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Spanish Dancer

We were in a bar in Malaga, my pal Mike and I, sitting at a table with a bottle of Spanish cognac between us.

A girl was dancing, and she was lovely.

The look on Mike's face was indescribable. I don't think I have ever seen a man's face so enraptured.

«That's the girl I told you about,» Mike whispered. «I met her here this afternoon. She's called Manuela.»

As Manuela danced, her castanets went clickety-click, her heels went clackety-clack, and two guitars went ting-ting-tang. As she danced, she sang, not a whole song, but just odd phrases in the high-pitched Flamenco manner. And all the time, singing and dancing, she smiled. Sometimes she smiled at the audience; most times she smiled only at Mike. Her big black eyes were very wide apart, and her mouth was very red. She was very lovely; even to me she was excitingly lovely.

Mike and I had sailed in many ships together, and we were good friends. We could not have been better friends. We had done all the usual things that sailors do in foreign ports, in the bars, cat-houses, and all the usual waterfront dives. But never before had I seen Mike show an atom enthusiasm about any woman we had met. Other fellows talked about their women, but we seldom did. I always had the impression that women embarrassed Mike; either that, or else he actively disliked them. Suddenly to find him wildly enthusiastic about a dancing girl he had just met, surprised me. More than that, it worried me. I felt that no good would come of it, and in any case, I had my own private reasons for feeling unhappy about it.

The music got wilder and wilder, and Manuela's dancing became more and more abandoned. Mike's face was flushed, and his breathing heavy. Manuela started to discard her clothing piece by piece, and Mike's hand across the table gripped my wrist like a vice. First she threw off her bolero jacket, then her skirt, and then, as the dance stopped with a crash of chords from the guitars, away went her brassiere — and the wig of dark, tight curls she wore on her head.

The applause was deafening, and Manuela wearing nothing but a small V-piece stood there bowing and smiling at the whole room in general, and at Mike in particular. But Mike wasn't smiling. He was grim, white-faced and dead-pan. He was stunned, and so was I.

For the person who stood there acknowledging the cheers and the shouts was just as muscular, as athletic and flat in the chest as either Mike or myself, and because we knew only sailor Spanish we had not realised that this was a female impersonation act ending in a strip-tease, and poor old Mike in his innocence just had not suspected that the person in the bar who had excited his interest so much was not Manuela, but Manuel.

I think everyone was cheering and applauding, except Mike and me. I wanted to laugh, but looking at Mike, I did not dare to. He looked like trouble.

«Take it easy, Bloke,» I said. «And sit down.»

He was on his feet, and I could tell from his face that he was in a fighting mood. And he was half-seas over with all the wine and cognac inside him. That made him even more dangerous.

«She can't do that to me,» he said.

«You mean, *he* can't.»

«But I thought it was a dame.»

«So did I. And it isn't. So what?»

Mike picked up the bottle of cognac from the table. He picked it up very deliberately. And before I could stop him, or even before I realised what he was going to do, he threw it. It hit Manuel square in the face.

Manuel just stood there, his hands to his face, which on the lower half was red with blood. The upper part of his face was white, with no blood at all. For a fraction of a minute there was dead silence; the applause had stopped, and so had the cheering.

Then suddenly there was the clamour of voices, mostly in Spanish, but probably in all languages, for one hears every language of the world in the waterfront bars of Malaga.

«Throw the bastards out.» Someone shouted this in English.

Someone threw a glass, which hit me on the side of the head. A group of people moved towards us. I can't describe exactly what followed. Fists, bottles, glasses, flew in all directions. Tables and chairs were knocked over. It was a general free-for-all fight, but it lasted only a few minutes. I lost Mike, and I was not interested in Manuel. The lights went out just as something hard hit me on the head, and I went out too, just like the lights. I came alive again as I hit the ground when someone threw me bodily into the dark alley behind the café. I sat up to find myself in a gutter, behind a group of stinking garbage cans.

«That you, Joe?» It was Mike's voice I heard. «You all right, Bloke?»

«Where are you, Mike?» I called. I looked around, but could not see him at first. Actually he was in the same gutter, only a few feet away from me. Manuel, now dressed in shirt and pants, was standing over him, helping him to rise.

«You must come with me,» Manuel said. «I live near here.»

«Should we?» I asked.

Mike said nothing. He still looked shaken. Whether he had been knocked out as I had been, I did not know.

Manuel led the way and Mike followed dumbly. I followed last. In a few minutes we came to a house. In a small flat Manuel made coffee and got some water heated.

