

Blown with the Wind

Reflections on Survival

World War II to AIDS to Coronavirus

80 Years of Gay Life in 10 Scenes

A Treatment for a Screenplay

A Love Story, a Stonewall Manifesto,

an Epic Poem, a Curtain Call,

and Something Else in Ten Scenes of Memoir,

Impressionism, Cultural Anthropology, and Sex

1. YOUNG GODLINGS

Zus is a child of the Holocaust. I am a child of the Depression. Zus and Jack. Jack and Zus. Were we not queer, and true to queer, we would be dead. We were born gay under the iron fists of fascist violence, financial collapse, and war. Survivors, birthed terrified, we found each other. And we love each other. Truly. Madly. Deeply. From the start of then to the finish of now, we continue to make it through our long day's journey through this new liminal time of viral plague. As it was before and ever shall be, the sustaining sex that saved us begins and endures swift in love. With everything against us war-torn children in the 1940s, we survived. Forced to be brave. Gay childhood selected us out of the ranks of straight children. Isolated in our otherness. Precisely because we were gifted with the second-sight of homosexuality did we survive. We two boys together clinging. That queer edge gave driving strength to our erotic, militant adulthood. In our queer human condition, we were born to challenge the straight human condition. Living forward birthed our activism. We. Meant for each other. We. In our true tale of desire and love. Old souls destined to meet because Eros is the oldest god. Our moments rooted in twin lifetimes. Conceived the same year. 1938. Zus, a Taurus, outside Berlin; and I, a Gemini, in Chicago. Both born 1939. So long ago. Between us we have one hundred and sixty years of experience. Coronavirus isn't a plague. It's evolution on speed. Fast forward. Raw. Survival of the fittest.

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Because every gay bar in the world is closed, we, invisible to them, watch rerun videos of millennial men queer as folk standing allegro in gay clubs flashy with HD videos and LED lasers and DJ turntables pounding tachycardia rhythms at 120 bpm. The past may be prologue, but context is everything. The diseased new century belongs to the new kids who have no personal memory, nor need they have, of our prehistoric gay time when Hitler horrified us with his angry-white-man voice on the radio and his toothbrush moustache on movie screens in black-and white Pathé newsreels of war atrocities. Nazis in a village square hanging children by the thumbs. Our terror triggered in the movie seat, our isolation from our fathers shipped off overseas, relieved by the informing Braille of other schoolboys' hands on our short pants, comforting, calming us into a sweet secret bond of brotherhood. It's not their fault, the new young godlings, that they know nothing of the infant fears and traumatic boyhoods of the generation of us who survived the 1940s to liberate the 1960s and celebrate the 1970s and fight the 1980s AIDS plague and outlive the century.

But we remember. Zus: hunger, bombs, death, his mother begging the Gestapo officer there was a mistake in the paper work. I: food rationing, blackouts, panic, the men in my family, father, uncles, neighbor boys, all gone to war. Goodbye, my Fancy. Baby pictures. Snap shots. A scorched ribbon from a wedding cake. A kiss goodbye. A newspaper clipping. In gay years, Zus and I are prelapsarian. In bed alone as boys, thousands of miles apart, we lay scared shitless with anxiety. Child insomniacs. Children were not shielded then. Our young boys' terror of suffocating atrocities, wrapped hiding in a Chinese finger-trap of bed blankets, hardening into the first stiff of thrilling wet nocturnal emissions in masochistic fever dreams and fits of tears and sleeplessness, escaping the killing world into the safe world of gay desire. Sex an escape through time and space. Traveling out of the midcentury into the emerging gay world when the holocaust of wartime darkness turned to the holiday of peacetime sex, drugs, and fun.

In the 1960s and 1970s no one could stop us in our twenties and thirties because we had learned to survive world war and food rationing and politics and atom bombs and polio by holding on to our dicks. History could not sweep us away. Masturbation is magical thinking. The conjure power in our wand of hard cock taught us self-reliance and self-defense because sex can alchemize fear. Comforting us. Healing us. Beyond all the human-trash hate groups. Our goal was to make it through life unabashed and unabashed. We read too many books to believe what we were told, refusing to listen to what churches, synagogues, ashrams, schools,

and politicians preached at us to tame us. Wild, we held on for dear life to the true north of the thrilling hardness we found in ourselves and hunted in each other. To a gay man, touch is communication.

2. VICTORY

Once so young. Eighty years ago. Once so fucking hot. Sixty years ago in the 1960s. Now so old among Millennials. Once in synchronicity, lads turning six, oceans apart, autoerotic, in bed, stroking in relief when the Nazis surrendered on May 8, 1945. Zus, his father lost in late 1944 somewhere along a road east toward Auschwitz, cannot help but remember where he was. And I, my Irish-American father about to return from ground combat in France, cannot help but remember where I was. Zus and his mother lifted euphoric by waving teenage American GIs into an A5 Army truck, riding through the ruins of Berlin. And I, the same day, standing in the rumble seat of my grandpa's old Plymouth coupe cheering on the soldiers kissing girls who kissed them back. Crowds surging in the streets. Traffic stopped. Everyone shouting and dancing in a V-E Day celebration in the Loop. Some things are so huge no one forgets where they were. Newspaper headlines. "Hitler Dead." "Victory in Europe." What happens to a boy at six imprints him forever. The men gone with the draft, defeating the enemy, marching home again, *hooray!* We sang, *hooray, hooray*, upbeat with the determined Judy Garland in uniform up on the silver screen in *For Me and My Gal*, singing to a crowd of soldiers at the Palace Theater, "When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again, Hooray," so surprised on stage, seeing her missing soldier Gene Kelly seated in the audience, running down to him, home from war, safe in her embrace. Men returning, meet me in St. Louis in the good old summertime, homecoming, picking us up in their strong arms, tossing us toward the red-white-and-blue sky, hugging us delirious kids into their wool uniforms and battle ribbons and into chins slapped with notes of sweet aftershave finished with the pheromones of seed-bearing men urgent for their women.

