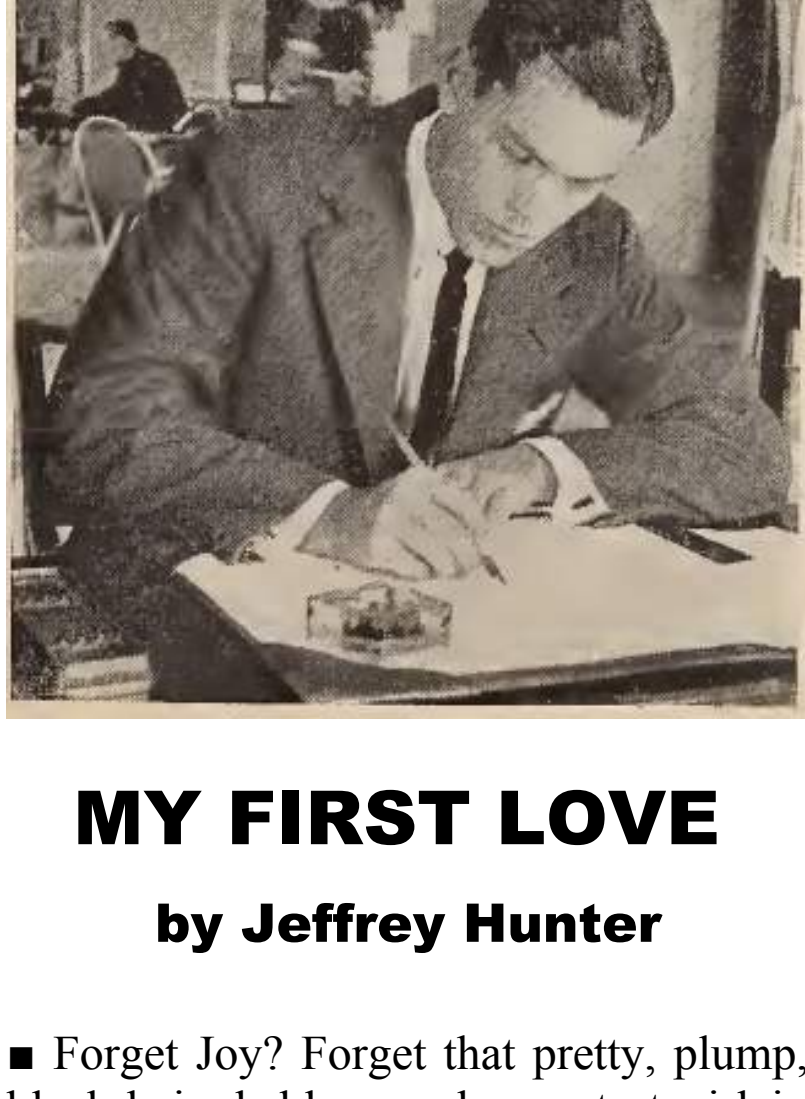


*Herewith the tale  
of young Jeff— who  
loved not wisely,  
but too well!*



## **MY FIRST LOVE**

**by Jeffrey Hunter**

■ Forget Joy? Forget that pretty, plump, black-haired, blue-eyed, smartest girl in the class, who never had to crack a book? Never! She was my first love and even if it only lasted about three months, that has to go down as the steamiest one-sided romance of my life. I went steady—all by myself. Come to think of it, I can't remember Joy taking any active interest in my callow courtship, but that was beside the point. I loved her.

The big thing was the love letters I wrote her when I should have been applying myself to my lessons. I must have written a thousand of them, and every time it was so thrilling that I could hardly stand it. First, the anticipation, composing the immortal lines I would pen. Then, the actual writing: "Dear Joy. I love you. I hope you love me, too. Love, Hank." This part was so exciting that I had to keep a vise-like grip on the pencil to hold my hand steady, the result being a few holes dug through the paper and dirty, sweaty smudges here and there. Then, the bit of sneaking the note into her desk without being seen by her or anyone else; by this time my heart was too big for my chest. And then—oh, beautiful climax!—I watched her read what I had written. She never answered the notes, she never even acknowledged them by looking at me. But right around here, around the cheek-bones, she'd turn all pink. Never has a man gotten so much from so little.

After school I used to ride my bike back and forth in front of her house, willing to expend my last energetic erg in the forlorn hope of seeing her, which I never did. This patrol of mine wasn't entirely pure in motive, though. A friend of mine named Jimmy, who also had a crush on Joy, had the advantage of living right across the street from her and, what to my way of thinking was worse, he had a basement with a pingpong table in it where they could get to know each other better.

I didn't have a pingpong table, but I had something else: a gasoline-powered train that my father had built me, big enough to seat two kids in the locomotive cab and a few in the passenger car behind. On the outskirts of Milwaukee, where we lived, there was only a dirt road in front of the house and no traffic, so I could run my train up and down the block all day long. Joy liked that. We'd sit up in the cab together, and it didn't matter to me that we weren't talking or holding hands or anything. She was there.

The train reminds me of something that maybe I shouldn't tell, except that it's so funny. One day Joy was riding in the passenger car with another girl while I was engineer, and my father took movies of us. Well, the first time he ran that film off, it nearly laid me out on the floor because when Joy got out of the car you could see at least an inch above her knee. Of course, I saw her in shorts very often without giving a second thought to anatomy, but this time she was wearing a dress. Wow! I must have run that reel until it was in tatters, and every time, that perfectly innocent, grubby little knee practically finished me. Finally it was too good to keep to myself; I had a showing for the other guys in the neighborhood, and for about 1/64th of a second they, too, got a view of Joy's knee. Stag reels at the age of twelve.

Except for that normal lapse into little-kid curiosity, we were a remarkably innocent bunch. If we went down to Jimmy's basement to play pingpong, for instance, that's exactly what we did. Not even spin-the-bottle or post-office. Pingpong.

There was one day, though, that Jim went upstairs to get us some cokes, giving me the opportunity I had been waiting for, and I did something very daring. The minute he left the basement I tiptoed over to the record-player, put The Record on, and stood at my own end of the pingpong table, breathing hard, while Joy and I listened to the beautiful strains of "I'm Falling In Love With Someone." Her reaction? She probably beat me 21-0 while I was still overcome by my own audacity. After all, how forward can a guy get?

The greatest romance of the century ended as it had begun three months before: without an indication of pleasure or displeasure from Her. What happened was simply that football, which was to occupy me for some years to come, took over my life and left no time for girls. Whether Joy minded my forsaking her I never knew—but I'm sure that my parents, who had been suffering silently through it all, were greatly relieved. Even if I did come home bloodied and bruised now and then after a football game, at least the walls of the house no longer billowed in and out with my pensive, lovesick sighs.

*Jeff Hunter can next be seen in Seven Cities Of Gold.*