

# Del

by John Bishop

Tropical sunlight filters into a room through half-open shutters. Though mid-afternoon, the room has retained a coolness from the rain of the night before, and a sudden morning shower. An old ceiling fan stirs the air above a bed, where a dusty-amber youth lies on his stomach, looking at pictures in a magazine. At the foot of the bed, idly at ease in a large armchair, a pale young man studies the boy. A newspaper covers his lap, where it has dropped from his sight. A page has slipped to the floor. His gaze envelops the boy in the way an insect views the world; unmoving, intent, absorbent, weaving a slow web of observation around the slim body engrossed in its pictures.

The boy has lately returned from a shower. A hand towel, loosely wrapped around his waist, has come adrift and now lies under his hips and stomach, his back bare to the dry caress of the fan. As his hair dries it lifts and waves in the shallow breeze, as though a hand were playing with it; a lock here, a strand there; taken, replaced. As the boy absorbs the pictures, so the man absorbs the boy. Outside, the muted cacophony of sounds, an occasional silence, and in that silence, distant breakers on a beach.

Bars and flecks of light dapple the boy in slow movement; the chair and its occupant in luminous shadows. The boy bathes in light. The shadow of a tall palm splinters the sunlight; it runs off his back, hips, legs; cascades across the sheet in a shower of amber. Where his body touches the bed, a golden halo reflects from his skin. He lies propped on his elbow, his face close to the book. Sometimes he nuzzles a picture with his nose, touches it briefly with his tongue. A vortex of diffuse light glows in the smooth hollow of his shoulder. The magazine is his favorite after-shower study; a mild collection of naked girls, brought as an after-thought by a friend. He studies every page in minute leisurely detail; small murmurs of pleasure punctuate his concentration.

Apart from his breathing, only the man's eyes move in their careful survey. The boy lies across his vision, diagonally, on the large bed. Occasionally he raises a slim calf and neat foot into the sunlight, and

drops it again. From time to time, a slow squeeze of his small fruit-like buttocks, and a gentle, purposeful, thrust into the towel. He has carefully positioned his erection for this pleasurable movement.

The line of neck, shoulders, back, hips, thighs and calves has a cool mathematical logic; a perfect balance, immediately visible and self-explanatory, as though a complex and intricate problem were suddenly found to have a solution of surpassing simplicity and elegance. A paradox, expressed simply as a collection of curves and arcs and lines. "Thus," says this image, "is that not the answer you sought?"

A leaf is missing from the book of pictures. The boy turns and returns the pages. Half a girl is left across one page, her legs agape, her torso severed by some young trophy hunter for the image on its reverse. "Girl robbery," the boy says thoughtfully. He looks up from the book. "Del, this girl is in big trouble; her legs are in bed with me, and her body is half way across town, maybe." They laugh. The boy resumes his study.

Del is still unsure in the boy's environment. He had survived his youth and early manhood in a distant land reasonably intact, he felt, though logically not without scars. His emotional and sensual life, of necessity, something of a blasted stump, but a stump that somehow still harbored the germ of life, and now and then thrust out a pale shoot and unfurled a green leaf to the light. More recently, it seemed to him, the very air had become poisoned, and an acrid rain of fear and paranoia shriveled up the young shoots, so that their leaves fell to the dead earth, His one-time pride in his culture, in its achievements, came back to mock him in the sterile wilderness of his life, and he found himself occasionally longing for an opportunity to deal it a body-blow from within, a self-inflicted wound to dent the seamless armor of its smugly hypocritical values. These bitter thoughts being basically alien to his nature, it seemed sensible to spend some time away, to sterilize them in sunlight, and not let them fester within him.

He also hoped to extend his knowledge of boys, of their diversity, of his enjoyment of them. In all these things he felt he was making progress. A wide chasm of culture and language separated him still, but the binds of his past were loosening and falling away. His challenge to the preconceptions of his own society made him receptive to other, perhaps better, ideas.

Emotionally, he seemed to have exchanged a warm fog for a crystal maze no less impenetrable. It happened that his young friends of the past had been, in a sense, exclusively his. They had not, to his knowledge, shared their intimacy. They were truthful almost by reflex; concealed

nothing from him, nor needed to. If they had found other, similar, adult friends, they would have lost no time in telling him. He had never had intimate friendships with more than one or two boys at the same time. Without exception, those boys had cloven to him gradually until their lives had become so twined and bound in with his own that it excluded the possibility of an unknown third element. For this reason he had never known jealousy, or possessiveness, only a resonant emptiness when, sometimes, there had been no boys at all. Those boys had been surprised and pleased to discover that they were of interest to an adult for their own sakes, and that an adult might prefer their company to that of others. Their friendship had always grown first, eagerly embraced, and a physical intimacy followed in its turn. He found that, far from needing to seduce his young friends, it was merely necessary not to take any steps to prevent physical closeness from occurring. The boys were mildly surprised when it happened, and then more surprised that it had taken so long, as it seemed to them, though Del knew that it seldom took more than a month or so. "I never knew that a man could appreciate a boy like this," one of his friends had said, "if I had known, we could have done this long ago." And, "I didn't know it was like this – that's why I was frightened of men following me."

