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Carnival in Zurich

Nicky was in Zürich for the Frühlingsfest. He had come from England and it was his first visit to Switzerland, and being unfamiliar with the local scene and with local customs, he was far from feeling confident just how things would go with him.

In his hotel room he unpacked the gown he would be wearing; it was a new, quite magnificent thing of emerald-green velvet, with high neck and half sleeves, and it fitted him like a sheath. Back in London, he had considered bringing his old magnolia satin crinoline that he had worn so many times privately, but which was always sensational, but it was difficult to pack, and though it still fitted him very well, it was rather low in the neckline. Low necklines were becoming a problem with Nicky. They were all right when you were young, but when you started to age, (and Nicky was now twenty years old), and you had hair growing on your chest, they were something of a problem.

He shook the dress, and hung it up. Being velvet, it would not need ironing. Then he laid out his various accessories, the treble diamante necklace, the imitation ruby earrings and the large dress rings, the diamante evening bag, the white elbow-length gloves, and his shoes. His shoes had been hand made by an Italian shoemaker in London. When one's feet were rather large, it was necessary to have hand made shoes. Standard women's sizes were completely unsuitable, and it was impossible to get anything quite large enough unless they looked like boats, and one's ankles bulged over the tops, and the heels were too high to be comfortable. Handmade sandal type shoes on only moderately high diamante heels were just right, even though expensive. Lastly, there was his silver fox cape, a gift from a recent Swedish admirer, and which looked so svelte over the rich emerald gown. Thinking it over, he was glad he had not brought the magnolia satin. He examined with critical eyes what he was going to wear, and felt satisfied.

He proceeded to his toilette. He stripped off all his clothes and surveyed himself in the full-length mirror, and he looked good to himself. His face was oval, his lips full and red, his hair a mass of tight rolled curls which were quite natural and needed only a minimum of attention from the hairdresser. His dark complexion was his biggest problem, for he had to shave twice every day, and even then, as the hour grew late, a dark shadow would inevitably appear on his face, and he hated the fine growth of hair on his chest. One time in his life he had turned himself into a blond, but this did not suit his skin colour, and although he could bleach his hair reasonably well, it was impossible to do anything about his beard. Beards grew so quickly during the evening, and one could not be continually dabbing one's face with peroxide and ammonia which took too long to work and which ruined one's makeup. The only thing to do was to shave very carefully and closely, so that one almost shaved the surface layer of skin off. This, Nicky did, while relaxing in his bath, after attending to his arms, legs, and chest.

These operations completed, he dressed carefully. He was not wearing stockings, and his only underwear consisted of a posing strap and a rubber bra. Getting into the emerald green velvet was a struggle, but he succeeded. Then he applied his makeup, not very much, but just a little shadow under the eyes, some added colour to his lips, and a discreet powder base, carefully chosen to delay the obviousness of his beard growth. He ran a comb several ways through his hair, fluffing it out carefully. Then, after fixing his various pieces of jewelry and slipping on his silver fox furs, he again examined himself critically in the mirror, and was more than satisfied with what he saw. He was, he considered,

certainly much more attractive than any of the year's debutantes in London as photographed by the Society magazines.

He consulted his watch. This was an old-fashioned timepiece in jewelled gold which he had inherited from his grandmother, and which he wore on a strip of black ribbon pinned to his breast, just beneath the corsage of red roses he had ordered in advance, and which had been delivered to the hotel just after he arrived. It was too early to go to the Club. Although he had been advised to go early, in order to get a table, Nicky knew that no matter what time he went he would have no difficulty in this matter, and in any case, to be among the first to arrive was quite the wrong thing to do. Much rather he wanted to be among the last arrivals, if not the very last. He knew that there would be people from almost every country in Europe, as well as all the Swiss belles, and probably there would be overseas visitors as well from places as far apart as America, Australia, and the Argentine. He did not want anyone to arrive after him, or at least anyone who was nearly as well dressed. He decided that he had best have a drink or two in the hotel bar before he went off to the Club. Behind his ears and under his chin he dabbed the minutest amount of a subtle oriental perfume, a gift from a young Malayan whom he had met at the last Chelsea Arts Ball and who had been his escort for several weeks following. This perfume, combined with the scent of roses, was truly an exciting combination.

He went down to the bar; it was American style, with high stools around the bar counter. There were only about half a dozen men there, and no women. Nicky walked to a stool as though entirely unaware that all eyes in the bar were fixed on him, seated himself with some difficulty, for the gown was very tight, and ordered a double whisky on ice. From his diamante bag he withdrew the various components of his ivory (actually bone) cigarette holder, and after screwing them together, inserted a Turkish cigarette with black paper in its end. He felt a little awkward about this, but it was so difficult to carry twelve inches of cigarette holder in a small evening bag. He flicked his lighter, knowing well that it was empty, and when the man on his left offered him a light, he accepted it gracefully.

The man was fair haired and fair skinned, with just the complexion that Nicky wanted for himself. He was also very good-looking. He was not tall, but was well built and muscular, and as Nicky noticed, he had powerful hands. He also had a very nice smile and his face was vaguely familiar.

