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# TIME TRAVEL BOYFRIENDS



by Josephine Halbert

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by Josephine Halbert  
with a foreword by Alicia Foster

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## TIME TRAVEL BOYFRIENDS

Elmer Clifton started it. He jumped out of a book I was reading in the British Film Institute Library and I just knew him at once. There was something familiar about this zany character from the world of silent films striking a theatrical pose with his firestarter look and I realised if I'd been around when he had he was **JUST** the type of guy I would go and get involved with.

This triggered thoughts about other 'men' from the past. So I followed my bliss and started my own Time Travel Dating Agency. Lightheartedly playing with the idea, I wrote lists of inspiring but very dead men. There were a lot to choose from. Some, maddeningly, turned out to be still alive and so were exempt from consideration – or at least in this edition! This collection is not necessarily a line-up of my ideal romantic loves but a group of men whose appeal is as diverse as the sides of myself (as are anyone else's) and are the focus of a mood, a memory or a particular longing. We can time-travel back in our own lives to significant moments and evoke their atmospheres or the past will find us somewhere lingering in one of its familiar rooms. These hauntings can be pleasant or not. There are many avenues and choices and many characters to meet along the way.

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As time went on I realised that this was about myself and not about the men at all. We can all muse forever about lives we may have had in other times but it always comes down to the fact that whenever and with whoever, we would always be... OURSELVES! This could be my own personal ‘coping mechanism’ about love, loss, disappointment, hope, experience... all of this we humans know when we are trying to make the sense we cannot make of it. The day dream resulted in this book... an indulgence...

The men in this book are mainly from the early to mid-20th Century. There is a familiarity to our grandparents’ era but also a safe distance – we can do our own ‘mythical’ edit of lives truly lived among the sepia photos – not so far from our contemporary world. Also, we grow up in the shadow of their dreams, inspired by their wish-list of heroes and heroines and enjoy its nostalgia. I needed some personal and cultural connection which rang true when considering these men even if I did dream further from home... Crazy Horse, for instance, with his reputedly handsome and perfect symmetrical face and bravery has his obvious attractions... but would I really want to live in a teepee in the American mid-west in those winters? No. But, Grey Owl, the self-invented Apache persona of Archibald Belaney from Kent who went to live in Canada in

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the early 20th Century appeals to the English eccentric in me... I can imagine sharing his cabin with a few well loved classics to read by the log fire and staring up at the stars together beyond the giant trees from his canoe.

It's hard to avoid the power of the early Hollywood influence before the 'now' celebrity culture and its lack of mystery... I'd like to have sat next to Orson Welles in his heyday in a sports car in the Riviera when I'd be old enough to handle the worldly stuff but impressionable enough to be star-struck... and get caught up in its tornado.

I don't want to dwell on the dark side of these playmates or their realities. This is fantasy, after all...

I want to see Robert Browning, the rescuer, who becomes your only family as you journey off to Italy on a wing and prayer but together. I want to ride in the ancient chariots of Robert Graves' mind in his Mediterranean paradise, enveloped by the scent of jasmine where our dreams would be real to us and I'd be his muse of the moment. I'd like to call my soulmate Jim Morrison in the middle of the night and suggest a poet's tour somewhere or just round at my place, the agony and ecstasy of waiting for him to

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arrive as the ‘other’ world sleeps, our next few hours charmed by lamplight and the generosity of the fairies. My earth would move as Charles Fry turned round and looked me straight in the eyes as he marched down the steps to take his turn at the wicket, adjusting his gloves, the sun shining and the spectators applauding. I can imagine the energy of a young Brunel sharing his ‘visions’ with me, and stealing away on the night train to Inverness with the eternally romantic Robert Donat, young and beautiful forever on golden hued celluloid, us sharing a cigarette and a hip flask by the window in the train in our beautiful clothes. I want to laugh out loud with the earthy James Martin and breathe deep with him among the elements.

And Marlon Brando – I’d like to have met him straight off the set of *A Streetcar Named Desire* wearing that torn t-shirt.

I dedicate this book to the Unknown Man.

*Josephine Halbert*

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## ELMER CLIFTON

(1890 – 1949)

Actor / Director

Elmer Clifton found himself working in silent films in Hollywood's early years after being discovered while on a tour with a theatrical troupe by D.W. Griffith (THE film director of the era). Clifton could be described as the first 'method actor' – he was said to display a range of emotions and a masculine heroism unknown before in films, though this went apparently entirely unnoticed by the critics of the time. He became a gifted and capable director, his only independent production, his dream epic on whaling, *Down to the Sea in Ships* (1923) was a whole year in the making and made a star of Clara Bow... (It was perhaps inspired by his remote upbringing on an island on St. Lawrence River). Clifton seemed to be either ahead of his time or in the wrong time – after *Down to the Sea in Ships*, the Wall Street Crash abruptly ended his chances of more lavish independent productions. In spite of this, the popular and resourceful Clifton carried on making movies for Hollywood studios and was to take his last breath in 'the director's chair'. His films are still available today as are his performances in D.W. Griffith's films *Intolerance* (1916) and *Birth of a Nation* (1915). He was married and had children.





Dear Emel Clifford  
I just wanted to  
let you know that  
if I'd been around  
too in 1916 - I'd  
have really gone  
for you