



Beautiful Dreamers

Schoolboy Novel
by

Chris Kent

novel

Beautiful Dreamers depicts in unapologetic terms a world with changing boundaries, where some of the adolescent boys choose to dally with willing, mature men. But this is not a tawdry tale of young victims lured into destructive relationships; in fact, the young students of Bruce Academy are frequently the sexual aggressors.

As usual with Chris Kent's fiction, the plot is engaging, the characters are believable, and the sex scenes are torrid. The jail bait are in control, and they play a dangerous game with each other and their older lovers. This is uncertain territory that may create some degree of controversy.

— David Chapman

Chris Kent tells it like it is even more than usual in *Beautiful Dreamers*. The boys are sexy and adventuresome with each other, and some also are willing acolytes for older men who also love them. Here's where the potential conflicts begin.

— Bill Lee

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BEAUTIFUL DREAMERS

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A novel by

CHRIS KENT

GLB Publishers

San Francisco

First Edition

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This book's for Jon
who convinced me
to write more when
I was convinced I couldn't.

“He who would learn, must first suffer,
and even in our sleep,
The pain which will not forget,
falls drop by drop upon the heart,
and in our despair, against our own will,
comes wisdom, by the awesome grace of God.

Aeschylus

Chapter 1

“Fuck it. I can’t get this in. The hole’s too small.”

“Well then, stretch it a bit. Nobody’ll notice.”

I pulled Leslie towards me. “I’ll know it’s been stretched. And I don’t want it slipping out. Will you hold bloody still while I try again? It’s like getting a camel through the eye of a needle. Hold on, I think I’ve got the end in. Stay steady while I push.”

Leslie, sounding slightly strangled, wheezed, “Why don’t you just swallow your pride and put your glasses on? They really suit you, honestly they do.”

“I only need my glasses for reading.” It was my turn to gasp. “There, it’s almost in. One more shove should do it.”

I stepped back from Leslie, gave him a quick once-over, then stepped forward to adjust his bow-tie. “There, that looks cool. Though I don’t know why you can’t wear a school tie like everyone else.”

“Burgundy and gold don’t go with this suit. I’ve told you ten times.”

I had to agree Leslie looked terrific. The oatmeal-coloured linen suit, silk waistcoat, light brogues, and an arse to die for. The dickie bow was the perfect touch. By contrast I was conservative to the point of drabness. Dark blue pinstripe, white shirt, school tie. Hard to believe Leslie was the doctor and I was the publisher of avant-garde novels; for avant-garde read erotic, and for publisher read my own small printing press and staff of two. But I was doing what I wanted to do, I was making a living and I was happy.

Much more than happy, though I didn’t tempt fate by claiming too much happiness; a man can stand only so much happiness. And Leslie, in the second year of practice, was already a highly sought-after gynaecologist. The irony of his chosen profession didn’t escape us. Lying in bed, I’d still let a ‘Why?’ slip out to which he would murmur, “How the hell should I know? Now just let me in a little deeper, a little deeper, there, that’s it.”

We shared a flat in South Kensington, or rather Leslie gave me house room. No matter. I’d supported him as best I could through those long years of training. I’d sat up with him late into the night, testing him on this, that and everything gynaecological. The happiest days of our lives? Who knows? Leslie and I’d been blessed with so many happy days it seemed invidious to compare them. Now my business was making a small profit at last, and I could afford to contribute a better class of plonk to the household fare.

“Let’s walk,” said Leslie. “It’s such a beautiful night. It’s a shame to waste any of it. It’s only half a mile.”

“C’mere,” I said. He joined me on the hotel balcony. A warm, cloudless summer night, the sky pocked with star dust. We looked out over the city. We could see Union Street. It was strange to know other folks now lived in the Morrisons’ home. Strangers, not Mrs M., Leslie, Bryan, me, sitting down to dinner. The rooms echoed with their laughter, not ours. “Is your mother happy?” I asked. “Yes, you know she is. I was on the phone to her last night. She loves the house in Montrose; she’s so glad she bought it. Let’s stay on for the weekend and visit her. She’ll squeeze us in somehow.” I started to find excuses, then said, “Fuck it. Let’s do it.” Leslie, as so often, rescued me from my innate caution. “Hey,” I said, “we’d better get going. Don’t want be late for the big date.”

