



PHOTOGRAPHY
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It's Always Darkest Before Dawn

By Jeremy Kost

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**This PDF of It's Always Darkest Before Dawn is only a preview of the entire book.
To see the complete version, please contact Nina Ventura,
Publicity Associate, at nina@powerhousebooks.com**

Entering a nightclub can be akin to cracking open a fortune cookie; you just never know what you're going to find. Jeremy Kost, a renowned New York-based photographer, has seen the proverbial light by opening himself up to the darkness inside both. Party-prone New Yorkers and Chinese food have had a long history together – mostly one of countless hangovers helped with greasy sustenance. One day, after a long night of debauchery, and exactly a day before the deadline to name his yet-unnamed book, Grand Sichuan came to heal Jeremy from all his ailments in one delivery. Most people eagerly await opening those bland, horn-shaped biscuits at the end of the meal with a mix of childlike-enthusiasm and jaded cynicism primed to mock the cookie's mass-produced clichés. Jeremy cracked his cookie and it revealed, "It's always darkest before dawn." Sometimes you just need to be willing to open up your mind to what life puts before you. Jeremy has done just that.

It's safe to say that Jeremy is a voyeur: he is notorious as much for his Polaroids of young model-type boys and celebrities as he is for shooting drag queens and other outrageous inhabitants of nightlife. Without knowing who Jeremy is, one might incorrectly place him under the vague banner of a "gay photographer." But to delve deeper into Jeremy's history as an overweight, lonesome child who found solace in an underground world of outsiders would be a fair place to rewind to. Discovering himself through photographing others, Jeremy elevated a creative outlet into a successful career. For *It's Always Darkest Before Dawn*, he has returned to his place of artistic origin: the nightclub. It's a place he knows well, and his understanding of the club's social ecosystem and its nuances could only come from his years of experience.

Simultaneously, he is not who he once was, thus allowing him an outsider's perspective. He is perched high-up on a finely balanced fence of understanding, at a safe distance to see what those who are living it cannot. I, too, understand this.

I myself am a creature of the night, or a nightclub denizen, if you will. Not quite a drag queen but not far from it, being that I'm a gay nightlife personality. Possessing a natural queer sensibility, I take much inspiration from the drag queens whom I've admired since my youth. Much like Jeremy, I use the nightclub as a personal, a political, and an artistic platform. Known as one of his muses, I still stand a photo distance apart from the others, as my tendencies lean at times closer to the "Lady" than the "Fag," and thus I often find myself belonging to the underworld but with one foot aboveground.

This has given Jeremy and I a more interconnected relationship than either of us could have guessed the first time I posed for him. We can now often be found together, on the sides of the

dance floor, sharing a moment of appreciation for what's transpiring a few feet away from us in the melee of nightlife madness. That's where we part ways however; with me eventually getting happily lost in said mayhem, while Jeremy behind me snaps away with his lens.

Drag is a political art form. A labor-intensive process that uses a wide-ranging spectrum of media. The complicated canvas of a male body being converted to female starts with the precise technical execution of plucking, tucking, and styling. The process can often put most painters to shame with its fine brushstrokes to "beat a face flawless," as it is called in drag terminology. Stepping their stilettoed feet outdoors, the entire world becomes a stage and performance art begins. Often in a nightclub setting the context is lost to camp frivolity. Once again, it takes an understanding, outside eye to properly give it context and its due place on a gallery wall.

Nightclubs are full of subversive glamour. From drag queens and transvestites to transsexuals and creative youth adopting costumes as a form of expression, there is no lack of exhibitionist subjects longing to have their photo taken for their minute of fame. While this provides photographers ample options of willing models, it can also take away from the rawness one is trying to capture. Looking for moments of true intimacy, and armed with the quick, capturing snap a Polaroid allows him, Jeremy has taken the time to fully integrate himself in their world, gaining trust, acceptance, and the privileged access that accompanies it.

Nightlife is a constructed reality living itself out naturally. Innumerable elements make up what is your final experience. The cropped visuals of seductive footwear along with the remnants of garbage strewn on the floor, the glamour of costumes festooned with rhinestones and feathers against the money shots of shock-inducing public fellatio, are all pieces in the puzzle of Jeremy's nightlife portrayal. Taking it a step further in the constructed quality of the collages, Jeremy respectfully controls the situation without trying to take away from the chaos. A true partnership, taking the rawness of the subject and creating a balanced collaboration to achieve a harmoniously elevated visual.

