

# Tea and sympathy

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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

of homosexuality, is dismissed from his post and the boy is immediately misjudged and suspected too. The only person who sees things in their right perspective is the housemaster's wife. The boy's companions make life unbearable for him; even his skill at games once admired so much in no help for him any more, his love of good music is suddenly looked upon as an odd trait in his character and when he is asked to take the leading part in the school's production of 'A School for Scandal' — Lady Teazle — this turns into bitter irony. The housemaster is a very dominating type and tries hard to have the boy expelled from the school, not taking the slightest trouble to find out whether the rumours spread about the boy are true or not. He talks with the father of the boy who had been to the same school and used to be a baseball-hero in his time. Both men are deeply shocked by the boy's apparent queerness. Only the housemaster's wife knows that the youngster is in no way a 'deviate' and innocent of what he is accused of and that he is moreover shyly in love with her. When the boy after a disastrous experience with a waitress, begins to doubt himself, the wife leaves her husband and shows the boy the way to manhood. In the course of a conversation between her and her husband it is revealed that the so seemingly masculine housemaster is fighting against homosexual tendencies in his own nature.

From these outlines of the story it will be seen that the play is acceptable to a large public. For those however, who have a deeper knowledge of homosexuality, it is interesting to notice the underlying tendency of the play. There is not one sentence which would speak in favour of the boy if he had really turned out to have homosexual tendencies. Every climax is built up to show that there was only suspicion. Had the boy really felt inclined that way nobody would have dared to oppose the housemaster in condemning him. When the boy starts to worry about whether he has any homosexual inclinations in his nature, the audience is never for a moment left in doubt that eventually he will come through with a clean breast and be proved innocent of that 'unspeakable' vice. In fact the play represents a most severe judgment of homosexuality in general, and it is sad to realize how utterly ignorant people in the States are of this complicated problem. They don't seem to have an idea that to pass judgment in such a way is a sign of very low intelligence as well as of great intolerance. As long as such prejudices are predominant in the United States no change of the laws dealing with homosexuality can be expected.



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