His eyes continue to reflect the luminous figure on the bed. Between pages, the boy acknowledges his gaze with a brief smile, a wink, a raised eyebrow. All one gesture; sensual, friendly, receptive.

These boys certainly know, he thought. They are well aware of their likely attraction for men. They extend or deny their friendships to men depending on how they visualize the advantages that might accrue from it. They are not frightened by men following them, at least not in the same way. Their friendships with their peers, he supposed, would not be so very different from his earlier boy friends', perhaps; though with a more physical, less modest dimension. In this society, children and adolescents seldom slept alone. The idea of separate beds for all the children of an average household would be absurd; there were far more urgent uses for money. There was also often very little space for such luxury. Households usually extended beyond a single family group. How much more would he have learned about his sensuality and sexuality, he wondered, if he had slept until his late teens with lots of brothers, cousins near and distant, and a variety of other youths, older and younger, from time to time? No wonder these boys had no modesty to speak of, except in very public places. Even the boyish modesty of the colder countries, he reflected, was hardly the seamless web of propriety

parents evidently wished on their sons. Let a boy once display himself naked to an admiring friend, and he will shrug out of his clothes at every opportunity thereafter. In his own youth, he remembered, his school-friends had always showered together, but his parents had been, at that time, very careful to instruct him in a decent modesty, and he was always as shy and bashful as a maiden aunt, and dreaded exposing himself. Now, twenty years on, his parents holidayed in the south of France, on a naturist beach, and went into middle-aged raptures over the beauty of naked children and teenagers.

So take a society with a little less hypocrisy about sex, in private, at least, he reasoned; make its boys beautiful and sensual and unselfconscious; sleep them in a jumble of cousins and friends from infancy to young manhood, and these are the results. And give these boys a certain brightness, and independence, and instant readiness to seize every possible advantage, and you have the intimacy developing first, and a friendship possibly growing into that foundation.

The boy came to the last picture in the book. Del knew his routine. He had one special picture which excited him more than the others. He would turn back to it, to crown his enjoyment. The boy turned on to one side, his shoulder to the sheet, and arranged the edge of a pillow to support his head. With the book open in front of him, he raised and bent one leg, opening his thighs. A pearl of lubricant shone at the tip of his erection. His hand cupped and fondled the tight sac below.

Del resisted the temptation to get involved in the boy's climax. This once he preferred to be an observer. Slowly the boy started to masturbate, sensually stroking his foreskin, while his eyes scanned the page in front of him. His thighs and hips jerked spasmodically.

Del had been surprised at the size of the boy's genitalia. He had expected, if not the flower petals of pre-pubescence, at least something flower-like. This boy was more like ripe fruit; a luscious heavy fullness. Though otherwise smooth, a springy bush of shiny black pubic hair made a base for his heavy limb, and his testicles were almost as large as Del's. In erection, he was unable to conceal the fact, and had to force his unruly member straight upwards inside his shorts, where it could be restrained by his belt. Even then it was inclined to poke over the top, like a small warm pet, anxious to see out into the world from its owner's pocket. His pubic hair did not extend to his testicles, and Del would often study the intricate pattern of deep ridges, and the one high central ridge leading from them. His sac never seemed to be still, even when the boy slept, but kept a sinuous movement always somewhere across its surface and

within.

Del felt this boy knew more about sex than he did himself. He had often made love to boys, as completely as he could wish, or could imagine at that time. The boys had enjoyed it, and if they had ever seemed not to, he had stopped. This had seemed to him right and logical. There had also been plenty of kissing and cuddling, though always as a statement of affection, not sexuality. With this boy it was different. Physical closeness immediately produced a large erection, and the boy's own hands quickly dispelled any idea that it could stop there.

There were other differences. Early in their friendship the boy had asked Del whether they should have intercourse, and supported this with an unmistakable gesture. They tried, in the only position Del knew at that time. At the very first muted groan, Del withdrew, as he had expected he might have to, considering the boy's size. The boy looked up, his face a picture of confusion.

"Why?" he asked.

"It's hurting," Del replied softly. The boy looked even more confused.

"A little," he agreed, hesitantly. They looked at each other.

"I don't want to hurt you," Del explained.

"A little hurting," the boy said quietly. He had not changed his position.

"Are you angry?"

"No, no, not angry." Del bent to kiss his forehead. The boy was upset and disconsolate.

"Why did you stop?" he persisted. "Don't you want to do it?"

"Do you like it?" Del asked.

