



three men i want

non-fiction short story by alex jeffers



paragraph

I am enamored of a man I've never met. Physically, facially, he doesn't appeal to me at all – I've seen photos – being one of those square-faced northern Slavs, washed out, tepid, boyish in a way that's faintly repellent. He resembles Mikhail Baryshnikov. Not his body ... well, I don't know about his body, but it seems unlikely: he's not a dancer. Not to say a dancer's body would appeal to me more. Too much muscle makes me nervous; big thighs especially I dislike. The truth, shameful as it is, is that I like scrawny men. Men with big hands, prominent, boney wrists, and skinny arms. Men who, when they take their shirts off, you can count their ribs. And my erotic compass points south, toward the Mediterranean, east, toward the Levant. Blond, brawny, blue-eyed Swedes and Teutons and Poles need not apply.

This man, the man I'm enamored of, is at least not blond, but he has a very bad haircut and his eyes appear to be blue. He's German and, going by his surname, Polish. His eyebrows are conspicuous for their invisibility.

I think I need to say (it distresses me) that my eyes are blue and as far as I can find out all my ancestors were northern European. I am, however, not brawny (five foot seven, hundred fifteen pounds) or blond, though I have a blond's useless, fair complexion. It is a great disappointment to me that my parents couldn't have arranged to be Italian, Greek, or Turkish. I'd settle for Spanish. But no.

This man I'm enamored of, I don't want to sleep with him. Dear God, no. Actually, the thought of it, rather than making me hard, makes me feel dizzy and a little ill, as though a migraine were coming on. There's

another man I've never met whom I do want to sleep with, although, again, this isn't a specifically sexual urge: I want to hold him and cuddle him (he's considerably younger than I), kiss his bruised-looking eyelids, his poignant mouth, comfort him. We might fuck or we might not. I want to leave that up to him. I won't say more. I have some hope of being introduced to him one day.

The one I want to fuck is completely hopeless. I've never met him either. To begin with, he's some kind of priest, or a monk – I don't have Catholic regalia down. Not having been raised in the Church, I missed out on developing a fetish for Holy Orders, and it would seem to me rather more bathetic than liberating or transgressive to be the cause of his breaking his vow of chastity. The notion is in any case beside the point, because he's dead. Has been dead for a long, long time: El Greco painted his portrait in the first decade of the seventeenth century. It hangs in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. I go to see him a couple of times a year. A postcard from the MFA's gift shop is pinned up next to my desk – I need only turn my eyes to the right, away from the computer screen. In a 1966 monograph Leo Bronstein writes of Fray Hortensio Félix Paravicino: *Blood red is the silence that here seals up the too-ardent, perhaps too-dangerous lips. Red (in Byzantine fashion) is the outline of the sensual fingers.* In a novel my agent hasn't managed to sell yet, I wrote: *Of course he was a Spaniard, ascetic, ruthless – and, with his broad, cruel mouth and long, paradoxically delicate hands, beautiful in a way that was terrifying. He'd chew you up and spit out the pieces. He'd burn you at the stake.*

I don't know what this says about me. The man I'm enamored of, the first one, is a singer. It's really his voice I'm in love with. This is all quite recent – I only bought the CD last week. It's on the stereo right now. He sings in Italian so I don't have any clear idea what he's singing about. Anyway, you can't describe a voice. In a sordid story about a castrato soprano, I wrote: *There are words to describe beauty, to describe perfection, every one of them halt, imperfect, unbeautiful unless they were to be scored for the castrato's voice....* Jochen Kowalski is not a eunuch (so

far as I know) but a countertenor with an unusually high tessitura, up into the mezzo-soprano range. Singing an aria from Telemann's *Flavius Bertaridus*, he hits the same pitches as the high, bravura horns, with similar precision, penetration, and brilliance. His top notes make the hairs on the back of my neck to prickle, my ears to ring. This is a very definite, physical, sensual reaction. I get hard in my shorts.

Well, it's true. If I go out walking with Jochen on the portable disc-player I have to wear tight briefs and baggy trousers or embarrass myself completely. Bad enough I'm bopping along, wagging my chin and rocking my shoulders ... to Baroque opera. I mean, some of it's got to leak out under the headphones, people can tell it's not rap or funk or house.

