

# The Book of Moth

by Jared Bunda

*“a hand on the bird is worth two in the bush”*  
– Moth 1983

THE FIRST DAY. Everything and everyone is new to you. Standing there in that way you have with your ankles crossed and your left hand in your back jeans pocket, waiting, you see that I am watching you. First you look away as if you had seen something you shouldn't have. Then in a moment you are back and return a grin captivating my own. You blush. I find my way over to where you stand and say, “Hello, Moth.” You look confused and tell me that your name is... but I silence you with a finger at my lips and say, “To me you can be Moth, can't you?”

“I guess so,” you reply, still a little perplexed. “But I don't get it.”

“It's an endearment. Don't you like endearments?”

“What's that?”

“A name a friend gives you.”

“What's your name? Or do I make it up?”

“Peter Candella... Pete.”

You are smaller, a camper. I, a counselor. You are perhaps flattered, still a little puzzled. Still you stand closer in the newness, as names and cabins are called, and soon you have taken my hand.

When your turn comes and it is time for you to go, you press harder for a moment until you realize it and then blush again. “He's a good counselor. You'll like him,” I reassure you. You nod and walk away with that ancient leather strap bag that must have been your grandfather's. You can hardly carry it. You glance back over your shoulder, unconfident, to be sure I am still watching, and then disappear out the door.

Later I see you at play with the other boys. Your name is called more frequently than theirs. You are a little cocky in your preeminence among those who are all new to one another. It is your beauty, Moth, and your poise. They will follow you all summer through. You see me and

wave, then become busy again with your captaincy. Again you glance to where I have been standing and I have stepped from your line of sight. Your smile fades and you search, unsuccessfully. I will be there when you search again, Moth. I am candle.

We pass that evening and you reach to take my hand without pausing even to consider. Your surety delights me. At twelve a boy might think twice. "Hello, my Moth," I say. "You have made so many friends!"

"I'm the biggest in our cabin," you respond.

"And the most beautiful." You are caught off guard and then you whisper, "Boys aren't beautiful, Pete."

"Not many are, Moth."

Your friends shout after you and for a moment your hand tightens in mine and you look after them. "Your friends are calling. Go to them. I'll be here."

It is a slow rest time and you have wandered off from the others looking for something. I watch you meander from building to building poking your head in the doors. I step down from the porch where I have stood and, seeing me, you come over. Have I been the object of your search? You don't say. "We don't have to stay in the cabin rest period if we finished all our lunch," you offer.

The logic escapes me but the consequence does not. "Shall we take a walk?" I ask. I pocket my impetuous hands. Caution has its place. All counselors are suspect. Anyone would be suspect in your company, my lovely Moth.

We come to the water and you take off your shoes and socks, wading out to where the pines hang and drop their needles to lie in the sand.

"Don't you want to swim?" I ask.

"You aren't supposed to after lunch, especially if you eat so much." You raise your T-shirt to show me how you have overeaten and smack your belly.

"It doesn't look chubby to me, Moth."

You pull your shirt off and toss it aside, turning toward the water. I come up behind you and put my hands where yours were. "No fat there, Moth. All muscle." You flex to prove me right. Your running shorts hang below your underpants at the waist. I say that you can always tell where a person shops when he takes off his shirt. You wrinkle your nose and look back to the T-shirt. Then at your front; then you laugh. "My unders." You try gymnastically to see the tag. "Come on, Pete. It's

inside out. Right?"

I tell you that you will have to figure it out for yourself. What a natural flirt you are, my lovely. Off come your shorts and, as you delightfully call them, unders, and in a twinkling you announce proudly, "Montgomery Wards! But they weren't inside out, Pete."

"Really?"

"Come on, Pete."

"Sorry, classified information."

"I'll make you tell."

You square off and suddenly, I suspect, you are aware of your nakedness. To hide that fact you pick up a stone and turn away. "I'll figure it out. You wait."

Eager that the moment not escape us entirely, I quickly disrobe and run into the lake. You follow at my heels. The water cools your blush if not my fervor, for what I have seen would have incited Julius Caesar to abandon the Gallic Wars and retire to a temple. You are a moth still in pupa, my momentary Moth. All is in place but unmarred by a single hair. Does it work yet? I wonder. You ride my shoulders and dive; your legs wrap around my middle as you try to bring me down. Now and then the water becomes electric. You are air and I am fire. You are Moth and I am candle.

