

Finalist, Fiction

Your Loving Son Ralph
By Bill Teitlebaum

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Dear Mother,

Uncle Walt and Aunt Harriet met me at the bus like you said but I could not stay with them because Uncle Walt says they promised the room before they knew I was coming. They took me to their house for supper and then Uncle Walt took me to the Y that has a bus in front that takes you to the restaurant. Also Aunt Harriet wrote down how to get a different bus when I go to Dr. Foster.

Aunt Harriet was worried I will not be happy in the Y but Uncle Walt says Aunt Harriet is always worried and do not pay any mind to it because it is nothing and I will be happy in the Y. My room is on the top floor so you can see the whole town and they have a gym and a swimming pool and a big room like in the hospital so you can play ping pong and read the newspaper.

Aunt Harriet says I will have to come for Sunday dinner on Sundays so we will know each other. Uncle Walt says a young man like me will be too busy for that but Aunt Harriet says I have to eat dinner on Sunday just like other days so I will come and it will be no trouble and that is that because Uncle Walt will take me in the car if it is too hard to come by bus. She is a good cook. I would like to eat there all the time except it is so far. But Uncle Walt says I can eat all I want in the restaurant because Bob is his pal from the army. So do not worry.

Your loving son

Ralph

Dear Mother,

Well I am not a millstone at last because I am working in the restaurant. Uncle Walt told me it is only a little place but it is not. It is only little outside but it goes all the way to the back and when you see all the tables you cannot think how they cook so much in such a little kitchen. But they make everything before so really it is not so hard. Otis says it is only putting things together so they look nice so it is just a lot of work. Bob is the cook and Otis is the cook too and Bob says I will cook things too when I know how but I have to keep my eyes open. That means I have to work and also help Mark and Cliff in the back so that is what I do.

Bob says I cannot have a menu to send you but you will like the Italiano Special the best because it is so much. It comes with spaghetti with tomato sauce and toss salad so you can dig right in. And also you can have meat sauce on the spaghetti but Bob says meat costs money so if people want meat sauce they can say so and they can pay for it then.

I went to Dr. Foster like Aunt Harriet told me but I will have to go a few more times so I will not get lost so much. You are right about Dr. Foster. Also he wants to meet you because you sound like a beauty to him. I did not tell him that but he knew without me telling. That is why I do not want a different doctor who will not know so much.

Your loving son

Ralph

Dear Mother,

I do laundry on Sunday before I go to Aunt Harriet and Uncle Walt for Sunday dinner. You have to go real early or else you have to wait for a machine to use and then for a dryer and I will be late. And also Uncle Walt does not like to wait for me in front of the Y so much. But Aunt Harriet says do not pay him any mind so I do not.

I do not know if Dr. Foster is too smart. Miss Josephson the nurse there says he is not but Dr. Foster says maybe he is.

Bob says he will pay me on Saturday a week when she comes back from the bank. That means the Saturday after the next one. But Aunt Harriet says not to worry because Uncle Walt will pay the Y for now and I can eat in the restaurant so I only need money for the bus and to do laundry so I am okay. And I am not a lazybones because I work very hard. I like it too because I can feel how I will feel in bed when you are tired like that because it does not feel good in bed when you are not tired.

Boy you really have to know a lot of things in a restaurant. I worry some days when I wake up but when I go to the restaurant it is like I am tall because I remember the things to do. Only it is hard to remember things all the time. That is why Bob says I am not listening. I am listening only some days Bob tells me to do things he does not want me to do and then he tells me to do what I am doing and then Otis tells me things and I get mixed up and then Bob gets mad. But I think he likes me because he will show me how to make pizza when he gets time and some of the times he lets me put the toppings on them and the sauce and the cheese and put them in the oven. You have to push the sauce around in circles so it will be same all over. Then you put on the cheese so there is the same all over and then the toppings go on at last. I like that part the best.