Mike was slumped in a chair. He had a small cut over his left eye and another on his lip. Manuel cleaned him up and dressed his wounds, and then did the same for me. Rather ruefully, he examined his own cut swollen lip in a mirror.

«It will be a week before I can appear again at the café,» he said, but he laughed as he spoke. «Why did you make trouble, Mike?»

«Why didn't you tell me this afternoon that you were a boy?»

Manuel half closed his eyes. He looked first at Mike, then at me, then back at Mike.

«I thought you knew.»

«How could I know? You were so — *hermosa*.»

We drank a lot of coffee, and some cognac. An hour passed. Little was said. Finally I got up from my chair.

«Time we went back to the ship.»

Mike made no attempt to move. «You go», was all he said.

«What about you?»

«You go.»

I did not want to leave him, but I recognised his mood and knew that argument was useless. So I went. Manuel took me down to the street door.

«He will be all right with me,» Manuel said. «I will see that he gets back to the ship.»

At that, I had to leave it. I shook hands with Manuel and went back to the docks.

We had a six o'clock turn-to next morning. I had slept little, and when I dragged myself out of my bunk, there was no sign of Mike. I checked myself on with the bosun, who was in his usual unpleasant early morning mood.

«Where's your mate?» he demanded.

I said I did not know.

«Still in some bloody cat-house, or else in gaol. I give him fifteen minutes. If he's not turned-to then, he gets logged.»

«That's generous of you, Bose,» I said. I had some misgiving, but I need not have had, because Mike appeared almost at that moment.

It was a very different Mike from the one I had left a few hours previously. He looked happy. He only laughed at the bosun's sour greeting. We took some brushes and got busy on our job of painting the lifeboats. He told me nothing, and I asked no questions.

We stayed a week in Malaga, loading wine and oranges. I think it was the longest week I have ever spent anywhere. In other ports, Mike and I had always gone ashore together when we had finished work and as soon as we could clear the ship. And we always came back on board together, without fail. Now it was different. We would take a shower, change into shore-side rig, leave the ship, and have a couple of drinks in various bars, as we always had done. Mike had little to say, and we talked only of general things. Manuel was never mentioned. After our second drink, Mike would get up, a little embarrassed.

«Mind how you go, Bloke,» he would say, and then take off, leaving me alone. He never told me where he was going, though I knew, and he knew that I knew. When he came back to the ship just before six o'clock the following morning he never said where he had been, or what he had done.

There did not seem to be any point in my telling him how I had spent the night wandering from bar to bar, alone, getting more and more cheap liquor under my belt, and hating Malaga more and more each night. —

Then came the day we were due to sail, sailing time being fixed for twenty-three hours. I felt relieved, and told myself that now at last we can get back to normal living, just Mike and me, without Manuel or any

other Spanish dancer to disturb our ordinary way of life. In the afternoon we made our usual preparations to go ashore, and I felt on top of the world.

As we were dressing, Mike threw a bundle of his personal belongings towards me.

«Put these in your pockets, will you, Bloke?» he said. «And wear your overcoat. It's cool enough.»

The things he threw at me were toilet articles, some small items of clothing, and other odds and ends. I would need my overcoat to cover up from the dock police who, if they had suspected that one or other of us was not coming back to the ship, would have done something about it. He did not look at me as he spoke.

«Mike,» I said.

«What is it?» he said, without turning round.

«You're jumping ship.»

«So what?»

«You can't do it.»

«I can, if you help me.»

«You're crazy. You're mad. You must be.»

Then he turned round, and he was smiling. «Yes», he said very quietly, «I know.»

I felt as though someone had hit me very hard, right where it hurts most. —

«What are you going to do?» I asked him, when finally I could get some words out.

«I'll find a job.»

«Doing what?»

«Fishing. Running, maybe.»

There was a lot of stuff being smuggled from North African ports into France and Spain. It was risky, but it paid off well.

«What happens if you get picked up? Spanish gaols are lousy. If you get caught, you stay in for months before you get a trial, and even after you do your stretch it's months before they send you back to England.»

He just grinned; it infuriated me. He threw an arm around my shoulders.

«If you're ready, let's go,» was all he said.

I could have refused to go, but I didn't, for I knew he would go just the same. I could have hit him and knocked him out and then locked him in the cabin, but I didn't do that either. I just stowed his things away and went with him.

We had our usual drinks in our usual bars. I waited for him to get up and move off. I started to unload the bits and pieces he had given me to bring off, but he got up.

«Come on, Bloke. Let's get going.»

I knew where we were going even before we arrived at Manuel's flat. Manuel, his face wounds quite recovered, was waiting for us. He looked a little uneasy. He gave us drinks, and said that he was to appear again at the café that evening, the first time since Mike had made

trouble. Mike was quite at home in the flat. I felt embarrassed and uncomfortable.

