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*

**WHERE THE RAINBOW ENDS**

*a novel by*

Jameson Currier

“Defiant and elegaic.”

*The Village Voice*

“Courageous.”

*Edge*

www.chelseastationeditions.com
March 2: “Camden,” poetry by Walter Holland
March 3: “My American Diary,” memoir by Noel Coward
March 4: “Graves, Camp Allegheny,” poetry by Jeff Mann
March 5: “Pisa,” from Alone, memoir by Norman Douglas
March 6: “Psalm 23” from the Polari Bible,
by Manchester House of Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence
March 7: “A Festival Destination,” feature by Eric Andrews-Katz
March 9: “The First Mercy,” poetry by Charlie Bondhus
March 10: “Little Rooms,” poetry by Chen Chen
March 11: “Almost an Elegy,” poetry by Luther Hughes
March 12: “Lifesaver,” fiction by Patrick Pink
March 13: “Amy,” essay by Jeff Mann
March 14: “Lovers,” poetry by Siegfried Sassoon
March 16: “From the Book of Duration,” poetry by Jeff Oaks
March 17: “The Letter I,” poetry by Dennis Rhodes
March 18: “Threads,” essay by Jameson Currier
March 19: “Body Image,” poetry by Dennis Rhodes
March 20: “I Can Usually Tell,” poetry by A Scott Henderson
March 22: “I sat at a tall chair,” poetry by Craig Cotter
interview by L.A. Fields
March 25: “The Plumber,” poetry by Frank Adams
March 26: “The Indian Ocean is Warmer than the Pacific,”
fiction by Kent Quaney
March 27: “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love,”
poetry by Christopher Marlowe
March 28: “Psalm 23” from the Polari Bible,
by the Manchester House of Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence
March 30: “Straight Men Explain Things to Me,” Essay by Alan Ryland
March 31: Balls & Chair by Eric Andrews-Katz,
reviewed by Keith Glaeske
March 31: A Gathering Storm by Jameson Currier,
reviewed by Eric Andrews-Katz
March 31: Calvin’s Head by David Swatling,
reviewed by Jameson Currier
March 31: “These, I, Singing in Spring,” poetry by Walt Whitman
Camden

One stone bears Whitman’s name over the entrance to the crypt

A hillside to itself, just as he intended, shady, cool, hidden from the brilliant sun. An American flag piercing the ground

beside it a rock shows his image, half in profile. Not a mile or two from his home, down on the harbor where sail boats glide over the river

along the Camden side, across the way sits Philadelphia, thriving city with a nation’s story. There the constitution was written,

there the bells pealed out in victory. How he must have strolled its streets remembering his time in Brooklyn, walking in another great city,

strolling its avenues, past shops, past the warehouses full of wares,

seeing at evening the ferry’s wake, softly lap the banks of Manhattan to ponder things great and small, the lives of the crowd.

Here in the dream of lands out West, fields of wheat and humble townships, or of the vast ports in the East, Boston dockside,

Norfolk, Baltimore, teeming with life and ardor —virile youths with powerful bodies, comradeship and manly adhesion — bromances and metrosexuals, down to our hands with these
two rings, symbols of trust and
same-sex marriage. What would
he think of two so bonded, drawn
by passion long ago, here in this time
of new-found freedoms—death
until death should dully part—
what would the Good Gray Poet say
as we stand so near his grave?

—Walter Holland
SATURDAY

I felt that some sort of scene was necessary in order to celebrate my first entrance into America, so I said “Little lamb, who made thee?” to a customs official. A fracas ensued far exceeding my wildest dreams, during which he delved down—with malice aforethought—to the bottom of my trunk and discovered the oddest things in my sponge bag. I think I’m going to like America.

I have very good letters to Daniel Blood, Dolores Hoofer, Senator Pinchbeck, Violet Curzon-Meyer, and Julia Pescod, so I ought to get along all right socially at any rate.

It would be quite impossible to give an adequate description of one’s first glimpse of Broadway at night—I should like to have a little pocket memory of it to take out and look at whenever I feel depressed. I shall feel awfully offended for Piccadilly Circus when I get back.

God! How I love frosted chocolate!
WEDNESDAY

For a really jolly evening, recommend me to the Times Square subway station. You get into any train with that delicious sensation of breathless uncertainty as to where exactly you are going to be conveyed. To approach an official is sheer folly, as any tentative question is quickly calculated to work him up into a frenzy of rage and violence, while to ask your fellow passengers is equally useless as they are generally as dazed as you are. The great thing is to keep calm and at all costs avoid expresses.

As another means of locomotion the Elevated possesses a rugged charm which is all its own, the serene pleasure of gazing into frowsy bedroom windows at elderly coloured ladies in bust bodices and flannel petticoats, being only equalled by the sudden thrill you experience when the two front carriages hurtle down into the street in flames.

I took three of my plays to Fred Latham at the Globe Theatre. He didn’t accept them for immediate production, but he told me of two delightful bus rides, one going up Riverside Drive, and the other coming down Riverside Drive. I was very grateful as the busses, though slow moving, are more or less tranquil and filled with the wittiest advertisements—especially the little notices about official civility, which made everyone rock with laughter.

FRIDAY

Met Alexander Woollcott and Heywood Broun at a first night—we were roguish together for hours—Alexander Woollcott says that each new play is a fresh joy to him, but the question is whether he’s a fresh joy to each new play!—I wonder.

TUESDAY

Spent all last night at Coney Island—I’ve never known such an atmosphere of genuine carnival. We went on “The Whip,” the sudden convulsions of which drove the metal clasp of my braces sharply into my back, I think scarring me for life. Then we went into “The Haunted House” where a board gave way beneath my feet and ricked my ankle, the “Giant Dipper” was comparatively tame as I only bruised my side and cut my cheek. After this we had “hot dog” and stout, which the others seemed to enjoy immensely, then—laughing gaily—we all ran through a revolving wooden wheel, at least the others did, I inadvertently caught my foot and fell, which caused a lot of amusement. I shall not go out again with a sharp edged cigarette case in my pocket.

THURSDAY

Went down to Chinatown with a jolly party all in deep evening dress which I thought was rather inappropriate. Mrs. Vernon Bale dropped her side comb into the chop suey which occasioned much laughter—Jeffery was very tiresome and refused to be impressed, saying repeatedly that he’d seen it all before in “Aladdin!”

We all went to “Montmartre” afterwards. Ina Claire was there looking lovely as usual. Marie Prune was sitting at the next table squinting dreadfully and, I think, rather drunk and obviously upset about her sister running away with a Chinaman—poor dear, she’s had a lot of trouble but still even that’s no excuse for looking like a blanc mange slipping off the dish, she should cultivate a little more vitality and never wear pink.
MONDAY

Just back from a week-end at Southampton with Mrs. Vernon Bale. Apart from coming down to breakfast she’s a perfect hostess. We played the most peculiar games on Sunday evening and she and Florrie Wick did a Nautch dance which was most entertaining and bizarre! How hospitable Americans are, I’ve fixed up heaps of luncheon engagements for next week—Edgar Peopthatch was particularly kind—he offered to introduce me to Carl Van Vechten and Sophie Tucker both of whom I’ve been longing to meet.

THURSDAY

Such a busy day! Had plays refused by Edgar Selwyn and William Harris, and this book turned down by Scribner’s. I also fell off a bus, being unused to getting out on the right-hand side. I just love America.

SUNDAY

Went with Lester to hear Tom Burke sing at the Hippodrome. His voice is better than it’s ever been and he sang exceedingly good stuff. Poor John MacCormack with his winsome Irish ballads.

TUESDAY

Lunched at the Coffee House—what an atmosphere—even the veal and ham pie tasted of the best American literature, and there was a lovely signed photograph of Hugh Walpole. I do hope I shall be taken again.

The “Vanity Fair” offices impressed me a lot, they’re so comfortable, artistic, and full of deathless endeavour. They took the proofs of this book in order to publish one or two extracts from it and sent it back full of the loveliest corrections. I was duly grateful as Mr. Bishop had told me a lot about burlesque during the afternoon.

WEDNESDAY

Lynn Fontanne took me to tea at Neysa McMein’s studio which was most attractive, she is a charming hostess and there was an air of pleasing bohemianism about the whole affair which went far towards making me take another cake—in more formal surroundings I should naturally have refrained. After tea I played and sang and everybody talked. It was all great fun. I liked F. P. A. enormously, he really ought to write for the papers.

SATURDAY

If I had money I should buy the English rights of “Dulcy” and drag Lynn back to England by sheer force—we have few enough good actresses without letting those we have, fly away. There’s no denying that America’s the place to get on—this book was refused by Harcourt Brace only yesterday.

Met the Theatre Guild this morning and played hide and seek with them in the park—such a merry set of rascals! Teresa Helburn invented a new prank—she took all my MSS. and hid them in a tin box for two months—how we laughed!

THURSDAY
Apparently all the theatrical “Elite” congregate at the Algonquin for supper, I noticed Elsie and Mrs. Janis, Irving Berlin, Frances Carson, and Desiree Bibble who looked appalling in probably the rudest hat that has ever been worn by man, woman, or child.

Marc Connelly made me laugh for twenty minutes over a friend’s funeral—what a sense of humour!

*TUESDAY*

Spent all day on an island in the middle of the Sound with a lot of old gentlemen in towels—returned very sunburned and in great pain—now I know what Jeffery suffered when he embarked for England looking like a fire engine.

Went to the first night of “Bluebeard’s Eighth Wife” with Alfred Lunt—in which Barry Baxter made an enormous hit, he is now a brilliant light comedian. I think one or two of his sworn acquaintances in England will be quite cross when I tell them.

*SATURDAY*

Had my first experience of surf bathing to-day, at Easthampton. Apart from spraining my wrist, being grazed all over, stunned by a breaker, and finally swept several miles out to sea, I enjoyed it thoroughly.

*MONDAY*

Met Mr. Liveright—what a dear!

Sir Noël Peirce Coward (December 16, 1899–March 26, 1973) was an English playwright, composer, director, actor, and singer.
“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
Desire, Lust, Passion Sex
stories by
Jameson Currier

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

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

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

“What Comes Around
a novel by
Jameson Currier

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

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

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

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

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

1.
I’ve been here many times without finding them, having kept to the public side of barbed wire, as historical markers demand, staying off private land. The Angel of History, I call him—a middle-aged local sitting in his pickup at this isolate spot, this windswept mountaintop, as if he were waiting for us, who steps out as we two drive up and offers to show us around, who turns out to be a godsent expert on the battle and the camp—he is not so timid, showing the way between strands of said barbed wire, leading us to two sets of graves.

2.
They have planted a red spruce forest around you, back in the 1960’s, scaly trunks equally spaced, rising straight as rows of temple columns around your graves. You have lain here since the 1860’s, victims most likely of disease, the war’s first bitter winter, when horses froze standing up and epidemics swept the camp. No doubt you had markers once, wooden ones made by comrades who survived you, but those have vanished, and now the only indications that your bones rest here, a few feet beneath the needle-carpeted forest floor, are these four sunken indentations, man-length, such as a potter’s thumb might make in clay. In the shallow dips the wind blows leaves, and so the leaves collect. Perhaps those fates who felled you have after all decided that you deserve an extra blanket, and a few spring beauties as mourning bouquets, blossoming from mountain earth you joined long ago.
3.
Only the base of the obelisk remains. This high, four thousand feet atop Allegheny Mountain, the sarvis blooms still, pinwheels of snow, as if deliberately planted to mark the head of your graves. Such small stones, barely calf-high, like those of infants, the stillborn. Names long worn off. You were here, living long enough to become men but little longer, these memorials proof you were more than numbers in fact-heavy history books. Were I less proper, wilder, I would sit cross-legged above you, drink a goodly bit of bourbon and pour the rest into the ground, as if to regale the thirsty dead. You loved home, yet you chose to ascend this awful height. You knew misery more than most, and then you died. Suffering’s only reward is remembrance. I gladly give you that. I envy you this quiet bed at pasture’s edge, beneath the drifting sarvis. I envy you your high, windswept home.

4.
The Angel points out heaps of rubble that once were cabin chimneys, shakes our hands, climbs into his truck, and heads down the dirt road that used to be the Staunton/Parkersburg Turnpike. Sweet Yankee husband, how tolerant you are, following me from Rebel site to Rebel site without a chiding word. Time to leave the war, descend the mountain, reenter spring, leave the dead behind. For such patience, I promise you Southern delights: pulled pork barbeque at Smiley’s truck stop, with cole slaw and sweet iced tea. How lucky we are still to bear the burden of appetite. How lucky we are inside this era, blessed by the ordinary, far from the shriek of shell, the smoky curse of valor.

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

Praise for The Haunted Heart and Other Tales

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

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

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

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

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

AVAILABLE FROM CHELSEA STATION EDITIONS
After a glacial journey—those English! They will not even give us coal for steam-heating—I arrived here. It is warmer, appreciably warmer. Yet I leave to-morrow or next day. The streets of the town, the distant beach of San Rossore and its pine trees—they are fraught with sad memories; memories of an autumn month in the early nineties. A city of ghosts....

The old hotel had put on a new face; freshly decorated, it wears none the less a poverty-stricken air. My dinner was bad and insufficient. One grows sick of those vile maccheroni made with war-time flour. The place is full of rigid officers taking themselves seriously. Odd, how a uniform can fill a simpleton with self-importance. What does Bacon say? I forget. Something apposite—something about the connection between military costumes and vanity. For the worst of this career is that it is liable to transform even a sensible man into a fool. I never see these sinister-clanking marionettes without feelings of distrust. They are the outward symbol of an atavistic striving: the modern infame.
We have been dying for sometime past from over-legislation. Now we are caught in the noose. A bureaucracy is bad enough. A bureaucracy can at least be bribed. Militarism dries up even that little fount of the imagination.

Another twenty years of this, and we may be living in caves again; they came near it, at the end of the Thirty Years’ War. Such a cataclysm as ours may account for the extinction of the great Cro-Magnon civilization—as fine a race, physically, as has yet appeared on earth; they too may have been afflicted with the plague of nationalism, unless, as is quite likely, that horrid work was accomplished by a microbe of some kind....

In the hour of evening, under a wintry sky amid whose darkly massed vapours a young moon is peering down upon this maddened world, I wander alone through deserted roadways towards that old solitary brick-tower. Here I stand, and watch the Arno rolling its sullen waves. In Pisa, at such an hour, the Arno is the emblem of Despair. Swollen with melted snow from the mountains, it has gnawed its miserable clay banks and now creeps along, leaden and inert, half solid, like a torrent of liquid mud—irresolute whether to be earth or water; whether to stagnate here for ever at my feet, or crawl onward yet another sluggish league into the sea. So may Lethe look, or Styx: the nightmare of a flood.

There is dreary monotony in all Italian rivers, once they have reached the plain. They are livelier in their upper reaches. At Florence—where those citron-tinted houses are mirrored in the stream—you may study the Arno in all its ever-changing moods. Seldom is its colour quite the same. The hue of café-au-lait in full spate, it shifts at other times between apple-green and jade, between celadon and chrysolite and eau-de-Nil. In the weariness of summer the tints are prone to fade altogether out of the waves. They grow bleached, devitalized; they are spent, withering away like grass that has lain in the sun. (Sometimes at this season there is not the smallest trickle in the stream-bed—mere disconnected pools to show where the river was, and will be. Then you may walk across it, even in Florence. Grant Duff says he has seen the Arno “blue.” So have I: a hepatic blue.) Yet with every thunder-storm on yonder hills the colour-sprite leaps back into the waters.

Your Florentine of the humbler sort loves to dawdle along the bank on a bright afternoon, watching the play of the river and drawing a kind of philosophic contentment out of its cool aquatic humours. Presently he reaches that bridge—the jewellers’ bridge. He thinks he must buy a ring. Be sure the stone will reflect his Arno in one of its moods. I will wager he selects a translucent chrysoprase set in silver, a cheap and stubborn gem whose frigidly uncompromising hue appeals in mysterious fashion to his own temperament.

*      *     *

Whoever suffers from insomnia will find himself puzzling at night over questions which have no particular concern for him at other times. And one seems to be more wide awake, during those moments, than by day. Yet the promptings of the brain, which then appear so lucid, so novel and convincing, will seldom bear examination in the light of the sun. To test the truth of this, one has only to jot down one’s thoughts at the time, and peruse them after breakfast. How trite they read, those brilliant imaginings!

For reasons which I cannot fathom, I pondered last night upon the subject of heredity; a subject that had a certain fascination for me in my biological days. The lacunae of science! We weigh the distant stars and count up their ingredients. Yet here is a phenomenon which lies under our very hand and to which is devoted the most passionate study: what have we learnt of its laws? Be that as it may, there occurred to me last night a new idea. It consisted in putting together two facts which have struck me
separately on many occasions, but never conjointly. Taken together, I said to myself, and granted that both are correct, they may help to elucidate a dark problem of national psychology.

The first one I state rather tentatively, having hardly sufficient material to go upon. It is this. You will find it more common in Italy than in England for the male offspring of a family to resemble the father and the female the mother. I cannot suggest a reason for this. I have observed the fact—that is all.

Let me say, in parenthesis, that it is well to confine oneself to adults in such researches. Childhood and youth is a period of changing lights and half-tones and temperamental interplay. Characteristics of body and mind are held, as it were, in solution. We think a child takes after its mother because of this or that feature. If we wait for twenty-five years, we see the true state of affairs; the hair has grown dark like the father’s, the nose, the most telling item of the face, has also approximated to his type, likewise the character—in fact the offspring is clearly built on paternal lines. And vice-versa.

To study children for these purposes would be waste of time.

The second observation I regard as axiomatic. It is this. You will nowhere find an adult offspring which reproduces in any marked degree the physical features of one parent displaying in any marked degree the mental features of the other. That man whose external build and complexion is entirely modelled upon that of his hard materialistic father and who yet possesses all the artistic idealism of his maternal parent—such creatures do not exist in nature, though you may encounter them as often as you please in the pages of novelists.

Let me insert another parenthesis to observe that I am speaking of the broad mass, the average, in a general way. For it stands to reason that the offspring may be vaguely intermediate between two parents, may resemble one or both in certain particulars and not in others, may hark back to ancestral types or bear no appreciable likeness to any one discoverable. It is a theme admitting of endless combinations and permutations. Or again, in reference to the first proposition, it would be easy for any traveller in this country to point out, for example, a woman who portrays the qualities of her father in the clearest manner. I know a dozen such cases. Hundreds of them would not make them otherwise than what I think they are—rarer here than in England.

Granting that both these propositions are correct, what should we expect to find? That in Italy the male type of character and temperament is more constant, more intimately associated with the male type of feature; and the same with the female. In other words, that the categories into which their men and women fall are fewer and more clearly defined, by reason of the fact that their mental and moral sex-characteristics are more closely correlated with their physical sex-characteristics. That the Englishman, on the other hand, male or female, does not fall so easily into categories; he is complex and difficult to “place,” the psychological sex-boundaries being more hazily demarcated. There is iridescence and ambiguity here, whereas Italians of either sex, once the rainbow period of youth is over, are relatively unambiguous; easily “placed.”

Is this what we find? I think so.

Speculations....

I never pass through Pisa without calling to mind certain rat-hunts in company with J. O. M., who was carried out of the train at this very station, dead, because he refused to follow my advice. He was my neighbour at one time; he lived near the river Mole in relative seclusion; coursing rats with Dandie Dinmonts was the only form of exercise which entailed no strain on his weakened constitution. How he loved it!

This O—— was a man of mystery and violence, who threw himself into every kind of human activity with superhuman, Satanic, zest; traveller, sportsman, financier, mining expert, lover of wine.
and women, of books and prints; one of the founders, I believe, of the Rhodesia Company; faultlessly dressed, infernally rich and, when he chose—which was fairly often—preposterously brutal. Neither manner nor face were winning. He was swarthy almost to blackness, quite un-English in looks, with rather long hair, a most menacing moustache and the fiercest eyes imaginable; a king of the gipsies, so far as features went. Something sinister hung about his personality. A predatory type, unquestionably; never so happy as when pitting his wits or strength against others, tracking down this or that—by choice, living creatures. He had taken life by the throat, and excesses of various kinds having shattered his frame, there was an end, for the time being, of deer-stalking and tigers; it was a tame period of rat-hunts with those terriers whose murderous energies were a *pis aller*, yielding a sort of vicarious pleasure. The neighbourhood was depopulated of such beasts, purchased at fancy prices; when a sufficient quantity (say, half a hundred) had been collected together, I used to receive a telegram containing the single word “*rats*.” Then the pony was saddled, and I rode down for the grand field day.

We once gave the hugest of these destroyed rodents, I remember, to an amiable old sow, a friend of the family. What was she going to do? She ate it, as you would eat a pear. She engulfed the corpse methodically, beginning at the head, working her way through breast and entrails while her chops dripped with gore, and ending with the tail, which gave some little trouble to masticate, on account of its length and tenuity. Altogether, decidedly good sport....

Then O—— disappeared from my ken. Years went by. Improving health, in the course of time, tempted him back into his former habits; he built himself a shooting lodge in the Alps. We were neighbours again, having no ridge worth mentioning save the Schadona pass between us. I joined him once or twice—chamois, instead of rats. This place was constructed on a pretentious scale, and he must have paid fantastic sums for the transport of material to that remote region (you could watch the chamois from the very windows) and for the rights over all the country round about. (It afterwards passed into the hands of the German Crown Prince.) O—— told me that the superstitious Catholic peasants raised every kind of difficulty and objection to his life there; it was a regular conspiracy. I suggested a more friendly demeanour, especially towards their priests. That was not his way. He merely said: “I’ll be even with them. Mark my words.”....

