

Performance Club 4–6: The Syllabus

PERFORMANCE CLUB 4

September 10, 2019

Book Club: snowflakes in the echo chamber

Performed by Moe Angelos

PERFORMANCE CLUB 5

September 12, 2019

The Talking Grave

Performed by Hope Thompson

PERFORMANCE CLUB 6

September 19, 2019

Art Immuno Deficiency Syndrome, subtitle;

Does this Giacometti Make Me Look Fat?

Performed by David Bateman



ABOUT PERFORMANCE CLUB

As a proposition for a performance or the framework for an actual book club, Performance Club redefines the historical and contemporary performance art canon, one book club, and one book/article/essay/anthology at a time. Invited artists perform the role of book club facilitators, leading the audience through a performance of a reading, a reading performance, a performance about a book, or a bookish performance. This series is on-going. Sometimes we pick the book and invite an artist; sometimes we invite an artist and they pick a book. Just like a real book club, we ask the audience to read the suggested material before coming to the performance. But don't worry, just like a real book club, participants seldom do.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE CLUB FACILITATORS

Moe Angelos is a theatre artist and writer. She's one of The Five Lesbian Brothers, an Obie-Award winning theatre company, and has been a member of the Wow Café Theater since 1981. She is a core member of The Builders Association, an internationally touring, New York-based theatre company that has been making innovative large-scale, media infused performance work since 1994.

Hope Thompson is a playwright, filmmaker and writer. She is obsessed with mystery, film noir, camp and comedy. Her film, *Switch*, premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and her recent play, *Trapped!*, was published in the anthology *Queer/Play: An Anthology of Queer Women's Performance and Plays* (2017). Hope is currently at work on her first novel and on a play based on a night in the life of crime writer, Cornell Woolrich.

David Bateman is an arts journalist and performance poet. He holds a PhD in English Literature with a specialization in Creative Writing (University of Calgary), and an MA in Drama (University of Toronto). He has four collections of poetry published by Frontenac House Press (Calgary) and his collection of short stories and creative non-fiction, *A Mad Bent Diva*, was published by Hidden Brook Press in 2017.

ABOUT FADO

Since 1993, FADO Performance Art Centre has been providing a platform for the presentation, embodied research, and development of performance art practices in Canada. FADO exists to champion performance art within a collaborative and rigorous curatorial context, and support artists who have chosen performance art as a primary medium to create and communicate provocative new images and new perspectives.

www.performanceart.ca

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This is a Queer Series...

Moynan King

Welcome to the fall 2019 iteration of Performance Club where three queer artists take you into the heart of their processes, practices, and deepest fears. Through performance gatherings, readings, discussions and one workshop, these experimental forays into a hybrid form—somewhere between the academy and the studio—seek to provide an opportunity for you to contribute to, reflect on, and shine in the light of three innovative interventions into performance and being.

In order to enhance the experiential proceedings that define Performance Club, we provide you, here, with this syllabus and course pack (even though this is technically not a course). All will become clear soon enough.

Club Objectives

This Performance Club will increase your ability to:

- Compare and contrast various styles of performance
- Discuss art with strangers
- Critically engage with original live performance
- Formalize the space between performance and learning
- Enhance your conceptual understanding of performance
- Enhance your conceptual understanding of clubs
- Gain a deeper understanding of process and its centrality to performance
- Develop confidence in your ability to communicate in a club setting
- Understand the ways that performance is in conversation with the social and political forces that surround it
- Laugh and then cry
- Retreat and then rejoin
- Eat snacks and then eat more snacks
- Embrace your inner queer

Required Reading: A Script, A Story, A Score

These Performance Club events are self-referential inasmuch as each refers back to a previous performance, gestures toward a future performance, or imagines a related performance.

Research, creative engagement and hands-on learning intersect in this multi-pronged approach to develop spectatorship that is aesthetically, socially, and formally engaged. As clubs, these events necessarily rely on collective meaning-making and shared interest in specific topics. Assembled here, in one handy volume, are all the printed materials required for your fully informed club experience.

Take this syllabus home with you. Read it, review it, and come prepared to discuss its contents in an open and friendly environment. Extra points will not be given for talking at length.

CLUB STRUCTURE

Attend Performance: September 10

Performance Club begins in week one with *Book Club: snowflakes in the echo chamber* by Moe Angelos. Moe's performance contemplation of fragility, fear, and the flattening of knowledge in contemporary society is performed as a "sort of" sequel to her previous Performance Club contribution, entitled *Queer/Play*, which you will find published in this volume. Moe wants you to know that: "When you arrive, you should be aware that performance will take place and you may be a performer and/or in the audience. And there will be snacks."

Readings: September 6–11

Participants must read this introduction, plus the entry by Moe Angelos entitled *Queer/Play*, as well as the entry by Cornell Woolrich entitled *Three O'Clock* in preparation for the coming week's club performance.

Attend Performance: September 12

In week two Hope Thompson performs a conjectural interaction with the ghost of Cornell Woolrich to dissect the trans-historical connection between queerness and mystery. This conjuring is inspired by Hope's work-in-progress play inspired Woolrich's *Three O'Clock*, which is included in this volume. Hope hopes you know that: "You will be watching an interview with a deceased writer. I don't expect you, necessarily, to know much about the writer."

Reading: September 13–18

Participants must read the entry by David Bateman entitled *I Wanted To Be Bisexual But My Father Wouldn't Let Me* in preparation for the following week's club performance.

Workshop: September 14

Attend *Death, Sex, & Macrame* where there will be some macramé weaving. The workshop is not mandatory, but it is compulsory.

Attend Performance: September 19

For the third and final performance of this series David Bateman, who wants you to know that he is "trying to configure new and current work as aspects of 35 years of creating performance, and the influences that continue to affect [his] ongoing performance work," will delve into the ambiguities of gender and performativity to either enrich or confuse your previous views, depending on his current state of gender/mind.

Participation

Each event happens only once, and while the events are connected they are not the same—interlinked, but unique. Participants are strongly encouraged to attend all Performance Club

events related to the materials in this syllabus. Extra points will be given for initiating discussions that draw on material covered across the entire series.

Grading

The grading scheme for participants will be fully self-regulated. If, however, you prefer to be graded by an experienced professional, please feel free to approach me at the final event. But, be advised, once you have been graded by me that grade will be considered final.

This Is Not A Course, Nor A Show

How do we define the spaces between learning and viewing, between art and politics, between being and performing? These clubs seek to extend the reach of performance to find new forms with which to answer these questions and to pose many more questions along the way. The club format, likened to the traditional salon, can be seen as a default space of education, or as an open forum for creative expression. The club is always about engagement and in this club we hope you will find yourself engaged and embraced in a series of performances that are not just for show.

MOYNAN KING

Moynan King has done lots of theatre and performance stuff. She is currently preparing to defend her PhD dissertation at York University. She makes regular appearances on CBC's *Baroness von Sketch Show*, on which is also a contributing writer, and she was the editor of the book *Queer/Play: An Anthology of Queer Women's Performance and Plays*. Moynan will be presenting a new work about queerness and sound in the context of FADO's Performance Academy series in 2020 (which might account for the scholastic tone above).

Queer/Play

written by Moe Angelos

The video gallery space is wearing the costume of a living room. In the middle of the floor is a bad Ikea rug and on the rug, a large Ikea coffee table. Ikea lounge chairs circle the coffee table and the audience encircles the lounge area. Snacks are on the table and these are accessible to all. Everyone can graze freely throughout. Cheese balls, cheese platters, shrimp rings, boxed wine. Lots of boxed wine. Some holiday fucking cheer going on, but this is seasonally optional. Volunteers are sought, to read from this script and casting is based solely on willingness.

MOE

Ok, everybody get your snacks in order and we're going to start.

JASMINE

Wait, I need some cocktail sauce.

STACY

Did you make the hummus?

ELLIE

Nope, President's Choice. I just put paprika on it to make it look fancy.

STACY

That is adorable!

MOE

Grab a seat everyone. Welcome to our Book Club's FADO installment. First off, I'd like to thank FADO for having us and Shannon Cochrane for her wonderful support as full-service producer and also Jess Dobkin who took us to Ikea and back, without any loss of blood. I can speak for myself in saying how exciting this all is and it's a great opportunity to talk *about* the ideas in our amazing book, *Queer/Play* edited by Moynan King. Everybody, Moynan! (*applause*) So, the first question is as it always is in our book clubs: who has read the book?

JASMINE

I skimmed it.

STACY

I didn't quite finish it.

ELLIE

Not that I know of.

AUDREY

I read the whole thing.

MOE

Let's hear it for Audrey everybody! This is a non-competitive book club but Audrey, that is why you are in the club. You always read the book.

AUDREY

It's a book club, duh.

STACY

I'm in it for the Pinot Grigio, honestly.

ELLIE

Merlot.

JASMINE

I love baby carrots, what can I say?

MOE

That is all legit, women. In these times of moral confusion on a personal and global scale, a little box wine and chat with some women friends can be a balm to the soul, am I right?

ALL

Here, here! Yes, sister! Etc.

MOE

So, let's get down to it. *Queer/Play*. We have this very big book of performances by queer women in Canada. That is totally impressive to me!

STACY

Who knew that so many women performers were making so much diverse work?

ELLIE

Stuff I've never heard of!

JASMINE

I mean, wow, right? Like I go to avant-garde stuff, but I didn't know any of those women.

ELLIE

Jasmine, Yuk-Yuks is not really the avant-garde, sorry to be the one to tell you.

JASMINE

It's not mainstream, though. Like, lady comedy? You do not see those women on HBO or Netflix.

STACY

But you do see them more on the Canadian shows, can I just say.

AUDREY

It's interesting we are talking about this because one of the parts of the book that is really fascinating is a discussion with women comedians about the state of things for them in the industry, in the standup world.

ELLIE

Wait, where is that?

AUDREY

It's in the book. It's the last section. It's a roundtable discussion.

MOE

Right now in our world, it's pretty hard to tell satire from real life. I mean, for me it is.

JASMINE

Dude, totally.

MOE

Jasmine, don't call me dude.

JASMINE

Sorry, but you guys know what I mean. Right?

MOE

We're not guys.

JASMINE

OK, is this the FADO hardcore feminazi installment of book club?

MOE

No, this is the regular self-respecting women book club, OK?

STACY

We don't have to police each other's language, do we?

ELLIE

We are beyond that, Moe. It's understood now in post-feminism that we can take back those names like 'guys' and 'dudes' and we can reappropriate them on our terms. It's camp. Don't take it so seriously. We've covered this already.

MOE

Look, I'm old, OK? And number two, with the daily, no hourly, onslaught of news pieces full of woman hatred, misogyny, sexism and masculinity-gone-wrong, I think it might be time to roll back the language timeline a little bit and return to honoring the female in our speech.

JASMINE

Wow, that is so Second Wave of you.

ELLIE

Borderline terfy.

MOE

Turf-y? Like AstroTurf? What does that mean, exactly?

AUDREY

Trans exclusionary radical feminist. T-E-R-F, terf. It's an acronym.

MOE

(She thinks really hard about it for a second.) OK, I don't think I'm that.

STACY

Your language was pretty harsh there. It was really gender-limiting I think.

MOE

I don't get that. Everyone these days is all about their gender pronouns which is amazing and all I am saying is I do not want to be mis-gendered with the assumption that it is all right to use a male noun to name me. That's all.

ELLIE

OK. I get it. Sure.

STACY

No probs.

JASMINE

How about 'ladies'? Is that OK?

MOE

I'm not really a lady in the classic sense. But I will own it in an ironic way.

JASMINE

Cool.

MOE

So, where were we?

AUDREY

We were talking about how comedy is performance I think.

STACY

Of course it's performance. It just isn't avant-garde, in my opinion.

ELLIE

But is it avant-garde when it is practiced by women? Since there are so few women that can make space in that world?

JASMINE

I took a standup workshop once. It is like, so hard!

STACY

I took a painting workshop last weekend and it was really hard too. And then I was going home on the Spadina streetcar with the painting and you know those new spaceage streetcars, the ones that Bombardier is so behind on building? They are so narrow inside and there was a woman with her stroller and it was 11 pm and her kid was wide awake I was like, "Shouldn't your kid be home in bed?" (in my mind) and the stroller was up against my leg and I was talking to my friend Sally and we had had some, you know, chardonnay at the painting party and when the stroller and woman and kid got off, the kid had smeared her little hand all over my painting and my view of Paris was totally fucked up.

MOE

Wow.

ELLIE

That's so shitty.

(Bored pause. Everyone fills their glasses or gets a snack, if they wish.)

AUDREY

Maybe we could talk about some of the ideas in *Queer/Play?*

STACY

OK, that's a great idea.

ELLIE

Can we start out with the "queer" part. Does anybody have a grip on what that means these days? Like the latest definition?

MOE

I can tell you the old definition.

ELLIE

Ok, that's a good starting place.

MOE

OK, remember I'm old. So in my mind queer meant first of all "odd" or strange or not normal. Then it meant gay, like not the happy kind of gay but the homosexual-freak kind of gay and that can be gay for a man or a woman or a transperson.

STACY

I guess all of that pretty much still applies. It's just a bigger category now.

MOE

Like how do you mean?

STACY

(looking at her phone) My phone says that "queer is an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities who are not heterosexual and/or not cisgender." Blah, blah, blah and oh, "people who reject traditional gender identities and seek a broader and deliberately ambiguous alternative to the label *LGBT* may describe themselves as *queer*."

MOE

Right, I get all that. I was just checking that something hadn't changed since the last time I googled it. *(looking at phone)* Hey, did somebody go on Facebook here?

ELLIE, STACY AND JASMINE

Well, yeah. Uh huh. Yup, etc.

AUDREY

I didn't.

MOE

OK, Jasmine I know we do not see eye-to-eye on the 'guys' and 'dudes' language issue but did you have to post about it?

JASMINE

What? What's wrong with that?

MOE

Now I have a trollstorm starting on my feed and I'm right here and you could have talked to me about it instead of sitting across from me and accusing me of some bullshit maliciousness.

