At the naturist dig-ins on Sylt are exposed some of the richest men, pound for pound, in Germany.

a fine and secret place for being naked—all the more so when M. le Patron insisted he had no record of my reservation and no space available. The island was jammed; I was so parched that I could hardly croak my despair. The patron relented. For the first night, he said, I could sleep on the balcony over the bar. Perhaps next day he could find something for me. A Moroccan servant boy was turfed off his pallet above the bar, I was installed, and that was that.

By 8:00 A.M. guests of the hotel were passing through the bar into the dining room, and there I lay, more or less On Display. But it would have been peculiar of me to draw the rumpled sheets about me in embarrassment, considering that the guests were quite as naked as I was and completely indifferent to what would have been, in any other place, my plight. So I just got up and had breakfast in a sunny courtyard and by my third cup of coffee the world looked somewhat brighter. The patron materialized with a room key, everybody was suddenly nice to me, and I started to have a good time.

Because the island is open to the public, and because it is administered from the mainland community of Hyères, complete nakedness is permissible only on the rocks and beaches and in the hotels or, of course, in private villas. On the streets a pouch is a necessity. I began rather discreetly with a tweedy beige number, but later I added to my store a nice blue, with a zippered pocket for cigarettes and odd change, and a flashy Tahitian print in red and white. It was difficult to choose among them, but as an old college friend of mine used to say, a handsome man looks good in anything.

I stayed on Levant for a full week and had a thoroughly good time, but I suspect it was because I had friends there, a couple who go every year for at least a month, and they kindly functioned as my social sponsors.

Strangers, going in alone without contacts, would be likely to get a very chilly welcome from the regulars unless they happened to be extraordinarily beautiful of face and figure. A great mind or a brilliant conversational style will get you no place; a fantastic body and willing ways could lead to anything. In that respect, perhaps, Levant does not differ from any smart coastal resort, except that regulars on Levant are particularly wary of voyeurs and the voyeuristic mentality, and they can spot a leering amateur at once. It does not do to stand around drooling, and it is impossible to stand around drooling—on the beach anyway—with your clothes on. When people come into these areas, as they do every day, fully dressed and voyeuristically inclined, the whole beach erupts with catcalls and, ultimately, physical assault. The cry goes up, "VOYEUR!" And people point and shout, "*Au poil! Au poil!*" and a good deal worse. You either retreat or get out of your clothes.

This is not to suggest that the Ile du Levant is not a sexy place. It is so sexy, in fact, that most regular nudist organizations, in Europe and America, profoundly deplore it. For insiders Levant is a kingdom of kink, and the restless search for something and/or someone new and different is the basic current of social life. No invitation to lunch or dinner can be taken as simply that, and the most banal conversations are always ripe with innuendo. At the outdoor cafés, where people tend to start the day with *Le Monde* and a *pastis*, during the long, hot afternoons at the beach; amongst the frolicking children; over dinner by candlelight in hotel dining rooms; at the nightclubs into the very wee hours—the eyes never stop roaming, questing, consulting.

The nightclubs are especially remarkable. The popular spot last year was La Paillotte, and it was jammed every night. People usually arrive between ten and eleven, fully dressed as a rule because the evenings are chilly. La Paillotte is like any small, swinging discothèque; the music is deafening, the crush unbelievable, and pretty soon everybody is sweating and drinking and taking their clothes off. Taking their clothes off? Not in New York, of course, but in Levant, yes. The ladies usually lead the way, shrugging out of their heavy-knit sweaters, freeing their breasts for comfort. And then the guys, if they are anything like me, are out of their shirts in a flash and asking ladies to dance. It is one of the most agreeable conventions of Levant that ladies rarely refuse a courteous invitation to trip the light fantastic, and by God it *is* fantastic.

Fully clothed passengers swarm ashore from boat at Ile Du Levant

Later in the month I finally made my way to Sylt, which is not so much a nudist island as an island with nudist beaches. The towns on Sylt are hyper-respectable Germanic settlements, heavy with cleanliness and rectitude, almost prissy with *Nordsee* order and neatness. The three-hour train ride from Hamburg, over the rich, pancake-flat plains, is a suitable preparation for the spare, open quality of Sylt. Westerland, the major town, is the end of the line for a run that brings the train, finally, over a long causeway from the mainland and, oddly, there is nothing island-like about it. Indeed, on the streets of Westerland one has no sense of sea or beach; high dunes separate the city from the beach and seem to insulate it from any suggestion of holiday-making.

After Levant I found it difficult to warm to Sylt. My hotel was beautiful and elegant but blocks from the beach. There was no one on the streets in shorts or other beach wear, and when I bought my way onto the boardwalk (at a price of DM2.50 per day), I found only Teutonic ladies in hand-knitted sweaters and sensible shoes, marching arm and arm in the salt air to the military tunes emanating from the band shell. The entire beach, as far as I could see in either direction, was lined with wicker bath chairs, each one large enough to contain an entire family, set out with Prussian precision and numbered prominently from one to infinity. And everybody in sight was dressed; indeed, the practice is to set out from your hotel in complete costume, strip to your bathing suit within your bath chair, and dress fully before entering the streets of Westerland again. Some nudist island, I thought, and repaired to my hotel bar to take something for the chill.

The bartender set me straight. The beach I'd seen was virtually the only non-nudist one on the island. In either direction beyond Westerland stretch miles of open sandy beaches and dunes, and the entire terrain is free to dress or not to dress. It is because of these beaches, or more especially because of the dunes behind them, that Sylt constantly provides flammable material for the West German scandal sheets. Some fat industrialist is always committing suicide these days on account of what he was seen doing in a sand dune, and luminaries such as Gunther Sachs, Brigitte Bardot's husband, have to keep their shirts on all the time lest they be photographed nude by the German *paparazzi*.

The duny wastes in the vicinity of the village of Kampen are especially busy by day. There are dunes for every persuasion: wife-swapping dunes, Lesbian dunes, homosexual dunes, troika dunes—you like it, they dune it, and please forgive the pun. By six in the evening, however, the sand is abandoned, and action does not ensue again until about eleven at night when the small clubs and low joints of Kampen start to heat up. Last summer the Tenne, the Pony Bar and the Kupferpfanne were the hot spots. Because these joints have to close at 1:00 A.M., the well-upholstered crowd rushes up the road to Westerland, where the hours are more commodious. Stand, on any summer evening, at the entrance to a discothèque called the Old Forester, and at 1:00 A.M. you can hear them coming a long way off—great strings of white Mercedes convertibles roaring into Westerland with their cargoes of youthful drunks, who then spill into the street, snatch at the cap of the doorman, and disappear into the Forester's psychedelic lower depths. The cars stand abandoned any which way in the road.

These people comprise not only an inside set, as in the Ile du Levant, but a group impenetrable except via money and influence. The occasional pretty face might be picked up and dropped, for the lark of it, in the course of an evening, but otherwise this is a prohibitive, firmly closed society. However, for casual beach nakedness, in or out of the dunes, all you have to do is walk right or left from Westerland until the boardwalk gives out. And then walk twice as far in the wet sand. And abruptly you find yourself in free beach sections, where the wicker bath chair may well contain a lady whose pleasure in sun and surf is unhampered by costume. If you hesitate to rent a bath chair you can always requisition one of the many deep sand bunkers—great moonscape craters dug everywhere for protection from the wind—pull off your pants and commence to stroll the beach. The surf is rather cold and wicked and the sun is a sometime thing—the color on Sylt is usually more gray than golden—but you may meet the most interesting people, and the goose pimples, at least, will be real. *Continued on Page 98*

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