

EMILE J. WALTERS

THANK HEAVEN  
FOR THE  
ANGELS

Amsterdam, 2012

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*If Michelangelo had been straight, the Sistine Chapel would have been wallpapered.*

Robin Tyler



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## Preface

One night some years ago in Amsterdam I was out with my friend Christian, a young man of twenty at the time. We took our leisure and passed from one place the other, where one of his buddies joined us, and we ended up in a *Drag Show Bar* near the Rembrandtplein. Transvestites stand behind the bar and the public is a joyful mixture of gay minded people, women but mostly men, and the atmosphere is absolutely.. well, gay: happy and slightly hilarious. That particular night the bar had a Karaoke party going. One after the other took the stage and did a song – mostly well known hits of past and present. I was curious if I could do a song too. I have some experience on the stage, but after many years of smoking my voice has turned rather scrappy. So I took the catalogue and flipped through it. My eyes suddenly caught a song that perfectly fitted my diminished capabilities as a seasoned tenor. It matched the occasion in the most wonderful way. It was the song which immortalized the musical movie *Gigi*, of the late fifties, with the middle aged French *chansonnier* Maurice Chevalier and Leslie Caron.



So I decided to sing “*Thank heaven for little girls*”, the song of an elderly gentleman musing about the joy of youth and the promise of future when he is surrounded by happily playing girls in their late teens, *Gigi* among them of course. My performance was an instant success. One can imagine: singing about

the virtue of girls in a bar filled with gay boys and men. I got a standing ovation when I sang: ...." *for what would little boys do without them...*!" Indeed, I was myself approaching the age when one can credibly chant his way through a ballad dedicated to the beauty of female youth – not as an object of desire but as a temple of virtue and true affection.

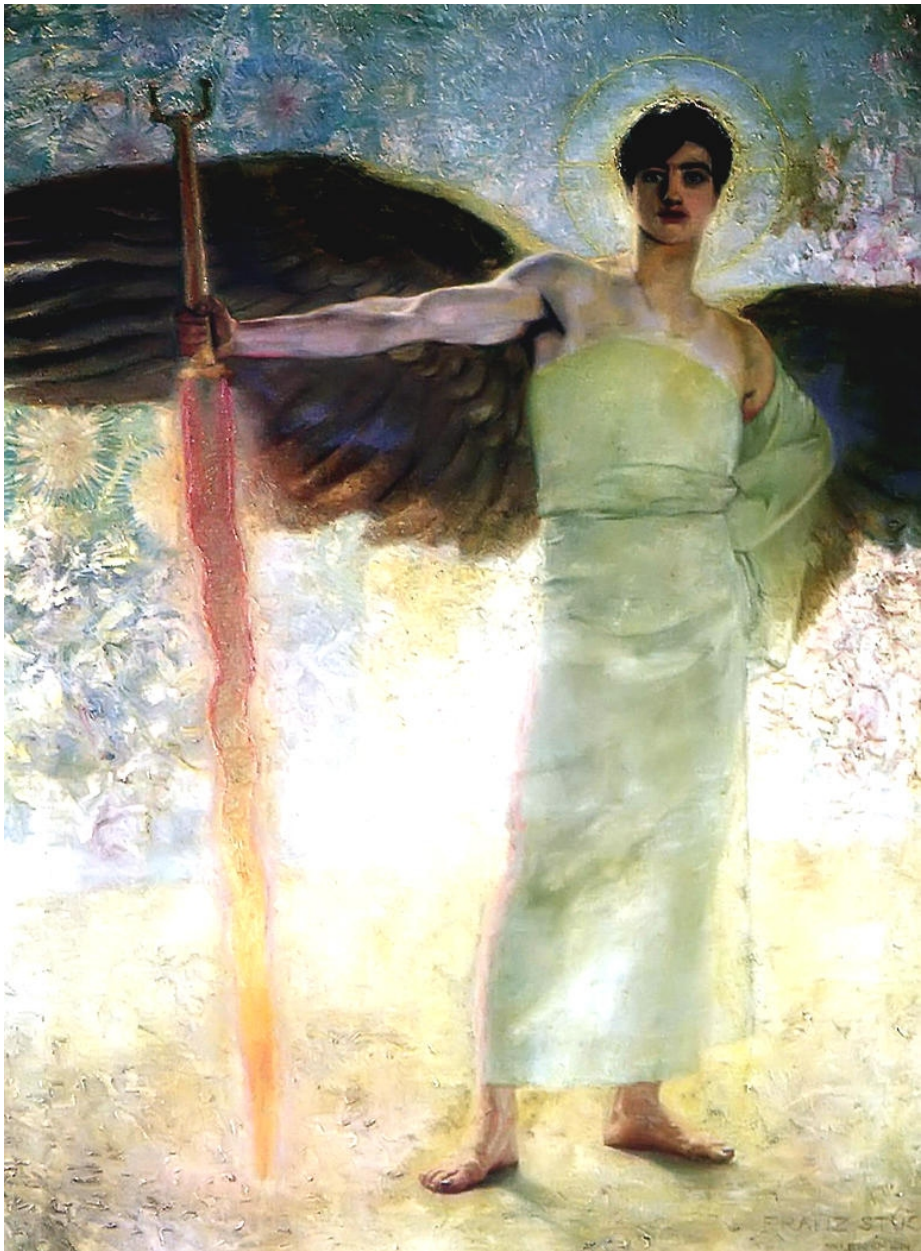
My adventures among people in the gay scene triggered my awareness of the much broader diversity of human nature. They have enriched my own life far beyond the boundaries of my existence thus far. My story ventures into the experiences of many others. Much of it belongs to a universal experience of men (I cannot speak in the same way for the experience of women) and more in particular of those men who have a chance – or simply take it – to step outside their social and cultural confines and allow themselves to build their own conventions – and values – along the line of their own observations and their own logic of life.

