

Stonewall

June 27, 1969, 11 PM

JudyJudyJudy. All over the television, *JudyJudy*, all over the radio, *Judy*, all over the headlines, *Judy Garland Dead*, and all over the juke box — against which leans Aretha Iago.

“She’s the flaming, burnt Toast of Chicago, darling. Very South Side.”

“On loan to Manhattan, Greenwich Village, the Continental Baths, and the Stonewall Inn.”

“No deposit. No return.”

“I never repeat gossip. So listen carefully. You know what I’m saying?”

“I can dig it.”

“Groovy.”

M. Iago is singing along (at 43 rpms) to (the 45 rpm) “The Man That Got Away” catching some sniffy notice from the early birds doing laps through the Stonewall’s two rooms. Growing up staring into her mother’s three-way mirrors, magnified twelve times, M. Iago faces reality. Inside every drag queen is a man that got away. M. Iago, stoned at the Stonewall, believing *Judy/being Judy/belting Judy*, is gay happy-sad.

Early on a Friday night, the joint is jumping like a high-school hop. It’s that hour of the optimist in any gay bar, only eleven o’clock, sixty minutes before the wee bitching hour when everybody who is anybody changes into somebody else to make their entrances.

M. Iago is exhausted after two hot June nights standing in line, crying and pushing and shoving (groping), craning her neck among the throng of men dragged up in boots and heels on the sidewalk outside Campbell’s Funeral Chapel at Madison Avenue and 81st waiting like a — what? — huge conga line snaking (one, two, three, kick) in to view the famous corpse smothered in yellow flowers, and

hoping to catch a glimpse of Judy's poor babies, Lorna and Joey and Liza, the Red Menace.

The first night—or was it last night?—lost in the army of thousands of waiting men, Iago latches onto the flurry of Candy Darling's pink-chiffon entourage, featuring Holly Woodlawn and that Jackie Curtis, all of them daring to drag illegal drag (*tah-dah!*) into the public street, and is positively swirled up inside the muffled interior, into the *ruzzabuzz* of voices passing the casket of Frances Gumm who three days dead looks better than, well, to be kind, ten percent of her mourners. What *ruzz* was she doing in London, *abuzz* loaded in that hotel bathroom, with that last husband—her groom of ninety days!—who could be *ruzz* forgiven for being clueless but not forgiven *abuzz* for not being glamorous. He should be slapped. All her husbands should be slapped. Louis B. Mayer should be slapped. The Wizard behind the curtain should be slapped. Somebody should be slapped.

If Miss Garland hadn't been with what's his name, if she had been with us, she'd be alive tonight—although Iago insists that at a snotty soiree in an Upper East Side apartment in May, six weeks ago, Judy had been a tiny tipsy when the hosts persuaded her *JudyJudyJudy* to lean into the curve of the piano and croon a little tune of Dixie, but what was worse Iago says is that the living legend smelled, uhh, dead, but that's just Iago's high ego bragging that she that night stood as close as she could get to Judy Garland whose vodka glass fell accidentally into Iago's purse, and is now a collectible (if not a holy relic) worth, with its red lipstick smear, at least twenty-five bucks or half a lid of killer grass.

"Midsummer magic," Iago says. "The moon is full, and I'm not even high."

The crowd swims towards booths and tables through the humid Inn. A school of tropical fish darts left. Another school drags right around three young leathermen, each standing alone on the dance floor (squared off with puke-yellow tiles), as if no one else exists, sweating in their leather shirts and jeans. Two are a pair detached out of *Easy Rider*. The other is a stunning Kenneth Anger blond. Hippie ringlets fall from his leather cap to the broad shoulders of his *A Star Is Born* T-shirt; he rubs his packed black lederhosen to show off his hairy blond legs well turned in his sharp (red) stiletto

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HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS BOOK

heels. Skirting him, couples with eye-make-up dance shaking their hip-huggers to “Hot Fun in the Summertime.”

At the coat check, a man batting Bette Davis lashes says, “Hey, look. Somebody threw away a perfectly good slave boy.”

“But I feel high,” Iago sniffs at clouds of cologne mixed with poppers. “Everyone is so emotional. What will we do now? We’ve always had Judy to get us through.” She wipes a defiant Garland gesture through the bright psychedelia of black lights, day-glo posters, beer signs, and a mirrored ball flashing like one of Judy’s sequin concert jackets. “When she sings ‘Over the Rainbow,’ I always stand, like, the gay national anthem.” Of which Iago sings a snatch. “What a dump,” her hands sweep the Inn. “Who said that?”

“We say that. We all repeat shit like that. We all say the same shit over and over and over. Like *Boys in the Band*. Like it’s, like, always fresh.”

“Shut up, Brain.”

“My name’s Brian.”

“Fuck you and the evil twin you rode in on.”

“Judy had a long life. She was forty-seven.”

“A limited engagement!” Iago grimaces like the mask of tragedy. She had studied acting one semester in high school when Mister Janeway, the drama teacher, cast her (him, Tyrone Washington) opposite Othello and Desdemona, because “a black Iago tips the play.” To say nothing of a queer one. Which Mister Janeway could never say. “This dump was a dump when the guidos opened the door two years ago. If one of these flaming creatures catches fire, head for the front. Always shout *theater* in a crowded fire. Who said that? The rear exit is welded shut, but, darlings, mine ain’t.” Iago bumps and grinds. “My guido told me.”