We walk to the beach. I lie down in the hot sun. You look for colored stones where the lake has washed them from the bank. We can hear the sounds of free swim back at the camp now and then, on a breeze that comes by. I meditate on puberty and doze.

When you return, it is to wake me by hourglassing sand into my navel. I smile to discover you, colossus-like, above me. Modesty has returned. The soft white of your underpants peeks at me from behind the blue ribbing of your shorts. I squint from the sun and you move to block it from my face. You don't speak. "What have you been doing?" I ask.

"Thinking," you say.

"Big thoughts or small ones?"

"Medium ones... Pete?"

"Yes, Moth?" You look back the way you have come. You seem so thoughtful, even troubled. You shiver as if a sudden breeze had caught you, but it is quiet. A fly buzzes nearby. You watch it, waiting for it to land; instead it flies out over the water and disappears. You reach in your pocket and produce a white stone you have found. There is a vein of red running through it. You kneel beside me to show it. It is like the vein in your thigh, I say, and show you where, in the ivory where your tan ends,

there is a small blue pulse. You are so vulnerable, Moth. A small thing yet, still unmade. The blueness of your birth is still with you. I hold the stone alongside, and sense your tenseness, your imminency.

“You could drill a hole and make a necklace for your mother,” I say.

“Wouldn't it break?”

“Not if you were very careful.”

“What if I gave it to you?”

“It would be one of my greatest treasures.”

“Would you wear it?”

“Sure.”

“I'll have to think about it.”

“I know.”

I WONDER IF you have been carried off from camp in the middle of the night! I wander from building to building throughout the morning to catch a glimpse of you. Of course, I might ask someone. But with what explanation? After a casually frenetic tour between classes, I return with a cloying forehead and a parching tongue to teach the next group of junior riflemen.

At lunch you enter gaily with your friends. Has my candle so dimmed in the sight of your sun? I munch my cold hamburger and damp french fries and watch you radiate to those around you an enchantment. All eyes are on you, Moth. Even the Director condescends – oh the privilege of royalty! – to call you to his table as you pass and, inquiring perhaps about your mother, or your Cocker Spaniel, or your guppies, to slap your lovely bottom. I drown my grief in Kool-Aid.

Such is the fickleness of youth! The world is for you to bustle in and for me to curse. Not a glance for two days. Where is the boy who grasped my hand so firmly? But that was when his footing was unsure. Now he forsakes the earth entirely and flies above, choosing as he will, where to alight and show his exotic wings. My Moth has become a butterfly! I avoid the periphery of your traveling court, my celestial navigator, lest my fears be confirmed. It is one thing not to be sought; it is another to be glimpsed and not seen. I prefer the illusion that you have sought me but in the wrong places. The day darkens and it rains; only I know why.

I find myself mysteriously on an errand to your side of the camp, pausing outside the window of your cabin at rest period. You are sharing tales with your friends, filled with conquests in a world which you have made up. It is filled with young-old mother-lovers, strolling seductively,

furtively among you. Your imagined perversities charm me. I study your voice, disembodied and secretive, and I too am seduced. I think these stories are the conventions of childhood, Moth, not the fancies, not even the dreams. There is first a prologue, however, if you would allow me to help you perform it.

The third day brings me to despair and I find that I am helpless to discover another who charms me at all. There is a ten-year-old towhead in rifle class named Clement who always wets his pants in the prone position and who, for that amusement, has won my gratitude but not my heart. None charms me, Moth, as you do. My flame flickers.

Standing at rest period on the dock, about to drown myself in the beginners area, I hear a board creak behind me and a figure passes me to sit a distance away. You have alighted and stare at your reflection in the water. My candle sputters and then burns steady but, like candles, it is silent.

“I finished all my lunch.”

“Oh?”

“I looked for you.”

“And you found me.”

“I had to make a decision.”

“Did you make it?”

“Almost.”

“Is it a secret?”

“Sort of. Well, until I make it, it is.”

And then you tell me about the baseball game that will happen this Saturday when the boys from across the lake come over and that you are captain, that your counselor, Jack, is nice but kind of old-fashioned and then you profile your cabin-mates: those who are rich and spoilt, the one who is fat and supposed to be dieting but isn't, the two who are on welfare, the bully, and the littlest one named Derek who wets his bed and whom the bully picks on. You look out for him, you tell me, because he can't help it and it's not fair. There is a boy who is very quiet and reads all the time but who buys pop on the black market from the older boys and there's Kevin, your best friend.

It is a monologue, punctuated by your hopelessly infatuated friend with the proper cues, smirks, judgments and even once a belly laugh which comes from the very depths of his belly.

