

A young man with light brown hair is standing outdoors, leaning against a black metal fence. He is wearing a dark blue school blazer with a crest on the left chest, a white checkered shirt, and a maroon tie. He has his hands in his pockets and is looking towards the camera with a neutral expression. The background shows a red brick building and a concrete base for the fence.

YOUNG LOVE

Or how it all began

Miss Piony

Young love – or how it all began

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Last year of boarding school. The headmaster's daughter shows up and stirs the life of three boys on the verge of becoming men. Friendships are challenged, and enmity increased. A one-shot that might be a prequel to something.

An idea from CJMfollower sparked this one – thanks for that, even if I think it ended up quite different from what you thought it might.

Charles

For the first time ever, I'm longing to get back to school after summer. Even though the last years have been quite decent compared to the first hellish one for many reasons, I know there is only one true reason why I want to return. Why I have longed to return all summer. Her. The chance I might meet her again.

I know I have changed this summer. I had felt myself changing somehow but running around back and forth to the beach dressed in shorts and t-shirt I did not think too much about it. It was only when it was time to put on trousers and shirt again that I realised all trousers were far too short and the shirts too tight, and my aunt took my face between her palms and tenderly said that I was a late bloomer, but she had always known I would bloom. Not hundred percent sure what she meant by that, but it was only then I took a real look in the mirror and realised I was becoming a man. I, who always had been shortest and thinnest in the class was suddenly tall and during all the outdoors activities that summer I had grown muscles in a way I never had before. My lean stomach had even turned into an unexpected six-pack and my boy face seemed sharper too, like some softness was gone. It somehow shocked me. I still feel the same and I never expected I would change like this. I guess that also should make me feel more comfortable to return to school, knowing that I have outgrown some of my old bullies, but the last years have not been that bad anyway – and bullies or not, I long to return if I can only meet her.

Young love – or how it all began

The first year at boarding school was hell. First of all, I did not want to go there. I wanted to stay with mum and dad, or rather mum – dad I did not see much of anyway and it was also he who was firmly decided on that at age thirteen it was time for me to go to boarding school, to get the best education and to be shaped into a man. I still do not understand why that shaping could not be done closer to them, but in his book that was how things were to be done. My father is an officer in the army and I had grown up moving around to the different places his career took us, time after time uprooting myself and saying good bye to friends. Yet, I felt panic now that I would not get to come along when they moved once again and instead would be placed at the King's school for boys for six years.

"It will be great", my mum tried to console me. "You will stay in one place, home in UK and you will get loads of friends."

But I saw in her damp eyes that she was questioning this decision as much as I. Unfortunately, she has never had the last say between the two of them and one early autumn day they left me and my suitcases at the school and I was on my own.

It is not an exaggeration to say I did not do well. Rather, it was catastrophe. I was a small, shy boy, I was scared, and I did not know anyone. A very easy target for anyone looking for a whipping boy. Another freshman, a boy we all later called Bones, immediately identified that and gave me a nosebleed before the end of the first day. After that it just escalated, and my life was a living hell. It was not only all the mean and physically painful things they did to me, Bones and his friends. It was also that I had no other friends, that I was completely alone that year. I never

tried to tell any of the teachers. I understood the rules of the game well enough to know that that would only make things worse. All I could do was to make myself as small as possible, try to avoid them as much as I could but it was not a very successful strategy and I was counting down the days until I would get to leave the place.

Luckily, things got better by the second year. A new boy began. Elvis. He was different from everyone else in the school, but he rather seemed to embrace that than let it bother him. When the teacher introduced him to the rest of us the first day in the classroom, I felt envy. He looked so self-confident and even being a boy myself, I could see he was extremely handsome with his dark hair and olive toned skin, tall and athletic – and a big smile like he did not have a care in this world. I was sure he would join Bones gang, he was the type they would gladly had accepted – but surprisingly he chose me. He came to talk to me when classes were over that day and it was the beginning of our friendship. I do not know if that was the only reason, but Bones backed off after that. Not that we became friends, but he limited himself to occasional verbal insults and with time other boys than Elvis also became my friends now that they dared because I was longer a complete outcast. So, school went from horrible, to quite okay but I was still looking forward to the day when I would leave and be able to live my life more as I wanted to, in an environment without so much rules and traditions and that was not so predominantly governed by testosterone filled young boys.

Then something happened that changed that.

