I would say to the next generation of Rent Boys, “It Can’t Last.”

CHELSEA STATION
Andrews-Katz: *City of Night* deals honestly with the world of homosexuality, drag queens, and male hustling. What challenges did you face trying to get it published in 1963?

Rechy: I had no difficulty! I already had a contract for it by 1960. It wasn’t written at that point but the contract was there. I resisted writing it and didn’t do it for two, maybe three years. A friend of mine helped me go back to El Paso so I could write it. I eventually wrote it in about a year. So, it wasn’t difficult to publish at all. At first it got vile reviews but it sold, and sold well. It was prohibited in Canada, Australia and Spain. Now, 50 years later, people are calling it a classic.

Andrews-Katz: For a while you led a juxtaposed life being a writer/professor at UCLA during the day, and a hustler at night. How did you handle it when those lives crossed paths?

Rechy: I didn’t think about it. Now, in retrospect, I look back and I want to laugh and I want to quiver with fear at those times. But then, it was just my life. I don’t think anyone thinks about it, it’s just his or her life, and nothing exception because it is your life. I would go to UCLA and teach, and if it were a night class I’d take a different shirt. After class I’d changed to another kind of ‘more appropriate’ shirt, and then I’d be out there on the street. That was that. It never occurred to me that people would recognize me. People did. Sometimes it was hilarious and sometimes it was awful, too. I prefer the funny ones. Once about 1:30 AM on Santa Monica Boulevard, a car slowed and stopped. The window rolled down and I heard, “Good evening Professor Rechy. Are you out for an evening stroll?” I love those things when they happen, but it didn’t faze me. It was amusing. There had been some awful threatening things that I’d get into, but I try to focus on the funny ones. On a corner late one night, a very cute queen with just a little lipstick (not in full drag) was flirting with me. She would chase away anyone else that came by. Well I wasn’t into sex; I was out to make money. She called out to me, “Listen honey, you’re muscles are as gay as my drag is.” I love that kind of profound street philosophy.

Andrews-Katz: In one section of *City of Night*, a character plays Bartok’s *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* every encounter with the [nameless] main character. Was there a particular reason for such a specific piece of haunting music?

Rechy: It was a piece of music that a friend of mine (whom I didn’t know was gay at the time) introduced me to. There was something that haunted me about it, something that still haunts me today; I have several recordings of it. I used to play it very often and it found its way into the book. I love music of all kinds, and play it with my mate frequently. I don’t like the word ‘spouse’ {it sounds too much like ‘mouse’}, and I don’t like the husband/husband thing. But with Michael, my mate, we go to concerts all the time.

I did last longer on the streets than anyone else (I wonder if I’m in the Guinness Book), but eventually (by popular demand) I gave it up and met Michael. That has been the best part of my life. I don’t regret any of my life. I’m not ashamed, that’s not a word I like. My life is my life and I get to live it now. I live in a beautiful Hollywood Hills home with my mate, and it’s good!

Andrews-Katz: What does the milestone of reaching the 50th Anniversary Printing of *City of Night* mean to you on a personal level?
Rechy: It’s so difficult to say. My experience has been that I accept whatever happens. And now this anniversary happens with this book. Of course, I’m glad but it doesn’t feel like a milestone. It makes me very happy, but it again makes me very sad. The more City of Night goes on, the more distant the people I wrote about become in my mind. And it doesn’t only include hustlers, because I also met a lot of men that were customers and wonderful people. It was sad to me that I had to play a role for them that obviated any form of closeness, playing ‘tough’ and all that bullshit. But the more it happens the more distant they become. I think about and wonder about what happened about most of them.

Andrews-Katz: In reflection, what changes would you make (if any) to the original City of Night?

Rechy: Oh, I could never write it now. Now it’s a book that was written at that age and views at that age. I find it so entirely romantic, and I wouldn’t write that way now. I’m a much better writer now than I was. City of Night gets all the attention. I have written better books, but no other is so beloved as this one. The Coming of the Night is certainly one of the very best books I ever wrote. I did everything I set out to do. I hope all the others eventually get the same attention. I don’t dislike City of Night, it’s like a wild child in a sense; it goes out and on its own. But I’ve written so many others and have grown a lot as a writer myself.

Andrews-Katz: Out of all the people you have met (famous, infamous, or neither) who has left the largest impression on you and why?

Rechy: I don’t mean to make it a hierarchy. Before I was a writer, when I was in college, a very wonderful director Wilford Leach, he was one of the big Broadway directors of the day. I met him when I was about 18 or 19, and he was such an influence on me. He introduced me to wonderful music and books, and the better-known people I met that I remember fondly. I do remember Liberace fondly. I didn’t like the recent movie that just came out. Heterosexuals just don’t know what the Hell they are doing; they don’t know how to deal with two very complex men. I met Liberace briefly, and he was a very sad man. And this was not conveyed there. The movie was all very salacious. We became friends and then had a falling out. I’ve met a lot of people that have influenced me, I’m sure.

Andrews-Katz: Who were your written influences?

Rechy: William Faulkner influenced me a great deal. Philosophers influence me. Books and movies were always more influential on me than people. Comic books. The book I wrote The Vampires is completely influenced by the comic books I read as a kid. I’d go to the library and read there. Then I’d traipsed off to Pershing Square. Once I was carrying some books back to my room from the library, and I saw two of my friends from Pershing Square. I saw them and moved across the street because I didn’t want them to see me carrying books. It would go against the image.
John Rechy's first novel City of Night stirred great controversy when it was first published, although Christopher Isherwood said: “The seething, brilliant novel of America after dark — comic...tragic...exciting.” His writing career would continue with over a dozen novels including The Sexual Outlaw (listed among the 100 Best Non-Fiction Books of the Century), Marilyn’s Daughter and About my Life and the Kept Woman. Mr. Rechy has been the recipient of the PEN Center USA Lifetime Achievement Award, a National Endowment for the Arts Grant, the Outstanding Alumnus 2007 University of Texas at El Paso award, and holds the honor of being the first recipient of ONE Magazine’s Culture Hero Award. He currently lives in Hollywood, California with Michael, his mate of more than 20 years.

Eric Andrews-Katz (WriteOn530@gmail.com) lives in Seattle with his husband Alan. Eric’s first story “Mr. Grimm’s Faery Tale”—a 2008 Spectrum Short Fiction Award nominee—was published in So Fey: Queer Fairy Fiction. Other works have appeared in: The Best Date Ever, Charmed Lives: Gay Spirit in Storytelling, Gay City Vols: 2, 3 & 4 (co-editor of Vol 4), The Advocate, Chelsea Station, and a contributing writer for the Seattle Gay News. Eric is also the author of the novels The Jesus Injection (the first Agent Buck 98 adventure) and its sequel Balls & Chain.
“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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Reviewed by Shawn Syms

Fantastical elements and universal human emotions combine to delightful effect in *Light*, a charming debut novel from Canadian writer ’Nathan Burgoine. In a book that is clever and entertaining but explores sophisticated thematic territory, Burgoine raises thoughtful questions about gay community and identity and the nature and mechanics of heroism.

Kieran Quinn, a lad of Irish descent raised in Canada’s capital city of Ottawa (also home to author Burgoine), realizes at the age of ten that he possesses telepathic and psychokinetic abilities. In other words, he can read others’ thoughts and control objects with his mind—think Stephen King’s *Carrie*, but quite a bit more self-possessed and taking the form of a mild-mannered gay dude.

Kieran’s abilities are most profound when it comes to manipulating nearby sources of light; hence the book’s title. When Stigmatic Jack, an evangelical preacher who’s also psychokinetic, descends upon Ottawa in the middle of Pride Week bent upon harming queers, Kieran conjures up pyrotechnic light shows to dazzle and subdue the homophobe. Along the way, Kieran courts Sebastien LaRoche, a French-Canadian muscle daddy who gets injured during Stigmatic Jack’s flesh-searing antics. Romance ensues—but so does a whole lot of chaos. Kieran quickly learns to hone and amp up his powers to combat the dangerous demagogue.

Burgoine, the author of numerous published works of short fiction, has ably made the transition to novelist. *Light* offers a well-structured and smoothly propelled plot, with tight pacing that increases in dramatic tension chapter by chapter, culminating in a full-on battle of good vs evil on the streets of Ottawa. The book was genuinely hard to put down, and offered several late plot revelations that were not easy to predict yet made perfect sense in context.

*Light* is in many ways an examination of the notions of difference and belonging. Kieran Quinn is a queer among queers—he’s openly and proudly gay, but he must hide another secret. Only his mother, who died when he was a young boy, was aware of his special abilities. He finds it a challenge to manage interpersonal relationships, especially given that he can read the thoughts of anyone close to him. Since the trauma of his mother’s death from cancer, Kieran’s mantra has been “I can handle this.” Through his burgeoning relationship with Sebastien, he makes the journey from perseverance to pleasure, learning that life is to be enjoyed, not simply withstood.

Sometimes differences can lead to shared understanding and new commonalities, as Kieran learns through a subplot in which he gets to know another hero who breaks the traditional mold:
Miracle Woman, an African American woman who has used her powers to rescue children from traffic accidents (Kieran ends up with a superhero moniker as well after publicly battling Stigmatic Jack with his multicolored, blinding-light barrage: Rainbow Man). Burgoine also exploits difference and variation in more earthly and carnal ways: romantic interest Sebastien is far older than Kieran, he’s a top to Kieran’s bottom, and they each have a different one of Canada’s official languages as their mother tongue. But Kieran’s developing relationships with both Miracle Woman and Sebastien possess a shared characteristic: they demonstrate the process of opening up and learning to trust.

*Light* manages to balance a playful sense of humour, hot sex scenes, and provocative thinking about the meanings of individuality, acceptance, pride, and love. Burgoine takes some known gay archetypes—the gay-pride junkie, the leather SM top—and unpacks them in knowing and nuanced ways that move beyond stereotypes or predictability. With such a dazzling novelistic debut, Burgoine’s future looks bright.

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Shawn Syms has written for more than 50 publications over the last 25 years. He's the author of *Nothing Looks Familiar* and the editor of *Friend. Follow. Text. #storiesFromLivingOnline*. More information at [http://www.shawnsyms.com](http://www.shawnsyms.com).


City of Night
by John Rechy
Grove Press
978-0802121530
400 pages, paperback, $16

Reviewed by Eric Andrews-Katz

City of Night is one of those novels that made Gay Literature history. First published in 1963 the novel tells of the dark underbelly of the gay world, filled with hustlers, johns, drag queens, leather men, and every type in between. At a time when the word ‘homosexual’ was barely whispered and rarely put into print (except for the medical journals branding it a mental illness), City of Night did as much for exposing the gay world it describes, as shocking its participants back one analyzing step. But the book itself is a remarkable account of a man’s self-discovery.

