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The Kiss

by O. F. Simpson

I suppose it is absurd in the middle forties still to be concerned about keeping fit; but as all the world knows, Englishmen never really grow up, and I for one have continued to make a mild fetich of athleticism. Having been a successful long distance runner at school, I still, for better or worse, like to keep in good training with early morning runs, cold baths and all the rest of it when I can. All very unsuitable for a middle-aged man, but there it is.

It was six in the morning when I started out across the hard sand that Sunday, the first morning of my holiday in the little Welsh resort of Penwyn. Approaching the rocks at the end of the beach on my first run, I became aware of being hailed by a lone fisherman some way out to sea; he divided his attention between rowing shorewards with great energy and calling out words I couldn't catch, but which sounded like a call for help. I hurried towards a small artificial jetty among the rocks, for which he was obviously bound, and we reached it at more or less the same moment.

I then saw he had a corpse in the boat with him or what I took to be a corpse, so still it lay in the bottom of the boat. It was a young man with flaming red hair who (the fisherman told me) had been out swimming round the point and had got into difficulties. The fisherman, out in the early dawn to tend his lobster-pots, had arrived just in time to lug the half-drowned boy with great difficulty on board («He fought me like a shark» the fisherman said) and had decided to make for shore at once: he could not both row and attempt artificial respiration at the same time.

The fisherman being a local, I sent him off for the doctor at once, and set about the respiration myself on the spot. I fireman's-lifted the young man—who was inert, heavy, wet, very cold, and I thought probably dead—along onto the nearest patch of sand, laid him face down, straddled his thighs and set to work on the small of his back at once. Press up—count three—release: press up—count three—release; I went on and on, without the slightest result, longing for the doctor to arrive, and knowing I'd have no rest till he did.

After a bit I began to study the details of the naked body I had underneath me; and I was pleased with what I saw and felt. He was a strong boy with big shoulders and arms like so many swimmers, a neat muscular waist, and long shapely legs. His face, as it lay sideways on the sand was very freckled, and topped with a glorious mop of russet-red hair, very bedraggled and wretched at the moment—but I could picture without difficulty how handsome he would be in life. All sorts of speculations chased themselves through my mind. Would I be working so hard if he was unattractive—if he was a girl—if he was an old man? I decided these things are mainly a matter of early training and one's basic humanity, and one does one's best to revive the dead by instinct whoever they are.

Having read so often cases where artificial respiration was given up too early, I never stopped, though it was nearly half an hour before a car at last appeared at the top of the beach and the fisherman came down with the doctor carrying a mackintosh sheet, blankets and thermos flasks. (The doctor told me later he always held these things ready in his house day and night, drownings were so common on that coast.) I kept my hands at work while we rolled the boy onto

the rugs and the doctor began to chafe his arms and legs; after a time we changed duties, and it was actually under the doctor's hands that the water first started to pour from the boy's mouth, his whole body began to twitch, a trace of colour returned to his cheeks, and we knew the corner was turned. The rest of the process of recovery does not concern us here.

It was the reporter from the local newspaper who first told me that the young man was staying, with his mother, in the same hotel as I was, having arrived late the night before. A few days later when he had recovered and was sitting playing patience on the hotel terrace, I made myself known to him—thinking at the time how difficult it must be for red-heads ever to avoid anyone they want to avoid—and suggested a walk along the top of the cliff. Having been told by the doctor to take it easy for a bit, he agreed—otherwise I doubt if he'd have thought a «middle-forties» much company.

So away we went. Psychologists tell us, don't they, that boys who wear tight trousers do so to reassure themselves, and show the world at large, that they still have the strong bodies they haven't yet had the chance to use: a young man who has come to terms with his sexuality no longer feels the need to define his figure so prominently. This young man belonged to the first class: tight faded blue jeans with white patches on each buttock where he sat, and a tartan shirt unbuttoned down to his waist set off his athlete's figure exactly right; indeed he was one of the very few youths I had ever seen, the exposure of whose body in this confident-casual way really gave aesthetic pleasure. Striding along at my side, with the light of health and a spark of mischief in his eyes, he was a walking invitation to those of my persuasion.

He knew more than most young men about music, and we pulled Beethoven's symphonies to pieces one by one in a desultory way. It was rather hot. Then quite suddenly à propos of nothing he said: «I say, Mr Simpson, is there anything I can do for you? I've said thank you, but after all you saved my life, and I'd like to do something to repay you. I haven't got any money, so I can't give you that, but if there's ever anything I can do, you'll let me know, won't you?»