At the end of last semester, I was walking alone in the park on the east side of the school. There is a large beautiful green area and a pond, and I liked to go there to be alone and think. In earlier days it was a way to get away from my bullies. Later, when that got better it was still a place I liked to come to, to be alone with my thoughts. Even though I loved Elvis and sharing room with him, he was sometimes a bit too chatty for a thinker like me. However, this particular afternoon I was suddenly disturbed there too. I had sat down in the shadow under a tree when a girl came running, chasing a dog. She did not see me at first, so I could stare at her if I wanted to. And I did. She was dressed in the white shirt of a school uniform, but the sleeves were rolled up and she was wearing it with a pair of really short shorts. Despite that it was early in the sunny season her legs were already tanned, as was her face and despite that she was petite, those legs seemed endless and absolutely gorgeous to me. She had long dark hair which was shimmering in the sunlight as she moved, and she was laughing as she played with the dog, the most infectious laugh and I felt myself smiling too. Then she noticed me, stopped her play and came over.

"Hi, I'm Molly."

"Hi, I'm Charles" I said. "You know these grounds belong to a boy's school, you should not be here."

I do not know why I had to be such a bore to tell her that when I immediately liked her being here.

"I know, don't tell anyone I'm here", she just smiled mischievously. "I have decided to move in."

"In the school?"

When she saw my disbelief she just laughed and explained.

"My dad is the headmaster. I have just arrived, and I will live with him now. I will start the nearby girl's school next semester."

It was difficult to imagine that the grey headmaster Dawes had somehow managed to produce such a stunning daughter, but she was not joking. We sat there talking for an hour or so, and she made me play with the dog and her. During these years, I had only laughed as much with Elvis as I now did with her. I did not see her again before I went away for the summer holiday, to live with my aunt and uncle as my parent were abroad, but I could not stop thinking about her and how great it was that she would be around next year. I do not know for sure if it took the full hour, or only the first minutes but when we said good bye that day I was already in love with her and wanted to see her again.

That was the reason why I longed to come back for my final year.

Bones

Honestly, I have never wanted to cause harm to anyone. It is just that when I was thirteen, the day before I was sent off to boarding school, my father kindly enough gave me some advice on the way. He sat me down in his office back home, himself

at a safe distance at the other side of his desk and told me that I needed to know that from day one a hierarchy would be set.

"It's like with animals, you're either the predator or the prey, eat or get eaten. Think about that and decide which one you want to be."

He drilled his ice blue eyes into mine and I knew that if I ever was bullied, there would be exactly zero support from home. I was expected to make a choice and manage on my own. So, I decided I would rather be the predator.

"There will always be someone weaker than you. Identify him quickly and demonstrate your strength on him. Then others will leave you be and chose to pick on him instead."

Cruel advice, but very helpful as it turned out.

The very first day, I kept my eyes open and it was easy to identify the target among us boys that were the freshmen of that year. For starters, he was half a head shorter than the rest of us and looked generally small and weak. In addition, and to his disadvantage, he had a pretty face and brown puppy eyes and he looked terrified about being here. I was too, a bit terrified, but I was wise enough not to show it on the outside, exposing myself.

As soon as an opportunity appeared, a moment when I was close to him and no teachers around, I picked a fight with him. Or there was no fight really. I insulted him, and he just tried to make himself as small as possible and back away, but I

followed and took a swing at him and gave him a nosebleed. Crying he fled for the toilets, but he was at least not so coward as to tell the teachers. A part of me felt ashamed, but the relief of knowing I had achieved not being lowest in the pecking order overshadowed that.

I'm quite sure I made that first year a hell for Charles James. He must have been so alone. I do not think people disliked him really, but no one dared to befriend him in case they would end up getting the same treatment from me and my gang as he did. That included getting beaten up, having his books thrown into a mud puddle on numerous occasions, get his head flushed in the toilet, finding his bed full of earthworms and many other inventive pranks. The thing was, I never enjoyed it, it just felt like a necessity to keep it up and not show any weakness or mercy. In fact, I admired that he just endured and never told anyone, never squealed.

By the second year, things changed. I had considered already before the semester started, if I could go easier on him now that we would no longer be the freshmen, there would naturally be smaller fry than us. It would be a relief not to be mean to him all the time. But then he also found himself an ally. It was a new boy, who had transferred from another school to start new that year. A cheeky, Italian guy, who cared nothing about rules or pecking orders, he just did as he wanted to and seemed to be fearless. He was extremely good-looking, charming and athletic. The kind of guy that everyone wanted to be friends with but for some reason, Charles James was his first choice. He became his friend and protector and they were inseparable.

