

Tarry a while...

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Der Kreis : eine Monatsschrift = Le Cercle : revue mensuelle**

Band (Jahr): **23 (1955)**

Heft 12

PDF erstellt am: **17.08.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-570894>

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Tarry a While

The ground in the little pinewood was smooth as velvet. The glare of the burning mid-day sun penetrated only in shimmering reflections through the thick foliage overhead. The one and only vehicle track from the shore to the ancient city of Ravenna lay for much of the way in the shadow of these sombre trees.

As it was unbearable to lie on the beach in this heat after the swim, the two men lay in their scanty bathers stretched out in the shade side by side on the soft springy pine-needles, — the slender sinewy Kurt, and the solidly-built, radiant Paul. The grave expression of the mature Kurt disclosed the finely-moulded spirituality of his nature; his eyes alone betrayed his intense inner sensitivity, but they were now closed in repose, as were the eyes of his young friend, whose countenance, under a tused mop of blond hair, revealed a lustful primitive young animal. As usual, they lay close together, the older and the younger, Paul's head resting in its accustomed place on Kurt's arm. But, even so, and as always, their thoughts lay miles asunder.

Kurt mused . . . they had already been in Italy a month, and the long holiday was drawing to a close. With what joyful anticipation had he set out, hoping this time to break the intangible barrier which had always existed between Paul and himself. And what progress had he made during these weeks alone with the young fellow? To tell the truth, he had to confess, none at all, quite the contrary. It was true that the long car-trip had allowed him Paul's companionship from daybreak to sundown, but that was all. And now at the close of this vacation, the long torture of frustration had reached its climax. 'Where can I find the answer? . . . How can I touch his feelings? . . . How can I make him understand? . . .' wondered Kurt, as he moved Paul's head, to gaze into the face, which with closed eyes, lay resting on his arm.

Paul's thoughts raced rapidly on: 'This nonsense with Kurt must finish quick and lively . . . can't be bothered with him any longer . . . Gee . . . she was a hotstuff little bit of goods, she was, that little sheila serving drinks in the joint last night . . . she'll do me O. K.' . . . They had 'clicked' during the dancing. He decided to fetch her at closing-time to-night, and take her for a moonlight flit in Kurt's car, and the rest would be easy he was positive, for he had seen it in her eyes. All that had to be faced was the unpleasant necessity for telling Kurt what he wanted to do, in order to borrow the car, and for this he would have to put up for a little longer with the gentle irksomness of his friend's arm, before he could set about getting his own way. After all, he thought, Kurt wasn't a bad old stick, and neither did he demand much, so, now that it was all finished as far as he, Paul, was concerned, he felt he could afford for this once to be kind to Kurt. If only he could persuade him to go to the cinema, he would clear out with the car for a while, and when he had his fun and come back, he would make up for it by acting really nice, like, and make the poor old thing happy . . . it looked dead easy, he thought. Nevertheless, the eyes of the older man made him uneasy at times, for their glance was difficult to fathom.

As they lay there, side by side, both felt secretly embarrassed. While Kurt chafed at the emptiness of his existence with this young man of totally different disposition and tastes, so Paul realized all too clearly for his own peace of mind, how much he had accepted from his friend, and how his whole life had been made secure by Kurt's protecting friendship, without his ever having tried to make any adequate return. Was it awareness of all this, or was it the projection of his mounting lech for the Tavern wench, or was it merely the sense of relaxation produced by the mid-day sun that caused him to press his tense body against the older man? As the startled Kurt jerked reflectively, Paul buried his head in his friend's armpit, and Kurt's lips could only reach his thick blond hair.

It all happened as anticipated. Paul found it painfully difficult to cajole his friend into lending the car. The violent upsurge of rage with which Kurt refused to hand it over was as surprising to himself as it was to Paul. But the dammed-up self-restraint, not only of the last few weeks, but of the years past beyond recall, had at last burst all bonds, and for once had Kurt to give voice to the unending pain of this long and fruitless association. But eventually, he made it clear that he would give in, and, precipitately, as he had begun, he ceased his tirade, and with a weary resigned gesture, told Paul to take the car.