By the same logic I have developed my own critique of gaiety. I do not believe that in our western world we have yet reached the point where human sexuality and human culture are settled in their proper place. I find it strange – in fact: unacceptable - that sexual habits or preferences should create any cultural division at all. But then I realize we are still moving away from a situation where differences in sexual habits constituted a difference even in terms of legality (as in some countries is still the case). Many still find it unthinkable to conceive a world where any reference to sexual orientation is taken out of the law (as today we still include it as part of an explicit defense of sexual diversity) and thus is made irrelevant altogether.

The other part of gaiety is the part that in my view should not be the exclusive territory of 'gay' people only. Who ever came to the idea that sexually 'straight' people could not be gay, i.e.: happy, joyful, extrovert, creative, pleasant, warm blooded

I wish to leave my testimony to the evolution of my thoughts about this theme and all other related themes. At the same time I wish to honor the many people, young people most of all, who have been so generous to share their thoughts, experiences and feelings with me, which they did in many beautiful ways. Most of all they shared their youth with me, thus allowing me to retain and nourish my own. It is not age that drives out the child inside, it is the convention of our minds. I chose not to follow that convention.





Guardian of Paradise  
Franz Stuck (1889)



## Taking a look outside

### *Going for the fun*

I often wonder about the life of our forebears in ancient times. They must have been very much like us, when they were young, when they grew old, when they had their first love affair or when they did something you weren't supposed to do. I think of ancient times, I mean really ancient, before pre-history, at the dawn of humanity. Men and women, gathered together, dwelling in caves and shelters, gathering food and making their living, rearing their children, burying the grandparents, having a party. What would their parties have been like? In our time we have grown accustomed to regular dancing, music, laughter. We live in a world filled with entertainment. And even though we can still visit people in remote places whose conditions may be similar to those of our distant forebears, we find it hard to imagine what life they really had. No cities, no cars, no MTV, no fun? Of course there must have been a lot of fun too, but if our written history isn't overflowing with records of fun, most certainly we have little evidence of it from the days before literacy.

