Body Blows
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Published by University of Wisconsin Press

Miller, Tim and Tim Miller.
Body Blows: Six Performances.
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I cooked up *Fruit Cocktail* in 1995 because I had just fallen in love and was ready for a break. Finally giving myself a much-needed furlough from the AIDS and culture wars—vacations come hard for WASPs—I wanted to focus on a sweet and fun story I had never told. What I was going to do on my art holiday was explore the twenty-four hour period in 1976 during which I turned eighteen, came out to my parents, and had sex for the very first time.

For a dozen years of performance making I had been at such a high pitch of committing my creative work to the crisis du jour. In each show I stepped up to the plate to address Reagan’s election or the nuclear war panic or the AIDS crisis or the NEA controversy or the negotiation of psychological and sexual space for gay men in the nineties. I almost didn’t know what it would be like to make such a sweet show! Was I being mellowed by the narcotic haze of the relatively homo-friendly Clinton administration and the early glimpses of the AIDS cocktail arriving on the horizon? What was I to do? The set is not decorated with demonic Republicans lurking stage left! No untimely deaths of lovers or
friends! No untangling of garden-variety (perennial, that is) systemic homophobia! What a fucking relief! What I was left with was the joyous potential and pleasure of my first love, first sex, and coming out/into self. This performance was such pleasure to perform.

Strange that of all the autobiographical narratives I had recounted in my shows I had never told the Gay 101 story: COMING OUT. Patrick Merla had asked me to write such a story for a collection he was editing for Avon Books called Boys Like Us. I quickly saw that I wanted to play with the writing and explore its performance possibilities. Maybe the fact that I had fallen in love the year before also had something to do with this more vernal and chipper space I was exploring. I had met Alistair McCartney in London in 1994 and gone head-over-heels. During the next two years I was involved in a very difficult and emotionally challenging breakup with my partner of thirteen years, Doug Sadownick. When Fruit Cocktail premiered in 1996, my life was beginning to take a new shape, groaning and heaving and shifting with big tectonic forces. In a strange way I was feeling quite close to that adolescent self, all tortured and idealistic and ready to change.

In spite of the roiling offstage personal dramas, I am almost chagrined at how bushy-tailed this work is. Capacious—a word I even allow myself to use in the performance—in its adolescent joie de sex, Fruit Cocktail imagines a queer coming of age moment that is remarkably free of angst and angina. Wish fulfillment? A little bit, maybe, but true to what that precise late-seventies moment felt like to me. It was the rich fuel that would fling me to New York at the age of nineteen to begin creating my work.

Indeed, all the performances contained in this volume are fueled by gay love and eros; they are tributes to the gifts men can bring one another. Call me a relationship junkie, but I believe the charting of these homo love narratives has been one of my biggest jobs as an artist. While making Fruit Cocktail, I was being transformed by what I was going through with Doug and Alistair. This
seemed like the perfect moment to create a performance to honor my first lover, David, who brought me to a most juicy fruition.

In addition to being a thank-you note to the first love-of-my-life, the show also tips the hat to the other muses that helped me on my way. *Fruit Cocktail* constellates (germinates?) around the Cal State University, Fullerton, dance studio where I would meet David and eventually make love for the first time. This gives me an excuse to acknowledge the ways that dance saved my life. Getting to escape from the horrors of PE in high school by taking a modern dance class allowed me to connect with my changing body/desires and gave me a runway that made all my future performance work possible. The show also has one of my favorite uses of juicy, overblown music with my pop-your-cherry monologue set to the “Amen” from Handel’s *Messiah*. I make frequent inspiration pit stops in my performances to the canonical classical music literature: Copland’s *Appalachian Spring*, Ravel’s *Bolero*, Wagner’s *Liebestod*, Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. I go to the top of the charts! This was the music that inflated my self-importance, got me hard, and catapulted me to imagine that my little life mattered. Whether it was the power of dance, Handel’s *Messiah*, or a PBS play about Oscar Wilde, all of these cultural materials provided me a primer on queer agency and a road map for identity.

I was thirty-six when I wrote *Fruit Cocktail*, in 1995. It indulges a sunny memory of a moment eighteen years before. It occupies a liminal space, a warm patch of sun between the Reagan/Bush/AIDS era and the new storm looming on the horizon for my relationship with Alistair in this country where we have no rights. But for a couple of years during the creation and touring of this show, it was good to remember the feisty and fierce love of my eighteenth year and to feel its heat and ongoing challenge to me now, that potential to grow and change. *Fruit Cocktail* returns us to my Whittier backyard, that primal psychic-cum-suburban launching pad surrounded by orange trees. This is the story of how to grow fruit!
(The stage is set, festooned even, with painted orange tree branches and a tall row of punky spiked bright green grass bordering the upstage wall. There is a homocentric, ancient Greek, Corinthian pillar upstage right with a galvanized bucket sitting on top. On a good night we hope the set’s effect is both formal and saucy. Tim enters with branches, doing the fruit dance. He enjoys this for a while and then notices the audience.)

Hi, everybody. This is my “fruit dance.” I’ve been taking some workshops at the Center for Integral Fruition here in Santa Monica. We’re exploring our corporeal meditations to connect to one’s Fruit Guide within. I know you’re mostly lay people here tonight, so it might seem a little confusing. Let me explain what I’m doing with this fruit dance. You probably saw me doing this brushing movement. This brings all the energy in the space toward me. It goes right up to the genital chakra. Then to the heart chakra and back to you. It’s an ecology, the great circle of life.

In what my dance friends see as the most dynamic shift in this fruit meditation, we see this stamping motion followed by a lateral gesture. This brings into my spirit the possibility of rooting and budding.

