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„... and Calm of Mind, all Passion Spent,,

A Story in Letter Form by R. Young

My dearest Bob,

Thank heavens Rory left this morning for good! I feel relieved knowing that all is over; I couldn't have endured much more. My thoughts go out in search of you and I would give a lot if I could just now be near you and be comforted by your presence and by the knowledge that you and I belong together, despite the wife and children you have got. Thinking of you has kept me sane in the inner turmoil of these last two years. Had it not been for your understanding and your willingness to share my experience, knowing yourself that it could not destroy our own relationship, I don't know what the outcome of this strange love-affair would have been. Probably none at all, as it was up to the last minute a wholly one-sided affair and I thank my stars to-day that I kept it like that and did not try what to all intents and purposes would only have led me into a hopeless mess.

It's natural therefore that I am writing to you to-night, as my mind on this day of parting tries to recapture the delights and pains of what has now become a past. No more sleepy smiles in the morning for me from a Rory, scarcely awake yet; no more lunches together; nor long conversations about 'love' at night.

And yet, had he not come to that boardinghouse which is all I can call home, my life would have been much emptier. Unfortunately even pain gives you a fuller feeling of being alive, an experience I can testify to now.

If only he had not been so young! But wasn't everything just one great 'if' spelt with two capital letters? Rory was twenty-two when he met me. In his casual way it took him ages to get to know me, though my own heart missed a beat the first time I ever saw that tall, good-looking youngster enter the dining-room. All the guests were assembled for dinner, there were nine of us at a table which could hold ten. So Rory took his seat on one of the small sides of the table next to me. You know how unable I am to talk when I have been genuinely touched by something, be it music, nature or — rarely enough — human beings. But this youngster just took my breath away when I saw him for the first time. So I promptly lapsed into a nearly complete silence, not a favourable beginning for any friendship.

It took us nearly a year to become really friends. And, ironically enough, when we did become friends, it was on account of Rory's having fallen in love with that charming girl of his. I described him to you so often and you may remember how reluctant he was to attach himself finally to one of 'them females' as we jokingly used to call them. With his twenty-two years he felt himself to be much too young to enter lightly into a permanent relationship — one of the many points in his favour. But when it happened in the end, it actually started off what he doubtlessly called our own friendship. It happened one night, fairly late. I had gone to bed early, to give myself a few hours of uninterrupted reading, when there was a slight knock at my door and in came Rory, fresh from the bathroom. It was midsummer, he wore only the trousers

of his pyjamas and had his towel carelessly flung around his neck. He came in and to my utter amazement sat down on my bed — a thing he had never done before. I felt that there was some urge in him prompting him to come in as he did. In his slow, hesitating way he started talking and it took him a long time to leave off beating about the bush and come to the point. The point being of course the problem of how to deal best with his girl. It was touching to see him torn between his need of freedom and the demands made on it by his girl. He kept saying, 'I should really not tell you all this', but all the same confiding more and more of his troubles to me as the hours passed. For he stayed actually hours that night — never realizing himself what it might mean to me to have him at such close proximity, to have that finely modelled torso of his bared before my eyes. Never intending to, he captivated me completely that night. To follow the workings of his young mind, to hear all about his troubles, his doubts, his ideas and ideals was exquisite painful pleasure, as the confidence of the young is such a rare gift.

I must have behaved with the right amount of tact and understanding as from this night on I could feel a definite change in his dealings with me. Gone were nearly all the reservations a younger man feels towards an older one, and that lovely smile of his which slowly illuminated his whole face was now often lit up for me. Mind you, in gratitude only. He knew he could rely on my helping him along with all his problems. I did the only thing he apparently expected me to do and made friends with his girl. What else could I do in the face of so much faith in me? It wasn't even difficult, as she is such an extremely nice person and so well fitted for him. And who was I to blame her that she did her very best to catch and keep Rory? Heavens, between them they managed in all innocence to make me feel a hundred!

But there was never for me any real temptation to change the course of my relationship with the boy. Not even on that Sunday morning when I got very late to the bathroom only to find it occupied by a Rory, idly enjoying his bath. While I washed and shaved we talked a lot. Then he suddenly took his wallet from a chair nearby and took two letters from it, concerning small business matters we had discussed before. So I sat on the edge of the bath tub and whilst pretending to read the letters slowly and carefully I permitted myself to indulge in the delight of seeing this tall, supple body naked. That was all — there was no more to it.

The nearest I ever came to have any sort of physical contact with him happened shortly afterwards. One evening I went into his room and while he was sitting in his easy chair I kept talking to him, standing behind the chair. And as he told me of some harmless mischief he had been up to during the day I playfully grabbed his thick, dark hair and ruffled it. It became a habit from then on, he never seemed to resent it, nor my putting my hands slightly on his shoulders when opportunity arose.

You may well ask why I never went further. The explanation is simple. Two facts stood hard like marble pillars against my going one step further. First of all, fond as he doubtlessly was of me, his trust in

me was yet greater and it would have meant betraying that trust, if I had tried to change our friendship. And furthermore — in some indescribable way I just couldn't picture myself having any real physical contact with the boy. He was so unspeakably clean, both in body and mind. It would have meant desecration.

No — all I could do was to face the music and let things go on as they were meant to take their course.

So it went on for the whole of last year. And last night it came to an end. He was leaving town for good and had spent the last day with his girl. I didn't expect them to come and see me at all on that last day, but I had misjudged their good manners and perhaps also their affection for me. I had gone to bed early, so they asked if they might come in to say goodbye. There we were together, for the last time. I stayed in bed, the girl sat at my side in an easy chair and Rory had flung himself carelessly at the foot of my bed, as had become his habit. They stayed for a long time, then Rory saw her off on the last train. An hour later he was back. Seeing my room still lighted he came in once more. Exactly as it had happened the first time. Back from the bathroom, clad only in his pyjama trousers he sat for the last time on my bed, letting me enjoy without knowing it himself the harmonious and strong lines of his bare upper body, and letting me appreciate in a last conversation his clean-cut young manliness. He had given me all he was able to give to a friend much older than himself. Companionship, friendship, intense pleasure of participation in the process of his growing up intelligently and the delight his physical appearance offered to my eyes. Compared with all this what did it matter that I myself had come to love him deeply? After all, I am well versed in managing unreciprocated feelings.

He left a few hours ago. I went with him to the station and saw him into his train. I can't tell you how much it hurt.

But strangely enough I feel already different. His presence no longer around me, haunting and hurting me, I know that I shall probably within a short time have grasped the full value of this friendship, which in its richness has made my life so much more worth living. Just now I experience the truth of one of those famous quotations from good old Milton — read so often, but only in an hour like this one fully realizing its innermost meaning: '. . . calm of mind, all passion spent.'

Thank heavens I shall see you soon. These two years without you have been far too long. And I am grateful to know that you will not think less of me for having told you all this.

With my love — yours as ever

Henry.