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ITALIAN BEACH

by Frank Whitfeld

The young Italian was sitting in his usual place on the low wall just before the road curved down to the beach. His blue shirt was faded but neat and clean; his fair hair was rather untidy. He was about twenty-two or twenty-three, but looked younger.

Though he gave no sign, I knew that he had seen me, and as I drew level with him he slipped down from the wall and moved to me.

«Excuse me, have you a match?» He indicated his unlit cigarette. He spoke English well, with only a slight accent.

As I lighted his cigarette he laid his hand across mine, and I noticed again his light golden tan that all the hours spent in the hot Italian sun did not change. I noticed too that his hand trembled slightly.

«Thank you,» he said, and smiled at me a little shyly. «Oh, excuse me; will you smoke?»

«Not just now,» I said as he produced a rather battered packet of Italian cigarettes.

«I've seen you before,» he said after a brief pause. «You are staying here long?»

«All the summer,» I told him, and as I said it the days seemed to stretch out before me in a chain, golden, empty, waiting to be filled with experience, with pleasure, perhaps with pain. «You live here?» I added, feeling that the conversation must be prolonged slightly before I allowed it to die.

«This is my home. I work at night during the summer in the Splendide.» He indicated a large white hotel nearby. «There is not much to do so I am not tired. I shall sleep a little this afternoon.»

«And when the summer ends?»

«There is no work here. I must go to Milan.»

I felt he was going to tell me more. I did not want to be involved, I made a move to leave him.

«You are here alone?» he asked quickly.

I nodded.

«I would like to see you again; I would like that so much. Could we meet one evening—just for a talk, perhaps a stroll? I would say for a drink, but I do not drink. I can't really afford it. I am always free until ten o'clock.»

And now, I thought, I must kill this before it goes too far.

«I'm afraid I am busy in the evenings,» I told him. «I have come here to finish a book. I like to work when it is cooler.»

I turned aside so that I should not see his look of hurt embarrassment.

«Goodbye,» I said, and moved on towards the beach. I knew that he was gazing after me, but I did not look back.

At another time, at any other time, I thought, oh yes, for you are very sweet, but not now . . . not now . . .

*

I saw the other boy directly I turned the corner, seated high up on his life-guard's chair in the centre of the beach. Of course he is there, I told myself. Why do I think that one day he will not be?

I moved slowly along the beach, past the families, the sun worshippers, the lovers, until I reached a position from which I could watch him. High above the beach he sat, deeply burned by the sun, with the complete relaxation that perhaps only a natural athlete can achieve. There he sat, remote, god-like in his beauty and his indifference, almost unmoving, as if unaware of the busy beach below him, calm, proud, alone, ceaselessly watching the sea. And this he did every day.

Once during the morning and once during the afternoon he would swing down from his seat, and running easily down the sand would plunge into the sea and swim strongly out and out, forging through the water with slow clean strokes until he seemed only a speck in the distance. There he would float for a while and then swim back, usually sprinting the last fifty yards or so, cutting along at tremendous speed. Then back to his chair, his breathing still easy and unhurried. He would dash the water from his face, leaving the sun to dry the rest. Sometimes he would smoke a cigarette, sometimes he would climb straight back to his chair, back to his proud, lonely splendid isolation.

If people spoke to him, not many did for he seemed too remote for this, he would lean down politely to catch what they said, answering them gravely, carefully, but scarcely taking his eyes from the sea, missing nothing that was happening in the water. And soon the people would go, leaving him to withdraw again into his own special world.

In the evening, when the beach had almost emptied, he would climb down and pull on a shirt and slacks, and then would walk slowly along the beach and away. And to me it was always as if with his going the sun had moved below the horizon and the day had ended.

Day after day through that splendid, unvarying summer, I lay and watched him, until it seemed that I knew every movement he would make, until I could close my eyes and still see him in perfect detail. I seemed to be living in a dream dominated by someone who did not know even that I existed.

I quite often saw the fair Italian boy, but beyond a casual greeting we did not speak, and his invitation was not repeated.

Once when I was on the beach I saw him coming towards me, walking slowly, looking from side to side, and in case he was searching for me I hid my face. When I looked again he had gone.

