

An Afternoon in Stockholm

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An Afternoon in Stockholm

You're just back from Sweden? I don't suppose, while you were there, you went to Norrebro by any chance? It's a tiny town up in Dalecarlia somewhere. I've never met anyone who had been there. Anyway in the north-east corner of the market square there is a fountain with a green marble statue of a boy wrestler — and that boy's me. Of course I'm eighteen now, and know a thing or two about artists and their ways; but modelling for that statue was the first modelling job I ever did, and it was quite a show, I can tell you. Would you like to hear?

My father was traveller for a firm of printing machinery manufacturers, and Scandinavia was his «area». I'm the only child and have always been very close to my father and mother, completely happy alone with them — not at all like a modern family, we aren't. So when my father went on business to Sweden he used to choose the summer months and take mother and me along for the holiday.

As you can see for yourself. I'm supposed to look rather Swedish, with all this straight fair hair, blue eyes and light brown skin; anyway it was a standing joke I had with my father to catch his eye and burst into fits of laughter every time the Swedish families we used to visit came out with their stock remark: «Your John looks really just like a Swedish boy — much more Swedish than English» — or words to that effect. Sometimes they'd say it as soon as we met, sometimes not till we had known them for some while; but the moment they did, I would always look at father and catch a smile from him, and then sometimes have to turn away altogether to stop myself giggling helplessly, which would have seemed rude... Sorry — you'll think that all very silly, but I was only 12 or 13 then, and kids of that age are silly. Anyway it is how this business all began.

One day at the end of August — 1952, I suppose — we were all three sunning ourselves on the rocks at Saltsjöbaden just outside Stockholm. I adore sunbathing — always have — and was tremendously proud that summer of a new pair of salmon pink satin swim trunks that clung very tight and I thought showed my figure off nicely — you wouldn't catch me wearing anything so awful nowadays — plain stiff white nylon for me now, and made specially to measure too, it's my only extravagance — but anyway there I was spreadeagled face down in my pink trunks like a starfish, half asleep between swims, when I heard someone come up and start talking to my father in Swedish. To cut a long story short, it turned out this man too had thought I was Swedish; he was a sculptor and thought I looked right for the statue of a naked boy wrestler he was doing, and would I come and act as his model? My body was so lovely, he said, I was so much better developed than most other boys of my age, it was so hard to find boys to pose at all, and so on and so forth. He talked nineteen to the dozen very fast, and though I believe my father wanted to refuse him, he couldn't get a word in edgeways; and by the time it had penetrated to me what it was all about (I couldn't speak Swedish) I began to want to go just for the fun of it and finally I persuaded my parents to agree. We had several days to wait before we knew whether we'd landed a new order my father was trying hard to get, and I had nothing special to do.

The first afternoon my mother came with me to the studio and sat there all the while I posed. The sculptor was very charming to her and gave us a lot of chocolate cakes and tea because we were English, and we were all happy and laughing together. I stood on a pedestal stripped down to the famous pink trunks, legs apart, crouched a bit forward like a wrestler waiting for his opponent, and I didn't find it all hard or tiring after the first ten minutes or so. The sculptor turned out to be a German only living temporarily in Stockholm — Gunther Something, I've even forgotten the name now. He began to make the usual clay model of me round an iron armature, life size; and at the end, came and ruffled my hair and congratulated me on standing so still; but really I had rather enjoyed myself. I didn't find it hard.

The second afternoon my mother had something better to do, so I went alone. Hardly had I stripped and taken up the position when the sculptor said: «Look, Johnny, take off those trunks, will you? I want you completely nude — after all, the statue doesn't wear trunks, does he?» Well, I blushed like a tomato, I don't know why, and said I wouldn't; but then he began to flatter me, saying I was far the most beautiful boy he'd seen in Stockholm, «like the Greek Apollo must have been when he was young», and all sorts of other nonsense, till somehow I didn't know if I was on my head or my heels, and when he asked me again I took the trunks off. At first I felt very ashamed, and couldn't meet his eyes when he looked at me, but after a bit I didn't seem to notice any more difference, and so we finished the day. He paid me well, even better than the day before, and I suppose if I'd been anything but a silly young chump, that alone would have made me smell a rat.