There followed another long interval, during which he vanished completely. Then, one April afternoon on the Posilipo, a sailor climbed up with a note from him. The Consul-General said I lived here. If so, would I come to Bertolini’s hotel at once? He was seriously ill.

Neighbours once more!

I left then and there, and was appalled at the change in him. His skin was drawn tight as parchment over a face the colour of earth, there was no flesh on his hands, the voice was gone, though fire still gleamed viciously in the hollows of his eyes. That raven-black hair was streaked with grey and longer than ever, which gave him an incongruously devout appearance. He had taken pitiful pains to look fresh and appetizing.

So we sat down to dinner on Bertolini’s terrace, in the light of a full moon. O—— ate nothing whatever.

He arrived from Egypt some time ago, on his way to England. The doctor had forbidden further travelling or any other exertion on account of various internal complications; among other things, his heart, he told me, was as large as a child’s head.

“I hope you can stand this food,” he whispered, or rather croaked. “For God’s sake, order anything you fancy. As for me, I can’t even eat like you people. Asses’ milk is what I get, and slops. Done for, this time. I’m a dying man; anybody can see that. A dying man——”

CHELSEA STATION
“Something,” I said, “is happening to that moon.”

It was in eclipse. Half the bright surface had been ominously obscured since we took our seats. O— scowled at the satellite, and went on:

“But I won’t be carried out of this dirty hole (Bertolini’s)—not feet first. Would you mind my gasping another day or two at your place? Rolfe has told me about it.”

We moved him, with infinite trouble. The journey woke his dormant capacities for invective. He cursed at the way they jolted him about; he cursed himself into a collapse that day, and we thought it was all over. Then he rallied, and became more abusive than before. Nothing was right. Stairs being forbidden, the whole lower floor of the house was placed at his disposal; the establishment was dislocated, convulsed; and still he swore. He swore at me for the better part of a week; at the servants, and even at the good doctor Malbranc, who came every morning in a specially hired steam-launch to make that examination which always ended in his saying to me: “You must humour him. Heart-patients are apt to be irritable.” Irritable was a mild term for this particular patient. His appetite, meanwhile, began to improve.

It was soon evident that my cook had not the common sense to prepare his invalid dishes; a second one was engaged. Then, my gardener and sailor-boy being manifest idiots, it became necessary to procure an extra porter to fetch the numberless odd things he needed from town every day, and every hour of the day. I wrote to the messenger people to send the most capable lad on their books; we would engage him by the week, at twice his ordinary pay. He arrived; a limp and lean nonentity, with a face like a boiled codfish.

This miserable youth promptly became the object of O——’s bitterest execration. I soon learnt to dread those conferences, those terrific scenes which I was forced to witness in my capacity of interpreter. O—— revelled in them with exceeding gusto. He used to gird his loins for the effort of vituperation; I think he regarded the performance as a legitimate kind of exercise—his last remaining one. As soon as the boy returned from town and presented himself with his purchases, O—— would glare at him for two or three minutes with such virulence, such concentration of hatred and loathing, such a blaze of malignity in his black eyes, that one fully expected to see the victim wither away; all this in dead silence. Then he would address me in his usual whisper, quite calmly, as though referring to the weather:

“Would you mind telling that double-distilled abortion that if he goes on making such a face I shall have to shoot him. Tell him, will you; there’s a good fellow.”

And I had to “humour” him.

“The gentleman”—I would say—”begs you will try to assume another expression of countenance,” or words to that effect; whereto he would tearfully reply something about the will of God and the workmanship of his father and mother, honest folks, both of them. I was then obliged to add gravely:

“You had better try, all the same, or he may shoot you. He has a revolver in his pocket, and a shooting licence from your government.”

This generally led to the production of a most ghastly smile, calculated to convey an ingratiating impression.

“Look at him,” O—— would continue. “He is almost too good to be shot. And now let’s see. What does he call these things? Ask him, will you?”

“Asparagus.”
“Tell him that when I order asparagus I mean asparagus and not walking-sticks. Tell him that if he brings me such objects again, I’ll ram the whole bundle up—down his throat. What does he expect me to do with them, eh? You might ask him, will you? And, God! what’s this? Tell him (accelerando) that when I send a prescription to be made up at the Royal Pharmacy——”

“He explained about that. He went to the other place because he wanted to hurry up.”

“To hurry up? Tell him to hurry up and get to blazes. Oh, tell him——”

“You’ll curse yourself into another collapse, at this rate.”

To the doctor’s intense surprise, he lingered on; he actually grew stronger. Although never seeming to gain an ounce in weight, he could eat a formidable breakfast and used to insist, to my horror and shame, in importing his own wine, which he accused my German maid Bertha of drinking on the sly. Callers cheered him up—Rolfe the Consul, Dr. Dohrn of the Aquarium, and old Marquis Valiante, that perfect botanist—all of them dead now! After a month and a half of painful experiences, we at last learnt to handle him. The household machinery worked smoothly.

A final and excruciating interview ended in the dismissal of the errand-boy, and I personally selected another one—a pretty little rascal to whom he took a great fancy, over-tipping him scandalously. He needed absolute rest; he got it; and I think was fairly happy or at least tranquil (when not writhing in agony) at the end of that period. I can still see him in the sunny garden, his clothes hanging about an emaciated body—a skeleton in a deck-chair, a death’s head among the roses. Humiliated in this inactivity, he used to lie dumb for long hours, watching the butterflies or gazing wistfully towards those distant southern mountains which I proposed to visit later in the season. Once a spark of that old throttling instinct flared up. It was when a kestrel dashed overhead, bearing in its talons a captured lizard whose tail fluttered in the air: the poor beast never made a faster journey in its life. “Ha!” said O——. “That’s sport.”

At other times he related, always in that hoarse whisper, anecdotes of his life, a life of reckless adventure, of fortunes made and fortunes lost; or spoke of his old passion for art and books. He seemed to have known, at one time or another, every artist and connoisseur on either side of the Atlantic; he told me it had cost about £10,000 to acquire his unique knowledge and taste in the matter of mezzotints, and that he was concerned about the fate of his “Daphnis and Chloe” collection which contained, he said, a copy of every edition in every language—all except the unique Elizabethan version in the Huth library (now British Museum). I happened to have one of the few modern reprints of that stupid and ungainly book: would he accept it? Not likely! He was after originals.

One day he suddenly announced:

“I am leaving you my small library of erotic literature, five or six hundred pieces, worth a couple of thousand, I should say. Some wonderful old French stuff, and as many Rops as you like, and Persian and Chinese things—I can see you gloating over them! Don’t thank me. And now I’m off to England.”

“To England?”

The doctor peremptorily forbade the journey; if he must go, let him wait another couple of weeks and gain some more strength. But O—— was obdurate; buoyed up, I imagine, with the prospect of movement and of causing some little trouble at home. As the weather had grown unusually hot, I booked at his own suggestion a luxurious cabin on a home-bound liner and engaged a valet for the journey. On my handing him the tickets, he said he had just changed his mind; he would travel overland; there were some copper mines in Etruria of which he was director; he meant to have a look
at them _en route_ and “give those people Hell” for something or other. I tried to dissuade him, and all in vain. Finally I said:

“You’ll die, if you travel by land in this heat.”

So he did. They carried him out of the train in the early days of June, here at Pisa, feet first....

I never learnt the fate of that library of erotic literature. But his will contained one singular provision: the body was to be cremated and its ashes scattered among the hills of his Alpine property. This was his idea of “being even” with the superstitious peasantry, who would thenceforward never have ventured out of doors after dark, for fear of encountering his ghost. He would harass them eternally! It was no bad notion of revenge. A sandy-haired gentleman came from Austria to Italy to convey this handful of potential horrors to the mountains, but the customs officials at Ala refused to allow it to enter the country and it ultimately came to rest in England.

Another queer thing happened. Since his arrival from Egypt, O—— had never been able to make up his mind to pay any of his innumerable bills; the creditors, aware of the man’s wealth and position, not pressing for a settlement. I rather think that this procrastination, this reluctance to disburse ready money, is a symptom of his particular state of ill-health; I have observed it with several heart-patients (and others as well); however that may be, it became a source of real vexation to me, for hardly was the news of his death made public before I began to be deluged with outstanding accounts from every quarter—tradespeople, hotel keepers, professional men, etc. I finally sent the documents with a pressing note to his representatives who, after some demur, paid up, English-fashion, in full. Then a noteworthy change came over the faces of men. Everybody beamed upon me in the streets, and there arrived multitudinous little gifts at my house—choice wines, tie-pins, game, cigars, ebony walking-sticks, confectionery, baskets of red mullets, old prints, Capodimonte ware, candied fruits, amber mouthpieces, maraschino—all from donors who plainly desired to remain anonymous. Such things were dropped from the clouds, so to speak, on my doorstep: an enigmatic but not unpleasant state of affairs. Gradually it dawned upon me, it was forced upon me, that I had worked a miracle. These good people, thinking that their demands upon O——’s executors would be cut down, Italian-fashion, by at least fifty per cent, had anticipated that eventuality by demanding twice or thrice as much as was really due to them. And they got it! No wonder men smiled, when the benefactor of the human race walked abroad.

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Norman Douglas (1868-1952) was a British writer, now best known for his 1917 novel _South Wind_. He lived for many years on the island of Capri, where he died at the age of 83. Douglas was also noted for his many travel books which include _Siren Land_ (1911), _Fountains in the Sand_ (1912), _Old Calabria_ (1915), _Together_ (1923), and _Alone_ (1921), which recounts his travels in Italy.
“J.R. Greenwell does a lovely job of relaying the comic as well as tragicomic aspects of the over-the-top dramatic world of drag queens, and he nails it exactly.”
—Felice Picano, author of True Stories

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

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

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

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

“Who the Hell is Rachel Wells? is a collection of eleven short stories about being gay in the South and I loved each of them... Greenwell gives us a wonderful cast of characters with heart and we laugh and cry with them. Written with wit and emotion, we are taken into the world of Southern drag queens and feel what they feel as they navigate life.”
—Amos Lassen, Reviews by Amos Lassen
The Polari Bible is a version of the King James Bible, with key words translated into Polari, a constantly developing form of language based on British slang and Romance languages which has enjoyed camp use by performers and gay men in Britain. The Polari Bible was produced in 2003 and 2004 by the Manchester House of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence The Web site containing the text of the Polari Bible has disappeared, but has been preserved at The Polari Bible.
Psalm 23

1. The Duchess is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2. She maketh me to lie down in green pastures: *she* leadeth me beside the still *aquas*.

3. She restoreth my *nishta lucoddy*: *she* leadeth me in the paths of *bonaness* for his name's sake.

4. *Any road up*, though I *mince* through the valley of the shadow of *carking it*, I will fear no *nana*: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy*trolling fakement* they comfort me.

5. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my *oke* with *lube*; my cup runneth over.

6. Surely goodness and mercy shall *troll after* me all the days of my life: and I will *lett* in the *lattie* of the Duchess for ever.
People from all over the globe come to New Orleans for a variety of reasons: attend professional conventions and conferences, hear music concerts and jazz performances. It’s a top vacation destination: a romantic, haunted city full of cemeteries, voodoo spells, and all sorts of high spirits wandering along infamous Bourbon Street. And then there are the powerful points of brightness cast by the glittering ‘literati’ of two writing events: The Tennessee Williams / New Orleans Literary Festival and the Saints & Sinners Literary Festival. Both events draw large crowds of literary interests and a wide range of members of the theater and publishing industries, from the novice attendee hoping to write their first story to the established writer, publisher, agent or editor. Many of the people come to attend panels or lectures from their favorite authors, actors, and directors, while others prefer the Master Classes and the theatrical events. There are also those who come for the specific reasons of atmosphere and the seductive powers of the Big Easy.
The Tennessee Williams / New Orleans Literary Festival is currently going on its 29th year celebrating the talents of one of America’s most acclaimed writers. But it is not just about the eponymous playwright; there are a large variety of different interests that are presented geared to attract the literate in all forms. The mission is clearly stated as Paul J. Willis (Executive Director) explains, “to serve the community through educational, theatrical, literary, and musical programs.” And it does not disappoint. “With Tennessee Williams [festival],” says Martha Miller, author of six published books. “I was interested in the workshops and talent they had. Alec Baldwin did Night of the Iguana, and Sue Grafton did a workshop that helped me a lot.” This year’s theatrical production is Suddenly, Last Summer starring Brenda Currin, one of the stars of the original film In Cold Blood. Some of this year’s incredible list of participants includes: Amy Dickinson (NPR commentator), John Lahr (The New Yorker’s drama critic and author of a new biography on Tennessee Williams), John Patrick Shanley (Pulitzer Prize Award winning playwright/screenwriter/director of Moonstruck and Doubt), Martin Sherman (author of Pulitzer Prize nominated play, Bent), and John Waters (writer, artist, director) among others. The festival is “a chance to learn and daydream about mainstream publishing,” continues Miller, who has attended this particular festival on two separate occasions.

Both festivals offer a variety of ways for the beginning writer (and those established) to achieve further publicity. The Tennessee Williams offers three different annual contests, each one with a Grand cash Prize of $1,500.00. The Poetry contest (going on its 5th year) has special guest judge, the Pulitzer Prize winning poet Vijay Seshadri reading over the entries. The 7th Annual Fiction Contest is for the aspiring novelist. As expected, the biggest draw is the 29th Annual One Act Play Contest judged by the University of New Orleans’ Creative Writing Workshop and the Department of Film, Theatre, and Communication Arts. “I attended in 2010,” says Jerry Rabushka, author of the novel Star Bryan and numerous play titles. “I won the playwriting contest and came to see the play [performed].” Rabushka travels from St. Louis for the event because, “you realize that you’re not alone. There are others working on the same kind of thing you are.”

There’s even a “Stanley” and “Stella” shouting contest! In celebration of Williams’ quintessential play, A Streetcar Named Desire, crowds gather outside one of the French Quarter’s celebrated balconies, imitating one of the most iconic scenes from the stage or screen. (For a visit to the 2013 competition, click here.

And there are the extra benefits of attending a city seeped rich in culture and history. The food is world famous from Oyster Rockefeller, Bananas Foster, or Turtle Soup. New Orleans, especially The French Quarter, boasts being the most haunted city in America, where you can’t throw a set of Mardi Gras beads without hitting an establishment claiming a haunted history. “There’s the sexy atmosphere and ambience which allows some off-festival encounters,” says Felice Picano, author and editor of more than 36 books. “Let’s not forget the food. I’ve yet to have a mediocre meal in NOLA.”

The Saints & Sinners Festival is the GLBT love child of the Tennessee Williams Festival. Very diversely mixed of all members within and without of the GLBT community. “It began,” says Picano, author of the popular memoirs True Stories and True Stories Too, “as an offshoot of the Tennessee Williams Festival and was raising money for the local NoAIDS Center. It’s one of the two GLBT book conferences in the country!” Also offering a variety of panels, lectures and Master Classes, the younger sibling is celebrating its 12th year. Definitely more geared toward the GLBT writing community, it is none-the-less open to anyone wanting to participate. Hosting

CHELSEA STATION
the 6th Annual Short Fiction Contest (this year’s judge is Andrew Holleran, author of the landmark novel *Dancer from the Dance*), where the select finalists are published in a festival sponsored anthology. The two, second place winners are awarded $100.00 and the Grand cash prize is $500.00. Amie Evans, a board member of the literary festival, has helped to put together the anthology *New Fiction from the Festival*, with the help of Paul J. Willis (Executive Director of Tennessee Williams Festival), for the last five volumes.

“The festival is not just for writers and publishers,” says William Holden, author of six books who has attended the two festivals for 13 years. “It’s for everyone who has ever opened a book and been transported to another time or place. It’s for readers to meet authors, [for authors] to find out what’s being published and to understand the publishing arena.” Whether you are a beginning novice or an experienced published author makes absolutely no difference. “The first time or two [attending] it was a bit intimidating,” says author and poet Luis Flint Ceci. “I knew no one, and there were authors I had read and admired everywhere!” And the list of respected attending authors is impressive. Some of the speakers at the Saints & Sinners include well-recognized names like Picano (*Like People in History*) Greg Herren (author of the Scotty Bradley and Chanse MacLeod mystery series), Radclyffe (author of dozens of lesbian-themed novels and publisher of Bold Strokes Books, one of the largest GLBT publishing houses in the US), as well as other established authors such as award winning novelist Jim Grimsley and *Chelsea Station* magazine editor, Jameson Currier. Having some of the GLBT community’s authors, editors, and publishers being accessible for talking, networking, and signatures is one of the biggest draws to these festivals. “I’m hoping to spend time networking and learning from others,” says Russ Gregory, first time attendee and author of the ‘Honey Agency’ trilogy. “I really want to meet Greg Herren, Jeffry Ricker, and Ken O’Neil (among others). I’m also looking forward to hearing Radclyffe speak again”.

Like its parent, the Tennessee Williams Festival, the Saints & Sinners Literary Festival offers Master Classes and panels as well as many other opportunities. As Dale Chase, author of 5 printed books and 8 ebooks, says: “I was well experienced before attending, yet I gained a great deal and mostly found a home in the gay literary world. I met the publisher of my first book there, and pitched it over dinner. That was huge for me. Since then I’ve taken something every year from the festival: knowledge, a connection or a raring good time.” The classes range from previous classes taught by Jess Wells (Lambda Literary Award winning author of *The Mandrake Broom*) on writing science-fiction, or Edmund White’s (award winning author of *A Boy’s Own Story, The Beautiful Room is Empty*) lessons on utilizing the craft of memory and the skills of observation when putting lives on paper. Other previous panels include: The Devil You Don’t Know (panel members included writers Nathan Burgoine and Christopher Rice) or Do Reviews Matter? (panel members included authors Andrew Holleran and Carol Anshaw). No matter what your interest in any literary field, you are sure to find something to strike an interest. “Jeff Mann’s workshop last year on a sense of place is a good example of what works best for me,” says Louis Flint Ceci. There was even a panel called “Inside the Writer’s Studio” where two authors (Felice Picano and Andrew Holleran) of the original Violet Quill Group were interviewed on their insights about writing, reviews, publicity, and all manners of the literary world. And the ever-popular appointment times open for schedule a pitch for your own novel to be published by one of the attending publishing house representatives.
For more information on the two festivals, visit:

Tennessee Williams / New Orleans Literary Festival (March 25-29, 2015) and Saints & Sinners Literary Festival (March 27-29, 2015).

Eric Andrews-Katz (WriteOn530@gmail.com) lives in Seattle with his husband Alan. His 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 as 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.
“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
“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

“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 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
The First Mercy

Your mother said all the words
the priest forbid, when you vamped
out in her pearls,
the gold bracelets from her glamour days
clicking about your wrists, Lake Winnipasaug
shirt sagging with ruby-
eyed dragons and rhinestone insects.

Rings fell from your fingers. Your ears
were brilliant with shame.
The first mercy came a week later
when, unable to suppress
your appetite for the sparkling,
you were caught by your older sister
slathering your sexless face
with her mall-bought cosmetics.

Remember how she took your hand
and led you into the unforgiving light of the bathroom
where she washed your face
and told you she’s going away
next week, if you want to learn,
I’ll teach you.

—Charlie Bondhus
Chen Chen is a University Fellow in poetry at Syracuse University, where he also serves as Poetry Editor for *Salt Hill*. His work has appeared/is forthcoming in *Chelsea Station, Connotation Press, PANK, Foothill, NightBlock, CURA: A Literary Magazine of Art & Action, Nepantla: A Journal for Queer Poets of Color* (in collaboration with Lambda Literary), among other journals. He has received fellowships from Kundiman, Tent: Creative Writing, and the Saltonstall Foundation.
I told my new friends I was going home, & I walked out of the bar quickly, somewhat happily at first, because soon I would get to lie down & rest, like being at home should be. But before I reached home, the feeling that it wasn’t home, that the place didn’t belong to me or I didn’t belong to it—the feeling crept in some side door of my head & decided to stay awhile. Then the feeling felt bold enough to stretch out & remind me how annoyed I had been with a boy I loved in college, his saying *I'm going home now*, after a class. His walking across campus back to his dorm room. I hated his saying that & his walking that way & his home couldn’t possibly be that little room with its little bed that so many had slept in before. Still, I went on walking. Towards a rented room with its little bed, which was just two stacked mattresses, no frame, & covered with my little sheets to hide any previous use. All along the deepening dark of the street, I saw objects operating, seemingly living without their human owners pushing them along—the car drove itself back into its garage, the window sighed toward its sill, the light retreated from each bedroom to go to its own little, little place for the night. Things simply belonged to things. But it was too sad that way, so I thought of my new friends, thought of Jess driving the car into the garage with Adam beside her, telling jokes, then the two of them entering the house where they would find Tim already closing the windows, Becca & Grady taking turns switching off the lights of the house. But it was too sad that way, too, because these friends were all new arrivals like me, whom I knew only a little, & why would we want to live together like that,
like a troupe of well-trained synchronized swimmers
who continued the act
at all hours? So I thought instead
about the college boy, a soft familiar sadness
I could bear, walking to my apartment,
going through the front door, up
to the second floor, into the little room,
the little bed—
till all my thoughts grew little enough
that the only thing I belonged to
was sleep.