Nothing is ever gained by pulling your punches with young men. I replied, boldly and lightly: «As a matter of fact there is something. I'd like to kiss you—now.»

He was completely thunderstruck. «You—kiss—me? I don't follow you. I'm not a girl.»

«Of course, I can see that . . .»

He interrupted me with mounting scorn, his young maleness now properly up in arms: «Oh, I see—you're one of *those*, are you? Well, I don't hold with that sort of thing, so forget it please and don't ask for that again.»

What novelists call a «pregnant» silence fell between us and we carried on along the cliff top without a word. I was sure I'd failed. Fortunately a small trawler hove in sight on the far horizon, and the process of identifying it started us talking again, and incidentally revealed to him that I had keener eyesight than he had. I could almost feel him beginning to wonder about what he had heard about «*those*» was quite right.

The next silence he broke, by saying awkwardly: «Look here. I'm sorry if I spoke too sharply just now. What the hell! I guess you've got the right to kiss me if it takes you that way—I wouldn't be here at all but for you—but

for sputnik's sake get it over quickly. It's not really my line of country, you know.»

I determined to tease him a bit. «O.K. Come here», and holding my hands well behind my back I leant forward and just brushed his lips very lightly with mine for one second only. Then two things happened at once. He began to say, «Oh, is that all? I don't . . .» and inside me such a flood of love welled up at the touch of him and the sight of his clear-eyed, rather puzzled face, that I threw all restraint to the winds. I caught him roughly in my arms and forced my mouth down hard across his lovely full red lips, holding his body tight against mine in a grip of steel. My hands found the small of his back, where they had gone to work so hard three days before. then wandered on down over the coarse sailcloth of his jeans; and so we stood locked together, me exerting every last ounce of strength until I had tamed him, and I felt his hands moving across my shoulders and the first softening of his tensed-up muscles which meant he was beginning to respond and play it my way. Then, without ever lifting my mouth from his—it would have taken an earthquake to separate us just then—I lay down with him on the wonderfully soft turf and slowly, slowly the fierce blaze of our passion cooled down, till we were at peace together, laughing and talking in each other's arms again. But he would not look me in the eyes.

Striding down the hill into the town again, he broke the silence: «Look here, you've upset me properly—I can't honestly deny I enjoyed that romp with you, but I'm an ordinary chap and I've got a girl—indeed we're to be married at the end of this year. What would she think? Have I done wrong letting you kiss me? And well . . . wanting the kiss to go on, and liking your hands all over my body, as I certainly did, I'll agree. Can you help me, please?»

I had already made up my mind about him, and this charming and characteristically direct outburst was merely the occasion for telling him my decision. I would show him that «one of *those*» was as capable of self-denial and restraint as anyone else. I said: «I'm never going to come between you and any girl of your choice. If you've chosen her, or more likely she's chosen you, I bet she's good . . .»

«She is,» he half murmured.

«And better her hands on your body than mine any day. Men making love together can be fun, but it's nothing at all to the fun and fulfilment the right girl can give you. For one thing, they're trained for it; we're not. Believe me, I know what I'm talking about. Tell me when and where the wedding is, and I'll be there.»

«O.K. That's a date.»

«Good. Well, that settles your life for you, doesn't it? But it doesn't settle the next few days for us, does it?»

«What do you mean?»

«I don't know what age you are—twenty perhaps?»

«Twenty-two.»

«Then you're grown up, and I can talk to you accordingly. Far too much of the misery in life comes from people being afraid of sex and feeling guilty about the pleasure it gives. I am not. I know I'm very much attracted to you, and I know that for a few minutes just now, perhaps in spite of yourself, you were attracted to me. Well, what about it? You're an adult. We're here on holiday

and I want some fun—the fun you and I could have together. I can't say clearer than that.»

He thought for a bit in silence. Then slowly: «Well, I respect you being outspoken and all that, and agree we ought to speak our minds more; but I don't think I want you, or not that way anyway. We all did that sort of kid-stuff when we were at school, I don't mind admitting, but haven't we grown up a bit since then? I know I have, and I suppose you have. I'm not sure I wouldn't feel guilty behaving as you suggest, and wouldn't be quite right too. After all . . . well anyway it's not on, so far as I'm concerned. Don't be offended or anything, it's just not on.»

It was more or less what I had expected. I left it at that, and we went back to Beethoven.