Everyone recognizes this visceral series of whipping motions. Now, as you all know, in many world religions, and in all leather clubs, whipping is used as a way of altering consciousness. In this case, this whipping reminds me of the pain, for there is pain involved in that tender little bud breaking through the hard bark.

Finally, in this most integrated sequence, this sacred series of movements connects head and dick, head and dick. You may have to do this one for a while. It’s followed by a big sweeping mid-seventies modern dance movement. This shows my commitment.
to nurturing my queer fruit within. I’ll do the whole thing so you get the organic flow.

*(Tim does dance once more with feeling.)*

It works for me.

This is not new for me. I’ve been working with fruit for a long time. In kindergarten, they gave us each an apple sapling. We planted them out next to the jungle gym on Whittier Boulevard. They showed my kindergarten class the Disney Johnny Appleseed cartoon on a daily basis. We would sing the Johnny Appleseed hit single, “For giving me the things I need, the sun and the rain and an apple seed (sing along everyone), the Lord is good to me!”

My first-grade teacher Mrs. Walters was good to me too (“teacher’s pet”) cause she gave me two apple saplings. (“Because you’re such a special, though unusual, boy.”) As those tiny apple trees grew, I saw that magic was possible. It existed as concretely as the fourteen layers of hair spray on Mrs. Walters’s hurricane-gale-resistant bouffant existed.

Those saplings grew and so did I. They are tall trees today. Years later, another teacher in the California public school system continued the fruit lesson with the old Avocado, Toothpick, Glass of Water trick.

*(Tim peers into a bucket. Light reflects off a mirror in the bottom and shines up onto his face.)*

That avocado seed stripped of its flesh, tortured with toothpicks, and perched there over the lure of that shimmering water (see, it’s shimmering). My friend Ralph Higgs and I put our succulent twelve-year-old bodies very near each other as we stared at the reflection of our faces in that water. We wanted to see if that avocado seed was gonna crack through its shell and send its roots down toward that hot and wet place. Just as my love for Ralph was growing toward the heat and damp. The roots of that love as deep
as the roots of the trees in the avocado groves where we walked every day after school, looking for arrowheads that didn’t exist.

Ralph and I leaned over the first-peach-of-the-season-colored, protozoa-patterned Formica table. I was drunk with the nearness of his body. Ooooh. I wanted to reach underneath that untucked, mottled green Boy Scout shirt and let my fingers wander over his drum-taut belly and tiny nipples. I stood behind him and saw the smooth skin and downy hairs at the back of his neck. I reached forward to touch him but something stopped me. (“Shields up, Lieutenant Worf!”) I tried to fight it and my hand moved closer. A tiny moan escaped from my lips. Ralph turned around and looked at me funny. He moved away and said, “I think we should go play war now.”

In my backyard in Southern California, which is where the show is set, we had a number of fruit trees: lemon, persimmon, pomegranate, loquat. But there was one very special fruit tree, a Valencia orange. The one remaining tree of the orange grove that used to be there.

(Mysterious music fills the theater. A single orange flies down from above on a string.)

Somehow, as I grew up, that orange tree slowly became the symbol of my family. (This was a special hybrid tree bred to withstand the pressure of even the heaviest metaphor!) Every waking dream and unnamed desire dangled there as heavy as that fruit. I would lay underneath that tree naked when no one was home. I’d beg those branches to help me grow. I’d prick my finger on its sharp thorns and drip my blood into the dirt. C’mon, let’s make a deal. I wanted its roots to wind through me and let me become part of the tree. I wanted to be as juicy and dangerously tart as the fruit of those Valencias. Those oranges so sour and sweet and sharp that one bite could make your face sphincter up into a Jesse Helms look-alike. Their juice would make you breathe your life in deep. I’d jerk off in the light of day when nobody was home
and cum on that tree root. I’d ask it for things they said no one should ask for.

(The orange goes back to where it came from, as long as the transparent fish line doesn’t get tangled up like it did once in Atlanta.)

I’d try to actually see the tree grow. If I watched really closely with my child’s eye, I was sure I could see it happen. I’d lay there very still and watch that orange against the sky. I’d see it oh so slowly grow beyond its boundaries.

Just like I tried to watch my pubic hair grow when I was a boy.

(House lights up. Time to torture the audience. Tim heads for the front row and picks on somebody.)

I need some help. Could you please pull one pubic hair out.

(Sometimes they resist pulling a pubic hair and Tim needs to encourage them a bit.)

Audience participation, ya gotta love it. Just pull the damn thing!!!

(Often they grab a handful. This is hard when there are eight shows a week.)

Ouch, you took too many; now I’m gonna need a pubic toupee! I waited such a long time for my first pubic hair. I was a late bloomer. I’d read all of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer twice before my voice began to change. Not a good idea. I was tired of being made fun of in the showers in gym class. I tried to will my pubic hair to grow. I’d concentrate very hard, “GROW GROW!” then I would get the flashlight and a mirror and then contort myself to see if anything was growing around my dick or butthole. When would I get my first pubic hair? I decided to take extreme action. I thought I could maybe help them grow. I would go out in the backyard and lay naked in the sun under the sprinklers when
no one was home. No one was home a lot. The graceful arc of the water drenching me. Maybe my pubic hair had been planted with special pubic hair seed. Like the little specks on a poppyseed bagel. If I watered them they would grow. The sun might accelerate them. I sensed, as I looked at my hairless boy-belly and crotch, that when these hairs finally came they would bring some new revelation, a new awareness (ssss). I wanted this to happen soon. I started putting food supplements, house plant vitamins, fertilizers on my crotch to make that fucking pubic hair grow. In desperation, I even sent away for special miracle hair tonics for male pattern baldness. I was sure that would help. NADA!

