Ty Ross Comes Clean

"Do you really want me naked?"

April 1, 1994 By Kevin Sessums

Yet again: Los Angeles. I have visited here so often – either in my role as a journalist who specializes in celebrity interviews for *Vanity Fair* or as a guest of a few of my closest friends – that there is a comforting familiarity about the journey to my favorite hotel room at the Regent Beverly Wilshire from LAX, the very abbreviation of the city's airport confirming the laid-back attitude of the place. This trip is different, however. The person I am here to interview is not a celebrity in his own right, but the descendent of one. Ty Ross, the grandson of conservative icon Barry Goldwater, who ran for President the year that I turned 8 years old and the year that my mother died of cancer, has agreed to talk to me about being an HIV positive gay man. As the Hollywood hills come into view I think back to 1964 and how all three of us lost something that year – my mother, her life; Goldwater, his White house dream; I, my childhood. All journeys are personal ones, but this one, now 30 years later, will prove to be profoundly so.

Some Young Ty Ross in the early ’80s when he first modeled for the Zoli agency in New York City.

“I don’t know why I’m frightened/I know my way around here…” I softly sing to myself the first few

lyrics of “As If We Never Said Goodbye,” the new musical *Sunset Boulevard*, which, appropriately enough, is having its American premiere here on the West Coast. (I’ve got tickets to Sunset my last night here, but no date yet). The cab driver glances up at my performance in the rearview mirror. He smirks. “Fuck off,” I think, as I sing the lines again, this time louder and, if I do say so myself, more luminously.

As usual, the taxi takes the Santa Monica Boulevard exit off the freeway, and we head toward Beverly hills by way of Century City, where Sunset is playing and ex-President Ronald Reagan, who first made a political name for himself by filming a commercial for Goldwater’s ’64 campaign, now maintains an office inside one of the gleaming corporate spires. First, however, to the left, there is the Los Angeles Tabernacle of the Church of the Latter Day Saints. It is massive white structure atop an enormous slope of astoundingly green grass abutting the boulevard. Today, as usual, there is a white-gowned bride and her tuxedoed groom standing atop the lavish lawn and smiling for the cameraman who is recor ding their just completed wedding. Such a sight coming in from the airport has grown as common to my gaze as the male hustlers who linger along the eastern fronts of Santa Monica. I turn and look out the right side of the cab, and directly across the str eet from the Mormon couple is a new billboard from Benetton. On it a bare male chest is displayed and a muscled bicep tattooed with the words HIV Positive. As the cab speeds by, I see how the sunlight seeps through the billboard’s image as carefully as it seeps through the white gauze of the bride’s crisp gown across the street. The giant word AVAILABLE lies pentimento on the billboard, beckoning all those who look close enough beneath the marked body – the marketing.

“Don’t ask, don’t tell, but go right ahead and pursue.” Ty RossGreg Gorman

“Do you really want me naked?” asks Ty Ross the next day when he arrives at celebrity photographer Greg Gorman’s studio in his house right above the real Sunset Boulevard for our scheduled photo shoot.

“Yeah, I think it’s important. People need to see that an HIV positive person can still be sexy,” I tell him, trying to coax him to take his clothes off. “Look at it as politically correct beefcake,” I continue, stepping into the dressing room’s bathroom to take a piss. There, I confront a Gorman photo of Andy Warhol used in one of those stylish L.A. Eyeworks ads. I was an editor at *Interview* magazine when Andy died and yet another memory of death surfaces, these moments of perceived mortality as fleeting and customary now in a gay man’s life as sex itself once was. I read the inscription from Warhol to Gorman as I zip up and by the time I step out of the bathroom, Ty has stripped down, exposing the two tattoos on his left bicep – one the head of a lion with the word Allegiance pledged above its perfect mane, the other the constellation for Leo. His right nipple is newly pierced and below his left one is a startlingly large and jagged scar caused by walking through a glass door when he was a child. “My father – he divorced my mother when I was about eight – sewed me up,” he tells me when he catches me staring at the huge crescent-shaped patch of flesh surrounding his heart. “This is why he’s now an anesthesiologist. He was never any good at being a surgeon.”

Ty dons a terry cloth bathrobe, the name of the glamorous Hollywood-heyday designer Travilla monogrammed on the pocket, and slips off his Jockey briefs. A crew cut crowns his head, but since he is balding, I ask if he’d consider shaving his scalp, he shrugs. “Sure,” he agrees. “Why not.”