JASMINE

But I talked to you about it!

STACY

She did!

ELLIE

We all saw it.

MOE

Obviously we talked about it for about 30 seconds and when we left it, I thought everything was worked out only to find that my request here in this room is being called "hate speech" now on the fucking internet!

JASMINE

I can't help what other people say on social media, Moe.

MOE

No, but you can help what you say! Why did you do that?

STACY

This is getting kind of personal.

ELLIE

Let's get back to the book.

JASMINE

I'm not feeling that this is safe space for me.

MOE

No, no, no, I am just asking you why you denied me the basic respect of trying to work this out with me to my face. Instead of my Facebook. Which, by the way, is not a neutral entity and is controlling and shaping all of our online social interactions but that is for another discussion. Why didn't you say something?

JASMINE

This is the exact reason! I feel silenced by you and bullied and that I am not entitled to my own opinion!

MOE

You are completely entitled to it! I want to hear it from you, is all I am saying. I'm 10 feet away, not on the moon or speaking another language or hostile.

STACY

That's your opinion.

MOE

I'm angry. This is what angry looks like. I am capable of looking you in the eye and saying I am really angry at you, Stacy. It doesn't mean I want you to shut up or that I don't like you or that you should be kicked out of the book club. Jasmine, I want to talk to you about what you said and did and that it felt like I was blindsided. I am right here in front of you! Talk to me, not to Siri or Alexa or whoever it is in your phone.

(Silence.)

MOE

I'm going to the washroom. *(Moe leaves)*

JASMINE

Did you guys see that?

STACY

We are sitting right here.

ELLIE

Totally saw it.

AUDREY

She was just mad.

JASMINE

I don't think this book club thing is for me maybe.

STACY

Don't bail again, Jasmine. We might not take you back this time.

ELLIE

She totally lost her mind. Like, from a little Facebook.

JASMINE

I'm glad she's too old to understand Twitter, is all I can say.

AUDREY

What did you post?

JASMINE

Something like #terfwarsatfado.

STACY

(on her phone) That's hilarious. I'm liking it right now and retweeting!

JASMINE

Maybe not, OK?

STACY

Too late. It's already trending.

JASMINE

Oh shit.

STACY

Well, I have like almost a million followers. All my activist people.

ELLIE

Wow.

STACY

Yeah I just follow everyone I can and most of them follow me back.

JASMINE

Can you delete it?

STACY

It's not such a big deal. She should be grateful the book club is getting any attention at all. People would kill for this.

(Moe comes back.)

MOE

So what do you say we get back to the book?

STACY

Can I ask a question?

MOE

Sure. Always a good jumping off point.

STACY

Are there transwomen in this book?

MOE

There are. Gein Wong is trans, for instance.

ELLIE

OK, how about women of color?

MOE

I couldn't say how everyone identifies but there are definitely women of color creators and performers. About half are, if I go by the pictures.

STACY

That is kind of racist of you.

MOE

Well, I guess I'm kind of a racist.

AUDREY

No, you're not.

MOE

Thanks for trying to defend my character Audrey, but I am racist. I grew up in this world and it's pretty much impossible to not absorb the toxic messages.

(Silence. Everyone takes in this declaration.)

STACY

That's not OK. You know that, right?

MOE

Thanks for the racesplaining, but obviously it is not all right. It's fucking awful and I do my best to undo that and reading books like *Queer/Play* is part of that. But that is my stuff to deal with. The book club does not need to process my bullshit.

JASMINE

So, you think it's OK to process with me and to call me out in front of a live audience but it's not appropriate to talk about your shit in front of everyone?

MOE

You want to talk about my shit? All right, let me lay it out for you and skip the tedious part where I work for decades to examine my privilege and internalized bad news and let's get right to my personal inventory of crimes.

ELLIE

Not again, OK? This is what derailed us last month. We didn't get past the title.

STACY

We should not have focused so directly on the patriarchy with the last book.

AUDREY

Moby Dick knocked us off course, so to speak.

MOE

I still want to talk about the homo stuff in the first chapter of *Moby Dick*, where they are outfitting the boat in Provincetown.

STACY

You always want to talk about the homo stuff.

MOE

I'm a homo. What can I say?

ELLIE

What about the homo in this book? In *Queer/Play*.

MOE

Oh, there is very high-quality homo in there, for sure. After *Moby Dick*, it was like an antidote book. Not that there is not good homo in *Moby Dick* too and Audrey can vouch for me here.

AUDREY

When they call each other "Bosom Friends," for instance?

MOE

Exactly!

JASMINE

I just could not look at the word 'dick' on that cover and after I read the first chapter, I put it in a bag so I would not have to see it.

STACY

Yeah, I got triggered too.

ELLIE

So triggered!

MOE

I feel for you, sisters.

AUDREY

I'm not saying it's any easier to be a queer, but for me I don't think I could handle being straight right now.

STACY

Oh god, it is so crazy, ever since Ghomeshi.

ELLIE

Seriously crazy.

JASMINE

It's hard when I deal with my boyfriend these days.

STACY

Wait, Clint?

JASMINE

Yeah, Clint.

ELLIE

Now he's your boyfriend? When did that happen?

JASMINE

I don't know. We've been going out for six years.

STACY

But you were being a feminist and not calling him your boyfriend.
What changed?

JASMINE

I don't know. It's all this sexual misconduct stuff in the news. It's like now, guys have to deal with it in a different way, you know?

ELLIE

They are freaking out, worrying if someone is going to come after them at their job, even if they didn't do anything and they are searching back through personal history about anything they might have done that might be misread.

JASMINE

Don't you think that you would somehow know if a guy was some pervy criminal though?

STACY

Well, I hope I know. I ask now, for sure.

MOE

You ask?

STACY

Yeah, when I Tinder a guy and hookup, part of "the talk" I have before we do anything now includes my little test question, to see if they are going to be abusive.

MOE

How does that go?

STACY

Well, first I ask if they know their HIV status.

MOE

Yeah, that's standard.

STACY

Then I ask if they know the status of everyone they've ever slept with.

MOE

Might be tougher to answer for some.

ELLIE

It depends on the guy.

STACY

Right, and if they make it that far, I slip in the bonus question: have you ever asked anyone for their email password.

AUDREY

Ooo, that's a good one.

STACY

It is not foolproof but if someone answers yes to that, it's like they are probably totally controlling.

ELLIE

Or they're a parent.

JASMINE

True.

MOE

And has anyone you Tindered said that he had asked someone for their passwords?

STACY

Yup. This guy who was sort of classically a little too good to be true in his profile shows up to our first face-to-face and he's got a cast on his arm and my brain is going "serialkiller, serialkiller, serialkiller" but we had a really sweet time at the cat cafe and. . .

JASMINE, AUDREY AND ELLIE

Awwwww!

STACY

And we went for drinks after and I got to the password question before the sexytime questions and when he said yes, he had his sister's passwords and his houesmate's passwords (for perfectly legitimate reasons) I was rethinking the evening, as I searched for the nearest exit.

MOE

So, you left?

STACY

Yes I did! I slipped a 20 on the bar to cover my drink and excused myself to the washroom and left out the back door into the laneway.

MOE

But was he that weird?

STACY

He was obviously not too weird to function in social settings and on Tinder. But the cast on his arm was weird and there was just something off, you know? He was perfectly nice, like really too nice almost. It's really important for me to trust my gut on these things.

(Silent, thoughtful pause.)

AUDREY

Can I say something about the book?

ALL

Yeah sure, go on, etc.

AUDREY

First, I really appreciate that you were all willing to read the *Queer/Play* book because this is the queer book club for queers and allies and so thanks for showing up and being allies.

ALL

Sure Audrey, no probs, it's cool.

AUDREY

Really, thanks. We don't usually read outright queer books.

STACY

Yeah, we're queering other stuff.

AUDREY

And that is totally cool and I love that but sometimes it's also really great to read straightforward queer writing, about queer experience or from the queer imagination.

ELLIE

Right, right, like "Fall On Your Knees"?

AUDREY

Did you read that one?

ELLIE

Some of it, yeah.

AUDREY

The character Kathleen is like the most excellent femme.

MOE

She is, I agree.

AUDREY

Wow, I thought you hated her.

MOE

I didn't hate her.

AUDREY

We had a big fight about her.

MOE

We were just discussing. I would not call that a fight.

ELLIE

It was totally a fight.

STACY

You stopped talking to Audrey.

MOE

I talked to Audrey!

JASMINE

Not directly. Not for like 3 book clubs.

MOE

Did I? Huh. I didn't notice.

STACY

That is such bullshit!

ELLIE

You would hardly look at her!

AUDREY

They are kind of right, Moe. You got weird after that book.

MOE

It's a weird book.

AUDREY

OK, back to *Queer/Play*. I know you all didn't read it..

JASMINE

I skimmed it!

AUDREY

OK, I know you all did not do a close reading but I just wanted to say that even though the work is all made by queer women, it's not all about the queer experience or about becoming queer or anything like that. The content is not queer-only and a few of the pieces are not all same-sex-y or trans-y or bi-y or homo-y. Only a few of the pieces are directly "about" being queer.

ELLIE

Wow.

STACY

OK

JASMINE

Huh.

AUDREY

And I don't know about the rest of you but I think this is a really, really good thing. All those authors and performers are grouped together by their shared identity, but it's their personal identity, not the identity of the characters in the plays. Some of them are, for sure. But it's also amazing that we live in this time where it does not HAVE to be that, you know?

STACY

It's like the conversation has moved forward.

MOE

That's exactly right. And as the old person, let me once again say how incredible it is that this has changed so much in a very short period of time. I can see it in my lifetime.

ELLIE

OK, I didn't read it but from what you are saying, it sounds really cool that these plays and stuff are together as queer, even though they are not "about" queer.

AUDREY

Right, the queer experience is no longer expected to be portrayed only through the lens of sexuality, of coming out and those big dramas.

ELLIE

That is still a big drama for some people though.

MOE

For sure.

ELLIE

Like my friend Edgar. He's old, like 45 or something and he lives with his partner Vin here in Toronto and his whole family still believes that his Vin is the super of his building! Who shares an apartment with their super, for starters?

STACY

Who believes that?

ELLIE

His family does. Or they pretend to because that's much easier for them up in the boondocks of northern wherever-he's-from than dealing with the reality of Edgar and Vin.

AUDREY

They *think* it's easier.

MOE

Believe me, it's a lot of work to keep up all that story.

ELLIE

He's been doing it so long, he doesn't know how to get out of it now. The crazy thing is, Vin goes home with him for the holidays and stuff and they sleep in the same bed. "For warmth".

AUDREY

Just like Moby Dick.

STACY

Ha!

AUDREY

Anyway, I think it's just great that so many different queer women are making so much interesting performance and I was happy to read it.

JASMINE

You know, the book is important.

STACY
It is.

ELLIE
Totally important.

JASMINE
It's kind of like a perfect intersectional sandwich.

ELLIE
Like a 12" Subway club: you get turkey, you get roast beef, you get ham, you get cheese you get vegetables, all in one place. All the intersectional food groups.

MOE
And it passes the Bechdel test with flying colours.

JASMINE
It is a perfect stocking stuffer.

AUDREY
If you have a really big stocking.

MOE
It's a lot of book for thirty bucks, on sale after the club and some of the artists are here to sign them if you like!

ELLIE
There's lots of pictures too. I'm really a visual person.

STACY
You should be in the picture book club.

(All laugh.)

ELLIE
That is such a good idea. *(she pulls out her phone)* Anyone want to do that with me? C'mon, who has the ovaries, you slackers?

MOE
Well...

ELLIE
Too late, I posted an event date and tagged you all!

(All groan.)

ELLIE
Yeah, and you are all going to come and you're all going to invite five friends and we are going to raise some money for rescue degus because at least you can get behind that since they are sooooo cute.

AUDREY
What's a degu?

MOE
Here, look. *(shows one on her phone)* It's a South American rat?

STACY, AUDREY AND JASMINE
Awww! So cute.

ELLIE
OK, you're all coming and we're going to have it on the solstice in my backyard and we'll have a bonfire.

JASMINE
And wine?

ELLIE
Yes, wine.

JASMINE
I can find 5 people, as long as there is wine.

MOE
(looking at her phone) Hmm, it says the degus eat their poop.

ELLIE
So they eat their poop? So do rabbits! So what?! Are they any less important to the world because they eat their poop? They extract more nutrition out of it the second time around! I would eat my poop too if it was nutritious.

JASMINE
Gross.

STACY
There are humans in other places in the world who eat their poop.

AUDREY
OK, OK can we not get bogged down on this, please?

JASMINE

Speaking of rabbits, what did you think of that play in the book, the one that was in French and English, about the rabbit? “Lapine Moi,” I think it’s called?

AUDREY

I thought you didn’t read the book.

JASMINE

I read a little bit at the beginning. The rabbit one.

AUDREY

That’s awesome, Jasmine!

STACY

What got into you?

JASMINE

It was about a rabbit and a hunter. And I liked the French. I did not understand the end.

AUDREY

Why not?

JASMINE

She is like the hunter, the Elmer Fudd hunter, and she is trying to find the rabbit but then she finds the carrots and then the hunter takes her pants off and she has a rabbit tail and I didn’t get that.

MOE

What do you think it meant?

JASMINE

I don’t know. Are rabbits some kind of lesbian thing, like a sex thing?

AUDREY AND MOE

Ummm, no, well maybe, I don’t know, etc.

STACY

Jasmine, OK, what if there was not really a rabbit?

JASMINE

But there was a rabbit. A blue rabbit.

STACY

No, what if it was all in the hunter’s head?

JASMINE

That’s not what the play said happens.

AUDREY

OK, you’re getting warm. Keep thinking...

JASMINE

Oh, so it was like a fantasy?

ELLIE

All plays are fantasies to one degree or another.

JASMINE

So the hunter turned into the rabbit? The fantasy of the rabbit?

MOE

Yeah, that is one way to look at it.

JASMINE

OK, now I get it! I thought it was real, like a real play, like a musical where things really happen to real people.

