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Quarantine

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QUARANTINE

by

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ABSTRACT

Quarantine is a collection of poems concerned primarily with pre-Stonewall and early AIDS histories of LGBT people.

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each time I ask you to see

us on 53rd holding
hands past twilight having just
left the premiere and each brown
stone each dark window each fire
escape half risen or half
draped in time to *Clair de Lune*
see us singing the streets
to sleep you in your tenor
me to myself until when
you could no longer sing we
tried always to hold hands at
night because then it was death
to love a man in the light
yet there on 53rd there
beneath Claude's crepuscular
love song two blocks from the end
tell me you remember that
you see us two sepia
sissies in pristine peacoats
one navy one gray a pair
a counterpoint tone poem
so easily thrown into
other moods and other lives

Gnossienne No. 4

Like two somnambulists
—Thomas James

In the year since
I last saw you
your frame shrank
six or more inches
around the waist
a wasting
I need time
& a thousand
miles to notice
& now that I
am bathing you
like several
years ago
nothing changed
but numbers
& what's a few
lesions between
old friends
when I know
your sponge
& my hands
are the first touch
gone ungloved
this whole year
my legs laced
over your legs
against the sides
of the tub
our old ritual

the gentle sweep
of my arm a sweet arc
of eighth
notes floating
then falling
from the record
in the bedroom
yes I feel this
motion hides
your heaves
mark a moment
the scent
of your soap
its top notes
chamomile coconut
its mid notes
hard to say
its base notes
the virus

Raising Lazarus

When you fell like Christ your arms stretched open
Your feet frozen and folded were just
As always when you were sleeping in fear
The nurses' nearly dropped your legs you were
That moment suspended between dying
And life though travelling the other way
From the miracle of Gospel fiction
Rushing from the hall the vigil queens helped
Heave you back into bed to die yet not
Quite lifeless collapsing capillaries
Dripping from your arms again the morning
Before you had planned your lover's wake
Who too died down the hall here on Twelve Oaks'
Seventh floor faggot quarantine those poor
Invisible brothers pricked statistics
Whose resurrected bodies prefigured
The Capitol Mall littered with quilted
Catacombs of mixed media memory
Tombs of plastic intubations threadbare
Prayers and clipped goodbyes stammered as one
Name is dragged out and another in

4/12/1954 – 10/2/1986

Here is where we
read about your
hometown and
the upbringing that
uprooted you and
brought you to us.
You're survived by
an estranged family
who strangely claims you in death,
as if your story is so easily rewritten
without your campy critiques.
Their version won't say it for fear
of Judgment, and couldn't name it
even if they'd been here.

A shame cremation was all
your parents agreed to, once they
saw your body. Even now in death
you can't show your face back home.
Services will be held privately
for family. In lieu of flowers,
the family has asked for our silence.

Gnossienne No. 6

(1937 – 10/11/1979)

was it Paris or Prague where we
bought our souvenir charger
on tour was it river or grand
it was river I think & the river
was grand its beautiful elbow
an unlost ambling flâneur
the Seine in Paris or the Vlatva
in Prague where we purchased
our charger its garish shield
lions & crosses in glitzing
silver remember our guests
always gawking *Dear God*
they'd prate over our plate
tell us what port supplied
your charming charger they'd
coo over hors d'oeuvres yes
our preludes to Metropolitan
nights hosting gossipy gays
our chorus prattling about
the solo coloratura's tenor
was it a man or her manner
they meant I forget but yes
yes her sonorous tenor
how lovely she in the green
room at the Met when we
first locked cufflinks dear
this chemo is eating our
souvenir tour though I still
recall our first Wagnerian night
beside an operatic explosion

our first foibled how-dos
when our cufflinks helloed
fell in love & eloped
there in the floral explosion
our searching & searching
I remember with operatic
clarity yes strelizia reginae
snapdragons variegated gerbera
daisies our cufflinks found
harbored among boat orchids
waiting to carry us from home

Half Cadence

Ask to hear the story again the one
You know already how the composer
When he passed at last left only sketches

Of the third act how the hired pen who
Completed the opera overwrote it
At first with notes from his own oeuvre how

Toscanini still cut the final score
Down three further minutes and yes I know
You ask for the story because only

Its sound can forestall my melancholy
My reluctant grasp of what is coming
The operatic forgetting of time

No longer mine now the story is yours
Administer its morphine dream
To the coming queens who like me

You numinously usher
To their long-gone loves

ω

When the last legend I ever loved
Knew he was going blind

He said he'd give me his right eye
So at least that little bit of him

Would live to find a cure
And I told him it would

Be an immense help if he could
Give me his left as well

From the hospital morgue
I collect his nameless eyes

With other eyes I look at his
And tell the tale again

ω

She enters your ICU room as though
A starlet stepping down through and into
Other dimensions she tells you that there

Could be lesions on your optic nerves and
That's why your field of vision is blurring
Like an old Hollywood dissolve lean in

She says listen to this composer's
History you feel it's mostly true though
Intercut with details of an opera

Critic she once knew but what you hear is
Her operatic resolve your ruined
Vision she tells you could be an unknown

Condition you wonder how many other
Queens get this kind of celebrity care.

