

TO BE HEARD
ROOF ALEXANDER

“If you are lucky enough to have lived in
Paris Williamsburg Brooklyn as a young man, then wherever you go for the
rest of your life, it stays with you, for Paris Williamsburg is a moveable
feast portable second.”

-Ernest Hemingway

Chapter 2 NEW YEARS EVE

THAT Christmas Day, before walking back to Chinatown, before walking out of 99 South 6th Street for the first of many times, I checked out the corkboard full of fliers. Most of them had to do with bicyclists' rights, but there was also one that was for a New Years Eve party. It was at a place called Death By Audio.

"You should go." A voice came from behind me. I turned to see a frail man that didn't seem to care whether I responded or not.

"I should leave?" "No, you should go to the party." "Okay, I might. Are you Foxcroft?"

"No, he lives upstairs. I'm Seth, I live downstairs."

"Hey, I'm Alex. I'm moving upstairs in a few days."

"Hope you like strangers."

"That seems to be the sentiment."

"Only because it's true."

"I live with ten people right now so I figure it won't be much different."

"Maybe. No one else could say until it happened."

Abe didn't tell me anyone else lived there, and I didn't see anywhere else that resembled a bedroom. "Where is your room?" I asked. He led me over to what appeared to be a refrigerator. When he opened it, there was a small windowless room behind the doors. "That could get confusing." I said.

"Maybe."

I started to go back to Manhattan, but before leaving I asked Seth why he told me I should go to the New Year's party.

"Because I saw the way you were looking at it. I like to imagine that if one can imagine going somewhere, then they should just do it. You were contemplating it with yourself, so I thought I would help you make the decision. It's what I do best."

It was true. I had already convicted myself to be different in the coming year. The past couple months I had hardly left my room. I was working on a novel while trying to not spend any money, so I only went out to smoke a cigarette on the roof, or to take 3am

excursions to the grocery to buy ramen noodles. The move to Brooklyn represented a change in everything. My new challenge was to constantly ask myself, “What would I never do?” The answer in that case was, I would never go to a New Year’s party by myself.

The last day of 2005 came and I had moved in the three boxes that made up all of my worldly possessions. There was always a small Chinese boy playing down by my doorway. I assumed he belonged to the family that owned the print shop next door. He had never acknowledged my presence till that day. He waved goodbye to me. I waved back, I waved back more sad than I thought was normal. On my final trip back to Brooklyn, I walked over the Williamsburg Bridge with the last of my stuff in a backpack and two plastic bags. I turned around and said goodbye to the city, goodbye to the yellow cabs, goodbye to Mars bar and Sophie’s, goodbye to Chinatown and the Lower East Side, goodbye to all the friends that didn’t really stick, and goodbye to my old self. Looking across the skyline it seemed like an aquarium, or a train set, or a model city that I could just burn down in my mind. I was sadder about the Chinese boy than the city.

Each time I went in or out of 99 I saw the flier for the party. I had no other real options for the night, and there was a lot of self-applied pressure to do something I would never do. A plan developed in my mind, which was go to the party right before midnight, wedge my way into a countdown toast with a group, and hope they just accept that I’m a part of them. Maybe I would be so lucky to have a random girl try to kiss me at midnight. There *have* been stranger things happen, as they say.

Turns out that I’m not *that* kind of lucky. I walked down to South 2nd Street with my pint of Wild Turkey 101. There were a dozen bodies outside an unmarked door. I went inside confidently, sticking to my plan, except I was about a half an hour early. I was getting anxious just sitting in my new little room. That’s what New Year’s does to people, makes them think they have to be doing something important. I suppose I could have just sat there in my room writing stories about being lonely and such, but at the very least on the first day of the year, I had to give my new motto a chance.