“Your Mister Man must lu-u-u-v you,” Brian says.

“Love me? Love? Me? The Afrikkin’ Kveen? No, doll. I was pushing on the door, which was formerly famously open to the alley. I was in a tiny panic to go out back to score some Quaaludes, and my guido holds up a baggie and says, ‘Stop pushing, doll. No exit. I’m holding Vitamin Q.’ My guido’s connected.”

Iago brags she’s a born depressive who lifts her mood with higher stakes, wilder sex, outrageous make-up, dangerous boyfriends. Just like Judy. “She’s the queen of masochism. That’s why we all love her.

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HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS BOOK

You don't have to be into whips and chains to understand Punch and Judy. She's got shoulders padded to carry our dreams, our anxieties, our sins." Iago's radar, constantly scanning the door, catches a pouf of (hit it!) limelight. "Enter," Iago announces, purposely punning her nemesis, "Norma Desmond, pursued by a boa."

Stout and stately, Norma Dessun, opera queen, enters through the Stonewall crowd that parts to let her parts go by, Iago thinks, like a (marcelled de-camped) nude descending the stairs.

"Get a load of Funny Bun tonight."

"She forgot her broom and monkeys."

Norma's face is stretched by her all-conquering past with no future even at 11:02 by the clock. In gay years, she is in middle-age, pursuing what once had come quickly to the fourth runner-up in some drag bar in San Francisco. "Hello, infidels and daffodils!" She exists with no visible means of support. Two seasons ago, briefly, she was a comb-out *arteeste* for the wigs in *Cabaret*. Norma, true queen, presenting plucked face to a follow-spot she is certain exists, holds court *en route*. "Judy is exactly that song about Elsie in Chelsea, the happiest corpse I've ever seen." Norma, fresh off the funeral line, had been at the same Upper East Side drag party with Iago. "Judy was happy to let go. I know for a fact the names..." Norma floats like the Pope above the crowd, "...of more than one sleazy hotel in Hollywood, where she used to take her rough-trade tricks. And I don't mean Chateau Marmont."

"Norma's had her cake," Iago says, "twenty-eight cakes, pushing twenty-nine."

"Miss Dessun is dragging thirty-six," Sylvia Rivera says passing by with two soft drinks. "After I fucked her, I looked in her wallet. She's twice my age."

"Liar."

"That flower child is what's left of the last of the hippies."

"We're all the last of the hippies. Norma just seems old. She can't get over never going on as understudy for *The Madness of Lady Bright*."

"Type casting, *puta*." Sylvia walks away impersonating "The Girl from Ipanema."

"Norma," Iago yells, "you tacky mannequin! Weren't you Goebbels' mistress?"

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HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS BOOK

Norma Dessun has the vapors. “Darlings, I cruised six of the cutest cops drinking coffee out in Sheridan Square. If the Sixth Precinct had a ball...”

“Those aren’t cops,” Iago says. “They’re Hitler Youth. Leather queens. Hanging out to go down to Keller’s. Did I tell you I lost my thing for cops last summer...”

“Oy! Here comes her litany of Jack and Bobby and Martin Luther King.”

“...during the Democratic Convention in Chicago.”

“Darling, you’re a rebel without a dress.” Norma oozes cuckoo bravado. She fabulously dispenses free beauty tips. “LSD is the fountain of youth. It stops mental aging. Take acid when you’re nineteen,” she tells her tricks, “and stay nineteen forever.” Norma accidentally came out into stunt-double drag in Mexico, on the beach at Mismaloya, standing in for some of the biddies on the set of *Night of the Iguana*. Between takes on the bus driven by Richard Burton, Norma, who was still Norman Dempsey, hears Tennessee Williams comment to Liz Taylor, “Why is every stuntman two hundred pounds of meat in a blond wig?” Then Tenn says to Norma/n, “Have you met my friend, Victor? That’s short for victim.” And Norma/n says to Tennessee, “I’m Norman. That’s short for enormous.” Tenn takes one long smirking drag on his cigaret holder, and exhales his message like skywriting, “Norman is short for Norma.”

Fingernails, red with polish, delicately drop a dime into the spinning psychedelia of the Wurlitzer juke box, and push the buttons for C-9, Mickey and Sylvia dueling out “Love Is Strange.”

“This dump really is a dump,” Iago says. “Amazing how you can take black paint and a red light bulb and call it a gay bar.”

“This dump,” Brian says, “is a high-school sorority. Legal booze would keep out all this drag chicken. I dig the Hayloft on 42nd Street. Gay sex and beer. Now that’s a private club.”

“This dump,” Iago says, “is not private enough—if the doorman let you in.”

Frankie the Goon: “Members only. Sign your name. Five bucks. Get a ticket for one drink.” Frankie squints. “I don’t want no trouble. Show me your draft card.”

The guidos pay off the cops who they try to screen out at the

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HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS BOOK

door, because the undercover pigs are, like, moody about private clubs serving unlicensed liquor, and unpredictable about enforcing the law that every bar in New York City keeps a proper ratio of men and women.