Honestly and liberally autobiographical, City of Night tells the story of one man’s search for friendship, love, and an understanding of himself. At the center is a young Texan boy of Mexican heritage that sets out into the world with the one major character trait that is as much a blessing as a boon; his undisputable sex appeal. While the nameless protagonist sells himself to men, he keeps up the appearance of being seduced by women—a common trait by the ‘hustler’s world’ standards to invoke an aura of masculinity around themselves, and thus create a more intense desirability to their ‘scores’. According to the rules of the street, a hustler must always be the ideal fantasy of masculinity; any queer traits would banish the illusion. To be queer was to be labeled effeminate or not a real man, and reason enough for being loathed; a hustler needed to be manly in order to be desired.

The young man’s journey takes him from the small Texan town to the animalistic prowling of New York City’s Time Square. Along the streets or in darkened movie houses, he meets an endless turnstile of men all seeking out the one thing denied them, sexual exploration of another man. The protagonist is first approached by Mr. King who makes his proposal brief and to the point: “I’ll give you $10, and I don’t give a damn about you,” setting the tone for ‘Young Man’s’ New York (if not life) experience. He is ‘employed’ by a bedridden Professor who collects memories and pictures of his boy ‘Angels.’ He meets Peter, another street hustler who helps introduce him to perspective scores, and teaches him the rules of street-hustling survival.

As if a darker version of the Everyman protagonist from The Pilgrim’s Progress, the nameless hero explores homosexual America, learning about the world as much as about his own self in the process. In Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco and the Mardi Gras of New Orleans, his hustling introduces him to an assortment of people, all seething with the desperation of an endless searching for something else—an unfulfilled, never-ending longing. There are the Queens like Miss Destiny (a true-life character) that is over the top and constantly planning a ‘fabulous
wedding’ with a new husband. Or Sargent Morgan a police officer that relishes in arresting the men in Pershing Square, but secretly delights in taking advantage of those he arrests. And of course there is the absurdly funny and tragic “Mom,” a man who enjoys picking up men, taking them home and cooking for them as if they were his own children, before collecting his money’s worth for their services. But this after-dark world that Rechy has exposed is not just an endless procession of seedy world inhabitants. Skipper is the former lover of a famous Hollywood director, searching to recapture the comfortable position he once enjoyed. Lance O’Hara was once a Hollywood star, beautiful in appearance and scorned by the one man he loves but can’t obtain.

Of course there are the men looking for love in this dark maelstrom world. That inevitable, demanding master that taunts each character with delightful, moon-filled promises only to burn away illusion and reveal each of their own harsh truths in daylight. The married man the narrator meets on the beach, which tries for a more fulfilling connection than just the blatant and brief gratification of the sexual encounter. And the man in New Orleans that watches from a distance before confronting the narrator and chipping away at the carefully built protective exterior. But it is the struggle and definition of what ‘love’ is that finally breaks down the narrator, sending him on his own search to find that that has always been missing from his own life.

Fifty years later it is easy to understand the importance of City of Night’s impact on society, currently if not in retrospect. Despite how much has changed on a social or political level, it is frightening to see how much of that same self-loathing and desperation still exists today in the gay community. It is also important for the generations that have never lived in a world without HIV or some form of social awareness, to remember how far the gay movement has come. The darkened bars reeking of oppression, desperation, and the fear that at any moment police could raid the place and arrest all inside... really happened. It was a time when being gay was a criminal offense, and lives were ruined if the truth was discovered. Not so long ago the world that Mr. Rechy writes about was a reality, and City of Night graphically documents the blueprint to exploring this forgotten world, grime grit and all.

What started out as a letter written detailing his life as a hustler in New Orleans during Mardi Gras, became City of Night, a book whose writer was described by Gore Vidal as “One of the few original American writers of the last century.” When Grove Press originally published the novel in 1963 John Rechy was still working on the streets of Los Angeles, trying to keep his worlds from ever meshing together. Since then he has published more than 10 books (fiction and non-fiction), has lectured at Harvard, Duke and Yale, as well as teaching courses on writing at UCLA, and offering other writing courses to the public (check out [www.JohnRechy.com](http://www.JohnRechy.com) for details). This year City of Night will be celebrated being named one of the 25 all time “Best Gay Novels” by the Publishing Triangle of New York in time for its 50th “Golden” Anniversary Edition. John Rechy lives in Los Angeles with his long-term partner, writing and lecturing.

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Eric Andrews-Katz ([WriteOn530@gmail.com](mailto:WriteOn530@gmail.com)) lives in Seattle with his husband Alan. Eric’s first story “Mr. Grimm’s Faery Tale”—a 2008 Spectrum Short Fiction Award nominee—was published in So Fey: Queer Fairy Fiction. Other works have appeared in: Charmed Lives: Gay Spirit in Storytelling, Gay City, The Advocate, Chelsea Station, and a contributing writer for the Seattle Gay News. Eric is also the author of the novels The Jesus Injection (the first Agent Buck 98 adventure) and its sequel Balls & Chain.
Travis Ferrell is gay. But not your stereotypical gay youth: sure, he is bullied by some of his peers, misunderstood by his well-meaning relatives and friends, but he is not interested in fashion, show tunes, or the latest celebrity gossip. Nor does he look like a stereotypical gay youth: he is tall, heavy-set, and hairy. This brilliant coming-of-age novel retells Travis' life during the final year of high school, starting on the first day of school and ending with his arrival at college. Each chapter portrays a pivotal event in that year, usually associated with a holiday—Hallowe'en, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's. Over the course of this year, Travis finds himself drawn to another boy, comes out to said boy and admits his attraction, eventually they have sex, they fight, they make up; he will learn about himself, about the beginnings and endings of love, and the value of friendship.

This book is important for several reasons. Of course it is obviously for young adults who are outsiders, but it acknowledges that they may still feel like outsiders, even among the very group they supposedly belong to. This point has already been made by advance reviewers of the book, but I think that it bears repeating: because of the often one-dimensional perception of GLBT people in media, and despite their occurrence across race, gender, religion, age, and class, it is not uncommon for newly-out GLBT people to feel alienated from the very community they nominally belong to. (This was my very experience as a gay man in my twenties.) Thus even among the expanding number of GLBT coming-of-age novels, *Cub* fills a very real gap. Moreover, *Cub* challenges the assumption that homosexuals exist only in urban areas, only belong to a certain class, and speak/act/dress only in a specific way. Travis does not want to leave West Virginia—yes, he wants to leave the small-minded people of his community, but he wants just as much to find a place there where he and his boyfriend can live and love together. Despite the slogan “We are everywhere,” we seldom glimpse proof of its truth.

*Cub* also presents BDSM sexuality in a real, non-sensationalistic way; Travis' initial fumbling attempts at gay sex eventually develop into exploring kinky sex with his boyfriend. Here Mann uses it to demonstrate the paradoxical, complex character of Travis: on the one hand, he cannot bring himself to hunt (just about the only thing he can bear to kill are garden pests), on the other he revels in the feelings of mastery and control from dominating his boyfriend.

Finally, this book is a sensual feast. The sounds of rock 'n' roll music wafting from the radio, or played on guitar, the feel and scent of leather, the smell and taste of good-home cooking, the look, smell, and feel of a hairy man...Mann's vivid prose describes all these and more.
The West Virginia setting, the presence of bears, the BDSM—one is tempted to assume that Cub is more than a tad autobiographical, and no doubt Mann has used his own experiences to inform the story. And it is a story well worth reading: GLBT people may be more visible now than during the ostensible setting of this novel (the early 1990s), but seldom are they presented in such a multi-faceted, complex way. Cub is for anyone who has ever felt the outsider—in short, for everybody.

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.
First, it must be noted that it has been far too long since a novel came along with the proper aspirational tone that actually targeted the brand names correctly.

Since something by Jackie Collins, most likely—maybe even Hollywood Wives or Lucky?

Right from the start, Inside, the debut novel from Charles L. Ross, references the Pierce Martin tables, Daum lamps, Georg Jenson flatware, Judith Leiber clutches, Paloma Picasso bracelets, and Claude Montana leather jackets of years past, and the years fall away and suddenly Carter is being shoved out of the White House and gets to leave the rose garden at last after Reagan brokers that deal over the hostages, and Nancy is in her china-buying frenzy.

It all comes back too clearly, thanks to author Ross’s recreation of life among the lifestyle brokers in Los Angeles, as ‘70s experimentation yields to ‘80s excess. And where better to be in the moments before Joan Collins in her veiled hat testifies against her ex-husband, Blake, over the accidental death of their son Stephen’s boyfriend, and even the hoi polloi uncorked the chilled Cristal and settled back, grinning?

That title, Inside, references both the name of the shelter magazine that is home to myriad machinations, temptations and schemes, as well our authors point of view. Ross, his author’s biography reveals, was himself the art director of Architectural Digest from 1978 until 1985 and then jumped ship to become the founding art director of Veranda and its featured bouquets of bougainvillea and hydrangea bigger, taller and wider than any round entry-way table you or I might ever own.

In other words, if anyone was ever going to write a book about the goings-on (including the more-or-less constant sexual meanderings as well as the occasional murder) inside the ochre walls of a magazine with a cover featuring an ultra-close close-up of an antique breakfront with a Henry Moore bronze nestled on it, with just the slightest corner of a lovely sofa in the foreground, it had to be Charles L. Ross.

Who else, the reader wants to know, could have created a character likeInside magazine’s editor Leaf Wyks, who suggests AD’s own Paige Rense in much the same way that Meryl Streep channeled Margaret Thatcher inIron Lady?
And who else but a former magazine art director would have himself overseen the creation of the photograph that graces the cover of his own book, complete with the sine qua non corner of a luxe sofa and a discretely placed copy of Inside magazine itself, and then given himself credit for it in an “on the cover” listing?

Ah, but such is the fun of Inside and books like it: trying to guess just who’s who, trying to remember the scent of Yves Saint Laurent’s Opium or the sicky-sweet raspberry taste of framboise—bottles of which are scattered throughout the narrative, as its scent ends up on the lips of at least one corpse.

Such is Ross’s skill that he evokes here an era in loving detail, and, in doing so, allows those of us who shared it with him to remember the mustaches and the polo shirts, the poppers and the Pines. (To say nothing of such cultural touchstones as Quincy and Lee Radziwill in the actress phase of her life, and to the multitude film references from All About Eve to the noir classic, The Big Clock.)

And he gives us this, a monologue from a gay man of a certain age, informing a neophyte about the pleasures to be had (in a Boys in the Band sort of way) during a weekend on Fire Island:

“‘Let me fill you in on Island life,’ Robin says once he’s arranging a Bill Blass sheet on the sand. ‘Are you going to tea?’ is the only conversation heard from noon, when everyone staggers awake, until four, when tea dance begins at the Sandpiper. They pose, rainbowed in Lacoste shirts, on the bar’s deck, a la Greek statues, waiting to be admired, the ‘men’ gulping beer, the ‘boys’ sipping greyhounds, a subtle hint, no doubt, that they’d like to do it doggie-style. No one dares look back if he spots someone eyeing him. One must never display interest. At the firstpounding note of a Donna Summer song, thy whip out poppers andpounce onto the dance floor like savages in a jungle. After an hour, drenched with sweat, they’re ready for a nap with, they hope, an obliging boy and, absolutely, with a Quaalude. It makes, they say, a nice matinee.”

