

*Host*

“Listen Travis, if you don’t like someone you meet online, just be honest and say *thanks for playing!* Then, *slam the door in their face*, and they’ll get the hint. You, my friend, are too nice. These guys know the rules,” Janice said, slyly.

Travis just nodded, sipping his happy hour Heineken, trying hard to relax. The thumping house music at *Pieces* on Christopher Street had already managed to give him a splitting headache, and as he nervously scanned the crowd, he knew that tonight, like every other night, he’d be going home alone. At twenty-five, Travis’s dating life was basically non-existent heading full speed toward complete oblivion.

“Get one of those gay apps and find yourself some boys. You ain’t getting any younger. And Grandma’s tired of you bringing Janice to all the family reunions,” Travis’s mother said the next week while shoving an *Apple* bag at his chest. Inside the box was an *iPhone*. Not only did Travis not have *Facebook*, but, up until this very moment, he still used his *Motorola* flip-phone circa 2005.

In his wildest dreams, Travis never thought he would actually ever WOOF at a man online. He yearned for a real life connection, but could it be possible that *Apple* was onto something...

What am I looking for, Travis thought, staring at the *iPhone* screen.

Was he looking for *right now*?

Later?

Did he want to host?

Travel?

Robert A. Palmer

*Travel where?*

Want to party?

*What the hell did PNP mean?*

Masculine for Masculine?

No fems.

*Am I fem?*

POZ?

BB?

Undetectable?

Gay shorthand was baffling! As he browsed all of the profiles on *Manhunt.com*, *Adam4Adam*, *Scruff*, and *Grindr*, he wondered what he could possibly see in these hard-bodied-headless-figures roaming the Internet super highway with their penises proudly exposed?

Travis didn't know the rules, but he took his Grandmother's advice and signed up for them all. Soon, he got his first smile, then wink, then *woof*. It felt surprisingly good. Perhaps this wasn't going to be so bad, he thought as he made the first of many *first* dates with the headless men of the gay inter-web.

The men came in droves, like Travis had a sign on his back that spelled: *fresh meat*.

Oh boy, did they come...

One eyed Monsters.

Mr. Bad Breath.

Mr. Man Boobs.

Robert A. Palmer

Tweaker Man.

Micropenis Man.

It was after one of those regretful-if-you-ever-bring-it-up-I'll-murder-you first dates, that Travis found himself out on the streets riding his bike. As a child, Travis preferred to be alone on his bike, riding through streets of Bay Ridge into Park Slope, staring at the twinkling lights of Manhattan Island, which silently beckoned him from across the East River. It was in that spot that he began envisioning his future boyfriend. He actually had fantasies of meeting a guy at Vacation Bible School. Hopefully someone with a spiritual side, he fantasized, perhaps a bible-beating-alter-boy-with-a-heart-of-gold. In his present reality, it seemed like every man in his gay-friendly non-denominational church was well over 50, straight, married and/or sang really, really badly in the choir.

As he stared out at the skyline of Manhattan, it seemed to hold less promise than it had before. He deliberated if New York City was really the ideal place for him. Travis had spent his entire life in the concrete jungle. Maybe it was time for this gay Christian to move. Maybe... *the Bible Belt*? Travis wondered if the den of iniquity that is NYC could offer him what he truly needed. And at that moment it was an honest man's hand interlaced into his own.

The cool spring air collided with his face as he rounded the corner of Broadway and Houston. iPod blasting, he didn't even see the other bike darting right in front of him—

SMASH!

SLAM!

Robert A. Palmer

Travis flew from the bike and skidded down Broadway. The rider of the other bicycle was somewhere on Houston Street tangled in the greasy chain. As Travis dusted himself off, he searched for the culprit causing him to almost catapult to his death.

“You know, you really can’t be riding your bike the wrong way on a…”

But his angry voice trailed off as he noticed that the other biker was most definitely a very *attractive* man. A man in a pink polo, covered with just a little splatter of blood from a shallow head wound. Travis immediately rushed over and knelt above the injured angel. Their eyes met. For a small second they both forgot about their pain and just stared.

*This is for you Grandma,* Travis thought, taking a breath.

“You know, my apartment is just around the corner. I have a first aid kit. We really need to clean you up,” Travis blurted out.

It was definitely time to *host*.

“Um, sure. Okay. Which way?”

Travis pointed to the left and grabbed the injured stranger’s arm and helped him to step up the curb and onto the sidewalk.

As they hobbled down West Houston Street, dragging two mangled bikes behind them, Travis asked his new friend, “What’s your name?”

“Benji,” he said, and smiled.

The next couple minutes were silent. But it was an easy silence. Travis loved those moments in life where people didn’t feel the need to pepper the air with idle chitchat.

Robert A. Palmer

“Well this is me...” he said pointing to the small stoop going up to a modest prewar. “After you...” he said unlocking the door.

One exhilarating hour later, Travis exhaled after about 47 and a-half minutes of some of the best sex he’d ever had. Well, it was the *only* sex he had ever had. Could it be possible? All that wasted time online and then WAM a bike accident sparks a love connection only Chuck Woolery could understand.

Benji rolled over and put his head on Travis’s chest.

“Can I ask you something Benji?”

“Sure, Travis, anything.”

“Um, you never went to Vacation Bible School, did you?”

Benji smiled, nodding his head.

And, at that moment, they both felt found.