In the evenings I would try to work, but my room remained hot and airless, not cool as I had hoped, and the long days on the beach seemed to dull inspiration. Sometimes I managed to write a little, but usually it was unsatisfactory, and more often the paper remained blank and the typewriter silent.

And then in despair I would throw myself on the bed and think about him, try to remember every incident during that day. And I would ask myself again and again what happened to him in the evening. Where did he go? What did he do? Why did I never see him? My room would become a stifling prison, a cage in which I paced hopelessly, and nearly always I ended by wandering from bar to bar, ordering drinks I did not want and could not afford. And always I turned my face from the many adventures that offered. Evening after evening I would wait and watch, for surely somewhere, sometime I must meet him.

I longed to ask someone about him, but how to do so without revealing my interest in him? At last I mentioned it to the young barman in the small bar I frequented most often. «Surely the bathing here is quite safe?»

«But of course it is safe. It is magnificently safe.» His note of indignation suggested that I had denied this.

«I felt sure it is. I just wonderer why there must be a life-guard.»

«Oh that! There was a drowning here two, three summers ago. A German lady, of course. It seems that she ate enormously and then bathed at once. We all said that she blew up! But there was trouble, big trouble, and always now there must be this guard. But it is magnificently safe.»

«I suppose the guard is a local boy?»

«Oh no, the local boys all work in the summer, or their wives work for them. Besides, the money is very poor. This one is an American. He arrived from nowhere, he needed money so he took the work. Mike, he is called. The local boys would not work all day for that money.»

«A long day but an easy one,» I said, and then before I should see the look of enquiring awareness in his eyes that continued discussion might bring I spoke of something else, and soon finished my drink and left.

So his name was Mike. He was an American. Even this slight knowledge made me watch him with interest. But with some bewilderment too. Why should an American be doing such work in a small Italian resort? I suppose I considered that the Americans in Europe were either students living on an allowance from home or were wealthy tourists. It seemed strange that an American should be prepared to do such work.

The golden days slipped by, sun-drenched, enervating, and at last I realised that if I was to achieve a meeting I must make some definite move. It seemed that my only chance would be when he returned from his swim. I must time it perfectly so that when he returned to his stand I must be passing, or, better still, standing there. For several days I lacked the courage to move, or else my timing was wrong. Then at last I managed it; I was in just the right place and taking a cigarette from my case when he returned.

«Cigarette?» I asked him, holding out my case.

He turned slowly and looked at me, his face quite without expression. Then: «Well, thanks,» he said.

«That's quite a case you have,» he added when I had given him a light. And now his face had come alive, and I thought he looked at me with new interest.

He was right, it was quite a case, about the only thing of value I owned.

«I've had it sometime; it was a present.»

I had not known when I received it that it was a goodbye present, and for a moment I caught the echo of an old sadness.

«Yes, that's quite a case.» He took it and examined it carefully. «Quite a present! Not the sort of present I get.» He gave me back the case, and grinned at me.

«You're American?»

«Yeah. The name's Mike.»

Unexpectedly he held out his hand and shook mine warmly.

«You're English? Yes, I thought so. You've been around quite a while.» So he had noticed me.

«Oh, I notice all the ones who swim. You're not so bad, you know. You could be better.»

«I could never be in your class.»

«Oh you aren't too bad. Your leg action isn't quite right. You don't time it properly. Look, why don't you let me give you a lesson?»

«Would you? Would you really do that?»

«Sure; why not? Only thing, it would have to be in the evening. If I started it during the day they'd all be after me.»

«The evening suits me perfectly. It stays quite hot.»

«Swimming at night's fine. What about tonight?» He named a time, later than I expected.

«Swimming at night's fine,» he repeated. «It's quiet too; we shan't be disturbed.» He gave me a long look, as if trying to make up his mind about something.

«I must get back to my throne.» He grinned at me again as he swung himself onto his seat, giving me a little salute of farewell.

«What about tonight?» he had said, and already time had slowed to a tormenting crawl. Quite soon I left the beach.

As I walked down to the beach that evening I met the fair Italian boy, Ricky, evidently going to work.

