



The Tall Boy: A Memoir

Jess Gregg

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“Walk tall, man,” the junkie behind him whispered. “Don’t let the bastards see that you care.” They were standing in line at police headquarters in Los Angeles, waiting to be fingerprinted. The twenty-two year old writer had just been arrested on a “vag-lewd” charge. Or, to put it more clearly, he had been busted for being gay. Entrapment, police stings, and unauthorized raids were still the acceptable tactics for catching and imprisoning gays in America in the mid-twentieth century. The gay world, regarded as criminal or sick, was a scorned minority with its own private vocabulary, but no voice politically, forced to rely on intuition, courage, and laughter to survive. What led up to this arrest, and the struggle to live it down afterwards, lies at the core of this very frank, and sometimes hilarious memoir. *The Tall Boy* includes close-ups of some of the legendary theatre and film figures Gregg came to know and work with, among them Elia Kazan and Tennessee Williams, Agnes de Mille, Gower Champion, Joshua Logan, Colette, Gian Carlo Menotti, Sir John Gielgud, Jean Cocteau, and Scan Connery. Just as colorful are the profiles of less celebrated figures—Ma Coyle, cheerleader to a generation of gay boys, Raymond, the smoldering icon at the Hollywood hotel, and Marty, the good-looking lesbian with whom Gregg set up housekeeping in an effort to go straight. Jess Gregg does not hold back in telling of the struggles and perils of those days. Neither does he stint on the fun and adventure. Or the progress. The twentieth century proved to be revolutionary; the walls that came tumbling down were not just social and cultural, but sexual.

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