A six-footer named Chris, with a blue-tinted crew cut of his own, is the hair and make-up person Gorman has hired for the photo shoot. He lathers up Ty’s head with shaving cream, then carefully begins to run a brand new razor in even strokes from ear to ear.

“Have you ever done this before?” I ask Ty.

“Nope,” he says, his reflection smiling at my own in the mirror before us.

“Don’t cut him,” I tell Chris.

“Yeah, gotta be careful of that blood,” Ty teases me. “Don’t want to get infected, you know.”

I had not thought of the viral implications. “I was speaking more aesthetically,” I say. “It just wouldn’t look good in the photograph. Did you see that great portrait of Warhol that Greg did? It’s hanging above the toilet in there.”

“I met him, Warhol, during my early New York days when I was a dumb kid and couldn’t carry on a conversation. I was a model for Zoli back then until I picked up a guy at Xenon, caught hepatitis and had to move back home. Andy Warhol put me in his magazine once because he was into you if you had famous parents or something. He also hired me for his fashion shoot he was doing about jewels; I played the jewel thief. Janice Dickenson was one of the models for it, and Patti Hansen, who arrived with a black eye and one marijuana leaf earring. Those were the days, huh? I wish I’d gotten Andy to sign something to me like the picture in there over the toilet though. You just never know when someone is going to die. You just never know.”

Chris runs the raz or a few more times across his scalp.

“What upset you more, losing your hair or testing HIV positive?” I ask.

“Definitely losing my hair,” Ty admits. “Definitely – because you don’t see the HIV. When you’re as vain as I thought I was, losing your hair is certainly a traumatic experience…. I thought maybe you’d have a Jackson Browne sort of wig I could wear,” he tells Chris.

“You just want to be a drag queen,” I say.

“I look like Ivana Trump when I put on a wig,” Ty says, sounding like it’s a complaint. Complaining, however, is not something I can imagine him ever doing. He claims he has never once cried since he received his HIV diagnosis four years ago.

“What does make you cry?” I ask.

“I cry when I hear a country song,” he admits, having developed a love for two-stepping at gay country-western dance bars since he left Los Angeles a couple of years ago for his home in Scottsdale, Arizona, where he now lives with his mother, Joanne. “There’s a song Garth Brooks sings that’s called ‘The Dance.’ That makes me cry. Its chorus goes, ”And now I’m glad I didn’t know the way it all would end/ the way it all would go/ our lives are better left to chance/ I could have missed the pain, but I’d of had to miss the dance"

He lets his robe fall open and a bit of his bare crotch is exposed. “You did come prepared to pose nude for the photo,” I say, staring at his pubic hair, which has been cropped quite close.

“Oh, I always shave down there,” he informs me as our eyes once again meet in the mirror. I put my hands in the pockets of my jeans and touch my own crotch. Am I afraid to sleep with this man because he has tested positive for the AIDS virus, or am I just adhering to a set of journalistic ethics? We continue to contemplate our images while I contemplate such thoughts, as if each is the other’s reflection in this fucking house of mirrors we gay men, now call home.

Thirty-one-year-old interior designer Ty Ross feels right at home back in Scottsdale where he and his mother live close to his three sisters – Carolyn, Alison and C.C. His father also lives in town, but they seldom, if ever, see one another. “I’m so fortunate to have a good family. I can go back home, and it all works out,” he tells me. “I feel more comfortable in Arizona than I do here in L.A. I’m older now, and I want to live a more normal, more settled life,” he says. “Good ole clean country livin’! I like that I’m able to take off in my pickup truck up to Sedona and sit by Oak Creek at Grasshopper Point and smoke pot.”

Joanne Goldwater with son, Ty RossTy Ross

It doesn’t hurt that he’s the fifth generation of the Goldwater family to settle in Arizona, which makes him somewhat of a local celebrity. The family owned the largest chain of department stores in the state before it was sold to finance his grandfather’s unsuccessful presidential campaign.

“My mom is the real celebrity, though,” Ty says, bragging about Joanne Goldwater, one of the ex-Senator’s four children, who now runs Goldwater’s Foods of Arizona, which specializes in salsas, barbecue sauce and chili fixins. “Joanne is really fun, really nice.”

“Do you call your mom by her first name?”

“If she’s at a party or I want to get her attention, I call her Joanne, yeah. Sometimes she ignores us if we call her Mom. She just doesn’t hear it,” he says, laughing. “She has a hard time believing she is a mom. She’s just fun.”