Finally, one day, I saw something. I had just finished re-reading Also Sprach Zarathustra. Was it a speck of dirt? A bit of lint? No. It was an actual hair. I doubled up on the vitamin E oil and hot towel treatments. That pubic hair grew from an eighth of an inch to a quarter to a half an inch long. I got out my chemistry set microscope and saw there was some strange hieroglyphic writing on this first “naturally curly” pubic hair. I slowly deciphered the words on that pube.

(Tim reads the fine print on the pubic hair.)

“Greetings! Things will not be as you think. You are going to have a very different life from the other boys on your water polo team. You will want to hold and be held by other men. You will feel the tide of gender shift around inside of you. Sacred visions may appear. You will have an unusually developed appreciation for female vocalists of all eras. Welcome to your life.”

End of message. This was my first pubic hair. There soon would be more and more. Each with its own tidings and greetings for the life to come. A forest of tales and guideposts for how to live my life.

As I look at you now, dear audience, I see you too as a lush field of pubic hair. Raise your arms and let that pubic hair dance. Each of you unique in your pubic splendor. C’mon do it. I promise you this is the most uncool moment in the show.
(Amazingly, the audience always does the arm wave. Tim works the room.)

This pubic hair suffers from K-Y buildup. This pube’s gone gray. Lady Clairol’ll fix that. All you not waving your arms must have a bad case of crabs. I’m going over here. Let those arms dance. Each of you pubic hairs here present has grown through many challenges and crises to be here tonight. You have grown up and through your bodies to get your butts on these seats tonight. Dance pubic arms. Dance. Woman or man. Straight or gay. Wait. One moment. Just for tonight I’m gonna assume everyone here tonight is queer. (I’m in a risk-taking mood.) For the three of you here tonight who are not queer, I’d like you to know that I’m empowered by the state of California to deputize you all right now. All you men, you’re all cocksuckers and you’ve been up and down the Hershey Highway so much ya got enough frequent flyer miles for a round-trip to Cleveland. All you women, you are all clitlickers. If you’re not queer, just see this as a compliment. It’s kind of a mixture of what does daddy do at work and queen for a day.

Okay, lovely queer audience waving your pubic hair arms in this gentle breeze, how did we fulfill the promise and the prophecy of that pubic hair? How did we get through the gauntlet of a zillion cultural pressures to the contrary? Pulled this way and that. PULLED. Pulled as if by great ropes. Why look. Some rope. Got a date later. Grab these please. You people hold this end. You people this one.

(Tim gives the front row two ropes so they can tug him from side to side. The front row gets a real workout in this show!)

We were buffeted by the cold winds of cruel conformity—buffet me NOW please by the cold winds of cruel conformity . . . back and forth.

Fucked over by growing up in a homophobic world.
Messed with by right-wing homophobic hate-spewing.
The harsh challenge of AIDS.
The tyranny of conventional gender behavior!
(Build to a climax here, okay?)

(Before this gets out of hand Tim lets go of the ropes.)

Thanks for the buffeting.
I think I’ve always really known what finally got me through
that shit and helped me be queer. It was written there in the really
fine print on that pubic hair. I sense a TV signal tuning in. When
you get right down to it, it all came down to one thing. PBS made
me gay.

(Stage lights bright. Time to get down to business.)

Yes, here we have every right-wing nut’s 3 A.M. nightmare
come true. They broadcast that homo beam right into my fam-
ily’s suburban living room in the mid-seventies and saved my fuck-
ing life. It was that Theater in America production about Oscar
Wilde. Thank you KCET! From you, public television, I received
my first dose of queer images and a sense of historical lineage! (I
got a tote bag too, but that’s another story.) Well, maybe I can’t
give PBS all the credit. It could also have been that Civic Light
Opera production in the late sixties of A Funny Thing Happened
on the Way to the Forum. It was a notorious revival with the butt-
revealing tunics on the chorus boys. Or, while we’re in a Greco-
Roman mood, maybe it was those delicious homoerotic novels by
Mary Renault. (DYKE! WE LOVE YOU MARY!) Her books
were set in classical Greece and were full of those buffed Athe-
nian ephebes going for Truth and Beauty and Biceps. A little dab’ll
do ya! No, wait, I know. Wait! I know. It had to be the eighteenth-
century composer George Frideric Handel. His music helped tell
me who I was and sent me zooming into my queer life. Yes, there
is absolutely no question (it’s been scientifically proven)—Han-
del’s Messiah made me into a faggot!
Allow me to explain. It is 1976. Ah, 1976! Let me smell the crotch of my maroon double-thick corduroy bell-bottoms and remember 1976! The capacious toothy grin of soon-to-be-President Jimmy Carter spreads like a shovel full of smooth peanut butter over the land. Let me take a whiff of Jif and sniff that tremulous year. Let me rub those bell-bottoms through my ass crack. Let me reach inside the pockets of those pants, past the tiny tube of Clearasil acne ointment, and grab my dripping teenage weenie.

I was seventeen going on eighteen and I was desperate for love and dick. I searched everywhere for it to no avail. During my entire sixteenth year, I constantly cruised the psychology section of the Whittier Public Library and not a single cute grad student tried to pick me up. So throughout the forty-years-in-the-desert of my adolescence, my backyard had been my only dependable sexual partner (except for Mr. Hand and the International Male underwear catalog). I had hid behind the succulents and jerked off there. I did my earliest experiments with zucchinis in the vegetable garden behind the garage. This is the part of the show that my mom really hates. When she saw it she said, “My god Tim. You did what with my zucchinis? Then I put them in the Tuna Helper.” Those squashes’ sunlit heat still inside me. The backyard was a minefield of holes in the lawn where I had stuck the rake handle deep in the warm earth to make a tight, hot, wet hole to fuck on dull summer afternoons. There had been a few kisses already, of course. First there was my girlfriend Janet Mauldin in junior high. We kissed on the Journey to Inner Space ride at Disneyland on eighth-grade graduation day.

