

*The Sixth
Acolyte Reader*



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Printed in The Netherlands by Krips Repro, Meppel

First Edition published October, 1991

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Cover design and painting by Mario de Graaf

The Acolyte Press

P. O. Box 12731

1100 AS Amsterdam

The Netherlands

ISBN 90-6971-034-X

Getting Over It

by Bob Henderson

I spot Marios as soon as I turn the corner, a block above the cinema.

He is standing outside, early like me, but doesn't see me, distracted by a five-way intersection, lights, traffic and queuing patrons. I am thus granted the luxury of observing him for a few minutes, as I deliberately dawdle down the inside of the dark footpath towards our rendezvous.

It is unfair, perhaps, to spy on him: he is so obviously waiting, nervous and uncertain. While I can hide my middle-age symptoms. Most of which have been building up for hours, if not days. Doubt, guilt, even a touch of panic.

Still it is nice to look at him again, before facing whatever judgment awaits.

Let me tell you how he looks.

A neat, dark-haired boy in well-pressed jeans and denim jacket; wide leather belt and a white shirt. Rather tall for his thirteen and a half years, he stands straight, his feet in new sport-shoes almost together; his arms hanging loosely at his sides, hands at rest in the warm spring air. Only the set of his shoulders and his slightly upraised chin show that he is not completely at ease.

As I approach, I remember his curling lashes, his honey-colored skin and the dark brown nipples which his buttoned shirt does not manage to conceal. He is slim, not very muscular, exuding health and energy. A few steps closer and I can see his Adam's apple moving up and down, perhaps in response to current thoughts and feelings.

Almost on top of him now, and he still hasn't seen me – how can he know which way I shall come? – gazing at the poignant nape of his neck.

Sorry for him at such disadvantage, I make myself speak.

"Hullo, Marios."

He turns towards me as naturally as if he had not been waiting; and this were not our first rendezvous. A slow, graceful movement of greeting.

"Oh, hullo, David," he offers warmly, his face lighting up in a cheerful smile.

I am instantly lost. Faced with those glad blue eyes, light as the morning sky yet deep and strong; accented by the coal black brows and

lashes.

"Shall we go in?" It is almost time for the picture to start.

My casual clasp of his hand rewarded by a long squeeze, firing me, unprepared. My attempted cool blanketed in the total warmth of his welcome. (Did he think I wouldn't come? Probably.) The many small ways he finds to touch me as we wait in the queue, more patient than the others, happy to be together. Pushed against him by others behind, I inhale the clean outdoor scent of his hair.

Truly I wonder who we are and what will happen to us.

I who have officially given up this boy business. What am I doing?

It is, after all, two years since I've had anything to do with young boys. I have been going straight. That is to say, Gay. Finally persuaded by my good friend Christopher, who is actively gay himself and has never approved of boy-love in general, nor of my affairs in particular. (I must admit, his attitude has mellowed somewhat, over the years: beginning with shock, outrage and hostility; moving through willful blindness and a kind of cold tolerance; towards a much milder form of head-shaking indulgence. Other gay friends have expressed one or other of these three attitudes, usually the first. Interestingly, most people I have met who accept boy-love – apart from boys – are adult heterosexuals.)

Christopher had never persuaded me before – not in the least. I had listened to his elegant tirades with patient amusement, knowing from the first that it was all nonsense: my experience of boys showed it to be so. He had no such experience. From time to time, I tried to explain things to him, about men and boys. But not very energetically. Perhaps because I felt it to be futile. Perhaps because I did not want to be accused of proselytizing, having no such desire.

So, how did I come to be persuaded, by my best friend? After more than ten years immunity.

Two things happened to change my stance. Three, if you count my age.

The first was that, by sheer luck, I escaped by seconds being sprung by an unfriendly father, while making a fairly gross pass at his boy, who had never given me invitation. And in whom I had no real interest of any kind.

This madness was connected with another recent event: the abrupt and unexpected departure from my life of Angelos – dear Angelos! – who 'grew out' of our long, perfect relationship much sooner than I anticipated. With none of the delicacy nor tenderness that I had learned

to expect of him. Quite brutal, in fact. Chop. Good bye. I'm going. Gone. Still is.