*

All the same he came, that very night, without any warning. Soon after ten, as I lay reading in bed, there was a knock at my door and he was inside the room without waiting for me to reply.

«Well, I've got over feeling guilty for to-night anyway, you see. You didn't think I'd come, did you?»

«I certainly did not.»

He began to struggle out of his shirt and trousers. «Well, I thought over what you said, and you may be right. Why should we always be holding back and denying ourselves and all that, and why shouldn't we have some fun? After all, we're not young for ever—indeed you're not young at all. Oh dear, oh dear»—he pulled himself up—«whatever have I said now? You'll have to forgive me, you know; Irish blood or something, not very tactful, I'm afraid. You won't think much of me, after all your kindness . . .»

«I do not,» I replied laughing. «I now wish the sea had got you. I think you're pure hell, and but for the shape of your legs I wouldn't be speaking to you at all!»

He stood looking down at me, stripped down to nothing but the tight white satin swim trunks, legs apart, arms swinging, the light dancing red in his hair, a sweet smile creasing his very attractive freckles. I am not normally one of those who ever regret being middle-aged; but at that moment the vernal years of early manhood seemed to me the most desirable thing on earth. Then, all of a sudden, he was over at the door to switch the light out, and next had taken a measured flying leap over the end of the bed so as to land at my side, with a resounding crash on the bed-springs that I thought would have awakened the whole town.

«Love me, Fred, love me, please,» he began softly and urgently. «That kiss wasn't enough, you know. You're right, damn you. Come on, throw that mouldy old book away»—he snatched it from me and did so. «I want to please you. You're not such a bad old stick, you know. Old enough to be my father of course, old enough but nothing like good enough, you silly old graybeard . . .»

I put a stop to his affectionate ragging with one or two mild little neck-pressures I'd learnt after the War up in Japan during the occupation. I was almost frightened by the speed with which these tricks worked and I had his beautiful young tiger's body lying completely inert and at my mercy; and he too was suitably impressed when I let him up.

I had just a moment to reflect with amusement how suddenly and how gratifyingly the ideal boys I'd been reading about in Plato's *Symposium* had been transformed into a single real one that beat the lot. Then I began the fun by peeling off his tight white rubber-satin slip—it took me all of ten minutes to get it down and off his threshing legs. And then, much later, in the dark of the night, softly and gently, serious at last, he was mine, all mine.

*

All this was three years ago. He was indeed married the same autumn to his girl, a darkhaired elfin little thing to whom he was quite obviously devoted, and he set up as a vet in the small town in Somerset where he still lives. They have twin boys, both with flaming red hair like their father. I am their godfather.

The Two Sides of the Coin

Let us acknowledge it: the Western Hemisphere feels insecure. It also has an unacknowledged guilt complex in connection with all the social problems it is dealing with inefficiently and incompletely. In times of insecurity and unrest mankind has always looked for an easy way out, and an age-old escape is to find scapegoats and offer them publicly for sacrifice. In the search for scapegoats, homosexuals fill the bill perfectly. Here is a minority, almost never able to fight back: a minority different from those made by race or religion; a minority to which even UNESCO would never risk giving any support.

So once again let's sacrifice the homosexuals, and by sacrificing them ease the world feeling of insecurity and all its guilt complexes for evading the real issues of Western civilisation.

Raids and closing down of places in the United States; the refusal to take on the recommendations of the Wolfenden Report in England; raids and scandals in Italy and France; talk of a change in the present law in both the latter countries—quite an impressive list. Is it any wonder that Switzerland also felt the need to join in these activities against homosexuals? After centuries of neutrality, and with the present standard of living as extravagantly high as it is, the Swiss may doubly feel this insecurity and the inherent guilt complex. So they decided, at least in Zürich, to do something about it. The famous Swiss democratic way which allows two grown-up homosexuals to live the way they want to live is one side of the coin; the recent police raids at Zürich (officially directed against male hustlers) is the other side of the coin.

The first big raid took place in Zürich in July. It was followed by a second double raid in November. In the late afternoon of November 15th, 60 policemen went out to three localities known as homosexual hangouts, and in surprise raids within a very short space of time, brought in 27 men. These 27 were either suspected of male prostitution or of other punishable crimes, and were taken to police headquarters. Then, on the same day at 11:00 p.m., 271 policemen raided five other localities and two public places, taking 75 men to headquarters for questioning.

It would be useless for a homosexual to try to point out publicly all the weak spots in those raids. A homosexual's voice would never be heard under such circumstances when the yellow press has once again managed to stir up «public feeling».