(Fifties science fiction music and throbbing red lights for Tim’s big heterosexual first kiss.)

As I stroked her Marcia Brady hair, we climbed into the royal blue automated car that would carry us into the microscope where we would be shrunk and injected into a water molecule. I kissed her pool-tanned neck as we journeyed through the snowflake
field. We put our lips together as those oxygen and hydrogen atoms swirled around us. I stuck my tongue in her mouth as we approached the pulsing red nucleus.

The atom got bigger and bigger, this huge throbbing nucleus hanging in front of us as our wet, wet, wet tongues danced around each other and we got on the ride again and again. Janet and I walked through Tomorrowland with our arms entwined the rest of that June day. I felt the full hot cradling breath of heterosex- ual privilege wash over me. It floated me up as an offering to the gaping mouth of Walt Disney’s hidden queerness, his closet the size of Frontierland.

I was thirteen and I had a cute girlfriend. This looks good. She was valedictorian and she would sing a song to me at eighth-grade graduation. The world was fine as I walked arm in arm with Janet Mauldin down Main Street, USA. Everything was good—

(Sound bumps off: Lights get us back to queer reality.)

—except that very soon (once I got the aforementioned pubic hair the next year) I was going to become a giant fruit.

Disneyland would again loom large in senior year of high school as I kissed my first boyfriend Robert at a white-trashy trailer park in Anaheim on New Year’s Eve, 1976. The Magic Kingdom’s fireworks exploded and Tinkerbell twirled with that frozen frightened-to-death smile on her tightrope descent through the fiery bursts from the Matterhorn while Robert and I stuck our hands in each other’s pants a few blocks away. At the last moment, Robert wouldn’t put out. We greeted the New Year sulking, drinking cold marijuana tea on opposite sides of a sexless bed.

So, I arrived for my first day at California State University, Fullerton, a reluctant virgin and a proto-punk-rock wanna-be. First class. Eight A.M. Modern Dance 101A. I had been taking dance classes in high school, thus escaping PE and the magnetic pull my head seemed to have for balls of all shapes and sizes. It was part of a pilot program during Governor Jerry Brown’s first
term called the “Advanced Homosexual Placement and Empowerment Act.” Governor Brown came down and gave each of us queer boys a special dance belt embossed with the California state seal. I slipped that dance belt on, then my tights and Patti Smith T-shirt and entered the dance studio. I was about to start my warm-up when my eyes were pulled out of my head by the sight of a sleek dark-haired fellow doing some deep pliés in the corner by the barre. His arm wind-milled over his head. His leg magically circled his ear. The room began to tilt in his direction and I began to slip and slide toward his embrace. Then another cute dancer boy, with an obvious perm and wearing an unfortunate silver unitard, touched him on the arm and said, “Hi, David.”

His name was David! That name means “king,” I thought. Or, if it doesn’t, it fucking well should.

He was totally beautiful. He looked like . . . DAVID BOWIE.

(Bowie music bounces on. The mid-seventies thin white duke period.)

Dancer David, like his namesake, had long articulate legs and fine black-brown hair—maybe a henna highlight rinse. Who knows? David’s arms were as long as a giraffe’s opera glove, his face set off by a delicate strand of off-white pukka shells around his neck. He, without question, represented one version of the homo physical ideal of 1976, at least as far as my seventeen-going-on-eighteen-year-old eyes could see.

David was the best dancer, and the big queen dance teacher obviously favored him. David dove into each arabesque, devouring the space as he flung himself through the dance combination, scraping the acoustic tile ceiling every time he leapt. I was in the last group and I tried to match his power as I danced only for his eyes.

(Tim struggles as he dances through the combination. Then shrugs. The music stops as Tim stands in a pin spot, only his face illuminated.)
Who was he? Who was this man who would be so much to me? The fuel he would give me still fires lots of kisses. The taste of the food we were gonna eat together is somewhere on the plate at every table where I sit with a man at my side. The touch David taught me is at the tips of my fingers as they dance over the skin of other men. The back of David’s neck is suddenly there on another man in a bed fifteen years later, in a strange blue house in Minneapolis. I think I still strive to nuzzle that neck, to sniff my way back to that moment. Of course, I didn’t know how he’d change my life and memories then. I just wanted to hold this man with the black-brown hair who looked like David Bowie very close to me.

And who was I at that moment? With the blitzkrieg of puberty, I had come to occupy a world of romantic-cum-homoerotic forces that were a strange cocktail of a nineteenth-century Russian novel and a mid-seventies gay porn movie. A place where Dostoyevsky would get salvation and a locker-room blow job. Maybe I was looking for this imaginary scenario instead of keeping my eyes peeled for the messy real life that just might present itself. I was too smart for my own good and yet not smart enough to know my heart’s highways. I finished the dance sequence and caught a glimpse of myself in the thick wire-rim aviator glasses which often made people mistake me for a lesbian separatist from Ann Arbor.

What did I really look like then? Well, my boy-child cuteness had done the usual teenage weedy thing. Hair, bones, and ego had all grown in the most unlikely directions. My cheeks and nose often sported several zits, sometimes in patterns as recognizable as certain constellations (Cassiopeia one week, Ursa Major the next). Nothing that would show up in a dermatological textbook, but enough to cause panic.

I stood near David at one end of the studio and I got incredibly anxious. I began fiddling with my fingers in my new “natural” Afro hairstyle that my barber Big Al Stumpo had given me. My hair had suddenly lost its silky goyish qualities and had become
incredibly curly the day after I first jerked off. Big Al Stumpo had tried for years to tame my relentless curls. All during high school, he had forced me to brush through my bristles and comb all those curls to one side. They’d pile up like an electrocuted poodle over my left ear; then, one by one, when no one was looking, those curls would spring back with an audible twang. In 1976, Big Al Stumpo finally gave up. He threw his enormous nicotine-stained hands in the air and said, “Basta! Have it your own way. A curl’s gotta do what a curl’s gotta do!”

