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Life's Little Loafer

An Old Story Rediscovered

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Comments and suggestions are welcome. Please write to hubertk@pacbell.net.

Preface

The volume *And Thus Will I Freely Sing: An Anthology of Gay and Lesbian Writing from Scotland*, edited by Toni Davidson (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989), included my translation of a chapter from the novel *Fenny Skaller* by John Henry Mackay, a brief introduction to it, and a translation of the poem “The Nameless Love” by Mackay, one of whose lines suggested the title of that anthology. As a consequence, although the second anthology published three years later was to include only Scottish or Scottish expatriate writers, I was asked to contribute. Despite my Scottish name, I did not think I qualified, but if I wrote a story in imitation of Mackay’s style, pretending that he was the real author, I thought that might be “Scottish” enough.

Thus the following story was first published in *The Crazy Jig: An Anthology of Lesbian and Gay Writing from Scotland 2*, edited by Joanne Winning, with an introduction by Iona McGregor (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1992). Apparently my attempt to imitate Mackay’s style succeeded only too well, for Iona McGregor wrote in her introduction to the volume: “The pastiche romanticism of ‘Life’s Little Loafer’ not only resurrects a dead gay author but reminds us, as Edwin Morgan pointed out in his introduction to the previous anthology, that even what there is of our literature has largely been stolen from us and remains hidden. To restore it is as important a task as the publicizing of modern gay writing” (p. 5). It was not my intention to fool anyone.* I would like the story to stand on its own merits—and surely the subtitle “An Old Story Rediscovered” has more than one meaning—but I boldly put Mackay’s “arrow” imprint here.



* Similarly, several years later, when I published my novel *Sex and Math in the Harvard Yard: The Memoirs of James Mills Peirce*, whose title page clearly labeled it “a fictional biography,” a prominent historian of mathematics demanded to know the location of the original “sex diary” of Peirce, from which I had quoted in the novel.

Life's Little Loafer

An Old Story Rediscovered

HUBERT KENNEDY

When my dear friend Ian returned recently from a holiday in Germany, he gave me the manuscript of the following story. At first I did not appreciate its possible origin, for it was in English, not German. He himself did not know where it had come from; it was given him by someone he met casually in Berlin. He had mentioned my name by chance, and his new acquaintance said that he knew of my interests and asked him to give the manuscript to me, remarking only that he thought I would enjoy reading it. It had no title and no author was named, but my interest was aroused by the very first sentence, for it appeared to be a translation of a story by the Scottish-German anarchist writer John Henry Mackay. My first impression was confirmed again and again as I read on, so that by the time I had finished there was no doubt in my mind that Mackay had written it. But where was the original? I quizzed Ian about it, but he was no help. Forgetful as ever, Ian could not even recall the man's name. But let me explain why I feel so certain of the authorship of the story.

Although Mackay was born in Greenock, after the early death of his Scottish father his mother took him back to her native Germany, where he grew up speaking German. In 1896 he wrote a charming story that he called "The Sybarite." The title character is named Germann and the story tells of the narrator's meeting with him in Geneva and the evening they spent together. Near the beginning of the story, as the two are leaving the Taverne Anglaise where they have dined, Germann introduces the narrator (clearly Mackay himself) to a young man named Astruc cadet. At this point the narrator interrupts the story with the following parenthesis:

(How could I have guessed that I would later write both their stories! For one day I will also describe Astruc, life's little loafer, whom later that evening my new friend incidentally called a Sybarite of Freedom and a Complete Anarchist ...)

Despite this promise, the character Astruc never showed up again in any of Mackay's stories. I had supposed that, pressed by other matters, Mackay had simply abandoned the idea of

writing Astruc's tale. And yet, here it was! On reflection, the reason for its apparent suppression by Mackay became clear. If he had published it under the pseudonym Sagitta (which he used for his various writings on man/boy love), or even anonymously, it would have been immediately recognized that the author of this story was also the author of "The Sybarite", for it is clearly the sequel to that story and so would reveal him as a boy-lover. But Mackay, for his own purposes, was determined to keep his identity as Sagitta secret. The mystery still remained however: What had become of the German original, and why was there an English translation?

I have no answer to this mystery. Nor can I prove that Mackay actually wrote this story. The internal evidence is there, but without the German original we cannot even compare it with Mackay's unmistakable style. If genuine, it furnishes an interesting insight into his psychology—both as an anarchist and as a lover of boys. But even if the story is not by Mackay, that is no reason to suppress it, for the following tale, presented here just as I received it from the unknown Berliner, has a charm all its own.

