

BILL KONIGSBERG

**DESTINATION**  
UNKNOWN

SCHOLASTIC PRESS • NEW YORK

Copyright © 2022 by Bill Konigsberg

All rights reserved. Published by Scholastic Press, an imprint of Scholastic Inc., *Publishers since 1920*. SCHOLASTIC, SCHOLASTIC PRESS, and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.

Lyrics from “Love Don’t Need a Reason (What We Don’t Have Is Time)” by Peter Allen, Marsha Malamet, and Michael Callen © 1987 Woolnough Music, Malamutation Music, and Tops and Bottoms Music. All rights on behalf of Woolnough Music administered by Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp. Reprinted by permission.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher. For information regarding permission, write to Scholastic Inc., Attention: Permissions Department, 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.

While inspired by real events and historical characters, this is a work of fiction and does not claim to be historically accurate or portray factual events or relationships. Please keep in mind that references to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales may not be factually accurate, but rather fictionalized by the author.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available

ISBN 978-1-338-61805-1

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

22 23 24 25 26

Printed in the U.S.A.

23

First edition, August 2022

Book design by Christopher Stengel

## CHAPTER ONE

# NOTICEABLE ONE

September 1987

The first thing I noticed about CJ Gorman was his plexiglass bra.

Alone he skulked in a dark corner of the Tunnel. I say *skulked* because his head bent down and his posture curled in, which I thought was interesting because he was dressed to be seen, obviously. His short hair was dyed platinum blond with shocking pink highlights in front. His tall, thinner-than-rail frame would have cut an imposing figure without the clincher: He was shirtless, with an open black sequined jacket over a plexiglass bra that was only half covered in tin foil, allowing his obvious lack of mammary glands to be seen.

“Brand New Lover” by Dead or Alive blared over the speakers and rumbled the floor. The air was hazy with cigarette and who-knows-what-else smoke. The haze smelled faintly of paint thinner. My friend Deena had dragged me out with a group of school friends on a Friday night when I could just as easily have been comfortable at home, watching the replay of the MTV Music Video Awards, hosted by Downtown Julie Brown. My friends were all out on the floor dancing, while I stood alone near the bar.

Story of my life.

I'd barely made it in. This guy with an eye patch stood out front, pointing at various groups and people from the mob wanting to get into this former-railroad-terminal-turned-chic-nightclub. I was praying I'd be disallowed so I could go back home, but Deena was hanging on my arm and Deena is hot. So yeah, I made it. Yay.

The lights and movement on the dance floor dizzied my already heavy brain. A girl with Goldilocks braids in a peppermint-striped skirt swirled, her dilated pupils at the tops of their sockets. A white guy with dreadlocks, wearing what appeared to be a plastic bag, ground against her.

I looked away, and found myself drawn again to CJ, his arms folded across his plexiglass bra, surveying the crowd. He looked to me like everything I never would be. He postured like he owned the place and was a little over the whole scene.

I was transfixed. I wasn't sure if it was the height, the unapologetic attitude, the thinness, or all of the above.

Maybe I gawked. Maybe I stopped myself. I had to be careful who saw me taking this boy in.

Yes, we were at a club with plenty of gay people around.

But no, none of my friends besides Deena knew I was one of them.

CJ turned and caught me checking him out. He uncrossed his arms and put his hands through his wild platinum-and-pink hair, entirely unselfconsciously. I spun away and almost crashed into Deena, who appeared amused by my embarrassment.

"Take a picture, it'll last longer!" she screamed over the

thumping beat. Strobe lights illuminated the floors and walls. Next to us, a bald, brown-skinned woman in a neon-pink tank top was spinning for some reason, even though we weren't close to the dance floor.

"I'm not—"

"So now you're into drag queens?"

I crossed my arms over my chest. "Yeah, no. Not my scene."

She laughed and ordered a vodka tonic from the (extremely cute) bartender. "Your scene is closet cases. How's that working out for you?"

True, the only gay experiences I'd had were with two closeted jocks at Trinity, where we were juniors. I wondered what parallel universe I'd have to live in to have a friend like the boy in the corner. Or, better yet, a boyfriend. He was taking everything in; I was busy keeping it all out. He was so beautiful and thin. I was like a sixth grader who'd expanded sideways without growing up. He probably had plenty of other gay guys to talk to. I didn't have a single one.

I dropped my head onto her shoulder. "Can we just go? I hate this."

She looked at her pink-and-aqua Swatch, then pulled my hair lightly until I was upright again. "It's literally ten thirty. No, you cannot go home. I'm trying to expand your horizons beyond the closet."

"MTV is not going to watch itself. Come on. Please?"

She pulled on my arm. "Come out here and dance. That's like the one perk of being a fag hag, and you're ruining it."

I lowered my voice. "I'm not a fag, and you're not a hag."

She rolled her eyes. "Fine. That's the one perk of being a

needlessly closeted gay boy's, um, what's another word for *hag*? Witch? Whatever the case, you're standing here like some demented straight guy in your awful Members Only jacket."

"I like it," I said, caressing the beige collar strap.

"Yes, that's been abundantly clear for some time. Come on. Dance!" She grabbed my arm and pulled.

"I'll be right there," I said, jerking away. "Gotta piddle."

Deena couldn't argue with that one, even though I could tell she wanted to.

"Fine," she said. "Be that way."

I felt like I'd won the skirmish when she rejoined our friends on the dance floor. Then I realized the weakness of my plan: Now I had to face the bathroom.

The Tunnel didn't believe in men's rooms or women's rooms—all the bathrooms were unisex, first come, first serve. When I walked in, Club Kids filled the space, hogging the mirrors. Company B was busy screeching about how fascinated they were by my love toy.