Although it must be admitted that the truth of this description makes the reader wonder if that time and place was truly as much fun as it seemed then, it must also be noted that chief among the gifts Charles Ross gives us Inside is the restoration of our youth.

Add to that the strange pleasure of also remembering, from time to time throughout the long unwinding of our tale, that this is a mystery, kinda, sorta. That it does, in its “last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again” opening chapter, have a dead body, a secret letter sealed in a pink envelope, a couple of antique porcelain Chinese burial guards bearing witness, a couple of liqueur glasses on the coffee table, and the scent of raspberries in the air…

But the mystery surrounding the death is of the most affable sort. It’s tied up very quickly in far fewer pages than the reader suspected it might. It is, in fact, resolved in what might be considered a coda to the tale itself, as if both author and reader together, having reached what might otherwise have been considered a very satisfying end to the story, suddenly thought, “Oh, what about that dead body?”

So, what—other than the corpse—fills the more than four hundred pages of text?

Well, given that Inside is rather an anthropological look at the sex, lust, and greed that drove a generation into both venereal disease and deep debt, and, in its way, something of a murder mystery, it is also, nominally, the tale of one Anthony, he of the ‘70s mustache and the chestful of luxurious hair, who leaves his art studio job in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan for Los Angeles
and a job in the art department of *Motor Trend*, of all places, before he lands his dream job at the gay haven of a shelter magazine, *Inside*.

From here, Anthony is all about the work (and the occasional tryst and the now-and-again discovery of a dead body), as he rises to the all-mighty position of art director, in which he innovates the industry by aiming his camera low and knowing when to crop.

Which brings to mind the chief weakness of the book.

It is the book’s strong focus on the issues of the magazines themselves, as if they were real deadlines, real magazine-stand fodder, that slows the narrative, as Anthony frets over the art direction of all eight of the features in the March/April issue, coming in early and staying late to get the color separations just right, only to have to turn around and do it all over again for the May/June that allows the reader’s mind to drift, wondering what Joan Collins might have been up to while Anthony was slaving over his slant board.

*Inside*, the novel, lacks what *Inside*, the magazine seems to have: strong editorial focus. Further, it needs exactly the tools that Anthony brings to the magazine: an ability to tell the arc of a story concisely, effectively, and a willingness to crop.

Those readers who have themselves worked as art directors will find much to admire in the pages of *Inside*, both the book and the magazine. The rest of us may grow restless from time to time by the over-abundance of detail, although the book, as a whole thoroughly manages to entertain.

As to the mystery itself—the slim slice of the book that it is—pondering it, the reader hears suddenly the voice of Carol Channing herself offering a clue, right in his ears, by exclaiming, “It’s the raspberries!”

But more than that cannot be said.

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

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

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

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

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

"In the depths of despair, standing outside looking in, Josh touches the hearts of those who have lost their way to their dreams and aspirations. His inability to find himself finally leads to an epiphany of his hidden, yet acknowledged, desires."
—American Library Association GLBTRT Newsletter
The Boy in the Middle

He lives, that is, in the middle condo and dresses all in black.
A cute young thing of mystery.
So you’ve named him “the boy in the middle.” Though we’ve never spoken, we watch
him sometimes slipping off to his car and if he has a lover
the evidence is slim. Still, like a Hitchcock film of old, you
like to spot him—stare and declare his handsome pretense.
It’s as though we watched someone we used
to be. He comes and goes,
a creature more intent
on vanishing before our very eyes. And though he knows us
as two men who are old, we two linger in our looks, not jealous
but celebratory in our own way of things that change
and things that remain
and stay a mystery even now.

—Walter Holland
A native of Chicago, Richard Johns now lives, with his boyfriend of many years, in a small town on the far western fringe of that lovely city’s metropolitan sprawl. Three widely unavailable chapbooks bear his name: *2000 Poems*, *Hollywood Beach*, and *Explicit Lyrics: Poems*. He sometimes checks his inbox at: richardmjohns@hotmail.com.
Unfinished Memoir

I don’t completely remember that night
—who all was there, and everything they said—but we met in the middle of that room,
I remember, when the rap session ended,
as if drawn to where our eyes had led us
all evening long as we explored each other.

What small talk we made with one another—even that I forget. And to this day
I really don’t remember if you and I exchanged numbers… Even so, time would tell
that our life together had just begun thanks to a chance encounter in that place.

One prophetic detail: when we left there,
I remember, we went our separate ways
—a not inauspiciously original
manner in which to welcome our future!
“You want to go for a drink?” I had asked,
to which you’d answered “No,” beaming at me.

So mysterious, life! I look at you
now, sometimes, and wonder how we got here
—surely an unanswerable question.
And where this companionship will lead to,
who can say? —Further into a present,
hopefully, that is ours and open-ended,
where life and the memory of it are continuous.
And so, what else do I remember, love?
That lying in bed with you, time passing,
I would marvel at each dark arrival
that I made as toward your arms I travelled.
And that I asked, “O really? Any good?”

when you said you were an artist. That the best
does not come last, but happens all along,
constantly infusing our every move:
a becoming, reciprocal tenderness.
Also, the thrill of finding you at home
when I return, and days together spent
doing what we do late into the night:
reading (me) and painting (you), no words said:
deep within our closeness a place for room,
both memory-encompassed and present-ended;
and quietly contented, both of us,
with where we’ve come to be with each other.

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

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

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

“A slew of bizarre stories, some hilarious, some heartrending, and almost all of them as original as an Ionesco play with a good dose of David Lynch trompe l’œil 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
from Teased Hair and the Quest for Tiaras

Jungle Fever
J.R. Greenwell

I got out of the cab and walked through the double doors that were propped open. A man sweeping the entrance said hello to me.

“I’m supposed to meet Wendy here,” I said to him.

“They’re in there.” He smiled and went back to sweeping the floor mats.

The Sweet Gum Head. I was walking into this classy club that had only been opened a few months. A show from out of town had been playing here for a short time, but was now gone. It was Danny Windsor’s show with Carmen Del Rio and Micky Martin, entertainers I’d heard of
but never seen. I wanted to see the show, but never could afford the convenience of a trip to Cheshire Bridge Road. Yes, even though the club was a few miles from 12th Street, the cab ride, cost of drinks, and the ride home would be far too high on a budget with a zero balance. Even though Larry and Herman had cars that operated on whether their engines would start or not, driving around on someone else’s schedule never seemed to work. Our motto was if we couldn’t walk to it, we usually never got to it.

I strolled past the foyer into the club, my eyes trying to adjust to the darkness inside. The stage lights were on. The bar was in the center of the club. There was balcony seating, side seating, front seating...seating everywhere. The silhouette of black metal railings surrounding the oaken dance floor was just beautiful, I thought to myself. The place was huge. It could seat a hundred, two hundred, maybe a thousand people. Well, maybe not that many. I started to count the tables. I heard voices coming from the balcony.

“Rachel?” the shadow of an approaching figure said to me.

“Hi,” I said.

“Hi, I’m Wendy.” The man had the biggest smile. It was as if his grin wrapped entirely around his head. He didn’t look like the drag type. He had a large nose, a big grin, and he, well, he looked like a man. He had a friendly and inviting face.

“How many people can be seated in this place?” I asked.

“Oh, about three hundred, maybe three fifty.”

“It’s pretty big,” I responded, still in awe.

“Well, don’t you worry your pretty little head about how many people we can get in here. We’ll pack the place. You’ll see.”

Others approached us from the darkness of the stairs. I was introduced to Tony Romano, Ted and Don. I didn’t know any of them. They were going to be the male dancers. (I always found that term funny since we were all male dancers). Tony was a singer and British Sterling’s roommate. British was the reigning Miss Gay Atlanta. Apparently, Ted was hired because he was cute and looked good in a tank top. He had a great smile, as well. And Don? Well, Don was a dancer, a real dancer and quite good at it. I thought he looked like Princess Anne. He had an English look about him.

“Hi, I’m Rhonda Blake, and it’s nice to meet you.” I didn’t know Rhonda, but had only heard of him. He was a cute man. Tiny, but cute with petite facial features and a heavy day’s growth of stubble. I wondered how he covered that up.

“Hello,” I’m Rachel, I said still fixated on his thick facial hair.

“Hey! Remember me? Allen?”

“Lavita!” I said. Finally, somebody I knew.

“Yeah, Rachel and I met along time ago before he was Rachel,” Lavita said. “I tried to pick him up at a party at the Kavanaugh mansion, remember that?”
How embarrassing, I thought, to bring that up. I was at one of the Saturday night parties at Richard Kavanaugh’s home. Richard would throw parties and all of his renters (he referred to them as family) and their guests were invited. One evening, Allen had introduced himself to me and then plopped down on the floor next to my chair, put his arm on my leg and then rested his head on his arm, looking straight up at me. At this time in my life, I had space issues, and he was definitely invading my space. He fluttered his eyes at me. Lavita Allen, I thought to myself, is flirting with me. A drag queen is flirting with me. Even though he was out of drag, each time he blinked his eyes, I could see Barbra Streisand looking at me. Now if it had been the real Barbra, well…but it wasn’t. It was a fake Barbra; a good one, but nonetheless, a fake one.

“Oh, you were just pretending to pick me up,” I said.

“No, I wasn’t pretending,” he snapped back while winking at me. “Come on, let me show you the dressing room.”

Lavita and I went upstairs to see the dressing room, and he showed me where my station would be. I was going to have my own dressing area with a makeup table and mirrors, and a rack for my costumes. It was unbelievable, though I kept thinking to myself that I didn’t have anything to put on the rack. All my clothes fit nicely into my bag, and thank goodness for polyester blouses and hot pants that didn’t easily wrinkle.

We had a cast meeting and then a rehearsal. Wendy was the director of the show and laid out the roles and rules that we would be establishing. He was the one who named the show the Red White & Blue Revue. The name didn’t sound too exciting to me, but I was new and what did I know about show names? Nothing. I kept my mouth shut and listened. Wendy would be the Liza Minnelli and Carol Channing of the show, as well as the emcee. Lavita would be doing comedy and the occasional Barbra Streisand act. Rhonda would be the glamour girl, and I would be the newcomer, though I wasn’t sure what that really meant. I was still trying to find my “drag identity” and couldn’t quite put myself into any one role. But one thing was clear. I wouldn’t be doing any of their acts, so there would definitely not be a conflict of interest. We would be working five nights a week, with two shows a night. And we would have rehearsals three days a week to learn production numbers. Of course, being new, I raised my hand and asked what a production number was. Humbly, I quickly learned that a production number was when there was more than one person on stage during an act.