ELLIE

Musicals aren’t real.

JASMINE

Some of them are. Like “Hamilton.”

AUDREY

You’re right. Hamilton is based on facts.

ELLIE

Hip hop did not exist when Hamilton was alive. It’s not a documentary musical.

STACY

It’s a modern interpretation of the events of his life.

ELLIE

It’s still not real!

STACY

I don't like those kinds of shows anyway which is why I never go to shows because all that stuff, the opera, the ballet, the musicals, they are all so woman-hating most of the time and I can't take it. It gets my PTSD going to get near the opera house.

AUDREY

Well that's part of the reason why we chose this book for the club. Right now, it's really hard to go out and not end up in some big conversation after any show about how everything is so trigger-y.

STACY

Shows are trigger-y. Think about opera, though I know it is like the most extreme but really, can you name one heroine of an opera who does not either get killed or kill herself over some dude who is behaving badly?

JASMINE

I don't go to the opera.

STACY

Me neither and that's why! It all just reinscribes misogyny, in a deceptively beautiful package. The same old shitty messages about how restricted women's lives are.

AUDREY

But we don't live in those kinds of societies anymore, Stacy.

STACY

No we don't but we also do not live in a slave economy either and we do not see plays and art about the glorification of slavery. We also don't have musicals about tragically superb deaths in the pogroms, or in Nazi Germany or in South African apartheid.

JASMINE

Well, there's "Fiddler on the Roof."

STACY

But that is not about the martyrdom of the Jews and how sad and gorgeous it was! The pogroms are clearly wrong in Fiddler.

MOE

That's true.

STACY

All I'm saying is, I can't go to those shows anymore because all that pretty music does not cover up the facts of the matter: if a beautiful woman is in the show, I can be somewhat certain that she is going to die. For some asshole and she usually has no other way out. That is just not cool.

MOE

Did any of you see that show at the Theatre Centre, "Daughter?"

JASMINE

It was so good!

STACY

I got up and walked out of it.

JASMINE

What? Why?

STACY

Because of what I am saying right now. It's the same thing.

MOE

I thought it was powerful.

STACY

That show was totally irresponsible.

AUDREY

I didn't see it.

ELLIE

I like that guy in it.

STACY

You saw it?

ELLIE

Yeah. He is a very, very good clown.

STACY

Did anyone say anything the night you were there? Like from the audience?

ELLIE

Um, yeah. There are those parts where he asks the audience things, right?

STACY

Oh, I really hated that. He seduces us into liking him with the “you know how hard it is to be a parent” act so that we believe what he’s saying.

ELLIE

Wait, what do you mean so we believe it?

JASMINE

He was so funny!

STACY

He has to make us like him as a “regular guy” because then he starts talking like a monster.

ELLIE

Do you think that stuff happened? Like with his daughter, like throwing her?

STACY

I don’t care if it happened and no, because he would be in prison and his wife would have left him.

ELLIE

Well, not necessarily.

JASMINE

It was like a joke, right?

STACY

It’s not a funny joke. Especially not now. Not when so much bad shit happens to women all the time, in real life. I don’t need to hear a male fantasy about how complicated all that is. It’s not really complicated. We live in a world that hates us. Period. I don’t need a show to tell me that.

JASMINE

Are you mad because of Clint still?

ELLIE

Oh right, Clint.

STACY

THIS IS NOT ABOUT CLINT.

AUDREY

No, it’s about a book! A book I read! And some of you read some of it too!

ELLIE

I didn’t.

(Silence.)

MOE

We seem to have gotten into some heavy territory.

AUDREY

I’m going to go vape. Anyone else?

MOE

Everyone, look at the yule log for a minute while Audrey and I deal with our addiction.

(They exit. Everyone stares at the yule log video.)

STACY

God I hate the holidays.

ELLIE

So depressing, right?

JASMINE

I think it’s fun. Right? Presents? The tree? The dreidels, Stacy?

STACY

Ugh, it is always such a downer when people try to make me feel better about being Jewish and having a loser holiday like Hanukkah when the gentiles are loading up on gifts and the tree and the parties and the cute baby Jesus in the manger and we have like, an oil lamp as the main character and a spinning top and maybe a jumbo sock bundle with six pairs.

JASMINE

I love the dreidel. Remember last year?

STACY

Dreidel is not spin the bottle and we are not doing that again.

ELLIE

C’mon, it was just a little fun.

STACY

I do not remember.

JASMINE

That means you had fun!

STACY

I couldn't go to that new year's party. I was still drunk a week later.

JASMINE

It was so fun! Just go back in your Instagram feed and look.

ELLIE

You were really having fun.

JASMINE

Wait, did you two read the book?

STACY AND ELLIE

Not really.

JASMINE

The one about the rabbit was really interesting.

STACY

I can't believe you read it. Scripts are so boring. I mean, I tried.

ELLIE

Same here. I could not get through it.

STACY

And the book is so new that there are like no ways to know what it's about because nobody has written any reviews yet.

ELLIE

Yeah, no Cliffs Notes or study guides.

STACY

Nobody is going to write a study guide or Cliffs Notes for this book.

ELLIE

Some Canadians made those up you know.

JASMINE

What?

ELLIE

The Cliffs Notes. They used to be called Coles Notes and they sold out to the Americans.

STACY

Not Clint Notes?

JASMINE

Will you stop with the Clint stuff?

ELLIE

OMG, you are going to marry Clint!!!

JASMINE

What are you talking about?

STACY

She's right, you are getting married aren't you?

JASMINE

Where are you getting this?

STACY

Because you are not complaining about Clint. You always complain about him!

ELLIE

That's so deep.

JASMINE

I am not marrying Clint. *(silence)* I kind of already married him.

STACY

What?!

ELLIE

HOLY SHIT Moe AND AUDREY GET BACK IN HERE!!!

STACY

You got married? And you didn't tell us?

(Moe and Audrey come back in a cloud of vape smoke.)

MOE

What the hell is going on?

STACY

DUDE, Jasmine GOT FUCKING MARRIED!!

MOE

I'm not a dude but what the hell, Jasmine?

JASMINE

What can I say? It was time.

AUDREY

But why was it time this week and not for the last 6 years?

STACY

Did he pressure you?

JASMINE

No, I pressured him. I told him I got a new job in Saskatoon and that I was leaving unless he could think of a good reason for me to stay.

MOE

You are wiley!

JASMINE

It totally worked.

STACY

What about the other job?

JASMINE

There was no other job.

AUDREY

Well played, Jaswoman.

ELLIE

What the hell, Jaz? Aren't you going to have a party or something?

JASMINE

Yeah, we'll have a party in the summer in the park and you can all come and give us shit.

MOE

That's the spirit.

STACY

How's Clint?

JASMINE

Totally freaking, but he'll be fine.

AUDREY

I thought you two were committed to not getting married and buying into the system?

JASMINE

We were. And we still are. But it was like, OK, this is going to sound dumb . . .

STACY

Nothing about this is dumb, Jasmine. It's amazing.

JASMINE

Really? You think so? I thought because of all the old stuff . . .

STACY

Look, Clint is a loser who dumped me but that's his shit. You are incredible and that loser is going to have the best partner ever. He does not deserve you.

JASMINE

Aww, thanks. I thought you might be mad.

STACY

Jaz, if you can handle him that is great because then you take him out of circulation and save a lot of pain to a lot of your sisters out there.

JASMINE

He's not that bad.

STACY

I know, I just have to keep up appearances here.

JASMINE

It's weird because you know I was so committed to not getting married and then I was reading the book . . .

MOE

I thought you only skimmed.

JASMINE
I actually read it.

AUDREY
Wow, Jaz, I am impressed.

JASMINE
At first I couldn't get into it because scripts are strange to read.

STACY
But they are also fun, especially these, where the women are badass.

JASMINE
Right! I really got into them. And I was reading *She Mami Wata* and the *Pussy Witchhunt* and that is an intense play about Jamaican culture and this might be totally wrong and we can talk about it but I'm just going to say it: I realized my own privilege about marriage as a straight, white ciswoman. And that play really moved me and made me question my idea of solidarity.

ELLIE
I'm not sure I get that.

JASMINE
I'm not sure either. All I know is, when I was reading that play about people very, very different from myself, I thought about connection to who I love and it changed me.

STACY
That's beautiful, Jaz.

AUDREY
I'm all choked up.

MOE
I hope you . . . guys are very happy.

JASMINE
Aww, that's so sweet Moe. But I'm not a guy, haha.

ELLIE
I am not posting this. I am just having this experience here with all of you.

JASMINE
It takes a while to get here but that is why we keep coming back to the club.

STACY
For the company.

ELLIE
And the realness.

MOE
And the name-calling. I love the name-calling.

AUDREY
And the books.

STACY
And the wine. Cheers everyone! To Jasmine's shotgun marriage!!

(They toast.)

AUDREY
I guess we're wrapping up now that we have reached some resolution.

MOE
Yeah, are we done everybody?

ALL
Yeah. Sure. Let's eat shrimp. Etc.

MOE
OK, I want to thank you all for listening in and joining our little community for a night. And wait, women can we summarize this week, like usual? Everyone say one thing you are grateful for before we go.

STACY
I am grateful that I will never have to worry about Clint being a weirdo again! Thank you, Jasmine!

JASMINE
I am grateful I read the book. I know it is probably not PC to say this but *Queer/Play* made me realize that my problems are so small compared to a lot of other people and that I get to be with the person I love and that Clint is not my problem.

ELLIE
I am grateful that we have this space to just say stuff. Thank you all for being here.

AUDREY

OK, I am grateful that I am not the only one who read the book. I know that's kind of dumb but it's rare and Jasmine I am grateful to you for letting the plays and performances affect you.

MOE

So every month when we meet there is a point where I think that I am going to have to leave or I am going to say something that I cannot take back and that I will regret. And every month so far anyway, I have managed not to wreck everything. So I am grateful for all of us showing up and sitting through our discomfort.

STACY

Moby Dick was a lot of discomfort.

MOE

OK, everyone, are we good?

ALL

We're good!

MOE

All in?

(Moe puts her hand in the middle, above the coffee table. The others put their hands in too.)

MOE

One, two, three...

ALL

BOOK CLUB RULES!

(They raise their hands up together as the circle breaks.)

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Performance Club 1: *Queer/Play*, FADO Performance Art Center, The Commons @ 401, Toronto, December 14–15, 2017

Three O'Clock

written by Cornell Woolrich

SHE HAD SIGNED her own death-warrant. He kept telling himself over and over that he was not to blame, she had brought it on herself. He had never seen the man. He knew there was one. He had known for six weeks now. Little things had told him. One day he came home and there was a cigar-butt in an ashtray, still moist at one end, still warm at the other. There were gasoline-drippings on the asphalt in front of their house, and they didn't own a car. And it wouldn't be a delivery-vehicle, because the drippings showed it had stood there a long time, an hour or more. And once he had actually glimpsed it, just rounding the far corner as he got off the bus two blocks down the other way. A second-hand Ford. She was often very flustered when he came home, hardly seemed to know what she was doing or saying at all.

He pretended not to see any of these things; he was that type of man, Stapp, he didn't bring his hates or grudges out into the open where they had a chance to heal. He nursed them in the darkness of his mind. That's a dangerous kind of a man.

If he had been honest with himself, he would have had to admit that this mysterious afternoon caller was just the excuse he gave himself, that he'd daydreamed of getting rid of her long before there was any reason to, that there had been something in him for years past now urging Kill, kill, kill. Maybe ever since that time he'd been treated at the hospital for a concussion.

He didn't have any of the usual excuses. She had no money of her own, he hadn't insured her, he stood to gain nothing by getting rid of her. There was no other woman he meant to replace her with. She didn't nag and quarrel with him. She was a docile, tractable sort of wife. But this thing in his brain kept whispering Kill, kill, kill. He'd fought it down until six weeks ago, more from fear and a sense of self-preservation than from compunction. The discovery that there was some stranger calling on her in the afternoons when he was away, was all that had been needed to unleash it in all its hydra-headed ferocity. And the thought that he would be killing two instead of just one, now, was an added incentive.

So every afternoon for six weeks now when he came home from his shop, he had brought little things with him. Very little things, that were so harmless, so inoffensive, in themselves that no one, even had they seen them, could have guessed—Fine little strands of copper wire such as he sometimes used in his watch-repairing. And each time a very little package containing a substance that—well, an explosives expert might have recognized, but no one else. There was just enough in each one of those packages, if ignited, to go Fffft! and flare up like flashlight-powder does. Loose like that it couldn't hurt you, only burn your skin of course if you got too near it. But wadded tightly into cells, in what had formerly been a soap-box down in the basement, compressed to within an inch of its life the way he had it, the whole accumulated thirty-six-days worth of it (for he hadn't brought any home on Sundays)—that would be a different story. They'd never know. There wouldn't be enough left of the flimsy house for them to go by. Sewer-gas they'd think, or a pocket of natural gas in the ground somewhere around under them. Something like that had happened over on the other side of town two years ago, only not as bad of course. That had given him the idea originally.

He'd brought home batteries too, the ordinary dry-cell kind. Just two of them, one at a time. As far as the substance itself was concerned, where he got it was his business. No one would ever know where he got it. That was the beauty of getting such a little at a time like that. It wasn't even missed where he got it from. She didn't ask him what was in these little packages, because she didn't even see them, he had them in his pocket each time. (And of course he didn't smoke coming home.) But even if she had seen them, she probably wouldn't have asked him. She wasn't the nosy kind that asked questions, she would have thought it was watch-parts, maybe, that he brought home to work over at night or something. And then too she was so rattled and flustered herself these days, trying to cover up the fact that she'd had a caller, that he could have brought in a grandfather-clock under his arm and she probably wouldn't have noticed it.

Well, so much the worse for her. Death was spinning its web beneath her busy feet as they bustled obliviously back and forth in those ground-floor rooms. He'd be in his shop tinkering with watch-parts and the phone would ring. "Mr. Stapp, Mr. Stapp, your house has just been demolished by a blast!"