Truth be told, I envied them their friendship, but I guess Charles deserved it after what I had put him through. I had my own entourage, but I felt they were probably loyal to me out of fear rather than anything else as I had created myself a reputation of being ruthless. Sometimes I felt that if I had been able to go back and change the start and been someone else during the school years maybe I would have, but maybe I would just have been too afraid to become the prey even a second time around and had done exactly the same. I despise that about myself and I will never let anyone know. If given a new chance in the future I will try to be a different, better person though, I really will.

Elvis

I started at the King's bloody school when my new classmates had already been there for a year. Before that I went to another boarding school, but my parents somehow got the impression that I had ended up in bad company there, so they decided I should transfer to another. They never considered that *I* might be the bad company which was pretty naïve of them. However, I did not mind the transfer or being a newcomer. I always like to stir things up a bit and I never have any problems making new friends. Maybe that is why I like to befriend the ones which others seem to think are not really a match to me. But what is the fun of being with people who are the same as I? Of course, *no one* is really like me in these British boarding schools. I'm born and raised in UK, but my parents and whole family are very much Italian. Far too loud, emotional and loving for the common posh Brit to feel comfortable, but my parents are very wealthy and that opens most doors. Not all, but the remaining ones I kick open without much effort.

On my first day, I spotted a guy in my class who seemed to be alone for no particular reason. He sat alone in class, he sat alone in the canteen, he walked away alone when classes were over and seemed to peek a bit over his shoulder as if he was afraid something or someone might come up behind him. When I did, without him first noticing me, I startled him. He looked at me, with eyes darker brown than my own, and with pupils enlarged with fear. I wondered what he had been through in this place.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to scare you."

I sat down beside him, and he looked surprised that someone sought his company in a friendly way.

"What's your name?"

"Charles."

"How very royal", I smirked. I only intended that as a friendly conversation, but I immediately saw his face turn defensive. Bad way to start with someone who obviously had not heard many kind words from people here. I gave him my name as a peace offering.

"Mine is worse, I'm named after someone who my mum thought was the *real* king; Elvis."

"Your name is Elvis? For real?"

"Yes."

I laughed, and he realised I would not be offended if he did too, and so we had our first laugh together. As we got to know each other over the next weeks and months, he told me what that fucking Bones and his gang had put him through. Coward bullies. I do not know if it had to do with us becoming friends, but it seemed like they had backed off and from that second year Charles had an easier time at school, first bearable, then even fun I hope. I always kept an eye on that Bones though. I would not have accepted that Charles had to take any more shit from him. I think he realised that and over the next years there was a hostile truce, but at least they let Charles be.

Charles

It took a couple of weeks of the semester before I saw her, despite that I was looking for her all the time. It was not like I could walk up to the headmaster's office and ask for her, I do not think that would have been appreciated. On the contrary, it would probably be against school rules that she spent time with the male pupils. I did not mention our meeting to Elvis or any of my other new friends either, even when I heard they were talking about that she had moved in with her dad. Our encounter was my precious little secret and I did not want to hear any boyish jokes about it, and I did not want anyone to know about the feelings I had for her. Every now and then I went to the park where we had first met, and there I finally met her again. She looked the same, just as lovely and after first seeming like she did not recognise me, she appeared happy to see me again. I'm not sure how I managed to

behave like a normal person because my heart was beating at least twice as fast as normal, but somehow, I did and it was just as great to be with her as it had been the first time.

After that we decided to meet every now and then. It was not dates, we were just seeing each other as friends. She was four years younger than me, a huge age gap at that point in life and I would not have felt right about doing anything to her, trying to kiss her or so, not even if I had thought I had a chance. I'm sure she thought I was too old for her and she was so stunning, I was totally out of her league. And I had never kissed a girl, so it would have been a big thing for me to dare to. On top of that she was the headmaster's daughter, making it even more forbidden. We never agreed it verbally, but I know she also avoided mentioning our meetings, keeping it a secret to her father and her friends. We kept meeting in the garden, then in the winter often in a part of the library where people seldom came and later in the spring in a café in town which was not too crowded, but by then we were not as cautious as we had been in the beginning either. We talked, we laughed, we had a great, relaxed time together. Beside Elvis, she was my best friend. The one thing we never did was touch each other. But I dreamt of her and could not help being ashamed of it as she was so young compared to me, only fourteen. It was not a conscious thought then, but in retrospect I realise that I was waiting for her to become older and for me to no longer be a student at the school, so it from both aspects would be okay for us to be together. Then I might dare to tell her how I felt, and hope that she could feel the same one day.

