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Hook, Line, and Sinker

We had our only quarrel exactly in the middle of the two weeks we lived together. That quarrel made me realize that the one thing I had been at the greatest pains to guard myself against had happened. I'd fallen in love.

The two weeks started in quite a commonplace way. I had felt safe, because actually I thought my heart was thousands of miles away, and guarded well from poachers.

But on a Sunday morning Jack rang me up. Would I be interested in meeting someone he knew, someone definitely out of the top-drawer? Oh yes, Jack went on, even though admittedly his top-drawer was fairly large, this one belonged in it. The boy was working in a garage. It was a steady job but — the usual story — he had run out of money. Pay-day was a long way off. The boy could use a bit of pocket money. »What's he like?« I asked. Jack said, «Oo-la-la!» and I said, «Yes, of course.»

«I'll send him over,» Jack said.

When the doorbell rang, I saw the fellow was about twenty-six, six foot two, with brown hair and gray eyes. He was a bit on the lanky side, and a joy to the eyes. His name was Terry.

We were quickly at ease with each other. We had drinks and cigarettes and then he easily undressed. His long legs were tawny and his chest was broad and smooth.

All in all I think he stayed three hours with me. He took his «pocket-money» casually. He left for pleasures of his own, and I returned to the quiet of my Sunday afternoons. I felt relaxed, easy in mind, and grateful to him for having given me a good time.

When I was getting up next morning, the bell of my flat rang. It was Terry. «What in the world are you doing here at this hour?» I asked. «Well, you see,» he said, «I've been sharing a room with a guy until pay-day, and last night we had a fight. I walked out and now I ain't got any place to stay. See, I work nights.» He shifted awkwardly and then grinned. «Mebbe you could let me sleep here today. I'll be sure to find another bed tomorrow.»

The damn thing is that I can hardly refuse anyone anything. I have a soft heart. Terry came in and took the bathroom over, while I prepared breakfast for two. Thank heavens there was enough bread, butter, and marmelade in the house. Terry had not bothered to dress after his bath, and I enjoyed seeing him sit opposite me, eating. Afterwards he took over my bed. «Don't worry about me», he said, «I'll be all right.»

That's how it really started. He never found other lodgings, of course. He never looked for them. And for days to come, my front-door bell rang every morning at a quarter past seven.

I started going home during lunch-time to see how he was getting on. I provided him with canned food, and some pocket money every day. I made my very restricted means clear to him, however.

The anatomy of the mind of straight boys is not much of a mystery. He liked one thing, and none of the frills. And when he came in drunk one Friday morning and started kissing me, I wondered what he was fighting.

He told me a lot of dirty jokes and began to weave the fabric of his life for me. It was a wild story, involving a lonely childhood, a father's black-market

fortune, a Spanish stepmother who went to bed with him, discovery, disinheritance, an early marriage, debauchery, divorce, and a longing for death.

And he had looked on my side of the medal too. There was some vague talk about a famous Paris comedian and an author of French novels. But not even the money they gave him, nor their praise of his body had moved him in the least.

There were rough spots in our life, however. On the first Sunday when he worked day-shift I could hardly get him out of bed to go to his job. «Hell, Mac,» he yawned, «I hate to work.» But he finally went, and when he returned in the evening he was in a very bad temper. I didn't touch him. We went to our beds in a room grown strangely chilly. He turned on the light and read for two hours. The light was in my eyes and I could not sleep.

At ten o'clock I said, «How about putting that damned light out?»

«Are you mad at me?» he grinned.

«No,» I snapped, «but you ought to have some little consideration for other people.» Matter of fact, I didn't care a hoot about the light; I was boiling because I hadn't felt his arms around me.

He must have sensed it. He crawled out of bed, came over and touched me on the shoulder, and switched off the light.

But we were not going to have a peaceful night. The phone rang. I answered it and it was a boy I knew just back from Spain, and full of tales. We talked for half an hour about the golden lads of Barcelona.

I knew the talk made Terry furious. When I hung up I turned to him and said, «I'm sorry.»

He spoke with his face in his pillow. «Those goddamned queers,» he said. Fifteen minutes later the phone rang again. Someone wanted to get his apartment key that he had left with me. Terry was ready to explode. «Aren't we going to get any sleep at all?» «No,» I said, nastily sweet, «someone is coming for his key in ten minutes.»