—Chen Chen
“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.chelseastreeteditions.com
Luther Hughes was born in Seattle, Washington, but currently lives in Chicago where he is pursuing his B.A. in poetry at Columbia College Chicago. Luther's work has be published or is forthcoming in Espial, The Voices Project, Modern Poetry Quarterly Review, Four Chambers Press, and MUSED Magazine. He curates, "Shade," a literary blog for queer writers of color. You can follow him on twitter lutherxhughes. He thinks you are beautiful.
Almost An Elegy

what do you do when your father collapses
in front of you? when your mother grips
his head with her lap? her knees concrete.
her mouth screaming 9-1-1. your body
is brick. your father is brick, too. eventually
blue and red lights make the face of the house.
your eyes meet the backs of his. remember
the music molding the living room? the way
his shoulder adjusted the rhythm as he danced
for you and your mother – she, holding a bouquet
of roses in her cheeks? the doctor
pats your mother’s shoulder in the hospital.
she kisses your forehead quietly. do you
ask about him? if his chest absorbed
the heart attack. do you tell her about
the boy you meet years later?
about the way you call him daddy as he
frames himself in your lap? you don’t
understand how his body breathes
with tubes lining his mouth. you don’t understand
how the boy breathes, too. but you don’t ask
about either of them. your mother is all tears.
and waiting. and doesn’t ask your father about
his heart. how it almost suffocates.
how it bleeds the way any man does before
he dies. you don’t know what to tell him
when he comes home the next day. but you lay
your head in his lap. he doesn’t ask if
there was music in the hospital. doesn’t want
to know about the boy years later. he combs
your chest the best way he knows how. his hands
stuttering after each stroke.

—Luther Hughes
My brother’s boyfriend told me I should try out. They were hiring for the summer. It was outdoors and on the beach which certainly beat working at Countdown or for Uncle Yusuf in his shop. Besides, Roddy added, *girls think lifesavers are hot.* I wasn’t so sure. It would be just another reason for Baba to be disappointed with me. Behind closed doors, Mama’s hushed voice would try to smooth the edges, once again, though she understood me only a bit more than our Baba, the imam.

Baba had taught my older brother and I to swim. I often wondered what others thought, what was behind their eyes when we came to the swim centre. Here’s a man, obviously Muslim, in a long bushy beard and spectacles with his two small round-bellied boys in tow, all in knee-length togs and towels. I remembered quick glances and sometimes hidden stares and once a genuine double-take like the ones seen in comedies on TV or in movies. Once Baba got into the lessons,
though, we were ignored. They saw Baba as just another father teaching his kids to swim. *Aziz, you work too hard,* Baba would say to my brother. *Let the water hold you. Look at Hasan; look at the ease. It should not be such a struggle.* For the longest time, my brother had fought the water. In the pool, he had little control. He was more embarrassing splash than skilled buoyancy, though he always worked so hard for Baba. *You must learn to breathe correctly, Hasan. You forget the basics.* Baba would say to me as he showed me how to turn my head to gather the next gulp of air. I always found it hard to do most things correctly, properly. I liked the shortcut, which drove Baba crazy.

My cousins, Nasir and Naira, thought being a lifesaver was choice. If they weren’t Uncle Yusuf’s children, so obligated to work behind the counter of the shop, they would have jumped at the chance. Nasir was girl-crazy and imagining tanned beauties in bikini tops and slick sunscreen was almost too much for my cuz. Naira wasn’t any better. She had said that she would give anything to be out and about in the sun and not stuck checking inventory or stocking shelves. She also had a thing for Māori guys and Jarrod, in particular. He was a couple of years older than my cousins and me. My brother Aziz and Jarrod had been in the same class at college. At nineteen, Jarrod had been lifesaving for three summers already. In yellow and red togs and singlet and Aviator sunnies standing in front of the lifesaver’s tent I had to admit Jarrod was impressive. No wonder Naira thought he could walk on water.

Tomorrow was the try-outs. We were finishing up tea. Mama was clearing away the plates; Baba had been suddenly called away to the masjid. As imam, Baba had many duties and responsibilities at the mosque. He led the salah or five daily prayers and gave the Friday sermon, the khutba. We were a small community on the East Coast of New Zealand but Baba’s leadership and advice were always needed. He answered religious questions such as is it halal to eat Kentucky Fried Chicken or what is the view of hongi on the marae between Muslim men and women and Māori. He also served as a counsellor and even once as a matchmaker for a young man from Somalia.

Aziz was home from uni for the summer. He kept eyeing the door all throughout tea, but made certain he did it discreetly. He was meant to meet Roddy after Isha, the last prayer of the day that happened after nightfall. Baba would more than likely be involved with other masjid business after prayers. Mama would let Aziz go or pretend that she didn’t know he had gone but she would question him mercilessly when he returned. If he returned. It was only last week that I had caught my brother slipping in before Fajr or the dawn prayer. He had told me he had lost track of time, but his T-shirt was sandy and inside out and I could smell jizz or maybe Roddy’s jizz on him. I knew what sex smelled like. I was just as bad as my cuzie Nasir. I had sex on the brain all summer. Just the previous night, my hand had cramped after trying to beat my personal best of five times.

My brother and I sat on the front door steps, waiting for the final prayer of the day. Roddy had pulled up in his Mum’s dusty Honda. It was still just light outside and the waves from the beach a few streets over were so loud I could hear them from our house. I also heard Mama still in the kitchen, the plates clattering as she dried and put them away in the cupboard. Roddy had been out surfing. He smelled like the sun and sea. In boardshorts, singlet and baseball cap, Roddy was the typical kiwi summer. When he reached us, he sank onto the steps below Aziz. He asked me about the try-outs. I told him I was still not sure if I’d go or not. He looked at my brother and there seemed to be some unspoken message sent back and forth between them. It reminded me of the way Aziz and I were, growing up. We seemed to be able to read each other’s minds. But I
knew that what Aziz and Roddy had was something different and, seeing the ease with each other, wondered how could it be such a bad thing. Aziz, sensing my doubt over the try-outs and Baba’s response, placed a warm hand on the back of my neck. He did that often when I was smaller and I needed my big brother. I wasn’t the smart one like Aziz so Baba and Mama were disappointed every term when reports came out. It was frequently stated that I didn’t apply myself, that I was lazy. Aziz’s hand always said I wasn’t.

With the way Roddy leaned back against Aziz’s legs, I didn’t think my brother was fooling anyone. I had known about my brother for some time. What clinched it was when I had caught him wanking to a magazine ad with bare-chested All-Blacks in their coloured Jockeys a few years back. I didn’t know what to say and Aziz was so embarrassed and scared I’d tell Mama and Baba he didn’t talk to me for almost a week. When he had finally pulled me aside, I said I didn’t care if he liked guys because it wasn’t really that much of a surprise. Aziz was surprised at that; he had always tried to do the right thing for Mama and Baba’s sake. He had asked me if he was ‘obvious.’ I didn’t want to talk about this but I could see that Aziz was even more scared that maybe without him even knowing he was acting like a girl or talking like a girl. I had to punch him in the arm for being so stupid. I told him I was the dumb one, not him. I also told him to stop being such a girly sook.

My brother didn’t have anything to worry about being seen as not a man. Not the most athletic or coordinated or too much into team sports, Aziz was still a great long-distance runner and despite fighting the water as a kid was a strong swimmer now. He liked those loner sports where he only had to worry about disappointing himself. I, on the other hand, loved getting myself into the thick of things, testing myself against others on a field. Rugby was my game. Uncle Yusuf’s favourite childhood story about me was how even before I knew Arabic properly, I was able to do the haka like the true kiwi kid I was.

‘There’s a party over at Jarrod’s cuzzie’s place tonight,’ Roddy said, looking where we all were looking: nowhere in the distance.

My brother, knowing I knew and that I accepted, though I had a hard time still understanding why and secretly hoped he was the man with Roddy, rested a hand on his boyfriend’s bare shoulder. His long scholar fingers lightly smoothed the wild red curls that stuck out from the back of Roddy’s cap. The gesture was so intimate, so matter-of-fact, that I felt a stranger to my brother. I had a peek at a world that I would never be a part of or know. Aziz walked a different road that I was only a witness to as he walked away. I looked at my jandalled feet, out of respect and a bit of sadness.

‘What do you say, bro?’ Aziz asked me, possibly to invite or to ask permission.

‘We can skip Isha,’ I said, knowing that would never happen.

Roddy turned his head and looked at us. His eyes lingered on Aziz’s face.

‘Pick us up behind the masjid after,’ my brother finally said, grinning in the ever-deepening dark.

‘Aziz, Hasan,’ Mama was calling. She opened the door and looked at the three of us sitting on the steps.

‘As-salāmu alaykum,’ Roddy said, getting to his feet quickly like he had been caught doing something wrong. My brother pulled his hand from his boyfriend’s hair. He didn’t know where
to put it so his arm simply stood straight out in mid-air. I would’ve laughed if Aziz’s face didn’t look so stricken.

To Mama’s credit, she liked Roddy, thought he was a good young man. Which made it all the more difficult. Mama knew. We were her sons, after all.

‘How’s your grandfather, Roddy?’ Mama was a doctor in Egypt before she and Baba immigrated to New Zealand. Here she was an imam’s wife and supported the congregation whenever she could. Because we were such a close community and the East Coast was so tight-knit, people soon learned of Mama’s previous profession. She would sit on the back deck of the house, shelling peas or peeling potatoes or kumara, and give medical ‘suggestions’. Not advice or treatment. That would have been illegal. So Mama simply suggested. Word had travelled and now non-Muslims also came knocking on the old wire gate out back. Mama gave her ‘suggestions’ to anyone, Muslim or not. Lately, Māori and the elderly came to Mama’s garden. Roddy’s grandfather was one of them. Mama listened to everyone.

‘He’s doing much better now. The swelling in his legs have gone down, thanks to you, Mrs…Abbas.’ Roddy said, remembering to use Mama’s father’s name.

Mama nodded. She was wearing the dark blue hijab that always seemed to make her look younger to me. I often wondered what Mama was like when she was my age. When we were small, she had shown us grainy faded photos of her home in Cairo. Her Mama and Baba. Mates she had at uni. Her graduation from medical school. A young Baba, smiling in spectacles. I had asked Aziz once if he thought Mama was happy here. In New Zealand, she wasn’t able to be a doctor because of qualification differences; she quietly supported Baba in his ministry; she kept house, cleaned, cooked. I had asked him if he thought she was living a ‘too small’ life here. Aziz didn’t answer me. He only looked at me, placed his warm hand on the back of my neck and told me we should get back to the Qur’an that we were studying.

‘We need to go,’ Mama said, which was Roddy’s cue to leave. ‘Let your grandfather know he is in our thoughts.’

It was now Roddy’s turn to nod. He looked at Aziz, who looked at anything but his boyfriend. I glanced up at Mama. She was looking in the distance. At nowhere.

*     *     *

It seemed that Jarrod’s cuzzie’s house was on fire. I could see the glow through the branches of trees for blocks from the back seat of Roddy’s Mum’s Honda. Cars were parked crazily along the road as well as on the grass in front. Music thumped and throbbed from open windows and doors and every crack in the wood siding. A couple of guys and a girl stood on the cement stairs in a block of yellow light, beers in hand, smoking and laughing. The girl was a year below me. Her name was Rachel. She was Jarrod’s sister. She had dark hair and eyes, long legs in high cut-off shorts. Under a large flannel checked shirt, a black bikini top cupped her perfect little breasts. I wanted to run my fingers down her suntanned belly and draw circles around her deep bellybutton. She gave me a killer smile as if I wasn’t the same person she has seen before in the corridors of our school. I passed her and the two guys though I couldn’t help but look at her out of the corner of my eye. Rachel was so sweet. I had wanked off thinking of her often but never

CHELSEA STATION
thought I’d be partying with her. The two guys stopped Roddy and my brother. They slapped palms and bumped fronts of shoulders with Roddy and Aziz. They were some of Roddy’s surf buddies. By knowing Roddy, I got palm-slapped and shoulder-bumped, too.

The music was something hard and physical. It pressed and pushed. Like ocean waves. It seemed I had to shove through the bass to get inside. My brother was all-smiles when I looked at him. Someone handed him a beer. Roddy shouted where the fuck was his. Aziz popped his Tui, took a massive swallow, which made his Adam’s apple practically vibrate then passed it to his boyfriend. Their fingers touched; they grinned wide. Aziz eased. His shoulders dropped; he slouched and began to sing along to the song crashing around us. It looked as if my brother had found some elusive peace. That’s when I lost him. He turned back once, his shirt now unbuttoned and almost off one shoulder and gave me his brotherly smile and nod-up and disappeared into the surging crowd.

Guys and girls squeezed against me. I snaked through; found a small space eventually in the kitchen to catch my breath. A couple was kissing: she sitting on the bench top not caring she was on the benchtop, legs wrapped around his skinny waist; he, his hands under her tight T-shirt, playing. She was humming as if love was full of bees and electricity and he was making wet slurping smacks on her lips as he devoured her with his juicy hunger.

I felt a hand slip into the back pocket of my trousers. I was dressed for Isha. So I looked like a Mormon missionary missing his bike. I hadn’t even unbuttoned my shirt like Aziz. I slid away thinking someone was mistaken, taking me for someone cool, someone who didn’t have an imam for a Baba. But when I looked over, it was Rachel. She scooted over to shorten the gap I had made. Her hand still lived in my pocket though I wanted her to change address and shift to my front. Looking down, my trousers couldn’t hide that I liked what she was doing with my bum.

‘Here,’ she said handing me a can of bourbon and coke. ‘It’s kinda sweet. You may not like it.’

I practically drank the whole thing.

‘It’s too loud. And hot,’ she said, her sugary breath brushing my ear. ‘Come with me.’ Rachel grabbed my hand. Her skin was warm and soft and safe and promised so much. I let her lead me away like a sheep walking dumbly to the shearers.

She took me around to the back of the house then down to an old shed against a fence badly in need of another coat of paint. ‘That’s better,’ she said, smiled and I could see she was glancing back at the house. She seemed less sure of herself now that we were alone in the dark with the music only a faint weighty remembrance. My ears still felt like they were filled up with water from a deep dive.

‘Heard you were going for the lifesaving try-outs,’ she said, now looking a year younger than me.

‘Thinking about it,’ I managed to get out. I could only look at her little breasts in the black bikini top and how her short shorts made her legs look so incredibly long. I imagined them wrapped around my waist.

She nodded, took another sip from her bourbon and coke. ‘Sorry, I finished it.’ She didn’t seem to know what to do with the can.

So I leaned in to kiss her. She jumped back, surprised, which made me feel like the biggest fuckwit in the world. She laughed and I was happy it was dark because I started to feel hot and
weird and totally embarrassed. She then took my hand, said she was sorry, that it surprised her and planted a long hard one on my lips. What was going on in my boxers showed her apology was accepted.

I kissed back. Her lips were sugary sweet from the bourbon and coke. Her tongue was cool and fizzy. No one else came to mind. No one else mattered. Not Mama. Not Baba. Not Aziz. Only Rachel and my hands that tried but couldn’t touch her skin enough.

‘Rache,’ someone called from the house.

She broke away slowly, her lips grinning against mine.

‘We’re going to the beach. You coming?’ The person shouted.

‘You coming?’ She whispered to me.

Nothing could have kept me away.

*  *  *

The whole party seemed to have shifted to the beach. There was a group of us. It was star-dark but the waves drummed. White lines of breakers seemed to glow on their own and chalkmark the blackness. Someone was strumming a guitar. A fire was being built from driftwood.

I saw Aziz, his arm over Roddy’s shoulders. They were stripped to their undies. Aziz’s black Jockeys, Roddy’s orange-striped bikini briefs.

‘Hey, little bro,’ Aziz said, raising an eyebrow and trying not to grin because Rachel was sitting next to me on the sand, her hand in mine in her lap. My lips felt swollen from kissing her so much, but I managed a smile. Seeing Aziz free with Roddy and having Rachel’s body braced against mine, everything was right. Allah was happy. How could it be otherwise? Rachel rested her head on my shoulder. Aziz nodded his head like he and I had learned the most guarded secret of the universe. Roddy leaned in and nibbled my brother’s ear and said he was going for a swim. I watched as my brother’s boyfriend pulled him into the night and towards the roaring of the unseen sea.

I forgot my brother. All that was, was Rachel. I turned and saw her round face, her pointy-tipped black eyes, her thick lower lip, her sideways smile and kissed her again. She hummed like the girl on the bench top, like she was full of electric bees. Her hand touched me; her fingers popped the button and unzipped. She reached in, discovered I was shaved down there and smiled. I pulled her closer and was harder than ever because no one but me had ever touched me down there. I pulled on her bikini top to free a perfect breast.

‘Hey, bro,’ I heard through the buzz that was Rachel. I expected Aziz back from his swim. I was wrong. It was Jarrod. Rachel’s big brother.

If the sand was ice, I didn’t think I could slide quicker from Rachel. I stumbled to my feet. My lips were bruised from pashing. My hands smelled like Rachel’s skin. My trousers were undone. I was dead.

Jarrod—tall-powerful-larger-than-life Jarrod—eyed his sister, not pleased. He then turned to me and said, ‘Gotta keep it on the lowdown, bro, if you’re serious about trying out tomorrow. No
sense working yourself up. Stay chill. Sweet. Get what I mean? It’s like being an athlete, an All Black.’ He glared at me, then his sister with a look that made my hard-on go limp. ‘You gotta remain focused. If you want it.’ He moved closer to me and I thought: This is it. I’m done for. But instead, Jarrod said, ‘I’ve seen you. You’d be good with us.’ He then fixed his no-nonsense stare on his sister. ‘Time to go, Rache.’

Jarrod walked away as if there was no doubt that we’d obey.

‘You’re going to do well tomorrow,’ Rachel gave me a quick peck on the lips as she stood. She followed her brother, straightening her bikini top and short shorts as she scrunched across the sand.

I watched her as the dark took her. I pretended that I could still see her because we had that kind of connection. It was more than just a drunken grope and grab. Rachel was like the sea. We were meant to be together. I imagined winning the spot with the lifesavers tomorrow and Rachel would be there. Cheering. Wishing me well. Pushing me on. She’d worry as I swam against the mounting waves, the strong pull of the tide. I’d test myself and I’d succeed. On leaving the water, she’d be there. She’d come to me. Stand so close her skin would heat me and dry me of the sea. I’d place my hand on the back of her neck; I’d pull her head towards me; I’d kiss her and win her.

‘Aziz!’

The yell was simply loud at first. Then it became edgy. Frantic.

‘Aziz!’

It was Roddy. Somewhere in the dark. Amongst the roaring sea.

I didn’t hear my brother call back.

I ran into the dark. Towards Roddy’s voice. Towards the sea.

Roddy was still in his orange-striped undies. They were wet now. They sagged down his skinny bum and looked like he’d done something in them. He paced back and forth where the water just touched the sand. He was breathing hard and shivering. He searched the sea, the loud black waves. He yelled my brother’s name again and again.

Without knowing for sure but knowing too well, I pulled my shirt off and pushed my trousers down, grateful they were already unbuttoned and unzipped. My shoes and socks were somewhere where only a few moments ago it was only Rachel and I and waves that sounded like heartbeats. I high-stepped into the sea.

It was cold but I didn’t care. The shock was sudden but I dove under. I knew there were some powerful rips along this stretch of beach. Aziz knew it, too. Baba had moved us to the sea when he thought we knew enough from our lessons in the pool at the swim centre. He told us how to handle rips, to relax, to swim perpendicular to them. It would take you farther down the beach but eventually you’d clear it. So I started swimming parallel to the beach, scanning the wider sea as I did, hoping and praying he wasn’t out there. Farther from shore. Farther from me. I would give myself forty, fifty good strokes then turn around and try in the other direction. I tried not to think about anything but finding Aziz. Alive. There was no other option.

That’s when I found Baba talking in my ear. It wasn’t stern Baba when I messed up or fell short. And it wasn’t disappointed Baba when I didn’t live up to his hopes and expectations. It was Baba.
the imam; it was Baba the leader of our community. Though my mind frequently wandered during the Friday sermon, it was never because of Baba giving the khutba. He was always impressive. Sometimes he was searing fire before us; sometimes he was quenching water. He was always calm wisdom, this now stoop-shouldered man with round spectacles and beard with just as much grey as black. It was that Baba that talked to me as I pushed away the cold and kept swimming, kept searching for my brother.

Saving something for the other direction, I gave a few more strokes to make sure then turned around. The sea was black as oil. The moon behind clouds gave no meaningful light. I kept the beach steady in my view beside me. Though the water was cold, I seemed to burn. I knew I wouldn’t leave without finding Aziz. One way or the other. That worm of doubt nearly broke my stride. So I shoved it away, but I was getting tired and the waves just kept coming and coming, hitting alongside of me over and over. It would be easy to let them simply have their way and roll me under, but no. I kept saying no. No, no, no, no, no with each stroke. Like a prayer. Like the simple quiet voice of Baba.

I heard my name then. From the beach up ahead. Over the loud waves, I heard someone calling. I didn’t want to stop though. I didn’t think I could. But someone was shouting my name over and over.  

It was Rachel.