Your loving son

Ralph

Dear Mother,

I opened a bank account like you said but I could not put any money in it because Bob says I have to pay for what I eat just like the customers. I wish he told me that before because I really ate a lot. He says he has to charge us the same because he did not charge us before and we took advantage. I did not take advantage because I did not work here before but Bob says it is his restaurant. He yells at me a lot too. I try to do a good job but he does not listen and then he yells at Otis because Otis looks at Bob when Bob yells at me and Bob does not like that. Otis says Bob is the boss but he gets sad because Bob does not listen when Otis tells him where he worked before. Bob says Otis can go back there if he likes it so much but Otis says that is why the people do not like the onion soup Bob makes because he does not put croutons on it with cheese on top and bake it in the oven like the Italiano Specials so the cheese will melt on the top like it is supposed to. But Bob says that is too much trouble and that is why he puts the cheese in the bowl with the soup over the cheese so it melts on the bottom and not on the top. Otis says who is going to like that but Bob told Otis not to talk anymore. That is why Otis tells Bob you are the boss. Bob says that is right I am and Otis says that is right you are the boss but Otis means Bob does not make the onion soup right. But Mark says that is why Otis cannot yell at him because Otis is not the boss and next time he will wash the dishes and Cliff will bus the tables because he is not going to stand for Otis telling about him to Bob. Mark told me he was in the navy for three years and that is not how you do things in the

navy because only your boss can yell at you there. That is why Mark likes the navy so much. He would still be in it too except three years was all he was in it for.

Your loving son

Ralph

Dear Mother,

I am sorry I did not send your letter like always. I did not forget you only I was tired and could not get it right. That is why Dr. Foster says I am dizzy so it is not what you think. Only I have to rest more if I work so much so that is what I am doing. Because if I do not work so much Bob will not show me how to cook things when there is nothing to do. Only a lot of times there is nothing to do and Bob does not show me things and it is hard to fall asleep then. But I am okay really so do not worry.

Your loving son

Ralph

Dear Mother,

I told Bob how I am so tired like you told me but Bob got mad again. Bob says he puts in his hours every day and that is why he says we do not work so hard. But Dr. Foster says I have to sleep more because all the days are the same like this and I am not in them. I know how that sounds but it is like there are no days and it only goes on and on. Dr. Foster says that is bad because then you cannot remember when things happen or not. That is why I was scared because that is how it is a lot of times. Dr. Foster says that

is why I have to sleep more so at night I can stay up a little. Then I can see the days stop and also I will not forget how to cook things when I wake up. Then I will be okay again. Also Dr. Foster says I have to rest two times in the restaurant every day because that is the law and he called Bob on the telephone because he did not want Bob to get in trouble. But Bob was really mad this time. He says we are in a bad mood and we better come to Jesus in one quick hurry or he will know the reason why. I wanted to tell him the reason why but Otis says a kitchen is not a place for that. That is why he never says anything to Bob but only looks at him with his eyes down and then Bob tells Otis he is sorry. But I never say anything to Bob too and only look at him the same way but Bob never says he is sorry to me but only to do things and look like I am alive. Boy you think it is such a big deal the way Bob talks but Beverly says he could give us all the food he wants because he counts it in the prices. She says Bob is just selfish and that is why he made up that stupid rule and you cannot be tired or hungry because that is not good for anything. If he was not like that maybe Mark and Cliff would not sneak around so much. It really bothers me how Mark talks about the navy all the time like there is somebody next to him. A lot of times I will say what because I think he is talking to me but he looks at me like I do not know what day it is. But do not worry about that because I stay up in bed every night.

Your loving son

Ralph

Dear Mother,

Well here is good news so I will not be so boring. Dr. Foster says I do not have to see him all the time anymore and I can go home if I want so I will not be so far away.

That is good news because I do not like Bob. I know he is the boss but I cannot smile like you told me because it makes my stomach hurt and my head feels tight when he tells me to do things. Beverly says there are a lot of jobs in the town but I do not know where they are and anyway I do not want to stay here because I want to come home again and be with you and not here. Only I do not have money to come home so please send me money and I will pay you back like when you gave me the money to come here.

