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NIKA

TWO DRAWINGS

John Hazelton
Carl Fleischhauer



John Hazleton



Seated Figure

Heischhaver 61

HIKA

The Undergraduate Quarterly of Kenyon College

WINTER

1961

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HIKA



Too Much To Ask

(—For S.)

The paleness and sobriety so characteristic of Allan would customarily have been sufficient to curb his present whim; but fortified by a smooth tan and the pleasant inebriation of an hour's drinking, he had managed to pull aside the heavy tapestry of his inhibitions. He looked around himself slowly, wondering how many people had noticed the familiarity with which he had greeted the headwaiter, wondering whether his checkered slacks appeared predominantly white or black in the suffused lighting of the crowded little night club, wondering if he looked wondering. At a table before him to his left, he noticed two couples talking and laughing together. One of the girls had long, sandy hair ending gently at the middle of her back. Moving his chair slightly so that the angle of his face would appear lean (he had long ago resolved that the fuller side was not as good), he lit a cigarette and patiently allowed the ash to reach approximately one-half inch. He then carefully placed the cigarette in the corner of his mouth and leaned forward smoothly

"Parla Italian?"

The girl with long, sandy hair turned slowly towards him, paused, and shook her head.

"Sprechen Sie deutsch?"

Again she paused, smiled faintly, and formed a silent, exaggerated "noo" with her lips. By now, the other members of the party were staring curiously at Allan. He was almost ready to dismiss a transient nervous regret by asking her if she spoke French, but he quickly realized that the answer might be "*Oui!*"

"Would you care to dance?" he finally asked, smiling warmly. She hesitated for what seemed to Allan an almost unbearable length of time; and he felt the nervousness re-enfold him as he watched her faintly sardonic smile.

"Perhaps," she said carelessly, "perhaps I will dance with you. Or per-

haps I'd prefer to just sit here and talk with the gentleman on my right—whose name, by the way, happens to be Jamie.”

Allan thought his handshake just a little too firm to be authentic, as if, perhaps, he was trying to assert something.

“Jamie’s an iconoclast, but the only icons he succeeds in smashing are his own grandiose images of himself.” As she said this, she looked wryly at the man next to her. “Yes, perhaps I’d just prefer to sit here and talk with him.”

Allan blushed desperately, yet he did not forget to be thankful for the darkness around him. “You said ‘just’; I gather you think you’ll find dancing with me something extraordinary. As to what extreme you incline, I don’t know; but if you finally decide in my favor, please tell me.” He leaned back hurriedly and began to study the couples on the dance floor with almost ridiculous indifference. Out of the corner of his eyes, he watched the girl lean way over and say something to her escort.

“Hey!” she called suddenly, “I’ve decided in your favor.”

Allan jumped up eagerly and followed her to the dance floor. His relief was quick and intense, almost physical. Just before reaching the dance floor, he stopped briefly to crush out his cigarette in the ashtray of a nearby table. “Parla Italian”, he snickered softly. She put her arms around his neck and they danced, talking softly.

Christine lived in London, and for the past year or so she had done very little but entertain and be entertained.

“It’s pretty hard to differentiate between what is and isn’t my vocation,” she said, “but I suppose you’d say that this is. My family is, pardon me, quite mediocre—but lovably so—and as a child I felt rather obligated to rebel. I went to an art school, failed utterly, and lapsed into the questionable pleasures of doing nothing. I’m trying,” she whispered, opening her eyes melodramatically, “to *find* myself.”

“And when you do?” asked Allan, smiling.

“I’ll become a nun. I read somewhere that humility is the last desperate stronghold of an ego in search of truth. Do you think I’ll make a good nun?”

“I think you’d make an absolutely wonderful nun.”

“Oh you do, eh?” she replied, mimicking a frown.

Allan laughed happily. “Well, maybe you wouldn’t. How long have you been around here?”

“A month; I’m flying back tomorrow. What about you?”

“Oh, I’m just . . . travelling around.”

“What do you mean?” she offered.

“Well, I’ve been here a week. I’ll just sort of hang around until I get sick of it and then move on. Where are you staying?”

“The Villa Bellamare. You?”