* * *

Following that quite extraordinary evening spent with Germann, I could not get him out of my mind. For weeks I would find myself thinking, "the Sybarite would enjoy this," or "the Sybarite would avoid that." In all that time, however, I never once thought of Astruc cadet, even though Germann had mentioned him a couple of times that evening and even predicted that I would meet him again soon. Why indeed should I recall him? Our introduction by Germann in the Taverne Anglaise in Geneva had been much too brief. Thus Astruc was the person farthest from my mind when I stopped in Nice a month or two later. But it was there that I had my next encounter with him, an encounter that was to keep "life's little loafer" uppermost in my mind for a long time.

Our meeting took place in a small Italian restaurant on the Promenade des Anglais. I was enjoying a delicious dish of *risotto alla milanese* and thinking what pleasure Germann would have taken in it, when Astruc, whom I did not immediately recognize, approached. "Monsieur," he said, speaking French, "I'm delighted to see you again. Do you remember me?"

I looked up, annoyed that my dinner was disturbed, but even before I recognized him I was already under his spell. For a smile had spread across his face, the most charming I

had ever seen, and all annoyance melted in its warmth. “Astruc,” he said, holding out his hand, “Astruc cadet. Monsieur Germann introduced us.” I immediately recalled him: Sybarite of Freedom, a Complete Anarchist—thus Germann had named him. I wanted to know why, and I asked him to join me. “Gladly,” he said, and added as he sat down, “Did Germann tell you I would find you again?”

Startled, for Germann had indeed promised just that, I mumbled some kind of reply, lapsing into German in my confusion, but Astruc continued, as though I had merely nodded. This habit of the French, of pretending not to hear anything spoken in another language, usually annoys me, but in Astruc’s case it was only part of his charm. I doubt that he was able to speak a word that was not French—it probably never occurred to him that it might be necessary, for indeed he had no need. Not with me at any rate, for I have spoken French ever since my childhood travels in the South with my mother.

I was even more eager to talk with him now, for I was burning with curiosity to know why our meeting had seemed so inevitable to Germann and whether it was by chance, as it appeared, or if Astruc had somehow followed me from Geneva. As if to answer my questions immediately, Astruc said: “Our friend Germann told me you were coming to Nice. He said he had detected a certain something about you that I would want to uncover for myself.” And he added, almost triumphantly, “I think he was right!”

Far from satisfying my curiosity, Astruc’s answer only added to the mystery. Still under the spell of his first smile, I thrilled at the suggestion of intrigue implied in his words. How little I anticipated the adventure that lay immediately before me and which was to remain one of my most beautiful memories! For the moment, however, he turned to other matters. He had not yet eaten; so, having inquired about my risotto, he ordered a plate just like it. But after glancing at the rather ordinary red wine I was drinking, he ordered an exquisite French wine from the waiter, adding, to me: “You will allow me that, will you not, monsieur?” Oh Astruc, can one deny you nothing?

“What an invasion of my freedom!” I thought, however, and knew that I should have stormed at such an affront. Yet, in the next moment I found the most implausible excuses for his action and how gladly, yes gladly, I would pay for his meal. After all, I could easily afford it, and was it not worth it to see his enjoyment? If, as Germann had said, he

was a Complete Anarchist, here was a new kind of anarchy. I eagerly began to question him about it.

“Not so fast,” he said, reminding me of Germann’s words. “Don’t disturb the enjoyment of this meal. Later, while we linger over coffee and brandy, we can leisurely discuss the topic. I know just the place—one you can easily afford,” he added with a roguish twinkle in his eye. Ah Astruc, you rascal, how you read my mind! But I laughed aloud, and he joined in the laughter.

During the remainder of the meal we spoke only of minor things: of the good weather Nice was enjoying and of how delightful the sea was. “And do you swim every day, like Germann?” I asked.

“Just like him. It was he who taught me to enjoy it.” He was silent a moment, then smiled as if recalling a pleasant experience. “I was only fourteen at the time we met. How long ago that was!” (Long ago? He could not be more than seventeen now!) Then, looking at me, he continued: “We met not far from here, but on an isolated beach. I had been in the water already and was enjoying the solitude, but was still a bit lonely. So I was glad to see the pleasant-looking gentleman walking from the forest down to the beach. He came right up to me and without any introduction remarked: ‘How much more you would enjoy your swim, if you would strip off your trunks and allow the water to flow evenly over your body. And how much more I would enjoy watching you!’ ‘What a dirty old man!’ I thought. ‘But why not? Give the gentleman a thrill.’ Oh I was a cheeky kid!” (Was? And he now tells the story and hardly knows me!)