A slight concussion of the brain simplifies matters so beautifully.

He knew she didn't intend running off with this unknown stranger, and at first he had wondered why not. But by now he thought he had arrived at a satisfactory answer. It was that he, Stapp, was working, and the other man evidently wasn't, wouldn't be able to provide for her if she left with him. That must be it, what other reason could there be? She wanted to have her cake and eat it too.

So that was all he was good for, was it, to keep a roof over her head? Well, he was going to lift that roof skyhigh, blow it to smithereens!

He didn't really want her to run off, anyway, that wouldn't have satisfied this thing within him that cried Kill, kill, kill. It wanted to get the two of them, and nothing short of that would do. And if he and she had had a five-year-old kid, say, he would have included the kid in the holocaust too, although a kid that age obviously couldn't be guilty of anything. A doctor would have known what to make of this, and would have phoned a hospital in a hurry. But unfortunately doctors aren't mind-readers and people don't go around with their thoughts placarded on sandwich-boards.

The last little package had been brought in two days ago. The box had all it could hold now. Twice as much as was necessary to blow up the house. Enough to break every window for a radius of blocks—only there were hardly any, they were in an isolated location. And that fact gave him a paradoxical feeling of virtue, as though he were doing a good deed; he was destroying his own but he wasn't endangering anybody else's home. The wires were in place, the batteries that would give off the necessary spark were attached. All that was necessary now was the final adjustment, the hook-up, and the—

Kill, kill, kill, the thing within him gloated.

Today was the day.

He had been working over the alarm-clock all morning to the exclusion of everything else. It was only a dollar-and-a-half alarm, but he'd given it more loving care than someone's Swiss-movement pocket-watch or platinum and diamond wristwatch. Taking it apart, cleaning it, oiling it, adjusting it, putting it together again, so that there was no slightest possibility of it failing him, of it not playing its part, of it stopping or jamming or anything else. That was one

good thing about being your own boss, operating your own shop, there was no one over you to tell you what to do and what not to do. And he didn't have an apprentice or helper in the shop, either, to notice this peculiar absorption in a mere alarm-clock and tell someone about it later.

Other days he came home from work at five. This mysterious caller, this intruder, must be there from about two-thirty or three until shortly before she expected him. One afternoon it had started to drizzle at about a quarter to three, and when he turned in his doorway over two hours later there was still a large dry patch on the asphalt out before their house, just beginning to blacken over with the fine misty precipitation that was still falling. That was how he knew the time of her treachery so well.

He could, of course, if he'd wanted to bring the thing out into the open, simply have come an unexpected hour earlier any afternoon during those six weeks, and confronted them face to face. But he preferred the way of guile and murderous revenge; they might have had some explanation to offer that would weaken his purpose, rob him of his excuse to do the thing he craved. And he knew her so well, that in his secret heart he feared she would have if he once gave her a chance to offer it. Feared was the right word. He wanted to do this thing. He wasn't interested in a showdown, he was interested in a pay-off. This artificially-nurtured grievance had brought the poison in his system to a head, that was all. Without it it might have remained latent for another five years, but it would have erupted sooner or later anyway.

He knew the hours of her domestic routine so well that it was the simplest matter in the world for him to return to the house on his errand at a time when she would not be there. She did her cleaning in the morning. Then she had the impromptu morsel that she called lunch. Then she went out, in the early afternoon, and did her marketing for their evening meal. They had a phone in the house but she never ordered over it; she liked, she often told him, to see what she was getting, otherwise the tradespeople simply foisted whatever they chose on you, at their own prices. So from one until two was the time for him to do it, and be sure of getting away again unobserved afterwards.

At twelve-thirty sharp he wrapped up the alarm-clock in ordinary brown paper, tucked it under his arm, and left his shop. He left it every day at this same time to go to his own lunch. He would be a little longer getting back today, that was all. He locked the door carefully after him, of course; no use taking chances, he had too many valuable watches in there under repair and observation.

He boarded the bus at the corner below, just like he did every day when he was really going home for the night. There was no danger of being recognized or identified by any bus-driver or fellow-passenger or anything like that, this was too big a city. Hundreds of people used these busses night and day. The drivers didn't even glance up at you when you paid your fare, deftly made change for you backhand by their sense of touch on the coin you gave them alone. The bus was practically empty, no one was going out his way at this hour of the day.

He got off at his usual stop, three interminable suburban blocks way from where he lived, which was why his house had not been a particularly good investment when he bought it and no others had been put up around it afterwards. But it had its compensations on such a day as this. There were no neighbors to glimpse him returning to it at this unusual hour, from their windows, and remember that fact afterwards. The first of the three blocks he had to walk had a row of taxpayers on it, one-story store-fronts. The next two were absolutely vacant from corner to corner, just a panel of advertising billboards on both sides, with their gallery of

friendly people that beamed on him each day twice a day. Incurable optimists these people were; even today when they were going to be shattered and splintered they continued to grin and smirk their counsel and messages of cheer. The perspiring bald-headed fat man about to quaff some non-alcoholic beverage. "The pause that refreshes!" The grinning colored laundress hanging up wash. "No ma'am, I just uses a little Oxydol." The farmwife at the rural telephone sniggering over her shoulder: "Still talking about their new Ford 8!" They'd be tatters and kindling in two hours from now, and they didn't have sense enough to get down off there and hurry away.

"You'll wish you had," he whispered darkly as he passed by beneath them, clock under arm.

But the point was, that if ever a man walked three "city" blocks in broad daylight unseen by the human eye, he did that now. He turned in the short cement walk when he came to his house at last, pulled back the screen door, put his latchkey into the wooden inner door and let himself in. She wasn't home, of course; he'd known she wouldn't be, or he wouldn't have come back like this.

He closed the door again after him, moved forward into the blue twilight-dimness of the inside of the house. It seemed like that at first after the glare of the street. She had the green shades down three-quarters of the way on all the windows to keep it cool until she came back. He didn't take his hat off or anything, he wasn't staying. Particularly after he once set this clock he was carrying in motion. In fact it was going to be a creepy feeling even walking back those three blocks to the bus-stop and standing waiting for the bus to take him downtown again, knowing all the time something was going *tick-tock, tick-tock* in the stillness back here, even though it wouldn't happen for a couple of hours yet.

He went directly to the door leading down to the basement. It was a good stout wooden door. He passed through it, closed it behind him, and went down the bare brick steps to the basement-floor. In the winter, of course, she'd had to come down here occasionally to regulate the oil-burner while he was away, but after the fifteenth of April no one but himself ever came down here at any time, and it was now long past the fifteenth of April.

She hadn't even known that he'd come down, at that. He'd slipped down each night for a few minutes while she was in the kitchen doing the dishes, and by the time she got through and came out, he was upstairs again behind his newspaper. It didn't take long to add the contents of each successive little package to what was already in the box. The wiring had taken more time, but he'd gotten that done one night when she'd gone out to the movies (so she'd said—and then had been very vague about what the picture was she'd seen, but he hadn't pressed her.)

The basement was provided with a light-bulb over the stairs, but it wasn't necessary to use it except at night; daylight was admitted through a horizontal slit of window that on the outside was flush with the ground, but on the inside was up directly under the basement-ceiling. The glass was wire-meshed for protection and so cloudy with lack of attention as to be nearly opaque.

The box, that was no longer merely a box now but an infernal machine, was standing over against the wall, to one side of the oil-burner. He didn't dare shift it about any more now that it was wired and the batteries inserted. He went over to it and squatted down on his heels before it, and put his hand on it with a sort of loving gesture. He was proud of it, prouder than of any fine watch he'd ever repaired or reconstructed. A watch, after all, was inanimate. This was going to become animate in a few more minutes, maybe diabolically so, but animate just the same. It was like—giving birth.

He unwrapped the clock and spread out the few necessary small implements he'd brought with him from the shop on the floor beside him. Two fine copper wires were sticking stiffly out of a small hole he'd bored in the box, in readiness, like the antennae of some kind of insect. Through them death would go in.

He wound the clock up first, for he couldn't safely do that once it was connected. He wound it up to within an inch of its life, with a professionally deft economy of wrist-motion. Not for nothing was he a watch-repairer. It must have sounded ominous down in that hushed basement, to hear that *crick-craaaack, crick-craaaack*, that so-domestic sound that denotes going to bed, peace, slumber, security; that this time denoted approaching annihilation. It would have if there'd been any listener. There wasn't any but himself. It didn't sound ominous to him, it sounded delicious.

He set the alarm for three. But there was a difference now. Instead of just setting off a harmless bell when the hour hand reached three and the minute hand reached twelve, the wires attached to it leading to the batteries would set off a spark. A single, tiny, evanescent spark—that was all. And when that happened, all the way downtown where his shop was, the showcase would vibrate, and maybe one or two of the more delicate watch-mechanisms would stop. And people on the streets would stop and ask one another: "What was that?"

They probably wouldn't even be able to tell definitely, afterwards, that there'd been anyone else beside herself in the house at the time. They'd know that she'd been there only by a process of elimination; she wouldn't be anywhere else afterwards. They'd know that the house had been there only by the hole in the ground and the litter around.

He wondered why more people didn't do things like this; they didn't know what they were missing. Probably not clever enough to be able to make the things themselves, that was why.

When he'd set the clock itself by his own pocketwatch—1:15—he pried the back off it. He'd already bored a little hole through this at his shop. Carefully he guided the antenna-like wires through it, more carefully still he fastened them to the necessary parts of the mechanism without letting a tremor course along them. It was highly dangerous but his hands didn't play him false, they were too skilled at this sort of thing. It wasn't vital to reattach the back to the clock, the result would be the same if it stood open or closed, but he did that too, to give the sense of completion to the job that his craftsman's soul found necessary. When he had done with it, it stood there on the floor, as if placed there at random up against an innocent-looking copper-lidded soapbox, ticking away. Ten minutes had gone by since he had come down here. One hour and forty minutes were still to go by.

Death was on the wing.

He stood up and looked down at his work. He nodded. He retreated a step across the basement floor, still looking down, and nodded again, as if the slight perspective gained only enhanced it. He went over to the foot of the stairs leading up, and stopped once more and looked over. He had very good eyes. He could see the exact minute-notches on the dial all the way over where he now was. One had just gone by.

He smiled a little and went on up the stairs, not furtively or fearfully but like a man does in his own house, with an unhurried air of ownership, head up, shoulders back, tread firm.

He hadn't heard a sound over his head while he was down there, and you could hear sounds quite easily through the thin flooring, he knew that by experience. Even the opening and closing of doors above could be heard down here, certainly the footsteps of anyone

walking about in the ground-floor rooms if they bore down with their normal weight. And when they stood above certain spots and spoke, the sound of the voices and even what was said came through clearly, due to some trick of acoustics. He'd heard Lowell Thomas clearly, on the radio, while he was down here several times.

That was why he was all the more unprepared, as he opened the basement door and stepped out into the ground-floor hall, to hear a soft tread somewhere up above, on the second floor. A single, solitary footfall, separate, disconnected, like Robinson Crusoe's footprint. He stood stockstill a moment, listening tensely, print. He stood stockstill a moment, listening tensely, thinking—hoping, rather, he'd been mistaken. But he hadn't. The slur of a bureau-drawer being drawn open or closed reached him, and then a faint tinkling sound as though something had lightly struck one of the glass toilet-articles on Fran's dresser.

Who else could it be but she? And yet there was a stealth to these vague disconnected noises that didn't sound like her. He would have heard her come in; her high heels usually exploded along the hardwood floors like little firecrackers.

Some sixth sense made him turn suddenly and look behind him, toward the dining-room, and he was just in time to see a man, half-crouched, shoulders bunched forward, creeping up on him. He was still a few yards away, beyond the dining-room threshold, but before Stapp could do more than drop open his mouth with reflex astonishment, he had closed in on him, caught him brutally by the throat with one hand, flung him back against the wall, and pinned him there.

"What are you doing here?" Stapp managed to gasp out

"Hey, Bill, somebody *is* home!" the man called out guardedly. Then he struck out at him, hit him a stunning blow on the side of the head with his free hand. Stapp didn't reel because the wall was at the back of his head, that gave him back the blow doubly, and his senses dulled into a whirling flux for a minute.

Before they had cleared again, a second man had leaped down off stairs from one of the rooms above, in the act of finishing cramming something into his pocket

"You know what to do, hurry up!" the first one ordered. "Get me something to tie him with and let's get out of here!"

"For God's sake, don't tie—!" Stapp managed to articulate through the strangling grip on his windpipe. The rest of it was lost in a blur of frenzied struggle on his part, flailing out with his legs, clawing at his own throat to free it. He wasn't fighting the man off, he was only trying to tear that throttling impediment off long enough to get out what he had to tell them, but his assailant couldn't tell the difference. He struck him savagely a second and third time, and Stapp went limp there against the wall without altogether losing consciousness.

The second one had come back already with a rope, it looked like Fran's clothesline from the kitchen, that she used on Mondays.

Stapp, head falling forward dazedly upon the pinioning arm that still had him by the jugular, was dimly aware of this going around and around him, crisscross, in and out, legs and body and arms.

"Don't—" he panted. His mouth was suddenly nearly torn in two, and a large handkerchief or rag was thrust in, effectively silencing all further sound. Then they whipped something around outside of that, to keep it in, and fastened it behind his head. His senses were clearing again, now that it was too late.

"Fighter, huh?" one of them muttered grimly. "What's he protecting? The place is a lemon, there's nothing in it"

Stapp felt a hand spade into his vest-pocket, take his watch out. Then into his trouser-pocket and remove the little change he had on.

"Where'll we put him?"

"Leave him where he is."

"Naw. I did my last stretch just on account of leaving a guy in the open where he could put a squad-car on my tail too quick; they nabbed me a block away. Let's shove him back down in there where he was."

This brought on a new spasm, almost epileptic in its violence. He squirmed and writhed and shook his head back and forth. They had picked him up between them now, head and feet, kicked the basement door open, and were carrying him down the steps to the bottom. They still couldn't be made to understand that he wasn't resisting, that he wouldn't call the police, that he wouldn't lift a finger to have them apprehended—if they'd only let him get out of here, *with* them.

