

LEADING MAN
by Christopher Castellani

Truman was throwing a party in Portofino, and Frank wanted to go. The invitation came in mid-July, slipped between parentheses in the long, gossipy paragraphs of his letter to Tenn, as if daring him to acknowledge it. Frank read the letter in Tenn's absence. He'd been stuck for weeks in their stuffy fourth-floor apartment on Via Firenze, waiting for him to get back from Spain, while, on the loud streets below, the real Romans were escaping for the mountains. He replied to Truman with a brief telegram, and then he called the finest hotel in town, the Splendido, to book a room. He auditioned various linen jackets and swim trunks and hats in the mirror above the dresser, mended two pairs of Tenn's socks, and walked their silks down to the cleaners. When Tenn returned home to find their bags lined up in the hall, packed for another trip, he didn't protest. He was sweet on Frank again after three weeks apart. A drive in the Jag up the coast of Liguria, far from the melting heart of the *centro*, could only make things sweeter.

They left the next day for Portofino. Truman had rented an apartment a few steps from the harbor, above the Delfino Restaurant, which Frank and Tenn passed on their way up the hill to the Splendido. Tenn paid the boat guy to carry their luggage, and, when the hill got too steep, Frank grabbed the heavy case with the typewriter. He didn't like it when another guy did work for him that he could do himself, a guy that would have been him if he'd never left Jersey. Tenn went straight to the desk as usual and Frank arranged their dress shirts on hangers and brought their shoes down for shining and stole another hour for a nap. He'd never felt so tired in the middle of the afternoon, and he chalked it up to being thirty, but it's possible—no doctor was ever able to tell him for sure one way or the other—that the trouble had already started in his lungs. When he woke up, Tenn offered him a pill. Tenn had as many pills as Italy had houses on the water. But Frank wasn't taking pills, not then. Instead he smoked another cigarette and paid the boat guy to drive him over the mountain to Paraggi Beach, where he swam to find his strength and clear his head.

They didn't like Truman much, but Frank didn't hate him the way Tenn did. Or maybe Tenn didn't hate Truman. It was hard to know for sure with Tenn. It was a job in itself keeping track of who he was angry with, and who was jealous of him, whose parties he was looking forward to and whose they'd have to make up some excuse to get out of. Frank's official job was as Tenn's secretary, but even his secretary didn't have a reason for being in Portofino other than to stop by Truman's party, and he didn't know when they'd be leaving. There wasn't much Frank knew in the summer of 1953, least of all how long he and Tenn might last.

At the Delfino, Frank lost track of him the first minute. Tenn couldn't walk into a room without someone sweeping him up and into a crowd. How many times had Frank stood at the edge of the crowd as if on a shore, watching him drift farther and farther out, his head bobbing on the waves, glancing back just once to meet his eyes. How many times had Frank found himself in an overflowing room like this one, greeting guests as they arrived, recognizing their faces from movies and the back stages of theaters. How many times had these people walked in, looked around, saw Frank, saw nobody, spotted a somebody over his shoulder, and then headed upstairs.

In those years, there was no such thing as early, late, or on time. They went from place to place on a magic carpet. Dropped here, dropped there. Women in electric dresses, men in monkey suits and bow ties made of white silk. Cognac, cigars, wine. The sky turquoise even when it was gray. Because Tenn had no mind—and little use—for schedules and logistics and coordinates, he needed Frank to organize the day they woke up to, and the coming days, and even the days before. The dinner they'd had in London, Tenn swore on Mother Edwina's grave they'd had in Chicago. The party for the premiere of *Sweet Bird of Youth* in Philadelphia he remembered as the one in New Haven for *Camino Real*. The life of Tennessee Williams was a memory play in which memory was a jumble. It was bodies he remembered, bodies they remembered together. His body and Frank's, the Southern Gentleman and the Little Horse. When it came to matters of the body, Frank and Tenn trusted each other like soldiers.