«You have finished working?» he asked me.

«No work tonight. Sometimes one must play.»

He hesitated, but I did not stop. «Excuse me, I am late,» I told him, and in my voice was a little of the excitement that surged through me. I gave him a little wave and hurried on. And my excitement mounted as I set off along the beach.

At first I could not see him, then a voice came out of the darkness. «Hullo there. I wondered if you would turn up.»

«Sorry if I'm late.» I sat down beside him, and as my eyes grew more accustomed to the darkness I could make him out, lying with his hands behind his head.

For a while we talked. I told him about my writing. He told me a little, not much, about himself.

«Well,» he said presently, «We came to swim. Reckon we'd better swim.»

He jumped to his feet, and taking my hands in his pulled me up.

I had slipped out of my clothes when he put out his hand and took my bathing trunks, dropping them on the sand beside my towel.

«You won't need them, will you?»

«Well...»

«It's dark; there's no one here. Much better without. Unless you're shy?»

«I'm not shy.»

He moved close to me, and I felt he must hear the thudding of my heart.

«You're taller than me.»

«Not much. Half an inch.»

«Reckon I weigh more though. I'm 185, about.»

«I'm rather thin.»

«A bit. Not skinny. Slim.»

He ran his hands over me, then laughingly pulled me against him for a moment. «Reckon we'll have to wrestle sometime.» For a few moments he strained against me, as if about to throw me, then he laughed again and let me go.

«We'd better swim; cool ourselves off.»

Together we ran into the sea. The water felt like silk against my body, cool, delicious.

Somewhere ahead of me I could hear Mike splashing. «Come on,» he called. «Over here.» I swam in the direction of his voice, suddenly colliding with him.

«Sorry. Can't see a thing.»

«I can see in the dark. Sometimes useful. Sometimes see more than I should.» He laughed, his face close to mine, then we moved lazily through the water for a while.

«What about your lesson? Do you really want one? No charge.»

«Well, yes, as we're here.»

As we swam together I tried to imitate the strong drive of his limbs, suddenly aware of him as a powerful, perfect machine.

Ten minutes later I felt I really was swimming better. We moved easily through the water which seemed to glow as we thrust it aside. In the distance I could see the lights of the little town.

«You weren't scared to meet me alone like this?»

«Why scared?»

«I might be anything—a murderer even. I've often thought this beach at night would be ideal. Nobody here; you could shout all night—no one would hear.»

For a moment cold fear touched me, then was gone.

«You couldn't want to murder me, a stranger.»

«But I *could* do it. See this!»

Suddenly he dived at me, one of his arms was across my throat bending my head back, at the same time he struck me a violent blow in the small of the back. I was turned over, felt myself sinking, sinking. For a few moments I struggled, desperately trying to break his hold on me, then I knew somehow that this was what he wanted. I ceased to struggle and went limp, felt the water roaring in my ears, felt lungs almost bursting with pain, then I was on the surface again, gasping, retching.

He supported me, half laughing, half concerned. «You should have stopped me. I thought you'd know how.»

Soon I began to recover, and presently he said we had better go in. He swam slowly beside me, making sure I was alright. «I'm sorry,» he said. «I'm damned sorry. I am a clumsy fool. Sure you're alright?» he kept asking.

As we drew near the shore he sprinted away from me and ran up the beach. I followed more slowly, to find him drying himself vigorously on my towel.

«O.K. now?» Then he wrapped the towel round me and started to dry me, very carefully, gently.

«Why, you're cold,» he said. «I'll warm you.»

Again he held me against him, while he rubbed my back and shoulders with his hands. Soon the heat from his body passed into mine and I stopped shivering.

«Better get dressed.» We dressed in silence.

«Like some coffee? Do you good.»

«Yes, I would.»

«Come back to my place. I'll make some.»

«Your place?»

«My hut, at the end of the beach. They let me have it free. A bit primitive. Still, it's got water, and it is free.»

We moved further on down the beach, away from the town. Suddenly I felt confused, uncertain. This was a strange boy. I couldn't understand him. I couldn't understand him at all. For those few terrifying moments he had seemed cruel and ruthless, a few moments later considerate and kind.

