

Days of Fury

Liam Llewellyn



Copyright © 2018 Liam Llewellyn

All rights reserved. Published by L.L. Press.

liampublisher.com

liamauthor.com

ISBN: 1979770069

ISBN-13: 978-1979770064

On a frozen February night in 1986, a ranger sat asleep in a chair in a tollbooth at the northeast entrance of Yellowstone National Park. His window was shut and the inside was foggy because of the space heater at the ranger's feet.

The park was empty of people, though bears and moose and buffalos still ranged about during the day. But at night all was still, except the snowfall, which puts a spell on whatever environment it falls upon, a spell to bewilder whatever eyes are nearby to see it falling in the moonlight, such a delicate scene to educate hard minds as to the tenderness, the frailty of life.

The sides of the roads and much of the roads themselves were indistinguishable for all the snow piled up, making many areas of the park inaccessible even far into springtime. But from the northeast entrance came a trail of tire tracks, which the snowfall had made much progress in refilling. These tracks went on until the sign for Fire Hole Lake Drive, whereat the tracks diverged onto this side road.

Some way down this one-way road was a hot spring on the left side, 20 feet in diameter, no snow accumulated around it. The water under the moonlight was the colors of the aurora borealis, the pool itself having the appearance of a beach shell. The water boiled endlessly and the smell of sulfur was everywhere because of the steam wafting up from the surface.

At the end of the road was Fire Hole Lake, two bodies of steaming water divided by an empty asphalt parking lot. There was a simple network of boardwalks built out over the water, as well as the dry land five feet below the parking lot, and from this dry land stuck up signs: Do not step off boardwalks.

This dry land was not so much dry as it was damp, as it was riddled with abscesses through which steam effused, so the land was free of snow and was damp enough to retain the impressions of certain birds, squirrels, mice come scavenging for food during the day.

And also the footsteps of someone who hadn't adhered to the signs' orders. These footsteps began where someone dropped off the boardwalk immediately after coming off the parking lot surface, then headed for one of the steamy abscesses, which was about five feet in diameter. At the bottom of this hole, five feet down, a mound of calcified earth, about the shape of a stalagmite. This mound protruded from a pool of boiling water whose depth could not be determined.

And lying on the base of the mound, just out of reach of the boiling water, was a child's tennis shoe, mostly melted and burned through.

Nearly all the seats in the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis were filled, with more people standing at the back. Down in front of the stage, TV cameras were pointed toward the four lecterns set up in the middle of the stage. Against the backdrop of a ruffled silk scarlet curtain stood four men, all in black suits and monocolored ties, behind the lecterns. Three were in their 50s or 60s, only one noticeably younger—by at least 20 years. Wrinkles and sweaty foreheads prominent under the intense lights, they stood looking out over the crowd of more than 100 people.

Across from the lecterns was a wooden folding table draped over with a black sheet. Three people, reporters by the press passes hanging from lanyards around their necks, sat looking over what they'd yet written in rectangular notepads.

Down in the orchestra pit, her back to the crowd and corded microphone in hand, stood the moderator.

"Hello, everybody. Thank you for coming. Let's all take our seats so we can begin."

Metal and wood creaking as people dropped down into seats, the crowd soon quieted.

"Thank you. Hello and good evening, everybody, welcome to the 1986 Minnesota debates held here at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis and brought to you by KSTP TV. This is the second of four debates that will be televised before the big June 3 primary election. Tonight the four Democratic candidates for governor have taken the stage to ask for your vote. They are Rudy Perpich, incumbent governor of Minnesota, Walter Higgins, former U.S. congressman, Arthur Hoffstedder, state director of wildland fire suppression, and Matthew Baker, current assistant attorney for Minneapolis."

The young one, there came resounding boos after Baker's introduction. The moderator called for civility, then introduced the three reporters.

"Laura Holden of *The Minnesota Daily* will have the first question."

"Thank you. My first question is for Mr. Baker."

Baker swallowed, gripped the edges of his lectern.

