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„UNCLE JOE“

By Paul Peters.

«Are you going out to that new project?» asked my partner as I started bundling together the various plans and diagrams I needed for the day's work. «A very fine job that is going to be — for your first big assignment.»

«Yes, I'll be calling there» I said modestly, although I was very thrilled at the fact that I had personally designed this nine floor office block. My partner was getting on in years, having been my late father's partner for many years, and he was only staying on until he felt that I was capable of running the business on my own.

I pulled up the collar of my coat, for whilst it was already spring, this was one of those cold blustering mornings when a sudden over-night frost and sharp wind had come along to remind us that summer was not yet here. Then I climbed into my car and drove off to the site of the new building to see how the work was progressing. The shuttering was nearing completion for the first concrete to be poured for the foundation.

I found the foreman at the far end of the site, shouting at a young carpenter who was having some difficulty with some of the timbering, and as I approached I could see that the poor lad was frozen and that his hands were shaking.

«Mr. Brown» I called to the foreman, and he turned to me, greeted me briefly and then started complaining about bad carpenters and this lad in particular «More interested in books he be. Always readin' during the break instead of mucking in with the other lads» he grumbled. I glanced over his shoulder and saw the object of his scorn battling to get planks into position.

I do not know why, but this lad's face haunted me all morning, when I was going around visiting the other jobs our firm was engaged upon, so I decided to call back during the day. I arrived on the site just after the men had stopped for their luncheon break, and whilst most of the men were sitting around a truck, chatting noisily, I noticed the young carpenter sitting by himself in a sheltered corner, reading. I walked over to him; he closed the book at my approach and got up. «Hello» I said, and looked at the book in his hands. Imagine my surprise when I saw that it was a book on architecture by Frank Lloyd Wright — one of the great names in modern architecture.

«Gosh — do you follow all this?»

«Yes, sir, most of it. I have been reading about architecture for a long time — in fact, if all goes well, I hope to have saved enough in a year or so to go to University to study.»

I looked at his lunch, which lay neglected. It consisted of a hunk of bread and some cheap sausage. I looked at the young man. He looked tired and worn, and his clothing consisted of an old sweater and thin shirt under his overalls.

«I'd like to have a talk with you about this ambition of yours. When do you finish this afternoon?»

«About four o'clock, sir.»

«Right! I have to go out to some jobs this afternoon. Wait for me here after you knock off.»

As arranged I came back shortly after four o'clock. The site was deserted except for a solitary figure, sitting reading Frank Lloyd Wright.

«Hello. Jump in and we can get going. It looks as if it may start blowing again tonight.»

As he settled down beside me, I asked him where he lived.

«Can't we talk here, sir? My place is a long way off and not much of a place for you to come to for a chat.»

«Nonsense. You are going home to get changed, and then we are going back to my place for dinner and we can chat in comfort.»

«Won't your wife mind you bringing in a stranger, Sir?»

«In the first place I have no wife — I live by myself. In the second place stop calling me »sir« — I don't suppose I am much older than you. My name is Jack Spencer and I am 26.»

«How do you do? I am Donald Adams, and I am 21 today — funny, I was just going to spend the evening quietly by myself reading.»

His voice trembled slightly as he said this, and I felt a wave of compassion towards this young lad who seemed to be so completely out of his element. As we sat there I looked at him and felt that his would be an interesting story and I was determined to learn it.

His »home« was quite a long way off, and he directed me down a narrow street and bade me stop at a sanitary lane near the end. He wanted to go in and get changed, leaving me in the car, but I said that I would come along and wait whilst he got changed — he seemed reluctant, but said nothing, just leading the way up the lane to a tumble-down gate which led into a small back garden. Against the fence was a lean-to shelter and here he unlocked the door and entered a small room. I followed him. If the outside was drab, the inside was a revelation. It was a humble room, only a bed, a small table and chair and a wardrobe could have been called furniture. A primus stove stood on a stool in the corner and a bookcase made of planks mounted on bricks completed the scene. On the walls, however, were photographs from magazines of some of the finest buildings in the world and as I looked at the bookcase, I noticed that most of the small collection were books on art and architecture.