Catching me after breakfast you announce that you have made your decision and you hope it's the right one. Then without elaboration you are off to delight and amaze your worshippers. So portentous an

announcement! Have you plumbed my intentions so deeply as I imagine?

YOU'RE AT LARGE AGAIN during rest period. You find me on the rifle range. "Hello, Moth," I say, happy to have you near again. You study my face. "Do you want to come with me now?" I ask.

"Where will we go?"

"Where would you like to go?"

"We could go to the pines again."

"Is that what you'd like?"

For an answer you walk that way, leaving me behind. I follow and you run ahead, inviting pursuit. I decide to walk. When I get there you are standing, skipping stones. You are good. I try but fail to match you.

"You could be skipping champion of camp," I say.

You turn and I see that there are tears on your face. You do not try to hide them. I take that as a sign you want me to hug you against me. You have a good cry, responding to my question, that it is nothing, that you are a little homesick and that your Cocker Spaniel named Gilgamesh must miss you.

"You have so many friends here, my Moth," I comfort. "You are surely the most popular boy in middler camp."

"I guess I do... but... well... they're just kids, Pete."

"I see what you mean," I affirm, recalling with sudden inspiration your sultry modesty on our earlier visit to this spot, nodding in the way men do when they stroke their beards. Your lovely feathery head, I have just found, fits nicely into my sternum, giving you something fewer than five feet. Remembering your water weight from that earlier occasion, I estimate it now at eighty or ninety pounds and imagine, by contrast, the Lilliputians in your cabin.

But I do not know what you mean, Moth, and I am on the verge of volunteering myself as playmate, friend, lover, worshiper when you add, "You're my only real friend here, Pete." Knowing well the fickle fortunes of infatuations, I try to take this testimonial with a grain of saltpeter, an inspired demon forces me, against my better judgment, to bury a long and happy kiss in the golden fragrance of your head.

To this outrageous liberty you respond by putting your arms around my waist and pressing your muscular little legs to my right thigh. I discover that although my right leg is momentarily paralyzed my right hand is not, and, devil may care, place it on your rump to discover the state of the muscles there. I was not imagining things. You are indeed in

a state of semi-high torque. Is this it, then?

No. For it is the will of the lake spirits that at that moment a flotilla of canoes should appear among the trees about to break into view twenty feet from shore. The Cumberland Pioneers have returned from Owl Island.

It is the first time we have been interrupted here. The effect of it catches me by surprise. I worry: will it now seem to you as it would to them? For answer you take my hand and we walk back along the path to camp. It is a narrow path, not made for lovers, I think to myself. Finally you are forced to let go and walk ahead of me. But you turn repeatedly to be sure I am still there. When we have gone about half the distance you stop to have a pee.

“You can't let them get you down, Pete.”

“Right, Moth.”

“It's their lake too, I guess. Right?”

“Right, Moth.”

“But it's still our beach.”

“You bet.”

“You know that asshole from Georgia who runs Cumberland?”

“Smits?”

“Yeah. He was out there on the lake.”

“Probably. They were his kids.”

“He calls me butterfly.”

“Want me to punch his lights out?”

“He must of overheard you call me Moth.”

“Want me to stop?”

“Are you kidding? That's the best thing I got this summer. I'm gonna keep that name. Give it up to that turkey? Are you kidding? Boy!”

“What do you want me to do, Moth?”

“Just don't let the bastards get you down, Pete. That's all.”

“OK, Moth.”

And we make our way back in time for the general swim.

IF THERE IS A TIDE in the affairs of men, Moth, it has not washed against my hot and fervent toes. Though they would accompany you across the Steppes of Asia, through snake-infested jungles and parching sands, instead they go in circles beside you. Is discretion the better part of seduction or should we be gathering rosebuds? The very thought of rosebuds reduces me to *delirium tremens*. And so I will instead dedicate

this entry to your mother who on three accounts deserves to be Mother of the Year.

First, and not so much to her credit as to good fortune, she had brought to the manufacture of this twelve-year-old Hyacinthus a gene pool so nearly perfect as to put in jeopardy the future of eugenics. I suppose your father must have had something to do with that as well. But he is apparently not in the picture. You are, my take-it-for-granted Moth, the talk of the camp. I should think you would develop a rash from the number of times in a day your bottom is slapped.