And how do you recognize fun? Playing, going out, having a good time; pleasure for its own sake. Even animals seem to be capable of fun. I imagine people in ancient times having fun, playing with each other, like 'hide and seek' or boys chasing girls. That sort of fun. Pleasure that relieves the senses, that drives out anxieties; enjoyments which a human being needs to re-energize – and socialize. You won't easily have fun on your own, whatever we say about our need to be alone from time to time. Life is about going together, you don't live it in a void.

How much, in our own life, are we out to do it together, to share, to give and take? Especially when it is about having fun, about our love of life. We have come a long way from the Victorian age which, as I see it, threw most of our fun into the realm of guilt, and which molded our enjoyments into specified, regulated celebrations, into parties ruled by accepted behavior – from class to class, from high society down to the 'simple folk'. I was reminded of this when I

saw *Titanic*, which tells the story of a love that conquers all class values and rules.

Charles Darwin knew that the mechanism of love is not just a mechanism of pleasure. It is the mechanism of selection too. Subconscious and conscious choosing. Of wanting – and rejecting. Of celebration and tragedy. Of enjoyment and pain. But if you don't try and go for it, go for love – whatever the outcome – you are bound to end up in the emotional desert where your genes die out and where your life ends before you die.

There was a time when I went dancing four or five nights a week, often starting Wednesday, in a lounge filled with beautiful people, mostly young men gathered in celebration. Then came the dancing call. Deep down it felt as if all present were summoned back to the roots of our humanity, the music and the beats of the black African man. This is why I often think of the black African who was our own ancestor. Superior, alive, beautiful, dancing, in short: enjoying life.

Life in this 'underground' is of light - and darkness, sure. Filled with beauty and ugliness. All of it. I have visited quite a number of night-clubs and discos in a particular period of my life. I have experienced the rhythm of their music, the drums that lure us to the dance floor, the rhythm of the people, mostly men, moving up and down, arms stretched or moving sideways, whirling, roaring, hunting! I headed to the dancing call over and over again.

There were days that I just couldn't wait to join this mass of bodies and celebrate this fusion of minds, this amalgamate of men, each seeking his own 'thing' - pleasure, love, strength – whatever it was. I danced in the so-called 'gay-scene'. It will be part of my tale, and I will touch upon their clubs and dancing halls many times, but each time in a different way: as a center of ritual and foreplay, as a place dedicated to the expression of lust, as a temple of sexuality, a whorehouse, secret halls for the celebration of human beauty, the meeting place of evil but also of goodness, as the echo of the age old feast of our humanity.

## *A world unfolds*

When first I went out in the world of boys and men I had no clue what kind of people I would encounter. And I don't think that I had given it any thought before I finally got there. The whole exercise was merely geared to satisfy a vague curiosity. Presumably, this is common to most of us. And yes, I felt a growing urge too.



The possibilities to explore the gay scene through the internet as they rapidly proliferated in the second half of the nineties were a great help, of course. They are a great help especially if you want to talk to people without exposing yourself at the same time. At the time of my entry various facilities for chatting and dating had already become operative and they became an instant addiction.

It should be noted that this development of new communication had wider implications for the dynamics of the gay scene than perhaps has until now been recognized. It generated huge opportunities for so-called closet cases to firmly stay in the closet and yet find their way to any desired encounter. And thus the internet has in particular served to effectively awaken a considerable stream of

'bi-curious' men (I would simply say: men) cruising around for occasional male-to-male encounter.

During this period a buddy of mine spent a few months at my place. He was a young man of twenty-one at the time, whom I had come to know in a bar. Somehow we started to talk and after a while we had two or three dates at my own place. Soon, the talking overtook every-thing else. He didn't have a residence of his own. I offered him a temporary refuge, and in return he provided me with his company. There could not have been a greater contrast. He was a 'street boy' type whose family life had fallen into pieces after his mother died. He had not finished school. But he was a sociable guy, attractive and – indeed – street smart. My own world of breeding and education was just as strange to him.

