

**SOLOS, DUETS AND
IMPROVISATIONS**

BY WALLINGTON FUGER

STARCROSS

BY

SCOTT ALTMAN



ON HIS FIFTEENTH BIRTHDAY, RICHIE MAKES love for the first time in his life in the North Woods; unfortunately his beloved is straight. But that doesn't stop him as he grows into a man from exploring the outer boundaries of his nature which bind him ever more closely with younger boys. There is Ian, poor little rich kid, already at puberty bent on tearing the world apart. There is Cricket, at fourteen slow to mature but fast on skis. And there is Bruce, dock orphan who has learned to distrust the touch of all men. *Starcross* is a serious examination of a restless soul who puts honesty, love and adventure above all else.

SPRAWLING BESIDE A ROCK-BOUND LAKE, all but isolated in the Canadian North Woods, is the Farmer Academy, a private prep school for musically talented boys. Joel Forest is a virtually virgin 14-year-old freshman there. His budding good looks attract Craddock, the Don Juan of the senior class. Roxy Knowles, another freshman, attracts the predatory attentions of a senior specialist in electronic music. Sophomore V.I. Mallory's lackluster performance at the academy takes a dramatic turn for the better when he is unexpectedly asked to look after the small son of his flute teacher.... *Solos, Duets and Improvisations* is a delightful, explicit tale of love and lust, ecstasy and revenge, as half a dozen boys thrash their way toward self-realization during the course of one tumultuous academic year.

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Publisher's Introduction

Starcross has something of a publishing history — rather a rarity in boy-love fiction. Parts of it appeared in the early '70s in one of those ephemeral American paperbacks which in those days made little distinction between boys having sex and men having sex. We subsequently acquired its rights and published a complete edition in 1986 as *The Chronicles of the Starcross Complex*. It was soon sold out and has remained out of print now for some ten years. We thought it was time to bring it back into circulation.

In some ways the story shows its age. Speech, especially kids' speech, evolves rapidly, and probably no skilled writer today would make a teenage boy say, "A guy could get *used* to having his ashes hauled every night this way!" But the '60s and '70s, when this story takes place, were an age, especially for youth, of exciting self-discovery, a voyage on which the hero of this tale is launched. Now that we have entered a much more conservative era, the literature of those years acquires a kind of nostalgic glow.

Solos, Duets and Improvisations we published under the same title in 1989 and it turned out to be one of our most popular "BL-Classics". Again, it was soon sold out. Unlike *Starcross*, which had a more serious purpose, it is a light, fanciful tale which escapes into a kind of sexual Eden, not somewhere in the Middle East but in the middle of the Canadian forests — a music school for gifted youngsters (only boys, of course) where relationships could develop and establish themselves without a lot of worry from the outside.

We decided to bring these two very different tales together in one 256-page volume rather than reprint both separately, and this has allowed us to offer our "Twofer No. One" at just a slightly higher price than our usual 192-page book.

Starcross

by Scott Altman

It was a hot, bright Adirondacks day. The two boys had been on the trail for several hours, stopping only once to rest their packs. They had both stripped off their shirts and were standing on a log bridge sniffing the cool air of the little trout stream below.

“Let’s eat,” Richie said.

“Whose?” Jim turned around and grinned at him, a big, open, wide-mouthed grin.

“Come on!”

They dropped to the stream bed and sat on some rocks in the middle of the rushing water to eat their sandwiches. A troop of Boy Scouts came by, homeward bound. Two stragglers walked with their arms around one another.

“I bet they warmed only one sleeping bag,” Jim said.

“What do you mean?”

“Hand pals, you know.”

They reached the lake in mid-afternoon, unlocked the canoe that was to be theirs for the weekend and paddled around looking for a campsite. They settled for a small island nearby in the center of the lake, a rounded granite knob rising at its crest some thirty feet above the water. A fracture divided the rock, and at one point near the top a solitary pine had thrust its roots deep into the rift, grown, flourished and now provided a little shade. On the west side of the island was a grove of birch trees and a bouldery shore littered with years of driftwood. On the other side some sediment had washing into a cove, forming a little sandy beach.

Here they drew up their canoe. Jim jumped ashore and ran to the top of the island and grinned down at Richie. “I’m king!” he shouted, flexing his muscles.

“Hell you are!” Richie ran up after him and shoved him off the crown. They met and wrestled, neither trying hard to best the other.

In a moment they relaxed, stalemated. “This is great,” Richie said. “I mean, this is a hell of a way to celebrate our fifteenth birthday!”

“It’s too hot to fight,” Jim said.

“I guess so.” They rolled apart. “Just think, there’s nobody around. Anywhere. No parents, grownups. No kids, even. We could do anything we wanted and nobody would know it.”

“Like rob a bank,” Jim said.

“Like... oh, hell, I don’t know!”

“Like, if there was a girl here.”

“That would spoil it,” Richie said.

“Two girls.”

“They don’t go for this backpacking bit.”

“I know.” Jim grabbed Richie around the neck. “I guess we just got each other,” he said with mock sentimentality.

Richie stood up, vaguely uneasy. “Let’s take a dip.”

“Okay, hand pal.”

They walked down to the beach by the canoe and stripped naked.

“What’s this hand pal business?” Richie asked.

“Don’t you know?”

“Nope.”

“If I was your hand pal,” Jim said, grinning, “I would do this!” And Jim grabbed Richie’s penis and gave it a swift jerk.

Richie colored and Jim's naked body bent with laughter. Richie socked him on the shoulder, and Jim fell backwards into the lake.

They horsed around in the lake until they became chilled and then they crawled out and walked to the top of their island and flopped down on their backs to dry in the sunshine.

"This is nice," Richie said, "going around bare-ass."

Jim took his own cock in hand, bent it this way and that and said, "Yeah, this boy doesn't see the old sun very much."

"Mine neither," Richie echoed, but when he touched it he found it instantly began to fill.

"Getting a hard-on!" Jim teased. "Boy, you're sexy."

Richie colored. He started to turn away, but Jim touched his arm. "I get a boner at the damdest times, too," he said. "It's a pain."

"Yeah."

"Especially when you got to stand up and old Down Boy wants to stand up, too, and there's this girl that's looking at you..."

"You can always bring a hard-on off in the can."

"I hate that," Jim said. "I always feel lousy afterwards, don't you?"

"I guess so."

"Of course sometimes it turns them on."

"Who?"

"Chicks, naturally."

Richie didn't say anything.

"Not that it gets you anywhere." Jim pulled a piece of grass out of his mouth and flung it away. "All they ever do, when you get right down to it, is tease you. And tease you. And then it's all over, inside your skivs."

"Boy."

"And then they're mad at you 'cause you aren't interested any more."

By now they were both in the manly state, and Richie suddenly realized he didn't care, that he was, in fact, enjoying it.

Jim laughed a little nervously. "I guess that is the first time I ever sat around buck naked with another guy popping a hard-on."

"I guess it doesn't hurt."

The sun yellowed and sank toward the horizon. A cool breeze sprang up and rippled the lake, and the two boys finally dressed and went out in the canoe for some evening fishing. When they returned they made a fire near the tree and cooked a bass, their one catch, and when all was dark and chilly and the cooking fire had been built into a big, cheerful blaze, Jim sprawled out in front of it, leaned against the tree and beckoned Richie over to sit against him.

They were silent for a long time, both boys staring into the fire. Richie felt wonderfully relaxed and at peace. "This is nice," he said for the dozenth time.

"Yeah," Jim agreed. "Our best birthday yet."

Richie and Jim were within two hours of being exactly the same age. Jim's father, Leland Mansfield, and Richie's, Morton McAlister, were consulting geologists, partners in a little town in the Mohawk Valley. Their work took them all over the world. Years ago they had returned from a three-month stint in Borneo enormously richer and determined to start raising their families. That night Richie and Jim had been conceived, and 226 days later, in adjoining delivery rooms, they had been born.

They had known one another all their lives. For a few years they had drifted apart, when Jim had gone out for football and swimming and seemed to have no time for anything else, but recently skiing and backpacking had brought them together again.

“Look!” Richie snapped his head around to track a falling star and collided with Jim.

“Christ!” Jim swore, “don’t break my jaw!”

They laughed, and Richie reached up and touched his head where it hurt. “Was that your tooth?”

“No.”

“Good. I’ve been bitten by a dog but never by another boy.”

After a while, pleasant as their position was, they began to feel cramped. The rock was cold, the night even colder as they got up to fix their sleeping bags. Afterwards they dared each other to take a dip. They found the water surprisingly warm, mysterious in the inky night. When they got out they stood shivering before the fire, wishing they had brought towels.

Richie gazed at Jim’s body: the sturdy shoulders, well-proportioned chest and narrow waist, the hard, flat stomach. Across his hips lay the white stripe of his summertime tan, now glowing pink in the firelight and filled with tight, rounded buttocks and the bush of dark hair at the front from which sprouted the pendant, circumcised, swaying penis. Jim’s legs had recently become lightly brushed with curly hair and, like the rest of his body, they were sturdy and well made. He stood easily upon them, feet slightly apart.

“I’ll wrestle you,” Jim said.

They spread their bedrolls, then threatened and grappled and fell down and soon they were hot and out of breath and stalemated again. They rested, lying against each other.

Okay, I guess we’re warm,” Jim said.

But Richie held him. Strange feelings were beginning to flow through his veins, especially where his nakedness pressed against Jim. Something stirred deep in the memory traces of his mind, something forgotten, important, incredibly exciting. Blood rushed to his loins; his cock began to expand and he pressed it against Jim’s leg.

“I’m tired of this,” Jim said. “Let’s turn in.”

But Richie continued to hold him. He pressed once again.

Suddenly Jim stiffened and drew away. Their eyes met in the unsteady firelight. “Quit it,” Jim said, slowly and distinctly. He broke Richie’s grip and got up.

A moment later Jim had apparently put the whole matter out of his mind. He turned back from the fire and smiled. “Say, let’s hike up to Canyon Lake tomorrow, if the weather’s decent.”

“Okay,” Richie gulped. He forgot his momentary fright and the feelings that preceded it. And when he crawled into his bedroll a few minutes later, it seemed no time before the red dawn was awakening them into a new day.

Richie and Jim did hike to the lake but returned to their island before there was even a hint of the cooling of late afternoon. When they pulled the canoe onto their little beach they were dirty and sweaty.

“If they could see us at home now,” Jim said.

They stripped off their clothes and draped them over the canoe. Soon they faced each other naked and grinning, and Richie said, “They should see *you* at home now, all of you.” And once again he found himself admiring Jim’s body.

“Boy, I see the love light in your eyes,” Jim taunted.

Richie hit him on the arm and Jim grabbed him by the neck and laughed. “I know about guys that are always staring at your dick.”

They swam around the island three times, keeping pace with each other in a steady crawl. When they climbed out on the rock to dry they lay close together, elbows and shoulders touching.

Richie spotted a large red ant crawling about the rock and placed it carefully on Jim’s stomach just above the navel. The ant instantly sank its pincers. Jim started, saw Richie’s glee and attacked. They fought fairly earnestly, struggling for position, sweating and panting. Ultimately Richie found himself pinned on his back with the full weight of Jim’s body resting heavily upon him.

“Give?” Jim asked. There were rivulets of perspiration on his face.

“Give what?”

“Up.”

“Why should I?”

“Cause you lost.”

A few drops of Jim’s sweat fell on Richie’s cheek, and suddenly all the feelings of the night before rushed in and permeated his body just as their free-flowing and commingling perspiration was saturating their flesh. Richie’s loins filled with blood. Jim released his wrists. Richie put his arms about Jim’s back. For a moment their eyes met as they had last night, searching one another, evaluating. Jim started to speak, but then he frowned and pushed away. Richie tightened his grip and held him down. The memories were coming clearer. The mists that hid them were dissipating. Richie started to move.

Jim was saying something. One of Richie’s hands went to the back of Jim’s neck and drew his head down until their moist cheeks were touching. The other pressed against the small of Jim’s back, driving the trim hips down against him. Jim’s resistance began to crumble, as somehow Richie had always known it would.

Blood was flowing, too, in Jim’s loins, expanding his penis so that it began to indent the underlying flesh of Richie’s sweat-soaked stomach. Richie sighed with relief: although he had never done this before, although even his memories were of an all-but-forgotten dream, he was suddenly confident, and, in his confidence, joyous.

Richie dropped both hands and cupped Jim’s buttocks, which rose tense and immobile above him, and pressed them down and forward until he could feel Jim’s cock begin to move, to probe deeper into his stomach like a sword. Then Richie released the buttocks and counterthrust against Jim. This time Jim responded on his own. Soon Richie’s hands were all over Jim’s body, feeling the beautiful shoulders, the strong back, the still-wet, sun-bleached hair. Jim slid his arm under Richie, buried his mouth in the corner of Richie’s neck, and bit. The motion grew, the thrust of their cocks coming equally strong. A great sun awakened in Richie’s body, and soon it blinded every thought, every sensation except his intense closeness to Jim. The sun rose, white hot, higher and higher, until it seemed he would perish, vaporize in the sheer intensity of its fission. But then his feelings peaked with excruciating beauty and declined in great pulses that seemed to empty his soul of all the care and tension he had ever known.

Jim was sitting up, his back turned, head bowed. He appeared to be listening, to the insect noises, the gentle lap of wavelets on the shore. At length he got up and went down to the water and waded in. Richie heard a long swoosh, followed by the steady strokes of a competitive swimmer.

Richie put on his clothes and walked to the far end of the island and sat down. He knew he would relive what had just happened time and time again, but he wasn’t yet prepared to think about it. He needed a few minutes alone, simply to exist, without feeling or reflections.

Jim was rigging his fishing pole when Richie returned to the camping area. Jim grinned guiltily and said, “You know, that was kid stuff we just did.”

“I guess so.” Richie avoided Jim’s eyes. “Did you like it?”

Jim shrugged.

“While it was happening, I mean.”

Jim bit off a leader and tied it to the line. “Sure,” he said. “And so did you.”

“Have you ever done it before?”

“Hell, no. Have you?”

“No.”

“And I don’t think we better do it again. Agreed?”

Richie was silent.

Jim nudged him with his fishing rod. “Or else we’re liable to turn into a couple of little queers.”

By now the sun was getting low. They went out in the canoe and cast among the fallen pines that spiked the rim of the lake. The red sun went down in a clear sky. The sky faded into the deep liquid blues of evening and by the time the light had left the east to the first bold stars, the two boys had caught a bass apiece and were on their way back to the island.

They fried the fish and cooked some beans and built up the fire until orange flames leapt into the night. They dragged up their sleeping bags to the windward side and flopped down upon them, staring into the cheerful warmth. Conversation, that great lubricant of human relations, began to come back to them. They talked on neutral subjects.

They decided to turn in. Jim stood looking doubtfully at their sleeping bags, opened next to one another, and then stepped down to the water to wash. Richie went to the other side of the island, opened his Levi's and threw a sturdy, warm stream into the still waters of the lake. He held his penis firmly proudly, filling his lungs with the piney air.

When he came back, Jim was lying on his bedroll, still clothed and staring into the stars. Richie sat down facing him and took off his shoes and socks.

"Feel my chin," Jim said. "I got a lump on it where you cracked me last night."

Richie put a hand up to Jim's mouth and gazed down into his eyes. "Sorry."

"Bastard!" Jim said, grinning, moving away from the touch.

Richie fell onto Jim and they struggled half-heartedly for a moment.

"I'm too tired for that," Jim said. "Besides, we'll get our sacks all messed up."

But Richie remained on top of Jim. Jim finally stirred and pulled his arms away. "I guess you better get back in our own sack," he said.

Richie was staring into the dying fire. "I wonder if it'll be hot in the morning," he said.

"What, the coals?"

"No, the weather."

"Look, your sack is over there."

"I know." Richie looked down into the blurred highlights and flickering shadows of Jim's face. Jim's hands came to his shoulders and pushed gently.

"Come on, Richie."

"Huh?"

"Get off."

"Why? Do you think you can lick me?"

"It's not that."

"I wonder what time it is."

"Time to sack in."

"I'm happy right here."

"Look, I remember what happened this afternoon."

"So?"

"We decided it wasn't going to happen again, remember?"

"I remember *you* saying something about that."

"And that's the way it's got to be."

"Who says?"

"Everybody."

"Jim, we left everybody back at home." Richie made a first thrust downward with his hips.

"Goddamnit, Richie, quit being sexy!" Jim tried to rise up but Richie held him down. Already his hands were at Jim's neck and had found the zipper.

"Leave my jacket alone!"

"You gotta strip sometime before you hit the sack."

“I don’t need your help.”

“I think you’re getting a rod on.”

“Jesus Christ, get off!”

“Okay.” Richie sprang back and began to strip.

Jim sat up. He wiggled out of his jacket and pulled his sweater over his head and stripped off his sweat shirt. When it came to removing his pants, however, he frowned at Richie, who by now was completely naked, unashamed, in fact proud, of the erection which stood out lustily from his loins. Jim turned his back. Richie, with the blood singing in his ears, grabbed Jim about the chest, pinned his arms to his sides.

“Quit it!” Jim shouted, but Richie already had his hand on Jim’s cock and was pumping it up to rapid and full erection.

“This feels good to you,” Richie whispered, his lips touching the hard tendon at the top of Jim’s shoulder. “Admit it!”

“Guys aren’t...”

“Hell with that!”

“Okay,” Jim gasped, “so I got a hard-on. Guys still aren’t supposed...”

“There isn’t any ‘supposed’ out here.”

“*That’s true.*”

For a moment Jim wavered. Then he turned around and looked at Richie with real fear in his eyes.

“Rich, we’re crazy to fool around with this!”

“Don’t get shook. Nobody’s going to know. Just remember what this afternoon was like.”

“I remember.”

“This is going to be better.”

“Okay!” Jim spat it out, then pried Richie’s fingers off his penis. “Boy, a man goes on a back-packing trip and spends all his time making out with his best friend.”

“And likes it.”

“We’ll see about that.”

“Let’s get in the sack before we freeze.”

Jim looked doubtfully once again at the two bedrolls lying side by side. “You’re not getting me into your stinky old sleeping bag.” He wiggled himself down into his own and put his hand over the zipper when Richie tried to lower it.

“Come on,” Richie pleaded. “It’s cold out here.”

“Then suffer!”

“Jim!”

“All right.”

Richie opened out the bedroll and climbed in, Jim moving over to make room. They lay on their sides facing one another, hard bodies pressed together, hard cocks meeting and marking with wetness each other’s abdomens. Richie put his arms around Jim, brought his fingers into Jim’s slightly curly neck hair and breathed a great sigh of peace and fulfillment.

“Does this ever feel nice,” Richie whispered into Jim’s ear. “It makes us... I don’t know...”

He had been going to say ‘closer’ but just then Jim’s fingers closed around his erection and all he could do was gasp with pleasure.

“That feel better than beating it yourself?” Jim asked slyly.

Jim allowed himself to be rolled on his back and caressed with increasing intimacy. To Richie it was all discovery: Jim was a friend he had known forever, it seemed, but Jim’s body was something different. As he moved his hands over the skin of Jim’s face and neck and chest and stomach, he felt like an explorer setting out into unknown and immensely exciting country. Richie had never before touched, or tired to

touch, another person like this. The warmth, the smoothness, the softness overlying the hard, young body were all new, and the steel-hard erection that raised itself out of a rich tangle of new curls and sought comfort, contact, solace in its upward-seeking arc were so exciting that Richie could hear his own heart beat fast, getting faster, loud, heavy and commanding.

All at once he found himself bending double, his hips spilling out the side of the sleeping bag and his mouth seeking the knob of Jim's cock.

"Hey, Rich, for God's sakes!" Jim gasped.

But Richie was oblivious. The soft, velvety head was right there, pressing on his lips. He opened up and in it slipped, and then all he was aware of was the rhythm, the gradual increase in tempo and thrust, the shivers and ecstatic breathing of both of them, and then it was out, Jim's sperm pulsing and flowing into his mouth, and he realized that almost at the same moment he, too, had erupted and was dripping his seed onto the hard granite rock.

When Richie awoke the next morning the western sky was already red and a few land birds were busy chattering in the branches of the island tree. In the other bedroll Jim was still sleeping heavily, snoring slightly with his mouth open and the quilting drawn up to his chin. They had both remained naked after their lovemaking and Richie had slept a little cold. Now he crawled in beside Jim.

Jim's back was toward him. He draped an arm over Jim's chest and snuggled up spoon fashion. Jim stirred a little, then lay still. Richie sought and found Jim's penis and held it without making any motion. It slowly filled in his hand.

"Sun's getting up," Jim mumbled a few minutes later.

"It's cold out," Richie said. His lips brushed against the back of Jim's neck.

"Yes."

They lay silently for a few minutes. Richie moved his cock against the small of Jim's back. A fish jumped in the lake and Richie lifted his head to see bright, broadening rings on the water.

"There goes breakfast," Jim said.

The birds continued their ruckus in the pine overhead and the east brightened until the first tree-filled rays of the sun struck the island.

"Is this ever nice," Richie sighed.

"It's a new way to wake up, I'll say that."

Richie was breathing the sweet smells of Jim's body: the warm skin, perspiration, hair, the slightly sharper scent of Jim's healthy waking breath. A steady joy, which threatened soon to become too keen for the sleepy state he wished to preserve, had permeated every cell of his body. He gave Jim's penis a gentle squeeze.

Suddenly off in the woods came the morning call of the loon, clear, liquid and crazy.

"Everybody's getting going," Jim said.

"Except us."

They listened for another cry. This time it was closer. Soon they heard wingbeats and Richie lifted his head and, squinting against the fresh red light of the rising sun, saw the strong, streamlined bodies winging east.

Jim sat up, throwing off the blankets. He cupped his hands to his mouth and whistled low and warbling in imitation of the bird. Back came the cry from the bleeding heavens. Jim whistled again, and again the bird returned the call. Jim turned back and grinned at Richie. "How about that?"

"As a loon, you make a great lover," Richie said, and then he gasped, for one of Jim's hands had come about his cock and was pulling on it with devastating effect. They snuggled down in the bedding, staring into one another's eyes, working one another's cocks.

"I wish I didn't have to go away to school next month," Richie said. "I'm sure going to miss this."

One of Jim's hands grabbed Richie's neck and gave it a roughly affectionate squeeze. "Don't think about it," he said. "What's wrong with now?"

"Nothing," Richie said, and gathered their two cocks into one hand and directed a smooth, lubricated thrust against Jim's that sent them both into the full, deep current of intercourse. Afterwards they dozed and awakened to make love once more before the sun made their sleeping rolls too warm.

They got up and swam and laughed at the tininess of their cold-shriveled cocks. Then they built a fire.

"I'm starved," Jim said. There was a snapping sound and smoke and in the inner twigs a little yellow flame erupted and sputtered upwards. Soon the two boys were sniffing hungrily at bacon and coffee. Jim bent down to peer at the frying pan, a simple, sensual smile on his lips.

"Jeez, I'm going to miss you," Richie said, watching him, heart suddenly full of pain. "I wish you could come to Florida, too."

"Me go to a boarding school? No thanks."

"I just wish... I don't know. It's going to be awful hard."

"Well, it's not like forever."

"It'll seem that way."

"Boy," Jim exclaimed, "that making out makes a guy hungry. Talk about salivating dogs!"

"Will you write?"

"Sure." Jim raised his eyes and squinted through the smoke at Richie. Besides, in the next week or two we can get in an awful lot of kicks."

An “awful lot” had to wait a week, and the week of waiting, for Richie, was interminable. Jim had gone off with his family to New York. He sent back two post cards, then called one evening to ask Richie to join them. Richie couldn't, but hinted that he was impatient for Jim's return.

“Me, too,” said Jim. “Here there's nothing much swinging for me.”

Richie felt a little stab of jealousy. “How do you mean?”

“Girls, you nut.”

“Oh. When do you get back?”

“If you're not coming down, tomorrow.”

Richie met the Greyhound from New York. Jim looked different in a suit, but when the boys were walking home Jim stripped off his coat and tie and rolled up his sleeves and his old easiness of manner returned. He had been to a barber and his hair, as well as being shorter, smelled of powder and shaving soap.

They went to Jim's home, because his parents weren't expected for a couple of days. They opened the windows to let out the smell of shut rooms.

“Change into your grubbies,” Richie demanded.

“Gonna shower first.”

They went to Jim's bedroom. Jim pulled off his shirt and pants and Richie watched his friend's body come bare. Jim frowned at him, grabbed a towel and disappeared into the bathroom. A moment later there was the sound of hot water spraying out of the shower head and splashing on Jim's shoulders, and of Jim singing, as always well off pitch.

Richie stripped and walked into the bathroom.

“Boy it feels good to get rid of that smog,” Jim said. He shut off the water. Richie looked through the transparent curtain and saw Jim lathering his body. Then he reached in and took the loose handle off the shower regulator.

“Bastard!” Jim shouted, sticking his head out of the curtains. His eyes were closed against the stinging bubbles. “Come on, put it back. I can't see,”

Richie filled a tumbler with cold water. “Here,” he said, and dashed it in Jim's face. Jim swore. Unblinded now, he charged out of the shower and chased Richie into the bedroom, where they met, grappled soapily and finally fell onto the bed.

But not before Richie had wrapped his fingers around Jim's slippery, soapy cock.

“Quit groping,” Jim demanded.

“Try and make me,” Richie said. He thrust his hips against Jim's soapy buttocks.

“We're getting the bed all wet,” Jim said.

“Who cares?”

He had locked his arms around Jim's chest. Now he was stroking the rapidly erecting penis and thrust his own erection through the slippery crack between Jim's tightly drawn thighs.

“Hey, slow down,” Jim said, with a little edge of tension in his voice. “I mean, it's been bottled up there for a week and the pressure's pretty high.”

They rested, panting, for a moment, Richie holding Jim's cock still, then Jim began to move again and it seemed to Richie that he was thrusting his buttocks down against the shaft between his thighs. Richie gasped, backed off slightly, directed the tip of his penis upward, then slowly slid it snug.

Now the soft, swelling glans of Richie's cock touched the anal lips. Richie trembled, undecided, not knowing if he really wanted this and, more important, if Jim would allow it. But Jim tightened his buttocks on Richie in welcome, and Richie found himself pressing for entrance. His penis slipped aside. He tried again and this time the lips gave a little. Jim groaned but did nothing to stop him. Richie

continued to press. Slowly the long, soapy, ardent shaft sank into Jim until at last Richie's hips were pressing right against Jim's flattened nates, cock buried as far as it could ever go.

Once more they stopped moving, except for the deep breathing of advance passion. Richie was on an excruciatingly high plateau of excitement and he guessed — knew, rather — that Jim was there also. Now, unable to hold back his emission any longer, he pulled Jim away from him by the penis and thrust their bodies together again by hand and hips. Once more he partially withdrew and once more pushed home, and that was enough to bring on the intense fury of orgasm, his locked penis shooting a week of semen into the upper reaches of Jim's colon. And almost at the same instant Jim, too, emitted, adding heavy sperm to the clots of suds on the damp bed.

This time Richie was driven by his parents to the Albany airport and Jim rode in the back seat with him. They arrived early and the two boys sat talking for a few minutes while Richie's father and mother checked on departure schedules inside the terminal.

"God, home seems good to me right now," Richie said.

"Then don't leave it. It's a free country."

"Tuition isn't free and you don't get it back."

"Think of all those pretty Florida girls in swim suits."

Richie gave Jim a disgusted look.

"Okay, it's a boys' school but they gotta turn you guys loose once in a while."

"That's not the problem," Richie said, looking down at his hands.

"Sure, breaking in a new school is never any fun."

"That's still not the problem."

"Christmas isn't *that* far off," Jim said a little nervously. "Hell, I told you, Richie, I'd write."

"You better." Richie saw his father motioning to him from the entrance to the parking area. "Well, here goes." Richie grabbed the bag behind him. He opened the door, stepped out onto the sidewalk, slammed it and bent down to talk through the window. "Practice your loon call once in a while, okay?"

"Sure, Peckerhead, I'll keep it in shape."

Hi, loon lover —

Been here a week. Weird country. Hot. School seems okay, but I'm still a stranger. Lots of new faces, new feelings. But old thoughts. Like I miss you, old chum. And... IT! Hope everyone's fine.

— Richie — *Sep. 11*

Dear Rich:

How they hanging? Speaking of that, I can't believe CERTAIN THINGS went on this summer. I don't like to think about it, and I bet you don't either, eh? I'm awful ashamed. Creepy feelings. The works. Never again, never! Everyone's fine.

— Jim — *Sep. 15*

Dear Jim:

What's this conscience bit? Have you got religion?

— Richie — *Sep. 19*

Dear Richie:

No.

— Jim — *Sep 24*

Dear Jim:

Then, what's the scoop?

— Richie — *Sep 29*

Dear Richie:

There's some things you do and some things you don't do. Some things are natural and some things are unnatural, and those things are one of them.

— Jim — *Oct. 3*

Dear Jim:

Bullshit.

— Richie — *Oct. 6*

Dear Richie:

Well, that's the way I feel.

— Jim — *Oct. 10*

Dear Jim:

Think, you mean. Something that nice can be wrong, immoral, maybe, or unwise. But unnatural? I'm not buying.

— Richie — *Oct. 15*

Dear Richie:

Okay, have it your way. You did on the island and in the shower. But no more!

— Jim — *Oct. 19*

Dear Jim:

What a thing to tell a guy that's over a thousand miles away from home!

— Richie — *Oct 24*

Dear Richie:

Well, there should be lots of THAT where you are. Here we have a great invention — GIRLS!

— Jim — *Oct. 29*

Dear Jim:

I've heard of them.

— Richie — *Nov. 3*

Dear Richie:

At Christmas I'll set you up with Mary or Beth or June or Judy.

— Jim — *Nov. 8*

Dear Jim:

Big deal!

— Richie — *Nov. 13*

Dear Richie:

They all got a hotbox for Richie's little peter.

— Jim—*Nov. 18*

Dear Jim:

Yuk!

— Richie— *Nov. 24*

Dear Richie:

Who, then?

— Jim — *Nov. 30*

Dear Jim:

It.

— Richie — *Dec. 4*

Dear Richie:

You're crazy in the head, Rich, you know that?

— Jim — *Dec. 8*

The Barnes School sprawled across one of the eastern keys on the Caribbean side of the southern tip of the Florida peninsula. Dr. Barnes, the headmaster, tried to create an atmosphere of ocean living. There were sailing skiffs, fish tanks, marine life collecting equipment. SCUBA was taught, snorkeling competence demanded. Boys went to seminars in nearby Key Largo on coral reef ecology and oceanography.

Given time, schools evolve personalities of their own. In the first few weeks Richie found life at Barnes surprisingly relaxed. A kind of oceanic friendliness permeated the place, as though education was simply the legitimate, mature concern of every one, and this led to a community of effort which boys and faculty alike found far less burdensome than the usual high school hassle.

Although Richie was only a sophomore, and new at that, he had been put in charge of the camping program for the younger boys, because he was an experienced outdoorsman. Thus, just after Thanksgiving, he found himself leading an overnight to a small key lying about two miles offshore in the lagoon. As they sailed out in two skiffs, he was vaguely aware of a minor conspiracy being planned by the three seventh graders in the other boat, but he didn't care. In the first place, it was Saturday morning and the whole weekend stretched before him. Then, he was going to a wild place, and wild places had many nice associations.

"Hey, Richie," cried a boy's changing voice from the other boat riding hard on his stern, "where you got the girls stashed away?"

"What would you do with a girl?" Richie turned to look over his shoulder at the lanky figure of Tom Redmond, a naughty-faced thirteen-year-old swaying easily to the little boat's motion.

Tom grinned. "What do you think?"

"Aw, hell," Richie scoffed. "I bet you don't even know how to hold hands."

"That's right. I'd grab for better things."

They pulled their skiffs ashore in a sandy cove and started lugging their gear, tents and water ashore. Fringing the beach were a few coconut trees, acacia brush and some flowering vines which attracted several humming-birds. They put up their tents in a small grassy clearing, then they fanned out to gather

firewood, and when they had built a pile large enough to last them through the evening, they rested on the beach, debating whether to swim or explore the island.

“It’s up to you,” Richie said. He stretched his arms up to the sky. Tom made as if to sock him in the stomach and Richie grabbed the threatening fist. With his other hand he wrapped his fingers around Tom’s neck and squeezed.

“Okay, it’s war!” Tom shouted.

The other two attacked from behind. Mike was a small, aggressive, lithe twelve-year-old with a shaggy head of straw-colored hair and blue eyes. Johnny was darker and huskier, a little shy and something of a dreamer. The two of them climbed on Richie’s back and brought him down into the soft coral sand.

Now the three boys were all over him, grasping his wrists, trying to pin down his legs. But Richie felt no need to prove himself. A great laziness came over him. He felt the boys spread-eagle him on his back while they lay and wiggled upon him in all manner of cross positions.

“Okay, you’ve out-fought me,” Richie said. He smiled. They were nice, appealing kids, good-looking, clean limbed, clear eyed, healthy, tanned.

“You didn’t even try to fight back,” Johnny said.

“You’re too strong,” Richie said.

“Well, we’re not going to let you up,” Mike said. And then, to Richie’s amazement, as the other boys held his arms, Mike put his hand to Richie’s face and began to stroke it.

Under the knot of boys’ bodies Richie felt his cock begin to fill. His heart beat harder with excitement. He closed his eyes, letting the sexual feeling surge and envelope him. The boys sensed his arousal; the hands which had been holding him down began to feel his body as Mike had been feeling his face, coming inside his shirt to run along his sides and chest, neck and shoulders. Then Tom’s hands, larger and bolder than the others, were tugging on his belt. Soon the buckle was free, the zipper lowered, and Richie gasped as Tom felt deep inside, tangling fingers in the coarse, curly hair, and grabbed his cock as though it were a sport trophy.

“I got it!” Tom shouted to the others.

But Mike disputed Tom’s ownership. While Tom drew down Richie’s pants, Mike covered the bare cock tip with his mouth. Richie groaned in pleasure. When he looked up again Johnny’s hazel eyes were smiling into his. He reached for Johnny’s neck and brought the fresh, freckled face to his, crushing together their moistened lips.

Richie’s cock came out of Mike’s mouth and into Tom’s and then back into Mike’s again. It had been weeks since Richie’s penis had touched anything human but his own hand. Now it was all over much too quickly. With a gigantic spasm (his cock was in transfer at the time) Richie shot his sperm over the tangled legs of his seducers and, with a great sigh, relaxed.

The four of them splashed in the ocean and horsed around for nearly an hour. When they pulled themselves out to dry on the beach, Johnny and Mike tried to tease Richie into excitement again. But Richie had other plans. That night he chose Tom Redmond to share his tent, and while the stars reeled in the heavens and Mike and Johnny masturbated one another into sleep, Richie pulled himself against Tom’s coltish, angular body, drew their locked bodies deep into the dark warmth of his bedroll, felt the boy tremble in his hug, their erections probe, then lock and move, heard Tom breathe, then actually sob, into his face. It was the younger boy’s first taste of complete, abandoned lovemaking, and in the mutual joy of initiation they alternately possessed each other and dozed in what seemed to be endless cycles of warm, sleepy peace and sex brightening to climax. By morning they were drunk with multiple fulfillment’s, dopey from lack of sleep.

Dear Richie: I'm trapped! Old Buddy, there's nothing like it. I love Poppy and Poppy loves me and that's all we can think about. I can't wait for you to meet her! She comes from Utica. Doesn't that town have a beautiful name? How about me, old average Jim, getting so lucky?

— Jim — *Dec. 15*

Dear Jim:

Bully.

— Richie — *Dec. 18*

Outside the leaded window panes big, soft flakes of snow fell, muffling the night air and the sounds of town a mile away, smoothing the uneven ground into hummocks that rolled away into the Adirondacks forest. Before the hearth Richie sat reading in a stolid winged chair, feet on a needlepoint footstool, one leg overhot from the fire beside him. The enormous quiet of the old vacation house, which belonged to some relative of Jim's, its high ceilings and faded opulence, was wonderfully soothing after the turmoil and confinement of school. It was one o'clock in the morning. Richie yawned, debating whether to start another chapter, then closed his eyes and dozed.

There was a stomping on the outer porch. The heavy oak door opened and Jim came in, blowing on his hands.

"You still up?" Jim asked, shedding his overcoat and shaking the snow off it.

"Sure." Richie rubbed his eyes. "How'd you make it?"

"Not bad." Jim came up to the fire. "What have you been doing? Reading all this time?"

"Mr. Hayes stopped by for a while."

"Checking whether we had any shack-ups going on?"

"I don't think so. Just friendly. In fact, I like him. I'll bet he's a good teacher."

Jim stared into the fire, thinking his own thoughts.

"So," Richie said, "you had a good time."

"Of course. Poppy is wonderful. She's just got to be the greatest, most wonderful girl in the whole world."

"What else is new?"

"You don't believe that, do you?" Jim turned toward him. "I bet you don't even believe in love."

"Sure I do." Richie was watching Jim closely. "I just wanted to know how you made out, that's all."

"Poppy and I don't 'make out'. I respect her too much."

"Too bad she doesn't respect your gonads."

"What do you mean?" Jim turned around and stared at him, the red firelight flickering in his face.

"Or maybe you don't respect hers enough."

"Now, just a minute..."

"If she's got any."

"What in hell are you talking about?"

"Okay, they're not gonads in a girl, but there's glands somewhere in there, as I understand it. Doesn't she feel anything for you, physically?"

"Sure she does. Richie, you've never been in love."

"I suppose you think I'm jealous."

"I didn't say that."

"Well, I'm not. I just hoped you'd come in with a big sappy, happy, shit-eating grin on your face, and instead you're all wound up and twittery as a cuckoo clock."

Jim turned his back to the fire. "Rich, if only you knew Poppy better. She's so... considerate."

"So considerate she talks you out of every horny move you make."

"She shows me that's not the way."

"I'll bet."

"She understands how I feel."

"I'll bet."

"Will you stop saying that?"

"No. If she understood how you felt, she'd be feeling like wow, too. And she doesn't."

"She's a girl, Richie. Girls feel different."

“This one does. About you, anyhow.”

Jim whirled around. “Goddamnit, what do you mean by that?” “I mean this.” Richie stood up and stepped toward Jim. “Anyone that really loved you would want all of you, not just your kisses and your pettings and your pawings, would especially want the feel of your big, hard cock...”

“Stop it!” Jim roared.

“She’d want to make you happy, and if she didn’t open up her little cunt...”

And then there was a flash of lightning as Jim’s fist connected with Richie’s jaw, sending him falling backwards against the fireplace, hitting his head on the oak mantle and sprawling against the molded firescreen. But his senses came back quickly and he stood up.

“Come on!” Jim demanded, fists clenched lower lip down-hung in fury. “Let’s have it out! You hate her, don’t you? *Don’t you?* ”

Richie looked at Jim, holding back his feelings as best he could, and then walked to one of the window seats and sat down on the velvet cushions, drawing up a leg to hug. He looked out into the thickly-falling snow and put a thumb knuckle between his teeth and bit to the point of pain.

It was a minute before either boy could speak. Then Jim came to the window and sat down by Richie’s feet.

“I’m sorry, Rich.”

Richie still couldn’t talk. He continued to look out at the falling snow.

“I guess that’s the first time either of us hit the other guy, isn’t it?”

Richie nodded, his eyes still outside.

“As a matter of fact, I do have a hang-up,” Jim said. “I want it so much! Jesus, why do I have to be such a crummy, horny bastard?”

Richie put a hand on Jim’s shoulder and moved it gently.

“And take it out on you, of all people,” Jim continued “You know, love isn’t everything it’s cracked up to be. Sometimes it’s just plain hell.”

Richie continued stroking Jim’s shoulders, then moved to his neck and the light hairs at the back of his head. Jim made no motion to move away. Across the room the fire flared up momentarily as a log fell, and the sudden red flickering light on Jim’s face reminded Richie of another time and another fire. He tired to pull Jim’s head down into his lap, but Jim resisted, so Richie simply let his hand stay.

“Richie,” Jim said in a very quiet, small voice, “I don’t want to be stuck with guys.”

And then they sat for some minutes in a trance of temporarily spent emotions, not speaking, Richie occasionally moving his callused thumb on Jim’s neck.

“Well,” Richie said, finding his voice at last, “I guess we better go to bed, if were going to ski in the morning.”

They climbed the stairs and stripped in the chilly room. In bed Jim drew up the covers to his chin and looked at Richie who, naked and in the manly state, went first to the window and opened it a crack, next to the alarm clock and set it at seven-thirty, then to the light switch by the door and plunged the room into darkness except for the cheerful glow of the gas furnace on the opposite wall. Then, his skin pleurably goose-bumped in the frosty air (he could see his breath) and his heart throbbing with anticipation, he sat down on Jim’s bed and put a hand to the side of Jim’s face.

“Richie,” Jim said, “this is no good for you.”

“Let *me* worry about that, okay?” Richie moved his hand over Jim’s cheeks and nose and lips and felt the warm, moist breath against his fingers.

“Okay,” Jim said. He closed his eyes and allowed Richie to touch his eyelids and the long, even lashes, brown as tree bark, that curled down toward the smooth cheek skin and the well-structured bones beneath.

Richie lifted the covers and crawled in. His hands went to Jim's undershorts and lowered them, then to the cock which was already erect. Jim caught his breath at the first touch despite his permissive-but-passive pose. Richie slipped an arm under Jim's neck and brought his face down onto Jim's chest where his mouth found a nipple, sealed it with his lips and tongued it into erection. Then he moved his lips to the hollow at the juncture of Jim's collar bones, closing his teeth on the sweet, in-sucked skin. He could smell lipstick and perfume. He wanted to lick it, swallow it all away, until Jim smelled only of Jim, and of his own devoted kisses.

Beneath him the body began to stir. Gently, Richie moved on top, released his dry grip on Jim's dry cock, substituting his own streaming penis, which he pressed down onto Jim's, wetting it until they slipped past one another and came to rest on the soft and tender skin of adolescent abdomens.

"Jeez, it's been a long time," Richie whispered, cheek against Jim's cheek, sighing with the first outflow of contentment that comes with total embrace before the demands of passion rise too high. Richie brought his lips to Jim's, smelling the perfume more strongly than even, kissed them lightly at first, then more intimately and wetly.

"Oh, God," Jim said, as they turned aside to breathe, "why can't you be Poppy?"

"Because I'm me," Richie whispered and he made the first strong thrust with his hips upon Jim.

It had been nearly a week since Richie had left school, and since then he had been almost constantly with Jim and Poppy. Every night he had fallen into bed with a full erection. And all the time he had hoped, dreamed that something like this would happen, denying himself each time the quick, mechanical peace of masturbation. Now Richie could no longer postpone the final rise, nor could Jim. Each boy felt the other tremble, the tentative, questioning hold-back that needed no verbalization. Then, with a strangled cry, Jim moved against him and Richie answered with his hips, hand tightening on Jim's buttocks. Their legs clamped, their embrace jerked tight, their mouths broke open for air to sustain their effort, and in the fury of orgasm their feelings skyrocketed deep into inner space and peaked with pulses and counter-pulses of sperm which became inextricably mixed by the slowing cocks, flooding into a warm and slippery lake between them.

"That," Richie said, after a few dreamy minutes, still holding Jim's quiet body in his arms, "that is what you want to give up?"

"That," Jim said, "is that I want to do with Poppy someday."

"Looks like it's going to be a while."

"I wish you'd get a girl."

"Why?"

"I'd feel better about our relieving ourselves this way."

"Is that all this means to you?"

"Pretty nice relief — okay, I admit it."

It was four o'clock before Richie awakened again. All he could see of Jim across the room was a twist of dark hair protruding from the top of the covers. Richie rolled out of bed. Feeling the bite of winter air, he pulled off his quilt and drew it about his shoulders. Then he knelt beside the other bed.

Carefully, Richie drew back Jim's covers until he could gaze upon the sleeping face. Jim's head was turned sharply aside, lips parted, chin almost touching his naked shoulder. In the quiet room Richie could hear Jim's gentle breathing, and, lowering his face, smell the night breath and the last scent of Poppy.

Richie touched his lips to Jim's forehead, which was warm and smooth and still. He moistened his lips and began to move them from scalp to brow and from temple to temple, licking gently, cleaning the skin of remnant perfume and powder. Jim stirred and mumbled something unintelligible. Richie moved across Jim's upper cheek, down to the eye, across to the ear, back to the bridge of his nose. His tongue

came to Jim's nostrils, lips momentarily sealing themselves around them, then sliding off to kiss where his older kisses had already cleaned.

At last the sweet smell of femininity was gone and Richie dropped his mouth to Jim's throat, slid along the upper shoulder, down to the clavicle and out to a nipple, where he paused, waiting for salivary replenishment. Jim caught his breath, licked his lips and, still sleeping, brought a hand to Richie's neck. A minute later, his mouth moist once again, Richie continued across the chest and down, dropped to the navel, where his tongue explored the shallow recess, then crossed from hip to hip upon the flat, hard skin just above the pubic bush.

Richie drew the covers off Jim's chest, replacing them with a corner of his own quilt. He felt the erection (responsive even in sleep) and bared it. He dropped his face to lick into and suck on the basal hair. Here the smells were all of Jim, of sweat and groin and perineum. Richie circled the cock root with his tongue, brought the full testes into his mouth, raised the scrotum and licked toward the rectum as far as his tongue would reach. Then he began to moisten the root of the penis itself. He came up one side wetly, passed lightly over the glans, backed down the other. Now, with the whole penis wet, he pressed his lips to the tip, in-sucked, and brought the whole cock swiftly and beautifully into his mouth.

"Yipes!" Jim sat up, suddenly very much awake and aware. Both boys started to laugh. Richie dropped the cock, dropped his head on Jim's stomach and felt the reciprocating spasms of laughter hard against his cheek.

"You trying to scare the spooks out of the attic?"

"I'm sorry. But it's real weird getting waked up that way."

They laughed some more, Richie running his fingers over the neutral areas of Jim's penis. Then Richie took Jim's hand and guided it down beside the mattress until he felt the warm fingers wrap around his penis and begin to move in the streaming urethral flow.

"Oh, man, does that even feel nice!" Richie whispered, laughter forgotten, and once more he took Jim's cock into his mouth, sucked and drew back, sucked in again, establishing a rhythm that Jim echoed with his hand.

But it was all too quick, and less than a minute later Jim was saying urgently, "Let's hold it! Can you hold it?" And they relented and tried to rest and relax.

"Damn, I wish we could make this last," Jim said.

"Are you right there?"

"Right there."

"So am I."

"I guess we can't hold on much longer."

"Not without it being torture."

"Then, let's go."

With hand and mouth they fell on each other. Richie pushed home, recoiled, pushed home again. Jim moaned and moved against him. Together their feelings rose, together they were thrown beyond the simple world of two boys straining in a warm winter bed, hurled into each other's deepest beings, until they were fused with one another for one ecstatic moment. And then Richie's mouth was filling, lips clasped upon the emitting cock pulses, as he, too, pulsed into Jim's firm but finally quiet hand.

Richie dropped his head on Jim's thighs, treasuring the semen in his mouth, smelling it as he exhaled through his nose. He sensed the fertility within it, the clamoring life. He wished it could impregnate his own body so that some little part of him could grow and become inseparably Jim.

He awakened three hours later with Jim's arms about him. Jim's wristwatch ticked and glowed on the pillow in front of his face. He felt the top of Jim's legs pressing against his thighs, Jim's knees against the back of his knees, shins along his calves, and he sighed in the first, warm pleasure of sex.

“Hi,” he whispered.

“Lo,” Jim said. “You ready?”

And then Richie realized that Jim’s cock was lying inside the crevice between his buttocks, its soft tip resting against his anal lips.

“Sure,” Richie whispered.

Jim licked his hands and carefully moistened his cock, then began to press, flattening the slippery glans back against the end of his harder gristle. Richie clenched his teeth and forced himself to relax, to open, to accommodate. And slowly he felt the shaft begin to sink into him, slide past the roseate portal and move up, touching nerves he never knew he had, causing constriction and a fullness and a bright, brassy sense of being possessed.

“Am I hurting you?” Jim asked.

“No,” Richie said, “it’s okay.”

And then with a final push Jim buried himself as far as he could go. They rested for five, ten seconds, breathing heavily.

“Feels weird, doesn’t it?” Jim asked.

“Yeah, but sort of nice.”

“I know.”

Jim’s wet hand came about Richie’s cock. They began to move, slowly at first, then with increasing speed. Soon they were in that region of sustained high feeling that is second only in delight to the melting of orgasm, working quickly toward culmination and unwilling to postpone its onset. At last it took them. They twisted and writhed in the rumpled sheets, peaked and sank. And at that moment the alarm clock began to ring, announcing the arrival of morning.

Richie stood at the basin washing his face. Jim turned off the shower and stepped out. “Boy, it feels good to get rid of your dirty old lick,” he said.

“Should have left it there,” said Richie. “Keeps you from getting pimples.”

“How’s that?”

“Read *The Efficacy of Teenage Male Saliva in the Control and Reduction of Acne*, by Dr. Pickel von Reinhaut.”

Jim snapped a towel at Richie. “If you think I’m going to lick your ass to make it smooth, you’re wrong.” Jim draped the towel around his neck. “Move over.”

Richie rinsed off his face. Jim stood behind him combing his hair. Richie dried his face, grabbed his own towel, wound it around his middle and, just before he left the bathroom, reached for Jim’s penis, gave it swift jerk and left.

In the hall he could smell coffee. He paused, listened. Indistinctly he could hear singing in the kitchen.

“Poppy?” he called down.

“Good morning,” came the voice.

“Hey, what are you doing?”

“Getting breakfast. You boys don’t know how.”

“That’s awful nice of you. We’ll be down in a bit.”

Richie went to his bed and flopped down, staring at the ceiling. In a moment Jim came in, whistling, looking flushed and happy.

“You got a hell of a sense of timing,” Richie said.

“Why?”

Richie grabbed a leg and brought Jim down onto the bed beside him.

“It shows,” Richie said.

Jim tried to get up, but Richie held him down and wrapped his fingers around Jim’s clean, limp penis.

“Get out of there! What shows? Christ, you’re not getting horny again, are you?”

Richie rolled on top of Jim and forced their lips together. For a moment he smelled Colgate and Dial soap. Then Jim broke away.

“Look, we got to put a stop to it,” Jim said. “I gotta have *some* sex left for my girl!”

“Okay,” Richie said, “for now. Just don’t look so happy. Everyone’ll know what kind of a time we had last night.”

The sun was as high as it would ever stand that still, cold, cloudless day. At the top of the hill Richie and Jim leaned forward on their ski poles, looking down the back of the mountain where the snow, uncreased by skis, rolled and sparkled toward the lower wooded portion of the slope. Beyond lay the purpling ridges of the Adirondack Mountains.

A minute later they were floating down through the powder, Jim leading, Richie completing figure-eights behind him. The snow was getting heavy. By the time they reached the tree line and plunged into the deep shade of the cedars, they were flushed and out of breath, their faces beaded in perspiration. They stopped to pant. Jim tipped a branch, and a heavy chunk of snow fell into Richie’s hair, some of it immediately melting and running down his neck. He pushed Jim over and they fell, sinking deep and awkwardly into the powder. Jim was trapped on the bottom with his tangled ski poles, the leather loops drawn tight around his wrists. “Bastard, let me up!” he shouted.

“Now I got you where I want you!” Richie said.

“Wait till I get free. You just wait.”

Richie tried to kiss Jim, but Jim shook his head violently from side to side, bringing down more snow onto their heads. His lips were pursed, drawn tight and bloodless against his teeth. Richie began to laugh.

“Cocksucker!” Jim shouted.

“That’s not a bad idea,” Richie said. He put his hand on the front of Jim’s ski trousers and quickly unzipped the fly.

“Christ, Rich!” Jim panted, then, louder, “Richie!” Jim’s fly was open now, and Richie’s hand was searching for the slit in the thermal underwear. “This is no place to sex it up!”

“You think I’m going to freeze your weenie?”

“That’s not what I mean. We’re supposed to be skiing.”

Jim tried to rise, but Richie pushed him down again. The other hand continued to probe inside Jim’s trousers, got through the two slots of underwear, and finally began to untangle the limp, warm, sweaty penis from its mat of pubic hair.

“Get out of there! You’re pulling on my pubes!”

“Sorry about that. Shall I yank down everything so you’re bare-butt in the snow.”

“Just get the hell off me!”

By now Richie had pulled the limp, lavender cock head out into the winter day and was squeezing it between thumb and forefinger.

“How about a big, long smooch before I do you,” Richie asked.

“Come on!”

“Turn your face up. Cooperate.”

“Let me up or I’ll piss.”

“You’d sure look funny with your pants all soggy coming down the hill.”

Richie dropped his mouth to Jim’s and began to nibble on the closed lips. Slowly Jim yielded, relaxing his mouth and allowing Richie to put his tongue inside, suck on his lips and graze on his teeth. The cock in Richie’s hand began to harden and thrust itself out with its own inertia from the white sanctuary of Jim’s underwear.

“That’s more like my old buddy,” Richie said, laughing. He began to rub his fingers on the tiny bridle that lay along Jim’s stiffening gristle. “Now try pissing,” Richie taunted.

“I can’t, you bastard,” Jim said, and he began to smile. “Okay, let’s get it over with.”

That night, in another old house, the Hayes’s had a Coke party with dancing for the high school students they were chaperoning. Richie was rather bored, and after a while he slipped into the library to thumb through some old books on the American frontier. A half hour later Hayes put his head in. “My wife says I have to go into town for some snacks. Want to come along?”

“Sure,” Richie said.

They slipped on their ski parkas and jumped into the car.

“You’re not in the mood for partying,” Hayes said as they drove out the long driveway.

“Not especially.”

“Do you find it hard to get back in the swing?”

“I guess a little. I’m not much of a dancer.”

“Well, you don’t have a date.”

“No.”

“You wouldn’t have any trouble getting one if you tried.”

“Why do you say that?”

“You’re a nice guy, and you’re very handsome as well.”

“Thanks for the compliment,” Richie said carefully.

“It’s simply the truth. My wife remarked on it.”

Richie looked at Hayes, wondering if he was trying to pick him up, but the English teacher stared ahead through the frosty windshield, frowning slightly into the sudden snow flurry that sent big, white flakes streaking at them in the headlights. “What books do you like?” Hayes asked.

“Oh, everything. My dad says I’m a compulsive reader.”

“There’s nothing wrong with that.”

“It’s supposed to be un-American or something,” Richie said.

“How are you and boarding school getting along?”

“Okay.”

“Do you like the all-male environment?”

“I can stand it.”

“Of course you can. It’s a question of advisability.”

“You mean sex.” Richie allowed a slight edge to come into his voice.

Hayes’ intelligent eyes probed his for a half second and then returned to the road. “Yes,” he said.