That same day we worked on two production numbers, “Aquarius” from Hair by the Fifth Dimension, and “Millie, Rose and Mame,” a medley by Diana Ross. I had never even heard either of them, so I was learning from scratch. I would be working with pros, but they were nurturing and apparently saw my potential. But even then, I was still intimidated. After about three hours of hard work, we called it a day. It was Wednesday and the new show was to start the next Tuesday. We discussed rehearsing everyday before the opening day. I was okay with that, but I was concerned about the cab fare to and from the club. I was barely making do with one show a night and waiting tables at the Light House. I called Wendy to the side as we were wrapping up.

“Wendy, I have a small problem.”

“You don’t like the production numbers?” he said jokingly.
“No, those are great.” I was so embarrassed. “I can’t afford to take the cab every day to come to rehearsals. I live on 12th Street and my roommates have cars but I can’t always depend, you know…”

“That’s not a problem. Either Lavita or I can pick you up every day and take you back home if you don’t have a ride. We live near Little Five Points. We’ll just have to take a different way, but it’s not that far. Now, don’t you worry your pretty little head about it.” As he reached up and gently twisted my nose, I had a feeling that I would be hearing that saying quite often.

“I don’t mean to put you out,” I said.

“It’s not a problem, so hush.”

“And one more thing.” I never found the right time during our cast meeting and rehearsal to ask about money, but I thought this was as good a time as any. “What is the pay?” I asked sheepishly.

“Oh, we’re getting paid twenty-five a night, but since you’re new, you’re working for free.” He saw the shocked look on my face. “Gotcha!” he said. “We’re all making twenty-five a night, plus tips. And that includes you. Sounds good, doesn’t it?”

“Yeah,” I replied in a daze. I was doing the math in my head. Five times twenty-five is…fuck! I’m rich! I’m fucking rich! Wait till Herman hears about this.

* * *

The first week of the show went as expected with good crowds and wonderful responses to our format. I heard that our show lacked the Vegas style glamour that Danny Windsor’s show had, but there would soon be a spontaneity with the show that would be found nowhere else. In other words, our show would be different every single night, and not even we would be able to predict the makeup of the show from one number to the next. There would always be a surprise, and that would be primarily due to Lavita and Wendy’s whimsical nature and personalities. The shows would be fun for the audience and more importantly, for us as cast members.

I was overwhelmed the first week, not only with the rigors of performing every night, but with the lack of numbers to rotate so that I wasn’t doing the same routines every evening. The audience was very mixed, but with a larger number of lesbians, a first for me to entertain. They were quite different in many ways than the male audiences, and thank goodness for that. They preferred real, whereas most of the guys were looking at the dresses and hairstyles, preferring glamour.

I was also a bit disappointed with the responses to my acts. Almost everyone in the audience had no idea who I was. What little fan club I had was still in Midtown or somewhere back in the Virginia Highlands neighborhood, so even as I walked through the audience between numbers, everyone was a stranger. It was a challenge to be working with well known entertainers when I was the least known, or in this case, not known. I felt overly scrutinized, and the first week was difficult. I pondered on a gimmick or some way to stand out so that people might remember me or at least talk about me. In Midtown, our gang was recognized, and if not admired or loathed, at
least they knew who we were. I needed something. The right number, the perfect costume, maybe new hair. Just something. My hot pants, tied up shirt and laced up boots would be an image that wouldn’t last long on the big stage.

The Friday of the second weekend after our show opened, Larry and I went to Lenox Mall. It was still more of a strip mall then, but nonetheless, I had been paid and I was looking for a new outfit for the weekend and Lenox was the place to go. We just happened to walk by a pet store when I saw the cutest puppy in the window.

“Larry, it’s so adorable,” I said touching the puppy through the window. “Let’s go inside.”

We walked around in the store, fighting the urge to take home a kitten or puppy, when I saw a boa constrictor. It hit me right then and there. A boa constrictor in my act.

“Have you lost your mind?” Larry asked as if I really had gone loony.

“It’s perfect!” I said. “There’s a song called Jungle Fever and this would be perfect with it.” Larry stared at me.

“And where you gonna keep it?”

“In the apartment. Where else?” There was a pause and Larry rolled his eyes like there would be no need to dispute my decision. He had known me long enough to know that if I had made up my mind, there was no going back.

We soon departed the store with a six foot boa constrictor all coiled up in a burlap bag. We then proceeded through the mall to find the music and then cloth for the costume, all along with the snake in the bag as if it were no big deal to go shopping with a boa. No one questioned what was in the bag that I clutched to my side. We rushed home where I spent a short time learning the song…it was mostly moans and groans, and then I ripped the material into strips to make a Raquel Welch style prehistoric costume.

Herman was petrified knowing there was a snake in the apartment. Larry was not too comfortable with the idea either. And for me, I didn’t like snakes, nor did I dislike them. I was also terrified and I peaked in the bag every now and then, making eye contact with the beady-eyed creature. Am I really going to do this, I’d ask myself. What if that fucker bites my hand? Would it hurt? Would it let go?

That night I kept my act a secret. Number one, I didn’t want to alarm anyone that there was a snake in the dressing room, not sure of the panic that it might create; and secondly, I wanted it to be a surprise. I wanted to shock.

I was backstage holding the burlap bag waiting for my music to start. I should have been trying to go over the words to the song in my head, or making sure my new costume was covering all that needed to be covered. Instead, I was standing there building up the nerve to put my hand in the bag and pull the snake out. Hell, I hadn’t even rehearsed what I’d do with the reptile once I got it out of the bag.

The music started, and without hesitation I put my hand in the bag, pulled out the snake, and proceeded to sashay my way onto the stage. The crowd went wild. The adrenaline was running through my body. I had not rehearsed this, so suddenly I found myself improvising a snake act. For some reason, I quickly put the snake’s head into my mouth thinking it might look erotic. I
was about to gag from the thought of what I was doing. More applause. Then I came close to the front of the stage, held the creature by the tail, and then began slinging the poor boa as if it were a lasso. Patrons in the front row were on the floor, scared out of their wits, their heads bobbing and ducking as I made circles with what I’m sure was a dizzy and confused snake. I soon returned to the center of the back stage to hit my final pose. The number was over. The audience wanted more, so I did a short encore.

When I finally returned to the side stage to get my breath, I put the snake into its bag and tied it up. My first thought was that I had put its nasty head into my mouth and I began to spit on the floor. My second thought was I did it. I got their attention. Now they would talk about me. And they did.

In the 1970’s, J.R. Greenwell was a premiere headliner for many years at the Sweet Gum Head in Atlanta, GA, and performed as a female illusionist across the country. He later earned a Masters of Education at the University of Louisville, and now devotes his time as a queer writer creating plays and prose at his home in central Kentucky. He is the author of a memoir, *Teased Hair and the Quest for Tiaras*, and a collection of short fiction, *Who the Hell is Rachel Wells?* For more information on J.R. Greenwell visit his Web sit at http://www.jrgreenwellmga79.com/.

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LEAVING FLAT IRON CREEK

John S. Lloyd
White lines are on the mirrored top of a long coffee table in the living room. All the raver boys and girls are sitting on the couch, heads bent, noses snorting, not one of them asking what drug they’re taking.

DJ Oskar, who’s supposedly a big deal right now, shows up. Wes, the older gay dude I’m living with these days, knows a lot of people, mainly because he’s generous with drugs and gets friends into parties for free—but as I learned when I first moved in, it can come with a special price. He walks me around introducing me to people, or points at me when I’m across the room. I see his gay friends patting him on the back and I try to ignore it, take a couple pills someone has given me, and dance to the hardcore house DJ Oskar spins. But then I trip over some guy sitting cross-legged on the floor and fall over, landing on my side. No one asks if I’m okay, and I don’t get
up. Turning my head, I see Wes leading a boy who looks about 11 or 12 into the strobe-lit bedroom, a couple of the gay guys following and shutting the door behind them. The guy I’ve landed on nudges me. He doesn’t say anything, just pokes me a couple more times till I look up.

“Paul,” I say, recognizing him from school.

“Kyle Mason,” he says with a smile. “You look fucked up.”

“Aren’t you?” I ask, laughing uneasily.

“Just a little drunk. Everybody at school is talking about you, you know.”

“Really?”

“Uh yeah, dude. Your brother died just a couple years ago, and now you’ve bounced and you’re mom met with—”

“Wait, my mom?”

“Yeah, she came to the school and talked to everyone. She was showing your photo around, asking if anyone seen you.”

The chemically induced fun I was just having has morphed into nausea and a desperate need to vomit. I rush to the thankfully unoccupied bathroom to puke. I don’t know if it’s the drugs I’ve taken or the surprising news, but whatever it is, it’s making me spew chewed-up cereal, beer and bile. I keep heaving, but nothing else comes out. The hallucinating effects of the drugs kick in. I imagine myself as a skeleton covered with just a thin layer of skin, no blood underneath, the blood is gone, and there are no organs except for the heart, which doesn’t work anymore. It’s like a sun-dried tomato. But I bet it’s still a little moist, has a few drops of juice left, just enough for me to squish it. Nudge. Knock.

The door knocks, not really the door. Paul’s knocking, insisting on coming in. He doesn’t ask if I’m okay, just closes the door and sits on the edge of the tub, staring at me like I’m a new pet. Sticking my head in the sink, I open my mouth under the running water while examining him: his chubby cheeks, nice puffy lips, thin body, big clear eyes, their color I’m unsure of because it’s too dark in here; Wes replaced the regular bulb with a red one.

Paul’s always been part of the alternative crowd at school. Everyone thinks he’s a weirdo, but he’s hot so he gets away with it. Last I knew he was dating Courtney, one of the prettiest cheerleaders at Harding. He looked strange next to her, with his septum ring and baggy pants, dark clothing and dirty hair. I’ve always liked him, though. Not that we’ve ever spoken before tonight, but I’m not surprised he knows who I am; everyone knows me as Max’s little brother.

“So Mason, what are you doing all the way up here, and at Wesley’s no less?” I don’t answer right away because I’m busy envisioning my mom at our school, wondering how my old friend Fiona reacted to her speaking to the class.

