

Todd Tillotson is struggling to move on after his husband is killed during a Black Lives Matter protest in Seattle. In this novel set entirely on public transportation, Todd attempts to safely reconnect with the world.

Orgy at the STD Clinic

By Johnny Townsend

Order the book from the publisher BookLocker.com

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/12127.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**



ORGY

AT THE

STD CLINIC

JOHNNY TOWNSEND



Orgy at the STD Clinic

Todd Tillotson is struggling to move on after his husband is killed in a hit and run attack a year earlier during a Black Lives Matter protest in Seattle.

In this novel set entirely on public transportation, we watch as Todd, isolated throughout the pandemic, battles desperation in his attempt to safely reconnect with the world.

Will he find love again, even casual friendship, or will he simply end up another crazy old man on the bus?

Things don't look good until a man whose face he can't even see sits down beside him despite the raging variants.

And asks him a question that will change his life.

Praise for Johnny Townsend

In *Zombies for Jesus*, “Townsend isn’t writing satire, but deeply emotional and revealing portraits of people who are, with a few exceptions, quite lovable.”

Kel Munger, *Sacramento News and Review*

In *Sex among the Saints*, “Townsend writes with a deadpan wit and a supple, realistic prose that’s full of psychological empathy....he takes his protagonists’ moral struggles seriously and invests them with real emotional resonance.”

Kirkus Reviews

Let the Faggots Burn: The Upstairs Lounge Fire is “a gripping account of all the horrors that transpired that night, as well as a respectful remembrance of the victims.”

Terry Firma, *Patheos*

“Johnny Townsend’s ‘Partying with St. Roch’ [in the anthology *Latter-Gay Saints*] tells a beautiful, haunting tale.”

Kent Brintnall, *Out in Print: Queer Book Reviews*

Orgy at the STD Clinic

Selling the City of Enoch is “sharply intelligent...pleasingly complex...The stories are full of...doubters, but there’s no vindictiveness in these pages; the characters continuously poke holes in Mormonism’s more extravagant absurdities, but they take very little pleasure in doing so....Many of Townsend’s stories...have a provocative edge to them, but this [book] displays a great deal of insight as well...a playful, biting and surprisingly warm collection.”

Kirkus Reviews

Gayrabian Nights is “an allegorical tour de force...a hard-core emotional punch.”

Gay. Guy. Reading and Friends

The Washing of Brains has “A lovely writing style, and each story [is] full of unique, engaging characters....immensely entertaining.”

Rainbow Awards

In *Dead Mankind Walking*, “Townsend writes in an energetic prose that balances crankiness and humor....A rambunctious volume of short, well-crafted essays...”

Kirkus Reviews

Copyright © 2022 Johnny Townsend

Print ISBN: 978-1-64719-938-8

Ebook ISBN: 978-1-64719-939-5

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, events, and dialogue are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Trenton, Georgia, U.S.A.

Printed on acid-free paper.

BookLocker.com, Inc.

2022

First Edition

Cover art and design by Laceoni

Contents

Chapter One: The Road to Hell.....	11
Chapter Two: The Road to Ruin	23
Chapter Three: The Road to Market.....	34
Chapter Four: A Fork in the Road.....	46
Chapter Five: The Long and Winding Road	59
Chapter Six: My Address Is Bus Shelter 412.....	69
Chapter Seven: Detours.....	77
Chapter Eight: The Road to Enlightenment	87
Chapter Nine: It's Not the Destination, It's the Journey	97
Chapter Ten: Take the Long Way Home.....	108
Chapter Eleven: Strangers on a Bus	121
Chapter Twelve: Are We There Yet?	132
Chapter Thirteen: All Roads Lead to Rome	141
Chapter Fourteen: Waiting by the Side of the Road.....	150
Chapter Fifteen: Il Capolinea del Cuore.....	156
Chapter Sixteen: The Road Less Traveled	165
Chapter Seventeen: Journey of a Thousand Bus Stops	173
Chapter Eighteen: The Scenic Route.....	181

Johnny Townsend

Chapter Nineteen: I'll Take the Low Road	191
Chapter Twenty: Light at the End of the Tunnel	198
Chapter Twenty-One: The Road to Recovery	209
Chapter Twenty-Two: Oh, the Places You'll Be Late To	218
Chapter Twenty-Three: Nothing Behind Me, Everything Ahead of Me	229
Chapter Twenty-Four: An Unscheduled Stop	237
Chapter Twenty-Five: The Road to Success	250
Chapter Twenty-Six: Take Only Memories, Leave Only Footprints	258
Chapter Twenty-Seven: Lost	267
Chapter Twenty-Eight: Urban Roads, Take Me Home	269
Chapter Twenty-Nine: A Journey Makes Itself Necessary	280
About the Author	298
Books by Johnny Townsend	300
What Readers Have Said	306

Chapter One: The Road to Hell

“If you’re going to drive me to suicide,” I said, “the least you could do is provide the pills.”