Bones

Before I met her, I heard the rumour in the locker room after a football game, that headmaster Dawes daughter had come to live with him. Apparently, she was a pretty girl, but it would not have mattered if she had been hideous. The same mandatory jokes would have had to be made, about what we would like to do with her. Teach the headmaster's daughter a thing or two in return for all the things he had forced us to learn.

Then I ran into her one day. I had ditched class and came sneaking down an empty corridor. Everyone else were inside the class rooms but I was still vigilant as I did not want to be caught by a teacher. As I had not spotted anyone, I nearly jumped when a voice close to me said;

"You shouldn't be here."

I turned my head and in the deep window sill next to me a girl was sitting, curled up with her arms wrapped around her knees. She was nothing like the blonde tanned girls with substantial breasts, which I usually snogged and tried to get on further with on the weekend evenings. She was obviously younger than me and had barely developed any breast at all yet, but that did in no way diminish her beauty. She had long dark, shiny hair and large green eye which seriously stared right into mine and in an unsettling way seemed to see through me, right into my soul. I'm not sure she liked what she saw. I, on the other hand, was mesmerized.

"Neither should you", I said.

Then a smile lighted up her face and she just said;

"I know" and agilely jumped down from the window sill and ran away.

I was left with a heart beating erratic like no other girl had made it before.

Of course, I realised who she must be. There were no other girls in the school than headmaster Dawes' daughter, or Molly, as I soon learned that her name was.

From that day and until the end of that year, I was always looking out for her and secretly listening for and absorbing any gossip there was about her, which was not much. Her parents were divorced, and she had lived abroad with her mother for many years but now she was to live with her father. She went to the nearby girl's school and was four years younger than me. A little girl that should not have been of interest to me, but I think I fell hopelessly for her that first time when she looked at me. Or into me. Her eyes were not those of a little girl, they told me she knew much more of the world and the people in it than I did and she intrigued me immensely. The fact that the headmaster's daughter was forbidden fruit might have added to the whole experience. So, that year I kept dating and snogging all sorts of girls, meanwhile I was pining only for one who I rarely saw and even more seldom spoke to.

Elvis

I have always been a ladies' man, since I was a toddler. It is just a part of who I am, and I have never given much thought or consideration to that I might leave a trail

of broken hearts behind me. Girls and women are just so fabulous, and I want to enjoy the company of as many as possible. I think girls are a bit like pizza, even when they are bad they are pretty good. And why chose only one if you do not have to? At least that was what I thought until I met Molly Dawes, my first major crush. Maybe my only up to now. It did not start like that. First, I just got to know there was one girl living at the school and naturally I wanted to ask her out. Rules have never been my cup of tea, so I did not even consider the fact that she happened to be the headmaster's daughter. I asked her if she wanted to go to the cinema with me one evening, and she said yes – as I had expected. But the date did not turn out as I expected. We met an hour before the film started and went to an ice cream bar and had a milkshake. When we talked, I realised that even though she was younger than me, she knew so much more about the world through her numerous travels with her mother. She had seen so many places, met so many people. I got the feeling she was really talented at judging characters and even though we had a nice time, I also got the feeling that she saw who I was and found me a bit shallow. It was a very unsatisfying feeling and I found myself wanting to impress her. When we sat at the cinema I was so aware of her beside me the entire movie, I did not get much of the plot. I let my knee or hand touch her briefly, but she always moved away. I thought maybe she did not understand it was not accidentally. But afterwards, when I walked her back to the school and we were to say good bye by the gates, I moved in to try to kiss her, but she backed away. I was completely taken aback. It had never happened to me before.

"I'm sorry", she said. "I've had a really nice time tonight Elvis but being with you just makes me realise I'm in love with someone else. Let's be friends, okay?"

I did not have much other choice than to say yes, but I was not happy with it. When I got up to Charles' and my room and he asked how my date had been, I just muttered.

"What?" he said. "Is it possible that Elvis the charmer had his first bad date ever?"

"It wasn't bad, she just wasn't interested."

I thought he did not look like he pitied me very much. Actually, he smirked and looked pretty pleased, but at that point I thought it was only because I had experienced my first ever rejection.

"I'm sure you will get over it without too much effort. You will surely have a new date next weekend."

He was right, I did. Already on the Tuesday evening actually, and it ended in a long snog, but I could not stop thinking about Molly. How I had not quite hit the mark. It continued to bother me throughout the year.