3. DISPLACED PERSONS

Zus and his mother. Late 1945. In a DP camp in Germany. Displaced Persons of the Sh'erit ha-Pletah. My mother and I, mailing three of our winter coats overseas to DP families—her Mouton fur, my last snowsuit, and my father's wool overcoat. My mother who taught me everything I know instructed me how to pin our name and address inside the pockets. In 1946, we received a penciled note with a Polish stamp that a priest

translated for us at Saint Ignatius parish. Those coats and that thank-you note soothed my anxiety about Europe and made me curious about Europeans. In 1947, choosing between Palestine and Queens, Zus begged his mother to pick America. For two years, they waited in barracks outside Berlin writing letters to relatives in both places. His mother surviving by sewing. Zus, when sewing was not enough, standing duty as a towel boy selling soap and sundries outside latrines, sharp at earning extra rations and extra Deutschmarks and extra dollars, *Hey, Joe!*, kneeling with a big grin between American soldiers' feet polishing boots. Separated because of a snafu on an immigration list, Zus was left behind when his redheaded mother kissed him for good luck and shipped off to New York in 1949 with beauty appointments scheduled. After two years of red tape, Zus, a ginger-haired hustler, age twelve, expert at survival on his own, and sponsored by a young US Fifth Army soldier he loved, put to sea on a military transport ship, entering America, holding the hand of his soldier he never saw again, on October 17, 1951. He was met by his mother, Magdalena, pregnant and dubbed Dolly by her starchy new husband, the owner of Kaplan's Pharmacy, with his two small sons in their Roy Rogers cowboy outfits who shot off an All-American two-gun cap-pistol salute and welcomed Zus with a package of candy cigarettes.

As a gay Irish-Catholic altar boy surviving silently as a sexually displaced child in a straight parish where bullies schooled me in the wisdom of social distancing as self-defense, I was not yet bold enough to seek rescue from the handsome young assistant priest with the wavy hair of a Notre-Dame quarterback who had no clue he was my secret ideal. With no words for what I was feeling, I could not speak out loud. Like a little Druid priest, I began rejecting the herd immunity of Catholicism, casting an Irish love spell, lighting a red candle under a waxing moon, praying it forward for the well-being of whatever lost boy out there was the dream boy I was longing to meet.

4. THE EVERARD BATHS

Almost sixty years ago in New York, as Saturday midnight turned to Sunday, May 22, 1966, we cruised. Zus and I. We met. We fucked. Romantic. Young stuff. Both turning twenty-seven. Soaring on grass, poppers, acid. Fearless. Now invisible. Once we stopped traffic. Now we exist outside sexual traffic. In love forever, happy in our cuddle, we drive out carefully in our hybrid sedan to pick up takeout suppers in restaurants where the spaced-out-with-Plexiglas young and restless dare dine. Both eighty, going on nineteen. Obedient to the lickety-lickety voice of our GPS Nanny who

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nags: "Turn here. You are off course. Re-routing. Look at your eyes in the rearview mirror. Are you headed where you came from?" She's Mrs. Socrates. The unexamined life is not worth living. One of us with a beret. The European Him. The other with a walking stick. The Eagle Scout Me. Years of camp bar humor, of queens metaphorical in drag, and of men literal in leather taught us truth about presenting identity with self satire. Poking fun when we get too camp, we giggle and tease ourselves as the "Futon-Duvets" who are ever so precious fancying they live next door to *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*. You can will yourself into existence at the movies. In the ninety-second opening of *Funny Girl*, Streisand, the trickster, masked by the collar of a leopard-print coat, is keen to define herself, kid her face, revealing her otherness, double-daring moviegoers, selling her marvelous drollery about eccentric beauty, unmasking her radical profile in a cheval mirror full of drop dead "Hello, Gorgeous."

We look at television news of beautiful Covid Kids sitting masked and distanced alone with coffee and Wi-Fi outdoors on separate benches under the quarantine sun, so focused texting on their devices we could swoop on in, kneel, and blow them, and they'd never notice. How they'd stare up from their screens, wondering where was the irony, if we told them of our prehistoric boyhoods in Berlin and Chicago and how we met in psychedelic New York, hip, lean, and stoned in the Swinging Sixties scene. Zus's icons: Kenneth Anger, Charles Ludlam, Nureyev, Cage and Cunningham. My saints: the big A's of Warhol, Ginsberg, and Baraka; Blanche's Tennessee; the cold-blooded Capote; and Flannery O'Connor whose wise blood warned a good man is hard to find. I was living with an old college roommate sharing rent at 2 Charlton Street, a new brick building then, two blocks south of Houston, hardly the Greenwich Village beatnik garret I fancied as a bookish 1950s teenager, saving money for cheap seats at stage productions of *Marat-Sade*, *Mame*, *Cabaret*, *A Delicate Balance*, *The Madness of Lady Bright*, writing poems and short stories theatrically emboldened by Thornton Wilder writing "beginnings and endings are arbitrary conventions," cinematically doing what Gertrude Stein says Gertrude Stein says Gertrude Stein says cinema does, so many moving parts, and by James Joyce who with failing sight and rising visions opened the first movie theater in Dublin, toiling as a projectionist at the Volta dream palace on Mary Street, watching discontinuous flickers of streaming film montages, wearing an eyepatch and scribbling *Ulysses* with crayon he could see on big sheets of white paper, saying *yes* behind his closed eyes *yes* he always saw a movie going on *yes* bringing back *recherche* memories he had almost forgotten.

