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The Tides of Love

It was much too early. Still two whole hours before the boat-train from Dover was due. «Damn this restlessness,» thought Andreas. «It was foolish to have left the house so soon.» Much better to walk the streets than to pace the station platform for two hours. So at Tottenham Court Road he left his Victoria Station bus. A stranger among the throng of strangers, he turned down Charing Cross Road. «But tonight things will be different,» he thought. «We two together walking the streets of London side by side . . .» Side by side, yes — but in step? Really together? Uncertainty almost spoiled the joy of expectation.

At the National Gallery he crossed the thoroughfare and descended the broad steps leading into Trafalgar Square, feeling for a moment dwarfed by the enormous scale of building, street and stairs. In the dimming light of late afternoon the Western sky was a creamy reddish gold. The air was mild. Andreas seated himself on a bench. Most of the benches were empty now. Even the greedy pigeons had gone away. The first shadows of evening lightly veiled the huge column in the middle of the square. Now and then a strolling couple passed. Sometimes a guardsman in his tight-fitting uniform sauntered by and once in a while there was a group of them, moving in an aura almost flagrantly male. But all was lost upon Andreas absorbed in a turmoil of disjointed thoughts. Only when he stirred to light a cigarette and realized that the palms of his hands were damp with sweat did he awaken again to his everyday surroundings. And back in the everyday world again it was his normal, perceptive self who cried, «I am afraid!» And now the sweat of anxiety seeped forth all over him. And the inner tension of his love and his fear became so intense that he began to shiver. He rose abruptly. «No sense in sitting here. Better to walk to the station, all the way, than to sit sweating and trembling here.»

Slowly Andreas walked down Whitehall. His eyes saw but, again, his mind was blind. Horse Guards, Downing Street, Westminster, all the pride of London was meaningless to him. Only the tolling of Big Ben reached into him, for it seemed the voice of fate and history and in the midst of his chaotic thoughts, in spite of them, Andreas realized that at last, in the small orbit of his life, he had come to feel the full force of destiny and time.

Andreas . . . Albrecht . . . five years apart . . . and all the enchanted, anguished years before . . . And with the voice of Big Ben ringing in his ears, Andreas knew that his whole span of life was just a fleeting moment. And yet . . . and yet . . . one history is all history, one destiny is all destiny and each man is a world . . . Andreas . . . Albrecht . . . five years apart . . . And now? But why was he coming if he did not care? It was a long trip to undertake just to see a friend. Of course he cared! Andreas cursed himself for his foolish fears.

Looking back over the years, the tortuous years since they were students together, Andreas confessed to himself, not for the first time, that he couldn't understand. Out of all the undergraduates at the university why had it been Albrecht and not another? And why himself for Albrecht, that was the most mysterious thing of all. There had been so many others who were more intelligent handsomer, endowed with more magnetism — yet it had been to himself that Albrecht was powerfully drawn. But who can understand such things? It had been the confluence of two destinies. Yes, fate, for Andreas, wore Albrecht's face and form. Andreas accepted it. But Albrecht had always been at war with

fate. No, that was not true. He flirted with it, courted it — then ran away. No, no . . . that wasn't true either. It was just that Albrecht struggled with a more complicated destiny. Or perhaps all of these things were true to some degree. But of what good was such sterile analysis? This Albrecht, this professional man, this married man of middle age moved in an ambience which for Andreas was Cathay, the Indies, Eden. Yes, yes. «And Albrecht is the angel with the flaming sword as well as Paradise. Sometimes . . . And sometimes the flaming sword changes into a flame of love . . . Sometimes . . .» And this time which would it be?

In their student days when they had lived together and freedom had been theirs for the taking, their love smouldered unacknowledged and unspoken. When at last it had burst into flame Albrecht was married. The fire in Andreas burned clear and smokeless. He seemed to have the soul of a salamander. But Albrecht's fire was murky, smoky, like that which once consumed the heretics. If he slaked the desire which burned in him for Andreas he was plunged into a hell of remorse, to escape from which he fled back to the haven of his marriage, only to be seared by his wife's jealousies and reproaches — which drove him once more into the arms of Andreas.

In the beginning, when their passion was a new and wonderful discovery, to each of them an amazing self-discovery as well as a revelation of the other, the portal which they had thrust open revealed vistas of happiness hitherto unimagined. Neither of the young men had dreamed that life could hold such richness of experience, such intensities of passion. Andreas knew with certainty that through Albrecht's love he had at last found himself. He accepted all the hardships and hazards of the long voyage on uncharted seas, he yielded his soul to Albrecht's captaincy, believing that Albrecht alone could direct his hitherto aimless life along its destined course.