At first incredulous, I was soon totally bewildered. Barely able to function.

Which, of course, sank into the long sad process of withdrawal and hurt. Hurt I did.

Being my best friend, Christopher was quick to perceive my condition. I made it worse, for a long time, by refusing to believe. I kept on wanting and fantasizing Angelos long after he had gone.

To Paris. Got established there with assistance I had set up myself, but never mind. Not answered my letters, not even the first. No postcards.

I have to say that Christopher was very supportive. He went the extra mile. Made huge allowances, and some sacrifices. For this I am deeply grateful. I was really quite ugly to everyone, at that time. I cringe as I remember. Crass, demanding and self-absorbed. Wasn't I lucky to have a friend like Christopher?

After a long period of caring, he made some gentle suggestions about finding new interests. He meant company.

By this time, all on my own, I had come to a position which was part resignation and part defiance: if Angelos could give me up as easily as that, by an act of will (as I saw it) – then why shouldn't I be able in a similar manner to give up boy-love? Like, say, smoking cigarettes. I realize that sounds a bit pitiful, but I wasn't at my best at the time.

Christopher's nudges now had the ring of common sense: I was spending far too much time with him, and little with anyone else. It was unhealthy and unfair.

I knew that boys could give up loving men. (Subsequent experience has led to some delightful surprises.) Just as they gave up boyhood for adolescence; after, for manhood. A natural process, after all, I reasoned. Could I not give some due to Nature? And grow out of boy-love into socially accepted gay love?

Thus began a new phase in my life, of introductions and experiments.

I don't know how Christopher manages these things; how he makes new contacts so frequently. It seems there are plenty of young men in Athens ready to have sex with their elders, including foreigners.

My first blind date was very impressive: an athlete in his early twenties with Olympic ambitions. He was very handsome, beautifully built and charming. God knows how he'd been persuaded to meet me,

but his excellent manners shamed me from the start.

We had dinner at 'Je Reviens', and went to the theater.

Then we went to bed together. It was a disaster, sexually. A sense of humor, mainly his, got us through it and breakfast was better than bed.

We kept in touch, discovered common interests and are now good friends. He understands a little about boy-love, but the subject of sex never arises between us.

My second 'gift' from Christopher was diverting in a different way: it happened – unknown to them both – that I had nurtured a secret lust for this one year before, when he was a schoolboy. So that, when we were naked together, I could only see him as he was then. Effortlessly fantasizing, I had pretty good sex. Fortunately, the guy in question went into the army soon after, and is now living abroad.

A string of strangers followed, less rapidly as Christopher saw me 'well'; thought me well-fed if not cured. I suppose that I, in turn, fed him the impression that I was Over It.

I did not have sex very often, in fact. Having mastered the mechanics of mating with adults, I applied them when I found it necessary. Unsatisfactory – though I don't believe I was aware of this at the time.

I was O.K. Working again, prosperous, social, healthy in body. Doing fine, as they say.

As you think, until something really beautiful happens and you want to scream for joy. And wonder at your ignorance. Like you've been on tranquilizers for years.

A couple of weeks ago, I began to have a problem with my left ear, which was waxing up. Nothing new, an almost annual irritation, since I was sixteen and surfing in heavy seas. You can play around with hydrogen peroxide until the sense of isolation becomes too much to bear. Then you go and get it syringed. On this occasion, spring bursting forth in Athens in all its glory, I went straight to the local specialist and got myself fixed. Rushed out and reconnected.

Emerging from the surgery, as always, with a thrilling awareness of sound in all its variations and details. Not ready to protest at noise pollution; too appreciative.

Inevitably, I remembered the day a few weeks before when I put on my first pair of glasses; and wandered in the park wondering at details of color, texture and form. A revelation. The ophthalmologist said I was about two years overdue. And all that time I thought I'd been seeing things

bright and clear.

So, there I was. Brand new eyes and ears giving me a real high.

How to indulge the ears? Good stereo. Something like that.