I was learning, reading, experimenting, trying to alchemize typing into writing, rearranging twenty-six letters of the alphabet into words, sentences, paragraphs, dialog, insert shots, montages, imitating the assemblages of Joyce's prose and Warhol's cinema, pages of long paragraphs strewn around our two rooms, each story a reel of film, each word a frame, a single-frame advance, each framed phrase seeming the same as the one before, seeming repetitive, but not, like single frames flickering through a projector, the small difference in each still frame creating the illusion of movement at 24 frames per second, each typewriter keystroke on my portable Smith-Corona advancing the accumulating images in stories of character unburdened by plot.

Zus and I met cute the way Hollywood screenwriters like. An hour past midnight in the halls at the Everard Baths, an epidemiologist's nightmare, a filthy-gorgeous 24-hour firetrap of four floors, hundreds of men, a hundred and fifty lockers, private shelf-beds with thin prison mattresses inside a hundred and fifty plywood cubicles cobbled up as flimsy six-by-eight-foot boxes topped over with chicken-wire stretched for security and air circulation thirty feet below the high ceiling of the converted old church, and two huge dormitory orgy rooms each with fifty metal flop-cot beds arranged in tight rows even a military barracks would reject as close quarters. He said, "I'm Mark." By dawn, he broke the code of cruising and added his last name. "Keats. Mark Keats." Over breakfast at the Waverly diner where the pancakes and eggs were served in hot cast-iron skillets, and we laughed over newsstand shit like Norman Phalon's *The Fairy Wolf Packs of Manhattan*, he suddenly said, "Call me Zus." He had called himself Mark because the GI who saved him was Mark and because, in Roman times, Jewish citizens surviving the onward marching Christians, adopted safe Latin names like Marcus. He said Zus was short for Alexander, and Keats was Katz. "You can never be," he said, "too careful. Jews and gays? Real names?" I said, "Be my Zus, Mr. Katz." It's a joy of gay life that we never know if our first fuck with our latest trick will turn out to be the beginning of the love story of the rest of our lives. A man has to be careful, or lucky, because a one-night shag can turn into a fiftieth anniversary.

Our mystic third-eye pineal romance began in that men's workhouse dormitory at that ancient Everard Bath, that Everard always needing an internal "h," that backwash of gay history at 28 West 28th Street in Manhattan so convenient a refuge when Walt Whitman from New Jersey was in his sixties and drinking ale in gay bars in the Village, where, for three bucks for a locker and five for a cubicle, an endless march of young bathers and ancient mariners and seasoned inmates girded in white towels, each

with an elastic bracelet with a numbered copper key on our wrist, sorted ourselves out, barefoot, naked, anonymous, sousing each other with spray, freeing ourselves from centuries of inhibition and persecution in that sacred sanctuary of century-old hallways because sex liberation spontaneously combusts in night-blooming spaces where you dare do what you want with your body.

At the Everard, my beloved, shirtless, kilted with a white terrycloth towel, was standing in a doorway, whistling out a tune on a plume of pot smoke. I walked toward him. "What are you whistling?" He offered me his joint. "Like all gay songs...it is about love and death." Fuck me. I've always been a goner for cheap movie lines. We laughed. It's kind of sexy when cruisers whisper sweet fuckerie with a hint of English as a second language. Zus was never lost in translation, but he had been at first so defensively assimilated his mother had thrown up her hands. "Keats, feh!" Resisting the totalitarian psychodramas of Berlin and Chicago, we broke free in the mid-Sixties, marching for peace and civil rights, wild in the streets, grooving in the Manhattan sex world of bars, baths, and bookstores affirming the very sex lives and behavior our families and religions and government denied. The Grindr boys can never know, and now never will, the scary midcentury thrill of daring your teenage self to walk into a sleazy bookstore, role playing, pretending to be straight, looking at the girlie mags, giving side-eye to the muscle mags, waiting till the lone clerk was free to ask him what's new and he'd reach under the counter where photos and magazines of naked men were hidden before Stonewall.