Charles

I loved meeting Molly in the library and study together. We did not have the same books or home works of course, but we sat side by side doing them and talked about other things in between. The space between our shoulders was often very small,

nearly touching but not quite. Sometimes when she was talking, I was just lost in her. Her tone of voice, her expression, her lovely mouth moving. I managed to look and sound like I was listening, by nodding and humming in the right places even though I sometimes was too absorbed by all of her to hear her words. I wondered what it would feel like to touch those lips, graze over them with my fingers, or even better, with my lips. If I got lost too long, she would elbow me and say;

"Hello, earth to Charles! You're not listening to what I'm saying. Sorry if I'm not interesting enough for you!"

Then I would be embarrassed and collect myself, say that I had been thinking of the difficult equation I had to solve or some other lame excuse. Then she would look a bit deflated that she had not been more interesting. If only she knew.

When Elvis told me, he had a date with Molly, it was like he had hit me in the stomach. He was standing throwing a ball against a door, catching it again and again while he told me, so luckily, he did not pay attention to my expression and I had a few seconds to put on a poker face, but I could not stop myself from exclaiming;

"You can't!"

What I felt was, you cannot go on a date with *my* Molly. Of course, he did not know I thought of her as mine. He did not know I knew her at all, because I had chosen not to confide in him. Now it was too late, it would have felt petty to tell him when he had already asked her on a date. And worse, *she* had accepted. Why had she?

She had every right to go on dates with other boys than me of course, I just wished she did not want to. Especially not with my best friend, but to be fair I had not told her about him. Maybe I had been afraid she would like him as all other girls seemed to do and therefore kept them apart, but it hadn't helped, had it.

Luckily, he interpreted my exclamation wrong.

"I know you're not the type who would bend any rules Charles, but yes, I can. I don't care if she's old Dawes' daughter. She's pretty and it will be fun. That's all I care about."

I gritted my teeth because I was not like him, because I was afraid to break the rules and even more afraid that she would say no if I asked her on a date, and our friendship then be destroyed.

The evening when they had their date, I felt nothing but angst. I tried to read but could not focus. I paced around the room, but the floor was too small for my restlessness. Eventually, I went out running, far and fast, so my pulse echoed loudly in my ears and I felt the taste of iron in my mouth. Still, I could not keep the picture out of my head, how Elvis was kissing Molly and she willingly kissed him back.

When he came home, I was lying on the bed, exhausted from the run and freshly showered but my brain still overheated. I wanted and not wanted to know what had happened. When I understood she had rejected him, the relief was priceless, and I had to hold back not to sound spiteful or too happy. Even if she was not really mine, she was not his either. I do not know how I would have been able to bear her

and my best friend together, but now I would not have to. Soon the whole thing was forgotten for Elvis part. He moved on without grieving, to catch other fish and Molly was still my friend.

Bones

In the spring, when the last year was nearing its end and the final exams were already ongoing, I had agreed with a girl named Samantha to meet in a café in town. On my way there, I was surprised as rain suddenly came pouring down. I did not have an umbrella and dived into a niche which I thought would give some shelter. A few minutes later, another person jumped in there. It was *her*, a soaking wet version of her as she had been out in the rain longer than me. The long dark, wet hair curled down her back. She was wearing her school uniform and the white shirt glued to her body, now transparent and exposing a white bra underneath and I noticed that she had developed perky little breasts. Raindrops were like pearls on her face and eyelashes. She was so amazingly beautiful. She was shaking from being cold, but still gave me the brightest smile when she recognised me. All I wanted to do was to step closer and wrap her in my arms, but I did not dare to, even if I usually never had any qualms having a try with a girl and just see if it works out. I could not even think of anything to say during the minutes we stood there, and the rain kept pouring with the same intensity. Then she looked at me, shrugged her shoulders and said;

"What the heck, I must meet someone, and I'm soaked anyway so I may just as well run because I can't get any wetter."

And she just disappeared, as fast as she came. I stood there paralysed, tried to grasp what just happened, and that I had done nothing. After another ten minutes, the rain ceased, and I continued, almost reluctantly to the café. Samantha was already waiting for me, but although I sat down with her, I barely noticed her or what she was saying. Instead I was focused at another couple in the room. *She* was sitting by a table, already with a large cup of tea in front of her and a man's trench coat hanging over her shoulders. In front of her, laughing and happy, Charles James was sitting. God, how I hated him in that moment, wanted to smash his face, or wish I had done a better job long ago when I was at it, so he would not be so damn handsome. Because I had to admit that he was now. He had changed a lot from the almost girlishly pretty, terrified little boy he was when we came here nearly six years ago. To be honest, I was not even sure I would win a fight against him anymore and the thought of that made me even more furious. I realised that it was jealousy I felt, a new feeling on my repertoire which I had never experienced before. I did not particularly like it. I, we, stayed there until they left. I would not have been able to tear away from the scene no matter how much I disliked it, because I needed to know what would happen. Would he take her hand, or kiss her? I maintained enough of a conversation with Samantha to keep her satisfied, even held her hand, but my main focus was on them. What they did, because I could not hear what they said. They did not touch each other, it did not seem to be a date, more a friendly encounter. Yet, I envied him, because he got to talk to her and laugh with her for hours. They seemed so easy in each other's company that I understood they must know one another quite well. This was not the first time they met. I would have