“Sooner or later everybody comes to Rick’s.” Iago speaks in quotes from movies. She sizes up her chances with the crowd, big for this early on a Friday night. “Fuck 42nd Street. Location is everything. This is the spot. 53 Christopher. You take Christopher Street, you take West 4th, or Seventh Ave, or even cruise down Waverly Place, and you always end up here, dear, where we’re queer, dear, at this dump, where all yellow-brick roads lead to Rome — dig the guidos or not.”

Norma Dessun heads back to the toilet. “I’m visiting the black hole of Calcutta.”

“You are the black hole of Calcutta.”

“Is there nothing you queens will not mock?”

Marcia Garcia intones the 1930s ditty, “We are the Roxy girls.”

“Each and every one a virgin.”

“We wear our hair in curls.” Marcia Garcia and three queens (including Bessie Mae Mucho) dissolve in laughter singing, “We roll our dungarees way up above our knees.”

At the sink behind the bar, one of the managers, one of the better looking of the junior guidos whose job is watering drinks, picks up four Coke glasses with each big hairy hand and dips the eight glasses (1-2-3 fast dips) into gray sudsy water, and then again (3-2-1) into a murky rinse. “My God,” Norma says, “that water’s the color of jaundice.” She calls back over her shoulder, “Sylvia, darling! Another glass of Coke?”

“Envy me.” Sylvia Rivera swims away trailing a pool of color through the dim light. “Hibiscus is in town for Judy’s funeral. I may become an honorary Cockette.” Sylvia the street hustler is in mix-n-match drag because the law, enforced by Frankie’s fast eye (yeah, you) and faster hands, requires anyone with a dick to wear at least three articles of men’s clothing or risk being arrested for impersonating a woman. “Hibiscus says San Francisco is still all hippie flowers in your hair. So fuck you, my darlings.”

“Sylvia, you are the world’s only reusable *pinata*.”

“Outside that chapel,” Iago says, “there were so many friends

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HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS BOOK

of Dorothy they looked like an army of ballerinas. I shouted out, 'Boys! Boys! Your dance class leaves at dawn!'"

"You could have laid them end to end."

"Butt — of course! I had every tenth one. I confirmed Kinsey's count. Every tenth one was queer. And so was every ninth, every eighth..."

"Stop bragging. The radio said twenty-two thousand..."

"I haven't had them all, doll. Yet."

"...said twenty-two thousand single men — they called us single men — were there."

"What would you suggest they call us? Bachelors?"

"Considering..., I'd say we're lucky."

"I was there," Brian says. "I cruised by earlier tonight."

"Something was in the air."

"Yeah, babe, cheap cologne."

"Everybody was there."

"And those who weren't will swear they were. Every queen that ever was claims she saw Judy at Carnegie Hall."

"Tonight was historical."

"You mean hysterical."

"Queens thrive on hysteria. Judy was hysteria on a stick. We're all Blanche on a hot tin street car."

"I'm Judy, suddenly, this summer." Brian makes Fosse jazz hands around his face.

"You are such a phoney. That first artificial heart last month? Who knew you got the transplant."

"I'm so Tin Man."

In the toilet, Norma Dessun surprises two recent graduates of one of the finer Ivy League schools taking seesaw turns blowing each other. Gay sex is one way to keep out of the draft for Vietnam, but they look swish enough for immediate deferment. Both wear powder-blue Orlon sweaters across their shoulders with the arms tied loosely across their chests. They jump as Norma enters. One pats his styled hair. The other wipes his lips with the back of his hand.

"Perhaps I can be of service," Norma says. "I'll watch you while I guard the door against that big bad manager."

Norma, ever queen of the universe, lights a joint, huffs a hit,

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HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS BOOK

and offers the two sweater-queens a toke which they take and re-breathe into each other's mouths. Their dicks bobble between them. Locking lips, tangling tongues, the two jerk each other off in a sensuous preppie palming that raises the heat in the humid toilet. One of them has doused his balls with a choke-hold of Jovan musk oil. The tiny window is boarded up the way the front window of the bar is boarded up to hide from the street the kinds of shit that scares the horses.

"I feel faint," Norma says. She pops the glass of her yellow-mesh amyl capsule, and falls to her knees securing her heels tight against the door. She pushes her face between what she fantasizes (more popper) are two young college athletes who take the opportunity offered by the opportunist and double-fuck her face cuming together in...

"...My hungry hole," Norma says returning victorious from the toilet, lipstick fresh. "Film at eleven. Oh my. It's a little after eleven...which I'm always after."

The guido manager shakes a familiar finger at the impossible Norma. "*Gavone!*"

"Uh-oh," Iago says, "Maria's not an asset to the abbey."

"At least, she's not dragging toilet paper stuck to her shoe like Jackie O."

"This place only looks like a gay bar. It's really an eye-talian bar."

Norma Dessun has a secret taste for linguica which she indulges starting late one night—early last spring—when the lone guido closing the bar, like, leans back against the cash register and unzips his black gabardine slacks which causes Norma's knees to grow so weak she takes the uncut invitation deep down her throat and hums thirty bars of "Come Back to Sorrento."