If a tree falls in the forest, does anyone hear it fall...if Jeremy doesn't show up and a look isn't photographed, does it make a sound? Beautiful, raw, artistic moments play themselves out constantly on the dance floor only to be lost forever. Eschewing didactic essays, Jeremy's work gives the viewer a rare glimpse deeper into the beauty of a world usually shrouded in darkness. Dawn itself is the time between twilight and sunrise. So while it's true, it's always darkest before dawn, Jeremy's work beckons you to truly see. Now it's time for you to turn the page and see the light for yourself.

THE FRICTION OF BODIES, MOVING IN NIGHT LIGHT

ERIC C. SHINER, The Milton Fine Curator of Art at The Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh

Jeremy Kost captures a world of make-believe situated in the underground pleasure palaces of New York and the world beyond, a global fantasyland populated by pumped-up pretty boys, silicon-enhanced trannies, and outrageous drag queens who collectively define the essence of nightlife. This world is necessarily ephemeral, as looks and styles change on a daily basis, identities shift relentlessly, and the characters that appear take on wholly different attributes night by night as the carnival of gender and transformative spectacle plays out upon a plethora of nightclub dance floors and watering holes the world over. As an observer and documentarian of this labyrinthine realm of the night, Kost plays the role of trusted confidant and voyeur in equal measure; he is an insider with full access to the stories that unfold, and yet he always remains the distanced portraitist that captures both fleeting moments and personas with a steady shutter snap that records the revelry, just as it shoots the personalities that populate and ultimately create this ever-changing realm.

The collection of Kost's photographs in this book offers up a vivid, behind-the-scenes look at the global party circuit that is usually reserved for those that meet muster and are able to traverse the fabled velvet rope to become, at least temporarily, a member of the rarefied realm of music and transgressive performance that unfolds within. From costumed balls to the dark corners of hustler bars, Kost reveals intimate aspects of characters both famous and fully unknown, from superstar transsexual performer Amanda Lepore to drag queens who appear and disappear on the scene in nearly equal sway. His photographs make the viewer imagine the sounds, sights, and motions of a constantly undulating world where bodies grind, egos are made and destroyed, and varied shades of disco light give occasional glimpses into the souls therein. The friction of bodies, as they move in this so-called night light, creates not only an energy-infused party atmosphere, but also a stage upon which physical bodies morph and change, creating a friction between the binary poles of gender, sexuality, and even identity as all of these traits become fully transitory and fleeting, if only for that very night.

In addition to the photographs of the party people of the underground, Kost also presents here a large selection of his collage portraits that feature drag performers in a wide array of situations and scenarios. As an artist who shoots Polaroid photographs, Kost is deeply familiar with the

work of his predecessors Andy Warhol and David Hockney, who also created collages with Polaroid pictures, and yet he takes this media format in wholly divergent directions. The formal arrangement of Kost's collage work creates a staggered, fragmented image, which when analyzed one layer deeper leads one to realize that not only is the image patched together, but so too is the subject embedded within. The multi-layered personalities featured in these collages are drag queens and transsexuals from such far-flung places as New York, Paris, and even here in Pittsburgh. Their made-up faces, and whimsical costumes negate the possibility of a fixed position in terms of gender, just as the makeup of the finished work disallows for a direct and total view; the collage and the white margins of the Polaroids thus give rise to yet another separation from the here and now, indeed to a fragmented reality that calls gender, sexuality, and identity into question on all levels.

The combination of "straight" shots and collaged personas in the progression of this publication therefore creates a constantly shifting construct in terms of vision and point of reference. From libidinal ecstasy to debunked debauchery, Kost's photographs give rise to a narrative that can never be fully accessed or understood, and yet their provocative nature tempts the viewer into them as if the act of looking can allow one to enter into this world, to know it, and ultimately to feel at home. As a regular visitor to this scene, I know many of the characters well—from Ladyfag, Rainblo, and Jun Nakayama to Alaska Thunderfuck, Veruca la'Piranha, and Sharon Needles. For each of these performers—for indeed they must be understood as such, as their entire being is fueled by the desire to be seen, adored, and at times reviled—the realm of night light is both a stage and a shelter upon and within which they are able to digress from social mores, and indeed to be themselves, even though the "self" changes frequently through the application of makeup and the donning of always more outlandish and creative attire. The shifting nature of their lives becomes perfect fodder for Kost, and his recording of their world becomes equally disjointed and cloudy, almost by requirement. Jeremy Kost has therefore presented this world in the most apropos fashion possible, as a hugely varied and erratic mash-up of identities and forms, close-ups and fades, high heels and breast implants, powdered wigs and heavy makeup that when combined become the perfect representation of this enchanted world that is always seemingly darkest before dawn.

