THE GAY & LESBIAN READER

by Michael Dunning Henschel

We have a theory, Michelle and I, that somehow all of our actions are dictated by another. A script writer. And not a very good one. The problems start when our regular script writers take a vacation.

Or worse, they go on strike. We end up with young hacks. Our worlds get very mixed up for a time and then the regulars finally return, only to spend months getting everything straightened out. Anyway, I think there must have been a strike about a year ago. It might have been a vacation but Michelle and I don't have the same author and things went screwy for both of us at the same time.

Children answer the door naked. Women with stronger beards than I have. The not so normal. The downright crazy. You never meet these people when you don't have to be nice to them. They save it up, you know; let it all out when the canvassers come to the door. No wonder the Witnesses always look in such good shape; they're scared to death about what might peek around that door.

I should have known that a strike was coming when we met a very interesting old man. He looked as if he had not bathed since he had arrived at his political views, circa 1935.

"But we're social democrats?"
Michelle protested.

"Yes," the old man croaked, "I used to

about faggots and queers.

But it was a party. I'm afraid my writer likes to editorialize. A victory party. Two hundred socialists in the ballroom of a nineteenth-century hotel, never noticing the dichotomy, stampeding for the cash bar. Victory: I got a drink before they ran out of everything. Michelle went scanning for men. I watched her and laughed. She came up empty. She got herself a drink. We watched the room.

Look at that. Tall, about six three; short dark hair; excellent shape, beautiful dark green eyes.

"What are you staring at?" She answered her own question. We have the same taste in men. He was sitting all

would join them later. I moved around the room again, picking up the people I missed the first time. Eventually making my way back to Darren and Michelle. They thought a change of scenery would be good. We got ourselves together.

As we were leaving, Michelle took me aside: "Stop making a pass at him.

"Why?"
"So you were."

"No, never. He's not my type." So I can lie.

"Bull! I saw him first."

"No you didn't."

"Well, I talked to him first."
"So, I'm a coward."

"Just stop it."

"But I wasn't doing anything." She's jealous?

"He kept asking where you were."
"When?"

"When you went to the bathroom." It was left at that. Darren was coming back into hearing range. He's gay? No, They don't write things this nicely. I am definitely not RCMP material: I never get my man.

We started down the street. I was walking between the two of them. I find myself staring at him. Michelle notices. I stop. It's a beautiful late summer night. There's just enough breeze to keep things fresh.

"So, where do you go downtown?" she asks him.

"Scoundrel's, the Sea Horse, 2112 Gottingen."

I've heard that address before. That's Rumours. That's the only gay bar in Nova Scotia. I look over at Michelle,

she's made the same connections I have. "Rumours?" she says.

"Another reason I'm NDP."

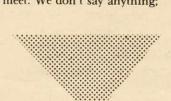
I can feel a lump in my throat. The best-looking guy I've met in months. Quick, witty and not biochemically opposed. Things just don't get written this well for me. I'm not this lucky; or, this self-assured. They're on strike. I don't know what I'm doing.

Was he coming on to me? How could I know? I've spent so much energy avoiding. Where's the ground? Poor Michelle. She'll hate me. Stealing another man from her. I know she wants him. Can her ego take it? Maybe if I ignore it it will all go away. God. I sound like my mother.

Finally we turn into the bar. "Sea Horse established 1948" comes screaming to my relief. I buy them a drink. Run off to the washroom. Where's the ground?

". . .really, so is Jonathan." As I come back to the table. I am a wimp. Darren gets up to play pinball. I sit down to talk to Michelle. She confirms everything I already knew: He's gay and she's never going to try to pick up a guy again. Actors have such frail egos.

I join Darren at the pinball machine. Michelle goes to talk to the friends I said I would meet. We don't say anything;



just feed quarters into the hungry machine. He's a cutthroat. I feel like I'm being tested. I have to perform. I've already failed. We play again. He gets a free game. Michelle tells us that everyone's moving on. "We'll follow along." Not having taken my eyes off of Darren playing pinball. He finally finishes. We down our draught and leave.

