

Book review : Never the same again : by Gerald Tesch

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Never the same again

by Gerald Tesch, G. P. Putnam's Sons, N. Y.

Roy is an attractive man of thirty. He has a possessive mother and an ineffectual father with whom he lives. As a boy he was seduced by an older sister who ended in a mental institution. Roy believes that due to a boyhood injury he is unable to have children. He operates a filling station in a small town somewhere in the United States.

Johnny is thirteen years old. He is the son of divorced parents and lives with his mother, his aunt and his senile grand-mother. His father is an alcoholic industrial worker. He lives in a nearby city and never sees his son.

Roy offers Johnny a job in his filling station. He lavishes money and gifts upon the boy, tries to advise him, guide him. He also seduces him. A deep and passionate love develops between the two, partly a father-son relationship, partly a sexual one. Roy spends all his savings on one idyllic summer of happiness with Johnny. In spite of Roy's follies and Johnny's unchecked exploitative trends a deep and sincere devotion exists between the two.

In the Fall, at his mother's insistence, Johnny joins a boys' club. The leader of the club is an influential business man whom one might call a cryptohomosexual. Through jealousy masquerading as righteousness this man exposes publicly the nature of Johnny's relationship with Roy. Roy is forced to leave town. God knows what happens to poor Johnny.

Never the Same Again is a first novel by a twenty-three year old writer. With impartiality it reveals the good and the bad of the Roy-Johnny relationship and makes it clear to the reader why and how such relationships come about. It gives us remarkable insight into the shifting, protean mentality of a semi-delinquent thirteen year old boy. It does something that is rare in homosexual fiction, it displays this type of relationship in its full social context from start to finish, not as something which exists in isolation from the world around it. In this case the social context is that of the lower middle class of mid-America; its longings and disappointments, its lack of stable values and its moral inertia, all are presented accurately yet sympathetically. One feels that these are essentially wholesome but dispirited people who follow the line of least resistance because they see no way open to a better life.

The style of *Never the Same Again* is colloquial, often rich and racy, sometimes over-ripe. There is a steady stream of effectively powerful crudities which sometimes defeat their own end by simply blunting the reader's responses. As an old army man I have no objection to rugged language per se. But when carried to the point where it has a dulling effect upon the reader's perceptivity and sensibility, that's something else again. However, this language is authentic and more often than not a real delight.

Never the Same Again is a brave book, an honest book, a book to be taken seriously.

Luther Allen.