

LEATHERFOLK

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Dr. Kinsey takes a peek at S/M: A reminiscence

by Samuel M. Steward

The year was 1949.

Dr. Alfred Kinsey had sprung to world attention the preceding year with the publication of his book *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. America barely survived the shock of many of his findings, among which was his discovery that 37 percent of the adult males he interviewed had experienced a homosexual encounter to the point of orgasm. But the volume placed his name in the firmament beside those of two earlier pioneers — Freud and Havelock Ellis. The three of them performed the same function for mankind in the twentieth century that Prometheus did for the Greeks: They brought fire and light to illuminate the caverns of ignorance on questions of sexuality — Freud the observer and theoretician, Ellis the synthesizer and collector, and Kinsey the hands-on investigator and statistician.

I had been teaching in Chicago at a small second-rate sectarian university noted more for its basketball team than for any contribution to learning or instruction, staffed by a faculty in which mediocrity was firmly entrenched, when one of my colleagues, a small gnome named Theodorus, approached me and whispered:

“How would you like to be interviewed by Dr. Kinsey?”

In those peeling holy halls such an invitation had all the wicked and attractive lure of Pure Evil, so I said yes, and forthwith an interview was arranged, with my name being added to Kinsey’s already-impressive totals of ten thousand other males and eight thousand females.

Theodorus had said the interview would take an hour; it took five instead, and seemed to me to contain thousands of questions, although it turned out to be only a few hundred. My gabby answers had prolonged the interview until well into the evening. In addition, Kinsey had discovered me to be a "record keeper," with data on every person I had ever "encountered romantically" coded on three-by-five cards in my Stud File. After that I became a sort of unofficial collaborator with him and his institute — never able to have any official connection because of my sexual orientation, which in those days he felt would have tainted the results of his surveys. Many times I was asked if Kinsey also was queer, and my answer was always: "Well, yes, but not in the way we are — he's an *auditeur* and a *voyeur* — likes to listen and watch." The good doctor gave me a rather odd look when I told him this.

But when I left university teaching and became a tattoo artist, he expanded his use of me to ask that I try to investigate the sexual motivations behind tattooing — and eventually I found twenty-five slanted in that direction out of thirty-two.

In several of our many meetings during the next few years he expressed his growing interest in sadomasochism. Characteristically, he never used either part of the term separately, since he felt that the two components were present in varying degrees in every personality, convinced that it was possible during many sadomasochistic encounters for the participants to switch from one side to the other. And it was he who invented the term "S/M," which he wrote and pronounced as two words. He and his staff had created a "little language" of initial letters so that they could discuss even the most hair-raising (and fascinating) sexual topics at lunch in a restaurant and not cause the waitress to collapse with cardiac arrest because of what she overheard. Thus someone might say: "My history today liked Go better than Z, but Ag with an H really made him er," with each letter pronounced individually. Translation: "My interview subject today liked genital-oral contact better than that with animals, but anal-genital with a homosexual male really turned him on."

I learned a lot from him. Once I thoughtlessly used the word "normal" in front of him, and he jumped on me.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Uh — usual?" I stammered.

"Usual? Usual for whom — you, me, the rest of the world?" I never used the word again.

And once in a washroom at his university where we had both retired to take a leak, I washed my hands afterward.

"Why did you do that?" he asked.

Somewhat confused, I said, "I guess because I was brought up that way."

"Ah-hah!" he said triumphantly. "A victim of the Judeo-Christian ethos of the Old Testament. Don't you think it would be much more sensible to wash your hands *before* handling yourself? The Old Testament says you'll be 'unclean until the even' if you touch yourself, but considering today's germs and door handles and all the other things you've come in contact with during the past few hours..."

"I get the point," I said, and since then have usually washed my hands before peeing.

Earlier, in the 1930s, I had become interested in S/M — long before it had ever become a "movement," as it tended to be thought of after Marlon Brando's film *The Wild One* in 1954. In those days there were no leather shops, no specialty stores; and leather jackets were unheard of and unavailable except in police equipment outlets that would generally not sell to civilians. I finally found my first one in Sears-Roebuck's basement in Chicago. And I had unearthed — literally, for his saddlery shop was in a cellar on North Avenue — a little man who braided a few whips for me, and even found a "weveling" Danish cat-o'-nine-tails crocheted from heavy white twine, and located also a handsome crop of twisted willow wood.

