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THE TART

by O. F. SIMPSON

For my sins I am a psychiatrist, 31, Giles Palmer by name, not much to look at, keen to distraction on my work and—they tell me—beginning to make a sort of name for myself at it. It may make you laugh to hear that most of my successes have been with hysterical young female neurotics: for some reason I seem to be able to quieten them down and get results with them that no one else can. Patience? Extra sympathy perhaps? I don't know. But I do know, or at least am convinced, that my interest in young men's bodies is not due solely to my being homosexual—it is some sort of obscure compensation for the hours I spend trying to straighten out twisted young female minds. Almost ever since my student days drawing has been my hobby; in the past ten years I have sampled most of the big London art schools as a more or less faithful evening class student. I have patiently committed to paper day by day the models, male and female, presented to me—the girls often very beautiful, the men uniformly dreary.

Being of rather an unimaginative temperament, it was only two years ago that I first thought of looking round for a male model on my own account—a simple idea, it may seem to you, but in London, where the profession of artist's model is not honoured, not so simple as all that. The fact is there are none: British boys and youths are some of the best looking in the world, but to get even one of them to overcome his native shyness and laziness and pose naked for you is like wading through thick treacle. I won't weary you with the advertisements I drafted for the newspapers, or with the appalling selection of pin-money waiters, out-of-work actors and students on holiday who paraded their appalling bodies in front of me, hoping I would be impressed enough to hire them: it all makes quite a funny story, but one that will keep.

I want to get straight on to Peter Gaul who eventually, when I was in despair, wrote in saying he was 19 and used to posing nude, and sending two photos. These showed a slight, shy-looking youth, who had, however, the one quality all the others so far had lacked—what I can only describe as *grace*. I made a date with him, he came, I saw, and was conquered. His body was beautifully made, though slight to the point of thinness, his waist no more than 25 inches (I measured it), and he was obviously still growing. He moved about with the catlike poise of a true athlete, his legs were absolutely straight (how rare!) and his skin shone with the silky sheen of complete health. I quickly got out of him that it was a lie about his ever having posed before—this was indeed his first job—but he was otherwise extremely silent, though always completely cooperative. I could hardly get another word out of him till our third session. I was drawing him face down on the bed, head on arms, with his legs apart, and I thought I'd try a bit of flattery:

«Peter, I'd say those must be about the nicest pair of male legs anywhere in London.»

His reply was mumbled into the pillow: «Well, how do you know—have you seen them all?» and I felt rather choked off.

But all in all it was a promising encounter—which makes it all the

odder that within a week or two I had forgotten all about him. Pressure of work at the hospital suddenly became terrific just then and there were three or four cases which demanded hourly care; very soon afterwards I had to go to Italy to lecture, and when I got back I had to start moving house. Once I thought I might start drawing but found I'd lost Peter's address, and I heard no more from him, even though I had sent him a card at Christmas.

It was all of two years before I again found by chance the paper on which I had written Peter's address, and having a little more spare time, I wrote to him. My memory of him having got a bit fonder in two years, I added something to my letter about wanting to have him as a friend as well as a model. Without any special comment on this, he rang me up, said he was very pleased to hear again and made a date to visit me.

He came in black jeans and a tight cherry pink pullover, on top of which his sunbrown face, two glittering eyes and tousled mop of untidy black hair made up an extremely attractive picture. But I was completely unprepared for the vision that met my eyes when I next looked up from sharpening my pencils and saw the jeans in a heap on the ground and Peter standing naked in front of them. Gone was all his boyishness—he had thickened out into a really gorgeous young male at the peak of his masculine good looks. His shoulders, arms, chest and thighs were all corded with new muscle, and the whole was knit together into a rarely perfect harmony of body and personality, which to my mind left the endless grinning huskies of the physique journals streets behind.

I went to work on this splendid creature with a will and through several sessions made what I thought some excellent drawings of him. We began to talk idly of this and that, and to know each other better—or so I thought. But at our fourth session the storm blew up suddenly.

I thought I'd take the big plunge with him: «Look here, Peter, I don't believe in beating about the bush. I'm fond of you, and want you to come and stay the night here with me. O.K.?»

«O.K. It'll cost you ten pounds.»

I was shocked. «Oh, so I see you're nothing but a mercenary little tart after all?»

He sat up at once. «Less of that, please. If I hear you use that word again about me, I'll give you the most fearful beating you've ever had in your life. See?»

