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The Far Away Music

by David A. Johnstone

1949.

In the quiet stillness of the willow beds, grown specially for the blind people to weave into fine baskets, two young boys wrestled and rolled on the grass under the blazing August sun.

Dressed only in tee shirts and shorts they played in the clearing every game which they'd seen on the cinema. Cops and robbers, cowboys and Indians.

It was the happiest time of the year for Peter and Thomas, the summer holidays. Six long weeks of games, fights, quarrels and adventures.

«You be the Indian now,» said Peter jumping up from Thomas's chest, «I'm tired of scalping you». They laughed.

«Let's just lay in the sun now,» said Thomas putting his arm around Peter's shoulders. Together they lay looking up at the blue sky.

Unexpectedly Thomas whispered «Pete would you be scared to stay here all night long?»

«Of course not, I'm not a baby, I'll be ten in two weeks' time,» Thomas smiled. «Well let's do it, let's stay here even if our mothers come looking for us, we'll be safe here in our secret place, nobody knows about this spot».

«Oh another time Tommy, I'm hungry and anyway we have strawberries for tea.» Peter replied lamely. There was a silence. The only sound was the gurgle of the small stream.

«Tommy I like you very much,» whispered Peter and turned his face from his friend's gaze.

«I like you too, we're pals and always will be,» answered Thomas, pulling Peter nearer. «We'll be like brothers seeing that your father has run away with that showgirl».

«Let's always come here together then. It'll be our place, our secret,» Peter said and felt a tear running down his hot cheek.

Thomas disliked the strange peace and calm so jumping up he shouted «Come on lazy let's play Tarzan».

«Well I'm not being Jane,» laughed Peter forgetting his father and his loneliness.

The tall willows, like a protecting fortress against the world outside, watched as the boys continued their fun.

The sound of screams and laughter floated into the summer air.

*

1959

A breeze stirred the slender tendril like branches of the weeping willow causing the air to grow golden with pollen. The bees buzzed angrily. Beneath the trees along the bank of the little stream the celandines opened their petals to the Spring sunshine. A kingfisher flashed across the calm surface of the water.

Thomas sat up and yawned. He was naked and his whole body glowed with warmth and vitality. He smiled, noticing the criss cross pattern of the grass on his elbows. Plucking one of the rushes he drew it slowly across Peter's face. Peter too lay sunbathing naked on the grass.

Peter's nose twitched, he sneezed and sat up quickly «Hey that tickled, man». They both laughed. Ten years had passed since they first played in this place amongst the willows. Ten years which had altered the boys in many ways except one. They still loved each other and wanted to be with one another whenever possible.

Thomas, looking at his friend's body, felt again that thrill he always felt. How different it was from his own. Peter's was suntanned to a golden bronze, Peter had developed his muscles too. Thomas sighed and looked at his own slim body.

Peter looked at his watch and almost shouted «Hey it's nearly two, we'll be late.» He began to gather up his clothes and to dress but Thomas just stood near the water and gazed at his reflection.

«Do you remember when we were kids, we planned to stay out all night?»

«We never did, though».

«No, but we could do now. Let's stay here instead of getting back into those black suits, collars and ties. We'll be boiled alive in the office».

«Oh Tom, when will you ever grow up, we have positions to keep now, we have responsible jobs, we aren't children any more.»

Reluctantly Thomas came back to reality and began dressing too.

«Peter let's come back here this evening,» suggested Thomas not daring to say 'I want to be alone with you again'. Peter looked at him and smiled, walking up to Thomas he put his arms around his friend and kissed him quickly and passionately on the lips.

«Tommy,» he murmured «I still like you very very much».

Once dressed they threaded their way back to the town, back to the cruel outside world where they became different, almost robot, humans, unable to live as their hearts directed.

«See you at five old man,» Thomas said, pushing the lift button while Peter again felt like laughing at the change of tone in his friend's voice. Peter called it Tom's office voice.

«Okay Thomas» replied Peter and they parted, noticing that they were late and eyes were asking questions. Stares followed them to their desks.

Alone in his office Peter saw the sun break through the clouds and felt its warmth on his cheek. Somewhere far away he heard the sound of music. Or was it the wind singing in the tall trees?

*

1962

Thomas opened the door of his new flat and looked around the pale green room. It was cool and shaded, the sun making the leaves on the pattern of the curtains stand out on the dark green material.

How strange, he thought, that three years later this luxury American styled block of flats stood where Peter and he had sunbathed.

Their little fortress of greenery was gone, gone with the kingfishers and the flowers. Gone too was the stream with its musical rippling.

The door opposite flew open suddenly and Peter appeared dressed in an apron. «Oh Tom,» he stuttered, almost dropping the glasses he carried.

«Darling».

Holding each other in an embrace they felt again that even on the sixth floor they still were in their own world.

«Perhaps this place was blessed,» whispered Thomas, kissing Peter's neck as the other looked up at the ceiling.

«Perhaps, but what ever happens now doesn't matter, we are together forever.»

Around the tall building the breeze murmured knowingly and from somewhere far away there came the sound of music, or was it again the sound of the wind singing in the topmost branches of the willows?

As the sun sank slowly down two figures stood at the window of their home and listened to the faraway music.

Book Review

CITY OF NIGHT by John Rechy (Grove Press, Inc., New York — 410 pages, \$ 5.95)

It is a pleasure to inform our readers of a true-to-life, outspoken book which can be recommended without reservations—one which deserves all of the bouquets tossed in its direction. Never has a writer conveyed with such down-to-earth authenticity the world of the homosexual.

To read this detailed fictional tour of the great cities of America is to be made aware of the defiant segment of twilight people who comprise rather more of society than it will permit itself to recognize. At some point in their lives, these deviates from «normality» refuse to accept the heterosexual pattern of life and make it in scene after scene of fleeting sex, using each other's bodies to satisfy a lust which can never be slaked.

Some try pathetically to impose the pattern of the conventional marriage on their doomed quest for abiding love. Others flout any pretense of conformity, selling themselves while youngmen and becoming the buyers when they become oldmen.

The characters in this lurid gallery form an endless parade: drag queens seeking «husbands,» hustlers, actors sadie-maisie (sodomasochist) johns, married men seeking the contacts they have tried unsuccessfully to subdue—these are all depicted with an honesty and lack of sensationalism which other writers have eschewed.

Again, may we urge one and all not to miss this swift-moving, unvarnished novel? It pulls no punches in presenting *la vie du monde gai* without mincing any naughty words or hard-boiled passages. Mr. Rechy is to be commended for bringing to life some of the questions which Dr. Kinsey posed many years ago. *Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner?* —Diego de Angelis

The Vassall Affair

A curious byproduct of the Vasall affair may be the end in Britain of the fairly old custom of hunting the homosexual.

I was talking about this with Lord Boothby. Said he: «In the light of this case I am considering the introduction of a Private Member's Bill to the House of Lords.

«It will have just one clause. It will seek to amend the present law which makes homosexual behaviour between consenting males in private a criminal offence.