Mixtape

8/16/58 – ?

I wanted you to have my Walkman. You always loved portable tech, said it was vintage already in 87, cool flat blue to match your favorite Calvins. You said the sound was *just like heaven*. I worried you'd burn *la Isla Bonita* into the tape heads, hair-trigger finger stuck on reverse, humming endless harmony lines. Perhaps it was best that you danced through every *easy lover's* wake, spinning in quixotic contrapposto, falling bone-weary on the loveseat, at last a mellowed Maxell model, photo-ready. When I left in 1990, you were in the throes of your *suicide blonde* summer.

I listen for your honeyed hum ghosting old cassette reels. I fear your voice was long ago launched in *99 luftballoons*. Do you lounge still in your stone wash Calvins on the couch, playing air piano and rewinding *blasphemous rumors* that murmur the virus is manageable? Tell me you survived the century.

Martha & Mary

It was all the dying
that kept us together until

we had to bear it separately
Lots of couples we knew

especially lesbians like us
came together because of

then got obliterated by
what we didn't know at the time

was a virus
What we did know at least

all of us who believed
was Bactrim

made effective prophylaxis
kept the purple plaques

at bay and any man with KS
was a time bomb

ω

My partner was about to
rehang the antique mirror

when I said
your brother will never leave this room again

she said I know and neither will
I said don't say it so she stood there holding

the mirror on the table
surveyed that small room

in our brownstone mausoleum
The curtains have remained open since he went

blind and the foundation
he could no longer apply on his own

The vanity where the mirror usually hung
drained of vanity since he began

sleeping all day I wondered how
she and I'd have survived

apart—me loving her through all that
death and she anchored to me for fear of

ω

But after her brother died
then his twice widowed boyfriend

then the widower's drag mother
then the next then the next then the next

then nearly our whole network of gay family
then she said she could no longer survive

our grief together she said
it's time at last to leave the room

Waikoloa

We was elsewhere in the field when the blast went off just far enough away to roar in our ears about an hour. Had to be the rusted safety ring and rotted pin snapped off of the iron pineapple meant to hold hell at bay. We combed that grass patch the whole afternoon, picked up a thigh bone, short stack of ribs, and other stupid teen pieces, tossed them in a heavy trash sack, thought the day were done till we stumbled on a second left hand, its fingers blown back to the first knuckle. Boys musta been third down at ten when the perfect spiral snap caught the busted lever, pried it clean off with no less than a whispered please. It was when we found the burnt-up half-thumb we knew the goddamn frag grenade had took his arm to the shoulder fore he'd time to finish his forward pass with pro-scout follow-through.

Gnossienne No. 3

*The uniform is the psychic link—the gazing-glass
through which we look into another world.*

—Samuel Steward

After weeks of days spent sifting
thigh-high grass for Japanese
air-to-ground bombs left fallow
in the field, we could have repeated
half a dozen rosaries
if we'd laid those duds
in loops. You feared our last
Lieutenant would explode—
all ghostly bluster—from each ordnance
we lifted. He'd been more than C.O.
to you, and maybe I only lay
beside you to hold his space—
too big for me to fill—still
I was glad you let me try.
When I look at my one shot
of us with those fresh-hauled shells,
I think on the endless parade
of photo set-ups, how the reporter
made us stand up, lay down,
stand again those steel cylinders
of dormant death—the anticipation
in each brushed arm and hand—
the measured braggadocio

captured—breathless. We prayed
that civvy would shutterbug off,
happy with his takes, so we could vanish
together in the tall grass,
go thigh and higher
beneath a late summer grenade shower
of locusts fleeing our blast radius.

QUAR • AN • TINE

VERB

3. cover; live openly but butch it up; refuse to perform faggotry
 - a. You stand afront the class / buttoned down & sleeves $\frac{3}{4}$ cuffed // pre-noon slacks barely rumple a subtle break over insensible shoes / this [you think] is how it must be // for every gay nearly here / a classroom persona / a front just legible enough // no need for you to be a prancing affront //
 - b. Yoshino [you think] wagged an e-ink finger at you / this morning from the Kindle crisp coffee & fresh fruit rush // his words afront your furrowed forehead / admonish you: // *to tone down* [your] *disfavored* identity / is to the cool prof who happens to be gay // as to hybrid seedy tangerine / is to the clementine // & this bargain enacted each morning not because / you've been asked to not because // you're an affront to the university not because // you're still some self-hating gay //
 - c. but because it *feels* good & right to have stable work / *feels* more natural than leather codpieces & glittered jackboots buried two decades back // the marching [the screaming] & the ashing of White House lawns with bone chips / all that advocacy to come to this place of rest // where you no longer feel // how you've always felt: a front [of] / afront [of] // affront

Look Back Again

The lush lunacy of another night
has long wound down at the nightclub, emptied
at 4am, the balcony chairs chained,
clubbers gone to their favorite strangers' beds.