“Do you think you would have been able to cope so well with your HIV status if you didn’t have such a good relationship with your mother?”

“No. I would have been dead by now probably. I have such a wonderful relationship with my mother and my sisters. They love me so much and accept me just the way I am. That alone gives me a reason to live.”

“Can’t you stay alive for Ty?”

“I don’t think of myself as being that important that I have to live for me. I look at myself as a little speck in what makes the world wonderful. One tiny grain of sand in the sandbox of humanity.”

“So why did you say yes to this cover story?”

“I guess because somebody younger than I am could read this and realize how important their family relationships are. Sometimes people take for granted what great families they have. I thank God everyday for mine, although I do realize a lot of people have shitty families. I’m sorry about that.”

“Your relationship with your father is pretty shitty. Has he ever said that he loved you?”

“No.”

“What did he say when you told him you were HIV positive?”

“‘I hope you’ve got good insurance.’ That was it. It’ll work out somehow. Thought it will take a lot of forgiveness on my part. He’s the one who dropped the ball. My dad told my mom back when I was just a little kid, ‘You know, Ty is going to grow up to be a queer.’ It was really obvious. I was playing with my sisters’ Barbie dolls. I would make little tin foil outfits for them with matching hats! But I also had G.I. Joe dolls because they were so darn attractive. I told my mom I was gay when I was seventeen. When I told her she went, ‘Yeah, I knew already.’ She’s always been pretty homo friendly.”

“Is she a fag hag?”

“Well…yeah… but I don’t like that term. It sounds so degrading. Homo friendly describes her

better. You know, I don't think she's too bothered by it. I'm sure if it bugged me more, then she would be more stressed out about it. But I try and let everybody know that it's not such a big deal so they don't have to feel for me."

"He's a very sweet man." Joanne tells me later when I ask her to describe her son. "Very generous. Very courteous. Extremely creative. I'm really proud of him."

"He told me that you weren't shocked when he told you he was gay. Were you shocked, however, when he told you he was HIV positive?"

"I wasn't expecting it," she admits. "I cried for a day, but now I try to think very positively about it. I think the government is finally coming around to the fact that it is an important disease that's killing people. I don't think they have it on the back burner anymore. But Ty is taking good care of himself. He works out. He eats very well," she continues (Ty had already having told me that he has only experimented with taking DDI, never AZT, during the four years since his diagnosis). "He doesn't do drugs," she says, "at least to my knowledge. Oh, maybe a joint or two, but that never hurt anybody. I mean, I do it now and then, too. Did you see *Tales of the City?*"

"See it? I was in it" I played one of the haughty homos." I tell her.

"Oh, God! That's right!" Joanne exclaims. "That show just really touched me. I related to Dukakis so much."

"Olympia, not Michael, " I offer.

"Obvisouly," she says, laughing. "She was wonderful in that part. That's the kind of kooky lady I am."

"How has your father dealt with Ty's diagnosis?"

"He knows about it, but he doesn't like to talk about it," Joanne says, her voice growing quieter. "It's too sad for him to think about it, I think."

"He's not the type of grandfather who will come and ask you about your health," is Ty's own take on Barry Goldwater's reaction to his condition. "Look, he's had a whole life of people wanting things from him. You're out in public with him, and he's like a magnet. People will just come up and stand next to him waiting to meet him. It's really strange. I look at him as just my grandfather, but he's also this famous person who demands all this respect from everyone. It's a little odd, but we try to deal with it. Now that he's out of his Washington life he's been much more accessible and more relaxed. His wife told him about my diagnosis. He married her after my grandmother died. He called the hospital asking for a nurse to take care of him, and the two of them hit it off. She's much younger than he is. He's in his 80s, she's in her 50s. Since she's a nurse, I let her know just to see if she knew of any connections for drug trials. Then she went ahead and communicated to my grandfather that I was HIV positive. But he and I never talk about it. I can tell by the way he looks at me, though, that he knows that I could be gone tomorrow. Just the way he looks at me I

can tell he’s proud of me for hanging in there. I can see it all in his eyes.”

I can see it all in Ty’s eyes.

We have taken a lunch break from the photo shoot and joining us is a young man who was, only a couple of years ago, one of the top models of Los Angeles. He had telephoned Greg Gorman earlier and insisted on showing up for the Mexican food that has now been arranged on the dining table. “I haven’t seen this guy in a long time,” Gorman whispered to me as he was changing his lens for Ty’s next pose. “But he’s adamant about coming over. Said he was even taking a cab. I think he might be sick. Trust me, this guy was one of the great beauties.”