“Sir, I’m just an ordinary healthy, crummy American boy.”

“And you’ve got a hang-up.”

“What’s that?”

“Your best friend has a girl and you don’t.”

Richie didn’t say anything.

“Look, I’m not prying. But when you teach you do more than talk at a sea of faces. It’s going to get worse, by the way.”

“What’s going to get worse?”

“Your feeling of separation. Unless, of course, you start knocking on other doors. You don’t have to give up the one in order to get the other.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Sure you do.”

They drove into town and parked by the grocery. They bought the pop and snacks and walked out, arms full, to load the car. On the sidewalk across the street Richie spotted an old man standing in the swirling snow trying to close his jacket, but his hands shook so violently from age and palsy that he couldn't hold one side of the zipper against the other.

"Just a minute," Richie told Hayes. He bound across the street and zipped up the coat while the old man's eyes looked at him in cold and unhappy confusion.

"That was a very nice thing to do," Hayes told Richie as they drove out of the village.

Richie shrugged and slumped down to rest his head on the back of the front seat, lanky legs crooked under the dash. "Is Poppy right for Jim?" he asked.

"Some Poppy or other," said Hayes, staring straight ahead into the dark night. "Jim Mansfield has a lot going for him. He's nice looking. He's smart. With a little luck he'll be happy as any man can reasonably expect. And he's conventionally sexed. Anything to the contrary that has happened, or might for a while continue to happen, won't change that fact. With Poppy he is doing his thing. He is lucky."

"Good," Richie said.

"When are you going back home?"

"Tomorrow."

"I know Jim and Poppy are, but they might be able to spare you for a couple of days."

"Well, I'm sort of Jim's guest."

"You could come to our place. My wife..."

"...would just love to have me hanging around."

"...will be driving down with the other boys and girls. And I'll be out of company on the ski hill."

"Sir, I better not."

"Okay."

"I appreciate your offer, though."

"Sure."

"I really do."

"Richie, how good are you at letting go?"

"Lousy."

"We all are, I guess."

Richie turned off the light and crawled under the covers beside Jim. "You don't have any girl smell tonight."

"Poppy just put the rag on," Jim said. "She didn't want to mess around."

"I do. Besides, this is our last chance until spring."

Jim grabbed Richie roughly by the neck and squeezed. "You know, a guy could get *used* to having his ashes hauled every night this way."

"When I get back are you still going to want it?"

"Hell, I don't know, Rich. I don't have a crystal ball."

"I'll want it."

"How do you know you won't be making it with some gorgeous chick?"

"I'd never turn this down."

Slowly, as they lay against one another in a light embrace, their goose-flesh smoothed and their excitement grew.

"Yeah, it's pretty nice." Jim yawned. He dropped his cheek against Richie's.

"Let's stay this way all night," Richie said.

"Even after we shoot?"

"Sure. I don't care about sleep. I gotta take back something to keep me going."

“Poor Richie,” Jim said. “I wish I could give you a little of what I got with Poppy.”

“I got you tonight,” Richie said, folding his arms about Jim’s back. “For now,” he said, whispering, the tension of sex coming into his voice, even as Jim’s body settled down upon his and their cocks slipped into hard, parallel position, “for now, Jim, that’s all that counts.”

The seasons passed. They grew — away from each other during the school year, together during the summer, when they formed an odd trio with Poppy.

“You’re very close to Jim, aren’t you?” Poppy said one day when they were fishing and Jim had gone off for some pop.

“Of course.”

“I mean, physically,” Poppy said.

In spite of himself, Richie turned red. Poppy put her hand on his arm. “It’s okay, Richie. I’m very liberal, you know.” She was smiling. “In fact...” Her smile turned into a tease, “...it’s probably the best solution all around. When you’re here in the summer Richie’s a lot easier to get along with. He’s a boy — well, a man — and he needs *something*. And that...” She arched her eyebrows shrewdly, “...he’s not going to get from me, at least as long as I’m living with my folks.”

When they turned sixteen they bought, together, an old car, and spent most of the rest of the summer — and most of the rest of their cash — keeping it running. Jim was shaving, now. Richie had let his hair grow, until it nearly touched his shoulders and became the focus of friction with his father. Because of that, he chose not to come home the following Christmas vacation but hired himself out as crew on a large sailing boat taking tourists on week cruises between Florida and the Bahama islands. He came back to school with his hair even longer, bleached out several shades lighter and his skin bronzed everywhere but in a thin stripe about his waist.

It was the end of the time of night when everyone sleeps most soundly, and in Richie’s arms, Johnny slept with the total abandon, the touching trust of the very young. Richie opened his eyes and consulted the glowing dial of his watch: five o’clock — the hour when people begin to stir. Some time ago his penis had filled with blood and lay gently in Johnny’s anal cleft. He drew an arm from under the sleeping boy, who sighed and turned toward him. Richie submitted to lust for just a moment. He bowed his head and kissed the upturned lips, dry and sweet smelling before they parted to expel the night breath’s pungency. Then he slipped out of bed, drew on his undershorts, lifted the window and stepped out into the dew-heavy April Caribbean air.

Desire receded quickly in the chill of his pre-dawn scramble along the limestone ledges. He reached his room, slipped under the covers, but almost before he closed his eyes he felt a hand on his shoulder shaking him awake. It was the night master and there was a telephone call for him in the office.

He stumbled into his bathrobe and shuffled downstairs. He picked up the phone.

“Richie?” The familiar voice was flat and far away.

“Jim!”

There was no response.

“Jim, are you still there?”

“Yes.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Last night, in a head-on, Poppy was killed.”

“Oh, Jesus!”

There was a long pause.

“It...” Jim’s voice broke.

“Jim, are you all right?”

“I... don’t... know.”

“Are you all alone?” Richie knew that his parents and Jim’s were vacationing together in Aspen.

“Yes.”

“Look, Jim, I’ll get the next plane home. Stay where you are, okay?”

Richie couldn’t find the night master again, so he went to his room and dressed and pocketed his wallet and air travel card and then awakened his corridor prefect to tell him where he was going. And three hours later, having picked up a lucky ride with a trucker to Miami International Airport, he was on a non-stop jet to New York, where he transferred to a local flight to Albany, where he caught the stage to his home town.

He found Jim slumped at the kitchen counter, head buried in his arms. “What took you so long,” Jim asked.

“Christ, do you know where the Barnes School is? How’s it going?”

“Not so good. I’m glad you’re here.”

Jim got up, but the color drained from his face and suddenly he was retching.

“Sit down, you nut,” Richie said. He grabbed Jim’s neck, forced him to a chair and held his head between his knees.

“I’m sorry,” Jim said. “I been doing this all day, except I usually made it to the john.”

“Have you kept anything down?”

Jim shook his head. “I was trying to make some tea. I swore I’d keep my cool until you got here.”

When the faintness subsided, Richie helped Jim up the stairs, stripped him and put him to bed. Then he showered in Jim’s bathroom, talking all the while about everything and nothing, and came into the bedroom to dry off.

“Are you kicking yourself?” he asked Jim.

Jim nodded

“Don’t.”

“It was past her twelve-thirty curfew and the roads were slippery. I wanted to drive her home but she wouldn’t let me.”

Richie slipped under the covers and lay on his back with his arms and shoulders touching Jim.

“I just can’t help... blaming myself.” Jim’s voice began to crack.

“Go ahead. Let it out. Bawl.”

Jim did. Richie turned to Jim and took his sobbing, shaking body into his arms, feeling just a little uneasy, slightly afraid of the sharp cutting edge of the lover’s grief.

Jim’s crying ended at last. Richie’s loins stirred with a gentle, sad arousal that didn’t press for completion. His penis touched Jim’s leg, and from time to time Jim brought it into his hand, as though to reassure himself of Richie’s continued presence and strength, to confirm the attachment that brought them both in crisis to the same bed.

For two days Jim didn’t sleep and wouldn’t eat. The spells of retching became more frequent. Finally, at Hank Hayes’ insistence, they drove Jim to the hospital where the doctors snowed him under with sedatives and began intravenous feeding. Richie went home with Hayes.

He slept through lunch and supper and awakened only to hunger late in the evening. He stepped into his trousers, found a chicken leg and a quart of milk in the refrigerator and retired to consume both, sprawled barefoot and tousle-headed in an easy chair in Hayes’ study. “How’s Jim?” he asked.

The English teacher was working on a pile of themes. “Still sleeping,” he said.

“Good.”

“How are *you*?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I doubt you got more rest than your friend. It takes it out of you to live with grief that long.”

Richie nodded, gnawing on the drumstick.

“It was quite a wonderful thing you did,” Hayes said.

Richie shrugged.

“But then you’re quite a wonderful person.”

Richie looked up to see if Hayes was mocking him.

“I mean it,” Hayes continued “I discovered it last winter when you zipped up the coat of that pathetic old man in the snowstorm. Your devotion to Jim Mansfield is Athenian, in the best as well as the more conventional sense of the word.”

Hayes shut his grade book, snapped off his desk lamp and stood up. “Tell me, have you sworn to be physically faithful?”

Richie colored. “I don’t get you.”

Hayes came to him and put a hand on his shoulder. “Okay, everyone’s got something sacred. I won’t pry. Let’s go to bed.”

“I just got out of bed.”

“Out of *your* bed. That wasn’t what I had in mind.”

Richie looked into the teacher’s smiling eyes. Hayes was a big man, standing nearly six foot two, with powerful shoulders, broad hands and a narrow waist. He was handsome and intelligent and Richie, who before had never thought of anyone but another boy in a sexual way, was surprised to find himself drawn to him.

“What *did* you have in mind?” he asked tersely.

“You deserve something after all of this. People who love you can, on occasion, give as well as take. It isn’t much, I suppose, in the long run, but it seems good at the time. And it’s always a bad idea to turn it down.”

“Sir,” Richie asked, “what about Mrs. Hayes?”

“She’s visiting her mother in Boston. She does that frequently.”

“And you make out with boys you meet in school?”

Hayes’ mouth widened into a grin. “Scout’s honor,” he said, “I never touch my students, potential students, charges in hobby groups, etc. They are liable to get the idea they have to go along with you in order to get along with you. And that worm can turn very quickly.”

“What if you fell in love?”

“I couldn’t answer very well for my wisdom then. But, of course, I love my wife. Which is something I hope you have one day.”

“I doubt it,” Richie said simply. Then he stretched, feeling the tension of sex creep into his stomach. “Besides, that’s a long ways off from tonight.”

Hayes smiled. “Come on.”

It was different, amazingly different, from lying with Jim, or even Johnny or Tom. For Richie it was totally without responsibility. Hayes initiated, guided, carried through, and Richie simply relaxed and enjoyed it.

Richie started by flopping alone on his back on the big double bed. He stared at the ceiling as Hayes’ hands loosened his zipper, barely bothered to unweight his buttocks when he felt the rough cloth of his Levi’s pull down over his hips. Hayes kissed him, then kissed his cock, then licked the shaft and took the head into his mouth to tongue gently the coronal rim, the eye of the glans and the tiny apex of his frenulum. The bedroom was a little cold and Richie began to shiver. Hayes released him, stripped, and they dove for the covers.

Richie was amazed at Hayes’ weight upon him, the strength of his embrace. They locked arms, locked loins, locked lips and began to move. Richie had loved more, felt his flesh catch fire and bum with a fiercer blaze with Jim and even little Johnny, but never had he felt so safe, so loved himself, and tonight he could accept it, welcome it, even, without shame. He closed his eyes, felt Hayes’ strong mouth move wetly over his face, and rocked upwards to the older man’s commanding rhythm. Back he drifted to some state of childhood, the hug, the cradle, the tactile world of infancy. They didn’t pause. They didn’t hurry.

They rocked on steadily until climax was sighted, climbed and accomplished in a deep flow of motion and emotion. And then Richie rested apart and was thankful for the dark security of the room.

In May, at the Bamcs School, the students came down with an epidemic of spring fever. During class they gazed longingly out of the windows, at the flowers on the poinciana trees, in a few cases at each other.

But then came the increasing tempo of summer's advance. Each noon the sun stood higher; gradually it assumed ascendancy over everything. By late May the boys were lethargic simply because it was too hot.

Jim had stopped writing, although Richie sent off some kind of letter or post card every week. He heard through Hank Hayes that Jim's marks had slipped, that he hadn't signed up for baseball, which caused a lot of resentment among boys and townspeople alike.

Then, just before final exams, Richie had a note from Jim saying he had secretly enlisted in the army, using an altered birth certificate. "I can't stand it here anymore," Jim explained. "I get gas from my folks, gas from my teachers flak from the kids. I'm no good to anyone. I go in a week, so I guess I won't see you till I'm though basic, some time in the fall."

Richie crumpled the letter and walked to this room in a state of shock. He and Jim had always talked over their big decisions. Why hadn't Jim consulted him? The first flush of anger cooled to depression and, in the days that followed, melancholy. He didn't answer Jim's note. He almost gave up. Only inertia got him through the exam week.

The day he flew home he received another longer and more cheerful letter from Jim. It was a wry account of his trials as a new recruit. Richie took a piece of paper, chose the innocent subject of the all-pervasive heat, and began to write. Soon he found himself deeply involved in everything he described. He began the letter at ten in the morning and finished it on the airplane, just as they touched down in New York. And so started a correspondence that carried them right to the end of Jim's life in the Army.

Richie counseled at a boys' camp that summer in Vermont. He enjoyed it, but felt bound by the ethos and cautionary comment Hayes had expressed: not to attempt sexual contact with any of the kids he was responsible for. Yet every night as he lay awake staring at the ceiling he could hear through the beaverboard partition the sounds of the dormitory. There were footfalls in the aisles, whispers, giggles, the cry, occasionally rhythmic, of bed-springs. He knew that fairly regular communal sex was going on at night among his fourteen-year-old charges. Whenever he walked out in response to some straight boy's complaint about the noise, he had to overlook compromising positions, flushes of interrupted passion, even the partially revealed erections of the sexual athletes scampering back to their own beds.

One night there was a knock on his door, soft but persistent. Richie glanced at his watch: eleven-thirty. "Come in," he said. The door opened and shut and a boy stood silently inside. "Who is it?"

"Terry Mansfield."

"What do you want?"

"To talk."

"Can't it wait until morning?"

"There won't be time." Terry was Jim's first cousin and there was just enough physical resemblance to remind Richie constantly of the painful separation he was enduring.

"Look, it's way after lights-out."

"I know. I couldn't sleep."

"It's hard to sleep when you're fooling around the way you guys do."

"I wasn't fooling around tonight."

"For a change."

Terry came to Richie's bed and sat down, clutching his arms in the chill. "Those guys turn me off. What do you hear from home and Jim?"

They talked for a while, exchanging news. Terry began to shiver. "Can I get under the blanket with you?" he asked.

Richie hesitated, then reluctantly made room for him. They lay on their backs with their heads on the same pillow, arms and shoulders lightly touching.

"Do you know that guys out there are jerking each other off?" Terry asked.

"I guess they'll live through it."

"Aren't you going to stop it? They do it an awful lot."

"Does it bother you?"

"Oh, no." Terry turned to him and touched his arm. "Sometimes I sort of feel like doing that myself."

"And you don't?"

"I told you those guys turn me off. They're too young. They act silly. Half of them can't even shoot. Do you miss Jim?"

"Yes."

"I do, too. He's always looked out for me, not that I need it much. Do you think they'll make him kill somebody?"

"I hope not."

"Me, too. This is nice, lying here and talking. Can I stay the night?"

"There isn't enough room."

"Please. I won't bother you. I promise. I hate that dormitory."

"Are you homesick?"

"No. Yes. I don't know."

"Okay. But you have to be quiet."

Very quickly Terry's breathing became steady. Richie was aroused, as he usually was in the evening, but for some reason it seemed to be enough simply to lie in bed next to Jim's cousin, and he found himself strangely at peace. He closed his eyes. There was a rushing in his ears and he slept.

He awakened a little later to feel Terry moving against him and putting his arms about his waist. At first he thought the boy was just turning in his sleep. But then Terry's cheek came against his and his lips began kissing his temples and ears. Richie was quickly aroused but he pretended to sleep on. Terry's hand, toying at first with Richie's nipples, moved down to his stomach where his fingers explored his navel like five little phalluses searching for a way to get in. At last he grasped Richie's penis through the underwear slit and began rubbing it from swollen tip to rooted base, his fingers leaving it from time to time to entwine themselves in the pubic mat, feel and cup the moving testes and then return to Richie's cock.

It had been a month since Richie had last experienced conscious orgasm with another person, and now it was all he could do to keep still in the rush of combustion that greeted Terry's touch. He wondered if the boy thought it strange that he sleep through all of this supporting a heavy erection but if such suspicions entered Terry's head they didn't stop his increasingly passionate caresses. His kissing became wetter, more intimately centered upon Richie's mouth. Terry drew up his loins, bared his cock, wet it with spit, locked it against Richie's leg and began to move.

Terry's mouth worked on Richie's lips. Terry's hand flew over the now self-lubricated surfaces of Richie's cock. Richie quickly approached climax, worrying about what to do with his ejaculation. But then, just before crisis, Terry released him, sprang up, skipped out of the room, ran to the bathroom for his own emission. After that Terry returned to his dormitory bed and Richie was left alone to deal with the turgid residue of his uncompleted feelings.

Jim came home for two weeks at the end of August. Richie was amazed at how much older he looked. Part of it, of course, was the uniform, which was new and fit him well and which, for some reason, he

insisted on wearing (these were the early years of the war in Viet Nam), and part of it was the short haircut which alone seemed to have served notice on his adolescence. But Jim's face was also somehow craggier, the skin thickening, the jaw taking a firmer set. He didn't smile any more the way he used to: the big open grin had disappeared and now his lips just parted and drew back over strong, white teeth while his eyes continued to probe, doubt and look a little sad.

From a community dropout who had refused to help his town baseball team, Jim now became a local hero, at least among the grown-ups. There was a round of parties in his honor. Jim was polite with his parents' friends but slightly ill at ease, Richie realized. With his former classmates there was an even greater measure of reserve; they were still schoolboys and their preoccupations were no longer his. It was only to Richie that he could speak of this, but during this time of lionizing the two boys could find little chance to be alone together.

Finally at one of the parties Hank Hayes took Richie aside and pressed a house key into his hand.

"My wife and I will be away for the next three days," Hayes said. "There's fresh linen on the bed. Use it, but use discretion."

Richie thanked Hayes with his eyes and was promptly dragged off to listen, with Jim, to another story about World War Two.

That night at Hayes's, lying on the floor in front of a cheerful fire, talking, listening, arguing, philosophizing endlessly, their shoulders, arms, hips, legs touching, Jim at last started to unwind and Richie began to live again.

"Yeah, this is good," Jim said. "Like it's the only way I have of touching home base again. You're still left."

"And always will be."

"Poor Richie. Good old Rich!"

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing."

"Have you been... making out with anyone?"

"Whores sometimes. It's better than nothing."

"No other guys, then?"

Jim shook his head. "I had offers. One sergeant in basic made it sort of rough for me because I wouldn't jump in the sack with him, but then he found another kid that would and it took the pressure off me."

"Did you hate him?"

"In basic you hate all non-coms. You get used to living with hatred. Maybe combat won't be that much worse."

"Combat?" Richie's heart quickened.

Jim nodded. "Southeast Asia."

"Jesus Christ!" Richie said. Then, "Can't you get sent some place else?"

"I volunteered."

"Why?"

"I don't know. I want to *do* something. I want to be where the action is. I can't stand still very long any more."

"You act like the fool-killer's after you."

Jim smiled. "Maybe he is. But he's not going to catch us tonight." And Jim threw an arm around Richie's neck, crooked it and stared into Richie's eyes. Behind the twin fires in Jim's dark pupils Richie saw the lust gather. "Let's go to bed," Jim said. "We got a lot of screwing to catch up on."

Jim had gained enormously in physical strength. His neck had thickened where the tendons and muscles ran down to his shoulders. His arms had toughened, his thighs expanded, his calves swollen.

Even his cock was bigger; his erection came on harder and the thrust that drove his hips was stronger and more implacable. Jim took, demanded, the active part. Struggling beneath him in their first, very brief cycle of love-making, Richie felt wrung out in the crush of Jim's terrible need. After emission they rested with Jim still in him for two, three minutes, then Jim began again, driving slower this time but harder and deeper. Richie tried to roll on his side but Jim held him firmly as he was, thrusting strong and true until he rose and drove through another orgasm, biting hard into Richie's neck while his loins drove on in hot, wet, moving fury. Then, only then, did they roll apart to murmur absently in the firelight about childhood, school friends and escapades. At last they came together more gently, and Jim took time and care to mouth Richie's masculinity before rolling over himself for Richie to enter. And when that was over they slept.

A week later school started. Richie was a senior now, and a prefect, and master of his own corridor. Eleven seventh and eighth graders, all entering or just inside the threshold of puberty, all in the confused state of intense longing for undefined bodies of many different types and ages, were in his charge and care, subject to his command, constantly in his view. Among these was a troubled boy by the name of Ian Kirk.

Ian's marks were terrible, his language even worse, and his conduct so bad that he had been on the verge of expulsion ever since his arrival two years earlier in the sixth grade.

Ian respected no man or boy, and no man or boy cared much for Ian. Occasionally some of his classmates would join him in some episode of his disruptive activities, but he usually went his own defiant way. At fourteen he was already a loner.

Late one afternoon, about the time everyone was heading for the showers, Richie heard a loud commotion in the science classroom which was just below his hall. He ran down to investigate and found a husky junior by the name of Cliff Benson slapping Ian Kirk around. Ian was wildly flailing with his fists and a torrent of foul language streamed out of his mouth.

"Cut that!" Richie said. He grabbed Cliff's arm. "Get out of here! Go beat on somebody your own size!"

Cliff drew away from Richie, still holding Ian by the collar. "Nobody says to me what he said!"

"Let go," Richie said. When Cliff didn't, he delivered a karate chop to the junior's forearm. Cliff yelped in pain and released Ian's shirt. "When I say quit, quit!" Richie said. Then he pushed Cliff out the door and locked it. "I'm sorry about that," he said to Ian. "What he was doing wasn't right."

By now Ian had recovered himself a little. Although damp with sweat and the lower part of his face smeared with blood, he stared back at Richie, eyes ablaze. "Screw you!" he said.

Richie smiled. "Is that the thanks I get?"

"Yeah!"

"Well, okay, want me to call Cliff back?"

"Smart ass! Fucking stuck-up big-shot senior prefect prick!"

"Man, you'd think I'd been knocking you around."

"You might as well," the boy said. "Clean up your room! Get to bed! You're late to study hall! Shit!"

"Go ahead."

"What?"

"Let it out. Swear. Get it off your chest. We're alone so I guess you're safe."

"I don't want your goddamned sympathy."

"Well, you got it whether you like it or not. Come here." "Why?"

"You're bleeding blood. I'm going to clean you up."

"What for?"

"Because I can't stand the sight of it."

"Liar!"

"And I don't want it messing up my hall."

"Do you think I'm stupid or something?"

"Okay, then, come here because I tell you to."

Richie turned his back, wet a paper towel at the lab sink and when he turned around, to his surprise, Ian was standing close behind him. Richie put a hand on the top of Ian's head, tilted up the boy's face and started wiping away the crusted blood, cleaning the cuts. Ian grimaced in pain but didn't pull away.

At last Richie was through. "There," he said. "You look almost human." He ruffled Ian's hair. Ian shook him off and stood back.

“Now,” Richie said, “what did you say to get that bully-boy so mad?”

“None of your fucking business.”

“As your hall prefect it *is* my business if I want to make it.”

“I’ll fight my own battles.”

Richie grinned. “Well, you sure were trying to, I’ll say that. Now for some friendly advice: don’t shoot off your mouth to people who like to pound on people.”

“And my friendly advice is don’t give me friendly advice.”

Richie still worked in the camping program for the junior high boys. In late October he set out with one faculty member and eleven younger kids in two pick-up trucks loaded with canoes on an overnight trip to the Everglades. Saturday evening found them in a deserted camping area from which a myriad of waterways fanned out into the heart of the great marshland park. It turned chilly and, after sunset, a full moon heaved itself out of the eastern swamps and rose into a cloudless sky.

The moonlight, cold and bright, reflecting on the gravel kept waking Richie. Around one o’clock he opened his eyes and saw someone crouching not more than fifteen feet from where he lay.

He studied the figure for a moment. Whoever it was wasn’t very big. He wore a sailor’s cap, denim jacket and pants, white track shoes and his arms were tightly clutching his chest.

Richie coughed. The head lifted and Richie said, “Ian. What in hell are you doing up?”

Ian stood and walked closer. “My bedroll wasn’t in the truck.”

“How come?”

Ian shrugged.

“Don’t tell me,” Richie said. “You didn’t bother to put it in.”

“It was their idea I come on this trip.”

“Man, your logic is something else. You look cold.”

“I’m freezing.”

“Don’t you have any warm clothes?”

“No.”

“Why don’t you get in one of the trucks?”

“They’re locked,”

“Okay.” Despite the exasperation in his voice, Richie couldn’t ignore a little feeling of excitement rising in his heart and loins. “Take off your shoes and climb in with me.”

Ian studied Richie and the bedroll for a few seconds. Then he shrugged, sat down and began untying his laces.

“If they hadn’t been so fucking stubborn,” Ian said, “I’d be in my sack at school and you’d be rid of me.”

Richie lowered the zipper and Ian crawled in and zipped up. He lay on his side with his back to Richie. There was so little room, now, that Richie had to fold himself against Ian’s body spoon-style and drape an arm over his chest.

“I’ll try not to wake you up,” Ian said. “I guess it’s not your fault I’m along.”

Ian seemed to go right off to sleep, but Richie couldn’t. Ian was, in spite of his troublesome temperament, an attractive, vital boy. With that taut, young body hard against his (buttocks, in fact, pressed snug against his loins), Richie found himself quickly in a state of arousal, a condition which Ian, asleep, didn’t share.

As the night ran its course, Ian turned several times from one side to the other, and when he did Richie rolled with him; there just wasn’t room to sleep back to back, face to face or side by side.

Just before dawn Richie dozed, and awakened with his face in Ian’s hair. The sweet, erotic scent filled him; instinctively he tightened his grip on Ian’s chest. Then he opened his eyes to the red world of

sunrise, and as he did Ian turned around and looked at him over his shoulder.

“Hi,” Richie yawned.

“Morning.”

“Sleep okay?”

“Sort of. Thanks. Want me to get up? I can walk around or something now to keep warm.”

“Don’t sweat it. When we hear others moving we’ll roll out.”

“Aren’t you scared they’ll think we been shacking up?”

“Not especially.”

“Anybody ever make you do queer things with him?”

“Not many people make me do things I don’t really want to do,” Richie said carefully.

“I’ve been had.”

“Against your will?”

Ian shrugged. “Last year I got good marks in one course because of it.”

“Was that the deal you had?”

“Part of it. The other part was that he’d see I missed every movie and get on ever shit detail because of my cutting up if I didn’t go along with him. So I figured why fight it when screwing was so easy.”

“And nice?”

“Does that disgust you?”

“The sex, no. Of course not.”

“The other?”

“Let’s say I think it’s a pretty poor reason for making out.”

“What’s a good reason?”

“There’s a lot of them. Love, enjoyment, release of tension. In that order.”

“How’s your tension these days?”

“About the same as most guys’. Are you trying to start something?”

“Maybe.”

“Don’t you think I’d be stupid to get sex going with a kid in my corridor?”

“Might be a good deal for me.”

“That’s what I mean. My control would be shot.”

Ian grinned. “I know.”

Richie thought their brief closeness might be a turning point in Ian’s behavior, but that same morning, after they had eaten breakfast, Ian simply didn’t set off with the rest of them in the canoes. He wasn’t missed until Richie counted noses and came up one short.

“I’ll go back for him,” Richie told the teacher. “You all go on ahead — slowly.”

He found Ian sitting on the tailgate of one of the trucks.

“Come on,” Richie said.

Ian shook his head.

“We can’t just leave you here alone.”

“That’s your problem.”

“Look, I’ve had about enough of this. Get off that truck and come here.”

Ian gave Richie the finger. Richie grabbed him by the shoulder and threw him off onto the ground, and Ian attacked. Richie, of course, was older and stronger and had the advantage of reach, but Ian was big enough to be taken seriously. He fought with everything he had — fists, elbows, knees, feet, even spit, which flew in Richie’s face like sparse desert rain, until the younger boy’s mouth ran dry from panting and fury.

At last Richie had Ian spread-eagle beneath him. “Had enough?” he asked.

Ian shook his head and spat once again. Richie grabbed both of Ian's wrists in one hand and with the other picked up some Everglades mud and rubbed it in Ian's mouth. Then he hauled the spluttering boy to his feet and shoved him in the direction of the canoe.

"Climb in. Sit still. You tip us over and I'll leave you there for the alligators."

Again Richie got the finger, but Ian did as he was told, and even helped paddle.

There were several other incidents before the day was through. Ian hadn't made any sandwiches that morning for himself, and when they finally reached a little dry mound and were sitting in the shade to eat lunch, he got mad when no one wished to share with him. Ian stalked off through the trees and Richie had to go after him before he stumbled into some soft place in the swamp and disappeared forever. Again Ian fought and kicked and again, of course, he lost.

"Let me up, prick!" Ian yelled.

"Not till you promise you'll quit being so hard to get along with."

For answer Ian again spat in Richie's face. Richie wasn't as angered by this childish act as others might have been. An attractive boy's spit wasn't really repulsive to him. After all, saliva is pretty intimately involved with kissing and other sexual acts. But Ian hardly meant it as a gesture of intimacy, so Richie rolled the boy over and twisted an arm behind his back until Ian was yelling in pain and begged him to stop. Then Richie let him up. They both knelt by some water and washed their faces, and Richie said, "One of the reasons I came after you was to let you have my other sandwich. It's there in the tree crotch."

Without saying a word of thanks, Ian walked over and devoured it.

On the way back another boy shared their canoe with Richie and Ian. When Ian sat in the middle he took to splashing water on the boy in front of him. After this had happened a dozen times the other boy got mad and started a fight. Between breaking up the fight and keeping their canoe from capsizing, Richie had his hands full.

By the time they got back to where the trucks were parked everyone was weary and thirsty and thoroughly tired of Ian.

"I'm never going on a trip again," said the boy who had been in their canoe, jerking his thumb in Ian's direction, "if *he* comes on it."

The Everglades trip was just the beginning of Richie's conflict with Ian. Their next encounter was over the routine Sunday morning room cleanup and inspection. Ten minutes before the hall master was due, Richie found Ian lying in his underwear on his bed reading a comic book.

"Well, what's this all about?" he asked Ian. "Are you defying society or something?"

"Go flick yourself," said Ian, turning a page.

Several other boys who lived in the hall came up behind Richie. Instead of getting angry this time, Richie laughed. "Well, if you'll show me how that's technically possible I might try it. In the meantime, let's get this pig-pen cleaned up."

Ian didn't move.

"Okay," Richie said, "if you won't do it maybe these fellows will, to protect their privileges."

Richie turned around and winked. The privileges were small — watermelon for dessert, evenings doing homework in their rooms rather than in study hall — but in the competitive nature of things the boys took them seriously.

"Sure," Ian said. "If they want to clean it up, let them." And he marched off to the recreation room with his comic.

Under Richie's direction the other boys picked up all the junk off Ian's floor and in his closet and bureau, soiled clothes, papers and books, and piled them in the trash can at the end of the hall. Ian's blanket and sheets followed. Then they dusted quickly, swept, pulled the spread over the bare bed and left the room looking better than it had in weeks. It passed inspection along with the others and the hall's

privileged status was saved, but when Ian discovered later what had happened, he stalked up to Richie, who was reading, lying on his stomach on the grass outside his dormitory, and kicked him in the ribs.

Richie gasped and went after Ian and shoved him up against the dormitory wall. "Christ, Ian, that really hurt," he said.

"Good!"

"You could break a guy's ribs doing that."

"That's what I had in mind."

"I ought to beat you to a bloody pulp."

"Go ahead. Try."

"Naw," Richie said, losing his anger. "I just wish I knew what was eating you."

"Throwing my stuff away, that's what!"

"Well, you better start cleaning your room, then."

"Yeah, yeah, I know." Ian started to relax. "Let go. I'm through being mad." For some reason Richie believed him. He released Ian. "What you reading?"

"*The Lord of the Rings.*"

"Is it any good?"

"Yes."

"Is it dirty?"

"No."

"Couldn't be much fun, then. Do you like to just lay around reading books?"

"Sometimes."

"I guess you think I'm an awful prick."

Richie met Ian's eyes which were raised to his, now, full of cool, gray, intelligent appraisal. "You make things awful hard for yourself."

"I gotta do what I gotta do. You know that, don't you?"

"It's beginning to look that way."

"And I don't really hate you. In fact, I think you're... less of a prick than almost any guy in school."

Suddenly Ian was overcome with embarrassment and he fled.

One other peculiarity Richie discovered about Ian was that he was a sleepwalker. One evening there was a crash outside his door and it was Ian stumbling into the trash can looking for the bathroom, dead asleep. Another time, on his way back from having sex with Johnny, he found Ian wandering around under the poinsettia trees. Then one night he awakened to find Ian crawling into bed with him.

"Hey," Richie said.

Ian pulled the sheet over his shoulders, turned on his side facing Richie and sighed a deep sigh of sleep.

"Ian, you're in my bed. Get up."

Ian didn't move. Richie shook him by the shoulder. Ian still didn't move. So Richie got up and carried the sleeping boy down the hall to his room and tucked him into his own bed. The next morning, as usual, Ian didn't remember a thing about his nocturnal wanderings.

The rest of the autumn Richie's closeness to Ian coexisted with violent antagonism. Ian's fury, when he fought with Richie, seemed to be blinder than ever, but he was leaving the other boys alone, now, for the most part and both his marks and general conduct were improving — somewhat. When he tangled with Richie it was as though he did so with a measure of trust that Richie could defend himself and, in turn, wouldn't really hurt him.

And more and more Ian tried to turn each physical clash into a sexual act as well. Even after Richie pinned him to the ground, Ian would refuse to admit defeat. He would go limp under Richie's body, often

cursing him, and when they finally did break apart, Richie usually found himself fully aroused.

On the other hand, Richie sometimes awakened nights to find Ian sleeping close against him, head resting warmly on his shoulder, or even lying full on top of him with a hearty erection. Richie became less and less certain that all of these visits were the result of Ian's legendary sleep-walking.

One night when Ian was getting more than usually sexy, he rolled the boy off of him and shook him hard.

"Now, quit it!" Richie whispered. "Just quit it!"

"What?" Ian said in apparent confusion.

"You know. Making out."

"I didn't even know I was here."

"I won't argue about that, but you got a rod on and you were trying to use it."

"What's so bad about that?" Ian was suddenly very much awake. "Why you so fucking prissy-ass about sex, anyway?"

"Because..."

"I been here nights when there was nobody in your bed. What were you doing then, huh?"

"None of your business."

"I don't see a whole lot of girls around school. If you're shacking up with some other kid, I'll kill him. Or maybe you go for the sissy type. Maybe..."

"Shut up."

"...you want..."

"Just..."

"...me to swish..."

"...shut..."

"...around like Hughie..."

"...up!"

Richie slapped a hand over Ian's mouth, for the boy was making far too much noise. At the same time Ian reached for Richie's cock, which was rock hard and poking through the slit in his pajama bottoms, grabbed it and held on.

"No, Ian. Now listen to me. I don't care whether you agree with me, or even understand me, but sex is something both parties got to permit. I'm not going to permit it. So quit jacking me off."

Ian shook his head under Richie's hand, at the same time trying to bite Richie's palm and spit through the contact.

"If I take my hand off your mouth, will you keep your voice down?"

Ian nodded. Released, he wiped his lips on his shoulder.

"Now, take your hand off my cock."

Ian shook his head and held on. "I had a dream about you last night," Ian said.

"Oh, Jesus, here we go..."

"We were on a beach, all by ourselves, and we were making out. I had my legs wrapped around your neck and you were sucking my cock like it was an ice-cream cone. I don't know as I could suck this..." — and Ian gave an extra squeeze with his hand — "...because it's so extra big. Well, okay, I could get the head in and a little bit more, and I could do all sorts of neat things with my tongue right where it feels the best... Hey, Richie, what's this sticky on my fingers? So you *weren't* with another kid tonight. You had a load! You did but you don't anymore. Yippee!"

Still gasping after his sudden orgasm, Richie just managed to get his hand back over Ian's mouth before the whole corridor woke up.

That was as close as Ian came to seducing Richie. From then on whenever Richie felt Ian creeping into his bed he led or carried the boy back to his own room — and he made sure he had lots of loving from some of the other boys who were not in his charge. Finding a boy to make love with was hardly a problem, Richie knew. Unlike later times, when American society became obsessed with stopping boys from having any kind of sex at all, this was a period of relative sexual permissiveness. Television preachers hadn't yet entered politics except, perhaps, in a few southern states; professionals in the mind industry hadn't yet discovered that proselytizing against "child sexual abuse" was an easy way to tap public funds and become famous. Boys had their sex willy-nilly, with each other, a man, a girl if they were lucky, and didn't worry too much about it.

Just before Christmas Ian went on an orgy of destruction. He got up one Sunday night and pulled all the books off the library shelves and dumped them in a heap on the floor. Next he went to one of the fish tanks and let all the live specimens swim away into the sea. After that he went back to bed and slept soundly through the rest of the night.

The next morning Richie watched Ian all through assembly. When it was over he drew Ian aside and said, "Why did you do it?"

"Do what?" Ian looked gloomy and dispirited. He wouldn't meet Richie's eyes.

"You know."

"Because... I want to get myself kicked out."

"In God's name, why?"

"Why not?" Ian lifted his eyes. "There's nothing going for me here. You've seen to that."

"I thought... Oh, skip it." He looked up and saw the headmaster approaching.

That evening Ian was hustled into a taxi and a few hours later he was winging north to his home in Chicago.

With Jim gone, Richie didn't have the heart to return home for the Christmas holidays. Instead, he accepted a job at the school when one of the groundsmen went on vacation. He wrote Jim every few days and, surprisingly often, he got a letter back. He was piously careful about their correspondence. Richie typed his own letters and preserved a carbon copy. He filed Jim's sweat-marked, rain-stained flimsy paper air mail letters (often written in tents, jungle hammocks, on the move sitting against some jungle tree) in careful order.

The boys returned and suddenly Richie was busy, happily so, with the life of the school. He worked hard at his studies, played hard and well in the school sports, was elected president of the student council and gradually came to be thought of as the outstanding boy in the school that year. His marks were excellent. He continued to have sex with a regular circle of a half dozen younger boys (who were also getting it on with some of Richie's classmates), but Richie's heart really remained with Jim, waiting for him to be released from the ugly jungle war.

"I don't know when that'll be," Jim wrote. "Sometimes I even doubt there's a normal world to return to. I mean a world where a guy can walk around barehanded and not look at every tree and bush and rock and think that some damned kid that doesn't even speak your language is hiding there just waiting for a chance to drill you, and not look at every smiling, sexy face and know that seduction can mean a knife in the ribs. Sure, there's a U.S.A., but at times it seems pretty remote."

On a hot day in early June, Richie, together with his classmates, stood up in the assembly room and received his diploma. He had to give a little talk, as council president, to the boys and teachers and parents (excepting his own who, together with Jim's, were in Australia), and then suddenly he realized he was eighteen, healthy, a free man and his own agent.

He had an airline ticket to Albany, but at the last minute he decided to cash it in on a second-hand motorcycle and make his own circuitous way home.

It took him a week, a week of noise, sunshine, wind, rain, the smell of asphalt, dust in the face, constantly changing scenery. Even though he had winged his way over it several times, Richie had never realized Florida was so long. He was amazed at its surfeit of ugliness and beauty, its variety and abundance of proud, still, lonely places and crowded, man-made, vital towns.

He headed north up the Florida peninsula, hugging the Atlantic shore as closely as he could. At Charleston he cut across to the mountains, where rain overtook him. For an hour he huddled in the lee of a road sign, then set off for the nearest town and holed into a motel until the bad weather blew over, or, rather, the worst of it. For several hours the next day he crouched over his handlebars riding the thin edge of the pavement below the gray line of rain clouds. Cars passed him, festooned with spray. Then the sun broke through and he climbed through laurel and rhododendron forests up the spine of the Appalachians and down into Tennessee.

Two days later Richie came to the outskirts of Chicago and headed north toward the wealthy suburbs.

The Kirk estate was almost indecently large, even by Chicago standards. Richie, coming from a humbler home, felt the power and privilege hanging over him like a degenerative disease, in the beetling gatehouse of brick so old it was almost black, in the uniformed gate-keeper who questioned him as his brash motorcycle idled between his thighs.

“Mister Ian is certainly in but he may not be receiving visitors.”

“How come?” Richie asked. “Is he sick?”

“No.” The gate-keeper smiled. It was the tooth-lacking grin of an old man’s envy and dislike. “Mister Ian has been grounded, by his parents at the request of the local police. Who shall I say is calling?”

“Richie Big Prick McAlister.” The voice was from above. They both looked up to see Ian sitting at the top of the gate post, legs wrapped around an ornamental ball of cement.

“Mister Ian!” the gate-keeper exclaimed.

“He’s okay,” said Ian calmly. “He isn’t one of my hoody friends, although he could sure teach all of them a trick or two.”

“You going to sit up there all day?” Richie asked.

“Is there anything worth my cock coming down for?” Ian spread his legs to show the tightly restricted form of his masculinity.

“Disgusting!” the gate-keeper muttered.

“Probably not,” Richie said. He turned his bike around. “Guess I’ll see what’s doing down at the loop.”

“Wait,” Ian said. He got up and walked along the fence, then swung down on an overhanging limb to the ground. Ian had grown a couple of inches since the preceding fall. His arms were becoming lanky. The boy looked generally skinnier, paler, altogether less healthy.

“You understand,” the gate-keeper said in an undertone to Richie, “he’s not to leave the property.”

“What’s wrong, Pops?” Ian said, coming up behind them. “Haven’t I been slipping you enough lately?” He jumped onto the seat behind Richie.

“You got my promise,” Richie told the gate-keeper.

They drove down a winding gravel road that curved through a small woods, then, at Ian’s direction, they turned off on a path. They parked the motorcycle and walked to a wild place beside a tiny brook.

“I bring girls here,” Ian said. “This nature shit really turns them on. I even got blankets so they don’t get their white little butts dirty when they wiggle them under me in the myrtle.”

“That’s considerate.”

“That’s practical. As you can see, I’m still raising hell.”

“You getting any fun out of it?”

“What do you mean?”

“I never figured you got your money’s worth out of it back at school.”

“Those kids were a bunch of symps, present company excluded. Anyhow, I’ve forgotten about Florida.” Ian stepped into the underbrush, opened a wooden box, took out his blankets and threw them at Richie. “Anywhere’s all right. Nobody comes down here.”

“Wait a minute. I didn’t say anything about shacking up.”

“Oh, for Christ sake,” Ian said, “don’t try to pull that prefect stuff around here. Spread those blankets and unbluckle.”

Richie threw the blankets in Ian’s face. Ian charged and they fell fighting. As usual, Richie had him spread-eagle beneath him in no time (but noticed the increased strength, the new power of the boy’s growing sinew); as usual, Ian spat upwards on him in defeat.

“Let go of me,” Ian panted.

“You give?”

“No.”

“Then how do I know you’re safe?”

“I’m not. Let me up!”

“If you promise...”

“Or get the blankets so we can shack up like we should.”

“Look, Ian, you’re not...”

“Sure, I am.”

“...calling the shots between us.”

“Look who’s shooting.”

“I...”

“Get off me, spermy drawers.”

“...just want to make you...”

“Go ahead. You got me down.”

“...realize I came all the way up here...”

“Sob.”

“...to find out how you were doing...”

“I’m touched.”

“...as I’d want any friend of mine...”

“Bull shit.”

“...to do for me.”

“So, you did it.”

“Now I wonder why I came.”

“So do I. You going to get off me or are we going to do slick leg in our pants?”

Richie released Ian and they sat up beside each other to brush the soil off their arms and bodies. Suddenly Ian threw himself at Richie and began kissing him hard and wetly on the mouth. Richie repulsed him and Ian broke away.

“I like to went nuts when I got home,” Ian said, scowling at the ground. “I kept thinking about what I was missing. You probably plugged every boy’s ass in school and sucked every pecker until it popped. I was back to an empty bed, all night, every night. After a couple of weeks they sent me to this private reform school place. Nine men ran the thing. One liked women, five were cornhole artists, three sucked cocks. They called this ‘affectionate communication’. All the kids were climbing the walls.”

“Why didn’t you just turn them in?”

“We wanted to get out. If we screwed real sweetly with our keepers, they’d eventually tell our folks we were rehabilitated. If we resisted, we weren’t communicating and they’d suggest we stay another term. Bear in mind we never saw a skirt. You’d be surprised how cooperative that makes you.”

Richie put a hand to Ian's shoulder and began stroking it absently.

"There was Kitchener, the Phys-Ed man, and his calisthenics squad. Push-ups, sit-ups, knee bends, naked, of course, and sometimes he was milking you with his hand as you went up and down. When you balked there were punishments. One of my buddies, Tommy Baines, was held down on the wrestling mat by four guys, one at each of his wrists and ankles, while Kitchener made a boner on him with his hands, then ringed his pecker with bug repellent, then pulled the wings off a half dozen beetles and let them loose to walk around on his cock tip, buzzing with their stumps, until Tommy just about went off his rocker with the tickling."

"Did this really happen?" Richie asked, incredulous.

"I saw it. I was getting out in two weeks. I was holding Tommy's right arm.

"Then there was Mother Taetz. He had to kiss all the boys good night and pat your crotch. He taught English, and it turns out all the poets were fairies and all of us were poets, though you couldn't have proved it by me. Funny thing was he really liked us, even the ugly guys. I guess looks didn't matter much because we had to mount him from behind anyhow. His asshole was as sloppy as an old condom.

"Then there was..."

"Shut up," Richie said. "Grab that blanket."

"You grab it."

Richie grasped Ian instead and put his mouth over Ian's mouth, moved it wetly over Ian's face. His hands, helped by Ian's hands, came to Ian's crotch, felt the erection beneath the cloth, dug at the buttons to release it.

"Forget the blanket," Richie said, the blood pounding in his ears. He ripped off his own shirt, breathless with desire, feeling Ian's hands, equally impatient, struggle with the buttons to his fly.

"For you I will," Ian said. "I'll dirty my ass... *Cheez!*"

Richie's mouth had come around Ian's cock tip and was sucking, tonguing on the hot, sweaty flesh. One of his elbows had knocked Ian backwards, and the younger boy lay gasping in the myrtle, trousers half-lowered on his thighs.

"Oh, Christ on a hot-rod!" Ian swore. "I'm gonna... I'm coming... Here *goes!*"

And then it was over for both of them. Although Richie's penis had touched nothing in the final moments, the excitement had been too great and his own loins echoed the ejaculatory pulses that filled his mouth with Ian's long-pent-up, sweet and barely viable sperm.

A week later Richie drove into his home town just as a heavy thunderstorm broke over the western ridges and sent the villagers scattering into their houses and shops. He tried all the doors of his home and found them locked, then drove to the Mansfield house, head down against the rain, only to find Jim's home deserted as well. A few minutes later he was in Hank Hayes' kitchen shedding his soaked-through jacket in the teacher's strangely solemn stare.

"Scotch or bourbon," Hayes asked.

"I don't drink."

"I'm out of rye. What'll it be?"

"Thanks anyhow, but..."

"Scotch treats you better." Hayes was already cracking ice cubes and dropping them into a tall tumbler and Richie began to feel a chill that was entirely unrelated to the weather steal around his heart.

"I haven't been in town more than ten minutes," Richie said.

"I know that."

"My folks and Jim's are still away, I guess."

"Here. You don't need to nurse it. Let's sit in the living room. They'll be back tomorrow."

"All of them?"

“Yes.”

Their eyes met and Richie felt the grip on his heart grow tighter and colder.

“Except,” Richie whispered.

“We will honor him in church tomorrow evening.”

He didn't know if it was thunder outside or something erupting deep within his mind, but there was a terrible explosion somewhere and then a definite lack of blood in his head. He couldn't keep his knees straight. He was slipping, the tumbler slipping from his hand and smashing on the floor. Just before he fainted he felt Hayes' arms come about his back and with quick competence break his fall, and then he entered the blackness which, consciously and asleep surrounded him for the next six months of his life.

The boy was fifteen and his real name was Alan but everyone called him Cricket because he was lean and fast and not very tall and his voice at the time still had a childish ring. His specialty was slalom. Richie saw him first at the top of the mountain early on a Sunday morning, splitting off from his high school friends to ski the steeper western bowls. He caught the boy's eye and said, "I'll follow you," and pushed off behind him.

For several minutes they sank together, through clouds of billowing white powder. Cricket skied beautifully, with cool, calculated skill. Near the bottom of the bowl the snow was beginning to melt and grow heavy. Cricket veered to the right and then rose and stopped on a little ridge studded with pine trees. Richie came up beside him.

"You must be from the east," Cricket said, looking him over and glancing at his ski equipment.

"How can you tell?"

"You're used to skiing hard pack. In this stuff you've got to let your tips float. Weight back a little more."

"Thanks."

"But you looked good just the same."

They continued to the bottom and rode up together on the lift, talking technique and snow. Richie looked at Cricket's face. There was nothing remarkable about it, except that it seemed a little young. The mouth was strong. One of his front teeth was chipped. His nose was straight and his gray eyes alert and intelligent, if not overly ready to smile. A lock of dark brown hair protruded from the base of a blue knit toque that came to a point a half foot above his head and seemed to mock the already lean lines of his face. And Richie thought (staring at him, seeing his breath whiten the thin Colorado air) that he had never seen anyone — except for Jim, of course — who looked so simply nice.

They skied together for the rest of the morning, then Cricket left for lunch and home. Richie looked for him in the afternoon, and when he was reasonably sure the boy hadn't come back to the mountain, he climbed to the north notch and ran down the fresh snow of Gulliver's Draw, bottoming out five miles below town. He hitchhiked back and arrived at his rooming house just as the city lights were coming on.

The next day he saw Cricket going to school. He waved at him from the other side of the street, shouldered his skis, crossed over and fell into step beside him. But they seemed to have little to say to each other, so they walked together silently for a couple of blocks and parted at the high school entrance. That day Richie sought out the deep powder and went to work.

Tuesday morning he was watching for Cricket, sitting in the window nursing his breakfast coffee, when he heard the boy's voice behind him. "Dad says don't worry. Just keep on giving him the pills, like it says on the label." Cricket was walking out of the kitchen with the landlady and her little dog.

"I didn't know your old man was a vet," Richie said, getting up.

"He isn't. But a doctor that can set bones can worm a dog too."

They went out into the street.

"Don't you ski during the week?" Richie asked.

"I will this afternoon."

"When?"

"Two-thirty. Meet me on top around three."

"Fine."

That morning Richie stood on the mountaintop and instead of looking across range after white range of Rockies rising into the cloudless blue, he found himself peering down to the town and seeking out the square old high school where Cricket was studying. At midmorning and at noon and then again at quarter after two he saw little black figures pour through the entrances and fan out over the white frozen ground.

At quarter to three he went to the top of the lift and waited, leaning forward on his poles, looking down the moving line of chairs.

At last he saw Cricket's toque rising toward him and then the boy was bending down beside him to snap tight his boots.

They started down. This time, to Richie, everything came right. First Cricket was ahead, then Richie caught up with him and passed, and then Cricket crossed his trail and pulled up beside him and they ran parallel, seven, ten feet apart, switching back and forth, down the headwall of the cirque, gradually straightening their tracks and as the gradient lessened, until finally they leveled out at the bottom and cut to a stop.

"You're getting it," Cricket said, eyes wide with quiet exhilaration. "Your pole plant's a little early."

"Good. I'll work on it."

"But that last bit, where we made it together, was perfect."

They loafed down the easy valley run to the bottom of the lift and started up again. There were very few skiers that afternoon. Richie rested his arm along the back of the chair behind Cricket. He felt Cricket's knee against his and he dropped his hand to Cricket's shoulder. And then suddenly they were looking at each other and he was contracting his arm about Cricket's neck and drawing him close. Cricket didn't turn aside. Their lips touched. Richie smelled the rich, sweet, human smell of mouth and sweat and dried wind tears and a trace of soap.

"Hey, kids, no making out on the lift!"

They jerked apart and Richie saw one of the ski bums that put up at his rooming house turn on the crest of a ridge below them and disappear down the other side. Thank heavens for the sexual ambiguity of ski clothes, Richie thought. He dug with a pole at some ice packed around his toe release. Cricket bowed his head and stared at the tops of his skis.

"I'm sorry," Richie said.

"It's okay," Cricket said.

"I didn't mean to do that."

"Sure."

They rode the rest of the way in silence.

At the top Cricket's classmates were waiting for him. They begged him to join them on at least one run down the easier trails. Cricket looked at Richie and Richie drew away, moving toward the bowls.

'Here's your chance,' Richie thought, 'to get the hell away from me. Take it, and don't stare back at me!'

One by one the boys disappeared down the mountain, shouting, skiing too fast for their skill, the last ones calling to Cricket, who finally stood alone looking at Richie. And then Richie turned his back and when he looked over his shoulder a moment later Cricket was gone.

Now Richie felt cold and empty and more alone than at any time since Jim's death. What had he done to himself? How had he got into this state? He had seen a boy and skied with him and walked him to school twice and finally fumbled a kiss. And everything he had built in the last eight months was falling: the separateness, the isolation, the feel of lean, hard muscles riding true upon snowfields until now successfully standing in for the use of that other lean, hard muscle that of late had merely acted as a pliant piece of plumbing. Everything now bore the bitter aftertaste of sickness, the ultimate whiteness of death.

Richie spat. Tears welled in his eyes, anger in his stomach. He pointed his skis straight down the fall line and pushed off and said to the wind, as it began to pick up and tear at his ears, lean and cold as an icicle, if I don't kill myself now I never will and it won't be for lack of trying.'

But life had other plans for Richie. He remembered the snow flying deep about his legs and then his hips. He remembered reaching up to keep his poles free, leaning down the slope against the tugging powder. He remembered closing his eyes, and then a thundering blackness, and then there was noise and jiggling and pain in his head and chest and then blackness again. When he opened his eyes he was looking

at a light fixture on the ceiling. He knew his room at home didn't have a light there. He opened his mouth to call for his mother and ask what was going on but instead a strange man's face appeared above him, gray-haired, lean, with weather-beaten skin, deep wrinkles about the eyes. The face said, "Are you seeing me double?"

Richie shook his head, then shuddered with the resulting pain.

"Good. I'm Doctor Ardley, Alan's father."