"This is more like it," one said, as they deposited him on the floor. "Whoever lives in the house with him won't find him so quick—"

Stapp started to roll his head back and forth on the floor like something demented, toward the clock, then toward them, toward the clock, toward them. But so fast that it finally lost all possible meaning, even if it would have had any for them in the first place, and it wouldn't have of course. They still thought he was trying to free himself in unconquerable opposition.

"Look at that!" one of them jeered. "Did you ever see anyone like him in your life?" He backed his arm threateningly at the wriggling form. "I'll give you one that'll hold you for good, if you don't cut it out!"

"Tie him up to that pipe over there in the corner," his companion suggested, "or he'll wear himself out rolling all over the place." They dragged him backwards along the floor and lashed him in a sitting position, legs out before him, with an added length of rope that had been coiled in the basement.

Then they brushed their hands ostentatiously and started up the basement stairs again, one behind the other, breathing hard from the struggle they'd had with him. "Pick up what we got and let's blow," one muttered. "We'll have to pull another one tonight—and this time you let me do the picking!"

"It looked like the berries," his mate alibied. "No one home, and standing way off by itself like it is."

A peculiar sound like the low simmering of a tea-kettle or the mewing of a newborn kitten left out in the rain to die came percolating thinly through the gag in mouth. His vocal cords were strained to bursting with the effort it was costing him to make even that slight sound. His eyes were round and staring, fastened on them in horror and imploring.

They saw the look as they went on up, but couldn't read it. It might have been just the physical effort of trying to burst his bonds, it might have been rage and threatened retribution, for all they knew.

The first passed obliviously through the basement doorway and passed from sight. The second stopped halfway to the top of the stairs and glanced complacently back at him—the way he himself had looked back at his own handiwork just now, short minutes ago.

“Take it easy,” he jeered, “relax. I used to be a sailor. You’ll never get out of *them* knots, buddy.”

Stapp swiveled his skull desperately, threw his eyes at the clock one last time. They almost started out of their sockets, he put such physical effort into the look.

This time the man got it finally, but got it wrong. He flung his arm at him derisively. “Trying to tell me you got a date? Oh no you haven’t, you only think you have! Whadda you care what time it is, you’re not going any place!”

And then with the horrible slowness of a nightmare—though it only seemed that way, for he resumed his ascent fairly briskly—his head went out through the doorway, his shoulders followed, his waist next. Now even optical communication was cut off between them, and if only Stapp had had a minute more he might have made him understand! There was only one backthrust foot left in sight now, poised on the topmost basement step to take flight Stapp’s eyes were on it as though their burning plea could hold it back. The heel lifted up, it rose, trailed through after the rest of the man, was gone.

Stapp heaved himself so violently, as if to go after it by sheer willpower, that for a moment his whole body was a distended bow, clear of the floor from shoulders to heels. Then he fell flat again with a muffled thud, and a little dust came out from under him, and a half-dozen little separate skeins of sweat started down his face at one time, crossing and intercrossing as they coursed. The basement door ebbed back into its frame and the latch dropped into its socket with a minor click that to him was like the crack of doom.

In the silence now, above the surge of his own tidal breathing that came and went like surf upon a shoreline, was the counterpoint of the clock. Tick-tick, tick-tick, tick-tick, tick-tick.

For a moment or two longer he drew what consolation he could from the knowledge of their continued presence above him. An occasional stealthy footfall here and there, never more than one in succession, for they moved with marvelous dexterity, they must have had a lot of practice in breaking and entering. They were very cautious walkers from long habit even when there was no further need for it. A single remark filtered through, from somewhere near the back door. “All set? Let’s take it this way.” The creak of a hinge, and then the horrid finality of a door closing after them, the back door, which Fran may have forgotten to lock and by which they had presumably entered in the first place; and then they were gone.

And with them went his only link with the outside world. They were the only two people in the whole city who knew where he was at this moment. No one else, not a living soul, knew where to find him. Nor what would happen to him if he wasn’t found and gotten out of here by three o’clock. It was twenty-five to two now. His discovery of their presence, the fight, their trussing him up with the rope, and their final unhurried departure, had all taken place within fifteen minutes.

It went tick-tick, tick-tock; tick-tick, tick-tock, so rhythmically, so remorselessly, so *fast*.

An hour and twenty-five minutes left. Eighty-five minutes left. How long that could seem if you were waiting for someone on a corner, under an umbrella, in the rain—like he had once waited for Fran outside the office where she worked before they were married, only to find that she’d been taken ill and gone home early that day.

How long that could seem if you were stretched out on a hospital-bed with knife-pains in your head and nothing to look at but white walls, until they brought your next tray—as he had been that time of the concussion. How long that could seem when you’d finished the paper,

and one of the tubes had burned out in the radio, and it was too early to go to bed yet. How short, how fleeting, how instantaneous, that could seem when it was all the time there was left for you to live in and you were going to die at the end of it!

No clock had ever gone this fast, of all the hundreds that he’d looked at and set right. This was a demon-clock, its quarter-hours were minutes and its minutes seconds. Its lesser hand didn’t even pause at all on those notches the way it should have, passed on from one to the next in perpetual motion. It was cheating him, it wasn’t keeping the right time, somebody slow it down at least if nothing else! It was twirling like a pinwheel, that secondary hand.

Tick-tock-tick-tock-tick-tock. He broke it up into “Here I go, here I go, here I go.”

There was a long period of silence that seemed to go on forever after the two of them had left. The clock told him it was only twenty-one minutes. Then at four to two a door opened above without warning—oh blessed sound, oh lovely sound!—the front door this time (over above *that* side of the basement), and high-heeled shoes clacked over his head like castanets.

“Fran!” he shouted. “Fran!” he yelled. “Fran!” he screamed. But all that got past the gag was a low whimper that didn’t even reach across the basement. His face was dark with the effort it cost him, and a cord stood out at each side of his palpitating neck like a splint

The tap-tap-tap went into the kitchen, stopped a minute (she was putting down her parcels; she didn’t have things delivered because then you were expected to tip the errand-boys ten cents), came back again. If only there was something he could kick at with his interlocked feet, make a clatter with. The cellar-flooring was bare from wall to wall. He tried hoisting his lashed legs clear of the floor and pounding them down again with all his might; maybe the sound of the impact would carry up to her. All he got was a soft, cushioned sound, with twice the pain of striking a stone surface with your bare palm, and not even as much distinctness. His shoes were rubber-heeled, and he could not tilt them up and around far enough to bring them down on the leather part above the lifts. An electrical discharge of pain shot up the backs of his legs, coursed up his spine, and exploded at the back of his head, like a brilliant rocket.

Meanwhile her steps had halted about where the hall closet was (she must be hanging up her coat), then went on toward the stairs that led to the upper floor, faded out upon them, going up. She was out of earshot now, temporarily. But she was in the house with him at least! That awful aloneness was gone. He felt such gratitude for her nearness, he felt such love and need for her, he wondered how he could ever have thought of doing away with her—only one short hour ago. He saw now that he must have been insane to contemplate such a thing. Well if he had been, he was sane now, he was rational now, this ordeal had brought him to his senses. Only release him, only rescue him from his jeopardy, and he’d never again. . .

Five-after. She’d been back nine minutes now. There, it was ten. At first slowly, then faster and faster, terror, which had momentarily been quelled by her return, began to fasten upon him again. Why did she stay up there on the second floor like that? Why didn’t she come down here to the basement, to look for something? Wasn’t there anything down here that she might suddenly be in need of? He looked around, and there wasn’t. There wasn’t a possible thing that might bring her down here. They kept their basement so clean, so empty. Why wasn’t it piled up with all sorts of junk like other people’s! That might have saved him now.

She might intend to stay up there all afternoon! She might lie down and take a nap, she might shampoo her hair, she might do over an old dress. Any one of those trivial harmless

occupations of a woman during her husband's absence could prove so fatal now! She might count on staying up there until it was time to begin getting his supper ready, and if she did—no supper, no she, no he.

Then a measure of relief came again. The man. The man whom he had intended destroying along with her, he would save him. He would be the means of his salvation. He came other days, didn't he, in the afternoon, while Stapp was away? Then, oh God, let him come today, make this one of the days they had a rendezvous (and yet maybe it just wasn't!). For if he came, that would bring her down to the lower floor, if only to admit him. And how infinitely greater his chances would be, with two pairs of ears in the house to overhear some wisp of sound he might make, than just with one.

And so he found himself in the anomalous position of a husband praying, pleading with every ounce of fervency he can muster, for the arrival, the materialization, of a rival whose existence he had only suspected until now, never been positive of.

Eleven past two. Forty-nine minutes left. Less than the time it took to sit through the "A"—part of a pictureshow. Less than the time it took to get a haircut, if you had to wait your turn. Less than the time it took to sit through a Sunday meal, or listen to an hour program on the radio, or ride on the bus from here to the beach for a dip. Less than all those things—to live. No, no, he had been meant to live thirty more years, forty! What had become of those years, those months, those weeks? No, not just *minutes* left, it wasn't fair!

"Fran!" he shrieked. "Fran, come down here! Can't you hear me?" The gag drank it up like a sponge.

The phone trilled out suddenly in the lower hallway, midway between him and her. He'd never heard such a beautiful sound before. "Thank God!" he sobbed, and a tear stood out in each eye. That must be the man now. That would bring her down.

Then fear again. Suppose it was only to tell her that he wasn't coming? Or worse still, suppose it was to ask her instead to come out and meet him somewhere else? Leave him alone down here, once again, with this horror ticking away opposite him. No child was ever so terrified of being left alone in the dark, of its parents putting out the light and leaving it to the mercy of the boogy-man as this grown man was at the thought of her going out of the house and leaving him behind.

It kept on ringing a moment longer, and then he heard her quick step descending the stairs to answer it. He could hear every word she said down there where he was. These cheap matchwood houses.

"Hello? Yes, Dave. I just got in now."

Then, "Oh Dave, I'm all upset I had seventeen dollars upstairs in my bureau-drawer and it's gone, and the wrist-watch that Paul gave me is gone too. Nothing else is missing, but it looks to me as if someone broke in here while I was out and robbed us."

Stapp almost writhed with delight down there where he was. She knew they'd been robbed! She'd get the police now! Surely they'd search the whole place, surely they'd look down here and find him!

The man she was talking to must have asked her if she was sure. "Well, I'll look again, but I know it's gone. I know just where I left it, and it isn't there. Paul will have a fit"

No Paul wouldn't either; if she'd only come down here and free him he'd forgive her anything, even the cardinal sin of being robbed of his hard-earned money.

Then she said, "No, I haven't reported it yet I suppose I should, but I don't like the idea—on your account, you know. I'm going to call up Paul at the shop. There's just a chance that he took the money and the watch both with him when he left this morning. I remember telling him the other night that it was losing time; he may have wanted to look it over. Well, all right, Dave, come on out then."

So he was coming, so Stapp wasn't to be left alone in the place; hot breaths of relief pushed against the sodden gag at the back of his palate.

There was a pause while she broke the connection. Then he heard her call his shop-number, "Trevelyan 4512," and wait while they were ringing, and of course no one answered.

Tick-tick, tick-tick, tick-tick.

The operator must have told her finally that they couldn't get the number. "Well, keep ringing," he heard her say, "it's my husband's store, he's always there at this hour."

He screamed in terrible silence: "I'm right here under your feet! Don't waste time! For God's sake, come away from the phone, come down here!"

Finally, when failure was reported a second time, she hung up. Even the hollow, cupping sound of that detail reached him. Oh, everything reached him—but help. This was a torture that a Grand Inquisitor would have envied.

He heard her steps move away from where the phone was. Wouldn't she guess by his absence from where he was supposed to be that something was wrong? Wouldn't she come down here now and look? (Oh, where was this woman's intuition they spoke about?) No, how could she be expected to. What connection could the basement of their house possibly have in her mind with the fact that he wasn't in his shop? She wasn't even alarmed, so far, by his absence most likely. If it had been evening; but at this hour of the day—He might have gone out later than other days to his lunch, he might have had some errand to do.

He heard her going up the stairs again, probably to resume her search for the missing money and watch. He whimpered disappointedly. He was as cut off from her, while she remained up there, as if she'd been miles away, instead of being vertically over him in a straight line.

Tick, tock, tick, tock. It was twenty-one past two now. One half-hour and nine scant minutes more left. And they ticked away with the prodigality of tropical raindrops on a corrugated tin roof.

He kept straining and pulling away from the pipe that held him fast, then falling back exhausted, to rest awhile, to struggle and to strain some more. There was as recurrent a rhythm to it as there was to the ticking of the clock itself, only more widely spaced. How could ropes hold that unyieldingly? Each time he fell back weaker, less able to contend with them than the time before. For he wasn't little strands of hemp, he was layers of thin skin that broke one by one and gave forth burning pain and finally blood.

The doorbell rang out sharply. The man had come. In less than ten minutes after their phone talk he had reached the house. Stapp's chest started rising and falling with renewed hope. Now his chances were good again. Twice as good as before, with two people in the house instead of only one. Four ears instead of two, to hear whatever slight sound he might manage to make. And he must, he must find a way of making one. He gave the stranger his benediction while he stood there waiting to be admitted. Thank God for this admirer or whatever he was, thank God for their rendezvous. He'd give them his blessing if they wanted it, all his worldly goods; anything, anything, if they'd only find him, free him.

She came quickly down the stairs a second time and her footfalls hurried down the hall. The front door opened. "Hello, Dave," she said, and he heard the sound of a kiss quite clearly. One of those loud unabashed ones that bespeak cordiality rather than intrigue.

A man's voice, deep, resonant, asked: "Well, did it turn up yet?"

"No, and I've looked high and low," he heard her say. "I tried to get Paul after I spoke to you, and he was out to lunch."

"Well, you can't just let seventeen dollars walk out the door without lifting your finger."

For seventeen dollars they were standing there frittering his life away—and their own too, for that matter, the fools!

