

Sandburg Buccaneers

by Kevin Esser

Kevin Esser has published two widely acclaimed novels in America. "Street Boy Dreams", the story of a teacher falling in love with a Puerto Rican street urchin, drew praise from many quarters of the gay press which is so often hostile to intergenerational matters. In "Mad to Be Saved" (1985) Esser brought an amazingly intense poetic style to a young man's odyssey through drugs, alcohol and boy-sex. Esser has published many stories in PAN Magazine, the Panthology volumes, various NAMBLA journals and little magazines. He is generally recognized as one of the most important of the younger gay and gay paedophile writers of our time. Some of the characters in "Sandburg Buccaneers" are drawn from a third novel set in Midwestern America.

WATCH, LISTEN, ENJOY.

Through the magic of Hollywood, we travel to a motel in the middle-earth hamlet of Sandburg. All the rooms are alike: imitation wood paneling and white cinderblocks, lamps and televisions and wall paintings bolted into place against thieving WASP tourists, plastic orange cups and ice buckets, miniature bars of soap, toilet seats guaranteed sanitary—the quintessential American dreamscape, synthetic down to the last polyethelyne molecule.

The camera pans to the bed on which a boy is singing and dancing, alone on his private stage. His name is Luther. He's tall for a fourteen-year-old, gangly thin, dark blond hair hanging long and straight around his oval emaciated face. Tartar cheekbones, slanted melancholic eyes glancing sidelong at the man watching him from the corner. The music inspires him to rock-star antics. Twisted Sister, Ratt, Sammy Hagar, AC-DC: a heavy-metal extravaganza cranked way up, a nightmare on speed. Follow the camera now (our 35mm Technicolor voyeur) as it savors the boy, moving down slowly over his sleeveless maroon sweatshirt; down farther over yellow sweatpants with "LUTHER" stenciled vertically up the side of one leg; down finally to white socks torn in front, bare toes poking out. He uses a tennis racket as his guitar, slides the handle between his legs, rubs it in and out, then tires of that and points the handle up from his crotch, giving himself a two-foot erection that he strokes lazily.

Dig it: a private dancing boy turning himself on in this secluded motel somewhere in the Land of Corn, getting high on his own sweaty aroma. He tosses aside the racket, undoes the string tied at his waist, leaps and kicks and prances until the loosened sweatpants slip down his legs. An adolescent striptease, so sexy that it hurts to watch—like looking into the sun. He's wearing white briefs underneath. He tugs off his sweatshirt and throws it onto the floor. Look at him: so thin that his belly appears sucked in, each rib and muscle showing hard and clean beneath the skin. He's not beautiful, not graceful, not even cute—just raw and nasty and full of sap. Dirty toenails, stringy hair, crooked teeth. He chews snuff and drinks Jack Daniels and pisses each morning into an empty wine bottle that he keeps beside his bed. He lopes though life like a horny hounddog pup, a hot young jack-off junkie who admits outright that he's gay and smiles

when he says it because he wants to be dirty and different and dangerous—a grinning Assassin adrift on the prairie, intent on sexual terrorism. So don't turn your back, don't glance away for even a moment as he drops like a trampoline tumbler onto his back, knees bent and feet in the air. He kicks off his tangled sweatpants and yanks his briefs halfway off, then back on, then off again, playing a naughty game of peekaboo with his ass. And then he yanks the underpants all the way off, no kiddin' around now. The director shouts for a close-up as Luther spreads his cheeks with both hands and starts fingering himself. The camera zooms in, circles him slowly, lingers on his up-curved boner pressed like eight inches of blue-veined sausage against his belly. "This feels good," he croons, each "s" made velvety by his soft frontal lisp. He's masturbating now, stockinged feet flat on the mattress, knees bent. He glances at the man in the corner, grins, "Come on, dude, time for you to do it," then puts his hands behind his head and closes his eyes.

We see a final close-up of Luther's fuzzy juice-plumpened balls being slowly, lovingly licked.

