



*singu-  
larities*  
book 1

*robert  
campbell*

**“Interesting enough to be banned in Texas!”  
— Gore Vidal**

# **SINGULARITIES**

**Volume One**

*by Robert Campbell*

eBook by the Ghost

Earlier versions of two of the stories in this book have previously appeared elsewhere: “The Pale Black, the World Servant, and the Voice of God“ in *Panthology Four* (1984), and “Rodney“ in *The First Acolyte Reader* (1986).

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# Contents

Author's Preface / 4

RUTH VAN MILLER: Teen Tricks / 6; 24; 41; 74; 89; 107; 115; 127

## SEDUCTIONS:

A Boy of the Island / 11

Evan and Simon / 29

Pale Black, the World Servant, and the Voice of God / 52

## EXPLOITATIONS:

A Real Nice Week / 77

Boccaccio: Fifth Day, Tenth Story / 95

The Failure /111

Rodney /118

# PREFACE

We all began in the One Singularity, an utterly impossible reality, an infinitely dense prison of stuff and light, from which came the Big Bang, some oh, maybe, 20,000,000,000 years ago, give or take a few billion. That was when, in an infinitely tiny moment, the whole universe exploded into existence. Other, lesser, Singularities were predicted, it is written, by Einstein's equations. They are testified to by ripples around distant stars that identify indiscoverable, invisible black holes in space.

And I too am a Singularity.

Or at least I was once, in years past, and you may remember yourself as one too; a Singularity waiting, expectant, for your first Big Bang. We, when young, were all Singularities, wishing to be Pluralities – oh how we longed, didn't we, you and I? For as Plurals (one Singularity plus one Singularity would be enough), and only as Plurals, we could explode out of our passionate dreams.

As in these stories that I have to tell you, one day a Liberator came for you, didn't he? And then you came too (as we say), and since then you have gradually learned that you have your role to play. Your role, like his then, has been as a Liberator, a maker of Plurals. You, having learned freedom, want still, even now, to create a Plurality with some waiting, hopeful Singularity. He may be next door, across the street, or beyond the great ocean. Wherever, with time and fortune, you will find him.

These, my stories, are about Singularities, and you should recognize them. Because all the stories are true. Only the formal dress of fiction has been changed: the names, the places, the sequences, the times, the circumstances, are changed. One, at least, is so changed as to become a futuristic allegory.

But the Singularities underlie all the trappings.

They do so, I think, truthfully. For I've mixed good and bad people, just as we all are. Don't expect all my stories to end well; they don't in your life or in mine. But we mustn't be afraid; we must persevere. Overall, I'm optimistic, and that optimism shows in the fiction because, as we know very well, most real events *do* turn out well.

True, the newspapers are full of horrible arrests and vulgar trials, but for every story that turns out badly, a hundred thousand turn out very well indeed, with no more than a day, a week, a month of heartache after too much happiness.

Yes, I am optimistic, and what is more I think of better days, when preachers, popes, and presidents, courts, congresses, and cops awake to love, and when the riddle of AIDS is solved (no doubt by Dr. Oedipus himself), and when the pendulum of Freedom swings our way. Though it swing again (as it will), it never goes as far back toward cruel bigotry as it began.

Better days are coming.

Perhaps you, heartened by these stories, will help bring the better days nearer. Do, so that the other Singularity, the one that we all are part of, will have its Big Bang of Freedom in our world.

– Robert Campbell

# Teen Tricks

by Ruth van Miller

*The following selections regarding teenage boys' problems and the problems teenage boys create are from the columns of Nite-Rider Newservice syndicated columnist Ruth Van Miller, © 1985, 1986, 1987 by Nite-Rider and van Miller. Permission to reproduce these and subsequent columns for the instruction of young people may be secured through your local Nite-Rider newspaper, or from the present editor. The editor also will refer letters from readers to Ruth van Miller from readers who not have access to a Nite-Rider newspaper. Readers may write care of this journal.*

– Robert Campbell, editor

Dear Ruth Van Miller,

My brother Don and I are in love with the same boy. His name is Jim. Jim says he won't marry me because he has too much fun with Don. I think Don ought to give Jim up because I'm pregnant. Besides, I'm sixteen, and Don is only thirteen, so the oldest ought to have first pick, right? Jim is twenty-two and he has a good job as an auto mechanic. Don says I'm a selfish bitch for wanting to take Jim away from him. Don't say I should tell my parents because Dad thinks his little Donny can't do anything wrong. I'll bet that if I tell people around town what Jim has been doing with my brother, then for sure he'll get fired. I don't want him to get fired. Sign me

– DESPERATE IN TYLER, TEXAS

Dear Desp,

Are you crazy or something? You just tell anybody in Tyler, Texas, what's going on with Don and Jim, and Jim's going to go to jail or he'll get run out of town. Do you want that? Where will that leave you?

You need to get together with Jim and Don. Tell them that you're not a selfish bitch (you don't sound like one to me). Say that you're willing to make a deal. Jim will marry you, and then you and Donny can both live with Jim, or Jim can move in with you and your family (which it sounds like he's more or less done already). When you're pregnant and nursing your baby, you won't want to have sex with Jim anyway. Jim will have little Donny to play with and Donny will be happy with Jim. And you will have your baby!

After a couple of years, Jim will be happy with the baby too (maybe it will be a boy!), and he'll want you to have another. About the same time, chances are your brother will start getting interested in girls. It will all work out just fine.

If there are any problems, ask your father to buy a shotgun. Then he can convince Jim that marrying you is a good idea. And don't try to split up Jim and Don; just let good old Mother Nature take her course!

Dear Ruth Van Miller,

I'm a fifty-year-old man, and I haven't gotten married because I took care of my mother until she died, and besides I never wanted to and that's just fine because ladies don't bother me and I don't bother them. All my trouble is with the boy who delivers the newspapers. His name is Kevin. The first time he came around to collect, I tried to be nice to him and gave him a coke. Now he comes around almost every evening after his route and wants a coke. And I give him a sandwich with it a lot of times because he lives with foster parents and they don't feed him right, in my personal estimation. I don't mind any of that, the trouble I go to I mean, but, oh, my! Summer's started and it's hot weather and sometimes all he's wearing is jeans cut very short. Though I've asked him to, Kevin just won't wear undershorts and the way he sits it's so terrible to see I can't tell you what because you couldn't print it anyway, but oh! It's enough to drive you crazy. Now, I wasn't going to write you about this, though I thought about it, until yesterday. Yesterday he opened the zipper on his shorts and hugged me and told me I'm "cute." He's very muscular, and even though he's only fourteen he's bigger than I am. He says that if I don't give him "head" soon, he'll "make" me. After he left, I rushed to the pastor of my church and asked him what Kevin meant and do you know what he said! He said to stop subscribing to the paper and to keep my door locked and don't let him in! I can't do that because it's the only paper in town and besides it makes me so happy when Kevin comes in for a coke. If he doesn't come today, I'll feel real bad. What shall I do?

P.S. Your column runs in the paper so I can't cancel my subscription until you answer.

– NEEDING HELP IN A HURRY

Dear Hurry,

You belong to the wrong church. Never, never discuss this problem with that pastor again.

Now, to the problem. Why don't you find out what Kevin wants? You don't even know what "head" is yet. Ask him to show you what to do, and then do it. To get things started, try taking your own clothes off. It may give you an idea.

Your pastor did have one good suggestion: lock the door – but do it after Kevin comes in, not before. Write again to let me know what comes out.

Dear Ruth Van Miller,

I have just found out that when I go out of town on business, my son has been sleeping with my husband Tom, who is Johnny's stepfather. I travel so much, that my husband is sleeping with Johnny more than he does with me. (He's awfully good with me when I'm home, I mean real good, so that's not a problem.) I know that Tom needs someone to love while I'm away so much, but I worry that this may not be good for Johnny, who had some very bad experiences with his real father, who's an alcoholic, so I don't want him to have more bad experiences. There's been a lot in the papers about sexual abuse of children by their stepfathers. Johnny was very depressed about my divorce, but now he's doing well in school. He's sixteen and on the basketball team. Tom is the team's sponsor and takes a real interest in all the boys.

– WORRIED IN DENVER

Dear W.I.D.,

There are a lot of questions your letter doesn't answer. For one, would Johnny be on the basketball team if Tom wasn't the sponsor? If the answer is no, then I'd say that Tom has turned



Johnny into a sixteen- year-old whore, and you should be concerned. Ask the coach. If Johnny really is a good basketball player, then the next question is, whose idea was it that they should sleep together? If it was Johnny's idea, or it just “happened” (and I'll bet that's more or less it), and if his grades in school don't suffer, put your mind at rest. Johnny's okay, and if Tom's comfortable with the three-way arrangement, you should be too.

Make sure that Johnny doesn't take Tom to any school dances as his date. That will cause gossip.

Dear Ruth Van Miller,

My son is a filthy, low-down, disgusting queer. He says he's “gay,” but I know what that means and he can't fool me, even when he plays dumb and says that he's only thirteen and doesn't know what I'm talking about. I had lots of experience with queers when I was in high school before I got married, and I know the filthy, low-down, disgusting things they do, like I told him, even though he says he wouldn't do all those things, just some of them. I want to throw him out of the house because I don't think a decent Christian family ought to have a person like that in it. My wife says that he's only thirteen, just like he says (and I guess it's true but what's the difference?), only she claims he'll outgrow it. Well, I think she's wrong, because I went to a queer I used to know a long time ago, and he did the same disgusting things to me, just like before, and said he really liked it and was glad I stopped by, and he wants me to visit him as often as I can, which I'm just going to do to show him how much he disgusts me and how low it is to do the things he does. Now to me, that proves queers don't change. Also my son has two little brothers and won't he make them queer too? So my wife says ask you. Will he outgrow it? Will he turn his brothers queer?

– DISGUSTED

Dear Disgust,

Of course he'll outgrow it. Give him ten years and if he hasn't outgrown it, write me another letter. And don't worry about your other sons. Just tell them that their brother talks too much.

Dear Ruth Van Miller,

For a long time my uncle and me have been best buddies. We go hiking and camping and boating and fishing just about every chance we get. That's all right. That's not what I'm writing about. I told two friends of mine about how my uncle does things, you know, that make me feel real good (or maybe you don't know, but you better guess because I can't write about it, not to you anyway because you're a lady, aren't you?) Well, maybe I should tell you. First he takes my shirt off, real slow, kind of rubbing me, like a massage, you know? And then he unbuckles my belt so he can get his hand into my pants so he can feel me get stiff, if I'm not already, like I usually am, and then he pulls my pants clear off and starts – have you got the idea? Well you better have, anyway, because one of my friends said my uncle is a pervert and I should tell my father. The other friend said my uncle's not a pervert but he's a gay and also he wants to meet my uncle and go on trips with us.

I don't know what to do. If I tell my father he might get mad. I don't know why, but we don't talk about that kind of stuff, and I don't think he likes it. And, oh yeah! I know I'd get mad if my uncle messed around with my friend the way he does with me, and I think that's what my friend wants. Please help me.

– ALL CONFUSED UP



Dear Up,

Who's your best buddy? Your uncle, or those two so-called friends? Ask your uncle if he wants you to tell your father. After all, he's got just as much to say about it as you do. Leave it up to him.

About your friend who wants to meet your uncle, don't let him.

Don't tell your uncle about him, either.

Dear Ruth Van Miller,

How come you run so many letters about sex, sex, sex? I had sex with with a hoor and it stank. I'd rather bowl.

– BETTER OFF BOWLING

Dear B.O.B.,

How old are you?

# A Boy of the Island

Once upon a time, not very long ago, in fact, a boy lived on an island at the edge of the Caribbean Sea. His name was Carlos. Long before he was born, the island was inhabited by Indians who lived there happily, so far as anyone knows. For one reason, as well as another, they all disappeared. Meanwhile, people from Spain came to the island, and also people from Africa. By the time the story of Carlos begins, the people of the island were mostly darker than the Spaniards and lighter than the Africans, and most of them spoke Spanish. Why they looked and talked that way is a mystery understood only by priests and doctors. Most of the people, including Carlos, did not care.

Another mystery, unresolved by priests or doctors, is that the men of the island, from the very first moment they were able to do such a thing, enjoyed sexual intercourse with other men almost as much as, and sometimes more than, with women. Strangers, foreign, light skinned men (and women) who liked sexual intercourse with men who had dark, but not very dark, skin, came to this island in large numbers. Because the island was not very prosperous, it became a custom for the men of this island sometimes to accept gifts when they had enjoyed sexual intercourse with these visitors, most of whom came from a land that was not an island but was very prosperous.

One day on the island, the boy Carlos decided to run away from home. He was not the sort of boy who would run away from home. Not at all. Nor did he look like the sort of boy who would run away from home. Such boys normally have bad complexions, surly lips, and hostile, deceptive smiles. Often they even smoke cigarettes and use marijuana. Carlos, from early childhood, had been a cheerful child, with good teeth that gave him a winning appearance, and high cheek bones, hinting that not all the Indians who once lived on the island vanished without descendants (regardless of what the keepers of the mystery say). His eyes were brown and lustrous, and his hair a compromise between his mama's, which was rather kinky, and his father's, which was straight: Carlos's hair curled in loose ringlets, as you might expect the hair of an angel, framing a face that, because he was a boy, one must never call pretty, though, in truth, it was.

Although only thirteen years old, Carlos was very strong. His cruel father made Carlos work in a brick yard, carrying bricks and bags of earth and other materials that were heavy for such a young boy. But he did his work willingly, and after the long hours he would join the other boys of his neighborhood in games of football and baseball, depending on the season of the year. This had been Carlos's life – hard work, play, and no school – since his mother had died over a year before this story begins. His good mother, loving and frail, had demanded that he be allowed to go to school, and on her deathbed got from her husband, Carlos's father, a solemn oath that he would make the boy's way easy through the high school. Carlos was happy when he heard his father's oath, but he did not protest when his father broke it. He knew by then that the oath had been made merely to allow his mother to die in peace.

Carlos's father was a worker in the brickyard. He collected the money that Carlos earned. He used this money to buy beer and prostitutes. Each evening Carlos's father would come home drunk. Each evening he would recall bad things that Carlos had done weeks or months before, and would beat him. Sometimes he beat him because Carlos had failed to do anything wrong recently, thus proving the boy was unmanly. If Carlos then did some little fault, his father would beat him all the more severely, with great pleasure. Indeed, in the past month, the beatings had become so severe that the neighbors complained that they were being awakened in the night. Carlos's father told the boy that he would beat him severely if he continued to disturb the neighbors.

Carlos decided that he would go away. He was not stupid.

One Friday night, after his father had beaten him and gone, satisfied, to sleep, Carlos stole from his father's pockets what was left of the pay for the week past. He had dressed in his work clothes, tattered denim shorts and a loose sleeveless sweatshirt, and put his few better possessions into a box which he had tied with string. He now carried the box out of the house, and walked with it to the edge of the town. There he waited sleeplessly. He waited for the first bus to the capital city. He feared that if he missed that first bus his father might awaken, find his money gone, and search for the thief, a possibility that terrified even so naturally happy a child as Carlos.

At the moment that Carlos was stealing the money, he heard the roar of a great jet airplane over his town. He paid little attention because, although the capital city and its airport were many miles distant, it was not unusual for such planes to pass over, on their way to the city.

He could not then know that a fateful passenger was on the airplane. The passenger, whose name was Bill, was from the prosperous land. Soon the airplane landed, and Bill got off of it, collected his suitcase in the baggage claim area, and took a taxi to a hotel. The hotel was situated by a fine beach, and Bill had chosen it for that reason. A half hour after moving into his hotel room, Bill took a short walk along the promenade that lined the beach. To his delight, he encountered a very nice young man of perhaps sixteen years, named Rafael, who had been standing, waiting for friends, he said, by a streetlight. Bill, suggesting in his rather poor Spanish that perhaps Rafael's friends might have changed their plans, invited him to visit the hotel room, which, he said truthfully, was large and pleasant, with a view over the sea. Thus it happened that while poor Carlos was waiting sleeplessly for the bus to the capital city, Rafael was having a pleasant and manly experience of sexual intercourse. Bill, too, was having a pleasant (if less manly) experience, but when he asked Rafael if he would allow Bill the same pleasure that Rafael had enjoyed, Rafael declined, saying firmly that he had never done such a thing (which was true) and that he never would do such a thing (which was not true, but that is beyond the telling of this story).

Later, while the bus to the capital with Carlos safely on board was well underway, Rafael enjoyed another experience of sexual intercourse with Bill. Bill felt very glad that he had come to the island, and that he had worked hard on learning a little Spanish, because he took pleasure in Rafael's pleasure. Rafael too was glad that Bill had come. And he was especially glad after Bill gave him a nice present of money and a tender kiss. It was essential, Rafael said, that he go home and not stay for breakfast, because, he said, he would be missed at home, even though it was Saturday and he had no school. His parents were, he said, overly strict, but what could he do? He did promise to meet Bill again, at the same place they had first met, if his father allowed him to go out. He feared, he said, that his tyrant father might order that, since he had been out all the night against his father's wishes, Rafael must not go out again. Such were the horrors of being the victim of a cruel parent. Bill did not understand everything Rafael said, but understood this much: he might, or might not, see Rafael again. So Rafael went home, and Bill ate his breakfast alone.

Carlos arrived in the capital city some time after Rafael had gone home and Bill had eaten breakfast. Of the city, Carlos remembered some of the things he had learned in school. He remembered also most of the things that older boys and young men had told him about the city. These latter things he remembered with excitement and anticipation. One thing he learned in school was of the beautiful and luxurious hotels near the beach. He wanted very much to see such a sight and spend his stolen money and live like the mayor of his town in such a hotel. As he was a sensible boy of thirteen years, Carlos asked a stranger at the bus station where the hotels along the beach were. The stranger said kindly, "Come, I'll show you:" and he led Carlos into a small alley, hit him in the stomach with his fist, and took his money and the box tied with string.

Bill had no similar problem. He was, at that moment, lying comfortably on the beach, reading a book.

He was doing what he could to make his pale skin dark like the skin of the people of the island, this color being fashionable in the prosperous land. Because Bill had fair skin, blue eyes and blond hair, he would not be very successful. However, it did not matter much. Bill was a man of moderate habits and athletic disposition, so that on the beach he was pleasant to look at. Passers-by, both male and female, noticed him, and some even called attention to themselves. But Bill was serene, remembering Rafael, and hoping for another evening with that fine young man, so he did not respond to the passers-by any more than mere politeness required.

Carlos, meanwhile, was hit several more times by the stranger who, though pursued, would not give back the money and the box. Carlos was not the sort of boy who would never resist a thief, but at last he let the man go away with the money and the box. Then Carlos sat down and cried in the alley. Now he could not live in a hotel by the beach like the mayor. Now he had no clothes to wear in the capital city, except the tattered denim shorts and the poor sweatshirt that had no arms and hung limply on him. After that he cried some more because he was hungry. And he cried too because of the pain in his body where the man had hit him. However, he was wise enough, though inexperienced, to know that crying did little good, so he got up and he began walking, not knowing where to go or what to do.

The capital city was big and frightening for Carlos now. However, as he walked he forgot his hunger and his pain, and after a while his fear eased as well. Eventually he came in sight of the sea. It was very different from the sea near his home, which he had sometimes visited by bus, to swim with his friends. This sea seemed much greater than it had been near his home, and instead of being lined with sea pines, the beach in the capital city was lined with streets and shops and, yes, hotels.

The time was early afternoon for them both, Carlos and Bill, and Bill, knowing the danger of too long exposure to the sun (though he used the proper protective lotions), had left the beach, and he entered a cinema to watch a film. The film was a talking film which he had seen before, except that now the actors no longer spoke in English but spoke in Spanish instead. Bill determined that he would listen very carefully. He hoped that such listening would help him understand the things that Rafael said to him.

Perhaps it would have, but he would never know. At the same time Carlos was very hungry. By a curious coincidence, Carlos happened to stop, to look at the busy traffic and at the sea, at the very spot, the exact place where Rafael had been standing when he met Bill. Carlos stood there for a moment or two. He had reached the sea. Where now could he go? What now could he do? How was he to eat?

How could he avoid seeing any person from his town who might report his presence to his father? He did not like to steal. He regretted stealing from his father, although a friend might well say that Carlos merely stole back money that his father had stolen from him. Stealing from strangers in the capital city might be very dangerous as well as immoral, yet, Carlos thought, as his hunger grew, what choice did he have?

As he was so reluctantly resolving to steal if he must, a rather large stranger spoke to him. After his experience at the bus station, Carlos might have learned to distrust strangers and, indeed, if Carlos had his father's money still, and his own box, he might have been more cautious. But as he had nothing to steal, he let himself be what he was by nature, a friendly, happy boy – though hungry. He had one problem, however. He could not understand what the man was saying. The stranger was wearing a bright shirt, short pants, and sandals. The skin on his legs was rather white, but the skin of his face was quite red. The man continued to speak, and, although Carlos listened carefully, as a good boy should to his elder, the man simply did not say anything that Carlos understood.

Then the stranger drew out his billfold and showed Carlos some money. It is likely he did so because the clothes that Carlos wore showed that he was poor. But it was also true, and Carlos in his innocence could not know this, that the tattered denim shorts showed Carlos's fine legs in all their smooth

muscularity, and the old sleeveless sweatshirt showed his fine round young arms in their strength, and the loose hang of the shirt showed the articulation of Carlos's shoulder and chest muscles, and if one looked from the proper angle, and the stranger could do so, he could see a touch of a small boy's nipple on the right side of the muscular chest, an exciting thing to catch a glimpse of when it is all but entirely concealed.

Seeing the money, Carlos had an excellent idea. He took the man's hand – not the hand holding the money – and drew him to a shop window in which an item of food could be seen. The stranger laughed, went into the store, bought the food, and presented it to Carlos. Carlos ate it quickly. The man, seeing that, laughed again, and returned to the store for another item of food. Carlos ate that quickly also. He smiled in appreciation and thanked the stranger politely in Spanish.

The stranger signaled to a taxi, which stopped. Only the driver was inside. The man opened the door and indicated that Carlos should get in, which the boy did, the stranger coming in after him. As they rode along, the driver did not, as taxi drivers in the country did, stop for more passengers. Carlos found that strange, and extravagant. In the privacy of the back seat, the stranger familiarly placed his hand on Carlos's leg and then glided his hand higher. This excited Carlos very much, for Roberto Asunta had told him that just such a thing had happened to him in the capital city, but until that moment Carlos had not expected such a thing. Roberto had told him what he must do in such a situation, and Carlos hoped that he remembered correctly. What he did was something that he felt could do no harm, even if it might not be exactly what Roberto Asunta had advised: he spread wide his knees and smiled happily at the stranger.

And indeed it seemed to Carlos that he had chosen the right thing to do because the stranger pressed his hand on Carlos's stiff penis through the cloth of his shorts, and, Carlos saw, the stranger too smiled happily.

He withdrew his hand as the taxi arrived at a hotel. Before getting out of the taxi Carlos pushed his stiff penis aside, encouraging it to lose some of its stiffness, so as not to be embarrassed among the many people. When the taxi had been paid, the stranger – who was less a stranger now, because he had put his hand on Carlos's penis, had he not? – led Carlos into the hotel and to an elevator, which was not an entirely new experience for Carlos because a building in his town had an elevator and Carlos had gone up and down in it. This elevator was all mirrors, however, and looking at himself and the red-faced man, Carlos thought that, though it was all very strange, it was at the same time an exciting adventure. Being only a boy, he did not know that the reason he could now enjoy an adventure was that he was no longer so hungry. In the hotel room, the man quickly removed all of his own clothes and picked at Carlos's so that Carlos understood he was to remove his clothes as well. In doing so, however, he remembered something else that Roberto Asunta had said, and that his friends Juan, Jesus, Enrico, and others had all told him, and he resolved that he would not let the man roll him over onto his stomach – which, as had been predicted by Roberto and his friends, the man did try to do. Carlos was a little afraid, because the man was indeed large, but the man only laughed, and letting Carlos remain on his back, began to lick various places on Carlos's body, causing the boy to feel greatly tickled and causing him to laugh, until, to his great surprise (though he had been warned too of this) the man placed his mouth directly onto Carlos's penis and gave to it a fine feeling, quite unlike any that Carlos had felt before, leading him to an eruptive climax, of more pleasure than Carlos might have, an hour before, imagined. Carlos, sleepy and oblivious after the thrill, hardly noticed the mouth still on his penis, the jiggling of the bed, the gasp and sigh of the man – but he did notice being pushed, being forced to get off the bed, into his clothes, and out of the door. But there he was, going down alone in the elevator. But he was not entirely alone, because in pushing him out, the man had put some money into his pockets, so, when he counted it, he found that he was accompanied by more than as much money as half of what he had stolen from his father. Let the man push, thought Carlos, though



in truth he was offended.

Carlos was now hungry again, and he ate quite a lot of food. Afterwards he tucked his money inside his shorts and, finding a place to do so in a park, he lay down and slept. By coincidence, Bill too was lying down, in the expectation that the late afternoon sun would be good for his skin, which of course it was not. Rather than sleep, however, Bill got up, dressed, and went to dinner, while Carlos slept until well after darkness had come. He did not know that, had he slept a little longer, or had he not looked so poor, he surely would have been the object of a thief's interest. But smart thieves do not ordinarily find money on children who sleep in parks, so they neglected him, looking for better prey. He got up and found that he was hungry again. He got some more food. Then, pleased and satisfied, he walked down the avenue that the taxi had taken him up, and returned to the place where he had met the large stranger. It was, to him, like a talisman. Here, his luck had changed.

As Carlos approached, Bill was in conversation with Rafael. Rafael was saying that he was very sorry but his father was indeed, as he feared, angry with him. He asked if he might borrow some money until the next night, which was Sunday, when surely his father would be no longer angry. Bill said yes in Spanish, gave Rafael some money, and Rafael went away. In speaking to Rafael, Bill had been careful to conceal his disappointment, but as the youth walked away Bill watched him go, down the busy street, until he turned a corner and was out of sight.

Bill looked at his feet rather than at the world around him. His disappointment was very keen, worse than he thought it would be. He hadn't really expected Rafael to come at all, so when he saw the tall, slender youth again, clad in jeans and a singlet that showed his wiry brown flesh, he had been both surprised and delighted. Then – Well, Bill knew better than to regret too much, so gathered himself to walk away. He looked up, preparatory to going back to the hotel. And that was the moment he saw Carlos.

When he began to walk and simultaneously saw Carlos, he could not immediately break stride; he stumbled, his feet disobedient, confused. The boy was looking at him, wide eyed, expectant. Bill didn't know that the look was occasioned merely because he was standing at a spot that had for Carlos an almost mystic significance. All Bill could see was a boy who seemed interested in him. The boy's face was not fully lit, yet dimly Bill seemed to recognize the black curls – uncombed now, it was true, but did that matter? – the lustrous eyes, the high cheekbones. And then there was no mistaking for in response to Bill's intense stare, the boy smiled, and Bill knew that smile the moment he saw it. He spoke aloud the only name he had, then, for Carlos: "The Boy of my Dreams," he said, and he could not restrain his hand that began to reach out to test the tangibility of the boy, the boy whose evanescent reality he had never doubted, but whose actuality was beyond belief. He held the hand back, but helpless he said it again, "The boy of my dreams," and corrected himself, "the Boy in my dream" but he could not remember what night he had dreamed this boy, who, not seeming to understand the words, was only half smiling, half puzzled. For Carlos wondered why the very fair man seemed to speak only to himself, when he seemed to see nothing except Carlos.

"What is happening?" Bill said in Spanish, thinking he should somehow discover if his imagination was beyond control or reality had intruded in an exciting, miraculous way. And Carlos had been advised what to say in response to this greeting by such a man from the prosperous land. It was, in Spanish, "I am." And he liked saying that so much that he laughed aloud, for he liked this stranger already, liked him far more than the larger man, and was ready for him to take him into a taxi, in which he would arouse his penis, and then lead him into a hotel, and give him pleasure and then give him money, so that he would have even more than he stole from his father, and maybe then he himself could, after all, stay in a hotel, like the mayor.

But that did not happen. The man's hand, which had started out toward him once before, now reached and held the boy's shoulder, drew him to the man a little, and turned him toward the beach. The moon was shining and the sand gleamed and the sea was white and black. In Spanish Bill asked Carlos his name and many other things as they walked. Carlos answered him both truthfully and evasively because, who can tell? The man might return him to his father. And the man asked him questions about the city, and these made Carlos uncomfortable because he knew no answers, but he did not dare to show such ignorance so he made up answers. At last the man said, as if he were a conjurer, "You ran away from your father, and everything you've got to sell is in those dirty shorts. And you don't even know you're beautiful." But Bill said these things in English, and Carlos did not understand them at all.

"Do you sleep in the park?" Bill asked in Spanish. Carlos was not sure what to say. He had slept in the park for a few hours, but the verb Bill used seemed to ask if he slept there always. But where would he sleep? With no good answer that might do for the longer term, the reality seemed to be "yes," so he said that. "You shall not sleep in the park tonight," the man said. "You will sleep in the hotel." Bill hesitated, then recklessly went on, "Tonight, and for as many nights as you wish."

"Like the mayor," Carlos said, surprised.

Not understanding, but guessing the right answer, Bill said, "Like the mayor."

And so it was that Carlos spent the whole night, just as the mayor might have done, in the hotel by the beach. And it may well be that his room was more splendid than the mayor's. Certainly the mayor could not have been better entertained. Bill did not even give Carlos the momentary unease of asking him to roll over onto his stomach. Instead, he only removed the boy's clothes before he removed his own, touched him everywhere, and kissed him, and with his mouth and his tongue he gave Carlos much wonderful experience before making him so excited that his whole body trembled. Then Bill produced in him the most glorious feeling he had ever felt, so much more than the large stranger had produced, unexpected and amazing as that was; it was much more than Carlos, alone, or with his friends, had ever known or had cause to expect. He did not know the cause of this feeling. Perhaps it was the hotel; perhaps being equal with the mayor, perhaps it was – but he could not have said; he did not have the words.

In the morning a courteous waiter brought a great deal of food, some of it strange – so many eggs – and what were the thin, sweet bread-like things? He served Carlos just as if he were the mayor. This was true although Carlos was wearing nothing but a beach robe much too big for him. Later he and Bill went to a large store, and Bill bought Carlos more clothes in one hour than Carlos remembered owning in all his life. In the oncoming days, they swam in the sea, built a castle in the sand, lay on the beach, read together, attended a cinema, saw the city, and enjoyed sexual intercourse night and morning. Days passed in this happy routine, and Carlos began to feel a love for Bill, who did not beat him and steal his money, and did not push him away when sexual intercourse was done. Indeed, Carlos felt happy as well, happy in the way that he had felt before his mother died, and when he went to school every day, and when he was not sure that his father would beat him every night.

Then the terrible thing happened.

In some part it was Carlos's own fault. He forgot. He knew that he must never roll over onto his stomach for a man's use. In truth, he had not rolled over for that purpose. He only rolled over because he was relaxed and happy after Bill had given him much pleasure. It was then that Bill attempted to do the thing that Roberto Asunta, as well as Juan, Jesus, Enrico, and others had warned him that the treacherous men from the prosperous land, as well as many bad men of the island, would try to do to him. It was a thing that Juan himself had tried to do to Carlos and thereby had shown his badness.

Carlos was greatly offended and angry. He got out of the bed and accused Bill of wishing to make Carlos like a woman, just as Bill himself was like a woman. Bill tried with many words, as many as he



knew, to assure Carlos that he liked Carlos just as he was and did not wish him different. Then why, Carlos demanded, had Bill done such a thing? Only Juan had ever tried such a thing with Carlos, and Juan was a bad boy who smoked much marijuana.

Bill answered. He said, in truth, he wanted to take Carlos back with him to the prosperous land. If he did not take Carlos, then he would have to leave him, which he did not want to do. Yet it made him sad that Carlos would not allow him that special enjoyment which, he said, would not make Carlos into a woman or even a man who was like a woman.

Carlos of course did not believe him, and he would not return to the bed but slept in a large chair.

He dreamed that Bill had taken him back to his town and given him back to his father and held him while his father beat him with a stick. He was crying and calling out in pain when he realized that Bill was indeed holding him but Carlos's father was nowhere near, and Bill was kissing him gently and caressing him. Carlos seized Bill tightly and could not stop crying although he felt no pain. He did not tell Bill his dream but he allowed Bill to carry him to the bed and he lay closely held in Bill's arms until he fell asleep again. On the next day he recalled the dream with horror and dread, and he could not forget what Bill had told him, that he would go away. It was true perhaps, if unlikely, that he would return Carlos to his father to be beaten, but fear of his father was not alone a cause for such unhappiness as Carlos felt.

It was Bill's custom to leave him for a few hours in the morning to attend to what he called "business." Carlos was learning some English words and he was teaching Bill words in Spanish and correcting him as he read from books. Usually Carlos was content. He stayed in the hotel room and read in the books that he had asked Bill to buy for him, books that the seller of books in the bookstore said were books that a boy such as Carlos would be reading if he were in school. But this day Carlos did not stay at the hotel. No. Carlos went into the city itself, half fearful and half compelled.

He asked of strangers (whom he was careful not to speak with except in the open avenue) the way to a street he knew by name as the street where people from his town were said often to live, and in time he found the very street. On the street he asked for Isidore Santos, who was his mother's cousin. Isidore Santos worked at a shop a long distance away, but with careful directions in mind, Carlos chose to go and find him and not wait on the street where his father's friends might see him. In fact one man who knew him and knew his father did see him, but far from carrying the news to Carlos's father he merely thought that the boy must be either lucky or wise, to have escaped his father's well-known cruelty and to be so finely dressed besides.

At the shop, Carlos saw Isidore Santos, who told him to wait outside until Santos could take time for lunch and rest. Now Carlos knew that Bill would expect to see him back at the hotel in time for lunch. So Carlos feared that Bill would be angry with him. Nevertheless Carlos waited. It was two hours that he had to wait. Then Isidore Santos, a dark man of fifty with wiry hair and a wiry black beard, and a grim look, left the shop and walked with Carlos to a restaurant where poor people eat food. Carlos told Isidore Santos everything, leaving nothing out, even showing the money in his pocket, which was enough to pay for the food many times over, and was, Isidore Santos noted with thanks, enough to allow Carlos's mother's cousin to have beer with his meal.