She was in the water. The waves up to her knees. Her hands were around her mouth, calling. For me. When she finally saw me in the dark sea, she walked further in. Towards me. She was saying something. But I was shivering all over now and it was hard to make out what she was saying clearly. But I thought she said he was found. As the water rose, she took to swimming and cut in front of me. I remembered saying my brother’s name over and over through clenched teeth to keep them from chattering. She grabbed me. Though I was slick from the sea and swimming, she still caught me. Stopped me. Told me he was found. Aziz was found. And he was okay. I thought I heard her say something about her brother and going in the other direction from mine and finding Aziz, tired but still struggling, still swimming to loosen the rip’s hold. But maybe I just heard nothing. Maybe it was simply Rachel’s fear and relief that told me all was right. Allah, be praised.

I let her help me out of the sea. She ran ahead to collect the large flannel checked shirt she had ditched on the beach. Hanging it over my shoulders, it smelled of her. It still held her warmth.

There was a group, huddled in a circle. A head taller than most, Jarrod stood out. He was looking down then he must have seen Rachel and I moving because he looked up then over at us. His hair was dripping; his face was flushed. He had a hoodie on that was obviously someone else’s who was way shorter than him. Jarrod gave me a single nod and a tired grin before looking back down at the centre of the cluster of people.

My brother was sitting up, his chin on his knees. Roddy was beside him. A beach blanket was around them. Aziz was shivering. Roddy sat there, adding his warmth. I found my way in. People around us stepped back a bit. Someone must have said something because in no time it was just the five of us. Jarrod stood in his too-short hoodie for a while longer than left. Before going, we looked at each other. He told me he’d see me tomorrow. I nodded a few times because it was true. I’d be there.
Rachel sat next to me while I sat on the other side of my brother. Roddy was holding his hand. Aziz had his eyes closed, trying to breathe deep to stop the shivering. His head rested on Roddy’s shoulder.

‘Dumb…huh?’ My brother managed to get out in staggered puffs past chattering teeth.

I punched him lightly on the arm. Before placing my forehead on his blanketed shoulder. Closing my eyes, I thanked Allah, who seemed to look like Baba, Jarrod and the sea.

__________

Patrick Pink grew up in Chicago, Illinois and has lived in Michigan, Texas and Germany. Currently he calls New Zealand home. Patrick has been published in Flash Frontier: An Adventure in Short Fiction. His work can also be found in Chelsea Station, Jonathan, and in the Halloween Edition of Glitterwolf. His latest piece of short fiction will be published and illustrated in Sixpenny Magazine.
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“You’re a poet. Who are your muses?” a friend asked me recently.

My muses have always been male. For me, the word “muse,” thanks to my early readings of Robert Graves’ *The White Goddess*, means a human being inhabited by a spiritual presence that inspires in an artist longing, love, and the creative impulse. Graves had in mind a goddess inhabiting a female muse who inspires a heterosexual man—he consigns male muses and homosexuality to the realm of “morbid pathology”—but I’ve blithely ignored that heterosexist bias. Other books I savored in college—Ian Young’s anthologies *The Male Muse* (1973) and *The Son of the Male Muse* (1983), and May Sarton’s lesbian novel *Mrs. Stephens Hears the Mermaids Singing* (1965)—all allowed me to “queer” the concept of the muse.

My spiritual path, Wicca, encourages me to see the divine as immanent, God and Goddess inherent in all human beings, while homosexual desire encourages me to see the bewitching
presence of the God flickering inside the erotic power of mortal men. Thus my own set of muses have been men who, for me, for a time, embodied Eros, Pan, Apollo, and the Horned God. I wanted them, pursued them, briefly possessed them, revered the beauty and divinity they distilled, then, losing them, wrote lovelorn poems as a way of coping with their loss.

My heroes have been as male as my muses. Most of the historical figures I venerate are men. A few notables would be Confederate soldiers like Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, Jeb Stuart, and Turner Ashby. (Only the ignorant would equate this regional pride with racism, I feel compelled to add.) Then there are the contemporary celebrities who serve as erotic icons for me, actors and country-music singers I’d love to spend a BDSM-drenched weekend with. Think Gerard Butler, Colin Farrell, Tim McGraw, Jason Aldean et al.

I’ve never understood the fascination with “divas” that so many gay men share. Joni Mitchell and Sylvia Plath would be as close as I get: creative women whose work I admire, who’ve been role models of sorts. Female celebrities like Cher, Reba McEntire, Dolly Parton? All fine ladies whose music I enjoy, but nothing to wax obsessive about. Men have my full attention (except for the few women who stoke up my inner bisexual with their beauty: Jessica Lange, Jane Seymour, Lucy Lawless, and Nigella Lawson).

“You’re a dyed-in-the-wool Southerner. Surely you have a favorite female icon from the South?” the same friend asked me. Again, I’m at a bit of a loss. Belle Boyd, Confederate spy? I don’t have time for the research. Paula Deen, butter-loving cook? She’s already overexposed.

One woman comes to mind. My sister Amy is an excellent embodiment of that mix of contemporary and traditional that makes the New South. She’s as close to a contemporary Southern heroine as I can get. Few folks outside of Summers County, West Virginia, know her, but she’s one of those women who, despite my devotion to male beauty, male deities, and male energies, remind me of how splendid and multifaceted female power and female caring can be.

*     *     *

I did not always find her such a gift to the world. Though I was thrilled to receive a baby sister—the family story goes that I danced around the room, a four-year-old dervish, when my father called from the hospital with the news—soon enough the sibling rivalry began, first in Covington, Virginia, my mother’s hometown, then in the environs of Hinton, West Virginia, my father’s native ground, where we moved when I was around eight. My family is like many: grandmothers and mothers dote on sons, and grandfathers and fathers dote on daughters. I reveled in female attentions—my mother cherished me, and my paternal grandmother, Nanny, adored me more than anyone has before or since. Still, my father was the great power in our family. Everything revolved around him, his interests, needs, and enthusiasms. I suppose I might have been the apple of his eye till he brought Amy home (it’s hard to remember much about my first four years), but once she arrived, his attentions shifted to her almost entirely. Or at least that’s how it felt.

No amount of female loving could make up for the removal of my father’s focus. Amy was his “little doll-baby.” He punished me for minor infractions. She, on the other hand, could get away with anything. She put sugar in his lawnmower’s gas tank; she poured water in his boots. Sometimes I was blamed for such wickedness and punished with a doubled-over belt. Sometimes, if she were found guilty, she had only to cry and Daddy would hug and console her.
This inequity maddened me. In fact, I vaguely recall keeping a journal of such unfair events—budding writer that I was—so that I might report them to my ever-sympathetic grandmother. My father seemed infinitely more interested in my sister and in himself than in anything I might do. To this day, I think my hunger for male attention (usually unfulfilled) is rooted as much in this emotional history as in my homosexuality. I am fairly sure that my literary ambitions and lust for recognition (also pretty much unfulfilled) have very much to do with trying to prove to my father and, by extension, to the world, that I am remarkable, magnificently talented, worth making a fuss over, etc. No attention, no acclaim is ever enough. Only my mother’s coaching in good Southern manners keeps my narcissism from being more ravingly apparent than it is.

Such family tensions and resentments are rarely clear in photographs. A few years back, Amy and I discovered an old cache of black and white photos my parents took of us as children at Touchstone. (Touchstone was the solid structure of knotty pine my father built by hand and ran as a popular roadside diner before transforming it into a residence in which my family lived for our first five years in West Virginia.) In one photo, Amy and I are sitting on a fallen elm by the Greenbrier River. Since my father was always trying to save money, he often dressed us in hand-me-downs and cut our hair at home. Thus, we have on baggy, mismatched (well, honestly? hideous!) clothes—plaid, paisley, polyester—and are wearing bowl-cuts. Amy’s tow-headed and, despite the aforementioned fashion handicaps, adorable; I’m awkward, long-limbed, with black nerd glasses. Our heads seem oblong, like aliens’. We look like urchins. I don’t think any orphanage would have had us. “The Children from Mars,” we dubbed our past selves, flipping through the pictures and laughing till our sides ached.

Those children in the photos were country kids, though we didn’t know it at the time, since Appalachian rural and small-town life was all we knew. We helped my father with his innumerable chores around the farm, weeding gardens, digging potatoes, picking green beans, gathering firewood, carrying zinc buckets of “sugar water” to the great vat where it was boiled down to make maple syrup, feeding the pigs, and herding cattle (a task Amy found frightening, small as she was). We played on the shale pile—a rocky road-cut topped by exposed tree roots, a fine place to “pretend like” we were Tarzan or assorted comic-book superheroes. Once Amy fell and bloodied her knee on the sharp shale. I carried her up the road to Nanny’s—perhaps the first expression of a protective instinct for friends and kin that I’ve since developed in spades. One spring, we picked and sold so many damned strawberries that Amy and I were able to ride the Greyhound with Nanny to Daytona Beach, where my father’s sister Doris lived. It was our first big journey into the outside world and our first sight of the ocean. The trip stimulated me but made Amy anxious. As I recall, whenever the bus stopped for a meal break, all Amy would order was stewed prunes, since they could be eaten fast. She was terrified that the bus would leave without us.

This anxiety highlighted a difference between us that was to grow more obvious, one that paralleled a glaring and inconvenient disparity between our parents. My father—an intellectual, nonconformist, and iconoclast—has always had a vigorous detestation of cities and has had next to no use for the world beyond the borders of West Virginia in general and Summers County in particular. Since his preferences were all-important, we almost never traveled. (The concept of “family vacation” seems oddly foreign to me even now.) My mother, on the other hand—much more “normal,” much more eager to fit in—always had a hunger, usually unconsummated, for the larger world. One of the many regrets of my life is that she died before I became financially comfortable enough to treat her to the travel she dreamed of.
My father’s suspicion of—even contempt for—the outside world is common to small-town and rural folks, I think. I have a strong streak of it myself; travel is very stressful for me. The presence of strangers and noise and, most especially, everything I can’t control makes me wary, irascible, and, well, fearful. Nevertheless, I’ve taken after my mother when it comes to “Out There” far more than Amy has. Though I don’t want to remain in any city long, I enjoy brief visits, and travel is one of the few things I’ll spend money on. I’ve seen most of the American cities that interest me, and I’ve been to Europe many times. But we Appalachians are known for our devotion to the home-place, and Amy illustrates this better than anyone I’ve known. Other than her college years and infrequent vacations, she’s almost never left Summers County. She seems entirely content there, and sometimes I envy that. My sister’s always seemed more easily satisfied and far less in need of variety than her perpetually restless, tormented, and discontented brother.

Amy’s heterosexuality made Summers County far more palatable to her and made her far more palatable to Summers County. Another major difference between us cropped up when I was sixteen, when I made close lesbian friends and discovered what my confused interest in certain boys meant. Amy was the first family member I came out to. She was, I think, nonplussed for only about twenty-four hours before we started comparing notes on the “hunks” we craved: Billy B., Billy G., Robbie B., etc. This shared secret and the co-conspiracy it engendered brought us closer. Both of us were convinced that knowledge of my homosexuality would horrify my father and downright kill my mother. Our high school years couldn’t have been different. I was a shy, socially awkward bookworm, with a pudgy body, bouts of acne, shaggy dark hair, stilted manners, and thick glasses. Other than the aforementioned lesbian friends, I was a loner. Amy was shapely, gregarious, and attractive (even briefly a cheerleader), with a slew of friends, parties, and other social activities to keep track of. I envied her. She seemed golden, blithe, and free of the fears, despairs, insecurities, and neuroses that plagued me.

She had her own streak of protectiveness, however. Once, after nerdliness and regular association with a butch/femme lesbian couple had garnered me a reputation as queer, a little bully, in Amy’s presence, inadvisably called me a faggot. She started screaming “Fuck you!” at the kid till he fled, then followed him down the hall continuing to assault his ears with obscenities. I’m still grateful.

One irony of our shared youth was her frequent success at courting the aforementioned Hinton “hunks” I frustratedly hankered after. In high school, she briefly dated Robbie, Keith, Steve, Billy, and Randy. Once, in the Summers County Library, we encountered Randy together. She and he flirted, while I rounded a shelf so I could ogle him through a gap in the books. At one point, as he scratched his torso, a shirt button came undone, giving me an ample glimpse of his smooth brown chest. Amy confessed to me later that she was half-tempted to say, “You’d better button up fast. My brother gets excited easily.” As blasé as she was about the erotic, we often joked that I’d gotten my sex drive and hers too. This fact was to make my life often complex and miserable, hers uncomplicated and relatively content. I envy her that, as well as her dates with all those small-town studs. When I got to college and heard Billy Joel singing “Captain Jack”—“Your sister’s gone out, she’s on a date. / You just sit at home and masturbate.”—I could painfully relate.
As popular as she was with boys, she took no disrespect from them. Her size helped; she was five foot nine and solidly built. Not fat or even plump, mind you; just not a “celery-eater,” as we both contemptuously referred to fashionably emaciated girls. Once a potty-mouthed brat, passing Amy in the high-school halls, said, with unbelievable effrontery, “You look like you have a nice juicy cavity. Let me enter.” She seized him by the shirt collar, threw him up against the lockers with a bang, and shook him till his teeth rattled. That take-no-shit warrior spirit that I’ve seen in so many of my lesbian friends is something I mightily admire in my sister. Often my inveterate politeness hampers that impulse in myself, but Amy has always been less tentative on such occasions.

I was so lonely, so starved for a meaningful relationship or even simpatico sex for so much of my youth while she enjoyed flirtations and dates that, remembering those years, I tend to simplify, to exaggerate my own suffering and to forget her sorrows. There was a boy in high school she was very fond of, even involved with to some extent. One foggy night, a car accident occurred along the Bluestone Reservoir. The boy was permanently paralyzed from the neck down. My guess is he still haunts her. She lost several friends—to car accidents and overdoses. Small-town kids are hard-pressed to find entertainment. Sometimes the entertainments found prove fatal.

Despite her losses, she and I continued to embody extremes: she seemed happy, fun loving, and optimistic, with many a male admirer, while I was over-sexed and perpetually single, struggling with depression and anger. I had yet to make peace with my identities as a country boy, a mountaineer, and a Southerner. Instead, I was hungry as hell to get out of Hinton, to find some kind of gay life at West Virginia University, three and a half hours away, and then move on to a queer-friendly city.

Our college years only emphasized our differences. I took to university life and Morgantown’s urban diversity with enthusiasm. Amy, like many other Hinton kids, found WVU too big, too intimidating. Homesick, she returned to Hinton every chance she got. While I studied, she and her friends partied, encouraging me to scold her with the Tennessee Williams line, “You’re not young at thirty when you’ve been on a goddamn party since you were fifteen.” At one point, she developed a strange rash and had it examined at WVU’s Student Health Center. The doctor proclaimed, “This is either Rocky Mountain spotted fever or the tertiary stage of syphilis.” Imagine that! It took her a few days to discern that she’d borrowed a friend’s medication and developed a violent allergic reaction to the ampicillin. That scare was the last straw, I suppose. She transferred to Concord College in Athens, West Virginia, much closer to home, only a forty-five minute drive across the county line from Hinton.

It was during her time in Athens that I began seeing the traditions of our family emerge in her. One year, she shared an apartment with a lesbian friend of ours who was a less than apt cook. (Once Amy woke from a nap to discover that Leigh had taped paper bags above and around the stovetop to protect the walls from spaghetti sauce spatter; the recipe, Leigh explained, had said not to cover the sauce.) Amy and I were accustomed to very good and very plentiful Appalachian food at home, so she responded to this less than ideal roommate situation by learning how to cook. I remember visiting her in Athens and being amazed: the dinners she prepared were always delicious. The insouciant, popular partier was following in the steps of my father and Nanny by becoming a top-notch country cook. My little sister, I realized with a start, was an independent adult, one who was taking care of me as my elders had all my life, by providing me with a remarkably flavorful home-cooked meal.
She was becoming a traditional Southern woman in this respect, much to my gourmandish delight. At about the same time, she did something less traditional: she became involved with a black man.

Michael was from Talcott, a little community at the other end of Summers County, home to the legendary folk hero John Henry. His mother, Joyce, was a grand matriarch; he had eleven siblings. My mother, Clara, was horrified. She’d discovered my homosexuality while I was in college and had taken it hard. (Every time I went home, I regaled Mommy with outrageous tales of drag queens and other extreme queers just to remind her that my leather/Levi’s look was tame in comparison and that she’d better count her blessings.) But Amy’s sin was infinitely worse to a woman who’d been raised in Virginia in the 1920’s and 30’s. “Nigger lovers and queers, that’s what our parents raised,” Amy and I used to joke. Our co-conspirator status deepened. Now we both were outside the pale. “Chicks what loves niggers is pigs,” we used to chant together, borrowing an illiterate slogan she’d seen on a bathroom wall somewhere.

I liked Michael just fine. He was quiet, polite, and possessed of a dry sense of humor. His family was welcoming and lively, and they provided spreads of food mouthwatering in their quality: homemade rolls, fried chicken, potato salad, deviled eggs, rum cake, and cream pies. Once again I envied Amy—she had the solid relationship I’d yet to find—but I was glad she was content. One evening I got into a horrible shouting match with my mother when she objected to Michael’s race. “Do you know how goddamn lonely I am? Be thankful at least one of your children is happy!” I screamed. From our mother, my sister and I might have learned a deep appreciation of Southern manners, but from our father we’d inherited a profound disinterest in what other people might think.

That individualistic defiance was to serve us well. Amy and Michael got next to no public disrespect in Summers County, since my father had been the prosecuting attorney for years and later a prominent lawyer. But when Amy and Michael traveled together outside of Summers County, she’d return with tales of the scornful, hate-filled looks they got, at gas stations, in restaurants. I had no problem equating that hostility with the homophobic jeers my friends and I sometimes heard as we exited gay bars. Some miserable old racists glaring at my little sister? I wanted to kill them, to feed their uncoiled guts to dogs.

I had a brief sojourn in the big city, decided it was definitely not for me, and came back to the mountains. Amy graduated from Concord, worked as a substitute teacher in Summers County, grew tired of the unmannersly brats, and ran a little restaurant in Hinton, The Upper Crust, which served lunches to local community groups like the Kiwanis and Rotarians. Then one night, despite my father’s position of power in the county, Michael ended up in a scuffle with some local cops. Clear racist motivation. That was a turning point, I believe: Amy decided that she needed to be in a better position to protect herself and her own. After a stint as my father’s legal secretary, she married Michael and then returned to Morgantown, tolerating the absurd traffic and mall-sprawl long enough to receive a law degree from WVU in May 2002. By then, I’d met my partner John, and one day he and I found ourselves, for the first and probably the last time, in the odd position of shopping for pearls. We bought Amy a strand for her graduation present.

For years, Daddy, Michael, and I have had to some extent vied for Amy’s attentions, but on December 24, 2004, someone new entered the scene who put us all to rout, her son, Michael Ferrell McCormick Mann. As John and I drove to Lewisburg, West Virginia, after the delivery to see Amy and my new nephew, we passed the John Henry statue on the mountain above...
Talcott. Someone had spray-painted “Nigger” across the statue’s chest. My first reaction was fear for my new kin’s future, but then I thought of Amy: her protectiveness, her position in Hinton. I gave a grim chuckle. “Well, one thing’s for sure,” I drawled, “long as that boy stays in Summers County, no one’s gonna fuck with him.”

I’m not much on children. To use the Misfit’s line from Flannery O’Connor’s “A Good Man is Hard to Find,” “[c]hildren make me nervous.” Especially noisy ones and badly behaved ones, of which there’s a plethora these days, which only encourages my tendency toward agoraphobia. (Cf. my previous comments about travel: what I cannot control makes me anxious.) But Ferrell, as we call him, approaching age seven, is a pretty cool little monster. He possesses the same enthusiasms I did at his age—superheroes and dinosaurs—so much so that, when John and I want to buy him Christmas presents, John drags me to Wal-Mart long enough to lead me through the toy aisles and ask me what I like, knowing that what I choose Ferrell will also relish. My nephew is, apparently, so much like me—his smarts, his willfulness—that Amy has even said to me, “You didn’t need to have a child. I had a little Jeff for you.” I wonder sometimes what my mother—who died in 1998, six years before he was born—would think of him. Despite her lingering objections to interracial relationships, I know she would have been irresistibly charmed.

How can I not approve of a kid who’s so much like me? He has his mother’s genial nature, which helps me hope that he’ll be spared my darker moods. He has her good looks too. The line I use to describe him is, “He makes Obama look homely.” The boy will be a mocha-colored heartbreaker. I just hope he’s kinder to his admirers than the men I’ve admired were to me. And I’m hoping that a nation that had the sense to elect Obama for president will prove to be a kinder place for him to live than it might have been in the past. On his father’s side, he’s the descendant of Southern black folks. On his mother’s side, he’s the descendant of a Confederate soldier. Talk about a living embodiment of reconciliation, a melding of the South’s multitudinous pasts.

Amy has since followed in my father’s footsteps and become the prosecuting attorney of Summers County, the first woman to hold the position. What with work and raising Ferrell (who recently got “Most Polite” in his class; my mother would have been proud), Amy’s incredibly busy, so, despite the fact that we live only an hour and a half apart, we see one another no more than four or five times a year.

