

*The Seventh
Acolyte Reader*



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Spotters

by Alan Edward

Shit. The train was delayed, the evening bitter, the waiting-room windowless, the bar closed. At least an hour to wait and, though it was only four o'clock, a February mist was already beginning to roll in from the fens. The curve of the up-line was almost hidden now, the far end of the platform was blurring, and the edge of the mist was brushing against the old-fashioned wooden canopy. Just, thought Marshall, like the beginning of one of those Victorian railway spine-chillers. In a moment there would be the tap of footsteps in the empty parcels office, then the wind of a driverless train on the disused branch-line...

He shivered, and moved round from the branch-line platform to the main part of the station. Here it was more brightly lit, and the approach of rush-hour was already evident. A suburban train pulled in, doors opened and slammed. At the end of the platform, some schoolboys clustered and pointed, one or two thumbing through pads and notebooks. Others from the train that had just arrived scampered to join them. Most appeared to have come from the same school – white shirts, dark raincoats, black-and-white ties and scarves. The newcomers jostled for position, tumbling and punching.

"Gerroff!"

"Gerroff yourself! I was here first."

Marshall grinned. Train-spotters. The satchels of his own school-days had given way to executive-style briefcases and sports bags – not to mention fluorescent arm-bands – and, indeed, he'd thought that the train-spotter himself, with the departure of the steam giants, was by now an extinct species. Clearly not. At least, not in the sidings and shunting yards of an ancient university town like this one.

And there was more. He had wandered closer now. A kind of law of advanced pulchritude posited an ascending relationship with distance from the infernal smoke, and here it was expressed, perhaps, in the lack of a certain hard-edged machismo, but also physically, in the very delicacy and curves of the cheeks, the lightness and soft contours of the hair, the limpidity of the eyes and skin....

"Piss off, you!"

"No, gimme it, fart-face! It's mine!"

Marshall smiled again and sat down on a bench. In some ways, thank heaven, they were all the same. But this lot, *visually*...

He always traveled prepared to follow at least one of his many interests. He took out his Nikon, fitted a 200m lens, and started to focus. He noticed that one of the schoolboys also had a camera. Spotters all... The scene was backlit, and tricky. But there was enough artificial light to fill in some of the details he wanted, and perhaps something quite arty could be made of the pale mist and the swirling clouds of exhaust from the locomotives. He would take a few shots from the middle distance, then move closer.

Marshall set the shutter, then began to click.

"I'd wait for the 16.34 if I were you," came a voice from close beside him, making him start. "That's just an ordinary multiple-unit job, they're two a penny on this line, just these and a class 47 or two. The through-road's on the other side. The 16.34's the 125 to Peterborough, but it moves pretty fast. You'll need a good lens, in this light."

Marshall had turned. Very slowly, he put down his camera. He didn't speak for a moment. This had to be – *had* to be the Prize Spot of the week. The month. The *year*. Clearly from the same school as the others, but the coat collar and scarf only partly hid the tumbled blond hair, the clear blue eyes, the flawless skin.

"These sprogs see a couple of multiple-bogies in an afternoon and think it's no end of a big deal," said the youngster dismissively, indicating the group in front of them. "Really, you have to go down to King's Cross or maybe up to Peterborough to see the really good stuff – you know, the class 91s and that. I do often, 'cos I like to take photos, too. But if you've got film left, I'll show you where you can get a good shot of the express, if you like. And there's some interesting stock in the sidings. We could look at that first.

"Yes – thanks. What's your name?"

"Andrew. Shall we go?"

"I'm Jack." They got up, then Marshall said uneasily, "Er – shouldn't you be...?"

"No, it's okay. They drop us here from the school bus, and most of us have ages to wait for our connections. We're *supposed* to be getting on with our prep." He laughed. "Come on!"

They walked to a broad siding between the two main platforms. Marshall tried not to look at the boy too closely, but couldn't help it. The eyes had it, of course. Though... did one talk about 'cupid lips' these days? He certainly showed beautifully even, white teeth when he smiled.

He smiled now. "More of my mates over there – doing their prep."

There were about a dozen schoolboys scrambling around in the area of the brightly-lit siding; Marshall and Andrew stopped where a couple of youngsters were examining a long and powerful locomotive, ticking off its number in their loco-files. There were several other large diesels there; it appeared to be a holding area.

"A very nice model," said Andrew, pointing. "New livery."