My introduction to S/M had begun with my answering a personal ad in the columns of the *Saturday Review of Literature*, a weekly publication out of New York City. In those days some of the wordings and contents of the ads were mildly outrageous for the times, growing wilder until the publishing of them was entirely stopped by the guardians of our American purity. The one that caught my attention ran something like:

Should flogging be allowed? Ex-sailor welcomes opinions and replies. Box...

The man who placed the ad was one Hal B., a large and helpful New Yorker who seemed to feel that his given mission in life was the happy matching of an S with an M, and he devoted all of his energies to seeing that these mini-marriages — if not made in heaven — were at least accomplished within thirty minutes, depending on traffic and telephone availability. Answering machines had not yet been invented, so if there were no response at one number he would keep on trying another until he found one person at home. For me he located a tough little Canadian whom everyone called "Mother N—" because in his ballet company he was slightly older than the rest.

But although being waylaid was fun, it does not lead toward Doctor Prometheus and his peeking. In the past he had been very generous, giving me in many instances duplicate photographs from his archives, and occasionally a few books when unwanted extra copies fell into his hands. Once he gave me the two-volume set of Wilhelm Stekel's *Sadism and Masochism*, with a word of caution: "Don't believe everything he has to say; much of it is untrustworthy and incorrect."

Meanwhile, however, I had been developing my own little corollary theory about S/M, a kind of sentimental one based on my own particular emotional needs. S/M involved — I thought — the Search for the Hero, who had been lost to the modern world; it concerned the quest for the symbol of what was left of the world's masculinity. I felt that the factor of maleness was vanishing, and my theories tried to account for its disappearance.

First, there was the speed-up toward the matriarchy. The increasing domination of woman in all fields except the production of spermatozoa was one of the fantastic growths of our time. The female had entered and succeeded in all fields of the arts and sciences, from Madame Curie's to Gertrude Stein's. And when Philip Wylie described Momism in his *Generation of Vipers*, he gave a name to the cult which displaced that of the Hero.

The second force, I felt, was the growth of automation, which with its computers and high-tech machinery was chewing up the domination of the male. Man was no longer his own master; he had been superseded by the machine — not quite

entirely, because the machine seldom had a penis, and could not yet quite make babies. Man was being replaced; he was coming to depend on welfare. The Hero as Breadwinner had departed; the young homosexual began to look for the replacement Hero who would take care of him, and for whom he could be a slave.

The third factor — very speculative and subtle but probably more disastrous than any shock since Copernicus picked man up by the neck and shook him, saying: "Look, little man, you are a dweller on a minor planet scudding around a dying cinder of a sun!" Such a blow to the collective ego of mankind was repeated in this century by the bursting of the first atom bomb — which destroyed the Hero as Warrior, along with his slingshot, bow and arrow, shotgun, and cannon. For what can a man, a male, do against the little killing sun of Hiroshima?

Kinsey listened to all these theories, waggled his hand, and like the true scientist said, "Perhaps these things will bear more looking into."

He also asked me to have the little old saddlemaker duplicate the collection of instruments he had made for me, and I did. Then he made an astonishing proposal.

It must be remembered that he was more than scrupulous about the confidentiality of the material he got from the persons he interviewed, and was fiercely protective of the identities of those subjects. But he was also scientifically interested in sadomasochism, almost to the point of obsession. The two were always in conflict, and this time his scientific curiosity won out. Accordingly, he asked me — very tentatively, to be sure — if I would mind his breaking the *sub rosa* seal on my confessional interview to the extent of arranging a happy little encounter between myself and a big bold New York sadist of whom he would make the same request.

"Of course not," I said, always happy to further the advance of scientific inquiry.

Accordingly it was done, and on a bright and sunny May day in 1949, I flew down to Bloomington, Indiana, to meet my Romeo from New York.