Off I strode, feeling ten years younger, to the only local cinema where I hadn't seen the picture – some American comedy about a baby, which I wouldn't normally bother with. Never mind, a very attractive cinema, with an excellent sound system.

I was surprised to find such a long queue on a weekday; the picture was obviously popular. Downstairs, the elegant honey and cinnamon auditorium was three-quarters full, mostly young teens. The welcome boom of orchestral pop-nostalgia pleasantly underlined by the excited babble of kids' voices.

Lovely. My ears couldn't have asked for better. A lively atmosphere. Nothing like a crowded cinema before the lights go down.

The music swells into a lush stereo version of a 60s hit. Excitement in the room rises, audibly and palpably. I close my eyes, sink down into the cinnamon plush, stretch out my legs and sigh with contentment. The picture is due to begin, but I will be well warned by a succession of gongs, an aural soupcon my ears are anticipating. Indeed, the first gongs send thrills through my nervous system. Between the first and the second, I am unexpectedly forced to open my eyes and tear myself away from "Moon River" by the shuffle at my side which signals new arrivals. I regret the intrusion, though not much. Two young kids, apologetic, consider the row in which I am seated near the aisle. Then decide on the row in front.

The last gongs sound and the lights dim, indulging us in a seductive series of hues before plunging us into darkness, our eyes now drawn to the big screen.

It is during these soothing, familiar moments that it happens.

An image, a sensation for which I am totally unprepared. I am stunned.

Those two boys. The ones who came in after me. No, one of the boys. Who have now sat down in front of me.

In the last of the magic artificial light, this young kid has hit me, like a hammer. By briefly looking me in the face, before taking his seat. And that was it: the moment that changed everything. Nothing to do with ears, eyes, stereo or healthy re-adjustment.

And even so, I could cast that excessive reaction aside, in favor of stereo and picture. If it weren't for the same reaction which I see, feel and thrill at, in the young stranger.

As the picture begins, there is quite a bit of shuffling around in the

seats in front, whereby the kid takes a second and third look. At me, all passive and wary.

Soon, however, I got interested in the picture, unexpectedly engaging and funny. The audience howled and rocked with mirth. Sometimes, when the gag did not survive the subtitles, I found myself laughing alone, often loudly. At these moments, the kid would turn quickly round towards me, as if to express envy. Possibly to indicate that he understood too, if imperfectly.

There was no doubt that he was very aware of me, sitting there behind him.

Then it was interval. Abruptly the pictures stopped moving, the stereo switched from dialogue to music and the lights came up. Pandemonium of reactions and negotiations concerning purchases at the snack bar, soon to be swamped.

Not hungry myself, I prepared to enjoy the music.

Before I had managed to close my eyes, the kid – boy beautiful, I now saw – sprang to his feet, stretched luxuriously and turned to face the rear of the hall. Ostensibly chatting to his mate. Clearly a display. Which he wanted to make.

I could only sit there motionless, seeking some distant spot to rest my eyes on. If I sat forward in my seat, I'd be kissing his crotch. If I dared to look up, I'd be facing those eyes again and we'd be exchanging new signals. Coward or cautious, I avoided both.

The second half began, accompanied by the happy sound of crunching chips and popcorn.

With no effort on my part, the kid contrived to communicate with me in the darkness, quite intensely. Shifting about in his seat, flinging one arm and then the other over the back, shooting glances aside and behind. No words were necessary. He offered a hundred chances to touch him accidentally. I refrained, knowing already the consequences.

The picture built to a crescendo of mirth and mayhem; signs of a happy ending began to appear. And I realized that I would need a piss, pretty soon. Appalled, I knew that going to the toilet after the picture would look like an invitation. Not my scene. Regardless of the boy's reaction. So I skipped the denouement, slid out of my seat and padded quietly back to the velvet curtains, midst mounting hilarity. Facing bright lights of reality, I slipped into the dazzling modern Gents, and had my piss.

I don't know how the entrance was managed – two sets of swing doors, carpet and spongy tiles – but just as I was slowing down to the last

dribble, I became aware of a presence beside me and saw the steady stream which flowed, adjacent. At least his need was genuine.

