

## THE WAY YOU'RE GOING TO BE

I'm at the Other Side with Polly, trying to figure out which is worse—straight celebrities who wear red ribbons to show they really care about their dying gay friends, or gay people who wear them instead of actually doing anything—maybe they should all move to the suburbs so we don't have to deal with them, okay? And this boy Andre who Polly knows from BAGLY leans over and says: That's bullshit.

I'm still strung out from coke, K, pot and ecstasy a few days ago—plus, I'm getting over a cold and all I've had is a double shot of wheatgrass and I'm waiting for the waiter to bring me food so I can write in my journal. Of course Andre is wearing a red ribbon. But Polly was wearing one when I met her, and she figured it out quickly enough.

Girl, I say, it's just an empty symbol.

And that's when Andre starts screaming in my face: I'm not a girl—if I wanted a girl, I'd sleep with a girl. I'm a man, a twenty-one-year-old HIV-positive Latino gay man, and I like the suburbs—what is wrong with the suburbs? If I want to move to the suburbs, I'll move to the suburbs—I don't want to live all my life in a ghetto. You can rebel all you want, but there's no way to fight your parents—they're the people who made you. The way you're brought up is the way you're going to be.

And I say: We're brought up to hate ourselves, and we can go beyond that.

But he just keeps yelling: If I wanted a girl, I'd get a real

one—a girl with a pussy. If I wanted a woman, I'd have sex with a woman. I like the suburbs, I want to live in the suburbs, I grew up there—what is wrong with the suburbs?

Then he walks off like we're mortal enemies, and I'm thinking: I need food I need food I need food get me food right now where is my food?

I go to the bathroom, and when I get out I'm about to light a cigarette, but then I think: Smoking's disgusting. So I go back to the table and tell Polly I'm quitting, and of course she looks at me like I'm crazy.

My soup finally arrives, but now I can't focus on eating because some straight asshole behind me is saying the stupidest things, I mean I guess he's on a date so he's trying to sound romantic. He just said: I have to confess something—I've never given flowers to someone I don't know before, but I really like you, I do, you remind me of my sister.

Maybe it's time to look for another pair of combat boots, I mean the duct tape on these looks glamorous but it isn't going to last through winter. Polly's too cold so she decides to go home—girl, bring a coat next time, okay?

By the time I get home it's already dark, and as soon as I get inside I hear something awful on the stereo. Are you kidding? It's *Aqualung*. I get to the living room and there's Brian with two of his buddies from the coast guard. Everyone's yelling and there are beer cans everywhere—I feel like I'm in a frat house. Polly, Joey, Bobby and Billy are all drinking with the straight boys like sorority girls—Bobby giggles and says want a beer? Gross. I walk into my room, even though there's nothing in

there—everything's still in the living room. That's what I'm supposed to be doing tonight, moving my shit into my room because I'm finally done painting and I got the new carpet and everything.

I call Joanna, who tells me she went over to Jack and Jamie's house and some man turned blue and they were smacking him trying to wake him up and someone else was screaming and crying and Joanna started laughing and said okay, let's get high. She says: I don't know if I can kick—heroin takes care of me.

I want to say come stay with me, but what the hell would she do in Boston with a bunch of coast guard assholes yelling in the other room? So instead I say: You can come here if you know you're not going to get strung out.

Joanna says listen, our relationship can't be the way it used to be, it hurts me too much—I'm getting close to a woman for the first time and you know our connection was fucked up. I say what do you mean? She says I know we kept each other alive—at one point you were the most important person in my life—but you're on the East Coast now and I need space to love women, to feel the fear and get somewhere with it.

But why are you putting me into some distant category, why can't you just talk to me?

So then she starts talking about speedballs: It's the most amazing feeling—all the colors in your head like you're part of the sofa and everything in your body is a door, the lights on and off, on and off. And I say that's not a sofa, it's a broomstick, and then we're finally laughing together—even if her voice still sounds hollow in that heroin way.