Sure enough, when the model enters the house there is no mistaking the late stages of AIDS, which have racked his body, his beauty. KS lesions line his arms. A rash covers his face. His torso seems bloated. All motor s kills have been curtailed, and the metal cane he wields cannot disguise the jerky movements of his arms, his legs, as blue-haired Chris sweetly, gallantly, assists him to his seat at the table.

“I’m older now, and I want to live a more normal, more settled life.” Ty RossGreg Gorman

Gorman tries to carry on a conversation with him about the fashion world, but other things, of course, are on his mind. “My mom is here taking care of me,” the model tells us with the instant intimacy of the dying. “She gives me this bottle at night so I can pee in it without having to get her out of bed to take me to the bathroom. She says, ‘Now take this bottle and do what I say’! And I

scream, ”Mom! It’s called a urinal! Not a bottle!" the model lifts his voice in a yodel-like yell, laughing and picking up a jalapeño pepper from the bowl in the middle of the table. He closely studies the pepper before taking a big bite out of it. Suddenly his face reddens with a hue deeper even than his rash; his eyes rapidly tear up. Throwing the pepper back in the bowl, he asks for some vodka to squelch the burning in his mouth.

“I don’t think we have any in the house,” Gorman tells him. “Have some mineral water. I should have warned you about those hot peppers.”

The model’s eyes fill with even more tears. His face grows redder. “My mom’s so sweet,” he rasps. “I love her a lot… but it’s a urinal, man. Goddamn it! It’s a goddamn urinal!”

Ty looks up at me from where he has been staring at his plate, and his eyes seem as old as his grandfather’s.

“Which made you the most political,” I ask Ty a couple of days later, “being a Goldwater, being gay or being HIV positive?”

“Being gay,” he answers without hesitation. “I’m not all that big of an activist unfortunately. I do think things like gays having the right to marry is important, though, and I don’t think it should be a straight person’s right to be making decisions about our lives because they don’t know how we operate or how we think. They [straight people] are always going to come from a position of judgement, no matter what they decide about us. It’s like men making decisions about women and abortion,” he says, proud of the fact that his grandmother, Barry Goldwater’s first wife, was the founder of Planned Parenthood in Arizona.

“Are you yourself a Republican?” I ask.

“I was a registered Republican in the ’80s. I voted for Clinton this time and changed my registration to Democrat. But what are you going to do? I can’t change the course of events. At the time, I was more concerned with the economy than I was about AIDS. I think that if something could have been done earlier it would have been done. If a scientist is that ambitious about finding a cure, he or she is going to find it regardless of the funding just for the prestige. I’m sure that funding is great – and the more funding the better – I just don’t know if you can blame Reagan completely.”

“Have you ever met Ron Reagan Jr.?”

“No, but he’s not openly gay, is he?”

"Are you saying he *is* gay?"

“It’s certainly apparent; that is, if my ‘gaydar’ is correct. But wasn’t President Reagan rather homo friendly?”

“How the hell can you say that?”

“Well, he and Nancy had these gay decorators they were close to.”

“Just because he let a couple of queers sleep in the Lincoln Bedroom doesn’t mean he was homo friendly. That just means Reagan’s a hypocrite.”

“Yeah, I guess,” Ty says, sighing. “Everything just comes down to aesthetics, anyway, not politics.”

“Aesthetically speaking, did it surprise you that your grandfather was so homo friendly concerning lifting the military ban on gays?”

“Yes it did because he didn’t have to come out and say that if he didn’t want to. He’s at a point in his life where he doesn’t have to take a stand on any issues.”

“You’ve said that you’re father has never said that he loved you. Has your grandfather?”

“No.”

“Do you think that his stand on the military ban was a way of saying it?”

"I think it was his way of saying that his affecting me and my family and he was offended that the right-wing Christian element is taking such a strong hold of people’s feeling on this issue. I think he’s offended in that they look on us as the embodiment of perversion instead of seeing us as human beings. Ironically, my first sexual experience was with a captain in the U.S. Army. It was the summer I got back from my sophomore year at the New Mexico Military Institute, before my junior year at boarding school in Austria. He was about 30, stationed down in Florida somewhere. He was with my mom, my sisters, my then-step-dad and me on a boat trip to Lake Powell. His parents were good friends with my step-dad – they were on the trip with us too. The captain was kind of like a Bob Crane [of *Hogan’s Heroes] type.* We went off to pick up some beer at the store, and we ended up doing it in the back of a pickup truck under the falling stars and UFOs. Mmmmmm, it was so nice."