Isidore Santos, encouraged by Carlos, got rum for his coffee too, and he told Carlos a true story of his sister's husband's brother's son. It began fifteen years before, when Alberto, the son of Isidore Santos's sister's husband's brother, met just such a man as William. Now Alberto in truth went with just such a man as William to the prosperous land. And there the man sent Alberto to school. Later he sent Alberto to a great university. Often he brought Alberto to visit his home and family. One day Alberto confessed to him, Isidore Santos, that the man, just such a man as William, used Alberto like a woman, or like a man

who was like a woman. Sometime later, after completing the university, Alberto married Consuela Maldonado, niece of the provincial magistrate. Already he had two sons and a daughter. Indeed, Isidore Santos said to Carlos, it is altogether bad to let a man, even just such a man as William, to use Carlos in such a way. Also it is not altogether bad. To be used like a man who is like a woman is not to become a man who is like a woman. Alberto did not.

Isidore Santos paused, deep in thought. Carlos bought him another glass of rum to sweeten his coffee. Isidore Santos sipped the rich coffee slowly. Then he said that when he himself was only a boy like Carlos, his mother's brother had used Isidore Santos in just such a way, and was not he, Isidore Santos, a man with a wife, a concubine, and six children? Such a story, the part Isidore Santos had told of himself and his mother's brother, such a story only weeks before would have caused Carlos to feel deep shame for his mother's cousin, so to disgrace himself. But today it only made Carlos very thoughtful. At last he asked Isidore Santos what he, Carlos's mother's cousin, the one man in the capital city Carlos could trust, advised Carlos to do.

"I do not answer you," Santos said. "A man does not answer such a question. I will nevertheless tell you this. It is not surprising that you feel love for this William who is like a woman. I have myself felt such love for Pepita of whom you know in our town, and I lived with him as his husband for more than one year. And it is not surprising that you wish to please this William and go with him to the prosperous land. I will also tell you this. Do not go to the prosperous land unless he promises you that he will send you to school and to the great university, just that university that Alberto attended. This William may not keep his promise. You cannot help that. That is all I have to say on the subject."

Although he was anxious to return to Bill, Carlos did not hurry his mother's cousin, nor leave him before he was ready to go out of the restaurant. And when the time came, he kissed Isidore Santos and Isidore Santos held him in his arms and kissed him also, saying, "How soon I shall see you again, that is God's will."

And Bill was indeed unhappy when Carlos returned. Bill was waiting in the lobby of the hotel. "I've been frantic," Bill said in English, and then translated as well as he could into Spanish. Carlos only asked to go with Bill back to the hotel room. In the room, he removed all of his own clothes, and then, insisting that he be allowed, he removed all of Bill's clothes as well. Then he turned down the sheets on the bed, and lay on the bed, his face to the pillow. Bill came and sat at the side of the bed. "Are you sure?" he asked in Spanish. Carlos answered, "Yes," in English. Bill turned Carlos over onto his back and looked into his eyes, pushing the curling locks aside, off the boy's cheeks. He kissed him on the mouth softly, and then he said, in English, "Not now. Not yet." And he did certain things that, he knew, Carlos especially loved for him to do, things that caused in Carlos much laughter, and ended in great trembling, excitement, pleasure, and satisfaction.

Afterwards, they put on their fine clothes and went to a restaurant that Carlos especially liked. While there, Carlos told Bill of his conversation with Isidore Santos, but of course he said nothing of his mother's cousin's uncle's use of Isidore Santos lest Bill think Isidore Santos unworthy to advise Carlos. And he told Bill of his hope to live in the prosperous land and go to a great university and, best of all, never see his father again. He did not think to say that he felt love for Bill, for what would that matter? In the morning, Bill said, he would make the necessary arrangements. Carlos went to sleep that evening full of pleasant dreams of the prosperous land.

Carlos was so happy in the morning that he ate his breakfast nude, just as Bill did. He did so even though it embarrassed him a little, but he had learned that it embarrassed the waiter even more, and that amused Bill greatly. Bill looked at Carlos fondly while he placed a call on the telephone.

Now, while Bill talked, Carlos knew that the call concerned him. And although he could not

understand what was being said, except for a word here and there, it seemed to him that that conversation did not please Bill.

He was right. Bill did not like what he heard. To begin with, Bill thought the language offensive. It was unlike his talk with Carlos, but he had to listen (and the words, sad to say, must be written here) because the prosperous land had customs and attitudes that were easy to forget about when one was far away, but they would be difficult to escape when he returned, or even, as now, when he merely took the trouble to telephone someone there. What he heard was indeed unworthy, crude and vile: "Can't you go down there and get rid of your hang-ups and then just come back and be civilized, for Christ's sake? Do you have to bring your tricks back? You could go to jail for this, so let's forget it, okay?" It angered him that the whole tone of his life should be so terribly changed in the course of one short conversation, and that with his best friend in the prosperous land.

Bill said, "The boy's father will never know."

"He'll know the minute the kid smells money."

Bill had no answer to that, even though he was sure it could not be true. "A lawyer," he said, "is supposed to tell me how to do things, not keep me from doing them."

"So get a lawyer. I don't know the laws down there. I'll tell you this. Unless you adopt that kid, with his father signing the bottom line, I won't take responsibility. And if you get caught screwing your own adopted son, I can't help you. And, Bill," the lawyer's tone became almost kindly, as if giving an affectionate warning, "listen. If my wife won't invite the two of you over for dinner, like she did with that Irish baby thug you got hung up on a couple of years ago – well, you bring it on yourself."

"She liked Brian."

"She loved him. He was the right color. Look, Bill. I can't stop you. But calculate the price, and don't be stupid." The voice laughed unpleasantly. "Why buy a cow – or a calf, for Christ's sake – when milk's so cheap?"

Bill sat, a few minutes later, staring unpleasantly at the telephone. The price was high, too high to pay. Inwardly he was full of rage, but he showed nothing but unhappiness.

That was why Carlos misjudged. He felt that action would be better than words just now, so he led Bill over to the bed, and, on the bed, began to do some things to Bill that Bill had done to him. Soon Carlos was surprised at the change this caused. Bill became angry in his movements, although he still said nothing. And then, for the first time ever, in all their lovemaking, he hurt Carlos.

Carlos had been holding Bill's penis, which was very hard and, it seemed, larger than it had been before, but no doubt that was only because Carlos was seeing it more closely. Bill pushed Carlos onto his stomach and began to use the boy like a man might use a woman. There was no warning. Now Carlos had thought that it would be easy, because Bill had shown pleasure not pain when Carlos did the thing to him. But not even the beatings by Carlos's father hurt like Bill's penis did. Carlos first bit the pillow, then he felt another thrust and not all the courage he had could prevent a cry. But Bill did not stop, and Carlos cried again. "No! Please!" the boy said in Spanish, then he said it in English, "please, please."

And in that moment Carlos knew that Bill did not feel for him the love that he, Carlos, felt. And he resolved, in that instant, if it was true he would go away from Bill. He would hope that Isidore Santos would find work for him in the city.

And in that same moment Bill began to know what he was doing.

He held steady for a moment, then drew his body away from Carlos, to look at him. He saw again the boy of his dreams, yet better than his dreams, for he was real, even to the light brown muscles of his back, his darker arms, his almost white, slim and powerful buttocks, his fine light thighs, his dark tapering legs. He turned the boy's head and looked deep into the moist and fearful eyes. In Spanish, he said, "I will be

gentle now.”

And he was. He covered his penis with the same kind of substance he had put on Carlos's penis so often before, and, burying his face in the boy's black curls, he carefully, lovingly entered him, causing only an “oh!” but not a cry this time. And it was good, because Carlos felt happy again, having thought, for one terrible moment, that he must leave Bill and abandon safety forever. Now when he felt the throb of Bill's ejaculation, his love grew even stronger, for at last he knew why Bill had so patiently, so many times, accepted Carlos's. To give joy was almost as splendid as receiving it. And for Bill too a crisis had passed. When he replaced the telephone in its cradle, Bill had then decided that he must leave the boy behind. Now he knew he could not do that. Nor would he seek out Carlos's father for the adoption, for that would risk losing Carlos.

Indeed, Bill said to himself, bribing officials on the island would be cheaper anyway. He remembered vividly the business that occupied his mornings, and its difficulties.

Carlos saw that Bill was deep in thought, so he merely ran his hand over Bill's body, again in a way he had learned from Bill's gentle play. Then, in a new tactic, he wrestled with the unresisting man until, sitting on his chest, Carlos pointed his erect penis to Bill's chin. This brought the man to life again, and a bright feeling possessed the boy of the island. And Bill reached with his hands, up that marvelous torso, to the boy's chest, then, reaching around the boy's body, drew it close, and knew that reality was better – though it might be worse too, and he would have to live with that – better than dreams.

# Teen Tricks – 2

by Ruth van Miller

Dear Ruth Van Miller,

Remember me, “Needing help in a Hurry”? You told me to let you know what comes out. Oh, I couldn't possibly tell you all the things that came out, and they keep coming out, and Kevin keeps coming and coming, you wouldn't believe it! My pastor came to see me and I told him that I did what he said, but he saw I had a copy of the paper here so I don't think he believed me. Kevin wants me to adopt him. Should I?

– ANXIOUS

Dear Anx,

Is the Pope Catholic?

Dear Ruth Van Miller,

I am a perfectly normal, healthy forty-five-year-old man of gay sexual persuasion. My interest has always been in older men. In fact, that's how I got started. I heard some high school boys tell about getting paid for tricks down at the bus station, so I went down myself. The first time, I was only twelve, so a policeman told me that I was too young to hang out there. He took me home (his) and, wow! He showed me that I really like older guys, like the policeman was. I mean, things were really great around the bus station after that, especially when I was a little older. Us guys who hung out there, well, we got to be like a club, you know what I mean? Well, that's a long time ago, and, you know how it is, I moved up to gay bars and all that. I'm writing because lately I've had trouble making pickups. Most older men, my type, seem to prefer younger men or boys, and they even ask me why I don't too. Well, their liking kids was great when I was younger, but it's not so good now. What can I do?

– SEX STARVED IN CHICAGO

Dear Hungry,

It's about time that you looked up some of those same highschoolers who used to hang around the bus station. I bet you haven't seen them in twenty-five years! You can find them in old year-books, if you don't remember their names for sure. Use the telephone to get in touch. See what they're doing now. I'll bet they're mostly married, bored, and ready for some of the old action, like they used to make out with from the bus station. You'll make them feel like teenagers again!

Dear Ruth van Miller,

I told my mother that I was gay and she told me to tell my father. So I did, and he just said, that's great, so you can stay with your mother. When I asked him what he meant, he said he was leaving and he planned to take me with him but now he wouldn't, my mother could have me. I went to my mom and she said to go with dad. I'd like to kill myself.



– THIRTEEN AND WISHING I WAS DEAD

Dear Thirteen,

Right now, this minute, you telephone the Gay Hot Line in your town-which I guess is Houston because that was the postmark on your envelope – and ask, first, for the Gay Youth Support Group and if you can't get them, try the Metropolitan Community Church and if they don't answer or help call the Crisis Hot Line and ask for Suicide Prevention.

When you've done that, stop and think a little. How did you find out you are gay? Didn't somebody help you? Can that somebody help you now?

Also, think about this. You can make your parents take care of you, and if you want you can control them to a certain extent. You have rights and they have responsibilities. I know you feel hurt, but living is the best revenge: you show them that they can't get you down. Stand up for yourself and for gay kids everywhere! If you have to go to Child Protective Services and complain against your mom and dad, do it. It will serve them right if they get busted for neglect.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

My best friend is captain of the football team and I'm real glad to have him for my best friend because I'm only on the freshman team and not big enough yet and the trouble is that Andy got clap from a whore in town, and now I've got it too (and so does Tim, who's another guy on the freshman team, and I know one girl has got it too because Andy put it to her, if you know what I mean, as a show for Tim and me, so we'd know how, like him, over at my house). Andy won't go to a doctor. What can I do? I was cured but now Andy's given it to me again I think. And there are some more girls he's probably given it to, only they don't know it yet. I don't know if they'd even care cause he's so good looking and has this fantastic body and hung like a horse.

– FOOTBALL PLAYER IN ROANOKE

Dear Football,

First of all, be proud that you have such a popular friend! He sounds like loads and loads of fun! Now, think about this. Andy won't go to a doctor unless there's something in it for him. What about getting the football coach to require every player to have a physical and donate blood to the local blood bank? All the tests, even for AIDS, will be included that way. And from now on, you keep him out of your backside – love him good, but do it the safe way. I'm sending you a dozen copies of my book, *Safe Sex for Torrid Teens*. You kids sure do need it!

Dear Ruth Van Miller,

I was the happiest guy in the world and now I'm the most miserable. I have this friend, see, and every afternoon after school and football practice or whatever he comes over to my house and we mess around. We come to my house because his mother doesn't work and she likes for him to be with me because I'm sixteen and responsible and he's eight and needs somebody to look up to and we don't want her to know what we're doing every afternoon.

But now that's all over. Yesterday was Saturday and I was out at the mall parking lot cruising with my high school crowd. Naturally they don't know what I'm doing every afternoon after school with Mikey. Anyway a couple of grown men, maybe thirty or forty, you know, old, are hanging out there and my friend Tommy says if we go with them we can get twenty dollars each. I figure I can buy Mikey something real nice with that kind of money so I get into the back seat of this big Buick with the old guy and pretty soon he's feeling me up and I get all excited and right there in the car we start and the guy says this kid's really hot and we have to put our pants back on to go up to this apartment. So we do lots more, and I never knew you could do things like that. And the guy gives me twenty dollars and says to meet him at the mall next Saturday too.

So now it's Sunday and I'm just sick. Tomorrow's Monday, and I know that Mikey can't do half those things. I mean, he's only eight, like I said, and I like him just like before but what's it going to be like tomorrow afternoon when he comes over and he can't do all that stuff?

– HEARTBROKEN KID

Dear Broken,

By now you know the answer to your question, so why the hell did you mail the letter? And just look what came in the same mail and from your same zip code! “DEAR RUTH VAN MILER SOM BAD MAN DID SOMTHNG TO MY FREND AN HE SAS IM NOT FUN AFTER SCOOL AND I HAV TO WATE TIL IM OLDER I CANT WATE.” So, kid, get this. Streets run both ways.

Mikey can't pay you twenty bucks either. Let him do his best and you do your best. If you get extra kicks on Saturday, it's no big deal. Just don't expect them every day. You're greedy, that's all. Be responsible, like his mother thinks you are. Give Mikey an ideal he can live up to the rest of his life. If you won't do that, then go ahead, be a full-time whore, and drunkard, and dope addict, and go to hell!

Dear Ruth Van Miller,

Thirteen. What's masserbating? I don't think it stinks like the hoor.

– BETTER OFF BOWLING

Dear B.O.B.,

Your spelling isn't all it should be. That was “whore” not “hoor,” and it's “masturbating” which ought not to stink if you wash yourself.

My advice is that you keep right on bowling, and when the right person comes along, you might try sex again.

Dear Ruth Van Miller,

My son got arrested for rape. I guess it was rape because the police said it was but my son wasn't the only one he was just the oldest he's sixteen and she's twelve. Anyway while he was in this jail for boys I guess he's highly sexed and all like some boys are and he was doing it to another boy and he wants this boy to come live with us because he's 12 and his daddy beats him something awful and that's why he sniffed glue and got arrested. I don't mind I guess because my son says at least I won't get arrested for rape no more and that's a good thing. My husband don't want such things in his house but says hell do what you advise he trusts you. I do too.



– TRUSTING IN PEORIA

Dear Peo,

Thank you for trusting me. You are right about your son being highly sexed. You do need to do something about it. Having his new friend come live with you is a solution your husband should be happy about. Remind him that boys don't get pregnant. Also you'll be saving a child from an abusive parent.

Be sure to lay down some firm rules though. Glue sniffing and other forms of dope and cigarettes and alcohol are OUT! They are not good for children at any age. Also you should get the parents of your son's little friend to pay something for his son's board, even if it's only ten dollars a week. That way they won't be able to say you stole him for your son to use for being oversexed.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

I was shocked by your answer to FOOTBALL! It sounded to me as if his so-called friend is actually a sex-crazed maniac. Do you think there's hope for him?

– CURIOUS

Dear Curious,

Hope? Who needs it?

DEAR RUTH

ITS OK NOW. BRUCE LETS ME COME TO HIS HOUSE AGAIN, AND HE HELPS ME WITH MY SPELING TOO.

– LOVE, MIKEY

Dear Ruth Van Miller,

For two years I have enjoyed a very happy relationship with my daughter, who is now sixteen. Her best girl friend is also close to her father. None of us are bothered by the fact that most fathers and daughters are not so close.

The problem is my son. I think he is a little jealous because his sister sleeps with me and all he has is his teddy bear. Unfortunately, I am not at all pederastically inclined or I would try to remedy the situation.

Can you advise me?

– ENJOYING INCEST IN INDIANA

Dear Incest,

For one thing, you could TRY. Little boys don't expect much. But a teddy bear? Yetch!

# Evan and Simon

*Simon*

While waiting for Evan, Simon had been dreaming:

Evan and I are near the forest. Aspens on the slope. June, and the meadow flowers are waist high. Now we're in the forest, not aspens now but hemlocks, firs, and pines. A lichen-covered rock, huge, stops us. (Why didn't we see it before?) I let Evan climb my back to get over the rock. From the top, he stretches his hand. I take it. It's warm now and his shirt is off. The sun is bright on his body and his muscles ripple. His hair is so light that it shines, but his eyebrows are dark; I never noticed before! He's much stronger than I am. It's all right, Evan says. So I know that I can do it. He pulls me up. You're strong, he says. You'll be strong as me soon. And I am; I put my arm next to his; they touch. I don't see them. On the other side of the rock is a meadow, but we stay on the rock. I tell him a poem I've written. He listens. His eyes are gray. He likes it because he knows the poem is about him.

We go down to the meadow. The grass and flowers are not so high. We're on the grass in Wilson Park, lying side by side. Evan asks me to try for the football team. He'll help me. I say yes, because I'm so strong already. I ask him to join the Boy Scouts. He says yes, because that way we'll be together. Now we're in woods again. I see where. We're at Camp Stanton. Evan and Mr. Randolph are in the woods. I'm watching while they –

The dream stopped. Simon looked at the track. Evan wasn't on it. Had he gone already? He'd be in the locker room, unless –

“Hello, Simon.” Evan was behind him.

“Hi. How come you're still at school?” Simon immediately wished he hadn't said that. What if Evan knew he knew why?

“I got Paling pissed off at me. Motherfucker gave me ten laps.”

Simon wished he could say “motherfucker” just like that.

He walked along with Evan. “I had a late session after Scout meeting. That's why I'm still around.” Now he wished he hadn't said that. What did Evan care?

“You like the Scouts, don't you?”

Evan was being nice. He wasn't like the other football players who said Simon was a wimp. “Sure do. I passed Second Class last week. I was a Tenderfoot, but I'm not now.”

“I guess Scouts would be pretty good if they didn't have such dumb names. I wouldn't be a tenderfoot for any thing – or second class either. First class or nothing.”

“I'll make First Class soon. It's just-you have to learn stuff. About life in the woods, that's what I like. I love the woods. And hiking.”

“What the hell for?”

Simon couldn't answer that. He didn't blame Evan. Loving woods might be a little dumb. But Evan would like it if he came with Simon to see. It was just dumb to talk about it. “Mr. Randolph helps me a lot.” That was a lie. But not a big one. “That's why I'm going ahead so fast.”

“Who's he?”

“Our scoutmaster. He was an Eagle Scout. He knows everything.”

“About woods.”

Evan's laugh was almost a cough. He wasn't so nice then. Simon hadn't mentioned woods again, so Evan didn't need to rub it in about woods. They crossed the street to where Simon ought to turn toward

his house. There was a mailbox at the corner, and Simon paused at it. To his surprise, Evan turned; he was going to walk out of his way to stay with Simon. Simon couldn't breathe for a moment. He tried to say something ordinary, but it wouldn't come out; he didn't even know what it was. "You're going to – going to walk with me." It came out so dumb Simon couldn't believe he'd said it.

"You waited for me, didn't you?"

He wasn't supposed to notice that. It was supposed to be just an accident, just luck. "No – I was just –" but the lie wouldn't come. Why not, when Simon could imagine lies so easily that they just rolled into his mind?

"Come off it, Simon. You've been waiting for me every afternoon. What you want, anyway?"

Was he mad? He didn't sound it. He sounded – "Are you glad I waited?" Oh, no! The wrong thing. Every time. It was as if he'd admitted waiting.

"Sure."

It was all right, but Simon had better cover anyway. "But I was late at scouts too."

"You late every afternoon until after football practice?" He's laughing at me, Simon thought, helpless. It's not fair.

"No, I just –"

"Knock it off, Simon. You're a friend of mine, aren't you? So you can wait for me if you want to."

He said *friend*. Simon disguised the elation he felt. "Yes." Then he added, coarsely, "I can if I want."

"There you go."

They walked in silence. So much had been said that Simon was terrified. Anything new could change the moment, make something that was perfect change to disaster. What disaster could come? If Simon was Evan's friend, and Evan said he was, then – friends don't have to apologize or hold anything back. Maybe now was the time. Simon had rehearsed the words so often they ought to come easily. But what if? He said *friend*. So what ifs didn't matter. He could take a chance, and say what he'd dreamed of saying. "We do a lot of things. You know." He took a deep breath. "We fuck around." Simon was breathless again; the impossible word had got out. Aloud.

"Who does?"

Where had that gone wrong? Had Evan forgotten about scouts? Simon tried again. If he said the word again, it might come easy the third time. "We fuck around at scouts."

"Yeah? Like what?"

Evan sounded interested. Now Simon had really started.

No backing down now. He would have to keep going. And he could. Dennis Holloway was a First Class Scout and tough and strong like Evan, and he did it with Mr. Randolph. They were friends. So now it was Simon and Evan, Evan and Simon. "You know what I was doing after scout meeting? The reason I was so late?"

"Jerking off?"

Evan's laugh – another cough – was a challenge, and it almost disheartened Simon. "No. I don't need to do that." Simon had to try. To say it. "To jerk off. Not any more."

"Why not? You got pussy at scouts? I hear they're letting girls in. That it?"

No, no, no. Leave girls out of it. "We don't need" – here came another of those words, *pussy*, and Simon couldn't say it. He stopped.

"What don't you need? How you going to get off without pussy?"

He won't understand. Girls. Always girls. The silence, Evan waiting. Simon had to answer.

"C'm on. How?"

"I got Mr. Randolph. He –" Simon almost gagged. "– sucked me." It was said. Simon could hardly

believe he'd said it.

“No shit?”

Evan wasn't mad. Just a little surprised. He stopped and looked at Simon. “No shit.” Simon said *shit!* It was getting easier. Just being with Evan made Simon feel tougher. “You ever been – ” Simon swallowed quickly. “– sucked?”

Evan stopped, pulled a leaf off a bush and put it into his mouth. Then he began walking again. He wasn't mad, though. Simon went on. “Have you?”

“Got head from a dude?” He spat out the leaf. “No.” Please, God, no; he's pretending, isn't he? What girl at school would suck? Evan looked at Simon again, like he wanted him to go on. So he did. “It's fun. Mr. Randolph only sucks me and Dennis Holloway. We really like it. You ought to try it.”

Evan stopped and spit a remnant of leaf. “I ain't joining the scouts to bust my balls.”

That sounded like a challenge too. Simon wished Evan hadn't said “ain't.” He wasn't like the black kids. Ain't wasn't natural for him; Simon knew that. So why did he use it? Simon didn't have time to think it out. He'd gone this far. He had to take a chance. “You wouldn't have to.” He took a very deep breath, let it out, walked on, and when Evan was in step with him, “I could show you.”

“No way.”

It was so quick that even though Simon felt a warning, he'd begun to speak; the warning came too late; the words were out. “I mean it.” The words, rehearsed, planned, couldn't stop. “I would. Just you. I wouldn't show anybody else.”

“Shut up.”

That was bad, but he didn't sound mad, even if the words were mad. “You'll like it. I know you will.”

Evan pushed Simon. “Get lost, motherfucker.”

“Why are you mad, Evan?” But Evan had gone. He'd cut across the street, running. In a moment, he was around the corner, past the new oaks, and out of sight. Simon, lonely and ashamed, wanted to run after, but – what could he do if he caught up? He didn't doubt he'd caused the disaster, but how? How could he get so close? It had been all right, right up to the end. If Evan had wanted to call him *faggot*, he had the chance and he didn't take it. Yet, still, he'd run.

Simon tried to see where he went wrong. He had to be ready. Tomorrow. Maybe Evan wouldn't talk to him, wouldn't walk with him. Would just pass. Simon could risk that. What he couldn't risk was not being there.

*Lying. Evan was nice to me until I started lying. He hadn't been really mean about the woods. I could have talked about the woods more. Or swimming. Why didn't I talk about swimming? Life saving. That's what Scouts are about. Evan's a good swimmer. Next time I'll tell him about swimming. I've gotten over being afraid of the water. I'll start diving. I can. I just get scared going in head first. Mr. Randolph will have to teach me. He'll want to when he sees how much I want to learn. I'll learn fast. When I'm swimming and diving I'll be good at it and I can ask Evan to come swim with me and he'll see how good I am.*

*We're coming out of the woods to a lake. The day's hot but there's a breeze across the lake. It feels good after hiking. Ducks. A large duck with four – no. five – little ones following. Evan and I watch the ducks. There's a sixth little one. We laugh at them. Evan says, Let's swim across. Do you think you can make it? Sure. I'm strong as Evan now. We take off all our clothes and I get a bone on, but I don't care because Evan does too. We dive into the lake. We swim together a long way. Evan has a cramp. He's going to drown. I save him, like the pictures in the Handbook. We're naked on the grass beside the lake, and I'm holding him, and he's holding me.*

*Evan loves me. It's because I'm strong, like him and Dennis Holloway.*

Reality, in the form of his “home,” the house he lived in, stopped the dream.

*Evan*

Mrs. Williams had put out a glass of orange juice and a banana. She was not in the kitchen. Evan gulped down half the juice, ignored the banana, only half seeing it, dropped his books on the floor, forgetting he was holding them, and went upstairs. Mrs. Williams must have heard him, because he could hear her.

“Evan! Come pick up your books.”

Evan didn't see any need to answer. He heard her call twice more, then he heard her stomp up the stairs. He sat on his lift top desk, puzzling out his own reactions to Simon. Why had he run? Could Simon think he was too chicken? But he had to go. He should have walked. A little tough dignity. To show Simon what he thought of faggots. Maybe even slugged him. Not enough to hurt much. No point in hurting Simon. Goddamn the little queer. “Evan!” she said at the top of the stairs. She came to his room and said “Evan” very sharply as she opened the door. “Evan!” she said, for the billionth time.

She was too much there, her face plastic rage, topped with a hair net. “Uh,” he said.

“Come downstairs this minute. What do you mean, dropping them in the kitchen?”

Evan looked up in surprise. Dropped? Dropped? “What?”

“You dropped your books in the kitchen. And you didn't finish your orange juice, and you didn't eat your banana.”

Banana? He was supposed to eat bananas? Simon eats bananas. Should he tell her? Shock her tits off.

“Damn,” Evan said.

“You will not say damn to me!”

Some things aren't worth fighting for. Evan got up, walked past her, and went down the stairs. He drank the rest of the juice, -shoved the banana into his mouth, an eating machine. He picked up his books and carried them to his room. Then he shut the door.

Mrs. Williams opened it immediately. “Evan! What is wrong with you?”

*Not a goddam thing, bitch, whore, slut.* “I have to think.”

“What about?”

“None of your business.”

“Don't take that tone with me!”

*It's useless.*

“If you have a problem, you can tell me all about it and I can help.”

“Fat chance.” That came out before he thought about it, but thinking confirmed it. He almost grinned to see her mouth twist. She was really mad.

“I'm going to tell your father about this. You are confined to your room for the next hour.” She slammed the door behind her.

He thought about her long enough to wish, for the billionth time, his father hadn't married the cunt, long enough to call his father a cunthappy dickhead, who he'd never ever be like, no way, he'd be loyal to his kids not fuck them over. And then he forgot her. Simon was messing up his head, and he didn't-like that Simon was spoiling the only good thing he had going. He looked for comfort at his new Jim Kelly poster, scrambling, about to pass. Comfort wasn't there.

He shouldn't talk with Simon anyway. He wasted time with that wimp because the football coach – he wasn't a real coach; Evan knew what a real coach was; nobody knew better at Jenkins Junior High – and that's where the sweat was – Paling made him do ten laps for talking back. Evan didn't mind. He'd do the



laps for himself, anyway. Telling Paling off was just extra. Paling thought he'd like to leave with the other players, fucking team spirit, but they just went for cokes and crap, poison for your body.

So when he started home, Simon was the only person around. Damn near every day. Simon the Boy Scout. Evan didn't take shit off of anybody, not even high school boys. Simon had started pushing shit. *Tenderfoots* and *second class* and hiking and trees. Evan had told him it was all shit. *Why was I so nice to him?* Simon said it wasn't shit, and – then cocksucking. *He would show Evan how much fun it was. Like Paling coaching football. What did I tell him?* To suck himself. Or fuck. That's what he said. He wished he'd said suck.

His father's cunt thought anything he did with his dick was bad, but who cared what she thought? A dick was for “love and marriage.” She said that. What about my mother's love and marriage? She had a chance to come back, until this whore came along: “Love and marriage.” If you asked her. Like she didn't know a dick was for piss too. He ought to ask her. “What do I piss with, Milly?” Shit, what a name! And creaming off. “You got to be married to cream off? That right, Milly?”

But now, why did Simon pick him? How could he know? Could she be right? No way to ask. She wasn't right about anything, anyway. Nothing she could talk about would have anything to do with a real problem. But it must show. It takes one to know one. But Dennis Holloway? If you are one you know one, and he didn't know Dennis was one, so –

Simon might be lying.

At dinner, she didn't tell his father. She was slick, with lots of teeth, and she put guck on perfectly good pork chops. He scraped it off but he could still taste it, so he filled up on fries. Then he ate the chops because they were protein, and Mr. Bradley said he needed protein to build muscle. He was growing. All his father said to him was, “Moody?” to which he answered, “Yes,” because neither question nor answer mattered.

After dinner he took off the sport shirt he'd worn since practice, and slipped a sweat shirt on. Then downstairs. He stopped to look at himself in the big mirror by the front door, to make sure he didn't look like a school kid. No belt on his jeans, so they hung low. His sweat shirt was cut short. Skin showed that he was bare under his jeans. Sleeves cut off above his biceps. He roughed his hair so it wouldn't look like he liked it so curly. Sunbleached. He didn't use much peroxide. He frowned his dark eyebrows; tonight he had to be tough. Mr. Bradley wasn't going to like this. Evan wasn't going to like it either. But he had to do it.

As he went out his father's slut tried to make him answer a question about homework, but he made it to his bicycle so he didn't have to listen or answer. Or think about her. He had to think what he was going to say to Mr. Bradley. He was always Mr. Bradley “in front of folks,” but just “Coach” when they were alone. That was because he wasn't legally Evan's coach yet. Though he really was. *Fuck legal.* “Coach –” No. He couldn't begin with “Coach.” “This guy, Simon –” No. *Leave Simon out of it. This is between us. Just us.* The spring warmth was fading with the sun; Evan ought to have worn a jacket. But no. Coach liked the way he dressed. The least he could do was dress right for Mr. Bradley.

When he got to Mr. Bradley's house, there was a tough new maroon Saville parked in front. Evan lowered the kickstand on his bicycle, then went to look at the Saville. He imagined himself at eighty, a hundred mph, the dashboard lit up like a spacecraft. The windows were open; he could have got in. But no. This was too serious. He had other things on his mind. The door to the house wasn't shut all the way, so Evan walked on up and pushed it open.

A man in a suit and tie was talking with Mr. Bradley in the hall, like they'd finished, almost. Coach could see Evan, but the man couldn't. “All right, you've got the buses, every road trip. And Southern Cadillac gets credited on programs and ads.”

“Hello, Evan,” Coach Bradley said, and the man turned, surprised. Coach said to the man, “We've got a deal.”

The man looked at Evan a moment longer, and Evan stared back, giving him an “I don't take no shit look,” until the man looked away. “And the Knutson kid?” the man said, more softly. Evan knew that Ken Knutson was linebacker on the high school team.

“You're going to see a lot of him,” Bradley said. “He thinks you're really fine. He appreciates your generosity.”

The man laughed. “Oh, he can count on that!”

Evan wondered how long this would go on. He caught Coach's eye and scowled.

“Remember – hang on, Evan – no cigarettes, liquor, dope, nothing, not even if he asks.”

“Right.” The man looked back at Evan. “And who's this?”

The man whispered to Bradley. Evan was wary; one mistake – But Mr. Bradley shook his head. “All right,” the man said. “I don't dig them that young anyway. But you are,” he said to Evan, “a really good-looking boy.”

That was all right. Evan let it pass. *No shit.*

“Don't make him conceited,” Coach said. “He's enough trouble already.”

*And going to be more, tonight.* But there was a question, too. Ken Knutson? Why would that man be seeing so much of Ken Knutson?

The man left, and Coach Bradley shut the door, locking it.

Alone with Evan, Bradley said, “Something's bothering you.”

“Yeah.” Evan paused, reconsidered, decided to delay. *I can't act like it's on my mind.* “That turd paling made me do ten laps for telling him a quarterback keep on third and six was dumb.”

Bradley laughed. “He was right. I'd have given you twenty. You got a big mouth.”

Hurt, Evan was uncertain too. But he didn't show it. “When *isn't* it dumb?”

Bradley sat on the couch. “When you're running out the clock for one thing. Anyway, that's not what's bothering you. You going to stand there? Come on.”

Reluctantly, Evan sat beside Bradley, who put his arm around the boy's shoulder. Evan pulled himself away. *That's the problem. He always starts that shit, whenever we're alone here.*

“Something's really the matter.”

“Yeah.”

“Well, tell me.”

Delay? No. Evan had nothing left. “I've decided.” Bradley waited.

The words came. “All our working out, you teaching me, timing, all that, I mean, that's getting me ready. I'm gonna be real good.”

“Any college you want, if you grow enough, and keep up your grades. And you're growing pretty good, and your grades –”

Now Coach was talking right. “I want you to be proud of me.”

“I will be.”

*Here it comes. Shit on the fan.* “It's the other stuff. I won't do that anymore. Not ever.”

“That's the problem?”

Yes! Evan looked for more reaction. Coach's eyes were still blue. He wasn't frowning. He looked – like he always looked at Evan. Always, except teaching him. “I mean, it's for fags.”