The man, about forty, strong and with worrisome muscles stretching through his Sonics T-shirt, stared at me. He was medium brown to my pale tan and, since he wasn’t wearing a mask, I could see his jaw drop in surprise.

Then the corners of his mouth turned up slightly.

“I’m going to give you a pass,” he said, “because you’re crazy.”

He continued two rows past me down the aisle and plopped onto a seat on the left side of the bus. “*Motherfucker*,” he muttered, but with a lighthearted tone, and I heard a woman near him laugh.

Odd that one could hear a black accent even in a laugh.

A white man across the aisle from me sneezed. No accent in the sneeze that I could detect. I wondered if non-white folks could tell.

A Latino sitting behind me banged on the window and shouted through the glass at someone on the street he recognized.

Like everyone else, I hated riding the bus. But I hated driving even more, so I'd sold my last car twenty years earlier. I could pay a lot of cab fare, I'd thought at the time, with the money I saved not paying car insurance.

Only I never hired a cab. Or an Uber or a Lyft. Or a Logger, the comparable system popular here in Seattle.

The bus swerved to avoid a pothole.

Ding!

I saw the Stop Requested sign light up, and a tiny Asian woman, old, crept to the rear exit one row ahead of me, hanging on carefully with every step.

A side exit, really, despite the name.

Back in Italy, the rear exit had truly been at the rear of the bus.

As the driver approached the stop without slowing, the woman's head swiveled about in confusion. She raised her free hand a few inches and then dropped it as if reprimanded.

"This is my stop!" I called out.

The driver slowed quickly, the woman bumping against the plexiglass next to the exit but maintaining her balance. The driver's eyes scanned the bus in her rearview mirror. "Sorry," she said.

When the doors opened, the elderly Asian woman hopped down onto the sidewalk and shuffled away.

"No problem," I called back.

The driver waited a second longer. I knew she was expecting me to leave, too, the voice she'd heard clearly not that of an elderly Asian woman, but I was too tired to explain. The driver either figured it out or gave up because she finally closed the doors and drove on.

“Hey.”

I turned to look behind me. The black man who'd threatened to kill me a few moments earlier after I'd asked him to wear a mask now offered his fist. He nodded an apology.

I touched my fist to his, returning the nod. Then he sat back down, and I looked out the window again.

We passed an apartment building under construction, and a convenience store, and a smoke shop.

Two police officers were talking to a black man in front of a taco truck.

I closed my eyes.

No one was waiting for me at home.

I was halfway to the corner before I realized I'd left my bus pass on the coffee table.

Mannaggia.

I quickly jogged back, grabbed the purple lanyard holding my work badge and Orca card, and started back for the bus stop. Ever since Brigham and I had moved into our house in Rainier Beach fifteen years earlier, I'd been

able to cut across the front yard of the Lutheran church on the corner. It saved both time and, more importantly, fifty yards of uphill effort to reach the sharply angled corner.

Walking was generally an easy, low-stress exercise, but because I carried so much extra weight in my belly, the strain on my knees was enormous. I'd heard that large-breasted women often experienced chronic back pain because their extra weight was all up front. But even 40DD breasts only weighed three to four pounds each. I carried the equivalent of twenty-three Dolly Parton breasts well forward of my natural center of gravity. Without a counterbalancing tail sufficient to stabilize an Ornithomimus, my back was aching long before I could burn enough calories to make a difference.

The church on the corner had been sold to a "troubled youth" organization a few years before the pandemic. Then the economic upheaval of worldwide disease forced the youth organization to sell to an Orthodox Ethiopian congregation. And those dedicated folks were at church almost every day. At the crack of dawn.

Even if the worshippers were inside when I cut across the property, it still felt inappropriate.

So I trudged up the hill.

The 106 thundered past on Renton Avenue.