The guido's shirt hangs open by three buttons. Around his neck, a gold chain rests in the tangle of thick black hair on his pumped chest. Hot enough himself he's made hotter by the thought of the powerful anonymous interests he works for.

It isn't so much that the guido lies and tells Norma he'll tap her head before he cums (in her mouth) that disturbs Norma.

It's more the gun that Norma's fingers feel strapped to the husky guido's right calf that cautions her to barely mention what

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HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS BOOK

was for some weeks an unspoken date that always ended (“Mambo Siciliano”) with the guido getting off squeezing Norma’s cheeks to make sure she swallows his eye-talian ice.

“That’s his trip,” Norma says. “I tell him, I don’t know who you work for, but I know *you*.”

“Oh, listen,” Iago says to Norma, “they’re playing your song: ‘Kind of a Drag.’”

A boy duded up (young, dumb, and full o’ cum) like Joe Buck in *Midnight Cowboy* lights a cigarette, exhaling with exasperation, “My john said he’d be here at eleven. It’s fuckin’ ten after.” His shirt hangs open. He has a bluebird tattooed on each pec above each nipple. “Fags are always waiting for something. So why am I waiting? Do I look like a fag?” He flashes the panther tattoo on his forearm. “That’s the difference between me and you brownie queens. I don’t wait.”

“Smell him,” says one of a matched pair of androgynous Pratt brats out slumming for the night, sucking energy like the lost love-children of Jim Morrison and Mick Jagger. They have art-school vibes silk-screened all over them. One seems like a girl passing as a boy. The one that seems like a boy carries a concealed camera—the one thing most taboo in a gay bar—because the Polaroid is his most valuable possession and he fears leaving it in their crash-pad at the Chelsea Hotel.

“Do something,” his twin says. “You’re so boring.”

“I’m not boring.”

“I don’t see anyone standing around wondering what you’ll do next.”

“Babble on, bitch,” says the number one Pratt brat. He turns to the cowboy. “You ever gone to Max’s Kansas City?”

“What?”

“You ever have to go, like, every night, to Max’s Kansas City?”

“Fuck, man, yeah. I been to Kansas City.”

“What’s your sign?”

“I’m a dollar sign on the cusp of ten bucks.”

“Are you ready for your close-up?”

“You got ten bucks?”

The brat ignores the remark. He prefers pictures to sex. He says,

“Slow night. Full moon. You wanna make a happening, something, anything, like, creative, happen?”

On the dance floor, the uncoupled crowd jerks akimbo to Creedence Clearwater pounding out “Proud Mary.”

“This place ain’t happening,” the cowboy says. “This dump is fucked.”

“So this *is* a dump.” Iago is rowing herself around the floor in her invisible gondola. “But I pretend this is so much grander than doing sailors in the toilets at the Port Authority Bus Terminal.”

“What you lookin’ at,” the cowboy says.

“I’m admiring the view.”

“I ain’t your view.”

“You would be if you straddled my chest.” Iago touches imaginary pearls.

“Fuck off. I ain’t into you.” The cowboy nods to the brats. “I’m gonna cruise down to the trucks. Where the action is. You wanna come?”

“Come? Cum?” Iago is jealous, and, turned on (turned down) by another man that got away, paddles up river. “This dump isn’t hell.” She looks at the clock that seems stuck at 11:20. “It’s Limbo.”

The cowboy tells the brats, “I got a party in my pants.”

“I got a couple hits of acid in mine.”

The brats and the cowboy merge into a tight threesome who shuffle their way making puppy licks over to the dark cubby hole behind the bright cigarette machine. They bump past a bleached blond beehive inserting forty cents for a pack of Virginia Slims.

“Vagina Slims,” the cowboy is a snide asshole, “You’ve come a long way, baby! And it ain’t far enough.”

“Darling,” the beehive snaps, “you obviously grew up in something aluminum and tow-able.”

Through their clothing the three-way makes furtive gropes at breaking laws against loitering for sodomy and deviant sex. The cowboy’s dick burrows up a 3-D outline of the Texas Panhandle inside his jeans. A wet circle of pre-cum darkens his denim where Amarillo would be. Since the nude scene in *Hair*, or is it because of the Summer of Love, nobody wears underwear anymore.

Inside the whirling Wurlitzer juke box, the needle scratches into “Town without Pity.” Norma is cadging drinks. “For ten dollars, I’ll

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HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS BOOK

count down the Gay Hit Parade. ‘Secret Love,’ ‘Secretly,’ ‘Strangers in the Night,’ anything from Cole Porter, everything from Noel Coward—all capped by the be-wigged, be-jeweled, be-gowned Diana Ross bullying the be-dragged Supremes into ‘I’m Gonna Make You Love Me.’ She can’t threaten me that way. But you can.”

“Two weeks ago, at a 6/9/69 party,” Iago says, “that fagalicious day and date celebrated everywhere in the gay world, I blew that cowboy. What a love-in. Now he pretends he doesn’t remember me.”