One of the other boys turned to look curiously at the pair, throwing his long scarf over his shoulder. He recognized Andrew and grinned.

"I prefer them without, on the whole," said Marshall.

"Mmm, I think you're right," said the boy. He led the way a little further along the platform. "Now – over there, that's much the same, but the newer, slimmer model."

"Mmm – I do like the slimline type," Marshall said, "and that's a nice design all round – especially with the curved back end. That design would be – how many years old, now?"

"About twelve," said Andrew. "There are two of them actually – twins, you might say. Nice round buffers in front."

"I can't see that, of course," said Marshall.

"I know."

"But I'll believe you."

The express train came though, rattling past the main platform in ten seconds flat, wailing off and vanishing into the mist in only a second or two more.

"Missed it," said Andrew.

"Pity. On the other hand..."

They strolled further down the platform.

The boy pointed again. "That one good enough for your album?"

"I'd say! A great looker, that – even with the headlamps. Lovely bodywork, far as I can see."

They wandered to the platform edge.

"Now, there's another lighter model," Marshall said. "Small crankshaft probably, but an attractive design otherwise."

Andrew nodded. "And that's a really nice one over there; I like the cream color. A high-level horn usually – and good gear underneath. One of my favorites, as it happens."

"I can see why," Marshall said quietly. "And how many years old is that one?"

"Thirteen and a bit."

They walked back up the main platform, under the wooden saw-

tooth awning.

"And you?" asked Marshall.

"Fourteen," said Andrew. Then he added, "I've got no hairs, though."

"I can believe that," said Marshall, and dared to touch the exquisitely smooth cheek, briefly, with his finger-tips.

"Well – just a few little ones, that's all."

It was more brightly-lit here, and more crowded. It was approaching the peak of the rush-hour. They stopped at the buffet.

"Let me get you something," Marshall said.

"Thanks, Jack. I'd like a milk-shake, if you wouldn't mind."

They sat down; the boy sucked his milk-shake; Marshall put his camera away.

Marshall said, "Though, at a school like yours, you hardly need to come here to do any spotting, do you?"

"True," said Andrew. "Games day is best. We play catch in the showers afterwards – and there's a big bathtub, too. And in the swimming-pool – lots of the kids don't wear anything. Some of my friends – and some of the sprogs, too – look... well, a bit special." His voice trailed off, then he grinned mischievously at Marshall. "I *knew* you weren't taking pictures of trains."

"Well, I wasn't – just then," said Marshall, "but actually I do take pictures of trains. I'll show them to you sometime."

"And I'll show you *my* railway album," said the boy.

"Tell me a bit more about your friends, and about the... sprogs, and how they look without their... livery."

Andrew began to tell him, but after a while his voice trailed off, and Marshall felt his hand very firmly seized, then pulled.

"Not here!" he hissed.

"I can't help it. Thinking about... what they look like... Here – through my coat pocket..."

With infinite care, Marshall investigated.

"Wow! That's quite *something!*"

"*You* made me do it, Jack," said Andrew, half-proudly, half-accusingly.

"Quite a wankshaft – I mean crankshaft!"

The boy giggled. Then he asked, "Will you...?" His hand pressed down on Marshall's and he made a slight movement.

"Not here," said Marshall. "Don't be daft."

"Please, Jack?"

"No!"

"Oh dear!" said the boy. "Oh dear, oh dear. I've spilt some of my milk-shake." He opened his coat. "Have you a tissue?"

Marshall fumbled. "I think so."

"Then you could rub it off for me – I mean rub the stain off. That would be okay, wouldn't it?"

"I'd guess so." Marshall found a tissue and crouched, occasionally brushed by rush-hour passers-by. He set diligently to work.

"How's that doing?" he inquired after a minute.

"It's certainly c-c-c-" The boy had begun to squirm in his seat. With a sudden movement he crammed his scarf in his mouth. Then his body quivered and jolted convulsively; choked sounds came from behind the scarf; the legs in the gray school trousers flexed, then relaxed. After a moment, the scarf slid down again.

"It's a disgrace!" said a voice alongside.

Marshall jerked upright. A stout woman with shopping bags had materialized on the bench beside them.

"I dunno, you got to be cleaning them up all the time – ice-cream, milk-shakes, I dunno. You just can't watch them, terrible they are."

After an interval Andrew said, in a slightly strangled voice, "I've got sticky underpants, too."