In the beginning the two young men were inseparable, even as they had been in their student days. Scarcely a day passed when they did not meet. Andreas was a constant visitor in Albrecht's home. Albrecht frequently came to Andreas' quarters. They went on little trips together, the two of them. Albrecht's wife had accepted the long-standing friendship placidly, if not with enthusiasm. But slowly her jealousy and opposition were aroused. Then there had been a letter from Andreas to Albrecht which she had read. Her vague suspicions now took concrete form. Before long her reproaches and recriminations bore bitter fruit; half defiantly, half remorsefully Albrecht told her the truth. Unable to achieve understanding or to arrive at any peaceful *modus vivendi* by their own ceaseless efforts, the desperate young couple finally turned to religion as a last resort. Undoubtedly, Albrecht loved his wife. Undoubtedly, he loved Andreas as well. But from that time on Andreas never knew whether Albrecht would come to him as a friend or as an enemy, whether he would appear brandishing the flaming sword or proffering, beseechingly, the flame of love. And all their meetings were surreptitious after that. The joy that they had found in each other's arms became increasingly a desperate kind of joy, and as the months and years dragged on those despairing joys became less and less frequent in the context of an uneasy and often discordant relationship. Yet there could be no doubt about Albrecht's need for Andreas, for even his denials and repudiations were hot and passionate, and always, he returned. And the stout core of reality in their love kept alive, in spite of everything, Andreas' visionary hope that somehow, some day

the pattern of what their relationship was meant to be would emerge and that they would at last find harmony and happiness. To Andreas Albrecht's love was all in all.

But life was as unthinkable to Albrecht without his wife as without Andreas. The very fact that she could not give him children made her the more solicitous of him in her love, and he, increasingly, of her.

During the war years Andreas and Albrecht seldom met. Andreas was in the service throughout the war while Albrecht worked at home as a production engineer. Their few reunions were, however, the happiest that they had known for years. Andreas had lost everything in the war; his parents, his house, his money, all was gone. Albrecht's wife was not a cruel woman and, knowing that her husband was all that Andreas had left, she acquiesced to the brief wartime meetings of the friends. The years of personal desperation, the time of national desperation through which they were passing had left their mark upon the two men, yet, in each other's company, in each other's arms they were once again two youths — and in truth, love gave to both of them a flush, a sparkle, a renewed physical bloom. To Andreas it was nature's benediction on their love. But Albrecht spoke of God and the Devil, of sin and Faust . . . Andreas knew that Albrecht had been happy with him nonetheless.

But after the war it was not long before the old deadlock, the old stalemate reestablished itself. Andreas, reaching the middle of his life, looking forward, looking back, could not bear to face a future such as the past had been. If the thought of life without Albrecht was desolating, the vision of moving ahead into old age in the grip of that sterile dilemma often brought him to the borders of panic. His decision to go to England had demanded more courage than any of his experiences in the war, or rather, it was a different, a higher courage which he summoned up when he made that drastic move. With the elasticity which was his most important weapon in life's struggle he had built himself a new existence, though he was no longer young. Viewed from the outside and by material standards his new life was a Spartan one, but the severe losses he had suffered had taught him much. He had found a modest job in London. He had come to love the great city and had learned to adapt himself to its people and their ways. Living in a succession of rooming houses for the first few years he had found a bit of companionship among his fellow lodgers, had drifted into ephemeral friendships, mostly with men as rootless as himself. Now, for over a year he had had a flat in the north of London, a place of his own again. His home was his castle, even more than it is to most Englishmen. Within the protection of those walls he felt free for the first time in many years. In solitude and privacy his fragmented life seemed to knit into a whole once more, his battered self began to heal. But it was lonely there.

Yes, he had written to Albrecht, who had of course replied. Their correspondence no longer contained the passionate extravagances of their youth, but sometimes there was a new lightning in their words, the flash of hard-won truth, not that pseudo-truth which is the propaganda of lovers and politicians alike, but the truth which is uttered simply because it happens to be true. As in the old days they bared their inmost thoughts to one another, but now they were measured thoughts, scrupulous thoughts, and they no longer strived to influence.