I walked around the room pretending to be looking for someone I knew. It seemed like everyone there was locked into these unbreakable circles of conversation. My mind made up scenarios of icebreakers. I could just ask someone if they have seen John, Paul,

George, or Ringo, and then they would pretend to know who I was taking about, and then we would be lifelong friends. Of course it didn't exactly work that way. There were about a hundred of them, either rock-n-roll or geek-cool. I'm not sure where I fit, maybe rock-n-geek. There was a stage with a band breaking down their equipment and another band setting up. Watching a band would be perfect. I wouldn't have to engage any of these intimidating circles. In the back was an open-aired room where most people smoked in the same unbreakable circles. I went out to the sidewalk to have my smoke. It was easier that way. The Wild Turkey was going fast, because I was bored and because I needed to get drunk to talk to anyone. I finished off several cigarettes between visits to the party inside. I went to the bathroom after these cigarettes, anything to pass the time. It was possibly the longest half-hour of my life.

A rock-n-roll man in a Cuban Army cap got up on the stage and announced that there was one minute left in the year. As this was happening, I noticed a girl across the room. She had dark wild curly hair and a young face with a pointy nose. She seemed to be looking at me, but I was so insecure at the moment that this concept was unconceivable. She was beside a wall ladder waiting for a rock-n-roll to climb down. I kept glancing that way in hopes of a connection. Before she started up the ladder I swore she looked back at me again. Once she disappeared into the ceiling I decided to follow up on my new life motto and do something that 'I would never do.' I followed her up the ladder. As I was pulling my body up to the roof the party began to chant the countdown. By the time I was up on the black tar rooftop, 2006 had arrived and I watched the curly haired gal kissing a guy in the darkness. I started to walk to the opposite side to light a smoke by myself, but a French female accent carried over the thick cold air. "Now you!" The curly haired girl was looking at me again. "Now you. Come here. We can't start the New Year lonely. That was last year. Last year we were lonely."

I liked the way she said *we*. I slowly walked over to them with my head down. When I got close she pulled my head over to hers and softly kissed me on the cheek. Amazing, delusional thoughts sometimes come true. Then I realized that's what she did to the other guy standing there, but I just assumed that they were tonguing each other down. He was quiet and nervous like me.

"Happy New Year." They both told me and I told them thanks.

“Whiskey?” I offered them my bottle and they both took small slugs. “Why were you lonely last year?” I asked both of them, but really just her.

“I engulfed myself in work and school.” She said. “Every so often I would go out by myself and find a girl to fuck and that would be it.” After she offered this blunt information, my heart sank a little bit. Isn’t it funny how you can just fall for someone right away when you’re in a desperate situation? She had saved me and then she had crushed me with a polite warning of sexual preference.

“That doesn’t sound so lonely.” George Henri said.

“Maybe. I guess it made it me more lonely because it was girls. One night stands with girls are like that because there are usually more emotions. Guys can just fuck you and roll off and you both can move on. I would prefer it that way, but it’s safer to be with girls for more than just the baby factor.”

I couldn’t believe the balls on this girl. I looked at George Henri to catch his reaction and he seemed very indifferent. He had a calm face, an ambiguous face, his emotions weren’t available. He was effeminate, probably gay, but that was hard to tell in New York. Many men along the L-train seemed at least a little gay. Nicolette asked him, “And you? Why were you lonely last year?”

“It’s the way I prefer it. 2006 will be exactly the same.”

She smiled. “I adore you George Henri. I know we just met, but I adore you, and I hope you stay lonely this year.”

“Thank you.”

“George Henri, this is our new friend. What do you think his name is?”

George Henri looked over me. “Something simple and American. Maybe Biblical? John, Luke, Mark?”

“Alex, it’s Alex.” I said before he went through the whole New Testament.

“Alex.” She said with satisfaction. “George Henri, why do you think Alex was lonely last year?”

“I don’t know. All I know is that everyone is lonely, so maybe the question should be, why was Alex not lonely last year?”

“Well? Alex?”

“Because when lonely started feeling better than most other things then it

transformed itself into not lonely.” I said while pulling out my notebook to write that statement down. “But... this is the real answer. As long as I have this, then lonely doesn’t exist.”

“That is a contradiction no?” She said. “Did you get used to the loneliness or did the pen and paper keep you from being lonely?”

“Well Nicolette, I swear on my American biblical name that I will always contradict myself.”