Forcing my fingers to leave my hair, I danced my way a little clumsily through the next part of the teacher’s combination, a really hard turn followed by a jump, watching David the whole time, the dance belt under my tights straining to its polyester limits. Somehow, I managed to get through every contraction and release with that dance belt smashing my hard-on against my belly. I wanted time to stop, to walk up to David and begin our pas de deux then and there.

The dance class finally ended. My eyes connected with David’s for one wide-screen moment, in the mirror of the rehearsal studio. I saw David walk to his stuff and write something down. He hoisted his dance bag to his shoulder and walked with clipped dignity toward the door. At the last moment, he crisply knelt down by my backpack and slipped a folded piece of orange paper inside. He shot me a nervous look, then quickly left.

I took a breath, counted to three, then raced over to my bag. There it was right next to my Carter/Mondale campaign literature: a flyer for the lesbian and gay student group. I love political organizing! On it he had written, “Call me later. I’ll be home around 9:30. David.” Then his phone number.

I looked at my watch every three seconds for the next twelve hours. Why do I have to wait so long to call him? I sat in a litter-strewn McDonald’s, writing desperate seventeen-year-old’s poetry in my journal, having triple-thick shake after triple-thick shake. Finally, at 9:29, my heart playing the bongos, I called David. No
answer. I had my sixth chocolate shake. The Big Dipper appeared in pimples on my forehead. I waited a minute and called again. He picked up.

I didn’t know what to say. “I got your note,” I stammered. “Good.”

I could hear a tiny creak in David’s voice, too. I listened to his anxious breath flow in and out against my sweaty ear at the receiver.

“Um. Thanks for the note.”
“Do you want to come over?” David asked.
“Uh. Okay.”

I ran through four red lights on my way to David’s sprawling stucco apartment building off Yorba Linda Boulevard, just spitting distance from the little house where Nixon was born (and buried). I walked into his complex, which was called “Vista de los Muchachos del Mar” or something. I walked past the hot tub, overflowing with the usual fraternity-style soapsuds. I sniffed in the tart whoosh of the swooning marigolds in the hot breath of the September Santa Ana breeze: those flowers, sharp chlorine, and Mr. Bubble are what that night in my life smelt like. I climbed up three flights of stairs, found David’s unit and knocked softly.

David opened the door slowly, glowing in his fifties red rayon bowling shirt. The smell of herb tea and something baking drifted through from behind him.

“Come in.” David opened the door wide.

I had never before visited a friend who lived in his own place. No parents! He showed me around. Even today, I can draw the floor plan as accurately as any architect. The deep shag living room. Piles of books and musical scores. The military organization of the kitchen. The red-lightbulb-lit bedroom with the auto repair shop sign over the bed which read, “All Deliveries Made in the Rear.” This was his fucking house; it screamed his independence and his point of view. Someday I will have a place like this for me.
We sat down on the small couch in the living room and we began to talk. I was awed by the extreme adultness of the situation. I kept using big words in absurd sentences.

“You know, David, I think postmodern dance creates an existential situation for self-awareness. And, for me, the artist must be a kind of Nietszchean Übermensch amid stultifying normative bourgeois patterns.” I made that up all by myself.

David smiled mysteriously and quickly changed the subject. He told me about his family and growing up. He mentioned he graduated from high school in 1970. I did my simple math and realized he must be at least twenty-four. I was shocked. I had never known anyone quite so old before. Could this relationship work?

David had been much hurt by his twenty-four years of this weird life we’ve all landed in. He told me about being queer-bashed in front of a gay bar in nearby blue-collar Garden Grove. The attackers stabbed him many times in the neck with an ice pick. He showed me the denim shirt he’d been wearing, still bloody, with the thin tear lines on the fabric where the ice pick skated until the sharp point found its way into his flesh. I still have that shirt. I keep it safe in what’s left of my closet.

These last bits of information were a bit too adult and scary. I finally shut up.

At last, we got to the main subject. David said, “Tim, I have something very important to tell you. It’s something you must know about me if we are to begin an honest friendship. I hope you won’t think any less of me. Tim, I’m... a musician.” In addition to his dance studies at Cal State he was also taking music composition and conducting.

“I have to ask you a question that may really affect how close we can become. What kind of music do you like?” he asked me.

Oh no. A test! Scanning his record collection for a winning answer, I said “I like classical vocal music mostly.” I lied, omitting the Patti Smith and the show tunes.
But I had won the daily double! He lit up at this and jumped to his feet. He told me that in his conducting class they were working on the “Amen” from Handel’s Messiah. He walked to his RadioShack combo record player—eight-track deck, his butt shifting lazily beneath his thrift-shop tuxedo pants with each step. He put a record on the stereo. The phono needle found its scratchy groove and clicked into the ending of Handel’s Messiah.

(The recording of the Messiah comes on. The great bit at the end, “Worthy Is the Lamb that Was Slain.” Tim speaks in time with the music.)

David listened and then slowly began to talk about the music as the stately voices vaulted through the cheap speakers.


David moved slowly nearer and nearer to me on the couch as he spoke. I put down my tea and turned my body toward him, my center of gravity slowly shifting into his orbit.

“Handel does something great here!” he exclaimed. “It’s like the tenors start to chat up the baritones. The sopranos start flirting with bull dyke altos. They find a way of understanding this weird world. A way of understanding who we are.”

David moved his leg up and down against mine as he slowly rocked with the music. I pantomimed a yawn and maneuvered my arm to rest behind his head on the couch. He grabbed my knee, hard, and whispered in my ear.