"Mr. Baker, your empathy for the gay community is well known. Just back in October, you were quoted as saying you were 'disgusted' with Ryan White being prohibited from attending school and then a week later, you were quoted as saying, as assistant city attorney, you actively seek out cases that involve discrimination or

violence against gays, minorities, and the issue of gay rights seems to be your main platform—advocacy groups for these communities are certainly your campaign’s financiers. Can you elaborate on your views of the gay community?”

Baker thought, the theater heavily silent.

“I’m from Mankato. Every morning at breakfast, my dad read *The Free Press* while my mom cooked fried egg sandwiches. I attended the University of Minnesota, where I majored in philosophy and political science before going into Stanford law. I picked up an issue of *The Stanford Daily* that asked, what’s going on in Castro Street over in San Francisco? I was confused, how could a gay man run for public office? How could California allow this? But I went to San Francisco and all my confusion fell away. I found a community that believed in a man who believed in the equality of all people and who both tried their hardest to get the rest of the country to notice and accept him and the people he advocated for. I signed up to work on Harvey Milk’s campaigns and I met dozens of gay men and women, extremely nice, well educated, working as hard as though it were a presidential campaign. This time showed me there are no significant differences between gays and heterosexuals. We live in a time in which homophobia and misconceptions have never run wilder. If elected governor, I will try my hardest to educate people about the gay community, about HIV and AIDS, to abolish antigay laws, and promote the integration and acceptance of the gay community. We’re better than our prejudices, I promise you.”

Six men were sitting at an old wooden table in an otherwise empty dive bar. There were beer logos on the walls, as well as a neon woman in a bikini. The six watched the debate on the TV mounted above the bartop while they all drank beers out of mugs. Five of these men were in their 40s, sweaty, bloated, while one was in his 30s, tall, lean, quiet, scrutinizing Baker on the TV, the others blabbering.

“Fucking queer-lover.”

“I could watch him all day. He’s just driving the whole party into the fucking ground.”

“Look at the other three—they all wanna tell him shut the fuck up!”

They listened to the debate some more, Baker still talking.

“That’s incorrect, scientists have found ample evidence that HIV originated in western Africa.”

“He may be a faggot but at least he’s got sense enough to blame it all on the

niggers.”

“Put them in a room together, let them kill each other off.”

“Liberals’d hate that. Who’d vote for them?”

“Can you imagine how many protests they’d throw up? Nobody’d get to work on time.”

“Faggots love their parades, protests,” said the 30 year old.

“Ryan White contracted HIV from a tainted blood transfusion,” Baker said.

“He’s a hemophiliac—”

“More like a *homophiliac*.”

They all laughed.

Later, after the debate was over, the TV was off and the six men were turned toward each other, still around the table, drinking from refilled mugs, talking loudly.

“It’s fuckin’ bullshit, they only allow that shit on TV for ratings. Should be illegal.”

“More entertaining than most of the other shit on TV these days.”

“Normal people tune in, watch, they write angry letters and make angry phone calls, they don’t realize that just fuels the fire.”

“It’s what they want—all the media, fuckin’ queers, give priority to these groups for Blacks and retards and women, people who can’t get regular jobs, so they create their own fuckin’ jobs, try to convince us all these fuckin’ *aberrations* are normal.”

“Fuckin’ Jews and Muslims too.”

“The queers are on a different level though,” said the 30 year old. “No other group coulda created their own disease that could spread like this. And they don’t wanna admit they’re the cause of it, otherwise they’d lose the sympathy of queers like Baker, lose political leverage. So they pay off all these politicians and doctors and celebrities to say it was goddamn monkeys in Africa. But if America would wake the fuck up, we would see that it’s goddamn biological warfare they’re waging, either turn queer or die.”

“These are the same people who tell us we’re descended from fuckin’ monkeys in Africa.”

“Well, I wouldn’t go that far—”

“Nope, stop right there, we’re not going down that road again, don’t even think

about it.”

“That’s right, this is my bar, I say no talking about that stuff.”

“But you’ll talk about queers.”

“I like talking about queers.”

“Maybe the niggers are descended from monkeys.”

“So the niggers made queers.”

“The niggers *are* queers.”