"Alan?" Richie stammered.

"Cricket. The boy you ski with."

Things were beginning to clear. "I'm in a hospital," Richie said.

"And will be for a week at least. And you owe your life to my son."

"But..." Richie tried to think, his thoughts moving thickly through pain and dizziness. "He followed the trail east with the other kids."

Dr. Ardley shook his head. "They came out on a cat walk just in time to see you take that header over the cliff. The other boys got the ski patrol, but Alan ran straight to you, risking his own innocent hide across that avalanche face, and pulled you out of the snow drift before you suffocated. So it didn't work."

"What didn't work?"

"Alan said your tracks were straight as rock spall. Your attempt at euthanasia, self-administered. You better not try it again, as long as I'm your doctor, and I'm the only one in town."

"What's broke in me?"

"Two ribs, and your noggin's shook. Neither bad."

"This headache's bad."

"I could wish it was worse."

"You going to give me something for it?"

"Sure, time. It'll take your mind off whatever troubles you got."

"Where's Cricket?"

Dr. Ardley motioned toward the door. "In yonder, doing his school work. *He's* going to get an education no matter what kind of ski bums he takes up with."

"Can I see him?"

"I suppose you ought to thank him."

Richie focused his eyes on the doctor's face. "Believe it or not, my father and mother once told me a few things about manners that I haven't forgotten."

Dr. Ardley nodded and left and then Cricket was standing where his father had been.

"How was the snow?" Richie asked him.

"What snow?"

"From the cat walk to where you scooped me out. Was it a good run?"

Cricket stared at him. Then his face broke into a confused smile. "You're crazy," he said. "All I remember was digging when I got there. Not scooping. You were deep. And still."

"My skis?"

"We never found the left one."

"Just me, and I'm not much of a buried treasure."

"Are you sore 'cause we lost them?"

"I'm sore 'cause I lost, that's all."

"What?"

"I don't know. That's just the point. People, I guess. I thought it was one person."

"Who?"

"That's none of your business, and I mean it."

"Don't talk about it, then. I better get out of here."

“No. Where do you sleep?”

“Upstairs.”

“Alone?”

Cricket laughed. “Sure. Why?”

“I just wanted to be able to picture it. What way does your window face?”

“South.”

“Toward the mountain.” Cricket nodded. “And your bed’s across the room?”

“On the side.”

“Which side?”

“East side. What do you have to picture for?”

“You saved me, didn’t you?”

Cricket shrugged.

“You did. When a guy does something like that he’s got to take the consequences. It’s not enough that you feel all those good Christian feelings, that you’re the hero of your class, that you stand three feet taller in your father’s eyes tonight.” Cricket was looking away from him, now, blushing furiously. “There’s me, too, that wouldn’t be here any more if you hadn’t meddled, me alive and warm, a boy not an awful lot older than you, lying here with his head splitting, feeling something he doesn’t know what for the boy who saved him, trying to think about an honest way to say thanks, except that’s not really all he means.”

Richie stopped suddenly, before his tongue ran away with his feelings, and then he found himself drawing back from Cricket, contracting into the pain of his injuries. “You got a dresser?” he continued, more calmly.

“Yup.”

“Where is it?”

“By the door to the room.”

“On the west side. What do you have on the walls?”

“Skiers.” It was Dr. Ardley’s voice. “Skiers all over the place. I tried to sneak in Hippocrates once but it came back to my desk with a note saying that there wasn’t enough snow in all of the Attic Peninsula to make three good days a year, unless he climbed Mount Olympus and he doubted he’d done that, what with the gods being there and him making up oaths and all.”

“Cricket wrote that?” Richie said in amazement.

“I’ve kept the note. It’s nine o’clock and I’m going to give you something to make you sleep, not because you deserve it but because I don’t want you keeping Alan up all night.”

“Thanks.”

“You’re right.” Dr. Ardley smiled, holding up the hypo. “You did learn manners, even if not how to live.”

“Did you?”

“I suppose.”

“What’s the secret?”

“Be useful and give comfort.”

Richie closed his eyes and felt the needle sink into his arm. “I’ll remember that,” he said.

“In the morning.”

Richie smiled at the two of them, and then they put out the light and he slept.

He awakened to find Cricket watching him. The morning sun bathed the boy’s face with a tender yellow, haloed his hair, made the light down that clung like childhood to his cheeks glow and delicately shadow the smooth, tan skin from which it sprang. “Morning,” Cricket said. “How do you feel?”

“Barfy.”

“You gonna heave? I’ll get...”

“Relax. Not that barfy. It’s just this head that I’d as soon have somebody amputate — and I know who’d like to do it, too, meaning your dad. How long you been here?”

“I don’t know.” Cricket glanced at his watch then folded his arms once more over the school books clutched to his breast. “Fifteen minutes.”

“Which came out of your sleep or your breakfast, one or the other.”

“I don’t eat that much in the morning.”

“I won’t eat that much *this* morning,” Richie said. He fought down a wave of nausea. “Tell me, how could you look at this ugly, battered face for fifteen minutes while it slept, mouth open, gurgling on its own glop? I know what I must have looked like, and it would really turn me off.”

Cricket smiled. “Your mouth was shut and you didn’t even breathe very loud. And you’re not ugly, to me, anyhow. As a matter of fact...” Cricket stopped and blushed.

“Go on,” Richie said.

“You’re just... not... ugly.”

“Thanks. So you watched me, thinking?”

“Lots of things.”

“Like why did this jerk try to kill himself? Like, in a minute he’s going to wake up and I’m going to talk to a madman.”

“No.”

“There he stood at the top of the hill. A crazed gleam came into his eye. He began to twitch, first his toes and then his legs and finally his whole body, writhing like a spastic. He started to cry hysterically, the slaver running down his chin. ‘I’m a meteor!’ he shouted. So he pushed off, arms and ski poles flailing in the wind, singing *The Heavens are Telling the...* Christ, my head hurts!”

Cricket was laughing, and now he stood up. “I got to go.”

“Sorry.” Richie felt ashamed of himself. “Sit down. I’ve no business making fun of you, or your thoughts.”

“It’s not that. I’m going to be late for school.”

“Coming back at noon?”

“Yes.”

“Good. I’ll miss you. I mean it.”

Slowly, as the pain in his head began to subside, Richie came to terms with the fact that he was once again in love. Cricket spent most of his evenings in the little hospital room. He did his school work there on the night table, raising his head occasionally to ask for a mathematical product, how to spell a word, where to place a comma.

“Don’t you ever date?” Richie asked the second night.

Cricket shook his head.

“Why not? You’re fourteen. You’re ready for it.”

Cricket shrugged. “What’s nine times eight?”

“Doesn’t any girl appeal to you?”

“Seventy-two.” Cricket bent his head.

“Cricket?”

“Huh?”

“I asked you a question.”

“I heard it. The answer is no.”

“For now.”

“I hope so.”

“For the future of the human race, yes.”

Cricket laughed. “Don’t expect me to fertilize all the women of this world.”

“One would be enough. The others you can just play around with. Don’t you want to?”

“If I did right now do you think I’d be sitting here. While we’re asking embarrassing questions, why aren’t you in school?”

“I graduated.”

“College, then.”

“That’s what my folks wonder and, since I don’t know what to tell them, I don’t know what to tell you.”

Cricket nodded, accepting. “How long you been a ski bum?”

“All winter.”

“What’d you do in the summer?”

“I went to Canada and took on the black flies. All by myself. I had fifty dollars and a tent and a sleeping bag and some cooking equipment. I ate fish till I began to smell like one. You see, somebody I knew...”

“What?” Cricket said softly.

“Died.” Richie fought back his feelings and turned away from the boy.

“I’m sorry,” Cricket said. “Was it a girl you loved?”

“No, it wasn’t a girl. And, yes, I loved. He was killed in Nam by a V.C. grenade.”

“I’m sorry,” Cricket repeated.

“So I checked out on the whole miserable human race. For almost a year it worked. It wasn’t pleasant, but it worked. Until I saw somebody that didn’t look at all like Jim, but he wore a blue knitted ski cap and his tooth was chipped, and he skied like no kid his age I’ve ever seen, and I kissed him and then I realized I cared.”

There was a long silence as they avoided each other’s eyes.

“Well,” Cricket said slowly at last, letting out his breath.

“Yeah, that’s it,” Richie said. “It’s not much of a deal for you.”

“I don’t know,” Cricket said.

“It isn’t. Take my word for it.”

Cricket nodded. “Okay, I’ll take your word for it. So what?”

“I should kick your little ass right out of here.”

“With a gimp head and chest?” Cricket grinned. “Try it.”

“Who’s a gimp?” Dr. Ardley’s voice sounded from the dispensary. “Do I have to say that a son of mine has no faith in my power to heal? Gimp, hell, he’s a malingerer, and that’s because he likes us. I put Humpty-Dumpty back together, and you keep whatever’s inside perking, with gosh knows what, ski talk probably.” The doctor was standing in the door now, looking from Cricket to Richie and back to Cricket again. “It’s time you went to bed, young man.”

Cricket continued to spend most of his spare time with Richie. They were less guarded now with each other. It was as though, with all actions impossible, and even the decisions to act held in abeyance, they had settled for getting to know one another. They talked about the small towns they had grown up in, their schools, friends, troubles with teachers, fun with bikes; skiing, of course.

Then in the evening, when it was time for Cricket to go to bed, Dr. Ardley would take his son’s place. He had discovered that Richie was moderately well read, so he discussed at some length, and entertainingly, his nonprofessional enthusiasms: Proust and Dostoevski. Richie tried reading *Swan’s Way* in the long midday hours when the clinic swarmed with broken bones, but he found the flowing prose and static pace put him promptly to sleep. The *Brothers Karamazov* was something else: he read it with great interest, was half way through when he realized he was almost well again.

That night Dr. Ardley kicked Cricket up to his room, made a quick examination of the knitting bones, grunted with satisfaction and sat on the side of Richie's bed. "He's in love, you know," Dr. Ardley said. "Cricket? That's nice. Who with?"

"Oh, come on. I was an adolescent once. You still are a little, but Alan's barely out of childhood. He's always been a slow starter, slow to walk, speak, read, come into puberty, everything except skiing, and it looks as though he saved all the quickness he had for that. So he's having feelings now that most boys breeze through lightly when they are younger. The later it comes the more intense it is likely to be. Are you fond of him?"

"Of course," Richie stammered. "He's a nice kid. He..."

"You're both nice kids and I wish you luck and I think it's okay and I'll try to protect you from those who don't. I was fourteen when it happened to me. In those days if people even suspected, you had a pretty rough time. We were lucky. I never thought it was dirty and I still don't. I grew away from it, of course, in time. So will Alan. He may be a slow beginner but he catches up. He just has his own pace."

"When are you going to spring me?" Richie asked, face to the wall.

"Couple of days if everything goes well."

"No sooner?"

"No sooner. You're thinking of leaving but I wouldn't, because you can both learn something. That time will come soon enough. When it does I want you to promise you'll be a generous man."

Richie lay back and closed his eyes and tried to contain the feelings that rushed through him: relief, happiness, embarrassment, anticipation.

"Do you?" Dr. Ardley asked.

Richie nodded. "I was thinking. I know this sounds crazy, but in a way I'm sorry it isn't you."

"I'm not a boy."

"I know."

"You are."

Richie opened his eyes and stared.

Dr. Ardley laughed. "Don't worry. Sons seldom realize it, but all a father really wants is to protect his boy and provide a setting in which he can flourish and grow. I wouldn't interfere with that for all the pleasures of a Turkish harem."

The sun had just set and the moon risen, all but full. Richie stood beside Cricket in the still, cold air of Youngman's Col and looked down the snowfields to the valley of Marsh Creek.

"Where?" he asked. "I don't see it."

Cricket leaned to him and pointed with his arm and ski pole. Richie dropped his head behind Cricket's shoulder. He sighted beneath Cricket's cheek along the blue nylon, then saw the cabin squatting beside the river.

"Looks like the snow's up over the door," Richie said. "Suppose we can't get in?"

"We will."

"We better."

"If we don't like it when we get there we can ski out to Elk Crossing. Chest still hurt?"

Richie nodded. "Hell, it's doing good for two weeks. Puffing up here didn't help. Let's go before our balls freeze."

Cricket turned around and grinned at him. "Sure wouldn't want that to happen tonight."

"Make tracks," Richie said, laughing. "I'll follow."

For five wonderful minutes they didn't stop moving. The snow was light and their motions on it sweet as the gliding of naked limbs upon a lover's body. Beside him was Cricket, and in a short time, so short a time as time goes, he would be moving together with him, all of him, but this time naked, sweetly, until...

Richie's joy was so keen he could hardly contain it. Slowly, magically, like a promise, the dark trees along the stream rose to meet them. They bottomed out in the valley, and then they were standing on the snow five feet above the cabin's front door, wondering how they were going to get in.

"Let's check the windows," Cricket said. They padded around opposite sides and met at the back where just under the eaves they discovered a winter trap door. They unbolted it and peered in.

"I can't see anything," Cricket said. "I've been here only once and it was summertime and I was just a little kid. Wait. I think I feel a mattress."

They crawled through onto a top bunk and then, their eyes adjusting to the gloom (a dim glow of light filtered through the half-snowed-up windows), jumped down to the floor and started searching the shelves for kerosene lamps.

There turned out to be plenty of wood, neatly split and cut to size and stacked along a wall. They started a fire in the pot-belly stove, which seemed to smoke, melted some snow, soaked and then cooked and ate their freeze-dried food. An hour later the cabin was getting warm. Richie unrolled the two sleeping bags they had brought in on their backs, pulled out the liners to use for sheets and went to the lower bunk to make their bed.

But the smoke was getting worse by the minute, and when he had finished his eyes were running and so were Cricket's. They put on their parkas and went outside. Richie boosted Cricket to the roof. A moment later the boy came back with a bucket in his hands. "Here's your trouble," he said. "It was over the stovepipe. Hey, it's pretty out tonight."

Richie looked up. Cricket sat at the edge of the roof, legs dangling down, face turned toward the moon, smiling. Richie reached for him. The boy slid off into his arms and Richie entered into ecstasy.

At first they simply held each other. They listened to the gigantic hush of mountain wind, stared over one another's shoulders at the bright and lidless stars and felt their shyness and doubts about each other slowly drain away.

"You remember," Richie whispered, "on the ski lift...?"

"I bet I thought about that a thousand times."

"Me, too."

Richie brought his lips to Cricket's, kissed them gently, and instead of the smell of snow and pine and winter air he was smelling Cricket, his skin and lips and breath. They broke the kiss at last but continued to cling to one another.

"That good?" Richie whispered.

"You know it!"

"I'm glad our first night's going to be way out here in the mountains."

"Nobody, like that skier, to interrupt."

They kissed again, deeper, longer. By now Richie was in the manly state but his pleasure was so profound, so warm, sweet and natural, that he wasn't even impatient. He held Cricket gently in his arms, conscious of the beauty of the night, the beauty of the boy, the wonder of love, his heart beating full, confident, steady, measuring his time at the fullest.

"Oh, man!" Cricket whispered when they stopped again. "How did I ever go so long without knowing about this?"

They crawled in through the trap and bolted it behind them. Richie sat before the stove to take off his ski boots. Cricket went to the lower bunk where Richie had already spread the sleeping roll they would share.

"What's taking you so long?" Cricket asked.

"I better stoke the fire."

Cricket peeled off his heavy gray socks as Richie filled the stove with wood. Cricket lay down on his side, drew his legs up onto the bed, propped his head on an arm and followed Richie with his eyes.

“Hurry up,” he demanded.

“Why?”

“Cause.”

Richie adjusted the damper. “Cause why?”

“Cause I’m getting really horny, that’s why.”

“Good.”

Richie blew out the kerosene lights, then decided to strip in the warmth before the open stove, which was now blazing brightly. Cricket continued to watch him. When at last Richie’s undershorts fell to the floor and released his firm, hard cock (it sprang down and stood away stoutly from his loins, sharply outlined by the firelight), the younger boy sucked in his breath, said, “Oh, man!” once, then again, then sat up and took off his ski parka. Then, still looking at Richie’s erection, he said, “Criminee!” and pulled the sweater over his head, returned to his staring, swallowing hard, unbuttoned his flannel shirt with fingers that were beginning to become unreliable, threw it off, followed with his T-shirt (so that Richie saw for the first time the trim, muscular chest and narrow trunk glowing red), certainly would have gone on to his ski pants if Richie hadn’t come to him, quieted him with calm arms and made him lie back on the bunk to have his zipper lowered for him.

“Jeez, be careful!” Cricket said and he inhaled sharply between his teeth. “I’m... *right there!*”

Richie lifted away the cloth and gazed. Out of a live dark tangled nest of young hair which crowned only his pelvic prominence (not the up-balled scrotum, thighs, lower stomach, which were young and bare and still looked delicately soft), the beautiful, sleek, bobbing penis rose, slender and red, pulsing in the fire glow. Out of the full head streamed its mucoid confession of longing. As Richie watched a drop rose in its eye, picked a red point of light from the fire, swelled, spread over the glans, globbed at the lower coronal rim and let itself slowly down upon its own cord to meet the clean skin of Cricket’s stomach.

Richie tore his eyes from Cricket’s cock and whispered in his ear, “Got your feelings under control?”

Cricket bit his lip and nodded and welcomed Richie into the bed, into his arms.

Then followed the ever more brightly burning beauty of touching Cricket, touching him everywhere, stroking his lithe back and the small, rounded buttocks below, moving his legs among Cricket’s legs, warming his feet against Cricket’s feet, kissing Cricket’s lips, tonguing the little chip on his front tooth, breathing Cricket’s breath, rubbing nipples against nipples, thighs against thighs, moving, inevitably, their straining cocks together until when the wet heads first met a gigantic spark of feeling shot across from pole to pole and spread with grand acceleration through their sweating bodies. Cricket called his name once, twice, choking in the extremity of his passion and locked his loins against Richie.

All Cricket had, Richie knew, was youth and strength and the fullness of his new sex. He had little control and no experience. So, on the very first thrust, Richie wasn’t surprised to feel Cricket tremble peak, emit and melt and burst into tears.

Richie lasted only a couple of seconds longer.

He didn’t know why Cricket cried, and he didn’t question him, but somehow it seemed right. With the tenderest feelings he held the boy until the sobs wore themselves out. Then they were quiet. The only sounds were their heartbeats, their gentle breathing and, outside, the cold hush of the western wind.

Minutes passed, neutral but strangely enchanted minutes. Neither boy slept. Neither spoke nor felt like speaking and, although sex was gradually seeping back, they remained motionless in their lock of tangled limbs.

Cricket’s cock was the first thing to stir. Richie felt it resume its manly shape. The sheer heft of arousal had never left it. Cricket swallowed and took a deep breath and made a short, gentle thrust with his hips. Richie answered with one of his own. Cricket tightened his grip. “Oh, boy!” he whispered, ecstatically, as much to himself as to Richie.

“Boy what?” Richie asked.

“Boy, what do you think? Is this ever great!” Cricket once again drew his cock over Richie’s stomach. “It’s just got to be the coolest thing ever.”

“Cool?”

“Well, I can’t say ‘tits,’ and ‘groovy,’ besides being corny as hell, sounds sort of female. Is it as good with one of them?” “Sure.”

“If it’s any better it would kill a guy. Oh, *man!*” Their cocks had collided and Cricket started to shiver. “That thing of yours is all over me!”

Richie rolled onto Cricket and put his mouth around Cricket’s mouth and bore down with his hips, driving his cock straight and true into the younger boy’s abdomen. The lips beneath his lips erected, the throat beneath his hand began to moan, the penis against his penis counterthrust its tip against him in a smooth trajectory. He answered, then Cricket answered, then he, Cricket, he, Cricket, he, Cricket, he, faster and faster until he froze their motion and broke their mouths apart to breathe.

“How long can you keep this up?” Cricket wanted to know.

“Not much longer.”

“You mean *you* ’re close, too?”

“Damned right.”

“I like that.”

“You ready?”

“I guess so.”

The motion began, this time as though it sprang from a single body. It accelerated, deepened, intensified with the tightening of their embrace, the twisting of their wet mouths upon each other, the enormous tension that rose in their loins to flood their flesh from locked lips to tangled feet. Together, with love, it welded them for a moment in perfect ecstatic unity, and then once again drove forth from their cocks the soothing sperm of resolution.

This time they achieved a deeper peace. Cricket dropped his chin to Richie’s shoulder, drew a leg over Richie’s thighs and soon was asleep with the abandon of a very much younger boy. Richie pulled up the bed roll and tucked it under Cricket’s cheek. Then he buried his nose in Cricket’s hair and, breathing its sweet boy scent, drifted, accelerated and fell into sleep himself.

The fire burned low and the cabin, losing heat through its walls and eaves to the winter wind, grew cold. Richie awakened and gently slid out from Cricket’s limbs that sought, even in sleep, to hold him. He stoked the firebox, shivering in his nakedness, and listened to the old walls creak under the snow and cold and outside moving air. It was three-thirty. The moon had set. He waited until fire caught the new wood and glowed orange behind the grate, then crawled back into bed.

It was like coming home to heaven. The robe smelled of their sleeping skin. Its touch was still warm. He snuggled down upon Cricket, who had turned away, to warm his chilled flesh on the younger boy’s back. Their bodies met in quiet, sweet occlusion. He pressed his nose into the back of Cricket’s neck, took Cricket’s sleeping penis in hand and squeezed it gently. A moment later it answered with a waking pulse.

“Hi,” Richie whispered.

“Hi,” Cricket whispered, stirring, wiping his dry lips on the back of Richie’s arm.

“Are you happy?” Richie asked.

Cricket just sighed. His cock firmed and Richie thrust his own between Cricket’s thighs where he felt leg muscles close slowly upon it. Now the back corona of his cock brushed the base of Cricket’s scrotum, and when Richie dropped his fingers to caress its rumpled skin, he moistened them with his own urethral tear and returned them to Cricket’s frenulum with a glide so smooth it made the boy tense and shiver and

exclaim into Richie's other hand, which had cupped gently around Cricket's mouth and nose, "Oh, Jeez, what are you doing?"

Richie kept the motion slow. His cupped hand brought Cricket's cheeks to his lips and then his mouth opened to move upon the top of Cricket's face, possessing it, commanding its flesh, marking it for his own. He began to move himself in Cricket's thighs. Sweetly the feeling rose, their breath increased, their blood sounded in their ears. Deeply they plunged with freedom and grace, moving slowly, grandly, inevitably toward total immersion. First from afar they sensed the climax warning, like a distant trumpet marking the time and site of engagement, then it drew near and they closed upon it, driving deeper, stroking true and fast, until they were in the midst of its glory and it took them, turned them, wrung from them everything there was, then rolled past to let them sleep again.

At dawn Richie awakened to the snap and crackle of fresh wood burning. Cricket stood before the stove in a T-shirt and shorts warming his backside, fire glowing against his calves. He looked at Richie and smiled. "You're an awful porcupine," he said.

Richie put a hand to his chin and felt the stubble. "Sorry," he said.

"My shoulder's raw."

"What about your pecker?"

Cricket blushed and turned to the stove. "I guess that's okay."

"You sure covered it up in a hurry. Are you putting it away or something?"

"Yeah. We gotta ski out today. I'm limp enough as it is."

"Limp?" Richie asked as he got up, eyeing the well marked ridge in Cricket's shorts.

"Not that! Me."

"Oh, I see." Richie grinned. He came up behind Cricket and caught him in a bear hug and dragged his rough chin across neck and shoulders. "That what you like?"

"No!" Cricket flinched away.

"You like this?" Richie closed his hand around the covered cock.

"Hey, quit it!" Cricket shivered and tried to break his arms free. Richie held him and held the cock and bit into the tendon of Cricket's shoulder. "*Come on!*"

"You'll come, all right."

No. I already did that. Three times. That's twice more than I normally do in a week."

"It's good for you to get rid of that stuff."

"Man, I'll go dry."

"Not you."

"It'll drop off."

"Feels real firm to me, and growing. Let me get my hand inside. That better?"

"Yes. No. Oh Christ!"

"Is it?"

"Yes. Okay!"

"Okay?"

"I said okay but I don't want to cream on the stove. Let's sack it."

This time they fought to climax and tore their improvised bed to a lumpy, wound-up tangle of green down quilting and sperm-spotted liner. When they were through and their clasp upon each other's sweating, panting bodies began to relax, they giggled.

"I hope you're *satisfied!*" Cricket said.

"For a few minutes."

"*Four times!*" Cricket shouted and pushed Richie onto the floor.

Richie lay there laughing. "Now it's *three* times more than your normal weekly jack-off rate."

“You come after me again and I swear I’ll kick your nuts in.”

Richie lunged for Cricket’s penis, but the boy leapt away from him, grabbed his shorts, pulled them on and slumped into a chair. “I mean it,” Cricket said. “I’m through. I’m dry. What are you, some kind of sex fiend?”

Richie picked himself out of the fallen bed clothing and made like a menacing gorilla, scratching his arm pits, mugging, advancing in a swinging gate on Cricket, who grabbed his ski socks and threw them in Richie’s face. Richie smelled the foot-sweat pungency, rolled his eyes, licked his lips in pretended simian delight.

“You *are!*” Cricket said and fled the chair, dragging along his ski pants, trying to get into them.

Making ape noises, Richie chased the laughing boy around the cabin. At last Cricket got one leg in his pants, then the other, zipped the fly, pulled on his parka, opened a window grabbed an armload of snow and threw himself in a freezing hug on Richie’s naked body.

Richie fell against the wall, gasping.

“There,” Cricket laughed. “That ought to cool you down.” And his fingers dropped to Richie’s rapidly dwindling penis and agitated it quickly, in a handful of snow.

Dr. Ardley looked into his son’s eyes, then at Richie, then told Richie, when they were alone for a moment, “I hope his first experience with a girl will be as happy as this must have been. How’s the rib?”

“Fine.”

“Bet you forgot all about it, didn’t you?”

“Making out’s a better forgetter than your sleeping pills.”

Cricket came back with their skis. They locked them onto the car-top rack, climbed, all three of them, into the front seat and set off for town.

“Well,” Dr. Ardley said, “it’s against my rules to let a cured patient sleep in the clinic, especially when he can’t pay me any rent.”

“Oh, I’ll move back to Mrs. Campbell’s,” Richie said.

“That’ll take money.”

“I’ll get a job.”

“Doing what?”

“Bussing at a restaurant. I don’t know.”

“How would you like to work for me?”

“Are you kidding?”

“My boy Max just quit. You know what he did — a lot of odd jobs that didn’t take much cerebral initiative. Sort of like skiing.”

“I heard that,” Cricket warned.

“That would be wonderful,” Richie exclaimed.

“I don’t pay much. I’m an old skin-flint and I would prefer to house and feed you ourselves rather than pay Mrs. Campbell, worthy woman though she is.”

“That’s fine,” Richie said.

Cricket who was sitting between them and looking back and forth as they spoke, grabbed Richie’s knee. “Hey, neat!” he said.

“Does he snore?” Dr. Ardley asked his son.

“No. I don’t know, really. I don’t care.”

“Then do you think you could put up with him in your bedroom?”

“Sure.”

“It’s a deal then, Richie?”

“It’s a deal.”

Cricket grabbed Richie's arm and whispered in his ear. "When we got home, let's make it five."

"Six," Richie said. He slouched down happily, closed his eyes and let the mountain world of late winter rush by the window unseen.

In Colorado spring and winter coexist. The mountains kept their snow, but in the valleys blossoming came with a rush. Rain fell. Buds on the willows burst with cloudburst. Sun burst upon the muddy soil, stirring the roots within. Suddenly the grass was green. Tiny flowers pricked at it with blue and white and yellow, and Richie traded in his skis for a fishing pole.

May went. June came with its own scents and colors and growing warmth. Now Richie could lie naked with Cricket at midday in the long grass by a swollen river and feel the fabric of spring in Cricket's lips, breathe the warm breeze of spring in Cricket's breath, and, time after time, mouth his taproot when Cricket reared his manhood. Once or twice, when they quarreled and made up with love, spring's tears fell sweetly on his cheeks. Mostly, though, they frolicked like spring calves, laughing, necking, petting, grasping, holding, mouthing, nibbling, kissing, tickling, rubbing, nuzzling, rolling, wrestling, throwing each other in the river.

As spring grew, so did everything about Cricket. His penis grew like the wild shoots around them, longer and straighter. His handling of it grew more assured. They were doing everything now, with each other, and more and more Cricket invited the active role. And somehow presiding over this spring bacchanal was Cricket's father, Richie's employer and benefactor and philosophical guide.

Then one day Richie stood in the hardware store buying a rake for the doctor, when he looked out onto the street and saw Cricket walking with a girl, holding her hand. They stopped. Cricket leaned against a store front and the girl kissed him quickly on the lips. She moved away. Cricket smiled and touched his lips. His smile broadened and he looked at the passers-by on the street and saw the warmth in their eyes, and then he shook himself out of reverie and shouted, "Hey!" and ran after the girl and grabbed her school books and they disappeared around the corner.

That night, even before the lovemaking began, Cricket started questioning him about women. Richie answered as best he could, pretending, for Cricket's sake, knowledge he didn't have. He held Cricket tenderly, feeling as never before the preciousness, the vulnerability of a growing boy. Of course he wanted Cricket's body, but even more he wanted things to go right for him.

"I didn't think it would come so soon," said Dr. Ardley the next morning when they were alone in the living room.

"I applied for the job last April," Richie said.

"Oh, that. I mean Alan, not your deception."

"Sir, it's..."

"Which I appreciate, by the way. Did I ever tell you what happened to the boy I loved? He found a girl about the same time I did. For a while we even double dated. When he married her three years later I was his best man. And later still he stood up at my wedding."

"That's wonderful."

"It is wonderful. Have you ever looked around here at all?"

Richie shook his head. "Women just... simply aren't for me."

"You don't think so. Alan's grown, with your love, so fast and happily in all ways, heart and head and spirit. Maybe now he can help you."

Again Richie shook his head.

"At least you can try."

"Sir, that's asking for something that just isn't in my nature."

"You don't know that."

“Yes, I do.”

“Listen, Richie, all I see is a nineteen-year-old boy who has gotten a little behind and needs help catching up. Let us give that help. Try us.”

“No,” Richie said softly. “I came to terms with this a long time ago. Pretenders wreck the lives of the people they’re close to. I won’t hurt you and Cricket.”

“We’re tougher than you think.”

“Besides, this way I can take away a fantastic memory.”

“A fantasy, you mean. A point of escape.”

“Good God,” Richie said, suddenly angry, “a guy’s got to have something!”

Strong hands came to his shoulders and moved to comfort. “I’m sorry,” Dr. Ardley said. “I had to know this.”

Richie nodded.

“Only one man understands a man’s heart and that’s himself, short of God and psychoanalysis. And of the two, one is impossible while the other just doesn’t work.”

“I know.”

“So at least you’ll keep in touch.”

Richie met Dr. Ardley’s eyes again. “For every letter Cricket writes I’ll write two. How’s that?”

Like many young men before him who were restless and unhappy, Richie took to the sea. One round trip on a tramp steamer convinced him that larger ships, with their dirt, bad food and lack of privacy, were not for him. So he hitchhiked to Florida, crossed to the Bahamas and bought an old motor-sailer by cashing in his life insurance policy.

He immediately started hauling Bahamian cargo. It was nearly a year before he felt competent to move out of the smaller waters of the island chain, and by that time he as the owner of a somewhat larger and newer ship. Her name was the *Delvin J.*, after some son or father of the native builder. In his spare time Richie was fixing her over to carry sport fishermen and SCUBA divers.

He found the run from Hispaniola to the Turks and Caicos Islands most profitable. He hauled fresh fruit and vegetables north from Cap-Haitien, lobsters south from the Caicos Islands to the Dominican Republic at Puerto Plata. Occasionally he smuggled: liquor for the Americans at the air base at Grand Turk, arms to Haiti.

Never confusing love with the needs of his genital sex, Richie nevertheless found a few nights of release in Haiti, anchored-down in some sleepy harbor, where he curled in the sand, listened to the cabbage palms rattle overhead in the strong easterlies, the surf crunch at the shore, and opened old pants ripped off at the knees, lay barefoot and bare-chested and let the white gristle of his masculinity sink slowly between the full, dark lips of some French-speaking black boy hired for a candy bar. He would lie back, sigh, staring at the hazy, cloud-flecked Caribbean heavens and see out of the corner of his eye the strong, bare adolescent shoulders, the short-haired, tight-curved head moving steadily up and down upon him, feel his cock glide in Haitian spit through pouting lips to graze the white, even and broadly spaced teeth inside, endure the tickle of rough tongue tip, and think, even as his sperm rose to meet the mouth, how alone he really was, how time, with nothing settled, was slipping past him.

One night when Richie was returning from Cap-Haïtien to Caicos he had a strange experience. The wind was directly out of the east, about 25 knots and steady. Overhead the Caribbean cumulus raced raggedly westward in front of an all but full moon which one minute flooded the cockpit, the wet decks and shrouds of the *Delvin J.*, the next moment was hidden from the ship but lit to mercury gray nearby patches of ocean. Richie was cold and wet and tired (he had been out ten hours) and was reacting to the predictable lift and thrust and fall of his ship in a thoroughly mechanical way. Somewhere toward the bow there was a sound he couldn't identify, like the wind sighing on a new stay. He looked ahead along the cabin top. The moon came out from cover and there, leaning against the root of the spar, was Jim Mansfield.

Richie started, shook himself, closed his eyes and looked again. Jim was still there, watching him, an arm wrapped about a drawn-up knee. A burned-out cigarette hung from his upper lip. He was wearing army fatigues, boots and helmet. Several days of stubble grew on his face. He looked weary beyond endurance.

Richie called out to the vision. Their eyes met, Jim's reflecting red from some shipboard source. Jim spat out the cigarette. His lips curled down and he growled softly but distinctly, "Fuck you, buddy!" Then, as the moon went under again, Jim disappeared into the night.

Richie was shaken by the hallucination more than he cared to admit, even to himself. Perhaps he was driving himself too hard, was too much alone. Over the past year his cash reserve had been slowly growing. Now he decided to draw it down working on his boat in Grand Turk. The boys at the NASA base, with time on their hands, helped him for free beers and smuggled liquor. The stench of lobster gave way to the aromatic odors of wood chips and paint. On sudden impulse he sent post cards to Jim's parents, Hank Hayes and Dr. Ardley announcing his new line of business. "I'll be sailing out of Nassau,"

he wrote Cricket's father. "Wish I had a picture of her. She isn't exactly beautiful but I'm stupidly proud of what I've done to her. Anyhow, wish me luck, that I won't starve."

And when the boat was ready he set sail up the long chain of islands.

Richie couldn't have come to Nassau at a better time. America's schools and colleges were letting out for Easter vacation. Boys swarmed the streets — grade school kids following in the wake of their parents, boys in junior high ogling motor scooters and SCUBA equipment in sporting goods stores, nervous groups of older adolescents laughing, jostling with one another, quick eyes searching for girls to lay. At first their skin was winter white, but gradually the sun tanned their lean cheeks, their sinewy arms and legs, bleached their hair lighter and feathered it dry. After a week or so they took to going about the waterfront in shorts alone, proud of their youth, their builds, the toughening soles of their feet.

It was good to look at American boys again, and the boys were good for Richie's business. He was twenty-three, now, well muscled, tanned, physically hardened by work and the sea. Having escaped the prolonged adolescence of higher education, he seemed to the vacationing boys calmly independent, strikingly assured. He soon found his space at the dock becoming the center of a highly transient group of college students.

Now almost every dawn the *Delvin J.*'s decks were a tumble with teenagers and their diving gear, her squat hull rolling over the calm waters of the harbor on the way to some fishing reef or well-plundered wreck. And in the evening, when the boys didn't take him out on the town, there was the easy sociability of the docks, with its school of pleasure craft in from Miami.

On the fringe of all this lived one barefoot, nut-tan, silent boy of pubertal age. Richie would catch sight of him at night standing just beyond the range of dock lights nearest his ship, or, days, sitting on the locker box of the *Iceman*, a large black-hulled cruiser out of Ft. Lauderdale. The boy habitually wore blue Levi's and a horizontally striped blue and red cotton shirt. He never talked or looked at people directly. Usually his back was turned.

Richie called to him one night when the boy had ventured closer than usual, "I got some ice-cream here I can't eat. Want to finish it for me?"

The dock lights fell on the boy's back and Richie watched the shoulders shrug.

"Come on, I'd hate to toss it out."

The boy shook his head but didn't move away.

"You think I'm going to poison you?"

Again the shoulders shrugged.

"Are you scared of me?"

The head shook.

"It's an awful interesting conversation I'm having with your back. Why don't you turn around and come over here so I can see you?"

Shuffling, staring at his feet, the boy moved slowly toward the *Delvin J.*

"Can you talk?" Richie asked.

The boy nodded, head bowed.

"Then say something."

"Hello," the boy said.

"Wow! One whole word. Come on aboard. The ice-cream's over there. Use the spoon in the box. What's your name?"

"Bruce."

"Just Bruce?"

The boy nodded and stepped onto the boat.

"No last name?"

"Kimball."

“Where you from?”

“Fort Lauderdale.”

“Go ahead. Eat it. I told you I’d pitch it if you don’t.”

Bruce started shoveling ice-cream into his mouth. Richie watched him with a growing awareness of his good looks.

When Bruce finished he carefully licked clean the spoon and said, “Thanks. I guess I’d better be going.”

“Why?” Richie asked. “So you can sit on that box some more and stare at the water?”

The boy shrugged.

“How’d you like to help me swab down the deck?”

“Okay,” Bruce said.

“You don’t have to if you don’t want to.”

“Where’s the mop?” Bruce looked directly at Richie for the first time. The boy’s eyes were hazel, steady and serious, seeming to be enormously older than his barely adolescent face.

For the next few minutes man and boy worked in silence, Bruce mopping the port deck, Richie the starboard, until they met in completion at the stern.

“Now I’ve *got* to go,” Bruce said.

“Okay, thanks for the help.”

“I’ll do it again tomorrow night if you want.”

And, good at his word, the following evening, just after Richie finished supper, Bruce appeared.

“I haven’t any ice-cream tonight,” Richie told him when they had finished, “and you’re not exactly the best talker I’ve run into. How about going to a movie?”

“I’d like that,” Bruce said.

They set off for town, without checking with the *Iceman*, and when they came back to the docks a little after midnight the big black boat was gone. Bruce shrugged. “He must of got a trip.”

“We should have told your dad where we were going.”

“He’s not my dad.”

“Who is he?” Richie recalled a big, rangy man in his late forties, deeply tanned and freckled to the top of his bald head.

“That’s Mister Kolarik.”

“And where do you fit in?”

Bruce looked at him strangely, as though to assure himself that he wasn’t being mocked. “I work there, sort of. Did, maybe.”

“You better stay with me tonight,” Richie said.

“If you’d let me, I’d like that.”

They boarded the *Delvin J.* and Richie gave Bruce a set of clean sheets and told him to make up the bunk for himself in the main cabin.

“Where’s your bed?” Bruce asked.

“Forward.”

“Isn’t there room for both of us?”

“No.”

Again the boy shrugged, but, as Richie watched him close the door, sheets on arm, he thought Bruce looked relieved.

When Richie got up the next morning he found that the boy had already mopped the decks and made a pot of coffee. Richie stood sleepily in his undershorts watching him stir cream into his cup. “Bruce, if I had any money I’d hire you.”

“I’d like that.”

Richie came up behind the boy and put his hands on his shoulders. Bruce tensed. "I don't like that" he said.

Richie released him. "Being touched?"

Bruce nodded.

"Why?"

The boy gave him a quick, searching look. "I get enough of that from Mister Kolarik and his guests."

"Really?" Richie sat down with his cup of coffee. "He doesn't look like the affectionate type."

"Who said anything about affection?"

"Does he beat you, then?"

"No."

"What does he do?"

"About everything. He and the others."

"You mean... sex?"

"I guess I better not talk about it."

"I think you better had," Richie said, but just then he felt the boat rock to someone boarding and a customer was standing in the hatchway ready for the morning trip.

When the *Delvin J.* returned in the evening the *Iceman* was still away and Bruce was at his usual post on the lockerbox.

"Did you get any lunch?" Richie asked.

Bruce shook his head.

"Come on, let's go to a quick and dirty."

They walked into town and for the first time Richie noticed that there were other eyes staring at the boy — young men, old men, most of them pale or sunburnt, clearly vacationers on their lonely pursuit of teenagers. One man caught his eye, gave him a faint smile of recognition, then looked away. Annoyed, Richie stepped faster and almost lost Bruce in the crowd behind him.

They bought hamburgers and shakes at a stand-up counter. "Where is Kolarik anyhow?" Richie asked.

Bruce stirred with his straws. "I don't know."

"Does he usually go off and leave you this way?"

"If he's got a trip or he doesn't need me."

"Then who looks after you?"

"Me."

"With no money?"

Bruce looked uneasy. "I can make money."

"How?" But as soon as he said it Richie knew. Their eyes met, Bruce's steady and appraising.

"Damn!" Richie swore.

"If you want I'll pay for my burger and shake."

Richie looked around him at the other customers who seemed, despite his sudden feeling of conspicuousness, to be paying them no attention. "Hurry up with that thing. Let's get out of here."

They took the side streets back to the dock. The cabin was still hot from twelve hours of sunlight but Richie and Bruce stayed below decks and stripped to the waist and played cards for a couple of hours. When they went to bed Richie thought he felt someone board the ship, but the rock was so gentle he decided he must be mistaken. He turned off his light and lay naked on top of his sheets. Staring at the ceiling, he thought about Bruce and drifted slowly toward sleep.

The door opened and the object of his thoughts stood there in the darkness.

"Seems sort of a waste," Bruce said, "what with you wanting it and me owing you and all."

"Go to bed," Richie said.

Bruce came in and sat beside him on the mattress. "Sometimes I hate to have to do it. Usually I just don't mind."

"Scram," Richie said.

"But I guess with you I feel different."

"Look, Bruce, I'm not one of those crummy men."

"I know."

"Oh, Christ, what I'm trying to say is you don't have to come in here. I don't expect it. That's not why I'm looking after you."

"I know."

"So, unless you really want it, get out before I mess up."

Bruce put his hand on the rising shaft of Richie's masculinity. Something clicked in the sky-light overhead. They both jumped. Richie swore and dove into a pair of pants and climbed onto the deck. He found it deserted and then laughed at himself for turning into a suspicious, jumpy old man. It might have been a small pulley he discovered moving in the breeze against the boom slide above the open pane. Or a hundred little things. When he came back Bruce was lying on his bed. The boy had divested himself of his undershorts and his cock was pulsing quietly on his smooth, hairless skin, beginning to straighten and erect.

"I'd like it if you'd let me stay," Bruce said.

"Okay." Richie felt his blood rise. He dropped his pants and came to the bed, his own cock quickly hardening. He bent to the boy and kissed him on the lips. Bruce returned his kiss, coolly but not, it seemed, without pleasure. They drew together, then Richie stretched out on the bunk to take the boy into his arms. Quickly he lost himself in the power of his own young feelings which, so long suppressed, were rising as the sweet flesh of the boy moved steadily against him. And then it was over, for both of them, and Richie was lying once again on his back and drifting off to sleep, but this time Bruce's head was resting on his shoulder and Bruce's hand was wrapped around his penis, as though, so assured, he could sleep deeply and, of course, in safety.

One morning about two weeks later Richie was docking the *Delvin J.* after a charter weekend of shelling with an elderly couple on one of the out islands. He was hungry and a little tired and when he threw the bow line to a tall, gawky teenager standing on the dock he snapped at him irritably, "No, *that* cleat!"

"Yes, sir, Captain!" the boy said.

Richie jumped at the voice, stared at the face that grinned back at him two hands taller than he remembered it. There were the same eyes, gray and honest, the same medium brown hair (but now cropped shorter for tropical coolness), the same chip on his front tooth. Forgetting the boat and his dumbfounded passengers (who were standing in the cockpit laden with bags and nets and shelling equipment ready to be helped ashore), Richie leapt onto the dock and threw his arms around Alan Ardley.

Richie couldn't speak. Cricket couldn't speak. Richie smiled. Cricket wiped at his eyes with the back of his wrist. Richie stepped back and looked over the new, lean lines of Cricket's body. In four years of growth the boy had caught up with Richie and now had an inch or so on him. True to his own pace, Cricket at nineteen was still sprouting up.

"Where you *been*?" Cricket said, finding his voice at last.

"If you ever answered a letter you'd know."

"I mean the last three days. I about wore out this dock waiting for you."

"So you got my post card."

"Dad sent it to me at school."

"Where's that?"

"Dartmouth."

“It figures. How you making it?”

“Good. I’m a sophomore. The team...”

“I mean marks, stupid. I know you’re Olympic stuff on skis.”

“Bs and As. I got to, ’cause I’m going to be a doctor.”

“Hey!” The *Delvin J.*, untied, was beginning to drift slowly back and the lady was shouting at them in amusement and mild distress. Grinning guiltily, Richie and Cricket made fast the lines and helped the couple onto the dock.

“My, you two boys make a handsome pair,” the woman said. “If only I were young again...”

Richie and Cricket carried their gear to a taxi. Richie accepted their money and some sincere praise for his ship and sailing competence.

“So, when did you get here?” Richie wanted to know when the couple had driven away. “Did you come alone?”

“Five of us drove to Florida and we took a plane across. They say back at school that everyone, if he’s got the cash, shows up in Nassau eventually.”

“Where you staying?”

“In some flophouse hotel room. Two of us checked in, but we played the usual college card and we’re all sleeping there, on air mattresses and stuff.”

“What would happen if you just didn’t show up for a couple of days?”

“They would figure I’d connected. One guy has already.”

“Good, then let’s go.”

“Huh?”

“To the grocery store for chow. ’Cause we’re taking off for the Exumas.”

It was nearly midnight before they were anchor-down in a snug little beach-rimmed harbor in the lee of one of the northern Exuma cays. They decided to swim and stripped in the cockpit.

Naked, shivering a little, they slipped into the quiet, moon-touched waters and stroked in easy overhand toward shore. At last their fingers touched sand. They stood to wade toward a fringe of coconut palms that tossed their heads and rattled their fronds in the easterly winds. Richie dropped back a little to watch Cricket’s legs (strong even in puberty, now even stronger and dark with wet, slicked-down hair) drag streamers of luminescent foam in the sea behind. He gazed at the working buttocks, strongly dimpled at the sides, glinting in the heavy moonfall with bright drops of sea water. Cricket still moved the way Richie remembered, but in four years the boy’s shoulders had spread, the lean chest lengthened, and in contrast his waist looked small almost to the point of deprivation.

They walked up the beach berm and dropped into the dry sand just above the swash line. They stared at one another openly in their mutual nakedness. Blood rushed to Richie’s manhood, filled it, raised it off his lower leg. For a moment Cricket frowned, then, shaking off whatever troublesome thoughts he might have had, he lay back and folded his hands behind his head. Richie leaned on an elbow and took in the smooth, moon-blached flesh of Cricket’s chest, the little brown rings of nipple. From the dark navel crater, shallow with its all but protruding central cone, a new trail of drying hair led downward to the flat plain and masculine bush. There Richie watched the nineteen-year-old cock grow, arch upward at the middle of its stalk, the head pulse in simple arc past the thigh and hip to rest for a moment on the line of his body’s symmetry until the stiffness behind it was complete and it raised itself up to slant toward him in nodding invitation.

Richie looked back to Cricket’s face. The moon-bright eyes stared up at him in inquiry. The lips were parted across strong, white teeth. Richie dropped his shoulders and his head until the features beneath him blurred and he could feel the warmth of Cricket’s face radiating against his own, smell the sea water

drying on Cricket's skin, the salt-damp hair and the sweetness of the shallow breath of anticipation flowing from Cricket's lips and twin nostrils and mingling with his own.

Richie moistened his lips and touched them to Cricket's cheeks. The boy closed his eyes, unlocked his hands from the back of his head and brought them to Richie's shoulders. Richie moved his lips gently across Cricket's face, wetting it where only minutes before the sea had wet it, tasting the sea on his tongue. Inevitably Richie's mouth came to Cricket's mouth and they kissed. Tonguing the little chip on Cricket's tooth was like footsteps on the grave of his memories. He reached for Cricket's cock and felt the boy shiver as his fingers began to move over the glans and frenulum in the slippery flow of advanced longing.

Cricket jerked aside his head. "Quit it" he warned. Richie released, only to find Cricket's hand around his own cock, moving in a callused but lubricated grip that in a few seconds had him, too, crying for cessation.

They had neither the desire nor the ability to hold back much longer. Richie rolled onto Cricket, buried his lips in Cricket's mouth and slid his penis against Cricket's in the warm secret place between their bodies. They began to move, to thrust steadily in the increasing wetness between them. Richie heard Cricket sigh, felt knuckles run down his spine, hands grab the twin handles of his buttocks. Legs twisted and rose against his own in slow, continuous movement.

Deeper and deeper they dug, spaded, drove with the blunt instruments of their desires. Higher and higher rose Richie's feelings. It seemed to him, having been continent for over a week, that nothing could contain the beauty which flooded out from his loins into every fiber of his own musculature. Time stopped; there was no time. There was only Cricket — his mouth his body — and their motion. Richie felt the hot semen gather in place, his feelings rush forward with it. He rose, just as Cricket rose, peaked in all but forgotten splendor, and then it was out, the sperm to meet Cricket's sperm, shooting forth in gigantic spasms that shook him as the trade winds shook the palms above their tryst. Slowly, after five or six pulses, the outpour slackened, stilled, and Cricket, beneath him, let his arms fall to the ground.

Richie was lying on his back staring at the moon. "I didn't know you'd want that again," he said.

"I didn't either," Cricket murmured.

"Did you miss it, three years ago, when I left?"

"I missed *you* something awful at first."

"Were there other guys?"

"No. Never."

"But there were girls."

"That didn't come to much for a couple of years."

"Now?"

"It's different." Cricket propped his head up on an arm and smiled down into Richie's face. "I got a steady back home and, well, we do just about everything."

"Is it as good as what we had?"

"You bet!"

"What do you think about what just happened?"

"It's still great," Cricket said dreamily, lying back on the sand. "But it's, I don't know, beside the point, don't you think?"

"How do you mean?"

"Well, the big thing is our friendship. We're both probably a little old to get the same thrill we did back in Colorado out of fooling around. You just have to come west this summer and meet Mary."

"Would Mary be mad at you and me making out on the beach?"

Cricket's smile broadened and his eyes danced in the moonlight with laughter. "You're not a girl," he said, picking up a handful of sand and throwing it on Richie's genitals for emphasis. "What goes on here

is none of her cotton-picking business!”

“I see you got it all worked out,” Richie said, unable to repress a tinge of bitterness.

“Well, what do you think?”

“I think I’m getting cold and we better swim back to the ship.”

They returned to Nassau five days later, and that evening Cricket booked himself on the shuttle flight back to Ft. Lauderdale.

“Promise you’ll come west this summer,” Cricket said at the gate holding his bags and raincoat and tennis racket.

“I will if I can.”

Suddenly there was nothing left to say. Richie put out his hand and Cricket dropped a suitcase, took it rather formally.

“So long. Good luck,” Richie said.

“Good-bye.” Cricket picked up his suitcase and started toward the plane. Then he looked back over his shoulder and grinned. “Until next summer, I mean.”

Richie watched him mount the steps to the plane. At the top he turned around and waved and then, with the passengers crowding behind him, he ducked and disappeared through the door.

Richie chose to walk to town. It took him a couple of hours and by the time he reached the dock the sun had set and the city lights had come on. The *Iceman* was in and Bruce was sitting on the locker box.

“Mr. Kolarik wants to talk to you,” the boy said.

“What about?”

Bruce shrugged.

Richie boarded the ship and found Kolarik drinking in a camp chair on the back deck.

“So, you’re finally free of your boyfriend,” Kolarik said.

Richie bristled. “What are you talking about?”

“Have a drink.” Kolarik shouted for Bruce, not stirring from his chair. “I’m talking about Beetle, or whatever you call him. The doctor’s son from Colorado. How is he?”

Richie remained silent but felt himself begin to tremble.

“I don’t mean his health,” Kolarik continued. Bruce stepped through the cabin door. “What will you have, Mr. McAlister?”

“Nothing.”

“Make him a, Scotch on the rocks, Bruce. He’ll need something stiff and medicinal.” Bruce disappeared. “Sit down.”

“No thanks,” Richie said.

“Sit down before you fall down.”

Richie sank into a canvas chair and stared at the lean, strong, intelligent face, the bald head above.

“Yes, I can see why both boys were drawn to you,” Kolarik said. “These pictures, crude, of course, hardly suggest your sense of self.” Kolarik threw a manila envelope onto Richie’s lap. “The first set, with Bruce, is already in the hands of the FBI and the police chief back in your home town in New York. The others, with the doctor’s boy, we’ll hold.”

Richie tilted the envelope and a dozen prints tumbled onto his lap. He looked at them and gasped. The clicking he had heard with Bruce and that had troubled him from time to time on his trip with Cricket, had come from a hidden, miniature automatic camera. It’s unfeeling eye had recorded everything.

Bruce came out with the drink. Richie sprang to his feet and smashed it out of his hands. “You knew about this!” he shouted.

Bruce stared back at him, color mounting in his face. Then the boy stooped to pick up the ice and broken glass.

“Actually, he didn’t,” Kolarik said, watching him calmly, “but it hardly matters. Sit down. What does matter is what happens to the other set. Right now there are envelopes addressed to Beetle’s college, his father, his father’s police chief, the FBI and others, including his girl-friend, Mary. Unless I give instructions to the contrary they will be dropped in the mail tomorrow morning. Bruce, make him another drink, and use the plastic glasses.”

“Who are you?” Richie asked in a low voice, as expressionlessly as he could. “What are you after?”

“We are Starcross, a rather large organization in the illegal business of providing boys for men who enjoy them. We are, well, adequately connected. We operate in almost every major city, but in the United States it is risky, and risk is something our more prominent clients cannot afford. So we have acquired a place in the Caribbean. Not only is the climate marvelous all year round, but there is absolutely no danger of exposure. Right now we are looking for boat service, which is where you come in.”

Bruce came out with another drink and, eyeing Richie cautiously, gave it to him.

“What’s wrong with the *Iceman*?” Richie asked.

“My business is here. Piednoir is serviced out of Trinidad. Shall I continue or are you still upset?”

“I’m upset as hell, what do you think?” Richie sipped on the Scotch, holding the glass with both hands for security.

“Do you want to go back to your own boat and think about all of this?”

“No, I want to find out what you have in mind.”