It was long past midnight when this key business was settled. We were both wide awake so I brought Terry a drink and lighted a cigarette for him and sat on the edge of his bed. He began to mutter an amplification of his opinion about queers, touching on their antecedents, their bitchiness, and their unreliability. Like an angry lawyer I rose to our defence, fighting mad.

It was a royal row and it lasted nearly two hours.

We were both rather exhausted by that time. Suddenly, unexpectedly, Terry said in a low voice «Do you know I'm afraid of becoming a homosexual?» I reached out and grabbed his wrist. «Terry,» I said, «you could go to bed with men hundreds of times and still wouldn't become a homosexual. It's what's in your imagination that counts.» In a kind of little boy's voice he said, «I can't hardly remember what a woman's like any more.» I smiled at him. «Oh well, I said, «wait until next pay-day and you can get yourself a woman.» He raised up in bed violently. «Damn it,» he said, «you oughtn't to be so nice.»

I glowed inside but hid it. Instead I talked for ten minutes about friendship and the difference between friends and lovers. «You haven't had a real friend for a long time, and I'm happy you picked me to be one. In our case sex was the foundation, but the building has grown into a solid structure now.» I bent down and kissed him lightly. «Everything all right now?» I asked. His head was dark

against the pillow; his eyes dark pools. He grinned up at me. «Everything is quite all right,» he said.

I turned off the light and went back to my own bed, but it was some time before the music stopped in my heart.

The next morning when the alarm went off I got up and shaved quietly. I got breakfast ready and took it into the big room. Terry opened one eye, turned over on his back and grinned happily at me.

«Well, you sweet sonofabitch,» I said, going over to his bed.

«You godawful pervert,» he retorted. And then his arms came up around my neck and he drew my head down to kiss me.

Whoever said Mondays were blue?

I was very late for work that morning. But what the hell did it matter? The atmosphere had been cleared by our quarrel, and that was all that mattered. As I was leaving he said, «Can I have money for a haircut?» I hesitated a moment, remembering I needed one myself. But what's a friend for? «Sure,» I said, and postponed the idea of my own haircut for another week.

My conscience was still a little guilty, so I took him to the movies that night. Terry wore my raincoat in the light autumn drizzle. When we parted for him to go to work he kept the raincoat on. «You don't mind?» he grinned. «No,» I said. But I was damply irritated when I got home. And alone in the apartment that night I took a little stock of Terry and myself. Knowing myself pretty well, I realized that I was thinking mostly of Terry. He was a product of the times, the times had made him what he was. I remembered a few lines from 'Dover Beach', «Ah, love, let us be true / For one another! For the world, which seems / To lie before us like a land of dreams, / So various, so beautiful, so new, / Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light, / Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain . . .»

The world, as it is, brutalizes the young and makes them hard where their elders were soft. In a day-to-day existence, shaken by threat of war, pressured by the struggle for life, the personality of the young develops a terrifying hardness. Small wonder that they seek sensation, or orgy, or violence in a world they never made.

A realisation of these things left me better prepared when the bomb exploded. A couple of days later I found him fast asleep when I returned from work. I let him sleep until supper was prepared and then wakened him.

His mood was vile but he hid it fairly well. Still, he grumbled at everything; cheese, marmelade, eggs, sausages. «I get so tired of being locked in here,» he said finally, «let's get out and have some beer.» And then he made one of those observations that startled me. «You can't really be friends until you've been drunk together.» So out we went.

At the pub, over the third glass of beer he suddenly looked at me and said, «I gotta tell you something. I had to get out of there before I could. See, it's too much yours there.»

I said nothing.

He went on. «I'm sorry I gotta tell you this.» He looked down at his cigarette while he elaborately and carefully twisted the ash off the end. Then he looked up at me.

«Everything I've told you for the past ten days has been a lie.»

Some cold vessel emptied itself inside of me. I felt something coming. Somehow the total of the little items had never added up correctly. I looked at him.

«Now,» he went on, «if you want to know what I really am you'd better write to the Army authorities. They've got my record. I got out of jail only four weeks ago. I'm a deserter. I'd been a paratrooper for five years with the French Foreign Legion. I got courtmartialled when I got back home, because I'd joined a foreign service. Six months in jail. Then I got here with no money and finally found a job. But I didn't know how to manage until pay-day. Then Jack cruised me — and I met you.»

