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«Well, here I am again,» said the young voice over the telephone.

Deep within I groaned silently to myself, and looked out at the San Francisco afternoon, grey for a change. And then I summoned up a bright inflection, and said, «What brings you back to Sodom and Gomorrah?»

«I'm working for a guy who runs a puppet show,» Danny said, «and I drove out with him from Chicago.»

«Where are you staying?» I said.

«At the Hilton,» Danny said proudly. «And the show's at the Fairmont. Then we have another one in Oakland.»

«Looks like you're coming up in the world,» I said. At least, if he were with someone else, I wouldn't be bothered with him and his sad little adolescent jokes. «Well, come see me some time,» I added, thinking that the coffee ought to come off the stove.

But he was not to be turned aside so easily. «I heard my brother came out here last time lookin' for me,» he said.

«Yeah,» I said, «and I made him.»

Danny giggled. «Like you always said you wanted,» he said.

«Sure,» I said. «At least he's one member of your family who doesn't lie flat on his back like a sack of potatoes,» I said. «Like you and your two other triplet brothers.»

«Maybe I've changed,» he said.

«I doubt it.» I saw that the conversation could go on for the whole afternoon. «Listen, Danny,» I said. «I've got to take the coffee off the stove. Call me up some other time, huh?»

«Sure,» he said, and we hung up.

The truth is that we all change from time to time, and as we grow more jaded in this crazy hummingbird life of ours, we go on to newer novelties. What they are is unpredictable. We may turn to the s/m game, or to foot fetishism, or to exotic types such as Polynesians, Eskimos, Orientals, or cops. I'd been through a good deal since Danny left San Francisco the last time—and had settled on one thing at the moment which brought me a good deal of satisfaction: the Negro, the image of God cut in ebony, and the blacker the better.

It was hard to say what I liked about them so much, whether their joyous abandon in bed, their lack of remorse or a sense of shame after it was all over, their smashed African faces, their abilities at lovemaking, their reputed size of what mattered, their wide shoulders and narrow hips and long legs, the harsh male smell of them, the feel of their hard black-curled hair—when it was not straightened, or 'gassed' as they phrased it. But at any rate in my Black Period, the thought of motionless Danny, white as milk, lanky and non-muscled, unable to react no matter how long one worked, left me about as excited as the prospect of feasting on strawberries smothered in lard.

And the blacks were numerous and available in San Francisco, or that failing, Oakland and Berkeley, where the whiteys were actually outnumbered. But in the City, the Magic City as we who lived in San Francisco called it, there was a club on Eddy Street called the Bettermen—why, no one knew except that it was a

close take-off on the name of a general who had done big things for San Francisco It was legally a private club, with dancing afterhours, and beer drinking, and a couple of pool tables in the back room. And it was a source of supply, one might say, for here both Negro and whitey hustlers, habitués of the Tenderloin district in the city, met to let off steam . . . and find their bed partners.

So, with such a source—what need had I to concern myself with Danny?

But I might have known I couldn't win. The puppeteer went back to Chicago, leaving Danny in San Francisco, and early one morning there came a ring at the door. Full of sleep I went to answer it—and there he stood, grinning his crooked grin (his teeth were much worse), carrying a suitcase and a smaller zippered leather case that looked as if it might be a container for a precious violin bow.

«What the hell,» I said.

«Can I come in?» he said, putting on as much charm as he could, which was not much as far as I was concerned.

I opened the door without saying anything and he came in. «Can I stay with you for a few days?» he asked. «I'm gonna get a job out here.»

«Seems to me I've heard that one before,» I said grumpily.

«No, honest,» he said. «This time I really am. I've already applied at three service stations.»

«Humph,» I said.

«I got some money,» he said. «Enough to hold me until I get my first paycheck.»

«*If* you get a job,» I said sourly.— «I will,» he said confidently.

«All right,» I said. «But there are certain house rules. You set up your folding bed every night, and you fold it up again in the morning. And you buy your own food. And then as soon as your second paycheck comes, you move out into a room of your own. Or an apartment. I need my privacy.»