"They'll think I did it, I suppose," he heard the man say with a note of bitterness.

"Don't say things like that," she reproved. "Come in the kitchen and I'll make you a cup of coffee."

Her quick brittle step went first, and his heavier, slower one followed. There was the sound of a couple of chairs being drawn out, and the man's footfalls died out entirely. Hers continued busily back and forth for a while, on a short orbit between stove and table.

What were they going to do, *sit* up there for the next half-hour? Couldn't he *make* them hear in some way? He tried clearing his throat, coughing. It hurt furiously, because the lining of it was all raw from long strain. But the gag muffled even the cough to a blurred purring sort of sound.

Twenty-six to three. Only minutes left now, minutes; not even a full half-hour any more.

Her footsteps stopped finally and one chair shifted slightly as she joined him at the table. There was linoleum around the stove and sink that deadened sounds, but the middle part of the room where the table stood was ordinary pine-board flooring. It let things through with crystalline accuracy.

He heard her say, "Don't you think we ought to tell Paul about—us?"

The man didn't answer for a moment. Maybe he was spooning sugar, or thinking about what she'd said. Finally he asked, "What kind of a guy is he?"

"Paul's not narrow-minded," she said. "He's very fair and broad."

Even in his agony, Stapp was dimly aware of one thing: that didn't sound a bit like her. Not her speaking well of him, but that she could calmly, detachedly contemplate broaching such a topic to him. She had always seemed so proper and slightly prudish. This argued a sophistication that he hadn't known she'd had.

The man was evidently dubious about taking Paul into their confidence, at least he had nothing further to say. She went on, as though trying to convince him: "You have nothing to be afraid of on Paul's account, Dave, I know him too well. And don't you see, we can't keep on like this? It's better to go to him ourselves and tell him about you, than wait until he finds out. He's liable to think something else entirely, and keep it to himself, brood, hold it against me, unless we explain. I know that he didn't believe me that night when I helped you find a furnished room, and told him I'd been to a movie. And I'm so nervous and upset each time he comes home in the evening, it's a wonder he hasn't noticed it before now. Why I feel as guilty as if—as if I were one of these disloyal wives or something." She laughed embarrassedly, as if apologizing to him for even bringing such a comparison up.

What did she mean by that?

"Didn't you ever tell him about me at all?"

"You mean in the beginning? Oh, I told him you'd been in one or two scrapes, but like a little fool I let him think I'd lost track of you, didn't know where you were any more."

Why, that was her brother she'd said that about!

The man sitting up there with her confirmed it right as the thought burst in his mind. "I know it's tough on you, Sis. You're happily married and all that I've got no right to come around and gum things up for you. No one's proud of a jailbird, an escaped convict, for a brother—"

"David," he heard her say, and even through the flooring there was such a ring of earnestness in her voice Stapp could almost visualize her reaching across the table and putting her hand reassuringly on his, "there isn't anything I wouldn't do for you, and you should know that by now. Circumstances have been against you, I that's all. You shouldn't have done what you did, but that's spilt milk and there's no use going back over it now."

"I suppose I'll have to go back and finish it out. Seven years, though, Fran, seven years out of a man's life—"

"But this way you have no life at all—"

Were they going to keep on talking his life away? Nineteen to three. One quarter of an hour, and four minutes over! "Before you do anything, let's go downtown and talk it over with Paul, hear what he says." One chair jarred back, then the other. He could hear dishes clatter, as though they'd all been lumped together in one stack. "I'll do these when I come back," she remarked.

Were they going to leave again? Were they going to leave him behind here, alone, with only minutes to spare?

Their footsteps had come out into the hall now, halted a moment undecidedly. "I don't like the idea of you being seen with me on the streets in broad daylight, you could get in trouble yourself, you know. Why don't you phone him to come out here instead?"

Yes, yes, Stapp wailed. Stay with me! Stay!

"I'm not afraid," she said gallantly. "I don't like to ask him to leave his work at this hour, and I can't tell him over the phone. Wait a minute, I'll get my hat." Her footsteps diverged momentarily from his, rejoined them again.

Panic-stricken, Stapp did the only thing he could think of. Struck the back of his head violently against the thick pipe he was attached to.

A sheet of blue flame darted before his eyes. He must have hit one of the welts where he had already been struck once by the burglars. The pain was so excruciating he knew he couldn't repeat the attempt. But they must have heard something, some dull thud or reverberation must have carried up along the pipe. He heard her stop short for a minute and say, "What was that?"

And the man, duller-sensed than she and killing him all unknowingly, "What? I didn't hear anything."

She took his word for it, went on again, to the hall-closet to get her coat. Then her footsteps retraced themselves all the way back through the dining-room to the kitchen. "Wait a minute, I want to make sure this back door's shut tight. Locking the stable after the horse is gone!"

She came forward again through the house for the last time, there was the sound of the front door opening, she passed through it, the man passed through it, it closed, and they were gone. There was the faint whirr of a car starting up outside in the open.

And now he was left alone with his self-fashioned doom a second time, and the first seemed a paradise in retrospect compared to this, for then he had a full hour to spare, he had been rich in time, and now he only had fifteen minutes, one miserly quarter-hour.

There wasn't any use struggling any more. He'd found that out long ago. He couldn't anyway, even if he'd wanted to. Flames seemed to be licking lazily around his wrists and ankles.

He'd found a sort of palliative now, the only way there was left. He'd keep his eyes down and pretend the hands were moving slower than they were, it was better than watching them constantly, it blunted a little of the terror at least. The ticking he couldn't hide from. Of course every once in a while when he couldn't resist looking up and verifying his own calculations, there'd be a renewed burst of anguish, but in-between-times it made it more bearable to say, "It's only gained a half-minute since the last time I looked." Then he'd hold out as long as he could with his eyes down, but when he couldn't stand it any more and would have to raise them to see if he was right, it had gained *two* minutes. Then he'd have a bad fit of hysterics, in which he called on God, and even on his long-dead mother, to help him, and couldn't see straight through the tears. Then he'd pull himself together again, in a measure, and start the self-deception over again. "It's only about thirty seconds now since I last looked. . . . Now it's about a minute. . ." (But was it? But was it?) And so on, mounting slowly to another climax of terror and abysmal collapse.

Then suddenly the outside world intruded again, that world that he was so cut off from that it already seemed as far-away, as unreal, as if he were already dead. The doorbell rang out.

He took no hope from the summons at first. Maybe some peddler—no, that had been too aggressive to be a peddler's ring. It was the sort of ring that claimed admission as its right, not as a favor. It came again. Whoever was ringing was truculently impatient at being kept waiting. A third ring was given the bell, this time a veritable blast that kept on for nearly half-a-minute. The party must have kept his finger pressed to the bell-button the whole time. Then as the peal finally stopped, a voice called out forcefully: "Anybody home in there? Gas Company!" And suddenly Stapp was quivering all over, almost whinnying in his anxiety.

This was the one call, the one incident in all the day's domestic routine, from earliest morning until latest night, that could have possibly brought anyone down into the basement! The meter was up there on the wall, beside the stairs, staring him in the face! And her brother had had to take her out of the house at just this particular time! There was no one to let the man in.

There was the impatient shuffle of a pair of feet on the cement walk. The man must have come down off the porch to gain perspective with which to look inquiringly up at the second-floor windows. And for a fleeting moment, as he chafed and shifted about out there before the house, on the walk and off, Stapp actually glimpsed the blurred shanks of his legs standing before the grimy transom that let light into the basement at ground-level. All the potential savior had to do was crouch down and peer in through it, and he'd see him tied up down there. And the rest would be so easy!

Why didn't he, why didn't he? But evidently he didn't expect anyone to be in the basement of a house in which his triple ring went unanswered. The tantalizing trouserleg shifted out of range again, the transom became blank. A little saliva filtered through the mass of rag in Stapp's distended mouth, trickled across his silently vibrating lower lip.

The gas inspector gave the bell one more try, as if venting his disappointment at being balked rather than in any expectation of being admitted this late in the proceedings. He gave it innumerable short jabs, like a telegraph-key. Bip-bip-bip-bip-bip. Then he called out disgustedly, evidently for the benefit of some unseen assistant waiting in a truck out at the curb, "They're never in when you want 'em to be!" There was a single quick tread on the cement, away from the house. Then the slur of a light truck being driven off.

Stapp died a little. Not metaphorically, literally. His arms and legs got cold up to the elbows and knees, his heart seemed to beat slower, and he had trouble getting a full breath; more saliva escaped and ran down his chin, and his head drooped forward and lay on his chest for awhile, inert.

Tick-tick, tick-tick, tick-tick. It brought him to after awhile, as though it were something beneficent, smelling salts or ammonia, instead of being the malevolent thing it was.

He noticed that his mind was starting to wander. Not much, as yet, but every once in awhile he'd get strange fancies. One time he thought that his *face* was the clock-dial, and that thing he kept staring at over there was his face. The pivot in the middle that held the two hands became his nose, and the 10 and the 2, up near the top, became his eyes, and he had a red-tin beard and head of hair and a little round bell on the exact top of his crown for a hat. "Gee, I look funny," he sobbed drowsily. And he caught himself twitching the muscles of his face, as if trying to stop those two hands that were clasped on it before they progressed any further and killed that man over there, who was breathing so metallically: tick, tock, tick, tock.

Then he drove the weird notion away again, and he saw that it had been just another escape-mechanism. Since he couldn't control the clock over there, he had attempted to change it into something else. Another vagary was that this ordeal had been brought on him as punishment for what he had intended doing to Fran, that he was being held fast there not by the inanimate ropes but by some active, punitive agency, and that if he exhibited remorse, pledged contrition to a proper degree, he could automatically effect his release at its hands. Thus over and over he whined in the silence of his throttled throat, "I'm sorry. I won't do it again. Just let me go this one time, I've learned my lesson, I'll never do it again."

The outer world returned again. This time it was the phone. It must be Fran and her brother, trying to find out if he'd come back here in their absence. They'd found the shop closed, must have waited outside of it for a while, and then when he still didn't come, didn't know what to make of it. Now they were calling the house from a booth down there, to see if he had been taken ill, had returned here in the meantime. When no one answered, that would tell them, surely, that something was wrong. Wouldn't they come back now to find out what had happened to him?

But why should they think he was here in the house if he didn't answer the phone? How could they dream he was in the basement the whole time? They'd hang around outside the shop some more waiting for him, until as time went on, and Fran became real worried, maybe they'd go to the police. (But that would be hours from now, what good would it do?) They'd look everywhere but here for him. When a man is reported missing the last place they'd look for him would be in his own home.

It stopped ringing finally, and its last vibration seemed to hang tenuously on the lifeless air long after it had ceased, humming outward in a spreading circle like a pebble dropped into a stagnant pool. *Mmmmmmmmm*, until it was gone, and silence came rolling back in its wake.

She would be outside the pay-booth or wherever it was she had called from, by this time. Rejoining her brother, where he had waited. Reporting, "He's not out at the house either." Adding the mild, still unworried comment, "Isn't that strange? Where on earth can he have gone?" Then they'd go back and wait outside the locked shop, at ease, secure, unendangered. She'd tap her foot occasionally in slight impatience, look up and down the street while they chatted.

And now *they* would be two of those casuals who would stop short and say to one another at three o'clock: "What was that?" And Fran might add, "It sounded as though it came from out our way." That would be the sum-total of their comment on his passing.

Tick, tock, tick, tock, tick, tock. Nine minutes to three. Oh, what a lovely number was nine. Let it be nine forever, not eight or seven, nine for all eternity. Make time stand still, that he might breathe though all the world around him stagnated, rotted away. But no, it was already eight. The hand had bridged the white gap between the two black notches. Oh, what a precious number was eight, so rounded, so symmetrical. Let it be eight forever—

A woman's voice called out in sharp reprimand, somewhere outside in the open: "Be careful what you're doing, Bobby, you'll break a window!" She was some distance away, but the ringing dictatorial tones carried clearly.

Stapp saw the blurred shape of a ball strike the basement-transom, he was looking up at it, for her voice had come in to him through there. It must have been just a tennis-ball, but for an instant it was outlined black against the soiled pane, like a small cannonball; it seemed to hang there suspended, to adhere to the glass, then it dropped back to the ground. If it had been ordinary glass it might have broken it, but the wire-mesh had prevented that.

The child came close up against the transom to get its ball back. It was such a small child that Stapp could see its entire body within the height of the pane, only the head was cut off. It bent over to pick up the ball, and then its head came into range too. It had short golden ringlets all over it. Its profile was turned toward him, looking down at the ball. It was the first human face he'd seen since he'd been left where he was. It looked like an angel. But an inattentive, unconcerned angel.

It saw something else while it was still bent forward close to the ground, a stone or something that attracted it, and picked that up too and looked at it, still crouched over, then finally threw it recklessly away over its shoulder, whatever it was.

The woman's voice was nearer at hand now, she must be strolling along the sidewalk directly in front of the house. "Bobby, stop throwing things like that, you'll hit somebody!"

If it would only turn its head over this way, it could look right in, it could see him. The glass wasn't too smeary for that. He started to weave his head violently from side to side, hoping the flurry of motion would attract it, catch its eye. It may have, or its own natural curiosity may have prompted it to look in without that. Suddenly it had turned its head and was looking directly in through the transom. Blankly at first, he could tell by the vacant expression of its eyes.

Faster and faster he swiveled his head. It raised the heel of one chubby, fumbling hand and scoured a little clear spot to squint through. Now it could see him, now surely! It still didn't for a second. It must be much darker in here than outside, and the light was behind it.

The woman's voice came in sharp reproof: "Bobby, what are you doing there?!"

And then suddenly it saw him. The pupils of its eyes shifted over a little, came to rest directly on him. Interest replaced blankness. Nothing is strange to children—not a man tied up in a cellar any more than anything else—yet everything is. Everything creates wonder, calls for comment, demands explanation. Wouldn't it say anything to her? Couldn't it talk? It must be old enough to; she, its mother, was talking to it incessantly. "Bobby, come away from there!"