Second, she has seen fit to array you so as to put your virginity inconstant peril. It is difficult to imagine that an old leather suitcase could contain so many treasures. What, I wonder, are the subtleties of design which post-date that classic label on the pocket of a pair of 501s? Certainly when Mr. Levi Strauss marketed his blue trousers to cowboys he did not have in mind the contours of a twelve-year-old. What assembly of entrepreneurial pedophiles decided upon the seat of your pants? Is it seemly that the seam at your seat should be so unsettling? Is it an accident that your buttons should bewilder, provoke and confound the imagination? What sainted designer invented that waist band? Who is the organizer of orange threads, the factotum of fade who has made of such as I a freemasonry of fetishists? What is the Cuisinart or the Polaroid camera next to this? A mere nothing, a technological straw in the wind of civilization!

And your running shorts! Short pants have been for the greater part of human history an abomination. But now, my fortunate skipper of stones, they are an art form and your mother, it would appear, is a connoisseur.

Third, she has shown the remarkable restraint, presumably throughout your nurture, not to slap your hands when they found their way to that place of which convention disapproves. You are the only lad in camp with blue fingertips. Oh to be the railing outside your cabin door! You alone on the baseball team warm up the bat instead of warming up with the bat.

"It's the stripe!" you say as we leave the dining hall. I wrinkle my brows. "My unders," you say, in a voice which I am sure is heard at the outskirts of Quebec or at the very least by the Camp Director whose crewcut is barely five feet away. He approaches and plants his one-sixteenth American Indian hand on your curly pate.

"Candella," he says, "Here is a boy who wants to learn to shoot." I swallow my tongue and several wisdom teeth and look quizzically at you



with what I hope is a convincingly skeptical and disinterested eye. “Antonio, do you know Pete Candella? He's your man for riflery.”

“Hi, Pete!” you say.

“Antonio didn't get into a riflery class, Pete. He tells me he's a pretty good shot. Maybe you could give him a couple of private lessons. We shoot against Wiggamantha Passoquam next week, don't we?”

“Yes, I think we do.”

“Well, if this young man can be taken at his word, he may help us out.”

You stand there throughout this with a gee-mister- could-I-really smile on your face, your index fingers hooked into the front of your Adidas running shorts as your thumbs play a tattoo on the waist band of your underpants.

“I'll check him out, David,” I say as huskily as I can, attempting to convey in those few words the indifference of a mercenary and the annoyance of a taxi driver on a short fare. Dave nods, smacks you smartly on the ass and moves to his next good deed.

“It's the two red lines, isn't it? Jockeys have gray, and Fruit of the Loom is blue. I checked in the cabin.” You snap the elastic. The sound echos across the lake.

“Moth, for God's sake!” I whisper between my teeth.

You look bewildered, but I don't believe for a moment you are.

“What's the matter? Isn't it the stripe?”

“Yes, Sherlock.”

“Who's Sherlock?”

“He is a detective. The world's greatest detective. He specializes in flirtatious little boys who conspire in the ruin of camp counselors.”

“Huh?”

“Why did you tell Dave you wanted to be in riflery?”

“Because I do.”

“You've never shot a BB-gun and you know it.”

“I have too. I shot rats at the dump with Billy Torens. You don't know everything, Pete.”

“I know that that was a stupid-assed thing to do.”

“You don't have to get mad.”

“Why didn't you ask me if you wanted to work at the range?”

“I don't know.”

“That's a dumb answer.”

“Cut it out, Pete. You're not my father.”

“How can you not know?”

“I don't know. It's easy. I didn't think about it. Anyway, if you don't want to teach me I don't care. And I'm not a flirt, and I'm not beautiful and my name is Antonio and I hate you.”

And you walk away gathering your court around you like a robe of state, the 'Hey, Antonios' drowning out the sound of the television news team which now packs up its equipment and heads back to prepare the evening news. I wonder how I should use the few hours of freedom which still remain in my young life.

There's nothing like comfortable routine, they say, to soothe the fevered brow. And isn't it a far far better thing to be at my post when they come for me? “Just a moment, officer. I don't ask for myself but for this child who some day may be asked to defend this great land of ours and who requires only a few more moments in the rudiments of riflery.”

I take my misery out on poor little Clement who I insist must shoot today from a standing position until he can do a perfect target. Dancing and marksmanship do not go hand in hand. It passes the time. When finally the boys hand in their rifles and head for Crafts I have made a decision: mountains and candles have something in common. I am prepared to seek my little Mothamet wherever he may be. What, after all, is a lifetime on Devil's Island compared to the moment upon which I have set my sights? The thought causes the blood to circulate once again in my veins with a predictable consequence.