changed all the girls I had snogged and fondled with during the years, for sitting talking there with her.

Many years have gone by since then, but still she remains that alluring girl that nothing ever happened with. The one that got away and it is frustrating to think I did not even dare to try. I think I will never get her completely out of my system.

Elvis

One spring afternoon I came walking in town and saw Charles through a café window. He looked incredibly happy. I had intended to go in and say hi, when my gaze fell on the girl he was sitting with and I froze in my step. She just put her dark hair behind her ear, so I saw her face and I realised it was Molly. *Charles with Molly*. He had never mentioned he knew her, or that he would meet her. Judging by the relaxed look of them both, this could hardly be the first time they met. And Charles never dated any girls, unless there were others he did not tell me about either. What did I know? But if I were to place a bet, based on his character, there would only be this one. I felt betrayed. Betrayed that he was seeing her when my date had failed, betrayed that he had not told me. And I felt jealousy, which was a new feeling to me. Maybe I was also jealous at her, because despite that Charles and I were best friends he had never looked this happy in my company. I hoped they had not laughed together about Molly's and my date, about my failed attempt to kiss her - but really, I knew that would have been beneath them both. They were better persons than that.

When he came back to the room later that afternoon, I could not let it pass.

"Did you have a good afternoon?"

"Yeah, I did."

At least he had the decency to look a bit bothered, but he still did not share anything.

"What did you do?"

"Just walked into town to buy some stuff."

My patience ran out and my Italian temper took over, and with heated voice I said;

"Really? Because when I walked by a café earlier I could have sworn I saw you sitting there with a girl. But it must have been your double then."

I saw that then he understood I had seen him, with her. He was quiet for a while before he spoke without denying it, just as I had expected of him. He is always so honest, except in this case he had not been.

"I'm sorry Elvis, I don't know what to say. I know you went on a date but I... I have been in love with her for a year. I met her already last spring and since then she is all I can think of."

I could not believe it, that he was such a secret mussel and had gone around with those feeling without telling me. He is so not Italian, fucking stuck up British twat.

They are all stiff like they have a poker up their arses and as good at showing feelings as marble statues.

"Why didn't you tell me?" I was disappointed he had not confided in me, obviously this was big to him.

"I don't know. Maybe I felt silly, maybe I knew you would just try to convince me to tell her how I feel..."

I interrupted him;

"You have not told her?"

"No."

"You have been in love with her for *a year* and not told her? But today, wasn't it a date?"

"We're just friends. We like to sometimes hang out."

"*You* are not, Charles. Just friends."

"No, okay then. I'm not, but I don't want her to know. I don't want to jeopardize our friendship, I'm not ready yet. I will tell her when the semester ends. If she says she does not want me then, I can leave, and I don't have to face her again. I don't think I could after such a thing. I'm not like you who can shrug your shoulders in the unlikely event that a girl rejects you and walk on to the next."

Even if that is generally true, his comment hurt me a bit as it had not been true in this particular case. I had kept thinking about her, dreaming about her - a lot. She was not like other girls. Maybe that was why I withheld what she had told me at the end of our date, that she was in love with someone else. Now, I for some reason felt pretty confident that someone was Charles. I was not sure how I would handle it if my best friend got together with the girl I wanted most but could not have. So, all I said was;

"I wish you would have told me."

"I'm sorry" was all he said, and I got the feeling he would have done it all the same way even if everything had restarted from the beginning. This was something he did not like to share.

The rest of that evening was filled with uncomfortable silence and I felt like there was a small wedge between us, that was not there before.

In time the awkwardness seemed to disappear, but I found it difficult to completely forgive that he had lied to me and even more difficult to forget Molly. But meanwhile she disappeared out of my life, he remained my best friend despite all.