There was no way that we could be anything more than just good buddies. "*I could fall in love with your character,*" he had said in one of our first encounters at my home, and in fact this was the opening sentence of a solid friendship that has lasted to this day. But at that time, I had only vague ideas about friendships with boys like him. I hadn't yet arrived there.

I had, in the mean time, picked up one or two like minded connections for joining up in my exploration of this unknown world. This turned out to be a great help in getting my first glimpse of the gay night life, the bars and discos.

But what did I really see? And what did I look like in this part of the world? There was so much that I had to learn. For instance the manifold distinctions of men in the gay scene, ranging from sturdy leather types to soft, rather effeminate types, only gradually dawned to me. And then of course, there was this excitement to walk around in a segment of society where almost everybody so evidently had one thing only on their mind. Even though I was in my late forties, this was truly the first time in my life that I experienced such a hot environment.

One of my first observations was the fact that boys most eager to speak with me seemed the least appealing. Many of them were Asians, who apparently made a habit of seeking out mature white men for what-ever arrangement. Their eagerness strongly reminded me of the behavior of the women I had met in clubs and brothels during the years before. Their interest in my view expressed the kind of submissiveness that in my hemisphere has the effect of a big turn-off.

But it made me aware of finer distinctions within the gay world that make the whole match making process such a complicated affair.

Even so, I was entirely ignorant of the countless lessons still ahead. I had been lucky thus far. This I largely owed to the boyishness that I had retained. It somehow made me acceptable company among younger people, even in a world where youthful beauty is a paramount quality. They generously let me into their lives. Through this I began to see the world in a new perspective. Not the perspective of privilege and education or of regular employment, but the perspective of severe neglect, of abuse, violence and day-to-day survival.

None of this is by itself a unique feature of the gay scene, of course. But it so happened that the guys who were most open minded in their acceptance of me came out of a youth filled with adversity to a degree I had never encountered in real life. And perhaps it was the contrast that attracted us to each other.

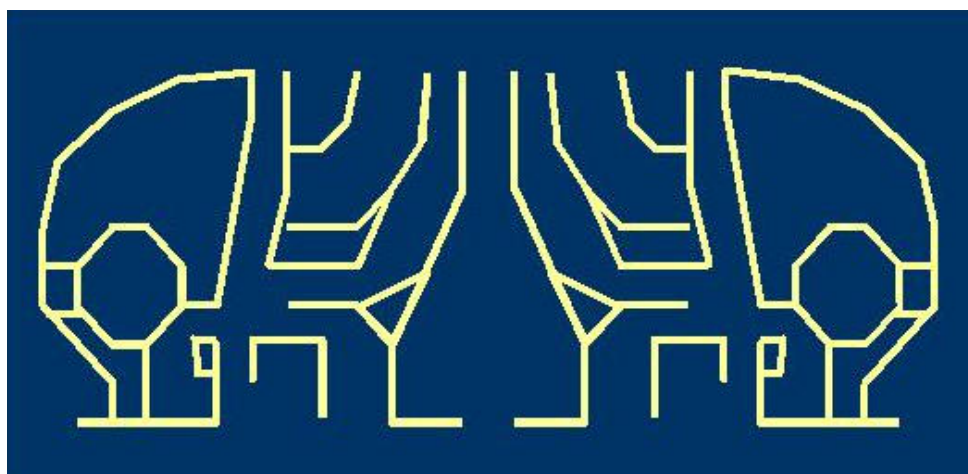
But as this world gradually unfolded in my mind, it would still take considerable time to understand – and accept - my own position. I had no intention to fully become part of it. My other leg was firmly footed in the straight world, which, as I began to note, is the case for many more boys and men who pass in or through the gay scene. And even though I had become slightly more conscious of my own rather dull looks and clothing habits, I had no intention or sense to go for a total make-over. What counted most was the experience, finally, of being a boy among boys when it was still possible, even at my advancing age.