«You won't even know I'm here,» he promised.

And so it began. Oddly enough, he did get a job at a gasoline station, only two days after he arrived. But I did know he was there, for he landed the night-shift and that meant that I couldn't turn on my radio as I always did first thing in the morning when I awakened. It meant, too, that I had to pussyfoot around and not rattle the breakfast dishes, although from the way he slept—the profound quiet sleep of the young—I doubted that a flourish of trumpets in his ear would have brought him around.

He got his first paycheck. «Now you can leave,» I said.

He looked down, somewhat ashamed. «You said the *second one,*» he said. «I had to use most of this one to buy my uniforms for the station and to pay for laundering them. And I had to buy a pair of boots, 'cause all that grease was ruinin' my good shoes.»

That much was true. The 'boots' were really calf-high paratrooper's shoes, with lots of lacing. I couldn't take my eyes off them. And Danny knew my weaknesses.

«Pretty, ain't they?» he said, holding one up by its top. I took it from him, and almost involuntarily smelled the good fresh leather smell of it. «Yeah,» I said, handing it back. But a small part of my icy shell melted in that moment and he seemed to know it. For he invented a little game: when he would come from work in the morning, I would hear him open and close the door softly. And then after a moment to take off his shoes—while I pretended to be asleep—he

would come into the bedroom and with one swift gesture enclose my whole face in the open end of the boot, laughing as he did so.

«Pretty good way to wake up in the morning, huh?» he said. It was hard to be angry with him after that.

During those first two or three weeks we tried a little roll in the hay as we used to, but not much ever came of it. His immobility made me think too much of making love to a corpse, and finally we gave it up entirely. I was reminded of the old wives' tale that twins shared the same soul, and that each twin had therefore only half a soul. In the case of triplets, did each possess only one-third of a soul? And was the sexual urge divided equally as the soul was?

I think that Danny was a superb example of the truth of such folklore. His barely perceptible movements in bed were precisely one third of what they should have been. For a twenty-two year old, he was the most asexual man—with a man—I had ever known.

*

The curious long leather case with the zipper contained Danny's most prized possession: a professional cue-stick that unscrewed in the middle. It was, he told me, a forty dollar cue—and I could believe him, for it was polished and gleaming, with brass fittings—phallic, straight, and strong. He played a lot of pool, and from what he said he was pretty good at it. «The balls just seem to know where to go when I hit 'em,» he bragged. Judging from the money he earned from side-bets, he must have been right.

From an active dislike of his presence, I gradually grew used to having him there when I got home from work. We are all lonely and we all ought to be married, either to a man or a woman or a dog. Or perhaps all we need is a canary to keep us from the endless round of cruising and hunting.

October slipped into November, and that into December. The morning ritual of the shoe kept on. I found also that I did not need to keep quiet; even the alarm clock at his ear did not waken him.

But there was something wrong with me. I did not feel actually a part of the scene in the most glamorous and romantic city of the states. I had lived too long in Chicago; my taproots had been sunk there too deeply. There was only one cure for it.

«I think I'll have to go back to Chicago to kill it off,» I said to him one day. «And I'll pick the worst season of the year there—over Christmas.»

Danny looked out at the bright sunshine of the December morning, at the camelias growing beside the door and the goldfish swimming lazily in the pond among the white-blooming water lilies. «And leave all this for the snow and wind?»

«Yeah,» I said. «And I'll make appointments with the dentist and the doctor, and have an eye examination—all at nine in the morning.»

«How'll you ever make it?» he asked. «You can hardly get up at ten-thirty.»

«That's the point,» I said. «I want to kill off that nagging little affection I have for the city. Zero weather, high winds, snow and slush—and having to get up early should do it.»

«What do you want me to do?» he said. «Move out?»

I crossed my legs and pushed myself back in the chair. «Well,» I said, «I guess I'll leave you here. You've talked so much about your honesty, and how you 'weren't brought up that way'—to steal anything, that is—that I guess I can trust you.»

«Yeah, you can,» he said.

«You're the only one I'd ever leave in the house alone,» I said.