There was a pause. "I don't *like* it," the boy said slowly, as though it was a stupid question. "If you want to, we can do it, like I told you."

"If you don't like it, I don't want to do it," Del replied gently.

"Then I like it," the boy answered.

Del changed the subject, but the boy was unhappy for the rest of the afternoon, as though blaming himself for some misdeed. Previously, he had a sure touch with Del, a confidence, and now this was somehow lost. Del felt he was back at the very beginning of the friendship again.

Later he worried at the events of the afternoon as a dog will worry at an old bone. Clearly the boy was prepared to accept a measure of discomfort, even perhaps pain, in those circumstances. But could he proceed in that situation? And *why* was he prepared to accept it if he didn't have to? He was not lacking in experience, confident that he could

cope with it. He had probably managed on hundreds of similar occasions in the past, Del realized, perhaps in all sorts of bizarre positions. Possibly in this same room, on this bed. He had expected, and wanted, to continue, despite the noises of mild protest.

Could it be, Del wondered, that he felt he was *supposed* to suffer a little discomfort in the interest of his friend's enjoyment? Could that situation be in some way meaningless without it, as though he had been asleep throughout? Del was no stranger to the fact that most boys need a little domination from time to time. Not completely, or permanently, but enough, within well understood parameters. It was absurd to pretend a kind of democratic equality with a boy; leave him flourishing in uncertainty. A boy who makes friends with an adult man expects him to remain an adult, and not become a generous schoolfriend. Was this how, and when, he was expected to dominate this boy? Might it not destroy what was already there?

The next afternoon, the offer again accepted, the boy kept a determined silence. Then slowly he began to grunt and groan to himself. Del stopped moving, unsure. "No, no, *finish!*" the boy pleaded in exasperation. Del finished, and collapsed exhausted. The boy lay still, breathing heavily. Del wondered what would be the outcome of this savagery.

"Nice?" the boy asked him.

"Beautiful."

The boy rested for a while, then leaned over and hugged him before getting up. Del heard him singing over the noise of the shower.

And now this boy was coming to his own climax. He rolled over onto his back, and brought his legs together, thrusting one hand deep down into the cleft of his thighs, his thumb curled around and buried in the tangle of pubic hair. His other hand moved in an uneven frenzy. From time to time his body curved and stiffened, the muscles of his hips and thighs straining. His eyes closed. One last thrust. An exclamation. All over. His body relaxed in a death-like attitude of exquisite exhaustion.

"Nice," Del said. The boy laughed back. Pearly drops spattered his shoulder. He wrung his hands in a towel, and wiped the rest of his body, then tossed the towel off the edge of the bed.

Now he will sleep for a while, and then it will be time for him to go home – if he goes home, Del thought. Once or twice he had stayed overnight, and even offered to move in completely, but Del, fearing parental complications, had refused. Boys seemed to enjoy what Del considered an awesome degree of freedom. Parents were not possessive

in the way he was used to, and youngsters lived with friends, relatives, strangers, virtually as they pleased. Compared to these boys, teenagers in his own country had about as much control over their lives as a bird in a cage.

Del wanted to make a friend of this boy. He recognized that it would not be easy, their differences being so wide and obvious. The boy could not yet know as much about him as he knew about the boy, and that chiefly by a process of analysis and deduction. Denied that adult science, he would have only intuition, observation and habit to work on, and those things took time. So he would give it time: he had enough. His holiday was open-ended; he had pulled up all his roots and scraped together every crumb of money to expend on the kind of education he was getting now, and the experiences he was enjoying. He couldn't imagine ever regretting it. There was nothing for him to return to, and in a sense that was very appropriate, he felt, as there had never really been anything there in the first place. To go anywhere you must first depart from where you are, and he had at least done that.

An afternoon shadow fell across the sleeping boy, who stirred and awoke. He stretched in the way of cats and boys, his arms curving back above his head, a full luxurious extension of his slim sheer body. A blissful instant, fan-fingered, tip-toed, at his furthest reach. Then out to the kitchen, where Del, ever merciful to adolescent stomachs, kept a schoolboy's dream of cakes and fruit and fizzy drinks, their combined internal effect no doubt riotous, but producing a very satisfied external effect. He pulled open the door of the refrigerator, as always surprised by the gust of cold air around the lower half of his body. A shiver, and boyish squeal of shock and delight.

Del helped him gather his clothes from around the room, and watched him dress. "See you tomorrow," he said. The boy reached up around his neck for a last kiss. Del bent, folded his arms; tightening, lifting the boy gently from the floor. He felt the small body relax against him, enjoying his helplessness in the strength of a man's arms. Del was on familiar ground here. He squeezed a little more, until the bones in the young chest and spine clicked. The boy laughed and wriggled to be free. Del lowered him slowly to the floor.

The door closed. There was the sound of a boy's tuneless whistle outside, and he was gone.