Sometimes, in summer, my sister comes over to Pulaski, Virginia, where John and I live. We take Ferrell to the nearby water park; afterwards, we grill hamburgers out on the back deck. Sometimes John and I drive over to Forest Hill, where Amy and Michael live, out in the West Virginia countryside, near the site of my father’s gardens. She always makes huge, fattening, and thoroughly delicious meals that make me feel as happy and cared for as any food can: pork roast, country ham, biscuits, deviled eggs, hash-brown casserole, broccoli casserole, all the comfort foods that Southerners have lavished on their loved ones for generations. Over dinner and stiff drinks, we share gossip and amusing stories, our shared sense of humor a mix of our mother’s supercilious, scathing wit and our father’s bawdy vulgarity. “Lord, there she was, in a halter top! Poor thing, she really should have covered up. And that girl’s big butt was eating her shorts, I tell you. It was just nasty!”

There is a delicious sense of camaraderie in mocking the same things. While Ferrell displays his new Spider-Man pajamas or T-Rex toy, or runs out to see how his pet bull is doing, Amy and I are excoriating the Christian Right and the latest moronic Republican politician. After such a
visit, she always sends John and me home with fresh vegetables in summer, or canned goods she and Daddy have put up: hot peppers, green beans, lime pickles, corn relish, or chowchow.

Mythology helps me see depth and divinity in the daily. Just as I’ve glimpsed Gods in the men I’ve loved, so I clearly perceive in my sister Hestia, Goddess of the hearth; Cerridwen, Goddess of the cauldron; and Athena, Goddess of wisdom and war. As with many of my lesbian friends, in Amy there’s that combination of Mother Goddess and warrior I so appreciate. As with many of my bear friends, there is in her a wonderful amalgam of strength, nurturing, and protectiveness. Amy’s as close to the ideal woman as any I’ve ever known. She’s one of a few folks in my life I have absolutely no desire to outlive.

I tend to give backhanded compliments. In Ferrell’s case, I’m always telling Amy that he’s a freak, because he’s so good-looking, smart, and thoughtful for a kid his age. Only a few weeks ago, she called to tell me about his latest amazing statement. Home from kindergarten, he’d hugged her and said, “Mom, I wish you were my sister instead of my mother. Then I’d have more time with you.” She assured him that she’d be around for a long time yet.

I must admit I choked up. What I thought was, “Well, kid, you beat me out. You’ve got most of her attention now. But, in this respect at least, I win. She’s my sister. I got all those years with her that you didn’t, and they’ve been a privilege and a delight.” What I said was, “My God! He’s a monster! Enough about him. If I come home next month, will you make me a bunch of fried apple pies or a batch of those delectable buttermilk biscuits?”

Jeff Mann has published four books of poetry, Bones Washed with Wine, On the Tongue, Ash, and A Romantic Mann; two collections of personal essays, Edge: Travels of an Appalachian Leather Bear and Binding the God: Ursine Essays from the Mountain South; a book of poetry and memoir, Loving Mountains, Loving Men; four novels, Cub, Fog: A Novel of Desire and Reprisal, Purgatory: A Novel of the Civil War, and Salvation: A Novel of the Civil War; and two volumes of short fiction, Desire and Devour and A History of Barbed Wire, which won a Lambda Literary Award.
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.”
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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
Siegfried Sassoon (September 8, 1886–September 1, 1967) was an English poet, writer, and soldier.
Lovers

You were glad to-night: and now you’ve gone away.
Flushed in the dark, you put your dreams to bed;
But as you fall asleep I hear you say
Those tired sweet drowsy words we left unsaid.

Sleep well: for I can follow you, to bless
And lull your distant beauty where you roam;
And with wild songs of hoarded loveliness
Recall you to these arms that were your home.

—Siegfried Sassoon
Jeff Oaks' newest chapbook, *Mistakes with Strangers*, was published by Seven Kitchens Press in 2014. His poem "Saint Wrench" was selected for *Best New Poets 2012* by Matthew Dickman. He has published poems most recently in *Assaracus, Mid American Review, Prairie Schooner, Rhino, Barrow Street*, and *Field*. His essays have appeared most recently in *Kenyon Review Online, At Length*, and *Creative Nonfiction*. He teaches writing at the University of Pittsburgh.
From The Book of Durations

Mother I spent the first anniversary
of your last birthday in a strange man's arms.
You wouldn't want me to say that.

When I said gay and you said no, don't be.
When I said gay and you cried, afraid
I'd be killed by other people's anger.

It's hard to say the date was a coincidence or not.
I smelled his body right down to the root.
You wouldn't want me to say that either. You taught me not to move suddenly
among predators, to assume anyone
anywhere could break open with hate.

We lived there once together, in that state.
When we escaped, we said never again. I kissed his feet.
You wouldn't want me to say that.

Maybe that isn't true. You also wanted me to be happy.
I can only speak about what you said, not what you meant
or thought to mean. I miss you. I'm not sorry.
I loved the way his hands erased your dead body.

—Jeff Oaks
Dennis Rhodes poems have been collection in *Spiritus Pizza and other poems*, *Entering Dennis*, and most recently, *The Letter I*. His work has been published in *The Jersey Journal*, *New York Newsday*, *Fine Gardening*, *Ibbetson Street*, *Alembic*, *Chelsea Station*, and many other publications.
The Letter I

Here’s to the letter i
a sweet little thing with a dot
in the lower case; a mighty
column in the upper:
indispensable I
Reprehensible I
a haughty, arrogant letter
which really ought to know better
than to assault the page
and throw its weight around
than to sting the ears
with its ego-centric sound.
Dumb, simplistic I
Fatalistic I.

One’s i’s are best kept small—
better yet, not used at all.

—Dennis Rhodes
Thursday, June 23, 1988. The day began hot, humid. The fan perched on the windowsill offered little comfort; before getting out of bed I was covered with a thin layer of sweat. The radio announced optimistically today’s temperatures would be milder: high eighties instead of sweltering nineties, but even after shaving and showering I couldn’t stop sweating. It felt like the kind of day that makes me vow every year I will never spend another summer in Manhattan. Walking to the subway I noticed everyone seemed to be moving with sluggish, irritable steps. I could feel the sweat on my back, underneath my arms, behind my knees, streaming in pencil thin lines down the sides of my face. Even the Empire State Building, which bisects the skyline from

from *Until My Heart Stops*

**Threads**

Jameson Currier
this block of Chelsea, seemed uncomfortable and sullen, lost in a haze the color of cigarette smoke.

By lunch time, however, the sky was overcast: strips of blue-gray clouds shadowed the intensity of the sun, though the wind which whipped between the buildings of upper Times Square was ironically dry, the type I have always imagined belonged in the Sahara. Summer in New York City can be irritating: stifling, overcrowded subway cars, sidewalks that reek with the smells of urine and dried beer, the deli that always seems to have a broken air-conditioner on the day you want it to work the most. But it can also be a feast for the eyes: tourists wandering around in tank tops and shorts, messenger boys atop bicycles speeding across town in tight, spandex pants, actors and dancers with knapsacks slung across their shoulders, reciting lines to themselves as they head toward auditions or rehearsals. At noon, businessmen in white shirts and tailored dark suits stream through the revolving door of the building where I work, adjusting sunglasses and checking watches before dashing off to appointments. The construction workers of the new buildings which spiral skyward every block of this section of the city, sit on the short, black walls surrounding the fountain and subway entrance of the courtyard of the Paramount Plaza. They have thick, tanned skin and wear tight, faded jeans, heavy dark workboots and T-shirts which cannot possibly have been ripped that way by design.

Crossing 50th Street at Seventh Avenue on the way to get a slice of pizza, I see the worker I look for every day hoping he has removed his T-shirt and stuffed it in the rear pocket of his jeans. Today he does not disappoint me; his body does not fail to stun me: a wide, solid chest and razor sharp abdominals, a tattoo on his left shoulder that reads USMC and biceps the size of the grapefruits they sell a block away at the Korean market. Amazing, I think, such energy at repose, a product of a profession of physical labor and an avocation of going to a gym. I can only stare at him so long without becoming self-conscious or risking a sneer. Looking skyward, I think if it rains later I will have a reason to change my plans. After work I am meeting my friend Jon at his office seven blocks from here. Together we’re going to see the Names Project Quilt at Pier 92.

* * *

Three months ago my best friend died after having been diagnosed with Kaposi’s sarcoma a year before. The day he called me and told me the results of his initial biopsy I said I would leave work and meet him, stay with him if he needed, do anything I could to help. He was choking over the phone, crying, saying he felt so ashamed, why had this happened to him? Then suddenly he pulled himself together, his voice returned to its regular intonation, and he said he had to get back to work, he would be all right. That night he went to the opening of a new Broadway musical.

I was the only one he told at first; though I did not feel privileged by being entrusted with this secret, I honored his desire to keep it quiet. I think what ennobles his life to me now, particularly his last year, was his inability to perceive himself as diseased. He treated his illness as though a cold or a broken leg, something that one day when he awoke would be better or healed, not something that was consuming him day by day, depressing him, immobilizing him. He kept up his normal, frenetic, crazy New Yorker pace for as long as he could, working long hours as a publicist and then attending film screenings, plays and parties. And he continued to write, as he
had since I met him nine years before, plays which had been produced in small regional theaters, plays which he never felt had been given the productions or recognition they deserved. Three months before his death one of his plays finally reached off-Broadway, and as he struggled with rewrites and revisions, we both knew but never mentioned, that this might be the only chance he was ever to be given.

Things did not get better. The medications got stronger but he grew weaker. After his second hospitalization the friends, family and co-workers he had not informed were told. When things took a turn for the worse, in January of this year, he stopped working and lost the mobility he cherished, and though he was surrounded by a network of support and did his best to maintain his sense of humor and sharpen his wit, he still flashed through moments of frustration, abjection and embitterment.

I have not been able to forget him a single day since his death. I am reminded of him by articles in the newspapers, reports on the six o’clock news, by his friends and mine calling to ask me how I am, by the details I have to attend to as the executor of the small estate he left behind, details which can be mundane, annoying or time consuming such as sorting through bills, writing letters, or photocopying his death certificate. And on the sidewalks, walking, where I think my actions, my movement will pull me away from his life and back to my own, I see reminders of him in the people who pass: one man has his mustache, another his profile, others his gold wire-rim eyeglasses or his out-turned walk.

We were born the same year, six months apart but in different parts of the country. We grew to the same height, the same weight and could have worn each others clothes if we wanted. But there were other, more important similarities which connected us as friends. We shared not only the same profession, but the same persuasions and aspirations: a love for the theater, movies, traveling and men, and though our tastes were never identical, our passions kept us linked. We were introduced to one another in the lobby of a Broadway theater; we had both moved to Manhattan right after graduating college, leaving behind our suburban roots, and finding employment as apprentice publicists though dreaming of careers as writers. We were awed by the challenges, possibilities and expectations of New York City, yet we were inspired to accomplish every conceivable goal, as young men in their early twenties with a lifetime ahead of them, often are.

Today in The New York Times Canadian officials reported Soviet diplomats had tried to snatch U.S. Navy secrets, the Mets won but the Yankees had lost three in a row, and the Presidential hopefuls were in Los Angeles, Louisville and Boston. A feature story announced The Paris Ballet would be presenting Swan Lake next week at Lincoln Center, a one-man off-Broadway show adapted from the novels of Becket was reviewed, and another article explained that an insect, smaller than a flea, was damaging millions of acres of forest in Vermont. A fire in Egypt killed forty-seven people, ten died in Burma riots and a car bomb in Bierut killed two. Yet when I reached the obituary page, near the end of the last section of the paper, I felt a mild, morbid relief when I noticed there was no one listed I knew and the youngest man who had died was fifty-seven, killed in a sail boat accident when he was struck by the boom.

And throughout the day, as I sat behind a desk, typing, answering phones and attending to the business that pays my rent, I keep reassuring myself I’m not the only person my best friend left behind. There is his mother, his sister, two nephews, a niece, his lover and other friends, most of them who knew him longer than I.
After work I am surprised to find the afternoon sky startling clear and bright, the oppressive heat of the last few days has disappeared with the clouds. In fact the weather feels so nice, so comfortable, it is the kind of summer afternoon I wish I were spending at the beach. I meet my friend Jon at his office on 43rd Street and together we walk across the west side toward the pier. Our walk is slow and relaxing, by the time we reach Tenth Avenue there is little traffic on the sidewalks or streets. We tell each other about our day: I mention the new telephone system we are installing in the office, he tells me his boss is going crazy because of her high-fiber diet. Together we discuss our plans for a trip to Pennsylvania over the Fourth of July, next weekend: I mention I would like to drive through the Shaker countryside, he tells me about a restaurant a friend recommended in New Hope. As we draw nearer to our destination, our steps quicken, our eyes scan every building and person in sight. Now when we speak our voices are sharp, clipped whispers, notations edged by agitation.

Earlier today, a friend had warned me over the phone that viewing the quilt would be worse than going to a cemetery. Another said I would feel every conceivable emotion. Before leaving my office, I made a trip to the restroom and slipped some toilet paper into my pants pocket. As we wait to cross the street beneath the elevation of the West Side Highway, my friend loosens and removes his tie.

At the entrance to the pier, a white concrete building which is normally used as a passenger ship terminal, we ride to the second floor in an elevator that I estimate is larger than the bedroom of my apartment. When the doors open we follow those ahead of us, men and women of varying ages, into a lobby filled with tables and exhibits, pamphlets, registration books, volunteer workers and other visitors. We are handed programs and presented with the facts: this quilt weighs over 11,510 pounds and currently contains 3,488 names, although today space allows only 1,696 to be seen. Spread out, it is bigger than three football fields and includes the names of brothers, fathers, sons, mothers, daughters, lovers and friends. It is the nation’s largest community arts project and is designed to memorialize the thousands of Americans who have died from AIDS. New York is only one of the stops on a twenty city cross-country tour.

We walk through a doorway beneath a handwritten sign that says “Entrance” and enter the main room. My first impression is this room is enormous and bright; sunlight streams in through windows, outside it shimmers across the Hudson River. Inside it is crowded but quiet. And what begins with a sense of curiosity, as I begin to assimilate the first few panels which I look at and read, is quickly overtaken by a feeling of awe. The fabric panels of the quilt are six feet by three feet and have been sewn together in blocks of eight or thirty-two. The main section, draped atop the floor, stretches the length of the 775-foot pier. On either side are blocks suspended from the ceiling, creating alcoves to display even more panels, placed evenly between these fabric walls on the floor.

But it is the names that command the attention. As we follow the white canvas walkway which borders the perimeters of the panels on the floor, statistics suddenly become people.

Some panels are simple, containing only a painted name on plain fabric. Others are more elaborate with hand-stitched designs or needlepoint, or names spelled out in sequins or bordered...
by feathers. Some are personalized by clothing: a plaid shirt, gym shorts, boot laces, a leather vest, one, even, displays a jock strap. Others hold records, photographs and quotes. Each panel contains only a single name of someone who has died. For me, the hardest to look at are the ones which contain only first names, the ones that read Mark, Bill, Mike or Steve. These are the names I collected years ago on scraps of paper at parties, bars, the gym and the beach. They make me wonder if this is one of them now. Or is it the friend I haven’t seen or spoken to in the past few months, the one I didn’t even know was sick?

It is hard not to keep my eyes moving from panel to panel. And when I look up I notice we have not even made it a third of the way down the room. We are surrounded by other viewers, and I am not surprised to discover they are mostly men and women my age, mid-thirties, their heads bowed, motionless, as if in prayer. The tableau reminds me of those large cathedrals I visited seven years ago in Europe, the ones with plaques and epitaphs lining the walls of the transepts where people are buried beneath the floor. Here, at the quilt, it is as hushed and solemn, yet what was there, in Europe, was viewed with a calm sense of reverence, is here magnified with anger, shock, compassion and grief. Here, footsteps move so slowly and carefully their sounds cannot be detected, the silence is broken only by the shutters of cameras. Ahead a young man in a blue polo shirt and jeans sits crosslegged on the walkway in front of a red silk panel that spells D-a-v-i-d with silver block letters, his head is buried in the palms of his hands. Though I strain to hear but cannot detect any sounds from him, I know by the way his back heaves with short, jerking breaths that he is crying. Behind him, I am suddenly astounded by the sight of a woman pushing an empty stroller, beside her a man carries a baby, less than six months old, in his arms. On the other side of the panel an elderly woman with a cane touches the frame of her eyeglasses and leans to read a name. This is something that has hit us all.

Behind each name is the story of a life, someone who struggled with this disease and lost. Behind each panel there are many stories: Who made it? Who helped? Why this color, this fabric? What does the design remember or represent? Who cried when it was finished? Who recognizes the name as they walk by? And each of us brings our own stories to the quilt, our views, opinions, knowledge and experiences with this disease. And we are united, sewn together as it were, by our thoughts of families, lovers, friends, and co-workers: some dead, some sick, some worried. This is our Gettysburg, our Vietnam Wall, our Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Yet those wars are over, this one continues. All of us are frightened this could be happening to us next. The quilt grows larger every day.

When we reach the center of the room, a crowd of people surround a block of yellow canvas on the floor. At the edges are boxes of tissues and black felt tip pens. Here, the words “New York” have been painted in large, cursive purple letters. Shoes have been slipped off and left on the walkway, their owners kneel atop the yellow canvas and write, covering the empty spaces with remembrances. This canvas is full of writing: names, notes, signatures and messages, hardly an untouched space, signed the way, years ago, we covered the pages of a high school yearbook. Now, standing here, watching a young man who looks hardly out of high school uncap a felt pen and write, I feel angry and guilty. Why has this happened? Why is it continuing? Was there anything I could have done to stop this? Was there something I can do now? At my best friend’s funeral his mother said to me that what I had done was miraculous, the way I had helped make his last few months as comfortable as possible. The way when he could no longer leave his apartment, I brought him food, made sure he took his medication on schedule, arranged doctors, nurses and friends to visit. The way when he was frightened and scared I tried to reassure him he
was not alone by leaving work early or taking a day off, many times staying at his apartment overnight. The way when the depression would overcome him, I would entertain and distract him with videotapes, games, magazines, books and records. But now I feel that wasn’t enough, and fearing I might abruptly lose my outward display of emotional composure, I turn and walk away.

As we approach the end of the room Jon sees someone he has not seen since college, twelve years ago in Boston. He introduces me to his friend, though I remain silent and listen to their whispered conversation. As their talk progresses from reminiscences and old friends to present day careers and activities, my eyes again roam through the crowd. All at once I see several familiar faces: a friend who works five floors beneath mine, a teller from my bank, a couple I see at the video store on my block. In the distance I spot an actor who has made a fortune from furniture commercials and who once appeared in a showcase of one of my best friend’s plays. Behind him is a former patient of my former psychiatrist and a guy whose name I have never known, but whose tight physique I always admired at my old gym and which I haven’t glanced at in over two years since I moved to a new apartment.

A man my age with a neatly trimmed black beard and wearing an old straw hat stops beside me and stares into my eyes. I look at him, confused for a moment, till he smiles and I recognize him as my friend Bryce who I once worked with booking guests on a late night local cable TV show. We hug, pleased to see each other alive in this room, and he tells me in the three years since I last saw him he has moved from Provincetown to Santa Barbara and now back to New York, where he has been living on the upper west side for the last two months. He apologizes for not having called, then his eyes narrow and he rocks his legs nervously, and says, softly, his best friend died this morning. I answer I am surprised he is here of all places, but I understand why he is. I know exactly what he is thinking and feeling. “How could I stay away,” he says and stops rocking and then looks at the ground. “I have it,” he adds and I know not even to ask, “Are you sure?” Instead, I slip my hand around his elbow and lead him to a corner of the room, near a window, gently pelting him with questions: Do you have insurance? Are you working? Have you started treatments or medication? Do you live alone? Who is your doctor? Who knows and who is helping? He answers my questions politely, without embarrassment, but then adds in an exasperated voice, “I think it was the radiation treatments that killed him. He was fine till last week. When are the doctors going to learn you can’t cover a bullet hole with a band-aid?”

Jon approaches and now it is my turn for introductions and I manage it with only a little awkwardness. As Jon and I part to continue viewing the quilt, I tell Bryce I will do whatever I can to help, that he must never hesitate about asking or calling, and though I start to write his name and new phone number on the back of my program, I stop just in time, finding a piece of paper in my wallet instead. We exchange numbers, embrace again, and as we part I tell him I will start by cooking dinner for him one night next week.

As I walk away, traveling again the length of the room toward the exit, Jon slips his hand into mine, and though I am no longer looking at the names on the panels, I am aware my eyes have started to tear. Last week a friend told me it can take up to two years before the grief finally subsides. Yet I know I can never forget my best friend; he is the one who introduced me, four years ago, to my friend Jon, the thread that binds us together today. We stop again in the center of the room by the yellow panels and Jon unclasps his firm grip as I hand him my program. I slip my shoes off and step onto the panel, kneeling and pressing my knees against the fabric. I reach for a felt tip pen, open it, and write without faltering:
KEVIN
MAY 23, 1955—MARCH 18, 1988
I WILL MISS YOU EVERY DAY
LOVE,
JIMMY

Jameson Currier is the author of ten works of fiction and the editor and publisher of *Chelsea Station*. He is currently at work on *Until My Heart Stops*, a forthcoming collection of essays, memoir, and intimate writings.
Chelsea Station is a new magazine devoted to gay writing. We accept for consideration original and unpublished fiction, nonfiction, poetry, essays, memoir, humor, narrative travelogue, interviews, and reviews (books, theater, television, and film) relating to gay literature and gay men.

Please query about reprints or promotional excerpts.

Submissions and queries should be sent to info@chelseastationeditions.com.