“When you first met someone you’re interested in, do you tell him that you are HIV positive?” I ask Ty.

“It depends on what level it’s going to get to. There’s a point where you want to let the person know. But you don’t want to let him know the first moment you meet him because it brings a lot of drama into the situation.”

“How about when sex becomes an issue?”

“You just have safe sex. You don’t have to bring it up. Why should a person have to bare his soul on the first date. I don’t think HIV negative people are out there baring their souls immediately.”

“Well, I’m a negative person, and I would like to have the information so I can make an informed

choice.”

“Oh, if someone asks me, then I’ll tell him.”

“So, it’s don’t ask, don’t tell, don’t pursue?”

“No. It’s don’t ask, don’t tell. But go right ahead and pursue. I knew this subject was going to come up. It’s just that this has happened to me in the past. I’ve told somebody ahead of time, and if they’re positive, then it’s something we can share. We still have safe sex because, like I’ve said, you don’t want to get reinfected. Now that I think about it, it’s never really stopped a negative person from having sex with me. What it has done is add this whole level of drama so that it gives someone the excuse to dump me because he can’t deal with the fact that he can possibly get infected.”

“Or that he will fall in love with you and then, you know, lose you. It’s as if one’s heart gets broken before it’s broken.”

“Exactly. That’s why I’m not in relationship right now. But I’m OK not being in a relationship.”

“When you’re diagnosed as being HIV positive do you begin a relationship with yourself for the first time? Do you become your own boyfriend?”

“Yeah. You just appreciate life a lot more. That cliché – it’s a good catalyst to make the changes in your life that are needed to be made anyway. Maybe it’s just a pipe dream, but I don’t see myself getting sick in the next 15 to 20 years. I am hopeful by then that there will be a treatment that will keep me alive until I want to die. Then I’ll stop taking the treatment, and I’ll die just like everybody else.”

“The gay pipe dream: to die like everybody else,” I say.

“I don’t know why I’m frightened/I know my way around here,” I sing the lyrics again, though the acoustics in Ty’s pickup aren’t as good as the cab I caught coming in from the airport.

“What’s that from?” he wants to know.

“It’s a song from the second act,” I tell him.

I’ve asked him to go with me to see *Sunset Boulevard*, and we’re pulling into the Shubert Theater’s parking garage in Century City. “I hope you like this,” I say. “Glenn Close is playing Norma Desmond. She’s supposed to be brilliant.”

“We’re all supposed to be,” Ty jokes and the echo of our laughter lingers behind us down the escalator.

As we approach the theater we both recognize a gay couple, each of whom has brought his mother to see the show. I explain how I know them, then ask Ty what his connection is. “I was with

the shorter one in a fake Miss USA contest one Halloween when I lived here. I was Miss Arizona, of course, and won best costume design. I wore a one-piece bathing suit made out of the state flag."

The mother-in-law take their seats between their two sons just a couple of rows behind us. I turn around right before the show starts and ask the former pageant participant which state he had represented. At first he looks puzzled by my question, then realizes, because I'm with Ty, what I am talking about. "Oh! I was Miss," he stammers and glances over at his mom. "Mr. Wyoming."

Ty and I laugh as the curtain goes up on a dead man facedown in a rich woman's pool.

"I'm having a Miss Goldwater pageant!" I explained to my third grade classmates back in Mississippi during our afternoon recess. I was holding a beautifully constructed golden wrapping bow that had been atop a present that my mother had received during her last hospital stay. Suffering from cancer of the esophagus at only 31 years of age, her past year, as well as mine, had been consumed by puzzled doctors, experimental treatments and heartfelt prayers. We had lost my father only the year before in an automobile accident, and I had overheard whispered conversations in overcrowded hallways to the effect that what she was really suffering from was a broken heart. This was back in 1964 – the height of the Civil Rights movement, so that politics and passion had already begun to mingle miraculously in my young life. My grandparents, who were tending to me during my mother's illness, were staunch Goldwater supporters. This particular political interest of my grandparents – as opposed to their preoccupation with the Civil Rights movement, which only made them angry – seemed to make them happy in the face of the enormous social and personal change confronting them. In fact, our familial love of Goldwater was the only source of happiness I can remember during those dark and lonely days. It was therefore reasonable that I wanted to celebrate it with that most cherished of Southern rituals, the beauty pageant.

