

Michael Montlack

“I’m 84,” Terrence said.

“I should be demented.” He chuckled, slipping the miniature Jameson bottle under the table. “Would you kindly—the cap’s quite stubborn.” His partner Gary fanned out a menu wide enough for me to use as cover. “We do love this place,” Terrence whispered. “But the bartender can be ... well, stingy.”

Gary shifted the menu so I could fill the tumbler discreetly. “What,” Terrence said. “I swim every day. Take NYU classes to keep sharp. And yes—enjoy a regular nightcap.”

We toasted. “To Kiss!” A 6-year-old Tabby they rescued that week. “A true survivor,” Gary said. “From a hurricane down south.”

“We wanted an older cat,” Terrence added. I remembered our previous dinner. How Gary struggled to get a server’s attention. “Age makes you invisible,” he said. More observation than complaint.

I always ached when they thanked me for checking in. “We’re friends,” I’d scold. Recalling the day Terrence proposed occasional coffees with Gary. Instead of my weekly sessions. “I’m always here,” he said. “But our work seems done.” My friends thought it crazy. “Is that even professional? To hang with your therapist?” “He’s not my therapist now. They’re like uncles—the coolest uncles ever.”

“Remember Emma?” Terrence asked. A Persian they had when I began seeing him. “How I loved her.” His eyes glistening the way they did the night he explained how he was thrust into the AIDS crisis.

“Before it had a name.” How his protégé, a gay grad student, was one of the first to go. “I trained for family court. But suddenly I was helping young men to die.” Terrence on his sofa, a generous Jameson on his knee, pausing before naming that student. Steve. Repeating it. Repeating it. As if to conjure him. So I might see for myself. “How kind he was.”

Gary said what Terrence was too modest to say. “He went to the hospital every day. To visit.”

The ice clinked as Terrence took a swig. “When he was gone, I came home one night to a check in the mail. For my time!” he cried. “For helping him die!” Emma leaped onto his lap, to comfort him. “Can you imagine? He wanted to pay me. Pay! But I was his friend. I loved him. He owed me nothing. Nothing. Not even a thanks.”



Michael Montlack is the author of two books of poetry, including *Daddy* (Sept 2020, NYQ Books), and editor of the Lambda Finalist essay anthology *My Diva: 65 Gay Men on the Women Who Inspire Them* (University of Wisconsin Press). Recently his work has appeared in *North American Review*, *The Offing*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Court Green*, and *Los Angeles Review*. His essays have appeared in *Huffington Post* and Advocate.com. He lives in New York City.