Molly

It was mum who thought it was about time that I spent some time with dad, more than just the occasional brief visit. Maybe it had to do with that she planned

another around-the-world trip and thought that this time I was so old that my schooling would suffer if I came along. Honestly, I had already travelled so much that I did not mind settling in UK with dad for a while, and so I came to live at the school. Dad was a bit awkward about it in the beginning, not used to having a child around in general, and not a teenage daughter in particular, but he did his best and I liked to get to know him better.

There were so many boys that tried things with me that year when I stayed at the school with dad. Tried to flirt with me, tried to kiss me, wanted to take me out on a date. Not only the ones my age but also the older ones and they were more forward. I'm not sure if it was because of my own good qualities, or because being the headmaster's daughter made me intriguing, or if it was just that they were starved of female company as there were none at the school only at the nearby girl's school which I also went to. Anyway, it was nice and flattering and sometimes I went on a date. Many of them were older than me, wealthy and seriously good-looking and I would for sure not have come across them if I had not ended up there at dad's school.

But of all those boys that tried to charm me, there was only one for me, and of course he did not try to charm me at all. He did not have to. I fell for Charles the first time I saw him, when we met only the day I had arrived at the school, at the end of the spring semester before the summer holiday. I'm not sure what it was. Maybe the brown eyes, beautiful, kind, intelligent and with a depth that seemed to come from life not always being easy. Maybe it was his smile, first hesitant, but as

we kept on talking and playing with the dog, so warm and genuine that it heated up my insides. I loved that I could make him smile like that, because I had the feeling he did not bestow that gift upon everyone. If I had dared I would have kissed him, but he was so much older than me, four years, and I'm not that forward. And I had never kissed anyone at all. We had the greatest time together that afternoon in the garden. He was going home for the holiday already the following day and I fantasised about him all summer. How he would come back, realise he was in love with me and we would become a couple. I began scrutinising my adolescent body in the mirror in a way I never had before, and always came to the dissatisfying conclusion that my breasts were no bigger than the day before and my cheeks still childishly round. I realised it was very unlikely that he would fall for me and what I might hope for was the second best, that he would want to spend time with me as a friend.

When all the pupils came back for the autumn, I looked out for him and when I finally saw him I almost did not recognise him. I was completely intimidated. The sweet boy I had met, was suddenly more of a man and the age gap even more apparent. On top of that he was an extremely gorgeous young man even if he seemed completely oblivious to it, and during the year I often heard other girls whisper about him. He was still as sweet though and it turned out that he wanted to be my friend. During that year he never made a pass at me, but we met many times, as friends. We had to be a bit restrictive with that too, because I knew my father would not approve of me hanging out with any boy from the school as he thought that would undermine his authority, but every time we met, I fell deeper

in love with him. He was just so completely out of my league and I did my very best to conceal my true feelings for him. I loved the way he made me laugh. I loved the way we could talk about small and big, serious and goofy things. I loved the way he confided in me when he shared how difficult his first years had been here, although he never named the boys who had bullied him. It made me ashamed such things could go on in the school that my dad was running, but such foul traditions seemed to be deeply integrated in the system. He also shared that he felt a bit rootless because like me he had been travelling around a lot with his parents, his father being an officer, until they placed him in the boarding school. In that we had a common touchpoint, although I think I might have liked travelling with my mum more than he did with his parents. Anyway, he missed them, and I missed her.

Most of the time, I was happy just to be near him but there were times when I wished for more. I was hurt that day in the library when it was so obvious he was not listening to what I was saying. I think maybe he lost his focus to some older girls further behind me and I wondered why he bothered to hang out with me if I was so unimportant to him. Maybe he was just being nice. Perhaps as a little revenge, or to show him others found me interesting, I said yes when his roommate Elvis asked me out on a date. Charles had not told me about him, but a girl has her ways to find out information about the boy she likes, and I knew they were friends. When I talked to Elvis, I understood he did not know that Charles and I knew each other, and it hurt me even more that I was so insignificant to Charles that he even did not tell his best friend. Or maybe he was embarrassed to be hanging out with a younger girl. It was a boost for my self-confidence that handsome Elvis wanted to

hang out with me instead, and publicly on a date. The date was quite nice, but I felt no butterflies in my stomach and I kept wishing I had been with Charles. When Elvis tried to kiss me at the end of the evening, I felt I could not keep up the pretence. I did not want to kiss him, did not even want to be with him. He looked very surprised, but I dare say he was the type of guy that would soon get over it.

