

**GETTING OFF:
THE UNLIKELY
CHRONICLES OF A
SOLOSEXUAL ON PREP**

JASON ARMSTRONG

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Some names and places have been changed to protect the identities of those in this book.

NOTE TO THE READER:

A portion of the proceeds from the sale of this book will be donated to The Rainbow Railroad, an organization helping LGBTQI people escape countries in which they are persecuted for their sexual orientation/gender expression. Visit www.rainbowrailroad.com/ to see how you can help.

Also by Jason Armstrong

Solosexual: Portrait of a Masturbator

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Even men don't know about men. There isn't an authority on the sexual lives of men. Henry Miller, John Updike, Philip Roth, they are literary pornographers. But they write fiction. They are hiding behind characters. 'This ain't me, ladies and gents in literary land, this ain't me.' But men? Men just don't write about their private sexual lives as women write about theirs. We really know nothing about the sexual lives of men. It's a dirty secret.

—Gay Talese, from p. 458 of Nancy Friday's
The Power of Beauty

INTRODUCTION

How do you get off? Do you want to know how I get off? Do you want to know how he gets off? Questions like these burn in my brain, a brain that has sex on it 24/7. On a crowded subway, I can't help but look at each and every man—young or old, pretty or less-than pretty, seemingly gay or straight—and wonder how these men feed their sexual appetites. And furthermore, I wonder what they are starving for, and why?

I spent most of the last three years having solo sex—masturbation had become my favourite sexual outlet and culminated in my first book called *Solosexual: Portrait of a Masturbator*. And when I use the word “sex” I most certainly include masturbation in its definition. Part of the goal with my first book was to help other men embrace masturbation as a valid

first choice among the many sexual outlets available to us. Doing so only made me wonder: What other outlets might I in turn embrace?

However, having limited sex to me, myself and I, what did I know of what other men were getting up to sexually? Where and how are men having sex these days? Is the internet keeping men at home? Are porn and online chat rooms causing public male spaces to close up shop? Or is the internet just part of the sexual equation at the end of this second decade of the new millennium?

When we, as a culture, speak of male sexuality, it's usually accompanied by much eye rolling. Negative connotations abound: Men are pigs, men only think with their dicks. There might be some truth to this, but it isn't the whole story. What men *really* are is quiet. While women are writing great tomes about their sexual journeys, there is a dearth of literature about what men are thinking and feeling about their explorations. The small sampling of non-fiction writing out there I've seen is often in a style that begets the criticism in the first place: brash, bragging narrative that belies the truth underneath. Because to admit to not always being Mr. Superdick takes a vulnerability—and courage—that is hard won.

Years ago, I started a now-defunct blog called "Hunting for Sex: Cautionary Tales from the Quest". In the "About" section, I wrote: "So many of us gay guys are having sex and grappling with the ups and the downs (literally and metaphorically). This is a

place to discuss what sex really means to us, how we have it, how we negotiate it, how we grow or are pained by it, the experiences we have with it and the questions it poses to us. We'll discuss things here that we might not even discuss with our closest friends... ." Years later, this book is the continuation of that dialogue, yet it could never had been written had I not first found my own sexual centre through masturbation before venturing out into the world of men again. A world that would often throw this solosexual off balance...and then some.

Truly, a solosexual is who I am at heart— a man for whom masturbation is the key to sexual bliss. It is how I am most sexually grounded. But when I started exploring, I lost sleep wondering if those who read and related to my first book would feel betrayed by my experimentations in the world of man-on-man partnered, penetrative sex. I thought of the men who play with men but claim to be straight. There was a time when I would have called bullshit. I thought of a man I knew on BateWorld.com who fiercely defended his claim to be a bator (masturbator) at heart, yet loved to suck cock. He said that he was a bator at his deepest *core*, but that sucking a penis puts him in touch with Lord Penis, his deity. I was learning that sexual likes and dislikes, regardless of how you define your orientation, can be varied, as on a spectrum, from person to person. But would people want to call bullshit on me?

The thing is, at the heart of my yearning to experiment was this simple notion: Men beguile me.

They tempt me. They floor me. A stunning picture of a hot naked man can make my hand fly from my cock to my mouth as I stifle a gasp. Male beauty is shocking in its variety. And to see that object of admiration doing something sexual, perhaps something as divinely simple as the act of stroking his shaft as he appreciates his connection to Lord Penis, causes this observer to marvel. And I wanted to roll in that deep.

But where are men going for sex? What porn are they watching? How are they communicating with each other? What, I wondered, is the state of the strip club in these times? I wondered about it all: Prostitution, bath houses, orgies, gloryholes. How, I wondered, was PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) changing the way gay men approach sex? I wanted to go back to my blog's roots and hunt for sex. So I did just that and found that the more things change, the more they stay the same. In comparison to the wild-west days of unabashed gay sex in the 70's, we, I find, are creating the same culture again today. But the reason that writing about sexuality never gets old is because any answers you might get to your questions only beget more questions. As with love, sexuality is a deep, deep ocean that is near impossible to scrape the bottom of, though we trawl like mad, like men possessed.

Never mind the notion of being an artist, even the thought of myself as a writer tends to sound too highfalutin for my ears. What I might be is an interpretative chronicler of a snapshot in time. What

this book is meant to do is, through a personal lens, report on the state of gay male desire—by way of my interactions with my own desire and the desire I witnessed in others. Let me take you with me to those sex parties, strip clubs, bathhouses, gloryholes. Then, come back home with me to my man cave, my “masturbatorium,” where I am again blessedly alone with my cock to sort out all that has been witnessed and experienced. Let me introduce you to the characters I met on my journey, with a plot you will be familiar with. Let me, your author friend, offer you my take on it all—and then decide for yourself your own interpretation.

The lights fade, and there is a pin spotlight on a 43-year-old shirtless man, tapping madly on a keyboard, wondering if maybe, just maybe, you feel the way he does about sexuality. He wonders ardently if you feel differently and might have a thing or two to teach him, to help him get out from under his own misconceptions. Sit in the front row and let’s see how things unfold.

Curtain up.

MY FIRST TIME WITH A MALE ESCORT

Part 1 – Anticipation

The headline of his RentBoy ad read “A Passionate Guy That You Will Never Forget.” His name was James. I scrolled down. Picture after picture revealed a very heavily muscled, attractive man in his twenties, in the gym or posing for a bodybuilding competition. He showed his face—brave, I thought, as many of the other escorts did not. For the first time ever, it hit me that people out there actually do hire sex workers. This *is* a thing that is done. I had always had such a nebulous understanding, but as I edged to the precipice of doing it myself, I felt seduced by the idea that a stunner like James would come over to my place and play with me for an hour. James

represented the kind of unavailable man whose beauty launches ships to war and, evidently, wins bodybuilding competitions. But me, hire an escort? Mr. Goody TwoShoes Jason? Did this make me complicit in exploiting someone, or did that apply only to men hiring female sex workers?

I closed the site, only to open it up again not five minutes later. When you get an idea in your head, and see muscle like James had, you start a trajectory that you know you will see through despite the trepidation in the pit of your stomach.

My unease came from the fact that Canada has recently adopted the so-called Nordic model of prostitution laws: it's not illegal to sell sex, only to buy it. I was on the wrong side of the equation. Aside from jay-walking, I don't recall ever breaking the law...ever. I never stole a candy bar as a child. I've never pirated music (mostly because I don't know how, but nevermind). Of course, I never did claim my tips on my taxes when I worked as a bartender, but nevermind that as well. I'm a good boy, to an eye-rolling degree. And a large part of that stems from a lifelong struggle with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. People with OCD are terrified of doing something "bad." Was I really contemplating hiring an escort?

What better thing to do than talk to an escort about my fears. Luckily, I have a new friend who is a sex worker and I told him what I was considering doing. I told him that I was terrified that it would be a sting,

that I'd be arrested, thrown in the pen, allowed one phone call, bail would be set too high, I'd be living *Orange is the New Black*.....and he told me to calm down. He said that the police weren't interested in male prostitution. He told me that he didn't think the new laws were going to impact men in the trade at all.* I took him at his word, but my fears weren't entirely assuaged.

On paper, I didn't need to do it. I was 41 and my popular Xtube videos have drawn interest from men that I know I could just hook up with. But complicating matters is my self-professed solosexuality. I love to masturbate, alone. I've turned it into an art form that takes hours of my time, happily. Masturbation is my favourite sexual outlet. But what am I jacking it to but to fantasy, either through porn or in my head, of hot, muscled men like James? I was seduced by the idea of a man who might come over to feed my masturbatory fantasies, but know when to leave so I could pleasure myself and enter my private world of self-satisfaction. Selfish? Yes. Hook-ups don't tend to look like James, and they often over-stay their welcome. After opening and closing the RentBoy site a fifth time, I finally composed an email to James:

“Hello James, my name is Jason and I've never been with a prostitute before, but I wondered if you would be open to an hour at my place where for the

**Neither of us could have foreseen the eventual shake down when, in the U.S., Rentboy's CEO would be indicted for promoting prostitution and the web site would be shuttered.*

first half, we could “simply” masturbate, I could worship you and for the second half, perhaps blow you until you came on my face”.

To me the idea of him leaving my apartment, and me returning to masturbation for hours with his cum on my face seemed the ultimate in sheer hedonism. I clicked send, and waited for a response. Two days later it arrived.

“First of all, we save the dirty word ‘prostitute’ for those working on the street. My rates are listed on RentBoy. James.”

Clearly I’d insulted him, right out of the gate. I quickly wrote back and told him that this was my first time, that I didn’t know the right words to use. I told him the truth, which was that I honored what he did. I left my phone number and he texted right away with a different, easy-going attitude, saying “No worries, but I needed to clarify.” Relieved, I told him that I was a good guy, just inexperienced and nervous. I suggested a date to meet two weeks into the future as I needed time to accumulate the \$300 to be paid. He agreed to the date. “Wow,” I responded. “Thank you. I’ll text or email you as we get closer to the date to confirm. Have a great night! I’m going to listen to Godsmack, smoke a cig, have a whiskey and masturbate haha!” James texted “Perfect. LOL, sounds about right! Enjoy my friend. Yaa Godsmack, you rock!” He liked Godsmack too. This one little detail made me feel that we’d bonded. Godsmack would be playing, I told him in text, when he came over.

I was elated. For the next two weeks, when I masturbated, I did so to fantasies of James. But as the date crept ever closer to actually meeting him, that elation turned to panic. I wrote again to my escort friend: “What if he’s an undercover cop and he cuffs me the moment I pay him?” But my friend said that the only way I was getting cuffed was if that was part of the arrangement—and that that would likely cost extra.

If I was going to be this nervous, perhaps I should just cancel the whole damn thing. But every time I looked at James’ photos on RentBoy, I acquiesced. I couldn’t *not* go through with this. Like a fool, I texted James about my fears. He reassured me that there was nothing to worry about—and that he was looking forward to playing with me. Was this escort talk, or was it real? Was I taking a brave new step in my sexual exploration or was I engaging in something false and ultimately harmful to all parties involved? Would I regret the experience, or would I enjoy it so much that I would make hiring men a part of my sexual life here on in? Would James secretly disparage me as a pathetic slave to sex, or would he understand that I truly admired the work that went into what he did: The body he built, the odd hours he had to no doubt keep, the odd characters that he perhaps met. Was I just another odd character in his list of clients?

Sunday, April 11, our chosen day, arrived and I awoke with a start. He would be here at noon. How cruel of me to make James do something sexual so early on a

Sunday—perhaps he'd been working the night before. But my anxiety meant that I wanted to do this early. If I was going to get arrested today, let's just get it over with. This was hardly the right way to prepare for James' arrival, but my OCD was taking over.

I cleaned the apartment. I paced so much that I surely drove grooves in the ceramic floor tiles. I texted James to be sure he was still coming. He did not respond. I paced some more. Maybe he was simply still asleep? An hour later I texted again, my hands shaking, asking again if he was still coming. He texted one word: "Yes".

A half hour later, shortly before noon, he texted seemingly peeved. He said that he'd googled my address and wondered if I was really in Markham—a suburb outside of Toronto. He was cabbing it so I assured him that I lived just west of downtown Toronto, and that the cab fare would amount to roughly \$15. Yet he texted again and said that my street was showing as a Markham street, not Toronto. Oh dear, this was precisely the drama that I'd avoided hook ups for. If he was getting bothered, how would he be when he arrived? He eventually found that my street name existed in Toronto as well and that he was on his way.

I put my boots on and stepped out onto the top of the stairs to wait for him to show up. There was no turning back now. A certain naive innocence of mine was about to be lost, but would the experience provide any gains? Did I look ok? Did I look like a

John? What does a John look like? Worse, did I look old? I momentarily let myself believe that James would see me and relax into me, into my looks. I readied the big smile that I intended to give him to make him feel safe and comfortable—never mind that I was shaking. I was nervous, but also excited on a primal level. I allowed myself to think that I might not get arrested and instead, have a hot experience.

No time to think anymore. A cab pulled up and stopped in front of my building. A man stepped out and looked across the street at me, squinting in the sunlight, and waved quickly. Dodging traffic, James ran across the street. I smiled and waved. There he was in flesh and blood, bounding up the steps. Without a cop in sight, I might add. I was strapped in the roller coaster—too late to get off now.

Part 2 – The Main Event

I reached out my hand as James arrived on the top landing. He took it and we shook. Here he was, an Adonis in gym clothes and a light jacket. His short hair curled in sexy locks, and his fresh face seemed open, yet his eyes told me he was shy. I needed to humanize him somehow, and found one flaw – a single nose hair that he'd evidently missed when preparing for today's date.

“My place is ridiculously small James, and sorry for the smoke. But Godsmack is playing.” We entered my building, and went down the short flight

of stairs to my basement apartment. We entered and I shucked my shoes and went to the computer, to restart the Godsmack concert to its beginning. James took off his shoes, and I took his jacket to put in my closet. Every hanger had something on it, so I whipped a shirt off a hanger, let it fall to the closet floor and hung up James' jacket. I'm a pleaser, so to be professional about it, I immediately turned to the dining room table and picked up an envelope, handing it to James. He began to put it in his pants pocket, but I urged him on, saying to feel free to count it as I went into the kitchen to make a drink. From the kitchen, I hollered "Is everything ok?" and he responded in the affirmative. I returned to James, holding a whiskey and water in my hand. In any other circumstance, I would offer a drink to a guest, but I had this notion that escorts followed a cardinal rule of never accepting a drink from a client lest it be spiked. Nevertheless, I smiled and offered him one. To my surprise, he said "sure," and I ushered him into the kitchen.

As he fixed his drink, I couldn't deny my curiosity. "James, I know I shouldn't ask you personal questions, but I have to ask you—are you really busy? I mean, you have the hottest ad on RentBoy and I bet your phone lights up continuously."

"I'm not that busy doing this actually," he said, turning back to face me. His face was open, his voice soft-spoken. "I only keep a few clients as I really am busy as a fitness trainer. And I have my own training

to do,” he said, referring to his body building career.

“If you don’t require a lot of clients, why did you agree to meet with me—which I’m so glad you did.”

“I had a good feeling about you,” he said. He said this plainly, in such an unfussy way that I was tempted to believe him.

“Then cheers, my friend.” And we clinked glasses. “Thank you too for seeing me so early on a Sunday. My nerves wouldn’t have allowed me to wait for this all day. Were you out late last night?” I asked. James related that he was at one of the strip joints in the Village the night previous, where he supplied Viagra to the dancers. I told him I was no stranger to Viagra myself, but as my sex life happily consisted mostly of masturbation, I didn’t really need it. But then I ate my words, and told him that if one is masturbating for hours, it sure as hell is nice to have a big, hard dick the whole way through, and he laughed.

We continued standing across from each other, smiling, taking sips from the whiskey, listening to Godsmack rocking out. “I liked that you like Godsmack,” James said. “Have you ever seen them live?” I hadn’t, and we discussed other rock bands that we loved. I told him that every bate of mine starts with this particular Godsmack concert playing. I playfully grabbed my crotch at that, and James mirrored me and we laughed. The ice was broken, and instinctively....we hugged. I thanked him again for coming over, and as the hug broke, I felt his pecs. He placed his hands on mine, and then moved to

remove his shirt. As his shirt went up over his head, I ripped mine open, my snaps going pop pop pop. He struck a pose and I dove in, nuzzling my face in his trimmed chest hair, tasting his nipples, finding my way to his pits to suck and smell. I sighed, losing myself to an alpha male who was soft spoken and seemingly guileless.

And I wasn't arrested. It was all really happening. Pants came off, tossed in a shared pile on the floor. I kneeled in front of James and watched as he jacked his cock in my face, while I jacked myself. His cock was thick and long, with even longer foreskin teasing me. I cupped his balls, small and shaven, and leaned in to engulf his cock into my mouth. He tasted clean and my tongue found its way inside his gorgeous foreskin, circling his cock head and finding the piss slit. I stopped after a time and stood. "James, I just wanted to say that if you ever doubt that what you do is important, don't doubt it. Sexuality is a big part of a man's life and you are giving me a memory that will last a lifetime."

"That's why the laws need to change," he said. I nodded and we drank some. My curiosity was piqued. I had to ask more questions. I asked if he had a partner, and he surprised me when he said he had a girlfriend—who sported a nine inch cock. He explained that she hormonally straddled the worlds of male and female. We made another drink and kept stroking ourselves while talking, with my hands grazing his chest every once in a while. He said that

he was bisexual and so I asked if, in regard to men, did he prefer to be with men built like him? He said no, that other bodybuilders could be competitive in the bedroom, as if there was something to prove. He also shared that he had hired female prostitutes, but his experiences had felt rushed and impersonal.

I had a clock on my kitchen wall and looked at it. How long had James been here? “James, how much time left do I have with you?” He shrugged and said “well, these things usually take a hour or so” and we left it at that. “How old are you James?” I asked. His ad had said 27, but he replied that he was actually 29. I asked if he’d done porn, but he said that he really aimed to be a success as a bodybuilder and didn’t want to tarnish that, though he’d been approached to do porn countless times. He asked me what made me want to hire an escort, and I explained that after he left, I was going to masturbate like an animal for hours after fueled by the memory of this. “I’m an attractive enough guy,” I said, “but I don’t think I would be able to attract a man like you.” He shyly smiled and whispered “Thank you”. I was hoping that he might say that I could, in fact, attract such a man, but he didn’t.

We’d poured a third drink, and I wanted to go for it, to blow this God and have his semen on my face. Right in my kitchen, where we’d just poured that third drink, I knelt down and inhaled James’ cock. Being a pleaser, and also because I wanted his load, I gave him the best blowjob I knew how to give, going

down all the way to the base and watching my teeth. I looked up at him as I sucked, to find him looking into nowhere. And I wondered what he was thinking. Where did he need to go internally to do what I had asked of him? Was all my friendly conversation my attempt to cover up the fact that this was an unnatural coupling, based on commerce first and hopefully mutual respect second? But he began to shudder, and I knew he would cum soon. I pulled off his cock and he grabbed it and jacked.

I know James was here for just a hair over 1 hour, 22 minutes and 25 seconds. I know this because drummer Tommy Stewart hit the drums for the final time on the final song of the Godsmack concert as the first spurts of James' cum hit my face and beard. James' orgasm seemed strong, and vocal, his eyes shut tight as his body spasmed. I wasn't the only one paying attention to the concert—James heaved a final time and said “Concert over” and we both laughed a little.

I stood and asked him if he was ok. He said he felt terrific and proceeded to dress. Once clothed, he stopped to look at me, and I reached to give him a hug, to thank him one last time. “Now, you have your wallet, your keys?” I asked and he said yes, that he travelled light. Dressed, he made a quick phone call, and I stood naked near him, his cum drying on my face. Phone call over, he said he was off to meet a friend and that if I ever wanted his Viagra, to let him know. At the door, we both smiled, wished each other well, and then he was gone. I closed and locked

my door and then stood there. Everything felt so quiet, my apartment so empty. Instead of inciting me to turn on porn and make love to myself for the rest of the day, I felt inclined to be still, and think. To a degree, I had the notion that I'd just gorged on empty calories. Then I noticed James' whiskey glass, still half full. I downed it, knowing his lips had touched the rim of the glass moments before. I had a decision to make: let myself enter a melancholy, or summon my rip-roaring horniness to take it for what it was worth and carry on loving myself all afternoon. But as I write this essay, months after the fact, I find I have no recollection of the bate that occurred after James' departure. I know I did masturbate, but as if overwhelmed by stimulus overload, I cannot remember a single detail of it.

Part 3 – Post Script

There would be prison time. A conviction would come. But not in the way my irrational mind had imagined.

The day after seeing James, I found myself floating on a cloud. I emailed him thanks for the experience of being with him. I also inquired about his rates for Viagra. He didn't respond. Days later I texted him, and he replied, saying he hadn't yet read his emails, he'd been out of town, in Vancouver. "How nice!" I replied, to which he said it was not nice. He had been there, he said, to face a four-year old charge of aggravated

assault. Years before, he'd been a bouncer at a club and there'd been an altercation. The prosecution was pressing for three years of jail time, his defense was angling for six months in prison and the rest under house arrest. But a conviction seemed assured.

I was out of my league. I said I was so terribly sorry. I babbled something in text about wishing I could help, to which James replied with a "Huh?" I said I wished I could help and perhaps the only way I could was by remaining a customer, to help him financially. I was bringing commerce back into this while James was facing prison—what was I doing? He stopped responding. I imagined him tiring of thinking about men and their sexual needs when he was contemplating time behind bars.

I emailed my escort friend and told him about James' situation. "Wow," he emailed back, "You've had sex with an (almost) ex con—hot!" I emailed another friend who knew I hired James, and told him too what had happened. "Well," he said, "aggravated assault is serious stuff. If he did the crime, he has to do the time." But how could my friends be so cavalier? This was *my* James they were talking about, my gentle giant with the soft spoken voice and trusting face. They didn't understand. James was misunderstood.

But then OCD made it all about me again. If they took James in, would they take his phone and see my texts about hiring him and come for me? The rational part of my brain railed at me for making this tragedy in James' life about my own welfare

and I gave my head a good shake. As I tried to clear my head of the reality of James' situation and my feelings of entanglement, my body reacted. I awoke one morning with groin spasms. Each muscle in my groin felt taut like steel, and swollen. Barely able to walk, I made an appointment with the doctor. My blood pressure was through the roof, and the doctor ruled out a hernia, instead making me an appointment for an ultrasound on my crotch.

But deep down, I felt I knew what was going on. "Doctor, is it at all possible that this is psychosomatic?" I revealed little except to say I'd had a sexual experience that had left me uneasy. He said that all we could do was to rule out real reasons before looking at what my mind was doing to my body. I know ever so little about chakras, but I know there is one in the groin, and mine felt traumatized.

I needed closure. I texted James again to apologize for asking for Viagra when he was dealing with major life events. He texted back right away, light-heartedly saying he hadn't thought anything of it, that he'd been dealing with this situation of his for four years, that it was nothing new. And so, what to do but to order some Viagra after all? He gave me his address and we set a time to meet at the apartment he kept for work, a different apartment from the one in which he and his girlfriend actually lived.