Your loving son

Ralph

P.S. Beverly says she has to wait on tables in the daytimes because at night she goes to college. First she was going to be a blazing Hollywood star but now maybe she will be a teacher in high school. Also I asked her about those other things you asked me about her but she said you were kidding. I said no you were not but she was laughing so maybe you were.

Dear Mother,

Do not worry that you do not know any jobs there to be had because Beverly says there are a lot of jobs here in the newspaper on Sunday and I can come to her place to look for a better job for me. Also she says there is a house near the restaurant where I can

stay like in the Y only it is not so much money so I can save money to see you on vacation if I want. Do you think that is smart. I do.

Your loving son

Ralph

Dear Mother,

I got your letter about Beverly only it was a holiday so that is why I did not get it before. So do not be mad. I will tell you what we did. Beverly cooked pancakes and then she showed me how to look for jobs in the newspaper. You will not believe how many jobs there were in it. But we could not find any to inquire about for me. That is how you ask about jobs in the help wanted. But Beverly says there will be even more jobs next Sunday because it will not be a holiday then and she will let me read them over myself and write down the ones I want to inquire about on a piece of paper. She is so nice. That is why I think you mixed her up with somebody.

Your loving son

Ralph

Dear Mother,

I want to come home where I belong too but I do not want to be a millstone and you told me there is not a job to be had. That is why I cannot come home because I will not have any money to pay you back then. And also I do not know why you worry because Beverly is so nice to me. She is very nice so do not say those things any more because really she is my only friend except Uncle Walt and Aunt Harriet and a lot of the times

nobody talks there only Uncle Walt wants to know how are things in the mine all the time like we are digging for gold and diamonds.

Your loving son

Ralph

P.S. I inquired about another job this week but it was not for me because really it was for Mark.

Dear Mother,

Bob was really mad last night because he burned his hand. His watch fell off in the fry basket and he tried to catch it. That is why I had to do everything with Otis. Also Bob got in the road a lot. That means he was in the way. I did not say anything but Otis told Bob he was in the road and Bob yelled at him for that but Otis said he could not work if Bob was in the road and he took off his apron so Bob said okay but just watch it. Otis said you do not have to tell me that but then Bob had to go to the hospital because his hand was hurting him so much. I said for him to see Dr. Foster there because he is such a good doctor but I do not think he did.

Please tell me about the new job you want me to have because you did not say too much and we do not think it will be good to quit here and go to a new job some place if I do not know what it is or if I will like it and how much money they will pay me. Beverly did not want to say anything but I think she thinks the same because I saw how her face was moving when I told her about it. She says I did not know about Bob before and I do not want to do the same thing all over again because what then.

Your loving son

Ralph

Dear Mother,

Bob has to wear this big bandage on his hand until the doctor says it is okay to come off so you can see how it is here. Otis takes off his apron all the time and Bob says keep your shirt on and then he tells me what I am doing so I have to stop when I am doing things. That is why I do not think you should come here now because it will cost a pile of money and we will not have time to talk like you want. But I am very mixed up so I will come home for vacation and then we will chew the fat because a lot of the times it is like talking to Bob the way it makes my head go around when you write to me. Only I do not know when my vacation can be because there is no talking to Bob the way he is with his hand and anyhow Otis says who will help him if Bob is not good for anything and only yells all the time and gets in the road. So that is how it is and also I have to show things to Mark and Cliff a lot because they do not like it when Otis tells them what to do. But I will come home soon because Beverly says you are mixed up too and I do not want you to worry. Because really it is not like that.

Your loving son

Ralph

Dear Mother,

I told you why I cannot come home right now only you do not listen. That is why I am mixed up. Because you want me to be happy but you do not like it when I am happy

and when I am not happy you are okay. That is why so do not say it is because of her because she is not like that.

Your loving son

Ralph

Dear Mother,

Bob did not come into the restaurant all week and Otis says we have to take care of things for now because Bob has to rest.