My mother had been moved home that October, though her bedroom seemed much like the room she had left back at the hospital since she needed a hospital bed and I.V. stand and a shelf full of medicine to make her stay at home more comfortable. I had gone in to kiss her goodbye that morning – the late stages of cancer now racking her emaciated body, her beauty – and asked if I could have the golden bow I knew she kept in a drawer by her medicine.

"Why would you want that, sugar?" she whispered, still a bit drugged with the pills that helped her sleep through the night so she would not awaken us all with her cries of pain.

"I just want it. Please," I begged.

"A ll right," she said, still able to smile. "You've always got secrets, don't you? My little mystery-boy," she called me by her favorite pet name. "That's what you are, my little mystery-boy."

I replaced the ham sandwich in my lunch box with the golden bow and all the way to school that morning on the bus planned my special beauty pageant. Later, equipped with a notebook in order to tabulate my schoolmates' votes, I matched around the playground and polled while others played. First they were asked who their preference was in the presidential contest and then who

they thought the prettiest girl in our class was so we could crown her Little Miss Goldwater. Diane O'Bannon – freckled, of course, and blond – won on the first ballot. I gathered my friends around and crowned her with the golden bow.

My third grade teacher had watched all of this from afar with her arms folded and a frown on her face. She even followed me into the hallway after recess where I ran into Flossie, the elementary school m aid, and asked her if she was voting for Goldwater or Johnson. Flossie seemed shocked by my question, but fixed me with her dignified stare. "Why, I'm votin' my first vote ever for Mr. L. B. Johnson," she said.

"But Flossie, how can you vote for him?" I asked, truly astonished.

"Get out of my way, boy," she said, the first time she had ever treated me so gruffly.

My teacher grabbed me by my shoulders and led me back into our classroom. She then proceeded to scold me in front of the whole class for my pageant prank and preached to us that we were all living in a tinderbox there in Mississippi, and all it took was one little spark to set off a big, bad fire. I had always been the best behaved little boy in class and such a reprimand sh ocked, not only me, but all my classmates as well as we tried to figure out what it all meant. Diane O'Bannon was still wearing the golden bow atop her head. Her speech finished, the teacher grabbed the bow and threw it in my startled face. "You take this back where you found it," she hissed at me. "You should be bringing footballs or something to school anyway. You're a strange one."

"I'm a mystery-boy!" I boasted right back. The class laughed, and I then received my first and only spanking.

Mortified by the turn of events, I sheepishly crept into my mother's bedroom at the end of the day and confessed all that had transpired. My mother, her eyes at half-mast. Croaked out a laugh. "Oh, that ole teacher was probably jealous that Diane O'Bann on is prettier than she is. That's all, sugar. Goldwater would have been proud of you. I am."

I stood on tiptoe by her tall hospital bed and tried to kiss her cheek, but she erupted in a coughing seizure. I knew to take the warm, wet washcloth my grandmother always kept for her by the bedside and wipe the yellowed, bloody spittle from her mouth when her coughing subsided. She reached out and touched my face. "You can have that pretty bow yourself, mystery boy, cause you're my Little Miss Goldwater."

She took the washcloth from me and wiped her mouth one more time. "You know mommy is dying, don't you, sugar?" she rasped, telling me for the first time. "I am dying."

I took the beautiful bow back to my room and placed it atop my own head. Down the hall, I could hear my mother begin to cry. I closed my eyes and thought of Barry Goldwater.

Ty and I return to my hotel room after *Sunset Boulevard*.

“What are you going to call this story?” he asks me.

“What about L.A.I.D.S.? Get it? First of all it spells laids, which has a certain connotation. Then you could look at it as LA Ids, for that psychological perspective. And finally, you know, LA AIDS.”

Ty looks hurt by my title suggestion. He starts to pout.

“What’s wrong?” I ask. “You don’t like it?”

“But I don’t have AIDS… not yet,” he quietly tells me and lies down on my bed. I kneel beside him and, as my mother did to me so long ago, reach out and touch a face that needs comforting. “My Little Miss Goldwater,” I can hear her voice; I lie down on the bed beside him. Slowly, hesitantly, I begin to kiss his pout away. We hold one another tightly before we begin to remove each other’s clothes. Naked, our bodies find the ways they must fit. I kiss his neck, his chest, that scar that surrounds our heart.

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