“You will be paid. You will make more money than I suspect you ever have. We propose that you start to outfit the *Delvin J.* tomorrow for a long sea journey, that you leave by the end of the week for Port of Spain. Bruce Kimball will go with you, as deckie, and... well, to help settle your nerves.”

“What happens when we get to Trinidad?”

“I will give you a name and an address. You will probably carry freight at first. Later it will be human cargo.”

“Kidnapped kids?”

“Volunteers. And clients.”

“What will the kids get out of it?”

“Money. Like you.”

“What happens if I want to quit?”

Kolarik’s eyes danced with cold amusement. “You are full of a great many questions, Mr. McAlister.” Richie stood up and walked to the stern of the *Iceman*. “A little background on the land we have acquired might be of interest. If you remember your recent Caribbean history, the Momes et Roches group of islands was formerly part of the British Windward colonies. Fifteen years ago these islands became independent, tried federation with one another, failed, and then Grande Planche, capital of the Momes et Roches, declared absolute, unilateral independence from the federation and the British Commonwealth as well.

“That was only just the beginning of fragmentation. St. Joseph, on the other end of the island group, declared *its* independence from Grande Planche, taking a few smaller islands along with it. One of these was Piednoir, which we purchased and, in turn, promptly declared independent. To everyone’s relief, no one has attacked anyone else, except at the United Nations, where the spectacle of a few black fishermen wrangling in committee has amused the press and drawn contributions from the lunatic fringe. At any rate, we are perhaps the smallest and least populous nation on earth. There would be a fortune in postage stamps except that we choose, for obvious reasons, to remain inconspicuous.

“To insure this we have an agreement with St. Joseph. It cost us a hotel there, staffed with magnificent inefficiency by local talent, and it will lose money for years, but our privacy at Piednoir is respected, even enforced. This is the way, in our century, you put together a paradise.”

“Or a nightmare,” Richie said, staring off at the town lights of Nassau.

“It won’t be as bad as you fear. We all sell our souls sometime. When you have done this irrevocably, and regained your cheerfulness, then you will have the right to call yourself a man.”

They left, Richie and Bruce, during a week of brisk northeasterly winds that carried them quickly down the long chain of limestone islands toward his old base at Grand Turk. Bruce found his place sitting on the stern, bare legs hanging over the side just as he had sat, back at Nassau, on the lockerbox of the *Iceman*. That Richie hardly ever spoke to him, or even looked at him for long, didn’t seem to matter. Bruce seldom used language as a means of communicating feeling, and he understood perfectly the sorrow and distress of his captain.

They might have sailed all the way to Trinidad in their separate silences if Bruce hadn’t fallen sick. One morning he appeared at the stove flushed and unsteady, his hair damp and his face wet with perspiration. Richie put a hand to his brow, felt the fever and measured it with a thermometer at 103.

“Get back in bed,” Richie said.

The boy shook his head. “I’m okay.”

“You’re not okay. Take one of these.” Richie gave him an aspirin.

“I’ll help you until you’re under way.”

“You just do what I tell you to do. Now get.”

Bruce didn’t move but looked at him with stubborn, red-rimmed eyes. Richie put his hand on the boy’s shoulders, turned him and pushed him firmly into the starboard cabin.

“Lie down.”

Bruce sat on his bunk. Richie began skinning off the striped shirt.

“I can undress myself,” the boy said.

“I know you can, but will you?”

Bare-chested, Bruce lay back on the unmade bed and looked out the portal as Richie’s hands went to his trousers to unfasten the fly button by button.

“I see you’re not too sick to get a hard-on,” Richie said, smiling.

“I can’t help it.”

“Don’t worry. We’re all human.”

Bruce nodded. “Is he a rich kid?”

“Who’s that?”

“The doctor’s son. That you love.”

“Let’s not talk about it, okay?”

“Okay.”

Bruce was sick to his stomach several times during the day, always making it to the head, however, and that night he started having bad dreams. Richie awakened to his cries, shook him into consciousness and then stayed with him for a few minutes until he was resting peacefully again. The second time this happened Bruce sat up and threw his arms around Richie and said, “Don’t let me go back to sleep again.” The boy’s cheek was hot and damp.

“You’ve got to rest,” Richie whispered to the ear that touched his lips. “That’s how you’ll get well.”

“Then stay with me, please.”

For three days Bruce was sick and for three nights Richie slept with him, enduring his restlessness, his nightmares, his delirium and babble. Sometime during the fourth night Bruce’s fever broke. His skin dried, his body cooled. The smell of sickness gradually left the bed. Bruce dropped into heavy sleep, silent and still, and Richie gratefully followed him.

At dawn Richie had a sexual dream. Cricket was undressing in the upstairs room they had shared three years ago in Colorado. Richie was waiting for him in bed. Cricket kept his back to Richie, hiding his masculine parts. Richie told him to turn around, but Cricket snapped off the light. In the darkness he could hear the boy groping toward him. When Cricket lifted the covers Richie’s blood rose — and his sperm as well.

Richie awakened and discovered an additional cause of his enormous arousal. Asleep, so deeply asleep he appeared to be working at it, Bruce had grasped Richie’s full erection and was holding it tightly, as though it were a ladder rung and he was dangling dangerously in space. For a moment they tangled hands, Richie working quickly for relinquishment while Bruce only tightened his sleeping grip. Then Richie’s feelings rose and completed awake what his dream had denied him. White relief pulsed over ten fingers clutching at cross purposes. Richie cursed and then began to laugh. It was dawn and the boy was getting well. When he got up a few minutes later, he could feel that the deep gloom of the past weeks was beginning, quite irrationally, to lift.

They stayed three days in South Caicos. Richie reprovisioned the *Delvin J.* for the long leg of open ocean to Puerto Rico while Bruce lay in the sun recovering his strength. The last evening they anchored in the lee of a nearby cay, happy to be rid of the town noises, the crowing of roosters and donkeys braying. After

supper they sipped their coffee sitting next to one another in the main cabin. In the warm silence between them Richie's hand came to rest on Bruce's leg. He didn't mean it sexually, but Bruce's fingers quickly entwined themselves in his and began to move.

"I'm starting to feel real good now," Bruce said.

Richie broke the grip and stood up. "Let's do the chores and turn in early. It'll be several nights before we sleep in a harbor again."

He went on deck, checked the sky and wind, the anchor, the readiness of sails and rigging. Bruce finished in the galley. "You're a real good mate," Richie told him.

Bruce's color heightened and he stared at his feet. "Thanks. Well, I better go to bed."

"Yeah," Richie sighed. "See you at dawn."

They went to their separate bunks. It was still warm. Richie undressed and lay down in his skivvies on top of his sheets. A moment later the door opened and Bruce came in.

"I got a sliver in my right thumb. Can you dig it out for me?"

"Maybe." Richie lit a kerosene lamp, got a pair of tweezers and a knife, looked at the toughening fingers.

"I been trying all day to get it out with my teeth," Bruce said, "but I only busted the end off shorter."

Richie worked for a few seconds, cut, pulled, as Bruce flinched, finally drew the sliver and presented it to Bruce. "When you come back next time," he told Bruce, "bring your pillow."

"What?" Bruce looked at him, his eyes slowly taking on light from the kerosene lamp. "You mean..." He swallowed. "You want..." His eyes traveled down Richie's chest to the white cloth that hid the flesh but not the shape of his turgid cock. "Gol!"

"Hurry up. Get it, and kick off your skivs. We got to sleep tonight, too."

A naked Bruce came back with the pillow and a case of the shakes. Richie smiled. He turned down the lamp and reached for the boy's cock which was in its customary pubertal erect state.

"Take it easy," he told Bruce. "This is the last thing I'd think you'd get nervous about." He pulled Bruce gently toward the bed by his cock.

"I'm not just a dirty boy," Bruce stammered. "I don't want you to think that."

"I don't."

"I really didn't know about that camera."

"I believe you."

"You've been awful nice to me." Bruce leaned with his knees against the side of the bunk and let his arms hang.

Richie started slowly moving the soft skin back and forth along the half-grown gristle of Bruce's penis. "You deserved it," he said.

"I was a lot of trouble when I was sick."

"You couldn't help it."

Richie raised himself on an elbow, and then he couldn't speak any more because he had slipped the penis in his mouth.

"Man, it's been such a long time!" Bruce whispered with rare emotion. One hand came into Richie's hair, the other to his chest, and the boy slumped slightly down over the bunk. "I should be doing this to you."

In a moment he was. He had dropped to his knees and was licking, mouthing on the taproot of Richie's feeling. Bruce, of course, was skilled. A captive professional at the age of nine, he had learned from the passions and angers of a hundred men. Richie sighed with enormous pleasure, as welcome as it was unexpected. Soon he had to cool it, and he unplugged himself from the boy's mouth, wrapped his arms about Bruce's waist and brought them both into a conventional hug on top of the mussed-up bunk.

They kissed. They cooled their loins by holding apart their penis tips. It was their lips that met now, deeply wet, deeply knowing. It was their tongues that penetrated, teeth that touched. They moaned low in their throats. They breathed one another's breath until they became dizzy. At last their lips closed upon the streaming, bobbing demanding instruments of their tensions, but released the streaming cocks so they could go into conventional embrace with Richie on top. They tangled their legs. Boyhood met and slipped on manhood. The thatched pubes met and ground on the bare one. In the night of their feelings the fireworks began to burst. Richie felt he, too, was rising with the rockets and then exploding outward in incredible glory. Climax burst upon them, held them for a few mutual throbs and then relinquished them slowly to the pleasures of afterlove and, eventually, sleep.

From then on Bruce loved him, and in his love the boy flourished. A hidden grace came into his movements. There was new light in his hazel eyes. He even smiled occasionally. During the departure in the morning and throughout their long crossing to the Greater Antilles, Bruce watched everything Richie did about the *Delvin J.*, tried his hand at repairs, learned to set the sail, took the helm for long hours during the day while Richie, who had the ship at night, caught some sleep.

After seven days of blustery sailing, the western end of Puerto Rico emerged from the haze ahead of them and at sundown they dropped anchor in the quiet waters off Mayaguez. That night they once again shared Richie's bunk. Four times they quenched the hunger of their ocean abstinence and slept off in each other's arms their sexual resolution. At dawn each licked sleep-dried lips to press on other lips then engulf the other's cock (bending down in the bunk, ear pressed against the other's heartbeat) until both mouths sighed and filled and passion left them. A new day faced them, with stores to be purchased, water tanks to be filled, rope and grommets checked, for the last leg of their freedom.

A month later, a tanner, tougher, longer-haired, sea-seasoned Bruce stood on the bow of the *Delvin J.* as Richie guided her, sails furled, under power between two gigantic spines that formed the only entrance to the harbor on the island nation of Piednoir. Embedded in the living rock to the right and above them were the ruins of a Napoleonic fort. In one of its paneless sockets a rifle moved. Richie waved and the rifle dropped. He was expected.

They made fast to an old dock a little further up the harbor. A slender, erect young man wearing only a pair of khaki shorts drove up in a jeep.

"I'm Colonel Larson," he said, boarding the *Delvin J.* "We've been expecting you for a week now. This must be young Kimball." Larson's eyes roamed over the boy and returned to Richie's face. "I suppose he can work here when he isn't needed by his skipper."

"The boy stays with me," Richie said. "When do we unload this cargo?"

Larson smiled mirthlessly. He was a small man, rigid but nervous. "Everybody in our organization accepts orders from above," he began.

"Except me, when it has to do with my ship. That, Colonel Larson, is an old law of the sea."

"And your sleeping companion here is essential to your nautical activities, I presume?"

"Bruce knows my ship and I need him. If you don't interfere with me I won't interfere with your operation, or whatever you call it."

They measured each other for a moment. "It will take you a while to adjust, I suppose," said the colonel.

Richie shook his head. "I've done all the adjusting I'm going to do. I'm here, with the understanding that I provide boat service. Period. Nothing more. That holds for me, my ship and my crew."

"Come ashore. I'll show you around."

The island wasn't very large. Geologically it was a composite of two fairly recent volcanic plugs (the rock bastions that guarded the harbor entrance) and flanking pyroclastic beds. On the windward side the complex had been eaten into by the sea; there only one small bay, all but cut off by coral reefs, indented a

palisade of cliffs. An eighteenth-century military community once flourished in the harbor, but with the general settlement at the end of the Napoleonic wars the facilities had been abandoned. After that the island was deserted. Natives from St. Joseph occasionally harvested the coconuts ringing the bay. They hooked conchs as well, and over the years piles of bleached shells grew along the shore. Just after World War Two an American company manufacturing sport fishing equipment bought the island for a tackle-testing and entertainment center, erected a Great House in the style of the old plantation days and added fifteen guest cottages. It was almost the company's undoing. With declining profits and a committee of angry stockholders, the board of directors sold the island to Colonel Larson's (and Richie's) employer.

For several months now Larson and a crew of native artisans had been struggling to reclaim the buildings, the water and electrical systems and the grounds from four years of disuse and the inroads of tropical growth. He showed Richie and Bruce about the premises, from his office in the plantation house to the soldiers' post at the harbor entrance.

"The first boys arrive in a month," Larson said when they had returned to the ship and were watching black bodies struggle along the dock toward the island truck under beds and bureaus, roll drums of gasoline and cylinders of propane. The colonel sighed, looking at Bruce. "It will be good to see American kids again."

That was early June. By September Richie had hauled thirty boys ranging in age from nine to eighteen, and many times that number of paying customers to Piednoir.

He preferred to spend as much time as possible in St. Joseph, where he rented a house for Bruce and himself, set up a joint bank account to deposit the money draughts that arrived regularly from Switzerland. When Piednoir didn't need him, he took out fishing and diving parties from the hotel. Bruce was with him everywhere. During the day they worked as a close professional team — sailing, fishing, SCUBA diving, serving their charter customers, handling cargo. It was at night, and in wordless ardor, that Bruce expressed with his body the love he could never verbalize. With his love for Richie, his body grew. In October the first coarse hair, chestnut colored as on his head, appeared on the tan of his pubic escutcheon, and by the new year Bruce had a respectable, boy-fragrant bush. Hair soon peaked from his arm pits. His upper lip and then his cheek grew the heavy soft down of early adolescence.

One day after dropping customers at Piednoir and attending to some business with Larson, Richie returned to the *Delvin J.* to find Bruce gone. He waited, growing angry, then worried. He went ashore and questioned a group of boys relaxing, naked, on the beach.

"Some of the soldiers came down and got him," an older boy said.

"He didn't look very happy," another told him.

"Was he fighting back?"

"Well, no. There wouldn't have been much point, would there? He just seemed worried."

Richie stalked up to the plantation house and burst into Colonel Larson's office. "Where's my boy?" he demanded.

"Bruce? Well, do you remember Howard Webster, the author you brought over last Monday? All he could talk about was your deckie, how wonderful he looked, how..."

"Cut the crap. Where is he?"

"We're a little short of thirteen-year-olds just now and, after all, Bruce Kimball is an employee of Starcross, so I told some of the men to go down to your boat and fetch him for Mr. Webster..."

Richie leapt across the desk and grabbed Larson by the throat. "Where is he?" Richie relaxed his thumbs just enough to let a little breath whistle though.

"Let... go..."

"When you tell me where the boy is."

"In... Number twelve."

Richie released Larson and stood up. "They'll hear about this!" the colonel shrieked.

Cabin number twelve was at the end of a footpath on a promontory overlooking the windward ocean. Richie knew it was the cottage given to customers with special tastes which often resulted in a lot of noise. Perched above the roar of the surf, exposed to the full force of the trade winds, the goings-on in number twelve seldom interrupted the tranquillity of the other cottages where, presumably, lovemaking took a more gentle turn.

Richie had visions of Bruce being thrashed, raped, strung up, caged, but when he reached the cottage and threw open the door he found the only person being victimized, and to his apparent ecstasy, was Howard Webster himself who was bound down naked to a narrow table by an amazing variety of smooth-link chains, leather straps, brackets and ropes. A stubby erection danced above his groin. Five bare-chested boys standing around the table jerked up their heads to stare at Richie. One of them was Bruce.

Howard Webster seemed oblivious of Richie's intrusion. "I'll be good," he whined. "I won't do it again. Please, please don't humiliate me any more. Not that way. It's too, too degrading. Especially in front of that insanely handsome sailor boy."

Since Richie appeared not to be interfering, the boys got back to their assignment. One of them nodded to Bruce and said, "Come on, all you got to do is spit on him like we been doing, and a little later piss on him. That's not much. And you'll get a nice tip."

Bruce smiled awkwardly at Richie, who was so relieved he couldn't repress a laugh himself and said, "Go ahead. You got lots of both to spare."

But Bruce shook his head firmly and moved to Richie's side. Then they slipped out the door and ran down to the harbor.

Colonel Larson met them at the dock. "Listen to me," he said. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have..."

"Damned right you shouldn't have," Richie said, casting free the bow line while Bruce attended to the stern.

"Don't make trouble," the colonel continued. "Everyone will suffer for it, including you."

"Just get out of my way." Richie jumped into the cockpit and started the engine.

"What are you going to do?"

"I haven't decided yet," Richie said. He put the engine in gear.

"You're young and impulsive, but you better calm down before you reach St. Joseph." The *Delvin J.* began to move forward, slowly pulling away from the dock. Larson walked with it. "Remember, Mr. McAlister, the pictures."

"So what have they got on you?" Richie shouted across the growing gap of water.

The colonel didn't answer, but for the next half year there was no trouble between them.

In the late summer there began to be signs. A tougher, grimmer kind of customer started arriving on St. Joseph for transport to Piednoir. The boys, when Richie saw them, which was rarely now, seemed listless and morose. There were more soldiers guarding the entrance to the harbor and loitering along the paths. Larson seemed increasingly jumpy.

By early fall Richie was convinced that some major storm was brewing and he wasn't sure how he and Bruce and the *Delvin J.* were going to come out of it. Working at his desk one night while Bruce was viewing the weekly movie, he wrote out a list of instructions to the boy that was only to be read and acted upon in the event of his death. In effect he made Bruce his heir, to inherit his boat and bank account. For guidance he told the boy to go to Colorado and put his fate in the hands of Dr. Ardley.

One October night when the trade winds had died to a whisper in the palms and it seemed altogether too hot in their little bedroom to have engaged in the lovemaking that had left them wet, spent and tired, they heard outside their window the sound of corrugated roof metal buckling under human feet. A figure appeared at the screen. It was a young white man, barefoot and naked but for a pair of pants ripped off just below the crotch. He hunkered down and stared in. "Richie?" he whispered.

"What to you want?" Richie asked.

"Let me in. Don't turn on the lights."

Richie walked to the screen with Bruce at his side. "Are you from Piednoir?"

"Yes. You didn't recognize me a month ago when you took me there. It's been over four years since you looked me up on your motorcycle and I looked you over from the top of our gate..."

"Ian!" Richie unfastened the screen and Ian Kirk jumped in.

"I see you still go for 'tween-agers," Ian said, looking at Bruce.

"How'd you get off the island?" Richie asked.

"Give me some food and I'll tell you. I haven't eaten in two days."

They went to the kitchen and drew the blinds and turned on the lights. Ian was now a tall, handsome nineteen-year-old with the taut build and spare movements of an athlete. His hair was almost shoulder length, well tangled and matted in salt, bleached much lighter than Richie remembered by the Caribbean sun. Richie brought out some cold food from the refrigerator and Ian started wolfing it down.

"Coffee?" Richie asked.

Ian shook his head. "All I need is another stimulant! Got any booze?"

"Sure."

It didn't take long for Ian to clean out all their cold cuts and milk and ice-cream and cookies. When at last he was finished he pushed his chair back and, holding on his knee a tumbler half full of whiskey, said, "How much do you know about what goes on over in Piednoir?"

"As little as possible," Richie said. "Tell me about yourself."

Ian smiled sardonically. "Well, Rich, for yours truly life's turned to shit. Just to bring you up to date, I never made it through high school. My folks couldn't quite bring themselves to disown me, but they did the next best thing: cut me off without funds. So about a year ago I left home. I'll bet every morning my old man's out there at the mailbox looking over his letters scared pissless there'll be something there from me.

"Anyhow, there weren't an awful lot of things I could do to put food in my stomach, so I picked up where you and I left off, except I did it for money. I went to the gay bars. One thing led to another and I signed on to coming down here. The pay they promise is real good, you know. It's supposed to be accumulating in a trust account for you in New York."

Ian gulped some whiskey and grimaced, his eyes watering. “Whew! I don’t drink much. That’s one vice I haven’t acquired. That and smoking. I do a lot of swimming, wrestle some and I try to stay in shape. It came in real handy the past two days.”

“Don’t tell me you swam from Piednoir!” That would have been a crossing of seven miles.

“Richie, customers leave, you and Bruce leave, Larson leaves on R and R weekends, but none of the boys ever leave Piednoir.”

“How does he keep them there?”

“It’s a nation, isn’t it? With its own laws, right? They can control immigration and emigration like the Russians. If a kid tells Colonel Larson he wants out, Larson says, ‘You stay.’ If he asks two or three times and starts making trouble, the boy just disappears.”

“I haven’t taken any kids off,” Richie said.

“Of course you haven’t. Three boys, eleven or younger, all homesick as hell, are missing. The last one, Billy, was my bed partner when the customers left both him and me alone. I raised hell for a while — you know how I can do it — then got suspicious. Larson told me they had isolated Billy for his own good and the morale of the other boys. When I insisted on seeing him, they pretended to give in and said they’d take me to him. For all I know when they drew that gun on me back in the bush I may have been standing on his grave.”

“Wait a minute,” Richie exclaimed. “You mean they’re *killing* kids?”

“I figured you didn’t know that.”

“But the boys are American citizens.”

“Subject to Piednoir’s laws. I guess wanting to spilt is a capital offense.”

“Good God. What happened to you?”

“Well, the old colonel’s eye must be slipping because he missed me by a mile. I ran through the jungle, three soldiers hot behind me, and pretty soon I broke out on top of that cliff that runs along the east side of the island. With nowhere else to go, I made the most beautiful swan dive this side of Acapulco and plunged two hundred feet down into the ocean where, fortunately, I missed all the boulders and coral heads. Any fool should of known I’d be killed, but the soldiers came looking for me — or my body — along the shore. I swam to the Cat and Kittens rocks and spent the night, where I felt pretty safe because Piednoir doesn’t have a boat on it — they depend on you for that. In the morning I found one of those conching rafts made out of century plant stalks pulled up by some native, I guess, on the Kitten and, after the sun set, I paddled it here to St. Joseph.”

For a moment Ian and Richie were silent, while Bruce looked at one and then the other. Finally Richie said, “Do you have a plan?”

“As a matter of fact,” Ian said, “I do.”

A few nights later a very different looking Richie waded ashore on the lee side of Piednoir. He was wearing designer shorts and an expensive print shirt purchased in the hotel at St. Joseph. Moreover, he had shaved off his beard and cropped his hair to its darker roots. All in all he looked more like a tourist than a seaman.

When he reached the beach he stopped for a moment and watched the ghostly shape of the *Delvin J.*, under power and running without lights with Bruce at the helm, disappear around the south point for home. Then he slipped into the jungle and in the light of a half-moon riding through the tom stratiform clouds of Caribbean autumn he found one of the jeep trails and set off at a jog toward the Plantation.

A half hour later he was knocking on the door of Ian’s old cottage. It was opened by a sleep-drugged teenager who, obviously assuming Richie was just another customer, groaned a bit impolitely and let him in.

The boy struck a match and put it to a candle and said, "Sorry, we have no current out here. I don't think I've seen you before, have I?"

"Don't I look like a normal client?" Richie asked.

The boy raised his eyes, still holding the burning match. In the light of the two flames Richie could see he had a handsome face. Physically he was well matched with Ian, but there was something friendlier and more restful in the serious blue eyes that were busy now appraising his new guest.

"You do and you don't," the boy finally said. "A lot of funny things have been going on recently. Sit down, now that you're here."

"Do you think I'd pass for a customer?"

"I guess so, except there aren't many this month."

"I'd estimate about 15."

The boy hesitated, then shook out the match which had burnt down to his fingers and set the candle on a bedside table. "What more do you know?"

"That your name is Davy, you come from San Diego and you pal around with Ian — from whom I brought you this message."

The boy's eyes widened with surprise and hope. "You mean Ian's okay?" Davy took the piece of paper Richie handed him and read it.

"Right," Richie said. "Okay. Now, tell me everything that's happened since Ian left."

They talked quietly for an hour or so, then Richie stripped to his undershorts, Davy blew out the candle and they lay down beside each other on the single bed, shoulders lightly touching, listening to the soft night sounds of the jungle. Finally Davy said, "Richie, do you only like younger kids?"

"No," Richie said, "but right now I've got to sleep."

With the first strong light of morning Richie set off to inspect the shoreline. The west side of the island seemed quite well guarded. From time to time he came across small groups of soldiers carrying repeating rifles and with cartridge belts crossing from their shoulders to their waists. He waved to them, the naive customer out for an early stroll, but received no greetings back. They had been recruited in Honduras, according to Davy. They didn't speak English and kept largely to themselves.

That didn't mean that all of them were indifferent to the appeal of young boys, however; later in the morning Richie came across Chucky, a chestnut-haired 12-year-old, fishing off some rocks and all but being courted by two young soldiers. Richie waited until the soldiers left, then joined the boy and asked how his luck was running.

"This is my day off," the boy said sourly. "Colonel Larson promised I wouldn't have to be on duty."

"I'll respect that," Richie said. "I just wanted company. I like fishing, too."

It was fifteen minutes before Chucky started to open up. Then Richie learned the boy came from El Paso and had picked up a sort of street Spanish from some of his Mexican school-mates. One of the soldiers by the name of Miguel was Chucky's special friend. In return, probably, for some sexual favors, Miguel let the boy play with his rifle, put on his cap and jacket, and look at the weapons in their little armory, which he described in detail to Richie. Chucky also got to ride in a jeep and sometimes, secretly, drive it.

"I'll bet they have a lot of vehicles," Richie said.

"No, just that one." Richie knew there was also a truck on the island which hauled supplies from the boat up to the Great House.

"There couldn't be very many soldiers, then," Richie probed.

"No."

"How many, do you think?"

Chucky squinted at him, suspicion dawning in his eyes. "Why are you asking all these questions?"

"Oh, just curious. Reel in — I think you've lost your bait."

By the time Richie finished inspecting the lee shore of the island he knew it was all readily accessible by jeep trails — and observable from the Grand Piton guard post overlooking the harbor. He was surprised, in fact, that last night's approach of the *Delvin J.* had gone unnoticed. Perhaps everyone, despite the killings, still felt secure at Piednoir.

When he returned to the cabin he discovered Davy had saved some food from the dining hall. Richie wolfed it down hurriedly then spent the afternoon walking along the edge of the eastern cliffs sketching the pattern of reefs and coves below him. After the evening meal Davy joined him back at the cottage and then he set out to rendezvous with the *Delvin J.*

Saturday was always the climax of the week at Piednoir. Then, just before each group of customers departed, Larson put on a Bacchanal. All day the boys wandered around in fur loincloths with bits of tropical greenery wound in their hair. In the evening a torchlight Roman banquet was served — on the grass when the weather was good, in the plantation house when it rained. Boys with candles passed food and wine, and the men stuffed themselves and drank and belched and laughed and occasionally embraced one of their servants. The meal lasted until well after dark, and then the boys disappeared to get ready for the torch run off the Grand Piton which opened the night of orgy.

The Saturday evening following Ian Kirk's unexpected arrival at Richie's window, the *Delvin J.*, with the aid of a moonless sky and the total calm that for over a week had engulfed the southern Antilles in its October lethargy, motored slowly toward the precipitous windward coast of Piednoir.

On the bow stood Ian and Bruce, the latter measuring the water depth with line and sinker. Richie guided the ship gently forward, backed up when they approached a patch reef of coral, tried again at a different point. After an hour of probing the approaches they dropped anchor in the single windward cove and swam ashore, Richie holding over his head their one weapon, his automatic rifle.

A jeep road led from the beach to the top of the cliff. They climbed it, without pausing or looking back, then melted into the jungle, where Ian took them along silent paths across the island and up the back of the Grand Piton. When they were near enough its bald top to hear voices and the crackle of fire, they dropped to their knees and crawled closer, until they could see the big bonfire blazing in the night and the thirty-odd boys of Piednoir milling around it. They waited a moment, making sure there were no soldiers among the boys, then walked into their midst.

All talk stopped. "Good God, it's Ian!" one of the older boys gasped. A couple of younger boys began to cry.

"I'm not a ghost," Ian said, smiling grimly.

Richie listened to the murmur of the boys pressing around the three of them. A log in the fire boomed, sending sparks high into the sky. Frightened, wide-eyed faces looked to him and Ian for help.

A rifle went off down at the plantation house. "That's the signal," one of the boys told Richie "We gotta go."

"Give us two minutes," Ian said. "With a little luck we'll all be clear of this place by dawn."

Hurriedly Ian and Richie went over the plan. The rifle sounded again from below. "Okay," Richie said. "At five forty-five the boat leaves. See you then. Good luck."

Thirty boys plunged their flares into the fire. The night went orange above their heads. They picked up the flaming fire logs by their unburned ends and hurled them over the brink in a red descending shower of sparks that fanned out from the cliff face like fire-works. They cheered, voices made wild by the savage excitement of their impending escape. Then they tore off down the hill in a mad flickering and bobbing and leaping of torches, making for the old coconut grove by the harbor where their customers were crouching in the long grass or standing behind palm trunks, ready to tackle the bearers of the flame and extinguish on their sweating bodies their own sexual fires in a last night of wild carnality.

The eastern sky was slowly turning twilight gray. Richie sat against a huge boulder beside the road where it turned on one of many switchbacks down the cliff to the cove. He hadn't slept but Bruce dozed with his head resting on Richie's shoulder. Ian lay in the grass across the road watching them with one hand propping up his head.

"You make a nice sight," Ian said, without his customary irony. "Remember, back at Barnes..."

"Were you really a sleepwalker?"

“Sometimes I was. Hell, Richie, you should have got it on with me. I probably wouldn’t be here now if you had. Well, that’s ancient history.”

“It doesn’t pay to remember too much,” Richie said. “People change. Boys grow up.”

“And men like us aren’t attractive except to queers and women.”

“And other boys.”

Ian nodded toward Bruce. “I like him, Rich. You’re lucky.”

Bruce stirred and lifted his head off Richie’s shoulder. “What time is it?”

“Five twenty-five.”

Bruce swallowed and got up and stretched. He relieved himself noisily onto the dirt road. Richie watched him as a father watches a son. It was a shame the boy, so quickly reaching manhood, was tied to this kind of life. He deserved a try, at least, of something different. Maybe now, one way or another, he would get that opportunity.

They heard footfalls. The first escapees from Starcross ran up, panting. Ian went down to the cove with them to help everybody board the ship. Now, by ones, two and fours, the boys came, in various stages of dress and undress. They were relieved to find Richie guarding them with his rifle.

The stream of boys slackened and stopped. Richie looked at his watch: 5:35. Time to go.

Suddenly Davy, naked but for a pair of briefs, crashed out of the jungle. “They know,” Davy panted. “That fucking Chuckie had to say good-bye to his soldier friend. They’re coming in the jeep. I saw them. They’ll be here in two minutes at most.”

“Okay, run to the boat,” Richie said. “Tell Ian. Tell him to hurry!”

Davy stumbled off down the path.

“You, too,” Richie told Bruce.

“What about you?”

“I got to stay.”

“Then I’m staying with you.”

Richie shook his head. “How’s the boat going to move without you to run it?”

“Me?!”

“You’re skipper now.”

The boy’s face crumpled and he burst into tears.

“Come on, Bruce, no baby stuff. Not now. We just haven’t got time.”

“You can’t... tell me... to leave you!” Bruce sobbed.

“I *am* telling you to leave me. Go down to the *Delvin J.* and get the kids the hell out of here.”

“I can’t! I love you!”

Richie leaned his rifle against the rock and put his arms around the boy who sobbed loudly into his chest. “Look,” he said gently, “there’s no point in all of us being killed. You and I are going to save thirty people, me here and you on the boat, working together like we always do.”

“It’s not together!”

“Sure it is.” Richie pushed the boy away. “Now you have to go”

Bruce stood in front of him, face smudged with tears, staring at him as though to fix him in memory for all time.

“Go,” Richie whispered. “You got to go.”

Bruce turned and ran and Richie was all alone.

He grabbed his rifle and went to a point of rocks which commanded both the road and the bay. There, below him, was the *Delvin J.* with a few kids on the decks, more swimming toward her in the dawn-gray waters of the cove.

At the road there was a whine of gears and a few moments later the square nose of the island jeep popped into view. Richie raised the barrel of his gun, sighted on a tire and squeezed the trigger. There

was a burst of sound. The jeep lurched and stopped. Four men got out. Two crossed behind the body of the jeep while the other two crept off into the jungle. Richie glanced back to the bay. The water was still filled with swimming boys. Bruce hadn't made it to the beach. Richie turned back, put a fresh clip in his gun and fired over the jeep. A bullet whined off the rock in front of him.

"Just give me three minutes," he said to himself. He fired another burst and slouched against the boulder, wiping dirty sweat from his eyes.

Suddenly he was a boy again in up-state New York. He relived the long, dark winters and then the dreamy, drowsy summers of hazy sun and broad-leafed shade, of gravel road dust and the cool of an Adirondack trout stream. He tasted grape juice at the church socials, the sweet pulp of the tender end of plucked June grass. And, of course, he remembered Jim, at eight and twelve and fourteen and sixteen, growing, like himself, in the stable comfort of town and family, until...

Another bullet struck the rock. Richie fired into the jungle again. Sweat blinded him momentarily and he blinked it out of his eyes.

His mind drifted back to Colorado. What was Cricket doing now? How, in a few years, as a man, married and with children of his own, would he remember the crazy ski bum he pulled out of the snow, who ended up seducing him, then and later? Cricket. Jim. Two loves. Both ended.

Questions came and agony with them.

Was the grenade that killed Jim doubly lethal? Was that what was killing him now, five years later?

Was Jim, could Jim be, altogether dead? Could somehow their consciousness, in another dimension of eternity, continue so that they could, with search and will and luck, fuse together again?

Richie smiled. An illusion like that could help a man when his back was against the wall. "Okay, Jim, old buddy, old pal," he said, surprised at the sound of his own voice, "if you're waiting for me still get your prick hard and your asshole ready!"

There was a quick pain in his arm. He looked down to see blood soaking his shirt sleeve. "Jim!" he cried, suddenly sad and worried and bewildered. He shut his eyes and trembled and felt faint and sick. The nausea passed and he opened his eyes. And then he gasped, for standing in front of him, clear as the jeep, was the fifteen-year-old Jim, balancing, naked, on one foot, water in his hair and clinging to his bare skin, grinning in relaxed exuberance, the veneer of sorrow and maturity stripped away.

"Hi ya, hand pal," Jim said. "Let's swim."

Richie smiled, slowly, at first doubting, resisting, then finally accepting, tears of relief running down his cheeks and mingling with the sweat. "Give me a little time," Richie said. "Give me about a minute. Then it won't be long."

The men at the jeep were crawling toward him. Richie fired into the ground before them and they darted back. Down in the cove the *Delvin J.* was at last free of her anchor. Several figures were climbing over the topsides. Bruce was at the helm and the boat slowly made for the opening between the rocky headlands.

"If they could just see you at home now," Jim said.

"Yeah!" Richie fired another burst into the jungle. There was an answering shot and a whine and a pain in his shoulder: a spent bullet lodged lightly in the flesh just above his clavicle. Once again he slumped against the rock and closed his eyes.

"What happened, Jim?" he asked. "What happened to you and me? It all started so good, when we were kids. What the hell fouled up?"

"Don't worry about it," Jim said. "Come on, I'll race you three times around the island."

Jim opened his eyes and looked into the cove. The *Delvin J.* was passing through the bay mouth, pitching as it entered the ocean swell. The breeze was returning with dawn. It took the sails and accelerated the ship seaward, making foam stream back from the bow. In a few seconds it would be out of sight. Richie raised his good arm and waved but he couldn't tell if anyone waved back.

“What you waiting for?” Jim asked. “First one in’s a peckerheaded dope!”

Jim dove into the lake and surfaced and wiped the hair out of his eyes. “Come on in, Rich, it’s nice.”

Richie threw his gun on the ground and climbed slowly, wearily to his feet.

“I’ll give you the count,” Jim said.

Richie nodded.

“Here goes. One... two... three.”

Richie stepped out from behind the rock. A rifle sputtered There was a pain in his chest and he realized he was falling, but it didn’t matter because the lake was below him. The cool Adirondacks waters parted to receive him and down and down into them he went. Somewhere in this dim, dimming blue world was Jim swimming, too. He stretched an arm to feel for Jim, to find him and touch him, and then...

Eight months later, in the church he had attended intermittently ever since he could remember, first with his mother and then, after she died, with his agnostic father, Alan Ardley married the girl he had fallen in love with just before he had gone off to college. Playing an inconspicuous role in the festivities (Cricket could hardly claim them as lifelong friends) were Bruce Kimball and Ian Kirk.

This unlikely pair had turned up on Dr. Ardley's doorstep less than a month after the *Delvin J.* had made her last desperate flight from Piednoir to Grenada. The doctor listened to the boys' story, read Richie's last letter and, reflecting upon the loneliness of his now-childless home, decided to take Bruce in. Ian had planned to go on to San Francisco where he knew he could survive as a hustler until something better turned up, but a construction company building a new chair lift on the mountain had hired him as a laborer and he'd stayed on, sharing a tiny cabin on the outskirts of town with an ancient prospector who cooked their meals and made their beds in return for an occasional 'favor.' The old man still had vivid recollections of the mining camps, the long winter confinement of the men and their "cabin itch". At eighty he could still get up an erection every fourth or fifth day, and this Ian had to manipulate, sitting on the side of the old man's tobaccosmelling bunk, watching the old eyes close to dream, old lips murmur to some long-dead companion, until the sluggish semen rose at last to end the ancient vision.

For both boys the direction of life's flow changed. Bruce came to love Dr. Ardley very much as he had loved Richie, except that there was only occasional sex between them. The doctor, for his part, delighted in the boy and his continued flowering; he began to feel useful as a father again.

Ian listened to the prospector talk about loads and placers, claims and mines and ores. At first he was simply bored, but slowly he caught the fever. He visited some modern mines, looked at the old man's samples, read his books, then decided he would become a mining geologist and, as such, travel the world until it was worn out. That winter he passed a high school equivalency exam and in the spring went to the university in Boulder. It was from here that he returned to attend Cricket's wedding.

He arrived in the small hours of the morning. Dr. Ardley showed him into the bedroom next to Cricket's where Bruce lay sleeping in a pool of moonlight. Ian watched the younger boy as he stripped, then knelt beside the closed eyes, the gently breathing lips. Ian put a hand to the swelling, growing muscles of Bruce's neck. An eye fluttered open. For almost a minute they watched each other wordlessly, as Ian moved his thumb slowly in the little hollow below Bruce's ear. Gradually his heartbeat firmed, steadied, measuring his young time at its full fluorescence. Then Bruce made room for him and Ian lifted the covers and entered the sweet-smelling warmth of Bruce's bed.

Heads sank in the single pillow. Fresh breath mingled with sleeping breath and noses met, then lips. Legs tangled. Thighs pressed inward on opening thighs. Bruce swallowed, then whispered in Ian's ear, "I'd almost forgot how nice this was."

"I hadn't."

"Do you ever stop liking it?"

"Who knows?"

"If we marry, like Cricket..." Bruce began, but he never finished, for Ian's strong lips came about his, repressing words, stirring up old feelings in both of them, warm, dark memories of Richie.

The night before the wedding Cricket's ushers gave him a stag party in the warming hut half-way up the ski slopes. There were champagne and speeches and lusty talk until dawn, when the young men began drifting home. Soon only Cricket and Ian and Bruce were left. The groom-to-be went to the window and watched the early sun pinken the granite peaks. Bruce and Ian drew their chairs up to the fire and fell silent, nursing the last of their champagne.

"There's one toast nobody made," Cricket said.

Ian and Bruce nodded.

Ian stood. He rocked a little with the unaccustomed blurring of alcohol. He opened his mouth but speech deserted him.

Cricket turned back from the window and watched Ian with steady eyes.

“Oh, hell,” Ian said at last, “he was doomed and damned, or at least he thought so, but each one of us loved him.” Ian grabbed a half-empty bottle of champagne and filled his glass until the golden liquid foamed over and ran down the stem. “Here’s to you, Rich. Sorry you’re not with us, but you couldn’t follow Cricket where he’s going now anyhow. So, good-bye, old punk. Better luck in the next reincarnation.”

Ian threw back his head and downed the drink and hurled the glass into the fireplace.

Solos, Duets and Improvisations

by Wallington Fuger

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1. Forrest Overture

Joel Forrest was beating off.

He had found a place in the woods not far from Skillet Lake where he could be down comfortably in the shade. If he raised his head and peered through the tasseled tops of the long grass hiding him, he could just make out some of his fellow students at the music school horsing around in the water. They appeared to be the closest company he had.

It wasn't, he told himself, that he was a real jerk-off freak. He didn't masturbate half as much as some guys. Twice a week was about average. But when he did do it he liked everything to be right

That meant first of all, choosing a suitable spot. The beds in his room were no good because both of them squeaked, groaned and clattered with virtually every body movement short of breathing. He certainly knew when his roommate was masturbating: sometimes Jerry's middle-of-the-night jerk-offs actually woke him up. So bed was out except in an emergency; usually he tried to find other spots.

Second, he liked to prepare in advance what his fantasy would be, and who would populate it.

Finally, he didn't want to be rushed: he needed to feel he could take all the time in the world, and then, if possible, doze in the warm aftermath of a really good cum.

If an inch-worm had been observing Joel, now, from a blade of grass beside him, it would have seen a conventionally handsome 14-year-old freshman, with honey-colored hair cut medium-long and parted in the middle, light blue eyes and rather thin eyebrows, high cheekbones and a generous mouth. If a breeze bowed the grass and brought our hypothetical inch-worm closer to Joel's face, it would have detected the distinctive musky-sweet odor of a sweaty adolescent boy: a scent compounded of healthy, moist boy-skin just starting to shed male pheromones, boy hair, boy saliva evaporating on full red lips — and when these parted, boy breath coursing over snow-white teeth and across the rough, red surface of a clean and virtually virgin tongue. A scent not, perhaps, designed to arouse anything but indifference in an inch-worm but one which would disturb the tranquility of many susceptible humans, both female and male.

In preparation for his pleasure, Joel had parted his flannel shirt and shoved his Levis and Jockey shorts part way down his thighs. Now the fingers of his tanned, rather wide right hand began to move on a sturdy erection, slowly pulling its sheaf of loose skin up and down over the hardened core. From time to time he broke this rhythm, brought his hand to his mouth, generously moistened his fingers, transferred the spittle to the important surfaces of his penis and then started rubbing it again.

As for his fantasies, the visions which accompanied this still lazy masturbatory stroke, Joel was thinking about Craddock. The day before, Joel had been sitting with some of the other Freshmen outside the big wooden rehearsal hall at school while Craddock entertained them with tales of his sexual exploits.

Craddock was a strapping 6-foot Senior, golden blond, with the smooth-cheeked face of a 16-year-old. He was also a born raconteur of sexy stories in which he himself figured as hero, villain, perpetrator or victim. He told of meetings, persuasions, kisses, hideaways, strippings, strokings, lickings; he described the scents, pleasant and piquant, of every part of his partners' bodies.

Then came the penetrations, the co-operative movements, the murmurs, sighs, moans. Craddock, it seemed, could stay coupled indefinitely, blasting through one orgasm after another without losing the hardness of his wonderful magic wand.

Some of the boys (after all, they were barely out of puberty) believed every word of this. Joel had his doubts. Nevertheless, he had been aroused: he *wanted* to think of Craddock as the world's greatest male lover.

And just before the dinner bell rang they had exchanged a look — one of the few times an upperclassman had deigned to recognize him — and Joel had seen that inside his white tennis shorts he had raised a very hard erection which was embarrassingly evident, right up to the growing pinkish wet spot at its tip.

So now he was re-working one of Craddock's tales. Craddock was in his bathing suit, rampant and erect, strong arms coming around his partner (gender left delightfully ambiguous).

Joel saw, felt, their lips locking, tongues searching, the passion charging back and forth like the tongues that sought to unite them.

Then the couple was safe in a secret place, where at last, with a careless tossing aside of his swim suit, Craddock's glorious penis stood revealed. A gasp of wonder. Hands came around it, felt underneath where the testes moved sweetly in their generative joy.

Craddock took charge, now, lowering himself, wetting his tool, sliding it around a bit, then entering slowly, letting the penetration proceed of itself; resting, once fully inside, until his partner begged him to proceed; Craddock refusing until he was good and ready; then beginning almost imperceptibly to fuck, building a little, tapering off, starting again, building, stopping, starting — until his partner was frantic with suspended passion — at last going for broke: driving, pounding, digging, slamming into orgasm, firing soft bullets of sperm.

But Joel didn't let himself cum, not yet. It was too soon, and he had the luxury of a whole free afternoon in front of him. Craddock was a good springboard for more fantasy. Craddock bragged that, one way or another, he "blasted his nuts" on average twice a day. "Even at school?" one of the Freshmen wanted to know. Craddock hadn't answered — and that was when he had looked at Joel, and Joel had looked down at his crotch and — probably lit up like a radish with embarrassment.

So now Joel imagined Craddock jerking off. It wasn't, he told himself, that he was attracted to Craddock, not like a queer would be. It was just that Craddock was such a fantastically successful person, every guy's ideal of the potent lover.

Joel conjured up Craddock naked in the corn fields, every muscle and sinew of his fine body kissed by the sun, while his hands caressed a huge, fat, circumcised tool. (Craddock had actually told them how he used to sneak off to masturbate in the tall corn back on his uncle's farm in Ohio.) Craddock stood with his head thrown back, mouth slightly open, penis and knuckles glistening wet — and as he pumped away one could hear the slurp-squidge-squeak of tiny bubbles of pre-lube and spit bursting against the coronal rim.

At last the sap rose in Craddock's loins: he didn't choose to put off climax any longer. One last pause to anoint his cock. Then he wrapped his hand carefully around it, started pumping, pumped harder, until his body spasmed with exquisite rictus. A fountain of thick, white sperm spewed out of his cock, made a glorious trajectory in the sun-filled air, gave in to gravity at last, fell, draped over leaves of corn and puddled in the rich Ohio soil.

This time Joel did come, and, even if his ejaculation couldn't be compared to Craddock's imagined fountaining, it had been a good jerk-off.

He closed his eyes, hand still clutching his sticky-wet cock, and found himself slipping gently off to sleep.

2. Roxy's Cadenza

The Farmer Music Academy where Joel Forrest had matriculated only a couple of weeks earlier had been founded in 1906 by a rich American industrialist who believed, among other things, that lots of Corn Flakes, fresh air and naked bathing in the cold Canadian waters would transform puny adolescent mandolin players into vigorous concert virtuosi.

Still enshrined in the *Code of Student Conduct* was Paragraph 34: “Masturbation is a vile habit which saps the body and corrupts the mind. Any student discovered polluting himself in this manner will be expelled from the school.”

While Paragraph 34 was merely smiled at now, the northern Canadian air was still fresh and clean and the waters of Skillet Lake chilly. The campus itself, however, resembled more a lodge for sportsmen addicted to the call of the loon and the lure of lake trout than a high school for exceptionally talented musicians. The buildings were made of solid log, heated in the winter by ancient coal furnaces (which the students had to stoke) and remained surprisingly comfortable.

Joel Forrest wasn't the only Freshman who was violating Paragraph 34 that afternoon. Roxy Knowles was jerking off, too, only he was doing it in his room, on his bed, and he had pulled a gray blanket up over his shoulder to protect him in case Brent, his roommate, decided to call his practice session on the trumpet short and come back. If he did, all he would see would be a strand or two of Roxy's hippy-long blond hair curled above the blanket — nothing of his sky-blue eyes, or his rather athletic musculature enclosed in lightly tanned skin of almost pre-pubertal purity.

Unlike Joel, Roxy knew he was gay. No, that wasn't quite right: he liked other boys, for he made a distinction between “gay”, which he thought of as feminine, and... whatever he was, himself. His whole image of the world was devotedly masculine. He was *male* – strong, healthy, athletic. He worshiped strong, male, healthy, athletic youths — like his roommate Brent. And it was Brent who filled his thoughts so often these days.

How many times had he seen Brent's prick? Dozens — in the showers, standing at the urinals, undressing for bed. And climbing out of bed in the morning, when once he had seen it partially erect, slanting out of the slit in Brent's blue pajama bottoms, its owner totally unaware of his state and display.

Roxy rubbed the loose skin of his cock slowly, letting his index finger occasionally travel over the tip to tickle it a bit. He was still on the lower levels of desire and was in no hurry yet to do much more than gather his thoughts and try out various images in his mind for their effect. His memory of Brent's half-lifted cock was one of them. It was nearly full-grown, for Brent was already fifteen, uncircumcised; its end was always hidden by the pink foreskin which closed over it like the petals of a very pale pink rosebud, but that morning the petals had retreated and the glans was fully revealed: purple, symmetrical, its rear edge lying well back along the penile shaft then the helmet head swelling forward to a rounded tip and falling away again on the front to mirror-image cheeks guarding the piss-slit between. The sight had taken his breath away. He had just finished swinging his legs out of bed. Brent's semi-erect penis had immobilized him. He hadn't been able to rise until Brent, oblivious of the excitement he was causing, had shuffled out of their bedroom with his bath towel around his neck.

Roxy worshiped cocks. As a little boy he had always tried to get other little boys to pee with him. Some of his earliest masturbation fantasies had been of his classmates standing in the summer fields at home with their little pee-pees held between thumb and two fingers, jetting bright yellow arcs of urine almost as high as they were themselves. Later the peeing disappeared from his fantasies but the cocks remained: big cocks, little cocks, hard cocks, soft cocks. It wasn't until he was ten that he saw an uncircumcised cock, and from then until the revelation of Brent's unconscious morning erection, he had wondered what the hidden tip of such a pristine organ would look like.

One day when he was twelve and on vacation at the seaside with his parents he had retreated to a public bathroom to masturbate, something he needed by then to do at least twice a day. Men kept coming in and out using the urinals, but in the stalls he felt safe. He had just got down to business when suddenly through a hole in one of the partitions — a hole he hadn't even noticed, so intent was he in serving his need — came an erect, mature penis. His first thought was that someone was getting ready to pee on him; his second thought, even less logical, was that the penis was going to attack him sexually. He pulled up his pants in a panic and ran out of the bathroom. But a few days later, having thought about the incident calmly and come to the correct conclusion about what the owner of the penis had really wanted, he was back. Nothing happened. He returned a third time, and a fourth time, and then on the fifth day he got lucky. He heard someone enter the cubicle next to his. He was too shy to peak through the hole, but not to display his erection, and soon what he hoped would happen happened: once again a cock, thoroughly erect, easily six inches long, eased itself through the hole.

Roxy didn't shrink from it this time. He touched it. It pulsed in a kind of thank-you, or a gesture of encouragement. He took it between his fingers, felt it curiously all over, becoming aware of increasingly troubled breathing on the other side of the partition. After a while the prick withdrew and was replaced by a note saying: MAKE IT SLIPPERY.

Roxy took his ball-point and wrote on the paper: I HAVEN'T GOT ANYTHING SLIPPERY.

The paper came back with: YES YOU DO.

So Roxy wrote: NO I DON'T! WHERE?

And the reply was: IN YOUR MOUTH.

So when the prick came back, Roxy coated it all over with spittle and started jerking it off. The sighing in the other cubicle increased. He heard fingernails scratching on the thin wood of the partition wall. And then suddenly the cock spurting. One, then two, then three, then four great white jets of sperm narrowly missed his rumpled Levis clustered about his ankles and splattered on the terrazzo floor. He knew enough to keep off the tip and not to stop stroking the cock all at once, even though some of the sperm collected at the base of the corona glandis and dripped over his thumb.

At last he let go. Roxy had found that ejaculation, the whole episode, in fact, so exciting that his own cock needed only a few swift strokes to yield up the light sperm his testicles had just in the last weeks started to manufacture. He caught it in a wad of toilet paper and flushed the evidence away.

He had no sooner done that than a new piece of paper had come back through the hole: IT'S YOUR TURN NOW. STICK YOURS THROUGH AND I'LL DO IT.

It was too late, of course, and, besides, Roxy didn't know if he was ready for *that*.

He and his family had returned home the next day, and that glory-hole incident in his early adolescence had been as close as he had ever come to having actual sex with another human being. He didn't learn until too late that circle jerks had been fairly common in Junior High at the time. Later one of his closer companions admitted to having participated in a few. But Roxy had the reputation then of being super "straight" and sports-minded. "Square" would have been a better description, he thought: no one would have dared ask straight-arrow Roxy Knowles if he wanted to fuck around with his cock!

Roxy had played football on the junior high squad, had wrestled, had swum. And jerked off, just as he was jerking off now, thinking about faces, limbs, buttocks tensed in action, cocks imagined in rampant erection. At the music school there was another freshman who sat next to him in theory class, a boy with curly chestnut-colored hair that smelled wonderfully male. Once he saw evidence on him of erection — a ridge the straining cock made in the left leg of his pants. For a week he had jerked off thinking about the boy, imagining his cock bare. And then had come that glimpse of Brent's early-morning hard-on.

After that he had begun to *notice* his roommate. Brent was a Sophomore. He wasn't classically handsome; he had the kind of looks that grew on you as you became aware of the personality behind them. Brent had marvelous, intelligent and friendly hazel-colored eyes. His hair was dark brown, cut

conservatively short. He was tall — over six feet — and broad-shouldered. Perhaps because he had always been bigger than his contemporaries, he gave the impression of great physical gentleness. Had those strong hands once hurt a smaller boy when he hadn't meant to? Had he sworn off fighting forever as a kind of penance? Whatever the reason, Brent was a quiet boy who seldom sought attention. That was probably the reason Roxy had never given him a sexual thought until one morning erection had changed all that.

Roxy began to watch Brent more carefully. He listened to what the older boy said, put out feelers of friendship, which was a little silly since Brent was, after all, two years older. But by mid-October something was happening to Roxy that had never happened before: he found himself falling in love.

Or was it falling into sexual obsession? He missed Brent, longed for him, when they were apart. He was only happy and calm when they were together, especially evenings in their little room, both pouring over their books, studying scores. The only air he wanted to breathe was the air Brent had breathed. Brent's unmade bed was an erotic object which he barely restrained himself from crawling into mornings when his roommate vacated their room for the showers. He masturbated, as always, at least twice every day; best was in bed after Brent's breathing took on the pattern of sleep, his face turned toward Brent across their narrow room.

