

Sex is a sometime thing

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Der Kreis : eine Monatsschrift = Le Cercle : revue mensuelle**

Band (Jahr): **20 (1952)**

Heft 10

PDF erstellt am: **22.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-570114>

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Sex is a sometime thing

It was a fine evening in March. That is, it was fine for Manila, where the days were deadly with a sultry, tropical heat. But a breeze had sprung up soon after sunset, and as it swept coolly off Manila Bay the palms in front of the newly risen Manila Hotel stirred into loud and happy whisperings. The creamy new walls of the hotel shone brightly in the glare of the spotlights from the circular driveway and cast a reflected light on the flaming red cannas in their bright green beds. Taxis, luxurious sedans and American Army jeeps proceeded endlessly to the hotel steps, discharging handsome, brightly dressed Filipino women and their white-clad escorts. The brilliant civilians passed under the left portal towards the beautifully renovated ballroom, while the Army personnel jumped out of their jeeps and ducked right, into the bar.

Although it was only nine o'clock, the Oval Bar was beginning to fill with the Saturday night «regulars». Reggie, the very blond Australian Red Cross worker, was there with his two American friends. Known as the Inseparables, they were a good-looking lot: Ed, the tall, slim Air Force Captain, and Tom, who was a civilian employee at Nichols Field. But a great deal of their attractiveness would vanish when they had had a few drinks and they began their nightly «dishing» of others at the bar, especially any newcomer. However there was not even a flutter from them as Lt. Cooke, thin to the point of emaciation, sauntered in from the lobby, accompanied by a young corporal. Cooke, down from Clarke Field, was beginning his weekly binge in Manila. It had been duly noted some weeks before that Cooke and his cpl. wore plain gold wedding bands on their left hands, though the Inseparables KNEW they had never been married. When Jimmie, a pretty, young soldier, walked alone and rather self-consciously into the bar, Reggie moved his position between his two friends so that his back was toward the boy, for it was well known that Reggie had treated Jimmie shamefully after the last week-end they had spent together.

By ten o'clock all but two of the suwali woven chairs around the bar were filled — and not a new face among them. Reggie and his friends were forlornly telling each other that this was going to be one of those DULL nights when, with one accord, they stopped talking and their mouths hung open as a tall, handsome Marine came through the arched entrance, swaggered to one of the vacant chairs and ordered a drink. This well-fleshed apparition, which had caused the boys to stare, was not a «regular». Oh, he had been around, and his infrequent appearances at the bar were maddening enough, but they actually KNEW nothing about him. He further mystified them by talking to no one, sitting aloof like the young god he believed himself to be, and leaving alone.

Tonight, besides the «regulars», there were some heavy-set, middle-aged Army officers from bases miles from Manila, in town for a touch of civilization they missed from their homes in the States, some American business men and a sprinkling of Filipinos without women. THEIR

women weren't seen at public bars unless they were . . . well, like Maria, who was now standing uncertainly in the doorway. She had once been barred from the hotel bar for too un-subtle soliciting. But tonight the gates must have been down, for no one barred her way and she swept her dumpy but well-corseted figure into the room. Holding her heavy-featured head high, she aimed for the only vacant chair near the end of the bar. That the one next to it happened to be occupied by the handsome Marine Cpl. whose disturbing entrance had so upset the Inseparables seemed to Maria to be the height of good fortune. On the rare occasions when the cpl. had honored the bar with his attractive presence, she had been occupied elsewhere or there had been no vacant chair at his side. But hope sprang eternal in her middle-aged breast.

Maria settled her plump bottom on the suwali chair and, after extracting some American cigarettes from her black patent leather bag, ordered what was often her one drink of the evening. On slow nights she eased this drink along until closing time. On more fortunate occasions some lonely officer, drunk already, paid for the next one and maybe a few more or until he was too tight to realize how repulsive Maria was — then they left together. And tonight here she was sitting beside this Pride of the Marines at whom she looked longingly as she took the first short sip of her drink.

