

To my darling ...

... is the inscription Liberace engraved inside the silver cigarette case he gifted to his boy toy du jour. The year was 1954 when the Hollywood gossip rag *Rave* caught wind of the flamboyant maestro's sexual deviance, publicly outing him for the first time in a front-page exposé. Meanwhile, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover and his assistant, Clyde Tolson, were off enjoying one of the many vacations they shared together over their decades-long romance—those treasured moments when they weren't overseeing the removal of hundreds of homosexuals from the State Department. Termed the Lavender Scare, the movement was parallel to the more public brand of McCarthyism, conflating sexual difference with matters of national security.

Oh, Nostalgia!

60-some years later: I'm a late-twenty-something living in New York. The heyday of cruising has passed—the West Village piers have been replaced by a jogging path for the ultra wealthy. Apps now control the circuit of desire, gathering geolocations and personal information while managing proclivities. Middle-class morality has come full circle, bland consumerism replacing any hints of radicalism.

Walking through Tribeca, home to my subsidized studio overlooking the Holland Tunnel, I line up with bankers during the lunch hour rush for an overpriced salad before walking to SoHo to buy some Nespresso capsules for an upcoming studio visit—a small gesture of hospitality. It's August and oppressively hot, the smell of Chinatown garbage lingering long after leaving the neighborhood. Hardly anyone wears clothes, but the ones they do are designer. My eyes scan as I navigate the streets, sweat dripping down my back—I'm carrying too many shopping bags.

Here I am, one of eight and a half million people—a stranger, the same. All I can do is collect the data: “He was cute,” “I could see his dick through his shorts.” The body is there for me to consume, a piece of meat to be internalized, idealized, and repeated. And who exactly am I in all of this?

I am, etc.,
Christopher