"Dannazione!"

In public, I tried to curse in Italian so as not to offend anyone within earshot. But my Mormon missionary

training didn't offer much to work with. "Pick!" and "Flip!" weren't even Italian.

Fortunately, I'd found the book *Merde!* years ago at Half Price Books. It provided the necessary instruction that had been lacking at the Missionary Training Center.

On our first anniversary, I'd pieced together a quilt for Brigham in the shape of a sign: "Missionary Position Training Center." We liked having sex on top of it. Sometimes in our old temple garments.

I almost didn't go out with Brigham after learning his first name.

He almost didn't go out with me when I told him I was ex-Mormon, too.

Then, after we discovered we'd both served in the Italy Rome Mission, we agreed to try a first date.

No longer in a rush to catch the 7:31, I strolled the rest of the way to the bus stop. I could hear deep, male voices humming inside the church. Lots of basses in there.

I missed my days in the Seattle Men's Chorus. I'd stopped participating when I gave up my car, even though Brigham offered to drive me.

Above and beyond the church parking lot, I could barely make out Mt. Baker in the distance, covered in snow and visible only a few times a year. Of course, a clear sky brought its own problems. I stepped off the curb and inched into the street to position myself in the shadow of the bus stop sign, trying to shield my face from the already hot morning sun.

108 degrees last week in Seattle. But at least it wasn't the 121 they'd suffered up in British Columbia. My friend Jeremy in Surrey talked often of moving to the countryside and had even looked at property in Lytton. Thank God he wasn't there when most of the town was destroyed.

It felt some days as if the whole world was heading toward the Bridge of San Luis Rey.

At 7:46, another 106 pulled up. The muscular Asian driver had a buzz cut and wore a shirt heavily starched with testosterone. Self-assurance could be sexy regardless of body type, but I was no longer able to muster any, and the driver didn't look twice at me.

Gaydar didn't work unless a few pings could hit their target. It was like looking into a cave without a light source. Anything could be in there.

Anything but interest.

Boo hoo.

Always something, as Gilda used to say.

An old black woman with a grocery cart sat in the disabled section, dutifully wearing her mask. The next several seats were occupied mostly by young Asians, all glued to their cell phones, most of them also masking.

A middle-aged white woman with her mask below her nose sat in the last row before the rear exit. She was one of the regulars and always sat with one leg blocking half the aisle, glaring challenges at everyone who boarded. No one would have sat next to her even if the empty seat beside her was the only one available.

I passed the insolent leg and climbed up a step to sit in the row directly beyond the door, one of my favorite spots. The wall of the bus here partially shielded me from the sun.

I'd hardly had the chance to set my bag down when the driver pulled over to the next stop. I watched as Tommy climbed aboard and cursed myself for missing the earlier bus, casually turning my work badge around to make sure no one could read it. Tommy's eyes lit up when he saw me, and he hurried down the aisle, swinging onto the seat beside me.

He kissed me—mask to mask—and squeezed my thigh.

“How are you today?” I asked.

“Horny,” he said. Loudly, as usual. I wasn't sure if Tommy had Tourette's or Asperger's or both. He was white, around forty, with mutton chops and scruffy brown hair. He'd first kissed me on the sidewalk up on Capitol Hill when he was twenty-five. I'd never been a fan of cringe comedy, and Tommy offered little other than cringe drama, which was far less appealing.

“I'm sorry to hear that.” I tried not to overemphasize the word “hear.” Perhaps this would be the end of the conversation.

“My boss yelled at me yesterday.”

I didn't want to ask.

I didn't ask.

Tommy leaned into me and rested his head on my shoulder. I reached over and held his hand until we pulled up to his stop.

Ah, I liked this driver. A white guy, maybe fifty, with a shaved head and a longish white beard. By itself, that might not have been enough, but he always wore a tight shirt, the buttons threatening to rip right out. Through the little diamond-shaped windows formed by the battle between fabric and buttons, I could see a muscular if thin chest, and hints of a beautiful hair pattern.

I no longer wore shirts with buttons.

“Morning,” I said, leaning down to tap my Orca card.

The driver didn’t respond.

In my younger days, I could cruise men in passing cars while waiting for the bus. Helped a lot of guys get their days off to a good start. It was how I’d first met Brigham, after all. Now I was invisible, even when people had to deal with me directly.