«You must excuse me now whilst I get some hot water to heat my bath» saying which he went outside and fetched in a bucket and a small galvanised bath.

«Listen, Don. Don't waste time now. Just get your clean clothes and come with me — you can relax in a comfortable bath at my place without having to go to all this trouble.»

«Thanks. It will be a blessing to relax in a nice bath for once. This business here is always a terrible nuisance.»

An hour later we were at my house and he was stripping off his working clothes whilst his bathwater ran into the tub. In the meantime I had a shower and dressed in my old flannels and coat. Then I went downstairs to tell the housekeeper to lay another place and went into the study to light the fire. All this took quite a while, but when I had finished, there was still no sign of Donald. I went upstairs and as I walked into the bathroom in my suite, he was just starting to dry himself.

«Sorry I have been so long, but, gosh, it was the first time for ages that I have been able to relax like this in a bathtub — quite a birthday treat.»

In spite of his thinness, he had a strong body with good clean muscles. His face was tanned from the open air and his light brown hair had a slight natural wave. His eyes, I noticed, which had given his face such a worn appearance

earlier in the day, were now bright, and he looked more like a mischievous boy as he rubbed himself vigorously down and then, throwing aside the towel, started to dress in his neat clothes.

«Come along now! We must celebrate this birthday of yours with a drink and supper, and then we can have a nice long chat in front of the fire.»

It was a bright meal and a different one for me, accustomed as I was to eating by myself. The conversation was on sport and a variety of general topics and it struck me that Donald was well educated in spite of his position.

After we had settled down by the fireside, I asked him to tell me his story. It was a very simple one.

His father had been an accountant who had married the daughter of a fairly substantial shipping merchant. Soon afterwards he had gone into his father-in-law's business and after the old man died, he took charge. In spite of his good training, being a weakwilled person, he fell into the hands of some bad types and started to drink and gamble heavily. In due course the inevitable happened. He came home blind drunk one night, assaulted Donald's mother and fled from the house, climbing into the car and driving off. His body was found in the wreckage of the car next morning. The business was ruined and after his mother had settled all the debts by selling the house and most of her personal possessions, there was only enough left for Donald, then 15, to finish at high school, but there was not enough for any University career. Poor Mrs. Adams did not survive to see Donald graduate from High school, for, a few weeks before, she quietly passed away in her sleep.

Donald found that there was a small sum of money left and after he had sold up all the unnecessary items of their humble home, he decided to go to work until he could save enough money to go to University. He lived as cheaply as possible, denying himself every comfort and pleasure in order to further his scheme — he felt that the goal was nearly in sight.

«There is one rare possession I have, though,» he said, «with which I shall not part. It is valuable enough to give me the money I need, but its sentimental value is far greater. It is a small golden Buddha, and it has a wonderful story behind it. You see, Jack, my grandfather was a fine man and always tried to help those in need if he thought they might make good. Many years ago, when I was a small boy, a captain of a ship ran into trouble through no fault of his own, but being the captain he was blamed for the loss of the ship. My grandfather secured for him another ship and he made good. He struck it lucky in the far East and when he came home he brought with him this golden Buddha and gave it to my grandfather, telling him that it would bring him or his family luck. Well, so far, there has been nothing but misfortune, yet I could not part with this Buddha for anything. You see, «Uncle Joe» as I called old Captain McBride, told me that one good deed deserves another, and he was sure that somehow some day, the Buddha would bring the reward of my grandfather's kindness — well, we'll see.»

There was quite a silence after he finished his story and then he looked at me questioningly. «Jack, is anything wrong — you look so strange.»