If the Marine Corps had ever gone in for male beauty contests, the young cpl. would undoubtedly have stood a good chance of being named «Handsome Marine in the Manila Area». Slim of waist, broad-shouldered and a little over six feet tall, his was the usual build of the American Adonis. His even-featured face was tanned, and though his black hair was cut crew fashion, on him it looked good. His most arresting features were his sea-blue eyes, heavily framed by black lashes, the length of which Joan Crawford might have envied. Although he was conscious that most of the bar habitués were staring at him, his cold eyes moved neither to right nor left. For the cpl. was one of that breed of too-handsome young men who believe implicitly that everyone is seeking to make use of their physical charms. Therefore he was coldly and mercenarily calculating upon whom to bestow them. It was true he had been in and out of a few beds in Manila, but too discreetly for any of this gang at the bar to know who the other occupants of those beds had been. But Reggie and his friends had heard rumors, and these stories had rankled in their breasts, for each of them had a separate and burning desire to share a bed with the Marine cpl. With the prescience that people of their sex have, they KNEW what the cpl. was. But this uncertain knowledge gave them no ease.

The Marine was beginning to show signs of annoyance. This hag on his right was trying to open a conversation with him. He was wondering just how much he could stand before turning a withering blast on her when his eyes caught the hurried entrance of a civilian. It was Ralph Enright who had rushed through the door in his usual agitated manner. He stopped short and let his bright grey eyes sweep the bar. They passed over the Inseparables, Lt. Cooke and his cpl., the other «regulars», but came to an abrupt halt upon the face of the Marine. Ralph was dismayed to find that the chairs on both sides of the cpl. were

taken — one, he noted with loathing, by that slut, Maria. With a sigh of resignation, he turned in behind Lt. Cooke, ordered a drink and began an animatedly casual conversation.

Enright, an executive for United Telegraph and Cable, was well-known to everybody who was anybody in Manila. In his well-equipped yellow station wagon he made the nightly rounds from the Metro on the waterfront by way of the Pink Elephant and the Manila Hotel to the swank El Cairo. At his beautifully appointed penthouse overlooking the ruined Walled City, he was known to entertain — and made no bones about it — certain good-looking members of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Merchant Marine. But up to now this certain Marine cpl. had eluded him.

But if the Marine was intrigued by this wealthy American, whose reputation he knew well, he carefully hid it. He knew, and he knew the «regulars» knew, why Ralph Enright had decided to stay at the Manila Hotel this night. But he was no fool, he thought, and decided to play another game for their benefit. Naturally he had had no intention of having even the most casual conversation with Maria, but now, with the eyes of the bar on him, he abruptly turned to the startled hussy and asked her to have another drink. Maria, nearly choking on the remains of her whiskey and water, readily assented. The cpl. then took one of the cigarettes, and the surprised onlookers saw them begin an animated conversation. All eyes took on a speculative look. The Inseparables were agitated. Enright looked sceptically at the wide-eyed Cooke. Young Jimmie even moved his melancholy gaze from the back of Reggie's yellow head. The agitation reached new heights as the Marine turned on as much of his vaunted charm as he deemed necessary and Maria bridled and wrinkled up her heavily powdered face in long, loud guffaws. Suddenly their two heads were close together and apparently Maria was whispering something invitational into the Marine's ear. For a moment his secretive eyes swept the bar, and when he was sure they were all looking, he nodded in assent. Maria, with a look of triumph at the «regulars» — she knew what desires were shooting around in those pretty heads — swept her cigarettes into her bag and slid off the stool, all in one motion. As she left the room, the Marine cpl. followed closely, looking neither to right nor left. That is, until he came abreast of Ralph Enright. There was an almost imperceptible flicker of the Marine's eyelid and he was gone.

The Inseparables were in a dither. There was much muttering, and Tom said he didn't see how ANYONE could sleep with a hag like that and that he had no respect for anyone who would. His friends realized that this was only a case of sour grapes, but it was wise Reggie who made the most pertinent remark. It was just a stab in the dark, but he was right.

Outside the hotel in the darkness near the end of the drive, where Maria had stopped to look for her car that was to carry them to her cool house in Cavite, the Cpl. was doing just what Reggie said he would.