He’d been there long enough to know that the Cesare Augustus, not

his own horribly modest pension, was the best hotel on the island.

"I'm at the Augustus. Will you sit down and let me buy you a drink?"

Christine glanced at her table and paused. "Oh all right."

They sat down at a table in the corner and Allan ordered two drinks. A little candle burned in a glass star; but it burned quickly, for all the wax flowed out from a gap in the soft rim of its top. As he sat back in his chair with a glass in one hand and a cigarette in the other, Christine leaned across the table, and putting a hand behind his head, pulled him towards her and kissed him lightly. He sat very still, thoughtlessly happy, and passively tasted the tobacco on her lips. The little band played "Ten Minutes of Love." Yet the kiss passed away as delicately as it had come, and Allan, watching all the while Christine's long, beautiful hair, found himself speaking quickly—and carefully.

"After flunking out of college, my family disowned me. My father said that I was, and I quote him as precisely as I can, 'totally incapable of establishing myself with anything less than a veritable fortune.' So he gave me a rather large sum of money with which, and again I quote, 'to make a place for myself in the world.' I soon realized, however, that I couldn't adapt myself to any sort of stationary occupation, so I began my own personal little *Odyssey*." Allan tried hard to convey the affectation of his gestures as he spoke.

"Where have you been so far?"

"Oh, all over the place."

"Well, how long are you going to keep up this '*Odyssey*'?"

"I guess until my money runs out."

"What then?"

"I'll get along."

"How?"

He paused. "Look, Christine, I'm one of those unfortunate few who doesn't even have one talent to bury. I've convinced myself that I don't give a damn, but because of this I'll soon have to rely on the talents of other people. On a general plane this doesn't bother me; I mean it's certainly my just due. In view of the condition of my attributes, isn't it only natural that I should take from those who have? Specifically, however, as far as *I* am concerned, this isn't easy. The first thing that I've got to do is cast aside all the self-imposed ethical restrictions."

("What an absolutely perfect sentence," Allan thought gleefully, "to say to a girl like Christine in a place like this.") He called the waiter and ordered another drink, beginning all the while to feel strangely sincere.

"I suppose," he continued, "the best way to do that is never to offend the people from whom you take. This way I don't have to reproach myself. No matter how little people have, they love to give; the trick is knowing when to stop taking so that you don't incur their resentment."

Christine looked at him through her glass for a moment. "What about me, I'm on the other side of the tracks—I've got just about everything I want. People will never have to give me anything. But then again, I'm probably in a rather sad position, because not wanting anything, I may not get anything."

"But you just said that you won't want anything anyway."

"Well, look at it this way: there's nothing that I consciously want. But I'm sure that I have some sort of tortured desires lurking in my subconscious. Don't get me wrong, now, I excel in nothing to the same degree that you do, but it ends right there. In fact, now that I think of it, you do have something over me—your ambition. In a sense, your ambition is your excellence; it mirrors your talent."

"What ambition?"

"To take from others."

"That is not an ambition, it's necessitated by my shortcomings. Anyway, the type of life that I am going to have to lead will afford me few companions. I'm sure that I won't really be able to help hurting people."

"Do you mind being alone?" Christine asked; "I've been alone most of my life and rather enjoyed it."

"Well, that much we have in common. Most of my friends ebbed away long ago, leaving the happy mollusc of my spirit lying peacefully on life's silver beach."

The inflections of his remark were a perfect synthesis of sarcasm and melodrama; and Christine smiled as she asked, "Why don't you think you'll be able to help hurting people?"

Allan placed two cigarettes in his mouth, lit them, and handed her one.

"Well for one thing, you've got to make sure that you never contend with traditions and established values. You can't offend someone's literal or figurative god without offending him personally. This would make him at least reluctant, if not averse, to giving."

Unable to cite a concrete representation of this theory, Allan forged ahead.

"No finally, all one should try to take are the prerequisites of his own contentment. This is relative. For some it's probably just room and board; for others it constitutes all the vast and prodigal progeny of money. Personally, the only thing I demand is an association with money. I want affinity, not possession. To me, wealth is merely leisure, buckets of it; and when it's around me, no matter how much I have to work, I'm leisurely. As I say, however, I merely want wealth's accoutrements."