## MATTILDA BERNSTEIN SYCAMORE

Joanna tells me she's going to help Jack kick—Jack told her she'll be shitting and throwing up in bed for seven days. Please call me, Joanna says, and when I get off the phone I need a cigarette, but then I remember I just quit.

Maybe I need a shower, but now I'm thinking about San Francisco and how Joanna wants me to send her the papers I've written for school, but I'm embarrassed because I feel like school is draining away everything I learned when I left school, I mean every time I hear someone say ontology or epistemology or reify or whatever other stupid theory bullshit I want to die.

I call Melissa, who says: What would you do if you thought AIDS was a government plot? And suddenly it's like everything in the room is vibrating, too dark and too light at the same time, and I get that familiar feeling like someone's behind me, my father. I know he's not behind me, but should I turn around?

Melissa's saying something, and I feel like I'm starting to cry so I say hold on. Where am I? Breathe, Alexa, breathe. Okay, this is my room, my new room. In Boston. My father doesn't even live in Boston. There's some annoying classic rock in the background. A few tears. I pick up the phone and say sorry, I was getting an incest flashback, and Melissa says oh, I'm sorry. There's something in the way her voice changes so fast to meet the situation, and then I'm thinking about when we met in ACT UP and how she would never say anything at meetings, but afterward her analysis was so clear, clearer than anyone I'd ever met, and she'd left school too. Melissa says: I had a dream that I had sex with my father, and I wasn't scared—I'm scared now.

I tell her I can lend her money to move out, but she doesn't

want me to—why, I say, why? I can't, she says, there's something I still need to figure out.

I hang up the phone and then I'm sitting on the new remnant I put over the old carpet in my empty room because the landlord wouldn't let me tear it out and shag carpet is disgusting—talk about allergies. I make a list of all the people I love, and there are five. Maybe six. The straight boys are yelling in the other room and I'm thinking about the first time I met Polly at Glad Day, or not the first time but the time when I was putting up my roommate flyers that no one ever responded to, too glamorous for Boston, I mean no one here can even deal with the word faggot. Anyway, Polly was the fag behind the counter, and she said guess what, some friends and I found a place in Dorchester and we need someone else to join the lease.

I didn't even know where Dorchester was, but when I arrived I couldn't believe we would have two stories of a Victorian house with stained-glass windows and a whole floor of common areas for \$965. All I knew about Polly was that she'd recently escaped a Christian fundamentalist cult run by her father, and she was getting ready to sign a lease with two people she met at BAGLY, the queer youth group, so I figured at least we were all queer. Or something. Siobhan, the pot-head dyke, seemed kind of dazed. And then there was Brian, seventeen going on forty—fake tan, frosted hair, overalls with one strap undone. He was some kind of model queer youth so he could hardly even smile at me, but we signed the lease together anyway.

Then Brian from the coast guard moved in—he’s Siobhan’s friend. Everyone calls him Straight Boy to distinguish him from Brian Marshall, but I think that’s tacky. Luckily he’s not in town very often. And now Joey, Bobby and Billy are practically living here too—those tacky queens might as well start paying rent, I mean we have at least two more bedrooms.

Gross—Bobby’s calling me: Miss One, you’re missing the party. She’s the most ridiculous person on earth, but I open my door and go in the living room anyway. Everyone’s fawning over the straight boys, and what’s playing now? Led Zeppe-  
lin—“Squeeze me, baby, ’til the juice runs down my leg.” One of the straight boys is doing air guitar. I thought it couldn’t get any worse than the *Priscilla* soundtrack. I introduce myself, and Bobby says aren’t they all so cute? He’s disgusting.

Apparently the coast guard boys have been drinking since ten a.m.—I don’t even know why anyone would get up that early, but now they’re so drunk they look like they’re swimming. One of them’s cute, I guess, but whatever. His name’s Calvin. Everyone keeps saying have some beer, but they’re drinking Milwaukee’s Best and anyway I only drink vodka. Billy’s giggling and Joey and Polly are chain-smoking and Bobby’s perm is looking greasier than ever and he’s talking about all his gowns. He says: It’s hard for me to hang out with anyone who doesn’t know the difference between Armani and Versace.

