

GAYS OF OUR LIVES

Episode VIII

by Scott Swentek

"Remember. There are questions that have to be put. I've called, he knows all about it and should be prepared. I'll call tonight from New York." He punches you lightly on the arm. "You be here and answer. OK?"
 "Yeah." You sway a bit, the iron balustrade digging into your butt. "I guess you're as

deep in it as I am."

"Deeper." The serious face suits his dark pinstripe — the young animal comes out in his smile. "It's my business nature. I like to know who I'm infecting." He lifts his chin. "Here they come."

A dented green Volkswagen rattles into the apartment lot, doughnuts to a stop before you. A naked elbow and close-cropped red head lean out the driver's window.

"Wanna make a living, Big Boy?"

You consider. "No." — Flex your buttocks as you stand erect. Roll your shoulders in the pinch of Mark's borrowed shirt. — "But I'm used to it now." You take the lapels of his suit. Run them between your fingers and pull him into a kiss. "Thanks," you say, aware of all the picture windows watching.

"Typical domestic bliss," Charlie razzes. The engine irregularly idles.

"I'll phone." Mark straightens as you turn away. "Take good care of him," he calls.

You nod at him over the car top, open the passenger door.

"Morning, David," Kelly beams, pulling the seat forward till she folds breathless.

You drop into the back. Kick her seat. "Scoot!"

"You're supposed to be politer to a maiden who helps in distress," she says, complying as Charlie puts the car in gear. "I didn't have to hold your head while you puked."

"I didn't want you to, anyway." You wave behind at Mark without looking.

"Then you would've missed the waste-basket."

"He mostly did," Charlie comments, watching to the left. "What's Mark do with a Thunderbird and a suit?" Turning the wheel, glancing at you.

"Going to South Africa," you answer, scuffing at the discolored spots on your tennis shoes.

"That's a job?" she wonders, gunning the little car onto the Sunset Highway.

"It's what he's doing." You see how the early morning hits the roadside vegetation; imagine how the dusty heat will parch it later. "His job is money. I don't understand it."

Kelly laughs. Charlie joins shortly. "You're short on gossip today, aren't you, Ryan?"

"I am gossip today."

Silence. "It happens to us all," Kelly soothes.

"Except I was set-up for it." Heating. "I mean I don't blame anyone for my getting AIDS."

"It takes two," Charlie interrupts.

"It was a monkey and there was no fun in it I noticed," you tell her, then continue doggedly at Kelly: "I even think it was swell," you emphasize, "you keeping my head where you wanted it pointed, but you still sicced your brother on me at the concert. What did you think I am? — A mobile vacuum? He screwed me out of Karl!"

"Good thing," Charlie mutters, pulling to the right exit lane.

"You've got Mark," Kelly offers.

"Yeah." You laugh once. "Look what it got him."

"You," Charlie retorts briskly, wheeling over a bump and stopping at the guardhouse of the Simian Research Center. "All out kids. Time for your performances."

You follow Kelly out. Turn, holding the door. Charlie leans suddenly across, arrest-

ing the door.

"Find me tonight," she pleads.

"I will," Kelly answers behind you. "Don't worry."

"Hah!" Charlie pulls the door closed, guns clattering away in a wide turn. Kelly waves, but to the uniformed man in the guardhouse. He salutes laconically and bends below the window. Kelly adjusts her blue Security shirt.

"Look, David," abruptly — but slow in consideration. "I'm sorry if my brother jumped on you, or spoiled anything all because I told him something, but he kept badgering me about you and maybe I was too loose because I was having fun, but I didn't say anything bad and he's been curious for a long time about the whole thing." She fidgets with the shirt.

"What whole thing?" You tug her hand from its button playing. Breathe deep. "Forget it. You're on shift. It would've happened anyway."

"Thanks . . . a lot." She smiles, meeting your eyes — then blurts: "How's Charlie for a woman?"

"I don't know." Urging her towards the gate, unthinking. "She's got anything you could want plus ten fingers and a sharp tongue. She's OK. Later, huh?"