"I think you're an opportunist. I don't see why you don't try to get rich in one of the many professions that require lots of aggression and little sensitivity."

She paused, then laughed.

"I don't mean that the way it sounds. It just appears to me that for all the trouble you're going to go through to carry out your wish in your own way, you may as well try mine. However, I still envy you for the very fact that you do wish."

"While you flounder purposelessly in the quagmire of your status?"

"While I wish for a wish."

"Well I certainly don't think I'm an opportunist," Allan said suddenly. "Those bastards are uncouth, aside from being idiotically ambitious. I'd gladly be anything from a footman to a valet. In fact, I think I demand less out of life than most people. Naturally, I don't want to just stand in the street looking at people's townhouses. But then again, all I do ask is that I in some way personally belong to that house. Is that too much to ask?"

"I suppose not," Christine replied, looking carefully at the ashtray on the table.

"Listen," Allan said, "let me walk you home."

"You can't . . . I've got an escort."

"Oh come on, we can walk out the back door—he'll never notice."

"Oh won't he?" said Christine, smiling the same way she had when Allan first asked her to dance.

He looked hurt, and slowly ran a swizzle stick back and forth across the table top. "How long have you known him?"

"Long enough not to insult him, if that's what you mean."

"Do you like him?"

"Not particularly."

"Do you care if he likes you?"

"I'm not sure."

"Well, you can find out by letting me walk you home."

Christine hesitated, then laughed loudly. "How can I resist logic like that!"

As they walked across the dance floor, Allan realized that he was a little drunk. It was not until he got outside that he noticed the scars on her face. The skin from her left eyebrow to the middle of her cheek was dabbed with short, deep, patternless lines.

On either side of the narrow passages through which Allan and Christine now walked hand in hand, gray, flat-fronted buildings merged almost imperceptibly into one another. Through the darkness, Allan could hear the sea shuffling quietly among the rocks. He wished briefly, and clearly, that the "violent tenor" of his present situation would never end. He wished he was sober, because suddenly everything had taken on such a distinctly romantic air. Finally she stopped before a large, iron gate.

"Do you want to come in?"

"Yes," said Allan, thinking the inflection of her voice a little too careless to be genuine.

She pushed open the gate, and Allan followed her into a lush, green, semi-tropical garden. Palm-like trees, thick low shrubbery, and flowers beautifully bright, even though the moon afforded their only light, grew in such wild abundance that the garden seemed to have its own unassailable will. Through the foliage, Allan could see a white iron bench resting against a wall. On a path through the plants he walked to this wall and looked over. The sight of a straight drop, hundreds of feet down into the black sea, sobered him immediately. But the reveries that accompanied the cool breeze blowing in his face were interrupted by Christine.

"Come on," she called.

Allan walked back through the garden and slowly followed her up a flight of stairs.

"There's another girl asleep in my room. She's probably dead to the world, but we'll have to be very quiet anyway."

They walked in; and behind the soft, white mosquito netting which hung down from the canopy of one of the beds, a girl lay sleeping. Allan walked over, pulled aside the netting, and looked at her. Her face was towards him, but all he could distinguish clearly was her hair, long and light-colored like Christine's. He stood by the bed for a long time, staring at the girl and wondering about her; then he slowly let go of the netting, turned, and walked over to Christine. He took her in his arms and together they sank onto the other bed.

"Oh, I'm dead," she murmured as Allan stared closely at her face.

They lay together peacefully for a while in the big, dark room. Suddenly Christine sat up, unbuttoned her blouse, and took it off. Then she reached behind her back, unsnapped her brassiere, and lay it and the blouse on the back of a chair by the bed. Allan watched calmly as she lay down next to him again. He had begun to think that she was now a function in herself, a function significant only in that it was related to him.

"Do you think," he asked her quietly, "that it's pride or sheer desire that makes me want to sleep with you?"

He listened to her softly breathing. Finally she answered him.

"I think you'd better go."

Allan sat up slowly as Christine walked to the door and opened it softly, saying, "No, you've got it all wrong. It's that you don't know the trick of when to start taking."