It had been Albrecht who had proposed this meeting which was drawing Andreas towards Victoria Station to meet the boat train even now. And Al-

brecht's wife had consented to it, what was more. At first Andreas had dreaded their reunion as much as he had wanted it. He was even angry with his friend for wishing to revive something which had brought so many years of torment to them both. But in the end his loneliness had made him write to Albrecht — «... Come»

He reached the station half an hour before the train arrived. As he paced the platform, more than once he was tempted to flee. He couldn't have said why. What kept him there was not so much the anticipation of any joy — although a joyous reunion was not impossible, for as unhappy as much of the past had been there had also been much joy — but rather the conviction that what lay just ahead was something that had to be. He thought of the train rushing through the dusk, bringing Albrecht closer to him by the moment. His mind took a backward look at those five, long, lonely years, and with Albrecht already so near he dared to realize in full what an inhuman horror they had been. Oh God! What if Albrecht didn't come? The wild hammering of his heart-beat almost stopped his breath.

Finally the train arrived and slowly eased to a stop in its appointed slot. Slowly Andreas made his way down the platform examining each compartment as he went. There were not many passengers, he needn't fear missing Albrecht in the crowd.

There! Suitcase beside him, there stood his friend!

Andreas' feet nearly refused to take those few last steps.

The train, the station, the hurrying people, the very platform on which he stood, — suddenly everything in the world became unreal. All meaning, all value was concentrated in that tall familiar form, that broad familiar smile.

Then suddenly he found himself entering Albrecht's open arms. Albrecht's face was close and large and blurred, his lips bent down upon his own . . .

Their embrace was not brief, perhaps it was long, Andreas didn't know. What he did know was that it was frank and free. And he knew that Albrecht shivered at his touch. When they drew apart they stood looking at each other, silently, half-smiling, their faces strangely, beautifully sensitized. Albrecht raised his hand and touched Andreas' cheek, as if to convince himself that he was real. Then they both laughed. They walked down the station platform arm in arm.

An hour later they stood at the entrance to Andreas' flat. As he opened the door Andreas realized that no one had ever entered this private world of his before. For the first time other steps than his own would be coming and going through his rooms. He felt a little timid, now. He had been alone so long, there was so much pent-up hunger for companionship. And companionship needs an element of casualness. But how could he be casual? His emotion was so great he wondered if he would be able to control it, he wondered if he would be able to bear the nearness of a beloved.

The door of the sitting-room closed behind them. The fire was burning cozily in the open fireplace. The tall lamp lighted the room softly and cheerfully. Albrecht abandoned his suitcase in the middle of the room and again took Andreas in his arms, with a sound that was half a sigh and half a moan. This time their embrace was a little savage: urgent, possessive, imperious. When at last they withdrew, all disarrayed and grinning at each other, Andreas thought to himself, «He has pent-up emotions of his own.»

«I suppose you'd like to clean up a bit before we have our tea?» he asked.

«I suppose I would.» Albrecht laughed. «I really don't know. I suppose I'm filthy but I don't much care.»

«Well, tea's all ready but for heating the water. You might as well wash up while I'm setting things out.»

«How can you be so sane at a time like this?»

«You think I am?»

While he was busying himself with the tea Andreas found himself wondering already when Albrecht's crisis of remorse would come this time. But he firmly thrust such thoughts away from him.

When they sat down Andreas felt too over-stimulated to eat a bite but Albrecht attacked the meal with such ravenous enjoyment that Andreas found his friend's appetite contagious. They sat on long after the plates were empty, the conversation veering from one topic to another. Details of Albrecht's trip, conditions in the homeland, books, musical events in England and on the continent. But at last, after Andreas had cleared away, they pulled easy chairs up close to the open fire. Their mood became quieter. Layer after layer, the superficialities dropped away. The conversation narrowed but deepened. They gradually assumed their own special frame of reference again. Now each of them could mention, in passing, events, experiences and lines of thought they had shared twenty years previously with the certainty that the other would remember and understand.

And for Andreas every well-remembered gesture, the sound of his friend's dark voice, his irregular yet so finished features glowing duskily in the fire light, made the passage of the years a preposterous irrelevancy. «Love can banish time,» he thought. «Love can abolish it.» He knew quite well that he was succumbing to an illusion, yet somewhere there was a germ of truth in the illusion.

It was late when they made up their minds to go to bed. Before Albrecht's arrival Andreas had set up a folding cot for his own use at the foot of his bed, not knowing what Albrecht's state of feeling towards him was going to be and wishing their reunion to be unspoiled by any disharmony. When Albrecht entered the bed room he surveyed the arrangement. Then he turned to Andreas:

«Why the cot?»

«I wasn't sure . . .»

«Not sure?» Albrecht made a wry grimace. «Well, I *have* been a pretty unpredictable mate . . .»

«After all, five years are a long time. One oughtn't to take too much for granted after five years.»