I place the lock on the door of the rifle shack and turn to find you sitting on a stump, whittling. I murmur a short prayer to Pan.

“What are you making?” I venture.

“Nothing.”

This is an answer which in the course of the day I have come to respect.

“Do you want to take a few shots?”

“I don't care.”

I realize that conversation is not going to get us anywhere at all and so I remove the lock and take out a bright new single shot Remington twenty-two. You study your stick carefully and toss it into the woods. It has not been so changed from its natural state as to provide a clue, except perhaps to the real Sherlock Holmes. “Yes, Watson, as I suspected. The boy came this way. Definitely the same style of whittling as we observed on the back porch of his cabin. He's with that Italian pederast. No doubt about it.”

The teaching of riflery to boys requires a great deal of hands-on

work. Much more than is popularly believed. Shoulders, torso, hips, legs, feet, all must be positioned perfectly. You and I talk, Moth, in the way which we have always talked best. I feel your muscles relax, and my own as well.

After three targets you are cocky. After five, affectionate, after seven you declare that riflery, is hot work and propose a swim. Indeed there is a condensation of nectar on your upper lip and a trickle on your cheek which is not a tear though it inspires in me the same urge to shelter. I resist. The time and place are wrong and I am prepared now to more patiently tend my flame.

How have you prepared yourself for this sojourn? I wonder. You were the peacemaker. You suggested the swim. But in the time between our spat and this pastoral expedition you have changed clothes. Is it for some ceremonial purpose that you wear virgin denim? Or is it that you changed into swim trunks, as is your habit before afternoon swim?, and as is also your habit, topped them with denim? My curiosity gets the best of me. That and the aphrodisiac which Mr. Strauss mixes with his starch.

I stop you to point out there are still staples in your back pocket. You put a hand in to confirm them. I volunteer to remove them and in the process discover the friendly white of Monkey Ward. Jubilant, I break a fingernail on the little wires.

At the beach you take off shoes, socks and shirt and then decide to skip rocks. I manage by sheer determination to beat your record and, through a calculated taunt, incite you to attack.

I turn out to be an easy target. Against all reasonable odds you pin me to the beach. Your style of wrestling might incite a eunuch to orgasm. You lie across my chest, then my face; you kneel triumphant above my head, you scissor my neck with your legs. At the end of all this it is not I alone, my horned Moth, who am in high torque. It is a panting respite in which we lie there, your legs no less intent upon mine for the interlude.

Opportunity knocks only until it has skinned its knuckles, my delicious youth, and it is then simply a matter of civilized hospitality to open the portal. Still it is with trepidation that my hand moves from the small of your back to the seat of your trousers. In your inexperience you have fastened your mouth at the bottom of my rib cage. It is not an unpleasant sensation and allows me to stroke the feathers at the back of your neck. The other hand, feeling now somewhat Victorian, slips unseen past the vigilant Messrs. Levis and Ward and, in the commodius

new denim discovers the rose that is not a rose. I sense that things are happening too fast. Your lovely new jeans are in danger of imminent pollution.

“Wait,” you choke out and rise to your knees. In a trice you remove the encumbrances, though not without a couple of ‘Oh, shits’ and a few catches of breath, and then reapply yourself with unabated ardor to my leg. It is not the most comfortable or satisfactory experience and a whimper inserts itself among the pants. You welcome a hand and in a second arch your back, bite a piece of flesh the size of an orange out of my chest and bespatter my jeans, not your own, with your very hot and foamy batter.

“Oh, boy,” you sigh, “I thought we’d never do that!” Then having lost apparently not a modicum of energy in the exercise, you stand up, kick off your jeans and briefs and run pellmell into the lake. I follow you, though without disrobing. In the lake I do a quick laundry, toss it back onto the beach and swim out to catch you.

We are late getting back to camp. Dinner has started. When queried by Dave you respond brightly, “Pete was teaching me how to shoot.”

Not being at all prepared for another ebb tide in this affair, Moth, while you second-think this venal sin, become ashamed, and hide away in the nature shack with your salamanders, I tell you after dinner that I have to talk with you before lights-out. You nod and take an illegal second ice-cream, asking me at the same time if I really want mine. With your three ice-creams and a few friends in tow, you parade down the steps and disappear towards the salamanders.

When you join me later it is with chocolate ice-cream still on your upper lip. I walk you down the beach a way and make the speech I had prepared.