«Have you got a spare cigarette?» His voice cut across my thoughts, startling me.

«Of course.» I put my hand in my pocket, then my heart seemed to miss a beat. No case.

«What's the matter?» I suppose I had gasped.

«My case; I've lost it.»

«That's tough.» Then suddenly, «Not *the* case? The present?»

I nodded. For a moment I could not speak.

«It must have fallen out when I dressed or undressed.»

«We'd better search. No, wait; have some coffee first. It's pretty hopeless at night, but after we've had some coffee . . .»

We moved on in silence towards the hut. Again I felt a vague uneasiness as he pushed open the door and we stood inside in the darkness. Then he struck a match and lighted a small lamp, and the feeling passed.

Simple it certainly was, just a bed, table and chair, a cupboard, a tap and china basin, a primus stove. That was about the lot.

«Hardly a palace,» he said with a wry smile. «Still, it's somewhere to sleep. It's all I need, and it's free.»

He moved around getting the coffee while I sat, half watching him, half thinking. Perhaps after all it was better to have lost the case. It was valuable, of course, but I would never have sold it. Perhaps it was only a reminder of a past sadness, better gone, finished.

The coffee was good, hot and strong; I felt it reviving me, making me more cheerful. Mike sat on the bed. He had taken off his shirt, and looked very attractive in the soft lamplight.

«Pity about the case,» he said. «I feel sort of to blame.»

«Nonsense, Mike. My fault for being so careless.»

«No, seriously, I do feel bad about it. Look, no sense looking for it tonight. I've got a torch, but it would be hopeless. But I'll search like mad in the morning, first thing before anyone gets there. I know exactly where we were.»

He half grinned at me, looking a little uncertain.

Well, here I was, with Mike alone at last. Something I had longed for so often. I knew that it was up to me to make the next move, yet I just sat there doing nothing. The silence between us grew and grew until it seemed to fill the small hut. And from under lowered lids Mike watched me.

At last: «Was that case from someone you loved?»

I nodded.

«Was she very nice?»

And when I did not answer: «Or was, perhaps, he very nice? Did you love him?»

I could not speak, but I suppose I nodded.

He sat up and held out a hand to me. As in a dream I went to him and he drew me down beside him.

«Look,» he said after a moment, «I know about these things. I'm not that way myself, but I understand about it. So don't feel awkward. don't think you have to hide things from me. I'm an understanding guy.»

And in that moment of happiness when the weight of his arm lay across my shoulder I suppose I was as near to tears as one can be without actually weeping.

«I like you,» he said presently. «I like you a lot. But just now I'm going to send you back home.»

«Don't look so downcast,» he added, laughing. «I've said I like you—and I mean that, I do. I think maybe I can do something for you, give you something you want. But I *can't*—just casually at a first meeting. Do you understand that? It's just the way I am. I hope you will come here again; come often. I think I can make you happy.»

He kissed me then, more in kindness than with affection, but feeling his firm lips on mine and his arm warmly round me I was satisfied.

It was as I rose to go that I saw it, and for a moment it was as though I had received a hard blow in the stomach. Where his slacks were drawn tightly across the curve of his thigh I could see the shape of something in his pocket. A cigarette case.

I stood there feeling half dazed, unable to move, then I saw that he was watching me, his eyes cold and wary, curiously darker in colour. And for a moment there was tension between us, each waiting for the other, then he stood up with a small laugh, and the tension was broken.

«No, I'm afraid I *can't* offer you a cigarette. We're a fine pair; you haven't a case at all, and my poor cheap old thing is empty.»

He moved his brown, strong hand casually into his pocket, and for an instant I thought he was going to produce a case of his own; but he did not.

I knew I should challenge him, ask to see the case, clear the matter up at once—but I knew too that I lacked the courage, that I should not do it.

«I must go,» I said at last.

«I'll search for your case first thing in the morning,» he called after me. «If it's there, I'll find it.»

When I looked back he was still standing in the doorway, looking after me. «Come to the beach tomorrow.» His voice came clearly through the still night. «I hope I shall have found it for you.»