He turned out to be a guy named Mike Miksche, a freelance illustrator who — as Kinsey told me — could walk down Fifth Avenue, go into Saks, ask if they had any work for him

to do, and go out with enough projects for the next month; his designs were extremely popular and much in demand. For relaxation and fun, he produced many pen-and-ink drawings of heavily tattooed men doing erotic and cruel things to each other; these he signed with his pen name of Scott Masters (note the "S/M"), and many of them are still to be found floating around in dusty collections of artwork from the past.

What a wonderful afternoon it was. As Kinsey led me toward his garden, I could not resist quoting Duncan's lines as he approached Macbeth's castle: "The air nimbly and sweetly recommends itself unto our gentle senses..."

"It remains to be seen how you'll feel about things the day after tomorrow," said Kinsey, always the realist.

Lounging with legs stretched out and with his back against the trunk of an apple tree was a handsome brute with crew-cut black hair and a somewhat tough bulldog face. He wore a shirt open to his navel, showing a fan of curly black hair. On his lower half were beige jodhpur trousers above brown English boots with lacings at the instep ... for black had not yet become the imperative color for sadists. His shirt-sleeves were tightly rolled into neat bands on each arm, showing half of his remarkably developed biceps; his belt buckle was overwhelmingly western and sparkled like the nuggets in Sutter's Creek — had it been the real thing, he could have retired on the profits of its sale. This was all long before the leather mania had codified and ritualized itself into leather-drag posturings, studied gestures, and modes of dress and behavior that Genet had partially described and analyzed in *Querelle de Brest*. I put all my reserve strength into my handclasp when we shook hands, determined not to wince, and discovered that my grip equaled his own. He did not rise from his position, but fixed me with a steel gray stare intended, no doubt, to put the fear of the Marquis Donatien Alphonse into me quite early in the game. I sank to earth, stretching my own legs out. My arms and hands were conveniently close to his feet.

I reached out nonchalantly, took one end of a shoelace between thumb and forefinger, and untied the knot at his instep.

"Humph," I said meditatively. "You don't look so tough to me."

During the next two afternoons, I paid and paid for that remark, as I had with foresight intended it all to happen. I was resolved — as I was sure Mike Miksche was, both of us having been given all-expenses-paid tours from New York and Chicago — to put on a good show for posterity and the archives, and to present the comparatively newly revived sport of sado-masochism in a light good enough to make it acceptable and politically correct for coming generations into the next century. A sense of history was on us both. Our romantic horizontal dance was to be filmed.

The apple-tree encounter took place shortly after lunch, early in the afternoon. Kinsey set about preparing Mike Miksche for the filming by feeding him a few glasses of gin and tonic — a pleasurable *divertissement* for Mike but a disadvantage for me, since I had stopped drinking and could no longer join in acquiring the happy euphoria that gin could bring.

When the sessions began, it was soon obvious to me that Mike was quite a ham actor. Aided by the gin, every time he heard Bill Dellenbeck's camera start to whirl, he renewed his vigor and youth like the green bay tree; his whackings took on an enthusiasm that brought small exclamations of astonishment and joyful shock from the few favored souls who were in attendance. Now and then these major staff members dropped in to observe and perhaps take notes, while Mrs. Kinsey — herself a true scientist as well — appeared in the attic and once in a while calmly changed the sheets on the workbench.

All of these goings-on would have horrified the faculty and regents and the good people of Indiana had they realized what was happening in the name of scientific investigation, but luckily they did not. Later in the volume on female sexual behavior Kinsey explained that since the orgasm lasts only some seconds, it had been necessary to film the sexual act so that it could be more closely studied. He pointed out that the institute had in its archives filmed records of the orgasms of fourteen species of mammals — the amusing detail being that one of the fourteen was of course the human mammal. It was much safer in those days to conceal such facts.

The whackings and the pummelings, the penetrations into various orifices and apertures that went on during the first

afternoon need not be detailed, for they were not at all elaborate or sophisticated. There were no "toys" in use, no studs or spangles, no leather harnesses or metal rings, or any of the vast armentarium that today exists in leather shops and S/M boutiques. Instead, a pair of leather gloves (with the knuckle-holes cut out), a tawse, a couple of whips, and a leather belt were all the accessories available or necessary.