Things were now a little strained, reverberations from the troubled past were in the air. It was Albrecht who moved to set them quite right again.

«Really, you know, there's scarcely room to turn around with that thing cluttering up the place. Can't we just fold it up and stow it away? If I had to circumnavigate that cot in the middle of the night I'd break my neck.»

Andreas laughed and together they busied themselves with the removal of the cot.

Yet, as they fumbled with the blankets and bed linen, folding them up, as they wrestled with the cot, Andreas realized that he was still beset by fear, a deeper fear. He had been alone so long. He wanted to be close to Albrecht more

than anything in the world. His whole being seemed one mighty longing now, so that he scarcely knew where he was or what was going on, but at the same time he was filled with an agonizing dread and he realized that it was the basic dread, the essence of the thing which had been tormenting him all day long. He knew already that once they had gone to bed he could no more embrace Albrecht than he could have brought himself to grasp a red hot iron. As though all strength had left him he sat down suddenly on the edge of the bed and looked up at his friend. He could not speak. His heart was pounding wildly. His limbs were leaden. Did Albrecht understand that it was impossible for him to act? Would Albrecht mistake this paralysis of fear for coldness? Would he fail to understand the enormous longing which this utterly irrational terror held enchained?

Andreas did not know how clearly his anguish showed upon his face, how clearly his dejected posture informed his friend that everything was up to him. Impulsively Albrecht came and stood above him, gently rumbled up his hair.

«Do stop worrying and tormenting yourself. I am with you. Wholly with you. Everything is going to be all right,» Albrecht said in a low voice.

«I'll try,» Andreas said almost in a whisper. He stood up. He raised his arm, touched Albrecht's hair. Then he turned away and started to undress. He hoped that Albrecht hadn't sensed how difficult that touch had been.

Albrecht undressed quickly, as if he were quite at home. And there was a little impatience in his movements too. «How good to be rid of clothes! Especially clothes one's travelled in.» He stretched himself. Then he crossed the room and threw himself on the bed.

The habits of self-discipline are not as easy to discard as clothes. Andreas found himself trying not to look at Albrecht, fighting the attraction of that dark-skinned body. Perhaps most of all he feared the emotional turmoil which had so often followed their pleasure in the past. «A burnt child dreads the fire,» he reminded himself. Now he felt more like the moth than the salamander. But this was absurd! He was behaving like an inexperienced boy. He gave Albrecht a troubled look. Albrecht responded with a quick smile, full of concern, tenderness a bit of amusement, and smouldering in his eyes was some quality at once dark and electrical. Andreas went to him.

«Which side do you usually sleep on?» Albrecht asked.

«The side you're on, if you really want to know.»

Albrecht heaved himself over to the other half of the bed and Andreas took the warm spot he had just vacated. But Albrecht left one arm extended to encircle his friend. Now they lay side by side, their thighs touching, Andreas' head resting on Albrecht's upper arm. They did not speak. They scarcely moved. But as the minutes passed Andreas' fears began to melt gradually away. His breathing became quieter. And before long the old familiar feeling stole over him — he was once again where he belonged, he had come home. It seemed a brief eternity of bliss, a moment, yet forever, both at once. Then Albrecht raised himself on his elbow, bent over him and kissed him lightly yet firmly on the lips. Andreas' arms reached out for him, enclosed him. And that was the end of all fears, hesitations, reserves.

It was late when they finally separated. Albrecht's fit of remorse hadn't taken place. He appeared to be peacefully happy, without even the mild depression which in the past had always followed their lovemaking even when he managed

to avoid a tormenting sense of guilt. And as for Andreas, for the first time in years he was free of the insomnia which plagued his nights. When he awoke the next morning he felt not only rested but healed, restored, increased.

The days that followed were leisurely but full. Like clouds in a windy sky they seemed to move slowly but in fact they sped. London was having an early Spring and the mild weather enabled the friends to roam all over the huge city every day. Andreas' years of lonely and restless wandering through London had equipped him to be an expert guide and he showed Albrecht not only the usual sights that tourists see but also took him to innumerable curious and beautiful corners which he had discovered for himself. The theatres were a great temptation too, and it was often late at night before they turned towards home. But always before they descended to take the tube they sauntered arm in arm along the whole length of Tottenham Court Road, quietly enjoying the sweet flavour of the day just passed, content in their companionship in the midst of the bustling crowd. Then, after the tube had rushed them far to the city's north, the escalator discharged them into a different world, all the restlessness of the big city was left behind, they entered again a world of almost rural peacefulness.