At the set time, I hobbled to James' door, the walk to his place from the subway aggravating my delicate groin muscles. He opened it and he shook my hand

welcoming me in. It was a small studio apartment, with room just for a double bed and a stereo system. No work out equipment, no weights were to be seen. I had thought he trained people, but no, this place seemed designed to exist solely for the purpose of entertaining his sex clients and I wondered if James was busier escorting than he let on.

James spoke softly, and I listened. He was headed back to Vancouver the next day to receive his sentence, to begin his incarceration. He was making arrangements for the apartment we were standing in, to have a friend sublet it. He said that the \$100 I was giving him for the Viagra would help.

“James, it seems inappropriate me buying Viagra and thinking about my dick when you are thinking of much more serious things. I’m sorry...” But he brushed me off and smiled. He said at this point, he just wanted to get it all over with. His regret was that he wouldn’t be able to train like he should and this probably meant his career in bodybuilding was at its end. He was already 29. He was reaching the end of his bodybuilding shelf life.

I told James again that he had given me a memory of bliss that would last a lifetime, and that that was important. “I know for you it’s just a job,” I continued, but he cut me off and said “No, I felt good with you, that’s why I had drinks with you....”

With my Viagra in my coat pocket, I hugged James. “I’ll text you in a week to see how you’re doing.” I left his apartment and shuffled to the elevator as best

I could. I had no interest in telling James that my groin was frozen. I turned back once, and he smiled and waved to me as he closed the door.

The pain in my groin began to subside, and when it had, I took up my phone and texted James: “Hey James, Jason here.....I hope you are doing ok.” As of this writing, he hasn’t responded. I still have OCD visions in my head of being arrested belatedly for seeing James. I still fantasize about James being in my apartment, vulnerable and naked as I worship him with my hands and mouth. I still think about how when he came, he wasn’t looking at me. I think of hiring someone again, but I haven’t yet. I think about where James is now, if he’s surviving. Hell, I think how odd it is that the Viagra was like a placebo, having no effect. But mostly, I think about sexuality’s divine power to bring together disparate people who might not have met otherwise. People who see each other close up, as if in the front row at a movie theatre. And yet to know that what we are viewing is largely illusion, no matter how real our feelings are about what we see.

PORN

Do you remember the first time you ever saw man-on-man pornography? How old were you? Where did you get it from? Where did you watch it? Did you like it?

I was twenty years old. The year was 1993, the month September. The place was The Fort Road Hotel in Edmonton, Canada. I was living in a hotel, performing nights in a touring musical production that was making its way through the western part of the country. My parents lived downtown, in an apartment block. George was their neighbour.

George was a little short, a little pudgy and though he was Canadian, adopted a faintly British accent. When I came out of the closet, George became my first real gay friend. He took me to a gay bar, the first time I'd ever been to one. Oh God—going to the gay bar elicited such fear: What if all the men

there started to paw at me, the new flesh, ripe and nubile? But when we got there, something worse happened. No one paid me any attention at all. But George and I danced, and I took in all that was around me: Other men who liked men. I'd never been in an environment where so many people were likely gay. But I also remember feeling lonely. How would I ever get to know these men? I immediately sensed a pecking order. Could I ever infiltrate the cliques I saw around me?

Fortunately, I could talk about these fears with George. He felt them too. And so we stopped going to the bar, but instead would hunker down at his place where he started to teach me about gay culture. He gave me a cassette of Bette Midler's stand-up, *Mud WILL Be Flung Tonight!* We watched gay-themed movies, like *Kiss of the Spider Woman* and *Cruising*. He told me about his own cruising escapades (I'd had none at this point). And one night, he told me he had a gift for me to take back to my hotel room. He went into his closet, foraged around under clothes and shoe boxes and came out with a VHS tape. The title of the movie? *Construction Site*. On the cover were two impossibly built hunks, looking back at me with desire in their eyes.

Gay porn.

Looking back, I'm impressed that George, to whom I wasn't physically attracted, didn't try to make me watch it with him. Instead, he intuited that I likely didn't want to listen to Bette Midler anymore, but

wanted to drive back to the hotel, lock the door and fall into gay porn for the first time. George put the tape in a grocery bag to conceal it from anybody I might pass on the way to my car. I drove back to the hotel carefully. I'm a terrible driver and couldn't afford to get into another accident now (in my most recent I'd hit a city bus). I needed to get home safe for what felt like a defining moment.

Finally, back in my room, I took the tape out of the grocery bag and opened it up. Those two hunks on the cover watched my every move. I inserted the video and momentarily thought the VCR would set itself on fire, burned by the flames of Hell. Good boys don't watch porn, do they? But I pressed play anyway.

I've never looked at a construction site the same way since.



There is more porn out there in the world than one man can ever watch in his lifetime. I take great comfort in that fact. Men reaching adulthood today have only known internet porn, but when I came of age, it was the time of VHS tapes. Within months of seeing my first, I had moved to Vancouver and found myself working at a video rental store in the heart of Vancouver's gay village. Tucked away in a back room marked "Adults Only" was the porn section. On my first night of work, I was tasked with the job of restocking the returned porn vids.

I took a small cart filled with blue movies and wheeled it into the back room, where I discovered a handful of men perusing the offerings. I was twenty, I'd only ever seen one dirty movie, and here I was, professionally, seemingly dispassionately, going about the business of restocking. But on the inside? I was jelly—and so curious about the men in the room with me. Who were they? What movies would they choose? I looked at the film in my hand. *Oklahomo*. Did Ado Annie sing the song “I Can’t Say No” in this version?

One of the perks of working in a video rental store was that I was allowed to take out any movie, at any time, for free. But to do so, you had to log it under one’s employee account on the computer, and so I waited, nervously biding my time, working up the courage. I was scared of getting a reputation with my co-workers, should they see what films I had checked out. But as I got to know my colleagues, and developed camaraderie with them, my fears abated. I went to work one evening knowing I’d be going home with a dirty movie in my backpack. Which one would I choose? What did my twenty year old self desire at that tender age? Maybe best to choose two, in case one disappointed. I remember leaving work with the movies in tow, feeling like an adult. It was, curiously, the same feeling I had when I first moved out on my own and could have a Coke at any time without first asking for parental permission.

Looking back, the porn on those early VHS tapes was so tame compared to what we can find

on the internet today. But one thing that has never changed is the desire to see beautiful men naked. Michelangelo gave it to us in the form of his Statue of David, and Chi Chi Larue gave it to us centuries later with classic smut films like *Idol Country*. All of it, Art with a capital A. I've seen the Mona Lisa, and it didn't move me in the way that art is supposed to. I am a philistine when it comes to the fine arts. Van Gogh, Monet, Manet – their work all leaves me indifferent. But I can become transfixed by a single picture of a beautiful man on my computer screen..

Beauty. That's what we're talking about here. Beauty in all its manifestations. Beauty is not just an Abercrombie & Fitch model. Beauty is also seeing the guy next door getting pissed and spit on. That's when I know there is a God: how else to explain the delicious feeling that goes from my eyes directly to my cock? The sight I'm seeing rearranges the molecules in my body to create a physical reaction, my hard on. It's a miracle, and that's not hyperbole. Just before writing this paragraph, I took a smoke break to listen and watch Elvis Presley sing "Suspicious Minds" in a 1970 concert. Seeing that man, in his white jump suit, in the best shape of his life, chest bared, moving his hips like only the King could, is to witness a wonder (and an archetype) of male beauty.

When the movie *Fifty Shades of Grey* came out, all the women in the office at work were abuzz about who had seen it already and who was planning to. I'd read a curious review that questioned why a film

ostensibly aimed at a female demographic would show more female nudity than male nudity. And so I asked a female co-worker, Jane, who had seen the film, her opinion. Saying it as if it were a given, she simply responded that “the female body is just more beautiful to look at than a guy’s.” I flinched inwardly for the sake of her husband. Not two days later, talking about the film with my boss and my boss’ boss, I asked again about the lack of male nudity in the film. Not knowing of my conversation with Jane, both women agreed that, obviously, a female body is the nicer to look at. They said this to a man, with no compunction or doubt. “I don’t need to see a man’s business below the waist,” my boss’ boss said. “If a man dropped his pants in front of me, well, we just don’t need to see that.” I bit my tongue. I’d probably give that man my phone number.

Reading erotica is to women what porn is to men. In spite of how unrealistic and fantastical books like *Fifty Shades of Grey* are, there are no calls from men for women to stop reading such works. But men are nearly reviled, and shamed, for their love of visual porn. I am in no way equipped to talk about how porn potentially influences the sexual behaviors of the straight male, behaviors that might be a turn off for women. So any discourse on straight porn will not be found here. But I will posit that viewing porn, for anyone of the male persuasion, can be as wondrous as a quasi-religious experience.



Every night, after work, I engage in a hunting expedition while “bating”. Anybody who read my first book knows that I love to masturbate for hours, what we bators call “edging.” This is the practice of letting your desire build to a near climax, then pulling back, letting the intensity calm a bit, and then doing it all over again, riding the roller coaster of your pumping testosterone. And porn is fuel for the “bate.” But what animals are we searching for tonight? Lions, tigers and bears, oh my.

In real life, men can be reticent to write, or even speak, of their sexual habits. But on the internet, they are creating shrines to sex in the form of postings (on Twitter, Xtube.com, the now-defunct porn Tumblrs) that depict every fetish imaginable. The fact that we men define gorgeous in a million different ways attests to the number of porn Tumblrs that were out there. Lately, for example, I’ve been hugely aroused by pictures of extraordinarily hairy men—“gorillas” as they are known in the gay community. This isn’t to everyone’s taste. Hell, it wasn’t mine until recently.

I recently met a “gorilla” and have played with him on more than one occasion. I asked him if he felt bothered by my fetishization of his body hair. Was I objectifying him? He laughed and told me to fetishize away, that he was happy to fulfill my desire for hirsute men. I realized that my use of porn wasn’t necessarily derailing my need to be with men in the flesh. Instead it brings into high definition specifics that I desire. A real time sexual encounter offers me

something porn can't (at least until virtual-reality porn becomes available): Instead of being limited to only visual and aural stimulation, a man in the flesh arouses my three other senses—taste, touch, and perhaps most importantly, smell. With all that sensory experience why then do men return to porn? Why is it necessary for us and what purpose does it serve?

Remember in Tennessee Williams' play *A Streetcar Named Desire*, when Blanche Dubois utters that famous line "I don't want realism. I want magic!"? Sometimes reality is just a little too...real. For every mind-blowing encounter I've had with a man, there have been three that left me wanting. Sometimes he isn't so great in bed. Sometimes he doesn't smell right. Sometimes he seems emotionally inaccessible.

But porn needs just one thing to be perfect: All it requires is your willingness to submit to fantasy. In these fantasies, you are the director and the porn performers are your actors. Good performers will often surprise their directors with actions that inspire new ideas, and with the internet, we can selfishly flip to a new fantasy with the click of a mouse.

Is this selfish? Should we not be out there falling in love and connecting with real, live people? Ahhh, love, a subject we will discuss further later. All too often, we mistake infatuation for love. And then when the infatuation, like a drug, wears off, we must make a decision—to forge something deeper, or, like the serial monogamist, look elsewhere for another hit. Writer Evelyn Lau recounted conversations with

middle-aged men who questioned whether they had ever known love—they weren't even sure how to define it. So which is it? Is love the mirage, or is porn the mirage. Is love, in part, based on how one feels about one's self when with another person? If so, might we go further and ask how one feels about himself when alone with porn?

If you are the kind of man who longs for a partner, porn might very well elicit feelings of loneliness. But my experience has been enormously different, considering my greatest relationship is with myself. Call me a loner, call me a solosexual, it's all correct. I love to explore my sexuality on my own. During masturbation, with or without porn, I feel free to fly into untold realms of my own desire, unencumbered and limited only by my imagination. Porn is a facilitator to that journey within.

It is within this context that I find myself both alarmed and amused by the commonly held notion that only social misfits would be spending so much time whacking off at their computers. Because the truth is, while I'm "whacking off at my computer," what I'm really doing is "touching the sky," as my friend Peter put it. When *Solosexual* was featured on Salon.com, the comments by the internet trolls were vicious, and I emailed Peter for support. His reply said it best. He wrote, "I know you, Jason. I know what the bating means to you. It's funny, when I was reading those comments by people online who just didn't get it, who said 'get a hobby', thinking they'd

just cracked a hilarious joke, I understood that they don't get it, and I understood you and the truth even more than I had before. Your sexuality is so potent that every day, with what little time you have to yourself, you commune with it. You let it renew you and you choose not to allow your day to be just a lot of hard work and office wisecracks followed by numbing in front of the TV. Instead you soar every day, again, in what little time you have. Who needs a hobby when he can touch the sky?"



If you think I am trying to normalize porn, you are correct. But let me be clear—I'm promoting porn that is safe, sane, consensual and legal. What is not legal is instances of revenge porn we are seeing more and more of, wherein rejected lovers post sexually explicit videos of their exes online, to get back at them. In another instance, I read of a woman who filmed herself in a sexual situation and shared the video to a handful of close friends. One of those "friends" posted it online and the woman spent a significant amount of money and time trying to expunge it from the net—a futile endeavor. Then there was the dreadful story of a school boy, a minor, who was surreptitiously filmed masturbating in a toilet stall at school by a classmate. The video was posted online, and the young boy killed himself. None of these are the porn I'm advocating for. My

porn utopia is one in which both the performers and the viewers of said porn are lifted to a higher plane, made joyful by the experience of creating it and viewing it.

I presume most people, perhaps, don't want to have a video of themselves being sexual floating around on the net. I can't help but wonder: If we all had one, would we all be a little less fearful of it coming back to haunt us? When I read the story of the woman trying to erase the video her friend had posted, I was taken aback by the harsh comments on the story. A common attitude was "If you don't want people to see it, don't film it!" What if we shifted the paradigm and said that it should be ok to film what is important to you, and you shouldn't have to be punished for it?

And it just gets messier: What of youths finding porn online at a tender age? Is the internet turning our young people into desensitized degenerates who are unable to engage in so-called normal sex? This idea was dramatized in the film *Men, Women and Children* back in 2014. In one scene, a teenage boy is unsuccessful in having sex with a girl his age. He can't get it up. We're lead to believe that he has watched so much extreme porn that he now can't have real time, "normal" sex with an actual human.

Describing my interpretation of the scene is morally dicey when the full context is considered. The girl in the scene is just a teen herself, but she is depicted as calculating. She uses her sexual power over the boy for selfish purposes—she wants him to

edit some provocative film for her personal website. *Men, Women and Children* is not R rated, so when the two teens go to bed, she doesn't remove her bra. She doesn't participate at all. Instead she lay there, expecting him to do the heavy lifting. As a viewer, I thought to myself, "no wonder he can't get it up."

Is it watching porn that did him in? Or are these characters much too young and inexperienced to even know how to begin the sexual dance? To translate what we see in porn into our realities, with real, and most importantly, communicative partners? Should we all be expected to be satisfied by culturally-sanctioned types of sex, like in the days when missionary was the only way and anything else (fellatio, cunnilingus, anal) was considered outside the bounds? Is it unreasonable to think that the boy in this scene is a kinkster who is going to need time to grow into it and that missionary, as the scene depicts, is just never going to get his motor racing? At his age, he is expected to get hard at the mere presence of a half-naked girl. Has his innocence been destroyed too early by internet porn, or conversely, does he precociously know because of porn what he really likes—that there is more out there for him?

Should we be reactionary and wish for a time when the internet didn't exist? We can't put the toothpaste back in the tube. I wonder how Europeans feel about all this? I live in North America, where we are still cowed by a puritanical sensibility. Or rather, a hypocritical sensibility, since sex is thrown at us from

every cultural angle, used to sell products, music, movies—all the while we are supposed to disapprove of the blatantness of it all. We are supposed to be above it. Conversely, I wonder why images of guns are not as scrutinized. It seems that for every second movie poster that I see on the streets promoting the latest from Hollywood, the main character is holding a gun. In the poster for the comedy *Central Intelligence*, the guns outnumber the people holding them. But somehow, we're not as afraid of guns as we are of sex.

Does holding a gun make a man brave? You know what I think bravery is? It's a man before a camera, allowing us all a window into his most private, personal and vulnerable sexual moments. He knows that society would like to crush him—for his audacity, for his boldness. If he is beautiful, he knows that the viewer will both crave him and envy him that power, the power of beauty. And he will hold us mere mortals at bay, sensing our hurtful jealousy. The green-eyed monster is a scourge, the ugly twin to our adoration of celebrities. It's all those who envied Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie's marriage and gnashed their teeth hoping that they would split up. Porn performers are rock stars, shock jocks, taking us to the edge of what is allowable in polite society. Are we teetering too close to the edge? Do we, with the internet, dance too close to a cliff?

If so, then why, when all is said and done, do I look at the picture of the naked, vulnerable man on my

computer screen and give thanks? I've orgasmed and shuddered and come back to reality after my sexual flight to the moon aboard the porn rocket. Thank you, I whisper, for the journey, thank you for the beauty. How can anything be as beautiful as man? I've seen oceans and mountains and skyscrapers and koala bears, and nothing compares to the sight of a man, naked, sharing so generously his private sexuality to remind me that I am not alone in *my* sexuality. To give me this gift, he must be an anarchist, a believer in *La Vie Bohème*. A believer that our carnality and our spirit can indeed merge. And that merger, my friend, is what makes us all beautiful.

EXPLORATIONS, PART 1: AFTER *SOLOSEXUAL*

On Saturday, January 23rd, 2016, I hurried by subway to meet my editor Jon at a Starbucks. Together, we were set to upload my book, *Solosexual: Portrait of a Masturbator*, onto Amazon. With *Solosexual* not yet even out of the gate, I was gushing about my next book idea. “Jon, it’s going to be called *Gay Porn: A Love Story*. Does that sound overused or cliché, using the phrase A Love Story?” Jon set up his computer. “Is it a book about bating too?” he inquired. “I think it’ll be a book about smut—porn in particular,” I offered, setting up my own computer in tandem.

In under an hour, we had completed the uploading process and pressed Finish. A message appeared on the screen that *Solosexual* would be available in

about a week for purchase. I feared the book would be rejected by Amazon for its frank subject matter, that their censors would deem it unacceptable. I had read the terms and agreements and I still wasn't sure that my book didn't contravene some of the rules about what could be published with regard to sexuality. Added to this worry was the looming date of January 28 when I was scheduled to go under the knife.

The surgery was for a hernia, and when people asked how I got a hernia (including my own doctor), I said that I must have hurt myself at the gym. This was a lie. At least I think it was a lie. I knew that the likely cause of my hernia was from a chronic cough, or in my case, a smoker's cough.

I only started smoking at the age of thirty-four. YouTube offered me my first glimpse of sexy, bare-chested men smoking seductively for the camera. A trip to Xtube revealed more men smoking, but these men were naked. To me, the cigarette was a dick being sucked slowly. The tendrils of smoke that swirled around the mouths of these men was semen in gaseous form. They seemed so centered, so calm as they sucked the cancer stick.

I had to try it. I went downstairs to my apartment building's adjacent convenience store and inquired about their cigarettes. "I'd like to buy a pack of cigarettes, which is the cheapest brand?" I asked the clerk. Like my whiskey, I didn't really care about the taste of the cigarette, I would be no cigarette snob. I just wanted the effect.

This is how smoking became part of my *bate*. Each pull on the cigarette with my mouth was like a load of cum down my throat. And for years, I relegated my smoking to *bate* time—never at any other time. This trick worked for a long time. I never carried cigarettes with me outside my home, never bummed one off a friend or stranger. I didn't feel the need to. But years later, in a new city out East, there was one fateful sunny day in March where my stress levels were at an all time high and I had just purchased a pack for that night's *bate*. It occurred to me for the first time to try smoking a cigarette when I wasn't being sexual, and I lit up on the street. I was frenzied by a job interview that I'd nearly been late for, and it had gone badly. The minute I inhaled, I felt calmed. I could realign, recalibrate.

It would be years before the chronic cough became noticeable, first to myself, and then to others. You would think the hernia would have scared me straight about my smoking, but no. I stuck to my story that my hernia was caused by a mishap at the gym. I went home the same day of the surgery, escorted by a piss buddy who met me at the hospital as I awakened from the anaesthetic. And that night, you bet your bottom dollar I *bated*, with a big bandage above the pubes that had largely been shaved away from the right side of my crotch. It's with great pride that I can claim to have *bated* just hours after being on the operating table. And like a true addict, I smoked during my post-surgery *bate*, hernia be damned.

The great stage and screen siren Tallulah Bankhead was equally unrepentant. After having surgery for problems linked to a venereal disease she told her doctor, “Don’t think I’ve learned my lesson!”

Due to the operation, I would be off work for three weeks. Within days, it would feel clear to me that the timing of the surgery was divinely inspired. My world was about start spinning so fast that it would take all my concentration—and time—to keep it on its axis.



My hernia was fixed on a Thursday. By Friday, the book still wasn’t live on Amazon. I began to wonder if all the work of writing it, editing it, revising it, living it, breathing it, would all be for nought. Amazon would reject it, would refuse to publish it. It was too graphic, I was sure. I went to bed Friday night with a sense of loss. If I couldn’t publish the book on Amazon, the last alternative was to find a printer to print them, order a bunch and go through the tedious, now old-fashioned process of mailing books ordered through my book’s website. That process sounded exhausting.

Before turning to self-publishing, I’d tried to have the book published by a traditional publisher, but to no avail. There are only a handful in the English-speaking world who publish books about sexuality of the homosexual kind. One publisher sent me a

rejection, including the manuscript I'd sent them in the return envelope. Only it wasn't my manuscript. The manuscript belonged to another writer, an author who'd written about a court case that had been in the papers within the past year. The rejection note said that it was old news now and would be a tough sell.

I also sent the manuscript to the publisher who'd accepted an essay of mine in an anthology of theirs. Jon had been the editor of that collection. But I learned that the editor I'd sent my manuscript to had left that house and it would likely be months before a suitable replacement was found. I didn't want to wait on a hope and dream. I tried the third and last potential publisher, and they sent me a kind rejection letter, suggesting I try the publisher whose editor had just jumped ship.

I decided I would have to do this on my own.

Saturday morning, I woke up and blearily made a cup of coffee. I wasn't about to bate, at least not yet, but I recall opening up BateWorld.com anyway. I had a few messages in my inbox, and one of them referenced my book in the subject line. I had written some about my upcoming book on the site's blog, so I wasn't surprised—yet. I clicked on the message. And that's when the roller coaster began.

He'd read my book. He was ecstatic about it. He asked to call me on the phone to talk about it. I went right to my self-publishing page on Amazon, and there it was: LIVE. How on earth did this guy find the book live before I did? Where was he from? I checked

his profile. Maryland. I'm normally hesitant to give my phone number out willy-nilly to someone I don't know, but he was proffering such superlatives about the book in his message that my ego decided that Maryland didn't have any crazy people. I shot him my number. I texted my editor that the book was live. Seconds later, my phone trilled. Maryland was calling.