Roxy sped up his stroke. The feeling was spreading out of his groin, into his stomach, making his thigh muscles tighten and shift. He decided, now, to concentrate on one image he had deliberately held back. It had happened the day before when they had returned in the school mini-bus from a concert at Loaner Lake. By taking care to be in the right place at the right time, he had grabbed the place beside Brent. Brent had fallen asleep and Roxy had pulled his head over against his shoulder. They had ridden that way for almost a half hour, Roxy surreptitiously breathing through Brent's hair, catching the light musty scent of it, looking down at Brent's sleeping cheeks, his slightly opened lips, straight nose that flared a bit at its end. All of this had lifted him at the time into an incredibly high state of arousal. When they came to a bumpy section in the road he could barely keep himself from coming inside his undershorts. And Brent had woken up, had lifted his head off Roxy's shoulder and looked at him through slitted eyes for a moment, then smiled and affectionately ruffled his hair.

Roxy relived that touch, that smile, those intimate smells, the warmth of Brent's head resting on his shoulder. As he jerked harder and faster, he felt his sperm rising, pouring into place. And now came the giant spasms. The first pulse of his semen shot along his urethra and boiled out its tiny mouth on the tip of his cock into the crusted handkerchief he had pulled out from under his mattress to catch it. That vigorous spurt was followed by a second jet, and a third, a bit lazier now, and a fourth, and a fifth, until the pulses died away into a feeling of frustration that it was only in his thoughts that he had touched the warm body of the older boy he worshiped.

3. Small Victories

Now, as Joel Forrest slept in the woods not far away with his hand wrapped around a wet and satisfied cock, and Roxy Knowles dozed in the aftermath of his ejaculation, two mini-buses pulled into the campus and disgorged fifteen football playing musicians, home from the first game of the season. They were happy and rowdy, for their team had won.

One of the players, however, had suffered a sprained ankle and had to be helped to the senior dorm. When he was put down on his bed by his admiring team-mates (he had played on, and even scored, despite his injury), O'Neill took one of the three pain pills the nurse had given him and told everyone to get out and send Mallory in.

Mallory was a small, sad-faced Sophomore who had been kept back a year by a bout with hepatitis. Mallory wasn't especially handsome, and he wasn't especially strong or especially bright, but he had two great advantages which kept him, if not exactly popular, at least accepted by the other boys: he gave good head and he never complained about the sexual uses to which he was put

Waiting for Mallory to arrive, O'Neill let the game run through his mind, especially the parts where he had excelled. The lineman opposite him was tough and fantastically handsome — at half-time he had seen him with his helmet off and he had a golden halo of blond curls. Perhaps inspired by this vision, he had played really well, endured a lot of pain to make one of the winning touchdowns. It earned him a grudging slap on the back by the handsome lineman — and what he could swear was a sly grope. Now the pill was dampening his pain, spreading a kind of gentle euphoria through his tired body. When the good feeling started to concentrate in his groin, he unzipped his trousers and took out his hardening penis and played with it, knowing it would soon be providing him an additional thrill, more intense, if shorter lived, than the nurse's narcotic.

Without knocking, Mallory came through the door. "Jesus, O'Neill," he said, "I could have been Mr. Kauder."

"But you weren't, were you?"

"They said your ankle's hurt pretty bad."

"Nothing this can't cure." And O'Neill waggled his cock at the younger boy.

"I suppose you gotta have *something*."

"I already had that something."

"Marijuana?"

"No, airhead, one of these." He pointed to the remaining yellow pills on the table beside his bed.

"Can I have one?"

"I don't know. I might need another hit tonight."

"Okay."

"Meanwhile, put this in your mouth." And again he waggled his penis at Mallory.

"Oh, all right!"

O'Neill spread his legs and Mallory lay down between them. He took O'Neill's cock in his hand, brought it close to his lips, then drew away saying, "Man, it smells raunchy!"

"I played a hard game," O'Neill said. "I earned that raunch."

Mallory tried to wash it off with a little with spit and his handkerchief, but the thick, musky odor persisted. Finally he resigned himself to the smell, the somewhat bitter taste, and popped the head of it into his mouth. Rhythmically, he began to suck.

Mallory didn't dislike O'Neill. In fact, he rather admired him. He was flattered that O'Neill chose *his* mouth so often to spill his sperm in. He couldn't be too much of a nerd if what he did turned on an important guy like O'Neill.

But was it true what they said behind his back, that he really loved to suck Seniors' cocks?

He didn't think so. He never wanted to masturbate while he was doing it. His private dreams were of smaller boys or younger boys — cuddling with them, holding them, stroking, kissing, licking, nuzzling — gentle penetrationless intimacies — sleeping curled around a beautiful 10-year-old just before his body turns that final corner into adolescence.

Dreams, alas, which thus far had never been fulfilled. At home there was a sick mother he had to care for, and now that she was at last in a hospital and an uncle had coughed up enough money for him to come here to the music school — now that he was free to pursue a private life of his own — he didn't really know how to proceed.

As for O'Neill, he lay his head back on the pillow and gave himself over to the nurse's gentle drug and the warm, wet lips pulling at his root

In that narcotic and sexual haze, the bliss built, subsided, rose again. The quietness of the room was disturbed only by the ticking of his old-fashioned alarm clock on the dresser and the wet sounds of Mallory's practiced sucking. He had all the time in the world. He floated on a cloud of time. "Slack off," he said once, when he felt the cloud beginning to raise him too high, and he hit the head sharply with his knuckles.

Mallory's lips froze; the tempting promise of terminal bliss temporarily retreated back into his balls.

For O'Neill was remembering the summer of Billy Baumgarten, now, and he didn't want to be brought to the frantic edge of orgasm before he had a chance to re-taste some of the more delicious things they had done together.

That had been — what was it? — two years ago, before his sophomore year. And Billy had never even masturbated! O'Neill had had to take him in hand, explain about erections, show him how to do it — Billy, the big, blond boy from the apartment building across the street, so naive, and then so passionate!

He'd also taught Billy how to kiss. It had been a whole education, starting with kindergarten pecks on the cheek, progressing to the brief juxtaposition of dry lips, then wet lips — then very wet lips, so that he sometimes thought he might drown (and, oh, so sweetly!) in Billy's abundant, honey-scented saliva.

After he had taught Billy how to kiss it was easy to substitute his penis for his lips — and then his asshole for his penis.

From then on, Billy simply devoured him. Once awakened, Billy's passion was overwhelming. Every day he showed up around noon, hung around the apartment until O'Neill's parents had gone out, or Billy would take O'Neill back to *his* empty flat, or an empty flat of one of his friends — or even a cheap hotel, posing as two country lads who had run away from home looking for adventure. And there, in his bed, Billy's bed, or in some grotty room with the Third Avenue Ls thundering by, they would grapple and roll, with Billy moaning and sobbing and licking out every crevice and orifice of O'Neill's delighted body, sperming three, four, sometimes five times in a single two-hour tryst.

But that was nostalgia. What O'Neill now needed was present possibility, opportunity, or, as his older brother used to say, consummatibility. For some time he'd had his eye on a 'cello-playing freshman named Roxy Knowles — a virgin, unless he missed his guess. Fine, straight blond hair worn hippy-long. He'd seen Roxy swimming in the lake a couple of times. The kid had good shoulders, strong arms, a deep sun-tan for someone so fair — and an absolutely fantastic ass: tight, rounded, firm and smooth. What wouldn't he do to get into that ass — glide home free through what he imagined to be the tightest sphincter in the freshman class!

Now O'Neill was ready to cum. Mallory would suck him off while the image of that perfect ass was fresh in his mind's eye. "You all set to drink?" he asked.

Mallory, without unplugging his mouth from O'Neill's cock, looked up at him and nodded.

O'Neill closed his eyes. He conjured up the beautiful freshman. The boy was coming towards him, smiling, white teeth and blue eyes sparkling in the sunlight. Roxy crossed his arms, grabbed the bottom of his music school sweat-shirt and pulled it over his head and tossed it aside. Now his fingers went to his

fly, undid the top button, lowered the zipper, shoved down his pants, stepped out of them, pushed down his underpants, too, so that at last his big boy-cock was standing out stoutly from his loins, confessing total arousal. And then the kid was turning, the shapely ass seen in profile, round, smooth, puckered at the sides by the strong muscles within, until the buttocks were backing up against him, the boy bending over, two strong hands grabbing the cheeks and pulling them apart, uncovering the target — pink and moist and puckered. That ass was coming to him, now; he connected; he was pushing, pushing harder; the ring was expanding, giving way...

O'Neill's sperm exploded out of him. He could feel Mallory trying to swallow, but that's difficult to do with a cock-tip lodged against your tonsils — and O'Neill made sure that his prick stayed buried as deep as it could go. The blow-job, and especially his come, had felt *so good!* He had arranged it just right, manipulated Mallory's mouth, held his head in positions for maximum pleasure — and Mallory had done what he was supposed to do. Now, slowly, O'Neill came back down to earth. His grip on Mallory's head relaxed a bit Mallory began to breathe again, and O'Neill watched, with a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment, a white stream of his own semen come trickling out of Mallory's nose.

4. A Letter From Home

Life at the Farmer Academy was settling down. There are always a few weeks in the autumn when everyone, especially the freshmen, are in transition — from home and vacation to school and work. A society is being built, and that consumes energy. By early October everyone knew who his classmates were, when to expect exams, what each teacher was like. They had their first Thursday concert — the student orchestra playing the delightful little Bizet symphony. Junior and senior projects had been decided upon and begun. And the weather remained warm and dry — all through September and well into late the following month. The students worked, played, slept... and — some of them — made love.

The night of October 19. Eleven o'clock.

Mallory lay awake with his head turned toward the window where he could see a small triangle of the starry heavens. He was playing with himself, wishing his hand belonged to some dear friend.

Joel Forrest, after a particularly good practice session on his violin that evening, was reasonably at peace with himself. He had slipped off to sleep for once without being troubled by a persistent hard-on.

The senior dorm, too, was going silent O'Neill's pain had subsided to a dull, bearable ache; his loins were at rest; he slept. For a while the soft sounds of Buxtehude slipped out from under one of the bedroom doors, but eventually that too, stopped, the young man who had played it creaked into his bed — there, presumably, to sleep like a rock till morning.

Craddock, however, had no intention of going to sleep so soon, although for some time he had been stretched out on his bed. He was thinking over a letter he had just received from his old history teacher, his old lover. Jim Harley hadn't really taught him all that much in bed — sex, for Craddock, had started at twelve, first with an older brother who had shown him the ropes, then with a group of jack-off buddies, then a girl-friend, then a boy-friend — and then came Mr. Harley — or, rather, Jim — the guy always got pissed off if he called him Mr. Harley when they were in bed. But the experience had been nice, Tom (then Tommy) Craddock had more than enough sperm to share — and it guaranteed him good marks, or at least special tutoring when his accomplishments in history started to fall short of the mark.

That was unfair. Jim Harley was a friend, lover, big brother, father.

He decided to read the letter over again. It was, after all, pretty horny:

October 15

My Dear Tom Craddock:

Here I sit at my desk at home with my cock in my left hand writing you this letter with my right, and do you know what my cock is saying? "What the fuck! You think I'm dumb? I deserve something better than *this!* How do you expect me to give you any kind of decent feeling if you do it dry? Out in the open? Alone? Christ, man, I'm used to something better 'n that! Like Tommy Craddock's mouth — *that* was something else."

Okay, I haven't been faithful to your memory! When you're almost thirty the sanctity of celibacy begins to pall. And I'm pretty damn sure you haven't been faithful to mine either, surrounded by all those brass and woodwind players with finely trained lips. Have you noticed a difference in technique with kids who play the flute, the oboe, the horn, the bassoon, the trumpet, the tuba (sorry, the contra-bass euphonium)? Do a little research and write me the results.

Two nights ago I had to take the boat across Lake Michigan. The boss wouldn't spring for a bed so I had to sit up — and so did a whole covey of kids from Inniscauld which, in case you've never heard of it, is one of these fancy boarding schools, the kind where teachers watch you day and night, check the sheets,

don't let you have Kleenexes, control your laundry (especially your undershorts and dirty handkerchiefs), and make you wear dark blue jackets with school crests on them and gray flannel shorts, even in the freeze-ass days of fall.

Anyhow, out of that school group there was this blue-eyed beauty, maybe twelve, sitting right across from me, so close that our legs kept getting tangled. He tried to sleep — I couldn't, with those gorgeous bare knees within cock-spitting distance. The kids were the school's debating team, I discovered (probably defending a subject like "Virginity before marriage is the only way to go!"). The other boys were kind of lined up on the seats beside him and beside me.

Along about two o'clock in the morning one of the boys a couple of seats away from me came to, looked about him and asked the guy next to him, "Where's Mr. Miller and Harlow?"

The other kid answered, "I don't know, probably having a session," and they got up to buy some pop in the automatic dispenser. Now I was really turned on!

I looked around me; everybody else seemed to be asleep — except for blondie, who had opened his blue eyes and had obviously heard what the other two had said. I leaned forward and asked him, "Do you think they're having a session?"

The kid grinned. "I don't know."

I moved my legs together, catching one of his in between. He didn't try to extricate it. He just sat still, with that faint grin on his face, meeting my eyes.

I leaned forward again and asked him, "Would you like to have a session?"

The grin slowly faded. "Here? Now?" he whispered.

"I'll get up first. You wait about five minutes, and we'll meet beside the men's room."

He nodded, and I took off to look for a place.

I don't know if you've ever taken that ferry. It carries cars, down below, and on the bottom deck there's a lot of little rooms filled with life preservers. The rooms have doors, but the doors are unlocked — so people can get at the preservers if there's an emergency, obviously. I found a room I figured might just work, and returned to the passenger deck, hardly daring to believe the kid would be there. But he was, and I brought him down.

"You know, we're not supposed to do this," the kid told me once we were safe inside the compartment and I was jerry-rigging a lock on the door with life-lines and jammed flare boxes.

"Does Mr. Miller do it? And Harlow?"

The kid just shrugged. A good sign, I thought. A kid that doesn't tell on his buddies and his teacher wouldn't be likely to tell on me.

We took off his jacket and laid it carefully on top of a pile of orange life-preservers. Then I loosened the top button of his gray flannel shorts and lowered his fly zipper and slipped everything — gray flannel and blue jockeys — down about his knees. The kid was ready, all right — he was hard as a hammer handle — all three hairless inches of him — and it was as nice and shapely a cock as you'd ever want to see. That poor appendage was just coming into the prime of its life and now it was subject to crazy school rules which throttled it, month after month — in theory, at any rate.

"You going to suck me?" he asked.

"You bet," I said.

But the trouble was that our little nautical love-nest had practically no room to maneuver. I couldn't drop to my knees. I had to sort of help him up onto some life-preservers, yank his shorts still further down about his ankles, wedge myself between his tender white thighs, bend down at a break-back angle to take him.

But, Jesus, Tom, was it worth it! I'd risk a double hernia for it any day. It was beautiful, it was sensitive, and it smelled and tasted out of this world. You know how dull a cock is right after you've taken a bath — and you know how raunchy it is if you *haven't* taken a bath for a couple of days? This one

was aged just right. There was the smell of skin. There was the smell of crotch — of ass and balls and sweaty locker-room sport-clothes. There was a light smell of cock cheese, but prime-cut, rare, perfectly aged cock-cheese. And a hint of ass-hole.

And so dancing in front of my nose was that beautifully scented privileged penis, an uncut prick with the foreskin well peeled back along the shaft, its cute little purple head just inches away, waiting for me, tempting me downwards.

“Come *on!*” the kid groaned. His hands were on my shoulders, pushing.

I took one more deep, ecstatic breath through my nose, and then started to lick it. First I ran my tongue around the tip, changing its tint and texture in the dim compartment light from powder lilac to deep glistening purple. Then I ran my tongue over the sides and the back and finally up over the most sensitive folds of its foreskin.

“Ooooooo!” he shivered. “Man, that’s terrific!” His hands moved from my shoulders to my neck, and then to my head. I could feel his fingers trembling as they touched my ears, brushed against my cheek.

Now that the cock was nicely wet, I pursed my lips over its tip, feeling its putty-like consistency, then opened them, drew back my teeth. I made a vacuum in my mouth and slowly dropped my head.

“Yikes!” he kid exclaimed. A gigantic shudder went through his body. His thighs closed about me.

Holding his cock at its base between thumb and first finger, cupping his up-tightened balls with the other, I raised my head, let my tongue flutter across his frenulum for perhaps two seconds, and sucked his prick in all the way once again.

“Oh, shit, man!” the kid said, almost crying, “you’re doing it *perfect!*”

Up and down I went, up and down. His prick was salty, but not at all bitter. I could taste, too, its cheese, its skim its sweat. It was just the right size, a tasty morsel which fit sweetly, even when it was all the way in, between lips and throat, between tongue and pallet I could always breathe in — through my nose — and savor all those wonderful smells, quickened, now, by being wet.

It couldn’t last, of course. He was just a little boy. He probably didn’t even get a chance to jack off very often. He certainly didn’t have much control.

“Okay. *Okay!*” he gasped, warning me, as he explained later, that he was about to come and I’d better get off if I didn’t want to take a load in my mouth (how innocent some boys are!). But I kept up my sucking, increased the tempo, and with a colossal shudder and a long wail that must have been heard if anyone was on the car deck, he came (and at least two drops of tasty goo leaked out of that piss-eye into my mouth). What his cocklet lacked in sperm it made up for in orgasmic jerks: one pulse, two pulses, three hard pulses — with me pretending, for his sense of pride, to swallow, holding the prick midway along the shaft with my lips so I could flutter-tongue the frenulum and not touch the ticklish tip.

Slowly the tension went out of his body. His grip on my head relaxed, his thighs spread. I proofed his seminal wetting. It tasted amazingly sweet — a bit salty. Its bleach-like smell drifted upwards into my head. It enchanted me; it turned me so thoroughly on I didn’t ever want to let go of it. What a fabulous little spigot!

“Hey,” he said a little while later, “I’m through.” I let the cock snake out of my mouth and looked up into those beautiful smiling eyes. “Thanks.”

“I enjoyed it too,” I said. “Can I put it between your legs?”

He looked at me a little quizzically, a bit doubtfully, then shrugged. “Okay.”

We had to re-arrange the life-preservers again. After a lot of grunting and sweating he was able to drape himself, bottom up, across a pile, and I, dropping my pants, mounted him from behind.

After all that excitement, my cock was thoroughly wet — you know how it runs when I’m turned on — and there was just enough pre-come love juice in and on it to lube up what the anatomists call the kid’s “interfemoral region”. I collapsed onto his back, my face tangling in the rumples of his white school shirt.

I was just getting a good rhythm started, quite content with this somewhat less-than-ideal fucking technique, when I heard the kid mumble something that sounded like “Don’t go up me.”

I told him not to worry, I wouldn’t.

He repeated his command, this time with a trace of annoyance.

I thought I’d understood him, but I wasn’t sure because of all the engine noise down there and the fact that his mouth seemed to be jammed against a wall of life-preservers. “No,” I assured him once again, “I’ll only do this.”

“*I said, you can go up me!*” He almost shouted it this time.

I was amazed — and delighted. “Really?”

“Yes!”

“I didn’t... bring anything.”

“Use what you got.”

I slipped off him, until my feet were on the floor. I bent over him. The kid didn’t just have a beautiful cock, he had a beautiful ass, too. The ideal ass of a little boy just achieving his puberty. His waist was narrow, his legs slender, his buttocks rounded, like a child’s, but firm and puckered a bit at the sides. I parted the cheeks and pressed my nose and mouth and chin inwards and inhaled all that great ass-crack perfume. He was a clean kid. There was nothing brown and obnoxious in there — and, of course, he was totally hairless. But he had worked up a sweat since his last shower, and the smell of day-old ass perspiration impregnated every square inch of that enchanted valley.

I started to lick up and down the length of his crack, from sacroiliac to the base of his cute little velvety, rumpled ball sack, wetting it down, making it slippery. Gradually I started to limit my licking to the area around his ass-hole, zeroing in, so to speak, with my tongue on the ultimate target of my cock. I started to suck on the little pucker, nudged it with my tongue, teased at the lips, made the tip of my tongue into an arrow-head and injected it in a ways.

“That’s nice!” the kid breathed.

Back and forth, in and out, I moved my tongue, over and over again, as the boy started to squirm beneath me. Obviously he was turning on again — one come wasn’t enough for a “session” with this kid.

“You ready?” I asked at last.

“Yup.”

“You sure it isn’t going to hurt?”

“What if it does? Inniscauld kids can take anything!”

I don’t have to tell you, Tom, that it isn’t just my penis that starts to juice when I’m aroused — my mouth does, too. There was enough for me to slather down my cock until it was dripping, and even add a bubbly dollop to his ass-hole lips. Then I climbed up on him, positioned my tool, and drove home.

Man, that kid was *hot, tight and beautiful* inside! I heard him groaning, but I didn’t know if it was in pain, pleasure or both. And at that moment I didn’t care. I was in the top heaven of all heavens, the ones you and I reached on those special fuck days when everything was perfect. I rolled back and slid home, rolled back and slid home, pounding away in that beautiful ass like one of the gigantic engine pistons that were beating away in our ship not far away. I gasped, tore at his shirt with my teeth, moaned, cried, shuddered and, as if there was a huge ball of fire up my ass, came gloriously and spermily as high up his backside as I suspect anyone ever had before.

Well, that was it. It was over. The kid had lost another drop of semen some time during that glorious fuck — I thought I could see its slick on the orange life-preserver when he slipped back down and started hitching up his shorts. I un-blockaded the door, opened it a crack to see if anyone was down there on the car deck. All was clear, so in a matter of minutes we were both upstairs in our old seats among the Inniscauld’s. And now both of us really did sleep.

Oh, yes, one thing more. As we were getting off the boat, with the kid last in the school line-up in front of me, he turned around and whispered, “Thanks, Sir, for the session.”

With all my affectionate best wishes,

Jim Harley

5. Craddock on the Prowl

Craddock started to put the letter away, then thought better of it and rummaged about in his desk for a book of matches and, holding the pages one by one by a corner, burned the letter up.

He opened the window to let the smoke out. The soft night air fell on his face. He waited a few minutes more, until all the faculty were likely to have deserted the lower school dormitories for their own little cabins, then stepped out his window into the dew-heavy night. Dressed in black pants and the dark blue music school sweatshirt, he was all but invisible as he jogged, barefoot, across the pine-studded quadrangle.

There were four student dormitories at the Farmer Academy. Originally each had been for a particular class, but exigencies of enrollment fluctuations dictated more flexibility. Only the graduating seniors slept apart in their own building now, for, as fitted their higher status, they had rather deluxe accommodation. Each occupied a suite of his own consisting of a small bedroom and living room with open-hearth fireplace. The other students, freshmen through juniors, were housed together, even roomed together, willy-nilly, in the three remaining dorms: the Bach, the Dvorak — and the Meyerbeer.

It was to the Dvorak that Craddock headed now. He had always had better success there, and, besides, the night before had been a Meyerbeer night. He crawled in through the bathroom window and a moment later was opening the door to Jamie Norman's room.

Jamie was just about half-way between puberty and manhood — in every respect. He had, Craddock knew from experience, a circumcised four-inch cock with a small tuft of brown hair on the escutcheon above it. He was rapidly passing five-foot-two in height and 100 pounds. He had a kind of square head crowned with curly blond hair.

Once inside Jamie's bedroom, Craddock knelt beside the bed. Steady breathing told him that its occupant, lying vulnerably on his back, was asleep. Craddock slipped his hand under Jamie's covers, moved it cautiously toward the young boy's root, until it encountered a cool, wet spot on the lower sheet and he caught the unmistakable scent of sperm.

He was too late. Jamie had already played with himself, and now was sunk in temporary respite from the tortures of young sexuality.

Craddock stood and started to walk away, when a sleepy voice said, "Hey! That you, Craddock?"
"Yep."

"Oh, shit, I didn't know! You didn't say anything — or anything."

"I know." Craddock knelt again beside the bed.

"So I already... well..."

"Don't worry about it," Craddock said, then went on, with light irony, "All fourteen-year-old boys masturbate. It's perfectly normal."

"You bastard!" Jamie chuckled.

An arm came around Craddock's neck and drew their faces together. Craddock sucked in the boy's lips, which were already taking on the musty scent of night, then released them. "Go back to sleep," he said, standing up. "Catch you on another prowl."

"Yeah, but., let a guy know first huh?"

Craddock slipped out of the room and crossed the hall to where two young clarinetists roomed together. Ardently heterosexual, Lester and Timmins nonetheless took the view that making out with a receptive roommate (and an occasional visitor) was preferable to nine months of abstinence. When Craddock opened the door they were, in fact, in such companionable embrace that they didn't hear him step into the room and quietly close the door behind him.

"Hold it... can you hold it?" whispered one of the boys.

"Not a hell of a lot longer."

“I’m pretty close, too.”

“Yeah, but let’s not...”

“Put your hand there. Sort of move it around.”

“Like this?”

“Uh huh. That’s good.”

“That feel good?”

“Yeah, real good. Your hair smells nice.”

“It does? I didn’t wash it”

“That’s why it smells nice. Jeez... you gonna bring me off if you do that!”

“Yeah, let’s cool it...”

Craddock slipped out as silently as he had come in.

Next door was Ray Dee Lowman, a small, compact hillbilly Junior who, to the complete bewilderment of his family, was studying not “normal” guitar (made of plastic, dripping wires and warty with control knobs) but the acoustical variety — and playing 17th Century music on it.

Ray Dee was not asleep. “Jesus, man, you gave me a fright.”

“It’s just me,” said Craddock.

“Yeah, I know that *now!*” Ray Dee lifted the covers. “Come on in. There’s plenty of room for two.”

Craddock skinned himself out of his sweatshirt and pants and crawled in beside Ray Dee. He could feel Ray Dee’s penis hardening. “This hasn’t already gone off, has it?” Craddock asked, taking the boy’s cock in his hand.

“Nope, but I’d been thinkin’ about a good pull.”

“So I came in time. I didn’t with Jamie.”

“Norman? You tried him *first?*”

“Uh huh. Then Lester and Timmins. You’re third choice.”

“Thanks a lot!”

“That’s okay.”

“What were Lester and Timmins up to?”

“What weren’t they? Kindness was not to disturb them.”

“Well, like my cousin Leroy used to say, ‘Third choice is better than no choice at all’.”

“Actually, I was just going down the corridor.”

“Sure. I believe you.”

They pressed their thighs together, thick penises rolling against each other. Ray Dee pulled his sheet and blanket around Craddock’s shoulders, as though to make it more cozy for both of them.

From under the covers, now, welled up all the rich human scents of Ray Dee’s body — the boy’s hair, skin, slightly musky-scented breath. Every boy carries his own scent about him, Craddock thought. If placed in a dark room with all the boys and girls he had ever loved, he was sure he could tell them apart, and even the time of day, from the distinctive aromas of their individual lips, hair, penises, butt-holes. There was nothing, except touching, of course, as sexy as scent.

Craddock rolled on top of Ray Dee and buried his chin at the joint of Ray Dee’s neck and shoulder. He took the lobe of Ray Dee’s ear gently between his teeth, then decided on an oral attack on the whole ear itself. He sucked it into his mouth and washed it with his tongue.

“Hey, what ya *doin’?*” Ray Dee was rather conservative in what he thought proper between two males.

“Getting ready to go after your mouth.”

“Oh, no, none of that”

“Almost a professional guitar plucker and never been kissed.”

“I kissed all right, but not another fellow. You knew that. We need some gully down there.”

What wasn't OK in Ray Dee's ear was acceptable on boys cocks — 'gully' being a local term peculiar to the cove where Ray Dee had grown up — and Craddock raised his hips just long enough for both of their hands to move from mouth to cock, to lubricate their erections and Ray Dee's underlying belly.

Then Craddock settled back down into Ray Dee's embrace. He gave a first thrust with his hips. With great satisfaction, he felt his penis, nuzzling against Ray Dee's, glide in their joint lubricant over Ray Dee's tauged skin just below and a little to the right of his navel.

"Whoa whee!" Ray Dee exclaimed, thrusting his cock back up against Craddock's body.

"You got a good place, too?" — meaning, had Ray Dee's cock found a slippery spot to ride in, always a bit of an uncertainty in mutual rubbing-off.

"Sure do. Man, is that ever *better* than my old five fingers!"

"But no four lips?"

"Now you talking dirty!"

After that neither of them could talk at all. Craddock, as top man, set the pace. With each commanding dig with his cock into Ray Dee's belly, Ray Dee rolled back his hips. With every release, Ray Dee thrust upward against Craddock. Their arms locked around each other. Ray Dee's hands kneaded Craddock's back muscles, buttocks, thighs. Craddock bit into Ray Dee's shoulder. Ray Dee gasped into Craddock's ear, pouring out hot, troubled breath into the dark air above them.

Suddenly Craddock remembered something that had happened a few days earlier. He had been spinning erotic yarns to some of the younger boys outside the rehearsal hall when he noticed that a pair of white tennis shorts opposite him was not only tenting up over a furious erection but that there was a growing wet-pinkish spot where that erection terminated.

He'd looked up and met the eyes of a rather handsome freshman, who had instantly turned bright red.

Was Joel Forrest — he'd subsequently made inquiries and found out the boy's name — to be had? Were his eyes really that brilliant, his lips that full — his cock that ardent?

Craddock shuddered at the thought and bit down into Ray Dee's neck.

"Hey! No hickies!" Ray Dee grunted.

But by then Craddock was beyond hearing — and so, for that matter, was the young guitarist. They groaned and jerked and gasped at their peak. Semen spurted out of their cocks. It mixed companionably in the crack where their bellies squeezed together, then started to run slowly down Ray Dee's now motionless hips.

The release was wonderful, yet something had been missing. What was it, Craddock wondered? He'd almost had it those last moments before orgasm. Oh, yes, the boy in the tennis shorts, Joel Forrest. That would bear some investigation.

6. A Project is Born

Roxy Knowles had given up on the exercises. Just for now. Somehow arpeggios had led to passages from the Dvorak concerto. He closed his eyes and improvised: now it was the *Rococo Variations*, then the first theme from the Mendelssohn trio and, idiotically, the over-played Chaconne from Bach's violin Partita in D. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't, but that mattered less than the release of his emotions, or rather the pouring of feeling with hand and bow into the great wooden box between his knees, which returned it all in living sound.

And even as he played he was rehearsing his speech. He had to tell someone. It wasn't just that he was drawn to boys and thought girls boring. It was that he loved one particular boy, and that boy slept by him, studied by him. Not all that love could be poured out of his 'cello; it had to be spoken, too, and into the ear of his beloved. *Brent must know*. He had to tell him. He had to find the right moment. He was pretty sure Brent wouldn't laugh at him: perhaps pity him, but not scorn him. Would Brent retreat, feeling threatened? That was a risk. At least now he had Brent's friendship, or as much of a friendship you could have as a freshman with an upper-classman. But that friendship was based on a terrible hypocrisy, and he had to put their relationship, whatever it might be in the future, on an honest footing.

Roxy forced himself back to the exercise book, with its idiot repetitive patterns of semi-quavers looping across the page, bar after bar, and it was then that he became aware of someone else in the little practice room, someone who had slipped through the door during his rapturous self-indulgence and was watching him. He turned around and saw it was one of the senior music students.

"I have a proposition," said the intruder.

"I didn't know anybody was here," Roxy said.

"You sound pretty good."

"Thanks."

"Do you think you're up to *Schelomo*?"

"Why?"

The senior put out his hand. "I'm O'Neill. I know who you are." They shook hands. "If you learn the 'cello part, I'll do the orchestra."

"Bloch already did that. He did it fifty years ago or something."

"I know. Only, I can make it better."

O'Neill was no conventional musician. He had little liking for musical theory, less curiosity about the artistic evolution of famous composers and the world they inhabited, except perhaps for the anecdotal, and absolutely no taste for textural musicology. He once mystified a group of sophomores by asking them, "Do you know who the coolest of all composers was?"

They shook their heads solemnly.

"Anton Bruckner," and, to their surprise, went on: "He lived completely for his own notes. He didn't give a shit about the world. He worshiped Wagner, masturbated his organ day and night, but in the middle of the last act of *Die Goeterdammerung* he turned to the guy next to him and asked, "Why are they burning the woman?" He's the pure creative radical, a really cool cat doing his own thing."

"Did he really mean that?" one freshman asked after O'Neill had wandered off.

"Who knows?" said another.

O'Neill did, however, have two relevant gifts. One was a good ear. He had not only perfect pitch but near-perfect memory. He could start a symphony going in his head and play it through to the end, varying its tempo to suit the time frame in which it had to play. The other gift was great manual dexterity: he was a facile keyboard performer and just as skilled with a welding torch and solder-iron.

And so it is not surprising that his field was electronic music, or, to be more precise, since he was not notably creative, synthesizer arrangements. And so he proposed to turn the molten gold of Bloch's

orchestra into a silver stream of electrons, a background of writhing computer sound for a live, romantic ‘cello to play against.

“Okay,” said Roxy. He sensed that O’Neill was serious, that he was a man with follow-through, no matter how odd the results might sound. Roxy had a record of Bloch’s ‘cello rhapsody at home, liked it and wondered why it never seemed to be performed these days. It flattered him to think of himself upon the stage as Solomon — Solomon the wise, Solomon the horny. It would be more fun to play it against this odd senior’s synthesizer production than a scratchy old Add-a-Part record. “Okay, I’ll do it. When do we start?”

O’Neill gave him a smile Roxy didn’t exactly like. “Start what?”

“Uh... you know. Working on the performance.”

“Yes, the performance. Would you like to see my synthesizer lab?”

They met several times over the next week. Roxy checked the ‘cello part out of the music library and started preparing it. He liked the project, even if he found O’Neill somehow unsympathetic. Not that the senior wasn’t handsome. His blue eyes and what Hollywood might call his “brooding dark good looks” were very much, for Roxy, a turn-on — so much so that in the days that followed O’Neill’s face, hands, the set of his shoulders, even, tended to enter his masturbation fantasies — with mixed results of pleasure and worry.

7. Duet for Four Hands

It is almost impossible for two young people drawn to one another not to reveal that information to each other, and so it was with Craddock and Joel Forrest. Their eyes met at lunch the following Wednesday. Joel and Craddock were sitting at separate tables, but they had spotted one another, even across half the width of the dining room. Joel found himself blushing. Craddock simply thought — and made plans.

After lunch Joel returned to his room. He was restless and frustrated. His loins were once again full to overflowing. He decided to get out of the music school for a few hours. There were no classes; he had no appointments until supper at six. So he slipped on his music school sweat-shirt, grabbed his violin and walked out into the school quadrangle.

The first thing he saw was Craddock talking with a group of seniors. With a sharp stab of excitement in his groin, Joel noticed that Craddock's eyes were following him. Joel turned onto the service road and then, at its end, plunged into the woods.

There Indian summer was in full reign. Sun filtered down through the pine boughs out of a hazy sky in which insects danced and mated. Its warmth filled the air with sweet piney scents.

Joel followed a low ridge which paralleled the stream feeding Skillet Lake. After about an hour he stumbled into a tiny glade. This was just what he was looking for. He threw off his sweat shirt and took out his violin, and for a while he serenaded the birds with a wild improvisation on themes from the Sibelius concerto, music which seemed most perfectly to fit the setting and his intensely romantic mood.

Then he put away his violin, stretched out on the grass, shoved down his pants and hoisted up his T-shirt and began to caress his penis.

It was Craddock again in his thoughts, of course, Craddock naked and aroused. He didn't know if he was Craddock, or if, by some Alice-in-Wonderland transformation, he was Craddock's partner, but it really didn't matter. Craddock's magnificent penis was his penis, or was against his penis, or inside his body? — he really didn't know. There was Craddock's mouth, heaving chest, vice-grip of iron-band arms. Craddock's penis was thrusting, pushing through, breaking down the barriers, battering at the flesh, a sword, a piston, beating, pumping, until... until...

Joel's sperm spurted out, free at last, urgent, covering his belly and knuckles, draining away the agony of his desire. Still just as powerful was that sense of diffuse longing, but with the release of his loins (and the previous release of his music) he was reasonably at peace. He closed his eyes and drifted off into sleep.

When he woke up he was instantly aware that for some time he had not been alone. He opened his eyes. There was Craddock, sitting not more than ten feet away, chewing on a piece of grass. For a moment Joel wondered if he wasn't still dreaming, if the corporeal Craddock wasn't really a carry-over from his earlier fantasy.

"I followed you," Craddock said simply.

Joel looked down at himself. His hand had slipped off his cock, which was lying athwart one hip, but crusty globs of semen were still visible on his naked belly. "Oh, Jesus *Christ!*" he swore. He clutched at his pants and jerked them up, deeply humiliated. God, to be caught this way! Especially by Craddock, by Craddock, of all people!

"Stay cool," Craddock said. He removed the piece of grass from his mouth. "If you didn't do that you wouldn't be human."

"Doesn't mean you like to be watched."

"True. I just checked you out and then went away for a while."

"And came back."

"And there you were spaced out in post-orgasmic doze. So I settled down and waited. What I can't figure out is why you have to do it alone."

Joel was beginning to recover a bit from his shock. “There’s not a lot of females around here,” he threw out, “or haven’t you noticed?”

“Doesn’t matter. Boys are people too. You could be pretty popular.”

“I’m a little old for pull-and-giggle.”

Craddock bent the grass he had been chewing around his forefinger and cocked the finger at Joel’s crotch. “Nobody’s going to giggle about what I saw in there.”

“Okay, so I’m normal — for going on fifteen.”

“I decided it was best not to interrupt you. It’s always best to talk *after* you cum.”

“Talk?” What in hell was Craddock getting at? “I know about, well... things.”

“I’m sure you do.”

“And VD.”

“The sickness and not the pleasure.”

“Huh?”

“The mechanics and not the fun.”

“Fun for us starts with a beautiful girl, doesn’t it?” Joel knew he was faking a bit now.

Craddock got up and walked over to him and dropped down to his knees. “Boys can be beautiful too,” he said. “Take you, for example...”

“Oh, for Christ sake, Craddock, I...”

“You look at guys. I’ve seen you. And you bone up, too.”

“You mean the other day...”

“Also.”

“That was because of your *stories!*”

“So this afternoon, like I said, I followed you. At first I figured you had a rendezvous with some other guy, and I wondered who.”

“I just wanted to be alone. To play the violin, among other things.”

“I know. Sibelius. The second theme from the first movement, with its great upward rush... you could try it on *that*.” He brushed his hand lightly over Joel’s crotch. “You probably did — a whole cadenza.”

“All right, all right, it’s no fucking sin, is it?”

“No, it’s no fucking sin.”

Craddock touched Joel’s cheek. Joel didn’t move away, although he felt he ought to. He felt the blood rush to his penis.

“It was my luck that you were alone,” Craddock said. His fingers slid gently over Joel’s nose and lips. “Do you mind what I’m doing?” he asked.

Joel gulped and shook his head.

“Your skin is so smooth,” Craddock said. “You got only fuzz. It’s really nice; boyish and nice.”

“I thought you liked women,” Joel finally managed to say.

“Oh, I do, I do. But boys can be pretty good, too.”

Amazed as he was to find Craddock doing this — Craddock, the wild womanizer — there was another thing to consider. If Craddock liked it there couldn’t be anything too queer about it, and that meant *he* couldn’t be too queer for liking it, too. He found himself staring into Craddock’s eyes. His penis by now was completely hard. He dropped his eyes to Craddock’s crotch.

“Go ahead,” Craddock said.

“What?”

“Feel it. It’s not going to bum you.”

“Your... cock?”

“Don’t be a wimp. When you want something, go after it.” And he took Joel’s hand and placed it on his crotch.

Joel could feel the hard shape pushing upward inside the denim, its toughness, warmth, even its dampness. "I can't believe I'm doing this," he said out loud.

"Come on, have a good feel."

"You don't mind?"

"For Christ sake, if I don't like something you'll hear about it soon enough."

Joel began to trace his fingers around the penile form. Craddock leaned back on his elbows, giving Joel's hand easier access. Joel stroked the ridge, pinched it lightly, fondled it, until a spot of pre-come began to darken the denim over its tip.

"Better take it out," Craddock said at last.

So Joel unfastened the top brass button of Craddock's fly, drew down the zipper and parted the two triangles of faded blue cloth.

Now Craddock unweighted his hips so Joel could push down Levis and undershorts alike. The big, musky-scented erection sprang up like a jack-in-the-box. "What do you want me to do to it?" he asked Craddock.

"Whatever you've done with other guys — that'll be a good start."

"I haven't done other guys."

"Ever?"

Joel shook his head.

"Man, I'm flattered," Craddock said. He sat up, pulled off his T-shirt, wadded it into a ball and made a pillow of it in the grass. Then he lay back, closed his eyes and, folding his hands behind his neck, said, "Just do to me what you do to yourself and we'll see how it goes."

Joel took Craddock's penis in his hand. It was a bigger erection than his own; the skin seemed looser. He could smell it, too, the pungent odor of crotch sweat. He began to stroke it, trying to make his grip as tight and smooth as he could.

It wasn't long before Craddock's body was shuddering and trembling. A minute later Craddock whispered, "Okay, I'm going to spunk."

"Shall I...?" Joel began.

"Chrissake, don't stop!" And then Craddock was sperming. Thick clots spurted out of his penis, flung themselves into the air and splashed down on his heaving chest and belly. What seemed like a cataract of warm, white semen pulsed over Joel's slowing knuckles.

"Whew!" Craddock said after a pause to recover his breath. "I needed that."

"You shot a lot of cum."

"You should see me when I leave it alone for a couple of days. Okay, Joel, it's your turn."

"Uh, I don't know. It wasn't too long ago..."

"If a kid your age can't do it twice in an hour he might as well be dead. Come on."

Craddock pulled a red handkerchief out of a back pocket and dried himself with it, stood to pull up his Levis. Then he led Joel to a tree, sat against it with legs spread and pulled him down between them. "Now get out your tool," he said. "And shove down your Levis unless you want to go back to school with sperm spots all over them."

Joel obeyed, and a moment later he was leaning back against Craddock's bare chest, feeling Craddock's warm breath on his neck as the older boy told him, "Now I'll show you how it's really done."

"I wasn't much good, huh?"

"You'll get better. First thing, make it slippery." He had a tube of Vaseline. As Joel watched, Craddock squeezed out an inch-long worm of clear jelly onto his penis tip and then spread it around so that all the skin of his cock was lightly basted.

"Wow, I never tried *that!*" Joel said.

"You must use something. Sometimes, anyhow."

“Yeah, spit!” Joel said unenthusiastically.

“Well, I didn’t want to turn you off first time. Besides, this won’t dry. Ready?”

“Sure!”

Craddock took Joel’s cock in hand and started the motion.

“Oh, Jesus!” Joel moaned.

Nothing had ever felt sweeter, certainly no touch to his penis. Craddock’s stroke was slow, tight, and the Vaseline, in all their warmth and the heat of the sun, had become incredibly slippery.

Craddock was letting his free hand roam all over Joel’s chest and neck and face, pushing their heads together. Joel could smell Craddock now, the acrid odor of sweat, the light residual scent of cotton from the discarded T-shirt, hair, breath, sperm.

It was amazing that he had so much feeling only an hour after jerking himself all the way off. But Craddock was doing it this time, and Craddock was an expert. He could lie back against Craddock, submit to Craddock’s fondling and caresses. He didn’t need a fantasy: his fantasy was actually happening.

Craddock’s hand slowed up, now, and stopped, but it didn’t release his penis.

“Did that feel good?” Craddock wanted to know.

“Did it ever!”

“The second time you always got more staying power. So there’s no point in rushing.”

“Okay.”

They rested for perhaps a half-minute, Joel’s forehead tucked against Craddock’s jaw, Craddock’s right hand rhythmically squeezing Joel’s erection but otherwise not moving over it, his left continuing to caress Joel’s lips and nose and closed eyes. Then the stroking on Joel’s penis began again, almost imperceptibly at first, but built into a fine full stroke that had Joel shuddering and moaning with delight.

“Tell me when you’re getting close,” Craddock said.

“It’ll be pretty soon.”

“Okay, I’ll slow down.”

“I don’t know as I can take many more pauses.”

“A couple you can. But I haven’t learned your body language yet. That takes a couple of times.”

Craddock nevertheless was guessing pretty well. He kept Joel riding from one incredibly high peak of pleasure to another. Joel realized that the movements on his cock were often small, but they were exquisitely planned, making allowances for the superb lubrication to which he was unusually sensitive. He felt his closeness to orgasm fluctuate ecstatically, from teetering on the very brink to agonized retreat and then back again. It was as if the whole universe was concentrated in one slippery penis, which belonged to him, and one ministering hand, which belonged to Craddock.

At last he felt he couldn’t put it off any longer. “It’s starting,” he said.

The hand motion stopped.

“Oh, God!”

“Can you hang on?”

“Do I got to?”

“Try.”

He gritted his teeth and at last the surge of passion rolled back and left him safely on the anticipatory side of climax.

“Good boy,” Craddock said, patting his cheek.

“Okay, but next time make it for real.”

“You sure?”

“Sure I’m sure.”

“Anything special you want?”

“How do you mean?”

“I don’t know. Most people have special things they save for the big moment.”

“If I do, I don’t know what it is.”

“Maybe one of these days we’ll find out.”

“Okay.”

“For now, just tell me when that final bit’s starting. I can make it nicer if I know.”

It seemed that the grip on his penis, already tight, got tighter yet, and warmer. And then the motion began, as before, almost undetectably at first, accelerated, concentrated, now, on that magic nerve running down from his piss slit and petering out in his patch of rumply, sensitive skin. It was incredible how Craddock seemed to know just where the best feeling was, and how to awaken it. But orgasm was rushing at him, fast, faster...

“Now!” he gasped. “This is it! Here I *go!*”

And then he seemed to explode. The orgasm shook him, raped him, went on and on, searing his bowels, tearing at his gut, cutting off his breath, making him moan and whimper, as pulse followed hard, wracking pulse, each searching to the bottom of his balls for new drops burning with their load of vibrant, thrashing spermatozoa. Jet after jet poured out of him, as though his previous ejaculation had barely tapped his seminal well.

Then he was limp. The orgasm had wrung all the vitality out of his body, yet he felt he should rise, tidy up, crawl back into the world of clothes and physical distance between boys.

He started to pull away, but Craddock, with his right hand still wrapped around his penis, held him back with his left, pressing the side of his face warmly into Joel’s hair.

“You got no hurry,” Craddock said. “Enjoy the next few minutes. God knows, you’re not going to get that kind of chance a lot at school.”

8. Loving: Nice and Nasty

Roxy had finally done it. He had heard Brent get up in the middle of the night and shuffle off to the bathroom. When Brent had returned, tousle-headed and eyes half-closed, he had found Roxy sitting at the desk staring moodily out into the night. “What’s the deal?” Brent had asked, and slowly, stumblingly, the story had come out. Now it was finished, and Roxy waited, full of fear, for his roommate’s reaction.

Brent too, was sitting up, on the side of his bed. “You’ve never done any of that?” he asked quietly.

“No.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know.”

“It’s not like there’s no opportunities. In this school. Christ man, don’t you keep your eyes open?”

“I never thought about popping into bed with just any old boy.” Roxy knew he was returning to their most dangerous ground.

Brent got up, put his hands on Roxy’s shoulders and began to massage them. “You’re all tensed up.”

“I know.”

“There’s nothing wrong with wanting what you want. I just don’t know how much I can help you.”

“Sure. You’re straight”

“Aren’t you cold?”

“I hadn’t noticed.”

“I am. Come on, let’s continue this under the covers.”

He couldn’t believe Brent had said that. Said it, what’s more, so casually. With his hand on Roxy’s neck, Brent led him to bed — Brent’s bed. He crawled under Brent’s blankets in a daze. His heart beat so loudly it seemed as if it had to wake up the whole dormitory. His cheek sank into Brent’s pillow, which smelled of Brent’s hair and skin, the gentle dew that less than an hour earlier had seeped out of Brent’s sleeping mouth. Brent turned toward him and put a hand to his face. “What do you want us to do?” he asked.

Roxy didn’t know what to say. He grabbed the hand and kissed it and moved closer against his roommate’s warm body.

“No ass-fucking,” Brent said. “I draw the line at ass-fucking. Otherwise... *It’s your night.*”

“Anything?” Roxy asked. “I mean, why you doing this?”

Brent chuckled. “You’re not a bad roommate — for a fresher. Maybe you’ll do me a favor someday, who knows? Come on.”

One of Brent’s hands reached inside Roxy’s pajama pants and took hold of his cock, which was not just hard but was confessing its intense delight by a steady flow of love-juice. At the touch, Roxy jumped. Sex surged out of his groin and almost paralyzed his breathing. Brent’s hand started working back and forth in the slipperiness. Roxy shivered from the deepest recesses of his being.

“Oh, God, Brent, how do you know how to do that so nice?”

“It isn’t the first time I’ve had another kid’s cock in my hand.”

“It *isn’t*?”

“No. Come on, Roxy, this is your chance. Explore me.”

“Uh... How do you mean?”

“Well, my cock for a start.”

Hesitantly, fearing, somehow, he would be slapped back at any moment, he reached for Brent’s penis. To his surprise, it was semi-hard. He felt it all over. It was the first time he had ever touched an uncircumcised cock, although he had fantasized about doing that often enough. And he knew just what he wanted to do: draw that loose, copious envelope of foreskin up over the tip, like the petals of a rose-bud, and then roll it back down again so that Brent’s penis, tip exposed, would feel almost like his own. He

did this, now, once, twice, three times, with great excitement, feeling the cock stiffen, assume its rigid stance.

They rid themselves of their pajamas, and then Brent pulled Roxy on top of him and took him into a tight, warm hug. Their cheeks met, Roxy's chin tucked itself sweetly into the little hollow between Brent's shoulder and neck.

"Close your eyes and dream," Brent said, stroking him almost as though he was a little boy.

They had set up a rhythm down below. Brent was letting Roxy direct that rhythm. Their cocks moved shoulder to shoulder beside each other, traversing their bellies.

"Oh, Brent, is this as good for you as it is for me?" Roxy asked.

"It's pretty nice," Brent said, then laughed, "little boy!"

Roxy felt his loneliness melt away, the weeks, months, years of frustration. This was what he was made for, loving manly boys, hard bodies moving against hard bodies, honest flesh over honest flesh.

But he was hardly experienced. It was impossible for him to postpone his orgasm. It rushed at him like a breaking wave, took him in its curl, shook him, slammed him down, sucked out of him all his sperm and left him gasping on the beach of Brent's breast.

"Jesus, I'm sorry!" he said. "Where are you? Were you even close?"

"Don't worry about it," Brent said, patting his butt. "Was yours good?"

"Not good, the best! Oh, man, thanks!"

"Don't mention it."

"Don't you want to get off?"

"Maybe I'll do that later."

Roxy knew he was being asked, very politely, to go back to his own bed. Brent grabbed a Kleenex and mopped up the sperm on his stomach.

"Again, man... I don't know how to thank you..." Roxy stammered.

"It's OK. Just don't expect that all the time."

O'Neill and Roxy had settled down to work on *Schelomo*. They consulted over the orchestral score. Roxy played parts against it in the synthesizer lab. In his mind their relationship was purely professional. If occasionally O'Neill's somewhat vampire-like presence intruded on his masturbation fantasies, he was still, in his emotions, only involved with his roommate Brent.

As for O'Neill, his trials with this new sound and that register — a kind of sensual accompaniment to them — were imbued with the physical presence of Roxy Knowles. The longer he spent with Roxy, the closer they worked on the project, the more he congratulated himself that he had made a good choice. Sensual peak pleasures take time to ripen; they should come as surprises to the seduced. The very vulnerability, the naivete of a pubertal virgin, furiously radiating his frustrated sensuality, was close to the ultimate turn-on. With his head next to Roxy's over paper and reels of spooling tape, he had felt the warmth of the other's body, heard the young tones of his voice, breathed the delicate aroma of hair and soap and sweat — the wondrous aroma of fourteen — and watched the lad's perfect ass in motion as they walked about discussing this point or that.

A few days later he made his first move.

They were in the synthesizer lab, alone. O'Neill said, "You know, this will give you a real head-start on the other freshmen."

"I suppose so," Roxy said. Competing with his classmates wasn't very important to him.

"So maybe you owe me a thing or two."

"Huh?"

"What do you do for entertainment in this God-forsaken wilderness?"

"Entertainment?"

“Okay, don’t answer me. You jerk off. Everybody jerks off if he doesn’t get his buddy to jerk him off — or do nicer things with him. You have a roommate, don’t you?”

“Yes, but...”

“Do you have a lover?”

“Look, O’Neill, I don’t really think any of this is your business...”

“You don’t? I do, because fate has thrown us together in a kind of professional association...” (‘You have thrown us together in a kind of professional association,’ Roxy was thinking.) “...and you’re a good-looking kid. You know that, don’t you, that you’re good looking?”

“What does any of this have anything to do with...?”

But O’Neill had taken the bow from Roxy’s hand, stood him up and started feeling his long hair, running his fingers through it. “This is a poor place to make out,” O’Neill said. “We can’t lock the door. Come up to the Senior dorm after supper.”

“Suppose I don’t want to?” Roxy said, although he found his heart beating fast and his penis surging into erection.

“I think you do.”

“And if I don’t come you’ll stop with *Schelomo*?”

O’Neill turned around and started gathering up his synthesizer notes. “No, I won’t do that,” he said. “But it wouldn’t be very nice, considering...”

Roxy did come. O’Neill obviously had gone to some trouble to create a seductive atmosphere. A cheerful fire burned in the hearth. O’Neill, dressed in a blue bathrobe, locked the door behind them, and, to Roxy’s surprise, offered him a glass of brandy. Liquor was strictly forbidden at Farmer, and Roxy didn’t really drink very much, even at home. Nevertheless he accepted the half-full snifter. The taste, the smell reminded him of the winter when he was ten and had fallen through the ice skating and thought he was going to freeze to death. His Uncle Ned had pulled him out, rushed him into his house and into a hot tub and poured brandy down his throat. He had loved Uncle Ned evermore, not so much for saving his life but for making him gloriously drunk.

This time he got almost drunk again. He felt O’Neill’s lips on his lips. He felt O’Neill taking off his clothes. He felt himself laughing — giggling was more like it — as he clambered into O’Neill’s bed and felt O’Neill’s naked arms come around him. This didn’t matter, he told himself. This was all superficial. It had nothing to do with Brent. It was experience. He would learn something from Count Dracula of the synthesizers. He let himself be kissed. He could taste the brandy on O’Neill’s lips. O’Neill petted him, toyed with his hair, played with his ass. Then O’Neill was rearing himself over Roxy’s head, his tannish cock, which had a slight leftward crook, was coming at his lips. He opened his mouth, just to moisten O’Neill’s penis, and found the cock rammed full in against his throat. He grabbed the hips and shoved them away and said, “Don’t do that!”