Zus had erased his German accent while cruising in movie balconies, chiaroscuro grind houses on 42nd Street where tradesmen lounged and smoked and lay in wait, and homeless people slept, hearing over and over the same soundtrack of the same American dialog of the same double features, biker movies and spaghetti westerns and soft-core slashers, living among the vagabond American boys at the Sloane House YMCA on West 34th Street, learning from the ancient Jewish men schvitzing nude in the steam room at the Westside Y on 63rd Street, and, nursing cups of H&H coffee, hanging out among the flower-power hippies and gay-for-pay hustlers killing time at the Horn & Hardart Automat overlooking Times Square, and the jive-talk tricksters trolling 42nd Street, the Deuce, that greatest of hurdy-gurdy gay streets prowled during the war by Kinsey who shocked everyone with his scandalous sex report that began the liberation of gay American men. Cruising the cruisers cruising the Deuce. On leave. Sailors young. Soldiers horny. Marines rough. Aromatic sweat smelling of napalm stinking of Vietnam. Straights and gays cautious with remorseless

codes. An eyebrow cocked in a dive bar. A lighter flaming in a dark theater. A tongue circling a circumference of lips. A flashing pink neon sign, LIVE NUDE GIRLS BURLESK 24 HOURS, signaling horny straight trade, thirteen buttons on a sailor's pants, waiting round the clock expecting gay relief in the theater seats while the sad live nude girls bumped on stage stripping to the grinding twelve-bar blues beat of "Night Train." Zus and I cruised like midnight cowboys through a fairyland of hustlers and hookers and pimps and freaks and artistes no one can now imagine of adult theaters like the Lyric, the Liberty, the Empire, dirty adult bookstores like Bob's Bargain Books, and peep show arcades, 25¢ LIVE PRIVATE BOOTHS, reeking of cum and Lysol Disinfectant, each with a turn-style leading to a backroom maze of ten or twenty plywood closets, walk-in projection booths smaller than phone booths and confessionals, door after door of stand-up coffins, some with two or three crotch-high gloryholes whittled through the walls by relentless woodpecker cocksuckers, each booth with a hook-and-eye door latch, a roll of paper towels, and a built-in shelf-seat so sticky most wankers stood, waiting for curb-service blowjobs, feeding quarters into the gun-metal coin box cued to a projector glassed in the wall just behind their head unspooling silent 8mm films over their shoulder onto the plywood wall painted flat-white for a rough screen two feet in front of their face. That was gay media then.

Zus and I joke that Millennial Covid Kidz, born after the flattening of the curve of AIDS, bruised by lockdown, bitching on a viral short leash, and swiping right with sanitized fingertips, can hardly divine how the porn galleries of 42nd Street, their second-hand archives sticky with medieval hygiene, set the gay taste for the rest of the century selling the sacred gay literature of photographs of young men described by force of law as "athletes" in posing pouches with perfect midcentury hair, ten cents each; magazines, all the sexier for being sealed in clear plastic, *Young Physique*, *Modern Adonis*, *Physique Pictorial*, *Tomorrow's Man*, with tough young men in jockstraps and leather belts "for artists who can't afford models," fifty cents each; 8mm film loops projected, twenty-five cents every four minutes. Selling ethnicity and class reduced into erotic commodity, the All-American models described by their exotic Italian and Hungarian and Polish and Latino and African descent which changed their very foreignness into a tasty fetish in the melting pot, pushing diversities into bars and bedrooms and brains through the *e pluribus unum* of porn. As every author, artist, photographer, and tourist who ever romanced a tall and tan and young and lovely boy from Taormina knows, the more you *amo amas amat* with immigrants the more positive your view.

5. JUDY GARLAND

“Extra! Extra! Read all about it!” Zus arrived home with the *New York Times* and silently laid it flat on the kitchen table. Bummed out. Bumping me out. The June 23, 1969, headline: “Judy Garland, 47, Dead in London.” She had finally found the Wizard’s permanent sleeping pill in her favorite gin sling highball. On June 27, the day before the Stonewall Riot, the *Daily News*, “New York’s Picture Newspaper,” headlined “An All-Night Vigil for Judy” as twenty thousand gay men stood in the sweltering street and streamed at twelve hundred per hour with Zus and me past her laid out like a queen in her glass-covered casket at the Frank Campbell Funeral Chapel: “New York’s Funeral Home to the Stars.” When Judy died, we cried because she had carried our woes on her tailored manazon shoulders the way Christ shouldered his cross to save us. On July 6, the *Daily News*, reacting to Stonewall, headlined, “Homo Nest Raided, Queen Bees Are Stinging Mad.” Those were the days. The awful time. The high time. The resistance. The liberation. *Carpe Diem* from AM to PM. We boys in the band played on, fast, in tune and out, okay with knowing good times like bad times can’t last, but not knowing the Titanic Seventies was cruising toward the iceberg of HIV. In our lucky window between Alexander Fleming’s penicillin and the viral dread of Ronald Reagan’s HIV, life was different. I shake my white locks at that runaway joy. Sex was anyone anything anywhere anytime. New-century e-younglings may think “YMCA” just another karaoke wedding song. God love ’em. I’m uploading our memories to them because we are, no worries, old enough to die.

Fresh and crispy new queer kids who choose to mirror-fuck the alt-genders of other queer kids just like themselves can hardly fathom the diverse anonymous thrills of the wandering halls and the kneeling stairs and the penetrating steam rooms of the YMCA, that landlocked cock-shop of fools, with its international fraternity of horndog soldiers and hornpipe sailors and golden athletes with vine leaves in their hair, and magnificent ebony and sepia grandsons of slaves, and sun-brown braceros from Michoacán in from fields in New Jersey, and big guidos from Little Italy, and uncut danny boys with cocks white as cod, and hairy Russians muttering fuck-you English. *Postoronniye lyudi. Fremde. Etranger. Stranger. Zdravstvujtye. Gluecklich zu sehen.. Happy to see you. Bleibe. Stay.* All that gorgeous anonymous sex uncomplicated by domesticity.