"So can I call you sometime?"
"About what?" with a smile I could have killed him for.

"I", don't know how to say this, "are you seeing anyone?"

He must have sensed the tentativeness. The unease. Known that I hadn't come out yet. Known that all I could have been capable of would be embarrassing nakedness in bed; inept placement in society. Known that he couldn't call me because someone might find me out. Known that I wasn't worth what he had already faced. "Yes, I am."

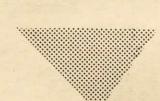
"Too bad . . . for me I mean."
"I know."

We met up with the others. I told Michelle what was said. "Thank God. I would have had to kill you both!"

"Isn't life wonderful?" I kept telling myself that. We have another drink and part

The next morning and the writers' strike is over but irreparable damage has been done. My circle has become bigger. Every day I take another step. They allow me that freedom. No running, but walking at a good stride. I must admit to running back to the closet once or twice but it gets harder every time. It feels less like self-preservation and more of an outright lie. I haven't met my Darren yet. I'm working on it.

Michelle and I laugh about him now. The one that got away, twice. I hope there is another strike soon.



STOMEDALB ROOPS I, ANDREA MATALIE OVICE AS SALEMA ON! WHAT TA BAT! ONE THAT'S NICE. WHO WITH?

AS USUAL, ELLEN'S HUSBAND WASN'T REALLY LISTENING TO HER.



this woman i'm dancing with

this woman i'm dancing with,
you wouldn't know her.
she used to live here but she moved.
she pulses grace and strength
and the best of lust.
we have known this way of dancing,
this modified jive,
for years now.
my body plays on her unrolling arm,
one hand knows exactly where another hand will be.

she's just here for a visit.

when we met,
i was a baby dyke
and she was this BIG, STRONG, OUT WOMAN.
it pissed me off when she got maternalistic,
but i was IN LOVE.
(i was actually in a long-distance relationship
with a guy in toronto,
but then i fell in love.)

the music pulls us together and apart.
she and her partner live on the west coast now.

we see each other every couple of years, and the changes make us joyful.

i love dancing with her. this dance is a ritual, my ritual for the ache one feels for one's first lover, the one that makes you wonder what if the bittersweet and unforgettable.

Andrea Currie

Thursday February 15

Hidden beneath
the robes of the priest
is a sacrament divine:
veiled from view
for the chosen few
is a chalice filled with wine.
And who will drink
of this bitter cup?
Will I with my confessor sup?
A eucharist blessed
by his soft caress
and I in his loving cup.

The dirty vicar

Without Acceptance 1

Persecution from within or without?

My hurt knows no borders, no distinction between self-suppression.

Other oppression.

Without Acceptance 2

Being gay was not the worst thing that ever happened to me. Not accepting it was.

DARREN

All this happened after years of my regular routine: middle class, gay, scared, pretentious, plain, and wanting to be an intellectual and a playwright with some success. Michelle was stuck in her routine too. She was beautiful, something you want to put on a stage, and she could act. She had an actor's vanity. We had met in the early years of high school. We would work together on plays. Eventually, we even took some of my work to a provincial festival. I was impressed and too full of myself to be approached. She was excellent in the role that I wrote expressly for her. The world was moving slowly and steadily. Nothing too strenuous ever happened.

That's what they wanted us to think. So that we could externalize. Not look at what we were doing ourselves, to ourselves. It was the end of summer. Not long before school. I would be going off to university now. Michelle stayed back in high school. Teachers found it easier to give extra credit for writing than for acting. I'm still not sure why. Acting seems more important out here. I had just gotten back to the city, after working all summer.

It was an election year. so we took up the banner: Art farts of the world, unite: you have nothing to lose but your silver bangles? We were serious; still are quite. We would fold mail-outs all afternoon; canvass from five to nine-thirty; find the coffee, and write until two or three in the morning. I would go home and we would start all over agin around noon the next day. Except weekends when we would go downtown. Get drunk. Watch guys. Get frustrated. Middle class.