Even though I asked, I don't recall how this man found my book, but find it he did and he'd stayed up all night reading it, from start to finish. He said it was no longer "my" book, but "our" book, meaning the bate community at large. I was dumbstruck. And grateful. I was relieved at how much he liked it. We hung up and my phone trilled again—this time a text coming in, from him. It was a photo, a picture of my book covered in his sperm. He'd jacked off on it. My book will never be included on Oprah's book club, it may never be on the New York Times bestseller list, but what author has had the honor of having a reader cum on their book out of appreciation?

Little did I realize, though, that the book would become a different type of best seller. I set about becoming a one-person marketing machine and emailed every single person on my friend list on BateWorld. It took all day. I ordered copies of the book for reviewers I'd lined up. I didn't have Twitter then, but Jon tweeted his ass off. That was the calm before the storm.

It was Monday when I realized that I was blessed by God to have had surgery and not be at work at

this critical time for the book. Interest in *Solosexual* was booming. Salon.com got wind of the book and requested an interview. A radio station in Ireland wanted to have me on. By Tuesday, I opened BateWorld to seventy-five messages. People were ordering digital copies of the book and reading it fast. The reaction was golden. Men were really connecting to it. The owners of BateWorld.com had read the book and helped me promote the hell out of it, for which I am forever grateful. Xtube.com did a piece on it.

My bates during this time took on a new tenor: I bated in gratitude. I read message after message of men extolling the virtues of the book and I would bate and cry, feeling that I'd done something creative to be proud of. Aside from moments in the theater in my twenties, this felt like the apex of my creative life. I'd never connected with this many people in such a profound manner before. I bated while listening to the glorious Whitney Houston singing the American National Anthem, over and over, her soaring vocals mirroring my soaring spirit. I listened to Celine Dion singing "You Brought Me Back to Life", because all of the messages from readers instilled me with the power of communion. I bated to Susan Boyle. I doubt that anyone anywhere has ever masturbated to the sound of Susan Boyle's music. But there is something so pure, so organic, so honest about her voice. It was in this state that I went back to my Amazon page to see if anyone had posted reviews

there. A few had, but like a laser, my eyes locked on one with this title: “Complete Garbage.”

I didn’t read further at that moment. Just the words “Complete Garbage” and I came undone. I pushed the chair back from the computer, slowly walked to the bathroom, leaned over the toilet, and threw up.

At that point, I believed that every kind reader who’d offered me praise for the book was deluded, and this Amazon reviewer had found me out. A fraud. A no-talent. I emailed my piss buddy who’d picked me up at the hospital about it and then screwed up my courage to read the review in whole. My piss buddy came to my rescue when he emailed back that he’d looked at the reviewer’s profile and found he’d ripped a bunch of books to shreds. I told him that I’d unexpectedly thrown up, a visceral reaction to the bad review. Being in Finance, he wondered at how fucking sensitive we aesthetes are. As a good friend, he told me to get a grip.

Over time, I had the most wonderful conversations with some readers. They don’t always agree with every point in the book, but it certainly sparks savoury dialogue. I googled the book and found that a dictionary site called Vocabulary.com had referenced my name and the book’s title under its definition of “masturbator.” I was now the dictionary definition of a masturbator! The book hit number 1 for a period of about a week in the Gay Studies section of Amazon Kindle and number 2 in LGBT Studies. But one thing was clear: I wasn’t going to be able to quit my day job anytime soon.

I'd long healed from surgery, but I milked my short-term leave from work to the end. What I wasn't ready to see end was this world I was inhabiting—the world of creativity. The day came to return to the daily grind, to my job pushing paper, a world where numbers ruled. I dressed for that first morning of work as if waking from a dream—only to enter a nightmare. When I got to work, I had nearly 800 emails. My voicemail was full. The inbox at my desk was full. My lovely co-workers welcomed me back with hugs and told me they'd missed me, but I could tell them nothing of what now felt like my real life as a writer. I didn't want my sex writing to be known in this corporate environment and I felt split in two. I looked at my emails. Each subject line contained the word "Urgent." None of the emails made sense. The mountain of papers on my desk loomed large. I didn't remember my passwords *and* I struggled to even remember where I'd written them down. Sheila from Marketing came by to tell me about what I'd missed while I was away—the petty squabbles, the office politics, the trials of the so-called real world. I had been sequestered for three weeks in a world of love and baste and approbation, and now I had to be a "real" person with a "real" job.

It felt like a terrible mistake had been made. I wasn't supposed to return to this, I was a writer now. I'd been given a taste of creative paradise, only to have it snatched away, as if I'd been punked. Cinderella's carriage had turned back into a pumpkin, with no

shoe-bearing prince in sight. I worked that Thursday and Friday. I called in sick on Monday. I called in sick so soon after having been away for three weeks. I pulled it together the next day and went in. Maybe I wasn't so special after all. Once again, I was nothing but a number, a cog in the wheel of capitalism. I shook with rage some days, so self-indulgently incensed that I'd had a taste of the wine but now could drink only vinegar. I reasoned that I should be grateful to have a job at all in this economy. I told myself I would learn to be grateful. "Yeah, and how's that workin' for ya?" my sister intoned when I told her I was trying to dredge up gratitude. I laughed a little at her non-nonsense response, and said "But Joanne, Oprah says that living a life of gratitude is the first step to living your best life." Joanne paused, considering my plight, before saying "Is Oprah still relevant?"

The writing life, my *Solosexual* story, was sustaining me. I rushed home each night to commune with men who wanted to share their story with me. I wanted more dialogue, more approbation in an unending stream. It was April and I couldn't shake the feeling that I was owed more of this communion with my readers and less of pushing paper that was only making others rich. Cynical doesn't begin to describe me at that moment.

I was invited on a late Tuesday night to appear on a radio show called "Sex City" to talk about the book. It felt magical - I loved doing the show. I loved the interviewer and her smart questions. And I went

home bereft, feeling resentful of having to go to my day job in the morning. And Wednesday morning, I stood on the subway platform and waited for the train to appear. It appeared—and I didn't get on. Another train came barreling through. I let it leave in a blur as I stood on the platform, intending to get on the third train. Finally a fourth train passed and I gave up and went home. I called in sick. Friday came, and my boss told me to bring in a doctor's note. So I trudged to the doctor. I told him I was sick of my job, perhaps mentally sick because of it. I told him I was overwhelmed at the work load. He asked if I was being pressured to perform at an unrealistic standard. I said no. The truth was that nobody was breathing down my neck and my boss was the sweetest woman on the planet. He told me that all I owed them was my eight hours a day of good work and anything beyond that was the concern of management, not me. He pretty much told me to go back to work.

So, I had to make work work for me again. I had to make peace with my day job. I was reading a book of essays on the writing life. Time and again, the writers hoped to write something that would touch people, that would elicit a response. And it hit me—I'd had that. *Solosexual* exists and the love poured in. No one could take that away from me now. Anything more, financial or otherwise, was gravy. I realized that instead of wanting more, I could accept what I'd had. As the song says, there are moments you remember all your life that no fire can burn away, no

wave can wash away.

And now it was time to be of service again, at my job, where the people were sweet and the benefits good. Once I realized that no wind could blow this experience away, of having done something creatively well and good, I resumed being alive in the real world. I was no longer afraid that my creative life would slip through my fingers.

Finally, I understood gratitude. I was grateful to the universe for the joy of publishing *Solosexual*. I was so grateful to the readers who wrote me to share their most personal selves. It was time to think beyond *Solosexual*. And so, as at the start of this chapter, I think to porn, to smut. I think to the future of male sexuality. They say that to predict the future, one must create it. And as Jonathan Larson wrote in the musical *Rent*, the opposite of war isn't peace, it's creation. What scene is male sexuality set to create now?

SUBWAYS ARE FOR STARING

Subways Are For Sleeping opened on Broadway in 1961. Nobody remembers this show about an assortment of vagrants who slept nights on the subways of New York City, except for the fact that Phyllis Newman beat Barbra Streisand for Best Performance by a Featured Actress in a Musical at that year's Tony Awards. I take the subway to and from work every day, and I'm on it for an hour each way. I too have been known to nod off during the journey. Just two days ago, I sat next to a man who would fall asleep and start to lean so dangerously forward, I was sure I was going to have to save him from toppling right over. Fortunately, just in the nick of time, he would come to and sit up straight—for about five minutes. Then he'd succumb to dreamland again and start leaning like the Tower of Pisa.

If I'm not sleeping on the subway, I have my nose in a book. But there is one other way I pass the time. I must confess to you that I people watch. Well, I look at men, men sitting or standing close enough that I can see them despite my near-sightedness. I try to be quick about it, try to be furtive, as I wonder about these men and who or what they're going home to. Are they heading home for a sexual adventure, or to fix the car in the garage, or to simply zone out in front of the boob tube?

Every once in a while, my eyes lock on a man so intriguing, so sexy, that I stare. Unnervingly so. I can't help myself. I've learned tricks to aid my staring. If the man I'm obsessing over is near a window, and the subway is in the tunnel, his reflection might be viewable in that window, and when I look at it, I appear as if I'm staring into nothingness. This is what I did a week ago on a morning trip up to work—I found a man that I couldn't take my eyes off of and stared at his reflection, while he slept. Since his eyes were closed, I also stole glances directly at him, but I was terrified that he would feel my eyes boring into him.

The subway was slowing as it entered the station, and he stirred and stood. I watched his strong back as he went to the door and just one second before the subway stopped and the doors opened, he turned and looked at me. He looked at me hard. His eyes said to fuck off. I dropped my gaze so damn quick, the gay gaze, the male gaze that I couldn't seem to control. He had found me out, I was naked. He stepped onto

the platform, the subway doors closed again, and I didn't breathe right for two full stops after.

You would think I'd learn my lesson. You would think out of common decency I'd refrain from doing what I know makes others very uncomfortable. I remember the subway worker, in his tight white t-shirt and his little orange vest, chatting with his coworkers, and when they got off the train, he stopped them, said something I couldn't hear, and lifted his arm to point directly at me. To mock me.

Getting caught staring at men is like having your desire hurled back in your face. The shame that envelops you combines with the loneliness of being an alien in a straight world where your desire can incite hatred. I know that if I'm stared at by an unwelcome pair of eyes, I don't like it, so surely you'd think that I wouldn't want to force that feeling on anyone else. While I may feel that it is I who is the one caught in a tangle of longing, that doesn't excuse how my behaviour makes my prey feel. Tell that to Harvey Weinstein and his ilk.

But sometimes...sometimes, things work out differently...

Rewind to New York City in the late 90's at the end of a Wednesday night Men Are Pigs event at the Lure. After having shot my wad in the backroom while sucking off two dicks at once, I gather the clothes I've left in the coat check and ready myself to leave the bar to enter the real world. It's still dark and I leave behind a bit of my heart and soul in the

Lure. I feel more naked now that I'm outside, even though I'm fully clothed. On the subway platform I steal glances at the few people around me. Can they smell sex on me? Can they sense it? Being New Yorkers, they probably don't care if I smell of sex. At this hour, they probably do too.

I crumple into a seat on the subway and look up to see an attractive man across from me with eyes closed. Seems like a good idea and I close my eyes too. But when I open them again, he is eyeing me. He grins slightly before closing his eyes again. We pass this flirtatious ball back and forth until I realize that I'm coming to my stop. When the door opens I take one last look back at my sleeping beauty. As I step off the train, he jumps up and leaps off the train just as the doors are closing.

Turns out sleeping beauty is a dancer with an esteemed dance company. He was heading home, but is up for hanging out. He follows me as I lead him up the steps from the subway into the street, and in the time it took to get home, a miracle occurred. Light had dared to make its presence known, if just barely, in the sky. This is the holiest of moments in New York, when the streets are empty except for the pigeons. It's just You and the City. And in this case, a beautiful dancer.

In my eighth floor single-room-occupancy apartment, the dancer undresses and lay on my bed. His balls are hairy, a rare gift in this waxed age, and I cup them in my hand. He breathes deeply. Teasingly, he shows me how

flexible he is by stretching a leg so far back that his heel nearly reaches his head.

My cock is done—what happened at the Lure was all it had the energy for. But I am up to worshipping this dancer with my tongue, tracing all over his body until I reach his cock and take it in. After he cums, we lay together silently. His energy is at peace and I instinctively sense that he is a nice person. This is meaningful to me.

When he goes, I lay down, placing my head into the groove in the pillow where the dancer had rested his moments before. The window is open. I hear the sounds of civilians starting their Thursday. As I lay there, I don't worry that straight people, and many of my gay brethren, will think that I'm a stereotypical example of the promiscuous gay male. I don't worry whether I've got an STI. I can worry about that tomorrow—and I probably will. I don't worry that I get seduced by men and lust, just as Roxie Hart was seduced by jazz and liquor in the show *Chicago*. Instead, as the machinery of capitalism begins to churn on the streets below, I simply fall asleep, in this city that never does.

EXPLORATIONS, PART 2: DAYTIME ORGY

Orgies. I fell asleep at the last one I went to, a combination of too much beer and not enough interest. That was in 2013. Now, years later, I was looking to re-enter that world. I was curious about the men attending them. I wondered if the experience would fuel my later masturbation sessions, like a memory of live porn. I wanted to feel the communal energy of men sweating and sucking and fucking all together again. I wanted to see if a solosexual like me could re-enter that experience and if so, would it be different from when I'd inhabited that life before I'd discovered that masturbation was my favored sexual outlet?

I didn't realize the first orgy I would attend after my self-imposed exile would be a challenging experience—particularly the set up. I discovered

a group that ran very private, very selective orgies here in my city. They wanted a face pic, a body pic and proof that I'd been tested for STI's in the last three months. If accepted, they would email the date, time and location of the next orgy just before it was scheduled to happen. They take place in one of the private homes of the organizers.

I sent my pics and was accepted. It was on a weeknight, and was scheduled to run from 7pm to 8:30pm. A short window of time, it seemed to me, a real slam, bam, thank you ma'am. As is my habit, I showed up way too early and found myself pacing the street in front of the condo. Before long, I noticed other men slowing at this address and pacing in front too, or passing the time texting, smoking, trying to be inconspicuous but surely with sex on the brain.

How funny it must have looked that as all of our phones told us it was 7, we slowly filed into the building, buzzing up, being let in. We had been given the condo number and were told to just walk in. After reaching the right floor, I checked myself in a hallway mirror and wondered if they'd tell me to leave once they saw me in person. I didn't think I looked particularly sexy in the harsh fluorescents beaming down on me from above. They say the greats in Hollywood knew that to look good, you need to be lit from below. Oh well.

I got to the door and walked in and was greeted by the host. He seemed happy to see me and we exchanged pleasantries while I took off my Timberland boots.

We'd been instructed to bring our own booze. Once the boots were off, I carried my beers into the kitchen where a few men mingled and drank, fully clothed one and all. It was an open space so there was no real division between the kitchen and the living room. It was to be all one big play space, this condo on the 22nd floor, overlooking the city skyline. It was the height of summer so the sun was still bright in the sky. This made me feel naked and exposed. Shouldn't orgies happen during the witching hour? Somehow the sun shining through the windows naked of curtains or shades seemed antithetical to getting nasty with a bunch of strangers.

Only, they wouldn't all be strangers. One guy entered the condo and we made eye contact, recognizing each other from a hook up we'd had many eons before. In the light of day, he looked older, more haggard than I remembered when he'd been in my apartment. However, the organizers had insisted on protecting everyone's anonymity so they requested that if we knew someone in the group, to keep it on the down low. We nodded knowingly, and then proceeded to avoid each other for the rest of the orgy. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

The host and his partner asked me about myself as we waited for more men to arrive. Right away, to seem important, to make them think they hadn't made a mistake in inviting me, I told them I'd published a book about masturbation. In an instant it hit me that they may not like this, a writer in their midst, when

anonymity was so important to this group. Before I could gauge whether I was right about this, more men arrived and the host interrupted our conversation to greet them. I made a mental note to shut the fuck up about my writing, drink my drink and scope the room.

I fancied one guy in particular. He had long blond hair tied in a bun on his head and right away I went over to tell him that I thought long hair on a guy was hot. He smiled bashfully, and we quietly talked. While I said things like “Do you work in a place that is amenable to long hair on a guy?,” the subtitles in my mind were “Will your cock be in my mouth soon?” He said that he’d worked for a bank where long hair was verboten, so he quit that and went into hospitality where he had the freedom to literally let his hair down. As he told me this, I wondered what his subtitles were. (As it turned out later, when the orgy was in progress, he seemed indifferent to my advances and was getting very tender with a skinny twink through most of the evening, but again, I’m getting ahead of myself.)

At a certain point, the condo door was locked. If you didn’t make it there by 7:20 or so, you were shit out of luck. The host spoke up to the crowd of us, twelve or so men, scattered amongst a couch, on chairs, or just standing, all of us with drinks in hand. He said, “Just enjoy your drinks guys. We find things happen naturally, it just sort of all starts,” at which point a cute bald guy (who had been stalking the street below with me before coming up) quickly

pulled his shirt up over his head. “See?” the host said, “like that,” and we all chuckled.

It took me all of a millisecond to predict who wanted whom. Right off, I noticed the cute, now shirtless bald guy make eye contact with a dark-haired beauty across the room, who returned the gaze in kind. They were perhaps the hottest men at the orgy. That neither threw a glance at me made me want to throw in the towel right there and then. That was the moment I remembered why I had stopped going to orgies and why I had ceased looking for hook ups. It was the cat and mouse game, where somebody wins and somebody loses, where my self-esteem seemed to rest in the desire either shown to me or not shown to me. This was a sport, a quiet, simmering sport. Who would be top dog?

We stood facing each other, politely appraising each other, and I longed to be back in my masturbatorium, jacking off in a frenzy that was anything but polite. My problem was that I wanted us to all love each other equally, but what fairytale land was I living in? I wanted us to all celebrate our sexuality, our maleness...as the masturbation community does.

I felt insecure, that was for sure. “Insecure” when used to describe a person can be put as “not confident or assured; uncertain and anxious”. But even truer of my experience was the use of the word to describe a thing: “not firm or set; unsafe”. I felt wobbly, without mooring. I tried to look cool. I planted my

feet shoulder width apart to assert my masculinity. I feigned nonchalance. I was back in high school again.

To my left, I spied another cute guy and said hi. He said hi and his eyes darted to and fro. “Is this your first time at one of these?” I asked. “Yeah,” he answered. “I’m straight, but curious, so thought I’d give it a try.” “That is very cool,” I responded. He smiled a nervous smile and sipped his drink, shifting his weight on his feet constantly.

Somehow, during this little interaction, I had missed the bell, but a few others had begun to take their shirts off, and hands groped torsos. It was time to take my shirt off, shuck my jeans, and engage. Once I was down to my underwear, I turned back to the group. The “straight” guy was now on a couch, his sweats down to his knees, jacking off, watching the melee unfold. If a straight guy could get his dick out that fast, certainly I could too, I thought, and I hauled mine out.

I went up to a small group watching a young guy sucking off a Daddy, and the Daddy noticed me, turning his head to kiss me. I kissed back with eyes open. This was not the bunch I wanted, no, I wanted into what felt like the exclusive club to my left, with the bald guy and the dark-haired beauty. So I broke the kiss and sidled over near to where the bald guy was being blown by the beauty. The bald guy gave me such a cursory glance that I think he only took me in peripherally. But it was enough to give new meaning to the word “indifference” so I scooted away.

Maybe what I needed was a second beer. I casually walked away from the group to retrieve a can from my backpack. Doing the same was the guy I'd had a hook up once with. "You again," he said to me with a chuckle. His mouth was smiling, but his eyes weren't.

Back in the kitchen/living room, I watched the action. On the sidelines with me were a few others, tentatively sipping drinks, including the host's partner. The host himself seemed happy as a clam playing with the men in the room. And where was the straight guy? I couldn't locate him anywhere.

The guy with the long hair was gently stroking the chest of a hairy twink, whispering in his ear, his hair now down and cascading onto his shoulders and back. I took a swig of my drink, put the can down on the kitchen counter and sallied back in the small throng, over to Mr. Long Hair. I touched his large bicep and he turned to me to give me a polite smile, but then turned back to his twink for more whisperings.

The rest is a blur. I know that I sucked some dicks, I know that mine was sucked, but this was with the players who left no real impression on me. At one point I found myself sucking the Beauty. But I did so for only a short time. I didn't feel worthy. I didn't feel his equal. I felt myself to be grovelling. I wanted to be wanted by someone I wanted. I took my mouth off of the Beauty's dick and looked up. He smiled faintly to me but I was just a mouth to him.

And maybe that was supposed to be the point. I felt this need for us all to democratically connect and

create a sense of brotherhood, like I had with men in the masturbation community. Why did it seem that once we started playing the role of top or bottom, whether orally or anally, the dynamics shifted so as to create dividing lines between men? I felt just as complicit in this game when I pulled away from men I wasn't attracted to. I wasn't looking for love, but something with my ego felt bruised. Could I just be a mouth and enjoy being a mouth for men? I certainly love that idea in theory, I love its representation in porn. Was fantasy and reality just too far apart to ever make real what I fantasized about in my head?

It wasn't yet 8:30, but there was really nowhere else to go with this group. No wonder that play time was purposely kept short. I slipped away to retrieve my clothes, casually put them on but inwardly hurrying to get out of there. And when I slipped out the door and heard it close behind me, I knew that it was unlikely that anyone had noticed I'd left. The cab I took home couldn't drive fast enough—I just wanted to be in my masturbatorium, where I knew exactly who and what I was. I got in the apartment, closed and locked my door, and slumped against it. I was home. Here I was, thinking of writing a book about a solosexual going back into the world of partnered, penetrative sex, a world full of men that I was curious about, and it seemed as if I might abort the whole thing. And for awhile, I did.

THE STRIP CLUB

When I lived in Montreal some years ago, we gay men were served by no less than four male strip clubs in the Village alone. My sex blog may have been called *Hunting for Sex*, but at a strip club, it's more like shooting fish in a barrel. There were sex gods everywhere, all gathered under one roof. I'd always gone to strip clubs by myself—to observe and give my attention fully to the experience and to how it made me feel. Narcissistically, I want to look as good as I possibly can when I go to a strip club. This means wearing a tank, to show off the muscles (such as they are), as if to say to myself that I could almost, possibly, if we stretched it, and only in very good lighting, be a stripper myself (if the audience is drunk...and near-sighted). And sometimes, before I hit my forties, I could nearly pull it off. There have been a few occasions I've been cruised by the other

strip-club customers, and I've even been asked if I worked there (this only happened once, but still!). For others, being mistaken for a stripper would be embarrassing. For me, it's the kindest thing you could say.

The other compliment comes when a stripper asks if you'd like a private dance in the back, and when you decline politely, they choose to stick around and chat anyway. Some of the conversations I've had with strippers have been revealing, wherein they seemed comfortable to tell me tidbits about their work, such as whether they were really gay or straight, and what some of their own sexual turns-ons were. Were they telling the truth? Were they being so open hoping that it would convince me to go for a lap dance, or did they just feel like chatting? Probably the former, I wish the latter, but in the end, I will never know.

But Jason, didn't you ever go for a lap dance, you ask? You bet I did. However, at \$20 a song, it's cost prohibitive, and there are limits to how far you can go. Lick their pits. Feel their chest. Touch their cock. But no sucking (well, there was that once...). And awkward moments can ensue. For my very first lap dance experience, I zeroed in on who I thought was the hottest stripper in the bar—muscled, tattooed, shirtless (as they all are). He came my way and I made sure our eyes connected so he could sense my desire. He did, and asked if I'd like a dance. Hell yeah, and off we went.