Not the same as it was for Ralph Ellison, but I understood his title a bit more now. It worked so much better than *Totally Unimportant and Valueless Man*, which was perhaps more accurate but less literary.

On the corner of 51st, an Asian man carrying two garbage bags full of clothes boarded. He was also juggling a small bottle of laundry detergent and a book he was

probably planning on reading during the two-hour ordeal ahead of him. *Interior Chinatown*.

I wondered if laundromats were a good place to pick up guys.

On Rainier, the driver let on two more passengers but then closed the door in someone else's face. I could hear shouting from the sidewalk.

"Put on your mask!" the driver shouted back.

The man pounded on the door while the driver waited. After another moment of pounding, followed by a moment of calm, the driver opened the door, and a black man in his fifties boarded. His shirt was wrinkled, and he walked with a wide stance, as if a long, invisible board were attached to his ankles, forcing them apart.

He slammed the plexiglass door protecting the driver, defiantly pulled off his cloth mask, and then grabbed a handful of paper masks from the dispenser and threw them into the air like confetti. They floated down onto other passengers, several seats, and the floor.

The guy stomped down the aisle, his feet still separated by the invisible board.

The driver waited for him to sit down and then pulled away from the curb.

I wished I was the kind of person the driver would have sought comfort from at the end of his shift.

I'd need to exit through the rear at my stop, but perhaps I could hurry up to the front again before he closed the door

to new riders and hand him a slip of paper with my name and number. Maybe he did need comforting but was too professional to let on. If he had my number, he *might* call.

He certainly wouldn't if he didn't have it.

I tried to work up my nerve over the next twenty minutes. Then, when I pulled the cord for my stop, the glucose sensor attached to my upper left arm popped off and hit the window.

Porca la miseria. I'd just attached the 14-day sensor that morning. Newly activated sensors took an hour to calibrate. I hadn't even gotten one reading off the damn thing. And my insurance didn't cover the cost. I paid out of pocket because I hated pricking my fingers three times a day.

I tossed the ruined sensor into my bag, stepped off the bus, and headed for Bay 2.

When the bus pulled up to the curb and opened its doors, I paused just a moment to make sure no one needed to exit out the front. When the pandemic began, riders were ordered to exit only out the rear, and most drivers kept their plexiglass shield extended to block folks from coming out the front. But some riders, even those with no apparent disability, still insisted on exiting through the front.

If the sun was hitting the windows at a certain angle, it was difficult from the sidewalk to see what was happening inside, but since I didn't notice any motion in the forward part of the bus, I started walking toward the front steps.

Beep, beep, beep, beep.

The driver was lowering the front of the bus. Apparently, there *was* a disabled person coming out. I waited patiently but still detected no movement. Then I saw the driver waving me aboard.

The driver had lowered the bus for *me*. And now I could see it was the Native American driver who was rude on almost every occasion. Once, when I unsuccessfully tapped my Orca card three times without getting an approval, he yelled at me. “Put some money on your damn card!”

“I have a monthly pass,” I told him.

“Then tap your card right!”

Another time, I’d boarded carrying a single bag of groceries along with a case of lemon seltzer water. Two seconds after I tapped my card, the driver slammed the doors shut and threw his foot against the accelerator. I’d dropped the case of seltzer water trying to keep myself from falling. Two cans started fizzing all across the aisle.

“Stupid!” the driver had yelled.

So I knew exactly why he’d lowered the front of the bus today. Seattleites were nothing if not passive aggressive.

I climbed up the steps, tapped my card, and nodded politely to the driver. “Bitch,” I said.

He slapped the plexiglass door protecting him from the riff raff. “You want a piece of me?”

He thought he was George Costanza's father.

"Thanks for offering," I said. "I'm partial to cocks. But I'll take a piece of your ass if you'd rather." I held out my hand. "Wanna give me your number?"

And I judged Tommy for behaving poorly in public.

The driver faced forward again and jammed his foot on the accelerator. I was prepared, of course, but I still made an exaggerated pretense at catching myself. "Trying to get my legs in the air already?" I asked. "We should probably do this when you're not working."

I made my way to a free seat midway into the bus. I'd been an asshole, I realized, and I was absolutely fine with it.

Chapter Two: The Road to Ruin

The Latina passenger across the aisle from me lowered her gaze and stared. Without the ability to see her entire face, I wasn't sure exactly what emotion she was conveying, but it wasn't elation.

