

CAMP CHAT

By Eric Presland and Nigel Pinn 1972

Oh, what a relief to sit down! I was having a lovely chat with AE Housman about Shropshire when this flat-chested woman in a yard and a half of tasselled curtain came up and insisted I tango with her. She said she was Ottolie Morrell, I thought she was Ottolie ghastly – ha! Ha!

Anyway, AE was telling me this lovely story about Lawrence. No dear, not the one with the John Thomas and Lady Jane, the other one. The butch leather queen with the motor bike. Yes, Shaw, that one. Never know what to call him, he keeps changing. He's had more names than you've had hot chorus boys. Anyway, it seems that Lawrence, or Shaw, had this camel and – Oh, you've heard it.

I feel sorry for AE, you know. He's always falling for these lads, these Shropshire lads, and they keep hanging themselves or being hanged. If I'd been chatted up by AE, I'd be very careful to avoid ropes.

I've been buttonholed by Isherwood too. He's just back from three weeks in Berlin. No dear, not Irving, the city. And what does he look like? Green just isn't his colour. Not on his fingernails, anyway. He's off next week to China of all places. With that friend of his – you know the one? Face like a prune, scribbles poetry. Yes, him.

Oh, do you like it? Well, some people can carry a tan and some can't, and I was fed up with being pale and interesting, it was too exhausting. What do you mean, out of a bottle? It's the real thing. I've just got back from the

South of France. Willie invited me down. Willie Maugham, you know? And such dramas we had, such dramaramas. Beverley Nichols came down and they had these terrible rows about what colour sails to put on the yacht. Beverley suggested Schiaparelli Pink to match Willie's eyes, and Willie got furious and told him to clear out and take his menagerie with him. Travelling with twelve cats, dear. Queer for moggies.

You know his affair's in pictures? With Alfred Hitchcock. Hitchcock? Half cock more like, from what I hear. Haven't you met Beverley's you-know? Cyril Butcher. And there's a misnomer if ever there was one. Butcher than what? I ask myself. Barbara Cartland, possibly.

Morgan Forster – you know, EM to his friends – Morgan Forster got pissed as a fart on Thursday and started screeching about this new novel he'd just written. What was it called? Horace? Boris? Doris? No, 'Morris', that's it. Of course, EM insists on calling it Maurice. Affected. It's meant to be terribly avant-garde. It's got this scene in with two boys in bed together. Of course, Lytton got all excited. "What do they do?" he screeched. "They talk," said EM. Talk, my dear! It'll be the non-event of the century.

It was a marvellous party though. Everybody who was anybody was there. Tallulah was there. Though what she did with Ronald Furbank's gold-topped cane quite turned my stomach. Can't have done his much good either.

I heard from Ivor, who had it from Noël – I said 'had it from'. Well maybe. I don't want to know, I'm not one for gossip. Oooh, guess who else I saw in the South of France. Nijinsky. Absolute wreck. He's never been the same since Romola got her hands on him, ruined his Grande Jetée and broke poor Sergei's heart. And guess who else was there. Gide. On Nice Station. He's

outrageous, that one. Had three little urchins carrying one suitcase. Still, you know what they say. An Arab a day keeps the priest at bay.

Oh, I must just go and talk to Mine Host. *[Gets up, crosses.]* My dear, I must congratulate you on a marvellous party. *[Looks back at the person he's just been talking to.]* Him? Oh, some naff little queen. What did he say his name was? Crisp. Somebody Crisp. Frankly, my dear, I doubt if we'll be hearing much more of him.