“Who says that?”

Bradley was smiling now. *He's not mad.* When Coach shifted his arm a little, Evan figured he ought to move closer. It was the least he could do. “Simon Keller.”



“He said it's for fags?”

Coach knew better than that. “No.” Evan grinned, up at him. Coach grinned back. “You *know*. He's a Boy Scout. He told me he does it with the – you know – scoutmaster.”

“Perry Randolph?”

“I don't know his name. I don't screw around with Boy Scouts.”

“They're not so bad. So your friend says he does it with the scoutmaster.”

*Goddamit, that's the whole point.* “He's not my friend!” Not now, anyway.

“Okay. So, did you tell him who you've been doing it with?”

*Goddam!* *How can he ask me that? Son of a bitch!* Evan pulled away, angry. “No! I know the rule. Simon doesn't.”

“You're right to be mad.”

*That's not the point!* The words, the outrage poured out. “I mean, he told everything.” He cut off Coach's answer. “And then, you know what that turd asked me?” He sat facing Bradley. They didn't touch at all.

“Tell me.”

“He was going to *show* me what they did. You know what he meant? I *know*. I told him I wouldn't put my dick in his mouth if he paid me to. I told him to suck himself.”

He said it, and it was all true. He laughed and settled back under Bradley's arm. He ran his hand along the coach's thigh. The words kept coming, not just like he'd planned, but okay now. “So this is the last time I'm going to do it. Ever.”

“I thought you said –” Coach sounded disturbed. “– you weren't going to do it again. Not ever.”

“No, I didn't.” *That didn't matter.* He grinned up at Bradley. “Maybe I did. Anyway, I want *you* to do it one more time.”

“How can you not do it again if you never did it the first time?”

*That wasn't fair!* “I pulled you off, plenty.”

“All right. I'm not arguing.”

Evan squeezed his cock through his jeans. “Look. I'm ready.”

“No,” Coach said. “Better not now.” He let Evan go and sat up. “Okay. When? You want to do it tomorrow, or save it until next week, or next month, maybe?”

*He's out of his mind.* “Save it?”

“Sure. If it's the last time, you got to watch out for the future. How are you going to feel day after tomorrow?”

“I'll be okay. I won't need it, not even tomorrow.” He pulled Coach's hand over to his crotch.

Coach yielded a little. “Oh,” he said. “What you mean is, absolutely, certainly, now?”

Evan pulled on Coach's middle finger. “Now.” He grinned. Coach Bradley leaned back and over, and, for a moment or two he just licked the down on the back of Evan's neck. “I don't know,” he said, finally. “I don't like last times. Maybe last time was the last time, okay?”

*Son of a bitch would pull that!* “No!” Evan was half angry, though he thought Coach wasn't really serious. He couldn't be. “You wouldn't get me all hot if you wasn't going to go ahead and do it.”

“You're hot?”

Evan unzipped his jeans. “See?” In front of a tiny dark tuft, a circumcised shaft stood stiff. Evan pulled Coach's hand over to hold it; he moved the hand up and down, and said, “Yeah.” Softly.

“How will I keep you working, if you don't get this for being good?”

Evan rubbed the hairs on Coach's arm. “You'll think of something.”

“Okay,” Bradley said. “One last time. We'll do it real slow.” He disentangled himself, pushed Evan

forward and pulled his shirt off, over his upstretched arms. Then he pulled off his own shirt and settled back, again with an arm around Evan's shoulder, but now skin to skin. "I guess you want everything this time."

"Yeah. Everything." Evan pulled off his shoes and socks and pushed his jeans off behind them. "Feet too." Evan lunged away from Coach, and kicked his feet up against Coach's chest. "You got to suck ten toes before you get dick."

Coach tried a big toe for taste, then said, "I don't mind teaching you football, but this is work." He put the boy's legs down, kicked off his own shoes, stood up and dropped his own trousers and shorts. The pubic bush spread thickly out above a thick erection, then narrowed up his stomach, to spread again over his stomach and broad chest. "Let's go into the bedroom and stretch out." He drew Evan to himself, then pushed the boy's head toward the hall. "You promise I won't have to do this again? Not ever?"

Evan didn't answer. He remembered the last time they'd done it on the bed. He stood in the doorway, waiting, grinning.

"Well? Have I got a deal? You don't get the whole works unless this is the last, the final, the end."

"Deal, you son of a bitch," Evan said.

"All right, tough guy. I know what you look like."

Evan put on a look deliberately lewd. "You got your tongue warmed up for me?" He turned and spread his buttocks, showing a neat hairless anus. He took the kick he expected, and let it propel him in a flip all the way into the bedroom and onto the huge bed, where he flipped again, then lay on his back, knees apart, expectant.

"The last time," Coach said, "so you're going to remember this as long as you live."

It was, for them both, a special occasion.

Later, with the glow of freedom that he felt every time he cycled away from Coach, Evan pedaled back home, easy. Oh sure, Coach had said, "That's the last time, ever," but he wouldn't stick to that. Evan knew that Coach liked to do it; it wasn't work, just a kick for Evan, to make him practice harder, like he always said. *He never says he loves me, but I think he does. Not like that dickhead of a father, who says it but doesn't.*

Then he glided, thoughtful. But what if he did mean it? Never feel like this again? Evan almost stopped, to go back; then glided on, downgrade.

Well, there was Simon. The wimp talks too much. *If he knows I'll bust his face open if he tells – he won't tell.* Evan laughed. He'd like to see Simon's face when he sees a hard prick. *Dick, prick, cock, what was it, penis. A stiff penis up his left nostril.* He won't be cool like Coach. But Simon loves me. That's funny. He's my groupie. A funny asshole.

And the Scoutmaster, what was his name? *The world is full of possibilities.* And Dennis Holloway. And Knutson. And the Caddie Saville. But for now, Coach. Evan breathed deeply. He felt free.

Simon

Simon spread out the photos he'd taken. Dennis Holloway and Mr. Randolph. In Scout uniforms. Evan, blurred, in shorts at football practice. Evan with Enid Glass, Evan wearing a cutoff sweatshirt that showed his stomach and his arms. Taking that picture had been the price Simon had to pay to get to take this picture of Evan alone. There it was, Evan posing, shirt off, biceps flexed. Simon kissed Evan's navel. Dennis Holloway in tank trunks, showing off the outline of his thing. Simon buried the picture. Evan wasn't like that. No dirty stuff with Evan. No cocksucking; he didn't like it the way Dennis Holloway did.

"Stop mooning over pictures, Simon."

She was there, in the doorway, hovering. Simon shuffled the pictures together, too precious for her eyes.

“Start your homework. You're going to blow your mind out on the tube tonight.”

“No, Elsie.” If she didn't go out, she could turn it off.

“You will, you don't care what garbage comes in. At least you can put in a couple of hours of brain stuff before you start shoveling the shit.”

It made him want to vomit when she said that word. His mother never would have. *My mother. Her gown flowed white. And in her hair a golden circle.* The picture changed with his moods. She was somewhere. And his father. But he was a dark menace. *Abandoned.* That was the real word. She was still there, in the doorway. Elsie. “Where you going, Elsie?”

“Damned if I know, Simon.” She was lighting a cigarette, and Simon swore once again he'd never smoke. “Your uncle Eddie's crazy. No telling where.”

“Not my uncle.” Simon said it softly, but loud enough for her to hear, soft enough so she could ignore it.

“What's that?”

“I don't like him.”

“Well, you'd better start. He paid for your Boy Scout stuff. I sure as hell couldn't.”

Simon could give up scouts, but what would he do during football practice?

“So hit the books, Sonny.”

“I'm Simon.”

“What?”

“I'm not Sonny. Who's Sonny, anyway? Why do you call me him?”

“Oh, God, you prissy little son of bitch. Go to hell.”

*I HATE HER!* “Go to – there, yourself...” He'd said “fuck” to Evan; why couldn't he say “hell” to *her*? He practiced, hell, hell, hell, hell, mouthing the word until slowly it became audible, “hell, hell, Hell, HELL –”

“What?” She was back.

“Go to HELL,” Simon shouted, almost; actually it was just loud, but to him it was like a scream.

“Well.” She dragged on her cigarette. “That sounds like you got balls after all.” She cocked an eye. “I could like a cute little faggot – with balls.” She paused. “An *educated* cute little faggot with balls. So study.”

Simon glared back with hatred and shame. *Faggot. What about “whore”?* He couldn't say that “I'll study,” he said, “but not so you'll like me.”

“I don't give a shit.” She turned and was halfway down the hall before she turned and came back, into the doorway. “Simon. For what it's worth. I like you.”

Good, Simon thought. *I've got her now. Now I can ignore her.* In a minute she'd go away.

She did.

Much later, Simon had finished his reading for history. On the page was a splendid old house, with the caption “Charleston.” Simon focused on it a while and then it blurred.

*Evan and Simon were in the old Freeman mansion, on Daniel's Cove. They had the house all to themselves. They ran from room to room, downstairs, through the living room – it had furniture now, like it must have long ago – and the dining room, with its chandelier and great table, which they passed through or over (which was it?) and then upstairs, sometimes Evan chasing, sometimes Simon chasing, but never catching. They seemed to pause over a bed, a great bed, with silk sheets, and Simon held Evan briefly there, not having caught him – he hadn't tried to catch him – just held him. They floated, nude, on their backs, penises erect as flagpoles, one after the other, up and down the grand*

staircase, then swept out, across the lawn, flying above the water now, penises down, cutting the air, so stiff they hurt. On and on, toward a ship that became smaller, not larger, as they approached. It was a little yacht, moving so swiftly under full sail that for a moment Evan and Simon were left behind. But then it was easy. Their bodies joined, became one, and they looked into the cabin of the yacht, and saw there Mr. Randolph and Dennis Holloway. They were naked too, and their penises hurt too.

Simon and Evan, one body, knew that all their penises hurt, but the pain was heavenly sweet, like nothing before. Dennis was standing, and Mr. Randolph was on his knees, sucking on Dennis's cock. And Dennis was tall, and fair, and his muscles glowed. And he ruffled Mr. Randolph's hair in such a way that Simon and Evan, still one body, could feel it too, and that was sweet pain, too. And as Simon and Evan looked, there before their eyes, Dennis changed, and it was no longer his long lean muscles but it was Evan there, stocky and swollen with power, smiling at Mr. Randolph. And Simon felt his whole body shake in sudden ecstasy as his cock spurted, and spurted, and would not stop. Simon, in agony, felt the wetness in his shorts. How could he explain it? He felt it go on, like he was peeing in his pants. It was awful.

*And why, oh why, did Evan give himself to Mr. Randolph?*

Simon shook himself. Had it been? No one was here. No Evan. No Dennis. Not even Mr. Randolph. Simon undid his pants and looked, then felt. He was alone, with wet, filthy shorts. He could rinse them in the shower. And Evan – it wasn't him with Mr. Randolph. Simon felt relief. It wasn't real! Or. Yet. Still. Dreams are real, real as warnings. And that dream had been the realest of all dreams. His eyes filled with tears.

*I can share.* Said Simon.

# Teen Tricks – 3

by Ruth van Miller

Dear Ruth Van Miller,

We are four girls who belong to a really gnarly latch string club because all our parents work. It isn't exactly a club because we sort of use whoever's house we want and any of the kids can come, boys and girls, except for beasts, and we have awesome fun, playing video games and making cookies and messing around. Well, there are these grody boys who will just make you gag, I mean, totally, because all they want to do is neck and take off clothes and have a sex club. Well, no way!

Now these space cadets say that if we girls don't put out for them, they'll do each other, beige for sure. And just yesterday at my house three of them did it in a circle on my mom's new rug. Not that they yucked up the rug, but they say it's because we're Joanies if they're gay, and they'll hang out with GROWN MEN instead of us have you heard of anything sicker?

Well, we girls do stuff to the max, and we're not gay, and we don't do in front of boys on a rug in a boy's house, no way, so I say it's all grody. Well, one of us girls is on my side, and the other two who are, like, regulars, are airheads who want to help those space cadets who belong on the moon. So we're totally in disagreement.

– FOUR UP THE VALLEY

Dear Fourup,

The problem is that you don't see the problem, for sure. You think it's totally sex and can't see that you've got a tubular situation. You're all doing what you want as much as you want, and I mean the boys too, if they're getting head on your mom's rug, who cares who they're getting it from? You know, besides them. I mean!

In case you're still hung up and still don't know what to do, you just send twenty-five dollars for my educational pamphlet, *Teenage Sex and How To Do It*; it's fully illustrated with photos.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

My mom's a hooker and makes fair money and I want to be one too, I mean hustler, but she says I'm too young and that boys shouldn't do it anyway. I can get two hundred dollars for all night and she just don't want me doing better than she does.

– WANTS TO WORK

Dear Wants,

I go along with your mother. You don't say how old you are, but I'll bet you aren't fifteen yet. Some of those big spenders think that you have to put up with whatever they put out, as your mother well knows! Instead, stick to your school work and be on the lookout for someone who will really love and care for you.

Dear Ruth Van Miller,

I followed your advice and made a deal with my boyfriend Jim that he and my brother could keep on



doing their thing while I had my baby. It was a boy, and we named him Harold, after my father. Now, as a matter of fact, I'm pregnant again.

Well, now Don (my brother, remember?) has got interested in girls just like you said he would, and because he hasn't got enough money most of the time, he peddles his a-- (you know what I mean) so he can be the big spender on the females. And Jim is so mad that he's calling Donny a slut and a whore and he wants to tell my father and get the police. I have to agree with Jim because nobody could approve of the way Donny's behaving, but, after all, he's my brother and I don't want him in trouble.

Jim says that he'd think about laying off Donny if we renamed baby Harold "Don." He really loves Harold, cuddles him and kisses him and never minds if he cries, and just takes care of him to see what's wrong, but he says he can't get on with his life without a "Don" in the family. But my father would be upset, to say the least.

– STILL TRYING IN TYLER, TEXAS

Dear Still,

Congratulations on your wedding and your little boy! It really sounds like you've got it worked out, so far.

Sometimes in marriage you have to make tough decisions. The old rule is that a wife gives up her father and takes to her husband, and, though times have changed, sometimes the old rules work. Go ahead and do what Jim wants, but I don't see that you need to change little Harold's name just yet (though, frankly, I've never liked the name Harold anyway). Have your doctor check on the sex of your baby that's on its way. If it's a boy, why can't you name him Don? If it's a girl, then have a double naming ceremony, rename Harold "Don" and let your father choose a name for the baby girl so he won't feel left out. Also, you've said (I looked it up) that Don was your father's favorite. So what's the big deal?

In this world, there's no substitute for love. Jim sounds like he's got a lot of love in him, and if he wants to lavish some on a "Don," well don't you let it go to waste! Just be sure to remind him not to go overboard on baby Don and neglect baby Harold! You do the old diapers and feedings routines so that Jim can keep right on cuddling and kissing Harold.

P.S. Ask Donny if he's ever heard of AIDS. People who peddle a-- are high risk! He can send for my book, *Safe Sex for Sexy Teens*.

Dear Ruth Van Miller,

Ever since I was ten, I started living my life as much like my idol Michael Jackson as I can. Even when the other kids stopped wearing one glove, I didn't quit, because he's still my idol, and I don't care. Some of the older boys told me Michael Jackson is gay, and I told them OK, I would be gay too, but the trouble is that they sometimes hurt me, and I don't think Michael Jackson would want to be hurt like that. I know one of the teachers at my school is gay and he likes me, but I don't know if Michael Jackson would like him. Can you find out, because I really like this teacher, and I don't like being hurt by mean boys who treat me like I was meat and not Michael Jackson at all.

– NOT MICHAEL JACKSON BUT DOING MY BEST

Dear Best,

I don't know anything about your idol's sex life, but I'm sure of one thing: he believes in love! I'll bet you know right now that those boys who treat you like so much meat don't love you. Now I

don't know whether your teacher loves you or not, but there's only one way to find out. So go for it!

Dear Ruth Van Miller,

Why should I wash myself? My buddy's doing it.

– BETTER OFF BOWLING

Dear BOB,

Who to? And wash anyway.

Dear Ruth Van Miller,

How can I get a job as a model for Playgirl or Blueboy or some other magazine like that? My dad says that I'm too young, though I'm fifteen and sex developed with hair and better hung than he is, and I work out with weights and have a great bod. Why does everyone discriminate against kids?

– WANTS TO SHOW IT IN ST. LOUIS

Dear Show,

You're another victim of ageist bigotry, and there's nothing you can do yet about breaking into the big magazines, and Playgirl is dead anyway. (Keep working on the bod, though; just be sure you don't get too hunky, or you'll only be good for muscle mags.) For now, there should be plenty of photogs around who'd let you pose for them just for a little action before you get all dressed up again. It would give you experience, and give them some good healthy fun. If you don't know anybody who can take your pictures now, just wear a muscle shirt, carry a copy of Blueboy around, and be friendly.

By the time you're eighteen and ready for the big time, you'll be well known and get the jobs. Modeling.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

I got an awful problem. If I knew where my dad was, I'd ask him to come kill this guy for me, but I don't have nobody to help me cept you. Anyway, my mom's got Al living here, which was ok cause he didn't bother me, until Harold came. Harold is Al's son, and he's 23, and he doesn't do nothing but watch tv, eat, and spy on me. He peeked through the window next door and saw me on the bed with my friend, whos a real nice guy and lives alone so he likes me. Now Harold says he'll tell mom and Al what he saw unless I, like he says, "take care of" him too. Maybe I'm not too smart (but I think I'm doing ok for eleven), so I think you don't do stuff like that unless you love somebody, like I love my friend and he loves me, which is why we make out. Anyway, I done it twice, I mean took care of Harold, and I hate it and I hate him. And I won't tell my friend next door cause it would hurt him something awful. What should I do?

– HURTING AND HATING

Dear Hurt,

Report Harold to the police. He's a CHILD MOLESTER, and ought to be in jail! Your mom



and Al need to know the whole thing, except about your friend next door, and if Harold claims he saw you in action through the window, call him a liar. It's just his word against yours. Say he forced you do whatever it was, which is true because what he did was RAPE.

I'm sorry I have to add this, but, first of all, you've got to tell your friend next door. I mean, EVERYTHING, including the fact that you're going to blow the whistle on Harold. If he loves you, he won't blame you at all, and he won't feel hurt. But you both need to get your stories straight. The police will check on Harold's charge, and your friend and you need to be ready for that.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

Everybody's down on me because I'm a punk. I got a pink and purple Mohawk and got decals of crazy sex (guys and girls, guys and guys, girls and girls, dogs and you name it). I wear them on my chest and back, so I don't need a shirt, and it would cover them up anyway. I'd get tattoos instead of decals, but I'm just fourteen and they won't even let me into a tattoo place. So I can't go to school unless I wear a shirt and shave off my hair, even though I get good grades and am only protesting all the evil in the world, like nuclear bombs and sex repression.

My mom's 100% behind me, except that she says I've got to compromise. I say that compromise is what got the world into the evil it's in now. Mom and I have agreed to take your advice, and I figure that you're on my side.

– PUNK IN PHILADELPHIA

Dear Punk,

Yep, I'm on your side all right. BUT – and get this – I'm on your mother's side too. First thing, go to a shirt shop that does designs and get your sex pictures onto shirts. That way you can protest against sex repression AND wear a shirt to school. Second, shave your hair, and as it grows out dye ONLY the Mohawk strip pink and purple. It will make the statement about the bombs and let you stay in school.

But I want to add one more thing. DO WHAT YOU BELIEVE IN: don't just protest. Pair up with some girls and guys who are also against nuclear war and aren't sexually repressed and you all make love (not war), as we were saying a generation ago. We had the right idea, and it's up to us all to keep trying.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

My girlfriend and I make out like crazy, cept for no real sex, all the way. But we're getting there, I think. Trouble is this guy I met at the park swimming pool, who wants me to go all the way with him. I mean, I could tell him to get lost, but fact is I'd rather make out with *him* than with my girl. I'm wondering. Could I be bisexual?

– MAYBE BI IN OREGON

Dear Bi,

Why not? Most boys are, and until you go “all the way” with BOTH your girl and this guy, how are you going to know which you like best? Just keep in mind that you are the one who decides. You don't say how old you are, but from your letter you sound young enough and smart enough to

keep your options open. But be careful! A good way to close out your options fast and ruin your life would be to get your girl pregnant or pick up a disease from the guy (my guess is that he's been around long enough to be a risk!) So play it SAFE, and enjoy!

Dear Ruth van Miller,

My husband recently told me that he had some homosexual experiences when he was younger, and I guess I reacted pretty strongly. Anyway, he and my two older brothers ganged up on me and said they'd all done the same sort of thing at that age, which they said was all the way from 13 to 18. Now I'm scared that my own brother, who is 17, and my son who is 12, may get into the same trap. What shall I do to protect them?

– ANGRY AND BAFFLED

Dear Baff,

Simmer down. If you'd written that your husband was sexually dysfunctional, and that the cause was those gay peccadilloes of his childhood, I'd understand your excitement (however ill founded it might be). But since you don't claim that he and your brothers seem any worse off for the experience, you might be sensible and conclude that some youthful experimentation might be good for a boy. Which, if you don't get excited about it, it probably is.

Now, as to your 17-year-old brother, my guess is that he's already in action. Whether he is or not, you wouldn't do any harm by asking your husband to talk to him. But don't do anything about it yourself.

And for heaven's sake don't lay a guilt trip on your son! His daddy can tell him what he needs to know, and from experience. And if you do find out that the boy is sexually active, show him that you approve. What good would it do to get mad or sulk? Read this next letter from one of the world's top authorities on children and sex.

Dear Ms. Van Miller,

I want to express my appreciation to you for the wise words you have given to so many young people and their parents. One of the odd things about adult memories is that we forget what it was like to be children. We hated the foolish tyranny of “thou shalt nots” which didn't apply to us in the first place, and we were made miserable by the feeling that we were bad just for wanting to express love with our bodies (not to mention have fun!)

No one is ever hurt by enjoyable, consensual sex. The only exceptions are people whose families make everything sexual seem dirty, with talk about “good touch” and “bad touch” and “private parts” and similar garbage. All affectionate “touch” is good, and no “parts” are private to lovers; they are meant to be shared. Mothers should teach this to their children, from earliest infancy. If they did, people in my position would be out of a job, and glad of it!

– Dr. Emilio van Rijn, M.D., Ph.D., Director, the Boston Metro Children's Hospital Psychiatric Clinic.

Dear Ruth Van Miller,

Well, when I wrote you last, just himself. Now, well, just sign me,

– BETTER OFF.

Dear Off,

Just don't give up bowling.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

Last year, our son Tommy, who was 14 at the time, became involved with “Milly” – a 19-year-old girl. Milly came to our house after school, while we were at work, and went to bed with him. Her parents knew she was seducing our son, but they ignored it in spite of our pleas. We tried to get help from the Child Protection Agency, but they told us that, according to Texas state law, “Milly” could be prosecuted ONLY if she was a man! A boy has no protection from lustful, predatory females. Tearfully, we told our son this, and to our amazement, he said “I can fix that!” and pretty soon he told us that he was going to bed with a thirty-year-old man! Well, we went back to Child Protection, and they said we'd have to Find out who the man is, and added that if we couldn't control our son's delinquencies, he ought to be put in foster home.

Now, Ruth, we have been good parents. We have never hesitated to beat Tommy, and we've made him pray for hours with bare knees on sand paper, but he's getting so big now that his father's afraid to hit him any more. We have preached to him until we are blue in the face, telling him he's going to hell in a handbasket. We are at the end of our rope.

– HANGING IN TEXAS

Dear Hang,

Well, I certainly agree you have a problem. Lotsa luck. And give Tommy a big kiss. Tell him he has an admirer!

Dear Ruth van Miller,

I know a fifteen-year-old boy whose mother is scitzy – real confused – and his father is long gone. I met him at a teen club where I'd gone to pick up my nephew. This boy, who I'll call Joe, wasn't in the club, but was hanging around outside, and when I asked him to maybe go look for my nephew and tell him I was waiting, Joe said they'd thrown him out when he called the lady in charge a bitch. I kind of liked his looks, and he didn't seem mean or anything, so I gave him my phone number, and when my nephew came out we left and I figured that was that. It wasn't, because he called right off that night and asked me if I could come to his house because his mother was – well, she was yelling right then when he was phoning me. Gee, I'd better cut this short. Anyway, I calmed her down and told Joe that anytime he needed to get away he could come stay at my place. And he started to do that a lot, and one thing led to another in bed, you know.

The problem started when my nephew told my mother that Joe was practically living at my place, and I'd promised my mother that I wouldn't mess with kids, like I had been doing and she found out when I was living at home. So I told Joe I couldn't see him because I must be a bad influence, like everyone said. So Joe went his way, but he wouldn't go back to living all the time at home, his mother was too crazy too much of the time, so you can guess what happened. He hit the streets and found another man, so my giving him up didn't do any good at all, in fact that made it worse because the guy he hooked up with chucked him out and Joe was crying when he called me, like he promised he wouldn't, and I went and got him and took him home to his mother, who, as it happened, was on her medicine and okay.

Don't you think I ought to tell my mother and my nephew to shove it? Joe needs me or he won't have

anything going for him, the way I see it. I've got a job now, and I don't need help from my mother. But just the same I don't want her to cut me off. I don't mean money, but I love my mother. She reads your column, so if you can help she might understand – but don't put my name down.

– NEEDED IN PASADENA

Dear Needed,

I think you've got to give some hope and solidity to Joe's life. If what you say is true, then he's going to be on the streets for life if he isn't rescued now. Don't you think that your mother can understand that? Maybe she'd be justified if you were picking up little boys and tossing them away after you used them – and I know there are people who do that – but if you and Joe have a real, lasting relationship, your mother ought to do everything she can to encourage you.

It's up to you to make her understand. Has she met Joe? Maybe she should, because it looks like he'll be around quite a lot if he's the boy you think he is.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

Last month police busted two guys I know for running a “sex ring” with about a dozen boys operating out of a shopping mall. Well, it wasn't a “ring” anyway, just guys having a good time together, and nothing would have happened but one of the boys told his girl friend, and she told her mother, and her mother told this crazy Baptist minister, and HE told the police. Now I was planning to get into the action, you know what I mean, like I'd been invited to, cause the boys are like 14, 15, 16, which to me is just perfect, but I don't dare go near that mall. Anyway, I'm going nuts thinking about those boys.

– WANTING ACTON IN A ST. LOUIS SHOPPING MALL

Dear Shop,

You want action? You go out and get action. What do you think those kids are doing while you sit at home going nuts? THEY'RE GOING NUTS TOO! Give them a break. If everybody gets scared off like you've been, I fear for the happiness of future generations.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

How can we get adult sponsorship for our high school sex club?

– GETTING IT TOGETHER IN GRAND RAPIDS

Dear Getting It,

You need to sit down and decide what your objectives are. Let's say, for example, that you want adult participation in your orgies. You would not want simple “sponsorship” by one adult, but you would need to hook up with some swingers. If you want financial assistance, one “sugar daddy” or “mommy” would be enough, if you can keep him or her satisfied. Maybe you need a place to party in. How large a place would depend on how many of you there are and how regularly you attend your orgies.

You see, it's not just a matter of wanting a “sponsor” unless you know what it is you want a sponsor to do, and what you are going to provide the sponsor in the way of benefits. Good luck.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

My father screwed my best friend. I don't mean nothing but what I mean, he screwed him, put it to him, you know? I don't think he ought to do that to my best friend. What do you think?

– MAD SON IN SALEM, OREGON

Dear M.S.I.S.,

What does your friend think?

Dear Ruth Van Miller,

We been doing it in the Mens at the bowling alley. We got four guys now, in a circle. My buddy says we ought to let a fag watch. He says he'll pay us.

– GETTING BETTER OFF

Dear Off,

Don't do it just because your buddy wants, but if you like the idea, why not? How about the other guys?

Dear Ruth van Miller,

About three months ago this very good-looking guy (I guess he's about 30) moved into the house next door. Its a quadplex, and he has the apartment that's right opposite my bedroom. This guy comes in from work at about ten o'clock at night, and strips off all his clothes, does some exercises for about an hour, and all this time he never pulls down the shade on his window. I'm supposed to be asleep, because 10:00 is my bedtime until Im 13, and though Im allowed to read for a while after ten, since this guy moved in all I do is turn my light out and watch, and all the time it's like I had an extra bone, and sometimes its so hard it hurts.

I don't dare tell my mom and dad about this. They'd think I was queer or something, being a boy watching a naked man, and they might tell him to pull the shade down. Then I'd really be sunk.

I don't know if he knows Im watching him. Hes real nice to me when he sees me around in the morning, and a couple of weeks ago I waved to him from my window when he was out back of his house and he waved back. So he knows where my window is. Some afternoons when he has a day off I know I could go up to his place without my parents knowing about it. How can I let him know? I mean, know that I'm watching him without taking a chance that hell pull the shade down. And know that if hed like me to, I could, you know, help him exercise or something. I guess I'd do anything he asked me to. How can I get him to ask me?

– WATCHING AND STIFF

Dear Stiff,

I think he knows you're watching. So I suggest you start a little game. Keep your light on in your room and your clothes off. Do some exercises. Stay near the window. Without being too obvious about it, see if he's watching you. If he is, and if he's (like you say) "stiff," then on the very first afternoon when he's off from work, you just sashay yourself up to his apartment and invite yourself in.



Dear Ruth van Miller,

He was only a second-class scout when he first climbed into the sleeping bag with me, but he was absolutely first class every other way. Now he's almost an Eagle, and he's still great in the sack – but that's not very often any more. I feel as though he's flying away from me, and I feel very jealous when I see him flapping around some dumb but pretty girl, because I know she's getting what I'm not. I'm still his Scoutmaster, so my question is, should I make it tough for him unless he roosts with me?

– HOT FOR A BIRD

Dear Hot,

Cool it. Those wings will carry him far, far away if you try to clip them.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

My son has a collection of posters of half naked men (and some more than half), like football players and rock stars. He has them all over the walls to his room. Is this normal?

– MOTHER IN MADISON

Dear Mad,

Most mothers worry about posters of naked women.

# The Pale Black, the World Servant, and the Voice of God

Carter saw baobabs trees as monsters, vast obese pillars of flesh, topped by branches so much like roots that they defiled the air. Farmers in Zimbabwe told him there were no young baobabs, anywhere, ever. Carter saw none. He had not seen a baobab of any age for more than a day when the axle on his Land Rover broke in northern Zambia, near Mpika, but one appeared, like an omen, not twenty yards from the cratered road. He imagined that the roots of the huge survivor blossomed below the earth in violent blues, purples and yellows amid bilious green leaves. Looking closely, while his driver assessed the damage (Carter knew it was beyond repair), he saw that the tree was not one tree, but an incestuous merging of a dozen trunks, flesh into flesh, an act of slow giant lust

Responding to his own impatience (but calling it urgency of mission), Carter left his driver (with a letter of credit) at the doubtful telephone of the crumbling Crested Crane Hotel. A bus was then already six hours late, but it promised to deliver him to the Tanzanian border. It did so, but the experience was not a good one. The Tanzanian customs officer sneered at Carter's passport as he seized it, observing that an American, traveling on a bus but pretending to be an officer of the United Nations, was obviously a CIA agent. He ordered Carter to wait on the bus until the customs post opened in the morning.

Carter slept badly, woke after three hours, cleared customs, and waited to board his next bus. Six hours later – without food – he was waiting still. God, he thought, had often punished him. Not always for a clear reason. The sins of his father perhaps. But why this form? At last the bus did move, and Carter boarded it. Carter was sick with hunger, heat and dehydration, and he was also bitter and depressed by the failures of the past two days. As a boy, Carter had found God's peculiar injustice comforting. Such capriciousness, known and anticipated, tempered a child's reaction to hurts and frustrations. Carter was no longer a child, and he felt himself falling into the sins of anger and racism, blaming the blackness of his tormentors for his suffering, and blaming his suffering on the sins of anger and racism. It was a theological paradox that made him even more angry, racist, and tired. Those feelings made him indifferent to the splendors of the splendid naked hills the bus traversed near the edge of Africa's great Rift.

But he began to notice, as the road flattened out near Mbeya, that Tanzania had young baobabs. On both sides of the bus he could see them, no longer great mounds of flesh, but each single and slim, ten, twenty, at first, then dozens, hundreds perhaps, scattered chaotically, each like a pillar, with hair, upon a moonscape of deep green cheese. He felt almost lighthearted, graced by the little trees, when the bus deposited him not twenty yards from the hotel entry.

The lift to his mood was brief. The hotel clerk was cool, clean, and suspicious of Carter's sweaty coating of dust. He held up his hand – the palm an ochre contrast to the almost blueblack of the rest of his visible skin – and said, “No.” A weary and bitter ten minutes later, Carter had, to make peace and in hope somehow of a bed, paid the full rate for a booking made in error for July 6, ten days previous. The clerk, appeased (and probably pocketing the money himself) promised to telephone for some sort of help – when the telephone was “back in service.”

Carter's mood was at its blackest as, responding to the clerk's only helpful advice, he retired to the hotel lounge. Hungry, even ravenous, he had already been warned that the dining room was closed until seven. He looked, grim and narrow eyed, at the Europeans, Asiatics, and Africans, sitting at tables in discrete groups, sharing the afternoon tedium in the dingy white room. Guiltily, he resented the racism so obvious, so visible. Off to the left, concealed from the lounge but visible to Carter at the doorway, was the small dark bar. Two people were seated on bar stools. The sight made Carter's eyes narrow even

more, and his emotions more grim. One, a fat Asian, was gently caressing the bottom of another, smaller person. Into Carter's oppressed mind came the image of a great baobab's fleshy union with a young tree, unresisting to the irresistible.

Carter was not the puritan his parents had raised him to be, but he preserved their prejudices. He detested, and this was immediately to the point, public displays of sexuality. His father's teaching especially reviled displays of unnatural vice. That revulsion was evoked at this particular moment because the smaller person at the bar, dark, with black hair in shining curls, was almost certainly as male as the Asian.

Now Carter's rage had an objective. No longer trapped in helpless anger, he possessed moral justification and a duty to act. He had, as he moved, the presence of mind to know that in East Africa no American, however righteous, has the authority to attack a Pakistani or Indian pervert when he, himself, is not the object of the pervert's attention. He could, however, invade the obscene privacy of the bar and, by his presence, publicize and quell the pervert's abuse of the child.