I walked slowly back along the beach towards the distant town. «It can't be,» I told myself. «It can't be.»

Suddenly I felt desperately tired, as if all energy had been drained from me, and with the tiredness came a black, uneasy depression. I walked more and more slowly. It seemed hardly to matter if I never reached the town.

*

At the first light of day I rose, dressed quietly and hurried to the beach, keeping out of sight in the sand dunes behind the place where we had bathed last night.

The morning was deliciously cool and refreshing, with a light breeze coming off the sea. The fresh beauty of the day did much to dispel the dark mood with which I had woken. Despite the feeling of hurt I could not shake off, I saw that perhaps after all it did not matter so much. But I must know about Mike. I must know.

I stayed there hidden for a long time while the sun rose and drained the freshness from the morning, until people began to arrive on the beach. Then at last I returned to my room. Mike had not searched for my case.

Much later in the day I returned to the beach and went to where Mike was sitting.

«Hullo there!» he called cheerfully. «You must have overslept.»

He swung down from his seat and stood by me. «I say, I'm damned sorry, I couldn't find your case. I searched for ages; not a sign.»

«It's alright, Mike,» I told him. «I know you didn't look for it. After all, it would be stupid to look for something you knew wasn't there.»

I couldn't look at him. I just turned and walked away—back to the hot imprisonment of my room.

*

And now the days seemed long and empty. The summer lost none of its perfection, each day was hot, golden, glorious. The setting was lovely as ever, but now it seemed that the stage was empty, the actors gone.

Yet through my loneliness and unhappiness I came at last to know a feeling of release. I found I could work again, and after a few false starts my writing began to run splendidly. I worked for long stretches each day, and even twice at night. Within two weeks the last chapters were finished. I knew it was good, and hardly troubled to read it before I mailed it off to my publisher. I knew once more the feeling of quiet triumph that always comes when work has gone well and to plan. Perhaps after all, I thought, this summer need not be written off as a complete loss.

There seemed no reason now why I should not return to England, yet I lingered on. After all, I told myself, I had difficulty enough to obtain sufficient currency to spend the summer out here; it seemed a pity to return while I still had some left. Besides, why leave this sunshine for the grey skies of England until I must? But behind all this I knew, though I would not quite admit it, was the feeling that I must see Mike once more before I left.

Several times I went to my old place along the beach and watched him carry out the same routine. If he saw me he made no sign, and I did not try to meet him.

He was as handsome and attractive as ever, but somehow, now that I knew what he had done, he was no longer a god. He was cut down to man size, and I found I liked him better for it.

The loss of the case had ceased to matter. There was still a hurt at what Mike had done, but it no longer seemed of importance. Soon I would see him and try to tell him this, and we could part as friends.

The summer now would soon be ended. Already the holiday crowds had thinned out. The mornings and evenings were much fresher, though the sunshine was still hot and strong. Soon, I thought, Mike will be leaving. I must see him soon.

And so, one evening, I felt the time had come. My publisher had written, very pleased with what I had sent him. He wanted to see me soon to discuss some minor amendments, also to talk about my next book. There seemed little point in delaying my departure much longer, though my ideas for a new book were pretty vague. I wondered wryly what he would say if I suggested that it should be «An Innocent on an Italian Beach».

Though I set off along the beach in high spirits, long before I reached Mike's hut I felt a growing depression. Quite a cold wind was blowing, and though the moon was shining brightly dark clouds were moving swiftly across its face. Summer had ended, and with its ending a chapter of my life would close.

I suppose I was a fool to do this. Mike might not want to see me. In any case it was late and he might be in bed. Better to leave things as they were. Yet I kept on along the beach.

When I arrived the hut was in darkness. After a moment's hesitation I knocked, then knocked again. There was no reply, and I stood uncertainly, wondering what to do. It was only as I turned to go that I saw Mike standing a little way off. I had the feeling that he had been watching me for some time.

«Hello, stranger,» he said, moving towards me. «Long time no see. I thought you must have gone home.»

«I'm leaving pretty soon. I've finished my work. I've come to say goodbye.»

«Well come on in.» He held the door of the hut open for me, and we moved inside.

