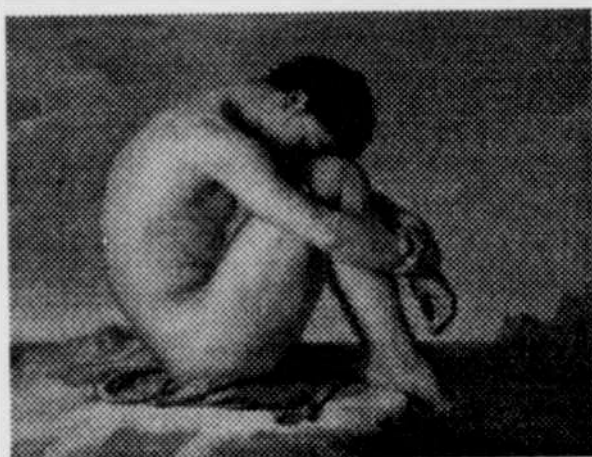


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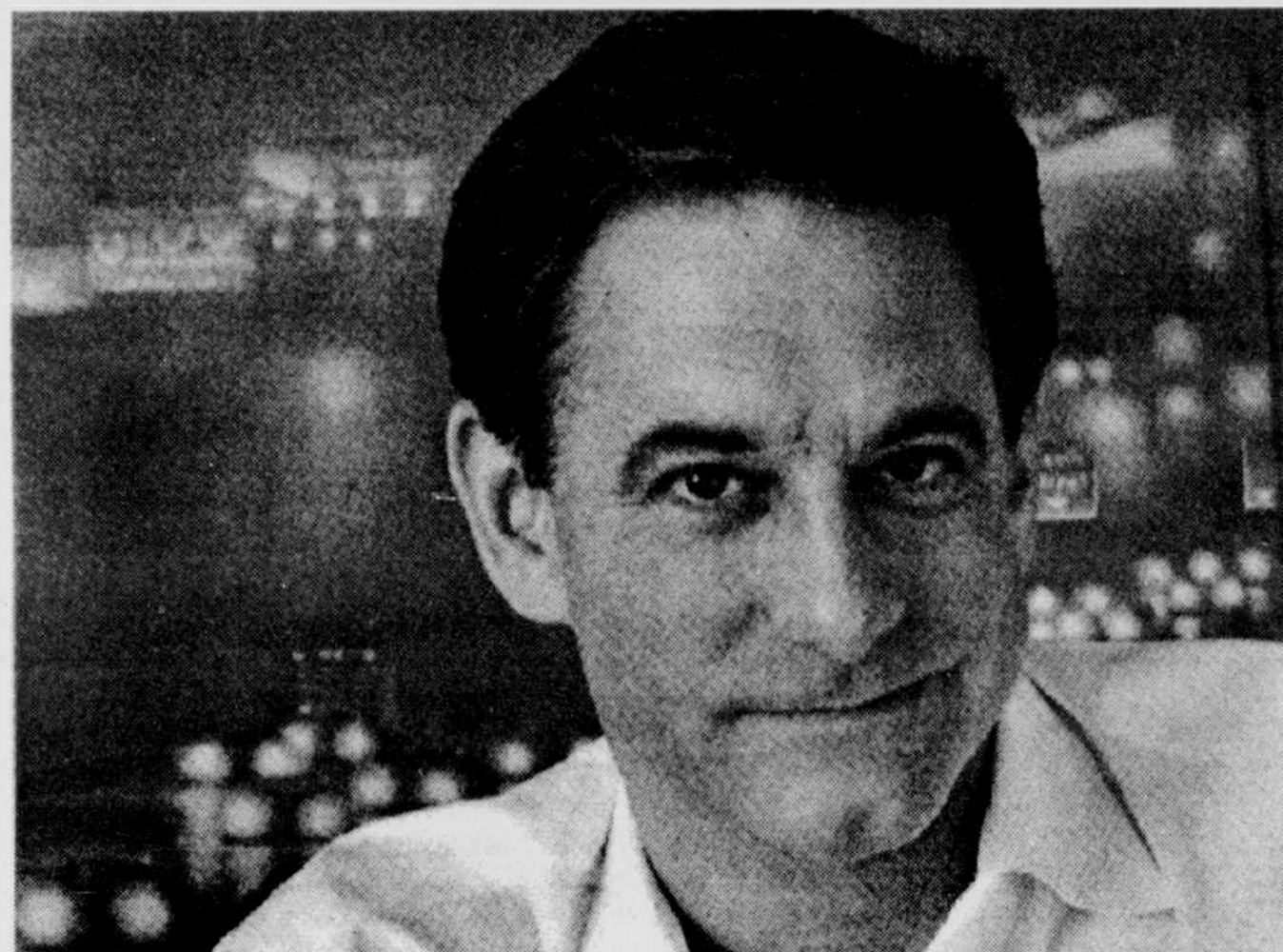
It's not the same old thing