“And right when it seems it can’t get more intense, at that moment all the voices come together and zap it up one more notch. Tim, they remind us to be who we should be. Remind us to listen to ourselves. To remember to make the best and truest parts of ourselves grow. To know ourselves. Loving our bodies.
Trusting each other. To nurture those places inside. To give them the light and water and care they need. We know. You and I know who we are. Don’t we? We know . . . what we want. What we feel. What we love. This is how we should be!”

David pulled my hand into his. I worried that my palms were too sweaty.

“It’s like they’re building a doorway for us.” He whispered with the music. “The string continuo kicks in and joins the celebration. It’s a way out of a place we have been trapped inside of for so long and never knew it. Finally we walk outside together!”

The energy of the chorus built. David put his arms around me and looked into my eyes. His lips moved slowly closer. I felt his breath on my face. Very gently his “Eagle Has Landed” lips touched mine and then—so softly, softly, softly—my new friend David, who looked like Bowie, kissed me!

(A flash-bulb brightness catches Tim in this moment.)

For an instant, I thought my brain would explode. I saw shooting lights and every picture in my photo album race in front of my eyes, a crazily shuffled deck. Then, David broke away and noisily tortured the phono needle across side B of the Messiah and said,

(We hear the phono needle abrasively scratch the whole side of the record.)

“I think we’ve had enough . . . Handel . . . for one evening.”

David made a beeline to the kitchen and boiled some water. He shifted us from the yangy “anything could happen” peppermint to soothing “I’m so sleepy” chamomile tea (it’s all relative, okay?). Then we held hands some more, listened to the Bach Mass in B Minor, and called it a night.

As I drove down La Habra Boulevard past Richard Nixon’s first law office, I felt David’s tongue on my lips, his taste as fresh as a bite of an apple that’s shiny enough to see your face in.
When I got home, I knew I was going to have to have a hard talk with my mom and dad. I had always subscribed to the slash-and-burn school of relations with parents: fits of outrage, extreme ideological transformations, a knee-jerk willingness to pass judgment on their lives. The usual. I wore my Chairman Mao button on my sleeve to Christmas Eve service. I didn’t do these things for me. I did it for them! I needed to provoke my folks and to keep their parental reflexes up. This scorched-earth policy would now cut to the chase. It seemed like a perfectly good time to come out to them.

It was late, really late, when I got back home. My parents were still up. Uh oh. I walked into their bedroom and Bettie and George looked at me, my dad over his *Time* magazine with Walter Mondale on the cover, my mom over her book, a cleavage-festooned romance novel. My mom had her nightly mudpack of Noxzema on her face; the Noxzema had started to harden around the edges and turn a vanilla-wafer-pie-crust brown.

“I think we need to talk,” I said. “I know you’ve been worried about me ever since I first did that summer school musical theater intensive workshop before eighth grade. I wish I could say those worries were unfounded. But I can’t. And I just have to tell you something very important. I’m gay.”

The pause lasted at least a millennium. My dad rolled his eyes. My mom’s book fell to her chin and a bosom on the cover got smeared with Noxzema.

“I just hope you’re not going to blame me,” she said. “I know they always try to blame the mother.”

“I want you to be careful,” my dad offered. “Don’t wear dresses in public and you won’t get beat up.”

My mom asked, “Do you have a boyfriend?”

I answered, “Yes, his name is David. He looks like David Bowie. He goes to Cal State Fullerton. I love him. If I’m not home at night, you’ll know where I am. I’ll bring him over so you can meet him.”
“Don’t forget to put out the trash,” my dad reminded me.
“Goodnight, dear!”

They went back to their reading. As I left their bedroom, I, like Miss Peggy Lee, had to wonder: Is that all there is? I slipped out into the kitchen and grabbed the one telephone in our house. I stretched the cord as far as possible from my parents’ bedroom. Around the corner. Through the sliding glass door. And called David.

“Hi, David? It’s Tim.”
“Hi, Hon.”
Hon! He called me “Hon.” Have any two people ever been more intimate?

We whispered to each other as I twirled the lazy Susan on the kitchen table around and around. I laid the side of my head on the Formica and watched it circle. The salt began to blur with the A-1, which got mixed up with the ketchup. This swirling and twirling of our lives, as lazy as that Susan.

I told him about the Big Conversation with my parents and their lackluster response. David laughed. Then I said, “I need you to meet them sometime soon.”

“I want to see you tomorrow,” David said. “I want us to make love.”
“!”

“I want it to be special. Meet me in the second-floor dance studio at Cal State at 9 p.m. I have the key. I’ll be waiting for you.”
“I’ll see you there, David. Umm, should I bring anything?”
“Well, don’t bring any Noxzema, whatever you do!” David said. “Why don’t you get a some Vaseline Intensive Care Lotion?”
“Oh. I’ll see you tomorrow night.”

I heard the soft click as David hung up. I unwound the phone cord, retraced my steps, and very gently placed my telephone receiver back in the cradle as if it were the baby Jesus. I was too excited to go to bed. So I quietly crept out into the backyard . . .
(Time for mood lights! As Tim so often did—see also Some Golden States—Tim heads for some nookie in the backyard and slips out of his clothes in the thick, green light.)

I took off my shirt. Felt the hot wind on my skin. My shoes came next and I felt the dry grass and the snails crackling under my feet. I took off my pants and felt the night creep like David’s fingers over my body. I walked across my backyard toward the Valencia orange tree in the redwood-fenced corner.

I had sucked and eaten the sour thrill of a truckload of those oranges. But, now, I pulled one off of the tree and ran it over my face.

(The mysterious orange bobs into view once again. Tim caresses it, then pulls it off the string.)


(Naked Tim has peeled the orange and now moves back to the first-row audience folks to place slices in their mouths.)