«Thanks.»

«Only one condition,» I said. «Don't bring any of your female hippie friends from the Haight-Ashbury district here. And no smoking of pot or anything like that.»

He looked pained. «Of course not,» he said.

And so I went to Chicago, and it was all as bad as I thought it would be. I could not understand what had ever made me love the city. The snow fell to a depth of eleven inches, the wind howled, the temperature slipped to zero; and through it all I was wading, puffing, and blowing to my early morning appointments. I forced myself to stay ten days, and then one night I called Danny.

«I'm coming back tomorrow,» I said. «Everything all right?»

«Sure,» he said. «How's the weather there?»

«Just what I expected,» I said bitterly. «I'm tired of fighting it.»

He laughed. «It's nice and warm here.» he said. And then, «Oh, by the way, I quit my job.»

«Just a drifter,» I said. «What was wrong this time?»

«The station owner made me work too hard, and didn't pay me enough,» he said.

I sighed. «Why is it that all you young ones want to start at the top?»

«The best place,» he said, and laughed again.

And so the plane deposited me the next day at the San Francisco airport. The curious looks I got from the people there annoyed me, but you could hardly blame them. For I was bundled up in boots, overcoat, hat and scarf, and gloves —and it was warm and sunny when I landed. I could hardly wait to get home to shed my winter wear.

When I opened the door, the house seemed curiously empty. You can somehow feel if no one is there. There were no signs of Danny's occupancy. And then I saw the note lying on my chair—scrawled in a green pencil on the back of an envelope. It said, in his nearly illiterate way: «I am ashamed of myself so I go. I have taken your money from the bedroom and used it. This is what I am ashamed about I will some how send you yor money and hope we can still be friens at a latter date all thoug I wont blame you for not trustin me. With regretts I sign, Danny.»

I had to sit down. The shock was intense. And almost unseeing, hardly knowing what I was doing, I took off my winter clothes and went to the bedroom. In a place that I had thought well-concealed and secret, I usually kept an 'operating' fund of about a hundred dollars. On top of the money, before I had gone, I had left a note saying: «This money is counted, Danny, so be governed accordingly.» Evidently, deep under the iceberg of my subconscious I did not trust him at all, and never had.

He had found it, all right. The money was gone, the cupboard bare. I checked everything else as quickly as I could, and all seemed to be as I had left it. His clothes were not there, nor the boots, but nothing else of mine was missing. Like a true professional, he took only what could not be traced.

I was sick. It was not so much the theft of the money I resented as the utter destruction of my faith in Danny, and from then on in possibly every human being.

As I left the bedroom, I stepped on something that crunched. It was a bobby-pin—and looking further on the bedroom rug, I found three more. I looked at my bed, unmade; he had been sleeping there. And then—shuddering — I went to get clean sheets and change the linens. As I folded up the dirty ones and reached behind the door to put them in the laundry bag, I saw the long black leather case of his pool cue standing in the corner.

The gush of hatred that swept over me left me weak and shaking. I picked up the damned thing and looked around. For a moment—like a bad-tempered child—I thought of breaking it, or burning it, or destroying it in some way. He had evidently forgotten it; certainly he would never have left it as a partial payment for the money he had stolen. I hefted it in my hand, and then threw it forcibly behind the door and closed it. But like some mysterious nuclear-powered device, it still sent out its waves of radiation.

It was dark outside by now. I looked at the lights winking down the hill-side towards the center of town. And then—my curious rage still swollen in my throat and temples—I showered and shaved and put on some clothes, and headed for the central part of the city, towards the Bettermen Club.

*

As I drove to the center of town, I found that my rage was still with me, and like any ordinary bitch I laid plans to put out the Black Word about Danny Shults. I had several addresses in Chicago of his former 'clients'—so off would go notes to them, telling of the whole affair. And there were also notes to be sent to Los Angeles, New York, Tampa, Dallas, and elsewhere. As for San Francisco, I would take care of that myself. Word of a hustler's treachery has a way of coursing like lightning on the underground grapevine. I presumed that he had not yet gone far, and that he had probably lost himself amongst the hippie-wilds of the Haight-Ashbury district, living in «love» and flowers amid the other members of the turned-on, dropped-out generation.