The party became easy after we met. We all went down together. We all went down to the party together. We all went up together. We all went up to the roof together. Then we stayed up there. The band called Buried by Strangers were overwhelmingly loud, something I would have loved an hour earlier. But I found people that were like me, young desperate people wanting to fit somewhere in the universe, young desperate people that moved from different parts of the world to be with others that needed to be heard.

George Henri came from New Orleans, a painter as far as we could tell from his paint-covered fingers and pants. He was half Creole and half Canadian, probably in his mid-twenties. He ended up at the party because an infamous Williamsburg painter, David Bastille invited him but never showed up. “He’s a real dick.” George Henri told me in envy. “But he’s doing it. International showings, local prestige. He’s doing it.”

Nicolette was a poet, just moved from Oakland, raised in Paris, twenty years old, finished her B.A. in English-lit from Berkley in two and half years, and then freshly enrolled in the MFA program at Pratt. She told me that she buried herself into a heavy rotation of open-mics and poetry slam competitions in her free time. When I told her I hated open-mics, she explained that she had to do those awful open-mics, because it was what separated the uselessness of creating and the purpose of creating. “I know that we all do this because there is this moment of bliss.” She said on top of that roof. She said it loud enough to be heard. One set ears that belonged to a young man named Castor Hazel was the one set of ears that needed to hear it. He was smoking with a rock-n-roll circle beside us. “It happens when we perform or present our art that can’t be equated in any other form, that feeling of making people interested, emotional, and ultimately feel what you feel.”

Castor broke from his circle and came over smoking a spliff. He coolly handed it to

Nicolette and said, “I won’t discount your theory at all but it’s not the sole reason why we create these songs or poems or acts or whatever. There has to be a deeper reasoning than the need to be *liked*.”

“I didn’t say liked.” She said with smoke rolling from her thin lips.

“I’ll tell you what you said, but differently. Say for instance I saw this very attractive girl across the room. I make my way over to her, maybe hand her a drink, maybe a spliff, and I’m subconsciously thinking about what I want from her. I want her to be interested in me, I want her to have an emotional reaction toward me, and ultimately I want her to feel what I feel, which can be attraction or just sexual intenseness, but at the bottom of it lies the truth, which is that I just want you to like me.” Castor was what you could call a man that women noticed, tall, dark hair, dark features, dark demeanor, and good looking with something to say. In short, he could say what he just said, and get away with it. At least to most girls he could get away with it, Nicolette not being one of those girls.

“That is a well thought out metaphor that I can’t believe you just made up on the spot. As a matter of a fact I have to guess that it has gotten you laid quite a few times, which leads me to this. At what point does the desire of being liked fit into people’s art that trick’s you into thinking they like *your art* when all they want to do is fuck *your art*?”

“Goddamn I think you’re right!” He clapped once. “All these years I’ve just been trying to fuck my audience, I don’t give a damn if they like me or not.”

“I think.” I said. “I think that both positions could be right. What’s most important when creating is validation, whether you want them to feel interested or sexual or emotional or just liked, what you want is that moment to be validated, to be heard, and the next day you can either call them or throw their number away.”

“Well?” Castor said to Nicolette. “What’s it going to be?”

“She likes pussy.” George Henri said out of leftfield.

We were all there for the same reasons. Down the ladder chute the music blared on into the night. An abandoned warehouse turned into an underground music venue. The building was first erected in the late 1800’s to produce mannequins. It was said to be the first North American factory to produce anatomically correct female mannequins. This

went on through the industrial revolution. Then during the Great War it turned into a canon factory. When the Great Depression came, the building was empty all the way until World War 2 and then it stored tank tracks. After the war it became a storage building for the Domino Sugar plant. The plant lasted for fifty or so years and that space became abandoned until some local musicians took it over. We were all there for the same reasons. It took all that history to get us there at that moment when the first sunrise of 2006 came over the horizon. We were the bravest of our former teachers, ready to go anywhere but home. The sun as our witness, we would be valid. The sunrise as our awakening, we would be seen.