Perhaps that surrounding peace and quietude helped to create the dreamy, ivory-tower mood which possessed them every night when they had regained Andreas' flat. But undoubtedly the serene happiness which enveloped them there was mostly due to the effortless union they had found in one another's arms. It was nothing they had striven for, this time. There had been no problems to discuss, no negative, rejective feelings on Albrecht's part either to protest against or painfully to bear. And Andreas' early fears had melted quite away. At the same time he was curious to know what had wrought the great and quite unforeseen change in Albrecht. For in spite of all the prized familiar traits a new Albrecht was now living at his side, a man he seemed never to have known before. Passion there had always been, and enthusiastic intellectual intercourse. But now there was a gentleness in their intimate life which was entirely new.

Late one night at the end of their first week together Albrecht raised himself on one elbow and looked down at Andreas lying beside him.

«I love you.»

«I believe it.»

«Perhaps you've wondered why things are so different this time.»

«Yes.»

«I've wanted to tell you. But most of all I've wanted simply to love you. We used to talk so much about our troubles in the past and it never got us much of anywhere.»

«I've wondered what happened to bring about this change.»

«It isn't easy to explain . . . After you'd been away a couple of years I realized that I still thought about you very often, and still missed you. And then I began to remember. So many things . . . You haunted my mind for days on end. You haunted my body too. Any bond which can last so long, without any laws or customs to reinforce it, well, it must be something very real. Gradually I came to realize that I had never taken this reality quite seriously. I did not understand the nature of this attraction, this tie. I came to see that because it was a thing I had never understood I had made the great mistake of doubting its reality. I believed in the ideas of the moralists. I believed in the theories of the psychologists. To me those ideas were real. But the longings I have felt for you

in my flesh, and in my heart — I did not believe in them, my dear. In the years we've been parted I came to realize more and more what a madness I've been living in. Putting intellectual formulas ahead of life itself, believing in the moral code of primitive Jews and superstitious Romans as if their ideas possessed greater reality than the longings of my body and my heart. It was madness! And as the years passed I began to marvel more and more at this mysterious thing which has made us dear to each other through all these years, in spite of all obstacles, in spite of all my craziness. I *marveled* at the power and persistence of this bond, do you hear! And at last I understood, not just with my head but with my whole being, that the love between us is a fact, a fact, you understand? It is a reality. It is a truth that Andreas and Albrecht have loved each other, body and soul, for two thirds of their life span. And because it is a mystery and a marvel doesn't make it one whit less true and real.»

«That's the way I've felt about it almost from the first.»

«Yes. I realized that, at last. Yet, do you know, all through the years I've felt morally superior to you, in spite of the countless times I succumbed to «temptation» with you. Andreas, I've been so ashamed of that self-righteousness. It was so horribly, disgustingly false. How could you have put up with me all these years?»

«I love you.»

Albrecht was silent. He looked away, across the room. Then he gently took Andreas' hand in his. After a while he spoke again.

«I need a man's love. Not just any man's love, your love. I've always needed it. I can no more explain it than a dog can explain his emotions. And I do not need an explanation any more than a dog does, now. And I cannot draw a line between the physical and the spiritual any more than a dog could do so, because such a line does not exist, such a line is a frivolous invention of man's brain. It is not real. A dog is at least genuine, sincere.»

«I understand . . .»

«Two old dogs, you and I, my dear . . .»

«I am your dog and you are my master. And now it appears that you are my dog and I am your master, too.»

«Yes, yes! That's exactly how it is!»

Albrecht threw himself upon Andreas and hugged him, laughing. Then suddenly he stopped, raised himself so that he could look Andreas in the face again and said very seriously and wonderingly . . . «At home . . . at home I am always and only the master. In the game of love, like this, I am always and only the master. The thing I've always, always wanted, the thing she can never give is this — I want to be our dog. Andreas, Andreas, I want a master. But a gentle one, a kindly one like you. A master who also likes to let me be the boss at times as well.»

A look of astonishment and joy appeared on the faces of both the friends, and as if they were one being an enormous excitement surged through both of them, swiftly, overwhelmingly. For the first time in all the years of their love instinct and comprehension were unified. Never had they felt so whole, so free.

