

Robert Campbell is one of the most gifted American writers of gay and boy-love fiction. In previous short stories he has explored the world of humanoid (or, to be more precise, boy-oid) robots, the effects of fundamentalist preachers on the fantasy life of a 13-year-old boy, sex and love relations across racial fronts, and the problems the son of a gay man has when he sees his father falling in love with a teenage boy. In "Scruples" he examines in the most delightful manner the conscience (or lack thereof) of two intellectually gifted pubertal lovers at a Roman Catholic boarding school. Robert Campbell is preparing a book of fine, and varied, boy-love short stories which The Acolyte Press hopes to publish in the near future.

Scruples

by Robert Campbell

THEY'VE RETURNED to their room directly from soccer practice—football has no place in the liberal (if that's the word) program of St. Sebastian's Roman Catholic Academy for Boys. Apropos of nothing, feckless Lucky asks David, whose impulse always is to take Lucky seriously:

What's the most important thing in the world?

I know. I just can't say it.

So you don't know.

That's crap. Brother Hendy says that and you believe him.

No way.

So I do know.

I don't have to believe a dumbass English teacher to know you don't want to answer.

It isn't any thing, airhead. It hasn't got a name. Can't you think of anything important that hasn't got a name?

No.

Think. Think of something you don't know the name of. What's this? (*David makes a lambda on a pad.*) It's a Greek letter.

I don't know Greek.

Neither do I, but it's something. You know it, even if you don't know its name.

It has a name. You want me to think you know something's the most important thing in the world and that it's something that doesn't have a name at all.

Do all your feelings have names?

Feelings?

Don't get cute with my ass. I thought you were serious.

I was until you started on feelings. What's the name of this one?

Don't do that. Let's quit, or start all over again. What do

you think is the most important thing in the world?

This.

(David sighs.) I suppose it wouldn't matter if I asked why you asked me in the first place?

Whatever it was I wanted you to have it.

Suppose I said sex.

You never do. Why do you still let me be your roommate after all that's happened? Other guys punch me or shove right in so I choke.

They don't love you.

You don't either.

You just don't believe I do.

I know the whole thing by heart. God is love. God is in me. You love God so you love me.

I never said that.

Jimmy Donahue did, just before he reported me to Father McGuire. If I get my ass whipped maybe I'll love God. That's what he said.

I'm not Jimmy Donahue, and if you pulled a knife on me and said, even, suck me, I'd do it and I wouldn't tell anyone.

Wait a minute while I get a knife.

I mean, if you really were going to use it. You knew that.

I thought you were making me a promise. Sucking isn't so disgusting that you can't even let me do it.

Now you're making an intellectual issue. Disgusting is an intellectual distinction, like between turnip greens and spinach.

Which is disgusting?

It was an example. Stop giggling. Turnip greens. Anyway, Jimmy Donahue is an air head and the air in his head is religion. No. It's what he thinks is religion.

He knows.

The most important thing in the world isn't knowing.

Look. I've got eighty dollars. What's the most important thing in the world that I could buy you for eighty dollars?

Where did you get eighty dollars?

Is that a fair question?

No. Forget it.

I gave a guy head for eighty dollars last night. He offered me fifty and I said a hundred.

Oh, no.

Oh, yes.

Did you like it? Was it fun?

It was okay. I wanted to buy you a present, and I didn't have any money. Kids at Donato's do it.

Give head?

Get. What's the difference?

You going to do it again?

You want a present for a hundred and sixty dollars?

(After a pause.) What's a guy who takes money from a whore?

Am I a whore?

I'm asking. Like this was English class.

A pimp.

Right. The nicest present you could give me would be to go find that man. Tell him you liked his meat so much you want to pay him eighty dollars to let you do him again.

That's gross. You should see him.

It was okay once. You could do it twice.

I mean, he's a fat truck driver.

What are you?

A cute kid.

No. Don't you see? You're not cute. You're beautiful.

He said I was cute.

That's truck driver for beautiful. *(He sighs; he's given up. He has another idea.)* Lucky, put your nose against my nose.

Like Esquimos kissing?

No. Look at your eyes in mine.

All I see is yours.

Don't do that!

It was a love kiss, not a sex kiss.

In about one second it would have been a sex kiss. I know

you. Put your next love kiss on my cheek.

How about your ear?

Be serious.

I am serious. You're a Christian, right?

Right.

And the poor in spirit are blessed.

Sure.

As long as I can't suck you I'm poor in spirit. So I'm blessed. If I'm blessed, then you ought to let me suck.

The minute you get your mouth on my cock, you're not poor in spirit and you're not blessed, either.

How about the rich man who gave his clothes to a poor man who was cold?

That's closer.

I mean, sex with me is charity, David.

You got me on that one before. Don't push it, Lucky.

I wish I had a truer nickname. How about this? We take our stuff off. You hold me and kiss my cheek while I jerk off.

I don't know. Even that's a mortal sin.

For you or me?

Both.

Ask Father Ben.

Why him?

He jerked me off in the infirmary.

Lucky!

It wasn't the first time.

With you there never was a first time.

Anyhow, he knows theology. You know that.

I'll ask him.

Let's do it first.

(David nods. They are wearing gym shorts and jocks. He pulls his off and tosses them at the corner where dirty clothes collect. Lucky, nude, still rather sweaty, but drying, lies back on David's chest and pulls David's arms around his waist.)