Rather more loudly than he intended, Carter, approaching the bar, demanded "Whiskey!" then looked to see if the fat, caressing fingers had moved from the boy's buttocks. They had not. Instead the bottom had moved when its owner turned to look at Carter. The fingers now, more obscenely than before, rested on a thigh. Carter was again appalled; the child seemed indifferent.

"They don't have whiskey," the boy's voice said-and it was a boy's voice; the boy was there, looking up at Carter, the boy who had not resisted the fingers, and the accent was midwestern American. Carter looked back at the boy and felt, very briefly (hunger, thirst?) a dizziness, a sense that he was on the edge of nausea. Carter couldn't, didn't have the time even, to rationalize the response. The boy was the most beautiful child he had ever seen. "You can get beer. That's all they've got." Brown eyes, set wide under black brows, furrowed, showing concern. "You okay? You're all covered with dust!"

Carter nodded, partly to shake off the evaporating sensation. "I need to wash, and, yes, I'll have beer."

The vile fingers moved at last, waving to the barman. "Sampson! A beer for this master. Very cold!"

The boy was smiling. "You can't wash. There's no water. Are you American?" Under the still shining curls a straight nose had nostrils slightly flared; then full lips and white teeth, in a smile against a skin the color of ginger snaps. "I bet you are."

"So are you." Carter grasped for his rage, discontent, and righteousness, but they escaped him.

"I don't live there. I live in Tangier. Where do you live?"

The effort to speak was almost more than Carter could manage, yet he couldn't choose. "I don't live in the states either." He paused for breath. "I live in Geneva." He slumped, exhausted, onto a bar stool, and found there that his own eyes were almost on a level with the boy's, intent, gleaming. The look was so nearly hypnotic that Carter was relieved by the distraction of the steward's putting down on the bar a 600ml green bottle on which was a label showing a rampaging elephant. Lucky elephant, Carter thought, and did not know why.

He rallied to see the Asian paying for the beer. Carter raised his wallet in a futile gesture while the fat man smiled happily, saying, "The stranger is a guest in Mbeya." Defeated, Carter cast about for some way to show his disapproval; none came. The Asian said, "Call me Punjabi." Rather than be rude to the boy's friend, Carter chose civility (saying, "Carter; Carter Seward"). The boy mimicked the Asian: "Call me Tommy." Then he held Carter's hand a moment too long and brushed his palm with fingertips.

Tommy? Carter blushed. A summer camp. A canoe trip, and a naked swim. Something furtive, happy, and guilty on the grass after. But why the memory? The name had not been Tommy. This boy's eyes were on him again, and Carter would have blushed again but for Punjabi's kind solicitude interrupting with gentle questions that led Carter to say why he was dusty, why he had no room.

“Use my room,” the Asian said, seeking some sort of grand gesture. “Rest there. I would give it to you, but an associate,” he dwelt on the word a moment, as if saddened by it, “will need it later.” His look was wistful, not seeing Carter, but focused instead on Tommy’s curls. “I have its private use only a few hours more.” The Asian was making a sacrifice. Carter had achieved a victory. The boy was saved. Instead of elation, Carter felt sympathy for a man who accepted defeat so gracefully.

“Try Mrs. Henderson,” Tommy said. “We can walk. It’s not far.”

Punjabi laughed. “Almost two kilometers. You will carry the luggage on your head, like an African?” He put a hand onto the curls, causing Carter’s hand to move, spasmodically, as if to resist. “I will take you in my car. You and our friend. It is my thanks to you for walking so far to visit me here.”

Tommy smiled, and his voice was gentle, contradicting his message: “I didn’t come to visit you. I didn’t know you. I found you.”

“It was decreed.” Punjabi spoke only to Tommy, but his message was to Carter as well. “You, ah, intuited that I would be here. In my country we have a different word for it.” He sighed and released the boy. “Now you have another friend you were destined to meet. He is an American, like you. Except for a touch of the tar brush. Yours is the darkest skin at Mrs. Henderson’s guest house.”

“No, it isn’t,” Tommy said, unoffended. “The stewards are African.”

Mrs. Henderson moved around the spacious lounge as if she were a hostess at a large party. She floated to a chair by the couch where Tommy and Carter sat, side by side. Carter had bathed and was dressed in a fresh bush jacket. “So good of you,” she said, “to bring Tom back to us. We’d have been frantic if there were any trouble a boy could find in Mbeya.” She lowered her eyes in response to Tommy’s smile. “I don’t doubt you were looking for mischief, but you found Mr. Seward instead.” She returned her attention to Carter. “Did the hotel decline your reservation?”

Carter felt grateful for the sheer Europeaness – the Britishness of her courtesy. “A mistake in Harare, maybe,” he said. “But who knows?”

“Indeed who? I think the mistakes were fewer when we could call it Salisbury – but there’s the colonial past speaking. Forgive me. We’re all on the side of black rule now, aren’t we? You especially. It’s your job. It’s mine too.” She had the English gift for self mockery. “So you’ll go on to Iringa tomorrow.” It was a statement, not a question.

“My Land Rover is still in Zambia. Somewhere. I doubt if I’ll see it again.”

She sighed gravely. “You had better have a drink.” She called to a steward, “Komo.”

When the steward stood waiting, Carter asked, “Do you have whiskey?”

“A double whiskey for this master. Tom?”

“Beer.”

“Of course, dear. A double whiskey and an orange squash, ‘Komo.’” She turned back to Carter with a kind smile. “You’ve been having a difficult time. You must go to Iringa tomorrow. Because there’s no room at the hotel, and your room here has been booked.”

“There’s no transport,” Carter said, “though, of course, I did get here on the bus.”

“No need for that. I’ll put out feelers. Someone will have space in a car.” She leaned forward, to take Carter into her confidence. “We have delicate antennae here. No secrets at all. It’s the hell of the land of the Zanj.” She drew back again, and sighed. “In poor Dr. Livingston’s time, it was scabies.”

“Very good, ‘Komo.’” She said that to the drinks, not the steward, then looked at Carter again. “I’ll see who’s going north.” She rose from her chair. “Dinner is at half past seven. You can have use of the club across the way. But I must warn you.” She began to float away. “The club has no whiskey. I have the only supply in Mbeya. Ah, Mr. Smallchurch!” She was gone.

Carter cocked an eye at Tommy's drink. "Orange beer?"

"She won't let us drink beer, me and my brother. She doesn't care really. My father would raise hell if she did."

"Your brother's here?"

"And my father. I don't have a mother."

Carter decided not to ask him to explain that. The more immediate concern was that Punjabi had been right: no one else at Mrs. Henderson's had skin so dark except the stewards. Wary, Carter asked, "Your brother and father, where are they?"

"At the billiard table."

Carter saw a sandy-haired man and a sandy-haired boy putting cue sticks onto the rack.

"I guess they're finished," Tommy said. "Here comes Donny."

Carter looked again. The man had a weathered face, and the stare he returned to Carter was weary. He's younger than I am, Carter thought, and he looks ten years older. As Carter turned away, he distinctly heard the word "Fag." The sandy-haired boy was passing. Tommy replied, "Airhead." Neither word sounded malicious. They were like passwords.

Carter imagined his mother's grandfather, the Confederate Army major, whose body servant died with him at Antietam; they had been "breast brothers," from the same black breast and, legend had it, the same father. Carter looked at Tommy's darkness with a new surprise, but now saw something else: the boy's whole body tensed at the approach of his "father." The voice that said, "Dad's coming," was constricted, almost fearful. A new image occurred: a newspaper story about a convicted pederast who had adopted one boy, and was detected only when he was adopting another. Carter felt a renewed protectiveness. The first danger had been Punjabi, now this American pervert was an even greater threat. Carter would have liked to touch Tommy, to reassure him. Instead he rose to face the pederast.

The pederast, smiling, extended a hand. "Lemuel Tolliver, Thomas's father." His accent was familiar, educated redneck. He called to the steward, "'Komo! Yes, here, bring this master – that's whiskey, isn't it? – double whiskey with ice in it. Ice now, 'Komo. It don't look like you put in any before. Who are you saving it for?"

'Komo smiled. "I doan save it, sah. You aks, I bring it"

"Orange squash for me. Ice in that too. Go along – but bring some ice for Sonny too." Tolliver sat, Tommy between them. "Mrs. Henderson told me who you are, Mr. Seward. I hope you'll visit the construction site. It's not your line, exactly, getting water to crops, but I want your folks in Geneva to know we're making progress."

"I have to go to Iringa tomorrow." Oddly, in view of what he'd just said, Tolliver seemed relieved. "You're restructuring the water supply?" Carter added, adopting a professional tone. Tolliver was immediately happy, talking about a dam and piped water for irrigation. Carter had little need to speak. Tommy, some invisible crisis past, sat serene, glowing in the dim light of kerosene lanterns. Carter studied Tolliver. No more likely to seduce boys than I am, Carter thought. Less perhaps. The thought amused him.

Dinner was served at tables for four. When they sat, Tolliver asked quietly, "Please join us in prayer." He took Carter's smooth left hand in his own callused right, a surprising intimacy, and took Donald's in his left. Carter reached to hold Tommy's hand. It was restless throughout the grace. Carter looked briefly and caught Tommy's half-shut eyes on him, and a sudden smile of satisfaction.

Donald, across the table from Carter, had the same wide-set eyes and straight nose as Tommy. His brow was lower and his mouth coarser, like Tolliver's. Donald's shoulders were heavy, as if he were the lineman and Tommy the leaner, quicker quarterback. The pairing was so odd that Carter could not resist



asking their ages.

“Fourteen in November,” Donald said.

“Twins,” Tolliver said. His tone was flat. Then he smiled. It was rehearsed. He'd said it just that way, and smiled, many times before. And he'd responded to incredulity like Carter's “Twins?” by saying, with the same laugh he used now, “Did I say identical?” The boys laughed too, at the old joke, and at Carter.

“We won the booby prize at a twins contest,” Donald said. “The judges were gross.”

Tolliver's voice was gentle, a practiced reassurance. “It was a long time ago. In their first year of grade school.”

“That was our only year of school in the states,” Donald said, grinning at Tommy. “Dad had to get him out.”

Carter looked at Tommy. His lack of reaction seemed practiced too. What was it? Carter asked himself. A lurking gene? Less likely – almost impossible – but more comforting than the truth. Comforting to Tolliver, but what did Tommy know? Carter felt his silence weigh upon the table. “I see,” he said, and smiled confidently at Tolliver. It was enough.

After dessert, Tommy appealed to his father, “Can I take Mr. Seward – to show him my rock?” Before Tolliver could answer, Tommy added, emphatically, “That's all.”

“I don't think Mr. Seward would want to see it, Sonny,” Tolliver said. “He's tired.”

Carter did not like decisions made for him. “I like a walk after dinner,” he said. He was careful not to sound insistent; he didn't want Tolliver to think – Carter's mind hesitated – what was it he did not want Tolliver to think?

Tolliver looked anxious. “Don't let him bother you. You can walk without him.”

Tommy rose, implying that permission had been granted. “Maybe,” he said to Carter, “we can see the Rift.”

“It's too dark,” Donald said, with an inexplicable laugh.

“The moon, Airhead. The moon's full.”

“Don't answer him, Donald,” Tolliver said quickly. To Tommy he added, “Don't keep him out long, with your tales and your stars. Or any of it.” The last was a warning.

Donald mouthed the word “Fag” at Tommy, letting Carter see it, then said, “Excuse me, sir,” with excessive good manners, and followed his father.

The moon lay low, full and mocking, in the northeast sky. It washed the road white on black tar, gleaming, and subdued the redness of the rock Tommy had leapt up and now stood upon, waiting, moonlit. Carter gathered in the sight slowly before following. “They call it the End of the World,” Tommy said. Together they looked west, out onto the badlands. Though only about a thousand yards from the guest house, the rock was the peak of a hill beyond the last houses of the town, and in the quiet they seemed, and perhaps were, entirely alone. The Great Rift, if it was there at all, was beyond the far darkness. “You can see it in the afternoon, when there are shadows in the Rift.” Tommy's voice was hushed, as if he were suggesting a mystery, saying “You can see, really see, Africa being ripped open.” He waited for a response.

“I'd like to see that,” Carter said, meaning it, catching some of Tommy's awe.

Now assured, Tommy was enthusiastic. “There's a road to the edge – out toward Chunya. We could go in a car tomorrow. Why not stay? It's the biggest thing happening in all the earth.” Tommy looked into the moonlit distance intently, then up at Carter.

It's as if he discovered it himself, and there's no one here to show it to. “I'm on a mission,” Carter said;

“my work is in Iringa, and I should get on it tomorrow, to meet my schedule.”

“I know,” Tommy said; “I mean, I thought so.” Tommy's voice verged on anger. “But just, it won't make any difference, I'd like to know.” Tommy seemed irritated, perhaps by uncertainty about how to proceed. “The Rift-you know – Dad says it's just the way God made it, the way the Bible says, but I say it's getting wider, even if we can't see it. Donald says Dad's right.”

Carter was cautious. “Your father's an educated man, Tommy.”

“Bullshit.”

Carter was offended. It wasn't the word itself. It was just the first obscenity he'd heard in more than a week – unless passengers had used African scatology on the bus at Mpika. They didn't count. Feeling awkwardly prim, he asked, “Where did you learn about the Rift?”

“At school, the American School, you know, in Tangier. My science teacher gave me a book when I told him where Dad's project was. It's a pretty simple book. But I did some more reading in the Britannica.” All that was said quickly, almost as a preface to his apology: “I'm sorry I said bullshit,”

The boy was quick, sensitive to more than Carter thought he showed. “I didn't mind it much,” Carter said, reaching to touch Tommy's shoulder. “It was just unexpected.”

Tommy shrugged off the hand, impatient. “You weren't going to answer my question.”

Carter felt hurt that his touch had been rejected. He felt the coldness in his own voice as he said, “Does it matter?”

“Yes.” Tommy faced him now, a bit defiant, as if a great deal did depend on Carter's answer, as if, hearing the wrong answer, he was prepared to have nothing further to do with the stranger in such a hurry to get on to Iringa.

The moon did strange things to Tommy's face, now that he turned it towards Carter. The moon lightened the skin against the black brows and hair. Carter wished the boy were not so beautiful, nor so concerned about geology. “You're asking if the world is very old. I think it must be.” Carter framed his answer carefully as if he were lecturing. “You're asking if the earth's tectonic plates have been moving for millions, perhaps billions of years, and are moving still. They have been, and they are.” Carter looked for a change in Tommy, but he didn't find it.

Tommy said, tentatively, “And the Bible, it's a lot of crap.”

Carter wasn't ready for that; it irritated him. But he smiled. “Are you going to apologize in a minute for saying crap?”

“No.” The boy was challenging him.

As a test of wills it was absurd. Carter's only feeling for the once-Holy Scriptures was a reverence, a remnant of Sunday School teaching and parental piety. A cultural respect, literary awe. But to say what Tommy asked? No. “The creation story's a fable,” Carter said coldly. “Every primitive society has one.”

“They're all, what I said.”

This was tiresome. “Not to the people who believe them.”

“Let's go back,” Tommy said, and turned away, down from the rock.

Carter felt something was ending, and ending because he was unwilling to say some simple truth in a way that a thirteen-year-old boy, brighter than most, wanted. Not moving, he said, “If I have to choose, why not let me do it before you go?”

Tommy turned. “I think you just did. You did, didn't you?”

Carter nodded, elated. “Dad's okay,” the boy went on, “but he lays this Bible stuff on me and – ” He paused, uncertain.

Carter helped. “You wanted to know.”

“Yes.” Tommy smiled, expressing a new hope. He came close to Carter again. “Do you know the southern stars? They’re what I really come here for.”

“No. Can you show me?”

“If you look for the Southern Cross, there, above it – Wait. I’ll show you Centaurus, and Alpha, that’s the nearest star. Maybe it has a world too, like the sun has?”

Later, as they walked back, Carter felt an odd discontent. It had all gone so strangely; far more was at stake, for Tommy and for himself, than the age of the world. It was more what thou shalt not do. He resisted the impulse to put a hand again on the boy’s shoulder. This time, it might be welcome. But now he could not touch Tommy spontaneously, as he had before. Now he would be a fool, courting disaster.

Carter had yielded, drunk, yes he was drunk then, at his fifth Yale reunion, yielded to an undergraduate, one of the boys on the workcrews. He forgot it, except to remember when in danger, as now. He’d not told Margaret, nor explained to her why he didn’t like reunions. She’d have blamed herself, her inadequacies, her miscarriages, though it had nothing to do with her.

Besides, now, he was cold sober.

Were he not in the comfortable lounge of Mrs. Henderson’s guest house, Carter’s situation would have been like his the day before, in Tunduma. He’d been ready at seven, packed, and had spoken farewells to Tolliver and his sons, putting an end to the evanescent friendship of man and boy. The image of Tommy, looking back from the departing Land Rover, stayed. Carter had gone in to sit alone, philosophizing about the meaningless heartache such partings gave to the modern world, and contrasted himself, citizen of the whole world’s diaspora, with the simple African villager who parted from friends only in death. He was inclined to such speculations, and had no doubt engaged in similar thoughts yesterday (though he could not remember just what his thoughts had been then) until, as now, the time grew too long. His digital watch read 9:18.

Mrs. Henderson, in deep distress, hovered. “We’ll have to double you up somehow. If someone’s willing.” Carter got up, expectant. “Oh, Mr. Seward, it’s my doing. You were to go with a Mr. Singh. He was traveling alone, and it was a kindness to him. He wanted to meet you.” She sat, and waved him to sit too. “It’s no good standing; there’s nowhere to go. He tells me his battery is dead, and it won’t take a charge. He could start out, but it’s too great a risk.”

Carter sat, shaken, yet elated. He felt the need to seem concerned, so he muttered, “What can we do?”

“It’s no use until a new battery is brought from Iringa. If Iringa has one.” That, her tone implied, was unlikely. “It will be all right tomorrow. Someone will be traveling. What you need is a bed for tonight. The question is, whose?”

Carter wondered if she was about to offer her own, then abandoned the idea as too bizarre. He let the silence speak for his own helplessness.

“The Tollivers,” she said. “They have two doubles. If you could bear to share a bed, I expect their Christian charity would require him to allow you.” She sighed. “He’s a great Christian, you know. Not of the sort we see much, but he’s not unkind.”

“He was hoping I’d visit his project.” It would be a kind of payment.

“Then, by all means, let’s go visit! You Americans can sort it all out among yourselves, can’t you?” Mrs. Henderson rose and called for ‘Komo. “Leave your suitcase here. I’ll drive you. Mr. Tolliver will get his visitation, and you will get your bed.”

The project was a half hour out the Tukuyu road, eleven miles. Tolliver welcomed them into his “office,” a tin roof on four posts. He dismissed Mrs. Henderson’s apologies as of no consequence, and immediately began illustrating what he’d told Carter the night before about the works. Donald, coming to

join them in the shade, wearing only shorts and sneakers, shouted back to Tommy, "Hey! He didn't go!"

Tommy, wearing shorter shorts yet looking less nude, hung back, entering only as Mrs. Henderson was saying, "Can I leave Mr. Seward here? It seems what you and he wish."

"Yes, sure," Tolliver said, rubbing his hands together, relishing an audience.

"Which room shall I have Mr. Seward's things put into?"

Tommy spoke immediately: "He's my friend."

Tolliver scowled at the boy, then turned an appraising look at Carter. "Mr. Seward's our guest. We're not playing finders keepers."

Carter intervened, smiling, with a touch of almost conscious deceit. "It doesn't matter. I'll appreciate any space – the floor, if the beds are crowded."

"He'd have more room with me, and Donny likes to sleep with you anyway." Tolliver stared at the ground a moment, dubious. Carter felt uneasy, and looked to Mrs. Henderson with an unstated question, to which she offered no answer. Donald put in, "Don't worry, Dad. It's just one night." Tolliver nodded and turned to Mrs. Henderson with what seemed almost an apology rather than an accusation. "For you English people, your beds may be double, but I don't see two grown men the size of me and Mr. Seward in one of them. Put him in the boys' room."

Carter didn't need to look at Tommy to sense that he was caught up in some sort of puzzle. Yet Mrs. Henderson seemed to see the arrangement as entirely suitable, and, when Carter did look at Tommy, he saw nothing unusual there. As Mrs. Henderson drove away, Tolliver was already moving Carter out onto the works, showing the interrelationship of plan, difficulty and structure.

In an hour, Carter was deeply impressed with Tolliver's engineering skill and ingenuity. His estimation of the man grew, as did his recognition that the project was seriously underfunded. Tolliver was careful, tactful, never overselling. A good report in Geneva would help, even from Carter, and Carter resolved to make it. When Tolliver had made his case, he asked the boys to take the project Land Rover and show Carter the Rift. "They call it The End of the World here, and you will see why. It's the end of these Africans' world," he waved toward his workers, "and it's the sight to see here."

"Won't you be needing it?" Carter asked, meaning the Land Rover.

"I can get back in the lorry; that's what they call the truck here."

Tommy spoke for the second time since Carter arrived. "Can we go to the Club too?"

"Whatever Mr. Seward wants, Sonny; not what you want. He's our guest. Remember that." He turned to Carter. "Do you play tennis? Sonny's continually looking for players." When Carter nodded, Tolliver told an apparently relieved Donald, "You can stay; three's too many for tennis."

It seemed that Tommy's friendship had parental blessing. A cause, Carter found, for dismay as well as a certain joy. The afternoon together, and then the night. If Tolliver had been able to read Carter's fears, he surely would not have let Tommy have his way. But surely it was Carter's own imagination that fueled his fears; Tommy had done nothing. He was just a boy, different in his way, lonely in his difference. Then, into Carter's thoughts returned the burning image of Punjabi's hand, and with it Margaret's dismay if she knew her husband harbored such thoughts.

An hour later, they reached the End of the World.

The new world, beyond this one, was greener, fairer, deep in a canyon broad as Eden. Carter, as always since childhood, imagined a population more pure than this one, unsoiled by sin and commerce, sheltered in a forest canopy. Tommy stood out at the edge itself, the edge of a fall grandiose in its danger.

Scuffing loose stones ahead, seeing them fall to invisibility, Carter moved to Tommy's side, and was inspired. He felt an ache in his loins, pleasure and death, and a wild desire to end this foolishness about the boy and Margaret. It would take only one step more, a step that seemed, for-an instant, certain, right,



and inevitable. Heights had that effect, the child in him wishing to be free, wishing the splendor of a terrible act that dared all others. Carter stepped not forward but back. "I promised you I'd play tennis," he explained to Tommy. Tommy nodded, unaware.

"Next time, I'll win." Tommy was stripping off his shorts in the locker room of the Club. The bath attendant was getting water. Rotting floor slats, designed to protect footing as wet bodies drained, confirmed the decay that the old colonial club manifested everywhere, even on the tennis courts, sandy deformations of what had once been infinitely fine clay from termite hills. On those courts, with their peculiar bounces, Tommy had lost one set 2-6, then in the second set came back from being down 1-4 to lose in a tie breaker. Now the boy, exuding confidence, tossed his socks, the last of his clothes, onto the floor, and stood, expectant. Around the middle of his body, from hairless pubic semi-excitement to a decorous dark navel, was a sunshaded pale stripe, the obscene mark of civilization. In spite of it, Carter imagined that he saw before him a god of renewal, who made the decaying lockers testify to a past that once too was young.

The attendant carried two buckets of water into the shower stall. Carter sat motionless, still dressed for the courts. He looked away from the god, pretending exhaustion. "You go first," he said.

Tommy did not move, but he looked at Carter with something like the impatience, the petty irritation he'd shown the night before, on the rock. Then he went into the stall. In a moment, he cried, "Ow! The water's cold!"

Good, Carter thought. When he had been thirteen, he too had used cold water, cold showers at Choate. He'd needed them in that sensuous world of adolescent hostility. When Tommy came out, Carter went in, and doused himself, feeling the same shock, the same quelling of emotion. Then, involuntarily, he whispered, "Damn!" A boy had surged into his memory and loins, a boy whose name had not been Tommy either. Cold water was not always enough.

No. It was not enough for the sight of Tommy, still naked, posing, one leg on the bench and his upper body muscles flexed. "How'd I be as a model?"

What did Punjabi say? Carter asked inwardly. We do what it is said we will do? No. But that was the meaning. Now, somewhere, the gods of motor vehicles and hotels are gambling for my soul. If there are gods, these are they. "Good," Carter said, toweling himself briskly. "Too good. Get dressed. What's the bath guy going to think?"

Tommy relaxed his pose and rubbed his hands over his chest and stomach. He looked serious as he said, "He thinks all whites are crazy. Even me."

Nothing is inevitable, Carter thought at the dinner table. He felt an irony in holding the hands of Tolliver and Tommy during Tolliver's recitation of grace. There is something between them, and I am part of it. Later, he stayed overlong at the billiard table, watching, not playing, and he delayed going to bed by having a late whiskey with Mrs. Henderson. But even she deserted him, reminding him of the early start to Iringa in the morning, and Carter went to face, or not to face, the sleeping Tommy.

As he entered, Carter knew that he'd seen the room before, but he was not prepared for the yellow glow of the kerosene lamp by the bed. What had been drably ordinary, four colonial walls peeling blue paint, were now the setting for a nimbus that brightened Tommy's black hair, shadowed his dark face, but somehow not his eyes – awake, watching – and illuminated his right shoulder, strong and soft. Tommy reached his right hand forward, toward Carter and the door, as if to touch across eight feet of space, then withdrew it, and, hand turned impatiently, said, "It took you long enough."

It is in the hands of the gods, with Punjabi's blessing. Carter told himself that resistance was futile. He



stripped, silent, and slipped under the sheet and blanket. But I won't do the gods' work for them. Let them do their worst. He did not even look at Tommy. They did not touch.

From far away, it seemed, he heard Tommy say, "I'm glad you got me away from Punjabi."

Carter did not want to answer, but his silence had grown so much that it intimidated him. "He had," Carter resolved on the truth of his intention, "his hand on your bottom."

"He wanted my ass."

The word hung, knifelike, over the bed. Carter stopped breathing.

"There's got to be a first time."

That was worse than Carter had feared. If it were true? Carter was lost.

"So what's wrong?" Tommy was angry with the silence, the stiffness, and Carter knew it, but he could not change. "In Tangier, kids smaller than me do it. All the time. They go out looking for tourists, and everybody knows. So what's the big deal?" Tommy was up on a elbow. He whispered fiercely, "Say something!"

Carter knew there was an answer to the boy's outrageous conception. "They are," he began, and failed. He tried again. "Tommy, it's different with them. They're street boys –" Where was the answer? He looked back at Tommy, helpless.

Tommy let himself fall back, then turned away. "They're different. They're niggers, right, Mr. Seward?" He turned back to Carter. "Well I'm a nigger too, so where's the difference?"

"Don't call me Mr. Seward." Carter knew that was the wrong thing to say while he was saying it.

"Shit, Mr. Seward, I know my place. I just thought you didn't."

"Tommy, Tommy." Carter was pleading now. No, I won't refuse love. "It would be the first time for me too." That utterly unnecessary lie was almost true. Such lying, he told himself, comes easily to a diplomat.

In the dim shadow of the kerosene lamp, Tommy frowned, yet his voice was soft. "Do you want to?"

Yes. Good gods, yes, Carter thought. "I'll try," was all he said. He reached down, beneath the covers.

He failed. They failed. Carter felt sick with anger. They had been like machines, or whores. Women could pretend. Carter searched for consolation. To the back of Tommy's head, to the curls, tinged with the yellow light of the kerosene, Carter said, "You're not what you thought you were."

Tommy wrenched one word out of the sobs he was concealing: "Bullshit."

Carter tried again. "Don't you see?"

"I am what I am. A nigger fag, and you can't get it up for a nigger fag."

"Tommy, look at me."

"You didn't even want to."

That, at least, wasn't true. "No, Tommy. I wanted to. I did."

Tommy turned, tear-stained and scowling. "Why? Why did you? If you did."

The words choked the diplomat. Sometimes we can't speak truth. Not even our romantic idiocies. Forgive me, Margaret. Then he said it. "I like you. Very much. Too much."

Tommy's scowl changed to a puzzled frown. "I thought you did."

Of course he did; he must have. "When?"

"All along. With Punjabi. As soon as you sat down. And when you held my hand. For grace. And on the rock. All the time. You wouldn't even take a shower with me, you were so chicken. But I knew I had to be right."

The young baobab. Carter could not speak, but he knew the boy was right. It had been from the first.

“Don't you want to know – ”

Carter cut in. “I know.” I can't risk seeing him now. I can't risk another failure. Yet the need for Tommy was beyond his control. We risk death breathing. I could have stepped off the End of the World. Carter turned his head and found Tommy's mouth almost touching his.

The steward at the door said, “Car for the master is here now.”

“Don't go today.” Tommy blocked Carter's attempt to unlock the door. They struggled, cold and naked, in the early morning air. “Say you're sick. Just till tomorrow.”

“I'm sick,” Carter said through the closed door. “I can't go. Say thank you, but I can't go. Do you understand?”

“Master can't go. He sick. Master says thank you.”

“That's right.” The struggle over, the two bodies were still in contact. “Iringa can fall into the Rift,” Carter whispered. “What will your father say?”

“Don't listen to him.” The room was grayly lit from the one curtained window. The light made Carter intensely aware of his nakedness and his excitement. He tried to pull away from Tommy, but his touch was too gentle, and Tommy held him close with only one hand. With the other, he held both their erections and pressed them together, measuring. “Mine's going to be bigger,” he said. “Come on, back to bed. We have to fix these. Come on. Now.”

They were the last guests at breakfast. Mrs. Henderson sat with them. “If you're going to make yourself ill sitting up to all hours with your whiskey, which I presume you did after I urged you, solemnly, to be ready this morning, you will never go to Iringa at all. And no doubt you disturbed the child when you staggered, drunken, into the bedroom.” Tommy found her version comic; Carter was embarrassed. “Your father,” she said to Tommy, “and your brother were up. They wanted to say goodbye to Mr. Seward. I suggested to them that you were both ill, gastritis perhaps, though I don't think your father was impressed, and I know your brother wasn't.” This too Tommy found hilarious. Carter began to realize that Mrs. Henderson was in on the joke not yet explained.

She went on, this time to Carter. “I'll send for you at seven tomorrow. You won't refuse Major Willowbend and his Mercedes. I've rather been saving him. Write me if you find out how he got it. That's if you want to go. Perhaps the night air at Mbeya has a fatal attraction for you.”

“At seven,” Carter was saying, while Tommy was saying urgently, “No, Buzz, take me with you.” Carter looked, showing what he thought was helplessness, to Mrs. Henderson.

Mrs. Henderson rose, and said the unexpected. “You should, you know. He's bored silly here.” She walked away, leaving Carter stunned.

“Until school starts, Buzz.”

“Don't call me that.” Carter tried to remember why, in post-coital conversation within the past hour, he'd been so foolish as to tell Tommy that name. “Not even my wife uses it. Only people who've known me twenty years call me that.”

“And me, Buzz. Until I've known you twenty years. Then I'll be old enough to call you Carter.”

“All right.”

“You'll take me?”

That was absurd, a dream, not a possibility. “No. Call me Buzz, if you want to. I've got a wife, for Christ's sake.”

“I'd be nice to her.” Tommy showed no sense at all of the impossibility.

“She's not stupid. She'd know.”

“Then just till you go back to her, so she won't have to know. When's that?”

Carter decided to go to hell. “September.”

“That's a month and a half, Buzz.”

It was still absurd. Carter turned away.

“You think it's wrong.”

“Of course it's wrong.” The image shocked Carter: “A man my age travelling with a thirteen-year-old child. And with passports that show we're not related.” The scandal would surface at every hotel.

“You think us fucking's wrong.”

“Yes. I don't know.” That was true. “Anyway, your father does.” But if God's not just, what does it matter?

“I don't care.”

“I can't kidnap you onto a pederastic joyride, if that's what you want me to do.”

“No kidnapping.” Tommy seemed sure. “He'll let me go.”

“I don't believe it. He's a queerhating fundamentalist Christian if I ever saw one.”

“Sort of; he doesn't hate me. Anyway I've got free will. Ask him.”

“I wouldn't know how.”

“Can I ask him?”

It was going too fast. He'd already given away September.

Carter nodded. Tommy kissed him, and there were still stewards in the room. “No!” Carter said, shocked. “Don't do that in public again. Not ever.”

“You liked it.”

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“You're lost without your shadow,” Mrs. Henderson said, lowering her bulk beside Carter. “Komo. You know what this master will have.”

“Why do we still use that word?”

“Komo thinks it's a lower title than chief. He's quite irreverent.”

Carter laughed. “I don't deserve reverence.”

“You've dropped all pretence.” She waited, but Carter found nothing to reply. “You'll have an interesting evening. I knew you would say yes. Here's your drink. The devil is very active here. He's at home. He's friendly, and he tells me everything. I'm on his side, you know. That seems to put me on yours as well.” She sighed. “Poor Mr. Tolliver. God can't help him much here. God lives in America.”

Tolliver's grace at dinner seemed even more grotesque; holding his callused hand and Tommy's sweet, polluted flesh linked improbability so starkly that Carter momentarily doubted that Tommy had asked the question. Tommy quieted the doubt with a grin during grace.

Tolliver quieted it too, in his own way. “Tommy asked me if he can go with you tomorrow, for six weeks, until school. Do you want to take him, or did he pressure you?”

Can I say yes twice? “I do want him to come with me, if it won't be a problem to you.”

“If you mean in a practical way, no, it won't be a problem.”

“Then it's okay,” Tommy said.

“You keep quiet, Tommy. You get your say later. You see, some problems aren't so practical. What I'm fixing to say isn't so nice.”

Donald giggled.

“You be quiet, too, Donny, or you go without supper. What's worrying me is this. Tommy's giving you some special enjoyment, isn't he, that makes you want his company?”

Next he's going to call a spade a spade. I won't. "I enjoy his mind, Mr. Tolliver, his interest in the stars – and he's good competition on the tennis court. I need the exercise."

"You could run mornings at considerable lower cost." Carter laughed, without being much amused. "That's true."

"What I'm thinking is that you want my son to be your whore." He pronounced it ho-wah, so Carter was slow to catch the meaning. At the same time, Donald had the shakes. "Donald. I'm not warning you again."

The steward served soup. Carter's gesture of refusal wasn't successful. The soup looked orange. Tolliver was going on. "You understand me, don't you."

"Tolliver, if you're refusing – " Simultaneously, Carter and Tolliver caught Tommy's desperate signal to Carter. Carter stopped.