Uncle Walt was happy too. I told him about Bob because they are friends from the army but he ate a big dinner and played the radio in the car. Aunt Harriet says Uncle Walt is not worried because he knows Bob will be fine but you can see she does not know how it is when you have to rest like that. I could not tell her how long Bob has to rest but Otis says it will be a few weeks anyway. That is why he is in a good mood.

Look I am sorry I yelled at you so please do not worry. I was only mad.

Your loving son

Ralph

Dear Mother,

Otis says we have to give the restaurant a good cleaning up next Sunday. I told him I have to eat Sunday dinner with Aunt Harriet and Uncle Walt on Sunday but Otis says Aunt Harriet never made no Sunday dinner like he will fix only he needs to see his face in everything. Then he turned my hat around. I thought he was making fun of me because everybody was laughing but Beverly took my hat off and put it on her head so it was

funny at last and everybody says they will come for the cleaning up because Otis will cook something that is really a special and everybody wants to come because he is a cooking fool when he is like that. So that is why they are so happy. Otis says Bob will be happy too because the place will be so clean and that is why I have to help. But Beverly says it will not be fun if I am such a gloomy gus so that is why I hope it will not be too bad.

So how are you keeping these days. That means how are you.

Your loving son

Ralph

Dear Mother,

Aunt Harriet was right about the party. There was a big table with candles on it and Otis made salad with peaches and onion soup with the cheese melted on the top and then shrimps with the shells on so you have to take them off and rub lemon on your hands so they do not smell shrimpy because it spoils the chicken. That is why Beverly said o no because she was full of shrimps but Otis told her that is too bad girl because then he took out the chicken and a big ham with pineapples and cherries on it and beans with onions and pieces of ham floating around. Then Otis sat down and everybody was clapping and yelling about all the food he made. Only then Otis got up again because he forgot the corn bread. You have to let it sit in the bean juice so it gets smooshy and then you eat it. Otis says it tastes better if you drink beer with it but it tastes good with ice tea too and even with nothing because there was ice cream and pie for dessert but I could not eat any

because I was full of corn bread. I told Otis he was right about Aunt Harriet so he will show me how to fix all that and then I can show her how to do it.

After the party there was still a lot of food so we fixed doggy bags and everybody took one home except I do not have a refrigerator in the Y so Beverly took one for me. I told her we can put it in the cooler in the restaurant because it is only a refrigerator but she says she will bring some every day for me or I will eat it up too fast. That is why I only took a piece of corn bread because you do not have to put it in the refrigerator only I ate it on the bus so she was right again.

But it was a good party. I wanted Bob to see us have a good time but Otis says it is better for Bob to rest because he only likes to work and does not have a good time if he is not busy. Otis says that is why Bob burned his hand. That is why he has to go away to rest where they can help him do it. I know that is all backwards but that is why Bob mixes you up all the time. Beverly says Bob is mixed up now too but maybe he will be better when he comes back. But Otis says Bob will be mixed up anyway because Bob is Bob and that is how he is. Only he will be rested so he will be like before and then Beverly did not say anything so you know what that means.

Your loving son

Ralph

Dear Mother,

Bob is coming back to the restaurant any time. That is why Beverly says I have to think about what to do now because it will be different when Bob comes back the same as it was before he went away. I know she is right but I wish she would not tell me what

to do so much because I have to move into my new place first and there is a lot to do. Her boyfriend, David, took me there before work yesterday and I can have it now because he is going to stay with Beverly. David says that is why she is so bossy and nervous and she will be okay in a few weeks but I did not say anything to him about that so I can still have it. You can see it is better than the Y because it has a bathroom for myself and also it is not so much money and there is a fan in the window. It does not work now but Mrs. Simonetti says she will get it fixed for me only I have to call her Lily because we will be pals.

Also I put my new address on the envelope but do not worry if you forget I am not in the Y anymore because they will send me any letters except I will get them the next day or maybe the day after or so.

Your loving son

Ralph