“I stripped off my swimsuit then and there, and held it out to Germann, asking him to hold it so that no thief would take it while I was swimming, and ran back into the water. He was right, of course; it is much more pleasurable to swim naked. Naturally I was more aware at first of the sensation in my exposed genitals, and I was quickly excited. A fourteen year-old is easily excited,” he added, and smiled with pleasure after taking a long taste of his wine. Whether the smile—and the reddish tint I detected in his checks—came from recalling that excitement or simply from the alcohol in the wine, I did not know.

While Astruc was telling this story I had finished my meal and leaned back in my chair. But I found myself leaning forward again, hanging on every word. How frank he was! “And did Germann enjoy watching you?” I could not resist asking.

“You bet! And when I came out of the water, he never took his eyes from me. I told you I was a cheeky kid. I walked right up to him, and he reached out and touched me. You know, there.” This time I turned red, and I looked around embarrassed, to see if anyone was listening. But even though Astruc had related all this in an ordinary tone of voice, it appeared that no one but I had heard it. The other diners were all absorbed in their meals or their own companions or both. Nevertheless, I was anxious to change the subject. So, remarking that we had both finished our meals, I suggested that we go on to the other place he had mentioned for our coffee and brandy, and I called to the waiter and paid.

Outside, we strolled along the Promenade. It was a warm, moonlit night and we could see the waves leisurely rolling toward the beach. Astruc, apparently having forgotten that he had related only the beginning of his meeting with Germann, was silent. I decided to change the subject and satisfy a curiosity. “Did you know,” I asked, “that Germann calls you a Complete Anarchist?”

“Oh yes. And he must be right—he usually is—though I am not sure I understand the term. But he told me that you have written a whole book about anarchists. Do you really know all about them?”

“Enough. But you have not read my book, then?”

“No. Germann has, and he told me about it.”

I wondered if Germann had also told him that my books are “sad”, as he had remarked to me. But I asked, “What is it you understand by the term ‘anarchist’?”

“Well, Germann explained that it comes from the Greek and means someone who rejects authority, that is, someone who doesn’t let other people tell him what to do. And that’s me!” And here he flashed again that charming smile.

“But do you want to tell other people what to do?”

“Why should I? It doesn’t matter to me what they do, as long as they don’t mess with me.”

“Did you always feel this way?”

“No. For a long time I was just a dumb kid. I thought, when I grow up I’ll boss kids around the way people did me.”

“When did you change your views?”

“When I met Germann. He is an anarchist—and a quite extraordinary man.”

I knew that already. But I continued to question him.

“And did he not tell you what to do, when he told you to swim without your trunks?”

“But he did not tell me to do it. He only said that I would enjoy my swim more if I did. I decided. And like I said, I did it—and I was glad I did. We had a lot of fun together,” he added, and again there was that smile of pleasant recollection on his face.

But I could not let him get away with so easy an answer. “So you admit that he talked you into it? That he used his authority as an adult or whatever to persuade you to do what he wished?”

“Well, yes, I suppose he did. But if he hadn’t suggested it, I might not have tried it. And I did enjoy it!” For a moment he was satisfied with his answer, but then he added, “You mean, suppose I hadn’t enjoyed it—what then?”

“Yes, precisely.”

“I see. But how can you know if you don’t try? And anyway, what would the harm be? It wouldn’t have hurt me. And Germann would have had his pleasure at any rate—for he did enjoy watching me.” And his eyes twinkled again.

“So he was right in asking you to do something for his pleasure, even though you might not enjoy it?”

“Yes. I mean no. I mean,” and he looked a bit irritated. “You make everything so complicated. Who has time to think out all those things? Of course he wanted me to. He knew he would enjoy it; he was just as sure I would too. And he was right, wasn’t he? You don’t think Monsieur Germann would want to hurt me, do you?” he asked, almost with astonishment in his voice.

“No, of course I don’t. But suppose it had been someone else?”

“Well then, I might not have done it.” And he looked a bit sad at the thought. But then he said with evident satisfaction, “I’m glad it was Germann. He showed me how to do a lot of things.”

Naturally I was curious to know what those things were, but Astruc interrupted himself to suggest that we enter the little bar we were just then passing. “Here is the place I mentioned earlier. I’m ready for coffee now. Aren’t you?” I agreed to his suggestion and we entered. I needed no coaxing, for I was completely under his spell. How I liked this “cheeky kid”!