Fiona. That fat bitch. She’s white but acts black, has her hair dyed black and pulled so tightly into a ponytail it’s as if she had a premature facelift. We were best friends, but that all ended on Rose Day at school. It’d ended well before that, actually. Whenever I’d say no to doing something with her or for her, she’d retaliate in some way. She was a big girl—and I mean huge—so it was good having her as an ally. Everyone was scared of her, and if anyone had fucked with me, she’d have fucked them up. But our so-called friendship came with a price, and when I told her I didn’t want to be her errand boy anymore, I found out just how much. She cut
me off completely, sealing the deal on Rose Day, a yearly event at our school when you secretly buy a rose for someone and they find out it’s you once they get it with a little note attached. The girls get the majority of the roses, the prettiest chicks competing for who has the most. It’s dumb. Fiona sent a rose to Ben, one of the most popular guys in our class who’d always said hi to me out of respect for Max, at least until he got the rose—the rose that Fiona had sent but signed my name. Ben no longer said hi to me. He and his friends would look at me across the parking lot and laugh. They wouldn’t beat me up, at least not while my brother’s friends were seniors. Maybe if I had stayed in school this year they’d have messed with me more—another good reason not to go home.

“I don’t know,” I say to Paul. “No one really cares, other than not having Rose Boy around.”

“Oh c’mon, dude,” he says, shrugging. “Everybody knows that Fiona chick sent the rose. She transferred to another school by the way.” It feels good to hear someone say they know the truth. I never took the time to deny the rumors, just let everyone believe what they wanted.

“Then why did all the guys talk shit?”

“Because you’re beautiful, and it makes them uncomfortable,” he says, looking me in the eye. A warm teddy bear hugs my stomach.

“Yeah right,” I say, touching my swollen cheek.

“You remind me of a monkey,” he says. “That’s why I love Courtney so much. I have a thing for monkeys.” I don’t know what that means, but the word “beautiful” sticks in my mind.

I’ve always just assumed I was ugly. Especially my nose. It’s too big, which is why I always sit in the backseat if there are other people in the car besides the driver. When I have to sit up front and there are people in back, I ride the whole trip with my chin resting on my left hand, the palm of it covering the side of my nose, so no one can see my profile.

There are monkeys in Paul’s hair. Jumping out of his greasy curls, they grab onto the shower curtain, hopping from one flower print to another till reaching the top, swinging off the rod and diving into the darkness behind the curtain. Paul is waving his hand in my face.

“Whoa, I’m tripping,” I mumble. He cups my face in his hands.

“It’s okay, dude,” he says, pressing his lips onto mine and opening our mouths.

It’s my first kiss. I mean, I had another first kiss, but it didn’t feel like this. I was thirteen, my girlfriend sixteen. It was this girl Amanda, a slut who’d done sex videos for money with the creepy crippled guy who lived next door to my mom’s; at least those were the rumors. She never fessed up, though. But regardless, she was a lot of fun—a crazy alcoholic drug whore everyone liked to be around. We made out in my basement a few months after Max died. She tasted like cigarettes. I had my hand up her shirt, my pointer finger tracing circles around her hard nipples, but I pulled back when she went down my pants, and she left in a huff. I lay in bed feeling like a failure, waiting to hear from her. Eventually, she called me that night. I heard a boy laughing in the background.

“Amanda?”

“Kyyyylllle,” she taunted. “I’m about to suck some cock.”

“Why are you doing this to me!” I yelled into the phone.
“I’m not. You did!” she said, hanging up in my face. This moment with Paul feels nothing like that, and I have no reservations. It’s my hand that’s creeping toward his crotch, and he’s the one stopping it. Pulling back, he licks his lips.

“Mm, vomit,” he says. Turning red, I cover my mouth with my hands and race back to the sink to rinse more, this time using toothpaste. He laughs out loud. “I’m only joking, dude. Can’t taste anything.”

Courtney comes to mind. She whips open the bathroom door, throws a disapproving look at him and eyes me with disgust. “What are you two doing in here? I knew it was true, Rose Boy! I’m telling everyone.” But she’s not really here. I ask him about her.

“I’m still with her, sort of, but kind of sick of it. Guess I just want to take a break for awhile…maybe chill with you again.”

“Yeah, I’m down,” I say, smiling. He stands, helping me to my feet. A line of frustrated partiers greets us when we open the bathroom door. Glancing at the clock on the wall, I realize it’s already after 6 a.m. The party is dying down. DJ Oskar’s gone. A mix tape is playing loudly from Wes’ expensive-looking stereo system. Paul’s holding my hand, guiding me toward the front door. “Wait, where are we going?”

“To my house,” he says. “You shouldn’t stay here.” He lives in Stratford, just one town over from my mom’s.

“What about your parents?”

“It’s just my dad and he doesn’t give a shit.”

“I don’t know.”

I hear loud banging noises coming from the bedroom, deep voices laughing, see the strobe light flashing underneath the door like someone’s in there getting electroshock treatments. Maybe it’s supposed to be this way. Maybe Paul came here to save me. The smoky loft, the ravers walking through the living room like lost souls, the demons in the bedroom torturing a child, Paul is a saint, an angel, and we fly away so quickly, drive away in his beat-up Toyota pickup so hastily, I forget my visor and bag of clothes.

* * *

The burning ash on the tip of the cigarette I’m holding matches the color of the rising sun reflected in the passenger-side mirror. There’s no one in the backseat so no need to hide my profile, but I sit sideways anyway in case Paul looks over. I need to remain the beautiful monkey in his eyes. My own eyes get heavy, I fall asleep.

* * *

I wake up to Paul screaming. We’re swerving all over the highway, horns from other cars honking. At first I think it’s ice on the road, but when I see smoke rising off his leg, a small fire on his jeans, I quickly realize my cigarette is the cause of the commotion; I must’ve dropped it when I nodded off. He pulls over in the emergency lane, runs from the car at lightning speed and jumps in a pile of leftover snow. I open my door and walk over, groggily. The hallucinating part of my trip is almost over, but I still feel dazed. He gives me an unhappy look as he stands, the hole in his jeans about the size of a tennis ball, so close to the crotch I can see through to his hairy thigh and the bulge in his tight white underwear.
“Sorry,” I say, unable to stop staring. I walk over to inspect the damage and check for burns. He steps back, doesn’t seem to want my hand near his dick. He says he’s fine, it only hurts a little, he just wants to get some sleep. As we walk back to the truck he throws his arm over my shoulder like a brother, chuckling a bit.

“These were my favorite jeans, dude!” he says, opening the door. I notice they’re just as dirty as mine, bet the oiliness helped ignite the fire. If I ever pulled something like this at home, my stepfather would’ve ripped me a new one. I’m Paul’s monkey, and his forgiveness makes me never want to go back.

* * *

The freezing wind coming off the water in Long Island Sound hits me in the face as we make our way from Paul’s truck to his family’s tiny beach house. It’s so small, basically a shack, reminds me of one of those hotdog stands on the beach in summer. Inside, the house is messy, but not dirty, just cluttered, which is to be expected considering how small it is.

His father’s sitting on the couch smoking a pipe. He looks like a drunk: fat, unshaven and cranky. He grumbles something at Paul who introduces him as Frank.

Frank stands, tipping an imaginary hat. “Seasons greetings. I’m going to bed,” he says, walking toward a room in the back of the house and shutting the door.

“Looks like he’s just getting home from a night of partying too,” I say. “Where’s your room?”

Paul points to the couch in the almost nonexistent living room, which is barely big enough to fit the loveseat and 13-inch TV in it. “Frank and I take turns in the bedroom, but I usually just let him have it. I like it out here.” He collapses on the laundry-covered couch, pats a cushion beside him. “C’mon, Mason. Let’s just sleep.”

Nervously, I sit down next to him. I’ve never slept so close to anyone, just those times when my old best friend and I played that pretend-rape game and I got my first hard-ons, but after we’d finished playing, he would always move a few feet away to sleep on his own. Grabbing me by the waist, Paul pulls me down, draping his right arm over me. He falls asleep and starts snoring almost immediately. With Frank’s loud wheezing in the bedroom, it sounds like they’re singing me a lullaby, or maybe I’m still high. “Whatever,” I whisper to myself, feeling safe and content for the first time since Max died.

Christopher Stoddard is the Brooklyn-based author of the novels _Limiters_ and _White, Christian_. _White, Christian_ was chosen by the American Library Association for their 2012 list of commendable LGBT literature. His writing has also been published by Lambda Literary and Go Deeper Press. In December 2012, he and artist Gio Black Peter released the limited edition literary/arts magazine, _Satanica_.

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a novel by
Jameson Currier

“Complex.”
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“Courageous.”
Next magazine

“Extraordinary.”
Lambda Literary

“Marvelous.”
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To Come Home To
Henry Alley

I get to leave, Garrett decided, as he looked out the morning window, and hearing Ethan stirring naked in their bed. Outside, the birds flew in toward the feeder in sprints of color, red, yellow, gray, and a chic gay mauve. Garrett had packed his bags the night before, and although the forecast had said March rain for the next five days, here was sunlight flying in like the birds, brightening the grass, grown lush in all the wet Oregon spring, with the rose bushes rising up all around their house, with curves of red coming out of the green canes.

From March until this January, Garrett had come to see his own life as one long overcast day, with dots of rain. But this was a change now. For he was getting dots of sun at the moment—and unforecast, too.

Which Garrett could see, as he peeked into the bedroom, where Ethan was lying with his naked chest, a strong one, in full view, in a dash of sun, with the covers thrown off. He was no doubt
spent from yesterday’s (Sunday’s) double performances. Garrett had no intention of waking him. They had agreed the night before, he would leave without saying goodbye if Ethan didn’t wake up. Garrett had said he would just be gone a week—“possibly two”—to help his stepbrother paint interiors in his forthcoming Bed and Breakfast up on the Olympic Peninsula. “Oh, those breathtaking views,” Ethan had said, affirming that he, too, had been to Port Townsend, and, typically, outlining what Garrett’s impressions were likely to be, even though Garrett had had more experience himself with what Ethan was talking about.

“Yes,” Garrett had answered. “I’ve seen them. I’ve been there before.”

“But have you seen them in early spring?” Ethan asked. “The way you’ll be seeing them now? There’s a huge cloud which comes right over the Strait of Juan de Fuca. It just hangs there while you’re looking at it through rain, and even in your rain, it turns gold!”

“Yes,” Garrett had answered. “I’ve seen them. I’ve been there before.”

“Is that right?” Ethan asked, playing a surprise, because he was too tired to say he’d witnessed that experience many times before.

Often, standing in the midst of Ethan’s expansiveness, Garrett, slender man, would forget who he was. He would forget, sometimes, that Port Townsend was going to be his, not Ethan’s, vacation, and that he was on his way, if his plans went right, to ending this with Ethan.

A house painter temporarily off season, Garrett had been with Ethan for over seven years, with Ethan always the talker, the social secretary, the original owner of the house, the icebreaker, with Garrett almost mute behind him—particularly at parties. Then, a year ago, Ethan, ironically a psychologist and researcher, had been stricken with depression, started drinking, and then lost his job, taking Garrett with him on that long overcast day. But since auditioning and winning a part in the local Full Monty, Ethan had started climbing out of his pit, particularly after the performances had begun, to regional rave reviews. Which meant that for Garrett the long overcast day was over, too. It was a promising morning like this one—and he was getting away! His first time out of this cage in twelve months, because Ethan was finally stable enough to be on his own.

