Bloodlines 1988

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Author's Note: By the end of 1988, 82,362 cases of AIDS had been reported in the U.S. Of those, there were 61,816 deaths. Treatment, though newly available, was largely ineffective.

SAN FRANCISCO, 1985-1988

You can't.

I've been here for months, London.

No you haven't. It's a mistake. I would have-

You would have noticed me? Think about it.

Think of what?

Think of when.

Think of when?

January.

January.

You were sick.
It was January. I had the flu.

No you didn’t.

It was you. It’s been that long?

Yes. January.

What did I do?

You know what you did.

But I don’t. You can leave. Anytime you like.

I can’t. You know that.

So what now?

We could be friends.

We’ll never be friends.

Won’t we?

I could never-

People started guessing. It was 1986. Mostly she stayed home and I stayed home, but she went to work with me sometimes and we went out to dinner and around town and to buy sweet potatoes when they were at the farmer’s market. You can forget a lot of Georgia but you can’t forget sweet potatoes. So we’d go to the farmer’s market.

AVA
She didn’t see her friends as much. I wouldn’t let her. They thought she had a lover. But she didn’t. She just couldn’t risk it.

ALLEN
Ava, she’s complicated. Not everyone can see her, right? She’s like an imaginary friend... but she’s very, very real.

1985. THE SAN FRANCISCO ENQUIRER.

ALLEN
So you can type.

Yes, sir.

ALLEN
You don’t need to “sir” me.

100 words a minute on a good machine, sir.

ALLEN
Now you’re toying with me.

LONDON
The speed or the sir?

ALLEN
Oh boy. You’ll be doing obituaries. Evans handwrites his on yellow legal pads. We’ll be doing his soon enough, though.
AVA
I can't kill you by looking at you. So watch how you look at me. You might've met me yourself and don't even know it yet. You think you're so much holier than thou.

LONDON
Or maybe you just think you're safe because you're white. And make $30K a year. And live in Berkeley. Well let me tell you -- I'm white and I live in Berkeley and I wasn't safe. Fuck 4H. I'm not Haitian, hemophiliac, homosexual, or a heroin addict. I'm white, clean, straight, and whole-blooded. Or at least I was.

Sure I've shot up. I'm 22 years old and I'm a writer in San Francisco.

ALLEN
But it got too old.

MATT
Not to mention expensive.

LONDON
Did I meet her at one of those parties?

ALLEN
Maybe, maybe not. I mean, she's everywhere now.

MATT
Walk up Haight and you'll brush elbows.

LONDON
Bathroom stall,

ALLEN
bar fight,

MATT
one night stand,

LONDON
she's there.

MATT
Maybe you met her at a party or maybe an old boyfriend introduced her to you.
You just know, after awhile, that you've always known her.

ALLEN

She's sadistic. The emerging bruises, the achiness, the headaches, even the control of food. She'll starve you if you don't watch out. She'll starve you anyway.

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The San Francisco Enquirer

ALLEN

You eat lunch late.

LONDON

It's quiet.

ALLEN

I know. It's my quiet space.

LONDON

You're eating peanut butter and jelly.

ALLEN

Peanut butter and banana.

LONDON

On Wonder Bread.

ALLEN

On Wonder Bread. I'm secretly eight years old.

LONDON

Diversions is short again this week.

ALLEN

Diversions is always short.

LONDON

Do you take submissions from the floor?
Do you have something?

LONDON

I have a lot of somethings. But I think I have something that will work.

ALLEN

Give it here.

(beat. He holds out his hand.)

Give me the pen.

(beat)

Well, your lead's atrocious, but we could run something like this. The Haight angle, twenty years later. It would add some flair.

LONDON

I know.

ALLEN

But you're not leaving obituaries anytime soon.

LONDON

So can I keep submitting?

ALLEN

We'll run this one and see.

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LONDON

I still went out with my neighbors from the Haight. There was a bar in the old fallout shelter across the street from our building. We'd shove tables together and line up Jaguarbombs and run lines of coke from the backs of chairs, using scribbled copy ripped in half and rolled in place of the hundred dollar bills we heard they used uptown.

Allen took me to the Examiner editorial Christmas party, where they drank champagne in bowls, not flutes, observed the legs of burgundies and blondes and ran lines of coke from pin-striped suit sleeves, using Benjamins. We got bored and left early and stumbled through the park and met up with the guys at Valhalla. That was the name of the bar.

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**LONDON**

You know, I've never liked crab cakes.

**ALLEN**

You know, I've never liked cheese with little toothpicks shoved into it.

**LONDON**

Look at them. They take themselves so seriously. Their little champagne bowls...

**ALLEN**

The artichoke hearts.

**LONDON**

The bouquet of the Merlot...

*(beat)*

Do you think they know I'm just a copy editor?

**ALLEN**

Of course not. They probably think I hired you to come with me.

**LONDON**

What is that supposed to mean?

**ALLEN**

That you look like an escort?

**LONDON**

An escort?

**ALLEN**

In a good way.

**LONDON**

In a good way...

**ALLEN**

Do you want to leave?

**LONDON**

With you?
Well, I brought you here.

You just called me a whore.

I called you an escort.

Are we going to debate specifics?

Are you going to leave with me?

Yes. I suppose so.

Then we ran to the Golden Gate Bridge.

I was stoned of course with stilettos in my hand and in stocking feet. And we leaned too far out over the edge, reading the signs aloud that say "Life is Worth It. Don’t Jump." And wondering what would happen if we did.