That evening was the climax not only to Albrecht's visit but to their entire relationship and thereafter they lived on a luminous plateau. All Andreas' doubts and fears about Albrecht's love quite disappeared. It was not difficult for him to forbid himself to think of his friend's departure. For once he lived wholly in

the day stretching out before him and savoured each moment to the full. And best of all at last he saw the pattern, the complete harmonious design which, all through the years, had been trying to emerge, to realize itself in their relationship. Although of a rather passive disposition Andreas knew now that it was nevertheless his own virility which Albrecht loved and for the first time in his life he felt completely male. He felt a new self-assurance, self-possession and in all the activities of life he felt himself to be a more effective man. He did not give the thing much thought yet always with him was the new clear consciousness that Albrecht valued him, wanted him as a male. And without premeditation, it seemed that everything within him which was male gladly responded to Albrecht's need.

During their second and last week together Andreas and Albrecht spent more time in the flat. They frequently went out during the day but their jaunts were shorter. Sometimes Andreas prepared dinner at home in his tiny kitchen. Then Albrecht set the table and dried the dishes while Andreas washed up. One evening as they were doing the after dinner chores together Andreas chanced to say: «It's like a marriage now.»

To his surprise Albrecht took his remark seriously. «No, don't think that. Really it is not like a marriage in the least.»

Andreas gave him a questioning look.

«Marriage is very different. Oh certainly, the domestic chores are similar but . . . Well, a sonnet by Shakespeare and a sonnet by Keats or Wordsworth are very different things. Whatever truth, meaning, reality the poems possess isn't lodged in the sonnet form but comes entirely from what the artists have infused into that form. One man's sonnet and another man's sonnet are two different worlds. There's a domestic side to every love. But our world and the world of my marriage are very different worlds.»

Andreas said nothing. Albrecht too was silent for quite a while. His expression was troubled now. «I must talk to you about my marriage.»

Andreas only nodded.

«That's real too, you know. Very real. A different reality, but just as factual and actual and true as this love of ours.»

«I know. I accept that.»

«Listen, perhaps what I must say now will hurt you. I do not want to hurt you but it is better that we have it understood. My wife is more necessary to me than you. You are necessary, she is much more so. I could learn to live without either of you, I suppose, but if I had to do so, in either case it would mean an amputation of an important part of myself. I would only be a partial man without either of you. Do you understand me?»

«I think I do.»

«I know that for you the situation is very different, and her situation is really much more like yours than mine. For the two of you have but one love, and I am the lucky man who is loved by both of you. I do not want to hurt either one. I love you both so much, how could I want to hurt you? I want to make you happy, both of you. All the same, you must know that always she comes first. Because that is my own true, simple feeling. That is the way it is. I would be insincere, a liar, if I pretended that I love you most and best. Yet, God knows, I love you much.»

«Have you talked to her about all this as you are talking to me now?»

«Yes. She doesn't understand.»

«So —»

«I don't know . . .»

There was another silence.

Finally Albrecht spoke again. «She is jealous. Not as jealous as in the early years. Because in the past she lived in fear of losing me to you. Now, after all this time she knows she will never lose me. She is safe with me. She no longer has any fear. But there is still much pride and some possessiveness, and the old morality is still strong in her.»

«Poor Albrecht . . .»

«No. Not poor Albrecht, because that is only one side of the coin. I have many rewards.»

«Yes. Of course.»

«She was able to let me come to you because now, after all these years, she knows that I'll return. She is safe. She does not fear.»

«That is a large gain.»

«Yes, it is. One of the rewards of growing older, I suppose.»

«But I am not safe, I have much to fear.»

«I know. I've thought a great deal about how difficult it has always been for you. I've reproached myself countless times for the position I've placed you in.»

«Is it a position that you have placed me in? It is just as fair to say that it is a position I've placed myself in. Perhaps it would be more exact to call it a position fate has placed me in.»

«If there is anything bad in all this, if I have any real reason for a troubled conscience it is because of the insecurity and insufficiency of our love for you.»

The dish-washing was completed now and as Albrecht mechanically wiped the last plate Andreas silently rinsed out the dish pan. Albrecht draped the damp towel over the back of a chair to dry. Then Andreas said, «We're through here. Let's go in the living room.»

«Is there any coffee left?» Albrecht asked.

«I think so. You'd better warm it up.»

After Albrecht lighted the gas under the coffee pot they stood looking at each other. Andreas gave his friend a smile, wry but sympathetic, and a little shrug meaning, «What is there to say?»