It might have looked like this decades ago
when the club was nothing more than a house
with a rotgut room of queens nattering
in the basement before mirrors plumping

their full lips—a crime out of doors—dragging
cigarettes from preposterous cases.
Shush when the host hears a siren; the lights
get cut fifteen minutes at least. No one

cracks a cutting line or laugh. Then a hand
cups closed the newbie's mouth, soft *honey it's
gonna be okay* whispered, while upstairs
the boys in their starched collars and waistcoats

have stopped holding hands; the mahogany
Victrola shut off for fear the papers
will print ninety more names—names stripped from each
queer loaded into the paddy wagon

with a snarled *don't this honey look damn fine*.
This scene is not the worst we've forgotten,
but must try to remember walking home,
seeing the moon drunk as a hung sailor

on leave, the nightclub—no witness—locked down
until tomorrow, derelict drag queen
propped up on the stoop as if she'd passed out,
a luminous pool spreading beneath her.

Gnossienne No. 5

A good cover has a distinct silhouette.
--J. C. Leyendecker

it's not his walking
cane's casual
incline across
the rail of the symphony
box not the taupe
hemlined vest
not his smartly
knuckled tie
nor his pinstriped
shirt and tawny
suit lost in a sea
of Saturday night
black tuxes
and white dickies
yes my wife
knows by the way
his bare right
hand rests akimbo
against his hip
face upturned
to me chest
open waist
half-turned towards
the exit her glare
legible beneath
the penumbra of
her black and wide-
brim derby
she knows by the way
he always speaks
right through her
eyeing my hands

gloved as I
turn again
to leave her for
my Arrow Collar Man
yes cruel
that it must be
like this husband
gone till intermission

03/15/1956 – 05/23/1983

Only 2 weeks before Your name forgotten
as soon as. No one called
it dementia until. Your
face already thin, skin
stretched taut over your
still chiseled chin. Like
other men you'd grown
a mustache to. Most
men like you were
quarantined so. That
you survived seven
months after your first
hospital stay gave us.

05/26/1948 – 05/23/1983

After years of battling an illness he'd had since childhood. After much struggle, survived by two loving parents, four older brothers, and a nestle of nieces. After several long years on the coast. Although still the same young man who left. After that final fight *Age 19, just before* with his disease—There are things that only God.

09/01/1952 – 05/23/1983

There are boxes of letters I can no longer read, despite knowing each by heart. How you've cleaved half my life. Remember those seven summers ago when we first fought on 53rd? When you told me we'd walked that way before in another life? And after that "bad brunch," had I not left the half-sheet to melt *Age 27, in the prime* in the front seat, we'd never have spent so much time smashing cake behind closed doors... and in front of open ones. Please send me some deliciously scented and sumptuously stamped airmail letter when you arrive.

Induction

Halfway through the bar the insomniac bass
stumbles, a small mirrored shard falls off the spinning
shattered star, your nausea sublimates
in four hot breaths, the stutter-edit soprano
rises from your feet, lifts you up, and hovering above
the crowded club kids, you realize your consciousness
has puddled the whole dancefloor.

Welcome to a queerly easy multiverse,
where slivers of snark like *twinks never turn
me on*, and *I ain't no chocolate queen*, and *girl,
you wearin' butt pads?* all churn
a sick cut-n-scratch groupthink that kills
labels with a little molly—a capful of G—
a bullet of K—a host of anonymous hands
pushing you below his baptismal belt.

But there isn't time to say how holy
you feel right now, in this high
temple of super-studded double-headed dildoes,
and you don't yet know this ecstasy is just
the first few desperate digits of a drunken butt-dial
to forgotten God, who can't hear the foxhole honey-dos
of nelly queers trading slavery for slavery.

This is how we love you, little one—this your recompense
for recreational abusury—your freshman
fifteen pricks pinned, Instagrammed,
and retweeted. Come slurp a half-choked kiss
on cocks you wouldn't slobber when sober.
Offer up your buy-in—your coming out—
with myriad homogenous homos,
and suffer nothing but oblivion.

The Head of John the Baptist

As if you could remember Mr. [Justanother] John,
an anonymous head [baited] behind the bookstore
stall. Yes, John—glorious [and holy]
gaping in the downstairs john—doe-eyed [delirious]
johnny on the spot [check], contagion
[check], head on over see him serving up sublime
head in the head. John the [Rest-Stop] Baptist
—face like a mile marker edging Palestine.
Dear John, pick up another John[’s johnson];
reply with a [prick] pic to the 5:00 shade
on his [Grindr-scripted] torso so toned, so like this Juan
here—[or that Juan over there]—sleeping in his second
doorway [this week], head on the nod in Orpheus’
crotch—carrying a needle [and a foxhole prayer]
—jonesing for a john-song. And here’s the lost
John [or Justthelast], who baptizes [and chokes]
you up against the wall, thrusts synchronous
with hands [cracking your head against the brick]
in the roadside head where you too had
baptized [supernumerous] surplus johns.