“You don’t suck cock?” O’Neill hissed.

“Not like that. You were trying to fuck my mouth.”

“And your mouth doesn’t fuck?”

“No.”

“Maybe your ass will.”

“NO!”

“Make it wet.”

The cock came back. He licked it, tasting the sweat-salt, smelling the slightly cheesy odor it gave off. When he had it dripping and shining in the light of the table lamp beside the bed, O’Neill tried to turn him over, but he resisted.

“Jesus Christ,” O’Neill said, “I was only going to fuck you outside.”

“How do you mean?”

“Between your legs — under your balls!”

So he let himself be rolled onto his side. The slippery cock came against him, its tip played in the cleft between his buttocks. And it did feel good! A stiff cock just plain belonged in there! He imagined that hard, tan, salty, cheesy weapon snuggled beside his asshole. He would like to feel it come into him, fill him up, but he didn't dare. He wasn't prepared for it — or the pain. Instead, he got ready for its outside penetration and moistened the crack between his legs.

But it kept playing around higher up, rubbing back and forth, up and down in his ass-crack. He felt himself getting slippery there — as if O'Neill's prick was leaking copious streamers of love-juice. Now O'Neill's cock-tip was making tiny circles around his asshole. And the motion, the touch, was delicious. He'd never realized what nice feelings his asshole was capable of giving him — or rather what someone else could give him at that spot. He relaxed his sphincter. And then all of a sudden, without warning, O'Neill lunged.

Roxy wasn't so drunk he didn't realize what had happened to him. He jabbed an elbow back into O'Neill's solar plexus. O'Neill choked, his cock, which had only started to penetrate, slipped out.

“Bastard!” Roxy cried.

“What'd you do that for?” O'Neill gasped. “Everything was going so well!”

“It was going up my asshole, that's where everything was going.”

“Okay, okay, I made a mistake...”

But by then Roxy was out of bed and throwing on his clothes. “Listen, O'Neill,” he said, “If you want to call *Schelomo* off that's all right by me.”

“You've got to get fucked sometime,” O'Neill said.

“No I don't. Not tonight. Not by you.” Then, somewhat wistfully, “You *promised!*”

“OK, get out.”

And he did.

9. Winter Nocturne

Winter came softly but implacably to the Farmer Music Academy campus. One day the students woke up to skim-ice on Skillet lake. A yellow sun continued to rise and set every day, the air remained still, but the thermometer plunged. Within a week the lake had frozen over solid enough to drive on, and the more athletic students had gone into storage and rooted around in their belongings to drag out skates, hockey-sticks and pucks. There was no more *alfresco* sex: boys met in bed, or in the furnace rooms when lovers helped each other stoke the fire-boxes, then met and tangled sootily behind heaps of coal.

That was the week Joel began to suspect he was suffering from satyriasis. He thought constantly about Craddock and what they had done together, but he had barely seen Craddock since they had parted from their tryst in the woods nearly half a month ago. His cock had gone up on Friday afternoon and stayed hard all through dinner, the rest of the evening and even as he was preparing for sleep. He had to make several trips to the bathroom before he finally succeeded in peeing.

In bed at last, with his roommate Jerry snoring lightly across the room, images of Craddock crowded in upon him: the way Craddock looked, sounded, the healthy, sweaty scent of him. “If I want a guy I want a masculine guy,” Craddock had said as they’d made their way home. That had set Joel’s mind very much at ease. He wasn’t girlish, and he wasn’t queer, or if he was queer he was only a little queer — like Craddock. “You’re real boy, with a good hard cock,” Craddock had said. Craddock fucked girls, sure, but he also wanted *him*, Joel Forrest, a masculine boy with a working, spurting prick! Craddock wanted his cock to nuzzle Joel’s cock! And maybe he wanted more, much more....

At last he couldn’t bear the frustration any longer. He sat up, shoved the covers away, fiddled at his bedside table for a jar of cold cream (so much he had learned from that afternoon — it felt better with something slippery!), clutched his cock, dabbed some cold cream onto its tip, spread it down its sides, smeared it around to be sure that all the sensitive skin draping the rock-hard core was well lubricated, then wrapped his fingers around the saturated, glistening, slippery shaft and...

The window beside his bed flew open. Someone was crawling through it. “What the fuck...!” Joel gasped, pulling the covers up over his lap.

“Cool it!” said the figure in the window, as yet nothing more than a silhouette against the moonlit forest outside.

“Who are you?” Joel finally managed to whisper.

“Who do you think?” It was Craddock. He heaved himself up, swung his legs over the sill and stood to lower the window again.

“Christ, what are you *doing*?”

“You’re full of more stupid questions tonight!”

“I mean... we can’t do anything here!”

“Why not?”

“With *him* in the room?” Joel pointed to Jerry, who was still lightly snoring — bubbling, really — in his sleep.

“Well, we’ll see.” Craddock knelt beside Jerry’s bed and shook him gently awake. Joel heard them whispering together, saw Jerry sit up a moment later, look at him, then lie back down again. They continued whispering. Then Craddock patted Jerry’s shoulder and came over to Joel. “I told him to go back to sleep and not let us disturb him.”

“Oh, great!” Joel moaned. “Now he’ll *know*!”

“Sure he’ll know. He’d have figured it out anyway.”

“What am I going to say to him in the morning?”

“‘Hello, roommate, sleep well?’ Trust me.”

“Better not, Joel,” came Jerry’s sleepy voice from the other side of the room. “He’s got a knobby cock that won’t take no for an answer...”

“Shut up,” said Craddock.

“Jesus!” said Joel.

Craddock climbed into Joel’s bed and lay down heavily on top of him, the springs groaning and protesting with the added weight. He felt Craddock’s cock lock against his own, hard and yet supple too. Slowly it started to traverse Joel’s firm underlying belly where the skin was already slippery with cold cream — smooth witness to Joel’s aborted jerk-off.

“This is more like it,” Craddock sighed.

“Sh! You’ll keep Jerry awake.”

“He’s already awake,” Jerry put in from across the room.

“Pretend you’re not” Craddock commanded, then, softer, to Joel, “How you doing?”

“I’m close!” Joel said.

“You’re always close.”

“I mean it. When you stuck your head through the window I was just starting...”

“I know — I figured you might. Glad I made it for the first round.”

“Man, you going to stick around for a second?”

“And a third and a fourth,” said Jerry, stifling a yawn.

“Jerry, I’m warning you...”

“Jesus!” Joel said. They were tremulously sliding their penises in counter motion against each other’s bodies. The bed groaned and sighed. With his arms around Craddock’s strong shoulders, thrusting upwards against that taut abdomen, with Craddock’s head looming warmly in the darkness above his face, breathing Craddock’s breath, smelling Craddock’s healthy firm masculinity, Joel found himself rising uncontrollably toward the end. He shuddered, crashed over the top. Five days of pent-up sperm spurted out into the warm occlusion of their locked bellies, where Craddock’s cock thrust steadily on, plowing through the fresh semen, bringing new, sharp scents to the bed.

“Oh, man... sorry... I couldn’t help it...” Joel gasped.

But Craddock was beyond hearing himself. It wasn’t a very sophisticated act they had pursued. This was no gourmet fuck, and yet the very greenness of the boy beneath him who had just spent his pungent sperm all over their two clasped bellies had excited him with a depth and poignancy that surprised him. Now he, too, was gripped in the rising throes of orgasm, trembling, shuddering, gasping, groaning (so that Jerry across the room giggled and said, “Atta-boy, Craddock!”), as the sperm rushed out to mingle with Joel’s and drip, with Joel’s, slowly down into Joel’s bottom sheet.

When he had caught his breath, Craddock sat up, grabbed his pants, pulled them on and said, “Now it’s time to take care of your roommate.”

Joel felt a stab of jealousy penetrate his post-orgasmic euphoria. Did Craddock want round two with Jerry?

But all Craddock did was grab Jerry by the shoulders, turn him over, and, with one hand over the boy’s mouth, lower the shorts Jerry habitually wore to bed and paddle his up-turned bottom. Then, with Jerry vowing dire vengeance, he raised the window and disappeared out of it.

The morning could have been awkward. Jerry got up, as usual, when the bell rang and stumbled, half asleep, down to the bathroom with his toothbrush and toothpaste tube in his plastic glass. When he came back Joel confronted him: “About last night...” he began.

“Last night?” Jerry seemed genuinely confused.

“You know, Craddock and things.”

“Oh, yeah. He’s okay.”

“You don’t... didn’t mind?”

Jerry searched his sleepy brain for a moment, then said, “Some of the kids put their mattresses on the floor when they do that.”

“You mean...?”

“Squeak squeak. But, well, I suppose I can sleep through it if you guys don’t.”

Jean-Pierre le Clerq had a problem, and his problem was his 10-year-old son Terrance. Monsieur le Clerq should never have been a father, according to music school gossip — nor, for that matter, a husband. Some said he had driven his wife insane, others that Terry wasn’t even his own boy, biologically. In any event, his brief marriage to a Juilliard flute student had ended when the girl, after giving birth to Terrance, tried to kill herself and, that failing, successfully sought divorce. There was a custody battle — each claiming the other should have the baby — and she won, went back to England and was never heard from again.

And so Monsieur le Clerq, a good but not brilliant flautist, had come to the Farmer Music Academy some years ago with a baby in diapers and determined to nurture not just budding musical talent but his own son — and in the latter task, surprisingly, he succeeded. Terry grew into a cheerful, investigative and very active little boy.

But of late Monsieur le Clerq had developed another interest. In Kalamoosa there was a lumber mill, and at a concert some of his students had given there he had made the acquaintance of a middle-aged woman who worked as a secretary in the lumber company offices. They now met every Saturday afternoon. She cooked him a nice supper, they went to bed, and he drove home later in the evening.

Monsieur le Clerq, however, had just about run out of other faculty members with whom he could park Terry during his Saturday rendezvous. Placed in another home, with people who sat in over-stuffed chairs and read books endlessly, or listened to organ music, Terry’s activity turned to hyperactivity. Tables collapsed, glasses of milk put out for him got overturned; one night he went missing and was finally discovered asleep inside Mrs. Allington’s bed, still clothed and wearing his muddy shoes. The boy was now known as Terry the Terror, and few were willing to baby-sit him any longer.

Then Monsieur le Clerq thought of doing a little blackmail. Mallory was his student, his most junior student. Mallory wasn’t really doing very well. Sometimes the boy achieved a nice wistful tone in the lower registers of the flute, but his rapid playing lacked the kind of cold fire even the most provincial orchestra would demand. It was questionable whether he could in good conscience pass Mallory at the end of the term — but perhaps if the boy took care of Terry now and then he could be persuaded to relax his standards a little.

So one Saturday afternoon, following a rather unpleasant session with O’Neill, Mallory found himself standing outside his instructor’s door with real anticipation in his heart. He had seen Terry a number of times, and the boy was definitely “his type”. Mallory loved blonds, and Terry was blond. Mallory loved blue eyes, and Terry had the kind of eyes that seem almost black until you get close enough, and then you see they are of the deepest cobalt blue. Terry was at that magic culmination of childhood, when nature has put everything finally in place, in face and body and mind, and seems to pause for a few breathless months before setting loose all those restless hormones which would transform the boy into an altogether different creature. Mallory especially loved boys during that time-suspended pause.

The door opened. Monsieur le Clerq already had his hat and coat on. He was in a hurry. A quick introduction to the boy, a few instructions, and he was off.

They looked at each other — fifteen-year-old and ten-year-old. Mallory was enchanted, but he didn’t know how to show it. Terry thought, ‘Oh, no, he’s just as stuffy as a grown-up.’

“Uh... I brought my flute along,” Mallory said. “I thought maybe, if you don’t mind, I’d practice a little.”

Terry didn't say anything. Mallory thought, 'I'm disappointing him — already.'

Terry watched, from a distance, as Mallory opened his flute case, readied his instrument, then spread some sheet music before him on the dining table.

"Do you know that Magic Flute thing?" the boy suddenly asked.

"Papageno's I'm a birdcatcher song?"

Terry laughed. "Is that what he was?"

"Yes. He caught birds for the Queen of the Night."

"What'd *she* do with them?"

"I don't know."

"Why don't you?"

"Cause it doesn't say."

"I think she ate them. And put the feathers in her hair. And maybe from those little downy feathers on their breasts she made blankets and coats."

"You want to hear it?"

"Sure!"

"You understand German?"

"French."

"Okay, I'll do it in English."

It happened that a couple of years earlier, Mallory had sung (and played) the piece in a school recital back in his home town — and used the Auden text. Now he started to sing, unaccompanied. He had a light tenor voice, a bit nasal and untrained, but that didn't seem to matter. A big smile broke out on Terry's face, especially when it came to the brief passages when Mallory stopped singing and breathed the sparkling little rising scale into his flute.

And then suddenly the boy was dancing, and tugging at Mallory's elbow to dance with him.

Mallory melted. They danced about the living room, both of them holding each others' hands before them, as Mallory sang, over and over, sometimes in German, the stanzas of the little song, whistling, now, the flute bit.

The ice was broken. They were totally at ease.

They put on their heavy coats and went out onto Skillet Lake, sliding around and pretending to play hockey by kicking a little piece of ice around. They returned to the house and took the macaroni out of the oven and ate it and followed it with ice cream. Then Terry brought out a video he'd been saving for some time when grown-ups weren't around: *The Horror of Dead Swamp*. His father disapproved of that kind of fare, but he figured Mallory wouldn't mind. Mallory didn't, especially when Terry insisted on their occupying together the big comfortable chair in front of the color monitor.

Mallory hardly watched the film. He was totally wrapped up in the beautiful boy sitting on his lap, snuggling against his chest, sometimes taking a finger out of his mouth to wrap an arm about his neck. He breathed through Terry's hair, grazed the pink little ear with his nose and wrapped his arms around Terry's chest. Mallory had a hard-on the whole time. A couple of Terry's squirms almost brought him to climax.

For Terry, the film was a catharsis, an encounter with the kind of monsters which sometimes crept through his dreams, but a safe encounter on the lap of his new friend. Sometimes he would ask, "They're not really cutting his eyes out, are they?" or "There used to be ghosts, but there aren't any more, right?" and Mallory would reassure him, stroke his cheek, and say it was all just pretend.

It was after Terry's bedtime when the last vampire was nailed down by the last silver spike, and the boy insisted Mallory make all the routine preparations for sleep with him. Face and hands had to be washed, teeth brushed and inspected (and what a beautiful mouth Terry had!), clothes folded and placed just right on his chair (otherwise the vampires "would use them for snot rags") and his pajamas brought

out and climbed into. Mallory for an instant had a view of Terry's little cocklet — not yet much more than a small mushroom cap jutting out above his tender white ball sack.

Then Terry was under the covers and patting the bed beside him. "Sit here," he said. "Tell me a story."

"I don't know any stories," Mallory protested.

"Then make one up."

"I'm no good at that."

"Yes you are. Try."

So Mallory thought for a while and started off with a tale about two boys, one called Terry and the other called Berry. Berry was very stupid and kept falling in the water and Terry kept having to pull him out. And then somehow Mallory himself was in the story, replacing Berry, a boy nobody liked who got teased all the time. Then one day there was a fire and he ran into the house and pulled Terry out of the flames, but he got terribly burned. And everyone thought it was he who had set the fire, everyone but Terry, who came to the hospital and brought him flowers and candy. But this last part of the story Terry didn't hear because he had, meanwhile, fallen fast asleep.

Mallory smoothed the covers around the little boy's shoulders, bent down and gave him a long, tender kiss on the cheek, inhaling for the last time the boy's individual and tender scents, then, filled with happiness, went downstairs to wait for the father.

10. Getting Things Straight Between Them

They didn't need to put their mattress on the floor the next time, because Jerry had been rushed off to the hospital for an emergency appendectomy. Joel had been awakened in the middle of the night by his roommate's groans. At first he assumed Jerry was having a particularly intense wet dream, then a nightmare. He got up and sat down on the side of his roommate's bed and was about to shake him awake when Jerry said, "I think there's something very wrong inside of me." Joel had awakened the health master who, in turn, had awakened Craddock. As a scholarship boy, one of Craddock's duties was to help out in emergency situations like this. Craddock and Joel and the master had bundled Jerry onto a stretcher, loaded him into a school mini-bus and the master had taken him off to the Kalamoosa hospital. Craddock and Joel stayed behind — in Joel's room.

That night Joel tasted the delights of true oral sex. Craddock's fine root, the cock he had played with out in the woods last fall, that had ridden beside his own a few days before in that very same bed, was now rearing itself stiff and warm and smelling wonderfully sweaty-salty-male, right in front of his nose.

"Don't be afraid of it," Craddock urged him. "We'll take it slow. It doesn't have to go deep."

Joel put out his tongue and licked the tip, tasting its saltiness, feeling the slightly oily drop of pre-cum that was lodged in its piss-slit. He licked some more — down the back, along the sides, up over the rumpled skin where he knew the center of Craddock's feeling should be. Then he made an "O" of his lips and sucked in the whole upper half of Craddock's prick.

"Ah, man, that-a-boy!" Craddock sighed.

He started going up and down with his head.

"Use your tongue," Craddock said. "And really suck."

He explored the whole front of Craddock's prick with the tip of his tongue. It was like seeing it in a different way, feeling it with another finger. The loose skin slid around under his tongue, the tip gave a bit where the end was soft. It was a totally new experience, having a prick in his mouth. He was sure he wasn't doing everything right, but more and more Craddock's cock felt like it belonged there.

"Okay, okay," Craddock said at last. "Here, let me show you."

And then Joel was lying on his back with Craddock getting into position above his loins, his head coming down, and a new incredible feeling swept through him as he felt his prick sink into Craddock's mouth.

He didn't know what Craddock did. He couldn't tell. He was beyond thinking. All he knew was that Craddock's mouth was incredibly hot, incredibly tight, unbelievably slippery, that Craddock's tongue was lashing his penis tip, his frenulum, that Craddock's head went down on him until he could feel Craddock's nose and lips in his pubic hair, and then came up until only his cock-tip was still inside Craddock's mouth. It was like a warm, wet explosion. The slippery feel of what was in Craddock's mouth was better than what Vaseline or cold cream had ever given him, perhaps because it was natural, a mixture of his own pre-ejaculatory love juice and Craddock's rich saliva.

He shivered and gasped. "God, Craddock... Jesus... Oh, fuck..." He was moaning, keening. The bed springs cried. All he could think of was the continuing combustion in his prick. He thrashed his head from side to side, clutched at the mattress, at Craddock's shoulders, head, ears.

And then, almost before he knew it was going to happen, he was writhing in orgasm, shooting sperm. It was like machine-gun fire, it seemed to him, machine-gun fire trained at the back of Craddock's throat. Out came round after hard, white round — bullets of sperm long stored in his waiting loins, now mercilessly flung outward by his furious prick. It seemed to go on forever — jerk, throb, pulse, the hot sperm welling up and up, out and out. At last, though, it subsided, rolled away, emptying him, scraping him clean.

They rolled apart. “You should warn a guy,” Craddock was saying. “Not every fellow wants a load, you know.”

“Oh, Jeez, sorry!” Joel panted. “I just... didn’t think. It was so... incredible!” Then, suddenly apologetic about the sperm he had made Craddock swallow, “Was it awful?”

Craddock chuckled. “No, but you’re going to have to learn a little better control. Now, let’s get back to what you were doing to me...”

Since winter cold had set in, not a flake of snow had fallen. The ice on Skillet lake deepened and deepened, turning pure, smooth black. The air had been still so no pressure ridges had formed. Skating on it was an almost sexual pleasure.

It was good, Roxy thought, just to be a kid again. He had been playing pick-up hockey all afternoon. Now the sun was so low that the only direct light from it fell on the winter-gray hills on the east side of the lake. Most of the boys had drifted back to the dorms, and now only Roxy and Joel Forrest were left. They skated out from the shore a ways, passing the puck back and forth, then stopped to catch their breaths.

“That’s one good-looking kid,” Roxy said to himself. ‘I could go for a guy like that’

“Too bad Knowles is such a jock,” Joel was thinking at the same time. ‘I wonder what goes through that good-looking head of his when he jerks off.’

“You got a roommate, don’t you?” Roxy asked.

“Yup. You?”

Roxy nodded, and sighed. Should he tell Joel about Brent? Well, there was nothing to tell... except how he felt about Brent, and how Brent’s physical presence made him feel. The strangest thing was that since that intimacy with Brent he found himself falling out of love with him. That relationship had gone as far as it could go. He was, in other words, searching for a lover, one who could really reciprocate.

“Not good, eh?” Joel said.

They looked at each other. Words could have been spoken. If they had, both boys would have saved themselves a great deal of future heartache, but they were shy. Even at the Farmer Academy, where it was uncool to verbally bash queers, boys thought long and hard before they committed their desires to the knowledge of another person. Yet before them, suddenly, the possibility, the opportunity loomed. Roxy was the one who put an end to it: “My ass is getting cold. I guess we’d better skate on home.”

Meanwhile, the three-fold relationship between Monsieur le Clerq, his son and Mallory had been prospering. Mallory’s flute started to deliver notes with a sparkle which surprised, and delighted, his instructor who never suspected the cause was his own 10-year-old son. He was doubly delighted when Mallory actually suggested that he sit the boy the following Saturday.

And so once again Mallory found himself at five o’clock in the afternoon before Monsieur le Clerq’s door. This time as soon as Terry saw him he rushed past his father and jumped into Mallory’s arms, wrapping his legs about Mallory’s waist, and kissed him repeatedly, and wetly, on both cheeks — “like they do in France,” he said.

There was no flute — and no video. Within five minutes they found themselves on the floor in a kind of pretend-wrestling, but it was more hugging and kissing and caressing than rough-housing. Their hands started to wander inside shirts. The aim of their kisses came closer and closer to each other’s mouths. Terry seemed to purr.

Then the telephone rang. “Let it ring,” Terry said.

“It might be important.”

Mallory got up — and suddenly realized his erection was trapped at an awkward angle so he had to walk bent over like an old man. Terry saw — and laughed. Mallory picked up the phone. It was Monsieur

le Clerq. "I forgot to tell you there's a pot of home-made soup in the refrigerator."

"Thanks. That will be nice."

"How is Terrance?"

"Oh... fine. Just fine."

"Is he behaving himself?"

"Yes. Absolutely."

"Well, if he doesn't, you can spank him."

"I'll tell him that, Sir."

"Good bye, then."

Mallory hung up and sat down on the couch. Terry joined him and moved over until their shoulders were touching.

"You had a boner then, didn't you?" the boy said.

Mallory found himself blushing. "I guess so."

"I did, too. I still have it, see?" Terry smoothed the material around his fly to show a little pointy rise. "Of course, it isn't anywhere near as big as yours. Why do you sometimes get boners and sometimes not?"

"Don't you really know?"

"Sure, if you're gonna make a baby, but I mean just fooling around like we were, we both got one. And the feeling..."

"I don't know as your dad would like me talking about these things," Mallory said cautiously.

"Mine is stiff half the time. And, you know, if you rub it when it's stiff it feels real nice. Does yours, too?" He dropped a hand to Mallory's lap. "It's *still* stiff, isn't it?"

"I guess so."

"Come on, lay down and rub my back."

They stretched out on the couch, facing each other. Mallory put his hand inside Terry's shirt and started moving it gently over the younger boy's skin.

"Mmm, that's nice," Terry sighed. "I could go to sleep this way. Kiss me on my closed eyes."

Mallory had little experience in seducing younger boys. Once, when he was thirteen, he had been rolling about in the barn with a slightly younger cousin and they had unzipped and jerked each other off. But they had both been in puberty, had cocks large enough to wrap a hand around and had come wetly at the end. Terry's penis, he supposed, was barely big enough to hold with two fingers. What could it feel?

Terry wondered what would happen now. He knew everything he had been doing since Mallory had come in had been in some mysterious way connected to a very important discovery about himself and about other human beings he had to make, and that Mallory could help him. He had no clear idea what it was. All he was sure of was that it had something to do with penises.

Now, as Mallory kissed his eyelids, he put his hand back on Mallory's crotch. He found the erection, still pressing up against the confining cloth. He explored its length and hardness with his fingers. Man, was it big! Mallory made no move to push his hand away, so he said, "Let's compare."

By now, Mallory couldn't have resisted Terry's suggestion even if he wanted to, which he didn't. He croaked an "Okay," and started unbuckling, unbuttoning and unzipping. Then he did the same to Terry. Together they lowered their pants and underpants.

Terry gasped with wonder at the sight of Mallory's all but mature erection. Mallory nearly swooned with delight at the sight of Terry's inch-an-a-half cocklet pointing perkily out from his groin.

"Oh, you beautiful kid!" Mallory exclaimed and then, losing control, folded Terry in his arms and crushed their lips together.

This, to the little boy, was most strange. He hadn't expected a hug and the kind of kiss you saw in the movies. After a moment of startle, however, he realized this was all part of what he had to discover, so he gave in to the hug and began to kiss back. When Mallory sucked, he sucked; when Mallory rubbed his wet

lips back and forth over his mouth and chin, he rubbed, too, in counter motion; when Mallory put a tongue-tip between his lips, he met that tongue-tip with his own. It was all new; it was weird; it was exciting — and it felt good!

“That’s... that’s... so *beautiful!*” Mallory panted, breaking apart.

“Aren’t we going to do anything with our boners?” Terry asked.

“Yes!” Mallory drew their trousers further down their legs. He took Terry’s little erection between thumb and forefinger and started to move the loose skin up and down. “You do this, don’t you? In bed. I mean, really do it.”

“Yes.”

“And you get a big good feeling at the end, before everything dies away?”

“Yes.”

“That’s called an orgasm.”

Terry giggled. “Now you sound like a teacher.”

“Sorry. I just didn’t know how much you did, that’s all.”

“You do it, too?”

“All boys do it.”

“Every night?”

“Some.”

“You do it every night?”

“I won’t have to this evening, will I?”

Terry thought about that for a second, then, with a big smile breaking on his face, he sat up and said, “That’s right!” And he wrapped his hand around Mallory’s erection and gave it a few short, inexpert pumps.

Awkwardly, they played with each other’s penises. A couch is not the best place for horizontal mutual masturbation, but neither of them realized this yet. Besides, on Terry’s part, a lot of curiosity had to be satisfied. He felt the older boy’s erection all over, very thoroughly, asking questions about what the various parts were called and where the touching felt best. He pulled apart the little cheeks of the glans and peered, and then blew, into the piss-slit, and wanted to know if that was where the sperm came out, too. Then Mallory’s scrotum and its twin testes took his attention. “You’re making them move,” he said.

“No, they do that all by themselves.”

“How?”

“I don’t know. They just do.”

“Look and see if mine do the same.”

“They’re hardly down in there yet”

“Will they later?”

“You bet”

“How do you know? You done this with other boys?”

“I read about it in books.”

Terry scoffed. “They write books with *that* in them?”

“Not the kind of books your dad would have in his house.”

Laughing, Terry squeezed Mallory’s penis harder and made his hand fly up and down over the rumpling skin.

“Ooooooo... Jesus!” Mallory breathed.

“Feel nice?”

“You’re going to make it spit!”

“Sperm?”

“Yeah!”

“I want to see it spit sperm. Can I?”

“Yeah, but I better sit up and take my shirt off. I don’t want to get stains all over everything.”

A moment later he was sitting bare-chested by the end of the couch with his Levis rumbled about his ankles watching Terry’s little hand go up and down over his penis. Terry was busily looking back and forth from Mallory’s eyes to Mallory’s cock. “You tell me, now, when it’s going to spit,” the little boy said. “I don’t want to miss it.”

“I will. I may shake a bit when that happens.”

“Why?”

“The feeling. It affects a guy that way. You pant and tremble and jerk. It’s normal.”

“I don’t do any of those things.”

“Wait a few years. It’s starting to get close, now.”

“Am I doing it right?”

“Yes. A little higher up. One thing — don’t stop or let go when the sperm comes out.”

“I won’t.”

“That would kill a guy.”

“Okay.”

“Now, here goes...”

Terry’s hand flew over his cock. He grabbed a breath, bit his lower lip between his teeth, and then he was rising, the sperm along with his feelings. He started to moan. Terry glanced quickly up into his face, then back at the cock, and was almost too late to see the first jet of sperm fly out of it and land somewhere between between Mallory’s nipple and belly-button.

“Oh, wow!” Terry exclaimed.

The first spurt was followed by another — and then another and then another — until finally the ejaculation settled down to a diminishing, pulsing flow of turgid white sperm out of the urethra and down over Terry’s thumb.

“You can let go, now,” Mallory said, for Terry’s continued agitation was producing only a rather painful tickle.

“Oh, wow!” Terry repeated. “How soon can you do it again?”

“Not for an hour or two.”

“That was a lot, wasn’t it?”

“Yeah, I guess so. I hadn’t come in several days.”

Terry, meanwhile, had been examining the drops of sperm on his hand. He sniffed it, tasted it

“What do you think?” Mallory asked.

“It’s great!”

“Maybe I’d better clean up.”

“No, not yet.”

So Mallory lay back in his post-orgasmic euphoria and let Terry play with his sperm. The little boy made trails of it with his fingers, smeared it over his chest and belly, worked some with a finger-tip into his navel. In a few minutes it had evaporated to a kind of crust on his skin.

Mallory shook himself out of his lethargy. “Now it’s time to get you,” he said.

Nodding, Terry scooted over beside him. Mallory put an arm around the little boy’s back and with the fingers of that hand grasped the diminutive penis.

“You tell me, too, when you’re getting close,” he said.

“Uh huh.” Terry dropped his head onto Mallory’s bare chest, so Mallory could rest his chin against it and, once again, breathe through Terry’s hair the sweet perfume of a reasonably clean pre-pubertal boy.

He started the motion. He felt the cocklet click in response. What a wonderful feel it had: small, warm, rigid but with the tender skin so supple and loose about it. He rubbed that skin up and down, up

and down. He felt one of Terry's hands running lightly over his forearm, from wrist to elbow.

"You getting a good feeling?"

"Yes."

He looked around and saw that Terry's eyes were closed. Just the tip of a pink tongue protruded out of a corner of his mouth. He rested his cheek back against the side of Terry's head and continued masturbating the tender penis.

About two minutes later Terry said, "I think I'm...I'm getting close."

"Okay."

"Yes... this is it!"

The cocklet pulsed — he could feel it jerk against his thumb — twice strongly and quickly. The muscles in his stomach contracted and relaxed and contracted again. Mallory slowed down his stroke, was careful to keep his fingers off of the tip. Finally the hand that had been on his masturbating forearm moved down and stopped the motion.

They sat together that way for a good half minute. Terry's penis never lost its erection, and every so often Mallory could feel a weak pulse — of pleasure or irritation, he didn't know which — go through it. Then the boy sat up and pushed his hand away and turned around and looked at Mallory.

"I'm hungry," he said. "Let's eat. And afterwards there's a whole lot I want you to tell me about."

11. The Lament of Solomon

Thanksgiving came and went. The student orchestra gave performances of the Mozart Jupiter and *Don Juan*. Roxy continued to work with O'Neill on their project, although their relationship had become rather icy. Joel was playing Haydn quartets with two other freshmen and one junior. The *Schelomo* performance was scheduled for the last week before Christmas vacation.

And now the winter blizzards began. The boys woke up in the morning to the sound of snowplows carving out their automobile life-line to the outer world. They stoked their furnaces and studied and practiced and ate and slept — sometimes with each other but all too often alone, masturbating to fond dreams of developments not taken when opportunities had arisen in the past

At last the time for *Schelomo* had come. Curious students filled the performance hall to capacity. O'Neill showed up first and tuned up his synthesizer, making the old wooden building resound with squeaks and rumbles and occasional bursts of melody. Then Roxy came in carrying his 'cello, long blond hair neatly combed back over the padded shoulders of a black tuxedo jacket. He nodded to O'Neill and O'Neill nodded to him. O'Neill picked up his baton, started a tape spooling, moved up a damper switch, and they were off.

Everything went reasonably well for the first half of the piece. Roxy's impassioned 'cello sang against the resonances of microprocessors. More than one student observed that the result was more interesting, at least, than the Beethoven concerto played against one piano, four hands, which most of the violin students had to perform.

Things started to go wrong when Roxy felt a tug at the side of his head in the middle of a passage of wide bowing. At first he thought someone was pestering him, and during the following *tutti* irritably turned his head aside only to find that the stock of his instrument turned with him. Around two of the pegs a lock of his hair had got caught surreptitiously, hoping no one would notice, he tried to disentangle himself, but the score called him back to his bowing before he could free himself.

During the next measures of rest for the 'cello he tried once again to free his hair, and this time it was noticed. Over the murmurs of the synthetic orchestra came a few titters, then subdued laughter. O'Neill was roused from his conductorial concentration, looked first back over his shoulder at the audience, then scowled at Roxy.

Roxy, meanwhile, had only managed to make matters worse. He had tried unwinding his hair from the pegs, but had wound the wrong way, and now his head and the head of the instrument were bound even more closely together. He looked up helplessly to O'Neill.

"Asshole!" O'Neill mouthed angrily.

The giggling in the audience increased and the sound of Roxy's 'cello diminished accordingly. His bowing was restricted; he couldn't move his head in musical punctuation without tugging his hair and jerking the 'cello about; his confidence was shattered. The kingly, soulful voice of Solomon began to sound more and more like the nattering of Mrs. Portnoy.

From then on, deterioration was rapid. "For god's sake do something!" O'Neill growled during a loud passage from his tapes.

"I'm trying!"

"You're ruining my performance!"

By the time the final pianissimo was reached the audience was dissolved in laughter. O'Neill stalked off the stage, followed by Roxy with his instrument welded to his head. In the wings they confronted each other.

"Help me, goddamnit!" Roxy pleaded.

O'Neill grabbed the 'cello and gave it a furious yank. Roxy howled. It felt as though his scalp had been torn off, but the 'cello was loose at last. Outside in the hall the boys had started a rhythmic clapping.

“Misfit!” O’Neill shouted. “What good’s a ‘cellist who can’t play the ‘cello! What good’s a fairy who can’t get fucked!” And he grabbed Roxy by the shoulders and, shouting in his ear “Take your bow!”, propelled him out onto the stage.

“Yeah! Ra-ra! Roxy! Yeah! Ra-ra! Roxy!” the students chanted in time to their clapping. Roxy took one horrified look at his jeering fellow students and fled back into the wings, out into the night where he mingled his tears with powder snow falling silently from the heavens.

Joel wasn’t in the hall to witness Roxy’s humiliation. He was in Craddock’s arms in Craddock’s room in the senior dormitory. Craddock didn’t like O’Neill very much, so he had decided to stay behind and had invited Joel over for an evening of love-making.

A bright fire burned in the hearth. Joel had by now learned to kiss. Craddock had told him, “It’s part of a guy’s repertoire. A lover who doesn’t kiss is like a violinist who refuses to use the G-string.” So they had tried, gently, lightly at first, then more and more intimately, exploring each other’s mouths with their tongues, beginning, too, to lick.

They had just finished the first round of love and were relaxing together, Joel with his head on Craddock’s chest, when Joel said, “You weren’t in your bed last night.”

“Last night? Oh, yeah.”

They were silent for a moment, and then Joel continued, “Where were you?”

“Out.”

“I mean, where?”

“Does it bother you I was out?”

“Sort of.”

“You’re a one-man boy?”

“I don’t know.”

“I think you are. And I think in the long run I’m not the right guy for you.”

Joel lifted his head and looked into Craddock’s eyes. “Why do you say you’re not? Something like that can hurt.”

Craddock toyed with the hair about Joel’s neck. “Better to learn these things early.”

Joel dropped his head back on Craddock’s chest. The cynicism of Craddock’s words! Of course Craddock would be gone next year — and he’d better enjoy what he had now. But, God, after having longed for something for what seemed all his life and finally found it, and now to be told it wasn’t solid, that Craddock was “not the right guy” for him — was just downright mean!

He reached for Craddock’s cock. It was rubbery but still big. He squeezed it, ran his fingertips over the scrotum, down along the perineum. Craddock kissed into the hair at the top of Joel’s head. Slowly both of their cocks began to fill again.

They turned onto their sides, wrapped their arms around each other and started to kiss.

He’d *make* Craddock want him. He’d *make* Craddock want to come to *his* room every night, rather than dragging through the corridors of Meyerbeer, Dvorak and Bach!

At the same time, Roxy was having a very different experience. After the disaster of his recital he had escaped into the forest and was now plodding on snowshoes on the upper reaches of Magnetic Ridge, fighting back tears. His head swam with the more agitated passages of the Bloch and O’Neill’s harsh rejection. *Never been fucked, never been fucked.* Left, right, left, right

Snow needles were forming in the air, glinting in the light of a nearly full moon. *What use is a fairy if he’s never been fucked?*

He reached the bare ridge-top and stood there panting for a moment. The hummocks of snow around him looked soft and white as a 10-year-old’s butt. He’d been ten when he’d stumbled into a bedroom and

found his uncle, poised, aroused, ready and dripping, just starting to bear down into the buttocks raised beneath him. Consternation on the faces of his uncle and the paper boy, both forming the same words: “For Christsake, I thought you’d locked the door!”

For Christsake, Uncle Larry, why didn’t you take ME? Who cares how much it would have hurt? It would have been nothing compared to this pain!

Roxy kicked the snow and started off down the other side of the ridge.

An hour later he came out onto the Kalamoosa road and almost immediately saw the headlights of a logging truck approaching. He had taken his snowshoes off and was carrying them under an arm. He stepped aside to let the truck pass, but he heard it slowing down, and he turned to see it stop amid a blizzard of its own making.

“Long way to Kalamoosa,” the driver shouted out the window. “Gonna get cold tonight Better jump in.”

“How far you going?”

“About twenty miles to our camp. We got coffee there. And a radio-telephone.”

“I won’t need the radio-telephone.”

Roxy crossed to the other side of the truck, opened the door and climbed up into the warm cab.

“I’ll be darned,” the driver said, “you’re just a kid.”

Roxy hated to be called that. He bit his lip and they rode in silence for a while, listening to the whine of gears and the soft C and W music tape which spooled away in the dash.

“I’m Floyd,” the man said at last. “Looks like the two of us’ll be alone when we get to camp. The crew’s gone off to Kalamoosa for the weekend. You’re in trouble, right?”

It showed. Obviously. “Right,” Roxy said, “but not the way you think.”

“Did I say how I think? I figure — you tell me if I’m wrong — you come from the city, your family’s got money and your problem’s with how you feel, not with the law.”

“Close enough,” Roxy said. He always resisted people analyzing him. An older boy had analyzed him once — a somewhat queeny type — and the cure to his troubles had turned out to be mutual masturbation. The session had been pleasurable, and free, but otherwise it hadn’t helped.

The driver wasn’t about to be put off by Roxy’s silence. “And that means only one thing — the big S.”

“Let’s leave it alone, okay?”

“Sure, sure... So where do you live?”

Little by little Floyd broke down Roxy’s reserve. Soon he learned that Roxy was a student at the music school and then, in deference to what he presumed to be Roxy’s tastes, switched tapes to the *1812 Overture*. Thus they arrived in the logging camp to the brassy, crashy final chords of the Russian national hymn, in Floyd’s tape punctuated by cannon-fire.

Inside they lit Coleman lamps, restarted the oil furnace after the crew’s departure. Floyd measured out coffee into a blackened pot and put it to boil on the gas stove.

They stripped off their winter coats and sat down opposite one another at the dining table. “You’re a good-looking kid,” Floyd said, “although I gotta tell you long hair doesn’t wash with the timber crew.”

His hair was the wrong subject to start a conversation with. “If I had a razor I’d shave it all off,” he said bitterly.

“I don’t know what you got to be upset about”

Roxy sighed. “You’d never guess.”

“I been pretty right so far, haven’t I? Let me see, it’s about something that happened pretty recent, it has to do with sex, and you’re at a school where there’s only guys.”

“You going to let that coffee boil all night?”

Floyd got up and fetched the pot. “I figure something in a relationship went wrong.”

“It went wrong all right, because nothing got started.”

“Was that his fault?”

Roxy shook his head. “I can’t believe you’re asking me these questions.”

“Why?”

“Because... well, truckers aren’t like freshman music students.”

“That’s true. Except, well, in playing around... and there you might be surprised.”

“You wear a ring.”

“Two. I been married twice, still am. That don’t mean having women is all you know about — or want”

“You know about fourteen-year-old music students?”

“I’m willing to learn anything — or teach, it don’t matter. I’ll bet you take your clothes off and I take my clothes off and all the other guys at your music school take their clothes off and we’ll all look pretty much the same, give or take a few inches, with legs and arms in the same places and cocks in the same spot, too.”

Roxy laughed. At the same time he felt an erection coming on. “Which means?” he asked.

“I’m an all-around man, so why don’t you tell me what’s troubling you and we’ll see what we can do about it.”

Floyd was nice looking if not conventionally handsome, trim, maybe forty, with a full head of reddish-brown hair flecked with white. Working outdoors had coarsened the skin on his face and creased it with tiny wrinkles. His blue eyes were very bright as they searched Roxy’s, offering friendship and support — and revealing lively feelings of lust.

“Okay,” Roxy said, “here it is.” He was taking the plunge at last. “This older boy wanted to fuck me but I didn’t know how so I wouldn’t let him. I got a virgin ass. He said there’s nothing more useless than a fairy that can’t be fucked.”

“Nice guy!”

“He’s not a nice guy.”

“But you got a thing for him, right?”

“There’s no love lost between us, if that’s what you mean. But he insulted me, and I want to show him.”

They drank their coffee staring at each other, warming their hands on the cups. “Will you put yourself in my hands?” Floyd said. “Just for tonight?”

“I don’t know...” Maybe this was too big a step. Maybe Floyd’s was too big a cock.

“In a minute or two it’ll be warm in here. Let’s put mattresses on the floor. That’ll be better than trying to do it in one of these narrow bunks.”

In the event, they didn’t wait for the bunkhouse to warm up. Roxy got to his feet — and immediately bent over, because his cock was trapped down one pants leg. Floyd came up behind him and started unfastening his belt. He loosened Roxy’s fly and let his Levis sag down to thigh level. Slowly Roxy straightened, his cock rising sideways up into the looser pouch of his boxer shorts. He felt Floyd’s chin sink into his shoulder beside his neck. Floyd’s cheek was bristly with a day’s growth of beard. Floyd smelled of man — wool shirt, sweat gone a little stale, coffee, the residual scent of the leather jacket he had been wearing in the truck cab. A hand came around Roxy’s prick inside his shorts and squeezed.

“Front end’s okay,” Floyd said. “Now we just have to see about the rear.”

After that they stripped quickly and, with erections poking out straight in front of them, shivering, they made their bed on the floor and fell onto it, pulling blankets about their shoulders.

They grasped each other’s cocks. Floyd’s was circumcised, rather flat in cross-section, with a nicely-formed helmet head. It dripped pre-cum into the palm of Roxy’s hand. He found it warm, reassuring; it didn’t feel like a frightening cudgel. It gave Roxy confidence that he might be able to admit it into his untested rear.

But now he was tasting it. Floyd had reared up, was kneeling over Roxy's chest and poking that purple helmet between his lips, urging Roxy's teeth apart, letting him smell the mustiness of the prick, that cheesy, slightly spermy taste of a sweaty cock which hadn't been washed in several days.

This at least was something Roxy could do, had done, and no longer worried about. He'd learned from O'Neill that sucking a cock was as natural as an infant's sucking a nipple: only the object had changed. He welcomed the soft, slippery, pliable helmet into his mouth and vacuumed in the rest of the shaft, until its tip was lodged in the back of his throat.

Then, very suddenly, the prick withdrew. "Whoo-whee, it's going too fast!" Floyd said, thighs tightening nervously on Roxy's ribs. "You learn more 'n notes at music school, don't you?"

"You that close?"

"Yep. Can't you feel it? Maybe I'd better get off once before we try anything else."

Roxy didn't need any more urging. He started licking Floyd's prick, up one side and down the other, lubricating its knob with the abundant saliva flooding into his mouth with sexual passion. To Roxy, sexual excitement made his mouth water every bit as much as sitting down at the dining table in front of a delicious steak dinner.

With Floyd's prick all glistening and wet and draped here and there with ribbons of tiny bubbles, he nuzzled it, rubbed it against his lips and nose, breathing in its somewhat dampened but still distinctive masculine smells.

A gigantic shiver went through Floyd's wiry body. "You're getting me close," he said nervously. "Better take it now, or I'll blow on your cheek."

Roxy sucked it in, suddenly, quickly, fluttering his tongue-tip on the loose pleasure-skin, as it sank past his opened teeth and probed the back of his throat. Floyd reared back, lunged inward again, drew out, slammed back, losing control now, moaning in ecstasy, thrusting, jerking back, thrusting forward, until the penis pulsed and started to give up its load, liquid pellets of sperm spurting out of its tiny mouth into Roxy's mouth, all the liquids, now — pre-cum, saliva and sperm — mixing in the churning chaos of Floyd's last thrusts and Roxy's rolling tongue.

Roxy drew back an inch so he could breathe again through his nose. He could smell the new sharp odor of the man's semen, and now he began to drink it. He swallowed twice rapidly, then stopped. He held in his mouth the rest of the the sperm. It continued to pulse weakly out of Floyd's penis, then seeped onto the back of his tongue.

Floyd turned and, without unplugging his cock from Roxy's mouth, lay down on his side. Instead of speaking right away he caressed Roxy's head. He ran his fingers through the boy's long blond hair and touched the pouting lips which remained sealed around his cock. Even though Roxy hadn't come, he was strangely satisfied. It didn't bother him that his cock was still laying about the bed long streamers of anticipatory pre-come. Orgasm could wait. The man's climax had somehow, for now, substituted for his own.

They remained that way for some fifteen quiet minutes. Every time Floyd started to withdraw his prick, Roxy tightened his grip on the man's buttocks, holding him in place.

The cock softened slightly; it never shrank or lost its bulk; it just became a bit rubbery, so that once or twice Roxy closed his teeth around it and felt it yield. Then, slowly, it hardened up again, and Roxy felt the nervousness of lust return to Floyd's body.

"You got to give it up," Floyd said gently, "if we're going to get on to more important things."

Roxy let the prick slide out between his lips. It vibrated in front of his eyes, wet and gleaming in the dim light of the Coleman hanging in another part of the room.

Then Floyd was rearranging their bed, urging Roxy onto his stomach and pushing a couple of pillows under his hips. Roxy heard the sound of spitting, and then slippery fingers were exploring the crack

between his buttocks, running its length, back and forth. The fingers paused at his anal rose, pushed, then moved away, then returned, pushed again.

“Try to relax,” Floyd whispered.

“What do you think I’m doing?” Roxy said.

“Try harder.”

“I think you need more spit.”

“Okay.”

Roxy forced his anus to un-clinch. He saw, over his shoulder, Floyd bend low and release a second, rather fluffy, glob of spittle into his ass crack.

“Christ, don’t you have anything else?” Roxy asked.

“Not with me. I wasn’t really expecting this.”

“Me neither. You better let *me* get your prick before *that* goes in.”

A finger picked up the spittle and made tiny circles around the puckered anal lips. Now it pressed inward. He was surprised how good this felt. It was as though his anus was a mosquito bite and Floyd’s slippery finger was satisfying its itch. The finger went deeper. The itching turned to pain. Roxy jumped.

“It’s nothing,” Floyd said. “The pain’ll go away. You’re doing fine. Relax. Take a deep breath.”

He did. The pain vanished. It was replaced by a new feeling, a bright, brassy tingling, tickling. He thought of hospitals where nurses were always and at unexpected moments taking your temperature.

“A little more in,” Floyd was saying. “That’s better. I can feel your fear going away. I can feel it on my finger. Now I’m going to touch your little acorn...”

Suddenly his anus came alive with a terrific electric jolt. He jumped, felt his asshole clamping down hard on the intruding finger. “Jesus Christ what’s that?”

“You don’t know?”

Roxy had heard about prostates. Boys said there was a special feeling when they were touched. One kid had told him a “finger wave” was really cool. But experiencing it was far different from hearing about it. Wave after wave of sensation flowed through his body like erotic electricity. He felt his prick dampen, the pillow beneath it grow sticky.

Floyd chuckled quietly. “You got a sensitive prostate. Feel good?”

“I don’t know. Ow... I mean oooo!”

The finger in him continued to move slowly, teasingly over his gland. Now another finger was probing at his anus. This time, when it entered, the pain was worse. Floyd avoided the prostate now. Roxy knew the man was simply trying to stretch and relax his orifice. He bit his lip, determined to endure. His penis began to shrink.

“Breathe deep,” Floyd told him. “You’re okay. You’re doing just fine. I’m real proud of you.”

Roxy bit the pillow. The pain was so intense suddenly he didn’t know if it was worth it. He didn’t know if he could take it any more. He filled his lungs as deeply as he could and the pain suddenly lessened. Hot sweat broke out on his forehead. The drops ran together and dripped down onto the mattress.

Then suddenly the fingers were gone and somehow Floyd’s prick was once again in front of his face, rock-hard, pulsing with blood. He knew what he had to do. He covered it with spittle. He spread the saliva around with his fingers until it began to drip. Then the prick disappeared and he felt its soft, slippery tip pressing against his anal eye.

At first it seemed kindlier than Floyd’s fingers. The end was pliable, there was no fingernail, no bony hardness just beneath the envelope of skin. He remembered one boy at the music school saying, “Hell, I’d made such a big deal out of it in my mind, shoving hard things up there and all, that when the real thing happened it was a piece of cake.” Once again he told himself to relax, un-clench. He took a deep breath — and immediately cried out in agony as Floyd lunged half-way in.

“I’m sorry,” Floyd said, “but it’s better that way than slow. It’s past the shoulder now. The pain won’t get any worse.”

“Jesus, I hope things get *better!*” Roxy moaned.

“I’ll just wait here. No more in until you’re used to it.”

Slowly the pain subsided and was replaced, in part, by a feeling of fullness, as though he had to take a crap.

“Shall I try a little more?” Floyd asked.

Roxy nodded.

He felt the penis invade him deeper, stretching his anus wider, traveling farther up his colon. He ached, but at the same time he felt a rush of pride. He could take it. He could take cock and the pain that went with it. He didn’t know if he liked it yet — it was all too new — but he hadn’t chickened out, and, most important, he was no longer a virgin.

Slowly the prick slid in. It pushed its way deeper and deeper, slipping gently on their two salivas and God knew what kind of lubrication there was inside his ass. Just when Roxy felt the cock couldn’t go any farther it seemed to claim another mile.

“Man, are you making it longer or something?” Roxy gasped.

“Only half an inch more,” Floyd said, “and then I’ll be up to the balls.”

“Thank God for that!”

At last it was all the way in. “That’s it,” the man said. “I’ll stay here a little, until you get used to it.”

“No, I want you to go ahead. I can take it now. Go ahead and fuck me. If it’s too hard I’ll let you know.”

The motion started. The cock drew partly out and then slid home again until the man’s balls were wedged into the crack between Roxy’s thighs. All the sensations came together now: pain, the hospital tickle, the erotic jolt as Floyd’s engorged knob slid past his prostate on each thrust and withdrawal. Roxy bit the pillow. He moaned and gurgled into it. He felt like a piece of old newspaper caught up and torn in a whirlwind. And then, incredibly, he felt orgasm sweep through his loins, not the gentle, satisfying climax of his masturbations, but a hard, racking, fiery voiding of burning semen, as much pain as it was pleasure.

But Floyd hadn’t reached his climax yet. “Oh, you beautiful kid!” he groaned. “I’m all the way up you. Man, you’re so tight!” He humped, thrust, slid. Roxy realized he was trying to stay gentle but in the end he hopelessly lost control. He dropped his mouth to Roxy’s neck, moved it on dripping lips to the tendon running along the boy’s shoulder and bit into it. He moaned and cussed and sobbed. His hips pounded over Roxy’s buttocks, driving his cock again and again into the boy’s deepest and most private places.

Roxy knew it couldn’t last more than a few seconds longer, so he thrust the pillow harder into his mouth and endured. And he was rewarded a moment later by a gigantic shiver ripping through the body on top of him, a slowing of the battering at his anus, a slackening of both the motion and the pain.

“Oh, God, Roxy, I’m sorry,” the man was saying, “I didn’t mean to be so rough. Are you okay?”

Roxy was more than okay. He was happy, filled with unreasonable and boundless joy. “Sure am,” he said.

“I’d better unplug.”

“No, say there if you want”

“Doesn’t it hurt?”

“Yup, a little. But it’s like it’s got used to you being in there.”

“You sure?”

“Man, am I ever going to be able to go up to O’Neill tomorrow and spit in his eye!”

Floyd filled his bowels three more times that night with his penis and his sperm, but he wouldn’t allow reciprocation. “You got to find someone else for that,” he explained. “I tried, but it won’t stretch. I started too late. Maybe it’d of gone better if I’d begun when I was a kid, like you just done.”

“I’m not a kid,” Roxy said.

Instead, Floyd did everything else: gave him a tongue-bath from toes to groin, and then from eyes to groin, before going down on him and delivering a subtle and delightful blow-job that made Roxy forget all about his aching ass. He allowed Roxy to get off on him between the legs, and later, when they were tired and spent, held the boy in his arms like an indulgent father until they both went to sleep.

The next day they drove to Kalamoosa in the logging truck and Floyd let Roxy out at the local barbershop. When Roxy emerged a half hour later he was a different looking boy. His fine blond hair was fashionably styled, parted in the middle and trained forward and falling down a bit longer in back. Washed and scented, it was the only really clean part of his body, for with every breath Roxy was all too aware of the dried and slightly acrid sweat he had worked up snow-shoeing over Magnetic Ridge and in bed with Floyd, and of Floyd’s sweat, too, remnants of the man’s spit and sperm that still clung to him like an afterthought, like a memory.

12. Encore

O'Neill was sitting alone in the rec-room when Roxy finally got back to school. "People were worried," he said.

"Everybody?" Roxy asked.

"I wasn't. Your hair's different."

"Yes."

"What'd you do?"

"Got a haircut"

"Okay, I'm not curious anyway,"

"I did more than get a haircut"

"Un huh?"

"I got fucked."

"I *thought* you were walking with your legs apart"

"It's the only way to go with snowshoes on. You don't believe me, do you?"

"No."

"You can prove it for yourself," Roxy said, "only now I got to sleep." He started out the door. "Why you cutting classes anyway?"

"I didn't feel like going. *You* sort of screwed up my life, remember?"

Roxy shrugged and walked out. Once back in his dormitory he went to his room where, without bothering to take his richly scented clothes off, he fell on his bed and passed out until mid-afternoon when Brent wandered in.

Showered, scented, teeth brushed, Roxy opened the door to O'Neill's room without knocking, closed it behind him and leaned against it. O'Neill turned around from where he sat at his desk and stared at him.

