

# The young Hercules

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Paul gently held John to him and said, «I should have told you that I am not free. I live with an artist—he designed the Vienna Festival posters I showed you this afternoon. I am sorry—I know I should have told you last night.» Helplessly, he patted John's back.

John didn't move. He seemed not to have taken in the meaning of Paul's words. He didn't raise his head from Paul's shoulder, but repeated, with his mouth muffled against Paul's neck, «Won't you kiss me?»

Paul sighed and pulled gently away. «I am in love with someone else, John. I am sorry. I can't love you—you would not want just the body, would you?»

John's frame shook with a hard sob and he swayed against Paul, catching him suddenly off balance. Awkwardly, they both half-fell to the bed. «Please kiss me, Paul.» John pleaded, pulling Paul to him by the shoulders. «John . . .» Paul's protest was smothered by John's swift kiss.

As suddenly, John jerked away, turning his head to obscure a twisted smile and tears that welled in his eyes. «May wine,» he said slowly, «you taste like May wine.»

by J. G.

## The Young Hercules

At last! Once again in Paris, Alex thought, as he got out of the bus that had brought him in from Orly to the center of the city. Eight days in Paris! No office, no mask to wear, no steps to watch—just eight wonderful days in Paris. Well, off to the hotel: a bath, change clothes, have dinner, and then look up the existentialist bar whose address had been given to him by some friends at the last minute before he left. One would really be with his own there. It had only been open a couple of weeks, but it probably wouldn't be long before it would have to close. The entertainment . . .

A few hours later Alex found the side street, walked down the short flight of stairs and opened the door. It was still early in the evening, but he knew that so much noise could only mean a full bar. The ceiling was already obscured by a dense layer of gently shifting cigarette smoke. At the end of the long cellar he could make out a low podium built out into the room. It was surrounded by a bright red curtain, and Alex guessed that it must be the small stage. There must be one more place, he thought, as he stared about the room. He realized that he was being stared at by quite a few people, and he was just about to become uncomfortably self-conscious when he caught sight of the waiter motioning to him. He walked the length of the bar to a chair that the waiter had placed at the table of two lovers directly in front of the stage. Waiters have a talent, he thought. He smiled, and their friendly return convinced him that they were really happy to share their table. The elder who wore the full mosaic beard that was so popular these days looked to be in his middle thirties. Alex also noticed the long red fingernails and dark blue eye shadow of the companion: the boy looked in his early twenties. Alex ordered Champagne.

The entertainment was really nothing special, and, after the first couple of numbers, Alex found himself trying to figure out just what his friends had been so wild about. The imitation of Marilyn Monroe wasn't bad, admittedly, but he had seen a lot better. Helen Vandyck, «The Famous Torch Singer,» sang hits out of the twenties, but with little more than a pleasant baritone.

The stage card was changed: «The Young Hercules.» And, true enough, as a strained silence fell over the room, the parting curtains revealed a young man that might just as well have been one of Phidias' friezes come to life. He leaned in a classic pose on a small mock-up of a Doric column. Slightly sideways, as Alex saw him, he looked entirely nude. However, he was standing on a slowly revolving platform, and as it turned in the changing colors of the spotlight Alex could see the flesh-colored figleaf that hid the last secret of the beautiful form before him. He followed the lines from the muscular, downy thighs, over the almost invisibly rippled abdomen, across the symmetrical chest, up to the beautiful head that crowned this truly herculean body.

The platform continued to turn slowly, and, as Alex saw the full face, a bell seemed to ring. Was it wish-fulfillment that he seemed to know the face? Alex rummaged madly in his own mind while the young athlete continued to go through pose after pose to deafening applause. Suddenly it clicked. Well I'll be damned, he thought! Sure! It's Charlie, his driver and orderly during two long war years. How often they had shared a room—if not a bed. In all that time he had never seen Charlie nude, and had never had the slightest inkling that Charlie... Good Lord, and there he is in his birthday suit on the stage of a Parisian existentialist bar. Idiot! Alex thought to himself: you stupid idiot! Two long, lonely years, and he had never tried a thing. Charlie left the stage.

Well, better late than never, he thought, as he bribed the door-keep to get through to the dressing rooms. Charlie was standing in the dim hallway talking excitedly to «Marilyn Monroe.» Alex couldn't resist placing his hand firmly on the muscular shoulder. The young athlete turned.

«Hello, Charlie. Do you still remember me?» He spoke English, though he knew that Charlie spoke fluent French. The dark eyes searched him for a few seconds before the whole face lit up like a neon sign. «My God! Is it really you, Captain?» Charlie grabbed Alex's hand and squeezed it tightly. «Now, c'mon, Charlie: the war's over with, so you can drop the 'Captain'.»

