

TONY CORREIA

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark hair applying mascara to her right eye. She is holding a black mascara wand with a silver band. The background is dark with numerous out-of-focus, glowing bokeh lights in shades of yellow, orange, and pink. The overall mood is warm and intimate.

Walk  
This  
Way

# Is it really love if you're hiding who you are?

After countless hours, Josh has nailed the drag queen look. And he's got the Instagram followers to prove it. His next step is to perform at Poodles, the neighbourhood drag show. But when he blurts out his intentions on his very first date, his date walks out on him. Josh isn't going to make the same mistake with the next guy; clearly not all gay guys are accepting of the drag look. So when Josh finally meets someone he likes — and who likes him back! — he keeps that side of himself hidden. But for how long?

**TONY CORREIA** has worked as a waiter, bartender, bouncer, barista, receptionist and is a technical writer for a software company. His newspaper column, *Queen's Logic*, ran in *Xtra!* West for five years. He is the author of the Lorimer Real Love novels *Same Love*, *True to You* and *Prom Kings*. His memoir *Foodsluts at Doll & Penny's Cafe* was published in 2012. Tony lives in Vancouver, British Columbia.



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*For Bill Monroe.*



# 01 Ghosted

I WALK INTO THE RESTAURANT feeling like a million bucks. You could bounce a quarter off my ass in my skinny jeans. I haven't been able to feel my balls since I got off the SkyTrain. They might be numb. The UnderArmour shirt I "borrowed" from my brother Ed is bringing much needed definition to my chest and shoulders. If I didn't know better, I'd swear I worked out. My face has that desired Instagram filter glow. There's a chance I may have single-handedly

destroyed a small rainforest achieving this look. But beauty takes no prisoners. If this date goes as planned, I promise to make it up to Mother Earth.

The restaurant is packed with rugged-looking men and women. I'm seeing lots of ballcaps and gym bags. There's an active game of darts happening. And here I was thinking people only played competitive darts on TV. A posse of pool players are analyzing the balls on the table like they're landing a rover on Mars. Forty-inch monitors light up the restaurant with baseball, football and hockey games. When Randall described the Dugout as a place where "sporty" gays go, I pictured yoga pants and Abercrombie & Fitch varsity shirts, not actual sports. The only gay thing about the place is the portrait of Freddy Mercury.

"For how many?" the musclebound host asks me.

"Joshua!"

I look in the direction of my name and see a hand waving above the ballcaps.

"I found my date, thanks," I tell the host.

My first date ever. With Randall, the hottest gay



guy at school, no less. If my friends could see me now, they would totally judge me. My best friend Kara never had time for Randall because he's a jock. She resents him more now that he came out of the closet a couple of weeks ago. Kara told me girls were literally crying in the bathroom when they heard the news that he's gay. I always had my suspicions. Seriously, how many straight guys wear T-shirts cut off at the midriff?

I squeeze through chair backs and step over backpacks to get to Randall. It's like a locker room with table service. I trip on a curling broom, and almost fall flat on my face before Randall catches me.

"I didn't plan that, I swear," I tell him.

Randall props me back up on my feet. He's a good inch taller than me. He has perfect black Superman hair, a sculpted nose that looks like it's never caught cold and a cleft in his chin I want to rest all my hopes and dreams in. I still can't believe he said yes when I asked him to go on a date with me.

"Have a seat," Randall says. "Unless you want to eat standing up."

I snort-laugh, then try to cover it up by pretending to have a coughing fit.

“Have some water,” Randall says, offering me the glass in front of him. I take a sip and wave away my fake coughing spasm like it’s nothing. Which it is.

“Nice place,” I lie.

“It’s one of the few gay places that serves minors. This is where I would come when I was still coming to terms with being gay. Did you have any trouble finding it?”

“Siri led me right here.”

“I hope you didn’t mind taking the SkyTrain from New West. I would have offered to drive you, but I had to take my sister to swim practice.”

“It’s all good.” Another lie. If he was going to make me come all the way downtown from the burbs, the least he could have done is given me a lift. But that cleft in his chin, it does things to me.

Our waiter has a body like John Cena and a voice like Ross Matthews. Randall already knows what he wants to eat. I open the menu and point to the first

thing under fifteen dollars. A club sandwich.

“I have to be honest,” Randall says. “You’re not really my type. I prefer more masculine, straight-acting guys. But you have some nice definition going on there. And I was impressed that you had the nerve to ask me out on a date. That took balls.”

“When I know what I want, I go after it,” I say. I’m trying to sound cooler than I really am.

“You’re like your brother Ed when he chases the puck playing hockey. I much preferred being on his team than playing against him in house league. He still plays, doesn’t he?”

“He’s trying to get into Juniors. He’s determined to play for Team Canada.”

“You look athletic for a thin guy,” Randall says, changing the subject. “What do you bench press?”

“Do push-ups count?”

“You don’t lift weights?”

“No, but I look after my figure. I have to if I plan on performing at Poodles.”

“What’s Poodles?”

“The drag cabaret up the street from here. Haven’t you seen me on IG? I’m Siri Alexa. I have ten thousand followers.” I pull my phone out of my pocket and start scrolling through my photo stream.

“You’re a drag queen?”

“Not in real life. But I will be. I make all my own costumes. I can paint my face in my sleep.”

“You never said you were a drag queen.”

“I’m more of a Look Queen. You can’t call yourself a drag queen until you’ve performed in front of a live audience.” I hear the legs of Randall’s chair scrape across the floor as they are pushed back from the table. “Where are you going?”

Randall is putting on his jacket. He leaves the table without saying goodbye. The waiter returns with our food and puts it down in front of me.

