

THE HOMOSEXUAL HANDBOOK

by
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for Men & Boys.
Also for the Edification of Ladies
and of the Lay Public—
Being an Introduction
to the Arts, Crafts and Sports,
and to the History, Sociology and Philosophy
of Masculine Love—
Also Courtship and Marriage between Males—
designed to Amuse, Enlighten and Instruct
all Manner of Readers.

THE
TRAVELLER'S COMPANION
SERIES

THE WATERING PLACE

I was about seventeen or eighteen when I first started going to bars. Straight bars and gay bars. Which was a little tricky because where I come from you had to be twenty-one to get in. But I always looked a questionable twenty-something.

It started when I was in my first year in college. The first places were just artsy-crafty hangouts for Art Institute students of U. of C. people. Not particularly gay unless you wanted that kind of action. Very discreet. Nicely accredited. I was just getting into the alcohol and sleeping-around bag, when I left to go into the service.

I went into my first gay bar in San Antonio, Texas and although I was told by my companion that it was a "gay" bar, I really didn't know what to expect. It seemed a little frenzied, somewhat crowded, but aside from being all male I didn't see anything peculiar about it. If I was nervous, and I

was, it was only because the place was "off limits," which in a service town like San Antonio is pretty ludicrous.

Then later, back in Chicago and the bars of that time, the Shoreline 7, the Butterly, Sam's and a few others. You have to remember that after the war things started tightening up. There were fewer and fewer bars, and dancing for many years was forbidden. Older people in their *thirties* told me colorful stories of how it was in the old days, and they said that in New York City one could still dance till dawn in the arms of countless tender strangers.

Well, I took some of my tuition money and went to New York with my first lover. Sure enough, they were right. We went one night to a place called the Capri where on a postage-stamp-sized dance floor couples, (yes, in those days people danced in two's), shook and writhed in the Mambo. We teetered on the brink of the fifties. Still a hayseed, I had never danced amid, let alone *with* painted black sissies. ("Black Sissy!" was the endearment these young men shouted to each other as they kicked, jabbed with their elbows, and lurched about angrily. Unless they were Spanish-speaking, in which case it seemed to be the same endearment but translated.) Frivolity was at its height. Perez Prado and the Cha Cha were just around the corner.

As the years passed I found myself in many cities. Baltimore, Montreal, Mexico City, et cetera. Drifting with the beat, as they say. There I was one step behind Kerouac and too young to care. So I can say I've been to a lot of bars. I know what they do and how they do it. And thinking it over, it seems to me to be a wise idea just to take four "typical" places here in New York and describe them. You'll probably be able to draw your own parallels in your own city. They don't change much.

I called and asked Xavier to go with me on a research project. He knew about this book and he had his little laugh about the prospect of going with me under such circumstances. "Me? Take Uncle Fudge with his questionnaires, his tape measure, his calipers? Never!"

But then I hadn't been to a bar in a while and I felt a refresher course might be helpful. "You go practically all of the time, Xavier."

"I don't. Only on weekends."

"Where do you go?" I asked him. I wanted to know his favorite places.

"Oh," he grinned, "I like the *Checkerboard* and *Danny's* and, oh, yes, *The Stud*." I guffawed for about ten minutes about *that*, which put him up tight. But not too. "Well, I like *The Stud*. Some very nice people go there."

"What about *The Stone Wall*?" I wanted to know if we could go there because I'd heard that it was not only a Dancing Bar, but a Dancing Bar with go-go boys. In cages, I hoped.

"Oh, you don't want to go there."

"Why not?"

"That's so tired. What do you want to watch a couple of bleached-out skinny faggots wiggling their much-used asses up on a bar for?"

I assured him that I did anyway, and that it was like "Old Faithful." If you haven't seen it you might as well; especially if you're in the neighborhood. My particular reason, which I did not confide in him, was that only a short time ago a person of my acquaintance with a growing reputation in the world of small theatricals, had accompanied the playwright D. to the bar in order that they might watch his latest love, a go-go-ette. For me, there was a gritty kind of glee in the prospect of seeing this gyrating

moppet, for the little fag had apparently refused to torture his admirer, thereby torturing his admirer. Treacle on my tongue! Once this D. had dared to presume on the good nature and commendable loins of my own steamy baby.

"We will begin," I said, "at *The Stone Wall*."

Sometime between that agreement and our entry into the club, another acquaintance, Wally, of whom I spoke earlier, joined us for a night on the town. There's a catch in my throat as I mention his name. That man is living proof that a man can find happiness as a pixie at the age of forty and beyond.

The bar is on Christopher Street, just off Sheridan Square, and is reputed to be a private club. The burly at the door keeps boxes that hold, or are rumored to hold, thousands of cards upon which are printed the particulars of the many thousands of customers that have come and continue to patronize this place. On the weekends, there is a price of admission which is euphemized into something else, but it's not very much actually, only a couple of dollars or so. I have often seen lines or near lines outside on a Saturday night.