The Bettermen Club was as dingy as ever, especially the ceiling with its holes in the plaster, though hardly anyone ever looked upwards. Most club-members were too eager to get in to see what other mammals or animals of prey were whooping it up around the corner of the L-shaped desk. It was early yet; there were not many there. The live combo did not start playing until two a.m.; before that, there was the juke-box to furnish music for dancing. Only a few couples were on the floor.

I wandered on through, back to the far room where there were little talk-tables, and where the beer was sold, and the pool tables were. Again, there were not many in the back room either, for it was not yet the hour when the walkers of the streets stared to come in. But both pool tables were busy, and I walked over to watch.

Then I saw him. He was possibly the best-looking Negro I had ever laid an eye on, tall und handsome like an African prince, and so black that when he stood in the shadows he almost disappeared from view. He should have been wearing a turban and jewels around his neck. He was playing the game with a nondescript little white faggot with shoulder-length blond hair who couldn't shoot worth a damn. I felt my heart begin to thud, felt the old familiar tug, and knew that I was going to get that blackamoor, sooner or later.

It was fascinating to watch him. Evidently the game had just started, for he still had on his suit-coat—a suit of iridescent green and blue that changed

color under the lights like a beetle's wings, the kind of suit that Negro dandies love so much. He was a man in every sense—his laughter was male, his shoulders were broad, his legs long. There was none of the faggot's affectation about him. He wore his hair short, in the style they called 'nappy natural', curled tight against his well-shaped head. His ears were tiny shells of jet, and his face had a pure African cast—lips full and dark but not grossly exaggerated. His chin was strong, with a small cleft in it. His movements around the table were lithe and panther-like, and his long black fingers scampered like black butterflies over the green baize cloth of the table.

Mentally I undressed him, and clothed him as he should be—naked except for a glittering gold breech-clout above his magnificent midnight thighs, his biceps encircled by broad golden bands. I discarded the idea of a turban and replaced it with a low crown of egret feathers, and set him on a golden throne, his legs spread wide, and his fourteen-inch long feet carelessly placed on the steps below him.

I exhaled, and muttered «Sheez» under my breath. There was a transsexual called Sandy standing beside me—a tall thin boy who never wore anything but girl's clothes, and who was taking the hormone shots in preparation for the time when he would have enough money for the 'Operation' that would technically change him into a woman.

Sandy heard me. «Sheez what?» she said lightly.

«Who's the stud in the blue-green suit?» I said.

«That's Jimmy,» she said. «I don't know his last name.»

«He sure plays a fancy game of pool,» I said.

«He's the best around here,» Sandy said. «He's straight—or says he is.»

«You been with him?»

Sandy made a little moue. «I'm married,» she said. «But I wouldn't mind.»

«He certainly has that mysterious x-factor of the real male,» I said.

«You want to meet him?» Sandy said. «When he finishes the game, I'll introduce you.»

Of course Jimmy won. The pale white faggot stamped his foot, tossed his blondined hair, and twitched his fat little ass over to the coke machine.

Sandy called Jimmy over to the table against which I was lounging, and introduced us. His handshake was firm, his hand moist from the exercise of the game.

«I'll leave you two lovebirds alone,» Sandy said, with just the faintest trace of a smirk.

«Thanks, Sandy,» I said. «I'll dance at your operation.»

«Man,» said Jimmy, looking after her. «I just don't understand.»

I shrugged. «No need to bother,» I said, and then changed the subject. «You're a wizard with that game,» I said, nodding towards the table. «Best I ever saw.»

«Thanks,» he said briefly.

«You handle that cue like a professional,» I said. «You play much?»

He laughed again. «Man, I'm a hustler,» he said. «A pool hustler, that is.»

«You straight?»

«Yep.»

«Even for ten bucks?»