Oh, no, I think. Not like this. Not in a public toilet. Wrong. All wrong. I want away.

Zippering up as he shakes off his drops, I realize that he is far too close to me. A good moment to avoid misunderstandings.

Stepping back and avoiding his eyes, I am able to ignore the erection he is now fondling.

I sense before I see his reaction. It halts me. Not much to do with sex. It is confusion, guilt, disappointment. His frame wilting.

"What is your name?" I sigh.

"I am Marios." Grateful recovery.

"Hullo, Marios. You are nice. I am David."

Inside the locked cubicle, I hardly squeeze his cock and stroke it twice before he blows spunk all over the names and phone numbers. I would tell him that he needed it, if it weren't so obvious.

In wiping his still hard penis on the tissue supplied, he chances to bare the small of his back, darkly ridged and promising, and call attention to his buttocks straining the denim. As if from a distance, I note his perfection.

Only to feel the shock of his small hand in my crotch, kneading me toward an erection.

He pulls me off very nicely. Though I can't tell if he's done it before to another man, or only himself.

And after. Hands washed, hair combed, clothes adjusted, we emerged from the toilet feeling – well, O.K. Knowing that nothing was very wrong. Only that we'd somehow been detoured and temporarily distracted. As we climbed the flights of carpeted steps to the foyer and the outside world, we began making noises symbolic of our desire to correct things.

"Pretty good movie, wasn't it?"

"Very good, yes. Very funny."

"I like this cinema, don't you? I think it's the best one round here."

"Me, too. Especially the stereo."

"Yeah, great."

By the time we were outside, we were past cinema and on to football. Having managed the journey a fair way back to earth, we felt better. All I wanted now was to get home and forget the last two hours completely.

Marios, however, clung to my side, jostled by incoming patrons, making me acutely aware of the difference in our ages and heights. The oddness of us, to the curious eye. I waited to be accosted by some relative or friend of his. Or mine.

I led Marios out of the light and bustle and stood before him in a darkened shopfront.

I felt responsible and repentant.

"Listen, Marios, I said. Resisting the urge to grasp his shoulder, looking suddenly so vulnerable. "I am sorry. You are a good boy. I know that. What happened tonight was a mistake. Forget it, O.K.? Be well. Live."

His face displayed a rapid series of expressions: I saw hurt, relief, agreement, maybe something worse.

"O.K.," he muttered, his head down, now.

Perhaps I had overdone it, in my anxiety.

"Look," I softened my tone. "If I was going to be your friend, it wouldn't be like that, see? It wouldn't start like that."

"I know. It was my fault."

"No, it wasn't."

A few minutes passed; and then I was on my way home, glad it had all ended quietly.

Only when I was safely inside did I reflect on the fact that I had made a rendezvous with Marios for the following week. His idea, carefully expressed, of starting again, in a different way.

But starting what? I wondered. Was there any need for anything to start? Unless, perhaps, Marios needed something. As he managed to suggest, grinning ruefully, with his, "I see you are not so keen."

Surely I myself had no need to start anything. With this schoolboy. After my years of retraining? Having got over it.

I spent a fair amount of time, in the days that followed, worrying about the unwise rendezvous. Which, of course, I could easily break. Except that it would be mean; and unexplained.

I mentioned my experience to nobody, least of all to Christopher. At certain post-midnight hours, close to hysteria, I did visualize dropping some bombs, for fun. Remarking casually, Oh, Chris, I met a very sexy boy the other day. You devil, he replies, winking. What's his name? Marios, I say. He's about thirteen or fourteen. We had it off in a cinema toilet. Stunned silence. Jaw dropping. Appalled expression...

But mostly I plotted to get through this second and last error quickly and conclusively.

Inside the cinema again, Marios hesitates, thoughtful, and I wonder why. I understand, when he leads me into the same row I sat in last time, leaving me the same seat and taking the next.

Before the lights go down, we chat easily about the movies, the football, the basketball, rock music, and other things. All very satisfactory.