“6/9/69 I filled up my dance card and my diary. It was a night to remember.” Glorious Wantsome, who thinks Warhol’s *Chelsea Girls* is *Our Town*, is the make-up girl for one of the actors who knows Gerard Malanga who knows Paul Morrissey who works with Mario Amaya who was shot when Valerie shot Andy last June. Glorious Wantsome was standing on the other side of Andy, and wants her fifteen minutes, and she has been speeding exactly one year and twenty-four days since two bullets went *pop-pop* like a cartoon into Andy’s spleen. She’s speed-queen friends with Bridget Polk, and she traded (for a load of meth) her Warhol drawing of Judy’s red slipper filled with flowers. “I’m an outdoorsy Pisces out of place in Manhattan. Andy refused to cast me. He said I’d leave a stain on the screen.” She wears a gingham pinafore shirt knotted above her bare midriff and speed-talks. “The trucks are a man’s world. Just like Keller’s.”

“What’s your point,” Iago asks Glorious, and then squeals out to a passing face, “Sabrena! You gash! So groovy! You blow my mind!”

“Help me,” Glorious says. “I’ve been up all night.”

“It’s only eleven-twenty-two.”

“Up. Up. Up. Ever since Judy died. Last night. Again. Every night. Fuck her self-pity. Fuck her *oi vey* songs. Fuck the man that got away. I could ream someone a new asshole.”

“And ruin your pinafore?”

“I’m so insomniac. I have jet lag. Without traveling.”

“Flight 69 now departing for *The Valley of the Dolls*.”

“Who do I have to fuck around here to buy some Quaaludes? All anyone has is speed.”

“Your mood ring is gonna explode.”

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HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS BOOK

“Out of my fucking way.”

“Down boy.”

“Don’t you *boy* this girl. No to all that.” She steams off to a rear corner in the bar, stewing in the shadows, near three guidos standing in the alcove at the back end of the bar—all talking at once with their hands. She drops her purse that spills open with a two-ton arsenal of bobby pins, compacts, curlers, and metal lipstick tubes.

“Thank God,” Iago says, “I’m not a drag queen. I only look like a drag queen. I’m really a manazon. In fact, I saw several manazons among the friends of Dorothy in Judy’s funeral army. And why not? Judy was a manazon.”

“What’s eating Glorious?” Norma Dessun asks. “She hasn’t been the same since that anti-war be-in last March at Grand Central Station. The one the cops busted because of the pot. She claims two cops dragged her by her wig into a paddy wagon.”

“Darling, I know that scene!” Iago says. “I was arrested for lewd acts in that raid on the Continental Baths last February.”

“Fags are like blacks. Always arrested.”

“This frikkin’ African ain’t whistlin’ ‘Dixie.’”

“Sooner or later. *Oy* and *vey*. Rounded up.”

“The cop identified my towel.”

“The Continental towels are all the same.”

“*Mais oui, cherie*. But I was lewd, am lewd, will always be lewd.” Iago lights a cigarette. “I been arrested nine times. Peace marches. The Ramble in the park. An erotic subway ride. I don’t care what people think about me.”

“My God, it’s hot out tonight. With the humidity, it must be a hundred.”

“Half of Fire Island came back to the city to see Judy.” (Iago knows Judy’s death is all about Iago, because *IagoIagoIago* is always the bride at every wedding and the corpse at every funeral.) “Christopher Street is shoulder pad to shoulder pad. Julie Julius’ was jammed this afternoon.”

“You trespassed into that bar and mortuary? That’s where Judy should have been laid out. Even you are too young for that Wrinkle Room.” At Julius’ Bar around the corner, the clientele, dragging

forty and pushing sixty, is *too, too much* in a decade trusting no one over thirty. “What was Julie’s having? A sip-in? A die-in?”

Young guido and mick cops get off strutting into Julius’ to hassle the old queens they arrest for soliciting if the old dears so much as stand at the bar facing out rather than leaning in.

“What was I doing?” Iago pauses (poses). “I was ticked off. My brother’s wife said I could come over as long as I didn’t say anything gay, and I said I’d come over if she didn’t say anything straight, which snapped her bra. The Swinging Sixties have not liberated my sister-in-law. I should have gone over anyway and kicked down their door. (You can stop arresting me, officer—I’ve cum!) I don’t care if I get arrested as many times as Mae West. Umph.” Iago, who swears Mae West is a man, does West’s vamp. “Why doncha come up and see me sometime?” In her wallet, Iago carries an Illinois driver’s license (expired), a draft card (with a high number), and a medal (miraculous) of the Virgin of Guadalupe tucked in with membership cards to the Hayloft, Mattachine, and NAACP. “I give massage now,” Iago says.

“You sell handbags in Filene’s basement,” Norma says.

“I also do massage. I make hotel calls. Closet calls.”

“You’re hustling.”

“But Judy has me thinking about singing in nightclubs.”

“Your name in lights over the Plywood Room.”

“I’ll change my name to Jetta Kay, tickling my twin keyboards in the lounge of the TWA Terminal at JFK. ‘Fly Me to the Moon.’”

“Darling, you have no talent. You sing into your hairbrush.”

“Fuck you, Mary. I can sing.”

“Lip-synching isn’t singing.”

“When I lip-synch, I sing along. In living color. When I was six years old, I wowed the Christmas pageant at Saint Jude’s. I lip-synched Judy at Saint Jude’s.” Iago sings, “‘Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas.’”