“I don’t have enough money to pay for all this,” I tell him.

“Honey, I saw the whole thing,” the waiter lisps. “This is on the house.”

“Can I have it to go?” I ask sheepishly.

At least I can feel my balls again. They're stuck in my throat.

# 02 The Wonder Twins

WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH, the tough do drag. Instead of drowning my sorrows in a pint of Ernest Ice Cream, I've invited the Wonder Twins, Kara and Chris, over to help me with a lip-sync video. Kara is an Asian dyke, and Chris is her Goth twin brother. We met at a pep rally in grade nine. Like me, they were trying to distance themselves from the enthusiastic student body. We've been thick as thieves ever since.

“For someone with so much going for him, you

sure keep a lot of secrets,” Chris says, after I tell the twins about my date.

“Whatever possessed you to ask Randall out?” Kara asks. “You knew he was a jerk before he came out.”

“This is exactly why I didn’t tell you,” I say.

“Randall is the kind of guy you meet on Grindr,” Chris says. “And you know what the guys on there are like: No fats, no femmes, no Asians.”

“It was an impulse decision,” I tell them. “I had just topped ten thousand followers on Insta. I felt invincible and I went for it without thinking. It was a real rush.”

“Down the toilet,” Kara says.

“He was probably using you to get to your brother,” Chris says.

“Both of you are doing wonders for my self-esteem,” I say.

“You are the most talented person I know,” says Kara. “You can draw, you can sew and you can repair anything. You can do better than Randall.”

Up to now, Siri Alexa's Instagram feed has been filled with selfies of me modelling clothes I've designed and made myself. But social media is crawling with Look Queens. Real divas *perform* on a stage. My plan is to use this video as a calling card. With any luck, I'll be performing at Poodles in no time. I position myself in front of the tripod.

"How do I look?" I ask Chris, who is looking at me through the camera on my phone. "Can you see my entire body in the frame?"

"As long as you don't move your hands, feet or head," Chris says.

The door opens and my brother Ed tromps into the apartment, dragging his hockey bag behind him. He sees me in drag, my wig blowing in the wind from the fan that Kara is pointing toward my face.

"Mom!" Ed shouts to the kitchen. "Josh is doing drag in the living room again."

"Stop stirring the turd, Ed!" Mom shouts back. Mom has no patience for Ed's complaints ever since my dad moved in with her best friend. Or as Mom calls her, "That Bitch Becky."



Ed goes into our room and shuts the door behind him.

“Cue the music, Kara.” I turn my back to the camera, take a deep breath, and channel my inner Carly Rae Jepsen. I point to Kara, and say, “Hit it!”

I spin around dramatically and start mouthing the words to “Party for One.”

THUMP! THUMP! THUMP!

“Cut!” I shout.

“What’s that?” Kara asks.

“Bill, the bitchy old queen who lives downstairs,” I say. “He bangs on the ceiling if I sigh too loud. Turn down the volume or we’ll never get through this take.”

We start the song over from the beginning. I smile coyly at the camera, pushing my fake boobs together to make them look bigger. I start to feel self-conscious and silly dancing in front of the camera for the Wonder Twins. Then I get tongue-tied during the chorus. I try to cover it up by moving my head back and forth to distract attention from my lips. This is harder than I thought it was going to be. I push through to the end

of the song, dancing and smiling, trying to show my imaginary audience a good time. I'm out of breath when the song ends. I feel good.

"What did you think?" I ask Kara and Chris.

They're silent, like when they're solving a math problem.

"Why don't you see for yourself," Chris says.

I join the Wonder Twins behind the tripod. Chris presses Play. I can't take my eyes off myself. It's a hundred times better than what I pictured in my head.

"I am awesome," I say.

"Are your eyes tone deaf?" Kara says.

"It's not bad for the first time," I say.

"You're wearing flats," Chris says.

"I don't know how to walk in heels," I say.

"And when you dance, your dress looks like a bird trying to fly for the first time," says Kara.

"What do you know?" I snap. "You haven't worn a dress since your First Communion."

"I know when a woman is rocking a dress," she says.

"People love my drag on Instagram," I say.

“Because they don’t know you,” Chris says.

“Thanks!” I say.

“What he means is, Carly Rae Jepsen isn’t you,” Kara says. “Why aren’t you doing Amy Winehouse? You love Amy Winehouse!”

“No one our age knows who she is,” I say.

“How many people our age know who Carly Rae Jepsen is?” says Chris.

“She just put out an album a couple of years ago!” I say.

“I like Carly Rae Jepsen, too,” Kara says. “But you’re too arty to be a pop princess.”

“It would take three wigs to create one of Amy Winehouse’s hairstyles,” I say. “And she has all those tattoos . . .”

“You don’t have to *be* her,” Chris says. “Just draw your inspiration *from* her.”

“The Josh I know and love is fearless,” Kara says. “But the woman in that video looks like a girl who’s embarrassed about her boobs.”

“I’m not feeling so fearless now,” I say.

“What you need is a drag mother to help you channel your inner Amy Winehouse,” Chris says. “And to teach you how to walk in heels.”

“Chris is right,” Kara says. “You’ve spent so much time alone in your room reading fashion magazines and watching YouTube videos on drag, you don’t know how to be a drag queen in real life. A drag mother will put you through your paces.”

We shoot the video a couple more times. Watching the playback, I totally see what the Wonder Twins are talking about. This whole time, I thought I was a drag prodigy, when I’m actually a bottom feeder. In one day, I get ghosted for doing drag and find out I was never really good at it to begin with.

How can this day get any worse? And where am I going to find a drag mother in suburbs?

THUMP! THUMP! THUMP!