A pause. Then I ventured lightly, and perhaps somewhat incautiously: «Well, it still seems to me, if you want to sell me your body for money, tart is about the word for it.»

He leapt at me in a flash, his black eyes mad with fury, forced my head over the back of the sofa where I was sitting, lay across me and began to squeeze and shake my throat in his hands. He certainly was as strong as a tiger. Every second the constriction of his fingers round my neck got worse. Some people might think it a perfect way to have the life slowly choked out of you by a beautiful boy lying naked on top of you—but I have many things I want to do before I finally kick the bucket; so I kneed him up sharp and hard in the groin (being naked has certain disadvantages) and toppled him right over my head onto the

floor behind me. There he lay gasping and writhing with the pain, spitting curses at me too with a flow of fishporter's invective I would certainly never have expected from so calm and reserved a boy. Not that it mattered. I had suddenly realized that I loved him and longed for him, and for that reason thought it more seemly to let him recover in peace. I went out into the next room.

After five minutes I came back to find him still lying on his back on the floor, but calmer. I knelt by him, put my hand on his thigh, and spoke as urgently as I knew how: «Look here, Peter, hasn't anyone ever told you about love? About the affection and trust that can exist between two human beings who know each other completely, bad and good, and what a wonderful relationship it is? The love that 'suffereth long and is kind'—but I don't suppose you fellows ever read the Bible nowadays. I know I'm not much of a catch for you—ten years older than you, and nothing special physically, I'll admit; but then you too have to admit something—that you won't always be able to get by on your looks. You'll probably run to fat by the time you're thirty, develop a rocky heart or something»—I could see him wince at this—«and perhaps then it won't be a bad thing to have someone around the place who's fond of you and used to you, even someone as self-centred and abstracted as I know that I am. From what you've told me about your poor lodgings; why not move in here where there's lots of room, and let's make a go of it together? You've got to think some time about the future, you know, and I'm pretty sure we'd get on O.K., and I could give you a spot of the comfort and support you need. At least that's what I'd plan to do,» I ended lamely, so set and bitter was the look on his face as he continued staring down at the floor.

Then suddenly, with a toss of the head: «Oh, be your age, Giles,» he came back to me. «You ask, haven't they told me about love? Well, haven't they told *you* about *lust*? And are you honestly trying to kid me you're interested in anything whatever but my body—as one of my clients so elegantly puts it, in «finding your peace between a boy's thighs»? If I was a cripple, would you have looked twice at me? If I got smashed up in an accident on that scooter of mine you laugh at so, would you still want to talk to me?»

«Yes, I would. Of course I would.»

«Well, I don't damn well believe it. Look, I know the world a whole lot better than you, psycho or no psycho. My world's a place where they pay me twentyfive pounds a go to see me dance my little dog-whip dance naked—it lasts precisely five minutes—five pounds a minute, mark you, to come and entertain the Maharaja of Blank or the Ambassador of Somewhere Else that evening, and send in my bill to the manager in the usual way—I leave you to guess what entertaining a Maharaja means, and Ambassadors aren't much different, white or black. My world's a place where you get modelling work from the advertising agencies if you're willing to roll about on the sofa with the photographer afterwards; if not willing, they use another boy who is. My world's Piccadilly Circus after dark, where I've only got to stand stock still in a pair of tight old jeans admiring the lights and in five minutes I've picked

up a man, to take home if I want him—and have fun being hellish bloody rude to, if I don't. My world's parties where clever people try to make me tight, and usually end up tighter than me, so they're fair game. My world's art schools where the girl students send me little notes saying I can have them any time I want; and when older women do that, they put money in their letters as well—which I'm always glad to take off them. While as for the mush I get as fan mail from the gents who take my body in the form of my nude figure studies, that'd certainly make your eyes pop right out.»

For a moment he paused for breath in this horribly sardonic indictment of our civilization, then came to his climax, almost shouting: «Anyway I can assure you I know, positively *know* that one way or another the world wants one thing only out of me, and that's the free use of my naked body. And if it suits me for them to have it, I sell it to them. And if you want it, I'm selling it to you too—and not too dear either, because I rather like you. I'll spend the night in your bed with you for ten pounds exactly. No more, no less. Now I'm going, thanks very much for half killing me. If you want me to come again, I will, and I never let people down on dates; but you know just where you stand.»

