

Two stories

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TWO STORIES

by Archie Waldren

I.

«We two boys together clinging,
One the other never leaving,
Fulfilling our foray.»

WALT WHITMAN

It was his back, golden brown and glistening with sweat in the hot, summer sun, that first caught my attention as I sat in the garden of the inn, watching the labourers on a nearby building site. As he worked, I could see the muscles of his legs outlined by his tight faded-blue jeans, and when he paused to brush his abundant golden hair back from his face, I could see his coarse but handsome features.

Presently, work on the site stopped for the men to have lunch, and he made his way to the inn and, as if by a miracle, came to the table where I was sitting. After a few minutes, he offered me a cigarette, and before very long, he was telling me all about himself, as lonely people tend to do to strangers.

After we had drunk a few beers, and the time came for him to go back to work, I suggested that we should meet again during the evening. He agreed readily, and went cheerfully back to work.

*

We met early in the evening in a noisy bar, where tarts and pimps, seamen and teddy-boys, lounged around the altar of the juke box. He came in wearing a black leather jacket with his blue jeans, and his first words were an apology for the way in which he was dressed. I would like to have told him how well his clothes heightened his appeal for me.

We sat for a time in silence, watching the antics of the people in the bar, until he suggested that we should go to a quieter place where we could talk without shouting.

I took him to a little inn on the cliff-tops, and we sat in the gardens enjoying the last light of day, until, as darkness fell, we were left alone whilst all other people had taken refuge in the warmth and light of the bar. As we sat talking quietly together, I felt his leg brush softly against mine, and I could feel his firm calves through the tightness of his jeans. I put my hand on his, and we remained very still until the landlord called for «Time, Gentlemen!» inside the inn, and the drinkers began to make their way home.

We walked home over the cliffs, and when we were out of sight of the inn, he put a strong arm around my shoulder, and asked me where I was staying. I told him that I had taken a flat for two weeks' vacation, and that he was welcome to stay with me until my vacation was over.

I shall never forget the quiet evenings and tender nights which we spent together, nor shall I forget our parting kiss, when he went away to find new work, and I went back to my city desk. Through all the memories of loves since enjoyed, I find the recollection of those two summer weeks unbearably nostalgic.

II.

«It's no go my honey love, it's no go my poppet,
Work your hands from day to day, the winds will blow the profit.
The glass is falling hour by hour, the glass will fall for ever.
But if you break the bloody glass you won't hold up the weather.»

LOUIS MACNIECE.

It was his back, golden brown and glistening with sweat in the hot, summer sun, that first caught my eye as I sat in the garden of an inn, expertly summing up the potentialities of the workmen on a nearby building site. As he worked, I could see the muscles of his legs outlined by his tight faded-blue jeans, and when he paused to brush back his abundant golden hair from his face, I could see that apart from a coarseness of feature he was indeed a »dream-boy«.

After a time, work stopped on the site, and the workmen made their way into the bar of the inn. After a short interval, I followed them in and managed to position myself next to the young man whom I had admired.

It was not long before I found an opening for conversation, and bought him a drink. He was soon talking in only too voluble a way of his years in the Royal Navy and boasting of his exploits around the world.

When the time came for him to go back to work, I suggested that we should meet during the evening. He said that he would like to meet me, but had no money. I told him, of course, that this did not matter, and he suggested that we should meet in a bar in the centre of the town.

*

And then — the meeting. First the anxious wait for him to arrive. The apprehension as to his intentions. The fear as to his motives.

His arrival. His flashy, cheap clothes, bringing into focus the coarseness of his features.

His greetings to the tarts, pimps and teddy-boys. His too apparent embarrassment at being seen with me. The constant demand for drinks. The insinuating jokes about »queers« and talk of those he met when he was in the Naval ports, and of his friends who had taken the »old queens« for a ride. The tentative questions about my interests and the leering remarks as he got more drunk.

Closing Time. Farewell to his friends and back to my flat for more drinks. Quick, unaffectionate release for him, mumbled curses, and drunken sleep.

The morning. Sullen accusations. The demand for payment. The abuse and threatened violence. The stormy exit.

And the right hand, automatic, reaches for the gin bottle, oblivion, and the last twist of the knife.

*

«When he himself might his quietus make with a bare bodkin.»