Tolliver glared at Tommy. "You're both leaving this table if you mess in this conversation. Eat your soup." Tolliver turned back to Carter. "Sonny's thirteen. That's too young for what you have in mind."

Carter felt trapped by the soothing tone Tolliver adopted for that line. "Yes. I mean, no."

"Yes. And you, a married man, sodomized him."

Carter felt the awful word. "Tolliver!"

"Was that wrong? I don't talk much about this. I don't know what you call it."

Tommy broke in. "I didn't tell him you were married."

"You tried to keep me from knowing it. You best keep quiet now." He turned back to Carter, "It's like you don't care about marriage vows."

That wasn't fair. "My marriage does matter."

"Then you want your wife's permission. Sonny, eat your soup."

"I'm too excited to eat," Tommy said. "Besides, it's carrots." He pushed his spoon around the bowl. "I think."

Carter put in, "I don't understand you, Tolliver."

"What I'm saying is, he can go with you."

Carter was not expecting that, not without a fight. "But then I suppose –"

"You thought I'd want to get rid of him." He eyed Carter steadily and spoke precisely. "The queer black bastard."

Carter appealed to Tommy with a look. Tommy said, "I told you. Don't listen."

"If you're not eating, you better excuse yourself."

"No, Dad; I just don't like the soup."

"Then you can be quiet."

Carter couldn't hold back. "How can you call him that?"

"I don't answer to you."

Carter looked, and Tommy shrugged, a funny grin on his face. "All right," Carter said. "Is this talk supposed to go nowhere?"

"Sonny, did you tell Mr. Seward what you did before he came?"

Carter hoped that the secret was about to come out. But Tommy only said, "I didn't do anything before."

Donald said, "You tried."

Tommy let his irritation show. "Trying? I was trying when Buzz first saw me. He saw me trying. You ought to thank him, Dad. He saved me. I don't think you'd have liked Punjabi."

Tolliver allowed himself a bitter laugh. "Sonny's defying me. He told Donald he was going to commit sodomy as soon as he could. Six weeks ago. Last night he did. Judging by the way he's acting, you won't

be the last.”

“He's a fag,” Donald said.

Tolliver's look quieted Donald. “I can't force him to be good. I believe he can be damned for his decision. I have prayed for him and I will pray for both of you, and I hope that prayer can save you from hell.”

Carter said, “I don't believe in hell.”

“Sonny doesn't either. Heaven and hell don't need you to believe in them.”

“Chicken stew again,” Donald said; he was being served the main course. “There's never enough chicken.”

“Take more rice. I thought you were going to disappoint Sonny. I could see that I was wrong when you didn't get up this morning. So I thought you must be a fraud. A man like you and a boy? No. I checked on you.”

What might he have done? “The telephones don't work.”

“We use radio at the project. A relay through Iringa to Dar. It goes very slowly. I spent the day making sure of you.”

“What did you say?” Carter was alarmed.

“I didn't give them a reason. I don't slander, I'm not a backbiter. You slander yourself. Sonny slandered himself, first to Donny, and then to a man here.”

Donald grinned. “What was his name, Sonny? Oh, yeah, Jack, Jack Otis. He came on real strong, all about how much he liked boys. We figured he was the one. But Sonny goofed, and the guy told Mrs. Henderson.”

Tommy cut in quickly, “She told him to forget it, but the son of a bitch told Dad anyway.”

Tolliver was quick. “Not at this table, Sonny. Say what Satan puts into your mouth, but not in my hearing!” Tommy's only reply was a push with his fork at his dinner plate. “I took Mr. Otis's accusation to Donald, to see if it could be true.”

Carter felt it was his turn to sneer. “Not to Tommy?”

“No.”

To Carter's surprise, Tommy seemed hurt by Carter's tone.

“It wasn't Donald's fault, or Dad's.” He paused. “But, Dad, if you had asked me, I would have told you.”

“I know that, Sonny. But I was afraid you'd lie.” Tolliver's emotions were mixed, apology and regret: “It didn't seem you'd be proud of what you did.”

“I wasn't. I still think he would have made it with Donny.”

Donny said, “No way I was going first.”

Tolliver ignored them. “I've been wrong, Mr. Seward. I forget to pray. God has never let me down, but I let God down.” He paused and raised a hand to forestall an interruption. “I have to tell you something. More than thirteen years ago I almost did a terrible thing. Their mother was going to nurse Donny but not Sonny. Before I prayed, I'd made up my mind to give him away. God stopped me. If she wasn't going to feed him, well, I could make formula and sterilize bottles good as any woman. Sonny, you see – he's something more my son than Donald. I was Sonny's mother, though not his father.”

Carter felt something like awe. Tommy returned Carter's inquiring look with a cynical nod, then looked down at his plate. His food was still uneaten. “Where,” Carter asked, hesitating, fearing tactlessness, “where is she now?”

“My church, my father, my mother, all of them wanted Donald. God told me to take them to where they wouldn't ever hear the word nigger.”



“We heard it, though,” Tommy said. “First week in school.”

“East Lansing wasn't far enough. I couldn't finish before they began school. Since then, God has let me work among the heathen, in Riyadh, Tripoli, here. You're not eating. None of you are.”

Donald said, “I ate most of the rice. As long as the chicken lasted.”

Tommy added, “You aren't eating either.”

Carter, though subdued, felt the need to return to the main issue. “You said Tommy could go.”

“He goes freely, and at no cost to you.”

“I can easily – ”

“I won't have him a whore. He's known you fifty hours, so, thirteen years old, he says he loves you. I can't stop him, and if he stays here; there's going to be another Jack Otis, another Carter Seward. He's studied, he knows them, the boy whores of Tangier, and it's my doing; I sent him amongst them. But if he wants to be free of you, if he wants to save himself, you won't pay his way to hell with you.”

Carter couldn't resist a smile at Tolliver's offer of substantial cash savings. “I accept that.”

“Good. One more thing. I'll write to your wife, telling her the whole story.”

That was monstrous. Carter only stared for a moment, then said, “Tolliver, that's absurd. In your own God's name, and I mean no blasphemy, for Christ's sake why?”

“You were married before God in a church. She has a right to know she has a rival.”

Carter, furious, exploded. “No! Next you'll write the Secretary General. Dear Sir! Carter Seward's sleeping with my son. You could write my mother too. And that sanctimonious son of bitch, just like you, my father. Hell, publish it in the Herald Tribune. No, Tolliver. I don't agree.”

“Well then,” Tolliver said, “that's that. You want coffee with dessert?”

Silent invective against Tolliver raced through Carter's mind, but, as if stunned, he just sat.

Then Tommy was standing at his side, pushing on his arm. “Say something!” When Carter only looked up at him, with a tiny shake of the head, Tommy turned. Carter reached to restrain him, but Tommy, turning back, brushed away the hand, saying coarsely, “Layoff!” and left the room.

It loosened Carter's tongue. “Tolliver. Be reasonable. It's not just Margaret. There's a world we're part of. You'd be breaking our marriage.”

“That might happen. Sin is sometimes punished in this world.”

Carter rose and, standing high over Tolliver, cursed: “Damn you.”

“God may,” Tolliver said mildly, “but it won't be because you asked.”

Carter sat on the bed, Tommy's bed, their bed, meditating on Margaret. He loved her still. Could she accept what had Tolliver called Tommy? This “rival”? Her willingness to justify him was great, but not up to that challenge. Carter had to smile, ruefully, because fifty hours ago, fifty, Tolliver's count had been right, he too found such a relationship monstrous.

No, not fifty. Fifty one hours. Where was Tommy? A low level desperation set in. Would he go to Punjabi? Carter knew he could never follow the boy there. He won't come back here, now. Carter decided he had to try.

Out on the verandah, Carter was surprised to find Donald, sitting on the rail. “Where's Tommy?” Carter asked.

“I don't know. I guess you got to give him up. Anyway, tonight's my turn.” He climbed down from the rail. “We got to do it quick, before Dad comes down.”

Carter found that he was beyond surprise. He walked out to the road. To the right, the hotel. The likely direction. To the left, the rock. Carter walked left, up the hill, into the brilliance of the stars, the low-lying moon on his right.

On the rock, he sat, arms around his knees, looking at the moon, hardly changed from the night before. It evoked tears. For the moon, not Tommy. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter at all. I'm well out of it. If I'd taken him, there would have been other Punjabis. Such a man, more generous than I, perhaps he deserves the boy, deserves all good, more than I.

Then a sound, a breath, told him that he was not alone. It could only be Tommy, and Carter's body warmed at the presence. He didn't move, not consciously, yet another sound from Tommy showed they were mutually aware: each knew the other knew, and neither moved nor spoke. Then the boy, the less patient of the two, moved and sat next to Carter, and looked at him.

"You've been crying," he said. "I haven't. I knew you'd back out."

"We were married the year you were born." Carter knew it would not explain anything to Tommy; he said it to please himself.

"What's she like?" This was false, like all polite conversation.

"We're cousins. We grew up the same way. We studied the same things. We have the same ideals."

"You're like each other. Sure thing." The boy's voice was rich with indifference. "No room for niggers."

That cut. And it was true. But Carter had to lie. "No, Tommy. It's not that."

"I bet," this was polite conversation again, "you and your wife are all for civil rights. You know, you're liberals. Right?"

Of course it was right. "You make it sound stupid."

"It's not stupid." Carter felt the hostility before he heard it. "It's bullshit. You're full of bullshit. You were, you are, and you always will be. That's why I'm not crying. I haven't lost a fucking thing."

But I have, Carter thought. His faith, and his love. Perhaps not yet. He was a rational man, one who calculated well; it was one of his admirable qualities, and he knew it. What he calculated now was that he was much stronger and probably quicker than the boy sitting beside him. "You're right," he said, "because I'm not through with you." He hoped Tommy would accept him, but Tommy felt the embrace coming and fought himself away. They grappled and rolled, until Carter's weight held Tommy firmly down. "Just don't bite me when I kiss you," Carter said.

Tommy didn't bite. He spat.

Tolliver sat in pajamas on the edge of the bed, the letter in hand, listening, sullen. Donald yawned irritably on the far side. Tommy sat on the floor, watching Carter with wary curiosity. "I've told Margaret the essentials. I'll seal it. You can mail it to see that it goes."

"Our names aren't the essentials."

"And there's another condition, Tolliver. He goes to school in Geneva."

Donald sat up, alert, understanding more quickly than his father. Tolliver said, "Absolutely not!" Then he paused. "You expect—" he gasped in astonishment, "to have him and your wife, both?"

"If she's willing. Anyway, as Tommy says, Arabs do it."

Having committed himself, Carter no longer cared what Tolliver thought.

"Again, no!"

"I'm going, Dad," Tommy said. "I already gave Buzz my passport."

"I'll stop you."

"You can in the morning, maybe," Carter said, "but by noon he'll have hitched a ride on a lorry."

"And maybe get killed, Dad, like lorry drivers usually do."

Tommy was having fun. He stretched out on the floor. "Death or dishonor, Dad. Take your pick."

"He's a minor. The police will stop you."

Carter laughed; he was euphoric. “Tanzanian police? You know better. So you get on the radio to Dar and Interpol. I'm rescuing a child from an abusive father. I've dealt with Interpol, Tolliver, and Europe's my territory. You won't have a chance.”

“The answer is still no!”

Carter took the letter back from Tolliver's now-trembling hand. “I'll deal with Margaret my way. And take Tommy. It's too late to change that. I've given him my word.” Tommy got up and stood beside Carter. “I'll pay all his expenses.” He put his arm over the boy's shoulders. “He'll be my little ho-wah.”

The image seemed to fascinate Tolliver. His mouth open, he stared. Then, very slowly, he turned on the edge of the bed and slipped to his knees, his back to his tormentors. “Jesus,” he said softly. “Sweet Jesus. Speak to me. Comfort me. My son defies me, Jesus. Tell me, please, o God.”

Donald grinned a long grin at Tommy, then plopped down beside his father. “Hear him, Jesus,” Donald said, “tell him.”

Tolliver made it into a chant. “Hear our prayers, o Jesus.” “Hear us, o Jesus,” Donald said, picking up the rhythm.

“Hear my dad. Put your spirit in him, Lord, put your spirit in him to let these queers go. Let 'em go, Jesus.”

“Hush, boy. Listen to God.”

Carter held Tommy closer. In Carter's world, Tolliver was obviously a madman asking God an obscene question. Yet Tolliver was a clever engineer, a dedicated father. Watching, Carter thought with a small shock that Tolliver's God might have rather good sense. He must be at least as intelligent as Tolliver. And that was far smarter than many versions of God around.

Tolliver rose, murmuring, “Thank you, Lord. Thy will be done.” He patted Donald. “That was a good prayer. God forgives the word, however vile, that is spoken with faith and charity. But don't use it again.”

Tommy rushed to Tolliver, hugging him. “It's okay!”

Tolliver stood, his arms around Tommy. “Yes, Sonny. God's ways are strange, and he didn't make me promises.” Releasing the boy, he moved heavily, as if uncertain where to turn. “It's the lesser of the evils.” He turned to Carter. “Swear to me that you will be good to him.” Carter saw that the man's eyes were moist. “By your lights.” He took Carter's hand, then rose and went to pick up a sheet of paper from the table by the bed. “I drew up this list of expenses before dinner.” He sighed. “I prayed I would not use it. It isn't complete, and the school will be changed. A saving if he won't be boarding.”

“You didn't mind me calling you queers, did you?” Donald asked Tommy. “I mean, it worked.”

Tommy punched Donald on the upper arm, hard. “Yes, airhead.”

“Don't answer, Donald,” Tolliver said, mechanically.

“But Dad, he really is a fag! I mean, now it's not even an insult.”

Tolliver ignored that.

“What about Thanksgiving, Dad, and our birthday and Christmas?”

“Tommy should have a week with us in November, and at least one at Christmas.” He shook his head. “You'll have to pay for those trips.” He looked up. “I should call you by your first name now, shouldn't I?”

“Carter.”

“Yes. Carter. We can settle the expenses at the end of the year.” He sat down, weary. “If he stays with you that long. You don't know him yet, Carter. He's not as reasonable as you seem to think.” He shook his head yet again. “It may be his father's blood. I don't know.”

Carter thought he should let that go.

“You boys get to bed now. The car is coming very early, and we're all tired. Donny.”

“Aw, Dad, I'm awake now. I want to be with Sonny.” “Come on,” Tommy said. “Help me pack. Your stuff's all mixed up with mine.”

“No fights, Sonny,” Tolliver said. “Take only what you need.”

“Okay, Dad.” Tommy followed Donald out, and pulled Carter after. “Come on, Buzz. I told you he'd let me go.”

“That's right,” Donald said, softly, beyond Tolliver's hearing. “You just got to handle him right. You'll catch on.”

The boys went into their room and turned up the lamp. Carter could hardly conceive that it was over, that it had begun. And uneasily he became suspicious again that he'd been caught in a conspiracy too complex for him yet to penetrate. The boys dumped drawers full of clothes onto the bed, and began sorting. A sweater, whose was it? Began a dispute, and Tommy threw stuff, seemingly at random, into piles while Donald protested.

Carter, faithless at the end, prayed. O gods of motor vehicles and hotels, he murmured, you gave him to me. Do not abandon me when we live among houses and schools.

# Teen Tricks – 4

by Ruth van Miller

Dear Ruth van Miller,

I don't agree with everything you tell young people, but I do think you have their best interests at heart. So I'm writing to beg you to please, please urge parents to teach every child that they must ALWAYS say NO when adults attempt to touch their private parts. Every attempt should be brought immediately to the attention of the police! The horrible consequences cannot be avoided, but at least the pervert will be put behind bars;

– CHILD PROTECTIVE PERSON

Dear Person,

I'm a little confused about who's touching whom. If my kid were to say NO when somebody touched MY private parts, I'd put a stop to that busybody on the spot. Now if you want my kid to say NO when I wash his little penis or her little vagina, I'd say to you, sorry friend but I think you're full of it (and I do mean IT). And as for saying NO when my kid wants a friendly feel, why? What's going to happen when the child is older and wants love? Going to keep saying NO? Going to feel guilty if he/she doesn't? If you're a child protector, give me some child lovers instead. Buzz off.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

I got a problem like you won't believe. I got a big cock. Nine inches, honest. And I got it when I was eleven. It embarrassed me then All the other kids had little kazoos and I had this clarinet. Then the swimming coach at the Y took me over into a corner – you know you can't hide your meat at the Y pool – and he told me, don't try to hide it. If you got it, flaunt it, wave it around, see who wants to play it. And would you believe who was first in line? The coach! And since him, well it seems like anytime I want to get off, all I got to do is say okay and somebody's going down, oohing and aahing over my big meat.

So what's the problem? It was okay, I mean great, until I met this guy who's real cool. Well, it's like this. I didn't really meet him, he was assigned to me. I've been kind of wild, so my mom thought I needed what she called a male influence in my life, so she signed me up for a Big Brother. And along comes this guy. He's about 40, and he's been around, and he knows, I mean, everything. But he doesn't like my cock. He says it's too big. I swear it. That's what he says. Too big. Oh sure, he'll slobber over it a little, like he does the rest of me, until he shoots, then the most he'll do is let me rub off between his legs while he hugs and kisses me. He's such a great guy that I'd whack three inches off the thing for him, and I told him so, but he just says forget it. He says he likes me anyway. I really get off on him, as a friend I mean, but it hurts my feelings that he feels the way he does. I mean, I'm proud of what I got, and how come he doesn't give me credit?

Should I dump this guy? And tell him to be a Big Brother to somebody else? Like I say, he's cool, and I'd feel bad if he was with some other kid.

– OVERSIZED IN THE MEAT DEPARTMENT



Dear Meat,

Your Big Brother seems to have learned one thing you haven't – that, in this life, we rarely find a perfect fit. You don't buy friends the way you buy shoes, trying them on first and kicking off the ones that pinch a little. No, you pay for friendship with affection and acceptance. You don't say how old you are, but my guess is about thirteen or fourteen, right? You've been pretty much a super stud, and now you're suspicious of someone who likes you for what you are and not for your equipment. Think about this: you like him without caring what size his meat is; why shouldn't he like you without caring what size yours is?

And you know something? I bet that a little bit of your problem is that you're still embarrassed at being hung. You want him to pay attention to reassure you that you're just one of the guys, only better. Relax. He doesn't have to ooh and aah to show how he feels about you, any more than he would with any other kid.

Stay with him. He sounds like as close to a fit as you're likely to find. Like the man says, “forget it” – and enjoy your good luck in finding someone who likes you all over, not just between your legs.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

I didn't understand your answer to my last letter, but Kevin showed me in the World Almanac that the Pope was Catholic, so I should adopt him. Well, it was certainly a lot of trouble, and if Kevin hadn't kept after me and after the Child Welfare the way he did I never could have done it. Well, what's happened is this, which is why I'm writing to you again. My house has only two bedrooms, mine and my mother's, so I want to keep her room just as it was as a memorial, but Kevin says that a kid should have his own room and some privacy, so if I want I could use Mother's room and he would take mine. Ms. Van Miller (Kevin says I should write Ms like that, so I hope it's all right), he's never had a room of his own before, so I can't understand why it's such a problem sleeping with me. He says it isn't a problem of where he sleeps, but he's been going out and buying posters and stuff to hang on the walls so he can show off to his friends. I don't want those posters in my room, or his radio tape recorder, which I just bought for him because he wanted it, and it's too loud anyway. And do I have to let him have his friends come over? I try to be firm with him, and tell him NO, but he tickles me and pretty soon, well, I just lose all control. So we decided to let you settle it in some way, but I don't see how.

– STILL NEEDING HELP IN A HURRY (only not such a big hurry)

Dear Not Such,

You only asked one question, and the answer is yes. But I do have some advice. Move everything out of your mother's room, right out of the house and into storage. Get furniture that suits Kevin, and give him the room, and let *him* put up the posters and whatever. Why should you do that? Let me tell you. The time is going to come when Kevin is going to grow up and go away. Maybe to college, maybe to a job. You're not thinking of that now, and neither is he. But it will happen. Then, when he's gone away, you can restore the shrine to your mother. But I bet that when the time comes you'll leave it just the way Kevin did, for him to come back to.

# A Real Nice Week

Honter is no more than a muttering in the mind of God. Still, His wheezes and chuckles are death and life in Honter, and His mutter alone is mayhem, sodomy, and, no doubt, worse crimes. If God bothered to look at Honter right now, He'd see a bank at the center of a mucky semi-urban desert: a motel, a cafe, a beer joint, six stores, of which one (now closed) was Montgomery Ward, and some pickup trucks. Tonight, the Sheriff saw (the Sheriff is God's deputy in Honter and sees what God doesn't), besides the usual, a shiny waxed turquoise two-year-old Chevy Nova belonging to Harold Glover, for whom God will, in good time, wheeze. Just as he wheezed for a small mottled gray and white cat, and for a little girl with an awfully big head. Perhaps future and past tenses don't belong in that last sentence, since God knows no time and he gurgles on a schedule all his own. In our time, the Sheriff knew about Harold's sodomy before he knew about the murder of the cat, but we can witness the pitiful death of the cat first, and see it through the eyes of Willie Tom, who is something to see, and knows it.

Willie Tom sighted until the bead on the crouching calico kitten was perfectly aligned. Between the ears, at the back of the head, where a yellow patch split the white and the black. He squeezed the trigger slowly. Almost before he heard the sound, the kitten's head exploded.

"Whatchu doin, Willie Tom?"

His mother had been out to the pasture. She must have come back.

"Practisin." It hadn't had the effect he wanted; that made him angry, impatient.

"Practisin on that lil cat? Willie Tom, you know what store Mary.Lily put on that lil cat. Whyd you kill it?"

"Shut up, ma," he said loud enough for her to hear, but soft enough so she could pretend she didn't. Willie Tom stuck the barrel of the rifle into the dirt and walked away. He heard her "Oh lord have mercy. Your father see this rifle he kill you sure." It just confirmed his impatience with her, and all of them. She'd clean it. And his father didn't scare him now. He'd done his chores. He got out of his shoes and jeans, dropped them into the hall closet, then stretched and scratched. Free now, he walked out the side door, and stood on the wood grate under the shower at the side of the house. He drenched himself once, soaped thoroughly until his hard cock came off, and then rinsed. He hoped somebody was watching, but who was there to watch? That was the trouble with this farm. And the one good thing about school. He stepped out, past the hinged half door he'd not closed, into the afternoon sunlight, wiping his body with both hands. He turned his back to the sun, liking the warmth. When he felt dry enough, he went back into the house, to Daisy's room. She had a mirror. He looked at himself. Straight, full black hair, brown eyes, ruddy skin, shoulders broad, chest full and hard. He picked up Mary Lily's Johnson's Baby Oil and spread it lightly on his face, shoulders, arms, chest and stomach. With a little grin, he stretched and anointed his now flaccid, uncut cock. He glowed. Satisfied, he went toward the kitchen. He paused, irritated. He went to the closet, picked up his jeans and put them back on. Aunt Annie was fat, in the kitchen.

He heard her before he reached the door. "He's gone shoot one of us we don't watch him." Maybe, Willie Tom thought, I should start with Aunt Annie. He looked in.

"Hush now," his mother was saying.

Willie Tom watched Aunt Annie's reaction. She squeezed little pig eyes and said, "You be a man soon, Willie Tom. Look at you. Fifteen, aint you?"

"Not til September," his mother said. "He just big." His mother was little. She could walk under his arm as he stood, right hand on the doorway. So could his father. Showed that his ma was a whore. So

was Aunt Annie. She was ready to fuck Willie Tom that night last month she got drunk, and would have too if his ma hadn't come in.

“He the handsomest boy I ever saw,” Aunt Annie said, with a pig-squeal laugh. “Why don you put a shirt on?”

“Hot,” he said, and, with his left hand, rubbed his oily chest, stopping his hand on a nipple and rubbing it. He looked at Aunt Annie with a little grin, and rubbed his nipple more. He felt a little pressure in his jeans, and looked down, to tell her he was ready when she was.

Aunt Annie's hands fluttered and she said, not looking at him, “You shot Mary Lily's little cat.”

It wasn't a question so Willie Tom stepped into the room, took a hoecake off a platter on the stove and broke it, scattering crumbs.

“I done just swept that floor,” his mother said, in the voice she always used, a little whine. She was thin and red-faced. Times, Willie Tom thought, he could have fucked her too, and if he had she'd know better than to whine at him.

“You a lot of trouble for folks,” Aunt Annie said, pigs-eyes in a frown. “Handsome is as handsome does.”

He sat and put a barefoot onto the table edge. His jeans were low on his hips and he watched his index finger tickle his navel while he munched the hoecake.

“Get your foot off my table,” his mother said. She looked at him a moment to see if he would. When he didn't she turned away. She always did.

“Handsome is as handsome does,” Aunt Annie said. “I declare,” she added, with another pig-squeak laugh, “Handsome is as handsome does.”

\*

He finished milking. He thought, without emotion, of better farms and milking machines. Squeezing cowtits pleased him well enough; it always had. He poured the last of the milk. Then he carried the large cans, one at a time, to the platform, long unpainted, decaying, propped by lumber he'd stolen with his pa, and lifted them on. Finished, he ran each hand over the opposite arm and upper chest to feel the engorged muscles. He passed his hands down and under the top of his jeans, down. And then he stopped. He saw Mary Lily.

She had forgotten the kitten since yesterday. She didn't remember much. Her head was too big for the rest of her and her mouth was always open. She slobbered. She was going out maybe to the pasture. The sun was bright and, yes, she swung open the gray fence gate and walked on, forgetting to close it. Willie Tom wondered for a moment if he should shut the gate, and then decided to do it on his way to the pasture, in a moment.

He went to the sitting room and got the rifle. He passed with it through the kitchen. “Where you goin with that?” his mother asked, without moving to stop him.

“Practisin.” His cock was already getting hard.

With one hand she pulled on her hair, and she whined, “You won't shoot no more cats, will you, Willie Tom?”

He didn't pause, but it was a question, so he said, “No, Ma.” He crossed the yard, littered with pieces of a defunct combine (in his memory, it had always been there, and he never noticed it except to step around the pieces). All he was aware of was that he lived on the worst-kept farm of them all, and everybody knew it, because his folks didn't have any pride, like he did, Willie Tom did. Outside the gate, still open, the grass was high from late spring rain. He passed through the gate and looped the old bailing

wire around the gate post to hold it shut.

In the pasture, he allowed Mary Lily fifty yards, about, because she was so big. He was patient. He wanted her clear, and no cow behind her. No use in shooting a cow. The large-headed little girl moved behind the pasture's one old oak and sat down in its shade. He relaxed and waited, to see what her pattern would be. She always kept at something, once she began it. Now she was rocking, leaning forward, then back. Forward, then back. That great head, the forehead bulging, too heavy, made her almost tilt over, but she'd hold, recover, then lean back. Forward, hold, recover, back. When she was forward, he could sight her safely. Her wispy blond hair caught a little breeze as she held forward for the perfect instant. Even before he raised the rifle, his cock began to hurt, pushing on his rough jeans. He set his position and counted, forward, hold, recover, back. His bone got too hard against his jeans. Distracted, he squeezed the trigger a moment too late.

He whispered, "Fuck," and then walked ten yards to his left to give himself a more frontal view. She saw him. She waved. He unzipped his jeans and let his hard on out, fondled it a moment and then waved back. He resighted. She was still now, looking at him, unmoving. He shot her in the left eye. For a moment, he wondered if he'd missed her, but then she fell forward and he could see that the back of her head was mussed. He lowered the rifle and with his right hand touched his cock. He watched the come spurt, again and again. Then he heard someone running. It would be his pa, probably. Willie Tom tucked his cock away and reziped his jeans.

His pa stopped beside him, panting, too winded to speak. Then he got out, "Oh, Lord, Willie Tom. Oh Lord." Looking at the grizzled little man, Willie Tom wondered who his real pa was, who'd fucked his ma and gone away. And he wondered how hard up a man – man enough to father Willie Tom – would have to be to fuck his ma. Even fourteen years ago. Or ten years ago when someone made Mary Lily. He'd fucked Mary Lily himself almost a year ago, and it wasn't worth the trouble.

\*

The Sheriff was mad. He was big enough to be Willie Tom's pa, but he was red faced, and what hair he had was reddish. Willie Tom knew, whoever his real pa was, he had black hair; no way Willie Tom could be so different unless that was so. The Sheriff stood, high and mighty in the kitchen, looking down at Willie Tom, who'd cleaned his shoes and put on a shirt; out of respect, though the shirt had no buttons. "Whyd you do it, boy?"

"I was practisin, sir. I didn't know she was there."

"You didn't." The Sheriff was sheriff because he was a big man and not because he was a violent one. He was a farmer, still in overalls, called from his home, not his little office. His shoes were muddy, tracking the kitchen, but Ma only cared if Willie Tom messed the floor. Well, he'd let her care.

Ma hadn't stopped crying. "She couldn't talk, Sheriff Taw. She was kindly. She took to people." She paused, then whined, the way she always did about her son. "Willie Tom don't mean to hurt. He didn't see her, like he says."

The Sheriff coughed; it might have been a laugh, but he didn't smile. "You didn't see Anson Hill's hog neither, last month, did you, boy?"

"No, sir." Willie Tom remembered, so he almost smiled.

"Just the same, you killed it, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir." It was going to be all right. The boy felt so safe that he scratched his stomach while he looked straight at the Sheriff. Shooting Mary Lily was just a test anyhow; no one would care too much. Funny though. He grinned at the thought: he hadn't planned the test, but he found out just the same.

The Sheriff looked back at Willie Tom. The boy's oiled chest shone; he'd been careful to look his best. He watched the Sheriff's eyes examining him. He felt his cock swell; that made him grin some more. He looked good, grinning, he knew; he practiced in the mirror. He saw Sheriff's gaze lingering on his crotch, which hardened him all the more. He adjusted his jeans for the Sheriff, like to make his cock more comfortable.

The Sheriff turned to Willie Tom's father. Beside the big man, pa looked even more decayed, though he was only forty. He looked back at the Sheriff through thick eyeglasses that were clouded with the dust and sweat of weeks of neglect. "Tom," the Sheriff said, "you come outside and talk with me."

The boy watched them out, then kicked off his shoes and peeled away the shirt. He looked at his ma, the old whore, still sniffing. He patted her behind, feeling one of the few soft places on her body. "Don't cry, ma." He squeezed a little; sometimes she liked that, unless he squeezed too hard and she yelled. "Mary Lily's gon t'heaven, ain't she?" He stretched, rubbing against her, feeling all his own body, easy, free. "Dint you say God loveser? Now He's gotter," His ma cried all the more, which was kind of funny. Folks lie a lot. It didn't matter. He knew the God shit was a lie too.

Well, whether what Willie Tom calls God shit is true or not is not for this occasion; certainly God has at least hiccuped, or else Willie Tom could not have done his share thus far. But now enough of Willie Tom. His mind, his way of seeing the world is clear. The Sheriff has something in mind for the beautiful boy, and the mind through which to see what it is – and to see, and touch, ah, yes indeed, touch Willie Tom – is the mind of Clyde.

Clyde Allen, at the Drummer's Inn (CLEAN ROOMS/ALL MODERN CONVENIENCES/DAY OR WEEK) wasn't glad to see the Sheriff. For one thing, Clyde was nursing a split lip and a bruised cheek. Worse, he was nursing his own stupidity. He'd met this young fellow Bart at Joy's Tavern (BEER) his first night in town. Bart hadn't shown any surprise at being asked to drink some whiskey back in Clyde's room. He was sure surprised at how friendly Clyde got with the fly on his jeans, but he didn't mind. He hadn't done that before with a man but he stripped right down and tried it twice and again in the morning. His wife was pregnant, he said. He came back to the motel without being asked night before last too. The trouble came at Joy's last night. Bart was late and Clyde was about to walk away with a boy named Harold; the motel was just a few yards down the road. Bart drove up, got out of his truck, grabbed Clyde, and punched him good. He told Harold Clyde was a shiteating little cocksucker and he ought to be run out of town. The little crowd spilled out of the tavern, and were yelling for Bart to kill the cocksucker when the Sheriff drove up, told the boys to get back to drinking their beer and Clyde to get back to his motel room and stay there.

Now the Sheriff had come back to Clyde at the motel and wanted to talk. It couldn't be anything good. Clyde would have left if he could have, but it was worth his job to walk out on a thirty thousand dollar sale down at the Minter Farm, and old man Minter and his son wouldn't make up their minds. Still, the big man didn't look like he wanted trouble. Maybe he wanted some of what Bart got. You never know, out here on the farms. It had happened before, and Clyde told himself that if that's what it takes, he'd do it, to stay on the good side of the law.

"Mr. Allen," the Sheriff said, with a friendly, concerned frown, not a dangerous one, "I'm right sorry you got hurt last night. You want to make a complaint against Bart?" He paused long enough to shake his head. "I don't think it would do much good, you or him."

"No, no," Clyde said, wary but relieved. He caught his own reflection in the mirror behind the Sheriff. Still a little baby faced at thirty five, but getting chubby; he needed to watch his weight. Those damned



beers when you go out cruising...

"Don't know why you couldn't wait for Bart," the Sheriff was saying. He winked. "Bart was likin havin you in town here, his wife being with child and all."

Yes, the Sheriff wants it too. That won't be much fun, but maybe, after that little service, he'd get Bart again tonight. Clyde said, "Well, I thought Bart and I was getting along."

"That Harold Newt, he ain't half the boy Bart is. You woulda found that out, Bart given you a chance. I bet you was a little drunk?"

Clyde laughed. "Maybe I was. Sit down, Sheriff." Might as well get it over with.

"Thank you, but I ain't stayin so long. You know somethin? You need to stay out of taverns. You was lucky, really, I was near, or you'd been up shit creek, you know? Well, sir, you know what I think?" He didn't wait for Clyde to say what he thought the Sheriff thought. "You should get yourself your own boy. Be like a son to you. And the rest of it." The Sheriff winked again.

"Maybe so," Clyde said. What now? He couldn't mean Bart.

The Sheriff came closer and put a friendly arm around Clyde's shoulder. His voice was low and confidential. "Would you believe somethin? Right here in Honter is a fine boy who got no family no more. Real sad. Oh, I reckon there'd be a home for him here – he's a good worker – but I got to thinkin about you after last night. You a fine man, Mr. Allen."

Clyde stared. The son of a bitch must have a dog for sale. "Thank you, Sheriff."