Paying the thirty-cent fare, Zus and I, one famous Saturday afternoon, rode the subway north in a filthy car that was a masterpiece of sprayed graffiti, screeching up the tracks from Times Square, inching all

the way up Massimo Vignelli's abstractionist new subway map to West 135th Street with two discount coupons reading: "The Harlem YMCA: A Popularity That Never Wanes. Today more than ever, the Y is Harlem's most popular rendezvous for men. Each day, the Y becomes richer in tradition, friendlier in service, and more complete in convenience. Single rooms \$4 and up. Membership \$5 per year, payable 50 cents per month." We were sincere white boys come up from the Village to watch physique champion Chris Dickerson, born handsome and black and gay the same year as us, promote fitness and Y memberships. He was two hundred pounds of man in a two-ounce Speedo performing his posing routine on a low platform under one spotlight clipped to the basketball hoop in the gym where we learned the number of syllables in *sheeeiit dayam* from the body electric of the small audience of young black men of the same red running blood as us.

Icons are one thing. Tricks another. Out on the hunt, I always murmured I don't know who you are and I don't care who you are, because you are this moment of union everything you should be. The erotic is the existential. You, my anonymous lovers, beautiful and pug-ugly and brutal and perfect, will never marry me, will never dry your socks in our kitchen oven, will never fail to pay our electric bill, will never need to go to Alcoholics Anonymous, will never leave me. In our perfect faultless ten-minute quickie we brothers from an army of fathers condense projected years of a long superfluous life together we need never have. Divine we are, my rainbow darlings, my bacchantes, inside and out, the aroma of our armpits finer than prayer, our sex an intuitive and natural spirituality easier owned than the revealed religion of churches, bibles, and all the creeds. We are larger than life, trading seed containing multitudes. "Yeah," Zus said. "We're all so goddam cool, but what would we call the Stonewall Riot if the cops had raided the Manhole?"

Zus and I. We have never fought. Except one tiny tiff after twenty years in 1984, during the first viral extinction that deleted our phone book when for years there was no anti-body testing, and I, freaking out, told him he was a fool for not following Auntie Mame's advice to live before everyone was dead, and he mimed a slow-motion stage-slap like actors do in movies when someone is hysterical and I said, "Thanks. I needed that." Gay life is risk. Sex plays the odds. We asked our doctor before anyone understood AIDS if it was okay to get into hot tubs. He said, "If you want to become part of the experiment." So we self-quarantined, stayed at home, played Monopoly and monogamy, two cocks roosting in our comfy kitchen, chestnuts roasting on an open fire, resisting the wild call

of Saturday night fever, until in 1988 we finally began to trust the 1984 advisory about safe sex. Thrust together at home, we fit. We never sang claustrophobic bitch-perfect arias like *The Boys in the Band*, that time-capsule Broadway play that before Stonewall was a sad opera of unliberated fag pain. Bonded tighter when AIDS drained joy out of gay life, when that first virus transformed us as we are being transformed now, we dusted ourselves off, acting up and out, tending the sick, burying the dead, living life. Safely. Vaccinated by our past. Graduating gay from a bully high school in the 1950s when *The Catcher without a Cause* revolted like a *Rebel in the Rye* against post-war conformity, cool with conjugating Latin, delivering newspapers, reading classics, attending college full time, working part time, we lads who grew up threatened by war and haters learned to face fear, to expel fear, viral and existential fear, by facing life. Forever since, we raise our wine stems in a toast, and spill a drop for lost brothers.

6. SEX TOURISTS

Rarely admitting to anyone inside gay-bar culture that we always had day jobs, careers we showed up for every morning 8-5 for forty years, there have been no secrets, but there has been openness, in our sustainable marriage. One person cannot be everything to another person. Having cruised solo in the 1950s, we winked at our mutual erotic vagrancy in the 1960s. Each intuiting each forever true, we cruised together in the 1970s, old souls, the perfect erotic tag-team, dragged up in leather, helping each other score with tricks the other might not get, plowing the pertinent at Max's Kansas City, smiling, trusting, best buddies, players jumping the red velvet rope at Studio 54, hunters, lovers dissolving together into helixes of three-ways and four-ways and orgy-ways at addresses lost to gentrification: the Continental Baths in the Ansonia Hotel, and Saint Mark's Bath in the Village, and the nationwide hippy-dippy chain of Club Baths where we rode a hippie blond horseman sporting two long pigtail braids we pulled from behind like reins, and the fisting paradise of the Slot Hotel and the bacchanalian heaven of the Barracks in San Francisco, the after-hours stand-up-sex clubs, the Spike and the Anvil and the Hayloft and the Mineshaft in New York, and the Meat Rack in LA, and the skid-row Gloryholes on Sixth Street South of Market Street, and the night in 1972, on a cross-country road trip from Chicago to San Francisco, when at dawn we wayfaring strangers exited the one gay bath house in Salt Lake City to a round of applause from a grinning band of hot Mormon husbands.

