

The story in a letter

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The Story in a Letter

by CLAUDE Z. Jette, Jr.

Jack, relieved from the busy, wearisome grind of the office work for a while, sought a quiet solitary place in which to relax and brood, where he would eat his lunch. Seated at a table in a dark out-of-the-way corner of an empty room, he casually removed his sandwich from the paper lunch bag and laid it on the table. As he fumbled with the cellophane folds to pull open the wrapping, his fingertips scratched against a crisp, papery surface of something like stationary. Surprised, he instantaneously flicked two quick curious eyes to the scene of contact where he saw a stiff square piece of crinkled writing paper folded in half, clipped by a safety pin to the wrapping; its rounded crease protruded beyond the sandwich, up and out on one side.

Startled, Jack stared for one moment; then his eyes moistened and lighted up softly but brightly as he unfastened the clip, unfolded the sheet, and began reading the long page written in strong neat blue letters on white: —

Dear Jack,

Tonight, after you went to bed, I was making your lunch and thinking about you and our life together, so decided I would write this letter to tell you what was on my mind. I hope you can find a chance to read it sometime in the course of your labors at the office and maybe you'll have a nicer day.

Gee, I am awfully sorry you were so sore about the argument we had last night. It really hurt me to hear you scream at me, and some of the things you said really set me thinking. I hope you did some thinking, too, and not just more blowing off steam; I think we had enough of that. It really grieves me that you are so upset about what I said. I wish I hadn't been so insistent on it or so emphatic about it, either. I guess that's what happens when you're so close to someone as I am to you and you are to me—when you're together all the time and depend so much on each other. Everything you say or do means so much to me—more than the importance of the thing itself seems to justify—because *you* mean so much to me, so much more than anything else.

Look, you know I have no one else to love; no one, nothing else, worth loving. You're it! my love, my life, which means that life itself without you wouldn't be worth much.

Really, the whole idea is not so important as I made it out to be last night. I don't care *that* much what you do or how you do it. I care only about how I *help* or *hinder* you in doing it. I have to tell you the right thing; what I *think* is best for you. You're *my job*, kid; I'm kind of responsible for you. Like a good worker, I have to *do* my job. I have to do it the best I can with my natural abilities. You have no one else but me; I can't ever let you down—wouldn't if I wanted to. I realize this—and I don't give a damn about the burden or responsibility. I'm worried only about the best way to carry it on from day to day—to help you, and both of us, as much as possible.

Anyway, all I said (when you told me you were going to quit) was that you ought to keep going at the job you have in the office, even though I know and *understand* how upset it makes you and how unhappy you are over the way things have worked out for you. I understand that the job is too irritating and aggravating—cashing checks, counting money, making change to receipts, all the time—with constant pressure and harassment; you're too sensitive and high-strung for that. But it's no fun for you to be out of work either, as you know. I guess because I'm older and have more experience I know how important it is to have something to work at, even just a place to go during the day—you need that for *yourself*, for both of us, not just for your own money or support. And I know how hard it seems to be for you to get jobs, how long you were out of work—I guess that's why I'm sort of a nag getting after you as I do, because I don't want it to happen to you again. But understand it's not that you're wrong, or that *I* think you're wrong. I'm in sympathy with you all the way, and I love you as you are, not as I imagine or wish you to be.

So remember, dear: You do what you still think is best—or if you can't do what's best, do what you have to do or perhaps what you want. I'm not going to go against you because you make a mistake or don't live up to the very best in yourself; I'll just help you do better. I'll be 100% in back of you, regardless—deep down, you know that, damn you . . . But I should have told you last night.

I guess that's all I need to say right now—

Only please don't scream at me again, demanding does it mean anything to me to have you with me and by me all the time . . . It means everything; I'm telling you . . . I can't stand thinking of how I lived before I had you: the emptiness and *lifelessness* of it—just existing, surviving, not really excited or moved by anything, not even aroused or caring . . . Not at all like now! You're my passion and pleasure and zest of life! You're all of it: it's all in you, nothing outside of you.

To see you near me—to spot you across the room or have the thought of you suddenly flash up in my mind—for me makes life a fountain of constant flowing joy that never stops. To wake in the morning and feel the sweetness and beloved intimacy of your being by my side—makes each morning and each new day an unspeakable joy, warming and tingling through me . . . Everything's like that. It all comes down to that. It's so alive and big and beautiful in me, it fills me! It fills you, too; you know that.

So let's have no doubt about it: You're the cutest nicest—the sweetest—thing I ever knew. I always wanted you so much; I chased you and almost begged you for your love. I fought your mother and your family when you came to live with me. You were so scared. They didn't want us to be together, to have each other, as we do now; they threatened to make trouble for us if we went together. But I had to have you. I told them to do whatever they wanted: You were still mine, and I would have you just the same. And I did.

