

The Pick-up

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The Pick-up

A frankly sentimental story

It happened — as these things will — on the last evening of my last night in Paris. I had packed my bags already — there was a midnight train to catch — and now . . . the last aperitif at the Cafe de Flore, the block of ice in the pernod turning the clear liquid a milky green . . . and then? I had no plans. Just to sit, on this soft autumn evening, in the blue dusk, «l'heure bleue», the lamplight picking out the turning leaves of the trees, was enough. I was alone, yet not lonely; relaxed, yet excited; happy, yet melancholy.

And then, the surprising thing happened — as surprising things do happen in Paris — an angel passed by. An angel in a bright check shirt and slacks. It paused, turned as though searching the crowded terrace for a vacant table (— or looking for a friend?—). For an instant, our eyes met: The impact was like an electric shock, a second of vertige. Then, shyly, the angel lowered his eyes, moved on. (The nape of his neck did something to my heart.) I held my breath. Oh, God! Let him come back! He turned again, hesitated, and again the flash, the instant recognition. Now he was about to pass me — it was now or never. In a panic, I half rose, indicated the chair next to mine; «Would you join me?», I managed to stammer, «or . . . are you looking for someone?»

The angel smiled, and the Heavens sang; he approached, shyly he sat down next to me. «No, I'm alone, thank you». Again he raised his eyes to mine, then quickly lowered them. I saw that the boy was beautiful.

We talked, trivialities.

«Have you been here long?» (His hair, shining, free and unruly — how I'd love to run my hands through it) — «Oh, at the Sorbonne! What subject are you studying?» (Those full lips! What heaven to kiss!) «What will you have?» (His hand, so close to mine, I can feel its warmth . . . just to touch it . . . dare I?) «Pernod. I don't know if you'd like it» (His knee against mine . . .) «. . . but my friends call me Cliff.»

«Mine's Louis.»

«Louis!»

«Cliff! Hallo!» (At last an excuse to take his hand . . . his hand in mine . . . the firm grasp, the hold a little longer than necessary. Oh, if I would never need to let go of that sweet hand!)

Surely this, this was love at first sight? And now . . . to take the plunge:

«Cliff, are you doing anything to-night? — are you . . . free?» I waited in anguished suspense for his reply, and when he told me that, indeed, he was quite free, I nearly laughed for joy, so great was my relief.

«Thank God!» I exclaimed, «I was so afraid —». At this outburst, Cliff laughed delightedly. «If you'd have gotten up and just said good-bye and gone away, I guess I'd have thrown myself in the Seine!», he exclaimed.

«Talking of the Seine . . . there's something I want to show you.» «I'd go anywhere with you», was the whispered reply, and our hands

touched and held beneath the table — like the sealing of a secret pact, the avowal of eternal friendship.

Together we strolled, across the square, along the quiet Rue de Seine. The blue dusk was turning to night, the old buildings were softly outlined against the sky—the air held a magic. Hand in hand we walked, entranced, like lovers, across the quai, up the steps to the narrow Pont des Arts. In the middle we stopped, and together we turned to gaze at that breathtaking vision, beloved of artists immemorial, of the Pont Neuf and the Isle de la Cité, the wedgeshape patch of lawn and trees known as the Vert Galant, dividing the waters of the Seine like the prow of a ship,



I had never missed an opportunity of coming to this spot, at about this time, and the beauty of it never failed to cast a spell — yet there was always a feeling of sadness and longing — if I could only share this with a friend, a lover

We stood silent, close, hand in hand, and then, as though of one accord, we turned and kissed

«I've always wanted to do this,» I whispered at last, «with someone like you.»

«I've been longing to kiss you since the moment I saw you at the Cafe» Cliff whispered back.

«I was so afraid you'd pass by . . .»

«And I was terrified you wouldn't ask me to your table . . . it took you a long time . . . I was getting desperate!»

It was already late and there were only a few precious hours left. I hadn't told Cliff of my departure — I was afraid it might sadden our so short time together. But where should we go? Cliff was living out at the Cité Universitaire, and I had given up my room. It was Cliff who solved the problem. «Do you know,» he said «I've always wanted to go to one of those private rooms they have in old restaurants — that one reads about in French novels — you know, where dirty old men seduce nice young virgins! *Chambre Privées*, don't they call them? Do you think they still exist?»