“What happened today, Moth, was all right. We both enjoyed it and shouldn’t feel guilty. I hope you don’t. But if you do, I want you to say so and not go off and avoid me the way you did the first time you gave me a peek at your treasures.”

“Do you feel guilty, Pete?”

“I certainly do not. It’s the biggest treat I’ve had all summer. I think sex is great.”

“You know, Pete, I’m only a kid. You’ll have to teach me some things.”

“It’s called leading children to sin.”

“You don’t have to worry about that, Pete. Most of us have found it on our own. You think we sit around in the cabins after lights-out telling

ghost stories?"

"Well, I guess it's in for a penny, in for a pound."

"There's one thing I don't like."

"Oh?"

"Talking. I like things just to happen."

"No talking."

"No talking."

"You have chocolate ice-cream on your upper lip."

"I saved it for you, cause you gave me yours."

And now, Moth, I know what it is to have things happen naturally.

YOU ARE PERFORMER, impresario, audience and critic rolled into one, my aerial acrobat. Your staging of this entire campout has been a tour de force. Has any boy so meticulously planned his own deflowering? You are like an anxious bride. Your trousseau is an inspiration. You explain that you have favored denim because it has a sentimental significance and in particular that you are wearing this day a "historical pair". Blue, you have decided, is your best color, "because of my eyes." And so, with a tasteful and restrained tempering with greens and reds, your shorts and jerseys are matched. All of this you explain to me after the tent is set up and you are arranging these treasures in neat piles at the foot of your sleeping bag. I sit there watching your fashion show, listening to your serious chatter, and you produce – voila! – a pair of navy blue ski pajamas with red trim. Emblazoned on the chest is an appropriate illustration to the words PETE'S DRAGON.

We return to the society of the camp. You manage somehow to make it through dinner, a swim and a camp-fire without breaking your neck. There is a ball of Haley's Fire wherever you go. You knock over the stew, fall off the diving rock, manage to sit on an ant hill and stub your toe. Throughout these antics, in high gudgeon, you play an electric guitar, your right hand wandering back and forth between strumming the imaginary strings and adjusting the voltage of your little generator. You are witty, silly, delightful and the hit of the evening. You declare a skinny-dip by moonlight and all the boys follow suit. Stopping by me for the moment a moth alights, and as I sedately supervise your nocturnal creation, you whisper, "...an added attraction brought to you by Moth Enterprises!" and then, cupping your hands around your treasures, you cannon ball into the lake.

Energies cooled, heads towed, everyone stands for a few last minutes around the dying fire. It is an excess of freedom and spontaneity

that makes the mood, and there is something primitively exotic about this circle of pubescence. Is this, too, a part of your ceremony, Moth? Or are you just reassuring me by this pageant that you are, nonpareil, the best piece of ass in camp?

The circle breaks up and off they go, two by two, to their tents. You express in a wistful fit of humanitarian generosity the wish that, “all of them get a little something tonight.” I wouldn't be at all surprised, my memorable Moth, if many of them did. Some had certainly warmed to the idea at your ceremonial fire.

You go off to the tent and your trousseau. I put out the fire, straighten things up, and make a tour of the tents to be sure the mosquito netting keeps the mosquitos out and the boys in. To give you a proper time for your preparations, I walk to the shore and smoke a pipe.

I return to the tent, shine my flashlight into the darkness and find my Moth, all cotton and eyelashes, fast asleep on the sleeping bags you have zipped together, one hand clutching a tiny jar of Vaseline which you have kept secreted for two weeks, and the other firmly encumbered between your legs.

I contrive to get the sleeping bag around rather than under you, wrest the jar of lubricant from your reluctant hand and crawl into the nest beside you. You mumble something about Gilgamesh needing a glow-in-the-dark collar. I kiss your misty hair three or four hundred times, you snuggle your head into my shoulder, wrap both arms around me and whisper, “Good boy, Gilgamesh.”

“First to sleep, first to freshen.” Where did you ever get that one, my little imp of the perverse? You recite it to me beneath the Puckish smile, having awakened me with a feather which I thought was a mosquito and was really a moth. You lean, mischievously, on one elbow and, having aroused me to a sense if not a sensibility, show me that there are games afoot. I reach for the little pest in your pajamas and come up with a handful of lovely soft cotton. There is no way in. Well, there is the waistband. I explore the elastic. You push my hand away, unzip your side of the bag, climb out and stand out of reach. You have them on backwards! You do have a creative imagination. The PJ's might in themselves incite this unabashed fetishist to premature rapture even if you were soft as a pudding. But you are not.