He went on talking for an hour. And now a new and wilder story emerged. He had been married at nineteen and after a year and a half of it could no longer live a normal restricted life. Like all the dispossessed, all the angry young men, the impossibly romantic idea of the French Foreign Legion drew him like a flame. He joined. He couldn't stand the discipline.

The chill spread within me, and in the warm and smoky pub I shivered a little.

«I used to laugh to myself, Mac,» he said, «when you took me for a hick. Matter of fact, my family is pretty good. My granddad was a member of parliament. But then we all grew soft. I had to prove to myself that I was still a man.»

I still said nothing. And so he came to the moment of our meeting. «If I hadn't met you, I'd just have gone on hustling. It's so damned easy to make money that way when you're young.»

Then he really startled me. He quoted from Goethe, and Nietzsche about the will to power. It was like hearing a sailor in a tattoo shop asking for a few lines from T. S. Eliot on his chest.

«I've had my eye on you for a few days,» he said, «watching to see whether you believed me. If I had seen any sign that you didn't I'd have gone off and left you. But to tell the truth you've given me confidence in human beings again. I like you. I respect you.» Then he grinned and his teeth were bright in the half-darkness. «If we weren't where we are right now,» he said, «I'd give you a real kiss.»

I was so shocked I had to giggle.

He grinned again. «I have really wanted to for some time,» he went on.

I could only nod my head. I was just about finished.

«From now on,» he said, «we'll be real friends. But don't fall in love with me too much. I wouldn't want it for your sake. But I've enjoyed *everything* with you. And I do mean *everything*.»

Then he looked at his watch. «My god,» he said, «I'm late for work.» He got up abruptly and I rose too, the inside of me whirling, joyous, excited.

As we stood waiting for his tram he said sombrely, «But how the hell do you know that this second yarn of mine is the truth?»

I felt the coldness again, briefly. How indeed? I looked steadily at him.

«Well,» he said, «you can always check on the details.»

Don't worry, I thought, I will. And I walked home, wondering.

*

My vacation was only two days away. The plans had been made long before — Carcassonne and the golden sunlight of southern France. Those two days were halcyon. Our relationship had subtly changed, and much for the better. And yet . . . and yet?

Things seemed to be working out beautifully. The day before I was due to leave, Terry heard of a better job in the South and he snapped it up.

What are we made of anyway? Here, with happiness in my hands, why should I not wipe out, erase completely the one small uncertainty, the little nagging, nasty doubt? Wo plants nettles in our gardens?

On the morning I left he took off from work to meet me at the station. There was a long black smudge on his cheek. And, oh Lord, the colour of his hair! We had time for a beer and he joked with me, calling me all sorts of names, in high good humor. But I knew what lay behind all this abuse.

He walked me to the train. I found my seat, lowered the window, and looked down at him for what I thought was the last time. Would it be? He was not grinning now, but a faint smile quirked the corners of his lips. «And thanks a lot, Mac, old boy,» he said.

He reached his hand up to mine. I felt his strong fingers around my own. The whistle blew, the train moved out.

(To be concluded)

by Philip Young

Should we marry the opposite sex ?

By JOHN FARLAND

I knew a girl who looked like Elizabeth Taylor. I could offer her only the love of an intimate friend, because I am homosexual.

Time after time, this girl (I shall call her «Carolyn») fell in love with gay men. I'm thankful that she didn't fall for me.

At the time I met Carolyn, she was in love with a man I felt certain was gay. Although she was aware of his past, she was optimistic about her chances. After they had gone together for several months, he decided that it should end. Her reaction was most tragic, her condition being aggravated by a temporary physical impairment.

I tried to help her by several means which were futile. Then, I wrote a story for her, which I like to think helped her some. She cried when she read it. In reading «her story,» Carolyn was able to feel sorry for someone besides herself, because she realized that her story was also my story, from a time long past.

Later, I lost Carolyn's friendship. The last I heard of her, she was working in the Salvation Army, in Greenwich Village, New York.

Here is Carolyn's story, which I called, «I Married a Homosexual.»

Yes, I'm certain that it's right for me to divorce my husband, Bob. I would not want the marriage to last — even if it could. He's a wonderful guy in many respects, but a marriage without love wouldn't work. I started out to take