At the start of the third afternoon I remember he began to ramble on and on about the ideal man's physique and how it should have broad shoulders, a narrow flat waist, and long straight tapering legs; also a lot about proportions and how the length of the head should be exactly one eighth of the whole, and a lot more I never listened to; but I did perk up when he said he'd come to the conclusion that I was physically just about the perfect boy. I thought I'd soon be telling my parents that and we'd all have a good laugh; because my last school reports had been far from perfect. «He is an attractive, goodnatured lad, but must not let his high spirits run away with him,» one old codger of a master had written, and this had been the text for a long lecture from my father about how I must now begin to grow up, not lark about so much, take life much more seriously, decide how to earn my living, and all that. So I would tell my father at least one person thought me a perfect boy and see what he said.

While I was thinking about this, the sculptor came over, put his head on one side and said: «Your position is not just how it was yesterday, please.» Then quite suddenly he stood close to the pedestal, reached his arm right up and drew me down towards him. I can still today feel the rough of his hairy cheeks on my skin. All the time he was murmuring some sort of endearment — I suppose it was — in German at me. But well, anyway, I wasn't going to be messed about by any old German, so I shook free, took one step backwards as old Sergeant Watson had told me at school (he didn't know I boxed for my house at school) and let him have it hot and strong with my right to the jaw. I think he was more surprised than hurt, but more furious than anything else; and he began to chase me all round the studio in a real rage, hurling books and tools at me all the time, while I tried to dodge back to the corner where my clothes were; but he headed me off again and again. The advantage was entirely his — not only was I naked, but he knew every inch of the place and I didn't. Finally, in cutting a corner too sharp, I slipped and fell on the floor, and he was onto me.

Well, of course, I know biting's a foul, and you wouldn't catch me even thinking of such a thing fighting with any of my friends — but I really was just desperate and I had to get loose from him by hook or crook — so it was crook. And it certainly worked. He let me go and concentrated on sucking his wrist, where I was pleased to see blood welling up into the tooth marks. «You bloody little spitfire,» he said, and a great deal more in German which I couldn't understand. All I could find to say was «I say, I'm sorry» — which must be about the weakest remark ever made in history. But anyway I was free from him, and you can bet I put my shirt and shorts on again in double quick time. Half dressed, I found myself going over to knot a handkerchief round his wrist, since he couldn't tie it himself — during which he put his other arm quietly round my shoulder, but I wasn't having any more of him. My body was bruised and burning all over, I found I'd cut my right thigh in slipping on the floor, and I really hated the cause of it all with a black fury and wanted to be rid of him as quickly as I could. Catching up my swim trunks and trying to look jaunty I picked my way among the statues towards the door, only to be called back:

«Aren't you coming again, Johnny? How shall I finish the statue, please?» Well, I didn't care what became of him, so I just said brightly «Why not telephone Apollo and get him instead?» and ran out. I didn't even take the money he put out for me. I didn't want to be indebted to him.

Outside in the street I stood undecided where to go. I must have been very dishevelled and wild-looking, swinging those awful pink shorts round and round in my hand, till people began to stare at me. So I started off half running and found myself on the way to Sven's house. Sven was the only other Swedish boy I'd really got to know in Stockholm — several years older than me and very serious and stern, but a marvellous swimmer, and he was teaching me all sorts of speed tricks we never learnt in England. I burst breathlessly in on him and his family just as they were getting up from a meal (Swedes always seemed to eat at times no one else ever does) and I called out to him «Come on out for a swim, Sven, come on, you must, you must!» I think his parents were greatly astonished at my rudeness, but Sven never batted an eyelid but fetched a towel straight away and followed me. He saw something was up — dried blood all down one leg was my most obvious trouble — but saw too I didn't want to be bothered with a lot of explaining in public. He was a good lad, Sven.

We went down to our usual place among the rocks, stripped quickly almost in silence and dived in together, me once more in those pink trunks. Never in all my born days has any swim been more heavenly. Sven was slim, dark and tall, and his long legs had a terrific thrust in them, so he could make rings round me in swimming, and all with hardly any disturbance in the water. I longed to get my crawl as smooth and effortless as his, but he always used to beat me in any race we tried — and that day more than ever, as I was just about all in.

