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Thank you, Zürich . . .

by Seaweed.

. . . and now I have gone, Robby, and you are still in that land that so captivated my heart. You are not just a memory, that would sound hopeless, but a beautiful dream come true, a very concrete and palpable reality which might, who knows, be mine again some day. Oh, I know you told me you «belonged» to someone else. You even called me by his name «Dick», in the wild moment when the floodgates were opened up releasing that first tumult of desire and distress. But, how long has it been since Dick got married and ceased to accept your gift of self? Three years, you told me, and you even admitted that you never answered his letters, and then he stopped writing. That was already a long time ago. Yet, you go on torturing yourself, and hoping . . . for what? That he might desert his wife and return to you? You know he will never do that, whatever may still be the measure of his affection for you. Another belongs to him now, but you go on wanting to be his, even though he can no longer accept you for what you once were to him. And you know it, Robby, but cannot bring yourself to accept this fact. I do sound cruel, don't I? Yet, you simply had to be shaken out of that way of thinking which was becoming morbid.

I am not asking you to pretend that Dick never existed. He was, for quite some time, a very real part of you. Even though you were Swiss, he got you a job on the base of the Air Force so that you could be together. But now, Robby, he has gone home. He has married. He no longer belongs to you, or you to him. Don't you see what it all means for you? The way you are going, the way I saw you behave the evening we first met, you shut yourself off from the rest of the world, moping and grieving like an inconsolable widow. Such constancy may be heroic, but it is against nature. Oh, I know you say that you never want to be in love again. But do you mean it? I cannot believe it, because your nature is loving and understanding. Do you mean to say that it is a matter of indifference to you whether people show any affection for you, want you, or care for you? Of course you aren't indifferent, by the very nature of your present grief, you need people, you need some one person care for you. Yes, I do care for you, and very much so. But, right now, in your present frame of mind, you persuade yourself that you do not need me or anyone else. You told me that you liked me, and I have no reason to disbelieve it. You have given me ample proof of your sincerity, Robby. But, until such time as you begin to realize that you cannot live alone, I have no right, nor perhaps the courage, to offer you anything. The time is not yet ripe.

Do you remember the night we first met, Robby? What is the name of that café, towards Bellerivestrasse, I believe? I thought it was one of the jolliest places I had seen in Zürich. It was Jean who had taken me there, and I saw you, alone at the bar, the moment I walked in. It must have been ten o'clock, and an hour later you were still alone, in spite of the crowd around you, and the many individuals who tried to engage you in conversation. And I said to Jean, «How sad he must feel.» You looked as if you half despised the company, and half pitied them. I felt you must

be grieving over something, and in time I found I was right. Jean began to resent my repeated comments concerning you, but I must say he was very tolerant about it all. My desire to walk over and talk to you became too strong to resist, and finally, when I was standing near you, I jokingly told you to cheer up. This did not come as a surprise to you, because there had been some sort of understanding in our eyes long before we spoke. Your reply was not novel, but at least you made no pretence to idle conversation. «This is a sad world to live in,» you said in perfect English, and that was one moment when I did not agree with you, because I liked you, and I was near you, and I was talking with you, and it was anything but sad. And you liked me, too, Robby. I know it, and you know it.

What did we talk about that first evening? Oh, so many things. I introduced Jean to you, and you went on gabbing in German, a hundred to the minute, telling him that you had seen him around. And I explained how Jean had become my cicerone since we had first met at the dance, the previous Wednesday, and how much I had really enjoyed myself at the Club. You were shocked, somehow, to learn that I had been there, though you are one of us. On knowing your reason, I assured you how impressed I had been by the atmosphere of genuine camaraderie that existed among members. It was all so very proper, decent, and I could sense that everyone felt he had to behave, because the reputation of our lot was at stake. But there was no great effort to behave, because it was all so natural and matter of fact, and no one pretended to be what he was not, or to make an exhibition of what he was. In truth, it was one of the few places I had known anywhere which did not look cheap or «camp». I felt so relaxed, and the guys I met soon put me even more at ease and made me feel as though I had known them always. And Rolf! You may not know him, Robby, but you must know of him. How unselfishly, liberally he gives himself to our cause! He is simply tireless, and he was so kind to me in his friendly welcome. Rolf even made a short introductory speech, much to my embarrassment. I could not understand a word of what he was saying in German, but from his warmth of manner I knew he was being very kind. It was there that I met Jean. He had asked me to dance. He is really a nice fellow, you know, I liked him a lot. In fact, we danced together practically the whole evening, and we met every evening afterwards, until I met you, Robby.