She wasn't looking at "me," though, at least not my face, so I looked down to determine what she *was* looking at.

I was picking at a scab on my left forearm, and it was bleeding ever so slightly.

Mortified, I stopped and turned to look out the window. In the months after Brigham's murder, I'd slowly developed an excoriation disorder. I picked for no apparent reason, the same way some folks chewed their nails or pulled out strands of hair.

In my case, of course, it led to bleeding and scarring, both off-putting. I'd seen a counselor twice, but it was so hard to travel to appointments that I found myself delaying the next one.

I pulled out my phone and sent myself a note to call the clinic on my lunch break. My glasses fogged easily

during the commute, so I tried not to text much while on the bus. Too many typos.

Or, worse, autocorrect. I hadn't meant to ask Jeremy to send me a picture of his tree. He liked *trains*, could wait for hours at a trestle for just the right shot, and I appreciated his dedication.

Autocorrect always seemed especially capricious, perhaps the first example of sentient AI. I hadn't meant to text Brigham, "Seed you tonight," when we set up our first official date.

But it had worked out OK.

I hit Send and turned to look back out the window. Flowers and candles surrounded a light pole next to a bus stop. Someone, it seemed, had been killed there in the last day or two.

A maskless passenger advanced as I retreated, wielding her, "I have an immune system!" like a weapon. The woman was probably in her late forties, thirty pounds overweight, and believed in coloring her hair a shade of blonde that would not have looked natural even if she were twenty.

All I'd done was point to the mask dispenser beside the train doors when she coughed on a commuter who was exiting at the same time she was boarding.

Don't kick against the pricks, I remembered reading decades ago. I'd taught the Elders' Quorum for over a year after returning from my mission.

"Drug companies are just trying to make money!" the woman shouted. I could feel a drop of spittle hitting my arm. I hoped no pathogens entered through one of my self-inflicted wounds.

"Are you talking about capitalism?" I asked. Here at the headquarters of Starbucks and Boeing and Microsoft and Costco. I had such trouble following the logic of some arguments. Those on the right were supposed to *like* the motivation of profit.

I closed my eyes.

Why in the world was I engaging with this crazy person? There was no Brigham to join in Paradise, or Spirit Prison, or anywhere. And I didn't *really* want to leave, did I? Or I wouldn't be wearing a mask, either.

"Like Amazon?" I asked.

The woman screamed as if her body were being physically ripped apart. Several passengers retreated into the next car, but others were trapped behind me at the end of this one.

"Hospitals get a bonus when someone gets COVID!" the woman shouted. "And then they mine hormones from them!"

I remembered as a teen reading one of Robert A. Heinlein's last novels, *The Number of the Beast*, in which I first learned the concept of alternative universes.

How had we ended up in one where insanity was the norm?

My heart pounding, I considered suggesting the woman start advocating for universal healthcare. Once a missionary, always a missionary. Instead, I nodded slowly, with broad movements. The woman hesitated just a second, not quite ready to stop arguing but apparently unsure if she'd already won or not. I'd say it was easy to confuse delusional people, but in truth, it was easy to confuse just about anyone.

I'd believed Richard when he told me he'd caught gonorrhea from absentmindedly gnawing on his coworker's ink pen. That was long before I met Brigham. Richard also brought crabs home one day after switching chairs with his coworker.

I tried to keep my voice casual. "You're absolutely right," I said.

The woman frowned, her lips twitching.

Not as charming as Samantha Stevens's nose.

Before she could recover, I added, just as casually, though my chest hurt now, "You know who else has immune systems?" I didn't allow even a rhetorical pause and pushed on. "The million or so people who die of tetanus every year." I was about to try squeezing in some numbers about measles and diphtheria but never got the chance.

The woman lunged at me and ripped off my mask, spitting in my face.

Had I read somewhere once that misery was a more reliable source of mental illness than genetics?

When her fingernails drew blood, I grabbed the woman's hands and said, so low she quieted down to listen. "I sure hope you don't catch my HIV."

Earbud day.

Pink singing "Just Give Me a Reason" and "What About Us?"

Kelly Clarkson singing "Walk Away" and "Since U Been Gone."

OneRepublic singing, "Love Runs Out."

But even listening to Sara Bareilles singing "Brave" couldn't erase the horror of seeing yet another name added to the yard full of signs I passed every day insisting we "Say Her Name."