There were a few precious moments, when I thought maybe there was something more there with Charles. Like one time when we were to meet in a café and I got caught in the rain on the way there and arrived completely soaking and shivering from being cold. When I came rushing through the door like a mad person, I must have looked completely wild, he looked at me in a way I had never seen before, like he was longing for something. He rose from his chair and came over and I nearly thought he was going to kiss me, but instead he put his coat around me and gave me a gentle hug to try to dry me a bit. I realised my bra was showing through my wet shirt and understood he just wanted to save me from the embarrassment, ever the gentleman. He got me a huge cup of tea and then we just had a nice time like we always did, and he did not look at me like that again. That was towards the end of the spring semester and two days later my dad told me that mum and he, had decided that I would travel to join her already the day after school was over, and next year start school in Italy where she now lived. Even if I had known already before, that Charles and I would be separated when the semester was over because this was his last year, I had nurtured a small hope that as long as both of us lived in UK we would stay in contact somehow. Now I was to leave for an unforeseeable future, still too young to have any say about my life, meanwhile he was on his way

into adulthood, likely going to university in the autumn. I was devastated. I needed to see him, but he was much occupied with the final exams and so it happened that we only met the day after his graduation ceremony, the same day that I was to leave. I had managed to leave him a note asking to meet in the park, by the pond where we first met. I waited there all through the morning, hoping he would come and I felt desperate as I knew a taxi would come to get me by lunchtime.

When he finally came I was on the verge of a breakdown on the inside, but on the outside, I think I seemed almost calm. He was gleaming with happiness.

"I'm so happy Molly! So happy these years are over, and I finally get to leave this hellhole. I really won't miss this school"

Of course, that was how he would remember this place, meanwhile I would remember it as the place where I first fell in love, but I did not say that.

"I'm leaving too. I will join my mum in Italy and then I will start school there next year, so I won't come back."

His smile disappeared, and he seemed taken aback.

"When are you leaving?"

"Now, I had hoped you would see my note and come sooner so we could say good bye properly, but now my taxi is probably already waiting for me."

"You're leaving *now*, now? I had hoped..."

He interrupted himself and I never got to know what he had hoped. We just stared at each other, and then I did the unthinkable. I stepped into him, wrapped my arms around his neck to pull him down to me and kissed him. For a moment, my lips were touching his, soft, warm ones, the most wonderful feeling, but I interrupted before he would come to his senses and push me away and ask what the hell I was doing. Then I turned around and ran as fast as my legs could carry me, all the way to the waiting taxi and asked dad to just tell the driver to go. As we went, I turned my face away from dad and looked out the window, tears streaming down my face. I did not want dad to see. If he noticed, he probably thought I was sentimental about leaving the school and he did not comment anything.

It is so long ago now, so much has happened since. I have been in love many times. Yet, no love has felt quite like that. I guess it is because the very first time you fall in love, it is so unfiltered, so unconditional. You love without reservations because you do not yet understand that loving like that will also make you vulnerable, will make you hurt. Already the next time you know that and have learned to be wary, to caution your heart.

I also wish I had told him I was in love with him, told him long before that stupid kiss, and heard what he had to say about it. I have no idea what he thought that day when I ran away, and I have wondered so many times. It would have been better to know, to be able to let it go. Wouldn't it? Or maybe we need such beautiful dreams, of what could have been, sometimes when the life we have in front of us

is not what we would have wished. There are still days when I'm wondering what he is doing now.

Charles

She kissed me. She kissed me and then she ran off and I was so shell shocked that I just stood there, could not move, could not say anything. The kiss shocked me. That she was going away shocked me. I had planned for so long that this day I would tell her how I felt and if she did not reject me, I would ask her to come visit at my aunt and uncle's summer house where I was going, and I had dreamed of the wonderful things that could happen then. I never got to it before she delivered her news, kissed me and ran off.

I do not know how many times over the years I have put that scene on replay and changed the ending. I respond to her kiss, so she understands I want it too. Or, I run after her, stop her from leaving and talk to her. But the fantasies always end in a question mark – then what? She had to move to Italy, I had to continue my studies. It was not like we had mobile phones in those days, not like now when you could call or text anyone anywhere. I have also tried to brush it off thinking that even if there had been anything it would not have lasted, we were too young. Still, that was my first love and my first kiss, and it has stayed with me. I think it is more special to me than the first time I had sex. To be honest, I think that the first time I had sex I even wished it had been with her instead. She is more special to me than any of the girlfriends I have had after her despite that she was just my

Young love – or how it all began

*friend, who I was in love with. Or maybe because of that. And after all these years,
I still wonder sometimes what she is doing now.*