But tonight it's late and I'm sitting alone in my oppressive little apartment, no-one near but the cats, who don't care. The last two days have been warm, Indian summer (it's October), and an excellent thunderstorm just finished up outside. I've brewed myself a double espresso, hot, bitter, invigorating. Hortensio gazes either right at me or over my shoulder with those huge, dark, lucent eyes. I'm really a very sentimental, soppy, vanilla sort of person – rough sex, in the flesh, doesn't appeal to me. I have my suspicions about the kind of sex Hortensio's after. He looks cruel. His fingers are very long, very slender. I think he would not be satisfied with necking and cuddling and rubbing, maybe a little mutual wanking. He has the most beautiful mouth, however, which I would really like to kiss. (The mouth of the man I'm not going to talk about, now that I think of it, is rather similar.) The lips are quite pale but very red against his olive skin and below his straggly black mustache; the upper is broader than the lower. I like the idea of his big nose getting in the way. His eyebrows are very black, very thick. His ears are too large. (Greco had a penchant, if not a fetish, for large ears, which I must say I don't share.) I like the fact that he's wearing these huge, bulky robes but you can still tell he's really skinny. Big Adam's apple.

Jochen on the stereo on endless repeat has just come around again to that Telemann aria. It's warm enough that I'm sitting here in just

boxer shorts, plenty of room to maneuver. As if it were a leaky pen, my prick draws a sticky line up my thigh. The silly thing wants to find the boxers' fly, but it's not very bright so it's pointing off at the wrong angle. I'm quite fond of my prick. It's not exceptional, I suppose, but certainly not exceptionable. A fair handful. Cut – not because I'm Jewish or Muslim, but a post-war American baby. Jochen hits one of those supernal high notes, drags it down, and then rides it up a spectacular arpeggio, and the thing jerks, jumps, pokes its way out. When it's headstrong like this I like to refer to it as *my member* ... my engine of desire. Still, I'm not going to touch it – I'm typing. Well, I probably will end up touching it, but not yet.

One of the rites of adolescence I skipped was measuring the length and girth of my dick. I really can't judge. At my age (as long as I'm being honest: thirty-eight), it would seem inappropriate to pull out a ruler now, if I owned one. One of the preoccupations of the modern gay man – one of quite a few – that I don't buy into is size. I see these hard-up fellows in skin magazines and they just look uncomfortable, as if their teeth hurt. One can imagine where their partners hurt. Mine, on the other hand, is the right size.

I'm practically ready to swoon – or to come – but I can't get any further with Jochen, his voice, his singing, on the keyboard. Damn the inadequacy of words. If only he was a hairy-chested Palermitan with a big nose who talked with his hands. I could think of a lot of other things he might do with his hands, if he were. Alas, as I said, I've seen photos. Puzzlingly, too, although the high male voice was practically invented and certainly brought to its peak of perfection in Italy (*viva il coltello!*), there seem to be no Italian countertenors currently recording. They're mostly suavely French and diffidently British. I'm as little in sympathy with Britain and France as Germany.

Just keep in mind that the divine German's still going great guns in the background. If French is the language of romance (another *idée fixe* I won't buy), Italian is the language of passion. Nobody ought to sing in any other language. The words might as well be pernicious non-

sense – something about the joyful sound of martial trumpets; so long as they're Italian and Jochen does them up proud, I'm his. Every so often he achieves something with that voice that – if you heard it without being told – you'd probably take for a woman's, something that makes me quiver from head to toe, that inspires a little twitch or tremor of my cock. I'm sitting up straight, on the edge of my seat, legs spread, so it's poking more out than up. My shorts are white with green stripes, an odd, not unattractive contrast with the pinky-beige flesh of the shaft. Thin, branching red blood vessels crawl up from the base, halting short of the circumcision scar, a brownish grosgrain ribbon tied all the way 'round some ways below the flared rim of the head; but the thicker, ropier, singular blue vessels burrow under the ribbon and bulge up again beyond before they peter out. The head itself, the crown, is bulbous, globular, and quite red. In porn stories they're always describing it as *spongy*; I don't know what that means. It looks slick, almost glassy, glazed, as if it would ring like porcelain when you flicked it with a fingernail. In fact, the shape of it, the way it flares out so decisively below the tender swell, reminds me of an English bone-china teacup I own. The glazed white interior of the cup displays a chinoiserie kingfisher perched on a flowering branch, but the outside is solid, a color fleshy and nearly obscene – Pompeiian red, or oxblood.

