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SHE'S APPLES MATE

by Stornoway

(Conclusion)

Just then Greg returned with the coffee. Afterwards, they swam in the blue water of the Pittwater, taking a dinghy some yards offshore and diving from that, all except Jeff, who just sat in the dinghy and smoked. Then they returned to the house and dressed. While they were having drinks the others returned from the main beach full of gossip as to who was there and what they had seen in the way of brawn and beauty. The evening meal was a scrappy affair, with more to drink than to eat. The record player worked overtime and while some of them danced, others did drag acts. This explained the enormous amount of baggage they had taken up with them.

It was late when Tom walked out into the garden to get some air. Greg followed him.

«Enjoying yourself?» he asked.

«Very much so, but when do people sleep?»

Greg put his arms round him and kissed him. «Are you tired?»

«No. Not really.»

«No. I just wondered if people did.»

«They sort the available beds out among themselves, and the rest doss down on the living room floor. Not much sleeping goes on. They're mostly shooting from one bed to another all night. Like to go for a drive?»

«That's an idea. Might clear my head a bit.»

Greg laughed. «No need to get your head too clear.» he said. «It's just as well not to remember everything that goes on here.»

They climbed the stone steps to the car. Tom closed his eyes and relaxed while Greg drove. They did not speak. Tom suddenly realised they were back in the Sydney suburbs.

«Where are you taking me?» he asked.

Greg looked at him sideways. «Back to the flat.»

«In Point Piper?»

«Do you mind?»

«Of course not.»

«So long as you don't mind being kidnapped for the night.»

«You mean we're going to stay there?»

«Tonight, yes. We can go back to the shack in the morning. They might miss you but they won't miss me.»

«Will everything be all right?» Tom was wondering if Jeff might start getting unpleasant.

«Freddie will keep them in order. Did you have your eye on something?»

«No.»

«Good, I was thinking of Robert.»

Tom laughed. «I've got nothing against Robert, but I've got nothing for him either.» He wondered what Jeff's reaction would be when he

discovered that he and Greg were missing. On the whole he felt a considerable amount of relief. Jeff was out for big stakes, and would bide his time. He could be dealt with when the necessity arose.

Back in the flat they went into Greg's bedroom. It was a large room, severely furnished. Through the window they could see the harbour lights, brilliant like diamonds.

Greg turned shyly towards Tom. «There's a guest room, or would you rather be in here with me?»

«In here, of course,» Tom answered. «I thought that was the idea.»

«It was, but I never like to take too much for granted.» — — —

It was midday when they arrived back at the beach house. No comment was made by the others about their absence or their return. Tom noticed that everyone was heavy eyed and looked worse for wear. The living room and kitchen were stacked with empty bottles. Jeff appeared to be sulking.

«Where the hell have you been?» he asked Tom, as soon as he could get him alone.

«Back at the flat. Were you worried about me?»

«You bastard. You walked out on me.»

«So what? You were well taken care of, weren't you?»

«That's not the point. Did you pick up anything?»

«What do you mean?»

«You know. Did he pay you anything?»

«No.»

«Didn't you ask for anything?»

«No. I told you what I thought about that.»

«You flickering idiot.»

«Listen Jeff. I'm not in this for money.»

«More fool you. I think you're just the same as these other screaming bitches.»

«I don't give a wank what you think.»

«The boys on the ship are going to have a good laugh when I tell them about you, aren't they?» Jeff said mockingly. «They'll all want to have you away, especially if you're going to do it for free.»

«Let them just try. And when you tell the others, don't forget that you were here too. You knew what you were coming to, and you didn't have to come.» Tom walked away, and went down to where the boats were moored. A few minutes later Greg caught up with him.

«What's wrong, Tom? Having a blue with your mate?»

«What did you hear?»

«Nothing. I just saw. He seemed to be mad as a cut snake about something. Did I do the wrong thing taking you away?»

«By him, do you mean?»

«Yes. I don't want to break anything up between you two. After all, you've got to go away together. It didn't occur to me that he'd mind me having you just for one night.»

Tom looked his amazement. «You've got it all wrong, Greg. There's nothing between Jeff and me.» Tom felt embarrassed, but thought it time to explain things to Greg. «It's like this, Greg. Jeff doesn't fit in with this sort of thing.»

«Why is he here then? From what Freddie tells me, he had a lot of fun last night.»

«He'd have fun allright, but it was an accident, and a mistake, inviting him here. We were together when Robert suggested we come along. I wasn't going to come, until I met you.»

«But I don't believe he doesn't like this sort of party. Why did he come, otherwise?»

«Oh he likes it all right, but he wants to be paid.»

«Trade?»

«Yes. The worst sort. If he doesn't get paid he gets rough.»

Greg laughed. «None of this crowd have any money. Freddie makes a bit, but I don't know how much. The rest aren't worth a cracker.»

«He's got his eye on you Greg. He's mad at me because I'm not going to put the pressure on.»

Greg looked thoughtful. «Do you want money, Tom?»

«Hell, no. With me, that's the last thing in the world. It's been fun meeting you, and more than that, it's something I shall remember. I just don't want Jeff playing up. Will you do something for me, Greg?»

«Of course.»

«If I give you five pounds, will you give it back to me? Just push it into my pocket as though you were giving it to me, when he's looking at us, of course.»

«What good will that do?»