As Paul swung it round in the Piazza, and drove off, Kurt gazed after both car and driver, until they had vanished out of sight. He felt a return of his rage and humiliation, but it was only for a few moments, and now he felt numb, and drained of all feeling — or was it a premonition, that the emotional bonds which still held him to Paul were already weakening? He could not yet be sure. He even smiled wryly at himself in gentle irony, as, shrugging his shoulders to try and dismiss the matter from his mind, he set out for the Cinema, strolling through the side streets to the little Square, where stood the brightly Neoned Picture Palace.

Not far ahead of him he perceived three sailors from the Italian Navy. Two were walking arm-in-arm, as sailors and policemen when off duty so often do in Italy. The third one, a slender 'cornstalk' of a youth, trailed along with them. They too were evidently going to the pictures. Quickening his pace, Kurt followed the handsome lads with awakened interest. At the ticket-window, he bought one of the expensive seats, solely to be able to choose a place near them. The three took their seats in one of the front rows, and as the two who had been walking arm-in-arm took their places first, Kurt soon found himself sitting next to the tall slender boy. And as they all for lit up their cigarettes, an opportunity occurred to exchange a few words.

When the lights came on in the interval, Kurt spoke to his neighbour. 'How about going outside for a smoke?' he suggested in his fluent Italian.

'Certainly, I should like to,' replied the young sailor. They went out onto the Piazza, walking up and down for a while, discussing the film, the city, and the boy's ship. Only when it was time to go in again, did Kurt say, 'Shall we take a glass of wine together afterwards?'

'Why not — thanks so much — with the greatest pleasure,' said the boy. And so it came about that later Kurt and Francesco were sitting over a glass of wine in a small bar. During a lull in the conversation, Kurt asked, 'Wasn't it rather impolite of us to leave your two friends in the lurch?'

'Oh no, they like to be alone, they are friends.'

'Friends»'

'Of course - they're in love with each other,' said the boy in a matter-of-fact way.

'And is that possible on the ship?'

'Why not?'

'I was only thinking . . .' Kurt paused, at a loss for a suitable reply.

'You thought perhaps, since they are two men? We have other couples like that on the ship. The first officer is a decent sort, and always sees that they get the same Watch.'

But Kurt found it difficult to lead the talk into more personal channels. When he had invited this good-looking lad to drink with him, he was mainly concerned with seeking the company of someone else, to try and erase from his memory that hateful quarrel with Paul. Burnt up after his outburst, he needed the compensating proximity of another human being, to feel that he was again alive, and, perplexed and troubled though he still was, there seemed to be no alternative but to invite Francesco to drink with him, so alluring did he find the young sailor's budding manhood. Pulling himself together he called for the bill and paid. They got up and left the bar. They spoke little, as their footsteps turned along the avenue bordering the canal which led to the sea, where Francesco's ship lay at anchor. The boy had to be back on board next morning, as the ship was to leave towards midday.

'Do you know the little pinewood by the shore?' asked Francesco, breaking the silence. He slid his brawny young arm into the arm of Kurt,

'Yes,' said Kurt, his heart missing a beat.

'The night is so mild — can't we go there?' begged Francesco. He strengthened the pressure of his hand against Kurt's arm, and said softly 'We shall be alone.' And Kurt felt relaxed and at peace, for he knew that he was with someone who was tender, and that he could close his eyes, and surrender to the gentle guidance of Francesco's strong hand.

Hours passed. Only slowly ebbed their passion. The warm summer night enfolded them like a healing garment. How long they lay there, twined together in the silence of rapture, Kurt never knew. All his thoughts and feelings were captured by the vibrant living union with this glorious body, so deeply browned by the sun and sea-air, which lay pressed into his arms. From time to time Francesco would draw even closer, as if to make the fusion of their bodies more complete. Once more Kurt, as he had done earlier that day, reacted reflexively to the ardour of his new-found friend. But this time it was not a shock of blond hair, but two warm eager lips which sought his, as he realized in a flash that here where only a few hours ago in this very grove with

Paul, he had been gnawed by the torture of frustration, so now he had achieved a glorious fulfilment with a kind and understanding young stranger. Kurt sighed deeply, a sigh of the serenest happiness. He raised himself slightly, drew Francesco close to him, and murmured these lines: —

'Oh could I to the fleeting moment say
Tarry a while, thou art so fair'

Francesco opened his eyes, and looked at him in wonderment.

'You were speaking in your own mother-tongue. It sounded so beautiful and so peaceful. Do say it for me in Italian.'