It's amusing and idyllic to imagine Hortensio creeping up under the desk to poke his excellent nose into my crotch, but I suspect he'd really rather tie me down first. He snuffles around down there for a bit, then draws back, lays his lovely hands on the tops of my thighs. Palms sliding against the friction of my leg hair, the fingertips push the fabric of my boxers toward the hips, pulling it up between my legs to form a cunning bag or basket for the balls. Lowering his head, open mouthed, he breathes coolly across the crown of my cock. The lucent little pearl of pre-come clinging there trembles, jiggles. His tongue, which I imagine long, meaty, pointed, stretches out to lap it up but doesn't get it all: a liquid strand like opalescent silk or spit hangs a perfect catenary curve between his lower lip and my prick. Then, as he licks his lips, it

breaks, trails down over his chin into his beard, and then he leans forward again.

The crown of his head with its curly, flyaway black hair being in the way, I cannot, unfortunately, see what he's doing. At first he simply kisses the head, his lips hot, dry, silky. Then the tip of his tongue dabbles at the vertical slit or eye. Then the lips part and I'm in. I imagine that the inside of any man's mouth is much the same as any other man's, and while a cock is extremely sensitive it's not especially discriminating. Hortensio is a competent cocksucker. He takes it all, doesn't scratch me with his teeth, it's hot and moist in there and he performs clever little tricks with his tongue, but his heart's not in it. Where he wants me is flat on my back, spread-eagled. My hands tied to the bedposts. He kneels up between my legs. First he pushes the black stole back up over his head, tosses it away behind him. He's smiling broadly, his eyes narrowed. The heavy white cassock drapes down from his shoulders, giving nothing away.

Do other men fantasize being made love to by the figures in masterpieces of western painting? When I was a kid reading *The Coral Island* I had dirty thoughts about Jack and Ralph and Peterkin shipwrecked all alone. Even then, I had my suspicions about young Peterkin, a queen in the making if I ever met one. I was deeply infatuated with competent, manly Jack. Of course, as a kid I didn't have much idea exactly what Ralph and Jack were doing there in the back of my mind with no clothes on, those lissome brown boys' limbs tangled together in a tropic bower, but I was quite sure they were up to something naughty and exciting. More recently, I wanted Lovelace to scheme and plot to ravish me, rather than Clarissa. What a splendid villain Lovelace is! I suspect I'm hardly the only man whose romantic expectations have been deformed by literature. But painting? I'm not a visual thinker – I don't see things with the mind's eye: I describe them to myself with the mind's word processor. When I remember my dreams, it's in the form of sentences and paragraphs.

In all of western art, the only hand more beautiful than Hortensio's

two appears in another Greco portrait (*Man with His Hand on His Breast*, in the Prado), but this observation is beside the point. Hortensio's hands rise to the neck of his cassock. He's no longer smiling, his lips in repose, disdainful and passionate at once, his black eyes glowing mutely. They're very long, his hands, weightless, delicate, almost translucent – one might characterize them (one might characterize Jochen's voice) as feminine. Grasping the heavy, soft, white wool with surprising confidence, they tear the fabric down the front in one motion, one sustained, satisfying ripping noise, and he shrugs the thing off his shoulders. Of course my eyes go first to his cock, but one narrative convention to which I cheerfully subscribe is the payoff postponed, the climax delayed ... until my readers whimper. He lifts his right hand to his breast in much the same gesture as the Man in the other Greco portrait referenced above. Hortensio's breast, however, now, is laid bare, just as I imagined it. He does not possess distended weightlifter tits. There's a sufficient layer of flesh, just enough, to either side of the decisive sternum. The growth of thin, feathery black hair sketches an upside-down capital T, its stem reaching for the defenseless hollow where his clavicles meet. He pinches his rosy left nipple between two of those pointed fingers.

I've forgotten half the Spanish I ever knew and what's left isn't nearly adequate to let him speak to me. A pity, since I've always found the Castilian accent sexy. His left hand at the end of an elegant gesture reaches between his thighs, gathers up his balls in a serene grasp, hefts them, weighs them. I would score this next passage for trumpets, fast violins, unearthly oboes, and of course Jochen Kowalski's miraculous voice, tripping up the artificial conventions of eighteenth-century Italian verse and the da capo aria with a passion no less affecting for being affected, dramatic. What I'd hope for Hortensio to do (myself being helpless, tied down, my prick straining, aching, leaking) is either to toss my ankles over his shoulders and with no mercy or compunction ream out my ass; or, carefully, to straddle my hips, thrust his knees into my armpits, and sit on my cock.