PEACH BUZZ

Oh, Savannah

*The sleepy Southern town's allure is spiced up by
an account of murder and intrigue*

by Kevin Isom



Author John Berendt

John Berendt's book *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* put Savannah, Ga., back on the tourist map. The sleepy Southern seaside town boasted orderly squares, charming fountains and historic homes before the publication of Berendt's book. But *Midnight's* tale of intrigue and murder in the varied strata of Savannah society added spice to the town's quiet beauty.

Midnight recounts the stormy relationship of Jim Williams, a prominent gay antique dealer and member of old Savannah society, and his live-in "employee," Danny Hansford, a lower-class hustler with a violent temper.

The story is replete with vignettes of the Lady Chablis, a drag performer at the Savannah gay club, and of Jim Williams' annual society parties—one to die for if you thought you were anyone in Savannah society, the other to forget about unless you were gay or beautiful or both.

The book chronicles Williams' killing of Hansford at the height of their tempestuous affair, the police charge of cold-blooded murder, and Williams' claim of self-defense. After three trials, Williams was freed on a mistrial and died shortly thereafter.

You can visit the Bonaventure Cemetery, the so-called garden of good and evil, where the voodoo priestess Williams hired would go to beseech Hansford's and other good and evil spirits to leave Williams in peace.

If you're gay or lesbian and visiting Savannah, and you don't have access to the hidden layers of Savannah society, you can drop your things at a bed and breakfast or any of the chain hotels down by River Street, and wander through the tree-covered streets, beneath dangling tendrils of Spanish moss. Strolling through the grid-patterned historic section, you wind your way slowly toward the river, to River Street with its shops and riverside walk.

For dinner, try 606 East Café, at 319 W Con-

gress St. Enjoy its hip, gay-straight crowd, moderately priced menu and psychedelic decor. Or if you want a more traditional chic environment, saunter over to John and Linda's at 313 W St. Julian's St. The food is a little pricier, but the service is pleasant, and you'll see most of the waiters out later in the evening.

The nightclub in Savannah, for both lesbians and gay men, is Club One, at 1 Jefferson St. The club has three levels, including a lower bar with a small dance floor and pool tables surrounded by butch lesbians who know how to hold a cue. The second level offers a large dance floor, and the third floor houses the drag cabaret where you can watch the Lady Chablis lip-sync and straight tourists gawk.

The popularity of Berendt's book has made Club One a straight destination, and on any given night you can rub elbows with a bus load of silver-haired straight tourists watching the show. If you can, put your arms around your partner, or anyone else convenient, to give the straight tourists an authentic gay club experience.

After a night of clubbing, hit the Paper Moon Café, at 152 Whitaker St., open until 5 am on weekends and very popular with Savannah College of Arts and Design students and the pierced and tattooed set. When you wake up around noon, head over to Clary's at 402 Abercorn St., an inexpensive place for breakfast where everyone goes to see and be seen.

Savannah won't be a frenetic, mile-a-minute getaway, but it will give you a taste of Southern history, along with just a hint of gay gothic intrigue.

Kevin Isom is a writer and attorney in Atlanta, Ga. His work includes commentaries in gay and lesbian newspapers and magazines throughout the United States and Canada, as well as short stories in magazines and anthologies in the United States, Canada and France.