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Still Dancing: New And Selected Stories



Synopsis

In Still Dancing acclaimed author Jameson Currier brings together twenty of his short stories that span three decades of the impact of the AIDS epidemic on the gay community. Along with stories from Currier's debut collection, *Dancing on the Moon*, praised by *The Village Voice* for their defiant tone, here are ten newly selected stories written by one of our era's preeminent writers of the short narrative.

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Customer Reviews

Written over the course of three decades, Jameson Currier's latest collection of stories some new, some previously published reveals a long, textured chronicle of gay men, gay life, and the horrific AIDS epidemic that both threatens and empowers an entire population. His tales tell of the initial shock and bewilderment in trying to come to grips with a deadly new menace to gay men's health in the 1980s, coupled with an unending sense of grief and hopelessness. Be forewarned: these are not sunny stories, but they're as real as it gets. By the conclusion of the collection, one wishes for a sweet, joyful story that hasn't been deflated by the mention of death or visible, purple lesions, T-cell counts, and devastating doctor visits. But Currier's fiction isn't the kind with the Hollywood happy ending secured with a pink ribbon. Currier's time-capsule harkens back to a time when drugs failed to stave off disease, and friends disappeared as quickly as they had come into our lives. Dance floors darkened, smiles faded, and the music just went away. --Bay Area Reporter Readers will likely find that several of these individuals (and their situations) remind them of someone they know in real

life. Those seeking a 'feel good' story collection will be surprised but not disappointed with the author's efforts, because the result is as impressive as it is impressionable. --Rainbow Reviews

I've been a New Yorker now for thirty years. I arrived in 1978 after graduating from Emory University in Atlanta and lived in a small and expensive apartment in the West Village that I could barely afford. In my early years in Manhattan, I worked as a telephone operator, a legal proofreader, and an entertainment publicist, sometimes all in the same day. Many of my early AIDS stories were inspired from my experiences with my friend Kevin Patterson when he became ill with AIDS. Kevin was a playwright (*A Most Secret War*) and a theater publicist (he worked at the Public for many years). And my early AIDS stories were published thanks to my friendship with David Feinberg (author of *Eighty-Sixed*), who showed my stories to his editor, Ed Iwanicki, at Viking. David and I were in a Gay Writers Workshop together back in the mid-1980s that met regularly in the members' homes and our friendship continued up until his death in 1994. The gorgeous photograph that is being used on the cover of *Still Dancing* was also taken by a New Yorker--Matt Chapin, who is a member of the NYC Photo Club, which meets regularly at the LGBT Center in the Village, and which was where I spotted Matt's work on exhibit this summer as I was assembling my AIDS stories into a new book. Along with ten stories from my first collection, *Dancing on the Moon*, are ten newly selected stories in *Still Dancing*, including the recently written stories "The Chelsea Rose" and "Manhattan Transfer," about the history of the inhabitants of a Chelsea apartment building, depicting the migratory path of its residents and the deep devastation the epidemic left on a generation of gay men.

Full disclosure: I not only know Jameson Currier, I count him among my closest friends, which makes reviewing his work that much more challenging; writers do not read their friend's work, it is safer that way. However, I have been a fan of Currier's since reading *Where the Rainbow Ends* and met him through the novel. Besides, it is too intriguing to search the faces of his characters for my likeness, or someone we know, and though I have yet to find evidence of a single similarity I do find the author's biological details surface here and there in the men who populate his fictionalized version of New York. For those who do not have the pleasure of knowing him, Currier is a southern gentleman in the classic sense of the term, and I have no problem summoning his gentle cadence with the soft-touch of a Georgia accent he has not completely lost in all his years in the north. This collection is a follow up to his first collection, *Dancing on the Moon*, and is a postcard from the decades of the 70s through early 90s when the gay community lived through its own

holocaust. These stories do not contain the melodrama common in disease-of-the-week movies, nor the sustained outrage of Larry Kramer, but are instead told in an objective journalistic style. Currier is able to capture the essence of gay relationships forged in the 70s during the sexual revolution, and the 80s when AIDS forced us to rely on those network of friends and lovers for moral and mental support. His world is populated by actors, lawyers, dancers, writers, doctors; characters who are clearly drawn and similar to men you know. He has the ability to capture our relationships in all their confusing and sexually intertwined complexity. These stories are not just about survival of those who were left behind to pick up the pieces and forge on, but about living in the city, living as gay men, and dancing, loving, and enjoying our freedom in the folds of a society we have created on our own.