Then cut to: Shabby railroad towns lie scattered and rotting across the continent, refugee hide-outs for Baptists and toothless farmers and scabby-kneed boys who talk with lazy twangs and hunt for tadpoles in cement drainage ditches. I know them all, every one—from Hartford to Peoria to El Centro—and they know me. Shivers of low erotic voltage connect us one to another. They gather in arcades and shopping malls and back lots littered with weeds and rusty tin cans; they break windows, shoplift comics and bubblegum, pay homage to chaos with kitchen matches and fire-crackers and water balloons. Their summer uniform is gym shorts and knee socks and T-shirts cut away above the belly, hightop sneakers with untied checkerboard laces, rising-sun bandanas worn like tribal emblems around suntanned thighs. Their beauty becomes a narcotic. Touch them, smell them, taste them.

OK. Pick a boy, any boy. Call him Kim. Dress him in a sleeveless lemon T-shirt and tight-tight shorts that cling like red cellophane to his ass, ratty gym shoes, white socks pulled up to his dirty knees. Put him on a field of ragwort and foxglove and dusty thorn bushes smouldering beneath a hazy August sun. Watch him rummaging in his fearsome Assassination Box for bottle rockets and cherry bombs, Roman candles and Chinese sunflowers. He sets them off in his field where he was born, the house gone now, torn down four years ago when he was nine, nothing left now but wormy half-decayed boards and tetanus-orange nails. Garter snakes swish through the dry weeds; blackbirds scatter like a flurry of exorcised demons as the bombs pop and sparkle and hiss. Kim gazes skyward, grinning. His wispy fine chestnut hair is parted in the middle, brushed behind his ears. He tilts his head, looks down to find himself in an antique four-legged bathtub. He stands up streaming lather and wraps himself in a big green towel.

His shoulders are wide, hips slender. He lifts weights every day at the Universal Gym in downtown Sandburg, wears clothes that are deliberately revealing: cut-off muscle T-shirts and skimpy shorts. He's starting to grow hair—a small tuft under each arm, some soft brown frizz around his genitals that he lets me see and pet after his bath or before bedtime. He's shy about it, always looks away bashfully as I lift his towel or stretch down the front of his shorts. Sometimes I think he's outgrown me, he's too old now for my foolish hugging and kissing, no longer interested in being caressed by a crazy old satyr. But that hasn't happened, not yet. His macho daytime aloofness melts away as soon as the lights go off. The bed is his sanctuary; no one can see him here; for a few hours he can stop chasin' girls and talkin' tough, he can stop

hiding his erection and pretending that sex is something you do only with foxy-lookin' chicks, man. He's free now to grab me in a sudden hug, both of us still wearing underpants on this warm summer night. He doesn't speak; neither do I. His erection flexes against mine through two layers of cotton. I'm always surprised by the fierceness of his midnight passion. There's a desperation about him, a frantic wide-eyed desperation in the way he holds me, desperation in the way he takes my hand and shoves it between his legs. He rolls onto his back, impatient, tense, his stomach trembling beneath my arms. He's not like Luther, this pale boy with the freckles and big ears and weight-lifter shoulders; he's not a grinning homo exhibitionist with crazy cunning eyes and a sweaty Satan T-shirt; he's a sweet-sauled gentle cuddler who struts and cusses and scowls his way through the risky daylight, waiting with edgy anticipation for his nighttime liberation. He's alive in the dark, finally alive. His stomach trembles as I peel off his underpants and lick the inside of his thighs, pushing them apart and licking higher until my tongue is playing in slippery circles against his asshole, my hand already on his cock, already jacking him off, yeah, that's the way, doesn't take long, just a few strokes and I can feel him tighten and swell in my fist, the cum being squeezed out, three spurts of it, not bad for a kid just turned thirteen, one mikly gob all the way up to his armpit, for Chrissake.

Remember: Salvation is doled out in lethal morsels; semen, sweat, and spit is our pagan Eucharist. Our sacraments breed madness. Luther has blissed out on divine lechery, dancing his way around the samsara thread-wheel with a wink and a leer and a wicked bulge in his pants. Kim swaggers behind, a small-town ninja fire-bomber afraid of his own treacherous pecker. I follow in the distant shadows, surrounded by a gang of joyful young buccaneers: Jimmy the Sorcerer, three months shy of his tenth birthday and already looking for traces of pubic hair, a grinning magian scamp and happy-go-lucky starfighter who converses with the wind, eats soup cold from the can, goes barefoot in winter; Justin the Scholar, long-legged and whippet-slender, always sweaty and smelling sweetly of sex, chess whiz and riddle master, a fully ripe twelve-year-old who never stops plucking and poking at the lump in his pants; Kelly the Red-Haired Bandit, ten-year-old undercover agent and hyper fast-talking trickster, the clever spy who always plays dumb, tender-hearted jester with snow-ivory skin and quick playful eyes.