He climbed off the bed and walked dully out the door and down the stairs. At the bottom he paused and looked back, but she had already closed the door. He pushed open the massive gate and started walking back to his pension.

"Well God damn it," he thought, tapping a cigarette lightly on the face of his wristwatch, "she couldn't have thought me unattractive. But I wonder how long I can exist on sheer affinity."

Paris 1960

I

An odd surprise, quite
exceptional, one says,
to find in a country
of such resplendent myth
a witch trying
to crawl
underneath a slipper.

II

Baudelaire's children balance
On the handle of a spoon,
While a finger sure and gentle
Taps them each in turn
(Grains of a fine black pepper)
Into the thick green soup.

EPILOGUE

How can he—
 even he,
Refind the devil's
 trill
From
 a
 broken
 violin?

A Pin

The evening bell tolls over the desolate fields.
My way seems to vanish into the gloomy evening scene.
It will never come to an end,
While I am walking.
It will open forward everlastingly.

The sky is getting darker.
I see distinctly my vitality ahead of me—
A pin hollowed by the reflection of marble,
Shining in the gradually fading light.
But, it goes far from me, when I grasp at it.

The night falls. I must walk interminably, chasing the pin.
But it flies to the sky strewn with glittering stars.
I watch it without word till it becomes small and melts into the stars.
I try to cry out, "Take me with you!"
But I cannot find my voice.

A Parabola

From spring to summer, and from summer to autumn,
Men and women rattled on along this street
With red sunsets for a background.

In December, the pavement, reflecting the evening glow,
Becomes deserted and runs to the dusky hillocks,
Like a Champs Elysees.

If you see this sunset, you'll feel forlorn
And be moved to tears for infinity of love,
For solitude of man, and for the origin of human species.

A dewy woman apricot-colored in the glow
Metamorphoses to a shadow like a lynx.
I feel myself in the hillocks in *Inferno* or in the landscape paintings of Poussin,

And feel sorrowful for Greek goddesses
In a nut of hawthorn which I picked up in the twilight
From the hedge of a farmhouse.

But, my dreams to dream are exhausted and life is lonely.
The parabola described from the woman to the hedge
Is a life line indicating man's aspiration for solitude—

The line which the Greek goddesses could shun.

"He Was Walking"

He was walking
In the cold wind.
The wind plucked up his skin
And penetrated into his nerves.

He walked, being afraid
Lest the wind should sound by surprise
The osseous trumpet under his skin,
Which played strange music for her.

But, his trumpet began abruptly to sound.
The strain of the music drew the heart out of him,
And then the wind wafted the sweet scent of a lemon used by her.
It led him into the insanity of love.

He could endure no longer.
He broke into a run.
The sound of the trumpet turned to dissonance
In the wind.

Waiting for Snow

In all the puddles I found wretched corpses
Whose hands and feet were frozen
And whose thinking was unsettled in the sounds of the wind.

The autumn was frightened
And, in the rain, squeezed itself when it walked,
As if it passed among enemies.

Fallen leaves, insects, stones and trees,
Which once enjoyed the sunbeams with me,
Were covered with mud and forsaken.

They, being trampled by men, waited for a morning
When snow would come and cover them white.
In all the puddles I found wretched corpses of the autumn.

JOHN PREBUS

The Varying Strand

A long scream rises over the wind:
 There is pain on the strand: Sleep,
 And we meet on the strand: Weep,
The dark world is over the strand.

The call floats in the wind,
 And steals my place of rest:
 Rest now; thus will we test
The language of voyage in the wind.

Follow the voice! Ride the wind!
 Who floats so late on the varying strand
 Rejoices: now can we understand!
The long scream floats on the wind.

MURRAY SCHUMAN

Concerto in C

Over the cricket chorus
The cicada cries out—
But from the blackness,
Only the chorus replies.

West Wing Delta Kappa Epsilon

East Wing Alpha Delta Phi

North Leonard Psi Upsilon

South Leonard Beta Theta Pi

Middle Leonard Delta Tau Delta

East Division Sigma Pi

North Hanna Phi Kappa Sigma

Middle Hanna Delta Phi

South Hanna Archon

North Leonard Alpha Lambda Omega

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