

Segesta

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SEGESTA

My eyes could scarcely believe what they saw. In front of me was the word SEGESTA spelled out in capital letters across the small station building. So it had come true. I had finally reached a destination I'd wanted to reach nearly all my life.

I had been the only passenger alighting from the local train which had brought me down from Alcamo. And at that I'd nearly missed Segesta altogether. At Palermo I had been told that the train I'd chosen would take me directly to Segesta. After quite a long train journey in an overcrowded «rapido», it had only been ten minutes or so before the train was due at Alcamo that the conductor had come round to inspect the tickets. On seeing my own ticket, he told me volubly a long story of which I didn't understand a word since I didn't speak Italian. My neighbor joined in, and soon after half a dozen Sicilians in the carriage were also in the conversation, in the friendly, noisily gesticulating way the Southerners have. I finally caught two words repeated again and again in the hubbub around me. One was 'Alcamo' and the other one was 'cambiare'. I took out my pocket dictionary and looked up 'cambiare'. It meant 'to change'. And not too early I looked up the word because the train was already slowing down at Alcamo. I snatched my light bag, cried

loudly 'mille grazie, mille grazie' to all concerned and left my train in rather a hurry. The local was already waiting and only six minutes after it had departed I was staring in some surprise at the word 'Segesta' across a small station building.

I passed through the building and found myself facing a road. Since it was the only road in view and ending at the station, it was certainly the one that would lead me towards my goal. The unbelievable heat of this noon-hour in early September struck me like lightning. I was grateful for the Italian straw-hat I had acquired a couple of days ago, silly as it most certainly looked on my head.

I set out on my pilgrimage. The mountainous country around me was as barren as only Sicily can be in the later months of the year. A deep earthy brown was the prevailing color. The green leaves of the few trees seen here and there were all covered with a thick layer of dust. It was a sort of prehistoric landscape — that's the way I felt on walking ahead.

But twenty minutes later all this was forgotten. One of the bends in the road gave me my first view of the Temple of Segesta. Towering above me, it rose majestically into the deep blue Mediterranean sky. My heart missed several beats — and not from the exertion of my walk in this burning heat of the noon. All was forgotten as my path led me slowly up and towards the temple.

Finally I had reached it — the goal of nearly a life-time. It was utterly beautiful and harmonious. It made me feel very small indeed when I stood at last in front of the towering building—small and yet indescribably happy. As long as I can remember Greek columns have given me that same big thrill: the way they rise up in all their splendor. The warmth of the sun on them when—full of reverence—you touch them! Maybe a psychiatrist would have to say something about erotic images and columns but then, you see, I never go to a psychiatrist.

Many, many centuries had mellowed the stuff of which the columns had been made into a deep rich golden color. The golden quadrangle of the temple stood clearly out against the earthen-brown cover of the landscape from whose vast loneliness it rose up. This temple was all that was left of a flourishing big city. A temple and a Greek theatre on the summit of a mountain nearby.

I spent a long time slowly taking possession of this dream which had at long last come true. Finally I sat down inside the large square of the ground floor, and feeling all of a sudden drained by happiness and fatigue, I pushed my light bag behind me, lay down on the stones in the long shadows the columns were throwing and fell instantly asleep.

When I awoke, an hour had passed. Refreshed from my sleep, I looked around me. There were no other tourists to be seen across the temple, but when my eyes turned to the right I saw squatting in the shadow of the next column a tall youngster. Clad only in a pair of tight-fitting blue jeans, wearing an old pair of open sandals, he had his multi-colored shirt knotted loosely around his small hips. From the kind of girdle his shirt made his torso arose in an even dark tan. A second time on this day my heart missed several beats. Here was a young demi-god right in the middle of the temple. The flat abdomen, the hard nipples

on his smooth chest, the perfect harmony and symmetry of his shoulders could easily have belonged to one of the many statues it had been my pleasure to see on my trip.

Overcoming my initial shyness I asked him, «Do you speak English by any chance?»

«Yes, I do,» he answered in a friendly way.

Well, that gave me at least the chance of a talk with him, the more so since his English turned out to be quite fluent. What a relief it was to be able to converse with someone again after all the Italian I'd been fed with lately! He was a young Dane, 24 years old, had just got his B.A. degree, and had taken a long vacation by hitchhiking from Denmark to Sicily—quite a distance which he had covered in seven days. His good manners and equally good breeding were obvious and rather captivating.

«Are you going to visit the Greek Theatre on Monte Barbaro too?» he asked me.