And then there's Johnny: Johnny the Golden Tiger who walks with a funny tiptoed gimp and pisses in rubbers just for fun, a lean little cat-god with thick blond curls and wide-set myopic green eyes. Johnny is the gang's warrior-prince, a wiry eleven-year-old berserker who snarls in combat, fiercely androgynous and freakishly beautiful. He's happiest without clothes, flings them off as soon as darkness forces him inside for the night, struts naked around the house. He's teaching himself to masturbate, uses his spare time to practice his jack-off technique, impatient for his first ejaculation, eager for a wet dream. He flirts as artfully as he fights, has perfected the charms of a cat-house coquette: dimpled kittenish grin, fluttering eyelashes, coyly tilted head. His feet are slim, toes long and graceful—the delicate porcelain feet of a perfumed and pampered harem-boy. He shimmers between war-painted savage and love-painted nymph, seething with hot lunatic energy—fearsome, cocky, reckless. Hold him too tight and he'll scorch your hands. Sit back, relax, enjoy him.

Don't be surprised when he undresses you for a bout of nude wrestling; think nothing of it when he ends up squatting bare-assed on your face. He wants you to kiss his little white butt. Go ahead, run your tongue along the sweaty crack for good measure, he'll just giggle and give your crotch a playful punch in return. And later, when he begins gently lapping your belly and chest

and throat, don't blink an eye, he's giving you "bobcat kisses" because you're his best friend, his very best friend, and he'll be glad to share other kisses with you, too, long wet kisses, lips parted, tongue licking tongue, you can't believe this is really happening, but it is, it is—linger as long as you want, Johnny enjoys lounging there on the carpet in your arms, diddling with his skinny pink boner while you taste inside his mouth. A table fan is ruffling his cornsilk-yellow hair. Your hand is on his back. The skin is smooth, warm, tinted gold. Nothing surprises you now about this boy. Your private fortress has been demolished; madness seems routine. A precious speck of Protestant soil has been snatched from the vultures. Don't slow down; don't look back. The boy-gang is marching. They're all here, all together, the living room littered with their clothing: underpants, socks, gym shorts, jeans, T-shirts. Their nakedness is defiant, gleeful. But you expect it now, it's the heartbeat of the whole alliance; they start whooping and stripping as soon as they run through the door.

Take a last look: Kim is stretched belly-down on the floor, propped up on his elbows, eyes fixed on a photo in Boy magazine. There's a reddened mosquito bite on the left cheek of his ass. He reaches back and scratches it lazily. His mouth is open as he concentrates on the naughty picture. You hardly notice at first that his hips are humping slowly, slowly against the carpet.

Justin is reclining on the couch, one arm behind his head, the other across his chest. His eyes are closed. He feigns sleep as Luther sucks him off. Several minutes go by, you're sure nothing is going to happen, then Justin's belly tightens and Luther starts swallowing. Suddenly it's over. Luther looks up, grins, wipes his lips.

Kelly is sitting and watching nearby, playing with his hard-on (stiff and white as a stick of chalk). Something clear and slightly sticky comes trickling out as he strokes it. He glances down quickly, amazed and delighted by his unprecedented bonus glistening on his fingers.

Jimmy is in the kitchen conjuring fire. He stuffs newspapers and cardboard into an old saucepan, drops in a match, watches the smoky rush of flames. His tiny penis is sticking out hard beneath his baby-fat belly. He holds it in his hand and arcs a yellow thread of pee sizzling into the blaze.

Johnny is here, too, asleep now, curled on his side atop the bed's crumpled sheets, knees drawn up, hands clasped against his chest. Pet him, kiss him, murmur into his dreams. Night is with you; day will never come. Close your eyes, feel the silence, let it go. Yeah. Let it all go.