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Story / Journey:

I did not write *The Blue Hour Gospel* because I had a clean, marketable story to tell.

I wrote it because I had spent too many years watching queer stories get softened into something easier to consume. Something charming and triumphant or something that made sense to people who wanted the gay experience to arrive pre-explained, emotionally tidy, and ultimately reassuring. A decade ago, there were raw gay stories coming out, and everyone complained they were too sad and not jovial enough. They actively shifted the narrative plots to be unrepresentative because to keep the raw and emotionally sad stories would be to admit they still didn't have the privilege the characters in the happy-go-lucky stories did.

That was not the life I knew.

The life I knew had longing in it, shame, silence, desire, happiness, love, grief, trauma, adventure braided together with nowhere safe to go. My story had the strange grief of growing up before you had language for yourself and the quiet violence of building a life that looked right from the outside while some essential part of you disappeared behind it.

That was the book I wanted to write.

The Blue Hour Gospel became a queer literary memoir about the fear of living the wrong life, and the slow erasure of the self in order to make that life look right. It was never meant to be a sanitized version of queer life. I was not interested in proving that queer people are acceptable, successful, lovable, or worthy only when we fit into the shapes other people recognize.

When I started thinking about publishing, I already knew the book did not fit neatly into the kinds of gay stories that often get pushed forward. It was not m/m sports romance, or the glossy memoir of whatever white gay celebrity happens to be having a cultural moment. It was not built around a clean arc from suffering to pride because like most of us it lived somewhere more uncomfortable than that, and I knew that would make it harder.

There is a version of queer storytelling that the publishing world seems to understand. It is polished enough to sell, painful enough to feel important, but not so difficult that it becomes inconvenient. I did not want to sand the edges off my work so it could pass through that door, so I chose to self-publish. And by “chose” I mean I recognized the importance of not quitting because someone else didn’t say “you are important enough to be chosen”.

That choice was all about alignment. If the book was going to be a love letter to every gay boy who had ever felt that he could not be fully himself and still be successful, then the process of making the book had to reflect that too.

I wanted to find gay editors, gay designers, and queer professionals wherever I could because many of us have been conditioned to believe that identity alone makes someone better at the work. So, because queer people are overlooked in every industry, often in quiet and ordinary ways I felt it only appropriate to flip that around and say if you don’t fit OUR box then you don’t fit this. Because there are brilliant people whose voices, instincts, and talents are underestimated for the same reasons our stories are.

I wanted the book to be made with people who understood, somewhere in their bones, what it means to move through the world while translating yourself.

Self-publishing meant I had to learn everything, and I will admit I was naive. Editing is something I thought meant spellcheck but encompasses many different styles and versions. Design is tricky because we live in an art space of anti-ai so any small decision could have you branded as an AI user and therefore blacklisted from shelves. Formatting is a world I was blessed to find someone for because if you think formatting a word document is hard, EPUBs are your second layer of hell. Distribution, marketing and all the other awkward and vulnerable work of putting your own book into the world and asking people to care are all things no one can prepare you for. There is no romance in that part, at least not the easy kind. It is exhausting and humbling and expensive and it asks you to believe in your work on days when you are absolutely sure no one else will.

But there was also freedom in it!

I did not have to make the book smaller and it didn't have to explain away its messiness. I didn't have to make the narrator more likable, more heroic, more certain, more muscular, thinner, or more easily understood. I could let the book be what it was meant to be which was a return to the emotional, nostalgic, difficult, sometimes inconvenient, and deeply honest story. And that honesty matters to me.

Queer life is not only the moment we come out or only pride celebrations, romances, chosen family, or survival. It is also the years before we know what we are surviving. It is the body we learned to judge before we learned to inhabit it. It is the life we built to stay safe and the memory of who we might have been if we had been allowed to begin sooner.

Writing *The Blue Hour Gospel* changed my understanding of what success could mean. It reminded me that success is not always permission from an industry. Sometimes it's refusing to wait for permission and build the thing yourself because the gate was never designed with you in mind. It also gave me great appreciation for reviews. I was NEVER one to leave a review after I finished reading a book because I thought why would this creative genius care what I liked about this? Well now I know that big, small, detailed, critical, a review is validation that someone is reading and thinking about your story.

I am now working on my second book, *WorldEater*, which continues many of the questions that started with *The Blue Hour Gospel*. It looks more directly at the gay community itself, and at how difficult it can be to separate who we actually are from the version of ourselves the community asks us to become in order to belong.

That question keeps haunting me, who are we? How much of us is us? How much of us is performance even when we are in the group we are supposed to be ourselves in? How much of what we call identity is actually a costume we were handed by people who promised it would make us desirable, acceptable, visible, safe?

I don't think my writing is interested in easy answers and if it ever does then you know it's a case of the body snatchers. I don't think I trust easy answers anymore either. What I am interested in is making room for the parts of queer life that are harder to package. The ugly feelings, the complicated desires, the memories we are embarrassed to admit still hurt and the versions of ourselves we abandoned because we thought we had to.

That is the journey I am on as a writer. Toward a return to honesty.