"Come on over here. Can I call you Clyde? You call me Jackson. Come look here, Clyde." He pulled the drapes open and raised the motel room blind. "Damned if he ain't taken his shirt off, and I wanted him to look nice for you."

Clyde saw a boy leaning against the Sheriff's heavily oxidized gray Pontiac. Willie Tom's body shone in the early afternoon sunlight. His jeans were far below his navel. The stomach muscles were like a washboard. The face was a dark angel's. "Is that – the –"

"Orphan? Yes, sir, Clyde." The Sheriff shook his head, sad for the unlucky boy. "Do you want a chance to get acquainted?"

Desire and fear set Clyde's guts rolling. It couldn't be happening. "Well –"

But the Sheriff wasn't wanting an answer. He went to the door, opened it, and called out, "Willie Tom, you come in here, boy. Now bring your shirt. That's right." As the boy approached, fumbling with the shirt, the Sheriff watched him and laughed. "You don't need to put that shirt on, boy. You just don't want to leave it. Mr. Allen don't mind, do you, Clyde?"

Clyde hesitated a moment too long. While he was saying, "Oh, no. That's fine," the boy had put his arms through the shirt sleeves. Clyde longed to see those muscular arms again. The open shirt clung to the boy's body damply. Was it sweat, Clyde wondered, that made the boy shine so? Clothed, the boy came into the room.

"Shake hands with Mr. Allen, Willie Tom. What do you say?"

"Please to meet you, sir," Willie Tom said. His smile was shy, but it showed perfect white teeth. He was just Clyde's height, and his black eyelashes were long. Then the boy looked directly at Clyde, brown eyed, and Clyde's knees felt weak.

"Well," Clyde said, confused, helpless, and not yet accepting that the boy was being offered to him. "I'm pleased to meet you, Willie Tom." His hand trembled as it took Willie Tom's limp fingers.

The Sheriff lowered the blind and closed the drapes. "I'll just leave you two to get acquainted now. I'll come back in an hour or two. Put the chain lock on, Clyde, so you and Willie Tom can get acquainted in private, now." Again in his confidential voice the Sheriff said, as if the boy would not hear, though he was just as close as Clyde, "He tells me he'd like the same sort of good time you give Bart, if you've a

mind to.” Then, in his full genial voice, he added, “Or you two can just, like I say, get acquainted.” He went out.

Clyde, irresolute, trembled so that he could hardly lock the door and chain it. When he turned to look at Willie Tom, the boy was silting in the room's one chair, his shoes on the bed cover making dust marks that Clyde noticed, intensifying his embarrassment. “Why don't you take your shoes off, Willie Tom?”

Silently, the boy kicked them off and replaced his feet on the bed.

Clyde was dismayed by the boy's beauty. He'd never been so lucky – if this was luck. “Sure is hot in here, ain't it? Think I'll take my shirt off. You can too, if you want.” Clyde shucked his shirt without ceasing to watch the boy, who moved lazily, stood, dropped off the shirt, then looked at Clyde.

“You want,” Willie Tom said, “I should get off my jeans too?”

“Be more comfortable,” Clyde said, unbuckling his own belt. “Be more comfortable bareass, won't it now?”

“Sure thing.” Willie Tom's hips were so slim that he needed to unbutton only the waist button to slide his jeans off.

“You ain't wearing underwear,” Clyde said, more to make conversation than anything else. Willie Tom's tiny brush of pubic hair appeared first, then slowly a stiffening tan penis was uncovered. It, too, like everything else about the boy caught the light. Its length made Clyde's eyes widen. Clyde stumbled on his own trousers from paying attention only to the boy. Impatiently, he threw off his shoes, pulled away from his trousers and shorts, and left them on the floor. In his socks, he approached the still-standing boy.

“That's a lot of meat, there, Willie Tom.”

“Sure is,” the boy said, taking it in his hand.

“A lot bigger than mine.”

Clyde hoped for a smile, but the boy seemed to see nothing funny. “I got the biggest cock,” he said, instead of smiling, “at Union Consolidated.” The boy was quite serious. “We measured em. Billy Bloor said his was bigger, but it weren't.”

“Mind if I feel it?” The boy couldn't say no, not now. The boy took his hand away. “Go on.”

Clyde obeyed, enchanted now. He manipulated the penis gently, exposing the glans, red against the tan foreskin.

Yet the boy seemed only half interested. He asked, “What's your name?”

“Clyde. Just call me Clyde.” The penis was fully erect now, and so was Clyde's. Clyde felt the thickness, and now touched the glans fully thrust out from the foreskin. Clyde drew close enough to press his penis against the boy's thigh. He watched for a reaction. Finding none, he began to move his free hand over Willie Tom's chest and shoulders.

“You breathin pretty hard, Clyde,” Willie Tom said, smiling at last.

The boy was right, but Clyde had not been aware of himself. “I wanna suck it,” he said.

“Suck it nice,” Willie Tom said, “like it was your mama's tiddy.”

Clyde fell to his knees to worship the god, though he felt he should not demean himself so soon. He kissed and licked, but didn't suck. “Get on the bed,” he said, breathless. “Make it easy that way.” The boy obeyed. Leaving the penis for the moment, Clyde started at the boy's knees, licking, and worked up slowly, to the inside of the thighs, so much lighter than the tan skin his hands caressed, and he nuzzled the tight testicles before, in the ultimate experience, licking, kissing, then mouthing the perfect penis.

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When the Sheriff returned, Clyde was dressed but Willie Tom was still on the bed. The Sheriff

chuckled. "Willie Tom just don't like clothes. I guess he looks too good without. That's quite a pecker you got, ain't it?"

"It's pretty good," Willie Tom said. "Ask Clyde."

"Now don't talk that way," the Sheriff said. He was smiling.

Clyde said, "Willie Tom says he'd like to go along with me."

"Why, Willie Tom! Is that true?"

"Yes, sir."

"And I guess I'd be glad to have him come along," Clyde said.

"Clyde, you are a fine man." The Sheriff looked very serious. "To take this homeless boy and care for him. God bless you, Clyde. God bless you." His gaze at Clyde was almost affectionate. Then his tone became brisk. "Willie Tom, I put your box in the back seat of the car. You bring it in." Willie Tom began to do as he was told. "Put your pants on. You ain't at home."

To Clyde the Sheriff said, "He's just a country boy, now. You got to teach him his city manners. His folks was poor, but you see how respectful they brought him up. He's quiet and good. You just got to teach him city ways."

"I'll do my best."

"God bless you, Clyde. I know you will." He hesitated.

"Clyde, you carry any gun? This ain't an official question. Like you keep one for defense when you travel, or at home?"

"No. Do you think I should?" Clyde was momentarily alarmed.

"Oh, no. Not at all. I'd say that's fine. You keep it that way. That's just fine. You don't need no gun at all I can see. Folks with guns just hurt themselves, I always say."

Willie Tom reentered with the box and put it on the floor.

"Sheriff Tam," he said. The Sheriff waited. "Kin I take my jeans off again?"

The Sheriff laughed. "Now, boy, you don't ask me no questions like that any more. You ask Clyde here. You got to do like he tells you now."

"Kin I, Clyde?"

Clyde winked at the Sheriff. "You just wait until the Sheriff here goes, and then we can both get bareass. It ain't right to go bareass in front of guests."

"Now you see there, Willie Tom," the Sheriff said, "Clyde's gonna teach you his ways now. You listen careful, and do like he says. Good bye, Willie Tom. And God bless you, Clyde, for your kindness to a homeless boy."

Clyde locked and chained the door, and then stripped. The boy was already naked on the bed, his penis rising. Clyde approached and stood over the bed, his own hard pointed at Willie Tom's face.

The boy grinned. "Anybody ever cornhole you, Clyde?" Taking that meat would be something, Clyde thought, and put aside the plan he'd made as too precipitous. He won't suck me today, Clyde thought, but he will. We've got time. He went to his suitcase and took out the Vaseline. He sat beside the boy, and after some licks and one long suck, he spread the ointment thickly. The boy murmured appreciatively. Clyde lay face down beside him, and the boy crawled over. "Be careful," Clyde pled, suddenly afraid.

"Careful, shit. This is gonna be somethin, Clyde. Billy Bloor won't never forget it, the day he lost. I reckon you won't neither."

\*

By sacrificing better than half his commission, Clyde closed out the sale to the Minter farm that night.

He wasn't up to hard bargaining when he felt too uncomfortable to sit or stand. He'd think twice before greasing up Willie Tom again. And yet – he was safe sex; that was one reason Clyde liked working the farm towns. Well, it would be all Willie Tom now. In the morning, Clyde drove with Willie Tom all the way to Huntington.

The second flaw in Clyde's happiness came at a restaurant, that night. Willie Tom ate steak: and baked potato with his fingers. Literally. He picked up the whole steak, like it was the hamburger he had for lunch, in two hands. To make it worse, he spat out the gristle, and not back onto his plate, but onto the restaurant floor. Luckily, the place was crowded, and the waitress didn't see it happen-at first. The trouble was that when Clyde showed him how to cut his steak and butter the potato, Willie Tom just said, "Don't you bother. Tastes good this way." Then he spat out more gristle, and the waitress noticed. Clyde left a large tip, but didn't feel good about it.

The comforting fact was that he could leave Willie Tom with clear TV images – "Just like school," he said. From a little before nine in the morning until after noon, when Clyde came back to the motel for lunch, it seemed that Willie Tom had not moved. Clyde decided that, as much as possible, he'd get food outside and bring it to Willie Tom, until the boy learned to eat with a knife and fork every time. After lunch – hamburgers the boy could eat with his fingers – Clyde sucked him. Sex was more interesting than TV. "You do that better than Mr. Crawford," Willie Tom said, flipping on the TV.

"Who's Mr. Crawford?" Clyde asked, disheartened that someone had done it first. He should have known, though; the way Willie Tom took to it.

"Music teacher." The boy let a fart, and giggled. "Like that?"

"No," Clyde said, offended.

"Tough shit," the boy said, in what sounded to Clyde like a calculated insult. "Mr. Crawford liked it. He'd rub his nose up your asshole."

Clyde restrained his anger. "You liked that, huh?" He felt for an opening. "Did he put anything else, I mean, up there?"

"Nobody buttfucks me, Clyde." That tone was total insolence, Clyde thought, yet he couldn't challenge him on it. It was the wrong subject. He decided to let it go, and bide his time.

\*

He bided, and the time passed. As it passed, Clyde began to absorb what being father to a fourteen year old was like, and he didn't cotton to some of it. Soon it would be fall, and the boy would have to be in school. Well, that was all right, if the school would take his word, which (he was just about certain) they wouldn't. Besides, it sure looked like Willie Tom couldn't read. At all. That could mean a lot of problems.

Other problems were more immediate. Willie Tom never seemed to hide anything, no matter how bad it was. He'd squeeze Clyde's ass and say, "When you gain to lemme in there?" in a cafeteria line, with people able to hear, like he was proud to be screwing.

Of course there was the other side. The other side was that Clyde, for the first time in his life, felt sexually satisfied. And that was odd because the most he got, himself, out of it was, when Willie Tom was sleepy, he'd be utterly uninterested, uncaring, indifferent, and let Clyde climb onto him and thigh fuck off (Clyde didn't know a name for it) and kiss the boy's closed mouth, except occasionally when the boy would stick a lazy tongue out for Clyde to suck. For Clyde, the indifference itself was an aphrodisiac, as was Willie Tom's seeming not to care whether he was sucked or not, because, he said, all he liked was cornholing anyway. Clyde was holding out, both in self defense and lest there be nothing in store to

surprise the boy, should he become restless.

Clyde and Willie Tom were in Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh is more than a mutter; it used to be a wheeze, but now it's a gasp. God is reasonable and, as a result, is totally unconcerned that murder is as likely in Pittsburgh as it was in Samarkand, or – what was the name of that other place? God gurgled, and it became – but now he's forgotten it and remembered only the gurgle, in which over a hundred thousand people were murdered, some of them really quite sinful, most not. Begins with an S. Oh dear. God knows what's going to happen, in fact, it's happened already, but Clyde and Willie Tom don't know it yet. They'd finished lunch and were walking back to the car. God is not cognizant of them now, nor they of him. Pity. Poor Clyde. Indeed poor Willie Tom. Yet each will have some joy, and isn't that what it is all about?

Clyde was irritated. Willie Tom had spat on the floor, even though he'd solemnly promised he wouldn't, and the waitress had complained. Willie Tom didn't quarrel, really, or even talk back; his was just quiet insolence. Every time Clyde complained lately, Willie Tom's answer was “Tough shit.” He never seemed to learn. Then, always on Clyde's mind these days, Sheriff Tams hadn't replied to his letter about Willie Tom's school records. After a month, Clyde was seriously thinking about taking him back to Honter.

Clyde realized Willie Tom had stopped. “Willie Tom?” he called, impatient. Willie Tom looked back in response, then returned his gaze to a store window. Clyde walked back. “Willie Tom, come on now.”

“That's what I miss, Clyde,” Willie Tom said. It was a sporting goods store.

“What's that? Football? Well sure. I told you I want you to go to school.”

“That's all right. It ain't football. Huntin.”

“Well, sure. In the country. I guess you did a lot of hunting.”

“I had a rifle. It weren't mine. I had use of it.”

“A rifle's pretty expensive. Better come on now.”

“I'd do a lot for a rifle.”

“Except learn some manners. I know you, Willie Tom.” Willie Tom looked up at Clyde. The boy's eyes were very brown and his oiled face glowed. “If I eat jus like you say, you buy me a rifle?”

Was it worth a try? Motivation. The boy never asked for anything, until now. Was this the handle?

Clyde loved him suddenly, as much as that first week. To take him back to Honter without one last effort? No, of course not. “Will you, Willie Tom?”

“Yes, Clyde.”

“You said that before.”

“I sure mean it now.”

“Not just eating right. I mean you got to lift the toilet seat when you piss. And you flush it after. Every time. Can you do that?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I mean all those things. Hanging up your clothes. Packing when it's time to go.”

“I can do all that.”

“Then do it!” Clyde felt passion and impatience.

“You'll get me a rifle?”

“You do right and I'll get you a rifle.”

Willie Tom did not answer, but walked on. He felt an erection begin. “Come on,” he said. “Let's go back to the motel. I got somethin for you.”



“Again?”

“And after, you show me about eatin.”

Flooded with love, Clyde would have been happy to spend the afternoon. But no. “Now give me time to do some business. When I get back.”

“If I eat right tonight, you buy me the rifle tomorrow?”

Clyde was stern, love or no love. “No. No siree bob! A week. A whole week you got to behave. So you get good at it. So it will stick.”

Willie Tom's erection eased. “A week,” he said. He'd been three – no, four weeks away from Honter. He could wait a week. His penis stiffened again. He smiled at Clyde. “You gonna have a real nice week.”

“Now you don't just be good for a week and get your rifle and go back to your old ways now.”

“I guess not, Clyde.”

“I know. I'll take that rifle away from you, you don't behave.”

“Yes, Clyde. Come on back to the motel. Get the week started right.”

“All right, Willie Tom. You do like you say, I'm going to love you good.”

Willie Tom smiled at Clyde. “Let's go to the motel. Come on. I know what you like.”

Which was more important? Work? Love? Clyde nodded, smiling. It was going to work out after all. It's funny about love, he reminded himself. You can never know what form it will take. And Willie Tom had something new to offer; perhaps he did know what Clyde liked. He quickened his pace to the car. Business could wait.

“I'm gonna suck somethin, too, Clyde,” Willie Tom said. “I'm..”

# Teen Tricks – 5

by Ruth van Miller

Dear Ruth Van Miller,

The feces really hit the fan! You know that fag? The one that wanted to watch? Well, he started giving us ten bucks a blow, which was okay – like you said, I only did what I wanted to do and ten was just what I wanted, and I liked the way I was getting it, cause that fag has a sweet head. But one of the guys in our circle has this suspicious mom, and she wanted to know where all the loot came from, and I can't believe this but he told her, I mean everything, and she called the police, not to mention my mom. And my buddy told me, don't admit nothing, and I didn't, but the cops took me down and said my buddy had told them it was all my idea, I started him and I got the fag started too, so I told them the truth and you know? My buddy hadn't said nothing! I'm so sick I can't face anybody, so it don't matter that all us guys are barred from the bowling alley. So I guess I was

– BETTER OFF BOWLING

Dear BOB,

Take courage. When he knows what the police did, your buddy won't blame you. You and he need each other, so don't let something like this hurt your friendship.

Please write again. I care.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

I'm fourteen years old and real thin. I want to put on weight, but I don't know what to do. I eat as much as I can.

– SKINNY

Dear Skinny,

Are you a boy or a girl?

Dear Ruth van Miller,

My friend won't talk to me about it, but when my father comes home while he's here, they go off together and I know they're getting off.

– STILL MAD SON IN SALEM

Dear S.M.S.I.S.

So what's your problem?

Dear Ruth van Miller,

We had a meeting after reading your answer to our letter (we wrote you about needing a sponsor). We are six boys and two girls, which seems pretty uneven, but two of the boys are mostly gay, so it generally

works out pretty even, because we switch around a lot. We have good attendance at our meetings (at a Burger King), but we can't meet the way we want, as a whole group, for what you call "orgies" (we looked that up and I guess they're what we're trying to have), but we have to pair off in the back seat of the car (we tried a cemetery, but got chased off). Also, with no place, we can't expand our membership. And, sure, we'd like some grown ups. One of us, Marsha, has an uncle who really swings, but he lives in Detroit. We'd like more like him. As for "sugar," well, that would be fine too.

– STILL TRYING IN GRAND RAPIDS

Dear Still,

I didn't print it, but you put the telephone number of your Burger King as a P.S. to your letter. By now, my contacts in Grand Rapids have also talked with you and you're working something out.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

About three years ago I met an absolutely wonderful man. He was older than I am – I'm 31 now and he's 45 – and splendidly handsome and one of those rare people with old-world courtesy. He was really the man of my dreams. You can understand my feelings better if you know that I had a terrible marriage, that started and ended in my teens, and I resolved that I'd never marry again. I'd raise my precious son and go it alone, and, frankly speaking, I did a damn good job! I'm able to support myself well as Administrative Secretary to a top business executive.

Then Albert came into my life. I won't say we fell passionately in love; he's not that sort and neither am I. In fact, that's one reason he was my ideal: warm, and caring, and generous, and, best of all, he and my son Jack got along just beautifully. I believed, in spite of my awful marriage, that a boy needs a man's influence.

Now I'm full of dread. How can I express my feelings? It seems that Albert has been sexually abusing Jack. This fact came out in a quarrel that Jack was having with another little boy named Pete (they're both 13), who I thought was Jack's best friend. Well, to my astonishment, Pete called Jack a "faggot" – and put two even worse words in front of that awful word. When I threatened to tell Pete's mother, Pete said it was the truth because he'd caught Jack and Uncle Albert doing it. And then – I couldn't believe my ears! – Jack came right back and said that Pete was only jealous because he and Albert wouldn't let Pete do it too!

That was a week ago. And I've been holding all this in, not knowing what to say to Albert or to Jack. Well, I did immediately ask Jack if Pete would say anything like that to anyone else, and Jack said no, and that may be right because Pete has been palling around with Jack again as if nothing happened. What shall I say to Albert? What shall I say to Jack? Should I bring in the police? Albert doesn't know about this, unless Jack told him, and Albert certainly isn't acting as if he's guilty. Maybe nothing has happened. What do you think? I feel as if I'm the

– WRONG ANGLE IN A TRIANGLE

Dear Angle,

The last thing you want is to ruin your life and Jack's, and I'll guess that you won't want to ruin Albert's either. Now, to look at the facts plainly, you really don't have anything to go to the police about anyway. Nor, I think, do you have anything to create problems with Albert. A wise person said, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. So let Jack and Pete and Albert alone.

Your feelings are a different matter. You are a woman of exceptional maturity for your age. The

fact that you've been quiet for a week, and only decided to write me after careful consideration, proves that. What you need is the assurance that you are doing the right thing, for yourself and the males in your life, and let me assure you that you are!

If you are in doubt, then here is the acid test: ask yourself how Jack feels. Is he stable? Does he do his chores around the house? Does he do his school work? Does he seem happy? If the answers are yes, then you are doing right.

By the way, if you want an example of the wrong sort of man – a nerd, a real contrast to your good Albert, see this next letter.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

I would like to marry a pleasant female, who is liberal about sex but doesn't want much, and who has several attractive, very young sons. Where can I find such a female?

– SEARCHING

Dear Searching,

At the dog pound.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

This is a very difficult letter to write. Do you remember a letter signed “Hanging in Texas”? Well, we were absolutely furious at your answer. And we had Tommy committed to a psychiatric facility for juvenile offenders. Well I hardly know how to go on. The doctors tested Tommy in every way, and then had the nerve to tell us he was “NORMAL”! We couldn't believe it! So we had him committed to another, but that lasted only two days because our insurance company said they wouldn't pay unless the initial tests contradicted the other facility's finding. Well, you may have guessed that by this time the Child Protective Services had got into the act (we suspect because of the insurance company) and wanted to take Tommy away from us. Well, to make a long story short, Tommy said he didn't want to go. He said all he wanted was for us to give him the KISS you said we ought to give him – and to leave his sex life alone.

Well, if it had been just me, I'd have kissed him, once anyway. But he wanted a kiss from his father too, and that was OUT! Tommy's father is a real man, raised on a farm, in the best American tradition of manliness. He hasn't kissed even me since we were engaged! So Tommy said, all right, I'll go wherever CPS sends me. Well, we just found out that they sent him right into the house of the same man he said he was going to go to bed with, who, it turns out, is a high school (not Tommy's) assistant principal. CPS says he's not going to bed with the man, but we know he is. Now, even though you aren't all that sympathetic, surely you don't condone what CPS has done. Tell us please, how can we get Tommy back? We've decided that he can visit Milly every two weeks, but Tommy says, of all things, that Milly won't agree. What is wrong with the woman?

– STILL HUNG

Dear Hung (which I doubt, and that goes for your husband too),

First of all, nothing's wrong with a woman who wants to see (or whatever) her lover more frequently than every two weeks. Second, if I was CPS there's no way you could get Tommy back unless you limited your control over him to seeing that his school work gets done (his assistant

principal friend can help you on that), and that he gets enough sleep – when he sleeps at home. AND – let's not kid around – Tommy's father has got to kiss him, and not only kiss him, hug him too. HE'S NOT TOO OLD! And do it every day. And you have to too.

Otherwise, forget him and get a cow. And give her to your husband. The poor son of bitch needs some affection!

Dear Ruth van Miller,  
I'm a boy.

– SKINNY

Dear Skinny,

Why do you want to put on weight? (See the next letter.)

Dear Ruth van Miller,  
I'm a thirteen year old queer and I'm fat. I wish I was dead.  
– FAGGOT

Dear Beautiful Gay Young Man,

Where did you learn those words – faggot and queer? You're not even fat, if the truth were told. You have let what other people say describe you to yourself. You've got what the psychologists call a “poor self image,” and it's something people you care about have laid onto you. The postmark on your letter says that you live – don't worry, I'm not going to give you away – in a town where I know there is a gay Weight Watchers chapter. Look it up in the phone book, call them, and get started. Write me again, after a few months. I care!

Dear Ruth van Miller,

The fag copped a plea, so we didn't have to testify. He got two years, which averages out to about one month per BJ. You were right about my buddy. He was glad when I phoned him, cause he figured he had to be mad at me, so he couldn't call me first. We're J.O.ing again, but it ain't the fun the fag was.

– BETTER OFF GETTING HEAD

Dear BOGH,

I'm sure another “fag,” as you say, will come around. In the meantime, you and your buddy will have to do what you can to help each other. Do I have to draw a picture? (Judging by your last few letters, you not only don't want me to give up on advice about sex, but you've learned a lot in the last six months.)

Can you get back to the bowling alley yet?



Dear Ruth van Miller,

My husband is a former pedophile. He gave up having sex with boys when he married me, and I have every confidence in him on that score. What is troubling me is that Dan's former boy friends keep coming to see him! One of them is nearly forty years old, and it's been something close to twenty-five years since they had their affair. The man – I'll call him Bob – was married to a no-good woman who ran off and left him with two children. So now he comes to Don for advice, just like Don was some sort of social worker or psychologist! And Bob's sons, who are very attractive teenagers, often visit too, and I know this puts some strain on poor Don's emotions. Several other of his old friends invite themselves over for dinner, with Don's permission, and while I don't mind putting on an extra plate, it does make planning difficult, since I always have to have some extra food on the stove, it seems.

I think these men should go to their own families for food and advice, but Don says that if they had homes worth going to they never would have been his sex partners to begin with. I think we have a right to our privacy, don't you?

– COOKING WITH GAS IN BUTTE

Dear Cook,

We? It seems like the objections are pretty one-sided. However I do think that you have a legitimate complaint: all the drop-in guests for dinner. You tell Don to tell his pals that, without advance notice, the only dinner they'll get is a pizza you'll send out for. No more cooking extra for guests who may or may not show up!

Dear Ruth van Miller,

What was I supposed to do while they were getting off? Jerk off?

– NOT SO MAD BUT JUST STILL PISSED OFF IN SALEM

Dear N.S.M.BJ.S.P.O.S.I.S., Yes.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

My brother and I never wear underwear (that sounds funny, doesn't it?) We think it's a dumb custom, and people, boys anyway, only wore underwear because clothes used to be scratchy, but we wear these cool jeans that are snug and smooth. Our mother says not wearing undershorts is not healthy – for some reason she says she can't explain to us. We say that freedom down there is like fresh breezes, instead of fouled up with sweat and all. Our father says (will you believe this?) that we just won't wear underwear so that we can show off our meat! He won't say why, but our uncle (his brother) tells me Dad thinks we're trying to turn on gays, like he did when he was a kid. Well, we have news for him – our uncle's gay, and we've been turning him on for years. So we don't see how starting to wear underwear (it still sounds funny) can make any difference, except to make us less comfortable, more sweaty, and – let's face it – less meaty.

– BROTHERS IN D.C.

Dear A.C. In D.C.

Let the breezes blow! Not to mention your uncle.

# Boccaccio: Fifth Day, Tenth Story

*or, how a Christian soldier was depraved by a handsome Jew, much to the distress of his wife, who did, however find consolation in the arms of an ambitious youth*

A lot of things were wrong with Curtis Military Academy (CMA) but homosexuality was not one of them. The CMA brochure for parents was specific: “Unlike other military schools, CMA does not encourage or permit indecent behavior among the cadets.”<sup>1</sup> This reassurance was not sufficient to secure for the school seventy five new boys each year, as well as replacements for upper class drop outs. Col. Haggis Beatty, U.S. Army (ret.), at one point considered dropping the sentence from the brochure. He had found that Capt. Richard Thames, U.S. Army (res.), R.O.T.C. Director, football coach, teacher of Military Morals and Bible Knowledge, had enjoyed carnal use of at least seven cadets in one term. Upon reflection, however, he reasoned that the sentence did not, in fact, apply. He considered as well expelling the students, but he saw two disadvantages to that. First, parents would expect a refund, and, second, they would insist that Capt. Thames be fired<sup>2</sup>— just when Col. Beatty had him where he wanted him. Instead, he delivered an ultimatum: Thames could go to jail, or he could marry Anne Beatty, the Colonel's thirty-six year old virgin niece,<sup>3</sup> Anne lived with Haggis and his wife Martha, both of whom loathed her. Thames, not realizing that CMA could not have survived the scandal, proposed. He was twenty-eight at the time, and Anne thought he was cute. Thames agreed; he found his own image in the mirror spiritually uplifting.<sup>4</sup>

Four years later the youngest cadet seduced by Thames had gone on to Salem Baptist Seminary College, Soqwevent, Alabama, and the near-scandal had been as well forgotten as such things ever are. Thames was still more or less as cute as he had ever been. Anne had become forty and, though no longer a virgin, she felt she was not, as she ought to have been, sexually satiated. She was disappointed; she had believed that women at forty were through with sex. This belief was based upon the joint opinion of her mother — who in fact had been sick of sex at thirty five and simply died at forty — and Martha Beatty, who, adjusting a bouquet at the wedding reception, congratulated Anne on achieving a Christian husband who could be expected to leave her alone.<sup>5</sup>

Anne was the only long term resident at CMA who didn't know about the Captain and the cadets. She thought his lack of passion was due to his unusual devotion to Jesus and the U.S. Army. The real problem, Thames told her, was her own dirty mind.<sup>6</sup> She found it difficult — usually impossible — to get him into her bed after he'd spent a full half hour kneeling beside his own bed discussing the Red Menace<sup>7</sup> with God. God, she could tell, was a very sympathetic and patient listener, but Rick (as she affectionately called him, “Dick” being offensive, not to say inspirational) bored the hell out of her.

So Anne, both married and relieved of Martha Beatty's constant companionship, discovered feminism and read a novel about lesbians. For six months she devoted herself to becoming one, in spite of the limited community at CMA and its nearby township, Grunwald.<sup>8</sup> She did succeed in having a brief affair with Mildred, the town prostitute — ex-prostitute really, because at fifty five she was pretty well off with three rental houses and IBM stock — but Mildred was easily bored and Anne was unable to see any improvement over Rick's embraces. Those rare but pleasant clutchings occurred only when Rick imagined himself a rabbi enjoying the protracted attentions of the boy Jesus in Jerusalem.<sup>9</sup>

It was a year after the failure with Mabel that Anne noticed Cadet Lt. Virgil de Kalb. It should have

been difficult for her not to notice de Kalb, yet she succeeded in evading his attempts to interest her for over a month. He had thoroughly scouted her habits and repeatedly set himself in ambush, in costumes and postures that she could scarcely avoid noticing. Yet she did. Her first awareness of him was completely original; there had been no seepage into her consciousness despite his efforts. When she noticed him for the first time, she saw him, literally, for the first time. This is both remarkable and unsurprising. Remarkable because de Kalb, having just managed to become fifteen, was five feet ten inches tall, weighed a very efficient hundred and forty pounds, and was, to Rick Thames, maddeningly handsome,<sup>10</sup> but then one fourth of the student body was, to him, at or near that category (one at a time, of course). Unsurprising because Anne never noticed cadets at all.

De Kalb, examining his own reflection in the communal bath mirrors (he dared not look too long because the sight of his nude body could give him an erection), worried over Anne's obliviousness. At one point, in defiance of several CMA rules, he lounged near the library door, wearing borrowed runningshorts that were too small for him, and displayed his ample, not to say excessive, organs of generation. Anne passed him with as much notice as she'd give a lamp post. De Kalb – or Virgil, as, in deference to his youth, he should be called – Virgil was not especially attracted to fortyish ladies with thick calves and perpetually scornful facial expressions, as one might expect from his silent solicitations.

No. He knew exactly who she was and knew also that if he did not make Cadet Captain on the next promotions list, he would never (barring unlooked for dropouts and deaths) become Cadet Colonel. His principal competitor, Cadet Lt. Jerome Gregory, the modest hero of this story, was a dark lad of fragile beauty.<sup>11</sup> His father, a decade after his conversion, was a national leader of the Jews for Jesus.<sup>12</sup> Virgil, son of an Army general who was (as is often the case) Christian only for official purposes, could not compete with Jerry Gregory in the Jesus business; a born-only-once Christian, he lacked the vocabulary.

He and Jerry were equals on the Army and the Red Menace and nuking first and all that,<sup>13</sup> but Capt. Thames found Jerry more inspirational than Virgil. So Virgil decided to (as his father would say) “outflank the Yid.”

Anne was so oblivious to Virgil's attractions that Virgil would have doubted they existed were it not for the attentions of several cadet privates, severely repulsed yet recurrent and persistent, to certify his vanity. He couldn't even masturbate without being crowded by a throng of small well wishers, eager to help in any way he chose, in the showers or in the dormitory, or behind the bushes west of the parade ground. The advantage of the bushes, grown rather wild in days of CMA's austerity, was not privacy but merely the assurance that everyone there was there for more or less the same reason. No. While it was impossible, at the height of things, to escape a soapy hand here or a grubby hand there, Virgil was exclusively heterosexual, having been jerked off by Alice Musgrave on July 26 last; the details of the occasion are of no interest here.

What is of interest is how Virgil made it into the sack with Anne Thames, which he did. This is how:

Anne hated cats. She disliked pets generally, but living with Martha Beatty and her five to twelve cats for twenty years had made all cats loathsome to her. One cat, Periwinkle Snuffles, had, as a mid-grown kitten, taken a fancy to Anne some years earlier. Martha could prove nothing, but Periwinkle Snuffles vanished after three weeks of courting Anne. Foul play was a certainty. That had been almost a decade before Anne's marriage, and no cat had dared to approach her since. Word gets around.

Virgil was elated by the discovery of this trait. The information was conveyed to him in an overheard conversation at the tea for cadet officers which Martha Beatty subjected them to every month. All teaching staff and their wives were required to attend. Long ago, staff and cadets had been expected to talk with each other, but the pretense had not survived. No one had any pleasure at the teas except Martha Beatty, who used them for dispensing such lies and truths as she thought would do the most harm to

particular persons. She told Elaine Erdman, a passionate vegetarian and anti-vivisectionist, the terrible fate of Periwinkle Snuffles. Virgil heard it all.

A couple of weeks later, when Capt. Thames was attending an R.O.T.C. course in electronic military hardware (not even simulators for which could CMA afford to buy), Virgil used two of his most admiring privates, promising them a very little bit of action in the shower that night, to capture a quasi-feral tom cat, tolerated at the CMA kitchen for his universal taste in rodents. Assuring himself that Anne was at home alone, Virgil took the cat, snarling and scratching in a box, to the rear of the Thames's house, opened a window into darkness, let the cat out of the box, and shut the window. Then he strolled to the front of the house and waited. The wait was unexpectedly long, but at last the signals came. Anne's shriek of rage and the cat's attacking howl were almost simultaneous. Virgil dashed to the front door, threw it open, and shouted, "What has happened? Can I help?" The shout had its effect – Anne noticed Virgil – but it was otherwise unneeded. The cat was dead.

"You can carry it out," Anne said. "What are you doing in here, anyway?"

"I was walking by –"

"Take that damn thing out, then come back in here and tell me what the hell you were doing walking by during study hours."

Virgil did as he was told. "It's hard to study three hours straight, Mrs. Thames. It's nice to have some fresh air and maybe even talk to someone. Someone nice to talk with."

Anne eyed him sourly. However she was bored. "You want some cocoa?" she said inhospitably.

"Gee, that would be excellent." Virgil tried to, and more or less did, look overjoyed.