Two hours of filming on two successive afternoons, with no more than a few rest periods while new film was being inserted in the cameras, was enough to exhaust the most dedicated fellators and rear-end devotees. I had given my all, and done my best, using the splendid technique of the sphincter-squeeze that I had developed in the past after much searching for the right muscles to activate. But whilst I was showering my battered body at the end of that first afternoon's pastimes, I heard Mike Miksche complain to Kinsey that while he was copulating atop me, my receptor had gone into spasms.

My admiration for his expertise and adequacy as a sadist began thereupon to diminish. "Inexperienced clod," I muttered to myself. "Up to now he has probably screwed nothing but amateurs with quiet tubulars and no real control." But in view of the circumstances I said nothing at that time.

By the second afternoon my bruises had begun to show up somewhat, and Kinsey was a bit concerned that if he put the two afternoons together in the final edited version, the sudden appearance of bruises and whip marks might be a distraction to future viewers who would wonder at their springing so quickly into view. A minor debate ensued about the advisability of using some body makeup, but this idea was discarded since someone pointed out that this was not a commercial film intended for public delight and the furtherance of an individual's fantasy mechanisms. Besides, the body paint would probably be visible on the sheets as dark smudgings, since the films were merely in black and white. Color was not in universal use in 1949.

The second afternoon began successfully enough, despite my sore muscles and tenderized skin. Mirrors had been installed beside the bed at my suggestion, to aid the action. But as the whompings and lambastings went on, the exertions

of the day before began to tell on me, and by the end of a couple of hours my jaw muscles were so tired and weakened that I could exert hardly any pressure or force at all.

At that point Mike soundly slapped me on each cheek, withdrew, and said something about my being the lousiest cocksucker he had ever had any experience with. I sprang from bed, seething, and went to the shower. If I had had an axe at the moment, I would have split his skull wide open.

Over the rush of water I heard Kinsey say, sotto voce, "I think you really offended him — perhaps you might try to make up a bit."

Mike tried, but I was still furious and unhappy, a condition that lasted almost until dinnertime. But after dinner, Kinsey gave us both the free run of the library with its thousands of books, by then already much larger than the mythical erotic collection of the Vatican. I browsed among the shelves of books, and Mike retired to the drawers of hundreds of type-written pornographic stories, which in those years — before the advent of printed erotica after the Supreme Court's 1966 decision — were the only forms in which erotic material existed and circulated.

Suddenly Mike burst through a door, hot-eyed and horny from reading a half-dozen of the typed S/M stories in the archival collection. In less time than it would take to write about it, he had ripped off my clothes, wrestled me to the cold concrete floor, and, in Victorian parlance, had his way with me there and then.

No rescuer appeared, no brave knight on white horse rode in to save me. Even Kinsey was nowhere to be seen. After it was over, my irritation of the afternoon seemed magically to have disappeared.

When we told Kinsey the next morning at breakfast what had happened, he was much amused, and concerned about only one detail. "I do hope," he said, "that since the library is on the ground floor, the window shades were down."

Thus ended the first filming of an S/M encounter for the institute's archives. When I viewed the finished film on my next visit to Bloomington, I remarked to Kinsey that I found it even much more erotic than the real thing, and he made note of that in his record.

And what happened afterward? Well, Mike Miksche jumped into the East River in New York and committed suicide after attempting to "normalize" himself with a marriage, thus bearing out Kinsey's feeling that masochists were better adjusted than sadists — although such a conclusion was never really established to anyone's satisfaction, including his own. Nor has the masochist's belief that it is he who in reality controls the sadist ever been proved or documented in actuality. And although my own memories of the episode have acquired a kind of golden patina from the intervening years, they have never enticed me into any attempt to repeat such a filming. Nor, it may be added in all honesty, has any invitation for a repetition been extended in the forty years following. Time conquers all, and the destruction of the citadel is inevitable.

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Prologue

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