«It will make him think you've paid me. Then I'll slip him a couple of pounds later. Otherwise he'll spread it all over the ship that I'm a queeer.»

«Will that matter?»

«Probably not at all. The men are easy going and they all mind their own business. I don't think there are many of them who haven't had some experience in their lives. I just thought if he saw you giving me some money he mightn't cause any trouble.»

«When are you sailing?»

«The day after tomorrow, if the cargo is all loaded.»

«Going to stay with me tonight?»

«If you want me to I'd like to.»

«Good. We'll stay up here. The others will all go back fairly early. We'll go back in the morning, and I'll get you to work on time.»

«Suits me. I'll give you that money now.»

«No. We'll do it another way.»

«How?»

«I'll tell you tomorrow.»

«That might be a bit late.»

«It won't be. I've got another plan.»

«Tell me.»

«No. Just shut up. Want to come for a swim?»

After their swim they went back to the house. The others were packing and getting ready to leave. Greg poured drinks, and took one of them over to Jeff. He sat down by Jeff and talked pleasantly to him. He hoped that Jeff had enjoyed himself, and apologised if he had appeared to neglect him. From the other side of the room Tom wondered what was

going on, but made no attempt to join them. At the same time he could not help noticing the smug look on Jeff's face.

When the others had gone he helped Greg clean the place up. Greg produced steak from the refrigerator and Tom helped him prepare that also. They took mattresses out on to the patio and slept there, under the stars. At sunrise they left to drive back to Sydney. Greg dropped him off at the wharf gates.

«See you tonight?»

«Of course. What time?»

«About nine. Will you come to the flat?»

«Yes. But not earlier than nine?»

«No. I've got some business to attend to. Sure you can find the place?»

«Pretty sure. I wonder if Jeff will make trouble.»

«I doubt it.»

«You don't know him like I do. He's really mean.»

Greg gripped his hand. «It's been wonderful meeting you Tom. Look forward to meeting you later.»

He drove off before Tom could say any more.

Tom saw Jeff a few times during the day but it was not until they were dressing to go ashore in the evening that Jeff brought up the subject of the weekend.

«You didn't make out so well after all,» he said.

«I don't get you.»

«Forget it. What are you doing tonight?»

«Nothing much. Just filling in time. Where are you going?»

A sly grin passed over Jeff's face. «I've got a big date for tonight. I'll tell you all about it tomorrow.»

With that, Jeff went on his way, leaving Tom wondering. He had about four hours to fill in before he met Greg. He went ashore with Dick and they had a few drinks and a meal, and Tom excused himself when the time came for him to meet Greg. He took a tram to Point Piper and walked down the short tree-lined street to the block of flats. He was about to ring for the lift when the automatic doors opened and a figure staggered out. It was Jeff. One eye was black. His lip appeared to be split and he was bleeding from his nose. Tom was standing to one side of the foyer which was dark, so that Jeff did not see him. Jeff, unsteady like a drunken man, made his way unsteadily to the street. Tom checked an impulse to follow him. Jeff could only have come from Greg's flat and it was more urgent that Tom should get up to Greg without any delay. He knew what Jeff could do in a fight. The lift was maddeningly slow in its ascent.

The door of the apartment was open and Tom rushed in.

«Where are you, Greg?» he called.

«That you, Tom? You're a little early.» Greg's voice called from the bathroom.

«Are you all right, Greg?» Tom called as he rushed to the bathroom.

Greg was washing his hands. He ran a comb through his hair and dabbed cologne on his face.

«Jeff puts a high value on himself,» he remarked.

«I don't understand.»

«I met him this afternoon, gave him some drinks, and brought him back here.»

«Was this arranged?»

«Yes. I decided to teach him a lesson. He said he liked it here, and it would be a pity to smash the place up, but for a hundred pounds he would behave himself.»

«Wow! That's a lot of dough.»

«As it happens, boxing is the only form of sport I've ever been any good at, and the shearers on the property showed me a few tricks that aren't in the book of rules.»

«Jeff is considered quite a fighter, you know.»

«I wasn't impressed. This is your last night in Sydney?»

«Yes, and I'm sorry.»

«What do we do? Stay in, or go out.»

«I think we'll stay in. But Greg, I'm sorry about Jeff, the way he's behaved.»

Greg patted his slightly swollen lower lip and grinned.

«She's apples, mate,» he said.

THE END OF THE CIRCLE a comment from TANGENTS USA

EDITORIAL

«The proper goal of all homophile organizations is to put themselves out of business.» This statement was made at the recently-held third National Planning Conference of Homophile Organizations in Washington, D.C. by Hal Call, editor of the once widely read but no longer published *Mattachine Review* and president of the aging *Mattachine Society* of San Francisco. Strictly speaking of course, given a logical consistency of conduct, the successful completion of our efforts would bring about Mr. Call's desired result. However, no homophile organization that we are aware of is anywhere near such a state of accomplishing its purposes as to be now ready «to go out of business.» Many gay organizations have closed their doors, to be sure, since the start of the homophile movement, but none of them to our knowledge has done so on this account.

It is mainly because of the amount of work yet to be done in the field that we learn with distress that *DER KREIS* of Switzerland, the oldest of all existing homophile organizations, will not be able to continue its functions past the end of the year. The editors of *DER KREIS* have said: «For the first time in 35 years of publishing we are facing financial difficulties to such an extent that it seems next to impossible to go on publishing for 1968.»