“What the hell is that racket?”

In a blowup, two of the guidos hassle a patron, a short skinny sixteen-year-old she-he wearing a Che Guevara T-shirt. They strong-arm the poor baby out the front door. “Beat it, Munchkin.”

She shouts back, “The Dwarf is not saying goodbye.”

“Poor Dwarf. How did these guidos take over our world?”

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HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS BOOK

“Gay bars can’t exist, sweet-cheeks, without the guidos paying protection to the fuzz.”

“Fuck it,” Iago sighs, “There exists a future time when we will already be dead.”

“Spare me.”

Iago sings the blues. “Judy has me crying in my beer. That quivering tremulo in her voice. We’re all just Judy waiting for some man to come through that front door, or kick us out the door. Where’s the sassy black queen with the huge Afro who’s supposed to hold all this together?”

“That would be you.”

“Me? Am I still black? Am I? Black? Still? Once I was colored, but I grew up Negro.”

“I feel one of your arias coming on.”

“Judy had soul. Belting out ‘Swanee’ and ‘Mammy’ and ‘Rock-a-bye Your Baby.’”

“And ‘Battle Hymn of the Republic’ on her TV show when JFK died.”

“All those white spirituals that sound black.”

“She also swam a lap or two around the island of Lesbos. What kind of woman sings ‘For Me and My Gal?’”

“Lesbos isn’t an island. It’s a cunt-inent.” Iago vamp-sings Kander and Ebb. “The cunt-inent of Lesbos is so wide, mein Herr.” She hates herself, her constant lip, her trivial quotes, her repeating everything a thousand times. “Well, shut my mouth!” Self-loathing (spreading through Iago’s body) ignites masochistic desire. “Depression is my only hardon. Can I go down to Keller’s to meet a leatherman? Can I go to Sanctuary and dance? Can I go up to the West Side Y to charity-fuck old farts in the steam room? Can I borrow five bucks to do the Everard Baths? Will white boys ever top me—and my ten inches of depression?”

The Stonewall has no past and no present. Gay hot spots hang in a constant future of hope and despair. The clock is always ticking toward closing time.

“What makes this night like no other?” Iago cannot stop her manic-depressive swing. “One thing,” Iago says, “Judy’s dead.” She sings another snatch, “The hopes and fears of all the years are met

in thee tonight.” She turns, “Why don’t I put a dildo in my mouth and pull the trigger.”

“Iago, darling, as a B-movie, you’re an A-Plus. For a revolutionary, you don’t quite grasp the power of queers. It’s like Black Power, only different. Smoke a doobie. Get a grip. Be cool.”

The Wurlitzer needle drops on Betty Everett slapping out “You’re No Good, You’re No Good, Baby, You’re No Good.”

Brian pulls Iago. “Come dance with me.”

Norma evaporates.

“I need rough sex,” Iago says, “like Judy needed rough sex.”

“You’re safe here in our little daisy-chain universe...where I slept with, mmm, him who blew her who fucked, uh, him who slept with you who never slept with me.”

“Thank you, Barbarella.”

“I’m much more Bette Davis or Joan Crawford.”

“Don’t play drag poker with me,” Iago says. “I’ll see your Bette Davis and I’ll raise you two Diana Rosses.”

“You can’t beat a full house: two Streisands and three Mae Wests.”

“Read ’em and weep.” Sylvia Rivera crashes up, cruising through, always on the game. “Four of a kind. I got four Garlands.”

“Let’s go up,” Iago says, “to that porno theater on 42nd”

“The Cameo?”

“...and blow some seafood. The Fleet’s in.”

“The *Times* says sailors are deserting in droves since the Tet Offensive.”

“The *Times* fails to report they’re hiding in back rows at the Victory.”

“I loved ushering at the Victory.”

“Not the Cameo, doll, and not the Victory.”

“Those balconies, those toilets are so *mondo*!”

“It’s called the Masque. Between 9th and 10th. Where they stop the fuck flicks at midnight, and Lady Ludlam performs *Turds in Hell*. Live on stage! And *Whores of Babylon*.”

“I auditioned for both.”

“You’re ridiculous enough.” Sylvia Rivera is pissed. She is eighteen, living in a squat, raging when she’s not ragging, and bitching about being shoved around by johns after they cum. “Do you believe

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HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS BOOK

these musclebound guidos giving Dwarf the gate?” The four-foot she-he often hustles protected by Sylvia whose stock in trade is her motto: What’s hotter to a john than discovering a transvestite’s penis? “My God, girl,” Sylvia takes a long and not unsatisfying look at Miss Aretha Iago, the crusty Toast, “you look like shit. You need a drink. Sashay your bones to my table. Sylvia will magically turn your Coke into a rum and Coca-Cola. Fuck the guidos. And fuck me. We all need a cock...(rim shot)...tail.”

Norma Dessun, reigning at Sylvia’s table, is interrupted saying, “Judy fought with everybody: MGM, managers, directors, husbands, hotels. She didn’t take shit from anybody.” She assesses Iago. “*Garcon*, two more chairs!”

“*Garcon* screamed the gargoyle.” Iago parries.