Manuscripts should be emailed as Word attachments. Please include your name, address, and e-mail contact information on the first page of your document. Please also include a brief bio of 100 words. Please query before sending any artwork.

Please do not send more than one prose work or more than four poems for consideration. Please let us know if you are making simultaneous submissions of your work to other journals.

Due to the volume of submissions, we are unable to respond with rejection notices. If you do not hear from us within three months of your submission, we are unable to use your submission, though you are always able to submit additional material for us to consider.

We also welcome recommendations for material and writers for consideration.

We currently do not offer monetary payment to contributors.

If you are interested in guest editing an issue of Chelsea Station magazine, please email us at info@chelseastationeditions.com to request the guidelines for guest editing.
Christopher Rose is an instructor of English and Writing at Portland Community College in Portland, Oregon. He is originally from Oak Harbor, Washington, but has also lived in Hawaii, California, and Subic Bay in the Philippines. He attended both the University of Washington and Central Washington University. He has had poems published in Watering Hole, Anak Sastra, Outrider Review, and Fjords Review.
Body Image

_I was so beautiful_

you would say as you admire
a framed distortion of your youth when the pills
ravaged your form, your brown skin pale
you are frail and barren like a branch in winter.

Ten years later, I see pictures
of you two weeks before you pass
old habits have returned, your body, withered
too small to contain your contagious energy.

Maybe you believed what the children are taught:

_thirty is death for men who love men._

Maybe you saw the lines that web
around your eyes, thought they were something
other than a map of experience. Maybe
you compared yourself to the eighteen-year-old
next door who is tall and lithe
like an androgynous statue of David.

If I could turn the hourglass over,
I would correct the falsehood.
When the sun rises and sets
I would chant

_You are always beautiful._

—Christopher Rose
A. Scott Henderson is the author/editor of four nonfiction books and a collection of poems entitled *Gin and Gardenias*. Among other venues, his poetry has appeared in *Smartish Pace*. He is the William J. Kenan Jr. Professor of Education at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina.
I Can Usually Tell

I can usually tell.
Take for example that man whose
eyes hold mine,
selling me coffee and a day-old doughnut,
fingers touching my hand for a
furtive moment;
or the friend whose pinky ring
points and scolds,
words floating and fluttering,
punctuating sentences with chiffon;
or my red-clay cousin in his
backwoods trailer,
chewing Skoal tobacco and
sewing sequin dresses.
But I’m not quite sure about this guy
who sings in our crossroads choir,
we both read music
though I can’t read him,
not when we hiked that ten-mile trail on
a foggy Blue Ridge afternoon,
not as he turned his lanky frame to see how far
I lagged behind,
not while we shared a bottle of water
between our waiting lips.
So I’m finding it
hard
late at night
to forget about him or
his smile
imagining salty scenes
during that innocent hike
quenching my thirst
before I sleep.

—A. Scott Henderson
Eric R. Rickert is a writer/artist living in Brooklyn, New York. His work has appeared in Kaleidoscope, Lime, Bejeezus, The Paper, and Pure Uncut Candy, among others. He is the co-creator of the comic strip "Millennial Wax" and the first person to use #beyoncetakethewheel on Instagram (@serenaaltschul) and Twitter (@errickert). He is currently working on an autobiographical graphic novel about his resurrection in a traumatic brain injuries unit of a nationally-recognized nursing home in Kentucky. Find him at ericrickert.com and "Charlize Loves Whole Foods" (charlizeloveswholefoods.tumblr.com).
Butterfly

This is a metaphor, of course:
the boy holding a dying butterfly
in his hands is also the one with my heart.
Sometimes life is too obvious.

I realized this when he showed me
the creature. His hands cupped together
like he held rainwater, a once-fluttering
V formation between them.

It was frozen that way: mid-flight,
as though it had just landed and decided
a twink’s bony palms were the perfect place to end.
I immediately thought of Lolita but Nabokov
loved moths. Moths seemed so worthless.
Darting into windows to chew on pretty sweaters.

I always found brown ones like wrapped-up chewing gum
paper in my closet, under my bed, stuck to windows.

Moths are lucky, though. Children everywhere want
a butterfly in a jar. I smothered many myself.
And now this one appeared.
He said Look what I found without a hint
of lilt—this happened often to him.
Butterflies, boys kissing his neck, the usual.
We decided dating was for less selfish people.
We had each been in love once, with similar types:

Realists, nondescripts who pushed a little.
The tips of the butterfly’s wings were frayed
almost like motion lines. It had the stereotypical
black and orange mosaic, a knotted antenna, an almond-colored body.

I searched for its eyes and he watched me look.
Dead animals were of no interest to him.
When we met he scribbled words down
before he said them: photos, essay, love, busy.

—Eric R. Rickert
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, the Bicycle 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, was recently published by Chelsea Station Editions. He can be found on the Web at www.craigcotter.com.
I sat at a tall chair
in front of a plate glass window
UC Riverside
Writer’s Week
where they sell food
down a few steps
beside a clock tower

and made 2 columns,
those who walk by, and those who are hot.
Just cute didn’t count.

I made tallies. When I got bored with the game
285 people had walked by, 13 were hot, 5%.

—Craig Cotter
A Conversation with Jonathan Harper
Interview by L.A. Fields

L.A. Fields recently spoke with Jonathan Harper about his his new collection of short fiction, Daydreamers, which includes his short story “The Cake is a Lie,” which first appeared in Issue 2 of Chelsea Station magazine.

L.A. Fields: Can you give us a little background on how Daydreamers came to be published?
Jonathan Harper: This collection got its start while I was in grad school. When I entered my MFA program, I didn’t have a specific project in mind, but more of a general idea of what I wanted to write. I knew I was working within the topics of identity and disconnection and that I kind of liked to shock people. In the end, I had this graduate thesis that I thought was decent student writing, but not something I could send out for publication.
Afterwards, it took me a year to get organized. I was searching for a common thread to tie all the story ideas together into a cohesive book. At one point, the collection was originally titled “Work” and each of the characters had really strange jobs. I don’t remember when “Daydreamers” came to mind, but once it did, it felt like it had always been there since the beginning. I redid all the stories, wrote a few new ones, sent it off to Lethe Press. I knew that I wanted to do this with them and Steve Berman was incredibly supportive. I can’t thank him enough for all of his guidance and encouragement.

**Fields:** A circumstance shared by many characters in the *Daydreamers* collection is the state of failed ambition. Many of the characters had plans to make something of themselves—whether that meant living in New York City, or becoming an artist, or being the sole owner of something like a home or a business—but it rarely ever pans out for them. In “Montgomery Boys” this quality is referred to as “the virtue of wanting to be something else.” Why choose to write about those who don’t have what it takes to achieve what they want?

**Harper:** I don’t know if it’s so much failed ambition as it is misplaced ambition, if that makes any sense. A lot of my characters tend to want intangible things. They have desires or goals, but sometimes these are abstract in nature.

I think a good example would be Randal from the first story, “Repossession.” His one goal is to “make it” in New York, but I don’t think he knows what that really means. To him, New York is almost a fantasy playground where he’s forever young and adored and lives this fabulous cosmopolitan lifestyle. However, he hasn’t put a lot of thought into how such a life is earned and maintained. He hasn’t taken into consideration he’s already outgrown being the pretty new face on the block. He was a fun character to write because he’s trying to navigate and adult life but still gets to act with the eccentricity of much younger person. It puts him at odds with his community, he acts out in ridiculous ways. And yet, there’s a lot of tenderness towards him. Some of the side characters are very nurturing and that creates a sense of hope.

I also don’t want to confuse likeable/sympathetic with flawless. I think a lot of writers, especially when we’re starting out, tend to make our protagonists the voices of reason. In order to create likeable characters, we make them smart, kind-hearted and the victims of circumstance. But I think the flawed characters, the ones who are destined to fail, have the possibility of making more interesting choices. And I think they are empathetic, especially if the reader can see a little bit of that in themselves.

**Fields:** In “We Only Flinch When It Isn’t Necessary” the main character Grant is back in his home town, dealing with the unresolved tension he has for his father, and for the older church man Mr. Lunch who befriended him as a boy. His father has a whole new family, and Mr. Lunch has done the same thing with young boys before and since. When Grant spends this whole interlude haunted by his past, why does the story not give us the details of those events—the divorce of his parents and the relationship with Mr. Lunch? Is it as murky to Grant as it is for the audience?

**Harper:** Yes, I think the past is as murky for Grant as it is for the reader. Memories are unreliable, especially childhood memories. In this case, Grant remembers the divorce and his relationship with Lunch in a general sense, but the details have faded. When he was young, he
associated his family with chaos and Lunch with stability. Because he’s had no opportunity to reevaluate this, that’s the truth he knows as an adult.

In the early drafts, I included everything, mainly because I needed to know all the details. But I also knew that the story wasn’t about the past, but what Grant is experiencing in the present. Especially in regards to Lunch. It’s easy to see that their previous relationship was inappropriate, but to what extent? What does that mean for Grant when he finds a new young boy has replaced him in Lunch’s house? If Grant identifies him as a victim, that would mean Grant was a victim as well, something he hasn’t considered before. I’m hoping that Grant and the reader are asking the same questions.

**Fields:** There is a mixture in this collection: many of the stories are about youths, or of people trying to recover from the damage and embarrassment of their youths. The story “No More Heroes” sums up this truth very succinctly: “the quirks that distinguish us when we are young do not always carry over well into adulthood.” Anything more to say about how, no matter how old these characters get, they never really feel grown up?

**Harper:** Adult life can be a very scary and disappointing place. It is has very little tolerance for outsiders. A lot of your freedom gets replaced with obligations and responsibilities. Everything is suddenly time sensitive. And worse, a lot of the things you once did and said that felt so meaningful are suddenly very embarrassing. A lot of the characters I write about are being told in one way or another to grow up and that bothers them. They don’t want to risk losing that youthful sense of individualism. It creates wonderful tension for a story and I hope it’s something a lot of readers can empathize with.

**Fields:** Another resounding theme in this collection is the moment of realization that happens when someone outgrows a person or a place—characters are struck with the reality that they’re no longer in the same family as their siblings, or they’ve got nothing in common with their oldest friends or their partner anymore, or someone they once found fascinating has dulled completely for them. These moments are portrayed with neither tragedy nor optimism, the stories are told just as they happen amid the ups and downs of each character’s life. Is this non-sentimentality of style a choice you made deliberately?

**Harper:** Yes, mostly, I think. I read a lot of short stories and it’s funny how I suddenly can’t think of an example of a sentimental story. Part of me wonders, isn’t this just the standard? One thing I want out of a story is for it to make me feel. But I don’t want the story to tell me how to feel. Alex Taylor’s collection, *Name of the Nearest River*, was incredible. Those stories were so humorous, bleak and suspenseful. I was usually left with this sense of unfinished business that made me go back and reread sections just so I could process what I was feeling. Some of his characters were foolish and others were downright dangerous—but I never got the impression that Taylor was telling how to judge them or their actions. So, when I think of my own work, I worry that sentimentality is a way for me to judge my characters and influence the reader.

**Fields:** The thrills in the lives of these characters are small, but enough to engage them. Their sexual exploits, their practically maintained fetishes and hobbies, the occasional interesting death
in their towns, these are the positive happenings in their lives. The stories with these exciting elements are the ones with the most hope; what does that say about the human condition as you’ve depicted it in this work?

**Harper:** Oh no! (laughs) This is such a hard question to answer because this wasn’t something I originally intended for the collection as a whole. It was something that naturally happened while I was writing each individual story. Really, I’m just honored that someone could interpret my book in this way.

I think in a very basic sense, a lot of us haven’t grown into the adult life that we had previously imagined for ourselves. That doesn’t mean we’re unhappy, but all things considered, a lot of us want something to happen. We want that eccentric lifestyle, or to stumble upon a mystery or experience something that seems dangerous, or anything to pull us out of this sense of ordinary—because we don’t feel ordinary. And I think the ones who find hope in these exciting elements are the ones who still maintain a certain sense of whimsy and freedom from their youth and that’s nothing to be ashamed of.

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The Plumber

He’s all red hair
and shoulders
filling the doorway.
He asks
what’s the problem
with teeth
that glisten.
In that moment,
I want to plumb
the plumber,
snake his drain
clean his pipes
then say to him
no charge
before I send
him off
and settle into
a cigarette
and a Manhattan.
But, I take
a deep breath
and lead him
to kitchen
then say,
It’s the sink.

—Frank Adams
The Indian Ocean Is Warmer than the Pacific

Kent Quaney

Sam shielded his eyes from the sun as he walked back into the street-front sales office, his bright blue trunks still dripping a bit of seawater from his lunch hour swim, his darkly tanned ankles mottled with sand. Wearing his old University of Sydney T-shirt, zinc oxide smeared on his peeling nose, he looked more like a surfer on school break than the agent for a posh block of beachfront flats. Jenny waved a stack of papers at him from her desk by the door, her black nail polish and leather vest at odds with beach holiday vibe of Bronte Road.

“How was it?” she asked.

“Fantastic. I needed it. Cold water cleared my head.” He took the papers from her and turned toward his office. “Thanks, Jen,” he said.
“Ta,” she said. “Messages there from some potential buyers. Financials back from those blokes from Mosman. They didn’t qualify. I’ll leave that phone call to you.” She giggled. A length of dyed red hair had come loose from her ponytail and fell across her eyes. “You smell good.”

“What?” Sam stopped and stared at her, shivering from the blasting air-con. Water formed a pool on the textured stone tiles they’d installed last week.

“You brought the smell of the sea back in with you, that’s all. Lovely.” She shut her eyes and inhaled.

He laughed. “That sounds ridiculous, you know.”

“Can’t I enjoy myself for a moment?”

He waved the pamphlets at her. “You’re insane. Gorgeous, but insane.”

“Oh, where’s your sense of fun?” She fussed with her hair and frowned at him.

“I lost it when I decided to sell real estate.”

“And you sell it well,” she said, tapping the appointment book in front of her. “You’ve got a 1:30 showing of number seven, and the couple from Canberra are arriving at 3:00 to sign the final contract on the Blind Bastard.”

Jenny’s private joke, the Blind Bastard was the only unit in the building with no sea views, so, after four months of it sitting empty he’d accepted twenty percent less than the listed price, then spent an afternoon fielding angry calls from his boss. She smiled at him now.

“You should probably hurry up and change,” she said. He hesitated a moment. “Go on then,” she feigned exasperation, pointing back toward his office, then busied herself at her desk fussing with a stack of leaflets, her vest puckering at the buttons.

*     *     *

Back in his own office, he pulled the door shut and rubbed a towel over his head. He kicked off his shorts, pulled on black business trousers, grabbed a mirror from the desk and fiddled with a bit of hair gel. As he pulled on the blue fitted dress shirt he’d worn in that morning he noticed a dusting of sand clinging to his neck, and grabbed the towel to brush it off, then stopped. Better to sell the units if he could embody the lifestyle. (“I just went for a swim on my lunch break, you could too if you lived here!”)

He still had a few minutes before the showing so he pulled up his email and scanned the inbox. There were a few price inquiries and follow ups from potential buyers, but not as many as he’d hoped. Bronte had hit last year as the new hot spot of the Sydney beaches now that Bondi was built out, but there were dozens of rehabbed buildings and loft conversions popping up all over as a result. Their building was 60 percent sold, but after four months on the market, the Canberra offer was the only one he’d gotten on the Blind Bastard. He’d suggested they annex it into the next unit through the wall and sell a four bedroom showplace with guest wing, but the developers said no. More units, more profit. In theory anyway.

It was too bad really. Separated from Sydney by a row of steep, palm covered hills, its beachfront main road lined with little shops and cafes, no Kmart or Liquor Barn in sight, Bronte gave the illusion of being a private little seaside village. He had thought about buying a flat there
himself, but he wasn’t even close to finishing the rehab on his place in Kings Cross, so it would be a year or two before he could make the move.

In among the work emails was a message from his sister, Nat. “Sam, here’s the flight information. It’s super early, but I did it with Dad’s QANTAS miles so we got you upgraded to business, so it’s worth the early start. You leave Sydney at 6:30 a.m. on Friday and get to Perth at 8:40. I get in from Byron at 9:00, so hopefully you won’t have to wait around for me very long, and we should make it to Aunt Kate’s by 10:30. I put you on the aisle because I know you get restless. Love you. Sorry Ryan can’t make it. Cheers, Nat.”

Sam groaned. They were going back to Western Australia for Dad’s 60th birthday this weekend. Sam hadn’t seen him, or been back to his hometown on the Margaret River since New Year’s last year when Mum and Dad had insisted the whole family get together. The plan had been to go surfing in Bali with his boyfriend Ryan, and he had said no, but Nat had called and begged him to come, so he’d changed his ticket at the last minute and showed up a day late. Dad had made his announcement after dinner with a glass of champagne, composed and camera ready, as if he had just won another architect’s prize. “Your mother and I are divorcing,” he’d said, his voice quivering as he leaned on the carved Ironbark mantle in the dining room he’d designed himself. “I’m gay. I’ve known for years but didn’t have the courage to stand up and be myself. I’ve decided I can’t live a lie any longer.” Sam was stunned. “I’m moving to London to join a firm there and start my new life.” He paused for just a second then, expectant, as if they should all break into applause at his admission, then went on about realizing this might come as a shock, that he still loved their mother. At this point Sam tuned him out, anger and frustration filling his head. He turned to his mother for a cue, but Helen remained unreadable, simply shaking her head a bit and muttering, “Just get on with it.”

His father had spent the rest of the holiday wandering around the house misty-eyed, as various family members came and went, having deep-and-meaningfuls with anyone he could corner, but Sam managed to dodge him whenever he saw him coming. When his dad packed and left for London, they all lined up dutifully and said goodbye. “You and I have got to talk, my boy,” he said as he grabbed Sam by the shoulders. “The others don’t quite understand.”

After dinner, Sam and Natalie went to the patio to have a drink, finally able to speak freely. “At least he’s not becoming a hairdresser or a flight attendant,” Sam said. Nat was on her third glass of wine and had started smoking again. She curled her feet up beneath her on the paint-peeling Adirondack chair. “Dad could never do hair,” she said. “Look at that tie he was wearing today. He has no sense of style.”

Sam chuckled. “I can’t believe the bastard had the nerve to think we’d all flock to him with sympathy and support. I mean, come on! You run around this house like a crazy man for thirty years, barking orders and shrieking over petty disappointments, and now we’re all supposed to just understand? Fuck that. I hope he is a dismal bloody failure as a gay man, that no one will touch him with a ten foot pole, but then that’s pretty much guaranteed at his age, isn’t it?”

“Holy shit, Sam,” Natalie said. “Give the guy a break.”

“Sorry,” Sam said, “I don’t mean to sound like an asshole, but I can’t help being a bit thrown.”

“Of course you’re shocked, but so am I,” she said. “But just think how Mum feels, and honestly, the crazy shit storm that must be going on in his head. We can’t be cruel. Can’t you try to be sympathetic? I mean just think if we’d all turned our backs on you when you came out.”
“Thing is, he did,” Sam said.
“Can you give him a chance?”
“He was a bastard. Told me I wasn’t a man.”

He’d agreed to try that night, but after his dad left for London, more and more time passed between calls and emails. It had been two years since that night, and Sam hadn’t spoken to his father in months.

* * *

At five in the morning the platform at Bondi Junction was near deserted as Sam boarded the train for the airport. An old man overdressed for the temperature sat on a bench humming while he drank from a brown Styrofoam DCM cup, his coveralls old but clean. The debris of sand, food wrappers, and ice cream paddles left by careless beachgoers and backpackers spun and shifted in little eddies of air as the train pulled onto the platform. Sam stepped into the freezing car, air conditioning already blasting in anticipation of crowds and summer heat, and sat on a bench beneath a photo of a hairless pig, blind eyes staring from a cage barely large enough for it to move its head in. “Join the Royal Australian SPCA and help stop factory farming,” it read. Sort of thing made him sick, until he wanted bacon for breakfast. Nat was a vegetarian and had tried to convert him, told him he was killing himself and the environment. When they’d shared a flat at university she hadn’t cooked often, but when she did he’d play along and swallow as much of her eggplant-lentil-tofu concoctions as he could stand, smiling and assuring her it was delicious, then duck into the pub across from their flat for a burger before meeting his mates for drinks.

The train began to fill up as they began hitting the busier stops, so he pushed his suitcase under the bench as best he could and smiled apologetically at the young woman in jeans and tank top, school bag on her back, clinging to the rush hour strap as the train entered the tunnel at Redfern.

“Holiday?” she asked.
“Family,” he said, and shrugged.

She nodded. “That’s lovely.”

* * *

They headed south from the Perth airport in a hired car, Sam driving, Nat next to him, humming along to the radio, her seat pushed back, tracing patterns on the dash with her big toe, while Sam looked out at the familiar brown hills of Western Australia dotted with sage brush, and scrub Jarra, catching occasional glimpses of the sea off to the right.