We found a table in a quiet corner and I let him order for both of us the coffee and brandy he recommended. While Astruc was speaking to the waiter, I looked around the bar, it was not well lit, but after my eyes had adjusted to the dim light I was surprised to see that it was nearly full. I had been fooled by the quiet, for everyone seemed to be speaking in low tones. And not only low in volume, but also low in pitch. It took me a few moments to grasp the reason for this: there were no women in the place. I relaxed, for I often find high-pitched female laughter grating on my nerves. And then I tensed again. The men were speaking to one another softly and intimately. It was one of those bars! Would they think that Astruc and I were just another pair of lovers? Or would they be concerned because he was so much younger than I? I looked around to see if there were other couples where one was younger than the other and, seeing several, I relaxed again. Then I wondered if Astruc had chosen this bar for that very reason.

Astruc, having finished speaking to the waiter, again read my thoughts: “I discovered this place only a couple of days ago and I immediately thought I should bring you here—if I saw you again.” This last was said, however, as if he had no doubt that he would. Oh Astruc, did Germann also teach you to scheme? By now, however, I was willing to let come what may. But I could not get over my scruples and I questioned my motives. Like Germann, I too would very much enjoy seeing Astruc swim in the nude. But would it be right to ask him to do it, as Germann did? Still, Astruc had completely justified Germann, and I suppose he would me too. But suppose it wasn’t Astruc, but some other boy? In this way, I tortured myself looking for some general rule. What worked in the case of Astruc might not work with another, but who that “other” was remained vague, and so I had no answer. My thoughts stopped. It was then that I realized that Astruc was looking at me intently.

“Monsieur!” he exclaimed. “I am here. Give me your full attention!” He said it sternly and I was a bit startled. Then we both burst out laughing simultaneously. And I laughed again because his laugh was so infectious.

We spoke of many things and, although I no longer quizzed him, I learned much about his background that interested me. His parents had neglected him, but an uncle had looked out for him and he had attended school long enough to learn to read and write. This uncle had died shortly after the meeting with Germann. Germann had taken him in for a while, but did not want to be tied down. Astruc would have liked to stay with him, but had also already learned that he could live on his own. He did odd jobs and he sometimes went with gentlemen, whom he met in bars like this one. “But only if I liked them. And I made them pay.” He said it with a certain firmness, but added equally firmly, “They got their money’s worth!”

In the nearly three years since the meeting with Germann he had wandered a great deal, mostly along the southern coast of France. Once he had gone into Italy as far as Genoa on the coast and then as far north as Turin. He thought the Italians spoke French in a “funny way”, but a mathematics professor he met in Turin, who had been very nice to him, buying him an ice-cream and then taking him to a movie, had spoken very good French. He had been forced to return to France because the police kept asking him for his papers. He had no papers. “Why should I carry ‘papers’?” he asked. I know who I am, and they have only to look at me. What did I do to them? Nothing. Why should they bother me?” And he looked at me as if I might have an answer. But he did not wait to see if I would answer him, and only added: “The French police are not much better. Only they speak better French.” He smiled, as if this were some excuse for their actions. I suspected that it allowed him to better use his charms on them. I would have been surprised to learn that the French police had ever put him in jail. In fact, Astruc ended his tale with: “They mostly just talked to me and let me go. Once a tall and very good-looking policeman took me home with him. That was a night!”

I saw my opportunity and took it. “I have only a hotel room, but I would like to take you there with me. Will you spend the evening with me?”

“I thought you would never ask!”

The waiter gave Astruc a knowing look as we left, but I did not care. I was proud to be one of his “gentlemen” and grateful that Astruc had found me that evening, though I was still unsure if it had been by chance or design. I could hardly repress my excitement as we walked to my hotel. I was breathing rapidly, in shallow breaths. But Astruc, although lively, had a calming effect on me. He made everything we did seem natural.

The concierge did not look up as he handed me my room key. When we arrived, I opened the door and let Astruc enter first. As I expected, he made a rapid survey of the room and then made himself comfortably at home. He seemed to become a part of the room—and its best part. No wonder the room had seemed so bare before, and how full of life it seemed now! In my discussion earlier I had learned that Astruc was indeed a Complete Anarchist. I was now eager to know what Germann had meant when he also called him a Sybarite of Freedom.