"Sorry, Martha" O'Neill said, "I have a headache tonight"

Roxy didn't smile. "What good's a fairy if he can't fuck?"

"Watch that mouth."

"Yeah, you know all about my mouth, don't you?"

O'Neill smiled, got up, came over to him and inspected him up and down, from side to side. "That hair-style suits you," he said, "your new *persona*. It'll help your 'cello playing, too." He went over to his bed and sat on it.

"Look, you want to prove I'm a liar or don't you?"

"Sure."

"Then get up. Let me lie down."

O'Neill remained where he was. "It's usually me that does the lying down. On my back. Maybe your knees hurt."

"I told you last night I got fucked."

"Sure... out in a snow drift"

"In a logging camp. By a prick bigger than yours."

"You're really asking for it, aren't you?" O'Neill went to the door, shoved Roxy aside and locked it, turned off the study lamp on his desk so the room was illuminated only by the wintry snow-light from outside. Roxy went to the bed and sat down on its edge. O'Neill's hands dropped to his belt loosened it went on to unzip his fly and, pushing the Levis slightly down, allowed his penis to spring out before Roxy's nose.

"Make it wet," he commanded.

The prick smelled: sweaty, cheesy, acrid, male. It was already erect, standing out at him with its slight leftward bend. O'Neill grabbed the back of Roxy's head and brought it closer. Roxy gave the prick a few preliminary licks, then broke the grip and stood up to face O'Neill eye to eye.

"If all you got is spit-lube, the deal's off," he said. But he was already throwing off his clothes, revealing an erection just as hard and rampant as O'Neill's.

"For sissys I got lube with pain-killer in it, but I got to use a condom because it puts your cock to sleep, too."

"I don't need pain-killer."

"How about Vaseline?"

"Anything but spit"

"That's what you used in the ol' lumber camp, eh? Maybe it wasn't all that good."

Roxy didn't answer. He lay down on O'Neill's bed, grabbed O'Neill's pillow and put it under his hips.

O'Neill sat down beside him. "If you're bluffing," he said, "I want to know now."

"Christ, O'Neill, you chickening out?"

"Because I'm not about to let you change your mind once I get half-way in."

"I know. Get on with it, will you?"

"What, my fine little 'cello-player, are you trying to prove?"

"That's for you to find out."

"And I'm going to look for it with my cock-tip up your thing? Okay. Maybe I will find the pot of gold up there, who knows?"

O'Neill opened the little drawer on his bedside table and took out a jar. The Vaseline, Roxy saw, had been well indented with O'Neill's finger gouges. Those fingers scooped out more of the substance and started playing around his anus, warm, slippery, knowing. Roxy closed his eyes and steeled himself for the pain of first entry. But the pain never came. Perhaps it was the difference between saliva and petroleum jelly, or maybe he really was broken in, but when O'Neill's first finger pushed inside he felt only pleasure, especially when it touched the little acorn where his sperm had been accumulating for the past twelve hours.

Another finger entered, then three, then he heard O'Neill preparing himself, rubbing more Vaseline on his cock, then carefully putting the top back on the Vaseline jar and replacing the jar in the drawer.

Now O'Neill was kneeling over him, guiding his slicked-up and rampant tool into the crevice between Roxy's buttocks, feeling up and down a bit until the tip found his relaxed anal lips and stopped there for a moment, poised.

"Ready?" O'Neill whispered?

"Yep. Go ahead," Roxy whispered back, then wondered, absently, why they were whispering, which was absurd.

As Floyd had taught him, he took a deep breath. His anal sphincter relaxed. The helmet-shaped tip of O'Neill's cock passed through, followed by its broadening shoulder. O'Neill took him in one slow lunge, collapsing onto Roxy's back as soon as he was in up to his balls. Roxy let out a groan, but it was more because of the sudden weight coming onto his back than because of any pain O'Neill was causing him.

"That's *okay!*" O'Neill exclaimed. "You got a tight one, all right!"

Roxy felt O'Neill's hips rock backwards, the cock slide out of him part way, then fill him again with its slippery hardness. Out it went again, and in it came. He felt O'Neill's body begin to tremble lightly; he heard his breath become harsh, and felt it hot on his cheek. O'Neill's teeth, now, were on his neck, biting. O'Neill's hands were on his sides, on his shoulders, in his hair. A tongue came into his ear and started to lick it out. And all the time that slippery cock was plunging in and out of his asshole, sending out messages of pleasure, prostate-tickle, colonic fullness to the sensory control center in Roxy's head.

And, because he was enjoying it, enjoying the situation, even, he began to rock back, roll his ass up to meet every stroke of O'Neill's cock.

"Jesus, you're really into this!" O'Neill gasped. "I can't hold off much longer."

"Good," said Roxy.

"Then... man, oh Christ, here I go..."

His arms shot around Roxy's chest and hugged him as if in a grip of death. He bit Roxy's shoulder and drew blood. The spasm shook him like an electric current, as though that final plunge of his cock opened all the circuitry of the older boy's body. Deep in his backside, O'Neill's sperm was pouring into him, calming the taut nerves attached to that pulsing cock. Gradually the hug relaxed, the quick, gasping breathing began, close to his ear, and slowly subsided. The cock stayed where it was.

"Who-whee!" O'Neill said at last "Who would have thought my ex-recital partner would have been so good at this? Maybe I'd better pull out now and let you clean up."

But Roxy reached around and held O'Neill's buttocks in place. "You can stay in," he said. "If you're any man at all, it won't go sloppy, and you can go for another round in ten minutes or so."

13. Chance Meetings

Skillet Lake had pike, rainbow trout and lake trout. After Christmas vacation ice-fishing shanties began to appear on its frozen surface, some hauled there by locals with their trucks, others put together from old packing crates by students at the Farmer Music Academy and brought into position on sleds.

Ice fishing is a very slow sport. It is good for old people, people of phlegmatic temperament, and 14-year-old boys who need an excuse to be alone to think. And so one relatively warm Sunday afternoon in January Roxy Knowles found himself in the Meyerbeer dorm's shanty looking down through the hole chopped in the ice at his line.

Things hadn't been going well for him. Christmas vacation had been a bore. The *Schelomo* disaster had (briefly) made him a butt of student jokes. More important, it had shattered his confidence with the 'cello. Brent had been sympathetic, occasionally taken him into his bed and into his arms, but those were acts of friendship and good will rather than couplings of love and lust. He knew now that happiness for him began with a hard cock up his ass, but O'Neill, as a person, disgusted him. Roxy's marks had suffered, too. He felt as trapped at Farmer as those poor fish swimming around below him under the ice. His life was leading nowhere, personally or musically.

He heard footsteps crunching on the ice outside and the door to the shanty opened. It was Jerry, from the Bach dorm.

"Oh, damn," Jerry said. "I was hoping this shanty'd be free."

"That's okay," Roxy said, and invited him in to warm up his hands.

Jerry squatted beside the hole in the ice. For a few minutes they discussed fish and fishing, then Roxy said, "I thought you usually took off skiing with your roommate on Sunday." He'd seen Jerry and Joel disappearing into the woods together several times.

"Yeah!" Jerry rubbed his hands together. "Forrest's got more important things to do, I guess. Like making out with Craddock."

"Oh?" Roxy was surprised.

"You didn't know?"

"No... I didn't." Roxy was remembering his brief conversation with Joel a month and a half earlier. He'd concluded that Joel was straight — even straighter than Brent. "They really got something going together, eh?"

"With Craddock?" Jerry chuckled. "Craddock's got something going with every pretty kid in the freshman class — Christ, you should know that — and even some who aren't so pretty. Hasn't he ever tried to get you into bed with him?"

Roxy shook his head.

"Remember when he played the Don Juan theme on his horn at the Thanksgiving concert? That's his signature tune."

"So..." — Roxy was feeling his way, now — "...it's nothing very serious?"

"Not for Craddock!"

"And for Forrest?"

Jerry grinned and shrugged. "Look, Forrest and me, we're friends, right?"

"Just friends?"

"Just friends. Why?" Roxy felt Jerry's eyes examining him closely. "You got something for him?"

"Uh, no. Just interested. I guess there's a lot I don't know that's going on around here, that's all."

"Like?"

"Craddock... doing those things. And Forrest., with Craddock."

"Does it disturb you?"

"You mean, like discrimination?"

“Also.”

“A guy’s body’s his own, isn’t it? It’s none of my business if Forrest wants to get fucked by a whoring senior!”

“I don’t think it’s gone that far.”

“Tell me more.”

Jerry smiled. “Nope.”

“Okay.”

“You want to know more, you talk with Joel.”

Joel’s lover Craddock, in fact, had just received another letter from his old history teacher, and was sitting in his bathrobe reading it before a comfortable blazing fire in his room.

February 22

My Dear Tom Craddock:

It was just wonderful to see you over Christmas — and what a handsome youth you’ve become. I can understand how you’ve been turning on all those freshmen.

As you know, I don’t really like to write letters very much. What I will some day write are my memoirs. You said you enjoyed my account of getting it on with the Inniscauld boy on the boat last autumn. That’s what gave me the idea: instead of writing a tale of my daily life, I’d tell you of a more recent encounter.

Perhaps you don’t remember Michael Longtree. He wasn’t really part of your circle of friends. A kid from the other side of the tracks — his dad actually works on those tracks. Not exactly an upwardly mobile family, but decent folks. We’d been close, Michael and I, and... Well, last week he called me from the café where the bus stops and asked me to pick him up. I hadn’t seen him for a year and a half. Like you, he’s become, if anything, more beautiful than when he was in grade school. As we pulled away in my MG we grinned at each other.

“This is great!” he said, for what seemed like the hundredth time. “I mean, seeing you before I went home and got all involved, you know. Chatter chatter. Michael, clean the windows. Michael go to the store. Help your sister. Rake the yard...”

He’d come back for a family wedding. And I thought: he’s got to test us, too. Would he still respond to me? Would I harden up when I was near him? And... would I still want IT?

I had an awful time keeping my eyes on the road. Just in my peripheral vision were those lanky legs in worn blue-jeans — and, higher up (Was I imagining it or wasn’t I?) a distinct bulge that was bigger than it ought to be.

“Same old car,” he was saying, “You taught me to drive in this, remember?”

“Taught you a lot of things.”

He wiggled down in the seat. The bulge was there, all right — I could actually see the shape of his glans. “Those were good times. Maybe the best”

We stopped at a red light and I turned to look at his face. His hair was longer. It fell nearly to his shoulders, yellow-blond, straight, moving gently in the summer breeze. It was a little duller now, but perhaps that was because it hadn’t been washed lately. On the whole, he didn’t look awfully clean.

It didn’t take long to reach my house. I parked in the driveway and he unfolded himself from his seat, got out, stretched his adolescent body luxuriantly in the gentle sunlight. “My second home,” he said, looking about and sniffing the air.

“And always will be.” I opened the door.

“Thanks... for that.” He gave me a friendly poke on my shoulder and went in.

At first he just paced about. He had to examine everything, open drawers and cupboards and tell me about what was new and what should be where but that he'd found missing or moved. Obviously he had a right to my house — and to me!

“Well, yeah, I had this job out in the oilfields,” he said. “You know, hugging pipe around the drilling rigs. And then when I heard my little sister was getting married I decided to chuck it in and come home.”

“And here you are, looking better than ever.” We were sitting in my kitchen, now, relaxing over a couple of Cokes.

“Do you really think so?”

“Yes, I really do.”

That was typical of Michael, and, in fact, if you don't mind my saying so, of all youth: it is naturally narcissistic, which is part of its charm — and one good reason for its sexual accessibility. I doubt I'd ever have gotten you, Tom Craddock, if it wasn't!

He leaned back in the hard kitchen chair, thrust his long legs out in front of him and parted them a bit — body language come-on, whether he knew it or not. Inside the worn blue of his Levis I thought could see his penis stir. It was tucked slantwise beneath one pocket, not stiff but certainly full, getting close to critical mass.

Our conversation started to limp — and sputtered out. We had come face to face with sex, and all we still had to tell one another could come later. Each of us was waiting for a signal, but you can't expect a kid to make the first move, even if he's taller and stronger and, yes, hornier, than you are. It was clearly up to me to break the tension.

“Michael, Michael, Michael,” I said at last, lowering my gaze to his crotch, “how long's it been since you turned that thing loose?”

He grinned. I was taking over, the way I should, just as I had in the past, when he was a schoolboy. Maybe he wanted to be a schoolboy again for a few hours. “I dunno,” he said, shaking his head.

I pulled my chair up beside his and put my hand over the ridge of his penis. I started feeling it, running my fingernails over its contact with the tightened cloth. It stiffened. He slouched further back in his chair, locked his hands behind his head, let his eyes wander up to the ceiling.

“Was last time with one of those horny teenage roustabouts?” I asked.

“You'd like to think that, wouldn't you?” he said. The grin still hadn't left his lips.

“Sure. A little sex play in the old oil camp — a nice fantasy. And it wouldn't be all that unusual.”

“You're telling me?”

“So I'm right.”

The grin widened into a slightly embarrassed smile. “There was this one guy, Alesandro — I think you'd of liked him. He had a sort of young-boy face...” He left the sentence unfinished.

I sharpened the angle of my fingernails on the denim ridge and scratched harder. “Well, go on,” I said.

“It's more fun to do it than talk about it.”

“Come on, you got my curiosity up.”

“Sometimes he'd let me fuck him if there weren't any other guys around, is all.”

“Did you like that?”

“Of course.”

“Was it as good as what we did?”

“I don't know. It was different. *I* was different.”

“Because you were older?”

“Maybe.”

“You like what I'm doing now?”

“Yes.” His grin widened.

“Like old times?”

“Yeah!”

“You’ve got it on with girls, out there, too?”

“Yup.”

“But you still fucked Alesandro.”

“I still fucked Alesandro.”

“You liked fucking Alesandro?”

“I liked fucking Alesandro.”

“Why?”

He thought a moment, shifted in his chair, then said softly, “It’s not like pussy, it doesn’t feel at all like pussy, but still it can be pretty nice.”

“How is it different? Say with Alesandro?”

“I don’t know. A guy’s... His butt-hole’s pretty tight. You’re doing it from behind. And he smells like a guy, not a girl. It’s... like... stronger.”

“The feeling?”

“It’s easier. A guy understands cocks better than any woman does. It’s more natural for him to make it feel good.”

“Seems to me that’s what I was telling you a few years ago.”

“You told me a lot that wasn’t so far off target.”

“Thanks.”

“Excuse me — I have to move things, or else you got to stop doing that”

In stiffening, his cock had evidently bent to the angle of agony.

“Which would you rather?”

He pushed my hand away, sat up, strained and adjusted things at his crotch so the ridge of his penis lay comfortably a little to the left of his fly. I started running my fingernails over it again, and now the raking was on its front, over his frenulum. He shuddered.

“That’s better,” he said. Once more his eyes drifted off to some spot on the ceiling. My fingernails scratched back and forth, back and forth, tearing gently at the cloth. The tension in his body mounted. Then he cleared his throat and said in an almost toneless voice, “You still like that special thing?”

“Are you still willing to do it?” I said.

He drew in his breath between stiff lips and said, “You could do me now and I could do that after.”

“Here? In the kitchen?”

“Yeah. I sort of feel an emergency coming on.”

Tom, that was a really familiar refrain from out of our past! Suddenly there’d be this clumping on my back porch and his grinning face peering in the screen door: “Can you let me in real quick? I think I got an emergency coming on.” And those times often had been the best, seized unexpectedly: one minute Michael would have been out working up a sweat on his bike or with a borrowed football, 30 seconds later he’d be lying semi-nude in the middle of my living room carpet writhing under my ministering hand as it moved back and forth over his growing tool in a fine emulsion of Mother Delicious Crisco.

He used to keep a list of all the lubricants he had tried. He put the record in his “secret private place” at my house. The substances were rated according to how good they made his cock feel. Crisco ranked somewhere in the middle — about five out of ten, as I remember. It may have been only mediocre as a lubricant, but when he had an emergency and I was called upon to take care of that emergency right there in the middle of my living room floor, right next to the kitchen, urgency usually dictated its use.

How he would cum in those days! Trembling, legs jerking, head thrashing back and forth, lower lip bitten between his teeth, moaning, snorting, breath hissing, until the sperm (after he started to get sperm,

that is!) jumped out, (at first almost a spray of light gooey stuff, later thick, white, clotted and copious goobers) and decorated his T-shirt (he was always proud of sperm stains), my hand and my carpet.

Well, back to yesterday. I didn't keep him waiting. I knelt between his lanky legs and unzipped him, becoming in the process more than ever aware of the fact that he really wasn't clean at all. It was warm in my kitchen; I could smell him: hair, sweat, clothes that had gone unwashed for too long. I envy the beauty and energy of youth, but I don't regret that I've aged to the point where I can ride airplanes and not buses, over-night in motels with baths and showers rather than \$2-a-night campings with only cold running water. Still... there's a difference between one's own all-too-human body smells and those of a beloved boy...

He put the heel of his hands on the sides of the chair and unweighted his ass so I could slip his Levis and undershorts down his legs a bit. Now the smells were even stronger — rich, pungent boy-crotch odors, sweat-damp denim, perineum, anus, the smegma of a circumcised cock long confined in bus-ride heat... and the unmistakable bleach-like scent of spilled sperm. Michael had never been able to go without orgasm for more than a day. He used to brag that he had probably spread more sperm around more odd places of our town than any other school-boy in history. I couldn't believe one year had tamed him. On the long trip east from Bakersfield I figured he'd probably come at least once in his pants — maybe, considering the boring nature of the trip and the constant crotch stimulation of moving bus, he'd ejaculated many more times.

The rich, dank odors drifted up to his face. Michael wrinkled his nose. “Whew, I sort of stink, don't I? Do you mind?”

I didn't, and told him so. The smell was of him, his body and his sex. “I think you've come since you had this off,” I said with my hand still on his slip which by now was about his knees.

“Yeah... between Albuquerque and K.C., at night, there was this other kid that was sitting next to me...”

“And one thing led to another.”

“He was cool about it. There's not much to do on a bus, you know, except read and...”

“Jerk off.”

“We didn't clean up very good, I guess. We didn't want to use our handkerchiefs.”

“You do it wet?”

An embarrassed grin. “Yeah.”

“You make him?”

“Yeah.”

“What'd he think of that?”

“I just told him he'd got to make it slippery to have me come.”

“And...?”

“Come on... I don't have to spell it all out, do I?”

“Sure. I'm getting off on this!”

“It figures! Actually I had some Glowlers Sun-Tan Oil in my pocket. We used it all up.”

“And it felt good?”

“It'll feel good now.”

“I don't have any Glowlers.”

“Jesus, Mister Harley, I know you well enough to use spit.”

I gazed at his yearning, uncovered penis. It hadn't changed much during his one-year absence. It rose hard and fat out of a tangle of chestnut-colored hair. I touched its tip. A shudder went through the boy's body. I reached for the Crisco can and daubed some of the creamy white fat onto the purple cock-head, where one clear drop of pre-come was already glistening in its eye, and merged the two substances

together, running a finger slowly down, over the sensitive frenular fold, then up one side, drawing the pre-lube and Crisco after it “God, that feels good!” he whispered.

I added more Crisco — and continued to run my finger gently around his cock. “It’s so stiff!” he moaned, then, a few minutes later, “Please, Mr. Harley, don’t tease it any more — get me off!”

I started to really masturbate him, now, using the full-handed grip, the slow, tight stroke I knew he liked best. I could see he was rising rapidly. Sexually, I guess, he was still just a kid. His body twitched; he gasped; his lips drew tight over his teeth, a sure sign, with him, of approaching orgasm...

And then there was a loud pounding on my front door.

“Damn!” I said.

“What’s that?” Michael jumped, wide-eyed, to his feet and clutched at his trousers.

“I don’t know.”

“Oh, shit!” His voice was high-pitched, almost querulous.

“I think it’s the kids.”

“What kids?”

“From across the road.”

He had his slip up, the tip of his basted cock peeking over its elastic band. He yanked up his Levis. As he struggled to zip his fly, two drops of dense sperm leaked out of his urethra and landed on his pant-leg.

“What timing!” I said. I flicked at the sperm with my hand. The banging on the door grew louder.

Michael’s fingers froze on the zipper. I licked his sperm off my thumb.

“You okay?” I asked.

He nodded uncertainly. His whole body, from his clenched fists to his gritted teeth, was locked in the struggle to resist orgasm, keep back the rest of his semen.

“Hang on,” I said. “I’ll get rid them.”

It was Billy and Jimbo and Darl: all about twelve-and-a-half, always ready for a giggle and pull when they got out of school in the afternoon.

“Hey, was that Longtree?” Billy asked.

I nodded.

“Man, I *thought* it was him! ‘S he still here?” The boys were peering around me, trying to see through the doorway.

“Look,” I said, “I can’t invite you in this afternoon.”

“That’s *obvious!*”

“We got a lot to talk about”

“Sure, cock talking to cock,” Darl said.

“It’s a nice winter day,” I said. “Why don’t you guys go down to the railroad bridge and pull a little taffy.”

“While you pull a big taffy,” Billy said. (Pulling taffy was current schoolboy slang for jerking off.)

I yanked the bill of Billy’s baseball cap down hard over his forehead. “Have a nice afternoon!” I said.

Michael was still standing with his fly half closed and a fiercely purple cock-knob poking out of his well-greased-up slip when I returned to the kitchen. He grinned at me sheepishly. “It won’t fit,” he confessed.

I put my arm around his waist and nodded toward my bedroom up the stairs. “Come on. It doesn’t have to.”

Clutching his Levis, he climbed the stairs before me and sagged down onto my bed, where I started stripping him clean of pants, slip, shoes and socks and his prized blue PLAYBOY shirt.

“Hey,” he said suddenly, “how many hand jobs you think I got on this old bed?”

“A lot more than the blow-jobs I really wanted to give you.”

“We didn’t start that until I was a pretty big boy, did we?”

“No.”

“Well, that won’t hold us back this time, will it?”

I shook my head. I had him naked, now, totally. And now I stood admiring his youthful beauty, noting the changes one long year plus hard physical work had made in his body.

But Michael was in a hurry. “Come on, Mr. Harley,” he said, “you can look all you want afterwards!” Then he had a sudden doubt “Maybe I oughtta shower first?”

“Don’t bother,” I said. Then I laughed. “But the smell *is* pretty raunchy.”

“Yeah,” he said, proud of it now, “real raunchy!”

The best way of sucking a cock is to position yourself between the other guy’s legs. Michael knew this; his legs were already spread when I climbed onto the bed. I ran my tongue along the inside of his moistly musky-smelling thighs, up the perineal fold, along the underside of his scrotum. He moaned with deep satisfaction. “Man, you’re killing me!” he said.

“Nicely, I hope.”

“You won’t say that if I blow all over my chest.”

But I knew he always liked to complain: I was always too slow; I was no better than a torturer — and he loved it, So I took my time. First I wiped the remnant Crisco off his penis — who wants a mouthful of *that?* — and carefully re-moistened it with spit. It didn’t take long to have his penis thoroughly wet, lubricated and gleaming. Then I held it vertically between thumb and forefinger and said, “It’s beautiful!”

“Mr. Harley...,” he croaked. “Please...!” He was almost whimpering. I could see it was time. I slipped my moistened lips over that inviting purple knob and, sucking very hard, drew the whole penis deep and snug into my mouth.

“Aaargh! Mfp! Mllllllump! Ssssssss!”

If I was a comic strip writer I could do better with the onomatopoeia. Anyhow, Tom, he gasped — and came instantly, with a gigantic shudder, his nervous hands holding my head so that the soft, spurting end of his hardened tool blocked the back of my throat. There it pulsed out round after round of rich, pungent sperm. Then slowly the throbbing in his cock faded, his grip on my head relaxed and I was able to move up on it enough to swallow his creamy jiz and begin to breathe again.

“Whew!” he said, “that was something!”

I drew away from him, rose and stripped and lay back down on the bed. He dropped his head on my chest, and for a few minutes we hugged companionably, with him playing his fingers very lightly around my erect and dripping cock. Then he snuggled down and started to lick it.

Tom, you’re probably not old enough to know how *nostalgic* it is to get your cock sucked by an *old* boy-friend. It’s like he’s still twelve, too, and fourteen and sixteen. All the ages are there in his mouth. You lie back with your eyes closed, running your fingers through his hair, and you relive all those glorious years of burgeoning growth, the pubertal, then adolescent boy elbowing his way into the world, rearing his cock at you and possessing yours as though it was his right. The sight, the touch, the smell of him during those explosive years rushed back into my mind, until I almost sobbed with the sense of beauty and the loss. Michael Longtree would never be the same rambunctious boy again. This meeting was also a kind of farewell.

Michael knew I was in no hurry, so he paused for a moment, to get his breath and let my feelings subside a little. “What you do for this when I was away?” he asked at last. “Those kids across the street?”

“Yup,” I mumbled.

“They were just *little* kids when I left”

“They’re bigger now.”

“You get your cock in any of their mouths?”

“Nope.”

“Why not?”

“Don’t want to gross them out.”

“The younger you are the less you get grossed out.” Then, suddenly, “Oh-oh, speak of the Devil. I think we got company.”

We both sat up sat up. Three boys were grinning at me through the window: Billy, Jimbo and Darl.

“What the fuck!” I shouted. “How’d you kids get up here?”

“Let us in,” Billy said, “and we’ll tell you.” As Michael went to the window and opened it, Billy told how first they had hauled a step-ladder out of my shed. That had got them to the lowest branch of a tree. They had crawled out on that to the top of the kitchen roof... and there they were.

“Come on. Let us in,” Jimbo said.

“Yeah, we want to see what you’re really doing,” said Darl. “Billy said Longtree was sucking your cock, but he couldn’t be sure.”

“Chrissake, keep your voices down,” I said. I got up, my steel-hard erection dripping streamers of love-juice, and unlocked the outside screen. They piled through into the bedroom.

“Was he?” Jimbo asked, once inside.

“Was what?”

“Was he giving you a BJ, I mean?”

Michael started to laugh. “I told you,” he said.

“Told him what?” they wanted to know.

“You guys weren’t going to get grossed out”

“Sucking it?” Darl said. “You really had Mr. Harley’s cock in your mouth?”

“You got it.”

“I *told* you,” Billy said.

“And he didn’t get mad?” Darl wanted to know.

“Do you get mad if someone does something real nice when he’s jerking you off?” Michael asked.

“No!” Then, “Mr. Harley, why’n you tell us you liked BJ-ing?”

“Yeah, that’s somethin’ we got lots of experience with.”

“More’n you got sperm, Jimbo!”

“Shut up!”

“Come on, guys, let’s do it to him.”

“I don’t know,” I said, getting rapidly flustered.

“You hold him, Longtree,” Billy said. “We’ll let him suck ours and you go on doing what you were doing.”

They could see that I wasn’t serious when I put up a token resistance. In a minute they had me on my bed, Michael holding my arms, the others lying across my legs. And then their pubertal cocks were pointing down at me, in all sizes and shapes, from Jimbo’s one-incher to Billy’s nearly man-sized (but still hairless) erection. They were tumbling about me, giggling, poking their penises in my eyes, rubbing them over my nose, forcing the entrance at my lips. And down below Michael had taken my cock once again in his mouth and was sucking it slowly, beautifully.

“Man, I never seen his thing so hard!” Billy said.

And with that I came.

I don’t think Michael was expecting it so soon. He choked, sneezed, the liquids of our conjugation spilling out copiously onto my belly.

“Hey,” Jimbo said, “I’ll bet this would be super to rub off in!”

“Go ahead,” said Billy.

“I wouldn’t mind. Really.”

“Go ahead. Strip,” said Billy.

“Should I?” Jimbo looked at each of us for reassurance.

“Yeah, no big deal,” Billy said. “He’ll like it. You’ll like it.”

“Okay,” Jimbo said, “clear the deck. Here I come. You ready, Mr. Harley?”

I only regretted I’d already cum. Jimbo was out of his clothes in a flash, and then he was on the bed, kneeling over me, his 12-year-old one-inch cock poking out stiff before him, lowering himself slowly, sensuously, grinning, watching his pecker touch down in a wet spermy spot on my belly, falling lower, lower, until I clasped him, hugged him, helped him set up the rhythm he needed, the motion, the smooth sliding of his little cock...

Oh, shit, the school just called and I’ve got to pinch hit for the basketball coach. Sorry to break this off. Hope you enjoyed it. But the sex — you’ll have to finish that yourself with your own Michael Longtree.

Your ever-loving and faithful ex-instructor

Jim Harley

14. Snow time

Mallory had been invited not to come home at Christmas. It would tire his mother, it seemed. His uncle had moved into their home and now a cousin was undoubtedly occupying Mallory's old room. One of these days he would receive a phone call from his aunt and he would be going back for the funeral. He wouldn't have a chance, even, to make an embarrassed farewell to a mother who, even during the best of times, he hadn't known very well.

So he had stayed with Monsieur le Clerq, sharing Terry's bedroom and — after all was still in the house — his bed.

"He loves you, undoubtedly," Monsieur le Clerq said one day.

"He's the little brother I never had," Mallory said, lying only a little, and then silently added, more truthfully and with more feeling, 'and now never will have.'

Mallory and Terry went through the usual stages of getting to know one another, made all the more difficult by the difference in their ages. Most fun was discovering what they had in common. Terry had inherited his parents' musical ability. He had perfect, and absolute, pitch, and he loved to sing. They invented duets — for treble and tenor, treble and flute. With Monsieur le Clerq at the piano, they piped Schubert's *The Deer in the Fields* with flute rather than clarinet over and over.

They built a snow castle, complete with prison. They planned a tree-house for the spring.

And limits were tested. One day toward the end of vacation the two boys snow-shoed to the top of the ridge back of school and Terry climbed the highest tree he could find. He was a pirate on the Spanish Main looking out for treasure-laden galleons sailing over the white hills rolling toward the Arctic. He shouted. He swung from branch to branch. He dared Mallory to come up and capture him and, after Mallory grew tired of waiting below, refused to come down. Running out of patience at last, Mallory climbed up the tree until he was within ankle-grabbing distance. Then Terry kicked. He had meant only to tease, but his boot caught Mallory in the mouth and blood spurted out of his lip.

Mallory was furious. At first Terry was horrified by what he had done, then, when he saw Mallory's anger, he grew angry himself. He'd given warning, hadn't he? If Mallory didn't want to get hurt he should have stayed safely below. What right did Mallory have to climb up into his pirate's lair to forcibly haul him down?

Mallory dropped to the ground and fastened on his snow-shoes.

"Climb the mast again and I'll slit your throat!" Terry shouted down.

"Fuck you!" Mallory shouted back. "You can find your own way home."

And so both learned something out of this — Mallory that he could be hurt, physically and emotionally, by Terry; Terry that he could be abandoned.

Their sexual ties deepened with less stress. Terry wanted to learn everything, try out everything — and discuss how everything felt. He would put a tongue in Mallory's ear, and Mallory would have to explain all the sensations and noises he experienced. Then Mallory would have to put his tongue in Terry's ear and say how it tasted.

They were charting each other's sexual landscapes. Terry was more directed toward peak experiences, more genitally oriented; Mallory, despite virtual maturity in organ and orgasm, thrilled most to simply holding the little boy in his naked embrace, pleasuring him in the ways of the moment chosen by Terry. Most precious for Mallory was when they slept, or, rather, Terry slept after an hour of love-making — upon him, across him, beside him, cuddled against his chest. Then the hours would creep past in sweet, protracted ecstasy, as he breathed the little boy's magic scents, pressed against Terry's smooth-skinned warmth, and achieved, often several times a night, a kind of beauty in orgasm which often surpassed those he shared with Terry when Terry was conscious and aroused.

And they made up their quarrels, like married couples, through sex. After the face-kicking incident they didn't talk at supper. Monsieur le Clerq sent Terry to bed then gently remonstrated with Mallory: *he* was the elder, *he* was the boss, it was up to *him* to set the pattern of firm, steady understanding in their relationship. Mallory was too close to childhood himself to be won over all at once, but when he eventually retired to Terry's room and saw the little boy fast asleep but all over on one side of his bed, facing the other with an arm and open hand stretched out just beneath the pillow, he felt such a strong surge of love and shame that all the unpleasantness of the past hours was forgotten. Mallory carefully folded aside the covers from his side of the bed, lay down beside Terry and took the boy's sweet little penis between his lips.

He sucked gently, slowly, almost like an infant on a nipple, except he felt more like the mother than the child. He drew its whole relaxed little length into his mouth then, moving his head back, stretching it out until the acorn-like glans was beyond his teeth, then sucked it back in again.

Soon it clicked into erection with that amazing swiftness of pre-pubertal potency. A hand came into his hair, then another to his neck, its fingers seeking the little hollow just below his ear which Terry knew was a very special place on Mallory to caress. Terry began to thrust with his hips.

It was quite usual for the little boy to have four or five successive orgasms. Mallory decided he would let him have as many as he wanted. He dreamed through them, one after the other, relishing the little cries of pleasure Terry made every time he achieved a peak. At last the hands came off of his head; Mallory let the still stiff cocklet fall out of his mouth and resettled himself, and the covers, preparatory for sleeping. Then Terry snuggled in and rested his head on Mallory's chest, and it was only a few minutes later, when, feeling something wet on his breastplate, that Mallory realized the little boy had, literally, shed a tear on him.

After vacation their intimacies were once again restricted to Monsieur le Clerq's Saturday visits to Kalamoosa, but one night in late January Monsieur le Clerq came home exceptionally late and not finding Mallory downstairs, he went up to his son's room and discovered the two boys in bed together. It never crossed his mind that they might be lovers (and if it had he probably would have dismissed it as "boys being boys"). He simply smiled at them fondly, thanked his good luck that Mallory had taken such a liking to his son that he could leave the two boys together without a worry in the world, and decided to let both sleep on. Mallory woke up in the pre-dawn darkness to the smells of bacon and eggs and, stumbling half-dressed downstairs in acute embarrassment and fearing the worst, encountered a smiling Monsieur le Clerq who said, "My apologies for being so late, and in thanks for your staying over, I prepare an American breakfast, see?"

Saturday nights from then on were Mallory stay-over nights.

A week after Roxy and Jerry's conversation in the ice-fishing shanty, Meyerbeer challenged Bach to a moonlight snowball fight. In the line-up, Roxy held back his ammunition and watched for Joel. It was hard, in the night and in winter clothing, to recognize people, but finally he was sure he had Joel spotted. Then he let go with three snowballs and, attracting as much attention as he could, ran noisily away around the corner of the dorm.

Joel pursued. He let Joel tackle him, and they fell laughing in the snow. Their ski caps came off. They found themselves staring into each other's eyes.

Roxy could hardly see Joel's face: it was shadowed from the moon and the light from a dormitory window. But his own face was well lit, and Joel was reminded of how handsome a boy Roxy was — even handsomer now that he was wearing his hair shorter.

And the image Joel had of Roxy as a super-jock dissolved when Roxy reached up and touched his face, gently, affectionately, curiously with the tips of his gloved fingers.

Slowly Joel lowered his face, until his nose was in the plume of white breath issuing from Roxy's lips, and then he touched those lips with his own. Roxy's face didn't turn aside. Joel drew Roxy's upper lip in, becoming aware, now, of Roxy's scent. The lips were so warm and moist and tender! Roxy's hand that had been feeling his face went to his neck; the other arm came about his back. Then they were kissing hard, rolling about in the powder snow, kissing and kissing and pressing their bodies together.

Joel finally pushed himself away from Roxy and stared at him, full of wonder. "Jesus Christ," he said. "Yeah," Roxy said.

"I mean, where do we go from here?"

That was the beginning. They were contemporaries, in age and status. They both came from small suburban communities tacked onto the edges of large Midwestern American cities. They had lots in common besides their physical attraction. They started studying together, skiing together in their leisure time. They didn't have sex all at once; they didn't even know whether they were ready to commit themselves to an affair.

At first they just kissed a lot, and held hands when they were alone, but their first real chance for intimacy was one Wednesday afternoon early in February. They were sitting on Roxy's bed talking and Brent came in to announce he was going into Kalamoosa on the mini-bus for a haircut and do some shopping. As soon as Brent was out of the door they looked at each other and grinned, and Roxy lay back on his bed and said, "You can do anything you want."

They locked the door. Joel stripped Roxy, slowly and sensuously: first pulling his music school sweatshirt over his head, then taking his time with the boy's Adidas track shoes, his white socks. Joel had already spotted the ridge in Roxy's pants before he unbuckled the boy's belt. He laid the belt ends aside, loosened the top button of Roxy's Levis, searched for and found the zipper in the fly, lowered it. Now he parted the fly-flaps to unveil the genital swelling in the cotton undershorts beneath. He cupped the warm, moist bulge with one hand.

"Mmmm," Roxy said, eyes closed, entering the gentle dream world of early sex.

"What have you done?" Joel asked.

"Just about everything. You?"

"I never been fucked."

"Ever fucked?"

"No."

Joel pulled off Roxy's pants, then his underpants. He stood for a moment looking down at the boy's fine athletic body, the rigid circumcised cock that stood at attention above his loins. Roxy may have still had the face of a younger boy, but his body was spare and beautifully shaped — hairless as a 12-year-old's (except around his cock) but muscled more like fifteen. He stared at Roxy's penis. It was almost as big as a mid-teener's, straight, its glans nicely and symmetrically molded to the end, forming both a climax and final cadence to its beauty.

Joel hurried out of his clothes and lay down on the bed beside Roxy. They turned to each other and reached for each other's cocks. Joel took both of them into his right hand and pressed them together. They kissed.

When they broke apart, Roxy said, "You can do it to me... if you want."

"Do what?"

"Go up me."

"Man, Rox, doesn't that *hurt*?"

"Sometimes. It doesn't matter."

"Okay."

Joel reached for his jar of cold cream, but Roxy stopped him with his hand. "I don't want anything else in there, Joel. I only want you."

“But., you gotta make it slippery... don’t you?” There were mysteries in the act Joel had only heard about — and could only speculate on. He had never even touched another asshole. He had been curious, it was true; he’d heard about cornholing. Some of the kids had bragged that a good young ass was tighter and warmer and nicer than a cunt.

“We’ll make it slippery, don’t worry.”

Roxy positioned himself, bottom up, on the bed. And how incredibly sexy he looked! His already firm, muscled, rounded buttocks rose even farther into the air by having a pillow and chair cushion shoved underneath his loins. Joel bent over, ran his hands over them, around and around. They smelled sweet, of soap. At Roxy’s urging he dribbled some spittle downward into the ass-crack and started spreading it around. He dribbled more onto the anus itself.

Then, with enormous curiosity, he started probing it with his finger. He pushed it in a bit, feeling the ring give. It was hot inside, moist and already a little slippery. It fit on his finger tight as a glove, but, once past the ring, it was softer, looser. Roxy told him to put in another finger, and another, and allow his saliva to trickle in and lubricate the walls of the expectant colon. Roxy’s body twitched and jerked with pleasure and discomfort.

“Now, let *me* get your cock,” Roxy said, twisting around. He mouthed out some spittle onto the palm of one hand and spread it on Joel’s penis. “Quick,” he said, turning back onto his stomach, “Go in before it dries off.”

Joel crawled onto the bed and poised himself, suspended on knees and elbows, over Roxy. His cock was wet, gleaming, drops forming at its tip as he aimed it downward at the targeted ring. Holding his cock at its base, he lowered himself slowly. His forehead dropped to Roxy’s strong back and, partially supporting himself there, he felt with his cock-tip for the moistened anal lips. He found them, pressed, and slid gloriously home.

He shivered with the most intense pleasure he had ever known. He couldn’t imagine anything more wonderful than being inside another boy this way. A hand on your cock was great, a mouth better, but this surely had to be the best. And the fact that he was coupled with a boy he didn’t just like, not just any handsome boy, but a boy his own age, just, like him, venturing out of the uncertainties of puberty, one he suspected was very special, a new boy, one who didn’t go on the prowl every other night, one who might make some kind of commitment — that was the crowning glory, the genius of the act.

He partly withdrew his cock and slid it home again. Yes, that was all the difference — the possibility of commitment. He had no commitment from Craddock. Craddock loved *it*. Sex with Craddock could be a terrific turn-on — and, for him, a great education — but it was foothills to the mountain he was now climbing.

“God, Joel!” Roxy was moaning, “Oh, Jesus, oh, shit!”

Joel reached underneath the buttocks he was fucking, sought for, found and wrapped his hand around Roxy’s hard-on, a hard-on leaking a steady stream of pre-cum from the grazing its prostate was getting. He felt the penis sliding over the palm of his hand in counter-stroke to his own hip thrusts.

“I’m not hurting you?” Joel asked.

“Oh, fuck... oh, shit... man... Joel...!” Roxy was beyond distinguishing between pain and ecstasy.

Joel buried his face in Roxy’s neck. He moved his lips aside to Roxy’s shoulder, where he sucked and bit, beginning to moan himself a little, now. And all the time he kept up the steady hip thrusting of his cock into Roxy’s ass and the stroke of his hand on Roxy’s slippery penis.

Ecstatic sex can divide lovers into isolated worlds of their own. Roxy hadn’t the faintest idea where Joel was with his feelings, nor Joel where Roxy was. The fact that orgasm rushed at both of them nearly simultaneously was only because they had been coupled for a mere minute or two, however eternal that union seemed to both of them. Roxy felt Joel’s cock and Joel’s hand driving him deeper and deeper into inner space. Joel felt Roxy’s ass enclosing him, enveloping him, sucking out his blood, his breath...

And now his sperm. It boiled up in him, shot through his penis and voided itself in the dark passage of his lover's bowels. Jet followed jet, and as he began to relax into the perfect (but all too temporary) ensuing peace, he felt Roxy's sperm flow out over his hand — warm, sticky, intimate, scenting the little bedroom.

They remained coupled for the rest of the afternoon, hardly speaking, only breathing and alternately fucking and dozing and fucking again. At last it grew dark outside, and darker in the bedroom. Brent would be coming back soon, and there was supper to think about. Both boys suddenly realized they were furiously hungry.

15. Easter Oratorio

A ten-year-old — O'Neill had never even thought about a ten-year-old, he didn't believe any guy could think about a ten-year-old, but he was sure, absolutely sure that Mallory was getting it on with that fluty Frenchman's son. All January, all February he'd sent messages to Mallory that he was expected up in his suite at a certain time and Mallory had refused — he was always too busy with his music or his schoolwork or something else. The truth was the little nerd was preoccupied with that ten-year-old kid. It was already almost time for the spring break.

So the next note he sent to Mallory was a little stronger: BE HERE AT 8:00 TONIGHT OR ELSE.

When Mallory arrived, O'Neill asked him, "What do you do with the kid?"

"What kid? What do you mean?" Mallory felt himself starting to tremble.

"Come off it, airhead. Terry — isn't that his name? You suck his cock? You make him suck yours? Or you poke it up him? Huh?"

"You're disgusting!" Mallory said.

"I'm disgusting! *I'm* disgusting! Oh, that's a good one."

"Yes you are — talking about an innocent boy that way."

"He may have been innocent a few months ago, but he sure as shit isn't now, I'll bet. How does he feel, Mallory? Is his ass tender and tight? Man, you've done a bit of growing up yourself, recently, haven't you?"

"I'm not going down on you any more, if that's what you want."

"Oh, you're not? Maybe I'll get Terry to do it for me, then."

"He wouldn't let you anywhere near him."

"Oh yes he would. Especially after I tell his dad what I know about you — that you're the Senior's whore, that you suck every cock you can get your lips around."

"That's a fucking lie."

"Is it? Besides, that's not the point. The point is it will be believed. And then, no more baby-sitting — maybe no more Mallory either. And then, with the rear door left open, shall we say, what's to keep me from walking right in!"

Mallory wasn't an especially violent boy, but O'Neill had transgressed into an area where he was prepared to fight like a mother bear — or endure. He was not about to let someone like O'Neill get his hands on Terry. He'd take any kind of punishment to prevent that.

He met O'Neill's contemptuous stare and said, with as much pretended calmness as he could muster, "Okay, what do you want?"

"To get off. That's all. Just like old times."

"Why don't you get a boy of your own?"

"Why don't you get your clothes off?"

"I don't need to."

"Oh, yes you do. Because you're not just going to *suck* cock. Now that you're in... a position where you can't afford to refuse... you're going to *take* cock."

"Christ! I never done that before!"

"All faggots got to learn."

"No!"

"Okay, tomorrow morning I break into your flute lesson and lay all your queer cards on the table in front of Monsieur le Clerq!"

He stripped. He bent over the back of an overstuffed chair. O'Neill gave him a pillow to bite. He felt oil being poured into his crack and worked into his asshole. It tingled, even smarted a little. When he looked back he saw O'Neill rolling a rubber on his cock.

“To make it easy,” O’Neill told him, “this first time, just this first time, I’m using a pain deadener. It’ll probably still hurt like hell. Now get ready — and you’d better not make a lot of noise!”

There was no preparation, no preliminary fingering. He felt the cockhead at his asshole, tried to relax because, since the rape was inevitable, it was up to him to take O’Neill’s penis as painlessly as possible. And then, suddenly, it was in him — and he yelled despite himself.

A hand came around his mouth. He groaned into it, feeling every millimeter of O’Neill’s prick as it partially withdrew and rammed home into him again. It was a nightmare he would soon wake up from: all he had to do was hold on and endure for a few minutes more. The cock was setting up a steady rhythm now, in and out, in and out. It was horrible. It was humiliating, it was painful, it was degrading. But it would end. He hung onto that one thought: it couldn’t go on forever.

Now there was a new pain: at his shoulder where O’Neill was biting him, drawing blood. A terrific shudder went through O’Neill’s body, and the motion stopped. O’Neill had cum at last. Then O’Neill was standing away from him, sliding the condom off his prick, and Mallory was walking, stooped, toward the bathroom.

“Shall we say Tuesdays and Fridays?” O’Neill asked, looking at the schedule pasted inside his loose-leaf binder. “Eight o’clock in the evening. That seems like a good time.

We’ll start to wean you away from pain-deadener next week, so I won’t have to use a rubber. We’ll go from Vaseline to KY — and then maybe pretty soon nothing except I’ll let you suck this thing a little beforehand.”

Joel and Roxy were walking across the quadrangle for lunch. The snow was already melting away to a few dirty piles alongside the paths and the air was warm enough, now, for all the students to have abandoned their down jackets. The two boys were talking about music, specifically the pieces they were preparing for the pre-Easter concert, when hands from behind grabbed their shoulders. “Come up this afternoon around two o’clock for a cup of tea.”

It was Craddock. The invitation was for both of them.

“Uh... well...” Joel caught Roxy’s eye.

Roxy knew all about Joel and Craddock. But he smiled and nodded. “Well, *sure!*” he said.

The tea was pretty perfunctory. “I mainly want to give you guys a chance to be together,” Craddock said. “I’ll be out all afternoon. You can stay here. Nobody’ll bother you.” Then he ruffled Joel’s hair and said, “Didn’t I tell you?”

Joel hated to have bigger people ruffle his hair, but he smiled at Craddock and, even blushing a little, said, “I guess I’ve been pretty lucky.”

Craddock laughed. “Lucky you started out with me. You’re my *student*, you know that? Now it’s my pleasure to promote your career. Well, I’m off.”

“What a strange guy,” Roxy said, as the two boys fell onto the bed.

“Do you like that?”

“I sure do.”

“Is this better?”

“A bit”

“It doesn’t tickle?”

“No.”

“Hold off a bit... down there.”

“Okay.”

“I was getting pretty close.”

“Yeah... I was, too.”

It was two hours later. Joel and Roxy were discovering each other's "secret places", some of which had lain dormant until an exploring finger or tongue or lips had suddenly activated them. Roxy, for example, had never known how sensitive his nipples were to being sucked. Joel had never had his ear licked out before, or his arm-pit, which was what the above conversation had been all about.

They had already cum two times, and both boys, still in the midst of post-orgasmic bliss, were working themselves up to a third. Roxy was giving Joel an around-the-world which one of the boys had read about somewhere in a sex book: one partner licks the other all over, from forehead to big toe, back to front, both arms and hands, spiraling slowly and inevitably toward the rampant penis.

Roxy's tongue and lips moved over him again; his lover's breath, warm on the exhale, evaporating-cool on the intake, played over his chest, his stomach, brushed through his pubic hair. He ran his fingers over Roxy's strong shoulders, stroked his neck. 'I love you, Roxy,' he suddenly said to himself, for it came as a kind of blinding revelation. Then he repeated it out loud.

Roxy lifted his head, stared into Joel's eyes and caught the deep seriousness of his words.

"Oh, God, Joel, so do I!" he said, and in great joy threw himself upon Joel's prone body. Around the world was abandoned. Kissing closely, they came.

And slept.

And were still sleeping, limbs tangled, with Roxy's head on Joel's breast, when Craddock returned and let himself quietly in with his key.

He stared at them for a moment, then sat down on the side of the bed. If you really love puberty, he thought, there couldn't be a more cryingly beautiful couple in all the world than these two boys. He put a hand into Joel's hair and stroked it. Joel's eyes opened.

"Jesus, what time is it?" Joel asked.

"Time to start thinking, at any rate, about getting back to your dorms."

Joel sat up and threw his bare arms around Craddock and pressed his cheek against Craddock's cheek. 'Thanks,' Joel said. "You're a real friend."

Roxy, who by now was awake, too, hit Craddock lightly on an arm and said, "Yeah, you're a brick!"

Then, suddenly it seemed, spring vacation was upon them. Instead of a concert there was a week of musical performances in which all the students participated. Joel played Haydn in a freshman/sophomore quartet, Roxy Brahms in another ensemble; Mallory performed a baroque piece for flute and harpsichord; Craddock did a finale from one of the Mozart horn concertos on the final evening with the student orchestra.

And then they were all went home to celebrate (presumably) Easter.

Except for Mallory. Once again, he was attached to the le Clerq semi-family, and this time, rather than staying at the school, Monsieur le Clerq had accepted the usual all-expense-paid invitation to join one of his rich French relatives in his Caribbean home on St. Barts. Mallory went along as babysitter cum companion.

Those three weeks were even more enchanted than Christmas. This was a life Terry was not only made for but had become over the years used to. He was, of course, fluent in the French language and reveled in translating for Mallory. And put on his spare, boyish loins a pair of cut-offs, put flippers on his feet and a mask on his face and a snorkel in his mouth, and drop him overboard on a coral reef, and he turned into a blond-haired, benign tropical fish whose skin was slowly darkening under the Caribbean sun. He could stay out there, literally, all day long.

He taught Mallory the ways of the sea. There was a book on reef ecology which they poured over, learning to recognize the fish and sponges and especially the corals. Of the 51 species reported from the Caribbean they managed to collect 19 and set their specimens out to dry (and stink) back of the house in the servant's area.

Mallory's days were filled with the sounds, the sights of Terry: the boy running on the beach, blond hair flying in the trade winds, blue eyes flashing with enthusiasm and energy; or in the sea, watching from underneath the little boy jack-knife to dive, his supple body twisting and turning in the surge channels, plundering the reef of its rarer things and putting them in his collecting net.

They had a cabin of their own, slightly removed from the main house where the older le Clerqs carried on their lives. The two generations met at meals, for an occasional expedition into town or out to one of the small islands in a launch. There was enough contact between them to keep everyone happy but not so much that they got on each other's nerves.

And then there were the nights. There was no control of bedtimes, just as there was no set time for breakfast — one just appeared in the livingroom/eating area and asked the servants for food. Many nights, especially during the week of the full moon, Mallory and Terry walked along the shore, climbed to the top of Pointe Sounion to watch the Atlantic waves dashing themselves to pieces on the rocks below — and talked. Mallory told Terry about O'Neill. At first Terry was angry (and it wasn't immediately clear to Mallory whether his lover was mad at O'Neill or at him). Then Terry laughed and said, "I got a plan." And together over the next few days they worked it out.

They made love — over and over and over again — mostly in their little cabin but also on the beach at night, or back in the palmetto thickets and among the sea-grape vines. "It's like a story you never get tired of," Terry said one day.

They got better at it Mallory learned all the sexual moods of his lover, when his little cock needed to be sucked fast, when slow, how to be brought toward climax, how most beautifully to back him away from it, how, (and this required a good deal of precision with lips and tongue) to deliver him the most intense and satisfying orgasm and let him come down from it with the fullness of continued mouthing but without irritation or tickle.

In sleep, too, they learned to accommodate their bodies. Only one bed was ever used, although the other was mussed to keep up appearances. With Terry around him all day and all night, Mallory could afford to let himself sleep deeply and luxuriously: he no longer felt he had to keep himself awake so as not to miss precious hours of contact. It was soon as natural to each of them to be sleeping with another boy at his side as if he had been doing it all his life. The sights, the sensations, the smells of waking up together was a norm which they both realized they would have difficulty relinquishing once back in Canada.

When Joel got home for Easter vacation he found that his Uncle Dirk and Aunt Polly were visiting and had brought with them their son Luke. It had been some time since he'd seen his cousin: he remembered, vaguely, a scruffy 10-year-old zooming about the sidewalks of suburban Milwaukee on his skate-board, all elbows and knees. Now, in just a few short years, the boy had metamorphosed into gorgeous puberty. Light brown hair, with the slightest natural curl to it, fell down his neck, covered his ears and parted in the middle of his forehead like open tent flaps. He had quick hazel eyes, a rather long face, a generous mouth with blazing white, amazingly even teeth. Joel could hardly take his eyes off him — and this, of course, Luke noticed.

After stuffing themselves at the traditional Easter dinner, the two cousins wandered out into the back yard and started passing a Frisbee back and forth. The weather was mild; shrubs and trees were in the midst of their orgiastic spring explosion of flower and scent. Inevitably, after a few minutes, the Frisbee sailed over the back fence into the alleyway behind and Joel ran to fetch it. When he came back he found Luke hanging his chin over the fence. "Joel," he asked, "are you gay?"

It was a most surprising question, coming out right like that, from the blue. But Joel could see only friendship, perhaps even a trace of hero-worship, and, of course, curiosity in his cousin's hazel eyes.

"I don't know, Luke," he said seriously. "How about you?"

Luke smiled. "If you don't know at your age, how am I supposed to know?"

"Well, as for me, I don't think so."

"Does that mean you don't get it on with guys?"

Joel laughed with a bit of embarrassment. "Why do you ask?"

"Haven't you heard? They're putting me in your room."

He hadn't heard. He walked through the gate, shut it behind him, and said, rather sardonically, "Don't worry, I'm not going to rape you."

"I wasn't worried," Luke said, following him with his eyes. "I wasn't worried at all."

Luke was clever, Joel thought. He's trying to extract as much information as he can, but isn't giving anything away about himself. Still, the likelihood was that his cousin had caught the vibrations — and wanted a tumble.