"I'm not surprised," said the woman.

"I'll have to change them as soon as I get home."

"I should think so. If I were your mother..."

Marshall conducted Andrew away rather swiftly, smiling inanely at the woman; the boy walked a little awkwardly. Then Marshall said, "Saturday morning, that's tomorrow – about ten? It's the best time for spotting."

"I'll bring my notebook."

Saturday morning was fine and crisp, and Andrew was undoubtedly the most noticeable object on Platform 1, not just because of his bright scarlet anorak. He came scampering across to Marshall, and took a large book from his rucksack.

"I've brought my railway album to show you. I can prove that I'm a good photographer, too. I'll show you later."

He wore a polo-neck sweater, neat blue jeans and white Nikes. The light breeze ruffled his blond hair. Something inside Marshall contracted sharply; his memory of yesterday evening hadn't played him false.

"But for now..." said Andrew, who seemed in high spirits, "I'll show

you the Spot of the Day. Follow me."

He scooted off and Marshall followed a little breathlessly. At the end of the platform a boy sat on a pile of fish-boxes, thumbing through a timetable. He turned and grinned. "Hi, Andy!"

He was about thirteen, slim and olive-skinned with jet-black hair and dark eyes. He said, "The ten-fifteen's about due. You're just in time. Class 45, probably the 4703."

"I've got that already," Andrew said. "I'll be back later. I just want to go down and see if there's anything new in the goods-yard."

"Okay, see ya!"

Out of earshot, Andrew said, "That was Toby."

"Yes, I see what you mean. He's a friend of yours?"

"He's not at my school. I've just got to know him recently. That's – well, partly why I've come." He added quickly, as if afraid of causing offense, "You're the other part, of course. And... the trains, too."

They sat on a bench; Andrew took out a camera and started loading a film. "I might get some shots today." Then he nodded in the direction of the distant Toby. "You think he's a nice... model?"

His eyes fixed on Andrew, Marshall said slowly, "I like what I see enormously – though 'nice' is hardly the word. Maybe... 'spectacular' would be a bit closer."

Andrew looked up from his camera; suddenly he colored.

After a moment or two he said quietly, "If you wanted to make friends with Toby – really best friends – what would you say to him? I'd like to – to get it right."

"It's important," agreed Marshall. He hesitated, his gaze unmoving. "I'd – well, I'd say, quite simply, I really like you very much and I'd like us to be friends – very best friends. Knowing him – what d'you think he'd say to that?"

Andrew nodded. "No problem, he'd say. Agreed!"

"Agreed."

The boy finished loading his film and snapped the back closed.

"And then?" he asked.

"It depends what you want. I mean, what *do* you want to do?" asked Marshall cautiously.

"I'd want to do anything," said Andrew, not looking up. "I mean – anything he'd want."

"Well, if you – I – really like him a lot – I mean *really* a lot..."

Andrew looked up and nodded again.

In for a penny, in for a pound.

"Then I'd say something like – I think you're just so fabulously nice and super that I'd like to take off every stitch of your clothes and lick you and kiss you all over – every last inch."

"Wow!" said the boy softly. "And...?"

"And... then I'd like to put you right on your back and suck your willy – *hard*. That – that's what I'd say."

"Wow!"

"I'd make you whinny like a mare, whoop like an Indian, shoot like a Colt-45. What'd he say to that, eh?"

The boy swallowed and twisted a little on his seat. "I think he'd say... when?" He had moved closer to Marshall and his voice, though quiet, shook a little.

"Guess."

Andrew squirmed again, then giggled. "And he might also say – you've made me stiff as a board now!" He reached out and snatched at Marshall's hand, but Marshall held back.

He laughed. "No, no – I don't think we could get away with the milk-shake trick again, do you?"

"Probably not," said the boy unhappily. Then he added slowly, "Anyway, I – Toby, that is – wouldn't want it that way. Not like before. He'd say..."

"Yes?"

The boy lowered his voice. "He wouldn't want it though his trousers this time. He'd say... this time I'd like to feel your hand holding my – my bare willy. I-I'd like you to do it *properly*." His body pressed closer and Marshall felt a slight tremor.

"I'd like that, too. But not here, Andy."

The boy said, "There's a shed at the end of the siding; they keep old lamps and other gear there. I've rummaged in it often. We'll go there."