I opened a box of cigars. My plan was to enjoy a smoke while gently quizzing him in the matter. But Astruc had other ideas. “Oh monsieur, please do not smoke! Not now at any rate. I only enjoy cigar smoke at a distance—and right now I want you to hold me close. You do want to, don’t you?”

Could there be any doubt? I opened my arms wide. He came to me and fitted into them as if they were made to hold him, and indeed I felt at that moment they were. How comfortable I felt with him, and how I needed the feeling of his small body close to mine! Then a nagging doubt came back to me: was the pleasure his too? Or had I selfishly enticed him to my room? How can I repay him? I thought of his “gentlemen” and somehow the arrangement seemed sordid to me. And yet, and yet ...

Astruc had no such doubts. But he did have an uncanny ability to read my thoughts. He made no effort to talk me out of my doubts; he merely snuggled closer and spread his arms around me too. Of course he wanted to be with me! As my doubts slipped away and I slowly relaxed in his arms, Astruc finally spoke: “That’s better. You are with me now, monsieur. Everything is as it should be. We are free to enjoy ourselves and each other. And I mean to enjoy you!” He raised his head and kissed me on the lips, twice—lightly at first and then warmly and firmly.

Suddenly overcome with emotion, I slumped onto the chair, while Astruc slipped between my legs. I again wrapped my arms around him, and now it was I who snuggled

onto his breast. He put his hands gently behind my head and held me close. How protected I felt. The world seemed far away, or rather, all the world I cared about was with me now and in my arms. I wanted to protect this slim body that seemed to me so vulnerable. And yet it was he who protected me! Wanting to get even closer to this body, I unbuttoned his shirt and pressed my face against his smooth skin. As I did so, his hands held me tighter. Wellbeing flowed from that slender body into mine. I raised my head, kissed his neck, took his hands from behind my head, and kissed their palms, first the left hand, then the right. He then placed them against my cheeks, lowered his head, and kissed me full on the lips. “Arc you glad I found you again, monsieur?”

What could I answer? I wrapped my arms around his waist again and drew him close. Then I stood, lifted him up—how light he was!—and carried him to the bed. There I set him down, sat beside him, and wordlessly—I could not have spoken a word at that moment—took his shirt off him. The sight of that beautiful body brought the blood rushing to my face. His shoulders were slim, the muscles were just beginning to show in his arms, and when he lifted them and placed them around my neck, I caught a glimpse of the fine hairs just beginning to sprout under his arms. I wanted to keep my eyes wide open and drink everything in and at the same time I could not resist the urge to bury my face in the hollow of an arm. He allowed me neither, for his arms encircled my neck and with unexpected strength he drew my face tight against his. I knew in that moment that it was exactly what I wanted. Never, never has anyone ever anticipated my desires, my needs, as Astruc did that night!

“But you must undress, too, monsieur.” And without waiting for my agreement—what need was there?—he proceeded to unbutton and remove my shirt. He ran his hands through the hair on my chest, measured the width of my shoulders, and snuggled close. I ran my hands up and down his back. How smooth the skin was! How sweet the smell it gave off! Is there anything more wonderful in the world than the sensation of holding, possessing, a young and beautiful person like this?

It was a moment of sheer perfection. And then—how do such things happen?—a feeling, almost of remorse, came over me. My hands froze while my thoughts dashed madly. Have I a right to this sensation, this pleasure, this body? Do I deserve this

happiness? Am I taking advantage of him? Shouldn't I think of him and his needs? And a hundred other such doubts suddenly rushed through my mind.

Again Astruc rescued me, and in his own simple, direct way. Again he read my thoughts. "It is I who want you, monsieur. And I want you to touch me, there, where Germann did that first day on the beach." The sly smile returned to his face as he said, in the same words he had used earlier: "I am here. Give me your full attention!" Ah Astruc, how gladly I gave you my full attention! My fears again melted, as we both laughed at his impudence.

He immediately got off the bed, unbuckled his belt, unbuttoned his trousers, and stepped out of them, letting his underwear fall at the same time. He stood still a moment, while I gazed at his charming figure. He was slim, with small but tight muscles that appeared to be just on the verge of becoming large and manly. His narrow hips were firmly supported by unexpectedly shapely legs. His body hair was slight and very light in color; it appeared to be bleached by the sun. Even the small amount of pubic hair was the same color as the top of his head. The few freckles only served to call attention to the perfection of his skin. I could not get my fill of looking at this marvel. He could never have served, however, as model for an artist, for his beauty could not be captured on canvas or in marble. He was a living boy, on the verge of becoming a man, and that was something that no artist has ever fully captured, though many have tried. I willed the moment to last, but it was he who again broke the spell.