«No, Don, nothing. I have just been thinking. I think the Buddha is lucky. Listen to me, I have a scheme — listen to it carefully and don't interrupt. Upstairs there is a new wing that I added when I bought this house. It is over the garage. There is a direct access to it from the house, yet it also has a private staircase down the back of the garage. It consists of a little lobby, a bathroom, a

living room and a huge balcony overlooking the valley. I use the place occasionally as a workroom when I want to do some plans at home, or I go onto the balcony for inspiration — there is a glorious view — when designing something big. So far so good, but now my plan. Briefly, it is this. You cannot go on living the way you are doing, not merely now, but during the years you hope to spend at University. I want you to come and stay in this little flat, and in the spring you can start at University. I am not offering you charity but a business deal.

«The money you have saved will see you through University, or most of the way. The balance I shall advance, and I shall also debit your account with your living expenses. During your long vacations you will come and work in the office as a draughtsman, and when you qualify you will undertake to work at an agreed salary, as a qualified architect, and out of this salary you can repay the loan I am making to you. My partner is old and will soon retire—if you prove yourself there is a future for you. If you fail, I shall have taken a gamble — like your grandfather did, and write off my loss. What do you say?»

I saw Donald struggle for words. My heart went out to this lonely lad and I longed to take him in my arms, but I controlled myself.

«Jack,» he said slowly, and the voice was husky as he spoke: «I could say 'no — it is nice of you but I cannot accept.' I could grab the offer with both hands and not consider all it entails. I don't know. I only know you mean every word you say, and all I can say is thank you. But let me think about it for a while.»

I got up slowly and went over to the radiogramme, looked through some records and then put on one of my favourites — Schubert's »Unfinished Symphony«. I lay back in my chair and closed my eyes. How long we remained silent like this with only the sound of music in the room I do not know, but I suddenly opened my eyes to find him standing by my chair looking hard at me as if trying to penetrate my thoughts.

«Jack, I accept your offer. I do so, knowing what it means to me, and I assure you that I shall do everything in my power to justify your faith in me. I promise you that I shall not let you down.»

«Fine — I am glad, for apart from being able to help someone, as your grandfather helped the old sea-captain, I shall have company in the house and I am sure we shall get along well — if we have no other common interests — and that remains to be seen — we both love architecture.»

«Yes, and music. I have missed good music since my mother died and I had to sell our records.»

«Now let us discuss some of the details. I suggest that you continue working at that job for another couple of weeks. In the meantime I shall get the flat cleaned out and ready. In about a fortnight you move in here, and that will give you a couple of weeks' break before you start at the University. For one thing you need a break and you need fattening up a bit.»

We went on talking for some time, arranging all the details. Finally Donald looked at the clock. It was past midnight.

«Hell, I must get going or else I shall never get to work in the morning. Is there a bus from near here I can catch into town?»

«Relax. It's much too late for a bus. You can sleep here, and in the morning I shall drop you off at work on my way to the office.»

Donald accepted my offer gratefully.

I was not going to start making up a bed in the guest room at this hour, and since I had a very wide bed I merely got another pillow and we got into bed with no delay. We said goodnight, and then quite unexpectedly he moved over and kissed me lightly on the forehead and whispered «God Bless you, Jack,» turned over and said no more.

I lay awake for some time, turning over all the events of the evening in my mind. Eventually I fell asleep.

The next morning I made the housekeeper prepare sandwiches for him and took him to his job on my way to the office.

For the next fortnight I met him repeatedly and we spent some evenings together, and invariably he slept at the house, until he finally moved in for good. Apart from his books he had little to bring to the house except his few clothes and his Golden Buddha. This was now definitely his lucky charm.

I shall always remember his wonderful smile of delighted surprise when I showed him his quarters. For I had not let him see them after that first evening. The place had been simply furnished. On the balcony stood a brand new drawing board and a set of instruments and the cupboard contained some new clothing for him.