Garrett, finished with his coffee, was startled by the birds again. Looking over toward the corner of the fence, he saw that the stone St. Joseph and Child had fallen face down in the mud. And the birds were becoming clamorous.

“Leaving now, Dear?” Garrett could hear from the bedroom. Somehow, he felt caught.

He went in and Ethan drew Garrett’s small, well-made body towards him. The man was a mound of warmth. Garrett could smell the cabaret on him from the night before.

“How did the performance go?” Garrett asked. “I don’t even remember you coming in.”

“Last night the ladies threw money on the stage. The man who played the big stripper Keno must have made fifty dollars.”

The character Ethan played was actually named “Ethan” as well and so he was known as “Ethan as Ethan,” affectionately in the press (which was more than familiar with him over the years) and on the boards. He was loved, and the women (and presumably, secretly some of the men) in the audience enjoyed seeing him take off all his clothes in the final number, for he definitely had a great body for his age of fifty-something years.
“And you?” Garrett said, smoothing the almost seamless Aquiline face. “Did you get a lot of bills?”

“The dollars were gone before I could even bend down. All the other guys are younger than I am.” His hands were in Garrett’s hair, caressing his mustache. The moment he felt the fingers, Garrett wanted to get away. Ethan became intuitive when the touching arrived. But, nevertheless, here it was—“You will come back, Garrett, won’t you?”

“What do you expect me to do?” Garrett asked. “Start painting Victorian houses full-time in Port Townsend? That’s hardly my style.”

The complete failure of this came back to Garrett immediately.

It wasn’t a surprise, then, when, as he still lay on the pillow, with hands around his partner, Ethan blinked with a few rising tears. “I mean, you won’t leave,” he said.

“It’s going to be hard enough to go on to the big time” (the show was moving from the downtown cabaret to two weeks at the arts proscenium built for the county—called the Coliseum) “without having you to come home to.”

The plea did not touch Garrett, who would have stayed on only if he had had someone to nurse. Garrett had been making secret plans to move out for some time, and only absolute obligation would keep him here. He’d known since Ethan’s depression that it was over between them, and pledged to himself that when Ethan was well enough to get on his feet, he would rent his old place once more and take his things with him. His former landlord had told him the apartment above the photography studio would be vacant again in May. He loved that special alcove. It had those bookcases right by the window looking down into busy Willamette Street. Ethan was well enough now to be featured in a hit show which eclipsed everything going on not only in Ethan’s life but Garrett’s as well. That was sign enough Ethan could go out on his own. Three weeks ago, on opening night, Garrett had sat in the cabaret audience, waiting for Ethan to strip, and heard Ethan sing, “Did I capture your imagination?” with the women in the audience yelling back, “Oh yes you did!” and decided, I’ll give Ethan until closing night, and then that’s it. As he sat on the bed now, with his arms around Ethan, Garrett could only say, “I’ll be back. I promise.”

“Back in time for the cast party? It’ll be a week from Sunday.”

“I’ll try,” Garrett answered. He kissed him lightly. “Now go back to sleep. I know you were up late.”

“And Garrett,” Ethan called, now that Garrett was out with his bags in the living room, “I promise I’ll look for work once the show is over. I really will.”

“Yep,” Garrett said.

Hoping Ethan was soothed now—for the nurse inside him really wanted Ethan to sleep—he took his red, very Spartan-looking backpack out to his glistening Ford pickup. Dangling from the top of his rearview mirror, a spangled necklace of crystal sent out what Garrett called “the pretty colors” of the rainbow, refracted everywhere. Garrett felt the whole promise of the seven-hour drive—the great potential of March—at the center of his forty-year-old body, the one that was so well articulated on ladders of tremendous height and which crouched so gingerly when he had to pull away rain pipes or do carpentry on very difficult spots. Coming back in for his sack lunch, he moved cat-like to the back door, and went out to the far corner of the fence, where, beneath the leafing apple tree, the stone St. Joseph and child still lay in the mud, also in a spotlight of
sun. The grass was silvery with coldness and the birds, frightened from the feeder, answered in sharp calls. He righted the saint and hosed him off, until his body and his child’s shone white again. The visage of the patriarch seemed to regain the smile he had lost on his whimsical bearded face.

Inside once more to get the mud off his hands, Garrett saw to his relief that Ethan was sleeping again. He pulled away from the house feeling he had left it in as good a condition as possible, had left Ethan, hopefully, in a settled mood. He couldn’t wait to get off I-5 at Olympia and on to 101, with its marvelous views of the oyster coves along Lilliwop and Potlatch, and of fifties motels with painted pink lawn chairs lying out in the intermittent rain, off season, waiting to be made use of again. Then his favorite—the old green power plant, coming out of nowhere with its huge arched windows. Pedro, his Mexican stepbrother, would be waiting for him in Port Townsend.

*   *   *

Garrett would always remember that he had been up on a ladder when he had seen Ethan through the triangular window coming up the Port Townsend street in a strange car. Garrett was in his white painter’s overalls and brushing carefully around the corners of the glass—a light seafoam green. Pedro was right below.

So this was it, Garrett considered, seeing Ethan get out of the car in front of the Victorian house—soon to be open to the public and blooming with wistaria.

“A man is here,” Pedro said. He was standing up from painting around a heat vent.

Garrett didn’t answer.

“I said a man is here.”

“I heard you,” Garrett said at last, coming down the ladder.

He touched Pedro’s arm. “Listen, this is my partner, Ethan. All I can say is try to be patient.” Pedro knew his stepbrother was gay, but traditionally Garrett did not share the details of this private life with family. Pedro only knew vaguely of “partner.”

Pedro looked tired. “I’m patient! I’m patient!”

Carolina, Pedro’s wife, young, wiry, and sharp-witted, opened the door before Ethan could knock. On the porch, Ethan smiled, charming. “I’m glad you people are the only new bed-and-breakfast in town,” he said. “All I had to do was ask down at the garden store.” He seemed too shy to kiss Garrett, and Garrett felt the same.

Garrett made introductions.

“Well,” Ethan said, laughing a little, “I hope all of you don’t mind the interruption but I wondered if I could talk with Garrett here for a few minutes. I’m actually on a tight timetable. I need to be back in Eugene by 7 p.m.”

The wind was bouncing clouds swiftly over the town. The shadows flew in through the triangular window. For a second the faces of the group were patched with light and darkness. Garrett thought of the necklace, hanging from his rearview mirror.

“You need to be back in Eugene by 7 p.m., Sir?” Pedro asked, looking at his watch. “You hardly have time to do that now.”

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“Don’t send him off before he has had a chance to sit down,” Carolina said.

“I didn’t mean that,” Pedro answered—and almost stepped towards Ethan to touch him. “I meant—”

Garrett felt himself in the midst of a very familiar position where everything that was happening was his business, but even so he had nothing to say, or at least, was at a loss for words. So everyone else was taking over for him. At last he said, “Ethan and I can go for a walk. Just let me wash up and get out of my monkey suit.”

In the one bedroom where they all changed their clothes, Garrett could hear Ethan ask if he could use their facilities, and while he was gone, he overheard Carolina say to Pedro, “Hey, you’ve got to be nice to this man.”

“I was nice to this man.”

“Well, then, don’t try to strong-arm him out the door,” she replied. “He’s the boyfriend of the man who raised you.”

“I know that, I know that.” Pedro waited. “You know I love Garrett. But him being a *pato* and then we’ve got another *pato* and we’re in trouble. People in Port Townsend will start thinking we cater to nothing but these guys even before we open.”

“Just be polite and let them talk it out. They’re grown adults.”

“Si, si, *señora*.”

“And invite him to lunch,” Carolina insisted.

“Yes, if you make it,” Pedro said.

“Oh, go to hell,” she answered playfully.

When Garrett came back out, he met up with Ethan, just emerging from the newly remodeled bathroom. He felt unsettled from the conversation he had secretly heard, yet proud that even Carolina acknowledged he had raised Pedro.

“That’s some tile you have in there,” Ethan said, ingratiatingly. “This is an impressive place.” He looked at the high ceiling, presumably in awe. “When do you expect to open?”

“In one month,” Pedro said. “We’re not far.”

“Good luck.”

“Good luck to you,” Pedro answered as the two of them went out the door.

*   *   *

Garrett steered them in the direction of Chetzemoka Park. From there they could walk along the beach. He remembered someone at the coffee shop speaking of there being a low tide this morning.

“What are you doing with a weird car?” Garrett asked, trying to start off on a commanding note. Ethan seemed surprised by the tone. “Do you know where we’re going? I don’t remember the park being this way.”
“Yes, it’s this way,” Garrett said. He could see the high pines which preluded the park, and which gave him his sense of compass in other parts of this neighborhood.

“Oh, yes, now I see. I’ve been here before.”

“Yes, yes, many times you’ve told me that,” Garrett said, exasperated.

The energy behind Garrett’s voice gave Ethan pause. Garrett knew it was coming from the genie inside him, which had been fully released on the drive up here.

They began descending the slope of the park. Hyacinths, white and pink and blue and even near-red made curving rows eastward, in the direction of the sea and Whidbey Island. Their perfume was overwhelming.

“I came in a weird car,” Ethan said at last, “because I partly flew up here. It was the fastest I could come. I did Sea-Tac, and then I rented a car. I had to do it quickly, because I have rehearsal tonight. We, in fact, have rehearsal all week until the first performance on Friday.”

They were among the picnic tables, and below them, there was a bower of roses, spent from last year and all vines with emerging red leaves. It led to a more steeply descending path. They went beneath the arch, and for a while were silent, because the passage was too narrow for two.

When they came to the beach, which was quiet and glimmering, Ethan said more confidingly, “I just had to come. I didn’t have your phone number.”

“Well, there is no phone, not yet.”

“And I needed to talk to you. I wish you believed in cell phones.” Ethan touched his arm, as the smell of salt, in the wake of the hyacinth, overwhelmed them. It was like Neptune routing out some wood nymphs.

Garrett, frightened, propped his foot on a log and stared at him. “Okay.”

“I need you to come home by Friday night. Which would mean you packing on Thursday.”

“And why Friday?” Garrett asked. “Everything’s planned for me to leave on Sunday.”

“Because the director is on my case about me not screwing up. I screwed up big time two nights ago by forgetting to rotate the set, and I screwed up again last night—not as big, but I still did. Alex savaged my whole ‘You Walk with Me’ number in front of everybody. If I knew you were going to be there for every performance—and I’ll pay for the tickets—I just feel sure I could make it. This is big for me because it’s the first time I’ve been out of the depression.”

Garrett sat down on the log and stared down at the kelp and pebbles as though searching for agates. “Why is it so important? Why? Every performance? Are you kidding? I like the Full Monty but I’ll be nuts myself if I have to go through three more shows.”