«They do! And I know of one», I replied eagerly, «I used to pass it every day when I lived in this quartier — it's not far, let's go!» Back across the bridge, along the quais, up the Boulevard St. Michel and a narrow street on the left. Here it was: Restaurant Boulet, and indeed there were *Chambres Privées*, and yes, there was one free for «ces messieurs». An elderly waiter showed us up a flight of ancient stairs, and opening a door, bowed us in. The room was all pink and red . . . faded pink and red brocade walls, pink shaded lamps, a table laid for two, and in an alcove, half hidden behind scarlet plush curtains, a divan, covered in red velvet.

When I had given the order to the ancient waiter, and the door had closed, Cliff looked around him and sighed joyfully. «This is Heaven!» he exclaimed, then turning, he stretched out his arms . . . The time was tragically short, there were so many plans to be made, and still I had not told the boy of my departure. We were lying in each other's arms on the divan, after dinner, when Cliff suddenly drew away, got up, his face serious. «Louis», he said, «Louis, I want to get this straight before we . . . go any further, or I get too . . . you see, we . . . don't know each other at all. I ought to have explained to you but . . .» I sat up, looked at Cliff, astonished, but he turned his face away. «It's been a wonderful evening», he was saying, and there was a catch in his voice, «I'll never forget it but . . .» he hesitated, obviously embarrassed, «— but I have to tell you that although I am American, I'm not at all rich — you see Dad had to sacrifice a lot to send me here — and I have very little pocket money — and . . .» I heard no more, for the bottom had suddenly fallen out of my world. So . . . all this had been for money . . . a bit of «rent», —? No, that was unbelievable, not *this* boy, this sweet kid? It wasn't the money that rankled, but oh! to pay for that heaven that had been mine . . . Heaven with a price ticket attached! Oh no! I hardly realized I was crying as I got up, reached blindly for my jacket hanging on the wall, fumbled for the wallet in the inside pocket. «How much do you want?» I tried to say, but the words wouldn't come. I stood there, trembling, trying to control myself, and I couldn't look at the boy. What was he saying now? I forced myself to listen. «B . . . but Louis! Look at me! You're not listening», he cried, «Please don't make it more difficult for me — you see I've never been in a situation like this, though of course I've heard — read about it — I know it's usual in France — I ask you again, Louis, please . . . how much ought I to . . . give you?» The wallet dropped to the floor and at the same moment we must have

rushed together. I know I was laughing and sobbing at the same time, and Cliff was saying «Why, Louis, my darling, you're crying», and together we clung and embraced and fell over onto the divan once more. When at last I got my breath and was able to explain the misunderstanding, it was very late, and I had to break the sad news of my departure. Feverishly we made plans for the future — for that day when we would be together . . . for always. «And then . . . you'll never let me go!» Cliff murmured against my ear. «Over my dead body» I replied. «But tell me, what could have put that absurd idea into your sweet head?» «I was so afraid of being hurt — I wanted to make quite sure», the boy explained, and then, blushing, yet with a twinkle in his eye: «After all, I *did* pick you up, didn't I?».

M. M. W., USA.

Tea and Sympathy

It is not often that one gets a close-up of America's attitude towards homosexuality. One often wonders what the average American may be thinking about 'deviation'. The wide publicity the Kinsey Report received may have given many people the misleading idea that America is a paradise where homosexuals are accepted as full members of the community. Unfortunately nothing could be less true and except for a handful of critics who try to show at least some understanding of the problem, the people of the United States are ignorant as well as intolerant and regard homosexuals as people to be despised or, if charitably minded, to be pitied.

This attitude comes clearly to the surface in a play «Tea and Sympathy» show on Broadway and acclaimed by the critics as the biggest hit of the season. Credit for this success must be given to a large extent to the leading actress. Deborah Kerr, of movie fame, chosen, actress of the year' as a result of her exquisitely sensitive performance in this play. The male lead is taken by a newcomer, John Kerr, who almost matches Deborah Kerr in the sensitiveness he brings to the very difficult part of a youngster.

«Tea and Sympathy» was written by Robert Anderson and directed by the well-known Elia Kazan. Its theme is not homosexuality itself but the suspicion of it in a young man. Here are briefly the outlines of the play:

The action takes place at a boys' school in New England. The boys live in several houses, where they are looked after by a teacher acting as housemaster. Deborah Kerr plays the part of the wife of one of these house-masters. While her husband is officially in charge of the boys she takes it upon herself to be kind and motherly to the boys and give them «tea and sympathy» on some afternoons of the week. John Kerr plays one of the boys in her husband's house. He is an intelligent chap, popular in the house, until something happens which he does not fully understand. He has gone swimming in the nude with one of his instructors and they have been observed by others. The instructor, suspected