Fruit is the nicest word we get called. Who wouldn’t want to be a fruit? Fruits are delicious, good for you, full of juice. They have a tough skin that can protect them from the shit that the world throws. It covers up their soft and tasty places. You can peel fruit. Expose the prize. Through the layers. To that good place. The fruit of our love, our tears, our sex, our juicy faggotry.

I traced that naked orange down my throat. Over my heart. Felt it wake up my left nipple (two hairs now, FYI), down the hollow of my belly, the pubic hair creeping out like on a Labrador puppy’s belly. I bit into that orange and let the juice run down my chest drip, drip, drip off of the end of my dick.

(Tim gets quite messy here what with all the orange juice. Definitely need a shower after this show.)
Dropped it behind my neck (this is where the ice pick was) and it slithered down my back into my ass crack. I pulled its flesh into my mouth and I swallowed a mess of pulpy sloppy orange. And I felt something hard catch in my throat. It felt as big as a Brazil nut. Tape out. This is an emergency.

*(Bright lights. Thunders! Alarums! Excursions!)*

I’m choking on the biggest orange seed known to man. I start to gag. I try to cough it up. I fling myself against the fence trying to force it out. I crawl toward my parents’ bedroom making strangled gurgle whimpering sounds. WALP MEEEEEE!

*(Tim goes to audience members and plops his orange-juicy naked butt on someone’s lap.)*

Please help me. Do the Heimlich maneuver. Don’t you read in restaurant restrooms? I guess I’m going to have to (GULP) swallow. Whew. That was close. I’m going to have to be more careful about swallowing. Thanks. Wait. I feel something. Uh oh. It’s moving around. This is the thing my Grandma Dutton always warned me about. Don’t swallow all those seeds or they’re gonna grow inside you! The pissed-off ghosts of a million watermelon seeds are coming back to haunt me. To grow through me. It’s getting so big in my stomach. Sprouting. Vining up my spine. My brain is blowing up. Bursting through my body. Sending branches out through my fingertips. Leaves out from behind my ears.

I see flashes of the life to come. No! I don’t want to know the future. I’m only seventeen! I just wanna get laid. The visions present themselves.

*(Mystical vision music comes on and pulsing, lurid lights.)*

If I had gotten that grant this would have been a good moment for a fog machine. Many men in my arms. Much love. Mmmmmm. Much pleasure. This isn’t so bad. So we trample each
other’s vintage sometimes. He did that. You did this. Men that I wrapped myself around hoping they could fix my life. Men that I fled from not knowing how to be what they needed me to be.

Then there is a cloud. There’s a terrible plague. This can’t be right. Let’s change channels. Some of these faggots begin to fall where they fuck. I see that in just five summers this seventeen-year-old will be at Bellevue Hospital visiting an ex-boyfriend, one of the first to become sick. The old round and round stops turning and now we better get wiser.

And there is a vision of a great love. But it’s not David. What? I’m going to have more than one lover in my life? As far as I can see they continue to tend each other in their private places even though they don’t share a roof or a refrigerator.

Their friends keep dying. Crazy politicians try to hurt us. Control our bodies. Stop our poet’s story-shout. “Wait!!! Ghost of Homo Times to Come!!!! Are these the shadows of the things that will be, or are they only the shadows of things that may be?”

From one of my arm branches, a giant fruit starts to grow. A huge Valencia orange coming right out from my body. It takes on features. A little nose. Cute shaved sides and a green mohawk. How late-seventies CBGB’s. Pierced eyebrow.

Oh buff fruit guide, what are you here to tell me?

The fruit pulls itself off the tree and looks at me and and speaks. He sounds just like the pubic hair oracle.

“Silence!”

(The freaky music stops.)

“Ya know. The future is gonna be pretty hard. You’re gonna be squeezed to the popping point. You will be hurt by men in ways you can’t imagine and oh the hearts and dicks that you will wander across. But each change needs to offer up its fruit. You have to prune the tree to bring forth the fruit. You have to pinch off lots of the buds to let the few grow. You need to bring the new pollen into that blossom to make a new life give fruit. Ya have
to sacrifice some to get the other ... CUT OUT THE DEAD WOOD ..."

(We hear faux audience members begin to criticize the show over an audio tape. Tim is pelted with fruit by theater ushers and technical people as he flees naked from taunts.)

“I can’t believe this.
This is the stupidest thing I’ve ever heard.
I want my money back.
I didn’t come here to get depressed.
Enough with the fruit metaphor.
Get a life.”

(Tim shouts.)

STOP!

(The tape bumps off.)

Jeez, haven’t you ever seen a dream sequence? I’m sorry. I’m scared. I try to understand what has happened. I hear these voices cause I want them to help me. I get so confused. Don’t you? I don’t know why I have so many dead ex-boyfriends. I don’t understand why I’m such a shit sometimes. I don’t know why love hops and hides like Alice’s faggot rabbit and tricks us when we least expect it. I want to figure out what I can tell that seventeen-year-old boy before he goes into that dance studio so he won’t get so fucking afraid.

Maybe it would help him. Maybe it would help ... me?

I know that there are these places, okay, maybe they’re fruit, inside me that are the treasure of my life.

These seeds of moments where the love rose up toward the sky as my boyfriend Alistair and I walked around and around the Eros statue in Picadilly.

Where the broken heart brought a new life.
Where the poem was as wet as his tongue up my asshole.

(Tim gathers oranges.)

One moment with Ralph Higgs. Some part of me will always be at that Avocado Altar ready to say “I do.”

Many many moments with a man named Doug whom I have grown up with and with whom I spent these thirteen ever-changing years that have made me what I am.