He got to his feet and began to pull on his jeans. Was it the Piccadilly Circus pair, I wondered to myself—they certainly left nothing of his figure to the imagination.). And so we made a date for the next Friday evening late, and after a rather awkward silence while he finished dressing—we had both talked ourselves to a standstill—I saw him out.

«Be seeing you, Peter.»

«Ten pounds,» he grinned back at me. «And I'm *not* a tart. Tarts have no choice; I always choose for myself.»

I ignored this. «You just think about all I've been saying, boy.»

«O.K. We'll see.» He straddled his little red Lambretta and raced off at high speed round the square. I tried to read some message of hope for myself into the rising whine of its exhaust as he accelerated; but I had to admit the sound was more like the savage mockery of a devil—the maddening boy-devil who rode it.

*

All this was three days ago. It is now Friday evening, and I have scribbled these things down while I sit waiting for his ring at the bell. I know he'll certainly come—he was right when he said he never let people down on dates; he is always entirely scrupulous about doing what he says he'll do, or letting you know if he can't. But will my remarks have made any effect on him? Am I resting too much on that parting «We'll see», to suppose he might be thinking again about it all? Or was it just good manners? Because the strangest paradox about him, to me, is that in spite of all his brashness underneath, his absolutely candid amorality, his steelhard 1960 paganism, his inconveniently well-developed commercial sense, his all-consuming physical vanity—in spite of all these things, he is on the surface such a well-mannered, soft-spoken, delightfully intelligent boy. Is it through that very intelligence I shall win him in the end? Perhaps it's after all my best hope that I may have frightened him a bit about the future, and that he might come to see

I could offer him something in the way of security, and might begin to like the idea. But whether it is really love or lust between us, I'm utterly confused in my own mind about that now.

Still, after all I'm a realist. So I don't mind admitting to you that in the back pocket of my slacks at the moment there repose two crisp new five-pound notes. Just in case. He's so breathtakingly desirable.

Adjustment and Maladjustment

We ventured to dip a shy toe into Freudian waters in our piece on the subject of Rejection. A reader who recently asked a stranger up for the traditional cup of coffee and discovered he was entertaining an analyst unawares, has informed us that his bed guest remarked before leaving that he was remarkably well-adjusted—for an invert.

This gave us literary pause and we decided to try a bit of furtive analysis as to the effect of adjustment and maladjustment in various individuals upon their success or failure in the *boîtes de passe* de Manhattan.

A trained eye, one suspects, could almost spot into which category a given cat belonged upon his first entrance into the little den of iniquity. The manner of walking (free or tight), the expression of the face (open or closed) the attitude to the bartender, above all, the extroverted or introverted look with which he meets the eyes of his nearest of sexual kin—all may betray whether he be a liberated soul or an imprisoned one.

The maladjusted queen—dare we make a guess?—is filled with a sense of guilt which makes him reject an approach which is too free, easy and rapid. He needs to feel that his *compagnon de la chasse* is just as guilt-ridden as he is, and can only draw near the \$ 64,000 question by means of an involved hesitant prelude on the subject of the weather, the news, the current book, the latest films, the state of the theatre or, even, per adventure, the baseball season.

All this preliminary reconnoitering is required to reassure the true maladjusted invert that he is in the presence of someone as subtle and circumspect as himself. He is too often, poor thing, like a golden-winged warbler who will mate only with another golden-winged warbler, lest he commit the error of mating with a blue-winged warbler and producing the hybrid called a Brewster's Warbler. (Brewster, *ça va sans dire*, was as gay as a Christmas Tree). He may subconsciously long for such a rash experience as to mate not only with a blue-winged warbler, but even perhaps with a butcher bird—but his guilt will cause him to repel anyone who is too contrasted a type and who approaches him in too direct, blunt and frank a manner. One genteel maladjusted invert, dressed in becoming seersucker, is reported to have had a stroke in the Annex, when a muscle man with tattooed arms and blue jeans who had somehow got in there by mistake walked up to him and said, «Hey, wanna get laid?»

If, however, two such tender warblers, each equally miserable, do miraculously manage to go home together, the inhibited host really will produce the night-cap or the cup of coffee which has provided the subterfuge of invitation . . . and a further half or three quarters of an hour of circuitously feline approach may transpire before he has the audacity to lay hands upon his delicate prey.

At this moment an abrupt and violent change of pace can occur. The fearful, guilty, repressed souls may all at once turn into two hungry, yearning gasp-