I gasped when a light-skinned Indian boarded the bus along MLK. In the second before he pulled his mask up, I thought I was looking at Ramesh again.

Ramesh wasn't really my friend. And we'd never had sex, though he was stunningly beautiful and I'd sure fantasized about it. He was part of the package deal when I started dating Brigham. They'd known one another for almost ten years already by that point. He and Brigham

continued to see each other for dinner once every month or so. I joined a couple of times a year.

But when Brigham was attacked during a Black Lives Matter protest up on Capitol Hill, I inherited Ramesh.

He inherited me, too.

For a while, we tried developing our friendship in an effort to keep the memory of Brigham alive. Only we didn't particularly like each other. If we had, we wouldn't have waited so long to begin with.

Still, I became part of the "Squad" when Ramesh was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. Near the end, each friend took a different night of the week to stay with him.

On one of my last shifts, I heard the door open at 3:00 a.m. Ramesh had wandered outside, completely nude, in the middle of January, falling down twice and skinning both knees before I could get him back to the house.

After that, the Squad brought on a couple more members, and we stayed with Ramesh around the clock. He'd asked for Death with Dignity meds but then was afraid to use them, worried there'd be consequences "later."

His hospice nurse had confiscated them the moment Ramesh died. I suppose she was legally obligated.

It wasn't that I wanted to kill myself. But I did want to know I *could*.

Ramesh II looked about now, but there was no obvious place to sit. The bus was "packed" in that every set of seats

was occupied by a single person. To sit anywhere, he'd have to sit right next to someone else. Even before the pandemic, people avoided such proximity whenever possible. Now, it felt like groping.

I motioned to the seat beside me.

The man looked at the seat, glanced over at me, surveyed the bus again, and then moved past me to stand by the rear door.

I jumped off the 11 at Westlake and ran down the stairs, almost tripping on the last flight. I dashed around the corner, slapped my Orca card against the reader, and grunted as a red light flashed with an accompanying honk informing me I'd been unsuccessful.

The reader broke down regularly. I slapped my card against it three more times before getting the green go-ahead and then raced down one last flight of stairs.

Just as the light rail pulled away.

“Cazzo!”

Trains arrived every ten minutes, so it wasn't the end of the world, but after a long day of work, and after missing my first bus, plus knowing I still had one more bus after light rail, it was damned aggravating.

Every day, I told myself not to take chances. Once, I'd slipped on the stairs and almost fallen on my face. Another time, I'd just been recovering from a bout of plantar fasciitis and risked tearing the tendon again. One day, I was

getting over a knee injury, caused solely by sitting on my sofa and crossing one leg over the other while watching *The Undertaker*.

But I simply couldn't resist the pull to go home *now*.

At least I hadn't injured myself today. It was only a matter of watching shoppers and workers and tourists milling about for a few more minutes, talking or texting and puffing out invisible virus particles.

Then the elevator doors opened, and a short, balding man with a white cane came tapping out.

Now *that* was a good-looking man.

He apparently had some level of vision, as he moved directly to where the rear doors of the last car typically opened. He'd be ready when the next train came down from Capitol Hill.

The guy was about fifty, far sexier than I'd been at his age. The thought made me realize that even a blind man would probably not feel attracted to me now. He'd still be able to feel my fat stomach, after all.

The man was a little plump himself, but in a dad bod kind of way, not the granddad bod I inhabited.

I watched as he pulled out a magnifying glass to read a text on his cell phone.

That meant he'd be able to read my phone number if I wrote it in large enough numerals. But I couldn't just thrust a piece of paper at him. I'd have to chat him up first. Yet what would I say?

“Lovely weather we’re having down here in the tunnel, isn’t it?”

The man turned vaguely toward me. It looked as if his eyes saw mine. I didn’t have a follow-up comment, though, and the man turned back to his phone. He probably wasn’t even sure I’d been talking to him, so I couldn’t be certain I’d been rebuffed.

But I still felt like the idiot I was.

When the train pulled up a few minutes later, the guy moved immediately to the disabled section. That was one of two bench seats in the car. I could sit on the far end of the bench without crowding him, but it felt too stalkerish, so I sat on the first row in the elevated section on the other side of the doors.

I’d already made contact, though, hadn’t I? It would be OK now to hand him my phone number on the way out. Assuming he didn’t deboard at an earlier stop.

If he never called, at least I’d know I tried.