There may be truth to the blood-sucking lore of vampire coffins closing before dawn. The narrow space of bars and baths, decorated with no

more than red bulbs and black paint, rejuvenated us sperm-spangled lovers crawling out sated on all fours in the last hour of Dionysian night. Time. Slowed. Down. Our newest next decade, as we turned thirty during Stonewall in 1969, reset our gay alarm clock to a specific kind of gaylife saving time. Thirty was the new twenty. When we were forty, we seemed thirty. “Mirror, mirror,” Zus said, “Liar, liar.” When we were sixty, we feigned no more than forty-five, touching up just a bit of the dorian in our goatees. When we turned seventy in Paris rubbing younger, hairier, bigger shoulders in the Bear’s Den bar in the Marais, our reflections looked sixtyish in the pier-glass mirrors of Versailles and—thank God, Monet was an Impressionist—fifty-five again, viewed inverted, among the water lilies, on the still surface of the reflecting pond at Giverny, *la France profonde*, where I needed a Xanax and the docent told me choking that there was no drinking water. Turning eighty, with those one hundred and sixty years between us, we look no more than one hundred and forty. At least to the blind and stoned. As Sondheim confessed in *A Little Night Music*: “My body’s all right...not in perspective...not in the light.” Funny, the first word intoned in his masterpiece is the Proustian: “Remember?” What kind of gay nostalgia and gay art will follow Covid-19, as follow it will, now that coronavirus has been found lurking in sperm?

7. DANIEL RADCLIFFE

Just because we are history does not mean that we did not manage to elongate the arc of our sex lives sucking and fucking from the New Deal of Roosevelt through the New Frontier of Kennedy and the AIDS of Reagan and the New Hope of Obama and the Pandemic of Trump, resisting gravity’s revenge, trying to represent the best at whatever personal decade we were traversing, still cruising the once-fine flesh of our bodies and hydrogenated faces through the forgiving red lights of bars and baths and circuit parties. Our lifelong success at making contact has been our instinct to stay relaxed and let the quarry come on in rather than come on too strong. And when that fails: play with their nipples, and they will cum. Are we fooling ourselves that we have pushed away from the table and pumped iron at gyms not to become what we avoided when we were striplings? Anointed head to toe with Lancome, we have worked hard to make safe sex wild. Corseted in leather, we knew at play parties how to stay discreet in orgy shadows, and when to avoid becoming so present we frighten the horses of young whiffenpoofs out on a spree who don’t need a sneak preview of their own future Ghost of Christmas Past.

We drag ourselves up in Harry Potter's Cloak of Invisibility. Careful not to drool on our raincoats, we paid good Euros in London to see the Millennial Daniel Radcliffe live and nude and barely legal smoking cigarettes on stage in *Equus* at the Gielgud Theater filled to capacity with teen girls and us dirty old men who keep theater alive using binoculars in the front rows. "If wrinkles hurt, you'd be screaming. Be thankful you were ever laid in the first place." This inscription was found in the eighth century carved on the wall of the world's first gay bar at Stonehenge. We know what a mercy fuck is, and we don't want one. Even considering hiring rent boy stunt doubles of the two modern Danny Boys: the seventeen-year-old Daniel Radcliffe selling it slightly fluffed on stage, or the uncut tough hustler, the thirty-year-old Daniel Craig, selling his burglar bits naked and wet, before he was "Bond, James Bond," on screen in *Love Is the Devil*, incarnating the hot hustler in that art film about painter Francis Bacon's gutter life at the Colony Club where he and his horrible friends should have socially distanced themselves because of their self-hatred. Back in the day, we both hustled a bit, Zus and I, separately and together, not because we needed to, but because grateful men sometimes threw cash as their fetish. Should a gay man grow old without having been paid for sex? Old hustlers never die; they just start buying it back. That's the oldest line in the gay bible.

8. LONGEVITY

We are realists. We should be. Sex is enlightenment. Promiscuity taught us humanism. Perversatility taught us tolerance. Unlike Catherine the Great who lamented she could only handle and hole five men at a time, we each scored more than thirteen thousand veterans of the gay lib wars. For contact tracing, that's twenty-six thousand men owed thank-you notes for making us more human. We survived world war and depression and bacteria and viruses and sex fiends and religious zealots and fickle friends, not because we are the fucking fittest but because of the good graces of some sweet gay god somewhere over the rainbow who protected us because gay spirit made us open our minds and bodies to everything life offers.

In this Covid pandemic, it is now as it was during AIDS, and always shall be when around you thousands die. We blush with survivor's guilt. We have lived so over-long that, with our cataract surgery canceled by Covid, sixty-year-olds look like chicken. We have become sexually transposed, reincarnated in the lavish eroticism of Walt Whitman's "Twenty-ninth Bather." We come. Together as one. Dancing and laughing along the sand. A voyeuristic bather, ancient, in a lather over twenty-eight young

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men playing along the beach, swimmers, surfers, muscle beach boys, who forever glisten with wet running streams engilding their bodies with rainbow light, floating on their backs, bellies bulging to the sun, not thinking whom they souse with spray. If a gay boy doesn't know Whitman, can he claim his birthright? Quarantined side by side in our double-recliner, we cruise the insouciant twenty-eight hunks on HD screens and LCD monitors in videos and jpegs. We yawp and sigh and cum and faint with Calamus emotion, our dreams gone to pixels online, watching healing visions of fit young men cavort shirtless on YouTube and nude on Pornhub where frozen in time-loops everyone lives forever.