“Oh, we got time for this,” he whispered, pulling me into his arms and kissing me full on the lips. I struggled a moment for form’s sake, then opened to let him enter. Noses crushed, lips mashed, our tongues fenced a wet duel under the starry sky. We continued to talk as we strolled down the street.

“Do you remember the night we sat there and watched the Northern Lights?” asked Leslie, pointing into the Western metropolis.

“Yes, I do. And I also remember what you wanted to do. Getting buggered in a cemetery wasn’t my idea of a romantic night out.”

“But it was Halloween,” pouted Leslie. “Trick or treat?” He stopped. “Do you think we’ve got time to pop in and make up for that lost opportunity?” I couldn’t help laughing but I grabbed his arm and pulled him across the road.

“Shut up. Behave. We’re here.”

And here we were. The mighty hulk of Bruce Academy lay before us, the gangway leading into a burst of light and laughter. One hundred years had passed since the first Bruce boys in their burgundy blazers had crossed the stone drawbridge into their destinies; fifteen years since I’d left; thirteen years since Leslie had left to join me at university. We entered through the swing doors; the hinges still creaked. Two handsome Sixth Form boys stepped forward. “Looks like one each,” Leslie whispered. I dug him in the ribs. I handed over our invitations. The taller boy scanned them. “Welcome, Mr Morrison. Welcome Mr Cameron.” The shorter boy chimed in, “I’m sure you remember where the Great Hall is. Have a wonderful evening.”

Leslie ran his fingers beneath the taller boy’s chin. “We would if we had you two,” he staged-whispered. Both boys grinned. The short one smiled, “I bet.” I muttered, “Plus ça change,” but no-one was paying attention to me.

The Great Hall was an explosion of lanterns and light. A ceilidh band was playing on stage. Kilted figures swung across the floor in a ‘Gay Gordons’. Buffet tables along the walls were stacked with Scottish fodder: heart attacks and soaring cholesterol guaranteed. Other tables groaned under the weight of

beer, wine and whisky. I wondered how many of the guests would be groaning under the tables before midnight.

Leslie saw him first.

“Over there, Donny, to the left of the stage. Isn’t that Eric Murray? He’s piled on the beef. Who’s that with him? She’s pretty in a mousy sort of way. He’s seen us. He’s waving. They’re headed this way. He’s still got great legs. Look your best for Bruce’s finest.”

So began our school reunion, and as the now adult figures from our past entered again into our conscious sphere, my mind flew back to the days when we boys were boys and very glad of it, too.

* * *

Fuck it!

Late again.

That was the second time that week and it was only Tuesday.

I’d almost made it. Sprinted out of the house. Down Merton Road, into the High Street. Just in time.

Just in time to see the red double decker pull away from the bus stop. I shouted. I waved. I bet the bastard conductor saw me. Bet he grinned. Probably waved two fingers.

Couldn’t really blame him. We were famous, infamous, notorious. You could hardly blame us. We were an all boys’ school. His was the school bus. Fuck it. We were meant to wreck it everyday, twice a day in fact. Going to school. Coming home. Wreck the bus. That was the natural order, the way it was supposed to be.

I stopped for breath at the top of Carnegie Avenue. Why hurry now? No matter how fast I ran, bag thumping against my shoulder, I’d be late.

In fact, being very late was much safer than being just a bit late. A bit late meant I was certain to get caught. I’d been caught the day before. But very late meant I’d a sporting chance of sneaking in without being caught.

After all, it was Tuesday. Whole-school assembly. Entire school packed into the old Oak Hall with its bewhiskered portraits of headmasters of yore. Wasn’t quite sure what yore was but if it meant a long long time ago that would do. The lists, names in gold-lettering of those old boys, prefects, war heroes, cricket captains, rugger buggers, all of those boys of yore who’d served God, King, Queen, Country, and school so well.

Ah, the old Oak Hall with its serried ranks of boys... boys, boys and more boys. Flannelled boys. Boys in blazers. The soft burgundy cloth with the piping of gold round the edge of the blazers. Badge affixed to each left breast. A dead

sheep and a stack of corn, representing what I hadn't the faintest idea. The school motto: *per arduam* etc.