And that posed a problem for Joel. First of all, he had to think of Roxy. They hadn't sworn to be sexually faithful over the spring break — in fact, they had joked about getting it on with all the kids back home — but he didn't want to just hop into the sack with the first appealing guy that came along. And then there was family to consider. Was sex with your mother's brother's son okay? Quite aside from the incest aspect, Luke was younger. Didn't he owe it to the boy to be a good "role model" as the psychologist called it?

When they were at last upstairs in Joel's little bedroom, with the door shut (and the hook-and-eye fastener snapped too), Luke made quite a display of stripping off his clothes: first his school jacket, then his shirt, then his T-shirt; then he wandered around the room bare-chested for a bit examining Joel's trophies and posters and record collection.

If ever there was an age of earliest puberty, Luke was at it right then. His chest was swelling, his shoulders beginning to become well fleshed-out, his skin as smooth, hairless and unblemished as a baby's.

The strip-tease continued with a slow removal of sneakers and socks, a deliberately sexy lowering of the zipper on his Levis, all of this accompanied by a stream of commentary on the most superficial subjects — pop stars, TV series, his dad's new car.

"Do you sleep bare?" Luke asked.

"Sometimes in the summertime, yeah."

"You going to sleep bare tonight? 'Cause I think I am. It's hot enough up here. Don't you think it's hot enough?"

"I don't know, Luke."

"I like that feeling of freedom. Everything can sort of move around the way it wants to... don't you think?"

"You do what you want to do," Joel said, sliding in his undershorts under the covers of his bed.

But he couldn't go to sleep, not with Luke lying only a yard away in the fold-up cot they had brought in for the occasion. He lay in bed staring at the ceiling on which the curtains at his window cast moving shadows from the street light outside. It was utterly still. There were no sounds of sleep from the other bed. His cock was killing him.

"Joel?"

"Yeah?"

"You awake?"

"Of course. I wouldn't have said yeah if I wasn't." He tried to sound casual — distant but friendly.

"How often do you jerk off?"

"What a question!"

"I guess there's nothing wrong with it. All the kids I know do it, except one, and he's a nerd. Our football coach says if you jack off just a little less than you want, then you're probably doing it a little

more than you should. I think he's crazy, don't you? I think you should do it as much as you want, because the more you do it the less you want to do it, and the whole point is to have fun with it, don't you think?"

"That sounds okay to me."

"Because I figure if there is a god and a Jesus like they say went to heaven today way back when, then he gave us our cocks to use, and all the feelings that go along with healthy penises to make you use them, isn't that right?"

"Could be."

"Joel?"

"Yes."

"Do you feel like jerking off now?"

"If I did, what makes you think I'd tell you?"

"Why wouldn't you tell me? It's not like I'm a stranger or anything. We're cousins."

"So what?"

"I feel like jerking off."

Joel heard Luke shove the covers down, and, turning his head, he could see a stiff cock rising above his cousin's hips. It was about three inches long, rather skinny, and not yet rooted in pubic hair. A hand went to it and started to pull on it lazily. Joel gulped, then caught Luke starting at him in the dim light and grinning.

"Want to join me?"

"I don't think that's such a hot idea."

"How do you do it?" Luke asked. "I usually start out slow, like this, and build the feeling up, and then stop and let it go down, and then build it up again, and try to drag it out for a while. I know kids that just grab it and don't stop, like they're in a race to see how fast they can get there. I think that's crazy... don't you?"

"There's probably as many ways of masturbating as there are males in this world."

"Maybe you can show me a new way. Some guys make it wet — in spit... and sometimes some other guy's spit, if it's... you know..."

There was the invitation. The poor kid was doing everything in his power, short of getting up and jumping into bed on top of him, to start the ball rolling. Despite the heart-beat thundering in his ears and his leaking, frustrated cock, Joel wasn't yet ready to give in. If he was going to lose the faithfulness battle, the anti-incest war, see his image crumble as the younger boy's role model, he would at least put up a decent struggle.

"You're talking about blow-jobs," he said flatly.

"You ever had one? Or given one?" The springs of Luke's bed were beginning to squeak as the jerking off became more and more impassioned.

"I think you should shut up and get on with... what you're doing."

"Ooo, man, that was close. I just about came. You got any handkerchief handy?"

"Yeah, here." Joel picked up the box of Kleenex lying on the table beside him and tossed it onto Luke's bed. Luke unhandled his cock, which snapped back against his belly. He extracted a tissue and set it on his chest, then he licked his hand and took up his cock once again.

Now Joel could hear the snapping of little liquid bubbles as Luke masturbated. The boy's stream of conversation tapered off as orgasm approached and faded away at shorter and shorter intervals. At last Luke whispered, "Okay, Joel, I'm going to splash!", and with a great commotion of rustling sheets, squeaking springs, liquid squiggly noises and sighs, his cousin came. Then, "That was a good one. Man!"

Joel heard Luke mopping up, even caught the light scent of sperm as the boy disturbed the still air by rearranging his covers.

“Thanks for the tissue for my issue,” Luke said a little later. A small wad of wet Kleenex fell on the floor between them. “Good night, Joel. Now I think I’ll sleep a whole lot better.”

April 14th

Dear Roxy:

Easter Monday. Gorgeous weather — sun, still air, every fucking flower putting out the old esters. A real first-movement-of-Mahler’s-First sort of day. Only inside Uncle Dirk’s Buick all you can smell is Aunt Polly’s perfume. The nerve of women to try to smell like nature! Luke, their teenage son, comes along. What a boat that Buick is, what vulgarity! We go to Douwa’s Creek and are walking along the stream when Aunt Polly stumbles and does something to her ankle — she says — I think she just doesn’t like the bees buzzing about her. They obviously like her — they think, with her perfume, she’s a flower, even if a big one. So the old folks abandon us, Luke and me — we can hitch home — and set off in the barfmobile to see if they can rustle up a local ankle-o-path.

Now, I gotta tell you this Luke’s been trying to get it on with me ever since he saw me gaping at him the first time he walked in the door. I’ll show you some Polaroids (don’t worry, they’re not *that* kind of Polaroids) so I won’t enumerate his bodily charms, but they are considerable. Anyhow, now we are alone. In T-shirts and shorts, and full bellies from a huge brunch so we don’t have to worry about coming home to eat for hours. We go deeper and deeper in the woods. The fishing trails give out, the stream’s now only a trickle. Luke is chattering. He’s always chattering. He’s the typical cheerful kid, a bit empty-minded, but what do you expect at eleven-going-on-twelve? But his high spirits are infectious, and somehow soon we end up wrestling — well, really tussling, like little kids are always doing — in a soft mossy place beside that brook.

Nobody’s around. Only birds and bees and flowers and grass and trees and running water — and Luke pretending to be defeated and complaining underneath me.

And if you think nature that day smells nice, it’s nothing compared to Luke. He bathed the night before. He smells of sweat, but fresh sweat, his breath (and now I’m verging on the hackneyed poetical) his breath is scented like honey, and the funny thing is that Luke knows it. Luke knows he smells good. He knows he’s turning me on when he pants in my face — and even sneezes, hard and wet. In fact it isn’t long before he can *feel* he is turning me on.

“Let’s just lie here like this for a while,” he suggests. His arms come about me. His cheek is against my cheek. My hips are right on top of his hips. My cock ridge is absolutely parallel to his cock ridge.

Rox, I’d had a bad night. After he’d jerked off — into one of *my* Kleenexes — I was so wound up that if I’d jumped out the window I’d probably have helicoptered down on an auto-rotating prick to a gentle landing on the lawn. I’d had to grab back my box of Kleenex from the bed where Luke was now in a deep sleep and pull off three times before I could find any peace at all. And I confess that, although mostly I was fantasizing about you and what we did together and will soon be doing together again, every so often I couldn’t keep Luke out of my thoughts.

I tell you this so you won’t think I’m a whore or some good-time-Charley who considers every personal commitment of love on par with a casual fuck. I don’t feel guilty about what I did with Luke; I do feel good about the fact that I waited until it meant something quite important — at least glandurally — before I gave in.

“Okay,” I say. And now we are kissing. It starts out as a gentle peck, a sort of tease, I give him, and that develops into long, wet ones. We start to move — hump. Off come our shirts, then everything else. Both our cocks are leaking. It’s getting slippery there. We’re gasping, kissing, running our fingers through each other’s hair...

Christ, I'm writing porno. You can supply the jabs, assorted "ooo"s and "mmmm"s and "aaa"s. I'll just say it's good, real good, and it doesn't last more than a couple of minutes at the most — the first time.

After we've both decorated each other's bellies and the moss we're lying on with our sperm, Luke sits up and says, "I thought that'd never happen."

I laugh and say, "Well, I only met you yesterday."

And he says, "I mean, to me."

It's the kid's first time. Ever. I don't believe him in the beginning. All I can think of is a boy that sensationally handsome just has to have been had. But he wanted it to be the right guy, someone away from home, somebody he could trust, somebody he liked but didn't have to worry about building up a relationship with.

So, Roxy, I put him through a short academic major in Getting it On With Another Guy. He's already completed Rubbing Off 101. We go on to Between the Legs 107, Body Licking 207, Cock Sucking 342 and 343 with its lab session for sperm swallowing — and, yes, at the end of the afternoon I fuck him, the first time anything's been up there except his mommy's rectal thermometer.

Last night he slept in my bed — all night. This morning they set off, all of them, in the barfmobile for Milwaukee. We only see his family about once every four or five years, so it really was a good-bye: next time he'll probably have a mustache and the time after that a pregnant wife. Because, do you know what he told me when we were tossing the Frisbee for the last time out in our back yard? "I think I'm more hetero than homo. Now I've got to try all that with a girl. Thanks, cousin, for the crash course!"

I suppose this is just a lead-up to saying how much I miss you — funny fucking lead-up, I know. One horny, frustrating night, one ecstatic day and one nice night and I'm talking about missing my lover. You accuse me of hypocrisy. Not so. What was stupid was holding out (although I didn't know that at the time). Because all I can think of, now, is the difference. It's fun to be a teacher — every once in a while. You can use your cock as a magic wand, conjure up responses a boy never knew he had in him. It flatters your ego. But I'm not cut out to do that professionally. If I don't make it with my violin playing I'll pump gas or something, I'll never become a pedagogue. Can you see me doing the Suzuki Method with little five-year-old boys you have hold their cocks for them when they pee?

The difference! Yes, he was beautiful, but you're more so. Yes, he was cheerful, but you're deep. Yes, he smelled, tasted, felt good, but with you there's really no comparison — to be crude, I'd rather breathe your farts than Luke's honeyed breath. Luke helped me get through this boring vacation, but even when he was here I was crossing off the days on my calendar until I get back on that bus and head for the North Woods, knowing at the other end is... Jesus, how many times do you think I'll have a spontaneous ejaculation just thinking about what's waiting for me at the other end, when we all pile out and take up our normal lives again? Do you know what I'm going to do tonight? I'm going to take my old bicycle and go out into the woods and I'm going to jack off into the sweetest night-blooming flower I can see and make it an offering to my 'cello-playing buddy, my lover, my soul-mate, my *other*, the kid with the most perfect ass in this most imperfect world.

Love, kisses and ejaculations....

Joel

That night he had something else to celebrate as well: the next day he would turn fifteen. Practically a man.

16. Spring Song

Spring is a time when birds and boys build nests. Joel and Roxy sited theirs on a grassy spot beside a small rock-bound lake about an hour's scramble through cedar swamps and rocky quartzite knobs from the music school campus. They built a lean-to shelter out of logs, sticks and sod, just big enough for the two of them, open side facing the lake. In really stormy weather they could close themselves in with one of the plastic ground sheets they always brought with them in their back-packs. They also carried foam-rubber mattresses and two sleeping bags which were usually zipped together into a double.

The first Sunday after vacation the weather was fine. They had spread their bedding outside and were resting upon it naked, having just dried off from an invigorating swim in the lake. Roxy's head was on Joel's stomach and he was playing lazily with Joel's erect cock.

That cock had become the center of Roxy's life, a warm handful of skin and blood and erectile tissue and ducts. It was Joel's — in fact the focal point of his friend's body — but it was his, too: Joel gave it to him, let him share it, even take it into his body, thus violating the physical principle that no two objects can occupy the same place at the same time. Almost nobody else ever saw it, and when someone did it was in a far different state than now, as in the showers, when it was down-hung and half-disguised by a light film of running water and sometimes a coating of soap bubbles. Otherwise, Joel's penis was nearly always covered. Even when he slept (alone) it was held in restraint by those white Jockey shorts he always wore.

Roxy pressed the tip of Joel's penis against the tip of his nose. There was no scent, now, after their swim, no characteristic odor of Male, of 15-year-old boy. The tip was dry, smooth, fine-textured, soft between the purple skin and the hardness within. It's touch was silky, like butterfly wings.

"I was mad at first," he said lazily, "when I got your letter."

"And then?"

"I got it on with a guy, too."

"You did!?" Unreasonably, Joel felt jealous.

Roxy ran a moistened finger down over Joel's frenulum. "Uh huh. It was a guy I'd always sort of had my eye on back in junior high."

"Nice looking?"

"The girls thought so."

"Rox thought so, too!"

"We went to the movies together. What I didn't know was that the first row on Friday night was traditionally giggle and pull time for the little kids."

"You're not so little."

"We sat in the second row, and Alden — that was his name — pointed out to me what was going on right under our noses. So, well, the movie was boring. He groped me — with his hand. He said the ushers knew what was going on and didn't interfere. They didn't want to lose all that kiddy-business for their boss."

"And?"

"We gave each other hand-jobs."

"That's all?"

"With some of the little kids turned around watching."

"That's still all?"

"Yes."

"Then I don't have to feel jealous, do I?"

Joel was looking at the back of Roxy's neck. It was so beautiful, and vulnerable, that neck! He put a hand on it and started running his fingers through Roxy's fine blond hair. Incongruous, that vulnerable

neck, set as it was upon Roxy's sturdy shoulders. He knew the whole area, from below one ear clear around the neck to below the other ear, was an especially erotic zone for his lover, as though there was a direct nerve link between the tender skin there and his penis. Sometimes when they were resting he had kissed Roxy below the ear and the boy's sleeping penis had immediately started to twitch and rise into erection.

He thought of Roxy in the movie theater. He imagined the boy's pent-up sex, ready to burst out of his trousers, sitting beside a boy he had admired from afar all through junior high. And then the hand on his crotch — the burning demand of the penis to get out, the sweet promise of touch and fulfillment, the tense, sensual darkness, with the masturbating littler kids just in front of them.

"Did you feel bad, at first?" Joel asked.

"About jacking off with that guy in the movies?"

"Uh huh."

"Maybe a little. But it all happened so fast. I didn't really think."

"Even when he was pulling on you?"

"Hardly."

"Did... you or he... want to do it again?"

"Yes. And, well, we did."

"You *did*?!" The jealousy was stronger this time.

"He had his brother's car — no license, of course. We drove out to a parking place. What was weird for a straight guy our age — I assume he is straight, 'cause he goes out with a whole lot of girls — was that he was into kissing. We sat there and kissed for about fifteen minutes. With our hands on each other's cocks."

"Was he good at it?"

"Kissing or jerking off?"

"Well... either, both."

"The kissing got boring. The same old thing — lips and tongues, tongues and lips, never going outside that small, tight area of the mouth. And dry. Like he was scared of my spit and didn't want to offend me with his. And after a while I just started thinking of you."

"And his hand technique?"

"On an octave of C-Major, about at E. What he didn't like was pre-cum. He kept wiping mine off with his handkerchief. And the skin inside his hand was rough. I think I gave better than I got."

"That all sounds pretty dangerous. Guys like that can spread rumors."

"Oh, no, Alden's a good guy. We're friends. It was just, as far as he was concerned, something that happened. Kids being crazy, I suppose he'd say. Anyhow, that's the only cock I touched in all those three weeks."

They rearranged themselves so they were lying nose to nose on their sides.

"You think we can kiss better?" Joel asked.

"Uh huh."

"I think I'll start with your ear."

Roxy had beautiful ears. They used to be hidden by his long hair, but now peaked out beside his temples like white sheep in a lush mountain pasture. Joel licked around the back on one ear, then below it, then up into it, following with his tongue-tip the canals that lead from its rim down into its hole. He probed its depths with his tongue, savoring the human, bitter taste of its interior. Then he closed his lips around the ear and, for about two minutes, washed it with his tongue, breathing through his nose the scent of wet hair.

"Oh, God, Joel, I love that!" Roxy said. He moved his loins in a bit so his penis touched Joel's. Both of them were leaking clear streamers of pre-cum.

Joel's tongue left Roxy's ear, traveled across his temple and paused to bathe an eyelid for a moment, then moved down across a cheek and eventually came to rest on the tip of his nose. Roxy must have the sexiest nose of any boy in the music school, Joel thought. It was still almost a little kid's nose — straight until the fine broad flare at its end. He wrapped his lips around the tip and let his tongue-tip search up each nostril, where the taste, now, was salty, blowing a little into it, commanding Roxy's nose with the moisture of his mouth.

Roxy pushed Joel away and said, somewhat breathlessly, "Okay, I'm ready." He turned away from him, on his side, and snuggled his buttocks against Joel's groin.

Joel bent down, ran his tongue swiftly but smoothly down Roxy's spinal column. What a strong, compact back the boy had! How marvelously tender the skin was! His tongue came to Roxy sacroiliac, and now, below his chin, rose the mirror-image mounds of Roxy's buttocks and the dear, sweet hidden target he had so longed for all vacation.

He pried apart the buttocks and, leading with his chin, ran his tongue, his moist lips, his nose slowly down the crevice between them, licking, bathing, lubricating as he went.

Roxy groaned.

Joel's tongue found the anal lips, the shallow depression at their center. He sucked, kissed, tickled, licked. He teased in circles, reducing his tongue-tip to a point, then broadened it to lap warmly and hard across the whole area.

Roxy shivered and sighed. His teeth chattered when he breathed in.

Joel had to fight the temptation to keep his face in there all afternoon: it was so tender and warm and responsive; it was such a central and personal fold in his lover's body. But Roxy was demanding the final act. Any more hesitation and postponement would be torture.

He reached over Roxy's hips and squeezed a large puddle of pre-cum out of Roxy's penis and onto his hand, and then added more of his own, and then added some spittle and laved his cock in all three substances until it was shiny and slippery and dripping. And then he positioned his cock at Roxy's asshole, pushed, and slid slowly in.

"Oh, Jesus, Joel... oh, fuck... oh, shit!"

Joel withdrew his cock a bit, then sank it home again.

"Oh, man, that's the greatest!" Roxy sighed.

Joel reached under Roxy's body and wrapped his still-wet hand around Roxy's penis and began to pull on it in counter-stroke to the thrusting of his cock.

They were speechless, now, except for moans, sighs, groans, the kind of keening lovers often make as they build toward climax. Roxy's whole world was filled with the penis which was buried in him, working back and forth in possession and in passion. It was an ecstasy beyond thinking, beyond feeling, beyond sex, perhaps even beyond love. He was part of a gigantic tide pulling him toward the eternal, the great cataclysms at the birth of the universe, the perfect harmony of the spheres.

"I'm coming!" he gasped.

"Yeah... me, too!" Joel answered

They exploded through orgasm, almost at the same time. Their young cocks spurted out their young sperm — one into his lover's hand, the other deep into his lover's gut.

Their panting, their shivering died down. Their muscles relaxed — all except for their penises. These stayed hard, in hand and colon, anticipating that second climax of the day but permitting their owners to doze in the golden bliss of a peak orgasm long looked forward to and beautifully achieved.

That lean-to became their weekend home, the lake, its cliffs and the forest surrounding it, the garden of their reveries. They even slept there Saturday nights sometimes (stealing food from the dining hall and getting their roommates to cover for them).

They were only the *newest* residents. A pair of loons had already occupied the lake, the birds' liquid call, echoing out of some mad but immensely important myth, filling the two boys' heads as they lay in their sleeping bags at dawn and dusk. It awakened in them a sad, infinite longing to penetrate this blue, crystalline world which mankind had quit without ever looking back so many millennia ago.

Sometimes it rained. They had trenched their lean-to so it was dry inside, and they would be on their stomachs and stare out onto the lake, clouds obscuring the heights opposite, a nimbus or two floating in between. There is something to the human soul that is slow about steady, gentle, windless rain. It is a time for long talks. Joel and Roxy had just discovered the long talk, which is something that never happens, really, until puberty has passed, and seldom occurs again after manhood has been reached, not the kind of deep, searching communication, which is a voyage of discovery in its own right, peculiar to friends and lovers during early adolescence. They covered everything: their childhoods, their aspirations, their music, their views on Important Issues. The long talks occurred between rounds of love-making, when the liquid of their bodies — sweat, sperm, saliva — seemed to void itself upon each other like the rain on the dank world outside. The loons dived to feed — and came up in different spots; Roxy and Joel dived to make love — and came up to continue the epic of their souls' progress in another chapter.

"I remember jerking off to Jackie Roland," Joel was saying one such Sunday morning. They had crawled out of their warm, dry cocoon into a dripping world and, clad like penguins in black and white slickers, had wrestled with wet wood to get their cooking fire going. They had finally eaten a hearty breakfast of eggs and bacon and muesli washed down with coffee and were perched at last on their sitting stones watching rain drops fall hissing into their dying fire and enjoying the lassitude of digestion. "He was the handsomest little guy in the third grade, but he was always getting into trouble. I'd imagine him being spanked, and taking his punishment bravely, not crying — or maybe letting one little sob escape, maybe one tear. It wasn't the punishment I liked but his bravery."

"And his bare ass," Roxy commented.

"Yes, I thought about his bare ass. And I'd lay in bed alone playing with my penis and thinking about Jackie Roland. He was so mischievous. We were soul mates. I got up to just as much mischief, but Jackie got caught and I didn't."

"You were too smart for them?"

"I think Jackie just didn't care. Getting punished was the price of having fun. He didn't want to be troubled with fear while he was having fun. And the thing is it was never mean fun. He never hurt anybody. He smoked. He skipped school. If it was a nice day he'd just take off. And I'd jerk off thinking about him walking along the roads, hanging out a thumb, or sitting beside a stream fishing — he liked to fish — and later skinny-dipping."

"Did you see him bare?"

"No. Never. Maybe it was better that way. I could imagine his body. Sometimes when he *wasn't* in class I'd play with my cock. Openly, or rather under my desk."

"In the third grade you can do that."

"Without raising a flag-pole, yes. Just a little pencil stub to play with. I'd sit there looking at Jackie's empty desk and think of all the things he'd be up to, the way that great smile would cover his face when he was enjoying himself, and I'd be fingering my little cock. That was before I was getting orgasms. I could masturbate all through geography class — and not remember one fact from the other. I was real quiet, though. One day the teacher took me aside and said, 'Joel, you're usually a good student, is there something on your mind?' Well, what was I going to answer him? 'Sorry, Sir, today it was more important for me to play with my pee-pee thinking about my friend than to learn about where pigs are fed corn.'? But Jackie died, about a year later, in a car accident."

"Oh, no!"

“It was my first brush with death. Jackie not being there at his desk. They quickly rearranged the desks, and it was as if they were trying to make it like he’d *never existed*. I got mad. I wrote POOP all over the blackboards. The headmaster hauled me in and I just broke down and cried. I thought he was going to spank me like Jackie got spanked — I would have liked that — but instead, when he asked me why I’d done what I’d done, I just started to bawl. There I was standing in front of him expecting to have my pants hauled down, and all he did was hand me a Kleenex and say, ‘We miss him, too.’ “

17. Dominant Resolutions

“O’Neill, I don’t want to do it any more.”

“That’s not a viable choice you have.”

“It is.”

“It simply isn’t. If anything, you’re entrenched even more with the boy and his father. You’re not going to risk busting that nice gig wide open with all your guilty little secrets.”

“I don’t have any guilty little secrets.”

“Like taking cock? You’d like to have the fact that half the senior class has been fucking you from here to back again spread around?”

“Only you, O’Neill, and that’s done under coercion.”

“And you don’t like it?”

“No.”

“Come on! You been sucking my cock since last fall.”

“I sort of had to.”

“Bull shit.”

“You ever seen me with a hard-on?”

“When you went down on cocks you could keep your pants on.”

“Not when I was being raped.”

“I never raped you.”

“What do you call it, then?”

“An exchange of favors.”

“Some favor for me!”

“I keep your guilty little secrets — and I’m also talking about your diddling that ten-year-old — and you keep my cock happy. I call that a very practical exchange of favors.”

“I call it blackmail.”

“Ah, so you admit you’ve been fucking Terry the Terror?”

“I admit absolutely nothing of the kind. I’ve never touched Terry. You know I’ve never ever touched Terry. You’re just threatening to tell a big lie which you figure people would believe.”

“They’d believe it because it fits all the facts.”

“I’ve let you fuck me only because I want to protect the kid, *and* his father, *and* myself.”

“And because, way deep down you love it, every inch of it.”

“You ever see me with a hard-on when you’re fucking my ass?”

“I never looked. I never wanted to.”

“When you do it to me it makes me want to barf.”

“That’s why your ass gets wiggling?”

“It doesn’t wiggle!”

“Yes it does. Sometimes very nicely.”

“It doesn’t wiggle.”

“Sashay, then.”

“It doesn’t sashay. If it moves it’s just to try to ease the pain. Anyhow, I want to stop with it.”

“Drop your jeans.”

“No.”

“And your shorts.”

“Come on, O’Neill, please!”

“Quit fucking me around. Show me some ass.”

“I’m giving you one more chance to stop. I’m asking you nicely.”

“No.”

“To quit.”

“No.”

“All by yourself.”

“No.”

“Because you’re a decent guy at heart.”

“No. Now, unbuckle and unzip and bend over that desk. This time I’m only going to use spit.”

Mallory switched the cassette to fast forward. He didn’t want Terry to hear his humiliation — his groans, O’Neill’s grunts.

They had been plotting for a week. Terry had acquired a small cassette recorder and a microphone “bug”. Mallory had carried the apparatus in his jacket. After he had stripped, he had draped his jacket over the chair beside O’Neill’s table, the bug in a good position to pick up all their sighs and groans, even the rhythmic pounding of O’Neill’s ass on Mallory’s. It was a very convincing tape — both the conversations before and after and the sex itself.

Mallory found the end of the fucking and switched the recorder to Play.

“Okay,” O’Neill was saying, “you can clean up in my bathroom, if you want”

“It would take more than a shower to wash your filth off of me, O’Neill.”

“Spoken like a true whore. Your asshole didn’t need anything that time.”

“It hurt like hell.”

“Oh, it hurts so good!”

“It hurts *bad*, O’Neill. It’s always hurt bad.”

“Get in there and wash up. I need to clean off my cock, too. And, well, next time’s Friday, isn’t it?”

“No. Next time’s never.”

There was the sound of running water, a toilet flushing.

“Friday at eight”

“This was the last time.”

“And let’s not have all this talk. You’re not the most entertaining conversationalist in school. You’ll be here at eight”

“We’ll see.”

Mallory switched the recorder off. Terry grinned at him. Mallory had the note all ready:

O’Neill –

This is your copy. I have the original — and another copy in a VERY safe place. Nothing will come out if you leave me and the people I care for alone. No more Fridays and no more Tuesdays. If you agree, hang something unusual out your window.

– V. I. Mallory

He put the note and the cassette into an envelope, sealed it and a little later dropped it through the slot of O’Neill’s letter box.

There was nothing out of the ordinary, at the music school, in boys exchanging tapes. Some people did wonder, however, why a white pillow-case dangled for several days from one of the windows of the senior dorm.

18. Suspended Time

They had played naked in the water for nearly an hour. They were both strong swimmers. They had raced each other over-hand across the lake, climbed barefoot over the boulders and ledges to the top of the cliff, scrambled down, swam back and crawled out on a big white rock they often used as a drying place. There Joel had fallen asleep and Roxy had contented himself just watching him, hugging his knees. Now he bent over and kissed Joel lightly on the lips. Joel opened his eyes and asked, “Rox, have you ever wanted to fuck me?”

“It doesn’t matter,” Roxy said.

“That wasn’t what I asked. Haven’t you ever wanted to do it?”

Roxy looked away, down to Joel’s shallow navel, and nodded.

Joel touched Roxy’s neck. “You don’t have to be embarrassed. I’ll let you.”

“It sometimes hurts a lot”

“I know.”

“The last thing I want to do is hurt you!”

“Some things are worth a little hurt. Come on — you can teach me.”

They returned to the lean-to and retrieved the tube of Vaseline they always carried in one of their back-packs. Then Joel stretched out on his stomach on the grass just back from the lake shore and dropped his head onto his folded arms.

He felt Roxy above him, licking into his crevice, as he had done so many times to Roxy. It was a good feeling, to have his lover’s tongue probing back there gently, wetly and warmly. He sighed with pleasure, knowing, however, that this was only the start.

Now a finger replaced the tongue. It played around his anus and then gently started pressing inward. He felt its tip pass the outer sphincter, then withdraw a bit, then press further in, and withdraw once again. A little fuck with a little cock. This was probably what he could have had when he was ten but was too dumb to know how to ask for it.

“Am I hurting you?”

“No. Go ahead.”

“I’ll just do this for a while till you get used to it.”

It was a strange sensation, like when his mother had sometimes given him an enema when he was smaller — the same touching of dormant nerves, the same feeling of fullness. He closed his eyes and tried to relax. He couldn’t imagine anybody else doing this to him. If he ever acquired a taste for being fucked it would only be for Roxy as his penetrator.

And it seemed that Roxy had infinite patience. He was in no hurry to step up the motion, probe deeper, so Joel finally had to say himself, “You can try two fingers, now.”

“I can’t believe how relaxed you are,” Roxy said a little later.

“It’s ’cause I trust you.”

“I think you’re ready for my cock.”

“Okay.”

Joel rolled onto his side and drew up one leg. He felt Roxy’s penis sliding in his crack, seeking, then finding, his anus. It pushed. Joel breathed deeply and told his sphincter to go loose, and... with incredible ease Roxy’s cock sank into him.

“Jesus, Joel, that’s it!” Roxy said.

“I know.”

“Is there pain?”

“Nope.”

“Feel good?”

“I don’t know. It’s a feeling I’ve always associated with sitting on the toilet.”

“Yeah, it *is* a bit like that.”

“How’s it for you?”

“Also weird.”

“How so?”

“I’m more used to the other way around.”

“Me, too. Go ahead and fuck.”

The cock went in and out, in and out. He hoped he was giving Roxy the kind of peak pleasure he got when he felt his cock sink into Roxy’s buttocks, but he suspected he wasn’t.

Nevertheless, he knew from all the sighs and trembling breath that Roxy was getting off on what he was doing. Pretty soon he was stopping and starting, stopping longer and longer each time, trying to prolong the fuck for both of them.

“Okay, I can’t hold it off any more!” Roxy panted into Joel’s shoulder.

“Don’t try.”

Roxy’s arms tightened around Joel’s chest. His hips rolled back, drawing his cock almost all the way out, then rocked back in, once more drew back and slammed home, and then Joel knew Roxy was squirting his sperm into him, the milk of his love.

Joel didn’t come, but he was strangely content. He knew what it was like, at last. They would probably do it every so often now, but both of them felt more natural with the positions reversed. That had nothing to do with gender type “roles” — one boy was as masculine as the other — but more with erotic zones and their individual “secret places”. Roxy had a sensitive anus and a prostate grateful for simulation; Joel liked asses. They were well matched by nature.

Terry’s treehouse was complete at last. Monsieur le Clerq had come out to inspect it, had climbed up the rope ladder and been ceremoniously entertained with a cup of tea, which had since grown rather cold, and a *digestif*. He had given it his approval. Now many afternoons Mallory joined Terry up there. It became their usual place to make love between Saturday nights.

Making love in the treehouse usually took a very particular form. The platform had been built on a crotch, and one huge branch sloped up from the floor through one of the walls. Terry would lie back along this branch, having disposed of his short pants, and, pulling the little boy’s shirt up almost to his neck, Mallory would kneel comfortably before him and take the 10-year-old cocklet into his mouth.

He could suck Terry forever. It put him into a timeless trance, the sweet penis between his lips, soft outside and hard within, warm and wet, his nose breathing the light boyish scent of his skin. Terry was still able to have one small orgasm after the other, spaced about five minutes apart, and go on doing that, it seemed, indefinitely. Lying back on that tree branch, with Mallory sucking him, was almost the only time, except for sleep, when Terry was not in motion. Being sucked seemed to put him into the same kind of waking dream as sucking did Mallory.

Terry often talked:

“Tonight I’m going to work on my drawings. I did a drawing of Dad. It’s not too bad, but it could be better. The eyes are always hard. I might try water colors. Maybe I’ll do a water color of our treehouse. Maybe I’ll do it like it would be in the winter, with snow on the ground, because the paper is white, and I’ll... I’ll... uh...”

Mallory felt another mini-orgasm pass through Terry’s body and the small penis he was sucking. He knew it by the jerking of the legs which he had wrapped his arms around, the clicks in the penis itself. He slowed down his sucking and kept his tongue away from the tip, and then Terry was off again:

“Dad said he’d bring M & Ms next time he goes into town. Maybe I’ll have to go with him, too, for a haircut. That means our Saturday night would be off — Dad’s too, I expect, only maybe he’d run me home

and then go back to visit his friend and you'd come over. We could play cards, no, you don't like to play cards. We could do music. I know a song. It goes..."

Mallory sucked on and on. Unless he missed his guess, Terry's cock was starting, just staring, to grow. It was still mouth-sized — he could suck on it without moving his head very much; it never touched the back of his throat, just lay along his tongue moving in and out. Sometimes Terry thrust with his hips, especially as he approached an orgasm, so it was like the boy was fucking his mouth. But mostly it was Mallory who did all that sucking, licking, making little wet noises no louder than the rustle of leaves.

Terry always had to watch Mallory come. "It's a shame you can't just keep doing it and doing it," he would say, wrapping his small hand around Mallory's cock. "But the sperm is neat. Are you getting close? Tell me when you're getting close, 'cause I don't want to miss anything." Now it was Mallory who would be lying along the tree branch, devouring Terry with his eyes and thrilling to the inexpert movements of the small soft hand on his penis.

"What am I going to do after next week without you around?" Mallory said.

"I'll send you post cards from France."

"I don't even know where I'll be."

"You're coming back?"

"You bet"

"Then it won't be so bad." Terry wiggled his little tail up against Mallory's crotch and trapped his upper arm into a lock about his chest.

"This is our next to last Saturday night before school's out."

"I'll be bigger when I come back. And I'll know a whole lot of new songs..."

"I'd like to keep you just the way you are."

"I'd look silly staying at ten all my life."

"I know. But everything's so perfect now."

"It'll get perfecter when I get bigger and smarter — you wait and see."

And Mallory thought, 'It will get perfecter for *you* — probably with some girl-friend — but it couldn't for me.'

19. Coda

For the graduation concert, O'Neill had prepared *Transfigured Night*. Craddock was going to do Strauss' second horn concerto. The student orchestra was rehearsing the *Academic Festival Overture* and Mahler's Fourth Symphony.

Parents started to appear in the quadrangle. The headmaster was busy with receptions and teas. Students began packing their things — seniors for the last time ever. *Gaudiamus igitur*.

One day, one concert, one long ceremony, and it was over. A society which had existed, struggled, worked together, sometimes fought within itself, which spawned loves and hatreds, was broken, scattered into hundreds of family units. The busy halls emptied and echoed with the few voices of the boys who stayed on for a day or to, awaiting travel connections.

Craddock's Uncle Joe had come to the graduation to pick up his nephew. Although Jim Harley was probably the most important adult in Craddock's life, Uncle Joe was as close as he had to an available blood relation, now that his Dad was in Borneo and his step mother wasn't speaking to him. Uncle Joe had arrived on Friday, in a cab-over pickup camper, which was probably the most un-cool vehicle seen at school that year. He had brought with him his new wife, Aunt Gladys, who was half her husband's age and was immediately classed by the students as a "dish". She had fidgeted rudely throughout the graduation concert.

"Joe's teaching me about classical music," she told Craddock afterwards. "I can usually tell Beethoven because it goes loud and soft."

Now he and Uncle Joe and Aunt Gladys were "camped down" for the night beside a pine-rimmed lake some two hundred miles away from school. Aunt Gladys was sitting on a deck chair beside the camper rubbing Lubriderm on her legs. Uncle Joe was inside out of sight tinkering with the gas refrigerator. Craddock had just swum and was walking back from the lake, his body water-beaded and hair adrip, when he caught Gladys looking at him with obvious interest. He stopped a few feet away from her. She smiled. *So, Tom Craddock, here you go*, he said to himself. *A new chapter in life begins*. And, returning her stare, he very slightly raised his left eyebrow.

The sun set and a full moon rose. Back at school, Joel and Roxy were in a state of great excitement. The week before they had discovered Beethoven's early piano trios. What struck them was not the glib naivete of the pieces but their exuberant confidence, their easy energy. Youth spoke to youth across the printed page, and as the two lovers poured over the scores together, wondering, pointing, arguing, they cooked up plans for a performance next year — they were coming back, of course, and would be roommates.

"Morrison for piano."

"Morrison's a nerd."

"He's late 18th Century."

"In more ways than one."

"Dallman."

"OK."

"We'll talk to him tomorrow."

"He's already gone home."

"We'll write him. He'll do it"

"We'll write each other... won't we?"

"Damn right!"

They had gotten into the habit of stroking each other's cocks when they sat alone together. Neither knew which was nicest — stroking or being stroked. It seemed that the one implied the other.

O'Neill's Greyhound plunged through the brilliant moonlit night. The closer it got to New York the more he liked it. Give him any day tenement blocks to pine trees. People lived in tenements, ants in pine trees — and idiot squirrels and dumb birds. Things *happened* in the city. There was *electricity*, heat came in municipal steam pipes, not from coal you had to get filthy shoveling into an antediluvian boiler. He would first drown himself in some 24-hour Harlem pop music orgy, and maybe a few “substances” (a term he'd picked up last year at a narc-ed lecture). Then he'd clean up and present the Foundation for Experimental Music with the wide-band multi-channel tape he'd brought along in the briefcase at his feet, the original recording of his *Transfigured Night* as self-advertisement. They *had* to hire him and put him through Julliard; turning him down would be interfering with his destiny.

At some town along the Mohawk a Chicano youth took the seat beside him and started pouring over a violent sex and motor-cycle magazine. In one full-page drawing, a semi-naked young man was bound to a cyclone fence and was about to be carved up by a half dozen bearded bikies as his horrified girl-friend looked on. The Chicano boy had an obvious erection. Was that meant for O'Neill's benefit? He'd see when the lights were turned down.

And, sure enough, once it was dark inside the bus and they'd tucked themselves into the blankets provided, he felt a hand on his thigh, a hand that explored him, found where his penis lay, adroitly drew down his zipper. O'Neill allowed himself to be manipulated, reveling in his total macho passivity. He didn't let it get really hard right away — the kid would have to work for that.

Then the boy whispered — practically the first words he'd said aside from grunts — “Hey, man, how 'bout gettin' *me*?”

“Fuck you,” O'Neill whispered back. “This is your scene, not mine.”

The boy stiffened, and for a moment O'Neill wondered if he wouldn't feel a knife at his ribs, but instead the boy just shifted in his seat so he could lower his head. And then O'Neill felt warm, moist lips come around his glans and engulf his prick. He pulled his blanket over the boy's head and shoulders. The head started to move beneath it, the mouth suck, lips clasp, tongue tickle and flicker on every in-stroke, over either his glans or his frenulum.

Why was it that everyone wanted to suck his cock? Why did they fall all over one another to give him the best blow job they knew how? Why — before the little wimp tricked him — did Mallory come back time after time? Why did Roxy get himself virtually raped in order to prepare himself for the famous O'Neill penetration? Ah, the mysteries of genetics — some guys are lucky.

He sat back, locked his hands behind his head, smiled, let the warm waves of pleasure sweep through his body. He was on his way. The barriers would fall before him, one after the other, when he reached the city. Everyone would do what he wanted them to do. He could hear the kid breathing hard through a somewhat congested nose, slurping a bit as he sucked. It couldn't be very comfortable, scrunched down sideways like that, your normal breath blocked by a fat cock buried to your tonsils, but it didn't matter. It was his, O'Neill's, impending orgasm that mattered.

And that orgasm was imminent, now. He felt himself rising. Below the boy's mouth, fluid shifted, poured through ducts into vesicles with Latin names, fluid teaming with life, his life, exuberant tadpole things that carried replicas of himself, thrashing their little tails in excitement, getting ready... one... two... three... GO!

The ejaculators spasmed. Sperm shot up his urethra and poured out of his penis into the boy's throat, bringing, with that ecstatic emptying, a delicious, bright calm in its wake.

And at the same time (he hadn't been aware of it until now) a bubble had gathered in that dark passage beneath the root of his cock. It wanted out — and he let it out, starting to laugh, now, releasing it right under the tented blanket, right beneath the boy's snuffling nose.

Mallory was crying. Terry was fast asleep, cradled in his arms, head on Mallory's chest. Tomorrow they would part. Terry and his father would take the bus to Toronto and the plane to Paris. He, Mallory, would go home to a house occupied by virtual strangers and a dying mother. This was their last night. Things would never be so perfect again.

Terry was thrilled to be going back to France. "There's caves so big they've never even been explored, and my uncle's got a pond with frogs, and they grow snails in their cellar because we eat snails in France, and I have a canoe all my own, and maybe this summer they'll let me out on the big river. You can go down the big river all the way to the Rhone, only I wouldn't do that, I'd just go a little ways, and find an island and camp. And then everybody comes and picks grapes. Most of them are Italians so you can't understand what they're talking about, but they sing. They've taught me a couple of their songs..."

Yes, he'd come back bigger, and browner — and a different boy.

Mallory ran his hand slowly over Terry's back and breathed through Terry's hair. He wouldn't sleep one minute this night.

The moon was higher. Roxy, waking up in Jerry's bed (Jerry had gone home the day before), reached for the arms of his lover, then realized Joel had crept away to his own bed after the second wave of their love-making that night. The narrow, squeaky school cots were hardly designed for sleeping doubled-up. But he wanted Joel, now. His brief slumber had replenished his loins and his appetite — and besides, he was lonely and in love.

He got up and knelt beside Joel's bed. Joel was sleeping on his back. The moonlight pouring through their window fell full on Joel's face. For almost five minutes Roxy looked at that face — the fine eyebrows, the tousled hair, the full lips slightly open showing the very ends of his two front teeth. How could Joel sleep with such brilliant light falling on his eyelids? Roxy never could. He could sleep in the day but had to turn his eyes away from any source of light Joel's sleep must be very deep indeed.

Roxy bent his head until his lips nearly touched Joel's. Through his nose he inhaled the gentle, moist and warm breath that issued from those lips. Why was it that some boys always exuded a kind of honey-like sweetness from their bodies? Every human's scent-aura must be different — something our mammalian pets know very well but to which most people show remarkable indifference. Brent's breath, especially early in the morning, had a faint, not unpleasant, scent of glue. Joel's was always sweet, and yet he made no ritual of keeping himself cleaner than everybody else.

Roxy licked his lips and touched them to Joel's. Joel stirred, turned his head aside, and as he did, Roxy let his lips trail across Joel's cheek until they were resting in the light hair that curled at his temple. Then Joel's mind swam into wakefulness and he reached out his arms for Roxy.

They didn't speak; they didn't need to. They were both naked; they were both erect; they wanted to do only the simplest thing, an act that can almost be a continuation of sleep. Their cocks locked together. Roxy made them slippery, then reached his arms under Joel and started the first rock of his hips, the well-practiced motion which, automatically countered by Joel, thrust his cock over the smooth, tight belly beneath him. His hips relented, and Joel's cock took over, its sensitive front probing the slick skin between Roxy's pubic hair and navel. Then that thrust, too, reached its end, and Roxy's started to move forward once more.

It was like falling back, deeply back, into some ideal state of bliss, an ancestral, tribal memory. It didn't require kissing, artifice, technique; Roxy, in this sleepy state, didn't miss Joel's penis, or even his finger, up his ass. All it needed was the slow, patient motion, his lover's warmth, a state approaching dream-sleep.

There were no noises in the other rooms of the dorm; nearly everybody else had gone home. Joel's bed cried as ever; there were sighs and moans from their mouths, and the rustling of sheets, but neither boy heard them. They built up the love-light in their loins together, knowing intuitively and by experience,

from hesitations in each other's thrust, heartbeats and breathing, just where each was in the great duet they were performing.

At last the music started hinting at tonic, home base; the colors brightened, harmonies intensified. Never had the currents flowed richer and deeper. The two lovers approached the final cadence. The dominant was hammered home, blazed forth in brass, and they were falling, falling deep into inner space, crashing through the ultimate blackness that was the source of all light, too. Then the sperm was out, sliding over their bellies, mixing, welding them together for ever and ever. They relaxed but kept their arms about each other. Still locked in the lover's hug, they rolled on their sides, and in that close embrace, becoming ever more closely glued together by their mingled semen, they drifted off to sleep again.

Brent slept, too, alone in his room for the first night since the preceding autumn. Several times he had entered REM-sleep; several times turned — from one side to the other side, to his back. And now, as if fate wished to reward him for his good deeds — to his roommate Roxy if to no one else — sleep gave him a most beautiful dream. It was of a girl, of course, for that was his nature. His cock, the fine un-circumcised instrument which had patiently stroked Roxy Knowles into sexual life, erected itself, the foreskin moving down the shaft to reveal its moist, salty tip. As he breathed, and his covers lifted and sank, the slight cheesy scent of cock-sweat rose about his face. The lifted cock rose and fell back against his stomach (he was lying on his back), lifted and fell again. His breath grew short. He mumbled something incomprehensible — meant for his dream-partner — and sighed. And then the sperm rushed out of its deep-seated springs and into his cock, rising and rising, until it squirted out onto his belly — one jet, a second, a third, heavy turgid drops that had lain dormant for too many days in his loins. With the orgasm, he woke up, glad of that hallucinatory fulfillment. He put his hand in the still-hot puddle of his seed and, knowing he wouldn't sleep in those sheets again, let the semen stay. Tomorrow he would go home, and there he wouldn't have to dream any more. He would be performing the Great Act with willing women, doing it in reality, day after day, through the course of the long hot summer.

The Buffalo Greyhound pulled into the New York Port Authority terminal at a quarter to six in the morning. Passengers shuffled off, half asleep. The driver was about to take his bus out to the sheds in New Jersey when he noticed a rider still slumped in his blanket near the back. When he went to investigate he found it was a youth just coming out of drugged unconsciousness. The driver pulled off the blanket, and to his surprise found that the boy had been thoroughly trussed up to the seat with high tensile-strength broad-band audio tape. Covering his mouth was a wide piece of adhesive plaster on which a message had been written with a felt-tip marker pen:

DETH TO ALL QUEARS

The young man's pants had been opened and a plastic clothes-pin clamped on his penis. Lying in the aisle nearby was a discarded plastic syringe.

O'Neill's city adventures had already begun.

If you enjoyed this book, you might want to read these other recent Acolyte novels:

Operation Jock, by *C. R. LaBarge*. 14-year-old Evan has two important friends: Ram, his 16-year-old hero, son of the high school coach and top athlete himself, who is always available for counsel, both wise and unwise, and Alexander, a boy of Evan's own age who is a kind of proto-Buddha able to influence spiritually everything from the behavior of mud wasps to school bullies. This amusing, realistic, exceptionally well-written up-beat novel chronicles the course of these two relationships over one eventful summer. Evan grows in his understanding of the complex world he lives in, of his friends and especially of his potential to love, physically, emotionally, spiritually, even though he finds the direction of his love is toward Alexander rather than girls.

A Natural Lizard Activity, by *B. J. Freedman*. 13-year-old Kim and his Pop are packed off on a transcontinental bus by Mom and her new dope-dealing lover. Once a trendy professor, Pop had burned out his wits, permanently, on an overdose of sacred mushrooms down in the Mayan jungles. Man and boy end up in Venice, California, Pop riding around on the beach trying to sell tie-dyed T-shirts, Kim swimming and surfing, both living in a filthy trailer. Then into Kim's life comes 31-year-old Bernie who introduces him to a whole new galaxy of erotic love. A vivid, comic, erotic tale of the 1970s, its "alternative" social networks and the people who inhabited them.

A Boy's Sweet Sorrow and Satisfaction, by *Gilbert & Holt*. Howard's body is just starting its long spurt of procreative maturation. He longs for his absent lover Mark. But while absence might make the heart grow fonder, it might also make it unreliable, especially when tempted by an attractive older boarding school roommate and a very wealthy Lord with his own country estate and super yacht. An entertaining and erotic "BL-Classic" novel of intrigue, murder, adventure and heartache.

The Fire-Worshipper, by *Alan Edward*. An alternate England in which the old pagan religions have prevailed and Christianity has been driven underground and grown nasty. This is the story of 12-year-old Alric, star dancer and "song boy" at the great springtime pagan festivals, and his quest with the help of fellow choristers for his slightly older lover who has presumably been kidnapped and dragged down into the catacombs of the dark Jahweh faith.

Explosion, by *I. L. Ingles*. The ultimate bomb is dropped and humanity exterminated, except for a mixed group of black and white schoolboys hiding deep in an Africa cave. Over three long, harrowing and exciting years, the boys learn how to survive on their own, growing up without girls. This big 384-page epic details their friendships, loves and sexual conjugations, their burgeoning sexuality and the ways they elect to govern themselves.

Strange Catharsis by *Daniel Mallery*. Richard: an author suffering from writer's block. Danny: a tough boy exploding through puberty, whose first instinct is to challenge all authority with his fists. Hansa: a gentler, reserved boy desperately seeking parental (and other kinds of) love. These three and many others come together in a small private boarding school for children in Care in the wild Scottish Highlands...

Something Like Happiness, by *Kevin Esser*. A lovely, honest, often humorous and frequently very erotic account of a 14-year-old Midwestern American boy's fumbling attempts at erotic fulfillment. We first see Andy stealing a color plate of Caravaggio's *Victorious amor* from a book in the town library to

add to his secret collection of erotic boy photos. A series of accidents leads him to the fringes of an alternate society of pot-smoking, kiddie-porn production and commercial sex, and he participates in one memorable wild orgy. Meanwhile, Matthew, the little neighbor boy, starts his dive into puberty, and Andy finds himself falling in love.

Lucky Lips, by *Rob Elan*. Ernie Willet is a good-looking, popular, athletic 11-year-old kid, but two years earlier he had lost his father in a car accident and he has been trying ever since to be “a little man”: He almost convinces his mother. He has a lot support from his hero, 16-year-old Rick who lives down the street and secretly adores him. But what is he to make of his “best enemy”, Gordie Lewis who always tackles him every time he sets foot outside of the school building and now invites him home for the weekend? Ernie and Gordie are possibly the most unlikely, and most delightful, lovers you are likely to encounter in any book you read this year.

As Schoolboys From Their Books by *Mario Kochany*. An amusing, generous account of the erotic goings-on in an English prep school as it never was and never could be. 11-year-old Jean-Philippe comes to the school half way through spring term. 14-year-old Andy Chanting, a “Top”, takes the new boy under his wing, and, very soon, into his bed as well. Brian Miners, another “Top”, falls in love with his P.E. instructor. There is a storm of pubescent boys: Barry Winters, the *nouveau riche* kid, “Kiss Me” Barchester, a most promiscuous spring of the landed gentry, Jocko who tries to get it on with practically everybody. If there are snakes in this Garden of Eden, they are the headmaster whose vice is whacking the bare bottoms of rowdy boys he fancies, and Timbers, the history teacher with a sadistic streak, but these two are hardly enough to stop the unstoppable kids in their charge.

*

*Nearly ten years ago, The Acolyte Press published a series of “BL-Classic Chronicles”, of which **Starcross** in this volume was one. Most of these plain-cover erotic boy-love novels remain in stock:*

The Chronicles of Fenway Academy by *Peter Zupp*. A boy-lover’s dream of what really goes on in a famous New England prep-school.

The Chronicles of the Desert Ranch School by *Peter Zupp*. Tucked away against the mountains near Tucson is a boarding school for privileged boys. There 14-year-old Jeff learns about life, love, and soon finds himself living a thriller...

The Chronicles of Scout Troop 131 by *Peder O’Cullain*. One long, lazy English summer holiday for 12-year-old Peter, his experiences in the local Scout troop, with his best friend and other Scouts, with “Roger the Lodger” who lives in his home and soon takes a very special place in his life...

The Chronicles of St. Barnabas by *Colin Murchison*. The training of a boy-chorister in a New England school by a boy-lover of rather easy principles.

The Chronicles of the Koster Dilemma by *Simon Worthy*. A 15-year-old boy tapes his erotic autobiography for an American sexological institute, not knowing its director is scheming to turn all this information over to the police. (Still a sober warning to boy-lovers never, *never* to tell anything

confidential to any brand of American therapist!) But don't worry: in this novel all turns out well for the boys and their lovers; only the psychiatrist gets his comeuppance.

*

And don't forget about our most recent collections of short fiction on the theme of boy-love:

The Twelfth Acolyte Reader
The Eleventh Acolyte Reader
The Tenth Acolyte Reader
The Ninth Acolyte Reader
The Eighth Acolyte Reader
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Eight anthologies of short fiction about boy-love as it really is experienced by the boys and men involved. As in our novels, you will find no psychiatric/feminist child abuse industry rant, rather honest depictions of erotic relations between boys or between boys and men. Nearly one hundred modern tales that span the centuries from Ancient Greek myth to the very real present of Spanish Harlem. Writers include Andrew May, Daniel Mallery, James Medley, Lee Savage, Randall Wilke, Christopher Monteriano, Luis Miguel Fuentes, Frederic Trainor, Alan Edward, Edward Bangor, Jotham Lotring, Paidric MagUidhir, I. L. Ingles, J. Darling, Kevin Esser, Jaymee, Chelsea, Marcus Tilley, William Barber, K. I. Bard, Jacques de Brethmas, Robert Campbell, Hakim Bey, Bob Henderson, Thomas Mitchell, Simon Worthy, B. J. Freedman, Steven Wood, Jared Bunda, Mario Kochany, Graham Day, C. R. LaBarge and Marcel Wright. Some of the best-known and finest writers working in this field today.

Included are ghost stories, love stories, adventures; tales told by boy-loving men, boy-loving boys and boys involved with their men friends. Some are humorous, others very intense and serious indeed. But all involve boys no matter where the tales are set: in the classical world, Australia, South Africa, England, Greece, Italy, France, New Zealand or America, even the future. All share the point of view that erotic love, erotically expressed, between men and boys of good will is a valuable and precious thing which should be protected and encouraged rather than persecuted. These are overall happy stories, a fine antidote to the bad news boy-lovers are constantly buffeted by.

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