Charlie's joy over the unexpected meeting beamed from his face, and he continued to hold Alex's hand with both of his in a vise-like grip as he asked question after question without giving Alex time to answer. It was all Alex could do to keep from throwing his arms around the beautiful form then and there. Charlie suddenly stopped his torrent of words and came back to earth. «I have to dress—have another show in another place on the other side of town—but you must come by tomorrow for coffee,» he said nervously. «Give me your address. No! Wait! I'm all shook! I'll give you my address... better yet, come for lunch so that we can have the rest of the afternoon to ourselves.» Charlie took

Alex's address book and held it against Alex's chest to jot down the address. Alex felt like he was going to faint. «Here, can you read it?» Alex took the small book and held it tightly with both hands to conceal the way he was shaking. «23 Rue de St... oh, sure, it's only about 10 minutes by Metro from the hotel where I'm staying.» «Good! Gee, Captain, I hate that I have to run, but I'll see you tomorrow. I can hardly wait to have you.»

*You* can hardly wait to have *me*, Alex thought as he went to bed alone much later. Lord! If only it was tomorrow. There was so much to be made up for...

The bunch of flowers was huge. Alex glanced at his watch and realized that he was on the way long before the appointed hour. His nerves had driven him out of the hotel, and he was breathing so hard that he had to pause a couple of minutes at the door before ringing Charlie's bell.

The door opened, and a beautiful young woman with a baby in her arms stood before him. Two little boys clutched her skirt and looked at him suspiciously. Alex immediately noticed that they were little Herculeses, and why he didn't fall backward down the steps he never knew.

«You are Captain of my husband, yes?» she asked in broken English. Her gestures were sincerely friendly as she motioned him in, and a beautiful smile crossed her face as she took the flowers that Alex extended almost mechanically. Well, a receiver is fine even though it isn't the one you expected, he thought. «My husband, yes, he bath... he come, yes.»

He had hardly taken the proffered chair when Charlie emerged from the bath. His white terry cloth robe was open wide at the chest, and those beautiful downy thighs would peep out for an instant through the folds as he strode across the room to grip Alex's hand.

It was wonderful that they had so many war memories, Alex thought as they were at the table, for they had been able to talk continually. Only after the beautiful young wife had left them alone with their coffee did the conversation change.

«But, tell me. How did you happen to be in *that* bar, Captain?» Charlie couldn't forget the «Captain.»

Alex smiled wryly and parried the question with his own. «How do *you* happen to be performing in a place where everything seems so obvious?»

«You did, then, notice what the place is?» Charlie's dark brown eyes searched Alex's face intently. The conversation seemed to be nothing but questions.

«Oh, for Christ's sake, Charlie! A blind man could see that. But how do you happen to be there?» Alex smiled again and repeated his question. Interesting, he thought, how hard hope dies.

«Captain, you'll never believe it!» The grin was so beautiful that Alex couldn't feel hurt even though he instinctively felt what was coming. «Actually, you know, I was an artist by profession. I had a little money saved up, so I took an overseas discharge—stars in my eyes I guess—and the next thing I knew I was stranded here in Paris without a job and broke. That's when I got to know my wife. She's quite a business woman, and she had a good florist shop in the center of the city. I helped her in the shop at first, but, of course, we didn't omit certain

other past-times.» Charlie winked impishly. «So, when the oldest boy was on the way we figured it was time to tie the knot. Really, Captain, she's a great wife. Anyway, one night in bed she got the bright idea that my naked body would bring in money for years yet. And with this,» he grinned again and jerked his thumb unaffectedly at his broad, smooth chest, «you make your best living in queer hangouts. I never even thought of it. Like I say, she's really got a head for business.» Charlie laughed heartily. There was really no evil in him. «My God, Captain, what you can experience in those places would fill volumes if someone would just take the trouble to write it down. Really, no one believes that I'm not gay.» Charlie's face suddenly became serious, and he leaned over and put his hand on Alex's knee. Alex almost winced. «Captain, it's really great to have someone to talk to for a change who's not queer—you don't know what it means to me to have someone like you.»

Alex smiled weakly but sincerely. Great consolation, he thought. Then he happened to think of the old saying about the sea being full of fish. After all, he still had six days to go, and Paris is a big city.

By Christian Graf

Translation: H.H.

## Joh. Joachim Winckelmann

It was Joh. Joachim Winckelmann (1717—1768), tragically murdered by a young Italian at Trieste, who revived in the 18th Century in Germany the classical tradition in art and showed himself one of the best interpreters of the Hellenic world that has ever lived. His letters to his personal friends breathe a spirit of the tenderest and most passionate devotion: «Friendship,» he says, «without love is mere acquaintanceship.» Winckelmann met, in 1763, in Rome, a young nobleman, Reinhold von Berg, to whom he became deeply attached. Almost at first sight there sprang up, on Winckelmann's side, an attachment as romantic, emotional and passionate as love. In a letter to this friend he said, «From the first moment an indescribable attraction towards you, excited by something more than form and feature, caused me to catch an echo of that harmony which passes human understanding and which is the music of the everlasting concord of things. I was aware of the deep consent of our spirits, the instant I saw you.» And in a later letter: «No name by which I might call you would be sweet enough or sufficient for my love; all that I could say would be far too feeble to give utterance to my heart and soul. Truly friendship comes from heaven and was not created by mere human impulses. My one friend, I love you more than any living thing, and time nor chance nor age can ever lessen this love.»

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