As I walked behind him towards the lap-dance area, it began to feel false right off the bat. This was about my desire and his wallet. Paying for it already felt like a mood killer and we hadn't even started. He was friendly and led me into a booth and closed the curtain. I sat down. He began to dance suggestively, and encouraged me to touch his torso. My hands moved up to his nipples which I grabbed and squeezed lightly. He winced and I immediately let go. He explained he'd just had surgery on his nipples and they were still tender. What kind of surgery? I asked. He replied that he had felt his nipples were too large and had had them reduced. I bit my tongue, since the truth is that I love large, quarter-sized nipples on a man. To each his own.



Recently, I went to a strip club with three others. My sister, newly single, wanted to go for the first time. So we went on a ladies night, along with my sister's female friend (who had been on numerous occasions), and my gay friend Alex (who'd also never been).

Here's how things on the stage go: The stripper comes out, dances and undresses a bit, teasing the crowd, then leaves the stage. Five minutes later he returns, but with a full hard-on. To this, my sister said: "Is that it? It's so tame. But I like the music." And tame it is. But it's all relative. In 1950, it would be

shocking no doubt, but now, when you can go to a bath house and watch a roomful of guys fisting each other, the site of a mere hard-on attached to a bored-looking albeit gorgeous man doesn't pack a lot of punch. A camera videotaped what was happening on stage and was broadcast in real time on screens around the club. It appeared that the dancers were watching themselves rather than connecting with the crowd.

My sister's friend gave my neophyte buddy Alex a play-by-play: "Now he's going to twirl around the pole three times...now he's going to lift his arm above his head....now he's going to slowly caress his crotch..." She was right every time. It was a routine that they all had down, without deviation. Alex and I were underserved. We generally like our men hairy—pits, chest, face, pubes. But dammit, these men were waxed within an inch of their lives. Alex, never one to keep his mouth shut, would alternately say, at full volume, "This is boring," followed five minutes later by "God, I need to get laid!" At first this frustrated me. I thought, which one is it Alex, do you like what you see or don't you? Because in spite of it all, I was transfixed. "Earth to Jason," I would hear my friends say. I felt they were missing the one reason why strip clubs exist.

Strip clubs are where you go to worship the beauty of the human male.

These are men who will have surgery on their nipples to look perfect for you. Their beauty is their currency and their power. Didn't the face of Helen of

Troy launch a thousand ships? But I couldn't help but feel second-class amongst all that beauty. I can never compete with these gods. I won't ever have one of these gods. If I do get one, would I even know what to do with him? Like my friend Alex, I vacillated between loving every man who stepped onto the stage, and being resentful that he was not really within reach. I was both in awe of his appearance while achingly wishing it were my own.

On this particular night, the strippers chatted amongst themselves more than they seemed to chat with the patrons. My only personal moment with a stripper happened on the way to the bathroom. The men's room door was adjacent to the door to the strippers' backstage area. As I passed, a stripper exited from the stage door with a loud belch. He then saw me and uttered a quick "Excuse me..."

I wonder if Helen of Troy also burped on occasion?

EXPLORATIONS, PART 3: EXPOSING THE BATE

In the worlds of love and sex, after a bad experience, we lick our wounds, brush ourselves off and try again. It's fascinating how the mind suppresses the memory of pain, or at least discomfort. Within a certain period of time since the orgy I'd been to, I was again feeling horny, wanting to inhale the scent of a man. I do try to learn from my experiences, so I thought I needed to adjust how I was going to approach meeting men for sex. I decided to put my expertise as a bator to work in bridging the gap with men. I would expose my bate and see where that lead me.

There was a time when, at bathhouses, I would wait and wait for someone else to make the first move. But knowing that bating was as natural to

me as breathing, I wanted to expose it and, at least, be in the proximity of other men. So, it was in the porn theatre room at a bathhouse that I learned the magic of being the first one to open his towel and start banging the dick.

There were multiple screens that surrounded the glass walls of the DJ booth. The whole area was ringed by a semi-circular padded couch that could easily seat fifteen to twenty guys. At any given time, there are two to five guys, ostensibly watching the porn but really snatching glances at each other. Generally, you will find that their towels are on and tied. Sometimes, a man's hand might slip surreptitiously under his own towel, but a sense of decorum or shyness usually keeps a group bate from breaking out. That is until one brave soul says "fuck it" and opens his towel and exposes his masturbation. This gives the others permission to do the same. I decided to be that guy who drops the towel first. Gradually other towels start opening, and like flies to honey, you've got a crowd before you know it.

And so here, on a Saturday night, I managed to instigate a group bate – success on that front. But I found myself demurring when a man would start to move his head down to my crotch. On so many levels, I was afraid of sex, especially of its medical consequences. Fears of HIV were ever present in my mind. Here I was, a self-proclaimed sexual adventurer in the world of men, but still clinging to safety. Maybe group bate in a bathhouse porn theater

would be my limit. I reveled in the experience of the roomful of us jacking off together, yet was pulled by a nearly forgotten force to be at one with these men, to know their innards. When, I wondered, would fear abate, so that bate wasn't the only meal on the menu? The real question though was this: did I really need to try any other dishes? What did I need to know about these men that I didn't already know as a man myself?



After my successful appearance at the bathhouse, I was eager to take my bating act on the road to other public sex spaces. Cue a visit to the XXX porn theater.

Located conveniently next to the city's premiere male strip club, you enter from the street and trudge up a steep and narrow stairway, not exactly Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven", but then again, somewhat apropos. Just deposit three dollars in the coin-operated turnstile and you're in. This is a place where you watch the floor for signs of spooge. To the left, the straight porn theatre, to the right, the gay one. In two hallways adjacent to the theaters are rows of private cabins, viewing booths that can seat up to four men.

I visited on a Saturday afternoon and found the hallways nearly empty, the cabin doors open. The lighting wasn't that dim, but upon stepping into the

gay porn theatre, with its row upon row of theater seating, my eyes needed to adjust to the dark. When they did, they saw that the theater contained only about four to five men, none seated near each other. Nor did I see any sexual activity. No matter—I was going to bring the party.

I found a seat on the aisle, throwing my backpack in the seat to the left of me. I opened it up and rummaged for the bottle of whiskey and water I'd snuck in. I took a swig, put the bottle back in my bag, and did some manspreading. I spread my legs wide, took a deep breath, and felt my crotch. The simple fact of being in a dark theater showing porn, knowing there were a few men around me was enough to make me bulge in my jeans. I wore a loose-fitting, old, torn tank top, and a frayed ball cap on my head (in fact, the same ball cap that I'm wearing on the cover of this book). I stole a glance at the other men around me. None appeared to make eye contact, but it was so dark that it was nearly impossible to be sure.

Turning back to the porn on the screen, I decided to go for it. I made a big deal of undoing my belt buckle and hoped the others could hear the sound of my zipper. I hauled out my dick as if it weighed a ton, shifting in my seat to draw attention. My cock was at attention immediately. My fantasies had sprung to life and I started imagining that the men here were waiting for their wives to finish shopping at the mall across the street. Dick out, I reached for another swig

of my drink, when to my right I sensed a man walking down to where I was sitting. I was not wrong.

A young, tall and slightly heavy guy sat down in the row in front of me, quickly getting into his seat before turning to catch my eye. I gave him my eye, as best I could in the dark. I even gave a tentative smile and glanced at my own hand moving up and down my cock's shaft, illuminated by the light of the big screen. If I thought I was the bold one in that room, this dude would outrank me soon enough. It took him just a few minutes before he stood up, hard dick in his hand, leaned against the wall and proceeded to jack off. I leaned back and deeper in my chair, slinging my left arm over the chair beside. I nodded at the dude and started jacking with purpose.

As bold as he was being, I sensed great nervousness emanating from this young man. Or was it simply excitement? His eyes darted from his cock, to me, to the porn screen, back to the room as a whole, back to me. I gave him an approving smile, which must have been affirmation enough to do more. With his cock in his hand, he walked out of the row he was in and stood in the aisle next to me, jacking his dick right next to my face. Ok, I thought, this is what you came for—but how to play my next move? I looked up at him ever so briefly, as if I barely registered him, and worked on my dick. He inched closer. I snuck a glance at his hand furiously working his meat. I saw precum glistening on my own cock head, and sensed

the dude getting slowly closer to me. Was he going to want me to suck it? Did I want to? He wasn't really my type and I was just getting off on us jacking publicly like this. Was this all I could give him?

I didn't have to answer any of my own questions. Instead, I heard a quiet grunt come out of him and in my peripheral vision I saw the white stuff start flying, landing on my shoulder and neck. One, two, three, four volleys of cum shooting on me and the guy zipped up so fast, making a beeline for the door to get out. He moved so quickly that if he'd been a cartoon character, there would have been dust flying in his wake.

I sat there pleasantly dumbfounded. I turned to see the cum coagulating on my right shoulder, and reached to touch it. I wanted to feel its consistency. Rather than bolt like the fellow had done, I wanted to revel in it. Then, with a stranger's semen on my fingertips, I brought my hand to my lips. I could smell the sperm, just as I could smell my own pits. Despite my trepidation I felt a need to go further into sleaze, so tasted the wetness, sucking the load into my mouth.

Could I possibly be as bold as that man had and stand up with my cock out? Right here, in this theater? I decided to do him one better. With my dick hanging out, I grabbed my backpack and got up, heading toward the screen. Once in the front row, leaning against the left hand wall, I fished a bottle of poppers out of my bag and huffed, while jacking my cock. I'm near sighted, so I couldn't tell which of

the four or five men in the room were watching me, if they were at all. So I jacked for myself, becoming the exhibitionist that I never thought I'd become, exposing my bate in this dirty porn theater, on a sunny Saturday afternoon, somewhere downtown. With a final hit of the poppers, I shot my wad, all over the black floor under the porn screen. I felt bold, I felt big, I felt maybe even adored by my legion of fans (all five of them).

I made a show of effort to put my dick back in my pants and zipped up like a sailor who'd just had sex with a hooker in a back alley, slow and methodical, ready to be congratulated for my display. Grabbing my backpack, I slowly sauntered up the aisle. As I got closer to each man in the room, I looked right at them. But they did not look back at me. I did not register for them. Not one shot me a smile or gave me a thumbs up. And so I sauntered out of there with a laugh and now-dried cum on my shoulder. So much for all my supposed boldness. It had gotten me no further connection with any of the men there.

I still sought connection, and would return to the porn theater again and again, sometimes playing with men in the private viewing booths. But why is my memory of these encounters hazy? Was it the booze I was sneaking in with me, or was it the almost frantic nature of such furtive behaviour? Looking back, I might have well been in a fight or flight state of mind. I was obsessively feeling for my wallet in my pocket, lest I be robbed, or worse.

Out of a lifetime of visiting porn theaters and glory hole booths, the clearest, sharpest memory I have is from when I lived near the Rockies. The peep show palace was just east of downtown, in a derelict neighborhood populated by flop houses and the denizens that lived in them. Unfortunately, the whole area was later gentrified, the peep show replaced by a glistening, but bland, condo tower.

In the basement there was a place to relax and chill out, with a large screen TV playing regular Hollywood films. One night, I found a woman sitting in there, alone, watching the TV. Outside the peep show, sex workers worked the street. I wondered if she was one of them and had come in to get out of the cold, wintery night.

She sensed my presence and turned her head around. She looked rough, hair a bit all over the place, make-up done not quite right, as if done without a mirror. But she gave me the warmest smile, a genuine smile, and said “hello.” And we talked. She asked me if I was having fun. She said she really liked coming here because she met some really nice people. I wondered if she was on something, as she seemed a bit off, though she seemed totally lucid. Or perhaps I thought her a bit off precisely because she seemed so comfortable. She seemed so at home in this space designed for furtively horny, blow-job seeking men. But she met me with a friendliness I do not often feel from the average person on the street.

As I got up to leave, she stretched out her hand to shake mine. I flinched, not wanting to shake

anybody's hand in that grotto, but then checked myself: I had taken stranger-cock in my mouth but wouldn't shake hands with this woman? I liked her, and she liked me, and we were both *there*, in this moment, this time, this space, whatever our reasons. She had the dignity to shake my hand, so I returned the gesture in kind.

I never returned to that peep show. I moved East shortly after that visit. But I return to the thought of that woman and her warmth, given to me in the most unlikely of places.

PORN – AN INTERLUDE

“Brother, been on dick for two hours. Gonna dive deep into my severe porn addiction tonight. You doing the same fucker?”

Click send.

Fix a drink. Pull on cock. Crank up Pantera videos blasting on the speakers via Youtube. The lead singer is hot as fuckin’ hell.

New message in inbox. “Fuck bro, porn is all that matters. Just got home, gonna fix a drink too. Only you get this need bro.”

“I get it bro. We are addicted to pornography. As we should be. What porn you need tonight?”

While I wait for a response, I stroke my dick and start opening all the porn sites that I’ll need tonight. I need pictures of very hairy men, showing pits and pubes and hairy ass. I’m going to open Xtube, Pornhub, Redtube. I’ve got a subscription to Treasure

Island Media. I should really get a subscription for DickWadd for the piss vids. Piss—once so outré, now de rigueur. What porn do you like?

New message from my porn addict bro. “I wanna see sweaty bareback. Licking hairy ass. Guys blowing clouds and getting fucked up on sex. Sex addicts on film man, sex addicts performing for porn addicts like us.”

Tonight is a night like any other. I worked all day, knowing that at the end of it, I’d come home to an empty apartment where the first thing I do, even before I shuck my shoes, is turn the computer on. Then I go back to the doormat to get my shoes off. Every night that I do this, I am filled with the terror that tonight, my internet will disconnect. I am never, ever late paying my internet bill. I lock the door, and check it repeatedly. Am I obsessively checking the lock to keep burglars and psycho killers safely away, or am I trying to keep my mother out of my head, knowing what I’m about to engage in?

Pantera is blasting. I like my porn just as I like my music—hard and rough. But I like a build up, a porn addict’s version of foreplay. I don’t even get into the porn right away. My masturbation sessions start slow, and follow an overriding arc. I need to check messages on BateWorld.com, the pre-eminent masturbation site, and on Xtube.com, where I have a few videos of my own of me banging my meat for the world to see. However, at a certain point, I need the stimulus of porn. Pornography. I love

that word. Leave it to the ancient Greeks to come up with the etymological root. Anglophones didn't use the English variation until the 19th century. Puritans suck.

When I decide to focus less on myself during a bate and focus more on porn, it's a decision made by the amount of liquor I have coursing through my body, and what time it is. If it's a work night, this porn addict knows that morning comes quick. Aren't I a good, healthy, responsible porn addict? Where's my parade?

I still look at Tumblrs, albeit now PG, and start with one called My Daddy Is Hairy. What page did I leave off on last time? I've got it written down here, from last night. Ok - I left off on page 22. The owner of the Tumblr seems to add about a page a day, so I need to go to about page 24 to see new shit. And just as I get there, I receive another email in my inbox. It's from a different bud, Joe. Let me tell you about this fucker Joe: he is no nonsense, and the times I get sentimental on his ass, he calls me a fuckin alcoholic jerk off who won't even remember our conversation the next day. But deep down, I know he digs me as much as I dig him.

“Wellwellwell. I see you're logged onto BateWorld. You're home early. Did you even go into work today, or have you been bating to porn all day? Bro, I woke up hung over, my hand on my dick, shaky and I tried to get some productive shit done, but fuck it, I went and got a new bottle and my dick is stirring. Saw

some fucked up shit last night, dudes puking on each other. Strangely arousing.”

I read Joe’s email and I think: Somewhere out there, there are men who come home to wives and children. They fix cars in their spare time, when not driving little Jimmy to soccer practice, or having sex with the Mrs once or twice a week. And maybe for them, that’s fine. I have to constantly remind myself that not every man has the sex drive I do. But what of the men who have all those extraneous responsibilities and would give their left nut to have the kind of life I’m living: hedonism to the hilt, unimpeded by a family. But then again, what am I missing by not building a family of my own? What joys do they know that I do not? Do I care?

Some family men must surely wish they could toss it out the window and find a man cave to indulge in porn like I am. Am I a lost delusional who’s missed a vital step in growing up? Or, conversely, have I found the secret that hot-blooded men should all learn before they walk down the aisle and then have to start hiding their porn watching? Hiding their affairs because monogamy feels unnatural? All the while these same men slut-shame women who feel the same way. What exactly happened to the sexual revolution of the 60’s? Did we collectively dream it?

“Listen to you, getting all fuckin philosophical,” Joe would say at this point. “Why don’t you just do a shot with me.”

Hot-blooded men. I am one and I want to see others who identify as the same. Look at Xtube. Who are all these men, who have also posted videos and pictures of themselves en masse. I've said it before: There is so much porn out there that I will never be able to watch it all. That thought hardens my dick to no end. All of us men, so happy to have dicks, parading it for anybody who'll watch. And the beauty. Oh, the beauty.

There are times that I see a still picture on my computer and the man is so beautiful that my hand flies off my cock and up to cover my mouth as I gasp. And that's when the praying starts. I pray thanks. There was a time I was so scared of my own sexual desire that I would have prayed for the strength to not worship or idolize the image I was seeing. But now, I see that the Universe is worshipped when I worship at the sight of God's most beautiful creation. Man is art. Only skyscrapers can compare, with their phallic reach to the heights.

That said, when I watch porn vids, I am observing from a different angle. The most beguiling man is not necessarily the most physically beautiful. Rather, he is the performer who bares his sexual soul, who dives into sex with a splash. The kind of splash a whale makes when breaching - total and absolute. But, especially in professional porn, how much of that soul-baring is simply really good acting?

I could be wrong, but I have a theory: The best porn performers may, in some cases, have been the most repressed while growing up. You repress someone

sexually and two results can occur. Said person joins the seminary and fights to suppress other people's sexuality, or they go into porn. To reclaim themselves. To take off the sexual shackles. Perhaps this pertains only to those whose sexual drive was strong from the start. Am I describing myself and my reasons for posting my own XXX videos on sex sites? Is this why I chose to go hog-wild in those clips? And is our collective repression the reason those little videos of mine garnered as much attention as they did?

Consumption. That is what I want sexually. To be consumed. To consume. To devour and be devoured. And finally, to worship. To worship the degradation that I would happily subscribe to. To worship the male and put him on a pedestal that he may find too high. Here I am, a guy like so many others who have an internet connection, looking at novel images and scenes, one after another. Nobody ever says this is ok. It's always talked about by pundits and experts as dangerous to one's psyche and real sexual relationships. I wonder if I can reclaim porn. I wonder if I can throw off the shackles of the so-called experts. I wonder if I'm walking a slippery slope. I wonder if I wonder that because that is what we are told. Do I have the courage to make up my own mind about it?

EXPLORATIONS, PART 4: “IT’S THE 70’S ALL OVER AGAIN”

At the risk of sounding like a broken record, I worried during the writing of this book that my readers would feel betrayed. On BateWorld.com, I was dubbed the world’s most famous solosexual, yet here I was transgressing. Would I be forgiven? Would my friends on BateWorld understand this need to explore the sexual fluidity coursing through my horny veins?

I never stopped living a bate lifestyle. Instead, I felt I was merely incorporating new ways to bring me ever closer to my deity—the meat between my legs. If a man sucked me off, did that constitute being masturbated by a mouth? If a man fucks another

man, is it an ass masturbating the dick? Or, tell me, are such thoughts my own rationalizations?

If these musings were those of a fallen solosexual, they were being supported by a premiere bator I'd known for years on BateWorld. I had flown to Chicago to meet him some time back. He was a leader among sexual men, popular in the bate community. So when he texted me and shared that he had just gone on PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis), I questioned him as to why. My limited knowledge of PrEP was that HIV negative men were getting on it to have bareback sex while supposedly still protected against HIV infection.

The actual drug is called Truvada. My narrow frame of reference included the phrase I'd heard bandied about: "Truvada whore." This term is a form of slut shaming, the prejudice being that men on Truvada are more promiscuous than most. When my friend told me he had gone on PrEP, slut shaming was the last thing on my mind. What I wanted to know, rather, was why he wanted to have partnered, penetrative sex.

He saw sex with others as yet another conduit to satisfying his cock lust, penetrative sex just another color on his spectrum of sex that included solosex. And he wanted it bareback. All I really thought when he told me this was "Humph." Interesting, yet so far removed from my reality. With him being in Chicago, he was far away. The notion of PrEP seemed foreign. None of it sank in.

But then I bated with Jake.

I met Jake on BateWorld and he lived in my city. He wanted to try piss play, a specialty of mine. It was a sweltering summer night and he biked it over to my place, arriving deliciously sweaty - just how I like a man and how I like myself. He carted his bike down the short stairway to my basement apartment, leaned it against a wall and was already hurriedly undressing as I locked the door behind him. He wasted no time in whipping his dick out and what a dick it was—long, thick, uncut, some veins. Quite possibly the most aesthetically beautiful cock I'd ever seen, in or out of porn.

We set to bating, but his beautiful cock beckoned me to break bate tradition. I asked to suck it and Jake happily obliged. On my knees, I worshipped. Pure, unadulterated, wet, sloppy worship. It was as if I'd never sucked a cock before. It felt new, like the first time.

Jake also celebrated a newfound, explosive love of being pissed on. I had set up a tarp and blanket under us, and let Jake have it all over his hair, his face, his body. The blanket became drenched. In a state of ecstasy, Jake lay on it and covered himself, immersing in my clear liquid, moaning with the lust of a new fetish being born. I bent over him, moving the blanket away from his wet cock and began to suck again. "I want your cum, in my mouth. Is that ok?" I asked. He said, "of course". Before going down on him, I added "I don't usually do this, for safety sake,

but your cock is just too beautiful.” He then said this: “It’s all good. I’m negative and on PrEP.”

I’d never met anyone in the flesh whom I knew to be on PrEP. Here was a specimen in my apartment. So I stopped sucking him long enough to ask him a few questions. Why was he on it? He liked to top, and he liked it bare. Remember, this was a bator I’d met on BateWorld, so I wasn’t expecting to hear this. My insulated world of solosexuality had made me think we all eschewed fucking.

How long had he been on it? About six months.

Wasn’t it really expensive though? His insurance covered all but \$150 of it.

Was he regularly out there fucking men bare? Oh hell yeah, he told me.

Where did he meet other barebackers? On a website called BareBackRealTime.com, he said.

But you’re a bator too? Jack it all the time, he confirmed, when not pounding ass.

“All my life, I’ve been so scared of the notion of fucking bare. It’s not even in my vocabulary,” I told him. “That’s how I always felt too,” he concurred. He thought for a moment before saying, “but now, it’s like it’s the 70’s all over again.”