«Donald, all this is a belated coming-of-age present I want you to accept. Accept it as a token of friendship and in anticipation of the happy companionship I hope we shall both enjoy for years to come.»

«Jack, 'Thanks' is a small word, but right now it means a hell of a lot I cannot express any other way. I don't feel right accepting all this and being able to offer nothing in return. On my friendship and all the companionship I can give you, you can count from now on, and some day I hope I shall be able to repay you in some way for all you have done and are doing for me.»

The weeks went by, and then the months until it seemed to me that we had known each other always. The University was fortunately near, so that, whilst I usually dropped Donald there on the way to work, he was able to come home on his own. He worked hard and played hard. His examination results were excellent and he won his «Blue» for swimming. He had filled out into a fine athletic figure. He was popular with his fellow students and we had happy tennis and swimming parties at the house.

During the summer we enjoyed an early morning dip, and, often over the weekends, when we were alone we would lie sunbathing on his balcony. During all this time we never discussed our private lives. No reference was ever made as to why I never discussed marriage, or whether he had a particular girl friend. I was sure, at times, that he understood things we never mentioned, and I sometimes sensed that he shared that feeling.

Some years passed in this happy way, until finally Don graduated with honours. After the graduation ceremony most of the students went off to luncheon parties and then made merry before preparing for the graduation ball to be held that night. Donald said he preferred to come home to lunch with me. We were both in high spirits, and as it was a hot afternoon we went for a swim, then went on to the balcony, spread out the rug and lay down to sunbathe.

I was lying on my back with my eyes closed, enjoying the warm sun when I felt Donald's hand gently stroke my arm, then let his hand stray over my chest. I opened my eyes and turned my head. He was resting on his elbow looking at me.

«Jack. Today I have completed half of my bargain. I shall now start repaying the monetary debt I owe you. The other debt I can never repay. Yet I feel that I must be honest with you. I have a feeling that you won't be shocked or horrified, but I must tell you . . . I love you, and have loved you for a very long time. Listen, it is not just fondness for you . . . I do love you really and truly.»

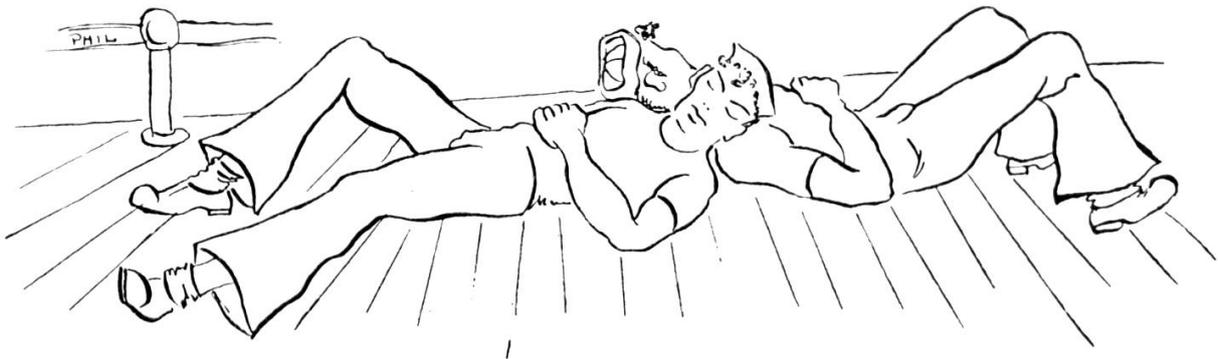
He had a look of near anguish on his face as he spoke. I turned towards him, took his hand and looked straight into his eyes:

«Thank goodness you have more courage than I. I have loved you from the first evening I brought you here. Yes, Don, my motives that night were honourable — as they say in the classics — and I think I have played the game for I was never sure and was too afraid to make a mistake. I love you as much as anybody can love anybody, and . . .»