He struck a match and lighted a candle. «Sorry about the lighting effects, the lamp has packed in. Then, turning to me: «A good thing you came now. I'm leaving pretty soon myself.»

«Back to the States?»

«Hope so. If I can make it.»

There was a shyness between us, and conversation died. The candle flame flickered, throwing grotesque shadows across the hut. Presently I sat on the bed.

«Excuse me if I have a wash,» Mike said. «I've been running on the beach, made me damned hot.»

Quite unselfconsciously he slipped off his clothes, and running some water into a bowl splashed himself all over. And as I watched him the old excitement grew, and I knew that for me nothing had changed.

«How about you?» he asked, grinning. «Come on; fresh you up.» He undressed me, laughing as he pulled me to my feet, then taking me to the bowl plunged his hands in again and again, splashing the water on to me and running his wet hands over me. I realised that I was shaking violently with excitement, and at last I clung to him, trembling and laughing.

«Better get dried,» he said, and taking a towel dried me carefully and then himself.

As if in a dream I let him take me to the bed and lie there with me, knowing only the warmth and strength of his body against mine.

«See what you missed by staying away.» Then seriously: «What did happen between us? What was wrong?»

«Let's not talk about that, Mike. It's finished and done with.»

He sat up, pushing the hair back from his eyes, looking very young.

«Look, you think I stole your case, don't you? I didn't, truly I didn't. You must believe me.»

«It doesn't matter, Mike. It's all finished. That's what I came to tell you.»

«But you must believe me.»

Perhaps this was the truth. I wanted it to be true.

«I believe you, Mike,» I told him.

He lay beside me again, with a sigh so deep that I had to press my mouth to his to stifle it.

«I've felt awful about this. I knew what you were thinking, I didn't know how to make you believe. And then, when you didn't come to see me any more, I—well I just can't tell you how bad I felt. And, gosh! Now everything's O.K.»

I drew him to me, holding him closely. «Everything's O.K.»

He seemed to be taking me along a green, secret pathway towards a garden brilliant with flowers, loud with bird-song. Gently, easily he was drawing me along towards a moment of ecstasy... when suddenly he halted me abruptly, and shocked and disappointed I was back in the hut. Mike had raised himself on one elbow and was looking down at me. With one hand he was still gently stroking my shoulder, and as he moved his arm I watched with fascination the play of muscles beneath the smooth, brown skin.

«Look,» he said, «I need help. I need it badly. I don't know anyone but you who can do this for me.»

As he said this I knew a sinking of the heart. What now?

«You asked me just now if I was going back home to the States. Well, I must. I've just got to. I couldn't stick a winter over here. But I must have money. I hoped to save enough this summer for my fare, but I just haven't been able to do it.»

«Look, Mike,» I began.

«I don't need much. I've saved part of the fare, but not enough. There are plenty of people back home who would help me, but it would take time. And people aren't so keen to help unless they are on the spot and can get something in return.» «Like you are,» he added, grinning at me.

«Listen, Mike...»

«You need not go for a day or two. I'd give you a wonderful time. And I'll give you my address in the States, and send the money back quite soon.»

He lay beside me again, and snuggled against me. «You're so nice; I knew you would.»

«Mike,» I said firmly. «You must listen. I can't help you. I just haven't the money.»

«You must have money.» His voice had taken on an edge. I would not look to see the hard expression I knew would be in his eyes.

«I've just enough to pay up here and get me back to England. I would help you, Mike, if I could; truly I would.»

He sat up abruptly and swang his feet to the ground, then grabbing my coat he whipped my wallet from the inside pocket.

«Mike,» I cried, «Put that back. Give it to me.»

I tried to sit up but he pushed me back violently, and opening the wallet pulled out a bundle of notes.

«Why, you've got 80,000 Lire here, nearly 90,000.»

«I've told you, Mike, I need it.»

«Not all of it.»

«All of it, truthfully. It's all I have until I can get an advance on my book. Mike, give it to me.»

I grabbed at him, trying to reach the money, and the next moment he had twisted my arm behind me and was wrenching it cruelly, so that I had to fight back the cry of pain that sprang to my lips.