Fuck it. I was only yards from the grey squatting hulk of the school. It lay there like some malevolent Loch Ness Monster or some beached, rotting battleship. I'd been day dreaming again. Focus now, you fucker. Do the Houdini. Slip and slide straight in, as the bishop said to the choirboy. You won't notice a thing.

I tiptoed across the granite drawbridge. It wasn't a drawbridge that could be raised, but it was known as the drawbridge anyway. Pupils weren't allowed to use it, strictly forbidden, which on a Tuesday at this time of day made it the safest entry of all. The Rector would be in Oak Hall, bleating on about whatever occupied his pea brain that fine day.

That's not fair. Saying the Doc. had a pea brain. Very few of us had intimate knowledge about our glorious leader's brain or much else about him for that matter. Very few of us had seen Doctor Humphreys outside of Oak Hall, beyond a Tuesday whole-school assembly. In fact, there was a rumour that the good doctor didn't actually exist, at least not at assemblies. Science nerds suggested he was a hologram projected from his office but they were all Trekkies, Star Trek freaks, so no one paid them much attention.

Across the drawbridge. Through the swing doors. Fuck it. Somebody should take an oil can to those swing doors, but who the hell had an oil can in an all boys' Scottish grammar school? It was all *amo, amas, amat*. We left the dirty-hands' stuff to the local technical schools. Places for plebs and proles. Not for us, not for the intellectual *crème de la crème*, not for the boys of Bruce Academy for the Sons of Gentlefolk. Whoever dreamt up that name had a sense of humour—or was a complete moron. Take your pick.

Sharp right. Tiptoe through the tulips, metaphorically speaking, past the double doors of the Oak Hall itself—fuck it. They were only into the first hymn: Who would true valour see... *hum dee hum...* down the Classics corridor and into the Junior Boys' Toilet.

Strictly legit. After all, I was only 13, so technically I was still a junior. At least until the Summer Holidays rolled in, and then away. In late August I'd be in Middle School—*hurrah!*—then I could have my wicked way with the fresh-faced first-years, but for the moment safety first was best. To be caught in the middle toilets meant you'd get a chance to see the brown goldfish close-up, to be caught in the seniors with your pants down... well, if they weren't, they soon would be.

The Junior toilets it was. Swing door open. Step inside. Let door swing closed. Fuck it—what a pong. Piss, crap and disinfectant. The smell of hundreds of boys, even this early in the week, even at this unearthly hour of... let's see: 10

to 9. To be honest, I didn't mind the smell. It was pure school. It was pure boy. And to be honest, I liked school and I love boys.

Wow—what a weird Statement: I love boys. Pretty strong for a 13-year-old don't you think? Thing is, I did. I loved their open faces, and their unruly hair, and legs going every which way, and the chests, broad and thin, topped with chewable raisins. And the way their bodies narrowed into their school trousers, or cricket flannels, or gym shorts. I liked their big feet, and their long toes. I liked their scabby knee-caps. I loved their bums, the fat ones, the thin ones, the round ones, the flat ones, the sticky-out ones, the sticky-up ones. I didn't discriminate. I loved them all.

And I loved their cocks, their dicks, their penises, their stiffies, their hard-ons. I loved them even when they had dumb names like 'members'. That's what our idiot tutor called them as we trudged through dog-eared manuals on Sex Education without ever really learning what we were desperate to know. Could you get pregnant if you swallowed another boy's... ejaculate? I swear that's what they called it. We called it stuff, or semen, or sperm, or the newly-fashionable word: cum. Though I wasn't sure if that was spelled 'come' or 'cum'.

At this point I should admit I'm homosexual, or is that homo-sexshual? To tell the truth, the word was too embarrassing to use. It was hinted at in our Sex Ed. manual but only to rule whatever those homo-sexshuals did as unmentionable, beyond the pale, guaranteed one-way ticket to Hell. And even then it didn't seem as bad as the big 'M'.

Masturbation!

I still shudder when I say that word, or even write it. They managed to turn one of the most beautiful activities on the planet, a gift as God-given as snooker, into something fit only for the fallen, only fit for his satanic majesty and his satanic minions.

Sucking cock—yes!

But Masturbation—no! That will get you to Hell faster than you can say "Beam me up, Scotty!"

So it was difficult for me to admit I was homosexual but I can admit I was queer.