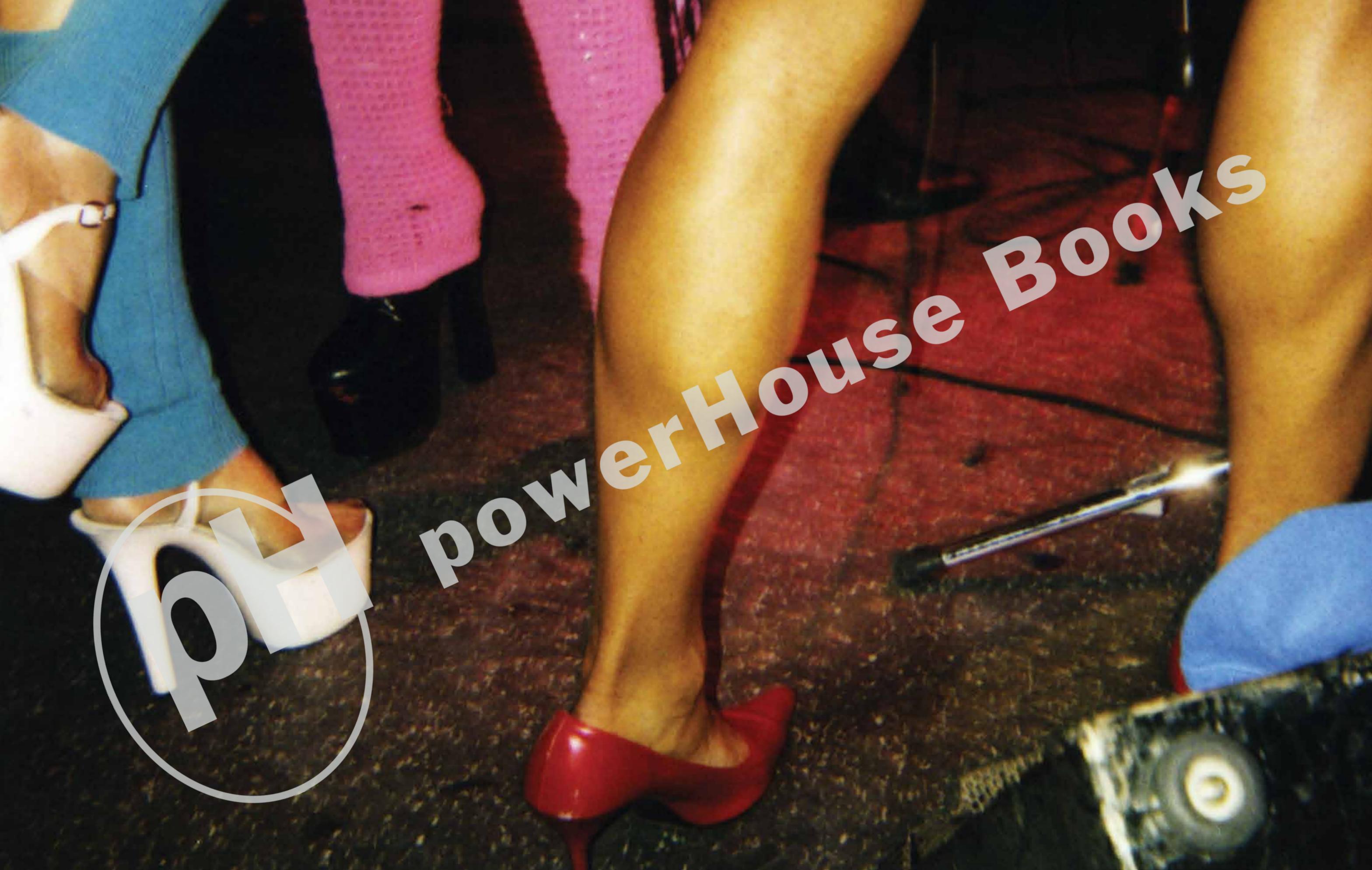


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