The guy fell asleep shortly after Columbia City. He was still sleeping as we left Othello. I could hardly wake him up to shove a slip of paper in his pocket.

I could always stay on the train past my stop, of course. He’d surely wake up for his own. I wouldn’t need to deboard with him and be all creepy, but I could hand him the slip of paper as he left.

Going even one stop further, though, would add half an hour to my commute.

The man was still sleeping when the train stopped at Rainier Beach. I took one last look and then bolted when the doors opened. If I hurried, I could cross MLK before the Walk sign changed to Don't Walk. That would give me a fighting chance to catch my last bus on time.

If I didn't damage a tendon first.

I'd had disturbing dreams most of the previous evening. In one, a Jewish family that spoke almost no English was looking for a specific synagogue, but the only Hebrew word I could remember from college was "shalom." In another, Brigham and I were arguing over whether to sail or fly to Iceland.

The one outright nightmare had been more traditional—me running for the bus, my legs trapped in molasses that smelled like tar.

This morning, I walked down to the stop below mine, pleased to see Tommy already waiting. I felt stupid and predatory, horny and inadequate. Tommy waved, thrusting his hips forward as if fucking. When I reached the bus stop, he took the bag out of my hand and set it on the sidewalk. Then he gave me a bear hug that lasted almost a minute, grinding against me while cars sped by on Renton.

The speed limit was an unrealistic twenty-five on almost every arterial in the city.

When Tommy pulled back, he tapped my crotch lightly. "Gave you a chubby," he said triumphantly. Then he reached for his zipper.

“We can’t do that here,” I said.

“I’m not shy.”

“It’s not socially appropriate,” I said.

Tommy sighed heavily. “Would you do it in a bar?”

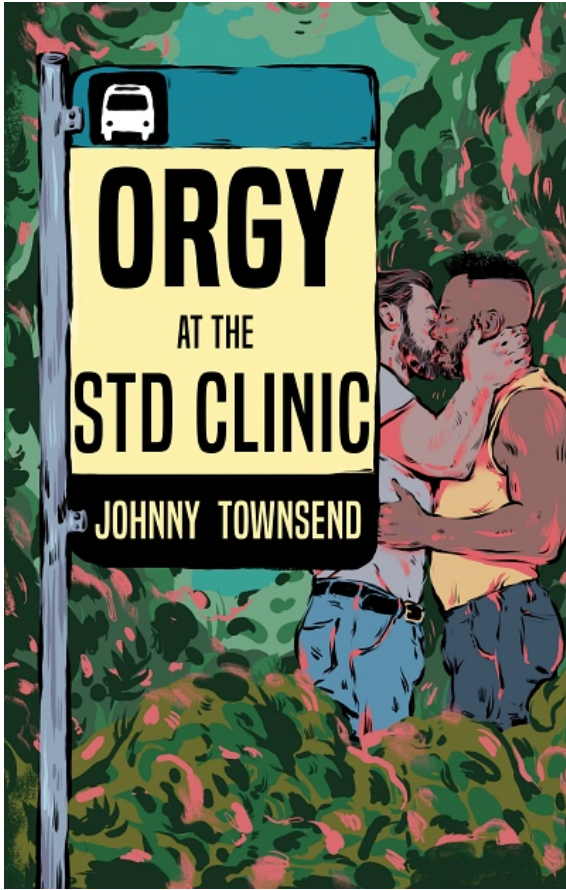
Probably not, I thought. That could also be grounds for arrest. “What bar do you go to?” I asked. A gay bar in White Center had just been torched by an arsonist the week before. Thank God, no one had been inside at the time.

“Bear Trap up on Capitol Hill,” he said. “They have a beer bust tonight. Wanna meet me there after work?”

A bear bar. Why hadn’t I thought of that? Even with a pandemic, I was going to have to go somewhere and take off my mask sometime if I wanted any type of acceptable human interaction. That was all there was to it.

“Yes,” I said. “Yes, I do.”

Tommy grabbed me again in a tight hug. This time, he pressed his mask against mine as hard as he could and moaned like Al Parker.



Todd Tillotson is struggling to move on after his husband is killed during a Black Lives Matter protest in Seattle. In this novel set entirely on public transportation, Todd attempts to safely reconnect with the world.

Orgy at the STD Clinic

By Johnny Townsend

Order the book from the publisher BookLocker.com

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/12127.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**