Fuck it—I AM queer.

I can't say I was proud of being queer. That's just the way things were. Might as well be proud of being left-handed, or ginger-haired, or having a big dick (well, I'm proud of that) because that's just luck, just the way the cookie crumbles, the way the genes combine, the way the cards fall—all a matter of chance.

God or Whoever had decreed that I was Queer! And I intended to make the best of it. Scatter ye rosebuds while ye may, and I knew a couple of puckered rosebuds that needed Scattering.

Fuck it!

The door swung open, and in stepped Raymond.

Raymond, ah, Raymond, how can a boy, so well-built, so good-looking, be such a nonentity? If you met a boy upon the stair, if you met a boy who wasn't there, if he wasn't there again today... well, that was Raymond who wasn't there.

Raymond MacGregor was 13, he was in my Year, in my tutor group, in some of my classes. I'd even sat beside him in class a few times, and Raymond, with those big sheep's eyes, those freckles, that tidily-combed fringe, was utterly fucking boring.

And so passive!

I always felt, when I could be bothered, like giving Raymond a sharp kick up his fat arse—not fair, it was big and round and firm, definitely not fat—telling him to lighten up, unload, have fun.

Raymond was an overlooked boy. Last to be picked for the rugby team, not because he couldn't play, he could, not because he wasn't strong, he was, but because he was hardly there. At cricket. Raymond always fielded in the deep, as far away from the action as possible, and he always batted number 8 though he could belt a cricket ball into the stratosphere with those arms, those shoulders of his.

Pointless trying to have a lively dialogue, conversation, or debate with Raymond to pass the time. All you could get was 'perhaps', 'maybe', 'I'm not sure.'

But to my credit I tried.

"Fuck it, I missed the bus this morning."

"Mmmm..."

"Did you miss the bus?" (I knew Raymond didn't take the bus, but might as well try for conversation.)

"No." (I swear Raymond blushed when he said the one word.)

"That's the second time this week." (Response there was none.) "How the fuck do you get to school, Raymond?" (Pause for thought.)

"Car."

"You're too young to drive." (That was me being facetious. No effect.)

"I know."

"Well, who the fuck drives you?"

"My mother."

The entire exercise was pointless.

“How long till the bell?” (Raymond looked studiously at watch).

“13 minutes.”

“That’ll do.”

I ran my hand across my flies suggestively.

‘Suggestively’ is the wrong word. I was suggesting nothing. This was an open, direct, invitation.

Did I tell you that Raymond was queer, too? Well, he is. Fucking raving queer. Though I doubt whether he’d have done anything about it until I sat beside him and stroked his flannels in an R.E. (Religious Education) lesson. (Well, how did ‘you’ pass the time during R.E. lessons?)

Raymond responded! And I mean ‘responded’. His face lit up like a Halloween lantern. He shuffled that yummy arse of his, but made no attempt to move away. Bingo! And when I let my sweet little fingers slide across his fly, he had a stiffy like a milk bottle.

Big, too. Big and thick and hard.

Big balls, too. When I slid my cute little fingers beneath his balls, he opened his legs wider and let me explore. Meanwhile he gazed straight ahead, listened raptly about ‘all things bright and beautiful’ while I tried naughtily to bring him to orgasm.

You’ll notice that those Sex Ed. lessons weren’t totally a waste of time. They gave us the language. We learned the terms, and I sat there trying to squeeze and stroke Raymond to orgasm. The devil in me, and there’s a lot of Him was trying to make sweet Raymond ‘cum’ in his Y-fronts. He’d go around the rest of the day with dry cum sticking his skin to his Y-fronts and I would be the author of the achievement. Bravo for me!

So I gazed at Raymond and ran my fingers across my fly. I already had half a hard-on anyway. One of the reasons I’d been delayed was I’d been playing with my dick over breakfast. I was aroused. And why was I aroused? Because I was going after Eric. Going after the first prize, the big one, the school idol, at least the sports idol of the Junior school. So I was playing with myself that morning, giving myself an edge, making sure I didn’t turn back... with the result I’d missed the bus and had to stroll-cum-sprint all the way to school.