We've been together ever since. We worked it all out; did everything for ourselves, made our life and home together. That's the way it's been

and always will be. I'll see to it that it is: I'll help you get another job; I'll help you get along better with the one you have . . . Or I'll send you to college, if necessary.

Just remember you'll be all right—with me you'll always be all right, no matter what happens. Nothing bad can ever happen, nothing that matters, as long as we have our love together. So think about our love and how much I need you; You'll have this letter forever to cherish as an expression of it; and take heart—you'll stop thinking about the bad things and the nasty upset I made for you last night in my bumbling. You won't have to put up with it again. I can't do anything but good for you, never will. So be a happy Good Boy now and come home early—I'll have dinner all ready for you; we can have a pleasant drink and eat and talk and laugh for a nice long evening together, as we always do . . .

And then, of course I'll have to embrace you over and over . . . and over and over again I'll have to say, «I love you, love you, love you . . .»

Always yours in love, Bob

His sad sweet tears, stinging and welling in his big blue eyes while he was reading, streamed softly, slowly, down his face as he finished. Trembling slightly, he stiffly laid the letter on the table and froze his hands together on top of it. He was overwhelmed by emotions having mounted up in him: glowing and thrilled, yet at the same time filled with the most mortifying shame. He had abused this wonderful, almost perfect, lover. He had refused even to speak to him before leaving him in the morning to go to work. Worse than that, he doubted him, questioned, defied him to prove himself!—just to satisfy *his* egotistical cravings for security and protection. In return—instead of scorn or rejection, or a much deserved coldness or wariness—he had received the unrestrained expression of consuming devotion, selfless dedication, to his love.

How stupid it was not to know the obvious! How simple to see the truth! Suddenly he made to feel *deeply, inescapably*, what he had felt all the time without really knowing or perceiving it: That what he had always suffered and longed for was already real, complete, and everlasting in the warmth and richness his life had *essentially* given to him,—in the superlative Good and Beauty which he had somehow been able to achieve, one so pitifully and sordidly denied to many, that blazed so gloriously now in his heart—being the finest natural good life could give to a human being . . .

Jack dried his tears roughly and hastily with the sleeves of his shirt. Proudly he stiffened the back of his neck and shoulders. He became resurrected: revitalized in his new feeling of the promise, the validness of Goodness in life: its joy, its depth of honesty and strength . . .

He held his head higher and raised the position of his arms as he started to march back to his dismal duties.

«Dearest Bob, thank you; I can do better,» he vowed in a stifled yet fervent voice, «now that you've shown me how. I won't be *less than you*

again. Whatever else I do or fail to do, whatever job I have or don't have, I can at least rise to your level and love you as you deserve, as you have earned, to be loved. I *can* and *will* love and serve you always, as you do me—as nature and destiny have decreed and worked out so beautifully, and rightly, for us both . . .»

Book Review

Sociological Aspects of Homosexuality
by Michael Schofield. Longmans. 35s.

Mr Schofield—in a most careful piece of research—interviewed six groups of men, fifty in each group. The groups were as follows: homosexuals imprisoned for homosexual offences with adults; men imprisoned for offences against boys under sixteen; homosexuals under psychiatric treatment and a control group of normal men undergoing treatment; a group of homosexuals who had neither been in prison nor under treatment, and a control group for them of heterosexuals. At first it might be thought a somewhat odd way of investigating types of homosexuals, but in point of fact the groups of homosexuals differed from one another more than they differed from the normals with whom they were compared.

Several points of interest emerge. The first, and perhaps the most important, is that the paedophiliacs were entirely different from the homosexuals. Many of them had gone through a period of heterosexuality, they got but little satisfaction from their encounters, and they did not mix with homosexual friends, having no interest in adult males. The homosexuals, on the other hand, preferred adults and were not interested in children. This puts paid to the notion that homosexuals are a menace to the young. So far as the three groups of homosexuals are concerned, the prisoners were from rather unsatisfactory homes, they had low-paid occupations and several of them were feckless and socially incompetent. They were promiscuous and reckless in their sexual activities and many of them had committed non-sexual offences. The psychiatric patients also came from unsatisfactory homes, as did their controls, they were not particularly promiscuous but they suffered from a sense of guilt and anxiety. The other group of homosexuals did not differ from the normals with whom they were compared in any respect save their sexual tastes. They had accepted the situation, had good jobs in which they were successful and happy; they were, in fact, perfectly well integrated.

After this series of comparisons Mr Schofield discusses the sociological aspects of the situation. We do not know the causes of homosexuality, psychiatric treatment has not proved a roaring success, therefore we must learn to live with homosexuals. And why not? They do no harm, and as nonconformists they are positively beneficial to society, to say nothing of their intellectual and administrative gifts. In fact, in Mr Schofield's view, it is the hostile pressure of society that produces the less attractive features. The men in prison 'develop anti-social attitudes'