And Kurt answered him, carefully retaining the significance of Goethe's lines, as he translated into the young sailor's own language.

It was very late as they walked slowly back toward the sleeping city. On the outskirts they paused, and Francesco decided to return alone to the harbour, where he could easily get on board his ship. An embrace, a kiss, and a final handshake, both too choked and emotionally exhausted to speak, for they knew they would never meet again.

Back in his room Kurt quickly removed his clothes and lay down. Happy, although a trifle wistful, but at peace with the world, he fell asleep almost at once. Dawn was already breaking, as he was awakened by the door being slammed and the light switched on.

There stood Paul, reeling slightly, and with dishevelled hair.

'What's the matter with you?' asked Kurt.

'The dirty bloody little bitch.'

'What about her?' Kurt's voice was toneless.

'When I put the hard work on her, she turned me down flat,' shouted Paul in a blurred voice.

'That's no reason to wake up the whole place . . .'

Paul flopped into a chair.

'. . . and you're drunk,' continued Kurt.

'What the Hell else did you expect me to do?' Paul's voice was suddenly querulous and full of self-pity. He felt like having a good cry.

'Come on now, slip your things off, and get to bed,' ordered Kurt. Paul got up with reluctance. He dropped his clothes carelessly on the floor, and without putting on his pyjamas, threw himself down next to Kurt. For a few moments they lay in silence, until Paul turned over on his side, and with a sigh, sought his accustomed niche in his friend's arm. But now as he tried to settle himself, he was only clumsy and awkward. Yes, thought Kurt: Disappointment, Vexation and Drunkenness — they were the reasons for all this fuddled fidgeting. As he placed his arm round Paul, he felt no desire, no passion, but only such pity as he would feel for some poor hurt little animal. Already the flood of Kurt's pity was overwhelming all those years of starved passion and desire for the boy. But was it right? Could it be natural? Kurt wondered, surprised at the sudden change in his feelings.

Carefully he stroked Paul's hair. Then he raised the boy's head, and laid it on the pillow, close by his own. It was not yet light enough to see Kurt's thoughtful smile, as he bent over Paul and said:



'Do you now, I feel so tired after this long day, and you must be weary too. Let's get some sleep.'

Gently disengaging his protecting arm, Kurt turned over on his side, and as he did so, he realized everything. For he now knew that Paul's hold over him had for ever snapped during those hours with the young sailor, and the magic moment which he had invoked to tarry a while, would remain for an infinite duration. He closed his eyes, and falling asleep in the strengthening daylight, passed through the portal into inner freedom.

By Christian Graf.

Translation by P. H. B.

An Open Letter to Peter Wildeblood

Dear Mr. Wildeblood,

A Swiss bookseller-friend gave me an advance copy of your autobiography *AGAINST THE LAW*, shortly to be published by Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London. Excuse me for not writing a lengthy review of your excellent book, but it has touched me so deeply that I would rather express my sincere gratitude in an open letter to you on the pages of *THE CIRCLE*. I feel that in this way the attention of many people will be drawn to your book and thus help to enlarge the circle of your prospective readers.

It goes without saying that any homosexual will be deeply and sincerely touched by reading your courageous autobiography. It is also such a well-written book that, in my opinion, it will one day rank among the few classics of homosexual literature. The descriptions of your early life and development, the fair way in which you describe the Montagu Trial (in which you were so tragically involved) and the narrative of your imprisonment all make deeply moving reading. (The way the author emerges at the end of his term in prison should set an example to all of those amongst us who have been imprisoned for having had relations with another consenting adult male.)

But I do hope that your book will be read by more heterosexual people than by homosexuals. It is for the heterosexual majority that your book may be of the greatest help in understanding the homosexual minority. May it come into the hands of all those at present engaged in England in the task of an eventual change of the law in regard to relations between two consenting adult males. I do pray that your book may prove to be the turning point needed for the reform of the present English law. As the book stands you have not left one stone unturned. You have industriously and intelligently covered the whole of the ground, and one is tempted to ask: Why set up a Royal Commission when all the answers are given in this book of yours? The essence of a crime is the harm it does to another individual or to society. In the case of two consenting adult males no harm can possibly be done, and as society takes no cognisance — at least not in law — of adultery or fornication it ought not to take cognisance either of the actions of two grown-up men.