After I’d taken his sweet load in my mouth, an act that I’d abstained from with men for most of my life no matter how badly I wanted it, he left. He’d

showered the piss off. He texted me fifteen minutes after leaving that he was at an ice cream parlour and wondered jokingly if he still smelled of piss. As I sat in my empty apartment, I couldn't get his words out of my head: *It's like it's the 70's all over again.*

What were the 1970's if not a hedonistic time in the development of gay male culture. A time when no one used condoms, a time when gay sex flourished unbound under the cloak of night. I had always felt a kinship with the men of that era, yet it was tempered by the cold, stark realities that played out in books of the time such as Larry Kramer's *Faggots* and Andrew Holleran's seriocomic *Dancer From the Dance*. Those books glamorized the sexual heyday that was the 70's while also imparting a sense of doom. The protagonists were looking for love which was nowhere to be found at the Meat Rack or at the baths. But if I wasn't looking for love, could I escape that doom and find only satisfaction? I envied the seeming abandon the men of that time appeared to experience, but HIV hit just as puberty did for me. Was I glorifying a time in history that I never knew out of all proportion, or were men like Jake and my friend in Chicago reinventing that era here in the now?

I was curious. I was awakened to something dormant in me. I was born in the 70's, but too young then to know that decade well. Something in me wanted to be reborn.

On Monday morning, I picked up the phone and made a doctor appointment.

ERIK RHODES

For all the porn I watch, I often don't know the names of the porn stars that I'm lusting after. But I never forget a face. I'm the guy who walks into a sex shop with my friend Alex and can say, while perusing the XXX films, "I know his work....and I know his work....oh and I know his work too." So when I read that gay porn star Erik Rhodes had died in his sleep at age thirty, I had to do an internet search to see what he looked like.

Erik was a gorgeous man, as built as they come. He was also a blogger. On his site, "My Romance with Misery", Erik answered questions that were supposedly submitted by his readers. His answers dripped with pain, depression, sadness, and loneliness. At the same time, he seemed to test the world by spewing out angry, insulting responses to some of his readers' questions. A clip I found on

Youtube showed him being dismissive to fans and in one case, insulting an elderly woman on the streets of San Francisco. In interviews, he seemed nonplussed about his work as a porn star, blasé if you will. He may have had a romance with misery, but he did not romanticize his career.

Turns out, I did not “know his work.” So with a quick search on Pornmd.com, I found a few clips of him. I was not watching to be titillated. I had read much of the blog and knew that the man I was about to view on the screen was not only now dead, but deeply sad when he was with us. But like people are drawn to car accidents, I had to see the wreckage.

I pressed play, and a clip began featuring Erik with two other gorgeous men. Neither were as muscled-up as Erik, but they were still very attractive. The conceit of the scene was for the person off camera to interview these three porn stars a bit before a three-way. During the interview, Erik seemed at ease, and was sitting in the middle, as a man of his stature should be. Then the sex started.

I’m sure that during the filming of porn, there is some discarded tape that captures moments when the actors are uncomfortable, either physically or psychologically. But we will never see it. I watched the threesome unfold, and in truth, it was standard threesome fare. But then a shift occurred.

Erik was pushing a large black dildo into another performer’s ass. But the other performer was having difficulty taking it. There was no masking his

discomfort. Any top will tell you that at this point, you must pull back for the bottom. Or at least hold still and say something encouraging (and this doesn't mean you become Mary Poppins. "Come on bitch, you know you can take it for me. Give up that ass" said right can be very encouraging, as domms and subs everywhere know). But Erik was impatient, saying "C'mon, just relax." It was as if the bottom was annoying him. As if he had better things to do. As if his massive arms were getting tired from holding a dildo. And the other performer bit down, did his best. This no longer felt like a fantasy. It felt like watching rape.

I stopped the clip. How is it possible that they left that portion in the clip?

I have been very lucky. Rarely have I been disrespected in the middle of a sex session. But watching this clip, I instantly flashed to Rick, a "straight" guy I had a brief affair with. We both loved piss play in equal amounts, but near the end of our sordid affair, I recall a time he came over and I was apoplectic with insecurity. I was naked both physically and emotionally, positioned over him to piss on him. But he held all the cards and he knew it. I couldn't release my piss. He complained "C'mon man, start pissing, that's what we're here for." He didn't say it flirtatiously, he didn't say it to goad me on to the heights of piss pleasure. He said it as if he needed to be out of my apartment in 20 minutes and would I just get on with it. I might have been pissing on him, but the humiliation was mine to swallow.

The shock at being disrespected during the act of sex was such a surprise that it didn't really register until after he had left. If I can remember that brief, nearly inconsequential moment, what does the porn actor remember from being bullied by Erik Rhodes on camera?

I didn't get to finish reading all of Erik's blog as it was taken down shortly after he passed away. While reading it, I hoped against hope that his story was isolated, that it wasn't the same one for all other porn stars. I hoped that while using one's sexuality to make a living (thinking too of those many men who make money on sites like Chaturbate), one does not have to give up on peace and happiness. I hoped that Erik's worldview was not the general outlook of all in the adult entertainment industry. I hoped that sexual expression outside of a narrow, proscribed box would not always be the reason for pain and strife. And even if a porn star were to tell me that I'm painfully naive about the whole thing, at least we would have dialogue, perhaps the beginning of shedding light on something unnecessarily hidden.

BUT WHAT OF LOVE?

A TRIPTYCH – PART 1

I could hear Stacey, who sits right behind me, getting testy on the phone with a client. Oh, how I knew what she was going through. We handle international calls with people who are demanding, plead for the impossible, ask the same questions over and over expecting a different answer than we can provide. After she ended the call, I swiveled in my chair to face her and give her a look of complete empathy. “Jason,” she said waving her phone at me, “See this cord? One day I’m going to wrap it around my neck and hang myself, right here at my desk.” A perky colleague strolled by and said, “Hey Stacey, how are you?” With her elbow on the desk, her chin in her hand, she rolled her eyes and mumbled “Livin’ the dream.”

She was Lady Stacey to my Sir Jason, monikers we had given to each other when she worked in another part of the building. Due to staff shuffling, she had landed at the desk right behind mine and I got to really know this firecracker of a soccer mom. The next Monday morning, as I sipped my coffee and started my day by looking for Hollywood gossip online, she marched into the office like she was going to war. I dared ask a simple question: “How was your weekend Stacey?”

Before she answered, she reached into her bag and slammed a banana down onto her desk. “My husband is annoying me,” she said, and also slammed down a yoghurt container. Slam went the sandwich wrapped in cellophane next, but ever so carefully did she place a box of Oreos next to her computer. “What’s he doing to annoy you?” I asked. She looked at me, a fist on her hip, and said “Breathing!”

She related to me, with cheeks aflush, that her husband had thought it would be funny to twist her nipple. “It hurt like hell!” she fumed. “So instinctively, my hand shot up and slapped him in the face. Now he won’t talk to me and I’m the bad guy!” I suppressed a laugh. The little I knew about Stacey and her husband was that they had been high school sweethearts, had never dated anyone else, and after ten years of dating and fifteen years of marriage, they were still going strong. They’ve got two kids and take trips to Disneyworld when they can afford it. They’re just getting by like the rest of us.

But then yesterday, I overheard her whispering into the phone. “If you think it’s bad, just go to emergency...is it worse than before? Honey, just go, go to emergency.” I was going to give her privacy, but Sheila, the Marketing girl across the aisle, had different ideas. She crossed over to Stacey and said “What’s going on? Are you ok?” At that, I turned to face them, only to find that Stacey’s eyes were red, and the tears were beginning to show. “My husband’s having chest pain. This has happened before...they say it’s nothing serious, but he says it feels like his heart is gonna jump out of his chest...I told him to go to emergency.” We told Stacey to go be with him. “He doesn’t want me to miss work, he said to stay put. And I’m supposed to cover the phones at 11...” she said, unable to stifle the sobs that were welling up. We told her we’d cover for her, to just go, and she looked into space and said slowly, to no one in particular, “He would be there for me.” With that, she was out the door.



Age 16, Winnipeg. The door to the music room opened. In walked Jack Rankin, the grade 12 all-star athlete. He was going to play a soldier in the Land of Oz. I, of course, was cast as the Scarecrow. He was on every sports team our high school offered, but he had this curiosity of what it would be like to be on stage, if only for one scene. The first thing

he did when he saw me was to saunter up and tell me he'd seen me in another school play. "You are really funny," he said, all smiles and sincerity. I was floored: He was the most popular guy in school. Was he talking to me?

We got to know each other ever so casually through rehearsals. Ever so slowly I began to feel like Dorothy being sucked up by a cyclone and deposited in a different land far from home. New sensations I hardly recognized were coursing through my body. He played intramural sports at lunch. Without being consciously aware of my intentions, I slithered into the gym one day with my lunch and found a spot on the bleachers. There he was, playing badminton. Furtively, I watched him. He noticed me. Like a deer in the headlights, I was sure he would magically sense that I was there only to see him, and he would retaliate somehow for the unwanted attention of a fag. But when he saw me, instead of giving me a funny look, like I anticipated, instead of ignoring me like he well could have, he smiled, gave a big wave and yelled "Hey Jason!" That clinched it. His warmth at that moment, in his natural environment of the gym with his buddies, did me in. I felt on some fundamental level that his "Hey Jason" was permission to like him.

I began to worship him out of all proportion. My religious training had made me believe that attraction to a male was a one-way ticket to hell. But this burgeoning feeling for Jack was so pure, so

clean, so golden, that I knew that what I was feeling was blessed by God. I cracked open. Everything I thought I knew to be true about God and the universe was turned completely upside down. Every bit of shame I felt from my religion and my society was, I discovered, unfounded. I had to totally reconstruct my concept of God, cope with this first blush of love, and yet keep it hidden – all at the same time.

But I couldn't hide it. My parents didn't know what to make of my crying jags at the dinner table. I would get in Dad's car and drive by Jack's house, circling the block over and over, aching to be near him, weeping, knowing I could never share my feelings for him or have them returned. He was dating the prettiest girl in school. Under some long-forgotten pretense, I got his phone number and called him, ostensibly to ask for advice about something or other. He told me that he'd asked Linda to the prom, but feared she wasn't totally into him. And I, ever the pleaser and the good listener, turned it up full volume. I told him the truth. Linda could have accepted any guy's offer to the prom, the boys were falling all over her, but she accepted his. All he had to do now was to believe in his worth. "Wow," he said. "Jason, you really are a great guy, thanks – you're right, she said yes to only me." While he hung up secure in the fact that his girl really liked him, I hung up horrified that I had just given romantic advice to the object of my affection. If I had had Romeo's dagger, I would have plunged it in my heart, except for one thing – I felt

a hollow victory that he liked me a bit more for my good advice. It was a crumb, and I was starving.



Starving, I went to lunch later, in the cafeteria, hoping Stacey's husband was going to be ok. Reading the paper as I ate, I happened upon the story of a wedding, a wedding the likes I'd never heard of before. Xavier Jugelé, a Parisian police officer, had been killed in a terrorist attack on the Champs-Élysées in April, shortly before the French election. Posthumously, as is allowed in France, he was married to his long-time partner Etienne Cardiles in a ceremony attended by the mayor of Paris and former president Francois Holland. The paper showed a portrait of a handsome Xavier in his Police Nationale uniform, and his partner Etienne spoke of the life they had lived together. "A life of joy and laughter, in which love and tolerance were your uncontested masters."

Back at my desk, Sheila had updates—Stacey had texted her. Apparently, when she got to emergency and found her husband, he bitched and moaned that she didn't have to leave work for this. To which she, effectively, told him to suck it up buttercup and shut up, that he would have done the same if the shoe were on the other foot. Turns out they had to stop and restart his heart twice to get it beating in two's rather than three's. But all things come in three's; my encounters with the face of love were not over.



Age 21, Vancouver. The movie was over. What to do now? Jonathan said he would walk me home. He was an actor too, nine years my senior. We'd worked for the same theater company but never at the same time. It was a typically rainy Northern Pacific night. He held the umbrella above both of us. At my place, I didn't know what to do. I had zero experience with men and dating. He didn't push it. Instead he kissed me under that umbrella for ages. Days later, he had me over to his swinging bachelor pad. I got drunk on his scent and his wine. He took me to bed and I made love with a man for the first time. He was slow with me, romantic, patient. It was overwhelming, enlightening, and lasted all night. This scenario repeated itself over the next few weeks. My heart and mind exploded all over Jonathan. My journal exploded with writings about my feelings for him.

On the couch one night, nestled in his arms, he told me he'd been tested for everything to make sure I was protected. As clinical as that may sound, the intent behind it sounded like a proposal. But he added, "I don't know if I am ready for a boyfriend, but I do want to keep seeing you." So maybe it wasn't a proposal. He was, he said, getting over a heartbreak, a dancer named Pete whom he'd been crazy about but who had ended it. "Do you still think about Pete?" I asked. "Not when I'm with you," he replied.

That night, I entered him for the first time, the first time ever doing such a thing. The feeling was of “I belong. I belong to Jonathan.” I left in the morning, wondering if my being inside him had made me a man. Too impatient to wait until I got home, I breathlessly ran to a pay phone to call him, telling him that I could still smell him on me, that I missed him already. I remember not what he said, but what he didn’t say. He didn’t reiterate my unabashed feelings. If anything, I got the sense that if he could have reached through the phone lines, he would have patted my head. But I disregarded any misgivings, any reticence he showed was just that of a world weary lover who had not been loved quite like I could love him.



On the bus heading home, I sat behind a young couple who were giggling, kissing, and cooing. His arm would be around her, her head on his shoulder, then they’d switch, his head on her shoulder. I didn’t recognize the language they were speaking, but the teasing voice is universal. There were copious displays of public affection—all rather annoying as I tried to read my book in peace behind them. I wondered at this young Romeo and Juliet. Were they soul mates? Had they found, in each other, their life partner? Would they marry, live to be old and gray together, and die days apart like you hear about some couples?

Or were they simply in the infatuation stage? Would today's mutual feelings twist into something ugly until a crime of passion ensued, or less spectacularly, would the feelings wither and die once the craziness of lust had lost its edge?

Yet, the next day, Stacey would tell me how her husband had only recently, finally, learned how to text and now they were "sexting" during the day. After all these years, the embers were still burning. It seemed that they were meant for each other.

As a forty-something, self-proclaimed solosexual, I couldn't help but ponder the times in my youth when love for another person had been all-consuming. Maybe that is the issue: my love had been just too much. The experience of love had twisted me so out of shape that I barely recognized myself.



Age 21, Vancouver. I recognized the words, but could barely understand them. Jonathan was telling me that he loved me but that he wasn't in love with me. And for the first time, I told a man that I loved him. There, I'd said it, just moments after Jonathan effectively broke up with me. Now that it meant nothing, now that I was faced with a brick wall, I could finally say I loved him. The words were right, the timing all wrong.

My breakdown was complete and absolute. He had initially pursued me. Where did I go wrong? Was

his heart still with Pete? I began to obsess about Jonathan, so much so that I bought a book entitled How to Stop Obsessing About the One You Love. I don't remember a word of it. My roommate at the time picked the book up and snickered that I hadn't been "in love" – I had only been infatuated and was being melodramatic. I believe that's what Romeo and Juliet were told before they offed themselves. I was incensed that my feelings could be so belittled and ran from the apartment (however melodramatically).

I hated myself for not being enough for Jonathan. I felt so small. Yet God had big plans for us. Not only did we keep running into each other as we both lived in the Gay Village, we also started getting cast in the same plays. Very funny, God. Not funny was my easy acquiescence when he took me to bed again. His feelings for me had not changed, and neither had mine for him. The pleasure of being with someone you love is heaven. The pain of being with someone who doesn't love you the same way is hell. I insisted he fuck me, which I'd never done. He resisted, saying that under the circumstances, we shouldn't, it wouldn't be right. I begged. I told him I might never love this way again and wanted him to be my first. I was right to demand it. I never did love that way again.

EXPLORATIONS, PART 5: TRUVADA WHORE, OR THE FEAR OF SEX

Leila liked to giggle. She liked to tell me little stories. However, this time I wished she would be quiet while she took my blood pressure. I needed to relax and keep the numbers down. My blood pressure was becoming an issue and I wanted nothing to stand in the way of what I was at my doctor's office to get. After taking my readings for a third time, Leila then asked, "And so what are you here to see the doctor about today?" I swallowed, made an embarrassed smile and said that I was there to talk to the doctor about going on PrEP. "Oh," she said, and paused while she packed up the blood pressure machine. Then she turned back to me and

said “We have a lot of patients here on that.” Out the door she went.

My family doctor is not necessarily known for catering to the gay community. His clinic is not in the Village. So who were all these patients? Was the whole world going on PrEP without my even realizing it? Was there, unbeknownst to me, a tribe of Truvada takers out there? Most importantly, would my doctor give it to me? He *had* to. I was a man on a mission. I wanted the 70’s back and if I was going to explore the sexual lives of men, this had to be a part of the journey. I felt time creeping across my face, I felt like my sexual desirability at 43 was going to slip slowly away. I had to experience everything *now*.

My doctor walked in. I broke out into a sweat when I sheepishly asked if maybe “PrEP was right for me?” He didn’t bat an eye. Right away he started putting together a plan for me to get an HIV test to make sure I was indeed negative (for if I was positive, PrEP could have an adverse reaction). I took the test. It was negative as I imagined it would be. With that, I was back in the doctor’s office a week later. I couldn’t believe it—I was going on PrEP. This nebulous idea was now a fully-formed reality. I will have bareback sex with abandon! And that’s when the doctor sat down to talk.

“While some studies show that PrEP can be up to 99% effective in preventing HIV transmission, it’s meant to be used in tandem with condoms. It’s simply an extra layer of protection.” What I heard

was the voice of Charlie Brown’s teacher, remember that voice? Completely garbled. As the doctor spoke, I heard “wahn waw, wahna wawwa.” *I’m gonna shoot loads up guys asses and felch it out.* “PrEP only protects against HIV, nothing else, so without condoms you are still at risk for various STI’s and most seriously, Hepatitis C.” *Wahn wahn, waw waw, wahnnnnnn, no more fear of sex, can I handle Hep C? No more worrying about loads in my mouth either... doc, gimme that scrip.*

“You’ll be tested every three months for HIV in order to renew the prescription. The drug is very expensive, do you have insurance?” That made me hear him clearly again—would my work insurance cover this? I didn’t know. The only way to know would be to take the prescription to the pharmacy and have them run it through. Without insurance, there was no way I could pay the hundreds it would cost out of pocket. The job I loathed going to each day might be my only hope of getting on PrEP.

With the prescription in hand and that hurdle jumped, I went to the pharmacy to fill it. I asked them to check to see if Truvada was included in my plan. The pharmacist punched keys on the computer. This would be it, the deciding factor. I wasn’t considered “at risk” so there was no way I’d get it for free. Dispassionately, not knowing my angst, the pharmacist looked up and over to me and said “you have 80% coverage, so you’ll pay a difference of \$150 a month.” Just like Jake’s plan.

I was in. I was a member of a new tribe. Fifteen minutes later, I was out on the street, heading home with a bottle of Truvada in my bag. I'd taken the day off work. Two subway connections and a short bus ride later, I entered my quiet apartment. I took off my jacket and shoes and carried my bag to the kitchen, where I poured a glass of water. Was I ready to swallow one of these large blue pills? Are these blue pills a game changer for us all—or had we learned nothing from the AIDS crisis? Was this a delusion in thinking we are somehow safe from the HIV consequences of barebacking?

I came of age just as the AIDS crisis was dawning. I've never known a time when sex didn't potentially equal death. Even as HIV medications began turning the disease from a terminal illness to a chronic condition, I remained scared. I wondered if men of my generation weren't all suffering from some type of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, where having sex felt like playing a game of Russian Roulette. It would be so easy for those in long-term, committed relationships to smugly look down on those of us who consider ourselves sexual adventurers. They would see us as sexual outlaws. I knew I wasn't going to use condoms anymore as my doctor told me I must. Did anyone on PrEP use condoms? Were we men so fatigued by condom use that we were collectively deciding to let Truvada be the panacea for all our sexual fears? At the advent of the 80's, it was a lack of condom use that allowed HIV in. Was

it possible that some new strain of HIV or some other virus might appear, resistant to the drugs we have today? Was barebacking a decision I would actually allow myself?

Thinking historically, when has sex not scared the living daylights out of people? In Ibsen's 1881 play *Ghosts*, the character Oswald pleads with his mother to help him end his life should his syphilis wreck havoc on his body. Fast forward to 1975, when country music legend Loretta Lynn sang about how "The Pill" finally gave her control over her reproductive destiny. The advent of penicillin and the birth control pill changed the way that people felt about the consequences of sex. Would PrEP do the same?

Standing in my kitchen, with this blue pill in my hand, I momentarily reconsidered. This pill seemed to give me a sort of permission—legitimate or not—to welcome partnered, raw, penetrative sex into my world. Another way to please my cock. Sex with others wouldn't replace masturbation in my life. Rather, it would be an addition to my sexual palette. Would anybody understand? I was as surprised as anybody at this turn in my sexual journey.

I paused, wondering if I would now become one of the maligned, so-called "Truvada whores." So be it, I thought, as I placed the pill on my tongue and swallowed it down with water. A sensation came over me, similar to the one Meryl Streep had when her character drinks the potion that promises to make her eternally gorgeous and youthful in

the film *Death Becomes Her*. My pill wasn't an elixir of youth or beauty, but one of supposed sexual freedom. Freedom from fear. Was such a notion real, or a ruse?

I texted Jake. I told him I was now on PrEP. He and a mentor in Chicago had made the idea of going on PrEP seem like a possibility. Both men I'd met on BateWorld, where partnered, penetrative sex is eschewed. I couldn't ignore the irony.

But would my readers think me a turncoat? Would they understand that I hadn't abandoned the bate lifestyle but was simply exploring? Don't I have the right? During bate, I often watch bareback porn, but now, with this new medication swimming in my stomach, I wanted to do what I had only seen on the screen. I craved it all of sudden with a surprising urgency. The contradictions had my head spinning, when Jake texted me back: "Let the fucking begin."

READING *MAGIC MIKE*

S*poiler Alert: In this chapter, I discuss the movie Magic Mike and its sequel, Magic Mike XXL. I will be discussing the end of the films, so if you haven't yet seen them and still want to, come back to this chapter later. You might think it's a bit dated to discuss these movies that came out so many years ago, but no! Channing Tatum is bringing Magic Mike to Broadway!*

For my birthday a few years back, my sister offered to take me to a movie, and we mutually—enthusiastically—agreed on *Magic Mike*, the movie based on actor/stud Channing Tatum's time spent as an exotic dancer before breaking into Hollywood. I made my sister buy both tickets herself. I was afraid that the pimply-faced teen working the ticket counter would laugh at a late thirty-something man coming to ogle Channing Tatum in his stripper movie.

I liked it—up until the ending, that is. You see, we're shown that being a straight stripper is a wild ride. Money in spades and adoring audiences of women. But in the mix are some shady characters and the temptation of drugs. And for our hero Channing Tatum, the party comes to an end when he realizes that the stripper life is a dead-end street. He makes the "right" choice to leave stripping and take up with a "good" girl (read: boring, button-down, plain-Jane). She is the moral compass, and the film ends up being a morality tale. Like many a Hollywood flick, it glorifies the fast-life at first, then swoops down to make us numb-nuts in the audience remember that we will pay for the error of our ways unless we do the "right" (read: Judeo-Christian) thing.