How shallow seem the world's engineering wonders compared to yours, my little Peterbilt! The Brooklyn Bridge, the geodesic dome, the Sears Tower – what are these compared to that miracle of evolution which, defying gravity, indifferent to the encumbrance of clothing,

arches between your young legs, impetuous, impatient to discover a world for which the rest of you is still unready.

“The tent isn't big enough, Moth, for a full-scale struggle.”

You turn away and cross your arms. The fly has of course defined an area on your posterior. There is a little door there.

The Vaseline is where I put it last night. I get out of the encumbrance, trying to protect my enthusiasm and, coming behind you, lick the place where your hair curls over the red neckband of your pajama top. Not wanting to spoil the lovely blue with a nasty grease stain on the first night out, I pull them and they drop at your ankles. A little lubrication here and a little there and you give that little shiver that I love. It's like a shock from a flashlight battery. This will take some positioning, Moth, and so I carry you in my arms back to the sleeping bag, taking the opportunity for a little nibble up front.

Having you down I have you up. Then having you over I see just how accommodating, after all of this ceremony, you are prepared to be.

I DO NOT KNOW, Moth, what “high gudgeon” and “high torque” mean. They are euphonia which turn me on. Letting you read this record of crimes against the natural modesty of childhood has had a number of interesting side effects. It is, for example, very disconcerting to hear my private expressions from your tender lips and awkward to explain precisely their meaning. They do not mean precisely “horny” as you reduced them. “Horny” has lost its power to excite the imagination, as have some of those other one-liners you are so fond of. (Now, let's get two things straight between us!, for example.) I will try to explain the difference.

Boys, Moth, the best of them, are part motorcycle, part electric guitar, part Paddington Bear and three parts blood and guts. These things are housed in a shape which belies all of them, a temple of apparent quiet and calm. It is the discovery of the one in the other that excites such as I to do the excesses we have shared. Put another way, Moth, the perfection of your shape, the opulence of your flaxen locks, the extravagance of your eyelashes and the Mediterranean depth of your eyes have nothing at all to do with the fire-breathing dragon that lives inside and erupts with astonishing regularity in a geyser of liquid marble.

The tension is manifest, Moth, in the most unlikely places. Take, for example, that right hand which so incites me to madness. What is it? A small, well-shaped boy's hand with the fingernails chewed a little, usually stained blue, depending on the newness of your apparel. Now

that hand could play the piano, Moth, or paint a picture. It throws a ball very well. It is very clever. But it is also crazed with lust after your own body. It is when your cheeks are flushed, your legs crossed or wrapped around a railing and you are, as I like to put it, getting into high gudgeon, that you bite your nails. I have only to look at that hand, to see its apparent, but only apparent, serenity, to see into the heart of your sex-craven soul.

Nothing turns me on, my milky boy, more than seeing you turned on. The more the merrier and that is why you sometimes pull great hunks of hair from my head and gnaw ounces of flesh from my poor body in your impatience to satisfy the dragon before his fire is fully up. As I helped you demonstrate the other day, you are, at full tilt, able to hit your own mouth, and that, my little Harley Davidson, is something for Mr. Guinness! It's just as well you don't like the taste. That would be cannibalism, and there are some sins even I don't encourage. Besides, there's really not enough for two.

You are all pepper and paprika, Moth. You sneeze your pleasures. You pop off a quickie, as you call it, standing on the dock with your bathing suit on; but what is the pleasure in it? How much more delightful for me, and I would hope for you too, when satisfaction is delayed and prudent denim prevails over impetuous hand.

It is the striving after and the waiting that makes pleasure sweet. When you are standing at the corner of the lunch table, your lips dry, your eyes wide, riding it on the pretext of reaching to gather the dirty plates, that is high torque! As to the difference between gudgeon and torque, I suppose it depends on the relative humidity of the palms.

Running shorts could be the ruination of boyhood, Moth. And of adulthood. The number one killer of men may be cardiac arrest but the number one cause of cardiac arrest is pepper pot boys like you in patriotic red, white and blue running shorts, sitting on the ground with knees akimbo, chewing on a blade of grass. The crafts counselor collided with one of the kitchen staff today and loosened a tooth because you, innocent as a blue jay, lay on your back dismantling a pine cone. You know full well the uses and misuses of that position. I have only to see you nonchalantly lying there causing such pedestrian collisions to experience the sensation of your heels at the small of my back.