"Now you must undress, too, and I will enjoy looking at you." But he did not wait for me to do so. As I stood to undress completely, he climbed onto the bed and lay on his back, his head propped onto the hands behind it. Nor did he look at me, but seemed to close his eyes. I undressed hastily, stepped back to the bed, and lay beside him. He turned to me, with eyes wide open, and said: "And now let us make love. You do love me, don't you?"

Astruc, Astruc! Never did a question less need answering, and yet I answered it with all my being. Nor did I need to ask if he loved me. Our love making was inspired by an eros implanted in human nature, and we made no effort to restrain our passion. For minutes, one hour, two, we lost ourselves in a frenzy. I no longer knew where I was; I no longer cared to know. I only knew that Astruc had given me the freedom to love him in

whatever way I wished, to love him my way. With no demands, no pressures, no limits, my pleasure was exquisite and boundless. But my greatest pleasure was to look at him, smell him, taste him, touch him—not just “there” but everywhere—and to experience how my pleasure brought his excitement to the height of ecstasy and beyond. All this was played through more than once, until finally Astruc, his energy spent and thoroughly satisfied, fell asleep on his pillow, contentment on his face.

I, however, could not sleep. Although the moon had long since set, the light of the street lamp came in through the window, which had been left open because of the warm night. The sleeping figure could be clearly seen, and lying beside him, propped on one elbow, I looked at the boy I loved and thought over the experience just past. Surely there were other boys in the world as handsome as he. Some of them were probably just as generous. What was it that made this experience so different? What was it about Astruc that was special?

I did not have to think long. It was our friend Germann who had given me the clue, though I did not know it at the time. He had called Astruc a Sybarite of Freedom. A Sybarite, surely—do we not all instinctively love pleasure?—but also a Sybarite of Freedom. With Astruc I had found at last the freedom to love, to love in my own way. And not just the freedom to love him, but others as well, for I felt now that I had been released from a bond I did not even know existed. The sense of freedom was overwhelming and my gratitude poured out to Astruc even as he slept. Oh Astruc, what can I do to show you my gratitude?

With this thought, a feeling of exhausted relaxation came over me and I lay back onto the pillow. As I did so, Astruc turned on his side and, in his sleep, laid his arm across my breast. Gently I placed my hand over his, and with my own smile of contentment, I too fell asleep . . .

I awoke the next morning with a sense of well-being, a feeling of being alive in a way I had never felt before. It took only a moment for me to recall the cause and turn to the source of my happiness. But Astruc was no longer there. Had he awakened early? Gone out for a coffee or a swim? It did not occur to me that I would not see him again that day, or ever again. I was nearly dressed when I saw the note, written in a rather

childish hand, on the table. I have it yet, for I have guarded it like a sacred treasure. In his farewell Astruc wrote:

My dear friend, I cannot wake you. You look so happy. But you would try to keep me, and I must go. I'm glad I found you again and I think you are too. Forgive me for taking twenty francs from your wallet. I need them for the next few days. Adieu, my dear friend. Remember me. Love, Astruc.

I have just copied out this note, but I know it by heart. I read it over and over. I was overcome by my loss: just when I thought I had found my "friend for life," he had vanished. I knew immediately that any search was useless and I sat on the bed, on the edge of despair. What was I to do?

It was then that Astruc came to my rescue a final time, but in a way different from before. In seeking to recall what I had lost, I remembered what he had given me and I realized that it was something I would have forever: the freedom to love. Astruc had let me be free with him and I had learned to be free with myself. If I would never love Astruc again in the way I loved him that night, I knew that I could now love other boys in the same way. The sense of freedom again flooded over me, and again my gratitude poured out to Astruc, no longer there beside me on the bed. I still felt the loss, but I regretted nothing. And I knew that Astruc was happy, that I had made him happy. I had given him pleasure and he had taken pleasure. And that was as it should be.

I looked at the note again and one sentence stood out: "But you would try to keep me, and I must go." He was right. I would have tried to keep him. But with this thought he left me a final gift, for he also taught me not to try to keep a love that follows its own nature in leaving. I have since had to let go many times and it does not become easier, but always I think of Astruc and I know that I can. If Astruc did not understand the term "anarchist" and would have laughed at being called a Sybarite, would he. I often wondered, have accepted the description I found for him? For I now understand and accept his right to be "life's little loafer."