"Mommy, look!" it said gleefully.

Stapp couldn't see it clearly any more, he was shaking his head so fast. He was dizzy, like you are when you've just gotten off a carousel; the transom and the child it framed kept swinging about him in a half-circle, first too far over on one side, then too far over on the other.

But wouldn't it understand, wouldn't it understand that weaving of the head meant he wanted to be free? Even if ropes about the wrists and ankles had no meaning to it, if it couldn't

tell what a bandage around the mouth was, it must know that when anyone writhed like that they wanted to be let loose. Oh God, if it had only been two years older, three at the most! A child of eight, these days, would have understood and given warning.

"Bobby, are you coming? I'm waiting!"

If he could only hold its attention, keep it rooted there long enough in disobedience to her, surely she'd come over and get it, see him herself as she irritably sought to ascertain the reason for its fascination.

He rolled his eyes at it in desperate comicality, winked them, blinked them, crossed them. An elfin grin peered out on its face at this last; already it found humor in a physical defect, or the assumption of one, young as it was.

An adult hand suddenly darted downward from the upper right-hand corner of the transom, caught its wrist, bore its arm upward out of sight. "Mommy, look!" it said again, and pointed with its other hand. "Funny man, tied up."

The adult voice, reasonable, logical, dispassionate—inattentive to a child's fibs and fancies—answered: "Why that wouldn't look nice, Mommy can't peep into other people's houses like you can."

The child was tugged erect at the end of its arm, its head disappeared above the transom. Its body was pivoted around, away from him; he could see the hollows at the back of its knees for an instant longer, then its outline on the glass blurred in withdrawal, it was gone. Only the little clear spot it had scoured remained to mock him in his crucifixion.

The will to live is an unconquerable thing. He was more dead than alive by now, yet presently he started to crawl back again out of the depths of his despair, a slower longer crawl each time, like that of some indefatigable insect buried repeatedly in sand, that each time manages to burrow its way out.

He rolled his head away from the window back toward the clock finally. He hadn't been able to spare a look at it during the whole time the child was in sight. And now to his horror it stood at three to three. There was a fresh, a final blotting-out of the burrowing insect that was his hopes, as if by a cruel idler lounging on a beach.

He couldn't *feel* any more, terror or hope or anything else. A sort of numbness had set in, with a core of gleaming awareness remaining that was his mind. *That* would be all that the detonation would be able to blot out by the time it came. It was like having a tooth extracted with the aid of novocaine. There remained of him now only this single pulsing nerve of premonition; all the tissue around it was frozen. So protracted foreknowledge of death was in itself its own anaesthetic.

Now it would be too late even to attempt to free him first, before stopping the thing. Just time enough, if someone came down those stairs this very minute, sharp-edged knife with which to sever his bonds already in hand, for him to throw himself over toward it, reverse it. And now—now it was too late even for that, too late for anything but to die.

He was making animal-noises deep in his throat as the minute hand slowly blended with the notch of twelve. Guttural sounds like a dog worrying a bone, though the gag prevented their emerging in full volume. He puckered the flesh around his eyes apprehensively, creased them into slits—as though the closing of his eyes could ward off, lessen, the terrific force of what was to come! Something deep within him, what it was he had no leisure nor skill to recognize, seemed to retreat down long dim corridors away from the doom that impeded. He

hadn't known he had those convenient corridors of evasion in him, with their protective turns and angles by which to put distance between himself and menace. Oh clever architect of the Mind, oh merciful blueprints that made such emergency exits available. Toward them this something, that was he and yet not he, rushed; toward sanctuary, security, toward waiting brightness, sunshine, laughter.

The hand on the dial stayed there, upright, perpendicular, a perfect right-angle to its corollary, while the swift seconds that were all there were left of existence ticked by and were gone. It wasn't so straight now any more, but he didn't know it, he was in a state of death already. White reappeared between it and the twelve-notch, behind it now. It was one minute after three. He was shaking all over from head to foot—not with fear, with laughter.

IT BROKE into sound as they plucked the dampened, bloodied gag out, as though they were drawing the laughter out after it, by suction or osmosis.

"No, don't take those ropes off him yet!" the man in the white coat warned the policeman sharply. "Wait'll they get here with the straitjacket first, or you'll have your hands full."

Fran said through her tears, cupping her hands to her ears, "Can't you stop him from laughing like that? I can't stand it. Why does he keep laughing like that?"

"He's out of his mind, lady," explained the intern patiently.

The clock said five past seven. "What's in this box?" the cop asked, kicking at it idly with his foot. It shifted lightly along the wall a little, and took the clock with it

"Nothing," Stapp's wife answered, through her sobs and above his incessant laughter.

"Just an empty box. It used to have some kind of fertilizer in it, but I took it out and used it on the flowers I—I've been trying to raise out in back of the house."

I Wanted To Be Bisexual But My Father Wouldn't Let Me

David Bateman

"I've got a brand new pair of roller skates"¹

This is a story of art without markets, drama without a script, narrative without progress. The queer art of failure turns on the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable. It quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being.

To live is to fail, to bungle, to disappoint, and ultimately to die; rather than searching for ways around death and disappointment, the queer art of failure involves the acceptance of the finite, the embrace of the absurd, the silly, and the hopelessly goofy. Rather than resisting endings and limits, let us instead revel in and cleave to all of our own fantastic failures.

J. Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Duke University Press, 2011)

After these deceptively dour yet empowering/transformational quotes from *The Queer Art of Failure*, I feel the need to take part in a kind of performative cheerfulness. I saw Melanie perform last summer at Hugh's Room in Toronto. She was my childhood hero. With her lyrical words and music, marked by frequently playful and poetic liberationist missives, she sang her way into my queer heart. I would sing along in a faint falsetto and my brother would simultaneously marvel and cringe at the sight and sound of his fey younger brother's talent for performative effeminate behaviour.

Seeing her live decades later was like going back to a time in my life when my queerness had no name, no definition—not one that I had any access to in a homophobic culture in a small southern Ontario town in the 1960s. During the same time period—suddenly last summer—as I watched Melanie sing many of the songs that transfixed and transformed me, a friend introduced me to a recent text on transgender theory and politics. One section stood out as a very indirect and playful association with one of my early performance pieces where I performed the entire text on roller skates, wearing a dress that was made from a patio umbrella:

WYETH

I think the art institution is like the Blob: it can devour you, and then you become a part of it. But then what do you do? How are you beholden to it? it is also a conduit; it is a donut; it is a hoop spinning—they want you to jump through it, in roller skates...²

In my 1992 performance, *I Wanted To Be Bisexual But My Father Wouldn't Let Me*, when I was 36 years old, I bemoaned (on roller skates) my lack of a "fixed" sexual and gender identity in

a playful way, rife with political and cultural association and marked by inquisitive sentiments about identity, and topped off with an odd, errant, racialized metaphor. The text of this piece, included here, always kind of bothered me over the years that followed. It became a text that never quite took me to the fixed point I was vaguely alluding to in the performance—bisexuality. Referencing an historically conflicted sexual identity—bisexuality (thanks to Kinsey and other sex “scientists,” among others)—in the title and the text, positioned that identity within a moveable definitional mode. In a sense, bisexuality, through no fault of its own perhaps, has become a cursed category, surrounded by suspicious onlookers eager to share their distrust of what they consider a confused identificatory position. Or worse, offering their opinions regarding my obvious effeminate physicality and how it just doesn’t quite match their notion of what it means to be “able” to have sex with the opposite sex. Having confronted these opinions over the years has contributed to a somewhat jaded response. I often shut down in the face of these attitudes after trying to explain my sexuality and the ways in which it playfully and seriously intersects with a mixed bag of desire and gender play.

So now, here I am, at 62 years old, revisiting that 27 years old script, and still wondering what category I might roller skate into. On arts council grant applications, I often check the gender non-binary box, but am never sure whether I have chosen the right category, or whether the arts councils have looked carefully enough at their gestures toward sex/gender identities.

As part of my Performance Club (and this publication), which will culminate in the performance of a recent piece titled *Art Immuno Deficiency Syndrome*³ where I examine AIDS identity within the glorious confines of an iconic arts institution—the Art Institute of Chicago (an art “Blob”⁴), I am also beginning to complete a new performance piece inspired by a colleague’s recent remark that bisexuality struck them as a kind of outdated term, like macrame. Thus, the title of a new work in progress—*Death, Sex, & Macrame*.

As I approach those final stages of a queer performative life that Halberstam indirectly refers to in the opening epigraph to this introduction, I go back to Melanie and roller skates and the ways in which performance can roll into place in a malleable, uncertain, unfixed position, like gender and sexuality, from the perspective of a six decades old roller skater (myself) who is still searching through and for his gender/sex identity, all the time knowing that it may very well exist as fractious, undefinable—a kind of “umbrella” for my experience as a performance artist over the past three decades. Decades where I have gradually embraced that “expanded umbrella of transgender. . . without making [fixed] identitarian claims.”⁵ Claims I simultaneously sought and cast off through “an expanded field of the visual that doesn’t simply generate an alternative canon; it offers a new methodological apparatus, one that allows us to understand gender as a category that is formed through multiple fields and aesthetic strategies.”⁶

ENDNOTES

1 “Brand New Key.” Melanie, 1971.

2 “Representation and Its Limits.” *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility*, by Reina Gossett et al., The MIT Press, 2017, p. 198.

3 *Art Immuno Deficiency Syndrome*, subtitle: *Does this Giacometti Make Me Look Fat?*, 2014.

4 “Representation and Its Limits.” *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility*, by Reina Gossett et al., The MIT Press, 2017, p. 198.

5 “Canonical Undoings.” *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility*, by Reina Gossett et al., The MIT Press, 2017, p. 361.

6 Ibid.

I WANTED TO BE BISEXUAL BUT MY FATHER WOULDN’T LET ME

written by David Bateman

(performed wearing roller skates and a dress fashioned from a patio umbrella emblazoned with the “Martini” brand logo, found in the garbage outside a tapas restaurant on Carlton Street.)

I am so moved by my own life

When I was born I somehow knew what was in store and I wanted out

At a very tender age my father made me the keeper of all his deepest secrets
his confidante, a therapist, for all his marital woes

I was six years old for Christ’s sake

So it was not surprising, in my early teens when friends would come to me,
magnetized by this unwilling, yet well-established therapist in me, and rail
on about how repressed they had been and how ready they were to come
out of the closet

At first I was flattered

I half-expected I would be their premiere lover, of course, and this was the
reason they were coming out—to me

but I was wrong

they wanted advice, encouragement, helpful hints and the first place they
wanted to come—out—was in one of my attractive friend’s mouths,
“Can I have his phone number?”

I would look them straight in the eye, when they asked when they laid their
stories on me, and I would soothe them, in the throes of their inaugural
coming out speech

I would soothe them by saying, by screaming from the rooftops,
“No, don’t come out!!! It’s horrible out here!”

And it is

It’s a horrible place to live, and an even more horrible place to visit

And I have lived

And I have visited
a lot of perfectly horrible places

Toronto is not one of those places

I love it here
It knows how to be horrible and how to stay horrible
It is so popular nowadays to say just how horrible Toronto is
I hear it in plays and in poems
on the streets and in buses
and I love it
It's high time
A renaissance for the truly horrible

I never believed, as a child that I would one day have the good fortune to be
able to live and work in a city where one can see *The Phantom of the Opera*
any time they feel like it

It is so restorative to know that you live in a city that offers entertainment
so good that the price of a single ticket could feed a family of five for a week
to ten days

I have named my cat "Pantages" in honour of that beautifully restored
theatre where you can see *The Phantom of the Opera* any time you feel like it

A recent partner once told me that he thought that "Pantages" sounded like
"contagious"

I told him that if he thought that then he must be saying it wrong and I
left him

I am now looking for another partner one who loves cats, and *Les Misérables*
and knows both scores by heart

one who sides with Merteuil, not Valmont, in those beautiful love quarrels
from *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*

Valmont says to Merteuil, his one true love, proven by the fact that they
always quarrel,
"I often wonder how you managed to invent yourself."

Merteuil replies,
"I had no choice, did I? I'm a woman. Women are obliged to be far more
skillful than men. You hold every ace in the pack. You can ruin us

with... a few well-chosen words... So of course I had to invent myself...
Because I always knew I was born to dominate your sex and to avenge
my own."

Isn't that lovely? I often use that speech to get rid of people at breakfast

Bored by their pretence, and my own, I have been known to recite entire
passages from *The Boys in The Band*. For example,

"You are a sad and pathetic man. You're a homosexual and you don't
want to be one. But there is nothing you can do to change it. You may
very well one day be able to know a heterosexual life, if you want it
desperately enough, if you pursue it with the fervour with which you
annihilate. But you will always be homosexual, always, until the day
you die."

After that passage nine times out of ten they leave. If that doesn't work I do
the entire murder sequence from *Being at Home with Claude*,

"He was smiling... Lying with his arms spread wide open... he was
holding on to me... And he died of pleasure... Without seeing his life
going to ratshit."

Isn't that nice?

Now don't get me wrong
I am not homo-phobic
I am homo-terrified
I am homo-sapien terrified
I am afraid of everything and everyone

I was happy once, and unafraid.

I had a lover, a perfect lover
French-Canadian
President of the Gilbert and Sullivan society
we met in New York at the airport
on the way to a cross-cultural exchange week in Haiti—the year AIDS
emigrated in the suitcases of a few gay men!?