In a loud voice Xavier declared himself to be "known," and the door was opened. We went inside gingerly, for even stepping out of the gloom of the evening, our eyes were not accustomed to the inky atmosphere of the noisy double bar.

There's a certain hastiness about the look of the place. It seems to have only recently been converted from a garage into a cabaret; in about eight hours and at a cost of under fifty dollars. Everything is painted black, even the windows. The long main room on the right has a bar of considerable length, and is patronized pretty well by the people who drink. Everybody doesn't, which is why the prices are so high. The younger, more agile and more

sensationally demi-dressed, jerk and bump on the rather large dance area at the end of the room. A space perhaps thirty by thirty. Spotlights are pointed directly down and they light the dancing youths dramatically.

This is a *young* bar. The patrons are primarily youthful and primarily good-looking. That's the premium. A haven of and for narcissists. Sex is in the air but it remains there while people preen and rubberneck about to see who is or might be watching their contortions. Median age I'd reckon to be about twenty-two.

In the room next door the scene is the same, but because the dance floor is considerably smaller, there is less dancing and so there is a great deal of that "standing around" business which is generally a sign of sexual activity, or at least the prelude to it. Occasionally people may take their eyes away from the dancers long enough to address a word or a remark to their neighbor.

Well, we did *that* for a while, and Xavier, who seemed to know fifty per cent of the people there, danced a couple of times and then he insisted we go. OK by me and OK by Wally.

On the way out of the place I happened to notice that the light shows and projections were suddenly turned on and two boys at opposite ends of the bar were flouncing about to assorted rhythms. They wore little flesh-colored bathing trunks and seemed to be quite devoid of unwanted body hair. The lad to my left was much too languid to be anything more than a travesty of the tired stripper, but the right-hand boy was really working out with verve and energy. He was not without looks, but wore one of those unlivin-in faces far too *weary of it all* for his age or even his environment. Should we ever

meet, I'll thank him for being just the hard little number he is.

We left quickly and without regret. This was one of those places one goes to when one is quite young and inclined to go everywhere in coveys. More social than anything else, it is simply a place to burn off steam and to be seen. Not the kind of place for making out, though there's that possibility too, especially the later in the morning it gets. But the usual practice is to leave The Stone Wall and go on to another bar, or for a long, slow walk down Christopher or Greenwich.

"Now we'll go someplace I like." Xavier was smiling and striding like a race horse, wearing one of those fashionable new innerspace suit-things, with huge industrial zippers on it everywhere at odd angles. Wally wore rather discreet Wig-winder Mod, and I was in a baggy old suit which drew howls of derision from Xavier. "Tweed? My God! You look like somebody's father."

"Where will we go now?" I wanted to know. "Thrills and chills? People stalking about in leather snowsuits? Transvestites? Lust-maddened caphropagists on the rampage?"

"What are caphropagists?" Wally and Xavier asked in a voice.

"Shit eaters!" I said with a fiendish leer, rubbing my hands together and cackling like Lionel Barrymore. A woman walking her dog gasped. Xavier made some remark about my being perfectly impossible after two drinks. "I've never seen you like this," he said. Which was not true. I reminded him that indeed he had. And we laughed about *that*.

But there we were in front of The Stud. "Shall we go in?" I asked, stepping over the threshold. Before I could put my foot inside I was grabbed from the rear.

"No," Xavier said. "It looks tacky in there tonight." I couldn't deny that, but then never having been there before I didn't think that reason enough to keep us out. But he spun us both around so quickly we nearly toppled a trio of college-clad fifty-year-olds who pursed their lips and clucked their tongues at us. "We'll go to Danny's." There was no objection to this, so we retraced our steps back to Christopher Street.

As we marched along Wally told us an amusing story about a middle-aged man on Fire Island this summer. It seems the man was a member of their "swinging" clique, and though they'd seen each other at parties, orgies, and pic-niques under the boardwalk, they'd only spoken, and never made that deeper more meaningful communication; i.e., fucked.

The end of the season was upon the Pines. People were gathering in wistful clusters for tear-stained daisy chains, exchanging names, positions, telephone numbers, and promises to meet again in the city.

A few drinks at the bar and a little hash later that evening with the mysterious gentlemen in question, Wally found himself talking with the now "handsome" doctor who was, among other things, a hypnotist. Later, at the doctor's house, after more drinks and a great deal more hash, Wally seemed somehow to be in bed and undergoing hypnosis at the hands of this same gentleman. "Which wasn't so bad in itself," he said, "but you know, he kept saying these funny things, and he had his cock out, and it was *enormous*. I mean really a big one, and he was stroking it and saying how I had these things inside me that he was going to release, tensions and things. And that some people required different kinds of stimulation to bring out whatever they had in them. An' by this time I was really seein' things