We kissed in the mist off the ocean and ran to the Ritz Carlton where we made hot toddies. We registered under false names and never paid for the room or the room service.

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I took a week off in October. I flew to Georgia for my sister’s wedding. When I got back, Allen was sick.

They were fine, they took a sick day, they were dead. It happened over and over and over and finally you wonder if it was like this when the bubonic plague came through London. I remember writing a paper in high school; the doctors wore these beaks stuffed with herbs. They thought it would protect them. We laugh about it now, make a joke of it, and then you tell us that protection really works.
And now we get it. But you tell that to lovers in 1986 and it doesn’t make sense.

For a long time I didn’t visit Allen. A long time -- a month. I was scared. I thought if I worked, if I edited enough copy and Chloroxed the copy desk and took enough showers I could... not.

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Hi, you must be London.

Yes, is this--


Matt...

I’m... I live here too. He didn’t tell you.

No. But...

Well...

Doesn’t matter.

It never occurred to me to ask why he hadn’t told me about Matt; it was 1987. I locked up the apartment in the Haight and moved into Allen and Matt’s room. Matt slept on the couch.
MATT
We took turns changing out the fluids -- banana bags, the nurse called them.

LONDON
She would have changed them but we had to do something.

MATT
He had an infection. He had pneumonia.

LONDON
The infection got better. The pneumonia got worse.

MATT
The pneumonia got better. The infection got worse.

LONDON
He got a new infection.

ALLEN
I'm trying to decide how old I am.

LONDON
What do you mean? Your birthday's next week. You'll be 34.

ALLEN
Right. But I feel 90.

MATT
Well, maybe you can be both right now.

ALLEN
I feel old.

MATT
You're not old.

ALLEN
I know. But I feel it.
You should get tested. You look thin.

LONDON
It’s because I’ve been worried about you.

You should get tested.

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A waiting room.

You’d think they could get the posters right.

You’d think.

Or at least update them regularly.

They do. They just update the numbers more regularly.

They could at least put cushions on the chairs.

Stop complaining.

Stop worrying.

You get what this means.

Of course I do.

(beat)

Well, that’s me.

MATT stands and leaves the waiting area.
Next. *(stands)*

*They stand opposite each other, open letters. The results are as they expected.*

Did they invite you into the trial too?

*MATT*

Yeah. Yeah they did.

*LONDON*

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*A coffee shop.*

I think I’m on the placebo.

*LONDON*

What’s your count?

*MATT*

Average.

*LONDON*

Average negative or average positive?

*MATT*

Average positive.

*LONDON*

Could be keeping you from crashing.

*LONDON*

Could be. But look at you.

*MATT*

What about me?

*LONDON*

Can I buy you a bagel?
I'm not hungry.

MATT

I know you're not. Can I buy you a bagel?

LONDON

Why?

MATT

Look at you.

LONDON

It's helping. My numbers are good.

MATT

Let me buy you a bagel.

LONDON

Enough with the bagel! (beat) Why are you being like this?

MATT

(pained pause) Because Allen won't eat anymore. And neither will you.

LONDON

Allen is dying.

MATT

And you—

LONDON

My numbers are good.

MATT

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March 1987

LONDON

They legalized AZT in March. $10,000 to put a kitchen timer on the electric chair. But of course we bought in, who wouldn't? The rope was a little bit longer. One fewer bullet in six-cartridge Russian roulette. Maybe it would make a difference.
And then Allen died.

*MATT exits.*

**LONDON**

And then Matt hung himself. He left his bottle of pills on the bathroom counter for me. I was alone in their apartment. They’d taken the rope away when they came for the body; it was thin cord, only rated to 100 pounds. That’s all he had needed.

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*A Mirror, 1988*

**LONDON**

Well.

**AVA**

Well.

**LONDON**

How long do I get?

**AVA**

How long do you think?

**LONDON**

What is this to you, a game?

**AVA**

Maybe. You said yourself it’s like Russian Roulette.

**LONDON**

That’s sick.

**AVA**

I mean, the odds are getting better for you. How many bullets down?

**LONDON**

Allen, Matt. But that’s not how odds work.
You can't pin Matt on me.

Yes, I can.

You look different.

I look tired.

You cut your hair off.

It keeps falling out. I'm shedding.

But the drugs are working.

I'm still sick.

But your numbers...

Fuck the numbers. It's binary. There's positive and negative. Nothing else matters.

You look tired.

I'm 24 years old and I haven't been able to live.

That's the drugs.

The drugs are because of you.
And I’m because of you.
How long are they going to work, anyway?

My heart’s beating too fast. I feel like I’m running out.

Which of us is killing you?

I’m running a fever. Constantly. I’m 97 pounds.

It’s the drugs.

It’s you.

I’m you. I’m going to win.

I know.

Why destroy yourself?

To keep you from doing it.

Do you hear yourself? What do you want?

My life.

You can’t have that. What do you want?

What do I want? I want sweet potatoes.
What?

I want sweet potatoes. In Georgia. But you can’t give me that. You can’t give me anything.

You’re stopping the drugs. You’re picking me over them for some reason.

$10,000 a year for AZT. I’m taking my year. I’m taking my $10,000. I’m going to Spain. Then I’m going to Georgia. I’m going to eat sweet potatoes. And I’m going to die.

At this point, it’s the only way I can win.