He regretted saying “nuts myself,” as if Ethan was nuts. Which, in fact, he was.

“Just this once,” Ethan said. “This is my first project since I was sick. I need a success in my life as a new beginning. After opening night at the cabaret and looking at you, you were my success.”

“But you did that for three weeks running. I wasn’t there every night.”

“But this is different—this is five hundred people staring down at me.”
Garrett held up his hand. “Look, Ethan, there’s something I need to tell you. I can’t just up and
leave Pedro the way I would a passing acquaintance. He’s like a son I promised to help out. And
he’s been harassed by the government at times. Because of his connections to Cuba. His family
of origin is rather renegade. He needs to get this work done if he and Carolina are going to make
it.”

Ethan stared at him. “You never told me Pedro was this important to you. Is he more important
than I am?”

Garrett got up, afraid of what he would say. “I don’t know. And I think maybe we should go
back.”

They returned through the park in silence, Garrett still uncharacteristically leading the way. The
rose bower made Garrett think of weddings, ironically. The clouds continued to flicker over the
trees of the park, some of them already vibrant white and pink, as if flourishing in the sea air.

“I want you to come back,” Ethan said at last, “because I want you back. To be in house. It isn’t
just having you in the audience for security. I feel like you’re checking out on me, and I want
you to come home to.”

Garrett was in an orange dress shirt. He looked particularly sexy and shapely at that moment,
with the gnarled sea-ridden apple trees of the neighborhood behind him. “I am checking out,
Ethan. It’s been clear it hasn’t been working ever since you got well.”

“Think again,” Ethan said.

*   *   *

The cast party was tinkling, rattling, unsettled. A full two weeks at the Coliseum and now the
show was over. The show had been so successful, it had been moved there from the cabaret. Five
times the seating. The party was at the home of one of the actors rather than at the director’s. The
director, in fact, had been so tired from the final matinee and the striking of the set, he had gone
home early. Still the time change had just arrived so as to give them an extra hour of evening
light, and the pre-Easter weather was kind to the patio. People rushed by Ethan with the alcohol
he was forbidden to touch. A rose bush was leafing out just over his shoulder, as he sat up
against the brick wall, with a perfect view of the street through the parting in the hedge. He
didn’t much mind not being able to drink—he only wished Garrett would come as promised so
the man could see that he had gotten by without him.

This whole last week had been filled with March rain. He’d seen it as an omen. Ethan had
watched the birds bathing in it on the lawn while he had been waiting for emails and letters and
phone calls to come in. He was looking for a job once more. Nothing arrived, including Garrett,
who had insisted on staying on the additional week anyway. A promise to Pedro was a promise.
So Ethan had that phrase in his head. So he had lived with the rain and the second week of lonely
nights of rehearsals and performances down here in Eugene. By day, it was water city, rain city,
and an indifferent voiceless dazzling landscape of white spirea and weeping Oriental pink plum
and naked coral maple. His pink camellia bush, now opened with blooms just outside his living
room window, was his companion, as this rose bush was now. A promise was a promise. And
then Garrett had told him it was over.

People at the party were smiling at him. He had not blown the performances as he thought he
would, even though Garrett had not been there to come home to. He had done all right.
Nevertheless, he was aware he was an amateur actor in his fifties who had to carry a few idiot prompt cards, one of them a small three by five which listed his steps for the “Cha-Cha” number, where, doubling as an extra, he had to dance with Vera, a lovely twenty-two-year-old with emerald eyes, natural red hair, and a bosom large enough to intimidate even a gay man. The other idiot prompt, also designed by himself, told him where he had to be on stage at any given moment, what clothes he should be wearing, where backstage they should be hanging, and what lines cued him to be out in front of the audience again. He was getting old and starting to lose his actor’s muscle memory. Fortunately, the backstage was lit like an alleyway with small, widely spaced lights, and he could lean beneath a “lamp post” and look. However, when the show shifted to the larger theatre, he discovered more difficulties—three different black layers to the backstage, in whose maze he struggled to get to the proper stations at the proper times and glance at his notes. Plus at the end of the booking, he had to double as Tony Giordano, the strip club owner in *The Full Monty*, since the original player, as old as himself, had fallen off the stage during rehearsal at the cabaret the final week there, and there was no one else, in terms of the massive body type which the director envisioned, to fill in.

Still, the director had proven pleased with everyone, including him, in this local staging. Ethan had not been brilliant—that was evident. He never could do harmony on “You Walk with Me,” guilty as he was of what his voice coach termed “codependent singing”—being overpowered into the vocal line of his partner. Not like the men who had played the other major parts. He had overheard Alex the Director inviting them to audition for *Evita*, which was coming up next, and he had been distinctly not included. He had in fact been so mediocre the final week, he wondered if he would even receive an email about the next tryouts of any kind.

Young Vera, all emerald eyes, came up. She had a photo of the two of them together, which she wanted him to sign. For some reason, he wrote, “To my favorite dance partner, Vera. Love, Ethan.” After weeks of being in rehearsals and her being indifferent towards him, she had actually stared at last into his eyes as he had stood waiting with her on opening night, their clasped hands held out in freeze position just before the stage lit up and they went on for the Cha Cha number. “To my favorite partner,” she read aloud now, and kissed him.

He got up at last to do a little last mixing at the party, but just at that moment, he heard talk of everybody watching a DVD of this afternoon’s final performance in the host’s living room. Vera came back up and said as much.

“I’ll only watch it if you hold my hand, all the way through,” he told her.

Her pink skin brightened. She smiled through her make-up. “Sorry, but my boyfriend’s here.”

He smiled back, wondering how long he should wait for Garrett, with that DVD going on in the next room. He remembered where he had been a year ago last March, sitting on the sofa in his major clinical depression, looking out the window on the watch for Garrett’s pick-up, trying to guess where Garrett would take him that night, because he, Ethan, was too immobilized and panicked in his depressive self-pity to drive or even know what he should do from one minute to the next. He had realized even then that his funk had been accentuated by his letting Garrett take care of him—doing the house, the chores, and carrying the financial load by being the one to have the job. Then the truck would appear like a red star on the crest of the hill, and Ethan would feel saved. It had been the same on opening night back at the cabaret. One look at Garrett’s profoundly smiling eyes as the man sat alone at one of the remoter tables, the candlelight flickering on his strong house painter’s wrists, and Ethan knew he could sing “You Walk with
Me” with his musical boyfriend Malcolm, even coming in on an “F” (although without harmony) which for him was like a leap over the World Trade Center, even so. Thinking of all of this, still he inwardly conceded to Ethan the split was inevitable. If this was what had kept them together, nothing was worth saving. As a matter of fact, truth to tell, he’d been planning to bail on Garrett just before the depression had come. He’d wanted to sow some wild oats, get some freedom dating around, but then he’d gone under, and all he could do was cling to this capable, handy, sensitive, and caring man, who was ultimately sexy in his own way.

He could hear the DVD going on in the next room, could even hear some notes he was singing, but he didn’t want to endure another critique of his performance, with everyone laughing and drunk to boot.

He looked above the slope of the rose bush, and there was Garrett, getting out of his truck. He could see from the ladders and paintbrushes, as well as from the tools for gardening, that he had come direct from Port Townsend. His own heart was up.

Garrett was at the door smiling. Ethan met him at the threshold. “You look like everything went all right this weekend,” Garrett said. “This weekend and last.” They hadn’t communicated since Ethan’s sudden visit.

“It was fine,” Ethan answered. But it wasn’t, not really.

“And you’re not drinking?” Garrett asked.

“Not drinking.”

“And taking your medication?”

“And taking my medication,” Ethan said, opening his arms for a hug. It was clear in the embrace how inevitable it was they talk like this. Inevitable, even though the focus on him was the last thing, now, he wanted. Whereas he had always demanded it before, made Garrett his groupie and ward.

“And you?” Ethan asked at last. They had hugged so long, even the drunker members of the cast were staring. “How was your trip?

Garrett looked surprised that Ethan would even ask. “It was good. And we got all the work done. Pedro and his wife will be able to open their place on time.”

“Congratulations,” Ethan said. “And it was good to meet your brother, who seemed so much like a son and—your ‘daughter-in-law’?—”

Garrett nodded. “Yes, that’s about what they are. Sort of. And it felt good to be needed, really needed, although I think this is going to be it. They really do seem ready to launch out on their own.”

The word “partner” now flew around the cast, as he led Garrett toward the food. “Partner! So this is Ethan’s partner.” The more militantly gay members were particularly pleased.

“I’m glad we’ll have a few days to be home together,” Ethan said.

Garrett nodded.

“And you’re still sure about moving out?”

“I am. I’ve taken even more time to think about it,” Garrett said.
Showing Garrett the heavily laden table, Ethan considered how he would be getting all the solitary views of rain again, along with the statue of St. Joseph and child. The pressure of the empty house would be more than enough to move him toward finding a job, and a job it would have to be, because now he’d have to carry all the mortgage himself once again. And he suddenly felt as if he was leaving home and entering the world for the first time.

Henry Alley is a Professor Emeritus of Literature in the Honors College at the University of Oregon. He has four novels, *Through Glass* (1979), *The Lattice* (1986), *Umbrella of Glass* (1988), and *Precincts of Light* (2010), which explores the Measure Nine crisis in Oregon, when gay and lesbian people were threatened with being made silent. His stories have appeared in journals over the past forty years.
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.”
—David Rooney, *The New York Times*

“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.”
—Curt Schleier, *The Forward*
“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

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

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“Intellectual, emotional and sexual.”
—The New York Times
A Conversation with Christopher Stoddard
Interview by Jameson Currier

Four years ago Brooklyn-based author Christopher Stoddard gained literary notoriety with *White, Christian*, a compelling debut novel about a twenty-year-old self-destructive “lost boy” on a downward spiral of crack and sex. He has now returned with a new novel, *Limiters*, a disturbing portrait of Kyle Mason, a sixteen year old in panicked flight from a dysfunctional family in Connecticut. Once an honors student who loved to read, Kyle has run away from home and seeks refuge in the underground rave culture—his only way of avoiding the trauma of the murder of his older brother, which has thrown his grieving mother into a shrewish, overly critical frame of mind.

Stoddard’s new novel is as dark, humorous, and fierce as his first, an addictive page turner of sparse prose and vividly depicted scenes. Author Jameson Currier recently spoke with Stoddard about the release of his latest novel.
Currier: Tell me about your new novel, *Limiters*.

Stoddard: After a sixteen-year-old boy’s brother dies, he flees a dysfunctional home life, searching for a new family amongst homeless ravers, predatory adults, and abusive addicts. It's a story about a teenager whose adult future seems inevitably doomed by unusually tragic circumstances.

Currier: The narrator of *Limiters* certainly has a wild youth. How autobiographical is the novel?