And it worked on me—for a while. I went home and thought, Why can't I meet a gorgeous Channing Tatum look-alike stripper who leaves it all to be with me? We can live happily ever after in a house with a white-picket fence. Then I got to thinking about the real Channing Tatum. Is he, in life, the morally reborn guy that he becomes in the movie? By the end of the movie, Channing's character feels de-sexed. Does Channing really have a secret kink?

To avoid a complete moralization, Matthew McConaughey's character is given a moment to shine wherein his character shows self-pride by giving a bombastic performance. But McConaughey's character is kept one dimensional throughout the movie, thus

making it hard for the audience to relate to this odd duck who seems actually proud of his life choices.

Tell me: what's more naive? To believe in the fairy tale Channing going off with the good girl and leaving all that stripping behind? Or that you can be a stripper, and feel fulfilled and good about yourself? Just recently, I read in the local gay magazine that a stripper in my city had died. The story skirted around the manner in which he had died, but made note that the bar where he worked and his family wished people to make donations in his name to a suicide hotline. You don't have to work in the adult industry to be pushed to suicide, but I can't help but wonder if we, as a society, push adult-industry workers to it when we devalue, degrade, and denigrate them.

How about this novel idea? Could it be that, as my sister once told me, that no matter what choices you make, there will be consequences? Will Channing's character and his "good" girl always lie in a bed of roses, or will there be times when his character secretly misses the excitement of performing? Is it possible that stripping is indeed fraught with pitfalls? Or can they be avoided? Because we collectively tell people in adult entertainment that it's a slippery slope, does it become a self-fulfilling prophecy?

In the sequel, the boys are back together again for one last hurrah. The film makes clear that commitment and monogamy are what these guys really want. Channing's character was rebuffed by the plain-Jane girlfriend when he proposed to her.

Matt Bomer's character had fallen in love with a girl who just couldn't be faithful. Another of the strippers, older than the rest, tells us that he would trade it all for a wife and children to come home to, but that opportunity had seemingly passed for him. The female demographic watching the film must have salivated over these hot men who really just want a wife and family, gosh darn it. If only these men could find *that* woman to save them.

Things are never black and white. The pat, moralistic tone, particularly in the first film, offers no insight into the messy, contradictory experience we call life. It is clear that the last thing we want to do is to tell someone that they can be sexually expressive and healthy at the same time. The only condoned type of sexual expression is a very small, narrow box.

I beg to differ.

EXPLORATIONS, PART 6: THE FIRST ANON, RAW FUCK

My doctor told me that it would take somewhere around two weeks for the Truvada to take hold. During that time, I watched bareback porn with new eyes. I counted down the days until I would throw off the shackles of fear and do what I had, up until now, only watched. I felt emboldened, however rightly so or not, and it was as if I was taking a wrecking ball to every limit I had ever placed on myself. It wasn't enough to watch men bareback—I wanted to see them shoot up first. I wondered about the whole Party N Play scene, where drugs supposedly take men higher during sex than they'd ever been. I was jealous of this supposed freedom, yet wondered at

the same time if this kind of “freedom” could also be a prison.

After I’d been on PrEP for two weeks, I felt as if I held the keys to the kingdom. And I knew exactly where to start my journey there.

Jake had reminded me of it, but I’d been aware of the site BareBackRealTime.com for years. Until PrEP came along, I thought I’d never explore it. Never mind that I love to masturbate, it just didn’t seem the right fit for me at all. But Truvada had me rethinking my sexuality from top to bottom (pardon the pun). What kind of men were on that site? Were they different in nature from the bators I loved on BateWorld.com? To create a profile on BareBackRealTime felt daring, dark, suspicious—yet undeniable. I Googled it on a Sunday morning and peeked at the black web pages of this strange, exotic world of men who bareback.

Reading the profiles, I was intrigued. To put it more bluntly, the pictures I saw and the profiles I read gave me wood. So what the fuck, what did I go on PrEP for if not to explore this? I started the process of creating my own profile. I kept hitting snags and got repeated error messages. My heart rate went up. I realized just how badly I wanted in. When I fixed what was preventing my profile from being created and got the message that said “Thank you for joining BBRT”, I breathed a sigh of relief. My profile would be approved after a review by the administrators. Not twenty minutes later did I see my own profile pic show up in the scrolling list of new members.

I had indicated that I was negative and on PrEP, that I was a top, and within minutes of my profile being approved, the messages started to fill my inbox. From old men, young men, men my age, men who were also negative and on prep, men who were positive but undetectable, men who love to fuck. Lots of bottoms, fewer tops. Being a top, and new to the site made me a prized commodity. I spent hours messaging men, adding phone numbers, and eventually texting men.

I viewed the local parties page and stopped in my tracks. Tonight, at a nightclub where I had bated in the past with men from the local nudist group, there was going to be a barebacking party. I'd been to this club before as a bator. It caters to the many sexual groups in the city. Could I go as a fucker? Would you believe my decision about whether to attend came down to one thing: Did I have any Viagra in the cupboard? I knew I would be so freakin' nervous that I'd need a boner pill to give me a sense of confidence. There they were, in my cupboard, my other blue pills. Really, I knew they were in there, but I had to see them. Nothing was seeming real—I was even doubting my senses.

To go to the party, you had to request an invite. I could see that the organizer was online at the moment. I sent the invite request. Not only was it accepted but I received a personal message from the organizer who knew me from a previous event I'd been to at the club. That time he'd marveled at my earnest interest

in the men on stage having their balls filled with saline. I'd been naked, full boner, watching from the audience. He said he hoped I'd have as much fun tonight. I explained in a brief message that this was all new for me.

Yet, I had to go. I had to at least see this with my own eyes—and maybe, just maybe, engage it with my cock. I wondered: Would I be welcomed? Would I be scared? Would the people on the guest list show up, or flake out? Would I flake out at the last minute?

As the day turned into evening, I willed the clock to move faster, to get me to this precipice. I showered and was ready to go far too early. I called a cab, and it took me to the familiar club. Tonight's crowd would be anything but. Once there, I stood aside from the door in the dark night to have a smoke, to chill out for a moment. I stood watching the men who sporadically entered the club. They seemed normal, like me—but what had I expected? I had, at one time, judged barebackers as some breed (pardon the pun again) other than myself. But Truvada is a game changer. Here I was, forging a new journey that started here and now. I wondered if it would be better to try barebacking for the first time in a less intense setting, perhaps a one-on-one encounter instead of jumping into a bareback orgy. But as we used to say in the theater, “go big or go home.” I reached in my backpack for a bottle of water and fished out my little blue boner pill. I swallowed. The act of swallowing water made me think of swallowing cum. I marched to the door.



Climbing the stairs to the entrance, I could hear the faint sound of music from inside the club. When I reached the door at the top of the staircase and opened it, a wall of sound hit me. Donna Summer was going on about leaving her cake out in the rain, that it took so long to bake it and she'd never have that recipe again. Donna Summer was familiar to me, this space was familiar to me, but nothing else felt familiar at all. At the door, I paid the \$15 entrance fee and was offered a bag to check my clothes.

Turning into the club, I saw only a few figures in sight, the souls like me who are always too early for events like this, the eager beavers who can't wait to get the party started. Up still another flight of stairs, I veered down a hall to the coat check, where I started to remove my clothes until I was wearing nothing but a black, frayed ball cap, work socks and my Timberland boots. I checked my bag, left a two-dollar tip and headed towards the bar for some liquid courage.

Approaching the bar, I saw a familiar bartender. He didn't bat an eye that I was here this time for a barebacking event and greeted me warmly. He either didn't care, had seen it all before, or didn't remember me to begin with. He knew nothing about me, and I knew zero about him, but still, it was nice to see someone I sort of knew, someone who had the power to give me a Budweiser. I gripped that bottle tight after downing a big mouthful of beer.

Up on the second floor there is a space and railing that overlooks the dance floor below. There were only two or three other men up here with me, as if this place had an early bird special. I walked to the railing and saw that there was no one dancing below. With the nudist group, the dance floor always had bodies on it, some jacking off while dancing or hugging each other. I would be swinging my dick around having a grand ol' time. But tonight, the mood felt different, there was a different vibe, one of serious business at hand.

Slowly, men began to arrive. Eventually, there was a line at the coat check. By that time, I was on my third beer and relaxed, eagerly checking out the men in the coat check line. The Viagra had kicked in. As naked and near-naked men start walking near me in ever greater numbers, my naked cock went straight up—Hello! The second floor had two ends connected by a walkway. Men were populating both ends. I started to strut, my dick hard as a rock. And that's when I saw it for the first time, the first time I think I've ever really seen this outside of porn: A man, bent at the waist, being fucked bareback by the top gripping his hips. As I walked past, I watched and stroked my cock.

Gay sex spaces, whether sex clubs or strip clubs, are often hushed environments—it's time to worship. I meandered through the growing crowd of men fucking and got looks. Some looked from my hard dick to my face with a sort of appeal in their eyes. Others seemed to barely register me. I, in turn, zeroed

in like a laser on those that I hoped to connect with. And then, unexpectedly, it happened, so quickly...

He came out of nowhere, suddenly standing in front of me. He was my height, dark hair, late twenties or early thirties. It was hard to tell. The dim lighting of the red, glowing bulbs above shaved at least five years off all of us. He smiled at me, I smiled back. That's it. Then he turned his back to me and offered me his ass. My cockhead met his hole. It was lubed. I assumed it was lube, and I slid in with no effort at all. I fucked my dark-haired slut hard, and he said "Cum in me," but I didn't want the night to end just yet, so I eventually pulled out. My new slut turned to me and said, "You're fun," shining his youthful smile on me again before carrying on into the crowd of fuckers.

I felt my cock and looked at it. My little slut was so clean. It was this cock that had just barebacked anonymously—my first time since going on PrEP. I needed a drink—to think, to recalibrate.

I carried a new beer with me as I walked the joint. I stopped at a sling occupied by a man, likely in his fifties, being fucked by a bear. With my hard cock still standing at attention, he looked at it, then at my face with longing. I touched his chest as the top rammed him. The bottom had a look in his eyes that made me see he was reaching his transcendence. I knew all about transcendence through bating, what we baters call "gooning." Gooning is when you reach a higher plane of existence, brought there by a sexual abandon. It seemed to me that the bottoms really were

having the best time, with the tops being supporting players. Oh, we tops were having fun, but we had to perform, play a role, work. By the glazed look in the eyes of this bottom, I sensed that opening his ass opened his access to the universe. I had always been too nervous a bottom to get there. I envied this man below me, being pounded. That's when I knew—I would not cum here, at the club. I would take this energy home with me as bate fuel and use it to enter my own universe later at home, with the memory of what I was soaking in, in the here and now.

It wasn't long until I ran into my little slut again, but this time he wasn't alone. "This is my boyfriend," he told me, "wanna fuck him too?" The dirty-blond boyfriend was silent, not the smiley type. He simply turned around and bent over as I entered him and smiled at the dark-haired one. His eyes locked with mine. Although I'd decided not to cum here, the boyfriend I was fucking obviously didn't feel the same way. As I fucked, I felt his hole tightening around my cock. He too had been so easy to slide into. Now I could feel him spasm. The dark-haired one said "he came". I pulled out. Dirty blond-boy looked dazed. He didn't look at me and he certainly didn't say a word to me. Dark-haired took me to retrieve our phones from coat check, to trade numbers. Trade. That's what I felt like, street trade. I felt dirty, horny, happy, and now I was oh so eager to get home to my masturbatorium to sort it all out in my head while banging my meat.

But in the cab home, I couldn't help but wonder:
Was I safe? Would Truvada really work? If so, what
was the next step?

ADDICTION REDUX

Log into BateWorld.com. Go to the rolling comments section. Type. "Looking for serious bate addicts." Click save. Wait for the messages to come in.

Five, six, maybe seven minutes go by. Then, there it is, a message in my inbox. Click to open. Read.

Him: "I really wanna get totally addicted, become a chronic bator, total solosexual. It's such a huge turn on! I just wanna bate my cock for hours and hours every day, hope this site will help me with that."

I check his profile. He just joined BateWorld today. Unbelievable. Profile says he's only twenty. The word Addict is part of his profile name. Does he identify himself as solosexual? No, it says "Gay" under orientation. I write back.

Me: "Lil bro! Welcome to BateWorld, your new home! I am a total bate addict, chronic and addicted.

Love the bate lifestyle, and you rock. FUCK BOY, how do you know the lingo, the words for this bate culture already if you only joined the site today?? LOL! Where did you learn about addiction to bate? And solosexuality, so young?

Him: "Been chatting on jackinchat for a few months and guys there helped me a lot, Gave me a link to this site too. MMM and I really love that u're a total addict! Just thinking about it turns me on so much...I wanna be the same!"

Me: "Addiction to bate turns me on so fuckin much, sex addiction, bate addiction, porn addiction, men who can't think of anything else but sex or porn or bate or just their dicks in general. I have a job, fuck, but if I didn't, I'd watch porn 24/7 and always be jacking dick. AMEN."

Him: "Mmmmmm fuck, I want that too! I'm totally obsessed with porn and edging...Horny all the time, craving for more porn. Can't wait to get home from school, open some nasty porn, get totally naked and start edging. And it can go on for hours, late into the night. I love how addicted I've become but I still need more. Feels like it's never enough, always crave for more bating."

Me: "What porn is nasty enough for you? How did you discover so young that you were solosexually inclined? I love my severe addiction. I'm horny 24/7 and think about bating to porn all the fuckin time. There are porn addiction groups on here that you should join, to meet other porn addicts. My record

edge is 14 hours, was talking to a bator who did 22 hours recently.”

Him: “Love watching vids of chronic bators but love some really nasty stuff too – gangbangs, bdsm, sex in public, other filth, stuff like that. The longer I edge the nastier porn I watch. And fuck, 14h is amazing! My record is 12h once on a Saturday when I was alone, usually it’s about 4-6h a day. But I wanna go much longer, get more addicted! And it all just came so naturally to me...when I started reading about porn addiction, I got so turned on! And reading about solosexuals mmmmm so fucking hot.”

Me: “I will help you get addicted, lead you down the path of living a bate lifestyle. You almost hit my record! As for porn man, love gangbangs, bukkake, rough sex, PISS IS HUGE, pits, white trash fuckin, taking drugs and fuckin, sex addicts filming themselves. Addiction is our future man, bate and porn addiction, always drink whiskey when I bate, and smoke, other addictions of mine. Interestingly, I don’t drink when not being sexual, but I’m sexual so much I’m probably an alcoholic LOL. Dude, I’m fascinated by guys who are addicted to porn! Am a solosexual here, fuck yeah!”

Him: “Mmmm solosexuals turn me on so much! I never had sex and I don’t really want to. Edging for hours to filthy porn is all I wanna do. I wanna become a porn addicted solosexual...”



I attended a workshop entitled “Dark Roleplay” presented by teacher and writer Lee Harrington. The online description of the event read as: *“We have been ‘playing pretend’ since we were young... but the realm of kinky sexuality opens up all new directions role-playing can take. Join us as we explore the shadowy realms of our fantasies and roles we can try on: abduction, abuse, torture, snuff, fantastical realms and anywhere else our twisted minds can dream up. We will discuss the joys and challenges of playing in our closet, why it turns us on, how to bring it up to our partners, negotiating our desires and troubleshooting the challenges these types of fantasies can elicit.”*

Attending this workshop helped me understand something fundamental about my own kink. I realized that, for me, addiction is hot. As terrible as that may sound for anybody who is struggling with addiction, I have fetishized the idea. I have become rather addicted to the idea of being addicted, whether it be to bate, to porn, or to my own sexuality and its incessant desires. How is it that this could be my kink? Where did these thoughts come from?

I have Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). At the heart of the disorder is a need for control. One repeatedly checks that the stove is off for twenty minutes to ensure that the house doesn’t go up in flames after leaving for the day. But it’s more than that. Checking the stove is a way to ward off all sorts

of fears. I may be checking that the stove is off, but at the same time, I'm hoping that *no* calamities will befall me. The stove is the focal point for a myriad of fears that I wish to control.

If control is such a huge part of my psyche, it makes sense to me (and it doesn't take a psychology degree to figure this out) that I might conversely be drawn to something that would take the weight of control away - like an addiction that I can't deny.

I've often said that Obsessive Compulsive Disorder is not the reason for my hours of bate. Bating gives me so much happiness (happy-penis), but it must be understood that OCD brings nothing but terror. OCD is all about FEAR: False Evidence Appearing Real. When you see people on talk shows discussing their OCD, they are not talking about hours of happy bate, they're talking about hours of debilitating rituals such as checking that a door is locked.

But lay people are inclined to lump OCD in with, for example, hours spent watching porn. That's not what OCD really is. Is a singer who practices voice for hours an obsessive? What is obsession? And if (a big if) OCD makes me predisposed to hours of bating, then I would have to be grateful for OCD (which I'm not), as bating is my greatest joy. OCD does not play into the fact that I think porn is art, that porn is beautiful. Something other than my OCD is at play here. Again, not to belabour the point, but classic OCD is a scourge on one's life. Bating has been the opposite, my shining hour (or hours). I take medication that has helped me a

million times over to decrease the obsessions that used to wrack my brain and the rituals I would engage in to combat my fears. My medication does not make me slow down my bating habits. Rather, the medication has kept me free of OCD. That has made bating all the more blissful.

Now I find that when on BateWorld, my roleplay is reveling in the idea that I am a bate and porn addict. While there is an element of truth to it, my life is actually fairly balanced. I have trouble bating if something is really wrong in my life and needs to be addressed (like family needs and work responsibilities). I'll also be the first to admit that I am grouchy as hell if I don't get to bate when I want to. But I know people who get grouchy when they can't eat when they want to, watch TV when they want to, go to a party when they want to, and so on.

The word "roleplay" connotes the idea of a game. But when I am messaging with men on BateWorld about being an addict, the so-called game of roleplay has all the weight of the world. I'm not lying when I say I want to be addicted to bate and porn and whiskey. But the truth is, I can't really. My family needs me. I need to keep a roof over my head. However, when you are bating and you are one big fat dripping cock, horned out of your mind, chatting with men who are deep into their dicks, addiction sounds like heaven.

I know addiction is not heaven, that it is a curse that too many people must face. I've read the

celebrity memoirs of drug and alcohol addiction. I also fear that the word addiction is thrown around a bit too loosely in the public sphere. I remember when Ozzy Osbourne was found to be cheating on his wife Sharon, and he went into rehab for sex addiction. I snorted at that. To me, he was simply a man for whom monogamy perhaps wasn't his thing. In fact, I had trouble believing that a rock 'n roll trail blazer like him would buckle in such a way. But such is the power of our society's mores about monogamy.

The celebrity memoir that had me most riveted was that of Suzy Favor Hamilton. In her book, *Fast Girl: A Life Spent Running From Madness*, she begins by documenting her years as an Olympic runner. However, after the end of her athletic career, life took a mighty detour. She began escorting in Las Vegas, using an alias to shield her true sports celebrity status. She quickly became one of the most sought-after escorts in Sin City within a year.

What struck me was that Suzy appears to have gotten the same charge, the same high, if you will, from escorting as she did from running—if not more so. As Suzy describes that year in Vegas, she was a woman driven by the excitement of the lifestyle, the money, the power of her own sexuality. When not in Vegas, she longed to get back there. Her husband begrudgingly, surprisingly, supported her because what could he do? She wanted to escort. Nothing was going to stop her.

What ultimately did stop her was a combination of carelessness and her celebrity status. She let a client

or two know her real name. As would be expected, someone alerted the media. Suzy's house of cards came tumbling down—she was tarred and feathered, publicly shamed and stripped of her endorsement deals connected to her career as a runner.

In retrospect, Suzy claims the root cause of her decision to start escorting was a medication prescribed to her after being misdiagnosed with depression. The depression diagnosis seemed, at the time, to make sense—her Olympic career was over, and she was dissatisfied with her new life as a real estate worker, with her marriage, and with her sex life. The medication she was prescribed caused Suzy to become manic, and she would later blame the medication for her choices. Even still, there is such a ferocious joy described as she relates how she felt during that year becoming known as the number two call girl in Las Vegas. I couldn't help but wonder that if she hadn't been a public person, if she hadn't been publicly shamed and stripped of those endorsement deals, if she wouldn't have carried on. The horror of being found out was such that one report stated she had to be heavily medicated when her secret was revealed—not just to the world, but to her extended family and friends, who previously had known nothing. Finally diagnosed correctly with bipolar disorder, and given a different medication, she started a process of recovery that led her to becoming the mental health advocate that she is today.

I was flabbergasted to think a medication could turn

one into an escort, and a different medication could knock the hooker right out of you. The manic phase of bi-polar disorder does sometimes manifest in the form of hypersexuality and a penchant for poor and impulsive choices. But does her new diagnosis and medication address the root feelings of dissatisfaction with her work and home life that contributed to her pursuit of the fast life? She claims she supports the rights of sex workers, but that that life was ultimately inappropriate for her. I wondered—was it inappropriate? Could it be that what is inappropriate is that she had zero choice but to stop escorting after being flayed in public over it?

If mental health issues were at play in her decision to escort, I respect that, but I also fear that the choice to escort will be viewed as the result of a mental issue, making for a derogatory, discriminating condemnation of those who work in the sex industry and are healthy people making choices that work for them.

So, am I manic then? Bating happily for hours at a stretch feels as good to me as escorting felt to Suzy. If I'm outted, if my real name should be discovered, if my x-rated amateur porn videos find their way onto the computer screen of my employer, will I too recant? While comparing myself to Suzy and her journey might be erroneous, I can't help but wonder at what point we must own our sexuality. Does Suzy's new medication now make her satisfied with her sex life with her husband, the sex life that had filled her with boredom in the past? Does being

a mental health advocate trump being sex positive? I can only hope that her sexuality is not squashed, relegated to the shadows.

Addicted. Manic. In recovery. Sex seems too commonly pathologized. I'm not discounting those who are truly struggling with issues of addiction and recovery. But if my kinks are weird to you and your kinks are weird to me, then we're all weird which means we're all normal. Remember in the movie *Nuts* in which Barbra Streisand's character, Claudia Draper, has to prove in court that she is sane? Her choices seem so out of step with those of the general population. So she must be crazy, right? That character was an escort too. She owned it. Like Claudia says, I won't be nuts for you. I too won't be just a picture in your head of who you think I should be sexually. Homosexuality was, only decades ago, thought to be a mental illness; now it's trendy. If I want to masturbate my goddamn cock for ten hours, I am responsible. (Does the lady doth protest too much?) Even still, I'm learning to own it all.

BUT WHAT OF LOVE?

A TRIPTYCH – PART 2

These days, it is lust, rather than love, with which I am most familiar. Lust is my companion as I march through the day, looking at the men around me in the world, knowing that they harbor lust in their bones too.

But what of love? Does the love I have for myself negate my ability to love another? Could I love someone and still keep on loving myself, or would my sense of self crumble? That did happen once, a long time ago, when I put my youthful, still-unformed self-esteem in another's hands.

Audiences, students of theater, philosophers the world over have all wondered what would have happened to Romeo and Juliet had they lived. Would Romeo have strayed? His infatuation with Rosaline

went *kaput* the moment he laid eyes on Juliet, so maybe he's fickle? Would Juliet have found his penchant for self-dramatization so endearing when they had three kids to feed and a mortgage on their heads?