In the harsh light of the kitchen, Anne looked haggard as well as harsh, so Virgil pretty much had to excite himself. "Mind if I take my jacket off, Mrs. Thames? Kinda warm in here." He began unbuttoning and Anne's face took on a slight curiosity as Virgil disrobed to a tight T-shirt and trousers. By a conscious process that did not quite look natural, he flexed his muscles as he draped his jacket on a chair.

"Just getting some air, huh?" Anne had a new skepticism.

"Well, not a hundred percent just for the air. As a matter of fact, I walk over here a lot."

"What the hell for?" The milk was heating.

Virgil tried rather fruitlessly to look embarrassed. He did however manage to look briefly at Anne, drop his eyes, look again, and so on.

"What's with you, anyway?"

"It sure is nice of you to give me some cocoa."

"I haven't given it to you yet."

"Well, when you do, it sure will be nice." Virgil depended on mother wit to see him through. Fortunately, he had other assets.

"Well here it is." She poured the stuff into a cup.

"Sure is nice being here with you. All relaxed, with my jacket off and all."

"Your jacket off," Anne guffawed. "I suppose you'd be more relaxed with your shirt off?"

"Sure would," he said, and began tugging up on the tail of his T-shirt. He pulled it over his head and then folded it neatly and laid it on his jacket.

Anne said, "I'll be damned. How about your pants?"

"Yes, ma'm. But I'll have to take my shoes off first." He knelt to unlace a shoe.

"The kitchen isn't the room for this, sonny." His arched back was much cuter than Rick's – not to mention Mildred's, the only other comparison that came immediately to mind.

So it was that, a half hour later, a panting, pulsating youth was committing adultery<sup>14</sup> with a matronly lady, who was regretting that it didn't last longer, but on the whole felt pretty good about it. Indeed, as the



youth lay, spent, at her breast (as it were), she came dangerously close to feeling affection, and kissed his sweaty neck. After a rather long time of quiet that verged on tedium, Anne became luxuriously aware that the youth, whatever his name was, wasn't finished.

Strolling back to the barracks, Virgil believed he had the cadet captaincy, hadn't any more doubt of that than of the promised little action in the shower.<sup>15</sup> Jerry Gregory was at his study desk as Virgil returned, and looked up in wonder as Virgil patted him on the back and said, "How ya' doin', Jerry? Did ya know Jews are behind the nuclear freeze? Christian Jews. I just heard about it."

Jerome felt that Virgil was on to something. He didn't know what.

At the first scrimmage after his return, Rick was a little surprised to see Anne out to watch. Anne lied, "Martha Beatty has been pressuring me to take more interest in the cadets. Maybe we should even have the officers over some time. What do you think?" Rick was numb. He didn't think at all for a while. Then the thought of hospitality leading to cadet officers dropping by and maybe parties for noncoms and get-togethers with privates<sup>16</sup> dazzled his mind and made him forget the improbability of Martha Beatty having any influence at all over Anne's behavior. "Yes, uh-huh," he said.

Anne was not so farsighted. Being serially monogamous, she was looking only for Virgil (she got his name before he left). She sat on a bench when she finally spotted him, almost naked and golden in the sun. If Rick had been in the habit of looking at his wife, he would have noticed an odd serenity secreted beneath her scowl. As it was, he was planning a party and wondering if he could get Lt. Gregory into the bedroom to discuss David and Jonathan.<sup>17</sup>

Tuesday was Rick's poker night, so it became Virgil's too. No longer concerned about debts to privates, Virgil could provide Anne with better service. His visits became longer and his Wednesday classwork suffered. He didn't mind because Anne fully sympathized with his ambition.

Meanwhile, to remove any mystery about her beloved's visits, Anne had entertained the cadet officers. Long experience with Martha Beatty's teas had taught Anne that cokes and cookies, and no clutter of faculty, might suit her better than tea, cucumber sandwiches, and gossip. By coincidence, the guests were relieved and gratified. The invitations, which could not be refused, had inspired horror when first delivered. The only clue that things might be better than at the Beatty soirees was the time, five to six, mercifully better than starting at four.

By prearrangement, Virgil was attentive to Capt. Thames, who preferred Jerome, when both boys were in sight. Jerome and the Cadet Colonel, among others, were forced to court Anne. She was unequal to the occasion. She saw instantly that Cadet Lt. Gregory was a Jew.<sup>18</sup> Afterwards Anne could, and did, say with perfect sincerity, "That's an awful Jew boy. I wonder how he got to be a lieutenant." Virgil, though himself rich in anti-Semitic cliches, had not imagined that anyone took them seriously. He never knew that had he been able to make Anne aware of Jerry earlier she'd have put him out of competition without Tuesday labors.

"He's not a Jew," Rick said. "He's Christian."

"He's a Jew," Anne said, "and he's conned you."

Rick became angry. "He's part of a great movement. Jews for Jesus. They are a strong defense against Jewish Imperial Communism."

"He's a Jew and he ought to be a private."

Three weeks before the promotion list was to be posted, Cadet Lt. Gregory was very much aware that Cadet Lt. De Kalb had moved ahead. Jerry just didn't know why. After PT, stopping only to get his Bible, wearing gym shorts and T-shirt, he knocked at the door of Capt. Thames's office. Thames was his idol. He even dreamed of him, even once a very embarrassing dream, for which he was tempted to apologize, if he could find the occasion. He was asked in. After formalities, he licked his lips and began,



“I wonder if I could have a talk with you, sir, about a problem I have with First Corinthians, chapter six.”

It was a chapter Capt. Thames blanked on. He had a scratch pad in front of him on which he'd been doodling arrows pointing at arrows. “Uh, I'm very busy this afternoon.<sup>19</sup>”

Genuinely hurt, the cadet walked past the captain's desk to the window. He looked out because he felt as if he might get wet in the eyes. That happened to him sometimes. He was unaware that when his eyes were just a little moist his dark brown irises brightened. He also did not know that his slightly olive skin, sun tanned – ruddy – was a shade that the captain especially admired. Nor was he conscious that his muscular right thigh and just a crescent moon of his untanned right buttock were visible exactly where Capt. Thames eyes were looking. “Brotherly love,”<sup>20</sup> the captain said.

“Sir?” Gregory said, having heard perfectly well but certain he had not.

“The army,” Thames said, his eyes steady on their target. “Our national defense needs soldiers who are loyal. Godliness with brotherly affection. Second Peter; one, seven.”

“Oh.” Gregory had not made a connection yet.

“Yes. Like Jesus and John.<sup>21</sup> David and Jonathan. It all goes together. The leader and the led. Manly love.”

Gregory turned to the captain. The captain looked up into the boy's lovely eyes, then down at his shorts. He could no longer see the crescent moon. But now Gregory's left thigh was only inches from the captain's right hand.

He reached.

A half hour later Jerry – he thought of himself as just Jerry – had stopped sobbing. He was about a mile from the campus edge, in a grove of oaks. It was the nearest place to be completely alone. He had no doubt whatever that Virgil de Kalb, on some recent occasion, had felt that same hand and had welcomed it. Maybe, Jerry thought, at another time, some other place, as in a dream, he too might have welcomed it.

Indeed, just such a scruple had motivated his study of the Scripture, before the captain's show of indifference. The all but lost legend of the old scandal returned to him now, and he knew that he had never forgotten it. Anger started the tears again. He wanted the cadet captaincy at least as much as de Kalb did. He wanted it more. He had earned it. You can't want something you haven't earned as much as you want it if you've earned it. Jerry wasn't convinced by that, but, unskilled in logic, he let it go. He trusted – had trusted – the captain. He worshiped – no that would be blasphemy – he loved Captain Thames, sure, like John loved Jesus. That was it. Now he would never make captain.

Or maybe de Kalb hadn't. Maybe only a Jew had to produce something extra. Jews always had to do more. Being Christian only made it worse. Jerry picked up the Bible he'd put down beside him. Starting with Revelations, from the back, he began tearing out, page by page, the New Testament.<sup>22</sup> Thames would have gone mad with desire if he could have seen Jerry's weeping eyes just then, weeping his betrayal, weeping that he would satisfy his dreams with an act of not love but revenge.

The following day Gregory, again in gym shorts but without a shirt, knocked again at the captain's office door. Inside, he said, “I want to apologize for my behavior yesterday, sir.” He walked around the desk to the same place he'd fled from. With his thumbs he pulled down his shorts in front an inch or two. “I want to be promoted to cadet captain, sir.”

“Lock the door,” Thames said, unbuckling his belt.

Not until Monday did Thames mentally confront his hopeless position. If de Kalb was promoted, Gregory, betrayed, would at the least deprive the captain of the one thing, other than Jesus and the Strategic Defense Initiative, that made life worth living. If he tried to put Gregory onto the promotion list, Anne would block it through Martha Beatty, to whom she had already make the point that CMA would never survive if it became known as a school for Jews.

Tuesday evening, Thames had had four private sessions with Gregory, four feasts breaking a four-year fast. Losing the boy, so recently (if cynically) won, was all he could think about. His poker playing was a disaster. After betting on three idiot hands and losing heavily, he took to anteing and then folding. It was at least cheaper than playing. Colonel Beatty decided Thames was not well. "Go home," he said. "You're not worth a shit here."

Thames walked home, morose, rather more quietly than usual because of his mood. He poured himself a large whiskey from the pantry medicine chest, and only as he started to drink it did he become aware of unusual voices upstairs. One was Anne's. It was unusual because she was giggling. The other voice he did not immediately recognize. He gulped down the whiskey, shivered, and then very quietly went upstairs.

Anne saw him first. She was in position to, her head being toward the door. Virgil's face was concealed by Anne's posterior, up toward the head of the bed. Rick's suspicions were confirmed, which didn't bother him much. What did interest him was who the visible lower male parts belonged to.<sup>23</sup> They did not belong to any of Anne's, or his own, contemporaries, and the virile member was remarkably larger than Jerry's. Indeed, he recalled seeing just such a member in the gymnasium shower on a rare occasion when he had indulged himself, when he knew the Colonel was away soliciting monetary endowments. "The glory of young men is their – oh, yes – strength,"<sup>24</sup> he murmured as he went to the bedroom chest of drawers and opened the bottom drawer.

"Omigod," Anne said. "He's going to get a gun."<sup>25</sup> He had not moved, Virgil was unable to make sense of this declaration. The frantic tone alarmed him however and he heaved (muscular lad!) Anne's lower extremities aside to see what was the matter.

What he saw was Capt. Thames taking a Polaroid flash photograph. Anne was distressed, grabbing for cover the sheet they were on top of and finding that useless. De Kalb did everything he could, except smile, to make the next picture worthy of the subject. The captain, while Anne was saying "Rick, Rick," walked out of the room and down the stairs.

"Get dressed," Anne gasped.

"What for?" Virgil asked, puzzled, looking at his still stimulated member. "You've already blown my chance for promotion."

Anne flung on a robe and gathered Virgil's clothes from the chair to throw to him. Alarmed, Virgil said, "You'll spoil the creases!"

"Oh good God," Anne said in desperation. She dropped the uniform, went out of the room, and hurried down the stairs. She met Rick coming back up. "What did you do?" she cried.

Rick was very calm. "I hid the pictures, Jezebel. So that you can't tear them up." She fled down the stairs.

Rick walked into the bedroom where Virgil, still nude but no longer excited, had reset his clothes on the chair and was about to pull on his undershorts. "You don't need to dress, de Kalb," the captain said. "You'll do fine just as you are."

"Sir?" Virgil paused, wondering if he should stand at attention, as was customary when addressed by an officer. He tried to click his bare heels and felt foolish because he knew that, for no reason at all, he was getting hard again.

"That's right. Just put your shorts back on the chair." Rick had removed his tunic. "You're going to render unto Caesar the things that are, as of now, Caesar's."<sup>26</sup>

"Huh?" Virgil said, snapping to.

"At ease," Rick said, with a little grin. The boy's erection flipped as he moved, then settled, perpendicular, straight as a rod. Trousers off; Rick shut and bolted the bedroom door. "Just get back into

bed, de Kalb, or you're going to be expelled for immoral conduct.”

Virgil hesitated at the sight of the Captain's organ, pointing stiffly, and wondered what he planned to do with it. Then he gave a moment's consideration to what his father would think of his expulsion.<sup>27</sup> And made a wise decision. He got back into the bed, bemused by the thought that he might make cadet colonel after all.<sup>28</sup>

A half hour later, upon unlocking and opening the door, Rick was confronted with a savage but intimidated Anne. “You pervert!” she squealed.

“You're the corrupter of youth,” Rick said blandly. “I can prove it.”

“Not by me, sir,” Virgil said, with a little giggle. He grinned at Anne from the bed.

“Virgil,” Anne said. “What did – the Captain do to you?”

“I guess we finished what you started.”

Anne understood the “we.” She was crushed at last.

“Goddam men,” she said. “Goddam every goddam one of you.”

Early the next morning, Capt. Thames moved to solidify his position. He had the situation, as it were, by the balls. He fiddled the recommendations, appeased Mrs. Beatty, and awaited the results, neglecting neither of his conquests. Never had he been more securely placed. Col. Beatty posted the promotions list five days later. Thames read it with satisfaction. Cadet Capt. Jerome Gregory was on it; Lt. de Kalb was not.

Now a new stage in the development of the relationship could emerge. Love freed from constraint and ambition. Love fulfilled. Thames trembled a little in expectation as he awaited the new Cadet Captain's afternoon visit. The day was warm, so Jerry would come through the door lightly clad, as he had that first, delirious time. His skin would be dark beneath a roseate glow from sport in the sun. His shoulders, a little narrower than ideal, but rounded in fine muscle. His chest, ah, those fine pectorals, rounded, not sharply defined like de Kalb's, the nipples large, so easily aroused. And Thames was himself aroused as he waited.

And he waited ten minutes, twenty, arousal failing. He waited. Eager expectation gave way to fear. And fear to certainty.

The boy did not come.

Not that day, nor the next. He had come, in both senses of the word, thrice since de Kalb's strategic error. It was only a day before Thames began, acutely, to sense that Gregory believed he had paid for his promotion. He had paid fully, and in advance.

By mid week, Thames was almost sick with acute anxiety.

Surely the boy could not hold out? Each hour intensified the agony. At last, Thames could bear it no more. On Wednesday at the morning review, he ordered the Captain to report after PT that afternoon. Thames' voice was harsh, concealing the choking fear that motivated him.

He waited through the day, almost indifferent to the teaching he was supposed to be doing. The baffled students by lunchtime had lost their disciplined order, but Thames hardly noticed. The hour approached; the hour arrived. Thames waited, his dreams of the flesh reviving.

A little late, Jerry appeared. He was in full uniform. “What did you get dressed for, Gregory?” Thames asked, dismayed.

Jerry's eyes stared well over Thames's head. “You *ordered* me to appear, sir.” He wasn't giving an inch.

Thames reminded himself that he was Gregory's commander. “Well, dammit, what do you expect? Where the hell have you been?”

“Excuse me, sir, but is the profanity necessary?”

Thames, now mad with anxiety, half rose from his seat. “Don't pull that shit with me!”

The cadet was still rigidly at attention. “You are the Christian, sir, not me.” His tone was scornful, just as he'd rehearsed, but Jerry felt a tear, irrepressible. Oh, it wasn't fair, to be betrayed first by his beloved Thames, and then by his own pain. But he refused to sob, and he let the tear fall.

Thames saw the tear and sat back. He would never understand boys. After a long silence, and another tear, he said, “Dismissed, Captain.” Alone, he too wept.

His hope lay in despair. Each afternoon, neglecting urgent affairs, he waited for Gregory's knock after PT. After an hour, he would weep again, compose himself, and (if the day was Thursday) prepare for his evening's sensuality with de Kalb (who was still making it with Anne on Tuesdays, which was their business, except that the scorpions in his mind spoiled his poker playing). The Thursday experience itself was like dust and ashes,<sup>29</sup> because Virgil's cold blue eyes and calculated passion (another round of promotions might position him for Cadet Major) could not compare with Jerry Gregory's delicacy of eye and touch.

There had to be an answer. The suffering was bad enough in itself, but Anne's suspicion that he was dissatisfied with his success – for why wasn't de Kalb promoted? Why was Gregory? – galled him. He rebelled against his own goodness and began to doubt even, if only for moments, that communists had control of the State Department.

Every day, during parade, during football practice, during Bible class, Gregory's eyes met Thames's, telling him, yes, I do love you, but I cannot forgive you. That was what the eyes said. The mouth said terrible things. Jesus must have been Joseph's bastard, or maybe was Gabriel the kid next door? Anyway Jesus never preached to anybody but Jews, and Paul was just a – But the worst was he came to class wearing a yarmulke. “Get rid of that thing before Col. Beatty sees it,” Thames had yelled, too late, because the colonel was already on his way in, having seen the abomination crossing the parade ground.

“I'll bust you to yardbird, captain, you dumb son of a bitch,” the old man had screamed, and to this day Thames does not know which captain he was addressing, “if I ever see that thing again!”

But why? Was it just to deny the boy a sacred obligation of his faith? A month before, protection of a Jew's rights would have seemed absurd to Thames, but now all sorts of notions were crowding in, baffling him. Oh, he knew it was the weakness of infatuation, yet he felt more rational than ever before. And then he would look at the eyes once more, liquid with hate and love, and Thames asked himself what was the difference? He had always known before that hate and love were opposites, yet here was another mystery, where he had known no mystery before.

It was in just such an heretical mood that a terrible idea crept into the good captain's desperate mind. An idea that, once entertained, refused to go. He wondered, only wondered, if, perhaps, only perhaps, Gregory would be impressed by a convert to – what do you call it? – Judaism. The thought produced a little thrill of terror. Had not the boy begun by sacrifice, giving a treasure, a gift beyond price? And what might Thames's sacrifice involve? Was not love, love – beyond all things, all materiality, even all flesh – the most precious? Was it not enjoined by Jesus himself? Was not Cadet Captain Jerome Gregory Captain Richard Thames's neighbor.<sup>30</sup> The purple head of Jerry's erect virility became ever more beautiful in Thames' memory, like the perfect nose cone of the MX, in contrast to his own pale thing, with its fleshy lip.

Thames at last, on a Friday, thirsting again after a fevered night of drinking at Virgil's copious well<sup>31</sup> telephoned Dr. Randolph Devilliers, head of the clinic at Winfield. “Randy,” he asked, “do you do, uh, you know, circumcisions – with a sharp knife?”<sup>32</sup> The pause was overly long. “Well?” Thames asked.

“No,” Devilliers said, “try Maurice Byrd. He's the obstetrician. Unless it's one of your students. Then mebbe I could be interested. Who wants it?”

Thames decided to let that go. Devilliers had been *persona non grata* at CMA for years. “I’ll tell the lady with the baby to see Byrd, Randy. Thanks a lot.”

Thames did not suffer defeat so quickly. After a half hour's thought, he recalled that Jerry must have gotten that little cap from somewhere, somebody, close by. Could there be? He grabbed the telephone book. Sure enough, there was a synagogue in Winfield. Where there's a synagogue, it stood to reason, there was a rabbi. He would, politely, ask Cadet Captain Gregory to inquire for him. Yes. He composed a note. A formal request. Not an order. No, no. Not an order. “Dear Captain Gregory,” he began. He crumpled the sheet. “Dear Gregory,” he began after long thought, and stopped. He started a third. A deep breath. “Dear Jerry.” His hand was almost unable to shape the letters. He had to pause at his own courage. Oh, not the “Jerry,” that was easy, but what it was prelude to. This was a commitment.

“No, dear Jerry, I'm not a Christian. Do you remember what you said? Not any more. What am I? I'm a Jew. So I need your help. You see, I haven't been –”

He stopped, the pen in the air. There came into his mind his childhood nightmare, a greatnosed Jew, dark and black bearded, in a skull cap, filthy black locks falling to his shoulders, a huge knife upraised over Thames' pitiful white foreskin....



# Teen Tricks – 6

by Ruth van Miller

Dear Ruth van Miller,

I'm writing because you won't believe the awful fight I just had with my father. His wife, my stepmother, had the nerve to call my best friend a name that, if a man had called him that, even if it was true (which it wasn't) he'd have slugged her for. She was drunk, and so was my father, who wouldn't stand up for me, but said I was a "queer" too. They both get blasted so that after 5:00 any friend who I bring into the house gets the treatment. Usually it's just jokes, like her saying, "You wanna share? I dig three in a bed." Or him yelling, "I got a banana for your buddy, and it aint in the kitchen." That's bad enough, but they sometimes come listening at the door of my room, and make comments, giggling and laughing. I keep the door locked, but some of my friends just won't come visit me anymore anyway, because it's all so embarrassing. Anyway, when he called me a queer right to my face, I called him a few names back, and he hit me and I hit him, and he called the police and had me put into juvenile, for assault.

I'd leave home, but I'm only 16 and have two more years of school. Don't tell me to hit the streets because I tried that, and I prefer my friends.

– PADDLING S\_\_\_ CREEK.

Dear Pad:

Far be it from me to suggest the streets; they're okay for them as wants them. My advice is to layoff slugging your dad, and use some imagination on getting to your stepmother, like telling her she can eat your banana. You won't have a problem unless she accepts.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

My stepdad keeps hitting up on me and last week he hit me so hard I had a black eye and it was awful at school explaining it so I got this good friend Joey who said we had a sort of fake fight only he hit me when I forgot to duck see? Anyway Joey's got a stepdad too only there like buddies and they play around a lot and theyve got this game bareass and they let me play and Joey and his dad get bare ass and lik and kiss and stuff until his dad's yonk squirts off and then he hugs and kisses us real good and says he can hardly wait until we can squirt off too and he takes us out for ice cream and maybe a show. So I got the idea why don't I play bareass with my stepdad? Sometimes I see him sleeping with his yonk stiff so I think maybe he'll squirt off and hug and kiss me too and not hit up on me so much. Joey's dad says its a terrible idea but I'll do anything so I don't get hit no more so what do you think?

– BRUISED IN BUFFALO

Dear Buff,

Here are two Dos and two DON'Ts. 1. DON'T play bareass with your stepdad. He's bad news all the way. 2. DO talk with Joey's dad and see if maybe he might be willing to take you on as a foster son. If he says okay, then – 3. DO tell the counselor at your school how you got that bruise,

and that you need help to get away from your home permanently. The counselor can get help from the children's protection agency to put you into a foster home – namely, Joey's. 4. DON'T tell anyone about playing bareass. Its a great game, but some people don't understand it.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

The Athletic Director of the Boys' Club at Jenkins Park is a real nice man who I like a lot. Some of my friends don't like him because he's black, but he doesn't seem to care and I sure don't. There's just one thing wrong. He sometimes lets me come visit him at this trailer he lives in, when he hasn't got some girl coming to see him which is pretty much most of the time. Here's the thing. When I come see him he calls me his “little honkey punk.” I'm not so little, for one thing, even if I am only fourteen. My mom says “honkey” is like “nigger” only its what they call us instead of what we call them, you know? And she says “punk” is jail talk for a guy who takes it up the rear, you know what I mean? What I'm saying, is that it isn't all true, at least I'm not little, and what makes him call me that? It hurts my feelings, and my mom says I ought not to put up with it.

– BIG HONKEY PUNK

Dear Punk,

You need to learn something about affection. Very often we call people or things “little” because we love them. Are you sure your mom isn't jealous?

Dear Ruth van Miller,

Recent court decisions make it possible for us to set up our own schools, independent of the public school systems. I'm writing in behalf of a group of twenty families who are determined to help our children escape from the bonds of bigotry and brainwashing that make our society corrupt. We are looking to you to help us find the best materials for teaching children liberated ideals of sexual behavior. What do you recommend?

– CONCERNED PARENTS IN DALLAS

Dear In:

Congratulations on a wise decision! Fortunately, I can advise you that the Walter Jenkins Foundation for Sexual Education has recently begun preparation of a series of text books, under the general title, “Creative Sex.” It will have four series, for grades 1-3, 4-6, 7-9, and 10-12. A Kindergarten and pre-school series is planned also. Each series, even the more advanced, will have a full program of games, though the advanced will emphasize things like disease and pregnancy prevention, along with alternate role modeling and free-form games. Parental participation, with assistance from adult guests, is very important in “Creative Sex,” but with a strong bias against incestuous activities: generally, the Foundation believes that parents should set examples and demonstrate, and allow their children to experiment outside the home. “Swapping,” of course, is fun for all concerned!

Dear Ruth van Miller,

She accepted, and now I'm back in juvie. What now?

– WAY UP S \_\_\_\_ CREEK

Dear Creek,

YOU have got a molestation case! Nail her. (Is that the right verb?)

Dear Ruth Van Miller,

No. We quit bowling. My buddy and me, we tried out for junior varsity football, and we made it. They had a circle jerk going in the showers, and the coach found out and you know what? He's giving head! He's a good coach too. My buddy and me made everybody on the team swear we won't tell anybody, so maybe my buddy and I won't need to service each other, like we did when we was still trying to bowl.

Do you think it's time I tried sex again? I mean, all this stuff we been doing, that's not really sex is it?

– BETTER OFF PLAYING FOOTBALL

Dear BOPF,

Now, for the first time, I understand your first letter. Sure, if you're in the mood, and you know a nice girl who wants to try you too. But don't go back to the "hoor,"

Dear Ruth Van Miller,

I dont know how you can help me, but Ive been reading your column for four years (since I was ten, so you know I'm not stupid) and Im desperate. This is real hard to say, so clean it up if it sounds too dirty for the paper. Anyway, I went down on this high school senior in the Boys, and got caught at it. Well, not exactly caught, I mean it wasn't a teacher or the principal, but it was a couple of guys, football players, no less. And now they won't leave me alone. They call me queer and faggot and make me suck them, I mean all the time, even during class Ive got to ask teachers to excuse me so I can go pee or something, but its really because one of these guys has told me he'll cream my ass if I dont give him head exactly at, say, 10:20 a.m., when he'll be waiting for me in the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor Boys. What makes it worse is I really love Dan – thats not his name really, you know why I cant write it in the newspaper, but hes the senior I was doing when all this started – and now I'm so sick of having dicks in my mouth all day that I can't have any good sex with Dan. Sign me (if it's okay with the paper)

– SICK OF COCKS IN BUTTE

Dear Sick,

My heart goes out to you. What for some boys would be a dream come true is, in your case, a nightmare. I'd say relax and enjoy it, because you're only young once, but that's no answer to your real need. My guess is that you're pretty small, or you'd stand up to these studs, so you need to enlist some help. Have you tried getting the football coach to help? Since you're already out of the closet, it wouldn't damage your reputation, and he might be sympathetic. He might even like a little action himself! But don't give it to him unless he agrees to get the team out of your mouth and back into class. And as to Dan, does he have to use the front porch only? Can't he get his jollies on the rear stoop?

Dear Ruth van Miller,

The boys I like to mess around with are real hunky.

– SKINNY

Dear Skinny,

So?

# The Failure

I can tell.

What?

From the look, your look. You look so –

Don't say it.

You look so old .

They said they wanted somebody older.

You must have looked younger. Insouciant.

Go ahead. Say it.

Gay.

It doesn't matter what I tell you.

It doesn't?

If I say say it or don't say it.

Naturally. I'm strong. You're not. That's the real reason.

Yes.

That's not the reason at all.

No, of course not.

Everything was in your favor.

True.

Your looks, your age, your intelligence, your learning, your wide reading.

I don't read much. Not yet.

You would have read widely. They knew that.

They knew about you.

That you have a fourteen year old lover.

You're not fourteen. You're forty.

One of us is fourteen. It comes to the same thing.

Arabs.

Don't say it that way. Ah-rabs.

Whatever.

It was a question of money, wasn't it?

Isn't it always? I need a new patron.

Richer.

And better looking.

That would be difficult.

For me?

Remember Mr. Fiumefreddo?

The Mafia man.

If he was Mafia he would have won.

You won.

So he wasn't Mafia.

Q.E.D.

Whatever.

I remember.



Damn right.  
Why did he shoot you?  
Why does anyone? Why do they all?  
Because of me. I'm your cross.  
I'm nailed to you.  
At least once a day. And often again at night.  
He missed anyway.  
So do they all.  
Was he richer?  
He was certainly better looking.  
Only when dressed. Pink shirt. Black tie. Orange dinner jacket.  
Lovely. Adorable.  
I'd have lent him my cerise bow tie. The floppy one.  
The perfect touch. He would have been perfect. Irresistible.  
That tie was too expensive for him.  
I knew that.  
I don't flaunt it.  
Yes you do. You never wear it.  
I would have, but they turned you down.  
Like a book mark.  
You don't read.  
Like the fire under stew.  
I know all about that.  
Or rice.  
Rice?  
I'm desolate.  
At your age that's ridiculous.  
We suffer more than our pretty faces can show.  
You're much too beautiful for me to take you seriously.  
You were in a jealous rage when I went skinny dipping with Mr. Skalbania.  
I wouldn't have minded if he had a sensible name.  
You wouldn't mind if I skinny dipped with Bill Smith.  
Who?  
So you would.  
I demand to know. When was this?  
Remember when you were arrested with the Coast Guardsmen at Freeport?  
That was in March. You can't skinnydip in March.  
In an indoor heated pool.  
Wait.  
Don't get your gun. You don't know where he lives.  
The telephone directory.  
Ridiculous.  
True.  
Why are you enraged?  
To think of you in an indoor heated pool with an Anglo Saxon pervert .

He was Greek. He changed his name. For business purposes.

You moved the handgun.

For your own protection.

Suppose a burglar came.

You have no self control.

I have great self control. I am a master of self control.

What if the burglar was five foot ten, one hundred forty pounds, blond and cute?

Burglars never are. They are overweight because they drink beer watching football on stolen color

TV.

That describes Bill Smith perfectly.

You disgust me.

De gustabus non, or something.

Cavorting with a fat burglar while I was being raped by several negroes in tandem with a Coast Guardsman in the Freeport jail.

As I just said, to each his own.

At my age?

Are you racially prejudiced?

I merely stated fact.

One negro, one fact.

Facts then. One is not prejudiced simply because one does not care to be raped. It is not self evident.

Forgive me if I have my doubts.

And me mine.

*A pause.*

Will it ever be as it was?

Of course. It is now.

Even though I failed.

You haven't failed. They were only testing you.

I failed the test.

Call on each one at his home. At the seductive hour. Ten o' clock at night.

That will mean five nights away from you.

I'll find something to do. Yes.

The Coast Guard again. Will you never learn?

Yes. I'll find a book, or something, at the public library.

You found me at the public library.

That's why I had the absurd idea that you could read. There are other things to do at the library.

I know. You.

Am I sure to succeed?

You cannot fail. Yes.

Each will suspect the others.

None will dare tell. None. O none.

What will you do the long lonely nights?

Drink cocoa and fall into a deep sleep.

I'll buy some cocoa before I go to see Mr. Fog. He is the first on the list.

Is the cocoa finished?

Six months ago. We used it up celebrating my birthday. Mama came.

She drank all the cocoa and the brandy.

She slept under our creaking bed.

You were showing off.

It had no effect.

It never does.

Is that why I failed?

No. It was because they knew you would never call on each one at his house at ten o'clock.

I haven't the courage.

Perhaps when you're older.

That's what they want. They call me jailbait.

You frighten them.

And excite them.

Let them come to you.

And you?

I'll videotape their carnality with my innocent poppet.

A camera would be better.

Must you always have the last word?

No.

# Teen Tricks – 7

by Ruth van Miller

Dear Ruth van Miller,

My brother Perry is a convicted child molester. It was said at his trial that he attacked as many as thirty or forty boys, and that he would have gone on attacking these innocent victims if one of them hadn't bragged about his experience to a girl friend, who told her policeman father. I am filled with horror and dread because he is being released from prison, and my sons will soon be the same age as his victims were – young boy scouts. He was actually their scoutmaster! My boys, Kent and Daniel, are 10 and 12, and the only way I know to protect them from this monster is to keep him away.

But our mother, who lives only a few blocks from me, just worships Perry and continues to say that he's done no wrong. Can you imagine! She even says those poor innocent children weren't victims at all, and that if Perry were to attack my sons it would be only because they want him to! To make matters worse, my husband Paul agrees with her!

I'm seriously considering divorcing Paul and moving to another city. I don't have any job skills – I've never been anything except a housewife – so I worry about that. To make matters worse, Paul says that if I desert him, he'll get custody of the children. And that means that he intends to just offer Kent and Daniel to Perry on a silver platter to do whatever horrible things he does to boys.

I think I could make a case to prove that Paul is a child molester too. He doesn't go to church (he's never even been saved!) and he's always hugging and kissing and petting Kent and Daniel. I don't think that is normal in any way, shape or fashion! Do you think I could get custody by proving that Paul hugs and kisses his sons too much? I rarely touch them at all, except when they need punishment, because I'm determined that they won't be sissies. They resent me for that, but I have to do my duty! If I can't get custody because Paul won't keep Perry from seeing them, do you think I could convince the judge that Paul is molesting them himself? What can I do to protect my innocent, innocent darlings from the evils that await them at any moment, right in their own home? Sign me

– FIGHTING EVIL IN ATLANTA

Dear Evil,

Let me get a few things straight. You say he “attacked” 30 or 40 boys, and not one of them complained? What did he attack them with, powder puffs? You say that one of them “bragged” about being his “victim”? Sounds as if your brother Perry made at least one kid feel good! The boy may have been a little vulgar, showing off like that, and he may have been stupid to tell a cop's daughter, but I don't see how you can blame Perry. He didn't kiss and tell; the boy did!

Well, that's water under the bridge and over the dam now. You want my advice about divorce and protecting your innocent darlings from evil. Okay. If you don't mind being hungry now and then, go ahead and leave. Go by plane or train, but go by yourself. Frankly, it doesn't sound like you'd be missed. Just make sure you go far away and stay there. I hear there are jobs available in Oregon. Or how about Alaska? Or Saudi Arabia?

Dear Ruth van Miller,

I'm pissed off at you now. You weren't no help and I wasn't going to jerk off just for you anyhow, so I waited around about five times Dad and Damon went at it and then I had enough and just went in there and surprised them right in the middle and Dad acted like he didn't know I knew what they was doing but I sure did and Damon tried to shut me up but I wouldn't until he started feeling me up and I said that if they let me get off too that would be okay and Dad said I should have said so a month ago. So why didn't you tell me?

– MAD AT YOU NOW (SON IN SALEM)

Dear M.A.Y.N.S.I.S.,

Sorry. I guessed you'd already busted in on them and that was how you knew. How did you find out?