I sincerely doubted they would be.

My head pounded, I didn't have to pee *that* badly, and I wished there were a black hole I could climb into, perhaps hidden in one of the stalls. Or some sort of fast-forward button I could press to jump past junior and senior year and be at college somewhere calm. Earlham in Indiana was calling me. Maybe I'd become a Quaker.

"Hey, fatty, are you actually going to use that stall, or are you just going to stand there?" this bald kid with a glittered forehead and painted-on eyebrows asked.

"Sorry." I covered my belly with my hands and moved

toward the sinks, inadvertently bumping into someone, which made me say “Sorry” again.

The person into whom I’d bumped had a blond pompadour and wore too much blush on his powder-white face.

“Excuse you!” he said, pushing me lightly with the backs of his fingers. Then he looked me up and down with his hands on his hips. “Pure bridge and tunnel. Go back to Long Island, honey. Leave us one place that’s just ours.”

I froze. *Long Island?* I was Upper West Side, born and bred. I opened my mouth to defend myself, but no words came out.

“Great comeback,” he said, sneering.

“Kindness. Give it a try,” a low, booming voice said behind me.

It was CJ, standing in the doorway. His voice was very *Top Gun*, even if the bra and hair pointed in a different direction.

“Oh my God! It’s Dale Bozzio!” Pompadour Guy said, all nasal and deadpan. “If she had AIDS.”

I felt like I’d been dropped into the middle of a parallel universe.

Dale Bozzio put his hands on his hips, which only emphasized his bare midriff. “Be gone, before someone drops a house on you,” he said, expressionless.

The bald guy laughed. So did the guy with the pompadour. He leaned in, and he and Dale Bozzio did this air kiss thing, one on each side, like they hadn’t just been insulting each other. Baldy and Pompadour went over to the mirror, leaving me and Dale in front of an empty stall.

I must have been staring, because Dale sized me up. “Why

are you dressed like this? Who hurt you?" Total unsmiling delivery.

I looked down. I was wearing an aqua-blue Lacoste polo shirt with the collar up, a pair of ill-fitting Lee jeans, green Keds, and my beige Members Only jacket.

"What?"

"Are you a plant? Are you a narc? Did the Russians send you? Only the Russians dress this way."

I shrugged, utterly unprepared for whatever kind of joking this was.

He pursed his lips. "You're cute. But that jacket. It must be burned."

"Everyone keeps saying that."

"Everyone is right."

I laughed, frustrated and surprisingly disarmed by this person who was obviously way cooler than I would ever be. I glanced around to make sure no one from school had decided that they, too, needed to pee.

"Thank you, by the way," I said.

"No sweat. I'm so over mean people right now."

"Well, I'm not mean."

He smirked again. "I wouldn't imagine you are, or could be."

"So your name is Dale Bozzio?"

The slap stung my cheek.

"Ow!"

"How do you not know Dale Bozzio?"

"Is she a drag queen?"

The second slap stung my chin less, but my pride a little more. I felt like slapping him back, but some weird chauvinist



thought came to me that maybe you don't slap a person dressed as a woman. I took a calming breath and tried a different tack.

"Don't slap me, I'm not in the mood," I said, quoting a line from one of my favorite songs.

That got a laugh of recognition. "And we are, in fact, 'meeting in the ladies room.'"

That made me grin and blush.

"So you know Klymaxx but not Missing Persons?"

"If I knew them, would they be missing?" I said, realizing too late this made no actual sense.

He rolled his eyes. "What are words for?"

"To . . . speak?"

He sighed in exasperation. "Famous lyrics. 'Destination Unknown'? 'Life Is So Strange?'"

I squinted. "That one sounds vaguely familiar."

He lifted his left hand, but this time I made a time-out sign with my hands and he abstained from slapping me.

"You need education," he said, moving in closer. "Such exceeding cuteness cannot be left to carry on with only what it knows."

I blushed and popped a boner in the restroom of the Tunnel.

"I'm Miles," I said, lying. (My strange logic being: *What if he calls my name and one of my friends hears?*)

"CJ," he replied, and I wondered if he was lying, too. Probably not. He smiled for the first time. His teeth crowded together like he had a few too many molars. I liked this surprise. It made him seem human.

We stared at each other, and it was so weird, because I

wasn't really into drag or whatever, but he thought I was cute, he was obviously stunning, and even more than that, it was like I'd just met someone important, like my body knew it, like the universe was whispering to me, *Pay attention*.

I shivered.

And then I realized I wasn't sure how to keep him focused on me. That he was standing in front of me, ostensibly waiting for me to say something, and here I was, lacking a certain luster while the restroom was bursting with color and people whose whole presence screamed, *Look at me!* I recognized that if I wished for this dialogue to continue, I needed to say something interesting, and though this moment was perhaps the most interesting in my life so far, I couldn't think of anything stimulating to say about it.

The best I could do was lower my voice a few decibels and ask, "Are you openly gay?"

He snorted. "Oh, sweetie. You're green, aren't you, Miles?"

"I'm emerald green. I'm the greenest possible green."

CJ adjusted his plexiglass bra. "High school?"

Somehow, the right banter tone appeared in my mouth, and I said, "As is required by law."

"I'm a senior at Bronx Tech," he said. "Turned eighteen in April. One more year to freedom."

"I've got two," I said, pouting my lip.

"Poor baby."

"I've never met a gay person before," I said. He raised an eyebrow and I corrected myself. "I've never met an openly gay person and talked to them. As a gay person. Which I am. Obviously."