As far as I know, she’s never even put on a dress, but she talks like she’s the mother of the House of Webstah, Mass.—don’t make me reeeeeead you, Miss One. Or, if you ask her

## SKETCHTASY

too many questions, she'll fling her wrist in circles and then boom: Talk to the hand.

I go in the living room to move my stuff. Brian stumbles in all red-faced, pats me on the back and says can you get me some coke? I say not unless we're in a club. He says can we go somewhere? I say I've got to move my stuff, but you can head over to the Combat Zone and there will be plenty of people selling.

It's kind of a joke—three smashed white straight boys looking for coke in the Combat Zone—yeah, here's some fifty-dollar laxative, sure. But then they're all up and out the door and the music's off. Bobby starts cleaning up the cans and dumping out the ashtrays, saying oh what a mess, Miss One, then sighing like she's the richest housewife in the world, saying: It's what a mother does.

I'm sitting on my futon, trying to focus on unpacking, and Bobby turns on the *Priscilla* soundtrack. She's singing along and I'm about to smack her, then everyone's on my futon and I've got that smile that hurts my jaw. Of course Joey's wearing her raincoat—does she ever take that raincoat off? Whining about how she needs cocktails and doesn't anyone want to go to the Eagle, and Bobby grunts, comes over to pinch Joey's cheeks and says oh, my messy daughter. Bobby shakes her Fendi key chain, looks at me, and says: It's what a mother does.

Joey says meet us there, okay? Polly looks me in the eyes like bitch, you betta, and then four kisses for me, luckily three sets of lips and Bobby's cheeks, and they're off.

I'm fantasizing about car crashes and then I realize *Priscilla's*

still on. I think about throwing it away, but instead I just press eject. Back to the living room and I pick up my boxes, one by one—into my room.

I put water on for pasta and wash spinach for a salad and then I hear someone at the door—already? Sure enough, it's the straight boys falling up the stairs. I'm stirring the pasta and it can't be more than a few minutes later when Calvin comes in. He's coked up for sure, looking at my pasta like it's the most amazing thing he's ever seen. I say it's just parsley garlic fettuccine. He says oh, I eat a lot of pasta, you need loads of carbs when you're working out and I'm trying to bulk up, you know—parsley garlic, I'll have to try that.

I'm squeezing tofu over the spinach and Calvin wants to know what that's good for. I say protein, iron, B vitamins. He says are you vegetarian? I say I'm vegan, and then of course I have to explain what that means. He says wow, I never thought of that, wow. Is that spinach? Yeah. Wow—what a great idea, wow—and then Brian's calling him. Brian sounds like he's about to pass out—maybe he didn't do any coke or maybe he's just that drunk. Calvin says okay, well, I'll see you later, okay? He looks right at me. I try not to notice how pretty his eyes are—sky blue and glassy from the coke.

I'm finishing my food and Calvin comes back in the kitchen, he says Brian and Dave went to bed and do you mind if I hang with you? I say as long as you don't distract me. Because Brian Marshall, the tanning salon queen, did you meet him? Calvin shakes his head no, I say well he'll throw a fit if I don't get my stuff out of the living room. Calvin says well I can help you, I



mean I don't mind. His eyes are wide and his lip is vibrating, he takes a ball of tinfoil out of his pocket and says do you have anywhere for me to cut this?

I can feel my eyes getting wide. I get Calvin my drug mirror, and he starts cutting the coke. He says you want some? I say is it good? He says yeah it's great blow, fucking great, and there's a lot left, we should split it. I say no, I need to concentrate on unpacking, but he's not listening.