Marshall hesitated, then shook his head.

"It's okay," urged Andrew. "Nobody comes there – especially not on Saturdays."

"No, Andy. You see..." Marshall searched for words. "It shouldn't be like that – not for us. I mean – a fumble in a dark shed. You're not that kind of... well, it's not just the way it should be for us. He shook his head. "Oh, I don't suppose you'd understand."

"I do," said the boy. "I do – and you're right."

"Good!"

"But do it anyway!"

"No! Not here. We can..."

"Please!" The boy tugged at his arm.

"Young man, you are asking for a good spanking!"

The boy got up, still holding Marshall's arm. "Okay, you can give me that in the shed, too. You can close the door, and no one will hear."

Marshall shook his head. "Look, I can see I'm not going to win by argument..."

"No, you're not," said Andrew cheerfully. Then he asked, "You live in the town?"

"I'm just here for a conference. I'm in a hotel."

"Goody. Invite me there for tea."

"Why not? We can look at your railway album. And then..."

"Everything you promised?"

Marshall nodded. "At four o'clock precisely."

The hotel was old, the orchestra a three-piece, the cream buns plentiful.

"We'll do this again," said the boy indistinctly.

Marshall had taken out his own photo album. He said, "These are taken at the school where I teach. Look – these are on sports day. You like the gear? Green tops, yellow shorts."

"And *short!*" said Andrew. "Love it!"

"And there's some of my class in the swimming-pool. Like a few of your kids, they don't wear anything. They're all about your age, or younger, perhaps."

The boy breathed slowly out between his teeth, his eyes fixed on the page; then he gently ran a finger-tip over one or two of the photos.

"You'll find my railway pictures a bit dull after these," he said after a few moments.

Marshall pointed to one of the swimming-pool shots. He asked quietly, "Do *you* look as nice as that?"

"You'll be able to let me know in a minute, won't you?" said the boy, also in an undertone. He shifted a little in his seat, then he looked into Marshall's eyes. "Take me up – now!"

Very shortly later, Andrew's clothes were puddled all over the floor, the boy twirled round, slightly rosy-cheeked, to face his new friend, arms theatrically outspread.

"Well?"

"Many times nicer," breathed Marshall, scarcely finding his voice. "Mega-times."

"Well, then..." Andrew still stood quite still. "Everything you said."

Everything."

"Agreed!" said Marshall. "Beginning with this..."

He sat on the bed, draped the boy across his lap, then his palm fell again and again, while the pale round cheeks bounced and joggled, the boy's body grinding itself vigorously into Marshall's thighs.

"Enough?" asked Marshall after a time.

"You'd – you'd better turn me back over, Jack," said the boy hoarsely. "A few more and I'm – I'm going to sticky your pants."

"I wouldn't complain," Marshall said, "but *this* way's better."

He rolled the boy over on his back on the Paisley-pattern counterpane, lowered his head...

The boy jolted from top to toe. "Oh, *Jack!*"

Then Marshall set diligently to work, the boy twisting, writhing, and wah-ing into a pillow he'd crammed over his mouth, like his scarf the day before. Marshall was glad about the pillow; in the busy hotel they were no more isolated, acoustically speaking, than they had been on the station platform. And then the boy's whole body arced as if shot through by a hundred mega-volts; he bounced upright and shrieked. His legs flew, scissored, his toes working, his bare thighs clamping and unclamping on either side of Marshall's head as the man continued and the boy's body was swept through by end-to-end shocks, over and over...

At last he lay back slowly, though all his muscles still jerked spasmodically, his skin twitching and quivering.

Gradually he relaxed.

"*Wow!*" he breathed after a long time.

"Is that all you can say?" teased Marshall.

The boy grinned and nodded. Then he got up and scampered across the room. "And now, as I promised, my railway album."

Marshall took an armchair; the boy sat on his lap, wriggling into position, then started to turn the pages.

"Like I said, it's better in the summer. See, that was on a hot day, and there's Timmy, he's thirteen. He's completely topless, looks great, doesn't he? And there's Toby in his shorts; isn't he super? I like the way he's sitting on the edge of the platform hugging his knees. And in this one he's only got his shorts on and nothing else...."

"I'll show you some I took at the swimming-pool. But, Jack – if we look at many more, you'll have to do all that over again, you know that? And more, maybe."

"I see... Why not keep going, then?"

"Okay. And on *this* page..."