«I've thought a great deal about my obligations to her and to you, believe me. I suppose to the average person I'd seem a lecherous beast, but that's neither here nor there. I love my wife. She knows it. She knows it as surely as you know that I love you. I've been a good provider. I've given her security, both economic and emotional. The marriage vow speaks of «forsaking all others». I have not been able to forsake one other, you. And yet, looking down the years I have been faithful to her. I've lived up to my obligations. I haven't failed her, I've given her everything a husband should. The trouble has been that I needed something more than she could give. I needed something that only a man can give, that you have given. Obviously, I am not the ideal husband. But I do not think that I have been a bad husband, after all.» The coffee began to boil. Albrecht removed it from the stove and poured himself a cup, sweetened it, stirred it and moved towards the living room, cup in hand. Andreas followed him. When they were seated Albrecht spoke again.

«As you know she is unable to give me children. That is no fault of hers, of course, but it has been a big disappointment, just the same. My love for you, my need for you, is no fault of mine. If I am not the ideal husband then neither is she the ideal wife. But only school boys, collegians think about ideal mates. We love each other very deeply, she and I. Now, I spoke about her jealousy a while ago. She cannot help being jealous any more than you and I can help loving each other. Her jealousy is one of the facts, one of the realities in this situation. As I see it there are two kinds of jealousy, one born of insecurity, of fear — the other born of pride. My wife has no fear of losing me to you. She knows that I am hers for life. Her jealousy is of the second kind. As I said earlier, along with the pride goes possessiveness. And that possessiveness is encouraged by morality. I think it is a false morality. I do not feel guilty about being here with you because I do not think that pride and possessiveness are good. I do not feel morally obligated to knuckle under to my wife's pride or to allow myself to be so completely, utterly possessed. Yet, her jealousy is very real, and it still makes her suffer. I do not want to cause her unhappiness. Years past I considered her pride and possessiveness to be virtues. I no longer think so now. That is another very great change in me. Yet, I know she cannot help feeling as she does, I cannot blame her, I do not want to make her unhappy. I realize that this is all very inconclusive . . .»

«You want me to understand that we will not see each other for a long, long time.»

«Yes, that's true. We will not see each other again for a long time. But I want you to understand much more than that. I want you to understand that for me it is a great sacrifice, not seeing you. I want you to understand that a large, important part of me belongs to you. It is rightly yours. It has always been yours and always will be yours. I want you to understand that this time I have given everything in me that belongs to you, freely and fully and without reserve. Everything that has taken place between us here has been utterly true and real. I've loved you not only with my naked body but with my naked self. You will always be in me, a living part of me. I will always be in you. You have never heard me speak this way before. I could never before have told you what you meant to me. This is the truth of it.»

Andreas was pale. For at one and the same time Albrecht had revealed the true meaning of their relationship and had told him that he was to be deprived of it for a long time to come. Yet for the first time in his life Andreas was utterly convinced that he was loved. Albrecht's revelation of the significance of their love was electrifying. Andreas was filled with a vast elation. And the very fact that Albrecht was the one who had at last solved the central mystery of the bond between them was the most conclusive proof of the depth and seriousness of Albrecht's love. His sadness at the realization that when Albrecht parted from him at the weekend they would not meet again for years was all but overwhelmed by the truth and beauty of Albrecht's discovery and the new conviction that he was greatly loved.

«This is the happiest moment of my life,» the words tumbled from Andreas' lips so unexpectedly that he did not realize what he had said until he had heard himself speak. He found that the words were true. «Even if it ended here I could be satisfied. Something has been settled now. It has all come clear. God knows, I hope it doesn't end. But I could bear it if it did.»

The few remaining days of Albrecht's visit passed swiftly, yet each day seemed a kind of era in the history of their friendship. Andreas' newfound confidence in Albrecht's love still outweighed the unhappiness of what he knew would be a long, long period apart. Finally their last morning together arrived. Before leaving the flat they joined in their last kiss. Their last bus trip together took them past many places where they had wandered happily together, places which thenceforth would evoke treasured memories for Andreas. At last they stood together — this time in daylight — on the same platform in Victoria Station where their twilight meeting had taken place. They had agreed that Andreas would not wait until the departure of the boat train. With only a last swift embrace, a last firm handclasp, Albrecht boarded the train. As Andreas retraced his steps down the long platform, alone again, he felt stupefied by misery. He wondered if he looked as dejected and defeated as he felt.

He left Victoria Station, crossed the square in front of it, his feet seeming to move mechanically. He walked on, past Westminster, Big Ben, past Downing Street. When he had left Whitehall behind he crossed over to Trafalgar Square, now lying jewel-like in the bright sunshine. Tourists were feeding the pigeons. The fountains played. Andreas sat down on a bench. Then he recalled that a fortnight before he had sat on the same bench an hour before Albrecht had arrived. He remembered the stark loneliness of his life before Albrecht had come. And loneliness was reaching out for him again.