Calvin cuts the coke and I wash the dishes. When I'm done, he's got two huge lines on the mirror. I say I just want a little. He does his line and I'm not breathing. Hands me the rolled-up dollar bill and I snort the other line, oh it burns I fucking love it. I can feel my eyeballs in the back of my head, lids closed and when I open my eyes I'm high. I say you're right, that stuff is great. I can't believe it.

Calvin's looking me in the eyes again and I'm looking away. We go into the living room and everything feels slow but frantic, in twenty minutes all my shit is in my room and we're doing another line. I lean my head back and wow. Calvin's on the bed and I'm unpacking boxes. The phone rings and it's Joey saying bitch it's almost one, you better get your ass down here, everyone's waiting. I say all right, just a few minutes, all right.

Calvin says what's up. I say they want me to meet them at the Eagle. He says can I come. I say it's a gay bar. He says I don't mind. All right, I say, and we do some more coke.

Damn these straight boys are generous—Joey always has coke, but she'll never even give you a bump unless you trade her something for it. I check my hair in the mirror and, yes, every

strand of flamingo pink and pillar-box red is in place. Calvin says he'll drive—sounds like a good idea to me.

Calvin's got this tiny little red sports car and we're both wired. I lean my head back and think I shouldn't have done that coke, I shouldn't have done that coke. But then I think fuck it, I might as well enjoy it, and Calvin puts on "You're So Vain"—more classic rock, gross. He says is this okay—I'm nuts about Carly Simon. Did he really just say nuts? Nuts and blow.

We get to the Eagle and there's our little youth corner in the back of the bar. Everyone's screaming for me and I'm actually happy to see them. Polly's got his ass against the bar and he's holding Bobby and swaying—they better break up soon, gotta get that bitch out of my house. Billy pokes me and grunts, her usual thing. Joey's eyes get big and he says: Oh. You brought. The straight boy.

Of course Calvin's the wet dream of everyone in the bar: preppy blond boy in jeans and a flannel, so Boston. The Eagle's all middle-aged South End guppies and then us. I get a drink and Jack the bartender looks me up and down: Well, I bet you've got a big dick, huh. He does that every week. But he never cards. I'm twenty-one and Bobby's twenty-three, but everyone else is underage.

Billy wants some of my drink—I grab him a cocktail from nearby and say drink this and he acts all shocked, but then he drinks it. Bobby's over touching Calvin's ass and giggling. Calvin's totally into it. I'm wired. Polly's trying to keep her eyes open—she says oh honey I'm messy. Joey's pacing the bar and some queen comes up to me, says is that Mizrahi? I say

no, Dollar-A-Pound, and Billy grunts—I'm laughing and the queen doesn't know what to say.

I get another drink and then I motion to Calvin, we head to the bathroom. He's about to take out the coke but someone comes in, takes out his coke—I say can I have a bump? He scrunches up his nose at me, and then leaves. I finish my cocktail while Calvin gets out the coke—he says do you have a dollar. I say put it on my hand and he pours a pile on. I snort it up then lick my hand, tasty. He snorts the rest from the foil and then I lick that too, his eyes are bulging. I say thanks. Then I study my hair in the mirror—the magenta matches the stripe in my plaid pants and it all contrasts so well with the green sweater, I'm on fire tonight.

Someone opens the bathroom door, stares at my hair and says you look like a parrot. She thinks she's reading me—I lick my lips and say thank you, honey. He's looking Calvin up and down. Calvin's pretending to piss—or wait, he is pissing and I'm just laughing, head up against the wall, loving my rush I could stay here forever. We go back into the bar, Calvin says what are we going to do afterward? I say maybe Billy can get us into the Loft.

Calvin goes over to his buddies at the pool table and I go back to the bar. Polly's getting sad, Billy and Joey are bored. I buy two madrases and hand one to Joey, tell him to split it with Billy. Their eyes light up. Polly's swaying and here comes Bobby sashaying down the aisle to—no way, it's 1995, and they're still playing "Supermodel." Okay, it is the Eagle so we're all up on the runway anyway—no one knows what to do with

us. I'm pushing Bobby aside, cackling and saying you're no supermodel honey. But she actually can walk—even if she's so exaggerated it's scary, she does work it.