He smiled. «I just don't go that route,» he said. «Too much pussy around.» But then he seemed to reconsider. He moved a little closer to me, where my

hand was resting on the edge of the table, and pressed his crotch directly against the knuckles. «But you can feel it,» he grinned. «Just to see what you're missing.»

I was missing a lot. Then an idea struck me. «You got a cue-stick of your own?» I said.

«No, man. Can't afford one.»

«Well, I'll tell you something. Somebody left a forty-dollar stick at my house. Leather case and all. And I don't want it around. I'd like to give it to some one, but it's too bad you're straight.»

He put out both hands and clutched me hard on my upper arms. «You kiddin', man?» he said. He shook me a little.

«Not at all.»

His eyes glittered in the shadows. «It in good condition?»

«Might need a coat of varnish, that's all,» I said. «But then you're straight,» I said ironically. «I better give it to a club member.»

He tightened his grip. «Listen,» he said. «I've wanted one for a long time. You mean you'll give it to me if we go to bed together?»

I nodded.

«How many times?»

«Just one for the bargain,» I said. «But I can always hope, can't I?»

He laughed, his teeth dazzling to my eyes. «What's holdin' us?» he said. «You got wheels?»

«Of a sort,» I said. «A Volkswagen.»

«You live far?»

«Out by Golden Gate park,» I said.

He let go of one of my arms and kept his grip on the other, steering me out past the dancing couples, and the front desk. Eddie, who ran the place, looked up.

«That's the shortest visit you've paid us in quite a while,» he grinned.

I nodded as Jimmy hustled me towards the door. «It's just that you gotta know how,» I said over my shoulder.

Eddie beckoned to me. I disengaged myself from Jimmy's grip, and bent my ear to hear what Eddie wanted to say. «You're the only one that ever made it outa here with him,» he whispered. «What's the secret?»

I smiled like the Mona Lisa. «Ah,» I said. «It's an old voodoo trick I learned in Haiti. I'll show you how some time.»

And then Jimmy and I went out into the noise and drunkenness and the nice fresh gasoline fumes of the Tenderloin.

*

Perhaps, I thought, I had been a little hasty in condemning Danny. In very few cases have I ever got so much for a mere hundred dollars, especially when you divide it by nearly a hundred weeks. All my friends in the San Francisco area think it odd that I always am otherwise engaged when they ask me to come to visit them on Sunday evenings.

But they find it even more odd that I—never a sportsman in any way—should suddenly become so interested in the game of pool.

Jimmy's been teaching me, always on Sunday. I've never known anyone who could handle a pool cue the way he does his.

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THE THREE KINDS OF LOVE . . .

the first, when one runs for protection; the second, the sexual thing; and the third — when you love someone so truly and unselfishly that you can bring yourself to do anything to bring about his happiness, even to the extent that what you do may take him away from you forever . . .

D.O.C.

A GLIMPSE

A glimpse through an interstice caught,
Of a crowd of workmen and drivers in a bar-room around the stove
late of winter night, and I unremarkt'd seated in a corner,
Of a youth who loves me and whom I love silently approaching
and seating himself near, that he may hold my hand,
A long while amid the noises of coming and going,
of drinking and oath and smutty jest,
There we two, content, happy in being together, speaking little,
perhaps not a word.

Walt Whitman

VICAR ASKS: WAS JESUS HOMOSEXUAL?

Oxford, England, July 26 — Jesus may have been a homosexual, the vicar of Cambridge University's main church suggested here tonight.

Canon Hugh W. Montefiore, vicar of the Great St. Mary, told the Modern Churchmen's conference that Jesus remained unmarried at a time when marriage was all but universal.

Men who did not marry usually had one of three reasons, Canon Montefiore said, and two of them—lack of money or of possible mates— need not have deterred Jesus.

The third explanation—homosexuality—«is one we cannot ignore,» the Canon maintained.

«Women were his friends, but it is men he is said to have loved,» he pointed out. He conceded that «the hearer may shrink from this in disgust.»

Canon Montefiore, 47, who is married and has three daughters, said later that he had been speaking very tentatively. «All I am saying is that (Jesus) might not have found women as attractive as men,» he explained.

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