«Here, you old bitch,» he said, thrusting toward Maria a ten peso note, «this is as far as we go. I don't need you any more.»

Maria grabbed the money, but before she could bring any words

out of her astonishment, the cpl. strode off toward Dewey Boulevard. In a moment a yellow station wagon flashed past the startled woman. She watched it pull up to the curb, the door open and a tall figure duck inside. As it drove off, Maria found her voice. It was full of Tagalog oaths, but she finished off in English something that sounded like, «The goddamned American son-of-a- . . .»

It would be difficult to know which one she meant.

J. W., U. S. A.

Nachklänge zum Herbstfest

Alles ist schon wieder verrauscht und verweht — das für uns «Auswärtige» so selten zu sehende festliche Bild so vieler froher Kameraden, die geschmackvoll dekorierten Räume, das Mitternachtskabarett, die ungezwungen und heiter Tanzenden, die Musik, alles schon wieder vorbei! Und wenn ich nun fern der Schweiz mich in meiner Bude hinsetze, um nochmals mit Euch zu plaudern, so geschieht dies aus einem grossen Gefühl des Dankes an alle, die mitgeholfen haben, den Fernstehenden wieder einen unvergesslichen Abend zu bereiten. Ihr, die Ihr ständig in Zürich seid, die Ihr jede Woche einmal zusammen kommen könnt, ganz unter Euch, in der beruhigenden Sicherheit, von niemand bespitzelt zu werden, nicht vielleicht doch mit zweifelhaften und unsauberen Elementen in den eigenen Reihen zusammen zu kommen — Ihr könnt nicht ermessen, was das für uns bedeutet! Ihr wisst nicht, wie wir Wochen und Monate zählen, bis sich wieder eine Gelegenheit gibt, unter Euch zu sein, ohne Maske, ohne falsche Konvention, ohne Angst, eines Tages doch von irgend jemand «entdeckt» zu werden. Wir fragen uns immer wieder: wo liegt der Grund, dass eigentlich so wenige Zürcher den Weg zu Euch finden, so wenige eigentlich Eure schöne Zeitschrift abonnieren? Hat wirklich der grösste Teil unter uns nur noch Sinn für das ewig wechselnde Abenteuer, das nie befriedigt und nie befriedigen kann, weil ihm das Wesentliche einer menschlichen Bindung, die Schwingungen des Herzens und der Seele fehlen? Ich verstehe das nicht. Jeder Mensch braucht doch irgendwo einen Platz, wo er sich zuhause fühlt, wo er ganz er selbst sein kann und darf und wo er Menschen findet, die gleichen Sinnes sind wie er. —

Im Programm gab es ganz herrliche Sachen! Die Lieder von Helmut, die Villons-Balladen von Georg, die Neger Spirituals in der wundervollen Stimme Diegos — unvergesslich! Aber auch der heiteren Muse dienten manche in bezaubernder Weise: Fred Alex aus München mit seinen Matrosenliedern, Frankie mit seinen Stepptänzen, Carlo und Guido mit ihren plastischen Bildern, Michael mit seinen Cabaret-Vorträgen, Rito als kapriziöse «femme de 1900», vor allem aber der umjubelte, kleine Röby. Hier wächst eine Begabung des kultivierten und geschmackvollen Frauendarstellers heran, um den man den Zürcher Kreis beneiden muss. So müssen die jungen Schauspieler an der Bühne Shakespeare's ausgesehen haben, die als Liebhaberinnen seine Komödien und turbulenten Lustspiele zu Triumphen führten. Hier kommt nicht einen Augenblick lang das Gefühl des Peinlichen und Unangenehmen auf, hier bleibt nur noch die köstliche Freude an der wirklich künstlerischen Verwandlung.

Vielleicht ist es Rolf ein anderes Jahr möglich, bei der einen oder andern Nummer noch kräftig zuzugreifen, zu straffen, nicht ganz Gelungenes umzumodeln. Aber was sind solche Kleinigkeiten gegen eine solche Fülle von liebenswürdigen und schönen Nummern! Und das Allerschönste: da oben stehen Laien und Künstler ein-