Still the boy in me was out for a transition reaching far beyond mere outward appearance or social behavior. I had just made my first steps, however belatedly, to finally complete my growth into full adulthood and ultimately, to reconcile the inevitable process of aging with the desire to keep that boy inside alive and kicking. And in another way they constituted the introductory stage for an experience that threw me out to every corner of my nervous system. He was a young man who would turn out to be the most vivid expression of the boy I had never been, nor ever could be.

## The other half of me

### *The advent of Jean Lou*

I met him by mere coincidence, when I was out with a young friend who wanted to visit one of Amsterdam's boys clubs. I spotted him, and he spotted me. It was an instant connection, to my great surprise and amazement. He had fled his country and the discipline of his parents to live in Amsterdam and earn his living as a club boy. This is where I met him, by accident. Our eyes met and the next thing I knew he was all over me. At first I took it as an expression of his professionalism. Only later I realized that he really meant it. He saw me as a true gigolo.



*Depiction of a twin symbol, tattooed on Jean Lou's back*

At the time he was eighteen years of age. We shared a first month of adventure out in the nightlife of Amsterdam. After that, we became *vrais compagnons*, at home, going out and shopping to satisfy his hunger for expensive clothes. The entire episode lasted for more than a year. He was my dark side in the flesh. We became spiritual twins. We shared movies, music, drugs, friends, exotic parties and much of our thoughts about life and the culture of Man.



It was after the first month with Jean Lou that he went home in France and decided to spend some time with his sister who in those days lived on an island even further away from civilization, somewhere out in the Pacific. But we kept close contact, knowing that at one point he would come back.



Soon thereafter I befriended a young man whose name was Alex. He had spotted me in a bar and decided that I could offer him some kind of knowledge or wisdom that he found unavailable in the community in which he grew up. The connection with Alex was of quite a different nature. In fact, this young man grew to become a true soul mate, a kind of big brother for me. He was tall, blond, with a swimmer's body, in short: a fully grown man, and hugely intelligent. Still, he was only 16. And since he was an outstanding lady killer, even at his young age, there was no hint – not between us nor in the eyes of others – of any gay connotation. Our minds connected, but that was it. It was a connection, which I pursued obsessively nonetheless. And to this day I cherish this friendship as one of the greatest fusion of brains that I have ever experienced.

Then, Jean Lou returned. Upon arrival, when he greeted me, he was unable to sense the same fascination that had bound us only a few months earlier. In his own mind I didn't quite look the same, and perhaps this was true. I managed to

make some free time for him, but otherwise I had my work to think of and all in all, most likely, I had become much too serious or too dull for his taste.

But the moment my French companion set his eyes on Alex his mind was fixed to realize one objective only: to conquer him. Jean Lou became totally infatuated with my tall, blond companion. And this obviously distracted him from entertaining too many passionate thoughts about me. The fact that Alex was a regular girl dating type of guy was not at all a discouragement. It probably worked the other way around.

So we both ended up seeing our dreams fall into pieces. I had indeed envisaged a similar experience of fun the way he had in our initial month, but it didn't work out that way. Tensions mounted. I cautioned him against his advances towards my blond friend, not for my sake but for Alex' sake. But Jean Lou only took this as an additional incentive. Also, he grew more and more demanding, in my view, in all the extravaganza that he wanted to stage in our further private life both in and out of my apartment. He had begun to bring along other guys to get some orgies going, which I declined to play along with. It was completely outside my experience, and I was not prepared to make an utter fool of myself. Initially, I didn't realize that it was another way for him to compensate for the lack of fire between the two of us. So really, in trying to stop him in his endeavors I only added substance to the turn-off that I had already become in his eyes at that point.

Yet, the whole affair proved to be another prelude and not the end of our companionship. Great expeditions into the unknown were still to follow, but they came many months later.

My French boy finally succeeded in having his pleasures with Alex the lady killer. He knew – or suspected - all along what I had thus far not recognized, which is that our blond straight swimmer boy to some extent couldn't care less about who would provide him with certain sexual services. It works rather gender independent, so to speak. Or at least, it can work like that.

Then, Alex and his family moved to another city. From that point onwards we only shared the occasional chat on the internet. But the strong bond remained.