But in fact the impact of our second meeting is much greater than I expected. Also different. I am neither filled with lust nor paralyzed with nerves. The anxiety which had been mounting for days dissolved before we even entered the foyer.

It is striking and strangely welcome. I am left with a post-critical sense, not of euphoria so much as of a deep relaxation. In some wonderful way, I am at home, and the furniture feels familiar.

I no longer worry about how we look together; it doesn't seem important.

(It remains baffling why Marios should be interested in my company. But then such things tend to be baffling, don't they?)

During the first half of the picture, Marios sits close to me, our arms and thighs together, his hand occasionally touching me in response to the onscreen action. Nothing overtly sexual, more like a message of tentative affection.

During the interval, armed with chips and coke, we become engrossed in a private interview. Politely, persistently, beaming with good intention, Marios bombards me with questions: about myself, my tastes, experiences, work and so on. The range and depth of his curiosity is rather surprising. But, after all, this is the Greek way of doing things; I am well-accustomed and submit with good humor.

By the time the picture is over, I am feeling quietly grateful that no new error has occurred.

What with jumbo coke and preceding stress, I am fairly urgently in need of a piss. But impose my will upon the body: I'll wait till I get home.

Outside on the footpath again, Marios is unwilling to let me get away. He continues an animated monologue begun during our ascent of the stairs, concerning "Hammerhead". He was initially shocked that I had neither heard nor heard of this group. I admit that I have got out of touch concerning rock groups.

Marios is enthusiastic and articulate about "Hammerhead", speaking ever more rapidly until I can barely follow him, midst surrounding chat.

He takes my silence for doubt; finds this provocative.

"Come on, David. Now! I will convince you. This morning I bought the new album – my third!"

I could easily have evaded the invitation, but a firm hand on my arm and a friendly voice insisting that it wasn't far, got me moving. At least a brisk walk would pacify my bladder.

"David," he half gasps, "I am sorry to walk so fast. The truth is, I am busting for a piss!"

We exchange a look of sympathetic understanding, burst into laughter and begin to run.

Marios skids to a halt outside a typical middle class block.

"O.K.," I say, "in you go. You're a good boy. I've enjoyed your company."

His face creases with puzzlement.

"Don't you need a piss, David?" Contorting his body to parody our common need.

"Don't worry. I'll find a dark alleyway. Go on. Get inside."

He grins, half in pain, half in mischief.

"Why bother? We have this big new toilet, ready and waiting. My mother put mushroom tiles. And fishes."

I wish he hadn't described the bathroom.

The lift was barely fast enough. Fifth floor, and we beat our fists on its paneled walls in desperation.

"You first!" he shouts, as we burst into the hall. He propels me towards the bathroom.

As I empty my long-suffering bladder into the king-size marble bowl, I begin to notice the opulent trimmings gold-plated taps; apricot spotlights; elliptical sunken bath; extravagant array of towels, color-matched; the rich, soothing aroma of many soaps and colognes.

Then I find Marios at my side, relieving himself in a long hissing stream. Taking even longer than me and blushing a little as we sigh with relief and zip up.

After this, it is only polite to stay and hear "Hammerhead". He leads me to his room. With its Scandinavian desk, bookcase, bed; elaborate German reading lamp; potted plant. Clothes invisible in the fitted cupboards and drawers. Shelves filled with the usual encyclopedias. Imported wall calendar. Everything neatly arranged.

I recognize this room and its pressures. The life of the bourgeois Greek adolescent.

I sit on his bed, he tosses me some (color-matched) cushions and I lean

back relaxing. While he puts "Hammerhead" on the compact stereo. And stands aside to watch my reaction.

Not bad at all, I think. And getting better. Obviously I am influenced by my host and my will to please. Nonetheless, the peculiar pleasure of submitting to hard rock comes back to me like a lost friend. One of the things I have let go, over the last two years.

Marios brings me the record cover and sinks down beside me on the cushions. I peruse the photographs and attempt to translate the words of the songs. This all takes time but Marios is patient.