Norma thrusts. “My limit is three drinks a day. It’s past midnight. Bring my next three.”

Sylvia pulls a flask from her Capri slacks, puts a Coke glass between her knees, and pours in a double shot. “That will be one dollar,” she tells Iago. “A girl’s got to live.”

Dwarf scoots into the table. “Frankie the fuck can’t keep me out.”

“Toto returns. Hello, Meeskeit.”

“I says to him,” Dwarf says, “You Don’t Own Me.”

“Thank you, Lesley Gore.”

“Attention Kmart shoppers! Fresh meat.” Norma Dessun says. Her three crepe necks periscope up. “Get a load of him. Hot new talent entering the front door. Now that’s a Mister Man.”

“In this dump,” Iago sips her drink, “nothing beats a new face.”

“You could use a new face.”

“I don’t like his face,” Sylvia says. “He don’t look like a paying customer.”

“He’s a tourist out for a spin from his closet.”

“Ask him to dance. Straight guys don’t dance. Here’s a dime for the juke box. Play E-16.”

“What’s that?”

“Hello, I Love You (Won’t You Tell Me Your Name?)”

“Judy,” Iago announces, “was a manazon.”

“Who isn’t?”

“Don’t look now.” Iago holds her rouge compact close to her

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HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS BOOK

eye (up periscope) and aims the mirror over her shoulder. “Another tourist.”

“Check out the number in the booth by the door. He’s been ogling us since a quarter to twelve.”

“So ogle back. He’s hot.”

“Forget E-16,” Iago says. His blood pressure ramps up. “Go play A-12. ‘Susie Q.’”

“‘Susie Q.’?”

“Susie Queer. Susie Queen. Susie Quaalude.”

“Why?”

When things go wrong, everything changes quickly.

“Because that tourist is the cop who busted me at the Continental Baths...”

“Not this tired bullshit.” Sylvia has the instincts of a kid born hustling Times Square. She came out working when she was eleven—under a table at Horn and Hardart’s.

“...and I’m gonna ask him to dance. If he dances, cool....”

“My nipples are getting hard.” Sylvia slides down into the booth pushing her flask under the cushion.

“We pay the guidos plenty,” Norma Dessun says, “to protect our little sanctuary.”

“Payoffs ain’t what they used to be.”

“Who needs an ambush?”

A palpitation ripples from Iago through the *JudyandMickey* musical comedy of the Stonewall. Faces look up from tables. Heads turn on the dance floor. As if it trembled. A red rush of instinct causes some of the seated to stand, some of the dancers to stop. Like a crowd in a theater at the first faint smell of smoke. The noise drops ever so, under its own roar of the crowd. Something ancient rises. Primal fear at a noise outside a cave. The snap of a twig. Those seated lean into one another. Those standing move one step closer. Alert. For a moment everything is pantomime. Everyone continues gesturing, talking, laughing, dancing, smoking, drinking because this surge of panic is coded in the bones and blood, and often is little more than a contagious rush that comes to nothing, and to notice it, acknowledging its hour-by-minute-by-second presence would seem, so, well, darling, paranoid. Drugs do that, and queens are ever so hysterical. Just like Judy.

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HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS BOOK

Under the suddenly dazzling mirrored ball, even though everyone looks the same and acts the same, the gay guido notices the mood change from major to minor. He leans hard against the locked back door, as the front door explodes inwards with six big-deal plain-clothes cops led by a cop in uniform. “Aw, fuck,” the guido says.

“Omigod!” Norma Dessun is unnerved. “This is a very bad scene. I’m ankling this joint.”

Iago’s cop-tourist yanks the plug on the juke box.

Silence.

Some screams, grumbling, hissing.

The uniform shouts, “This is an illegal membership club with no liquor license.”

Low booing.

“Hey! It’s the Keystone Cops.”

Catcalls.

“Pigs!”

“Don’t get your panties in an uproar.”

“Woop woop.”

“Okay, ladies, line up. Let’s clear this fucking dump.”

“My opinion poll is complete.” Iago stands up.

“Give me that dime,” Sylvia says to Dwarf. Sylvia threads her way through the crowd. She pushes opposite to the flow of panicky queens funneling toward the front door where a cop says, “One at a time. One at a time.”

“Hey, Officer Krupke!”

“Three pieces of picture ID, you fucking degenerates. Get ’em out.”

“Nobody has three photo IDs.”

“You’re certainly a prick.”

“You think so?” the cop says. “You ever had a football shoved up your ass?”

“Didn’t I blow you at the 6/9/69 party?”

The cop dodges a lipstick thrown hard at his shoulder. “Motherfucker!” He grabs hold of Norma’s arm.

“Please, officer, sir, officer,” Norma whispers. “Can I be the man that got away?”

Iago watches three or four huge sections of Norma Dessun cave

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HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS BOOK

in, very *nude falling down the stairs*. “The fatter you get,” Iago snaps, “the more submissive you become.”

Glorious Wantsome reapplies her makeup. “I’m ready for my close-up. I want all my minutes of fame, plus yours, his, and hers. I do not intend to blend in with the locals.” She throws a shower of hairpins that hit the plain-clothes cops like shrapnel.