Then the song's over and it's Crystal Waters—usually the DJ's bad but not as bad as “back to the middle and around again.” Joey's favorite song of course. Polly's still leaning against the bar, eyes shut and she's kind of nodding—oh no. Polly, I say, and she opens her eyes. I say honey you're a mess, and she shuts her eyes again.

It's getting close to two, I ask Billy if he can get me into the Loft since he's working there, and he looks at me like I'm crazy. He says it's Friday.

Friday's straight night, but I don't care. Billy says it's scary, you'll get beat up. I say honey, it's not that scary. He says: I might get in trouble. The lights are coming up and Bobby's pulling Polly along while Joey follows. Bobby says: My husband has a BIG dick. And she's grabbing Polly's crotch while Polly mumbles and shakes her head like she's in a bad dream.

They file outside and I look for Calvin. He runs up and says you want to go to an after-hours, I say where? He says upstairs. Sure.

I go outside and it's freezing but nice, Polly leans over and wraps her arms around me. Bobby says you need a ride? I say no, I guess I'm going to an after-hours with Calvin. Bobby smirks and I roll my eyes.

Calvin comes out with two South End tragedies. Turns out the party is literally upstairs from the Eagle, which is funny at first, until we go inside and of course it's some bougie hellhole—hors

d'oeuvres on a silver tray, white frilly curtains, plush department store sofas and a bunch of scary South End gays.

I'm too wired. Calvin goes in the other room with one of the guys who brought us and I'm stuck talking to the only queen who will acknowledge that I'm there. I'm crashing hard, just like that—no one's taking out any drugs and I can't stand the idea of another drink. I try to relax, but I keep thinking why am I here why am I here why am I fucking here?

I pour myself a cocktail, but yuck this tastes gross. Some queen with too much cologne is telling a story about how he went to this after-work party and he thought it was just going to be the boys, but then this chick walked in and he looked over and said: Who brought the fish? Everyone's cackling and I feel like I'm going to scream so I go in the bathroom. Run hot water over my hands and sip my Cape Cod and stare at myself in the mirror. I still look okay but I feel worn out. Just want to lie down. I fix my hair so it looks like feathers again, then someone's knocking so I open the door.

I sit down on one of the sofas and stare into space. The whole room smells like cologne and I sip my empty cocktail like it's giving me life. Everyone is talking about this restaurant and that party and oh the shoes I got the other day at Neiman's. And can you believe who I saw coming out of the Fens with her knees all muddy? Don't get too close to her—she'll give you AIDS. But, girl, are you going to South Beach? I can't wait until summer—we are going to own P-town this year.

Some guy wants to know how I got to this party—well, they all want to know that, but one guy asks and I say my friend

Calvin who's in the other room. Someone says oh, the cute one with blond hair—is that your boyfriend?

I say what? I mean no he's not my boyfriend.

Finally the bedroom door opens and there's Calvin—he stumbles out looking like a zombie, collapses on the sofa next to me. I say what'd you do in there? And he says I don't know—I did a bump and then I didn't know where I was. I say oh, you did a bump of K, and I'm kind of jealous.

Calvin rests and I'm suddenly talkative though who knows what the fuck I'm talking about. Then Calvin's finally ready and I'm literally pushing him out the door—thanks—and then we're out in the cold and Calvin looks clearer. We find his car, get inside and turn on the heat 'cause I'm shivering, didn't bring my coat. Calvin's still dazed—I say are you okay to drive? He says yeah, let's just wait a minute.

Calvin says that shit's crazy. I say yeah. He says no I mean crazy—I didn't know where I was and the bed and the ceiling were fighting with me. He pulls the car out of the space and we're off, I shut my eyes and think about sleep but it feels like flying.