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Beauty Unadorned

by R. Young

To K. St.

«A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.» (Keats.)

It was late at night when he addressed me at the centre of the town. Afterwards I learned his name was Fritz, that he was twenty-three years old and that he had come, as an unemployed worker from the industrial area of the West. Rather confusedly, he asked me for money, to enable him to get a camp-bed for the night in one of the former air-raid shelters, now taken over by the Salvation Army as hostels. For a week he had been sleeping in the parks of the town and he was fed up with it, so he told me. Whilst he was reluctantly telling me his story I was closely observing him. He was tall, blue eyes, his blond hair bleached with the Summer's sunshine. His clothing consisted of trousers, shirt, sandals and a well-worn woollen vest. In short he was poorly clad. Yet his apparent cleanliness impressed me strongly. The money he was asking for was of no importance; it would be more important, I thought, to give some food to the boy. When I asked him whether he would like to join me in a late snack he agreed heartily. In a side-street we found a small restaurant, still open despite the late hour. As he was eating I formed two impressions. In the first place he was genuinely trying to show good manners, but on the other hand I saw how desperately hungry he was because he ate his food so eagerly. During pauses in the meal and later on when we were drinking beer and enjoying a smoke he told me his story. At work he had met with an accident, lost his job and his room. At the table he rolled up the left leg of his trousers in order to show me a large cut on his leg which was barely healed. He had left the industrial area to find a new job in this town. They had been three at the beginning. One of them had stolen his jacket and his watch, the other had been arrested by the police for vagrancy. This boy, however, when taken into custody by the police, unfortunately was in possession of a suitcase containing both their belongings. So the clothings Fritz wore were literally all he possessed. He told me that he would be able to get work as soon as he had registered with the police but so far, he had been unable to save enough money to secure a place in a dormitory. Without such a place he could not register. His story was all too familiar. Yet there was no way open for me to prove or disprove the truth of it all. At the end of the meal he walked part of the way home with me and I promised, if possible, to meet him again next day and also invited him to lunch.

Next day I was able to keep my promise, though the time was a little later than arranged. I could see him from afar, restlessly walking up and down. As I approached him he happily smiled, he was pleased to see me again. We lunched together. My own free time was limited, but somehow, the boy had awakened my interest. Therefore I made a third appointment, again late at night, because a previous engagement prevented me from seeing him earlier.

Once more I gave him dinner, it seemed to me and I suppose to him also the most important thing to do. It's awful, never to be able to suppress wholly the delight one feels in playing the part of the benefactor. Once more he walked part of the way home with me, once more I gave him the money for his camp-bed and a little more. In the meantime I had learned that he had fled from the Eastern part of the country. He had left his job and his girl-friend for the sake of getting into the Western area, which to him spelt paradise. Proudly he had taken out of his wellworn wallet the snapshot of a goodlooking girl and shown it to me, as well as the tender words written on the back of the photo. Since he had met with his accident and had come to this town, things had steadily gone downhill with him. When he saw what went on around him in this big city, he had decided as a last resort, to sell himself. 'I don't mind,' he said, 'and perhaps it may give some pleasure to others.' But this money, depending on chance, was well earned and, still more, it was a dangerous game to play. Fritz was only too conscious of this fact.

The next day was my last one in town, I had to leave the morning after. During our last lunch together, our opinions clashed. Friends of mine had told me that anyone willing to work could find a job within the hour as re-building was going on at a pretty rapidly speed and on a very large scale, in this town. Having found work there was ample opportunity to register with the police. Anyone not doing so must either have something on his conscience or be a criminal afraid of coming into contact with the police. Both suppositions Fritz so vehemently denied that in the end, though rather reluctantly, I was compelled to believe his story. There was no way for me to prove the first point, and in regard to the second one I could not bring myself to believe that the boy belonged to the criminal class. His passionate denials sounded too genuine. Most of the money I had given him the previous day he still had in his possession. It meant two-thirds of the amount required for a week's rent for a bed in a dormitory. I gave him the rest and, much as I hated it, talked rather severely to him. He accepted my reproof in good grace and did not seem to mind my riding a high horse.

He walked back with me to my hotel. I was free for the early afternoon and some sudden, mad impulse made me take the poorly dressed, but clean-looking boy up to my room. When he entered the friendly, light room the first thing he noticed were the hot and cold water taps of the wash-basin. 'Do you think it would be possible to have a good wash with hot water?' he asked me slowly. 'I go swimming every day in the river, but hot water is such a luxury.' Of course I gave him permission and was pleased to see him opening his shirt, rolling up his sleeves and starting to enjoy the water like a puppy. Afterwards I ordered coffee and cake to be sent up to my room — I was past caring what other people's opinions were. When, later on, we sat comfortably smoking in the easy chairs, Fritz said, after an apparent hesitation: 'But would you really not care to do the other things with me — — ?' I smiled at him, but did not answer. So he went on, carefully and slowly choosing his words: 'You have been so kind to me — and with you it would mean real pleasure, for me too — honestly!' But I was not inclined that way. Then Fritz said in a last effort: 'I am also willing to undress if it would

give you pleasure to see my naked body.' This time he had found by chance my weakness — it would mean delight to see the tall boy naked, a feast for one's eyes. Fritz noticed my hesitation, smiled openly and friendly at me and said: 'That would at least pay off something of what I owe you, though there still remains a great debt.' And before I could check him, he had started to take off the few things he was wearing. Youth — tall and deeply tanned by sun and water — naked — that's how he stood before me. Muscular in all his suppleness, the body perfectly moulded by swimming, his skin an even dark tan except for the lovely whiteness of his slender hips from which the bathing shorts had slipped down. Joyously he stretched his arms and smiled at me unreservedly. With this gesture he had given to me of his own free will inexpressible delight — there was no urge in myself to ask for more. Enough is as good as a feast. In the carefree nakedness of his youth he continued to keep me company for a little while. «To look at someone beloved is the most intrinsic embrace we know of, the one which sinks down into our hearts and stays there alive for all eternity» — those words written by the Swiss poet Cécile Lauber came to my mind.

Then Fritz dressed and when he said goodbye to me he took me into his arms. Maybe that was his way of thanking me.

The next morning I left town.

Call For Revision Of Laws On Homosexuality

Protecting Youth from Corruption

Homosexuality is generally more prevalent in this country than is generally admitted said Sir Robert Boothby, M. P., in a discussion on homosexuality and the law at the Hardwicke Society's debate in the Middle Temple Committee Room last night.

It was increasing steadily, he went on, and it was by no means confined to London. There was in fact a homosexual underground in most of our large cities of disturbing dimensions which was a continuous menace to youth, and we had now reached a situation in which no man with any regard for his reputation would dare to enter a public urinal after dark.

Those who were most revolted by the subject of facing up to the problem with a view to reducing its incidence and minimising its bad effects, shrouded it in a veil of secrecy and silence campaigns against homosexuality, which are not unaccompanied by methods of great duplicity, do nothing towards its eradication. On the contrary they intensify the squalor by which it is surrounded and widen the area in which it prevails.»