If we insisted, once gamely, in our latter days before quarantine, on pinching our cheeks like Miss Scarlett and traveling out as voyeurs, it kept us real in the real world of sex clubs with street addresses, shuttered now, where, for twenty bucks each, any couple corseted up in leather and boots and caps and masks could enter and watch and extend their sex life by at least a decade. Or two. That's so *Death in Venice*. So Thomas Mann, so Dirk Bogarde, so Visconti, so cholera, so AIDS, so Covid-19, so Maybel-line, so egg tempera spackled on the canvas of an ancient face, cracking and peeling off to the somber sighing weeping dying Adagietto of Mahler's Fifth.

9. PARIS

Looking into the abyss, with only a few years, months, days, hours, minutes, seconds left in our autobiography, we pray for a happy death. Just sigh and die. On the couch. Coffee cup in hand. What are we, now entering our ninth decade, to think of the personal fade-to-black that may lie ahead? One of us dead; the other on a ventilator, gasping, recovering, surviving, grieving. What? Widowed? In the universality of queer. What? Alone? How is unlife possible? Both dead? Life has been bliss. Gay life has been bliss. Our life together has been bliss. Personal bliss. Domestic bliss. Anonymous bliss. We have been friends, lovers, together. Lying awake at night naked in bed feeling each breathing next to each. Spooning in. Cuddling in. Loving each other more intensely than ever.

Will this second plague of our lives become a fucking weird judgment day to break our fag trance? Sentence us to a hell of a heaven? Ah, Jaysus! Sooner or later the masked man carrying the sign "The End Is Near" will be right. Fuck him. Tennessee Williams wised us up: "Don't give up. The road goes on from here." We always agree to act according to our natures, not our fears, and our actions in the long and short run have been our survival. Zus jokes in three languages: "Do not ask for whom the *Nada*

nichts.” How dare the young or old straight world ever again rise against us, judge us, jail us, fire us, drum us out of the army, vote on our marriage, cause us pain without knowing us who are not satellite to them but equal to them. They are jealous because we dare separate sex from procreation. In the Swinging Sixties, we were young activists feeling what Wordsworth felt during the French Revolution, “Bliss was it that dawn to be alive, but to be young was very heaven.”

Let us remember because we do not want to forget. *Remember.* One more time. Let me go deeper. Deeper. With my own madeleine. Ah, my little cookie! Is this early-onset nostalgia? We remember the past, Zus and I, but are not lost in pastness. Fuck: why think about pastness? Why not? The comfort of pastness exists as a cushion for gay men like the brave old queens singing never-say-die show tunes in a piano bar in Palm Springs while out the window on Palm Canyon Drive the hearses pass by. Because the past is on a loop. One virus. A second virus. The next virus. Memories like dreams recur faster as a man—spinning dizzy eighty times around the sun—grows older in the stillness of quarantine. What was remembered before in sickness and in health becomes remembered again. But clearer. Once in Paris together in 1995, staying in a tiny room on the fourth floor of Hotel Saint Germain, run since time began at 88 rue de Bac by the regal elderly Madame who gave attitude to occupying Nazis demanding extra towels, Zus and I, intent on cuming on Jim Morrison’s grave at Cimetière du Père-Lachaise, sat down first on the ground next to the shiny black-marble tomb of Proust. Aimez-vous Brahms? Where does time go? And laughed haHaHA at death. And took a picture.

That ritual act was our little exorcism, one of our flings at romance, because Europe, even re-invented as the EU, made our horrifying childhoods real again. Flashbacks. Past fears. We fell back together through time. The post-traumatic stress of gay war babies recurs and recurs and recurs. Trying to delete the bad. Thinking of the good. Seniors retreating into distinct memories of boyhood, second childhoods, more real than the present, recurrent loop on loop. How during the wide world war, in synchronicity, at different longitude and latitude, in the whorls of memory, we keep revisiting first infatuations, repeating to each other the stories we have repeated chapter and verse to each other a thousand times, kneading and shaping them by hand like the plastic pillow-bags of white oleo-margarine we war babies begged to massage so we could break the magic yellow pellet inside the bag of beef fat and squeeze and mix the rationed lard until it looked like butter, how we chased the young iceman’s horse cart in Chicago and Berlin. His ice blocks dripping down his leather vest

in the summer heat. His handsome iceman's lips, cherry, and his hands, moist, his arms, muscular, his pits, sweating. Him a new grownup we remembered as a boy two years before, frozen in time: he so young, so salty, laughing under his first moustache, carrying on 4-F, his clubfoot in a braced boot, making deliveries, with hooks and tongs and ice picks, slipping us frozen slivers, letting us pet his horse, *all the same*, in the backstreets of Berlin and the alleys of Chicago. Handsome fucker. I can't can't let go of this. Of him. Tossing us kids grins. Zus loved the iceman in Berlin. I loved the iceman in Chicago. And now the iceman cometh. Without the security of such unspoken comforts from quiet men, icemen, soldiers, brothers carefully initiating us, as we grew becoming of age, we would never have survived to find each other.