«Thank you,» Nicky said in English. «My lighter never seems to work.»

«The pleasure is mine,» said the young man, speaking with an American accent. «You're very beautiful, you know.»

Nicky had known many approaches in his short life, but this so very direct one was unusual, even to him. For a moment he was stuck for words.

«I'm crazy about green,» the American continued, «and especially that kind of green. It goes so well with those lovely brown eyes of yours.»

«You're very kind,» Nicky answered, with a nervous little laugh, as he looked into the man's own deep blue eyes which reminded him of the Caribbean sea blueness where he had been taken cruising the previous summer by a wealthy young Venecuelan.

«What's your name?» the young American demanded.

«Nicola.»

«A nice name, Nicola. What are you doing this evening? I suppose you wouldn't possibly be free.»

Nicky suddenly felt that he would like to be free, instead of going to the Club. He thought it over. «No,» he said at length, «I must go to a party, and it will be quite late before I get away.» To have come all the way from England for the Frühlingsfest, and not go, especially with his expensive new gown, would be foolish.

The American smiled, and there was genuine regret in his smile. «I have to go to one also.»

«I think I've seen you before,» Nicky announced. «Are you in the theatre?»

«It's not quite the theatre, Nicola,» the American laughed, «but it's almost as good. I fight.»

«Boxing?» Nicky could not keep the excitement out of his voice. He loved to watch boxing.

«Yes. I hold a couple of lightweight championships. I fought in London recently, and we were televised.»

Nicky was a little breathless. «You're not Steve Smith?» he demanded.

«I am.»

«Then I saw you. You were wonderful, and I was so pleased when you won. I wanted you to win.»

«It's very nice of you to say so.» Steve's hand was now on Nicky's and was slowly moving up the arm. Nicky suddenly remembered that his arm might feel rough, even though he had just shaved it, and thought it best to withdraw it. Steve's blue eyes were laughing, and as much as Nicky wanted to stay with him, he thought it diplomatic to be on his way. Even though Nicky liked boxers, he was still aware of the fact that if he let himself go too far, and the young American started to make love, as he might well do, not seeing through the masquerade, he might then be very annoyed when he found out the true facts. Nicky had been beaten up before, for false female pretences, but he had never been beaten up by a boxer. Somehow he did not think he would like the experience, even from Steve. He finished his drink, and after removing his large imitation ruby ring, which was too big to wear under his gloves, and dismantling his overlong cigarette holder, he slid off the stool and prepared to depart.

«It's late,» he said, giggling slightly. «I feel like Cinderella, and I really must go to the ball.»

Steve glanced down at the handmade Italian shoes. «Like Cinderella, you will come back from the ball, and we may meet again. Look after your pumpkin, Nicola.»

Nicky had a sudden feeling that Steve had seen through his disguise and was laughing at him. He drew on his long white gloves and presented a slender hand to Steve, who grasped it in his strong muscular one. The handclasp was firm and friendly. Then Nicky tripped out to the entrance where he was lucky enough to find a taxi.

When he arrived everything was well under way, and there was dancing in both ballrooms, and everyone was very happy. His entrance created something like a sensation. He was sorry not to have an escort, and Steve would have been a wonderful escort. To have arrived on the arm of one of the world's champion boxers would have given Nicky really a thrill, but he was not sure just how Steve would react to such a club.

Nicky was certainly one of the best dressed at the party. There were all sorts of gowns, from long-waisted knee-length caricatures of the Twenties, through street frocks, to elaborate evening gowns like his own, and someone with a pompadour wig even wore a crinoline about six feet wide. This last, who turned out to be a visitor from Paris, was Nicky's most serious rival, but when they met, their admiration was mutual, and they settled down to drink a bottle of wine together. Nicky was, of course, considerably relieved that he had not, after all, worn his own crinoline as he had originally intended, but which was not early as elaborate as the one the French boy was wearing.

Nicky would have liked to dance, as everyone else was doing, but he could not stop thinking of Steve, and he wanted to dance with no one else. He wondered where Steve was, and what he was doing. Only once, when a muscular boy with Eurasian features, wearing nothing but a tight pair of trousers with a

single fastening at the waist, did a solo dance to South American music from the band, did Nicky really forget Steve.

Nicky was thoroughly enjoying himself in the centre of a group of admirers, some gowned as he himself was, some wearing ballet tights and shirts, and others dressed as Roman centurions with brief tunics and little else except for sandals, when someone else arrived, making an entrance which seemed obviously planned and which was accompanied by a fanfare of trumpets from the band. The new arrival was wearing velvet also, but of royal purple, with an ermine cape which looked real. He was very blond, and his hands, wrists and neck sparkled with diamonds so brilliant that they must be genuine. The gown, as tight fitting as Nicky's, was cut on similar lines, but in addition, had about eight feet of train. As he entered, he was announced as a visitor from Hollywood. Nicky did not care who he was; the thing that mattered was that his costume was very definitely the most sensational there, and for this reason, Nicky was furious. For a moment Nicky went green with jealousy, as green as the velvet he was wearing, but when the lovely stranger went straight to Nicky's table and very charmingly asked Nicky's permission to join him, he was a little mollified and tried to be polite. Actually it was easy to talk to the stranger, whose name was given as Celeste, and it was not long before the two of them, together with Pompadour in the crinoline, settled down to a cosy little chat with some more wine. They raved about each other's gowns, and criticised what other people were wearing. They discussed recent events in London, Paris, and Hollywood, and all the latest scandals in these cities were given an airing.