You continue through the gate, a confused "thanks" following after you. The air is already heating. Cars pass. As you cross the parking lot you see Kelly's Datsun pick-up unmoved from the day before. A big laugh generates inside but gets torqued somehow and you end up shaking your head.

"Must run in the family," you mutter and jump onto the sidewalk, walking onto the grass where a faint landscape lethal path leads to the building housing Dr. Wiggant's lab.

Inside white labcoats bustle the hall. The lab door is locked. You pass to the next door.

"Hel-lo," halts a voice. Seated opposite the door, nodding, is the musical Old Dane you jammed with Friday night.

"Hello," you respond automatically, nod, and then smile. You open the door and close it behind you. Dr. Wiggant starts from the microscope.

"David! Excuse me." He fumbles out the microscope slide, clicks it onto the table. "I've talked with your friend Mr. Jaidon. I hadn't known how much upset you were. Please forgive me." He stands. "It is a shock for me as well. I've been projecting my inevitable illness." Stroking his fringe of white hair, eyes locked to an irrelevant piece of lab furniture.

"Telling my wife. All the people I come in contact with. There are so many more than seems rational." Sighs. Drops his hand. "I'm very sorry if you've had a fraction of my worry but," he looks up, tired, "for you it may be in vain. It is so unlikely a human would contract Simian AIDS I began looking for a direct agent. I've contacted my friends." He purses his lips. "Scared quite a few."

"You've been screwing the Old Dane," you burst incredulously. "Is that his blood you're looking at?"

"Oh . . . ah," coughing, "no. What an idea. No. He's simply the father of the owner of the company supplying our glassware. Fine work. We use a great deal, you know."

The connecting lab door opens suddenly. "I don't want to get as sick as those chimps." The young blond man sizes you up, turns to Dr. Wiggant. "Well? Have I got it or not?"

"Glassware?" you erupt, bewildered.

Dr. Wiggant coughs. "we get a fine discount," he offers lamely.

end episode VIII

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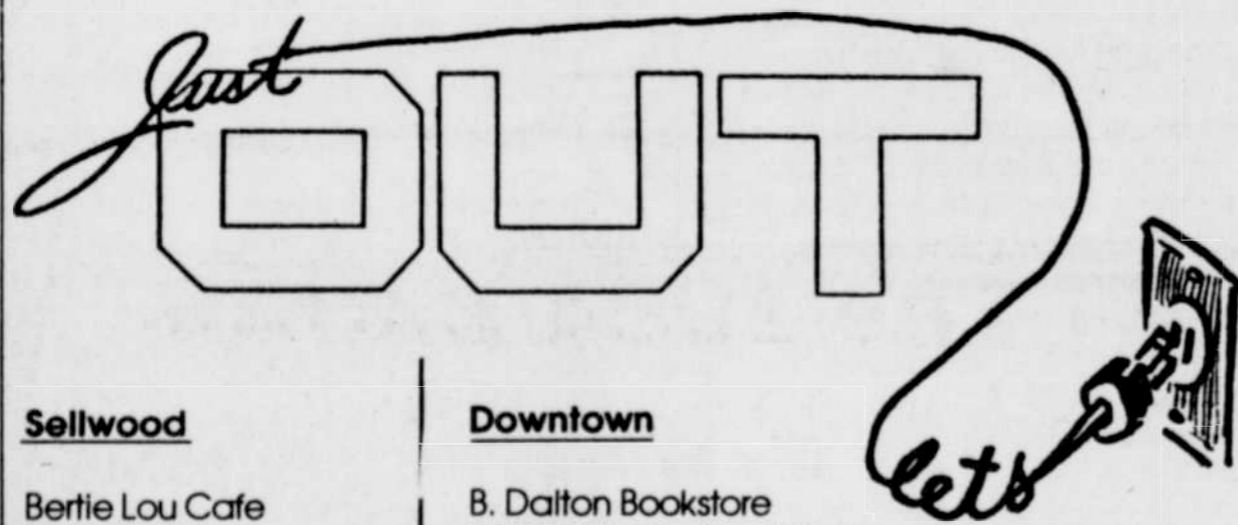
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