But something in him stiffened against that threat. Something in him was roused from the numbness of his grief to protest. Something new.

After all, when he had last occupied that bench he had been anxious, afraid. This time his fears had proven to be unfounded. Instead he had experienced the greatest happiness of his life. And although Albrecht was on his way back to their homeland and to his wife much was changed. Andreas dimly felt that their meeting was going, somehow, to bear further fruit. He, Andreas, was not the same. Not only had Albrecht changed, he had also wrought a difference in his friend. What was that difference?

A man, an intelligent, sensitive, cultured man, had come hundreds of miles to visit him, drawn to him in spite even of the lifelong opposition of his wife. He had made that man supremely happy, that was clear. He, Andreas, possessed within himself the power to give happiness through love. This thing was real. Sitting there on the sunny bench Andreas felt, for the first time deeply, the vital power which he possessed within himself, the force of love. Albrecht had given him, this time, the greatest gift — Albrecht had taught him to know, evaluate, appreciate himself. Albrecht had given Andreas to himself. He sat there for a long time, allowing this awareness to sink in . . .

By and by he raised his head and looked around the square. «I am here», he said to himself. Somehow, he was in a different world, an equal among equals, the equal of the high and the low, alike. A stranger among strangers — yes and no. He felt connected in some way, in some degree. Perhaps it was just because he had no fear of them. Many of these strangers were potential friends.

All this because he recognised something in himself which had been there all the time, all through the years, the power to give happiness to other humans, the power to love.

Andreas had not wept since childhood, but now, sitting in the sunshine in Trafalgar Square tears blurred his sight — to his astonishment — then trickled

down his cheeks. But they were not tears of desolation, grief. They were the tears of a prisoner just released, the tears of an exile just returned. Thinking of Albrecht on the train speeding away from him there was deep regret, deep sadness, yes. Yet life was so beautiful, so beautiful . . . he wanted to gather up all London in his arms. The dam had broken in his soul and he was at home in the world. He didn't care who saw his tears. He was smiling now, for his relief was greater than any pleasure he had ever known as he voided a lifetime's stagnant, unshed tears. The sun sparkled in his tears but Andreas no longer cared whether it was rain or shine, for he had discovered the sun hidden deep within himself. Was this thing God? This humble power he knew that he possessed? God, like a crum of uranium in each man's soul . . .

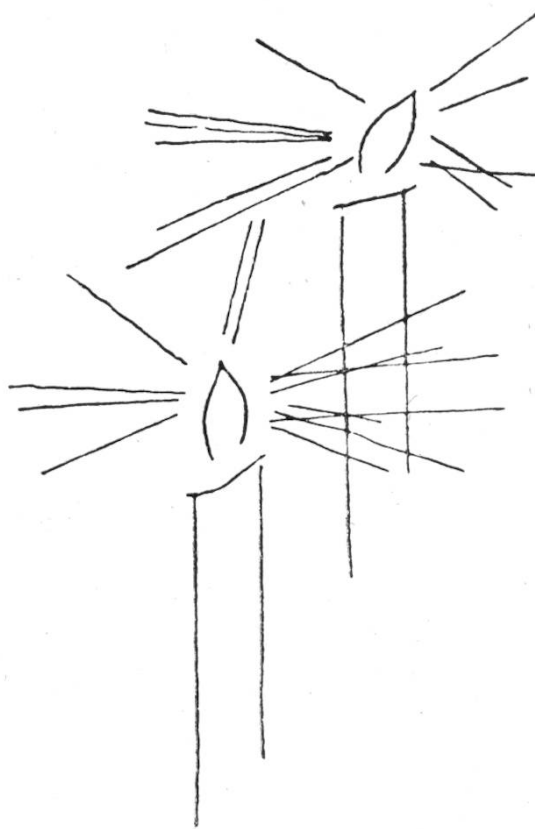
He realized that he had no idea of what might lay ahead, what further hardships and disappointments life might bring. Life could be hard, or sad . . . life he knew was often terrible . . . But now Andreas knew that with this sun of love within him, empowering him, he would never again, no never, be alone . . . Because at the very core of him was this self-generating warmth. He did not need to seek the light and warmth from others any more. Because he possessed within himself the thing the whole world was starving for, the most wanted thing in life . . .

By C. G. and L. A.

*Frohe Weihnacht und viel Glück im
neuen Jahr für alle Kameraden der
Welt! —*

*Joyeux Noël et heureuse année à tous
les camarades du monde entier!*

*A Merry Christmas and a Happy
New Year, Peace and Goodwill to
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