Cole Porter asked us in 1929 "What is This Thing Called Love?" How many shades does it have? Can we ever get the juice of it? In my reverie, I can still feel the hot burn of desire I felt for Jack and Jonathan. Today, as a solosexual, I'm faced with a paradox: Did something shut down? Or did something open up? Does it matter? When I listen to Anita Baker sing "You Bring Me Joy", I know now that this song is not about a partner that brings me joy. Instead, it is about my cock, myself, and my inner sexual world that is alive and real, astounding and internal.

When Barbra Streisand sings "People who need people are the luckiest people in the world," the message is a bit lost on me. Yes, we need people, family, friends in our lives, but it seems to me that needing people can also be a dangerous act of masochism. In the past, when longing for the attention of men, I was left feeling that I was at their mercy. I wasn't in the driver's seat in those situations. Hell, I didn't even own the car. I remember feeling buffeted by feelings so turbulent and disorientating that I now think infatuation is a type of temporary insanity.



Age 28, Berlin. Moving to Berlin was an insane decision. Months previously, on a sex-filled tour of Europe, I'd met a bartender one night at a club named Max. We flirted shamelessly. He gave me his number. The next day I called and called and couldn't get through. I went back to the bar where another bartender pointed out that what looked like a 7 to me was actually how Europeans write the number 1. I called Max again, dialing correctly this time, but there was no time to meet again – my flight back to Canada was imminent.

Back home, I hatched a plan. I would move to Berlin. Max would be so happy, and so would I. I took a four month course to become a certified teacher of English as a second language. I taught for a few months in Canada to gain experience and to save for my new life in Germany with Max. Max knew nothing of my plan, but no matter – it was fate.

I arrived in Berlin and went to the club where he worked. There he was, behind the bar. He saw me. He waved, said "Hey". He didn't jump over the bar to grab me and kiss me. So I ordered a drink. He gave me as much attention as he did any other customer. Later, someone he knew walked in. They kissed. They were more than friends. I drank and drank until I realized how foolish I'd been, and finally, without saying good-bye to Max, left.

On the street, a cute guy hollered at me. "You're not going home yet, are you? The night is still young!" He took me back to Max's bar. We drank together. I don't

think Max registered my return. My new date flirted with me. When we needed more money for booze, he took me to the nearest ATM. I took him home to the Bed and Breakfast I was staying at, and promptly passed out. In the morning, he was gone. So were my travellers checks and my debit card. I rushed to a phone to call my bank. One thousand dollars was missing. I, like a putz, called my parents. I told them I'd been robbed. By someone on the street? No, by someone who was kinda, sorta my date last night. A pause before my mother said, "Jason, what the hell are you doing over there?"



Going back to Streisand, I recall seeing her and James Brolin on Rosie O'Donnell's show back when they were just dating. James said to Barbra, "Thank you for giving me my life back" and the rapt audience cheered and clapped. I remember thinking that it seemed sad to have to wait for someone to give you your life. It seemed like a burden, too, to be the giver of life—what a responsibility.

So when Barbra continues to sing "You were half, now you're whole", I balk. I am whole already. Making a memory with someone else doesn't necessarily make that memory sweeter—so many of my best memories are of moments spent alone. As it stands today, I am the object of my own affection, any man in my life just a bonus. I feel married to

myself. As in most marriages, sometimes I fight with myself, but for the most part I long to shower myself with love despite my self-criticism. In fact, no one is as hard on me as I am on myself. But when I'm alone, cock in my hand, my spirit is being self-fed with the force of Niagara Falls.



Age 39, Toronto. Masturbation was always a driving force in my sexual life, but finding the site BateWorld.com in my late thirties put it all into perspective. I no longer had to wait for someone to love me. Loving myself became my practice and bonding with other men like me on BateWorld ignited my joy. My sister asked me if I ever got lonely. The answer is Never. The loneliest I ever felt was when in a relationship or in a state of infatuation. My relationship with myself now is complete and absolute. And within that experience, my relations with men feel healthy and happy. Who but other solosexuals might understand what I mean?

EXPLORATIONS, PART 7: AS LILY TOMLIN ONCE SAID...

I was visiting BateWorld less and less, and, eventually, I disappeared there entirely. Instead, I rushed home each day to check my messages on BareBackRealTime. I was still bating, but my fantasies were focussed on my next sexual conquest, my next fuck. Weeknights were too busy, I had no time. But weekends, that was my time to devote to hunting for a fuck. If a man I wanted said he was down, then I was ready. And if a guy on BBRT said that he Partied N Played, I liked him even more.

I've seen porn, mostly amateur, on tumblrs devoted to men bating or having sex and "blowing clouds." I knew the term, but I was hazy in my understanding

of what type of clouds were being blown. Meth? Crack? This was so out of my league, I felt like Mary Poppins being featured in an episode of *Breaking Bad*. Would men want to play with a guy who wasn't partying with them? Deep down, I really didn't think I could transgress my own barrier. When I thought of drug use while watching porn, my horniness made me feel invincible—my body screamed to be taken higher than it had ever gone. But at night, I would wake with a start, sit bolt upright in the dark and think about drugs interacting with my OCD medication. I thought about my need to write this book and couldn't fathom doing anything that would tamper with my creativity. Still, I kept going back to that world of porn where men blew clouds, or even shot up, and after the hit, would dive into sex play. Was it all like doing poppers multiplied by ten? If I wasn't going to do drugs, what, I wondered, would it be like to be sexual with someone who was high?

So, there I was, on a Saturday night, logged into BBRT. A bottom messaged me. He said he was partying with a friend and they needed a top. Have dick, will travel, so I hopped in a cab. He greeted me at his apartment door in a jock and a leather harness, smiling, but saying little as he led me to the bedroom. There I found the second dude, hotter than the first. He was laying back on the bed, a tattooed stud. He may have been trade, I'm not sure. He waved a little wave, and then the two of them lit their lighters and proceeded to blow those clouds I'd only seen on porn sites.

I was excited. I wondered how crazy these guys were going to get, what ride I was in for. Dropping my clothes, I asked the guy in the harness if he had anything to drink. What a stupid question. When you're partying, you don't drink booze. But he took me and my hardening dick to the kitchen and presented me with a bottle of gin that had roughly one ounce of liquor left in it. I poured it into a glass and we went back to the bedroom. I jumped in the middle of them, and reached out to stroke the chest of the inked dude. This elicited no real response. He seemed very focused on smoking and then just lying there. Well fine, because the guy who'd messaged me in the first place seemed ready to fuck. And we did and while we were fucking I asked him if he liked piss and he said he did and we kept fucking and he said that I could piss in his ass, and I said Oh my God, I've always wanted to try that and he said Please piss in my ass and we fucked and fucked til I told him I had to take a leak and he fucked me harder until I started to piss and I don't think a drop landed on his bed, he seemed to take it all, all of it, up his ass.

Through it all, the dude next to us didn't bat an eye.

Going home in a cab, my piss taker texted me and said he needed more sex, was going back online. I told him I was going to go home and masturbate to the wonderful memory of piss sex he'd given me, a first experience that he'd let me have. He texted "I just want sex all the time" to which I replied, "It's

because we're sex addicts, hell yeah!" Sex addiction as an aphrodisiac, in and of itself.



Since my meeting with Mr. Piss Up The Ass had gone well enough, I agreed to an idea of his when he next messaged me. He wanted to be whored out. He actually loved that I didn't party and could be lucid if needed (though with my drinking, I wasn't sure that lucidity was necessarily my strong point). The plan was for me to come over and we'd get on BBRT and Craigslist to see if we could get other men over to fuck him with me while he got high. In theory, on paper, this sounded exciting and new. I knew enough this time to bring my own bottle of booze. On the appointed day, I showed up at his door with my jacket—and the shirt with snaps underneath—open, my hairy chest exposed right there in the hallway of his apartment complex. When he opened the door and didn't register my brazen, slutty move, I got a feeling in the pit of my stomach that maybe something was a bit off.

He didn't say much, but he was busy. I mean *busy*. He was hauling his flat screen TV from the floor to the top of his dresser. I asked if he needed help. He said no. I asked if I could smoke. He said I could near the balcony door with it open a bit. Did he mind if I fixed myself a drink? "No problem." He was wearing just a jockstrap, so I jokingly told him that I was wearing

too many clothes. I wanted to match him, get at least down to my underwear until we really dove into this whoring out thing. He said “sure.” No enthusiasm for me being there, just complete focus on setting up the bedroom, preparing his drug paraphernalia, logging into BBRT and Craigslist.

In my underwear, I joined him in the bedroom with my drink in hand. I told him how horny I was. “Do you want to watch me smoke up?” he asked. I said yes. But he had trouble getting it to light. Maybe it was because the sun was up and I was at present sober, but the moment was sobering too. There was zero crackle of sexuality in the air. Zero acknowledgment that we were about to embark on a sex pig odyssey. Just forty-three year old me with a thirty-something man trying to light his pipe. I asked him what he was smoking. If memory serves, I believe he said Tina. I couldn’t remember if Tina was meth or something different. Mary Poppins was confused.

I waited while he created and sent messages and announcements online that he was being whored out today—partiers welcome. This is when the situation got...really dull. We waited. I thought we could be having sex, but he would just smoke and constantly check his inboxes. My attempts at seducing him weren’t really rebuffed, he just didn’t really notice them. I thought of Anthony Keidis, lead singer of the Red Hot Chili Peppers, and his memoir, *Scar Tissue*—a book loaded with drug-fueled sexual adventures. Unfortunately, while my Mr. Piss Up

The Ass got high, the most we did was judge the hotness of guys who messaged us and whether or not we wanted to invite them over. We did this for four long hours.

Eventually, we did get two men to come over—they arrived almost simultaneously. One was drop dead gorgeous. When he saw me, he smiled and said “you look good.” Unfortunately, that was the last time he ever looked at me again. He lit up his pipe right away, sat back on the bed and stared at the porn playing on the flat screen. His dick was completely soft. He tried tying a string of some type about it (maybe it was a shoelace?) but to no avail. As I lay back on the bed stroking my hard on, he lifted himself on top of me, with his back to me, and sat on my dick. Not for long though, because staring at the porn and smoking were, apparently, more interesting.

The other guy was getting high, but still seemed very lucid. Though I wasn't really attracted to him, I appreciated him being there to balance things out. With all of us on the bed, I fucked the host—who I was supposedly whoring out. I pulled out and unexpectedly shot my load on the back of his hip. This briefly woke up the porn-starer. He leaned over to lick it up, but then, just as quickly, resumed his place against the bed frame, staring at the screen.

If I was supposed to be the lucid one in charge of whoring out a guy, what were the ethics of leaving? These guys might go for days. I leaned close to the host and said I thought I was done. I asked if he

would be ok if I left him with these two guys? He said yes, so I took my inebriated self to the living room to gather my clothes. He followed me to lock the door behind me when I left.

In the cab heading home, Deana Carter's song of thwarted pleasure "Did I Shave My Legs For This?" rang in my head. And I remembered Lily Tomlin's wise words: "It's gonna get worse before it gets worse".



Following the "whoring out" episode, I worked a grueling week of twelve hour days. However, I had committed to attend a gang bang at a hotel on Friday. Craig and I had met online on BBRT. His fantasy was to be gang fucked while blindfolded in a sling. He was going to rent a room and set up his portable sling inside, leaving the door to the suite ajar for men to come and go as they wished. He set 9 p.m. as the starting time.

Friday rolled around. I was tired - and not that horny. However, after chatting with Craig for two weeks, and knowing that he was spending good money on the hotel room, I felt I had to show up. At 8:30 p.m., I called a cab. When the taxi arrived at the hotel, the driver turned to me and leered, "I hope you have a good time—whatever you're here for tonight." I faked a little laugh, paid the fare and got out on the sidewalk. I needed a smoke. I needed a moment to get myself in the mood. Think sex,

think gangbang, think naked men. But instead, I felt nervous, unprepared emotionally, sexually numb. I had taken a Viagra before leaving home, but would it work if my brain wasn't co-operating?

Up the elevator. Down the hall. I located his room number. When I reached the door, I was startled when it opened easily and revealed a cute guy. He was fully dressed, and, in fact, just about to leave. It was barely past nine, so he must have arrived early and dropped his load quickly to be leaving so soon. We exchanged smiles as he went out and I came in. Closing the door behind me, the room was dark, but I could make out the sling positioned by the bed—with Craig in it. Five men stood around him. I bent to take off my boots and clothes. One began to approach me, and I realized it was Jake, my piss buddy who had turned me onto PrEP. He was on his way to the bathroom so we gave each other a quiet hello and shared big smiles.

Unfortunately, a sense of regret burgeoned underneath my smile. I had a crush of sorts on Jake and his beautiful, huge uncut penis. All of a sudden, I didn't want to share him. I caught myself, wondering how this feeling had taken me by surprise, right then and there. I thought back to *The Ethical Slut*, a book I'd read years before. I had picked it up hoping for titillating stories of group sex. Instead, it is largely a meditation on handling jealousy. Jake blew his nose as I continued to undress. I'd brought an old 7-Up bottle filled with whiskey and water and took a swig—

anything to get me in the mood. Following the sound of fucking in the dim light, I approached the men surrounding the sling bearing our blindfolded fuckee.

Upon arrival and surveying the men present, I received only furtive looks back. There was no “welcome man!” Instead, silence pervaded the space. The focus was on Craig in the sling. He moaned quietly as he was fucked by one man after another. As they waited their turn to fuck, guys sucked each other off. My jealousy soared when Jake returned and got on his knees to suck not me, but another. The man was the hottest in the room—built and with a cute face. But it was a face that betrayed little of whatever emotion he might be feeling. At a certain point, he moved in to fuck Craig, and I stood next to him watching. I dared to reach out a hand to touch his slightly hairy pec. It did not elicit a reaction, not even a look my way. His face remained a blank slate that I could not read as he fucked away.

I felt lost, so I turned to Jake, kneeling to take his beautiful dick into my mouth. My own cock was hardening but his stiff dick was causing me to gag. I feared disappointing him, wondering if he preferred the built guy who was busy fucking Craig. I pulled my lips off of Jake’s dick and smiled up at him, feigning contentment. I turned to look once again at the built dude. He was so beautiful that I felt suicidal until I noticed that he had love handles. I prayed thanks that he had one flaw so that I wouldn’t feel compelled by envy to light myself on fire.

I realized what the room lacked was the sense of joy that bators bring to a party. I understand the serious, dark space that men love to inhabit when having sex or during bate, but at this moment I needed approbation. I thought I would get it from Craig. His ass was free so I seized the moment to approach him. I entered him. I wondered if he was peeking somehow from his blindfold. As I fucked him, I swear it seemed that he grimaced a bit, that his moaning was less intense than when he'd been fucked by others. Maybe I wasn't fucking right. Fucking a blindfolded man made me feel invisible. This was compounded by the fact that no one seemed to be watching me fuck—the others were busy blowing or getting blown, or shoving their cocks in Craig's mouth.

And that's when it hit me.

I had fallen into the trap of seeing a situation like this as some sort of competition. I was inwardly pouting. I wanted to be the center of attention, I wanted to be the alpha male, I was jealous of Craig being the focus of the party, I was jealous of the built guy for being tonight's top dog, I was coveting Jake and his beautiful dick and didn't want to share it with anybody else in the sandbox.

I pulled out of Craig to let the next man in. Shortly after, Craig announced that he was going to take his blindfold off, at which point someone exclaimed jokingly, "Hey, that's cheating." Laughter happened in the room for the first time. Craig removed the blindfold and looked at us all, smiling. I smiled back,

but felt horribly naked now, wondering how the sight of us all compared to what he might have been imagining while unable to see.

I walked away from the sling, from the men. As they all made small talk, I silently dressed, unnoticed. I reached for the door handle and walked out, saying goodbye to no one, not even Jake. I had been a prop in someone else's fantasy. The prop had had enough. I wanted to be seen, but instead, I doubted that I existed at that moment.

The next day was to be another hook up. I had booked myself solid with guys from BBRT, as if life was a buffet of men on whom I would gorge and binge. This Saturday date proclaimed on his profile that he wanted "a man who acted like a man, who knew how to fuck like a man, who smelled like a man." But I couldn't face being judged. When he texted me, I flaked, telling him that I felt like hell, asking if we could reschedule. After a pause, he texted me back: "I had a dozen sleazy offers yesterday which I turned down and dealt with blue balls all day and night so I would be extra, extra sleazy today for you. So I'll leave this up to you. You got a lot of making up to do."

I guess he told me. I blocked him.

But he was right. Don't make dates you can't keep. And yet, I made more dates anyway. With men who proceeded to tell me about their desire for rape (not of the role-play kind). About sucking off their dad and getting fucked by their uncles and priests in the village. What was fantasy, what was reality?

I felt ill-equipped for these personal revelations. I remained outwardly open-minded, while inwardly I couldn't cope with the dissonance in my head. The ground under me was filled with fault lines that were trembling. I realized I needed a moratorium from men in the flesh. I needed to stabilize. I needed it all to stop—to just stop.

Remember how, at the beginning of this book, I said that men beguiled me, floored me and whatever the hell else I said? At this point, I was beginning to dislike men, to feel disconnected from them, to feel, dare I say, almost contemptuous of them. I didn't want to feel that way. Why contemptuous? Because they seemed cold. It seemed as if fucking was a barrier to, rather than a conduit to, closeness. Maybe I was approaching it incorrectly. Or maybe, just maybe, fucking wasn't what I required to feel full and engaged and validated.

The writing was on the wall. I was consistently going home to bate after fucking, feeling like an empty vessel that I needed to refill.

But I knew how to heal. I opened up BateWorld, a site I had absconded from for weeks. In my inbox were old messages, men asking where I was, why they hadn't seen me online. "Are you alive?" they asked. I wasn't sure how to answer. How could I explain? But BateWorld was home. Maybe here, I would come back to life, by coming back to me.

THEY WERE CUTE

There is no place on the planet that I love more than a library. It's not just because I love to read and write, but because libraries make me horny. The library is where I first came into contact with men and sex. But it wasn't through furtive hook ups in a bathroom. It was simply through the act of reading.

I awoke one wintry Saturday morning with a plan. I was fourteen and had recently discovered that there was a sexuality section in the library. The books were few in number, but they were thick tomes that would take ages to get through. But I couldn't check these books out of the library. I would have felt embarrassed, transparent, mortified to have a librarian see what I was reading. So parka over sweater, I dressed with a hurry to catch a bus to the main public library in the city center.

Downtown, walking to Centennial Library, I trembled with fear, excitement and apprehension. I knew already which books lay in wait for me. I prayed they had not been checked out by some other horndog using literature as an aphrodisiac. I felt confident they would be there: The stickers on the books with due dates stamped on them indicated that these books were rarely checked out. Perhaps others were embarrassed to take them home too, where nosy parents might find them. I could see the books on the shelves in my mind's eye, radiating a force field around them. These books were so different from all the other books that spoke to everyday, acceptable topics. Approaching the doors of the library, I remember a feeling, a sensation. I experienced the same quickening in the stomach, the same roiling of the gonads I would feel years later at the door of a bath house.

Upon entering, I am greeted first by the smell, an aroma that still arouses me to this day. It is the scent of old paper in old books, it is the waft of the holy silence that libraries demand, it is the musk of the homeless looking for shelter from the winter wind. Head down, like a criminal about to rob a gas station, I walk directly to the shelf where I know my treasure trove is located. Thank fuck, they are still there. They have not been banned or removed and they have not been checked out. I will be in the library from morning until dusk, entering a world that is my new fascination, the world of male sexuality. I should be

doing my homework for school on Monday. I could also have gone to a movie with a friend. Instead, I need to be with these books to try and understand the burgeoning feelings exploding in my body that make me feel both guilty and ecstatic.

I take the books I need to a carrel that seems private, hidden. I remove my parka and already my cock is coming alive. Just the titles are forcing me to adjust the bulge forming in my jeans. It is at this cubicle that I inhale Shere Hite's The Hite Report on Men and Male Sexuality. I read Kinsey's Sexual Behavior in the Human Male. I am stunned by Betty Dodson's Sex for One: The Joy of Selfloving—learning that masturbation is an art form. I leak precum as I dive into the male sexual mind in Nancy Friday's Men in Love, Men's Sexual Fantasies: The Triumph of Love Over Rage.

But the leak of pre jars me back into reality. My lack of knowledge and propensity for OCD sets off an alarm in my head: What if it drips through my clothes and lands on the hard, wooden chair where a woman might sit after me, and then, somehow, become pregnant? I am aware this fear is a big stretch of the imagination, but my mind is askew. I'm undone by what I'm reading. But greater than my fear of impregnating some unknown woman is the hot desire to jack off. As the sun moves across the sky towards the horizon where it will sink, I sink into a deeper state of lust and frustration, until I know I must put the books carefully back on the shelves,

until next time. My bed is waiting. It wants to feel me frot it like a maniac.

The library was a womb that I immersed myself in all day. As I exit the building, I'm shocked that life has not stopped. People rush to get out of the cold and into stores, into restaurants. The sky is colored differently now, with night overtaking the day. My hard on won't fully abate: I have to adjust it and hide it with the bottom edge of my heavy coat. I pray that my parents will be out when I get home as they had promised they would be today, busy in their own activities, oblivious to their son's anxious need. I take the bus from downtown back to Unicity Mall in the suburbs.

Exiting the bus, the sky is drastically darker. This heightens my level of excitement. I'm hidden, unseen now. I walk to Fairlane Avenue and there is my school, Hedges Junior High, where I reign as student council president. Behind the school is the track and beyond that, the high school I will go to next year. Walking up Fairlane now, I pass the elementary school I attended where my fetish for libraries really began. It was there that I found a book entitled Where Did I Come From, and as the joke goes, it was not a book about Polish immigration.

The air is so cold I can see my breath. The street lamps above start to flicker on. I am alone on the avenue, heading toward Isbister Street. The sound of packed snow crunching under my feet is interrupted by the laughter of two teen boys some ways behind

me. Once I get to Downs Avenue, it's a short twist to Bernadine Crescent, where my house is the fifth one up the block. I imagine my bed waiting for me to hump it madly, fueled by the day's reading. Masturbating tonight is what the whole day was really about.

"Hey faggot." I do not recognize the voice that has interrupted my reverie. And now, it is not the cold air that makes my blood freeze. I hear laughter from them both. I've been here before. But how do they know who, what I am, when I myself don't yet know? How do they perceive my difference under my parka, my tuque, my hood, my scarf, my mitts?

"Hey faggot." They are gaining on me; I hear their footsteps hitting the ground faster than mine. I must turn and face them. I have no choice. When I turn, I see the shorter one at first, his face framed by the fur of his hood. He has acne. His upper lip and chin are sprouting hair. He seems as surprised to see my face as I am to see his. He lacks guile, but appears out for sport.

The taller boy's eyes burrow into me. I recognize neither of them. But somehow, through all my winter clothes, they know something fundamental about me. Something I don't quite yet know about myself. I remember feeling at their mercy at that moment, a moment where control over my person was to be snatched from me. I remember seeing their hot breath crystallize in the air. I remember that my home was so close...yet so far.

They were cute.