That's what I'd hope for. What he does is, the fingers of his right hand trail delicately down his long torso to grasp his handsome prick. The horsecock of the biggest discovery-of-the-year porn star would appear clumsy, inadequate in that lovely hand, but his looks just fine, just right, dark enough for contrast against the olive pallor of the boney hand, sturdy, fleshy enough for contrast against the spindly fingers. All the while he gazes down at me with cruelly tender eyes, his upper lip lifted just slightly off rapacious teeth.

The hand starts out clamped around the base, buried in thick black pubic hair, cutting off the blood flow so the cock expands still more, thickening, lengthening. Crêpey olive-beige foreskin shrouds the head, making it look blunt and soft, which it's anything but. He bounces it a little, then loosens his grasp. A phosphorescent dribble of pre-come drools from the wrinkly lip. He milks it, drawing along the whole length as he shoves his hips forward, until there's just a little collar, like the tied-off mouth of a balloon, pinched between index finger and thumb, and a strand of the sticky stuff dangles, swaying like a pendulum, the terminus of its arc being the tip of my own fine, upstanding prick. It slips, and breaks, and drips. The coolness of the slime eases hot flesh.

Suddenly rough, rearing, he pulls the foreskin back to expose the glistening, shiny head. With his left hand he tugs on his balls, grunting hotly, with his right fiercely pumps the shaft. Those lovely lips draw back in a snarl, nearly ugly, showing his teeth; eyes squint, brows draw down to meet on the bridge of his patrician nose, its nostrils widely flared. He breathes raggedly, heavily, the ribs showing on his flanks like the ribs of a Japanese paper lantern. He's glowing, gleaming, sweating, flushed, illumined. The hands keep working, one tugging, twisting, pulling, the other thrusting in little piston-like strokes, rabbit punches. Me, I'm just where he wants me, just how he wants me. All I can do is strain appealingly at my bonds, moan, roll my hips from side to side, cock flopping like a faulty metronome.

The violinists are sawing away, the band leader pounding at the keys of his harpsichord. Two trumpeters raise their horns to pursed

lips. Jochen Kowalski steps forward a little, tucks his chin into his throat, parts his lips. The sight of him's so disillusioning I can't bear to look. As if just testing the waters, he commences at the bottom of his register, a vibrant contralto, but almost immediately plunges right in. Plunges up, I should say, in jolts and quavers and swoops of stunning velocity and virtuosity, a cascade of brilliant notes, a Roman candle.

The first hot drop of semen strikes my belly, the second – as if a mallet struck a brass gong – my sternum, the third, acrid, salty, my tongue. As I lick and savor and swallow, Jochen takes his top notes through a sustained run of extravagant fioritura and Hortensio continues to spurt, peppering my belly and chest with hot little splats. Two tiny droplets, one, then another, light in the corners of my eyes, like tears.

I said I wasn't going to talk about the other one, that man I haven't met of whom I'm honestly afraid to become enamored quite yet, and I won't, except in terms so specific as to be meaningless. After I run the spell check on this document while smoking my last cigarette of the night, after I shut the computer down and turn out the lights so I can no longer watch Fray Paravicino watching me, after I slip Herr Kowalski's disc out of the CD player (such stimulation I don't need) and replace it with the angelic concerti grossi of Arcangelo Corelli, turned down low to lull me to sleep, after I toss my soiled boxer shorts into the laundry hamper, I'll pull back the comforter and lay me down on my ascetic futon. The cats will curl up by my feet. I'll lie for a little while on my left side, my head aching slightly, as it does after working too long. I'll sigh, satisfied with my labors, but unsatisfied, unfulfilled.

And then I'll roll over, into his cool, skinny, boyish arms, his whispered confidences, his raspberry-sweet breath in my nostrils, his lips like sweet pomegranates pressed first to one eyelid, then the other, then my mouth. His slippery tongue recoils from the taste of stale tobacco, then pokes right in, impulsive, parts my lips, touches my teeth. The

stubble on his lovely little chin rasps against the bristles of my beard and the tip of his nose caresses my cheek. One small, soft hand traces a path down my flank, dragging over corrugated rib cage to the hip. One knee nudges between my thighs as he draws me closer. Only one of us can sleep with his head resting on the other's chest, hearing the slow constant of the beating heart, monotonous thoroughbass for Corelli's virtuoso strings. Will it be I? Will it be he? Good night, sweet prince.

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