Parlor Talk

—I heard tell that Lewis
is where all gays go these days
to be embalmed.

—This crazy cancer all but boarded up
every other mortuary,
and Lewis's list is already long.

—When nurses draw straws
to see which loser has to
suit and zip up beyond all care,

—it's time to call Geo. H. Lewis & Sons.
Every body deserves a welcome
place to rest with kin.

Seven Acts of Mercy

For I was an hungered ...

she was starving
& you not knowing that
she was a she
took her to Chick-Fil-A
that sweltering Saturday
that she has yet to forget
you see the week before her
ad in the Free Press stopped
running & massage gigs
the only jobs she never got
fired from stopped coming
& what she never
told you because
you couldn't & wouldn't
have thought to ask
is that they only paid
well when they came
& had you known or cared
to ask if she liked such work
she would have told you
that it paid the bills
paid for gray market hormones
& when you came
across her that day
you took her
to Chick-Fil-A wearing

board shorts & tucked tee
signs she'd resigned to the fact
this life only loves her
in her most hated form

... *thirsty, and you* ...

through the rafters above
robotic arrays & smoke machines

our delirium superimposes
dreams of a long-forgotten virgin

Mary moon her infant Savior
spoon promise us a night's narcotic

vacation small merciful deliverance
from saline drips from Levaquin lakes

dearheart drown us please
toss some tequila in this jackass

jawbone & pass to no one but us
it's Wednesday & already we've washed

enough shrouds to quilt the Roman catacombs
only in oblivion will all the ghosts

leave us be no nursemaid but a button bleeding
Morpheus' toxic tales we'd gladly die for

a cup of stillness overflowing

I was a stranger, and ...

make for me a home —in your place
a shift: for the changeling weather
the minute you've left. lonesome grown
once was: a month. a mouth. a marker
or more: the thing it was— I begged
some memory of you. that long stole
who in the movie— how moving
whose: momentous morphology

makes of me: a home from your place
the weathered changeling's lonesome. groan
time's tiresome lie: a month's. mouthed mark
less loved —or more. a beggar's eye
remembers. other you: stolen two
how moving. moments' how. And who

Naked, and ye clothed me ...

You think it musta been God
turned that girl out. Girl like that
gotta get forgot by somebody big—
gotta be that rent-boy cum
Player Upstairs—to be left like
rough trade, like roadside trash.

But you see there she be, dress
tore wide, rent from the inside,
as if by magic, tragi-comedy
like Lady Chablis forgot to tuck
her candy, wore out like knockoff
champagne chinchilla, castoff
couture, empire-waisted Gladbag.

Honey, hasta be you—surprised by
her maybe-boy's beaten body—
who decides you ain't gonna go
one more mile, gonna light up
blinkers, pull a freshly cleaned
pink chiffon caftan from the front
seat, lay it over her limbs,
stumbling every second step,
911 on the line, knowing
what's at stake: *Yes'm,. Third block
down. Ain't going nowhere.*

... sick, and ye visited me

dear nameless
shadow you
will not be
the last
over whom
I sentinel
each time
surprised
how living
noise ebbs
the company
I've kept
all that's left
my dials
flick I
cardiograph
the human
vector
its easy
egress
had I more
heart than
the binary
switch that opens
switch closes
still I dream
my digital
ventricles
dissemble
beneath
my machined
immovable
face my
perpetual
report my
bedside penance
this how I
love each
stranger
specter
gone
before
the body
can be

collected
replaced

... in prison, and ye visited me not.

for weeks the reverend || was pinned beneath the a/c unit || in a second
floor window || of the Upstairs Lounge || investigators trying
their level best || to keep from laughing || half-heartedly worked
the incinerated room || to identify the other 31 || bodies
passers-by peering in || never knew he was a holy man || all markers
burned away || collar coat shirt slacks skin || what was left
visible || was his thin gossamer char || his mother's shame retreating
so far back || from his scorched corpse back || from the gaze
of her church friends || from Romans and from Leviticus so far ||
that she could not even || claim what remained

*... the king killed many;
but the bodies were not found ...*

I'd like to tell you I found us all
but you know how it was.
We weren't worthy of body bags,
but their black garbage sacks

were large enough for our fragile frames.
Perhaps we should have placed
markers where our bodies might have lain...
But where would be mercy

in that last miscarriage of justice?
Best would have been to back
dump trucks up against the morgue; then
let them loveless toss our

undesired dead into idling beds
—filled faster each return
to claim the corpses. Better yet
break into bio-waste bins,

burgling bundles of queer bodies...
But none of this could be done
in daylight. We were criminals
hiding in plain silence—

arrested once seen. God forbid
they ever see us claim the dead,
because one of theirs counted
in our number is twice

dead: twice forgotten: already
mourned long before any queer
body is cast from quarantine
to plastic prison.

