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The Age of Observation

The vernal equinox has arrived, the sap is rising in the inverts and it is time to commence the «Faggot's Guide» for 1959. It will be a year like any other year—but You Are There.

During the winter, the Enchanted Forest has been for the most part a desolate place, stripped of leaves and scant of pansies. Since times have been tough in show business, many of the actors have been existing in genteel poverty, neither giving nor attending cocktail parties, and scarcely visiting the bars at all. With the exception of the run of «Compulsion», the performances of Maria Callas at the Met, and a few choice chi-chi events at Town Hall, the gay ones have been more in hiding than usual—possibly to the relief of the «normal» minority of New Yorkers who are heterosexual. Nor have there been any quantity of giddy drag parties.

In short, the boys have been feeling the recession hitting them, shall we say, below the belt? Those who have not had husbands may have passed many a hungry night at home, watching TV or listening to hi-fi, trying to convince themselves that spring and gaiety really and truly would come again and transform this island once more into a flowering fairyland.

But for some of us it will not be quite the same this season, for some of us are growing older, Maggie. Silver threads among the cologned. Harder cheek-bones, harsher planes on the faces of the lean, and descending jowls and ampler under-chins on the faces of the plump. If we are sensible, we are going to have to admit that our pictures in this year's «Faggot's Guide» ought to be moved at last from the category of «Leading Men» to the category of «Character Actors». We are moving into the age group where we are almost right to play the parents of teen-agers and where, if we wish to preserve any relationship with the young at all, it may have to be in the category of Sugar Daddies.

This idea is going to prove very repugnant to some and is going to produce certain extremely short crew-cuts on some mildly ancient heads, and some extremely tight blue jeans on some increasingly scrawny legs. Various wistful figures of this sort will no doubt be seen during The Season, trying to fight off pneumonia of a chilly night along Faggot's Walk or in The Snake Pit. Some humblings of once proud vanities may occur and some bitterly resented exchanges of moola may ensue; to be followed by morning-after awakenings in which these *old* boys hate themselves in a brand new way.

Even where this same barter takes place on a level of regency murals and wall-to-wall carpeting, there will be a good measure of chagrin in the secret admission that one is no longer desired for one's beauty or passion, but only for one's dough.

In either case a loss of dignity is involved, and dignity, though it may be superfluous or even pompous in youth, has an odd way of being more becoming to age than a desperately prolonged juvenility. However, as one grows older, dignity can only be obtained by an acceptance of the idea of middle age and a willingness to slide gracefully into what we here designate as «The Age of Observation».

A man between the age of—and now, alas, girls, we must be mathematical—forty to sixty—can still be very attractive to younger women and women his own age, just as himself; but the chances are that he is not going to be

equally attractive to young men and that men his own age will not settle for him either. For in gay life Youth not only calls to Youth, but to Middle Age, and thus neither one is going to call Yoo-Hoo to you.

Between forty and forty-five some men do by good fortune retain the illusion of being between five and eight years younger than they are and so can postpone till the ultimate hour the arrival of «The Age of Observation»; but once they have said good-bye to forty-five, their fate is fairly well sealed. They are no longer girls; they are now aunts.

We will rashly attempt a few bits of practical advice for «New Aunts», or «Ten Don't's for Tired Dolls».

1) Don't go cruising out of doors anywhere. Leave the Enchanted Forest to the young. Most of them won't take home anyone either, but at least they belong in the setting and are not resented or ridiculous there.

2) Don't set out anywhere with a Do or Die feeling about the evening. You will only shatter what faint chance you do have by approaching the scene, as actors say, with the wrong «action».

3) Don't try any longer to initiate conversations in bars. You will only meet with a cool reply or none. Let others speak to you—or not speak.

4) Don't be kittenish in case you are accepted as a conversational companion and behave as if you still had something precious to offer. You haven't.

5) Don't grin and wink at younger boys. You will immediately deprive yourself of whatever attractive quality of mature dignity you might have. Be as much of a man as you can manage.

6) Don't offer instantly to buy drinks for the other party of greener years. You are only suggesting that you are a sucker and you will mislead the young fry into assuming you are ready to be someone's Sugar Daddy. If you do, after you are hooked, you will end up changing your will.

7) Don't drop Names, to try and delude the sprout into thinking you can be of social or professional advantage to him. You are only offering another form of material bribery, which you may be reluctant to implement later on.

8) Don't drink too much in public and begin thinking you are Rossano Brazzi. If you start coquetting drunkenly about the joint, you will only succeed in making an ass of yourself and become a source of derisive laughter to the young belles.

9) Don't allude self-consciously to your age, either in a foolish effort to seem honest or with the notion that it will arouse compassion. Compassion does not exist in the gay world of the young.

10) Don't get out on the dance floor!! You are *not* Jacques d'Amboise!

In short, what is necessary after a certain age is to underplay yourself. This can be accomplished best by assuming that you have come to a bar exactly as a normal man comes to a bar: to have a drink, and relax; and by acting as if anything further which eventuated would quite take you by surprise. If you have an opportunity to facilitate an acquaintance between two shy young things who don't know how to get together, undertake the Ruth Gordon-Shirley Booth part in «The Matchmaker» and play it with amusement and generous delight. If you find that no one speaks to you and thus nothing happens, avoid making a spectacle of yourself by moving about a lot, or staying hopelessly on and on, like a guest who doesn't know when to leave a party. Your theme song now is from «The Bells Are Ringing» and it is «The Party's Over.»

Gradually, if you follow these hints, you may find yourself accepting your new part gracefully and playing it with ease rather than with bitterness.

Think of yourself as a member of the audience instead of trying to be «The Member of the Wedding», and some night you may have a charming surprise. Some night, if you are by now very good in your part as a spectator, it is just barely possible that one of the actors may descend from the stage, take your hand, and sing, «Come On A My House. I'm Gonna Giva You Everything.»

by Hadrian

From English Newspapers:

Wolfenden Report

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—The Government's view, we are told, is that the recommendation of the Wolfenden report upon the private behaviour of consenting adult homosexuals is «very much ahead of public opinion.» We have heard this fairly often in the past year. Mr. Butler, like the Bellman, has said it three times at least; it is, indeed, the one major contribution to the debate which the Government have so far offered.

Those of us who strongly support the Wolfenden findings feel that the time has come to ask one or two more questions. What is this weight of adverse public opinion? Where does it express itself? What credentials does it have for holding up indefinitely a reform of this importance? What qualities of humanity, understanding, and common decency are to be found in its chief spokesmen—and who, in fact, are they?

The demonstrable facts are as follows. The Wolfenden Committee considered the evidence for three years, and recommended reform by the decisive majority of 12 to one. Their findings have been welcomed and supported by the Church of England Moral Welfare Council, the Methodist Church, a Roman Catholic committee, a great many respected Christian and liberal spokesmen, almost every weekly and monthly journal of any standing, almost every national daily newspaper (the *Mail* and the *Daily Express* are the only two exceptions known to me), and too many eminent doctors, psychologists, and sociologists to list. The society with which I am associated has over 100 national figures on its committees, and can testify to widespread concern among informed people about the continued enforcement of an inhumane and discredited law.

If this does not constitute an impressive expression of «public opinion,» it would be interesting to learn what does. If a comparable weight of opinion exists, in print or elsewhere, on the other side, it would be helpful to know where it is to be found.

Until the Government are prepared to deal with this issue much more seriously and constructively than they have done, many of us will continue to think that a humane cause is being sacrificed to political expediency.

Yours faithfully, A. E. DYSON, Honorary Secretary, Homosexual Law Reform Society, 219, Liverpool Road, London N. 1.