When I turned away to walk forward, I knew the inevitable was coming, and it did. The force of their push knocked me to the ice-covered sidewalk. My limp wrists broke my fall, my breath knocked out of me. They laughed, took off running, turning back to call me a faggot one more time.

Only when I could hear the boys' voices growing fainter did I push myself off the ground. God, I believed, had been vindicated: This was my punishment for reading dirty books all day, for potentially being the faggot these boys detected I was. Yet I thanked God that the punishment wasn't worse than a push to the sidewalk. I had not yet recovered, not yet recalibrated, when I got to my house, dark but for the porch light. No one was home.

When I got in, I shucked my winter boots, attempting also to shuck God's watching eye and the mocking laughter ringing in my ears. I headed directly to my bedroom and flicked the light on. There was my bed, sheets tucked tightly into place by my mother that morning. I ripped the covers back. My shirt came off, then the pants. In socks and underwear, I slammed against the mattress, fucking the bed with my face contorted, my body flush with desire and shame. My penis hardened, my thoughts began to dissipate, emptying out of my head. My heart raced. Then I heard a car pull up in the driveway.

My trance broken, I fumbled to get my clothes back on as I heard a key rattling the lock to the back door.

I heard my parents' voices and the door close behind them. Dressed, I met them in the hall.

"Hi."

"Hi Jason." My mother smiled at me.

"How are you? What are you doing home? I thought you were out all day today."

"Oh, this is just a pit-stop, we needed to drop off some groceries before heading back out." My mother looked past me into my room. "Why is your bed unmade?"

"I was going to take a little nap," I lied. Mothers know things, unspoken things. What could she see in my face? What was I revealing? What could she deduce?

"Well...we'll be off again right away." She paused, looking at her son for a beat longer than normal. "It's cold out there, isn't it?"

When my parents were back out the door, I waited. I waited for the car to pull out of the driveway. I waited some more, lest they return for some forgotten thing in the house that they might need. And when I had intuited that enough time had passed, that my parents were far enough away, I took my clothes off again. Slowly, this time. With intent.

Now, as I write this almost thirty years later, back in that small city I grew up in (visiting my father for his birthday), I wonder about that night when I was gay bashed. Perhaps I should have phoned a friend for support. Maybe I should have contacted the police. But what would I have said? How could I have explained? What would you have done?

Back then, I was conflicted. Maybe I was the guilty party. Perhaps I would be taken in for being a deviant, reading smut all day, reading about men, not women. Perhaps I had it coming. Perhaps my assault was penance.

So I did not call a friend. I didn't yet have friends I could tell. At fourteen, there are no words to explain that desire trumps fear, even if fear inhabits your desire.

EXPLORATIONS, PART 8: FUCKIN' HIGH

It just happened.

I hadn't planned it, but doing it left me nearly incapacitated and derailed my plans for welcoming in the New Year.

The day before New Year's Eve, I had a plan with a BBRT buddy to whore him out at the bathhouse. Before meeting, I texted him that I would be sneaking in some whiskey. He replied that he would need something a little harder to get up the courage to be whored out—a longtime fantasy that had never yet happened. Something harder? I didn't ask the particulars, but made my way to Steamworks.

I found him in his room. He'd gotten the big one, with the double bed and the sling. And he was

nervous. He isn't the type of bottom to take just any dick, so I didn't know how I'd negotiate who fucked him and who didn't. Would he give me a sign?

He told me he'd just done G (otherwise known as liquid ecstasy). I asked how it made him feel. He said it made him feel floaty, calm, and also horny. We began to play, just the two of us, on the bed. Getting his hole open, ready. Then, we decided to do it, to open the door. Within seconds, a crowd had gathered to watch as I topped my buddy. They started to inch inside. It seemed a somewhat motley group. As they started to crowd the room, I remembered that my buddy had wanted to be selective. So I stopped everything and said that we needed some privacy again, and gently ushered the men out.

After closing the door, my fuck buddy said "Why did you ask them to leave?" I guess he wasn't going to be picky after all. So we re-opened the door and I plunged back into his ass. Men gathered once again at the door. I pulled back out and told them to use my buddy, to make the slut feel good. So the men took their turns, fucking my friend. They were a good humored group, whispering cute jokes amongst themselves, sometimes resulting in a group laugh amongst the sex sounds.

When it was all over, when my buddy's ass had taken all it could, it was just the two of us alone again. He was going home, but gave me the key to the room, telling me to stay and keep having fun. Then he asked me a question: Would I like some chems?

Instead of immediately declining, my mind flashed to the thought of my bottle that had held whiskey but was now empty. In spite of my own self-imposed limits, in spite of my fears of messing with my brain chemistry, in spite of it all, here I was, in a bathhouse with a double bed and a sling, wanting to keep the party going.

I asked what he had. He offered me a choice of G, meth, or cocaine.

I didn't even hesitate. I took the coke. I watched in the floor-to-ceiling mirror and saw myself snort blow while standing naked with a man who'd just been gang fucked.

Nearly immediately, I felt it take effect, on my brain and on my cock. The cock died. My brain was wired. After my buddy left, it became clear to me all too soon that being in a bath house with a limp dick was a pointless endeavor, considering I am a top. I left shortly after, went home, and jacked off a limp dick for hours, riding the wave of the drug by messaging men at a frantic pace on BateWorld.

The next day, I woke up feeling horrible, as if I had the flu. I didn't want to get up, and nor did I want to stay in bed. I didn't want to eat, but I knew I was hungry. I was in a fog. It was ten in the morning. The naked men's dance I'd bought a ticket for started at four. It was New Year's Eve and I felt like shit. How was I going to party from four in the afternoon to midnight and beyond feeling this way? Get some air, I told myself. Get something to eat.

I made it to Club 120 for the dance—and lasted all of an hour. I couldn't make conversation, couldn't focus, and worst of all, I was naked in a nightclub and felt my stomach rumbling in threatening ways. I was leaning on the bar for support. What had I done to myself? Was my constitution so delicate that I couldn't handle that little bit of coke? Had it been laced with something else? The decision was inevitable: I had to go home. I had ruined my own New Year's Eve.

I had hoped to celebrate. In the past year I'd published a book that had sold around the world. 2016 was widely considered a terrible year by political pundits and commentators, but for me, it had been a watershed year. But instead of celebrating, I was back home and crawling into bed at seven in the evening to sleep off the physical and emotional malaise of the drug I'd taken the day before.

I woke back up at ten. I felt a bit better. I had a glass of water. Then it hit me: I would ring in the New Year as a solosexual, doing what I do best—jacking off. I got everything set up for a bate, and opened BateWorld again. And yes, there were men online, my brothers, doing the same thing as I on this momentous night.

As the clock came close to striking twelve, I was stroking my cock and getting close. I longed for a crystal ball to see what lay in store for me in 2017. What didn't I know, I wondered, about the evolution of my sexuality in the New Year?



Apparently I'm not the only one who saves his cum in a freezer.

Brent lives in my city but only learned about me through his friend Rob in Memphis. I knew Rob through Xtube where he posts videos of cum play as crazy as mine; we became fast cyber friends. Brent saw on BBRT that I was signed up for the next bareback party. Club 120 on Church Street houses a dancefloor, bar and stage on the main floor. Up the winding staircase are two large balconies (and a second bar) overlooking the activity below. The balconies are tricked out with slings. Hidden away in the back are private rooms for the more shy fuckers. Brent told me in a BBRT message that he was going to the party as well and had saved a jar of semen to bring with him. Oh, how we schemed and planned! We messaged back and forth about all the things we wanted to do with the sperm. We were so hyped up, it felt like this party would be Christmas Day and New Year's Eve rolled into one. Rob, down in Memphis, was gnashing his teeth in jealousy—he worked for an airline and could've come up for the party for free but alas, had to work that weekend.

I hadn't met Brent in person—I'd only seen pics. When I got to the club, I saw a man with a perfectly coiffed handle-bar moustache holding a jar of white liquid. He was chatting with a friend, another cum freak whom I also knew online through Brent. They

and I made eye contact. As if in slow motion, we each pulled the other in for a three-way hug. Cum freaks united! We placed the jar on the bar and just stared at it at first, as one would stare at a rare diamond. I'm sure Club 120's bartenders have seen it all—but a jar of jizz on the bar?

For the next three hours, we sniffed the sperm, tasted it, poured it on our chests, smeared it on our faces, stuck our dicks into the jar to then have the semen sucked off by the others, and jacked off with the penis cream. When the jar was finally empty, we looked at each other with dismay—there is nothing so sad as an empty cum jar. It takes so long to fill, so many loads go into it. I liken it to cooking a meal that takes hours, maybe days to make. Then you serve it up on plates and it is quickly gobbled. All that work, however enjoyable, seems for naught.

I didn't fuck anybody. The bloom was coming off the rose(bud). My desire to fuck was fading. Masturbation, male bonding and my various fetishes were resuming their place in my personal sexual hierarchy. I said good-bye to my two new friends and left to go home to complete the experience as is my wont—bating alone. At home. I wanted to take in all that had happened, to process all that my five senses had feasted upon. The taste of another man's saved sperm in my mouth. The feel of his hand coating my chest with it. The sight of men all around us, bonding through fucking. The sound of dance music pounding from the speakers up

where the DJ was naked too. And the smell...oh that scent...of male bodies in motion, torsos glistening with sweat.



There was a sixth sense that was being activated in me too, a sense that Christopher Isherwood's character Sally Bowles would have appreciated the divine decadence that was unfolding in the club. Sally's world, Berlin in the Golden Age of the Weimar Republic, soon fell victim to the stock market crash of 1929. This became a factor that contributed to the rise and eventual dominance of the Nazi party. It's perverse how quickly a cataclysmic event can radically alter society. When that happens, it's the so-called "pervs," the sexual outliers, who are among the first to be expunged. As Margaret Atwood explored in her novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, a society's trajectory can change on a dime, with the time before clearly delineated from the time after.

The terrorism and economic uncertainty that is now part and parcel of daily life has given rise to a right-wing rhetoric that makes me wonder if I—if we—are safe. Although I've had my x-rated masturbation videos on xtube for years now, not a day goes by that I don't wonder if it will be my undoing. I've checked with Human Resources at work to inquire whether we employees were subject to any formal code of conduct. I was told that one was in the works,

but did not presently exist. I'm a member of a union. But still, I feel like I'm treading on thin ice.

I recently read a news article about Manal al-Sharif who challenged her Saudi Arabian society by getting behind the wheel of a car and driving while female—and filming it for social media. She lost it all—her job, her family, for a while her freedom too. I can hear on-line trolls saying “well what did she expect?” but it was brave of her to drive when that was forbidden in order to show society her commitment to her self-worth. As a young girl, she was the victim of female genital mutilation (female circumcision, as it's otherwise known, sounds far too neat and tidy to my ears). A patriarchal society demanded that it happen to her, which amplifies my contempt of my own kind. My own circumcision rankles me, but pales in comparison. I would vote to place her picture in the dictionary next to the word “Bravery.”

If you'll recall, I did make it into a dictionary. On Vocabulary.com, under the word “masturbator,” is a reference to my pen name and my first book. When I first saw it, I thought it was hilarious. But my real name is still my secret. I will never be referenced in any dictionary under the word “bravery.” This dissonance has me reeling—I think bravery is the sexiest quality in a human being. If I am sometimes a bit autosexual, that is, someone attracted to his or her own self, it's diminished by my lack of fearlessness.

At this point, the only thing I can do is to chronicle the lives of gay men at the beginning of the new millennium. That is, while I can. Sexuality is one of the greatest gifts the good Lord gave us, but in troubled times it gets vilified so quickly. I want to write all about it—urgently, needfully.

Before I, and other writers like me, get shut down.

BUT WHAT OF LOVE?

A TRIPTYCH – PART 3

Solosexuality is a modern phenomenon and therefore we cannot look to literature for support. Shakespeare himself was not on our side. Right from the get-go, in Sonnet 1, Shakespeare urges a young man to marry and procreate. He lambastes us for our inward love: “But thou, contracted to thine own bright eyes, Feed’st thy light’s flame with self-substantial fuel...” Fuel? But wait! Did Shakespeare understand the concept of bate fuel, that gasoline that drives the masturbator, whether it be porn, his reflection in the mirror or some other stimulus?

Sonnet 1 takes inspiration from the myth of Narcissus. As the story goes, Narcissus was a young man of great beauty and Echo, a woodland nymph, sought his affection but was rebuffed. One version of

the myth tells that a lovesick and angry Echo placed a curse on Narcissus, so that when he saw his reflection in a pool of water, he fell in love with himself and pined incessantly for his reflection. This mirror image represented a love that could not be returned, just as Echo's love could never be reciprocated.

In all my readings of the myth, I couldn't help but think "Who really is the narcissist here?" Was Echo so full of self-importance and pride that she couldn't accept that Narcissus just wasn't that into her and had to exact revenge? In another, more common version of the myth, the goddess Nemesis places the curse on Narcissus, to make him pay for his supposed hubris. Even there, I couldn't help but think that it was really none of Nemesis' damn business—she ought to stop her meddling. What Nemesis needed to know was that those of great beauty often have to protect themselves from suitors who can't take no for an answer. As I read about Narcissus, as I read Shakespeare's sonnet, I became less interested in what the stories said and more interested in what the writer's objective or motivation was.

Shakespeare wrote from the vantage point of his cultural horizon, a time when one needed a large number of children to help on the farm. Those days are long behind us in the Western world. The myth of Narcissus is refashioned hundreds of years later in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Dorian's fascination with the youthful beauty in his portrait leads only to excess and finally, utter ruin. The book champions ecstasy

and hedonism, though it never does tell us just what hedonism Dorian engages in that finally undoes him. We are left with a moralizing tale.

The word narcissism gets such a bad rap. If we deconstruct it, we find that it can connote healthy self-esteem just as it can connote a hubristic fixation on one's self. Led Zeppelin sang that words can have two meanings. During a bate session, I am indeed fixated on myself in part, but never do I feel that it is at the expense of others. Nay, I'm often busy messaging with other bators online as we all fixate on ourselves. So we are also fixating on each other, mirroring each other, or fixating perhaps on porn. I certainly am not so vain that I think I look like the porn stars I'm drooling over.

Porn stars reveal to us their beauty – does that make them vain? I think back to the movie *The Color Purple*. Do you remember near the end when Shug says to Celie “More than anything God love admiration.” Celie replies, asking “You saying God is vain?” Shug tell her “No, not vain, just wanting to share a good thing. I think it pisses God off when you walk by the color purple in a field and don't notice it.” As Shug tells it, we sing and dance and show off, just wanting at the end of the day to be loved. I believe that self-love is perhaps the most hard-won love, but the kind of love one needs in order to feel at all steady in this shape-shifting world.



The curtain is coming down on this book. There is but one chapter left. I haven't really answered the question "But what of love," have I? But who can? How do I know that I'm right? How can any of us make sense of the dense layers that make up our sexuality?

Today, in the so-called first world, more and more people are choosing to live alone. We live in an individualistic society, but one that is hypocritical. We promote individuality while castigating those who don't support community. A relative recently visited his wife's family in the Philippines. They had little money, the whole extended family lived cramped under one roof, but my relative remarked that they seemed so *happy*. Still, I can't negate how utterly happy I feel when masturbating solo and going on my journey within, loving myself, alone in my masturbatorium.

Answers to questions come in the unlikeliest of places. I was at work, on my lunch break, sitting on a bench in a hallway, reading Camille Paglia's *Sexual Personae*, when a colleague named Priscilla happened by. She looked at me and the huge book in my hands and asked "What you reading Jason, *War and Peace*?"

Oh God, here we go. Why oh why am I reading a book about sexuality at work? Jason, don't you know better than to mix your two worlds? I didn't say anything but simply showed her the cover with a sheepish grin on my face. "Oh, what's the book about exactly," Priscilla enquired. Lordy, I thought

that I would try to sound as academic as the book to throw Priscilla off. “Well, the book is a look at changing sexual mores as seen through the lens of Western art dating back to ancient times.”

Priscilla thought on this and then said, “You know honey, I can save you a lot of time reading that big book and summarize it for you real quick.” I said, “You can?” And she said, “You bet I can. The bottom line to that book is simple – Do Yo Thang!” With that, she erupted into laughter, causing me to laugh in relief. She high-fived me and still laughing, kept on walking down the corridor.

I sat there giggling, and wondered: Do yo thang. After all the words I’d read in all the books I’d poured over, perhaps it all came down to three slang words. Simon and Garfunkel wrote that the words of the prophets are found on the subway walls and tenement halls. Priscilla had given me simple, down-home wisdom to chew on.

In the song “Stairway to Heaven”, we are taught that sometimes our thoughts are misgiven. Nevertheless, if we listen very hard, simple truths sometimes burst forth. The bottom line is indeed simple: Love yourself, love others, do no harm, but do your thing. Just do your thing. And when you are in a field of flowers, take a moment to say thank you for the color purple.



Age 27, back in Winnipeg. It had been a decade since I last spoke to Jack, a decade of living all over the world. Back in my birth city, each street contained ghosts from yesteryear. Did Jack still live here, on one of these streets? I half expected to run into him, as if he was lurking everywhere. He was lurking – in my mind. I looked him up in the phone book. There was his number, with his old address. I dialled and half prayed no one would answer, terrified of what I was doing. His father picked up. He remembered me from the school plays, as unfailingly kind to me as Jack had been. No, Jack didn't live there anymore, he lived with a roommate, would I like his number? Oh yes, please. I jotted it down.

It took me a day to get up the courage to dial Jack. When I did, I got his roommate. "Jack is out playing hockey, but I can take your number if you like." Two hours later, my phone rang.

Jack didn't seem fazed by my unexpected call. He was as gracious as ever. He had just broken off an engagement and was at a crossroads. I listened to him tell me about his life now. I trembled when he asked me about my life. The time had come.

"Jack," I stumbled, "this is so odd for me to say, I know this is coming out of the clear blue..." Just say it Jason, say it. "I'm gay, perhaps you knew that way back when, but the reason I'm telling you this, is that, well, I had quite the crush on you in high school, and the feeling I had was so golden, so pure, so good, that it facilitated me in coming to terms and accepting I

was gay. So, in essence, I have you to thank for my own self-acceptance, which really changed my life. I don't mean to sound so heavy and I hope you aren't weirded out by an out-of-the-blue call like this."

To Jack's great credit, he didn't miss a beat. "I wondered if you were gay back then, but it hadn't mattered at all either way," he said. Did he know that I had had a crush on him? No, he said. "But Jason, I'm honored that I played a role in you feeling good about being gay. Can I just say that if you ever wanted to meet for coffee sometime, or if you're ever back in Winnipeg doing a play or something, call me up." I told him I was leaving Winnipeg the next day and couldn't meet, but I finally got a chance to tell him how fucking gracious he was, back then and now. I thanked him profusely, inwardly thanking him for not betraying me now nor my memory of him. This graciousness solidified my affection for him. He was encased in the glass of my memory, and I was deeply grateful for his open heart. He gave an "aw-shucks" and repeated – "Can I just say again that you're a great person and feel free to touch base whenever you're in town."

I never spoke to Jack again.

EXPLORATIONS, PART 9: BACK TO BATING

Back to Barbra. At the risk of sounding uber-gay, I'd like to take a moment to compare my sex life to Barbra Streisand's musical trajectory.

Barbra started her illustrious career singing standards and songs from the musical theater songbook. I started my illustrious sex life by masturbating like a madman.

After a few years, Barbra threw herself into pop, and even disco. Well, upon reaching adulthood, I threw myself into hunting for sex, eventually starting a blog by that name. Those pop years were hit and miss for Barbra as were my experiences with partnered sex. We both had forays into the good, the bad and the downright ugly.

Eventually, in 1985, Barbra went back to her roots with *The Broadway Album*—it was a smash. In 2013, I discovered BateWorld.com and partnered sex came to a crashing halt (for the most part) as I reveled in finally realizing that masturbation was my favored form of sexual outlet. Previously, I didn't have the vocabulary nor the self-awareness to understand that masturbation could have an equal seat at the table in the sexual-experience buffet. We are all groomed to believe it's a substitute for the "real thing." We never stop learning about ourselves, do we?

After *The Broadway Album*, Barbra released a pop album again, 1988's *Till I Loved You*. About three years after declaring myself a solosexual, I went on PrEP to see if 1970's sexual decadence could be mine to experience in the new millennium.

But Barbra's next album, 1993's *Back to Broadway*, signified a return to the kind of songs that made her initially famous, and she really hasn't swung back to pop since.

As I approach my forty-fourth birthday, I too feel myself swinging back to my roots, my first love—bating. And yet, each morning I wake up, stumble to the kitchen, fill a glass of water and take my Truvada pill. As I write this, I'm on the subway headed to my doctor's office to get my most recent HIV test results which I need in order to renew my prescription. I'm sure the result will be negative—I haven't had partnered, penetrative sex in...I can't remember how long.

But next month I am headed to Hot N Wet, billed as the world's largest piss pig party. I want to keep my options open. For example, some pig might want me to piss up his ass. Really though, I wonder if I'll stick to piss bating while I'm there. I know one other guy from BateWorld who is going. We are excitedly planning a piss bate moment together. He's not into intercourse at all. I won't say I'm not, but you know, when choosing a title for this book, I insisted that the word "Solosexual" be featured because at the end of the day, as well as at the end of this book, solosexuality is the sexual label that best suits me, regardless of any other behaviours I sometimes engage in.

There are times when I'm home alone, sitting at the computer naked, hand around my cock. I turn to the mirror at my left and see myself as if for the first time. I am shocked, I just can't believe that I can experience the supreme joy of masturbation on a daily basis. My bate sessions have a pattern that starts with spiritual music where my heart soars until my horniness careens over a cliff and hard rock music pounds through my speakers. Through bate, I experience the gamut, the alpha and omega, the light and the dark, flying high at one moment, in the gutter of divine filth the next. Perhaps I have two souls that are, at times, contrary to each other while at the same time nurturally interdependent.

Before European colonization, our indigenous forebears honored the two-spirited of their tribes.

Fast forward to Toronto Pride this year, wherein our hunky Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, led the parade and Native elders were the honored guests, with a Cree artist holding the role of Grand Marshal. I think to what it means to be two-spirited, to have our dichotomies form a whole greater than the parts.

And I wonder, am I a bator, or a fucker, am I an agent of good through my writing, or am I a dirty man made short-sighted by my sex drive? When is sexual freedom truly that, and when does freedom become its own prison? Can we handle sexual freedom? Why, throughout history, does the pendulum swing back and forth, from times of sexual liberation to times of sexual inhibition and prohibition? Why do we surge toward bliss only to restrict ourselves again?

Lately I have restricted myself to bating. It's been fan-fucking-tastic. In fact, I am typing these final words quickly, because I absolutely plan to celebrate finishing this book with an epic masturbation session. This seems to be all I need and want, all I ever really needed or wanted. I'm aware that I do have options available to me. I suppose I could be out there, perhaps at a bathhouse, among men, fucking every Tom, Dick and Harry...*I could go out this afternoon and find a bottom slut to take my hairy dick, shove it up there real good...fuck him like he's never been fucked before. Get him to drink my load, get guys to cum in my beard...I could do that...I might do that...*

Then again, maybe I won't.

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