The rest was never spoken, for we were in each other's arms and his lips were pressed to mine. All the carefully withheld emotions of the four years we had been together, all the pentup feelings found their release that afternoon.

We lay back on the rugs, rivulets of sweat tricking down our bodies when I asked Donald to bring me the Golden Buddha. Taking it in my hands I told him my side of the story — a story which had remained incomplete from the night he first told me about it.

«Donald, listen. My mother was a Miss McBride. Her father was a sea-captain who made good when someone gave him his chance after he lost his ship. «Uncle Joe» was my grandfather! You see, Don, one good deed deserves another. I have merely repaid an old family debt. God Bless you for being such a wonderful person. Now let's get cleaned up and ready for the Ball. There is plenty to celebrate!»



Nochmals: Lendenschurz für Putten im Vatikan

Wir geben dieser ausführlicheren Stellungnahme einer deutschen Tageszeitung gerne nochmals Raum, weil sie Grundsätzliches zum vatikanischen Entschluss klarer erkennen lässt.

Vo, Rom, den

Die Frage nach dem Verhältnis zwischen Kunst und Nacktheit ist oft aufgeworfen worden. Im Bereich der kirchlichen Kunst gewann sie vor allem in der Zeit der Renaissance grosse Bedeutung. Denn sie wollte das Göttliche ins Menschliche legen, Gott durch die schönen Körper loben, «den Glauben durch die Eurythmie menschlicher Rundungen bezeugen». Wer könnte leugnen, dass damit auch ein Stück Heidentum wiederkehrte.

Es hat schon Hadrian von Utrecht, dem letzten Papst aus dem rauhen Norden, zu schaffen gemacht, der kurzerhand die vatikanischen Sammlungen vermauern liess. Die Laokoongruppe erschien seinem sittlichen Ernst als ein Götzenbild. Aber nicht nur der Gegensatz zwischen germanischen und romanischem Empfinden, sondern auch der erwachende gegenreformatorische Geist machte sich in diesem Sinn geltend. Das bekannteste Beispiel bildet die frühzeitig vorgenommene Bekleidung der Gestalten des Weltgerichts in der Sixtinischen Kapelle, die Michelangelo nackt gemalt hatte, mit Lendentüchern. Nur die drei obersten Jünglingsgestalten blieben davon verschont, weil sie so hoch standen. Unbekleidet war auch die Christusstatue in Santa Maria sopra Minerva in Rom, ebenfalls ein Werk Michelangelos. Man hat sie mit einem Schurz aus Bronze versehen. Das erscheint noch gerechtfertigt, da es sich um ein Andachtsbild handelt. Auch in Sankt Peter sind solche Ergänzungen mit Metallauflagen bei Frauengestalten an den Grabmalern der Päpste im Laufe der Zeit vorgenommen worden. Doch geschah die Anpassung so sorgfältig, dass die Figuren dabei nicht in Mitleidenschaft gezogen wurden.

Nunmehr sind bei Nacht und Nebel die Putten in der Peterskirche, wenn auch zum Glück noch nicht alle, mit einer schokoladenfarbigen Masse aus Gips verklebt worden, um ihre Blösse zu bedecken. Es ist dazu schlecht gemacht, springt in die Augen und hat damit auch seinen Zweck verfehlt. Die Anordnung ist nicht von dem neuen Papst Johannes XXIII. ergangen. Sie stammt noch aus der Zeit seines Vorgängers. Im Vatikan ist man nicht sehr glücklich darüber. Denn Einflüsse von draussen sollen dabei mitgewirkt haben. Aber es kann sich dabei nur um Kreise handeln, die mit dem katholischen Leben in ihrer Heimat schlecht vertraut sind. Denn gerade in den nördlichen Ländern hat sich in den letzten Jahrzehnten eine starke Bewegung gegen den Puritanismus des 19. Jahrhunderts in der religiösen Kunst geltend gemacht.

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