Oh yes, and towards the end of the evening you told Jean that you remembered having seen him in uniform. Do you remember how amused he was, because, apparently, he had never been in any uniform. But you insisted, and as the café was closing, I suggested you come with us to Jean's place, to see for yourself that he had no uniform there. Here, I must plead for forgiveness, Robby. I knew I was suggesting this because I liked you, and wanted to spend the night with you. But you knew it, too, I think, and our complicity tasted sweet, didn't it? So we bundled into a cab, and there we exchanged our first kiss. Jean said nothing, but I could guess his feelings. What could I do? It was my last night in Zürich. You and I would never have another chance if we allowed this meeting to come to an inconclusive end. I hoped that Jean would understand. And then we were in his apartment, in the room overlooking the

lake, far below. We lingered so long over the drink Jean had poured for us, that finally, with disgust, he bid us good night and went to bed. He had in his great kindness offered us the use of his guest-room, to which we retired, and it was there that we sat together on the bed, you and I, in a long embrace, as if we never wanted to part. And then I put the light out, and our arms and lips spoke poetry again. It was then that the sudden thought of Dick made you sob so violently for a little while, because, in the midst of a desperate sort of embrace, you murmured his name in my ear. I might have been annoyed, instead, I was filled with pity. I understood. I knew of all the agony you must have been through, and for that I loved you twice as much. I could feel and taste your tears on my lips, I calmed you with my hands. We were together once more, Robby. We could not get too close to satisfy our mutual longing (I dare not say «love»), but we understood each other well, and were filled with that satisfaction that can only come when two people find completion together in willing and total abandon. Does the bliss of that night still echo through your veins, Robby? As soon as either of us fell asleep, he was awakened by the other's kisses. Not many words were exchanged, in fact hardly any, for we communicated through our instinctive understanding of each other's impulses and emotions.

Morning found us half asleep, at last, for even lovers must give way to nature's tidal rhythms. We were still in each other's arms. But you had to rise to go to work, although it was Sunday. Jean came to life long enough to say goodbye to you. Our own parting was brief, though tender, and as it should have been. I was to leave for Rome in the evening, and the odds were we might never meet again, or at least not for a long, long while. You and I accepted things for what they were, a short wonderful time together, but, nevertheless, an episode. Another long kiss and you were gone.

But not so. A little later, Jean discovered your overcoat on a chair. I was overjoyed, for I knew where to find you, and now I had a good excuse for calling on you. You were surprised to see me, for you had not missed your coat, and you were pleased, even if you could not say much at the time. You were to be free from three to eight, and asked me to meet you then. Over the Bahnhofbrücke we went, and along the Limmatquai, past the Rathaus, then across the river once again, and along the Bahnhofstrasse. It was a delightful walk, just you and I. We still had two hours to ourselves, and we tacitly agreed to go to your place. The remembered warmth of your lips, the feeling of your firm, smooth-textured body, still make my blood run like wildfire. How can I thank you for the memory of those blissful hours, my friend? But it is more than memory, for you gave me something I was beginning to think might never happen to me again. I wanted and I was wanted and we lived it through without hesitation or reserve. I hope you may feel now as I do . .

A last handclasp from the carriage window — poor substitute for our long embraces of so short a while ago — and then the train left you behind . . .

Au revoir, Zürich, and thank you.

I want to see you again, Robby . . .