Dear Ruth van Miller,

Alice and I are happily married, but a rather surprising thing has happened. I was home with a cold – Alice and I both work so I was home alone – and I sent out to the deli for some lunch. Well, you won't believe the beautiful boy who delivered my sandwich! He's fifteen, with dark hair and eyes, and the sweetest smile I have ever seen. He's an illegal immigrant, he says, and that's why he's not in school. Well, I was in pajamas, but before I knew it we were in a wild sex scene. And what's more, Luis told me he wants to keep on. At least that's what I think he said. I'm not absolutely sure because my Spanish isn't too good. Well, Alice and I are very open, so I told her what had happened. She was very understanding, as she always is.

The trouble is that she thinks she should be part of the sex, and I feel very uncomfortable about asking Luis to make it a threesome. Suppose he says no, and then won't come to see me again?

– WORRIED ABOUT SEX IN COLORADO SPRINGS

Dear Springs,

Fear of rejection probably stops more good than any other one factor. I think that Alice's wanting to share Luis is beautiful! I'm sure, however, that she can wait a little, because getting Luis involved before he's ready for her could be traumatic. Have sex with Luis again as soon as possible, and while you're relaxing afterwards, show Luis a picture of Alice. If he gags or vomits, you'd better tell Alice that it won't work.

But if he's comfortable with your being married, tell him that Alice would like to meet him. If that goes down okay, tell him she'd like to do “this” and then do something to Luis that Alice might do. I'll bet he'll be intrigued, and your problem is solved.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

Wow! I took off thirty pounds. And, guess what? At Weight Watchers I met a great “friend,” whose name I won't mention, but just call him John. He's about twenty five and used to play college football. Now he's in business, and he had to learn to eat right, just like me. He says I can use my weight (he says it's okay to be husky) like he did, in football. Won't my dad be shocked when his queer son makes the high school team? John's teaching me football (and some other things too! Like why no one, not even my dad,



dares to call him faggot!)

– BEAUTIFUL GAY YOUNG MAN

Dear BGYM,

Congratulations to you and John! Just when the night is darkest, you are nearest the dawn. And tell your dad to take a flying leap up where the sun never shines.

# Rodney

“You sure was drunk last night,” the boy said. His slim black body rippled with every movement. He returned from the toilet and lay down again beside the white man. To the white man, puzzling through a terrible headache and malaise, the body and smile were utterly strange. He didn't remember the boy at all. The boy kissed him. “What you name?”

“Gary.” The boy was a child. How had he got here? Gary shook his head to clear it. “What's yours?”

“I tole you last night.” He kissed the white man again, longer this time. “Hey. Now we getting some action. You couldn't do nothin last night.” The kiss shifted from Gary's mouth to his ear, then neck, then shoulder, lingering on his chest, then shifting dramatically lower, while Gary struggled to contain his excitement – then, helpless, to reciprocate. There was “action” for a rather long time, punctuated by giggles, and animalistic growls, both from the boy. Gary's only sound was a cry of surprise.

Relaxed, repositioned, Gary asked again.

“Buster. But you call me Rodney. My real name. People I don't want to know calls me Buster.”

“You want to know me?”

“I knows you. This good.” He showed how good.

Gary pulled Rodney's head back up so that it was close enough to kiss, kissed, looked, considered, and, a little fearful that it was a bad question, said, “What grade are you in, Rodney?”

“I quit. But I be goin back. Don't you worry none about Rodney. I be getting the G.E.D.”

“You can't do that until you're eighteen.”

“I kin wait. I ain't in no hurry. You sure was drunk last night.”

“I know. I don't remember you.” Not even dimly.

“I saved you. I seen you outside the 'Seasons. This big black dude had his hand in you pocket. I said, don't do that, look what he doin, and you pushed him and you said I was your friend and I sure was pretty. Am I pretty?”

Now Gary remembered the street. The bar was closed. People milling. An alcoholic fog. He didn't remember saying anything, but it was the truth, if you liked blacks. “Better than Sugar Ray Leonard,” Gary said. “His nose isn't right. Prettier than his little boy.”

“Li'l Ray? You like'm young. How old you? Forty?”

“Fifty.”

The boy whistled. “You the oldest man I ever messed with.”

Gary passed a hand over Rodney's chest and shoulder, then moved the boy's arm to watch the articulation. It was lovely. “How did you get your muscles?”

“Work out some. Play ball. Box too. But I ain't no Sugar Rodney. I gone keep my nose pretty. For you. I don want no ski slope nose like Sugar Ray.”

Gary kissed Rodney's nose, and Rodney laughed and kissed Gary's. “I wonder did that dude steal from you? His hand was in you pocket.”

Gary reached and checked his trousers. “Oh shit,' he said. He accepted the fact that the boy was a thief.

“He get somethin?”

“Money. Credit cards.” The money clip had been a bad idea. Gary checked under the telephone and dialed an 800 number. He reported the theft and hung up.

Rodney held him. “How much money?”

Gary tried to relax his body; dislike had made it rigid. He couldn't. It was all he could do to keep his

voice even. "A lot. I started with close to two hundred last night."

"In gay bars? You crazy, man."

"Yes. I was stupid."

"You was drunk, too. Ooo-oh." He put his face close to the white man's and said very seriously, "You don't think I took nothin? Search my clothes. I didn't take nothin from you."

Sure. Took it and passed it on. "All right. I didn't think you did."

"Search my clothes. I don't want you thinkin I took nothin."

"I don't suspect you." Maybe, because if the boy had passed the money last night, why did he come home with Gary? To his surprise, Gary found himself wanting to believe. He eased back, and pulled the boy onto himself. The muscles he felt move were silky.

"I don't want you to suspicion nothin about me. I want to be friends with you."

A black boy? A negro? Friends? It was absurd. The face was too close, and Gary could find nothing to dislike about it. "You can come back. Any time. Call me and I'll come get you."

"You do that?" The boy stretched out to make his contact with Gary total. It made Gary feel very good. Slowly, reluctantly, he disengaged.

As they were dressing the boy asked, "You like big meat? I got a friend with the biggest you ever saw." He indicated his own as he pulled up his shorts. "I got nothin."

"I like what you got." Gary felt his language slip a little. It was okay.

"You ought to see him. Ten inches, man. You want, I bring him."

"All right. But phone first."

"I gon give you my phone number, Gary. But you don't call me, hear? My folks don't know I mess around."

"That's all right. You call me."

"Search me," he said, dressed. "I ain't got your money, Gary."

"No." Something said, search! "I don't want to search you. I'd rather kiss you."

Rodney kissed him.

Gary drove Rodney to where, he insisted, he would take a bus. "To far, Gary. You got change? That dude didn't want no change. Len me seventyfi, I be okay."

As Gary drove away, he smiled, thinking, I'll never do that again. He won't call, but it was a good morning, and I'm not sorry at all. Getting so drunk – drunk enough even to look twice at a black boy, and one so young – it was insanity. Fun, but expensive and dangerous. Never again.

He knew, Gary thought now. He knew I had seventy-five cents.

Rodney returned two days later without calling. With him was a large, sullen youth, in a muscle shirt and jeans. The boy's body was impressive, but the slackjaw face was ugly. "This is Zack," Rodney said. "He got that ten inch dick you wanted I should show you."

Gary was surprised, surprised the boy had returned, and surprised by a sudden happiness. His pleasure was brief, counteracted by irritation that the boy had brought the "ten inch dick". Zack, too obviously, was a threat. "I didn't want. You wanted." Gary shook hands with Zack. "Sorry, Zack. I really don't want to see it." Appendages, per se, did not interest Gary anyway. Zack's expression did not change. Might he be no more than a show of friendship from Rodney? An offering?

Rodney provided a sort of answer. "Gary. Can you len me ten dollars? I pay you back Friday." That explained it; he was supposed to pay Zack for the dick. Rodney was talking on, not waiting for an answer. "We goin out Friday?"

Gary felt unwilling to answer in front of Zack. Either fear of a witness to his corruption of a child, or –

was it just that he didn't want Zack to be part of Rodney? Zack confirmed Rodney's blackness, his danger. Gary held out a ten dollar bill. Rodney replied with a kiss that Gary had to pull away from. Zack was, beyond question, the problem. Rodney seemed not to notice. "I call you Friday where to pick me up?"

Good sense cried no, no, no. "After five-thirty."

"Okay." Zack left, and then Rodney was at the door to go too. He paused. "Gary. You wan some dope? I get some for you? Cheap too."

"No. No dope." Marijuana. Gary hoped that was all Rodney meant.

A quick kiss, that Gary could not prevent – the door was half open – and Rodney was gone.

Gary leaned against the closed door to let his panic ease. He didn't like black boys. Or dope dealers. Especially not real black, like Rodney. A copper mulatto, maybe, could be beautiful. Yet he was pretty. Not girl pretty, but like a blacker, baby Cassius Clay. Gary laughed. Cassius Clay. That showed his generation. Rodney's kiss, his cheek, had been like black satin. And Zack, with the big dick. Gary imagined himself, robbed and raped, his anus torn.

Now that Rodney had some money, maybe he wouldn't call. That would be best.

The Friday telephone conversation was cacophonous. Rodney was trying, whispering, to give an address while a woman's voice with unmistakable black accent and fury was yelling for him to get to work, go to school, to take out the trash, to get off the phone. When Gary finally said, "Got it," Rodney hung up without saying goodby.

So Rodney had a home. Awful perhaps, but a home. Was that woman his mother? No wonder Rodney wasn't in school, stayed out nights – and the rest. Was he gay? Or just polysexual? Sex for freedom? Or dope. Or money.

Gary telephoned for two tickets to the basketball game. The 76ers were in town. Rodney was certain to like that. Gary couldn't think of anything else even possibly interesting to a black drop out. And not over fourteen. Too experienced to be younger – yet how could Gary know? A lot of people would wonder at Gary being there with Rodney. Age or loneliness was leading Gary into folly. Public folly. Yes, but it was too late. The best hope was juvenile unreliability – Rodney would not show up.

The comer barely intelligible on the telephone turned out to be the right one, and Rodney was there, looking splendid in clean jeans and a very white T-shirt labeled in ornate script, "If you got it, BEAT IT." Rodney was merely affectionate until he saw the game tickets. Then his behavior began to interfere with driving. "Ol' Moses and the Doctor, too, man. I never saw none of 'em cept on TV. Lemme kiss you." Gary held him off and warned him. "I don't mind no accident along wit you. I do anything wit you. You my man. You not my main man. You my onliest man."

Excited but unbelieving, Gary was firm: "I love you too, but let me drive."

"You love me, Gary? You say that?" Rodney did not release Gary.

Gary's irritation showed in his voice. "Yes. But I sure mind accidents. They're expensive. Let me go before I wreck this thing."

Rodney withdrew, contrite. "I got to save you money. You lost a lot to that big back dude when you was so drunk."

Gary felt that the boy had pulled away too far. He looked and saw Rodney, unsmiling, vivacity gone. "What have you been doing all week?" Making conversation, though difficult, was not impossible.

"Hangin around," Rodney said, listless. "I ain't messed with nobody. Ain't messed at all." Life returned to Rodney's voice, as if he could not repress the energy. "Hey! I be hot as a goddam firecracker in bed tonight. What you think? I gone tongue dribble your basketballs. You gone be ready for that?"

"I'll be ready." Gary found he was ready now. Rodney's hand found out too. "Watch it, Rodney! Let

me drive, dammit,”

After dropping Rodney off Saturday morning, Gary drove to the park and walked a while. Rodney obsessed his thoughts. He'd been explosive in bed. The boy was, in his way – no, not his, but in any way that Gary could envision – the most exciting ever, in Gary's thirty-odd years experience of sex. Sheer animality? No. Just no inhibitions? Not just that. Rodney loved everything they did. Total participation. So much that Gary could, himself, forget himself. That was it. He had yielded himself to Rodney. He wasn't a yielding person, but he had yielded. Like so many years ago, his marriage disintegrating, he'd yielded to his own passion and submitted to depravity. And somehow, with Rodney, it wasn't even depraved.

He could do it again on Wednesday. Same time. Same comer. “We don't go out and spend no money, Gary. Just watch TV and mess around.” And mess around. A new reality, perhaps. He shook off the thought. He would not discover reality in a child. Wednesday, if it happened at all, would be the last.

He lost. Not in the way Gary had hoped for. Tuesday Maria found the credit cards. Maria cleaned on Tuesdays and Fridays. Tuesday she thought the books on the shelf by Gary's desk in the bedroom needed dusting. The credit cards, she told him, calling him at his office, were under the stack of books. Yes, the money clip was there too. Gary thanked her and hung up the receiver. He went to the men's toilet and locked himself in a stall for a while. It was absurd. After knowing Wednesday would be the end, still he'd been thinking of taking Rodney away from that screaming mother, of Rodney going to school again, of little black Rodney living in all-white West Pines. It had been absurd. This was no surprise. He rinsed his face and went back to his office. His secretary seemed not to notice anything unusual.

Wednesday he went out. He didn't go to the Four Seasons, outside of which Rodney had found him. He knew of a straight bar without swingers. A place with a little dignity.

Danielle's was plush, but the bar was relatively austere. The piped music was quiet and old. Tired, in its way, like Gary. He ordered a scotch and mellowed his anguish in the piped voice of Sinatra; something forgotten and familiar.

“Nice of you to take a black kid to the basketball game.” Murray Anderson, a man Gary didn't know well, had come to sit beside him. He was bald, with a belly. Nevertheless, he was more raffishly dressed than Gary, a scarf knotted under an open collar. “I didn't know you were such a liberal.” Murray sounded sincere.

Gary didn't want to lie or even to talk, yet he evaded. “A friend asked me to do it. Didn't want to disappoint the boy.”

“Hope he didn't hear you call him ‘boy’,” Murray chuckled. “They don't like that.”

“I don't remember whether I did not not,” Gary said, an edge to his voice. It was the truth. “I didn't think about it.”

“Oh,” Murray said with a reassuring laugh, “you can't have done anything to bother him much. I was sitting only a few rows behind you. That kid liked you so much he could hardly keep his hands off you.”

Gary felt threatened momentarily, but Murray's tone seemed admiring, not hostile. “You know I was assistant principal – I guess you don't know, but I was at Washington High – Booker T., not George –” he laughed again, “and I never saw real liking between a white and a black.” He lowered his voice into obvious sincerity. “You know, it really made me feel good inside to see you two. The new generation of black kids. Maybe there's some hope that they can grow up without hatred, with us, not against us or using us. You know what I mean?”

You simple, dumb, liberal son of a bitch, Gary thought. It's race war; only the rules have changed a



little. Strategic redeployment.

He was as polite as concealing his feelings permitted. He left the bar soon; what he sought wasn't there.

He drove to the Chicken Palace. It was the kind of place a cute thief like Rodney would frequent when he was old enough. Rick, the hunky bouncer who, for a quite reasonable price, Gary had made it with several times, was welcoming. But Rick didn't interest Gary tonight. And the crowd of overenthusiastic, overtired "chickens", some in drag, and their johns in whom too clearly Gary saw himself, discouraged him. He left the drink he ordered untouched and ended at a late movie. In bed that night he tried to remember what the movie was about. Rodney blacked it out.

He stayed away from home, one way or another, Thursday and Friday nights. So Rodney did not find him until Saturday afternoon. When Gary opened the door, Rodney began. "Where you been, man? I been phonin and phonin so my mama think I be crazy." He stopped. "Ain't you gonna let me come in?"

Gary spoke with an even voice, quietly. "I found the credit cards. I know you stole the money."

Rodney did not hesitate. He turned away without a word and walked down the path to the street. Gary shut the door. He had been "cool", you could say. He was glad he had shown no emotion. Rodney had not attempted a denial. It had been easy. It had ended easily.

Still, Gary replayed the scene. He wished he'd held him, asked him why. Or that Rodney had protested, even made a fight of it. A chance to know Rodney's feelings. No. It would have been useless.

Gary reran the scenario several more times, and always ended with the idea that had disturbed his thoughts from the start. Rodney was just setting him up for another theft, for a robbery, probably. He and Zack with the ten-inch dick. Using sex to gain entry, access. Insurance would not replace things Gary cared about.

It had been stupid of Rodney to leave the credit cards. Gary had thought Rodney would try to explain them, so he'd put off the question of why the young thief would make an error, an error that must expose him eventually. Maybe he'd put the money into one of those belts with slots for money. "Search my clothes." No place to hide credit cards. And then, having gotten away with the cash, forgot the cards. Could he have wanted Gary to find them? Nonsense.

As a citizen, Gary had the responsibility to report the Rodney/Zack scam to the police. But he could not face their contempt. What did he expect, taking a back boy to bed? Worse, on his own complaint, he could be charged with sexual abuse of a child. No one would be fool enough to believe him if he said he thought the boy was eighteen.

Damn Maria anyway. It would have ended badly, one way or another, but there would have been Wednesday night, if she'd waited until Friday. Wednesday night would have been – Gary's lust fogged his mind. He eased off as best he could, thinking, I got off cheap. In a few days, I'll forget him.

Tuesday evening, ten days later, Gary had not forgotten. But by then the rush of expectation when he heard the telephone or the doorbell ring had diminished. Still he did, opening the door, once again, though not so violently, feel his heart beating. It was Zack. And if Zack, then Rodney must be near. Gary spoke, a simple, "Hello, Zack," neither friendly nor hostile. Almost as if to a stranger. He did not even look to see where Rodney might be.

"Buster says give you this." Zack held out two grubby ten dollar bills. "All he could borrow. He got hisself a job at Jack in the Box. He be payin you the rest. He want to know can he come see you."

Gary took the money and looked at it. If the bills had been crisp, they would not affect him so. For just a moment, he couldn't speak. Then he said, "No, Zack. Tell him, no."

Zack turned, indifferent, without a word more, and Gary closed the door. He leaned against it. Then he remembered that he still had the two dirty bills in his hand, not wanting to give them up. He opened the door again. He called, "Zack." The car, a huge battered old Pontiac, oxidized blue, was starting. He refused to run, but he stepped down to the path, calling, "Zack" again. The door on the far side of the car opened.

It was Rodney. "You change your mind, Gary?"

All this was too loud for the tree lined street, the neighbors.

The bright sunlight. Gary just stood there.

Rodney slammed the door. He spoke too loudly. "You go on, Zack. Gary gone take me home." Zack drove off, leaving Rodney standing in the street.

Gary watched this, but didn't speak. He turned around and went back to the house. Inside the door, he waited for Rodney to come in. But he did not look at him or offer him the money, now crushed, wadded in his hand.

"Zack give you the twenty? He didn't keep it hisself?"

"No. He gave it to me." Gary looked at it, now puzzled at his own response. "Here. I don't want it."

Rodney pulled Gary around and tried to kiss him. "It ain't my money," he said, and tried again. The attempt didn't work against Gary's passivity. Rodney was too small to reach Gary's lips. "You still mad, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"It don't do no good." Rodney's voice rose in pitch. "Being mad don't do no good."

What difference did that make? "I know."

"Zack tell you about Jack in the Box?"

"Yes."

The enthusiasm rose. "Three seventy-five an hour. I be payin you back in no time. Mama ain't gone see none of that money."

That was the wrong thing to say. Gary, self-righteous and angry, turned away. "It wouldn't be right."

The boy's voice rose again, assertively, as if a restatement of the obvious. "I be givin her some. I owe you one hundred twenty-eight I give you my first week pay. After that I give her some." he looked at Gary and, finding no smile, let his anger show. "You still mad." It was an accusation.

"It's not the money."

Rodney's voice became shrill, impatient, like the woman hectoring Rodney on the telephone. "Did I know you then? Who was you to me? Answer me that."

Gary felt himself falling, though rebelling at that voice, and had no idea where the fall might take him. "A man on the street. Drunk." Not as he saw himself, not as the world saw him, but as seen by this black boy.

"There! You see?" Rodney caught Gary's head and pulled it down, and Gary let his hands touch the boy's back. "That's better. Now really do it." After the next kiss, Rodney whispered, "You my man, Gary. You my onliest man."

It was a lie. Rehearsed. Gary cared, intensely, that it was a lie. Yet there are worse things than lies. The future begins now. It took a terrible effort, but Gary forced out a confirmation, his own lie. "You're my man, Rodney," he said.

"No, I ain't." Rodney was scornful now. "I'm your boy. You don't want no man. And you ain't got no other boy but me. Stop wastin time. We got things to do. A whole week of things." He had his shirt off.

"You stood me up last Wednesday week." Rodney, still undressing, spoke bitterly. "I waited, man. Waited an hour. Gary ain't that kind, I said. You be sayin you love me." Rodney looked up to check

Gary's eyes. His voice became insistent. "I remembers what you says. I knows you now. I phoned you too. I thought you was sick."

The future seemed to be beginning all over again. What will he do if I try to get him to go back to school? He's not stupid. Gary pulled off his own shirt slowly, his eyes, reluctant, caressing Rodney's shoulder and chest, now his belly and erect cock, as the boy's jeans came off. Con man and thief.

"You wastin time, Gary. Let me do that." Rodney tugged at Gary's belt. "I didn't know. Ain't right to worry me so. You could a tole me. It don't matter you was mad. You could a told me, you hear me? Come on."

Yes, Gary agreed, I could have told him. Anything's possible-except for this to go on, hearing that hectoring voice. Yes, Gary must not worry Rodney, it wasn't right. Gary must not worry, too. He felt Rodney's hand pulling underwear away; he put his cheek down to the boy's shoulder, smooth as a baby's.

"There you is! I knowed you was hot for ol Rodney."

Con man, thief and – God knows what else. And what about Zack? He's even more dangerous. And then, what if Rodney should want to live here? It was impossible. Yet Rodney's hands on Gary and Gary's on Rodney, and their two bodies, became, for now, all there was.

# Teen Tricks – 8

**By Ruth van Miller**

Dear Ruth van Miller,

We played really awful two weeks in a row, like we lost a million to zip, and the coach really worked us over, extra situps, duck walks, laps, you name it. So we all decided to get even and not let him have no twinkies! So instead this girl, she's in high school and she's not real beautiful but she's got big tits, and we all busted balls in her. Well, now she says she's preg, and the whole team's the father. Can she do that? We finished football season 4 and 2 for the coach, just to show we were sorry, and now this. Coach says forget it.

– OFF

Dear Off,

The whole team? Ordinarily I'd say that you have an obligation to the girl, but if what you say is true, I have to suspect that you and your teammates were not her only experience. Chances are there will be no way of finding. Out who the father is, so I suggest you lay low, for now.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

A little over a year ago I married a wonderful man. We have been very happy, except for the fact that his 14 year old son Neal resented me. He refused to call me Mom or Mother, and said my name was Jill and that was enough for him. One day, about two months ago, I looked into Neal's room (the door was wide open, and he knew I was upstairs so I couldn't miss) and he was naked and masturbating. I thought I should stop him immediately, but I was terribly embarrassed because I realized that he was showing off for my benefit. And I was right, because he said, "Don't just stand there, Mom. Help me."

Ruth, I don't know what came over me. I thought that maybe this was the way to get him around his resentment. And I was thrilled that he called me Mom! And you've got to take into account that he's a very attractive boy, with wonderful brown hair and eyes, and, you know, an athletic build? So one thing led to another, and the fact is that now I'm pregnant, and I'm just about certain that Neal is the father. How come? Well, my husband didn't have sex with me that week, and besides, his sperm count is very low, and he's not a passionate man to begin with, and if my calculations are right, well, there it is.

To make matters worse, Neal has been coming home from school before his dad, and one week he and I had sex every afternoon! He is becoming possessive, and I'm afraid that his father already guesses what's been going on. Please, what can I do to get out of this mess?

– LOVING MOTHER IN GARY

Dear Loving Mother,

What mess?

Dear Ruth van Miller,

So? What do you mean "So?" I want to be hunky too, so they'll let me mess around with them.

– SKINNY

P.S. I've started lifting weights.

Dear Skinny,

O.K. Now we've got something. I have good news for you. Inside of every hunky teenager there is a missionary – for HUNK. He wants you to pump iron as much as you want to mess around with him. Do your weightlifting at school, or wherever the hunks you like work out. Within a week, one or two of those hunks will be helping you work out and asking you to help them. Now you've just got to work hard, and then you let them know how much you appreciate the help. After a while – I mean in no time – you'll be “messing around” to your heart's content, because next to pumping, hunks like humping.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

Thank you for your reassurance (I wrote you about what seemed to be a triangle involving me, Albert, and my son Jack). Jack scores a high yes on all your questions, and I recognize that it's Albert, and not me, who keeps him in line. In fact, I now suspect that Pete was, in fact, jealous. I've gotten to know his family, and their situation is sad indeed. His father is out of work and abusive, so Pete comes here where Jack's friendship and Albert's comradeship help to make life tolerable for the child. Thanks to you, I avoided a terrible mistake, and am helping a troubled child as well.

– IN THE RIGHT ANGLE NOW

Dear Angle,

Your letter made my day! Thanks.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

Please settle an argument. My young son says he can do what he wants to with his “private parts,” because, he says, he is a “consenting child.” I say that there ain't no such animal: there are only “consenting adults” (like me).

– NON-CONSENTING ADULT

Dear Adult?

To you, I've got nothing to say. To your son, I say this: right now, you have no rights, but you can do something about it. Teens (I suppose you are a teen, but if you're even younger, it doesn't matter) have political clout that they don't understand and so don't use. So pay attention: Just about every representative and senator in the U.S. Congress or your state legislature wants to either stay in his job or go on to a higher one. Even the president wants to get reelected at least once. Which means that if you're fifteen now, you will probably be voting for or against someone who's in office now – starting about three years from now. So you need to organize. Every boy and girl from age ten (or nine or whenever) should join together to say to these politicians, “You are going to want our votes, but you won't get them when you need them most unless you act NOW to free us!” Child liberation! Go for it!



Dear Ruth van Miller,

I listened at the door, peeked through the keyhole, looked from outside where the shade was crooked, that's how.

– SON IN SALEM

Dear SIS,

If your father hasn't fixed that window shade yet, get it done NOW.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

I can't believe it! She had the baby and says it's mine! Just because I was the first. And the only reason I was first was that I lost the coin toss. I couldn't even do it until my buddy tickled me behind the balls. My buddy says that when we were giving each other head, that was sex just like with a girl. Is it? If so, I'm swearing off girls forever.

How can I get the girl off my back?

– GETTING OFF THE SEX TRACK

Dear GOST,

This is where fathers come in handy. Do you have one? If not, ask your coach to recommend a lawyer through legal aid, and get your teammates to swear what you've told me – about the girl, not about the coach, or your buddy.

And don't "swear" off girls "forever." That's too long, and it's as dumb as swearing off coaches and buddies.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

My son Lance is ten and he has this one friend who he seems to spend just about all his free time with. My husband is very upset about this and has decided to break this up by sending Lance to a summer camp. I feel that he's over reacting, but I would like your advice. Lance is saying he'll run away rather than go to camp, but his father says he'll take that chance. Is my husband right?

– MOTHER

Dear Mother,

In a word, no. My guess is that your husband has got some left-over guilt from the days when he was ten and did some sexual experimenting, and he's afraid Lance may be doing the same thing, and he's probably right about that. But for heaven's sake don't break up the duo. How are little boys going to find the bounds of love that prepare them for later life? They can't from their parents – that's forbidden territory. And your husband would probably go bonkers if Lance did his experimenting with an adult, now wouldn't he?

And get this! The chances are pretty good that if he goes to summer camp he'll do the experimenting anyway, with some strange kid, or a teenage counselor or maybe the camp director! My point is that it's useless to try to stop Lance from getting it on with somebody.

But there's something even more important. Separate Lance and his friend, and I can just about guarantee that he'll spend a big part of his later life looking for his buddy to love, somehow, again. Hurts like that don't go away, and the longing that goes with them lasts a lifetime. If he doesn't run

away this summer, you can count on it, he will later on – if you break his heart now.

Dear Readers:

I reprint in full the following letter:

“Dear Ruth van Miller,

“I've been counseling boys and girls for forty years now, and a recent trend has disturbed me greatly. I am a strong advocate of feminine rights. However I am not in agreement with those who see males and females as just alike. I have seen real damage done to children because of the assumption that there is no difference between boys and girls. This damage shows up most acutely in cases of alleged sexual molestation of children by adults. The simple fact is that children react differently to sexual activity. Neither boys nor girls should ever be forced, so I have nothing to say except to condemn non-consensual acts of vaginal or anal rape. But boys are often more than eager to consent to being stimulated orally for the first time, while girls are rarely offered oral stimulation and may be deeply offended or physically hurt by a man's penis penetrating her maidenhead, even though she may have consented. Yet the two very different forms of activity are treated as if they were equivalent, especially by women who claim to be specialists in “child abuse.” It seems that they want the public to see no difference, as if such blindness were essential to the feminist cause. The result is that laws designed to protect females from rape (by which I mean all forms of coercion) are being used to give boys “protection” they don't want. What makes this even worse is that the parental and police pressure put on the affected boys can be severely damaging, while the “molestation” has not been of any discernible harm at all. I wonder if you would not be willing, as a woman, to help set the record straight

– “Harvey Metcalf, Ph.D., Topeka General Mental Health Clinic”

Dear Dr. Metcalf,

What you are saying is that, regardless of gender, people object to unwelcome invasion of their bodies. The commonest “molestation” of girls involves the invasion of girls' bodies – through their sex organs. This, you say, is very different from the mere oral stimulation of boys' bodies – especially their sex organs. I think that most specialists, male or female, will agree with you.

This, indeed, is why most “molestation” of girls is within the family, and most “molestation” of boys takes place away from home. Indeed, my consultants say that the vast majority of boys' inter-generational sexual “events” (to use a more neutral word) are actually sought out by the boys, once they have been introduced either to the idea (through peer information) or the act (by a friendly adult). Only a minority of girls, on the other hand, willingly go outside the family for inter-generational sex. The sooner certain publicists mend their ways by attending to reality, the better it will be for all concerned.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

Well, here I am again. I had the baby, and it was a girl. I told my dad that he could name her if he'd let us rename Harold, and he said no way. So we called her Alice, which is Jim's mother's name. Meanwhile, Don has gone off to Dallas with a big shot oil man, and he told Dad he was gay first and Dad is just furious. I don't see why Don couldn't keep going with girls anyway and not upset Dad so. Jim

wanted to go after Don and bring him back, but I put my foot down, because I notice things and one thing I noticed was that the big shot had eyes for Jim too, and Jim was looking back. I'm on the pill now, and I wonder if I should try again to have a boy to name Don, even though we really can't afford another baby. Jim is now organizing a boy scout troop at our church, the Evergreen Church of God in Christ, and our pastor thinks the world of him, he's so good with the boys. But frankly I'm a little suspicious.

– WORRIED IN TYLER

P.S. I really love Jim, and he's good to me and to the babies.

Dear W.I.T.,

Never hunt for trouble. Jim will be watched by the pastor, so you can be sure that his work with the scouts will just be good for all concerned.

You're right in doubting that having another baby is a good idea. No baby should be brought into the world just to please someone, especially when that someone isn't asking. Really the whole thing is spelled out in your P.S. Most wives should be so lucky.

Dear Ruth van Miller,

Maybe you can help because you did before, only I didnt write you, my dad did. He's the one who wasn't my dad until you asked him if the Pope was Catholic? Remember? Anyway he's the greatest dad a kid could have and I love him and he loves me, and he does anything you tell him, like he gave me his mamas room even, just like I like it. So I guess youre wondering what's the problem? Well, its just that he dont like me to date girls, I mean its all right to go out but if I dont get in by two hes on my butt and its not like I was cheating on him cause I dont like girls that much anyway but I got to get along with the guys, right? And to make it worse, if hes asleep he wants me to get in bed anyway only that wakes him up and he wants to know what time it is and if I dont get in bed with him he wakes me up in the morning and says I must have come off with the girl which isnt true most of the time because I only do that if I cant get out of it. Maybe if you tell him to get off my case he will. After all Im sixteen now and all the guys do it some if they can and for some reason the girls like me and its not like I was messing with some other guy. He says he knows that but he says it isnt right what Im doing and to ask you. It isnt my name but its the name he always called me when he wrote to you, so sign me

– KEVIN

Dear Kevin and Kevin's dad,

I looked up your last letter and what I said was going to happen is beginning to. Dad, you've only got a few more years before Kevin has to be his own man. It doesn't sound to me as if he's going to desert you ever, but you've got to allow him room in his life for others. So like he says, get off his case and let him have a late hour now and then.

But Kevin, I've got to say something to you too.

Your dad likes to wake up with you there, so how about making a deal: you slip into bed quietly as you can, and, Dad, you don't wake up! Fake it, pretend to be asleep if you have to and then, if you don't go back to sleep first, wait until Kevin's asleep and, instead of complaining, put your arms around him and thank your stars that you've got him. You won't ever know how lucky you are – until he's gone.

And Kevin, you won't know how lucky you've been these last two years – until you go. Both of you: make it last!

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1. abomination. Lev 18:22.
  2. For whosoever shall commit any of these abominations, even the souls that commit them shall be cut off from among their people. Lev 18:29.
  3. But if they cannot contain, let them marry ... 1 Corinthians 7:9.
  4. His mouth is most sweet: *yea*, he is altogether lovely. Song 5:16.
  5. It is good for a man not to touch a woman. I Cor 7:1.
  6. Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure, but even their mind and conscience is defiled. Titus 1:15.
  7. And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. Rev 12:3.
  8. Pop. 8732 (1980).
  9. And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors... Luke 2:46.
  10. My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand. Song 5:10.
  11. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look at. I Sam 16:12.
  12. Is any man called being circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. I Cor 7:18.
  13. The Lord is a man of war; the Lord is his name. Ex 15:3.
  14. Moreover thou shalt not lie carnally with thy neighbor's wife, to defile thyself with her. Lev 18:20.
  15. Rejoice, o young man, in thy youth... Ecc 11:9.
  16. Use hospitality to one another without grudging. I Pet 4:9.
  17. But Jonathan Saul's son delighted much in David... 1 Sam 19:2.
  18. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with money. Must needs be circumcised... Gen 17:13.
  19. And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him: for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance. I Sam 17:42.
  20. Heb 13:1.
  21. Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of the disciples, whom Jesus loved. John 13:23.
  22. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. Heb 7:14.
  23. His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold... Song 5:15.
  24. Prov 20:29.
  25. the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. Lev 20:10.
  26. Luke 20:25.
  27. Withhold not correction from the child... Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell. Prov 23:13-14.
  28. He that diligently seeketh good procureth favor. Prov 11:27.
  29. Job 30:19.
  30. Matt 22:39.
  31. John 4:13.