I had been contemplating the idea on my long trip down from Palermo but knowing from my guide book how steep a climb it was up the mountain to the theatre, I had half-heartedly rejected the idea of going there. But now with this pleasant-spoken and goodlooking youngster as a companion in the ascent, I readily agreed to come along with him.

«Well, Knut, let's get under way then,» I said. We had begun to use first names even though my own came rather hesitatingly from his full and sensuous lips. No wonder—his own 24 years and my own age differed 'slightly'. Knut got up and stretched lazily under the sun still mercilessly shining down upon us. What a sight for sore eyes it was to look at the tall lankiness of my new-found companion.

Climbing Monte Barbaro proved to be very steep indeed. Not for me any more the careless elastic steps of youth, taking steep mountains easily in their stride. Halfway up I took refuge in the shade of a big piece of rock overhanging the road. Knut sat down on the border of the road, in the brilliant sunshine, and we gazed down to the temple, now deep below us. It was the right moment in which to let my camera click.

Another climb and we had reached the summit. The great oval of the Greek theatre was spreading out before us. What a sight to behold! We rested for a couple of minutes on one of the top rows of the bowl. But soon Knut started exploring it all with the restlessness of youth. Finally he was standing high up on a corner of the walls. And time stood still when I saw that half-nude youngster stand proudly silhouetted against the vast scenery of the mountains around us, with the deep blue of the Mediterranean waters glimmering far away in the distance. «Tarry a while», old Goethe had said to the fleeting moment, «Thou art so fair». And the camera helped me once again to keep this fleeting moment alive.

Knut came back to where I sat, lowered himself comfortably to the ground next to me, and asked for another cigarette. While he bent forward to catch the flame from my lighter I let my other hand rest fleetingly on his lovely brown shoulder. Fleeting as the touch was, it was heaven to feel that silky skin under my hand.

Later we walked down together, once again in full view of the gigantic temple. At the foot of Monte Barbaro there is a small cafeteria. I invited him in for some coffee, cakes and ice-cream, knowing quite

well that his means were limited, and gave him also some picture postcards of Segesta. He accepted it all delightedly and gratefully, and we finally exchanged addresses.

Half an hour later our ways parted. My own went down to the station while he took up a favorable position to snatch another ride to the south. Whenever I turned my head Knut was still standing there, and every time I saw him he waved his hand to me. His figure became smaller and smaller until a bend in the road made him disappear.

Travelling back to Palermo I thought of a sentence once written by a Swiss writer in one of her novels. It was a sentence I had never been able to forget. «To look at someone beloved is the most intrinsic embrace we know of, the one which sinks down into our hearts and stays there alive for all eternity.»

Richard Arlen

The Queens' Summer Residence

Despite the notoriety of Cherry Grove on Fire Island hard by New York City, nevertheless, the most persistently popular spot of summer rendezvous for the gay elite of Canada and America remains Provincetown, Massachusetts, at the tantalizing tip of Cape Cod. As a tested Treffpunkt for the Third Sex, it has no rival on the Atlantic Seaboard, and it is to be feared the economy of that community would suffer a deadly blow were the City Fathers and the Provincetown equivalent of a Frauenverein ever to pass legislature, requiring all summer visitors to be «straight».

However, this is not to say that Provincetown is in itself an irregular and unconventional summer colony. In fact, after its own fashion, it is conventional in the extreme, and represents but another facet of the passion for conformity in contemporary American life, which has provoked the appearance of a book entitled, «A Nation of Sheep».

Certain kinds of conduct, schedules of activity and styles of haberdashery are as rigidly *de rigueur* in Provincetown's gay midsummer madness as in the Colony Club of New York or La Couronne in Bruxelles. This is what makes Provincetown so ironically amusing a colony for any cosmopolite to observe; he is mockingly diverted by the blatant provincialism of all these presumably free souls who flock there each summer to express themselves—but only in the prescribed Bohemian manner, that will make them acceptable to their peers. Togetherness (horrid word) is as rampant in Provincetown as it ever was in Outer Podunk.

For anyone who even vaguely hopes to be «accepted» into the annual gay colony of this beachhead for inverts a certain daily schedule is imperative. This involves a late rising, *ça va sans dire*, followed perhaps by a brief trip to the core of the town to a store called Patrick's, where the New York papers are purveyed, but a hasty return. It is not *comme il faut* to be seen on Commercial Street during the heart of the day; one might be mistaken for that odious creature «a tourist».

The heart of the day must be faithfully devoted to organizing for the trip to the beach, motoring to the beach, and beaching. When the crowd feels rather energetic, beaching may take place as far afield as