It's a double album, the rock is persuasive and we find ourselves comfortably intimate. Somehow my arm is about his shoulders. His head is nodding towards my chest. Again I remember how neat and handsome he is. How pretty the highlights in his glossy black hair.

The music goes on and we continue to recline together. From time to time, he raises his head to comment on some song, or solo. In doing so, he speaks directly in my ear. Brushing me with wet lips, and hot breath.

I am a prisoner. But a willing one.

I did not ask to come here. But find myself 'Here' again.

We spend an hour or so in total harmony. Listening together; then silent together. Half embracing.

The joy of simple, transient things.

I am with a beautiful boy who is no longer a stranger. It is more than sweet. Revelation and rebirth.

Marios shifts his body towards me and buries his face in my throat. Revealing with a forward thrust of his hips the erection that I have suspected; now asserting itself in the silence.

I try not to stare at this eloquent swelling; but given our respective positions, it is impossible.

Marios knows that I see, and gets harder as a result.

I will myself not to respond in kind, and partially succeed. Until I feel his eyes fixed on my crotch. Then I begin to bulge. We remain silent and motionless, inches apart, our organs straining against our clothing. A bit awkward, like untimely phone calls.

Such tension is more uncomfortable for youth: Marios slowly lifts his head, his hair endearingly mussed, and gives me a tentative look – (his deep blue eyes so close I could drown in them) – apologetic, beginning to plead.

His hand slides oh so slowly off the coverlet, over my thigh, and on to my cock. It rests there on my hard-on, light as lint. It is enough, though. Desire surges through my body like an electrical charge.

I would groan – for the shock, the memory. But that he beats me to it: groaning as only a boy can, in honest, natural need. What can I do but place my hand, in turn, on his crotch?

We begin to stroke each other.

When this becomes painful, we unzip and unbutton. Momentary relief.

Marios takes the trouble to say, "Sorry, David. I know what you said. But it is only a little time, yes? It is not everything. There is before and after. This is more, I think."

So wise, so young.

Not surprisingly, Marios comes first, copiously, as he did the other time.

For at least ten minutes he does not move or speak, his eyes shut. I pass the time observing the way his long thick lashes press and batter his cheekbones.

A persistent car horn out in the street arouses him, and he rolls away to clutch a towel and press it to himself. (Did he bring it from the bathroom? I didn't notice it.) A last small shudder. Then he wipes himself dry of sperm.

These movements draw my attention to his lovely firm bum, half exposed as he employs the towel. Once, by chance, his buttocks, squeezed tight as he sponges his knob, press full against my penis. I withdraw quickly.

Watch it, old boy. There'll be none of that here. Far too young. And you're far too big for him. The furthest you could think of going – if you ever saw him again – would be a quick suck. And he'd probably hate it. Of course. He's never even heard of cock-sucking.

As I am forgetting about his beautiful arse, he takes me in his hand and slowly, generously pulls me off.

A few days after my second meeting with Marios, I was sitting at home entertaining my good friend Christopher – or rather, being entertained, as he was in fine, witty form. He had bought a bottle of excellent ouzo, and some smoked salmon. I added olives, crackers and cheese. We were flying.

Christopher was especially complimentary about my health and appearance; also about my work at the studio.

Midst our hilarity following the nth anecdote re the neurotic leading lady, my door buzzer sounded. Unsuspecting, I picked up.

"David? Is that you? I am Marios."

Jesus. Marios. The last person.

I vaguely remembered giving him my address before I left him. But this meant nothing. Young Athenians are notorious for not knowing streets a block

away from home.

I am paralyzed by this sudden visit. Quite unable to think.

"Marios," I repeat dumbly, after a long pause.

Already feeling his presence although unseen. Marios hearing my silence, my hesitation to open the door.

"Oh, go on, Love," says Christopher, all mistaken benevolence. "Let him in. Give me a look at your latest. I promise you I'll be gone in minutes."

And he would. Good old Christopher.

Meanwhile the crackling intercom intensifies Marios' uncertain waiting. Outside.

I cough, clear my throat.

"Marios?"

"Yes. David?"

"Come in, Love. I am downstairs, O.K.?"