Among the graves, it pleased us two *pleurants* in Paris to remember discreetly sipping Bordeaux under the deep green chestnut trees among the stone phone-booth-size tombs of the silent Père-Lachaise, counting gay saints, kissing the lipsticked tombstone of Oscar Wilde, venerating Gertrude and the second-hand Rose of dear old Alice (her name on the backside of Gertrude's tombstone), and laying a nosegay for remembrance at the columbarium niche of Isadora Duncan, born, like Alice, in San Francisco. Remembering how our four parents, survivors of the 1918 flu pandemic, lived in a parallel universe, young then, 1940s, gabardine slacks rubbing against nylon tricot, nights, curfew, black outs, air raid wardens on the sidewalk, bombers overhead, dancing to records in the parlor: "Moonlight Serenade," da...da da da...da da da...da da da in the moonlight, Glenn Miller's signature song penetrating the Axis airwaves and the skies beyond our night skies crisscrossed with searchlight beams. Keep calm and carry on. Neither couple, *my darling*, knowing the other couple, *mein Liebchen*, existed. Both with babies, us, Zus and me, toddlers in our cribs, watching, hearing the romance of moonlight that, reconfigured, could, in a re-gendered world, also be ours. Neither couple, burping us, changing nappies, knowing queers like their kids existed.

10. BLOWN WITH THE WIND

After Stonewall and Judy, we segued, *Mein Herr*, to Liza with Z who promised life is a cabaret, and to Gloria promising our kind will survive. No bigot in the 1970s could scare us. Anita Bryant and John Briggs and preacher Billy Graham were the same old Christianazi douches blaming us like witches for causing earthquakes, hurricanes, and plagues. So we laughed, fucked, paraded, and fucked again, *oh baby*, and migrated with all the other sex refugees to San Francisco and bought a house together

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when the Castro neighborhood was young and contact tracing was a sport at brunch bragging who had laid whom and how many the night before.

Standing on the grand staircase leading up to the memorial bust for the targeted Jewish supervisor Harvey Milk in San Francisco City Hall when the statue was dedicated on May 22, 2008, which was also the forty-second anniversary of our meeting at the Everard, I was glad Zus' blue eyes and the camouflage of his foreskin, left uncut by his provident survivalist parents, had saved him. He had not lost his ginger hair. He was one of those hot Jewish redheads spawned out of ancient Viking marauders in long boats drafting shallow up medieval rivers like the Elbe into the Sudentenland and the Balkans and Lithuania and Poland, raping and pillaging, causing Jews and Gentiles to breed that wild red gene onwards forever. Everyone knows the redheaded baby is a born bastard outsider. How can anyone be prejudiced against another tribe knowing all the fucking that marauding men and survivalist women have done through the ages to accommodate each other in the dark? We are all one, leveled by the lust for life. In the deep dive of sex, gay men know what Rita Hayworth meant in *Fire Down Below*: "Armies have marched over me." From such horseplay we learn our humanity. From multitudes. From promiscuity. Not from social distancing. Walt said so. Zus and I are one.

In the mini-memoir of our twin journals, in the notes in our coupled photo books and Super-8 home movies and vacation videos, lies the graphic timeline of our desire. Opposites attracting. I wanted Zus and he wanted me because we were not the same. But together we were Aristophanes' whole. Not gone with the wind. Blown by the wind. We roamed out together, citizens of a gay world that no longer exists, like the pre-AIDS and pre-Covid worlds that no longer exist, tricking in cities. We'll always have Paris, New York, Amsterdam, the baths of Buda and the tubs of Pest, flying from London to Tokyo, sniffing poppers with cute flight attendants, cruising *a deux*, mile high and down low, mixed into three-ways and four-ways and orgies and into time and space, always climbing out together, *twogether*, with what our friends once called our famous vampire clause: always home before dawn to sleep together. He hugged me especially tenderly last night when the death toll of this chaotic disaster rose past a quarter million, and I said, "When you were young, did you ever imagine you'd be hugging an eighty-year-old man?" And he said, "Ist es nicht toll? Ain't it grand?"

In a global pandemic, why should a man of a certain age flatten the bell curve of more than sixty years of first-person natural sexual desire in his last will and testament? Challenged in a world of social distancing,

charge cards, and exit-ramp food, and internet diploma mills from keyboard universities, and 24/7 media corporations, and extreme politicians, and on and on and on with Second Amendment religions, all involved in the new kind of identity theft, the real identity theft, of self and soul, that leaves everyone spinning in their own shoes asking Who am I?

In love with each other, steadfast, no matter who comes and goes and no matter if Washington, D.C., is sweating isolationist bullets over global war and global warming and global pandemic, if greedy international banks are quivering at the knees, if Wall street is shaking again in its penny loafers, if armies of workers are unemployed, if the food shortages of the war return, and if fundamentalist voters keep resurrecting the settled question of gay marriage that fundamentalist queers also flip off as “Really, darling, just too bourgeois.”

We have seen it all. We’ve flattened every curve ball thrown at us. Together. Rings on fingers. Bells on toes. Locked eye to eye. Lovers. That perfect term before labels of confirmed bachelors, roommates, longtime companions, and significant others. Unique as individuals. In sex and out, we have had everything we ever wanted, or thought we wanted, and so we, husbands, report back as veterans from the war front of plague and seniority with our quarantine portrait, taking our curtain call. I never had need to surrender to Zus and he never had need to surrender to me, because there is no surrender in love me tender. And no surrender to this virus lurking to kill us tonight sheltering in place fortified in our sanitized cottage, our little Monastery of Art. Lucky. Lucky. Lucky. Will this shit never end? The bell tolls. When this pandemic is over, I will never again explain the way I love and move through the world to anyone. One man understood me. I understood him. That is enough.

*

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