The Ecstasy of Saint Francis

And years later, watching *Angels in America*, I know your collapse at the end of our last evening walk was worthy of Prior Walter, and I wonder if Kushner had known you, my anonymous saint.

Today I imagine you as you were then, though cloaked, freshly fallen, an exemplary Assisi, ecstatic with Kaposi's stigmata. I imagine me there with you, performing my best seraphic pantomime. The chimeric dark of Central Park. I wonder if Caravaggio would have painted your autoimmune wounds had he known you, soon to be late, long before the decade ran out.

Thinking on that summer moment in the Park, your brief peace before coma, I wish this snapshot, this metastasis could have lasted.

Martha & Mary

Yes, ginger and cardamom, a couple | other notes—wood
and spice—perhaps | some amber. This, Bethany knows,

is spikenard from her savior's | anti-fungal cream, sublimed
in her hair | when she clasped his feet between her hands

days before his death. Many Marys gather | in the studio,
audition to pantomime | what will become a masterwork.

Bethany, fervent believer in the method | school of modeling,
offers some spikenard | to Magdalene, whom Caravaggio

wrongly casts with Martha. Everyone | knows that
Magdalene is the wrong Mary. | Truth is often staged.

Yet one kernel of the real story is | preserved: Martha's
mid-preach mouth | when Magdalene realizes how many

martyrs have yet to die. Martha | and the wrong Mary
break character, | gaze off-frame to locate Bethany,

to plead *Caravaggio correct this narrative*. | Bethany?
Already withdrawn | from the studio stench with cattle

tallow spotlights. Withdrawn to smash | more bottles
of nard, to perfume | the sterilized feet of her dying

brothers laid end-to-end in the glass | monolith
of [name-your-] hospital | turned reluctant lazaret.

Quar • an • tine

NOUN

2. conversion; psychiatric or religious erasure of self; electric soul-cleanse
 - a. of course I give it all up and hand over even my collected middle school journals then stand with the others stripping to our skivvies post-pat-down the doctor says no trace of our outside lives can live here but were there room enough and time to hide I'd tackle that brash blond who took those journals and blithely burned my hand-written interiors God I desire to fold him beneath the bare collapsible tables dear Jesus this is why I'm here to pray away my fear of living right pray that He redirect my desire on bended knee please Lord push deep in me and cut out what offends thee
 - b. ...
 - c. not remembering is the most merciful part of Thursday mornings as they journey me to a room I can't place dreaming of an ocean pier waves shouting against tall struts and sand to meet my secret much older lover when I resurface with the bends the whole ocean is a fog I have to swim my way out of the ceiling tiles sharpen and I am made to rise swivel stand and shuffle to the sofa where a paper-gown man helps me cloud back into my skin this is how we emerge flash-fried mercifully forgetful as our ears awaken to electric wails down the hall our waiting room a sea of free-will

forgetters in dys-unison each new scream
adjoins as the last removes as the next
patient in paper raiment gets silently
gourneyed in

Suppers at Emmaus

Your old London life was full of crucifixion.
A sassy sissy who failed every time you *pretended*
to be a real person. In New York you discovered

you only understood happiness,
and spent your last decades spinning parables
at suppers supplied by friends and strangers:

A man who hardly worked a day, lived *like Blanche*
DuBois from gifted meal to miracle
rent check, a pauper philosopher swallowed

up in swirling sleeves, outstretched hand dividing
the table in two, making more emphatic
the lesson: One ought not keep up

with the Joneses; drag them down to your level.
It's cheaper. Resurrected in America,
you take tea with grace a wide-brimmed derby

demands, lavender nails aglow
in the soft light of the restaurant, apostles
enrapt and incensed at this wrinkled fruit's

prophesies that *AIDS is just a fad*
and *homosexuality is a horrible disease*.
Messengers are oft misunderstood,

and it's likely you were only thinking aloud,
at least that's how East Village queens
tell the story now. They have forgiven you

such eccentricities, swooning at your naked
civil service. *I am always the same*, you quipped.
Only the way people see me has changed.

And each time they see your prancing
phantasm, how they bow.

Gnossienne No. 1

*His gaze is like a star...
try to be the first to look aside.*
—Thom Gunn

It's the shape of your arm, the band on your left ring finger, muted downturned gaze, a silent reaching for the old leather spine scripted in illegible gold letters. How I could have lingered lifetimes below your graceful lobes, the notched bridge of your nose, would have nestled the small of your back—its curve still visible in the loose slung suit you wore those long decades ago. That library then was haven for men like us. Yes it was there we knew one another Thursdays and odd Mondays, sifted the shelves, each of us hearing privately our favorite of Satie's six sad dances—the glances through, the touch never ventured though often thought. This photograph on which I write worlds I still wish had dwelt in you.