They cuff Glorious (bruise her wrist, break her watch) and push her (resisting arrest) to the front door where shouting can be heard out on Christopher Street.

“I adore bullies.”

“Officer! Officer! There must be some mistake. We are the Roxie girls.”

“Hey! Arrest me. I don’t want to go to Vietnam.”

“This is the bad and the beautiful.”

“Get rid of your drugs.”

Uppers, downers, joints, pills, coke (folded in origami papers), poppers, baggies, tabs of acid hit the floor.

“You fuckin’ freaks,” a plain-clothes dick says, “Don’t you look at me like that. You look at me like that, I’m gonna kill you, and tell God you died.”

“I been hearing all that jazz since grade school, but not with such bad breath.”

Sylvia makes it to the Wurlitzer and pulls the console out from the wall.

Dwarf crawls behind the jukebox, sticks the plug into the socket, finds a quarter on the filthy tile floor, quickly peeps for more spare change, finds a hit of acid, and swallows it.

Sylvia pushes A-12.

Dwarf twists the volume control on the back of the Wurlitzer and turns it full tilt boogie.

The jukebox lights up bright, whirring alive with a whine, raises its metal arm to grab A-12, plops the 45 rpm down on the turntable, and drops its needle right on the revolving lip of “Susie Q” that blasts like a shockwave into the crowd.

“Kill that fucking jukebox!” A detective tries to shout above the din; he pats his gun.

Cops shove jittery, rattled, petrified patrons toward the double door that’s breaking open.

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HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS BOOK

Bright lights (red, white, and blue) from squad cars (black and white) sweep in from Christopher Street (hot and humid), sweep in past Frankie (pissed off), sweep in past the coat check (fat chance), sweep in splashing the walls, splashing the faces (red, white, and blue).

“Susie Q!”

Iago (flashing back on the Democratic Convention) chants “The whole world is watching,” and hustles up a scrum, “C’mon, girls,” who lock arms around the Wurlitzer. Iago tosses Sylvia a red-silk purse full of dimes that Sylvia feeds into the jukebox, punching, A-12, A-12, A-12, over and over. Iago yells at the blond leather hippie in the (red) stiletto heels, “I like the way you walk. I like the way you talk.”

The crowd around Iago shouts back, “Susie Q!”

“What a blast!” There’s two great things: to fuck and fight. “Susie Q! Susie Q! Susie Q!”

The uniformed cop charges the jukebox kick-line like a football fullback, knocking down four chorines and the leather hippie, and grabbing Sylvia’s wrist, squeezing the dimes out of her hand. “You fucking cunt,” he says. “You,” he yells at Dwarf, “unplug that thing.”

Dwarf flips him the finger.

“You! Tiny Tim! You’re under arrest. And you, you fucking deviate,” he turns to Sylvia whose wrist he is trying to hurt, “you’re under arrest.”

Two plain-clothes cops SWAT their way to the jukebox and kick it into silence.

Sylvia, tempestuous even on a slow night, does not like the cop twisting her arm, forcing her down to her knees, like one john too many. “I spit on you,” Sylvia says.

The cop straddles Sylvia and tries to cuff her.

Sylvia conjures every frame of every fabulous Maria Felix film she’s ever seen. She twists between the cop’s shoes on the dirty floor. She knows this movie. She’s got one take and she screams. “Don’t make the mistake you can treat me like a woman. Under this drag, *puto*, fucker, there’s a man who’s a woman, and she ain’t your bitch.”

“Pull this cunt out of here.”

Iago steps between Sylvia and the plain-clothes cops. “Black Power turns pink!”

“Try me, you knuckle-draggin’ fuckin’ monkey fruitcake.”

The Pratt brat, very *La Dolce*, very *Vita*, aims his paparazzi Polaroid at Sylvia knocked down on her knees. His flash explodes a tabloid-expose rectangle—very *mondo*, very New York *Daily News*—around the tiny little drag queen, nylons torn, lipstick smeared, played splat on the yellow-tile floor with the gum and cigarette butts. Very *JudyJudyJudy*.

A cop grabs the camera and smashes it on the hard edge of the bar.

The twin Pratt brats grab a zygote-hold of each other.

“You wicked old witch!” Iago screams at the cop. “You fuck!”

Sylvia, seeing blue dots from the flash, twists on her knees, wipes her hand across her mouth, and works her way to her feet.

In slow-motion, she rises up out of *papi’s* lap, up out of the movies, up out of ten cents a dance, up out of the streets, up out of centuries, up out of nothing to lose.

In slow-motion, she rises up the knees of the cop, rises up his blue-serge thighs, rises up past the gun slung low on his hip, up past the leather belt and buckle at his belly, and up past the badge on his chest.

In slow-motion, she punches him in the face.

Everything speeds up.

The crowd at the juke box cheers.

The cop is stunned.

The sequins on the mirrored ball shoot psychedelic light shards (red, white, and blue) that explode overhead like (frag-grenade) fireworks on the Fourth of July.

The room falls deadly silent.

Sovereignty teeters.

A pin drops.

The crowd being herded out the front door (torn from its hinges), turns, curious, muted, shocked, at the precise instant Sylvia hits the cop, again, with an open-handed bitch-slap heard round the world.

