

About the little every-day pleasures

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*Sweet love, renew thy force; be it not said,
Thy edge should blunter be than appetite,
Which but to-day by feeding is allay'd,
Tomorrow sharpen'd in his former might:*

*So, love, be thou; although to-day thou fill
Thy hungry eyes, even till they wink with fulness,
To-morrow see again, and do not kill
The spirit of love with a perpetual dulness.*

*Let this sad interim like the ocean be
Which parts the shore, where two contracted new
Come daily to the banks, that, when they see
Return of love, more blest may be the view;
Or call it winter, which, being full of care,
Makes summer's welcome, thrice more wish'd, more rare.*

Shakespeare

About the little every-day pleasures

Are you unhappy?

Do you believe that in the long run real happiness is denied people like us, that a great life-long love will never come—yes, that the day which brings others so many little pleasures holds not even a smile for you? For a long time I have seen your distress, and often wanted to talk with you. But you know how many things there are to plague me, so many obligations, certainly unimportant from an outsider's point of view — but today I shall come a short way with you for just a short time . . .

But don't be angry if I ask you first of all to try a change of expression. To be sure, you are no longer a young sprout — neither am I — but still not so old that you must run around all the time with wrinkles of care on your brow and the corners of your mouth so drawn down that you look like a gaudy advertisement for a newly discovered headache remedy. See, you are already smiling at my not-especially-clever wit. And if you could look into a mirror right now, it would be clear to you how thankful you really should be that God fashioned you so from your birth. You don't need to look at me so astonished! Still I don't object, for in that manner your eyes take on a gleam which doesn't permit an on-looker to glance away so easily. Don't drop your gaze like a modest virgin! After all, you're a well-built man provided with that certain something which doesn't leave anyone cold who is a captive of the manly Eros. Just now, if you hadn't let your eyelids lower like a shade before the approaching sun, you wouldn't have missed that charming sun-tanned fellow in the tantalizingly tailored ski-pants and ingeniously well-fit sweater who just passed us and who looked you up and down. After all, God gave us eyes with which to look at the world and His creations.

Shall we go somewhere for a drink? OK? Fine!

No, not that dull restaurant in artificial homey-style there on the corner; furthermore they have only waitresses. One should not enjoy

the little every-day pleasures aimlessly. Let's go to the Verona Loft! Here's the bus-stop . . .

Why don't I take the front bus?

My friend, bus-riding has its adventures too! Didn't you see the surly, humdrum conductor who snarls at the passengers even as they climb in? A type of person who finds his work nothing but drudgery and who at home certainly never favors his wife with a single friendly word . . . or is a hen-pecked growler! . . .

Yes — two, please. Oh, that's thirty cents? Excuse me — there. Thank you. —

Did you notice what I did? A charming game with an attractive conductor. Naturally I've known for a hundred years what the fare is. I could have simply and stupidly handed over the change, as on a hundred occasions otherwise — but then this young man with the rougish face would not have looked at me, would simply have torn off the ticket and clanked the coins into the change-belt. This way, though, he was forced to look at me so that our eyes met for a moment. Fresh masculinity beamed at me. His full lips parted for several seconds. And in this brief act we took each other's measure. For several seconds we belonged to one another, completely alone in the whirl of a large city. For several seconds the god Eros smilingly held the balance in his hand . . . Isn't that enough to make the streets brighter and your heart lighter for today? A poet once said that every day was lost in which he didn't meet someone he would like to sleep with. This day is already won for me.

You're smiling? See, you should do that more often. I don't doubt that then your road would be brighter! Here we are!

Don't turn around now! The conductor is looking at us — and grinning. You hopped off the bus a bit too lightly! He's still looking — and just now he saluted very slightly and playfully, as if he had understood . . .

Naturally, you're right, that doesn't mean a thing. But what of it? It's a game that can be repeated every day if one keeps his eyes open, a game that ends differently every trip — like nights of love which can never be duplicated . . . Thank Heaven they can't!

Well, here's the Verona Loft.

See, the pseudo-homey-style hasn't caught on here, nor has the imitation South Seas, but the place is cozy in spite of the indefinite architecture.

No, one can't just sit down immediately in the first vacant chair in a bar. Here, too, one must proceed according to plan, though quick as a flash in order not to attract attention. This table, for instance, is very unfavorable; the little partition cuts off more than half the view. Furthermore Tony doesn't serve here, Paul does. He's a nice enough fellow, but no comparison with Tony. Paul is conventional, serves as he was taught, not too little, not too much; just the thing for any ordinary hotel. Tony, on the other hand . . . Hello, Tony! Two fizzes . . .

Yes, that was Tony. It's worthwhile coming here just on his account. The way this waiter straightens a chair, adjusts an ash-tray and flips his serviette — that alone is practically Latin, languid grandezza and a suppressed glow. The way this young god walks, the way he holds his head and, with a half-turn of the body, achieves the effect of a discus-

thrower . . . all of that belongs to those little every-day pleasures which you have apparently passed up all too often. When he puts down the glasses now, notice his hands — Thanks, Tony.

Naturally you gazed into his eyes, which promise with a pagan certainty all of the earthly raptures. So you missed the play of those hands; only in paintings by the old Italian masters will you find them in such perfection.

No, this is not «such» a bar, which only «such» men and youths frequent. Now and then you will also see loving-couples here, but they don't usually stay very long. In the atmosphere of this rather commonplace room something vibrates which remains strange to them. At that table, for example, are students from the college. I know a number of them who have not only read the first Dialogue of Plato's Symposium, but have experienced it and still do. Probably they will all marry and establish families some day, just as most of the boy-lovers in Ancient Greece did. The manly Eros was as unproblematic for them as for these students. They simple gave themselves over to Life in its puzzling and enchanting variety. Why search for explanations, confirmations and categories when the wonder of man's mutual fascination is concerned? Why be concerned with the sex when the soul and the senses say «yes»?

You maintain that you can only accept people who are unmistakably this way or that? You believe that they are the only happy people, because they have no dangerous tensions to reckon with? But in reality it's different. There are not only white and black, but innumerable shadings of color between the two poles. Well, I see that your head is spinning at the prospect opening before you. We had better go. Good-bye, Tony!

Spring is on the way at last . . . Don't you want to talk any more? All right, think it all over, but don't close up again. Look about you and you'll see that the beautiful youth, the well-built man is no rarity, especially in this country. These days, when the air intoxicates because it is saturated with the sweetness of bursting buds, Apollo and Hyacinthus, Ganymede and Zeus, David and Jonathan saunter in the streets once again. God created Man in His own image. Didn't He create the male first, the earthly form which fascinates, transfigures, bewilders and blesses us above all others, which makes us hungry and thirsty and miserable, but which always takes us out of ourselves and makes us seek the Other, without whom we become only more miserable and parched? . . .

The time is up. I must get back to work. Good-bye for now! At least you no longer show wrinkles of care and a mouth turned down at the corners. Your eyes have already measured cautiously a number of passers-by; one of them is already smiling back. You know now that that is one of those moments which belong to you and him, even if you never see each other again. Don't, in any way, betray yourself to the crowd, but keep on playing the merry game! A brightening face, a greeting with the eyes, an enchanting mouth which opens ever so slightly . . .

Little every-day pleasures! Don't forget them!

So long !

Rolf.

Translated from the April, 1948, issue.