Together, my lover and I, we owned three copies of the film *Making Love*
on truly wild occasions we would rent televisions
and watch all three prints at the same time

We would freeze frame that fabulous five second kiss between Harry
Hamblin and Michael Ontkean

don't tell me they didn't enjoy it!!!
I always felt so sorry for Kate Jackson at the end

My lover's hair was red and his skin was pink
Even from a distance one could see that his lips were chiselled, faceted, like
those large, illustrated diamonds in jewellery advertisements

His cock was not so different from his lips

It protruded, of course, slightly, perhaps two inches if the weather was good

on the coldest day in winter, without the protection of thermal underwear
it became almost vaginal, a very tiny love canal

during those times one might have imagined his testicles as round floppy
ears hanging slightly inward along the edges of a small, flat, roundish face,
a one-eyed baby elephant of sorts

when it could be seen
this flattish, knobbish, roundish, pseudo-appendage was surprisingly
well-formed exquisite in fact

this beautiful little thing, this inverted cock, this baby panda's face, this
pubic teddy, as they say, this button on a fur coat

this inescapably unmarketable dildo

When I had it in my mouth
or should I say
in that small space between my lips and my teeth it would, inevitably,
become a struggle to keep a condom from wriggling free some flaccid
length of latex slithering along my gums

sucking his cock, needless to say, also meant, sucking his stomach

I rationalized the entire experience each time I went down on him

three times a day on average

by telling myself that it was a small beautiful doorknob, like the antique
brass ones on grandmother's house that held ice, in winter, within
beautifully designed crevasses that attracted my tongue

a child's tongue sticks to an icy doorknob and bleeds when it is removed
too quickly

an adult's tongue, with proper precautions, and a certain degree of familiarity
—say ten minutes tops—can lovingly and longingly embrace a miniature
penis, and make it something wonderful something to call their own

sitting on it was another matter entirely

splendid of course, if not a little detached because the end was so well-
formed, tailored, quite fat, and close to the body

It created, what I fondly refer to as, the G.I. Joe effect

Anyone who has ever rolled a condom over Joe's head—circa late seventies
once all the plastic heads had been replaced by the fuzzy hair-like ones and
inserted him, to the neck, into their anus—they will know precisely what is
meant by “the G.I. Joe effect”

Bear with me those of you who have spent the better part of your lives
sitting on cocks the size of barstools

Because G.I. Joe's neck, like the shaft of my former lover's penis, is so close
to the body, and narrower than the head, the cock, once in, stays put

The angle at which said penile object must enter the sphincter, however,
can, at first, be a disquieting, almost always upright encounter

standing in fact, to insert said small knob into my hole
remains the only position we ever managed to perfect

thus, the idea of kissing while getting it up the ass became a physical
impossibility

holistic sex was a luxury for my lover and I, my lover and me

smallness, to this degree, enables one to go down on the penis and both
balls all at once, an astonishing sensation, the three graces indeed

since having known him I have cultivated a tremendous fondness for eating
three grapes, cherries, almonds, cashews, and holding them in my mouth
for minutes on end

Granted, I have fetishized beyond reason but what better use for fetishism
than the pursuit of a little pink god that the rest of the world would call
quite simply—dickless

In a snug swimsuit, his cock, with balls, a still life of sorts, resembled three rather large fat knuckles

I would kiss his hips and hold his little Easter basket—Good Friday—fondly and firmly
always trying to re-assure, never diminish

Someone once called it a large fat cyst—we never invited him to dinner again.

A delightfully nasty sense of humour is one thing—large fat cysts are another matter entirely.

We were considered quite elitist at times—crude, aloof, and snobbish, in our love for one another, but we had no choice

Love enveloped us like a romantic novel

On cold winter days, by the fire, we would imagine ourselves hermaphroditic literary inventions, sexual Siamese twins, fucking like minks

We envisioned the Brontes' as vulvas

George Eliot became our mutual cervix

Virginia Woolf a gloomy—if not always energetic—clitoris
Thomas Hardy my nuts
and D.H. Lawrence, of course, became a well-intentioned always overbearing cock

We were together at the helm and in complete control of our silly little ships

Co-incidentally enough, my cock was nearly identical to my lovers that is what brought us together, but assuredly, not what kept us there
I loved him. We loved each other.
Now he's gone. To the big gay ghetto in the sky.

I'm growing stronger. Profound sadness—loss—can be nurturing.
Nowadays it has to be.

I, in fact, feel profound sadness, loss, whenever I think of all the tragedy all kinds of families have known, but please tell me, if you can, what is it about the Kennedy family anyway?

Every generation or so a story is leaked, a story so big, it's like a big hole, with water rushing in, not like a leak at all, like a car, with water rushing through, and if it's not Mary Jo Kopechne in the car, then it's Marilyn Monroe, or the troubled alcoholic Joan, or the stalwart Ethel, or the beautiful, silent and courageous Jackie O

or the unknown woman and her allies trying to make America see that indeed something did happen on the boathouse lawn

Edward Kennedy Smith, where are you?
I would like to stretch my asshole over the gaping wound you call your brain

Ted Kennedy, where are you?
I would like to go down on you, with a Cuisinart in my mouth
But what's all the fuss about anyway?
Can we expect more from a family that celebrates the union of Maria Shriver and Conan the Barbarian?

If Sylvester Stallone married Karen Finley, or Angela Davis, or an AIDS victim, or if he went out on a date with Arnold Schwarzenegger, there might be something to celebrate

but maybe not

if Madonna was a little poorer and a little less attractive and a little less like Marilyn, another dead Madonna

then there might be something to celebrate

but maybe not

If Warren Beatty had ever gone out on a date with Jack Nicholson without Angelica Huston and Annette Bening tagging along (Annette and Angelica could go to The Rose Café—a lesbian bar—on a Sunday night, and if they were even let in)

then there might be something to celebrate

but maybe not

The Kennedy's?
what's all the fuss about anyway?
Can we expect more from a family that refuse to come down from those great white towers on the Atlantic to look carefully and gradually at what

happened on the boathouse lawn, or the white house lawn, or all the lawns
that aren't in Harlem,
or in closed down hospital wards
or in homes for pregnant teens

oh, there might be a small over-mortgaged lawn
at the rape crisis centre
in a small Ontario town
where they can't get a wheelchair ramp because the great white
liberal arts university
with all the administrators
who have keys
to every fucking door
in the whole great white world
and none of them work
and none of them get there on time
when the lock breaks
on the old dingy little counselling room
and the soon to be radical fairy
fifteen if a day
is weeping and bleeding in the hall
because he, or she, or some TV movie of the week unacceptable gender
behaviour was beaten on the way to Beckers

What can you expect?

When they won't give you a space, or a lease, and the wheelchair ramp
bureaucracy won't give you a wheelchair ramp unless you have a lease

Besides, people in wheelchairs don't get raped, do they!? What's all the fuss
about anyway?

A family that can't mourn properly the loss of their sons
the sons of their country
the daughters

who organize around a family so out of touch with reality
that they construct this fairy tale and they call America Camelot

Go to any country's history and literature if you can't find enough
oppression in your own—go, if your own library is so barren, and you can't
get to the oppressive bookstore, and you'll see the Kennedy's, and the
Kings, and the Queens, and the Prime Ministers being called Lancelot,
meeting dead women, drifting in boats, with garlands, not Judy,

surrounding them, women who lived, half in shadow, in towers, in
reflection, afraid of what they'd see beyond the mirror

And when John, Ted, Bobby, finally view the body what do they say?

I heard nothing on the boathouse lawn, I heard nothing—and Lancelot echoes,
“Poor sad thing, she has such a lovely face. God in his mercy, lend her
grace. The Lady of Shallot.”

and Julie Andrews and Robert Goulet, every generation or so, by another
star or starlet's name, will inaugurate some beer-invested theatre in
Toronto, or elsewhere, with Camelot and we will all sing along

and feel sorry for each other and Guinevere
and Liz Taylor
and Michael Jackson

and Madonna
and Warren Beatty and Annette Bening and Angelica Huston and Marilyn
and ourselves

over and over and over again

because we have to, we just have to!!!

we can't feel sorry for ourselves without feeling sorry for each other can we?

and when we finally see what happened on the boathouse lawn, what has
happened on the white house lawn, what happens inside and out, of that
white man Monet's

lovely impressionistic Houses of Parliament on the Thames, or in Versailles
(where women didn't paint, with Moliere's daughter being raped by
someone's culture)

what happens in Ottawa?

I am walking into that boathouse
looking for the key to the speedboat to leave but I find that the boathouse
has been turned into a small elegant condo and the lake is gone
dried up in Russia

The entire Russian sports federation fell apart!

I feel so sad

What will all those athletes do? They can stay at my house!

the seas are no longer places to drown in
we drown in the minds and the cars of politicians

they are arid, concave land masses
dried up, in Russia
and we are caught
on the boathouse lawn

You see, I never wanted to be a man, or a woman, because

I love borders
crossing them, ignoring them
borders between countries
borders between sexualities
you know that space
just beyond the toll booth
that space James Caan never gets to
in the middle of *The Godfather, Part One*

he gets gunned down instead
filled full of little bullets
a dozen men, at least
stop him from making it
to that small plot of land
between the toll booth and another country

I thought that for a long time, identified with it
until one day I realized Sonny was just going across the state line
so I had to invent a whole new metaphor
but you catch my drift

I love borders, crossing them, and staying for a while
in that small radical plot of land where anything goes

between sexualities, between countries, where there are a dozen men or
more trying to stop you, trying to gun you down with all their little questions
before they let you into that small territory between two countries, two
sexualities

I ask you, why?
what are they afraid of?
that you'll stay there, undecided forever

never able to be in one country
for any substantial period of time
without making the kind of trouble
they would have preferred to have happened in the country you came from
I ask you, why?

Why decide?

Be both.

No, I never wanted to be a man, not in the strictest sense of the word, not
like the Kennedy's

perhaps my outfit tipped you off?

No, I never wanted to be a man

I wanted to be bi-sexual
but my father wouldn't let me

Our fathers wouldn't let me
we construct these distinct separations, these borders
and we just aren't allowed to cross them

and god forbid we ever try to access that small radical plot of land between

Yes, I wanted to be bi-sexual but my father wouldn't let me

and when he finally entertained the notion that I was a homosexual
who wanted to be a bi-sexual
he got really confused

and that always lead to severe bouts of anger and he'd scream at me,
"Hey, why would a fruit like you want to fuck women anyway?"

One day, when I was old enough to fight back, I said,
"Hey, I don't fuck women because I like them too much?"

In this terrible secretive end of the century world
where you won't let me be anything I want to be, I don't fuck women
because I like them too much and with men, well, I just always think of you
dad, and it's terrible, and it's sad and it's unfair, but it makes it a lot easier,
and I wish I could stop, I wish you could let me

I just can't enter that war zone where too many women are trapped because
I have been there too long with men

I wish I could love people properly

I wish I could fuck people properly

I wish I could learn to love people properly I wish I could learn to fuck
men and women
properly

My father never seemed to understand a word of those tirades so I'd go to my
doctor, my analyst, and he never understood either, but he looked so great

and that always helps for a few minutes

he looked like the young Lloyd Bridges of *Sea Hunt* fame, who, when he
sucked my cock, which he didn't, professionalism, you know

I would imagine it, his cock, as this snorkel
this elaborate life support system
of which I was at the helm
and could say, quite confidently,
"I, once willowy white china flesh and bone now dwindle to this lightly
fleshly pinkly sea-like creature."

well, no wonder!
I am the sole life support system
to the young Lloyd Bridges
of *Sea Hunt* fame
father to the beautiful Jeff
and the fleshy Beau
or is it the other way around?
none of whom ever sucked my cock or cured my love sickness
but they were so lovely to look at and that always helps
for a few minutes

So, I keep looking for a man that I like
and I keep looking for speeches to scare off men that I don't like
and I keep hoping that I'll find someone
with a tiny perfect cock
someone to replace the bitterness and sarcasm that I willingly took on
instead of innocence
a long time ago

I want someone's love on my back
in my mouth I want it to change the texture, the thickness
of my skin
the way I walk
the wave of my hair
the natural beckoning quality (come back, come back!)

of my receding hairline

please, someone, fashion me this cornucopic contradiction, un-word like,
this profound cultural innuendo this bisexual experience

fashion me
you flaming
fledgling
heterocentric faggots
I want to lose my politics in those ghost-like arms

in that willowy embrace that I have seen and seen and seen

like Michael said to Harold in *The Boys In The Band*,
"It's not always like it happens in plays, not all faggots bump
themselves off at the end of the story."

I haven't and I probably won't—if I don't get too bored

yes, I wanted to be bi-sexual but my father wouldn't let me
so instead I'm a radical, lesbian, feminist, fag, dyke, performance artist
who sticks G.I. Joe up his ass for no good reason at all, except that I'm pissed
off, and it feels good

(performer lifts skirt to reveal G.I. Joe doll protruding from his backside, through red tights)

It doesn't hurt, really, you should have been at the rehearsals

Yeah, I'm pissed off—at the Kennedy's and my father

In 1956, the year of my birth, Allen Ginsberg shouted,
"America, I have given you everything, and now I am nothing. When
will we stop the war against the mind. Go fuck yourself with your
atomic bomb."

and I wish that Rosamonde, at the end of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, was one
hundred per cent wrong when she says,

“Do you still think men love the way we do? No. Men enjoy the happiness they feel; we can enjoy only the happiness we give. They are not capable of devoting themselves exclusively to one person. So to hope to be made happy by love is a certain cause of grief.”

when some men, not all men, love
they're at a loss because they've mostly been taught how to hate
my father came to me as a child
we were both children
and he catapulted me
on country roads, in used cars
trunk littered with empty gin bottles
into the role of therapist

as an adult I went to him
not long before he died
he had given his secrets to me
but he had no capacity
to accept mine
he was empty

I had given everything, encouragement, advice
helpful hints, I felt like nothing

all he could give me
was his childish, unguarded, precious, inarticulate love

he tried to love but he had been taught how to hate

if we could just learn how not to hate ourselves so much.

If we could just learn how not to hate ourselves so very very much.

I think we're learning. Thank you.

(music plays: Bridge Over the River Kwai; as performer roller skates offstage; blackout.)

PRODUCTION HISTORY

1992: *Queerculture*, Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, Toronto, costume design by Martha Cockshutt
with David Bateman

1993: *An Evening of Performance*, Little Sisters Bookstore benefit, Firehall Theatre, Vancouver Canada

1993: Gallery 101, Ottawa, Curated by Laura Cyr

1994: City Stage, Peterborough

1995: Zeitgeist Theatre Experiments, New Orleans