“And the queers are niggers!”

They all laughed again.

“People say it’s not a choice,” the 30 year old said. “Then this telegenic Bolshevik tells us is ain’t genetic, so it can’t be cured. So what the hell is it?”

“They *say* it’s not a choice but you gotta wonder, if they *really* wanted to change, I bet they could.”

“It’s just an excuse, I’m too fat, I’m too ugly, I can’t get laid with women, so I’ll try some dick!”

“No, you know what it is? It’s influence. It’s a way for famous people to stay famous after they die.”

“What do you mean?” the 30 year old asked.

“James Dean, Montgomery Clift, Sal Mineo, Olivier, that goddamn Rock Hudson. That’s where all this shit started. Twenty years from now, people’ll look at queers like Baker and say, ‘They were gay when it wasn’t fashionable.’”

“Only place it’s fashionable is California. Fucking queers should all move out there.”

“Then when the Big One hits, they can be their own little sovereign island,” the 30 year old said. “Die out in a few years from disease or starvation.”

“It’s in the Bible, that’s what really pisses me off, it says very clearly, ‘Man shall not lay with man.’ And yet these people—”

“No, they’re not people.”

“That’s right, this guy wants them to have the same rights as normal people, then they need to get normal!”

“They don’t deserve rights,” the 30 year old said. “Fucking animals.”

“So these animals are telling the Bible to go fuck itself. They’re ignoring God, all these actors, singers—Liberace, Michael Jackson, I guarantee you—”

“Careful now, that’s dangerous territory.”

“I heard a rumor about Marlon Brando—”

“What? Get outta town.”

“Brando with Jack Nicholson.”

“Oh Jesus Christ!”

“These are who our kids are growing up with, their fucking influences.”

“It’s recruitment is what it is, worse than the goddamn Nazis. We need someone like Hitler—”

“What?”

“Hear me out, someone like Hitler, someone to get a buncha people to agree with him, then drive out all the queers and Blacks to Russia or Germany or the Mideast, like our own Australia. We outlaw gays, that’s the fucking cure to AIDS—they don’t have this problem in Ireland! But will anybody in Washington realize that? No.”

“Fags like Baker say the cure’s all medicine and chemicals, no, it’s get your ass in line and fuck women like you’re supposed to!” the 30 year old said.

“Only fags like fags.”

“How old’s Baker?”

“Thirty-two I think.”

“That ain’t much older than you, Tom. Maybe you oughta run against him.”

“Hell yeah. We’d vote for you.”

“Work on your campaign.”

“Run on that outlaw gays platform,” said Tom, the 30 year old. “Win by a landslide.”

“But I heard you really were interested in running for public office, that right?”

“Yeah, farther down the line, too young yet. That’s what’s gonna beat Baker, too young.”

“And queer.”

They all laughed.

Outside the bar they all said their goodbyes in the blowing snow, then Tom walked crookedly to his LeSabre.

“You all right, Tommy?”

He waved them off, feet crunching the snow as the other men chuckled. Once inside he opened the glove compartment and took out a square mirror and a small glass vial of white powder. He dumped some of this out onto the mirror, then took out his debit card and a dollar bill from his wallet. He pressed the card flat against

the mound of white powder, grinding it with small crunching noises. Then he rolled up the bill tight as a cigarette and used it to snort the powder. When he was done, he moved less slovenly, returning everything to where he'd retrieved it, looked in the rearview to wipe his nose clean.

He started up the car and drove out of the parking lot.

In Tom's suburban home that night, he sat in an armchair in his living room under the harsh orange light of a floor lamp behind him. He drank straight from a bottle of whiskey as he stood, got the phone off its rotary cradle on the wall in the dark kitchen, and dialed a number, taking the receiver back to his chair, extending the cord a little.

After nearly a dozen rings, a man answered with sleep in his voice.

"Hello?"

Tom said nothing, holding the phone to his ear as though it were a seashell whispering to him. His eyes scanned the ground as though searching for something he might talk about. But in the end, he said nothing.

"So help me God, Tom, you will never speak to him again."

The other end hung up.