He knelt across me on the bed, holding me there with contemptuous ease, and slipped the notes in a book on the small table.

«Well, I need it too.»

«Mike, that's stealing.»

He slapped me twice across the mouth with his free hand, and I felt a trickle of blood down my chin.

«You're very quick to use that word. I wanted to *borrow* it and repay you when I got home. O.K., I *will* steal it then, and try to stop me. And I did steal that case of yours; I stole it and sold it. Just try to prove it.»

I realised that I could not stop the sobs that racked me.

«Oh shut up. You make me sick. Why don't you stop me? Where's the fight in you?»

He gave my arm another sickening wrench, and drove a knee hard into my stomach.

«Just try to make trouble,» he said. «Just try it and see what comes to you.»

«Don't, Mike,» I moaned, «Please don't.»

«Your kind are all the same, always creeping round with your smut and your dirty suggestions. Well, you picked the wrong boy this time.»

He slapped my face viciously several times again, then suddenly released me and stood up.

«Get out, and make it quick before you really get hurt. I could kill you with one hand, so don't forget it. Don't try any funny business.»

Shuddering I pulled my clothes on while he watched me, smiling coldly.

«I wonder if this really is all you've got,» he murmured. «I do believe it is. Well, you're a writer; you'd better write something and make some more.»

He pushed me out of the hut, and I heard him laughing, a hard laugh, as he slammed the door behind me.

After a few steps I fell to my knees and did not seem able to rise. I felt deathly cold, and could not stop shuddering.

At first I hardly realised that someone had helped me to my feet, then I heard a voice I seemed to know. With an effort I looked and saw it was Ricky, the fair Italian boy.

«It's alright,» he said, putting his arm round me. «I'll take care of you. You're cold; look, come over here to the dunes, out of the wind.»

In the dunes he pulled me down and lay with me in his arms, and presently I began to feel warmer and calmer.

«I saw you start out this evening. I've finished at the Splendide. I followed you here in case there was trouble. I've been waiting here.»

He cradled me in his arms, rocking me gently to and fro.

«Don't cry; please don't cry. He's vicious and cruel. There have been others before you. I wanted to warn you, but I wasn't sure.»

I was calmer now, and conscious of his strong young body against mine, and his arms holding me.

«That's better,» he said softly, «Don't try to talk. Just try to forget what happened in here. I'll take care of you.»

But even as I felt the first response of my body to his, I knew with dreadful desolation that even after all he had done it was still Mike I wanted. And in anguished loneliness on that beach in Italy my heart was calling his name . . . again . . . and again . . . and again.

Ein schönes Ostergeschenk für Ihren Freund

sind nicht nur der neue Band «Der Mann in der Zeichnung» und der III. Bildband «Der Mann in der Photographie, sondern auch immer noch unsere gebundenen Jahrgänge. Kameraden finden darin vieles Wissenswerte und Schöne, wissenschaftliche Auseinandersetzungen, Kurzgeschichten und Lyrik in drei Sprachen. Auch mancher bildnerische Fund, sei es in der Malerei, sei es in der Plastik oder in der Graphik, wird Ihrem Freund oft eine festliche Stunde bereiten. Der Aussenstehende, der sich gerne sachlich über unsere Art orientieren möchte, wird ebenfalls manches entdecken, das ihm die homoerotischen Beziehungen verständlicher macht und klarer sehen lässt. Wenn Sie also ein Buch suchen, so denken Sie auch an unsere gebundenen Jahrgänge 1950—1960; sie kosten pro Jahrgang Fr. 30.— inklusive Porto.

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Deutschland: Verein für humanitäre Lebensgestaltung (VhL), Kettenhofweg 46, Frankfurt a.M.

Dänemark: Forbundet af 1948, Postbox 1023, Kopenhagen K, Organ: PAN, Klubadresse: «Admiral-Kroen», 2te stock, Admiralgade, Kopenhagen K

Holland: Cultuur- en Ontspanningscentrum (COC), Postbus 542, Amsterdam C. Central-Büro: Damrak 57, Tel. 34596. Organ: Vriendschap, Clublokal: «De Schakel», Korte Leidsedwarstaat 49, Tel. 64511.

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