3/6/63 – 2/8/82

Is it wrong of me
to miss your
motorcycle more
than you? Classic
black bike thirty
years your senior:
an Indian Four
that, like you,
wore its works out in the open,
air-cooled. I loved your small seat—
ample and accommodating enough
for one, but too sensible for two.

All those CCs rumbling my lithe
legs, hands clamped hard on low-
slung custom handles, chest pressed
against the gold flame detailed
gas tank... Oh God, how I wanted
to ride your ghost into the future.

Sacrifice of Isaac

he says the night he got arrested was
his side-door entrée into S&M
when a gray-beard plainclothes vice
pinned his faggot face against the bar
even pulled a knife some queens
love a grizzled daddy any way
they can get one lost in the thrall of not
knowing if it all ends one night
in the hot hands of fag-killer pigs
how familiar how cliché and he
would not be the first trotted off to cop
cruiser instead of paddy wagon fresh
with threat driven to a narrow alleyway
dragged out fucked and knifed lifeless
who would report such a man missing
who would dare risk speaking his name
connecting their own with a known homosexual
but that night in LA's Black Cat
another cop as if an angel of the Lord
appeared and whispered a few terse words
to the snarling silver fox pinning the fairy's
face to the bar and that cop so ready to
sacrifice another nameless limp-wristed
lamb to the coming year yanks him up
jack-boots him into the waiting wagon
and in the next day's paper that silly
sissy smiling wide having made
his covenant with power his routine rush
to the rush of reenactment how close each of us
every night to our needful little deaths

Intercession

The day before his hearse drove through the moon,
you said everyone wished they could be us, then asked
who wouldn't want to be a 6'2 glamazon
trouncing the world in studded McQueen brogues.
If fashion were cocks we'd be kings, quipped your young trick,
and you scoffed left in perfect pivot, snapping the whole way,
ordered him shake you another jellybean-tini, began
another of your histrionic histories.

*In the days before the beige invasion
crept across our Magic Queendom, queers ruled
the vast Arts & Crafts bungalow dreamscape
stretching from Upper Kirby to Downtown,
glitzing the then-vacant homes of Montrose,
making peace with dealers, gang-bangers, pimps,
and honeys-by-the-hour—a tramp-stamped
better-than-fabled era of no less than
30 queer bars oozing like spent money
shots between Shepherd and Brazos, up and
down lower Westheimer—each one rising
from a fiery column of pink lightning...*

Dancing a half-conscious apocalypso
on the scuzzed-out dancefloor of what was once
Pacific Street, now a shadow dubbed Blur, soon to be
blight on the beige yuppie stucco palazzos
plaquing up the arteries of our homo heartland,
you prophesied we'd rule again with glittered fist.

When your lover came home for hospice,
no longer able to survive the seventh floor
homo ward at Park Plaza, you collapsed,
clawed yourself almost upright with jellybean-tinis,
brogues stained with bitters, spikes of cooked coke
jabbed into your hands and feet,
a soured nightlife aperitif.

We pray your hearse will not lag long behind,
that you may know how timely death can be
such graceful sublimation.

[first] meeting/s

you wonder: how to keep grief. private when
every. faggot. you ever met is. veiled
remember: sitting shiva. as a child
know: no Manhattan man would [stand again]
if that were queer custom. and this is why—
this: Monday night. you wander settle in
a metal folding chair. sit somewhere near
the rear. panel of gay lays: debates
up front: an anger. you did not know
you didn't need permission to. feel this
[you think] could be our real liberation
[] wonder why we don't blare: Britten's *Dies*
Ire for every[]body in New York
wish: you could be brave like that [queer quartet]
up front ...intend to stay... handshake your hellos
but all that grief. and all those guys: it was
so heady. [] aphrodisiac: anger
and ass: supplied. to slake sorrow. [and now
incomprehensible: how some small few
all. who's left. alive. —inconsolable
sadness assuaged. [how] comfort the comrade
who? next week you may: bury or infect
those were they [and you among them] who lay/ed
dead. in the streets: a marching scream— made up
of the coming. decade's. dead. pool. célèbre

The CDC Sends a Letter Home

After seven years spent perfecting
our rituals thousand dead, comes
for some 30

this brochure that says the virus
has been dubbed
Public Enemy #1. Our government
wants us
to have the best available
information for fighting
the epidemic. This brochure has been sent to
over 100 million households y
Este folleto se publica en español si no entiende
la lingua franca. *Who you are*
has nothing to do with *whether*
and heterosexual *you are in danger*
cases are rapidly

replicating. This brochure was developed and
mailed for roughly 20¢ apiece,
its too-late placations
total more than all government-funded
research during the first five years

of plague. In Michigan parents only remember
being asked why *the rectum is easily injured*
after dinner during homework

checks. In California for chrissakes grandma will have
to learn how to un -see each *sharing*
drug needles and syringes. Her
wandering eyes, like
all others
concerned and horrified, skip around the pages:

3/4/66 – 2/13/87

You're the fourth man in Tampa we ever knew who didn't die of AIDS. Like those other three men, your obit listed heart attack as the official cause of death. If you believe the *Sentinel* obits, there's a rash of good-looking young men down in Orlando likely dropped dead from cardiac arrest. Makes one think that time bomb tickers are catching. Like you, the other three dead men came home from somewhere loose and liberal like San Fran or Chicago or Charlotte. And all y'all came back with something that made you bruise easy—came home bruised in parts no man ever hit on a coffee table or bedpost or doorjamb. We once asked your mama if it was really heart troubles and she said, *Well certainly. Cause it wasn't the goddamned AIDS.*

Central Texas Topographies

Before the night is through you know her body is a fact
that's legible to others,
and the fact is she's a desert closing

in upon herself, and this other man—
who you and she together chose—can read
her dry expanse retreating from his hands, knows

she cannot play the way the two of you
rehearsed, she shivers to the far side of the bed.
Is this how and where you meant love her?

In her darkened medic's shack tucked behind
the basecamp, where she attends the cedar gashes
and chigger bites of hikers lost

among the three expansive thousand acres
where she now wants to disappear? Her RV camper
nurse's station soiled this instant

when you come to know her limits?
She heaves away from your desire.
Know this is how she loves you—lone

Ashe juniper, lightning-stuck, who stands atop
the hill beside a ruined cattle driver's outpost.
This is how she tried to come,

to please you, to realize she cannot come
the way you two rehearsed.
You do not protest when he departs,

says he cannot continue. She burrows close
against the wall. Then comes the knocking
—late night hiker with a fractured friend, shin

granite bitten when they left the beaten trail.
You rise and dress, close the door, receive them,
begin triage with *Welcome, have a seat.*

Gnossienne No. 2

*...look at me good now, because
you will never see me again.*

—Toni Morrison

even in shiny spurs she was
still a real she but boy well she
mighta been male with her hair cropped
a little closer and those slacks
seams running up her shins those legs
not a flapper no note of femme
a couple extra drops' a man
look at that lush leather jacket
and love the linger in her glare
seems she knew you lived for a lash
or two cut with her crop but she
never knowed one horse more than you
maybe stroked a mane once or twice
but she never rode no reverse
or sideways cowgirl on no stud
don't she seem a sight seen only
at night no girl outside would dare
get spied in pants this side of town
come to think nobody never
seen her since she took this tintype
and even then none knew her name
just called her Jack

Quar • an • tine

NOUN

3. gay ghetto; magic queendom; see also: *Ansonborough, Hyde Park, Brady Arts District, Boys Town, etc.*
 - a. How not to hate one's own kin of a kind
I ain't figured how to do all the time.
Before the bougie boys began to build
Up Iberville with Sunday Services
& brunches & neighborhood playhouses
There was a home for me here—a place filled
With a fair mix of trade, johns, and nice men,
A couple of dyke couples peppered in—
Who wanted a safe space to disappear.
But that preacher and his glee club queers
Made a space weren't so safe for rent boys,
Or fairies with nails long as hair, to walk
Even at night. It weren't right: the noise
They raised. They fenced us out—whole Quarter talked
About how they would bring respect to Bourbon.
Queens, please. We seen every single last one
Of those fancy fops bouncing in our beds.
Yes, it was me who set the bar ablaze.
How else to flush out respectable gays?
I never meant to leave so many dead,
But where's one to go once you've been run out
Of every neighborhood, parish, and town?
When no kin of any kind will listen
Or welcome one with a bunk to rest in?
 - b. Pink petit fours rim creamy salmon canapés,
radish rosettes, & lavender vol-au-vent
on silver servers; ruby runners; French &
China rose centerpieces; pearlescent magenta
memorial bulletins. But don't forget whose
going to ground this is, & who's going
will later say *the service was oh-so nice*.
Singers, accoutered in amaranth, sing
expectedly so-so, being the adieuing amateurs

they are. The forgotten family are absent save one sister in a cerise camisole who plaintively paeans her deceased sibling. Then speaks the mayor beside wife & daughters, no less adopted than the departee's gathered camps. Who's going to witness his going to ground will process to the grounds around four. We'll first route past Il Divino Restaurant & Wine Bar that was once a wicked gay bookstore, then the retail bookstore that's now a Trader Joe's, past the Sushi King once a butcher's beside Whole Earth Provisions still there since '85, then past the cat vet's office that once was a magic shop that once was a record boutique that used to be the most charming white brick bungalow on West Alabama, & lastly by the first ever Zoë's Healthy Grill that's now something else.