One very important moment in my life when I got ready to go be with a man I loved in a dance studio in the California State University system, and that place is still there inside me as close to my skin as that dance belt. But I know that some part of myself keeps whispering in my ear from those places. I hear that whisper as gentle as David’s touch. As honest as Doug’s heart. As sweet as Alistair’s face. As soft as the skin on the inside of Ralph Higgs’s arm. The word that I keep trying to hear as it’s whispered to my tenderest place inside. So soft, I can just hear it.


These places keep calling me, challenging me to reach toward the wet and hot place. And from these places I can make . . .

(Enough of all this! Back to the story.)

But, first things first, I have to shower this orange juice off and get some sleep and buy some Vaseline Intensive Care Lotion and get back to the story. I got a date tomorrow night!

The next day was my eighteenth birthday. I went to Thrifty’s and bought an extra-large-size bottle of Vaseline Intensive Care Lotion.

The elderly checkout woman screeched, “Young man, you must have really dry skin!”

“Umm. It’s a birthday present—for a new friend,” I replied. Then, I vigorously wrote a long time in my journal. I walked up to my special place in the hills of La Habra. I re-read the dog-eared
sexy bits from Mary Renault’s *The Persian Boy* for the zillionth time. The night fell and it became dark. I bathed and then drove to the California State University at Fullerton. I parked my car by the gymnasium and walked through campus. I breathed in that night’s blooming jasmine. Up to that point, my life had felt like it had been written by somebody else. It was hidden in a big weird dusty book on a top shelf, just out of reach. That was about to change. I walked up the stairs into the Performing Arts Building as if I were going up to accept an Academy Award.

I climbed to the second floor and slowly opened the heavy metal door.

The dance studio was dark, except for a single white candle. I tried to see where David was.

A loud scratch as the needle hits the record: “Amen” from Handel’s *Messiah* begins to play. I walk into the studio, close my eyes, and fall into the music.

*(Tim speaks this over the “Amen” from Handel’s Messiah.)*

David’s arms enfold me and we begin to kiss, the kiss I have been waiting my whole life for. Our lips, hungry for each other, make a dance together. David strokes my face gently. This is the touch I have been looking for ever since I learned to tie my shoes—this brother this friend this lover in my arms as the sun rises inside me at last. He bites my neck. Yes. Oh. Fuck. Yes.

David’s hands run over my body. Each rolling feeling letting me know myself. My hands run down his back, feeling his chest, his heart beating within. I feel it in the palm of my hand. How much I want this man. I want to climb inside his mouth and swim around inside him, find every hidden wet place. Which I know belongs to me now.

Coming out inside of him. Even as he teaches me the twist and turn of my bones and feelings.
His hair slips through my fingers. He peels my clothes from me. Uncovering a new life underneath. Handel’s voices shoot around each other in great waves like all the angels in heaven. I know more than I’ve ever known anything that this is what God wants me to do. Who I am. What’s right for me.

David reaches down and grabs my dick; the touch blows my head to some scattered galaxy I forgot I knew. My eyes look to the back of my brain: stars shoot inside me, through me, his hand moving on me. His lips surround me. Comets whizz by me. A shower of meteors inside my heart.

David and I spin around each other to the music, leaning far back in each other’s arms as we twirl. He falls to his knees and puts my cock in his mouth. WOW. All the singing in my head gets really loud. Now. Here. Finally. To find this place inside myself with another man. I am eighteen fucking years old. I know the touch I want on my skin. Blessing each other with our touch. Blessing our lives as we live them. One big fucking AMEN to guide us through them. The trumpets pull us higher. All the voices reach a peak. You can see everything that you ever hoped you’d be. Everything is right and makes perfect sense in that moment of absolute and perfect rest!

(The music gets real loud. Handel would have loved this bit.)

The music climaxed.
And so did we.

(We hear the music’s final, definitive, glorious “Amen!”
but the phono needle is stuck at the crucial moment. Slowly fades out skipping. Tim steps into a pool of light.)

Many years later, I stood in front of that dance studio at Cal State, Fullerton, listening to those two young men make love.

I hear the laughter as the phono needle gets stuck at a crucial moment. My fingers touch the chipped corners of that
beat-up metal door. I wish I could go in there and join them. But I can’t. Can I?

What does that eighteen-year-old boy who I once was have to say to me now? Could he have known the good and terrible places he and David were gonna go together? The short time they would love each other? What really happened to him behind that door? Who the fuck was that teenage boy?

And what do I know, anyway? What do I think I could even tell him? I know I’ve discovered one or two things about life and love that feel a little bit true. I wish I could whisper them softly in his ear, as he lies on that hardwood floor kissing David, their cum a Milky Way across their chests.

What might that young man tell me, that boy who is now half my life away? Can I hear him? If I really listen, what does he say?

I remembered how eighteen years before, on my eighteenth birthday, I left that dance studio and I wrote in my journal. I felt David’s cum, dry and hard on my belly as I wrote. I sat in my room with the fluorescent green walls and the life-size poster of Oscar Wilde over my bed, a membership premium from PBS, and I wrote these words:

(Tape comes on with a voice-over of Tim reading from his journal. Tim performs the fruit dance very slowly and tenderly with the words.)

September 22, 1976

I am eighteen. I love. I don’t want this ever to stop. Round and round. The great circle. We die too soon. Lying and hiding chews on us. Must learn to reach out. What else can we do? All wandering in the dark. Nothing to fear. Nothing to lose. I must remember that. Not fearing has brought me the most wonderful man. We will all be dead in a hundred years. All we can do is to touch all the sunlight. All the experience. Eyes meet and a bit of death has been conquered.
Everyone wants to be touched. We all want it. We often fear it. I am only beginning. Everything is before me now. It’s late. The sun is sleeping. I have hardly begun to see. I am eighteen. I am happy. I love David. I love life.

(Tim, our big fruit, slowly reaches up to the sky as the lights fade to black.)