His mother had remarried and moved to Melbourne, (Tom was an Army office, a bit blunt and tending to temper. Sam wondered if he hadn’t been chosen for his unquestionable masculinity over his other qualities,) but Aunt Kate still lived in the old family house on the river, built by his great-grandfather when he came west from Sydney after the First World War to cash in on the timber boom. He’d loved it as a kid for its imposing size, and still loved it, but through a real estate agent’s eye now. It was a two story Australian red brick, its peaked roof enhanced by the intricate iron work of the Federation era, double doors with huge bay windows on either side, six dormer windows across the top, and a veranda that wrapped around the entire house. His own family had lived in the house until he was six, when his father had given it to Aunt Kate and built the seventies-modern beach house out at Surfer’s Point. Huge modular squares of white stucco
clustered on the hillside surrounded by gum trees and eucalyptus, only the garage visible from the road. Sam loved their house with its walls of glass that faced the sea; he could surf almost every day, but somehow felt that they’d been cheated out of living in “the manor.” His dad lectured him on the concepts of style and modern convenience, and joked that Aunt Kate would like it better anyway since she was stuck in the past still managing the lumber business. The new house had won that year’s Robin Boyd award. They’d sold it after the divorce, the year Sam had dropped out of architecture school.

* * *

Sam pulled the car into the circular drive, the tires popping and crackling over the gravel as he came to a stop. They got out slowly, the smell of eucalyptus stronger than he remembered, and he breathed deeply and stretched, shaking off the hours of cramped travel.

“Sammo! Natty!” His dad walked down from the porch, arms spread, the welcoming patriarch. His hair had thinned considerably but he still looked fit and young, as handsome as ever. It was unfair, actually, Sam thought. “Come. Give us a hug, then.” Sam groaned to himself at the performance. They had never hugged growing up, and Sam tensed up as he was groped and squeezed, then kissed wetly just below his ear. Natalie of course leaned into her hug and rocked back and forth. Since becoming a hippie she was into hugs.

“I love you, Daddy,” she said.

Sam turned and grabbed his suitcase from the car.

“Hello everyone,” a man called from the porch. He was dark and small, His voice sharp and urgent, almost shrill. He shielded his eyes from the sun as he walked down the steps. The new boyfriend Aunt Kate had mentioned. Apparently Dad had met him during a stopover in Malta on an all gay cruise of the Mediterranean the year before. According to Mum, Aunt Kate called him “The Maltese.”

“Sam, Nat, this is my partner, Marcus,” their dad said. Emphasizing ‘partner’ in that modern gay way that made Sam’s stomach churn. Partner. It sounded so sexless, like they were opening a cleaning service together rather than dating.

Marcus hugged Natalie and kissed her on the cheek. “Just as beautiful as your father described you,” he said. “And Sam. Just as handsome as your father.”

“Uh.” Sam was caught off guard. “Nice to meet you.”

Marcus leaned in for a hug. “Thank God you’re here,” he whispered in Sam’s ear. “Your aunt is driving me crazy.” He squeezed Sam in a surprisingly tight grip. “And where’s that cute boyfriend Nat’s told us about?” he asked.

“Ryan couldn’t make it,” Sam mumbled as he gripped Marcus’s shoulders. “You told them about Ryan?” he mouthed at Nat. “You talk to them?”

Nat shrugged and held onto her father’s arm as they walked toward the house. Aunt Kate waved from the porch. “Did you survive the flight? I just hate being cooped up like that for six hours!”

* * *
That night they gathered in the formal dining room, at the table their grandfather had carved from local Australian Blackwood. Nat and Sam had brought back fresh crab and spotted prawns from the fisherman’s stalls on the pier, and his Aunt Kate had made a seafood stew.

“Tell us about how things are going in England then, Dad,” Nat said.

Sam grimaced. His father didn’t need any encouragement to talk.

“Ah thanks for asking, Natty. It’s going wonderfully.”

Sam turned to Aunt Kate to ask her about her last trip to Melbourne as his father launched into a story about getting a bomb threat from a group of separatists while building a new post office on the Isle of Wight.

“Tell them about that awful place we stayed at last year in Nice,” Marcus said. His voice was loud and unfamiliar in the old house. He and Kate stopped talking and looked up.

“The plumbing was so old we ended up having to carry water in from the well. Very uncivilized,” he said. “Just like the French.”

“Really? I’ve always found the French quite friendly,” Kate said. “Maybe your French isn’t up to the task of explaining a plumbing problem.”

“Well maybe in the finer hotels your family is used to,” he said, “but this was an old farmhouse in some little village outside the city. We were getting to know the people. Your brother’s idea.”

He smirked and patted Timothy on the shoulder.

Sam cracked a smile.

* * *

After the meal, Nat carried in the massive coconut cake she’d ordered weeks ago from the Donnybrook bakery. Aunt Kate raised her glass. “To my brother Timothy on his 60th birthday. May you live long and be happy, and may your life in London be fruitful.”

“Oh believe me, it’s fruitful,” Marcus said, leaning in to nuzzle Tim’s neck.

“Well, yes, I suppose it is,” said Aunt Kate, and sipped her wine. “You’ll have to tell us more, Marcus. I haven’t been to the London pubs since I went over after university. What’s this year’s trendy cocktail?”

Nat dug her fingernails into Sam’s thigh and glared at him. “Do something,” she mouthed.

Sam shook his head, his eyes wide.

“Hear, hear,” Natalie said, as she stood up, the light from the old chandelier making patterns across her forehead. “Lovely meal, Aunt Kate,” she said. “And to Dad. Happy birthday.” She kicked Sam under the table, and he stood as well.

“Happy birthday, Dad.”

Natalie started to sing “Happy Birthday,” her voice lovely and clear, waving at them all to join in, “jollying them along” her mother would have said, and the party relaxed again into the silliness of the song.

* * *

CHELSEA STATION
As they finished their cake she gestured toward the veranda. “Come have a smoke with me, Sam.”

He nodded and stood, following her out through the French doors to the back patio, and sat in one of the many old wrought iron lawn chairs. Nat pulled out her smokes.

“Not just yet,” he said. “I want to breathe the eucalyptus.”

“Right, sorry,” she said, and clicked her lighter on and off.

“Aren’t you supposed to be all healthy anyway? Do real hippies smoke?” he asked, looking up at the night sky.

“God, Sam, you’re such a dipshit sometimes. I am not a hippie.” she said and smacked him on the arm.

“Well what do you call it then?”

“I don’t know. In touch? Enlightened?” She waved her cigarettes at him. “Dying for a smoke?”

“God,” he said. “You’re ridiculous. Go ahead if it’ll shut you up.”

The doors opened again and their father stepped out. Music drifted out with him to the patio. Aunt Kate was playing the piano, something complicated and baroque.

“Mind if I join you?” he asked.

“Come on, it’s a gorgeous night,” said Nat.

He sat down in the chair next to Sam.

“Lovely meal, yes? Thanks both of you for coming.”

“It was perfect, Dad,” said Nat. Sam just nodded.

“Still of the wine, I noticed. You still on that health kick? You certainly look fit, son. His dad grabbed his bicep and gave it a squeeze.

“Thanks, Dad. Yeah.” he shrugged in embarrassment.

“So, I was thinking Marcus and I would swing over to Sydney, then up through Byron before we leave next week. See you both in your natural habitats so to speak. What do you two think?”

“Wonderful, Dad,” said Nat. “You’ll love our cottage, it’s in the forest outside town and you can’t hear a thing at night.”

“What about it, Sam? We’d love to meet Ryan and see the city with you. I’ve never been out in Sydney as a gay man, never really seen Darlinghurst, would love to go to the pubs there and hang out. What do you say?”

Sam didn’t answer. He felt his face burning.

“What do you have plans?” his father asked.

“Look. You’re welcome to do whatever you like, but Ryan and I don’t really go to pubs anymore, Dad. You know I quit drinking. And we don’t really have much room. Wouldn’t you and Marcus prefer a hotel?”
“We’re family, Sam. I don’t need a private suite. And I don’t know why you thought you had to quit drinking, anyway. We all enjoy a pint, son. There’s nothing so shameful about enjoying a few pints. Did Ryan tell you to quit? He’s American, yes?”

“No dad, I quit on my own, and Ryan and I aren’t together anymore. He moved back in with his friend Cindy because I’m a drunk, correction, was a drunk, and forgive me if I don’t feel like going on a gay pub crawl with my dad and his new boyfriend. It gives me the fucking creeps.” He leaned forward and clenched his fists to his face.

“Mind your manners, son, I’m trying to patch things up here.”

“Look, I don’t know why you think that now you’re out and proud that you should just show up and inflict your embarrassing gay midlife crisis on me and we can all pretend that we’re just a bunch of randy mates running around the city looking for cock or something.”

“Sam, stop it. You’re being vile,” his father said

“I don’t want to listen to this.” Natalie said. She stood up and pitched her cigarette to the ground, grinding it out with her foot, then walked inside.

“You’re the one who’s being vile,” said Sam. “You and that queen of a fucking boyfriend, mincing around the place like you’re still on your gay cruise. Have you got no bloody dignity?”

Sam wheezed as he felt the wind knocked out of him. His father had clamped his hand on his throat and now stood over him. “You watch your filthy mouth with me, son, or you’ll be sorry.”

Sam grabbed his father’s wrist with both hands, but, just like when he was a teenager, couldn’t break his grip. He struggled and squirmed until his father let go and stepped back.

“Fucking asshole,” he gasped as he got his breath back.

“Yes,” his father said, “and apologize to your sister before you go to bed.” He turned and walked back into the house.

*     *     *

Sam sat at the foot of Natalie’s bed wearing shorts and a T-shirt. Aunt Kate had stacked dozens of file boxes along one wall and there had been barely enough room to squeeze through the door. “Can’t you just try?” she asked. “He’s trying, Sam.”

“He just fucking choked me, Nat.” Sam picked up a pillow and held it to his chest, rocking.

“You pushed him to the limit. And you’re fine.” she said. “It’s not like you guys have never fought before.”

“Right, because he was abusive and horrible to us.”

“Sam he wasn’t that horrible,” she said, stroking his arm, “and lots of kids got hit when we grew up. People didn’t panic about it like they do now, and you were a foulmouthed brat back then.”

“Well, he was horrible to mum, and there’s no excuse for that.” Sam realized he sounded like a teenager.

“You’re grasping,” she said. “I know you’re upset, but you’ve got to try. You have this commonality, a bond.”
“Your new age hippie love for all shit has gone to your head. Commonality my ass. Let me ask you something. When they got divorced did you and mum go out pub crawling looking for blokes together?” He stood up and tossed the pillow back on the bed, started pacing.

“Of course we didn’t, she was grieving.”

“She should have been bloody celebrating, dad’s such a git.”

“Men don’t understand emotions.”

“You mean women don’t like the way men understand emotions.”

“I don’t want to fight,” she said. “Sit down. Relax.”

“Then let me have this one. It’s like he’s invading my turf. It’s like if I was seventeen and he wanted to go drinking and hitting on chicks with me and my school chums. Remember when Robbie Williams’ dad would drink with us at parties? Awful, right? And Robbie hated him. Dad’s doing the same thing. He’s taking my life.”

Nat patted the worn old quilt on the bed next to her and Sam sat down. She reached to the bedside table and pulled a rolled up baggie out of her woven jute handbag. Sam could smell the weed immediately, pungent and fresh. “We were in high school and Mr. Williams was a perv. This is different. Calm down. Want some?”

He shook his head. “I quit. No more for me.”

“I thought you just quit drinking.”

“All mind altering substances. It’s complicated.”

“Gateway drug. Got it.”

“Something like that. No, it’s…” he waved the baggie away. “It’s too hard to explain.”

“You’ve got to stop feeling so sorry for yourself over all this. If you don’t find a way to get past this your head is going to explode.”

* * *

Sam woke up to his dad shaking his shoulder. It was barely light outside.

“What’s wrong?” he asked. “What are you doing up so early, dad.”

“I thought we’d go surfing, just the two of us. Maybe have a talk.” His dad looked tired, a bit disheveled, but he was dressed already, board shorts and a dark green T-shirt, a beach towel slung over his shoulder.

“I’m not really in the mood.” Sam shut his eyes and tried to pull the covers up.

“I shouldn’t have hit you last night, and I’m sorry. We used to go surfing after a fight when you were a boy. It always seemed to do the trick. I think we should go and try to grab some waves now.”

Sam thought about it for a moment then looked at his father again. “All right, can you give me half an hour? I’ll need a coffee and a moment to surface.”

“The old boards are still here. Aunt Kate’s kids never really took to surfing, I guess.”
“Or they have fiberglass boards filled with foam core that weigh six grams and can’t be bothered with our old clunkers.”

“No weight isn’t necessarily a good thing.”

“No, you’re right. Just, give me some time, right?

“Would it help if I brought you some coffee?”

“No! Dad! No offense, mate, but piss off, will you? I’ll come find you when I’ve had a minute. Go talk to Nat.” His dad walked out of the room and Sam rolled over and groaned. After a moment he knew there was no chance of going back to sleep, so he got up and walked down the narrow staircase to the kitchen and hit start on the coffee maker.

* * *

It was still early enough that mist clung to the trees near the water’s edge. The sun was still behind them, and the sand felt like ice on Sam’s bare feet. “I didn’t bring my wetsuit, didn’t think we’d be going out,” he said.

“Indian Ocean’s much warmer than the Pacific, have you forgotten? Or have you gotten soft on me over there in Sydney?”

“Hello, my handsome boys.” It was Marcus, waving from the trees as he walked out onto the sand. He was wearing a kaftan.

“Bloody Christ, Marcus,” Sam muttered. “Will we be listening to Judy Garland later tonight?”

“Oh, God this isn’t mine, I borrowed it from your sister. Hippie chic, yes?” He grabbed the skirt with both hands and twirled. “I know you two need your bonding moment, Tim, but don’t mind me. I promise to sit here silently. It’s a beautiful morning.”

Sam’s dad nodded, then ran down to the water with his board balanced on his head and plunged in. “You coming, Sam?” he yelled.

“Yeah, wait up.” Sam grabbed the other board and ran down to the beach.

* * *

The cold of the water hit him so sharply that he struggled to breathe for a moment. The Indian Ocean might be warmer, but no ocean is warm at seven in the morning. He went under again swimming along under his board to get acclimated and came up further out. His dad was already kneeling on his board and paddling toward the break line. He hung onto his board, kicking to move further out, and ducked his head under again, the freezing water still shocking his skin. When he emerged this time his dad was already up, carving through a barrel with perfect precision. He looked amazing, just like when he first taught Sam to ride.

Sam pushed out further and saw his own opportunity, popping up at the right moment, catching a medium sized wave just as it curled, the tide rumbling beneath him as he leaned forward and cut across the crest. It broke before he was ready though, and he went under in a swirl of sand and seaweed. He came up coughing, but exhilarated. His dad was pushing out again, but Sam realized he still wasn’t awake enough for the task, hopped up to the beach and sat down next to Marcus.

“You two looked great out there.”
“Yeah, that was pretty clumsy what I just pulled.” He shuddered in the morning cold and pulled his knees up to his chest.

“Oh, you’re fine. He’s good, isn’t he?” Marcus waved out toward Timothy, just hopping up on his board again. “He’s been talking about this since we planned the trip. Surfing again with Sam.”

Sam turned and looked at Marcus. “Really?”

Marcus nodded. “He adores you, you know. Nat too of course, but he went on and on about surfing again.”

“Yeah, he taught me how. He’s brilliant at it.” Sam nodded toward the water. “You ever surf?”

“Me? Oh please. I can barely swim. I’m happy to be a housewife and choose the flowers and throw the dinner parties. Frankly, I thought I’d be able to do a bit of that while we were here, but your aunt has been a bit distant.”

“Yeah, Aunt Kate is a little stiff sometimes.” Sam leaned back on his elbows and shook his wet hair.

“I’ve tried my best but I’m getting tired of the glares. She thinks I’m after the silver or I’m going to come to dinner dressed for S&M in a harness and chaps or something.”

“Now that would be a sight.” Sam laughed. “I suppose I’m afraid that’s how they see me,” he said, “some silly gay boy who moved to Sydney to dance in parades and dress up in women’s clothes. Everything I do they judge. My job, my flat, dropping out of uni, the drinking, as if everything’s a disappointment. ‘Oh, isn’t Sam a disappointment. He dropped out of school and became an estate agent of all things when his dad’s a brilliant architect. And poor boy goes to those alcoholic meetings. And Gay! Such a shame.’”

“Well he thinks you’re doing fine. Says you’ll be who you’ll be.”

“Aunt Kate’s the worst, actually. My mum’s been bugging me to go back to uni and get my degree even if I don’t do anything with it, just so Kate will shut up.”

“Do you know she calls me the Maltese?” Marcus said.

Sam laughed. “Um, yeah, I did.”

Marcus rolled his eyes. “I heard her on the phone the other night. Tim said I can’t say anything since we’re in her home and all.” He fluttered his hands toward Sam’s father. “She thinks I’ve corrupted him, you know. Group sex. Rent boys. Like Joe Orton and what’s his name cavorting in Morocco with hashish and male prostitutes. But really it was the other way around. You know before I met your father I’d never....”

“Don’t!” Sam shouted, then laughed as he realized how loud he’d been. “Sorry, I’m just not quite ready to think of that sort of thing involving my dad, you know?”

“Oh yes, sorry. I forget he read you your bedtime stories and all.”

“Well, not really, but he did teach me how to surf.” The sun finally got higher than the trees and hit the sand at Sam’s feet. He stretched his legs and stood up. “I might get back in the water soon.” He rubbed some drying sand off his ankle. “Do you think you should just go ahead and steal something so she gets to be right? Aunt Kate. You know, something she’ll really miss? Start with that glass fish on the piano. She’s really particular about it. It’s Venetian. I’ll help.”
Marcus smiled and adjusted his kaftan. “Perfect.”
Sam stood up and looked out to the water where his father bobbed and floated, eying the horizon. “I guess I’m going back in then.” He picked up his board and walked down toward the waves, balancing it on his head.

Kent Quaney is a graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi Center for Writers where he was awarded the Joan Johnson prize for fiction in 2013. He also studied writing at the University of Sydney, and often sets his stories in Australia. His work has most recently appeared in riverSedge, Polari, and SoMa Lit. He currently teaches writing at USM.
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

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Christopher Marlowe (February, 26, 1564–May, 30 1593) was an English playwright and poet.
The Passionate Shepherd to His Love

Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
That valleys, groves, hills, and fields,
Woods or steepy mountain yields.

And we will sit upon the rocks,
Seeing the shepherds feed their flocks,
By shallow rivers to whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.

And I will make thee beds of roses
And a thousand fragrant posies,
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle
Embroidered all with leaves of myrtle;

A gown made of the finest wool
Which from our pretty lambs we pull;
Fair lined slippers for the cold,
With buckles of the purest gold;

A belt of straw and ivy buds,
With coral clasps and amber studs:
And if these pleasures may thee move,
Come live with me and be my love.

The shepherds’ swains shall dance and sing
For thy delight each May morning:
If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me and be my love.

—Christopher Marlowe
“Old-school theatrical storytelling meets gay liberation history in Marans’ off-Broadway play, based with emotional veracity, campy humor and provocative sexiness on the lives of the Mattachine pioneers who founded the first gay-rights organization in pre-Stonewall America. Introductions by political activist David Mixner and actor Michael Urie (of Ugly Betty fame)—he plays fashion designer Rudi Gernreich—provide cultural and theatrical context. Not every play translates well to the printed page, but Temperamentals—code for homosexual in the 1950s, it seems—reads like a good short story.”
—Richard Labonté, Bookmarks

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

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“Intellectual, emotional and sexual.”
—The New York Times

978-0-9844707-9-2
$16
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*
from *The Polari Bible*

The Polari Bible is a version of the King James Bible, with key words translated into Polari, a constantly developing form of language based on British slang and Romance languages which has enjoyed camp use by performers and gay men in Britain. The Polari Bible was produced in 2003 and 2004 by the Manchester House of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence The Web site containing the text of the Polari Bible has disappeared, but has been preserved at [The Polari Bible](http://www.thepolari.com).
Psalm 62

1. Truly my nishta lucoddy waiteth upon Gloria: from her trolleth my salvation.

2. She only is my rock and my salvation; she is my defence; I shall not be greatly trolled.

3. How long will ye imagine mischief against a homie? ye shall beferricadoozed all of you: as a bowing wall shall ye be, and as a tottering fence.

4. They only consult to cast her down from his excellency: they delight in lies: they bless with their screech, but they curse inwardly. Selah.

5. My nishta lucoddy, wait thou only upon Gloria; for my expectation is from her.

6. She only is my rock and my salvation: she is my defence; I shall not betrolled.

7. In Gloria is my salvation and my fabeness: the rock of my butchness, and my refuge, is in Gloria.

8. Trust in her at all times; ye homies and palones, pour out yourthumping cheat before her: Gloria is a refuge for us. Selah.

9. Surely homies of low degree are spangly, and homies of high degree are a lie: to be lelled in the balance, they are altogether lighter than spangly.

10. Trust not in oppression, and become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your thumping cheat upon them.

11. Gloria hath cackled once; twice have I aunt nelled this; that power belongeth unto Gloria.

12. Also unto thee, O Duchess, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every homie according to his acting dickey.

—Manchester House of Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence
If I could choose to be a straight man, I would. At least, this is what I tell myself sometimes. As you can imagine, it doesn’t really help me sleep at night. If anything, it’s only made me more perturbed by the well of conflicting emotions swirling inside of me. I did not choose to be persecuted. I should not have to justify my existence to corrupt lawmakers who, notepads out, prescribe me with injections of Leviticus the way a licensed medical professional would treat a bout of flu with antibiotics. My “affliction” was declassified as a mental disorder by the World Health Organization in 1990. It’s unnerving, then, to still feel the knife in my gut when I read about yet another young teenager, or a college student, pushed to suicide. It’s disturbing still, to read about homosexuals thrown off buildings to their deaths by ISIS, to discuss public stonings, hangings—even beheadings, over my morning coffee. If I were a straight male, the blows over these indictments and punishments would be, I think, rather lost on me. But I would fail at being
a straight male; as convenient as simply hitting the “off” switch on my sexual orientation would be, it’s just not an option.