Have you noticed when you sit on the railing outside the dining hall that the senior citizen chairs opposite you fill up almost immediately with counselors intent upon some reading material or other, while the remaining twenty chairs on the porch remain vacant? I have, rightly or



not, a proprietary interest in those underpants and it bothers me to see them hung in public like that. It is a health hazard, Moth. Mine and yours and theirs. There are certain responsibilities which come with leadership and it is time you realized that. I will give you what you call some frinstances.

It is not necessary, during general swim, when you have been lying on the dock with your partner sunning your back, to stand for buddy check. It distracts the water-front director from very important work. He loses count and when he loses count the camp loses boys.

In chapel you should not sit in the front row. Leadership does not necessarily mean visual preeminence. The camp chaplain has some things to say which are important to the souls of those facing imminent debauchery. These things are sometimes difficult to phrase and require a quality of concentration which is difficult enough to achieve while staring at a row of denim laps, but nigh impossible if the hands that should be in those laps do not equal twice the number of the laps themselves.

I know you find sermons boring but it is not your prerogative to shorten them by stratagem. Remember the thumb rule! If you must delve, keep your thumbs in sight. It does not eliminate the distraction but it mitigates the negative impact of mathematics on cosmology. Calculations as to the plausible depth of pockets in blue jeans are apt to disorient even a very good speaker.

Yawning in public is rude and apt to provoke unwanted speculation on its causes. It also upsets adult digestion when it takes on the character of a yogic exercise. If you must yawn at breakfast, wear a jersey that has more than two inches of tuck in it, and jeans that have fewer than two inches of drop. Failing these precautions, yawn quickly and get it over. When you stand in line for a second platter of scrambled eggs, avoid doing prolonged and orchestrated stretching exercises. It is, as in so many things, my not-so-innocent Tantalus, anticipation which breeds social unrest. When you stand there, your hands on your head, the seam of your jersey precisely at the band of your jeans, scrambled eggs cool, cereal gets soggy and stomachs knot in anticipation. A good camp is a healthy camp, Moth. A camp dining room is not a night club.

These lessons look thou character!

I THINK, MY NOCTURNAL will-o-the-wisp, that you have been flying too near the moon. Your wits have turned. What could possess you to... how could you possibly... what in the name of... are you

thinking? I received this letter today from your Mom:

*Dear Mr. Candella,*

*I should call you Pete, as Antonio does so affectionately in his letters. You have been so very, very kind to my dearest boy this summer and so very, very caring. It is more than I expected he would find in the way of affection! Mothers, you know, worry and worry. It has given me such a sense of well-being to know that you had a hand in things. Thank you. Thank you.*

*Now to the matter of the offer which Antonio described in his last letter. You are very sweet to go so far out of your way. I'm sure it will be an inconvenience. But don't look a gift horse in the mouth, they say. You are being awfully kind and I accept the kindness. The weekend of the tenth is going to be hectic. I have a show in New York the following week and still have a couple of pieces to finish up. Saving the drive north will be a godsend.*

*You must stay over at least the night, and certainly longer if your plans allow. I'm so looking forward to meeting you.*

*Fondly,*

*Ragnhild Hansen-Sturm*

*PS. Aren 't the pajamas a kick?*

The catalog of grotesqueries that flash through my mind is material for a black comedy. Did you ask her for PETE'S DRAGON, or did she volunteer? Oh, my God. Don't tell me. I'd rather not know. Good Lord, Moth! We have to get out of this! I can't look your mother in the face! There are some creatures deep in the sea which, if brought to the surface, would explode from the normality of pressure. The world in Truro, my gypsy moth, is full of Boy Scouts, schools, churches, PT As and police departments. Our exotic lifestyle won't fit at all. We'll have to find a way out of this one. But the thought of it I will treasure.

HOW CAN IT BE that you are so persuasive? It can't have anything to do with reason. Why do I ask? I think that in three more days my Moth will have flown and I will drag my empty heart back to the fields of academe and I despair. You have deprived me of my sense

of the possible. I can't imagine you will be gone. Oh infatuate blatherer! And so when you explain that your mother's sexually liberated, that she's really got her stuff together, that you have a terrific water bed, my mind creates preposterous figures. When you create a minimalist argument – I don't have to stay the night; I can have an excuse – you know better. When you argue that I would, in any case, meet your mother if she came to pick you up, you underestimate my capacity for invisibility.

But nothing of all this matters, does it? You toss one bitten fingernail and an eyelash into the scale and I am on my way to Cape Cod.