Stoddard: Déjà vu! I was asked the same question about my first novel, *White, Christian*. All I’ll say is, I’ve used some personal experience as inspiration, but if *Limiters* were autobiographical, I’d have called it a memoir.

Currier: Where did you grow up? Were you part of the rave culture of urban Connecticut?

Stoddard: I did grow up in Connecticut, and participated in the rave culture in all of New England, often traveling three or four hours just to attend a party in New Hampshire or Massachusetts, only to turn the car around at nine or ten in the morning, with a car packed full of intoxicated buddies, and make my way back—hoping I didn’t get pulled over or fall asleep at the wheel!

Currier: When and why and how did you end up in New York/Brooklyn?

Stoddard: I moved to New York to act when I was nineteen, which I did for the first three of the eleven years I’ve lived here.

Currier: Tell me about your journey as an author. When did you start writing? As a teen? Did you do an MFA program or were you part of a writing group or workshop?

Stoddard: Well, at the same time I was acting, I was writing (had been since I was a teen), and after performing in an Off Broadway theater company for a bit, I realized the stage was not for me—I had a strong need to express myself creatively, but I felt more when I wrote than I ever did when I acted. I eventually met a literary agent, who was interested in a very rough draft of *White, Christian*. And from then on that was my focus. He hired a few editors to work with me, eventually getting me involved with Bruce Benderson, who became my mentor and taught me everything I know. I have a Bachelor’s in English now, but at the time my first book was published, I was a high school dropout with a GED and hadn’t finished college.

Currier: How has your New York experiences shaped you as a writer?

Stoddard: In New York, I’ve made the best kind of friends—the legendary underground artists and writers who’ve kept culture alive in this city. Their bold, transgressive work and strong influence on me, has made me less inhibited as a writer; I no longer shy away from subjects about which I’m passionate that the mainstream deems too provocative for publication.
**Currier:** How long did it take you to write *Limiters*? What is your writing process? Are you at work on something daily? Or do you binge and write it all at once?

**Stoddard:** Even though it’s pretty short, *Limiters* took me roughly two years to write. I don’t write daily; I can sometimes go a month without writing. It comes in spurts that sometimes last a week, or even a day every few weeks.

**Currier:** What writers influenced you?

**Stoddard:** There are several writers who’ve influenced me, but the two who stand out the most are Hubert Selby Jr. and Louis-Ferdinand Céline. In *Limiters* I’ve married Selby Jr.’s raw writing style with Céline’s nihilistic ideas; I have a passion for literature that touches on the violence and bleakness of humanity.

**Currier:** Like Christian White in *White, Christian*, Kyle Mason’s teen years heavily influence his adult experiences. There is a coda to *Limiters* where Kyle is in his mid-twenties and living in New York. Kyle has progressed from a wild, teen runaway to a reckless sex-addicted adult. What do you think readers will take away from this? Has Kyle changed? Is he healing or is he headed downward?

**Stoddard:** In both books I’m not writing about redemption—these people are not meant to be redeemed. The sentimentality we find in so many books and films these days doesn’t often translate to real life. My books are character studies of that truth, taken to the extreme. In *Limiters*, readers will experience the domino effect of each stage in Kyle’s life, how every circumstance in every year has a consequence on the next, and the next. At the start of the second half of *Limiters*, Kyle explains the book’s theme in a daydream:

“In a cab feeling desperate for something, but I don’t know what. Whizzing by buildings, people and cars, I’m imagining destroying them all as easily as flicking a train of dominoes with my finger. The brick walls of this one building I’m passing are smashing into the washers and dryers in the laundromat on the first floor, obliterating the customers waiting around, soapy water washing away the blood. Other buildings are collapsing on pedestrians, bodies splattering on the pavement the way those of rats and pigeons sometimes do when the dumb pests try crossing a busy avenue and end up squashed by a car. Concrete sidewalks and potholed asphalt streets are caving in, angular pieces of rock slicing and dicing the subway riders in this hollow city.”

He’s subconsciously alluding to the chaos of existence. Nothing has meaning; there is no fate, only random acts of bad luck and violence, smoothed over by distraction: money, sex, love, and drugs in whatever form.

**Currier:** Do you expect to write more about Kyle?

**Stoddard:** I don’t. I believe there are striking similarities between Kyle in *Limiters* and Christian in *White, Christian*, but as I grow as an individual and writer, the narrators of my books evolve—or devolve—into someone new. I suppose both protagonists are alter egos of mine, but once I get them out of my head, a new voice emerges.
Currier: What books are you currently reading?
Stoddard: Nausea by Jean-Paul Sartre, Against Marriage by Bruce Benderson, and Black Boy by Richard Wright.

Currier: What are you working on now? What are your current new projects?
Stoddard: A new novel is brewing in my head, but I’ve not written much since finishing Limiters. More will come when it’s ready.

Currier: What do you like best about living in Brooklyn?
Stoddard: I live in Greenpoint; I guess I like it because it has a less corporate feel than Manhattan does these days. And I enjoy the quiet, as does my dog, Monte. But in all honesty, if I had my way, I’d have moved to Berlin years ago.

Christopher Stoddard is the Brooklyn-based author of the novels Limiters and White, Christian. White, Christian was chosen by the American Library Association for their 2012 list of commendable LGBT literature. His writing has also been published by Lambda Literary and Go Deeper Press. In December 2012, he and artist Gio Black Peter released the limited edition literary/arts magazine, Satanica.

Jameson Currier is the author of nine books of fiction and the editor of Chelsea Station Magazine.
Chezla Station

Death by Silver
by Melissa Scott and Amy Griswold
Lethe Press
978-1590210550
272 pages. Paperback, $18

Reviewed by Keith Glaeske

In a magical Victorian London both like and unlike our own, Ned Mathey, a newly-graduated metaphysician just up from Oxford, is licensed to find curses, remove curses, and use magic to solve any of a myriad host of usual (and not so usual) problems. Eager to build up his fledgling practice, he accepts (with misgivings) an Edgar Nevett as his client—the father of the bully who tormented Ned at boarding school. Ned assures him that his family silver is in no way cursed, and that should have been the end of it; but then Edgar Nevett is murdered magically by an enchanted silver candlestick. To repair the damage to his professional reputation, Ned enlists the aid of Julian Lynes, a private detective and companion from boarding school days (and who was also bullied by Nevett’s son). Together, the two men enter London’s criminal and sexual undergounds in an effort to solve this murder mystery; along the way, they make peace with their pasts, and navigate the emotional minefield of their budding romance.

The above synopsis only hints at the total romp that is Death by Silver, written by Melissa Scott and Amy Griswold. Scott is no stranger to the combination of murder mystery and budding romance between two men, as fans of her Astreiant novels know; however, even given these superficial similarities to her earlier novels (co-written with her late partner Lisa A. Barnett), Scott has not simply re-written them in Victorian drag. Here she and Griswold have joined forces to deftly weave together a murder mystery, Ned’s and Julian’s experiences at boarding school (remembered in flashbacks), and the development of their rekindled relationship.

Given the dual male protagonists, in a quasi-Victorian England, comparisons to Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson are no doubt inevitable; unfortunately, never having read Doyle, I can’t speak to that. Having said that, I’m pretty sure that Doyle never explicitly presented Holmes and Watson as lovers (which hasn’t stopped readers from trying to find it in the subtext). For all that the attraction between Ned and Julian is obvious from the first page that we meet them, it is never presented in a gratuitous or vulgar way. Indeed, in keeping with the milieu, it unfolds in an understated, British’ manner.

Another very obvious difference is, of course, the presence of magic. Metaphysics is presented as a scientific system, codified and studied, much like any other branch of the natural sciences, and integrated into almost all aspects of Victorian life and society. For example, it can cure a hangover, or used as part of a lock mechanism, or to secure (or lose) a potential suitor. For all its omnipresence, it still is a force not to be tampered with (hence the need for trained metaphysicians such as Ned); much of the humor (and horror) in the novel results from the

CHELSEA STATION
mishaps caused by people with just enough knowledge to be dangerous. The novel also hints that metaphysics may be larger than the system imposed upon it: one of the more interesting supporting characters, Ned's secretary Miss Frost, is shown to have a knowledge of metaphysics, which she learned at a women's college, but quite different from what Ned learned at Oxford. Hopefully, the magical system will be explored in a bit more depth in future novels.

Readers who enjoy a little romance with their mystery, or a little mystery with their romance, will definitely enjoy *Death by Silver*; likewise, readers who prefer a more magical, rather than technological, steampunk should also pick up *Death by Silver*. As an added bonus, readers are invited to visit matheyandlynes.tumblr.com for more bits of Victoriana and updates on the future adventures of these two likable detectives.

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*.
The Old Lecher’s DVD Collection

What would the old lecher be without DVD? Beautiful boys would pass on the street, shimmer in the classroom, flex behind the counter, always clothed, always distant, entirely unattainable. But this shining disc opens the doors to Paradise, where beauty’s always naked, always fucking. Whisper the names of the brief demigods: Logan McCree, Ricky Sinz, Steve Cruz, Scott Tanner, et al. Life without them would diminish to handshakes, cheek pecks, stale hugs, the body slowly becoming a decrepitude no one can bear to love. In this audiovisual Eden nothing’s denied save participation, an eternity reserved for the voyeur, though a Tantalean sort of hell as well, prick perpetually in hand, always to observe, never to touch. Still, yes, proof that passion hasn’t entirely died is well worth the sixty bucks. Slip it in, push a button, behold! Praise Eros for this streaming scene! If you touch it, you stroke only the glasslike substance of the video screen, but behind that, within, in a writhing world only millimeters beneath your fingertips, there is euphoric sound and sight, there’s slim and muscled RJ Danvers, dark eyebrows and long lashes, ass and chest curves plastered with rich dark hair, on his hands and knees, face contorting with pain, whimpering —oh, God could anything be more thrilling?—“It hurts!” but Josh West snarls “Take it!” and only pounds him harder.

—Jeff Mann
Approaching Sixty

There seems to be a speed bump
in terms of years, slowing me down
to an ambling pace and the young men
just get younger and the old men
just get older and I seem to suspend
disbelief that I am almost at retirement,
retiring from what to what I
still don’t know. My body seems almost
implausibly the same, give or take
a few new ailments, blemishes and
marks corroborating my age. A few
more pounds, a widened girth,
a sense of gravity as in gravitas,
an uneven passion that comes
and goes, a faulty memory which ebbs
and flows with tales of embellishment
and disillusion. The old hurts occasionally
reviewed are brought out and polished
with guilty deeds and with wasted work
or words. Accustomed to feeling almost useless
except in the service of preserving the past
(which by the way, never lasts). Thinning hair
to almost bald, that wasted field seems almost bare,
compounding the fact that life’s not fair,
saluting that well known platitude that when
the mind’s ready the body’s not.

—Walter Holland
“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

“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

“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