«I'd love to dance,» said Celeste during a pause in the conversation, «but one can't possibly do anything in this drag. I really think that if you want to have fun, a simple street frock is the best idea, but if you want to be glamorous, then the only thing to do is sit still and let others admire you. It's a shocking bore, though.»

The party went on late into the night. Some of the belles had brought several frocks with them, and seemed to spend the whole night changing from one to the other. Everybody got a little drunk and the ballet dancers and the centurions became a little more abandoned as the wine flowed, the flowers and the confetti and the streamers were flung from one side of the room to the other, and the dancing and the singing was gay and unrestrained. When people started to leave, Celeste was among the first to gather up his train and say his farewells and depart. He kissed Nicky warmly and they arranged a meeting for the following day. Presently Nicky, again thinking of Steve, and wondering if he would meet him back at the hotel, and what he would do if he did, and what Steve would feel if he found out the truth, decided that for him also the party was over. He too made his farewells, and though a lot of men wanted to escort him back to his hotel, he left alone.

On the way back he stopped his taxi a little distance from the hotel, deciding he would walk the rest of the way. The cobble stones in the streets had been put there before shoes like Nicky's had ever used them, and as he was also a little drunk, the going was not easy. An involuntary movement of his hand to his face made him feel the stubble of his beard, and he knew the hour must be very late. The streets were almost deserted, but not completely. Suddenly, a little terrified, he realised he was not alone. Three youths had attached themselves to him. Such a thing had happened before, but most times he had been able to handle the situation. These youths, all rather drunk and very noisy, recognised Nicky for what he was, and unfortunately they could also speak English. They made passes at Nicky, and tried to put their arms around him and kiss him. Nicky hurried on, hoping they would go away, and was relieved when he found himself back at the hotel. The night porter was slow in coming to the door. Nicky had already rung twice, and one of the youths was threat-

ening to become really amorous and was using his hands in a manner too intimate for Nicky's taste. He was really getting frightened when a figure carelessly dressed in slacks and shirt stepped out of the shadows, and it was with considerable relief that he realised that it was Steve.

«If you don't mind,» he said to the three youths, at the same time taking Nicky by the arm, «this young lady is with me.»

The youths were so amazed that they mumbled a few words of apology as the night porter, who by this time had also appeared, opened the doors to admit Nicky and Steve. Together they went up in the lift.

«That, my dear, must have been rather unpleasant», said Steve as they left the lift. «If you don't mind coming to my room I can offer you a whisky.»

Nicky wanted to go to Steve's room and he also felt he needed a drink, but he was very much aware of the dark shadow on his face and he felt a little reluctant. However, Steve did not seem to notice anything and Nicky decided to take a chance. In the room Steve helped him remove his silver fox furs and drew up a chair.

«I lock my whisky in the wardrobe,» he said with a laugh. «If I don't, the housemaid gets at it.»

He took a key and unlocked the door of the wardrobe and searched inside for the whisky, eventually finding it. In the meantime Nicky's very surprised eyes had opened very wide, and his mouth had fallen open. This time he really had received a shock, for hanging in the wardrobe was the lovely velvet gown in royal purple and the ermine cape. Steve, quick to notice Nicky's surprise, looked first at Nicky, then at the gown, and back at Nicky. He grinned as he poured the whisky.

«I'm getting a little tired of that old bit of drag,» he said. «I've worn it at least a dozen times. If you would like it, Nicky dear, I'd love to give it to you.»

Ned Kelly.

Homosexual Laws in History

The Wolfenden committee has stated a reasoned case against continuing to punish the private behaviour of two homosexually disposed men. Public reactions have been confused and emotional. This is hardly surprising. This was the first official inquiry ever into an unsavoury problem customarily ignored, coming not 60 years since Havelock Ellis's pioneering study of sexual inversion was held at the Old Bailey to be a «lewd, wicked, bawdy, scandalous, and obscene libel.»

Few people ever knowingly meet an invert, or realize that there are one or two persons in every busload whose affections and impulses are irretrievably directed towards others of the same sex. Homosexual, like heterosexual, relations run the whole range from the altruistic and tender to the selfish and commercial. Most of what the average man and woman know about homosexuality derives, however, from scandals in the courts. Whether homosexual or heterosexual in character, these mostly involve indecent or offensive behavior in public, assault, or interference with children. Homosexual offenders of these sorts are no more typical of the majority of their kind than are the more numerous «normal» offenders typical of theirs. Unaware of all this, and naturally stern on sins to which he is not tempted, the ordinary citizen tends to respond with the loaded phrases with which custom has stereotyped discussion of sexual inversion.