Canvassing, unlike folding, goes well with writing. Folding gives you papercuts. Canvassing gives you characters to play with. Housewives who really do wear curlers, and fuzzy pink bathrobes.

work for your party. When they were the CCF. Before the Jews started to take it over." I was appalled. This is the nineteen eighties. People still think like this? I have to talk to people who think like this. I want this person (for lack of a better word) to vote for our party. Oh god.

"Well," I stammered, "well, I hope you get out to vote." He wanted to tell us more. I had stopped listening when he started on about the holocaust never having happened, "We shouldn't keep you. Have a nice day." We ran outside the apartment building, had a cigarette. Stared at one another. Then started in on that nervous laugh that you get when you are thoroughly unprepared for something. We finished our cigarettes. Had another. Went back in for more abuse. Ever need some inspiration? Go canvass. Meet the people the way they really are, not the way they see themselves.

Besides, when you work for a political organization, they always have a victory party. Unluckily, the author who handles my life gave me a social conscience and very little pocket money. The two do not go well together. The NDP never has free alcohol. They always lost. You always need a drink. I think the cash bar is how they fund the election campaign. I know it uses up my donations to the party.

Just before the polls closed. They went on strike. The temporary replacements were not all that hot. They did have more imagination that the regulars but they just didn't do it for quality. We lost the election; fourth in a field of three. The party did badly all over the province. But all to be expected of the NDP in Nova Scotia. Nova Scotians prefer politicans who lie and cheat. They don't want equal rights. They think that Indian is a bad word. Don't even ask

alone at a table not far from us. He pulled out a cigarette. "You've got good eyes. Give me a smoke." I did; pulled out my lighter. She waved it off. Went directly over and asked him for a light. He's well dressed; white oxford shirt, navy trousers; black penny loafers, and green rimmed glasses to match his eyes. If I strain I can see — very conservative but catchy, not many men our age can pull that look off and still look like they're having fun. He looks like Rob Lowe.

Michelle got her light; sat down and started talking to him. I was jealous. I had no reason to be. I hadn't done anything. I'm such a coward. Later I found that she had engaged in most of the conversation. "Whose campaign did you work on? Really, she taught me English in high school. Yes, she is quite a lady. Two hundred votes and the Tories had a PR firm working for them."

Things seemed to be going well for her. He was warming up to her. I said hello to some people I know. Making contacts — never know when they might be needed. When I ran out of meet-and-greet spirit, I joined them.

They were talking about Newfoundland. He was quite easy to talk to. He was from St. John's; had come to Halifax to go to university, Mount Saint Vincent, accounting. He asked and I told him Dalhousie, chemistry. He's even more attractive now that he's talking. I get pulled away. I don't think that my writer really wants me to intrude. He had been letting us do our own improvisation. I went to the bathroom.

"Where's Jonathan?" Darren asked. She told him and moved back into the conversation. I bumped into some friends of mine. "Coming down to the Sea Pig?" I told them Michelle and I

Penser d'abord d'une place une place silencieuse Comme sans les

une place de satisfaction
où il y a de l'air calme
plein de sons naturels
Ne pas se décourager
prendre du temps
effacer toutes les mauvaises idées
imaginer n'importe quoi
peut être la mer

peut être la mer
ou les montaignes
oui, le bel océan
avec tous ses mystères formidables
Ensuite, se relaxer
mais
ne pas perdre cette idée
essayer d'être là vraiment
penser fort
regarder le ciel et l'eau
quel beau bleu
écouter l'eau frapper

sur les roches énormes

observer l'herbe longue

comme ça danse dans le vent

entendre les mouettes en haut

Comme l'air est clair sans les nuages rentarquer une petite tache noire loin dans la distance un grand bateau seul entourer par l'eau quelle solitude

Si vous ne pouvez pas sentir vraiment le bel entourage vous n'avez pas la chance alors vous rêvez simplement mais si maintenant vous êtes content c'est bon vous allez attraper la bonne tranquilité et heureusement ce n'était pas un rêve.

T.Y.B.

ge 10 Dalhousie Gazette Thursday February 15