**July 5, 1955 –
Oct 20, 1990**

At first it's just the two:
one red one blue. White
socks half calf. Red
in white sneaks and blue
in black. The ref all in
white. Camera close on
the floor hardly moves,
lingers on the long shot
as red binds blue in
half nelson. All four legs
locked. Both torsos rise in
a sort of cobra pose
duet. At this moment
you cut to camera two
and the angle pulls wide
to reveal three pairs
of red and blue. The far
end blue raises hands
with his ref.

Snow noises up screen.
A split second where
tape has worn down.
The image throws out
a shadow of itself, then
comes together again.
Your work that day
now in my archive. Once
a queen with a camera
crew, then the official
documentarian of Gay
Games '86. It pains me
that this record may soon
be absent as you, that
even this evidence of you
must pass away too.
How many yet survive?

Writing this I wonder:
Do my memories wear
down each time I replay,
rewind, rewatch? How
alike my mind and
VHS? How reliable any
technology over time?
How many of these
wrestlers now dead too?
This tape I know—a copy
of a copy of a copy
of mourning. Men none
of us would ever know
throwing out shadows
until memories of our
splitting are all that
remain.

late love poem

and when the rockstar had finished reading me
her memoir of younger years in love with a once-shy
S&M photog who burned down the world
with silver gelatin prints the rockstar's
lovely epilogue of memorial poems made me
think of you when you were seventeen
and newly sober and I was twenty-three and
gunning for oblivion the way you were so forward
and I always had to be out of my mind
to venture hello but sublingual LSD
made my shyness magnetic seductive again
I think of you at the gay café where we
met when you told me about sobering up
in a Christian recovery house and I was
tripping on five hits of blotter you
sipping coffee and I knew we'd be friends
all your life long by the way we laughed through
that first fumbling night in your sister's guest
bedroom sprawled out on the floor panting
you half-covered half-conscious
and though you would later pair up
with another I always dreamed
we'd be lovers for a night or two
again hearing the rockstar's last love lines
I think back to that first night following your small
pickup barreling down the interstate
to your sister's house in west bumfuck
hallucinating your naked body superimposed
over the undulating four-lane expanse
of concrete hurtling into our futures

04/21/1961 – 11/30/1988

Last Thursday, our best gay gal-pal crashed the pearly gates at home after a last long bout with over-fabulous youth—once again proving he always knew the best moment to exit. Let us not forget that chillier-than-usual spring when he breezed like a clumsy zephyr into our icy gay-borhood with all the grace and charm of a farm boy from Bumpkin-land. A quick study in all things tragi-camp, he soon endeared himself as one of our happy hamlet's beloved bearded ladies.

We ask that you join us in celebrating his several favorite forms of debauchery at The Eagle this weekend during a revelry lesser folk might mistake for a memorial. Please be sure to come wearing your best leather harness, angel wings, and a codpiece to make your mother blush. Though his blood relations have whisked his remains back to who-cares-where, an open casket will be provided at the back bar where you can toss in your offerings for the after-party to follow.

In lieu of sad Sally spirits, please bring satin flowers, brass clamps, fairy glitter, and poppers.

Gnossienne No. 7

What a sweet gift this is
—James L. White

The music from my living room
meanders through our clumsy romp.

Your lips sforzando each time I
crescendo through your buttonfly,

diminuendo at the drops
of picture frames on countertops.

This kitchenette impromptu fuck
is not uncommon comfort work.

It's how we box up luckless men—
once strangers in our darkened dens,

now hidden deep in Gnossiennes.
Our slackened traps and limbs receive

Satie's sad salty melody.
It's messy, but it's how we grieve.

Ravenous and raving, our months
in love begin and end with death.

And you my relic, you my breath,
half-stammer notes of grace, bereft.

These liquored kisses, your bequest,
will soon bloom blotches on my chest.

Medusa

The saints have brought to bear your face
As good as any other when enough of us look
In one direction it's like that old Baroque

Master knew we'd see every eye
Is a you I-ing itself into the paint a go-go boy
Resting on the flight to Egypt

To visit the Holy Family his wings
And raver flag draped down hips
Angelic in near-nakedness there is

Another scene and another nameless
You now facing you in the gilt-frame walls
Where we remake you into anyone

A hired twink with his cardsharp daddy throwing
Glances over a shoulder a signal hardly
Necessary look the mark knows whose camp

He's in studies the gallery flier who could be
A younger me maybe a weaker we who can tell
Whether we've deceived ourselves who cares when

You pass beneath the Gorgoneion
Our gays' gaze drapes all such drudgery
In the drag of devotion this seeing of suffering

Is our fucking religion when we've heard enough history
Cultural trauma becomes contagion and each
Caravaggio is a counterpane to wrap ourselves into

Is a painting you and I eye us into
Our regeneration of a whole
Generation lost