In 1993, Jameson Currier released "Dancing on the Moon," an anthology of short stories dealing with the impact of the (then, decade old) AIDS crisis on the gay community. Asked to reissue and add to that compilation now, the author's "Still Dancing: New and Selected Stories" make it clear that HIV has made an indelible mark on the lives of so many people, especially gay men. The stories are not about treatments that failed or the newer drug strategies that often seem to work, but of the lives of those who were affected by those who were infected, never to be the same again. There are stories of survival and hope, and of loss and remembrances, of people reacting with emotions ranging from somber depression to conscious denial, and the chance to value each day of life as a gift not to be taken lightly. In effect, this is not really a book about the evolution of the AIDS epidemic, but one dealing with how our community survived and adapted, growing stronger despite (or because of) the devastation the disease brought to us. There are 20 diverse, emotional stories, 11 of which appeared in the original "Dancing on the Moon" anthology. In the author's skilled hands, each includes relatable, fully-developed and realistic characters that will involve readers on an emotional level within a few short pages. Like another reviewer, I find it impossible to pick out a favorite, as each unique tale is noteworthy on its own merits. Much recommended, as much for younger readers as for those who experienced the first years of the epidemic. Five stars out of five.

One of life's pleasures, as any book lover can testify, is falling in love with a new author. Or, rather, the work of an author new to you. I recently discovered Jameson Currier and am head over heels in love with his writing. I have so far read only one book of his, *Still Dancing*, but have two others, *Where the Rainbow Ends* and *Haunted Heart*, waiting their turn. (I have so many good books waiting their turn I wish I were twins.) There are twenty stories here, written over a time span of

about 30 years. Not just any 30 years, but the three decades beginning with the mysterious and agonizing deaths of gay men in the mid-80's to the present. Yes, these are AIDS stories. And yes, AIDS stories aren't particularly popular now with either readers or writers. I suppose that's because the average person thinks of AIDS as something in the past or something that is better ignored. Or perhaps in tough times maybe people just want escapism. I don't know. But what I do know is that no one with a heart could read this collection and come away unmoved. Jameson Currier is a master at the difficult art form of short fiction. Within the space of a few hundred or a few thousand words he can take out your heart and break it. I do not suggest that these are maudlin, pity-poor-us stories. Not at all. If they tell of death and dying, they tell equally of family, friends, lovers past and present, dead and living. The stories are gritty and honest, as real as IV tubes and funerals. Some also have a subtle meaning that doesn't hit the reader until later. Currier's stories don't whitewash the physical ugliness of AIDS, or the pain, the fear, or the grief. Nor does he elevate the friends and caregivers to the status of saints who are never angry or impatient or resentful. The stories are elegant in their simplicity, and sublimely humane. As I read the stories my favorites kept changing. "Still Dancing" was my favorite. No, "Ghosts" was my favorite. "Everybody is Always Somebody Else" was my favorite. Impossible choices. But I know I have to pick just a couple to draw attention to, so I chose "What They Carried" and "Winter Coats." "What They Carried" is deceptive. In less skilled hands it could have been a dreary laundry list of things taken to comfort a dying man: flowers, pajamas, books, etc. But because even the most mundane object carried to the fragile, beloved, and sometimes cantankerous Adam, are symbols not only of caring but also of helplessness, the story is unforgettable. The people in the story are not only carrying tokens of love to someone they are about to lose, but some of them wonder if they carry within their own bodies the deadly virus that will soon make of them objects of caring rather than givers. And some of them know. "Winter Coats" is nothing short of charming, and that's because Dennis, friend of the narrator, is charming. Dennis is handsome, talented, a dancer and actor, graceful, humorous, kind, and the embodiment of Je ne sais quoi. Shortly after burying his lover, for whom he was the devoted caregiver, Dennis, too, is losing his life to the virus. The narrator is Dennis' friend of many years, and he is as much bemused by Dennis as anything else. At the end of the story, as if flipping the bird to frailty and his own mortality, Dennis can still spin a graceful, perfect double pirouette on a cold New York City street. Jameson Currier is, simply, a remarkable writer who deserves to be read. Reviewed by Ruth Sims, author of *Counterpoint: Dylan's Story*

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