«Don't look like that, Bloke,» Mike said, speaking as though nothing was happening, as though it did not matter to anyone, and to me most of all, that I was sailing, and he was staying behind in Malaga.

«In a week you'll be back in London,» he went on. «You can have jellied eels and beer in the Old Kent Road, or champagne and cake in the West End, whichever you like.»

«It's not much fun drinking anything alone,» I said. «Even champagne.»

«I know, old boy,» he said. «But it's just one of those things. And you've got to understand. I count on you to understand.»

«I still think you're crazy to jump ship,» I insisted.

Manuel was standing between us.

«What you mean, jump ship?» he asked.

«Pack up. Leave the ship. He'll get caught by the police and put in gaol.» —

«Is true,» said Manuel. «Mike, your friend is right. Is *loco*, is mad to stay here, and the ship goes.»

«What do you want me to do?»

Manuel poured himself another cognac.

«I think you should sail with your friend,» he said, but I could see that he was having difficulty with the words.

«I did not ask you what you think. What do you want?»

«That, it would not be fair to say. What you do, is O. K. by me. What I think, I have told you.»

Mike looked at me pointedly, again with that maddening grin. «You're sailing at eleven,» he said, «and your shore leave expires in half an hour.»

Argument was useless; that, I could see. I got up. We shook hands. I don't think I had ever shaken hands with Mike before. He gripped my hand very tightly, and I thought for a moment he would change his mind. But he let me go, and turned away.

«Mind how you go,» was all he said.

For the second time in Malaga Manuel took me down to the street door. I was angry, in my heart, with Mike, with Manuel, and with myself. But Manuel had been fair. For a moment I thought that I would also stay, though I knew there would not be much sense in that.

«I know you're right,» Manuel said again. «But what can I do?»

«Tell the clown he must come.»

«But I have told him. What else can I do?»

«Tell him you don't want him around.»

Manuel just smiled, touched my hand lightly and closed the door. If Mike was happy to stay, Manuel with his philosophy of *mañana por la mañana* was likewise happy to have him stay. Only I was alone.

I went back to the ship. Mike was missed in the check-on of crew, but it was too late for the Captain to do anything about it. They gave his name to the dock police, with a description. Because we were always together, I was questioned. I just said we had had drinks together, and I

had gone off with a woman. I expected to see him back on board. At that, they had to leave it.

Right until the gangway came up I hoped to see him come back. I even watched for him on the launch that came to pick up the pilot after we cleared the harbour.

We cleared the harbour just on midnight. It was midnight when Manuel did his act in the café. I could see Mike sitting there, a bottle of wine in front of him, and Manuel dancing. I could hear the clickety-click of his castanets, and the clackety-clack of his heels, and the ting-tang-tong of the guitars, and the shrill Flamenco song. I could see Mike's eyes fixed on Manuel, and Manuel's flashing smile, sometimes at the audience, but mostly at Mike. I knew I was forgotten.

We gathered speed as the lights of Malaga faded. Feeling desperate and alone, I went below to our more than empty cabin.

Stornoway.

Is there an American Homosexual and a European Homosexual?

by
Howard Griffin

Since World War 2 an open systematic revolt against Puritanism, (as well as the desire to escape mother), has sent thousands of young Americans to the more liberal havens of Amsterdam, Portofino or Ischia. As a result, the continent has acquired a population of 'floating homosexuals', who spend their time drinking in obscure bars, by virtue of a small (or large) remittance from home. For the most part, they seem to nourish contempt not only for things American but for each other; it is this scorn and nonacceptance which keeps them drifting like precocious children dominated by sex on the mother-continent, where they are not cherished except for their income. — It is easy to predict what will happen when people without character go to a country with character.

Because they cannot find 8th Street at the Piazza di Spagna or the Café Flore, they continue to sit around Paris or Rome, as if it were a dull suburb of New York, halfheartedly expecting a good time (with aesthetic inspiration), but Europe being the hard shrewd party she is, is not giving anything away.

What happens when a not untypical American goes to Italy?

Morris Cohen is a short, dark, homosexual Jew, whose father disappeared when he was six. He had an awful home life and could not wait to leave America to realize for himself what he thought would be the desired haven, his true psychological home. In New York City he lived for five years with his lover, a young musician, but their relationship was sexually unhappy; the latter had sporadic vomiting spells; the former, migraines and insomnia. With scarcely any money, Morris struggled to escape his obsessive feelings of illegitimacy as well as his sense of the positive hostility of environment. For about ten years he