After ten minutes or so I came ashore and dried and lay on a rock looking at the sun go down across the clear Baltic water. Then, whether it was the lovely soft evening or the troubles of the day or whatever, there was I suddenly in floods of tears — delayed action, I suppose; I couldn't explain anything or speak at all, but just lay face down and howled away like a two-year-old. Sven crept up, lay close beside me on the rock, and took me in his arms. «What's up, Johnny, tell me please — what's up?» But of course I couldn't tell him without giving the sculptor away; and I reckon it's usually better to fight your own battles in this world. Then after a bit I did calm down. It was so good to have old Sven there, and the feel of his strong cool hands on my body was as comforting to me as the artist man's hands had been horrible. Most wonderful of all was suddenly to look up through my tears and see the tender, half smiling, half questioning look on Sven's handsome face as he gazed down at me, and to feel the single brusque hard, man's kiss he planted full across my lips when I'd recovered a bit. I'd have liked that moment to prolong itself for ever; but I suppose for him I was just a silly hysterical English boy not worth bothering about any more. Anyway he quickly got up off me, looking a bit ashamed, and said in his correct, clipped English: «Go on, clothe yourself, or you will become cold and I will be blamed.»

«Sorry, Sven, I'll tell you about it one day.» (Of course I never did.) Then we found it was much later than I thought, and I had to hurry back to the hotel.

Well, that was the first time I ever went modelling. The sculptor must have finished the statue with another boy because we heard the next year it had won a prize; but I've never been up north to see it — I'd like to go one day. As for me, well, people quite often ask me to pose for them now, and I go and enjoy it, because I think I'm getting to know something about the refinements of the job. I think of course I'm also getting to know a bit better now how to look after myself!

by O. W. Simpson

Wichtige Beschlüsse an der Jahresversammlung

Gästekarten werden in Zukunft von den kontrollierenden Kameraden ausgefüllt auf Grund eines vorgewiesenen Ausweispapieres. Wer ein solches nicht vorweisen kann, dem darf kein Zutritt gewährt werden. — Es werden nur noch zwei Gästekarten ausgestellt. Beim fünften Besuch muss sich der Gast für ein Abonnement entscheiden. Den Vertrauensmännern der Klubabende bleibt es auch überlassen, eine früher gewährte Besuchserlaubnis nicht mehr zu erteilen, wenn ernsthafte Gründe dagegen sprechen.

Platzreservierungen bei grösseren Klubabenden und Festen dürfen nur noch für die technischen und künstlerischen Mitarbeiter und für die verantwortlichen Leiter der Organisationen vorgenommen werden. Die Türen werden jeweils um 19 Uhr geöffnet. Wir mussten diese Regelung, die beinahe einstimmig beschlossen wurde, vornehmen, um nicht eine Anzahl auswärtiger Abonnenten zu verlieren, die seit Jahren jeweils überhaupt keinen rechten Sitzplatz an den Anlässen finden konnten.

„Alles was rächt isch“...

... aber der Kehrausball in der Basler «Isola» war wirklich «ä diggi Sach»! Das darf man nicht nur, das muss man sogar sagen, auch wenn man ein Basler ist und das Blättlein in Zürich gedruckt wird. — Die Stimmung war ganz einfach da, von Anfang an. Jeder brachte sie mit, und sie blieb auch, bis in den frühen Morgen hinein, und mit ihr blieben viele Freunde und Kameraden, von hier, aus dem benachbarten Badener Ländlein und dem Elsass, aus dem Jura und (wie könnte es auch anders sein?): aus Zürich...

Georgette erschien, wie erwartet, à la distinguée, andere eher à la demi-monde. Es gab auch saloppe Männer und — (exgisi!) besonders aus der Böögggenstadt — solche die es einmal sein wollten, mit Kohle-Koteletten und dito -Schnurrbärtchen. (Gäll, Du känsch mi nööd?) — Eigen (wann ist er es einmal nicht) war unser verseschmiedener Hans Dampf im Schnooggeloch als «Lex Iris», der seine Flinte aber reichlich früh ins Korn warf, barhäuptig sich «bewegte» und somit auch: erkannt, von wegen der «Sauhitz», wie er sagte. Eingeweihte wollen aber wissen, dass ihm während einer Erfrischungspause im Foyer die Maske in den Feuer- bzw. Wassereimer gefallen sei. Das gibt bestimmt wieder ein Gedicht...

Der Höhepunkt des Abends war aber unbestritten Hansjörg, der die Meneghini-Callas so gut parodierte, dass selbst die Berufsmässigen vom Haus Steinenberg «weg» waren, vor allem Michael, und das will doch etwas heissen. — Alles in allem: Es war «ä diggi Sach», und jetzt: ä grossi Pause bis zum nägschte Mool!» Remus

Ein schönes Ostergeschenk

Der Mann in der Photographie Band III

Wie seine beiden Vorgänger enthält auch dieser neue Band wieder hundert ausgesucht gute veröffentlichte und unveröffentlichte Photos.

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