Just open your hand so I can feel it all over my stomach.

Okay.

I love you, David.

I know.

You're hard.

I know that too.

(Lucky turns and kisses David on the mouth. David's resistance is gone. With it his inhibitions. His mouth and tongue rapidly, passionately, wash Lucky's neck, shoulders, chest—especially the nipples—stomach, balls, thighs, and only, finally, when he feels himself soon to come, Lucky's cock. Lucky comes first, as always; it doesn't take much for his first come on any one day. And David follows: huge spasms after weeks of continence. When David's last drop is out, Lucky repositions himself and kisses David's mouth. It is a love kiss—no tongue—and it lasts a long time.)

(THEY ARE QUIET, half asleep, until David awakes suddenly.) I wish I didn't love you, Lucky. It's so sinful.

I'm glad I love you. Love is good. God is love.

But First Corinthians—

I know. Six-nine. I call it sixty-nine. I know it by heart. It isn't us. We don't abuse ourselves with mankind and we're not effeminate. You're not, anyway.

You're not either. Anyway, the RSV says homosexuals.

I know that! Father Ben says that's a mistranslation.

Of what?

I don't know, but Father Ben says Paul couldn't have imagined that there were homosexuals, since everybody did it. And the RSV isn't a Catholic Bible anyway.

And Father Ben jerks you off, too.

That doesn't mean he's wrong about First Corinthians.

(Lucky's face is so close to David's when he finishes that sentence that he kisses David again.)

Just a love kiss. Don't get me hard.

(Lucky kisses very, very softly.)

Anyway, now I'm going to have to confess this again to Father McGuire.

Confess to Father Ben. He says two Hail Mary's is enough.

What about sucking off a guy for money?

If I tell him it was to buy you a present, maybe he'll let me off easy.

If we both confess to Father Ben, people are going to get suspicious.

Why should you have to do more penance than me? I practically raped you.

I enjoyed it more than you did. I'm more passionate than you are. And I'm older.

Six months. *(Lucky kisses David again, a sex kiss, and David doesn't resist. The previous love kiss got him hard anyway. This time they make love more slowly, David following Lucky's example and taking long, langourous licks into the corners and crannies of Lucky's body, and finally coaxing the sperm from his cock rather than just letting it gush. After, they lie mouth to mouth again awhile before speaking.)*

Oh, boy. I can't say you raped me that time.

No. But I seduced you.

Yes. Sure. While I was naked in bed with you and holding you. Haven't you ever heard of an occasion for sin? I was guilty. I still am. *(He kisses Lucky, a soft, lingering love kiss.)* I just wish I weren't in a state of mortal sin.

You aren't. I'm not either. Father Ben says the whole thing in First Corinthians six, nine is irrelevant anyhow. *(Lucky rushes when David doesn't answer quickly.)* He showed me so I could tell you. Let's see. One, it's just a repetition of Romans one, twenty-seven, and all that is a warning against idolatry. And two, it doesn't apply generally because the Cointhians were a special case.

Did you tell him about me?

They were preaching Lutheranism—justification by faith.

What did you say about me?

I didn't say your name. Anyway, we don't do it.

Don't do what?

We're not like idolaters and we're not Protestants. Paul was just listing stuff Corinthian Christians did that were like the heathen. You know, fucking in the temples, adultery, covetousness. Nothing to do with being friends.

Tertullian said sucking a penis was repulsive. I showed you the book.

And I checked on him. He was a heretic.

The pope says homosexuality is a sin.

Popes come and go, Father Ben says. You know that. So cocksucking is a venial sin, and in your case—

My case? What's special about my case?

Charity, turkey. You didn't want to suck me but you did it for me because of love.

(David's voice rises in this speech to a climax.) I did it because I wanted to. Just as much as you wanted to. More, because I'm closer to sixteen than you are, when the male human hits his sexual peak. And also I didn't suck off some truck driver yesterday.

(Lucky's voice is so soft that David barely hears.) You mad at me?

No. Only don't—

I won't. Not ever again. I mean, if—

What about the eighty dollars?

(Lucky gets up and pulls his wallet off his dresser.) Here. You put it in the poor box.

Why don't you?

I'd use it to buy you cuff links. I know you want some.

I do. I mean I did. I don't now.

Will you put it in for me?

Yes.

And will you confess to Father Ben?

If I do—

We can go on like now. That's the if. No more whoring if you know that sucking me's not a mortal sin.

How about letting you suck me?

There's a difference?

I'll see what Father Ben says.

Now do you know what the most important thing in the world is?

In the world?

This world.

For me, right now?

Yes.

Seeing you happy. And I wish to God I knew why. Come here. *(He strokes Lucky's shoulder and touches his hair. Then he suddenly stops.)* Hey! It's no deal.

What's the matter?

I won't let Father Ben jerk me off. So let's forget it.

That's okay. He won't ask.

He won't? Then how come—

For a kid who makes all "A"s you sure are dumb.

What do you mean?

He didn't ask me. I asked him.

You know something, Lucky? You're crazy.

No. You got it wrong. I like to see Father Ben smile. That's not crazy.

(David stands and looks at Lucky, with a hopeless half smile. Then David takes his towel off the hook.) I'm going to take a shower.

Wait for me. You know what happens when I go to the shower alone.

Okay. But keep your hands off me out there. If I lose my reputation too it's your ass.