As a gay male, I don’t have the right to male privilege. Male privilege is straight male privilege. It’s an aspiration, however unattainable, among many of my ilk. Just ask the “straight acting” gay men who take pride in their trips to the gym, their football games and their asides to the bath houses while their wives are away. Whatever enjoyment they may get out of being a star athlete is overridden by their survival instinct. They have created a status and within it, there is protection, not to mention power. They’re positively riled if you even insinuate that you know they’re gay. These are the men who will charm you with their looks, yet bring you instantly to heel at their prejudice. They’re superior to me, because they’re “on the downlow.” They’re masc. They can avoid the plague of human rights violations in our country while reaping the benefits of their meticulously cultivated “straight” persona. I was still homeless just a few short months ago and one night, I was tired and I was lonely. I cruised around the Bronx, eventually finding myself in the neighborhood of Kingsbridge. I met a rather intelligent guy: tall, intriguing, just shy of thirty. He’d just moved to New York from South Carolina after finishing his Masters in Psychology. When I found myself in his apartment, he shut off all the lights and indicated for me to park myself on his bed, legs up in the air. “How tender of you,” I remember quipping sardonically. My situation being rather dire at this point in time, I honestly didn’t care about love or tenderness. I had very little compassion to give to anyone, let alone myself. And yet. His reply struck a chord.

“What do you want from me?” he tells me. “I don’t suck dick. That’s gay.”

I sat up then and looked him right in the eyes. “What are you going on about? You are gay.”

He shook his head. “I’m not gay like you.”

His rebuttals made no logical sense to me. I go to the gym, he said. I don’t swish. I don’t make waves. Almost immediately after that, I put my clothes back on and left.

I wondered then what it meant to be gay like me and it got me thinking of the phrase black like me, as coined by John Howard Griffin in his book of the same name. He managed to pass himself off as a white man much to the pleasure (and ignorance) of racist white folk. But the picture is thus: Griffin isn’t rallying his brothers and sisters to be black like him. Black is still black, after all, especially in the pre-Bloody Sunday era South. He’s pointing out that to be truly free, one has to be white like them, which is an impossibility. Conversely, no gay male, if they truly want to be taken seriously, can be gay like me. To be straight like them is the way to be. You’ll be rid of the feeling that you live in a climate of perpetual injustice, you’ll be able to toss out your strawberry daiquiris quicker than a huntsman will yell “Tally ho!” upon catching sight of his quarry; you’ll be one of the guys, people will actually listen to you, you’ll be normal. Is it any surprise that horrors such as aversion therapy even exist? Is it bewildering, then, that the straight ideal has contributed to a sort of makeshift caste system among an already vulnerable, even disillusioned minority? Our identity isn’t even our own.

So straight men explain it to me. Even some straight women, too. Well, they’ve tried. It boggles the mind that one group could be so ignorant to the full extent of their privilege and the catastrophic effects of so many years of sexual entitlement and misogyny built up into one rather grand, even brilliant, ripple effect. Society has, for years, embarked on a campaign against our gay men for being too feminine and our lesbians for not being feminine enough. It’s a
philosophy filtered down from Capitol Hill to armchairs across America. There’s talk, oh there’s talk, about the threat to marriage, which is simply another way of saying the threat to heterosexual identity, namely straight male identities, who are fearful of no longer being able to call it their own, their elated positions as providers polluted by a notably inferior identity. (Marriage has only been the heteronormative fashion of choice for a short time in our history, but that’s another discussion for another day and to be frank, there are many other voices out there who have stated these points and have continued to reiterate these points far better than I; suffice it to say that if straight men decided feather boas were prime examples of masculine superiority and fortitude, a few thousand more rewrites of history would render it as such.) This identity already exists in conjunction with the subjugation of the female experience, which carried over and mutated into the monster which has been heavily at work consuming the homosexual one. In equating gay men and women to the so-called “weaker sex,” the process of dehumanization is complete, as is the relentless contribution to the rise in LGBT depression and suicide rates. This is the world we live in, a world where Sean Hayes can be castigated by a theatre critic for not being straight enough and where even Michael Sam, as broad and as abrasive on the field, I reckon, as any American football player would have to be, can’t kiss his own boyfriend without confessing to outlandish, socially constructed perceptions of weakness (this “weakness” is directly related to why straight men are intimidated by the very notion of being peeked at in the locker rooms—they don’t want to give a homo the opportunity to treat them the same way they treat women). The world we live in sees to it that homosexual role models are snuffed out.

Working at a bookstore, I’ve found myself exposed once again to authors I know and love, but the real magic on the job lies in discovering (or perhaps re-discovering) authors you may or may not have heard of. Rebecca Solnit and her essay collection, *Men Explain Things to Me*, were in this latter camp, though I distinctly remember her original essay making the rounds in 2008. It’s hard, as homosexuals, not to relate to, or even see a lot of ourselves, in the plight of the fairer sex. It’s difficult for me not to nod my head in silent agreement when I hear women so fervently and astutely challenge the patriarchy for its diminutiveness towards their experiences, when so many of my own straight male role models have let me down, directing me to accept my own subjugation, my excision from a “normal” family unit, telling me, not imploring me, to silently regress within myself and adhere to my status as a second-class citizen, never mind however implicit or explicit the discrimination!

*You take this too seriously,* I’ve been told. *You live in the best and brightest country in the world* and *You live in the best city in the world* are other mantras I’ve been hearing. Well, let me explain this to you: I am a gay man living in (allegedly) the most civilized country on the planet and even that’s not civilized enough. I live in a country where gay men and women can be fired in 29 states simply for being who they are. I live in a country where same-sex couples can be denied hospital visitation, family health coverage, and even their role as parents and carers to their children; where gay men and women commit suicide to avoid emotional and physical retribution from their family members, peers, colleagues and even total strangers. I live in a country where I was ridiculed by the police after escaping an abusive relationship because I “could have, you know, been a man.”

He then explained how this could have been achieved and refused to take my statement.

And I’m tired of it. I’m tired of it because none of it should have happened. I should not have had to be homeless and cast out by society, the very institutions I pay my taxes into and many of the people in my life because I did not meet anyone’s preconceived notions and expectations of
how a man should or shouldn’t act. It’s impossible for me not to take umbrage with the idea that
domestic violence is a female problem, for while it is true that the majority of cases which are
reported involve heterosexual coupleings, the stance serves to simultaneously shame the
victim and subjugate them to the level which women are so commonly subjugated.

We all know that women are history’s favorite scapegoat. They are scapegoats because straight
male privilege has dictated that the easiest way to do this, if they can’t be, at least in our country,
raped, beaten, flogged, circumcised, stoned, drowned in wells or burnt at the stake, then they can,
at the very least, be mocked, chastised, forced to live up to unrealistic beauty standards and have
their experiences completely and utterly invalidated.

Let me leave you with a little story:

There once was a woman who had two children. Boys. With two different men. She worked
tirelessly raising them to be gentlemen. She did this alone. She juggled single-parenthood
without complaint. She dated women. Some relationships lasted longer than others, but the
children weathered the storms as they came. The mother endured the silent treatment from some
of her relatives, quietly bracing herself for each biting recrimination. Her children were never
raised to believe that their home was anything but normal. Childhood was a happy time, though
they lived, for the most part, in obliviousness to any familial rifts which may have come about as
a result of their mother’s sexual preference. It was easier that way. Then, when the elder son,
who had endured endless streams of teasing and bullying for many years, who had secretly
fostered a drinking problem, embarked on his first serious relationship and decided to come out
of the closet, the mother was not happy. She expressed her misgivings and berated him. If only
you’d been straight, she said. You’d have been spared. I wouldn’t have to worry so much.

The woman in the story is my mother. For the longest time, I had the utmost difficulty with
reconciling those feelings. I have had to make sense of her struggles in an attempt to
comprehend, even mitigate, my own.

As of this writing, I’m still not straight. I don’t really see that changing, do you? I have also
come to understand my mother’s seemingly disappointed response to my coming out and have
been able to make sense of her feelings. They come from a place which is outside of myself; a
place which is greater than the both of us. It is not, however, a place that is beyond me, though it
might be beyond the limits, perhaps even absurd, to some and, even still, inconceivable to some
others.

It is merely the space I live in, that we live in, explained to the best of my ability.

__________

Alan Ryland is a twenty-three year old aspiring novelist and poet. He graduated from Frank
Sinatra School of the Arts in 2010 and has, since then, been taking classes at CUNY’S Borough
of Manhattan Community College, with hopes of transferring to Hunter College to pursue an
English degree. In August of 2014, after escaping a physically and emotionally abusive
relationship which left him homeless and penniless, he decided to document his experience on
his blog, The World According to Ryland. He currently works in a bookstore, where you can
typically find him raving over Nathanael West and laughing it up behind the cash register.
Imagine, if you will, a world where Miguel Reyes—the first Latino and openly gay governor of Florida—is poised to enact Referendum 65, a statewide referendum that will make Florida the first Southern state to have full marriage equality. However, when Alejandro Reyes (Miguel’s fourteen-year-old son) is kidnapped, his abductors deliver the following ultimatum: either Miguel kills R65, or they will kill Alejandro. Simultaneously, and suspiciously, Alejandro’s tutor disappears, and an anti-gay minister begins leading protests against the governor. Into this fray enters Agent Buck 98 from an undisclosed government agency: snarky, irreverent, and very queer, Agent Buck has only a week to locate and rescue Alejandro, and bring his kidnappers to justice.

Such is the premise behind Balls & Chain by Eric Andrews-Katz, the second Buck 98 Adventure, and sequel to The Jesus Injection. Agent Buck is joined by his agency rival Agent 46 (the equally snarky Noxia von Tüssell), their superior Agent Muffin 69, and a host of eccentric new characters: Phynilla Jackson, the governor’s executive assistant, with a tongue as sharp as Agent Buck’s; the rifle-wielding Countess Margareta and her three yapping dogs; and the handsome security guard Benjamin Dover. Readers are not required to have earlier knowledge of the first Buck 98 Adventure in order to enjoy Balls & Chain; nevertheless, readers of both will appreciate the character development, especially in some interesting revelations concerning Agent 46’s backstory.

Andrews-Katz keeps the action speeding merrily along, whether Agent Buck 98 is hunting for Alejandro, escaping death-traps, enjoying various techno-gadgets, trading bon mots with everybody, or seducing Benjamin, all in the best tradition of James Bond (albeit a queer James Bond). Andrews-Katz is actually more the literary descendant of Mabel Maney than Ian Fleming; Maney, with her Case of the Not-So-Nice Nurse and subsequent sequels during the 1990s, parodied 1950’s juvenile detective fiction heroines Nancy Drew and Cherry Ames, to hilarious effect. (And everyone in her stories was gay, except for Ames’ parents and the villains.)
It is rare for a novel to be nearly upstaged by current events, but that is indeed the case with *Balls & Chain*: this novel anticipates the striking down of Florida’s 2008 marriage amendment by a federal judge this past August, which has nearly made its premise obsolete; not that Andrews-Katz had any way of knowing that the momentum of the marriage equality movement would do so (and potentially could do very quickly) while he was writing his novel, or while it was in production.

One might be tempted to write off this Buck 98 Adventure as pure escapist fluff (again, in the very best tradition of James Bond), but occasionally Agent Buck reveals that he is more than an Oscar Wilde wannabe: for example, when he questions Benjamin about why he remains closeted, even though he works for an out governor. So never mind that any secret agent who acted like Agent Buck 98 (especially to his supervisor) would be drummed out of whatever unnamed governmental intelligence agency he works at for insubordination: readers should not let this or other “lapses” impede their enjoyment of the novel; just as Agent Buck 98 takes nothing seriously, neither should they.

__________

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*. He regularly reviews books for *Chelsea Station, Lambda Literary Review*, and other sites.
Review by Eric Andrews-Katz

*A Gathering Storm* by Jameson Currier is a book that’s difficult to read. It’s well written and brings the reader directly into the plot but it is in the subject matter that one finds the challenge. It’s about a vicious and senseless hate crime. But the novel doesn’t make this the only focus; it explores the main people involved, those indirectly connected to them, and a town that sees the ripple effects such a heinous act can elicit both in and outside of their community.

The story centers on Danny, a boy small in stature, slightly effeminate and a college student at a school not far outside of Washington DC. Newly out of the closet, Danny isn’t shy about his homosexuality but doesn’t announce it either—aware of his more conservative surroundings. He goes to class, has friends, and explores on-line dating like any other normal student—anywhere—in any university town of the United States.

One night Danny goes out to a ‘mixed’ bar where he meets two boys named A.J and Rick. The two strangers, strung out after a drug binge, plot to rob Danny and start off with subtle flirting and light conversation. The two boys offer the smaller boy a ride back to his apartment. When all three of the boys leave together the trouble starts. Danny is attacked as the truck drives to a secluded graveyard outside of a small church. As the beating frenzy escalates, the attackers’ anger, frustration, resentment, and hate transforms a planned robbery into a near-deadly assault. Leaving the barely conscious Danny tied to a fence-post; the two attackers take his wallet and his shoes before driving away leaving Danny defenseless against the elements. It is the further stupidity of an attempted drug transaction immediately following the college student’s beating that allows the two other boys to get caught. The police are unaware of the hate crime when the initial arrest occurs until they are alerted of a horrific find found by late-evening cyclists. Soon it is not only the fate of the three boys involved that becomes the center of an investigation. It is also the town and its residents that come under the scrutiny of the entire country, thanks to the descent of the media.

To say the story is a slightly masked tale of Mathew Shepherd is not in question. Currier explains his motives for writing in the prologue, stating that the first draft was indeed started as a result trying to personally deal with the horrific attack and murder on the Wyoming college student.
The parallels are noticeable including the motives, the involvements of the assailants’ girlfriends, and the gruesome scenes at a deserted fencepost. Currier even includes the audacity of zealots hiding under a religious guise and preparing to picket Danny’s funeral, showing that hate crimes happen on different levels.

*A Gathering Storm* is much more than another factual retelling of the case. Currier infuses subtle details from other true hate crimes incorporating them into the storyline. His third-person, journalistic style allows the author to speculate about the characters feelings, thoughts and emotions. This technique allows the facts to easily be conveyed allowing a ‘silent observer’ effect for the reader to be in on the scenes developing before them. Currier explores the thoughts and reactions to the two assailants’ girlfriends, the sheriff involved in the case, relatives to all three boys, the doctors working to save his life, and various people directly (and indirectly) involved showing the unmentioned butterfly effect a horrible crime can have on so many others.

*A Gathering Storm* is an important book to read and definitely worth your time to read it! It is not an enjoyable book in the sense that one can enjoy Holocaust Memorial Day or the Anniversary of Nagasaki’s bombing. The book focuses less on the horror of the action itself, and more on the consequences—both positive and negative—left in its wake. *A Gathering Storm* is very well crafted allowing any reader to explore, and possibly understand the results of such a gruesome cause-and-effect crime on any town or on anyone.

Eric Andrews-Katz (WriteOn530@gmail.com) lives in Seattle with his husband Alan. His 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 as 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*. 
“A Gathering Storm is enraging, engrossing and impossible to put down.”
—Christopher Verleger, Edge

A Gathering Storm begins in a small university town in the South when a gay college student is beaten. In the ensuing days as the young man struggles to survive in a hospital, the residents of the town and the university find themselves at the center of a growing media frenzy as the crime reverberates through the local and national consciousness. Using details and elements from actual hate crimes committed against gay men, Currier weaves personal and spiritual layers into a timely and emotional story.

LAMBDA LITERARY FINALIST

“A captivating, highly detailed, and impressively impartial, almost journalistic, profile of a Southern college town shaken by the after-effects of a hate crime when a male student is beaten and left for dead for no reason other than his sexual orientation. The powerful prose effectively conveys why it was written, as well as the inherent need for it to be read. Despite — or perhaps because of — the unpleasant circumstances and outcome that shape this novel.”
—Christopher Verleger, Edge

“Currier explores Matthew Shepard’s murder in richly empathetic fiction. The large cast shows how widely a crime’s ripples extend. Written in powerful, choppy sentences and consciously patterned after screenplays and true-crime stories, Currier’s novel is told in the present tense, shifting among the perspectives of the many characters involved. A compassionate tribute to hate-crime victims.”
—Kirkus Reviews

“Currier weaves throughout strands of outrage, courage, uncertainty, denial, doubt—all typical human responses to tragedy. His approach allows us to learn not only the immediate effects of the crime on the community, but also the dormant seeds that led to the crime in the first place.”
—Keith Glaeske, Lambda Literary

“A wonder of emotive writing and intuitive imagination, and a fitting tribute to the community-scarring event which inspired it.”
—Jim Piechota, Bay Area Reporter

“The point and the power of A Gathering Storm is the impact the crime has to transform the characters—spurring some to come out or stand proud against hate, and others to vocalize their homophobia. An absorbing read about an important topic.”
—Gary M. Kramer, Philadelphia Gay News

“This book is not an easy read but it is a worthwhile read. It is a thoughtful exploration of the emotional complexities of homophobia and a reverent tribute to the victims of hate crimes. Despite its grim subject, the novel does manage to strike hopeful notes.”
—Frank Perez, Ambush

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Calvin’s Head
by David Swatling
Bold Strokes Books
978-1626391932
264 pages, paperback, $18.95

Review by Jameson Currier

While homeless in Amsterdam and living out of his jeep, US expatriate Jason Dekker and his
dog Calvin stumble upon a severed head one afternoon in Vondelpark. Dekker recognizes the
face as belonging to one of his former suitors, a man named Valentine, but instead of reporting
the crime, Dekker and Calvin flee, fearing for their own safety, but not without first discovering
a set of keys nearby the decapitated head. Thus begins David Swatling’s highly entertaining
debut novel, Calvin’s Head.

The found keys soon turn out to be both a blessing and a curse, bringing Dekker off the street
and inhabiting Valentine’s home and personality, but also the arrival of Valentine’s killer, a
handsome, if unstable, young man named Gadget.

Swatling’s novel is equal parts screwball comedy and suspenseful thriller, full of twists and
turns—both in plot and locales—involving a sex dungeon housed in an attic, a romp as an erotica
writer, a bout with amnesia, a thesis on Van Gough, a road trip to Arles, a sunstroke at a
bullfight, and a denouement that tests the loyalty of Dekker’s best friend, his dog Calvin.
Swatling wisely flips the point of view between Dekker and Gadget to illuminate each
character’s back story and current predicament, but the pièce de résistance is allowing a point of
view for the dog Calvin, a unique technique that gives this novel its heart.

Swatting, a resident journalist in Amsterdam for many years, has indicated that there may be
further adventures ahead for both Calvin and Jason. I certainly hope so. I enjoyed this one a lot.

Jameson Currier is the editor and publisher of Chelsea Station magazine.
Walter “Walt” Whitman was an American poet, essayist, and journalist.
These, I, Singing In Spring

These, I, singing in spring, collect for lovers,
(For who but I should understand lovers, and all their sorrow and joy?
And who but I should be the poet of comrades?)
Collecting, I traverse the garden, the world— but soon I pass the gates,
Now along the pond-side— now wading in a little, fearing not the wet,
Now by the post-and-rail fences, where the old stones thrown there,
pick’d from the fields, have accumulated,
(Wild-flowers and vines and weeds come up through the stones, and partly cover them— Beyond these I pass,
Far, far in the forest, before I think where I go,
Solitary, smelling the earthy smell, stopping now and then in the silence,
Alone I had thought— yet soon a troop gathers around me,
Some walk by my side, and some behind, and some embrace my arms or neck,
They, the spirits of dear friends, dead or alive— thicker they come, a great crowd, and I in the middle,
Collecting, dispensing, singing in spring, there I wander with them,
Plucking something for tokens— tossing toward whoever is near me;
Here, lilac, with a branch of pine,
Here, out of my pocket, some moss which I pull’d off a live-oak in Florida as it hung trailing down,
Here, some pinks and laurel leaves, and a handful of sage,
And here what I now draw from the water, wading in the pondside,
( O here I last saw him that tenderly loves me—and returns again,
ever to separate from me,
And this, O this shall henceforth be the token of comrades— this Calamus-root shall,
Interchange it, youths, with each other! let none render it back!)
And twigs of maple, and a bunch of wild orange. and chestnut,
And stems of currants, and plum-blows, and the aromatic cedar:
These, I, compass’d around by a thick cloud of spirits,
Wandering, point to, or touch as I pass, or throw them loosely from me,
Indicating to each one what he shall have— giving something to each;
But what I drew from the water by the pond-side, that I reserve,
I will give of it— but only to them that love, as I myself am capable of loving.

—Walt Whitman
The Third Buddha
a novel by
Jameson Currier

“Complex.”
Library Journal

“Courageous.”
Next magazine

“Extraordinary.”
Lambda Literary

“The Third Buddha”
a novel
Jameson Currier

“Remarkable.”
GLBRW

“Incredible.”
Edge

“Riveting.”
Echo

“Marvelous.”
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