Raymond stepped forward. I stepped back. Into a cubicle. Raymond followed. I turned on tiptoe, probably looking like a fucking ballerina, so Raymond was facing me, knees against the toilet seat. I gave him my best ‘yes, please’ smile and stepped forward. He reached tentatively forward and let his fingers brush across the front of my flannels. Knowing Raymond, I suspected he might take his time, time we didn’t have, so I reached down and unzipped my

flies. Then I pushed him gently backwards. His legs bent at the knees and he was sitting on the loo.

Is there anything more erotic than the sound of a boy's fly being unzipped? I know a few things, so I'll leave you to answer that.

My shirt tail stuck out of my flies—hardly erotic, but it least it served as flag and guide to the treasure, to the family jewels, as it were.

Raymond, like a good boy, reached in with his fingers, fished around like a blind man, got his fingers through my Y-fronts, and pulled out my hot, hard, sticky shaft. Yes, I'd gone from half-hard to tent-pole hard in a matter of seconds. Hell, I was only human, only 13.

I looked down at Raymond. His nose was up against my dick. I wondered just what he could see. He was enraptured, I could see that. He was worshipping my dick, my 6, well, nearly six inches of hot hard boy flesh. I could feel his breath against my skin. I knew what he wanted to do, and I knew he couldn't do it without my help. God knows, I was a helpful boy.

"Take it, Ray," I whispered. "Go on, suck it. You know you want to. And I want you to. Go on."

And on he went.

I felt the shaft of my penis slip between Raymond's thick lips, felt his tongue caress the unsheathed head, felt him release my penis for a moment and slide little kisses down its length. Felt him take me deep again till the head of my cock touched the back of his throat, tickling his tonsils as it were. I opened my legs to let his fingers slide inside my underpants, dig deeper until they unearthed my sweaty little sac and manipulated the gems within.

I sighed and ran my fingers through his thick rather coarse dark hair and thought about... thought about myself actually.

Thirteen years old. Not that short, not that tall. Maybe about 5-4. Slim but not thin. Dark brown hair in a sort of bowl cut, the fringe parted at the middle and swept away on either side. Lovely skin. I've always had lovely skin. It sort of glowed, even in the winter, now it was sun-kissed. Yes, the sun does shine in Scotland. Brown eyes set fairly wide apart with curving eyebrows, and thick up-turned eyelashes that made me seem permanently cheerful and inquisitive and cheeky. No little upturned nose, but nicely shaped, and framed on either side by round cheeks that dimpled when I smiled, and I smiled a lot. Nice, white, shiny teeth. Thanks, Mum. I'd served my time in braces, and here I was now with a lovely set of nice white shiny even teeth. Little ears. Legend had it that mum had sello-taped my big brother's big ears every night when he was little. No need for that with my small pointed elfin ears.

What else?

Oh, yes, I had a big penis. For my age anyway. Actually I'd had it since I was about 11 years old and since it was much the same at 13, I guess it was big for my age. About six inches and quite thick with it. Not like Eric's, not that jumbo-sized beauty, but big compared with boys my age, my Year, and in the couple of Years above.

I knew that because those were the days when we all bundled into the showers after sports. No curtains. No cubicles. No separation of the ages. All for one, and one for all. Bundled into a big marbled shower room where the pipes rocked and rolled and the shower heads spat either scalding or freezing water with no Mister In-Between. And we all compared. What boys don't? And I was big for my age, noticeably big, pleasingly big. I saw other boys eyeing me up and staying to linger. And hair. I even had hair at 11. Not lots and lots, but it was there, the dark little tuft on the pubis. No waiting till Third Year for me—I had it in First Year. No embarrassment of naked skin for me. Dark hair—the rest of me satin smooth. And a dick many a Fifth Year could envy. Surrounded by naked boys, all sizes and shapes. But none as big and shapely as Eric, my Eric. Not my Eric yet, but if he was human, if he could be seduced, I'd have a real go at it.

My sac had tightened, my balls rose in my scrotum. I felt the pulsation that leads to the shudder, the uncontrollable shaking, the heavenly squirting and spurting.

No, no, not yet. Keep the edge. Keep the hunger. We had German second period. German, where I sat beside Eric, the seats so small, his thighs so big, contact guaranteed.

Fuck it!

Gently I eased Raymond's head off my penis. He looked up at me, glassy-eyed. My pre-cum glistening on his lips. Shit, he had beautiful eyes. I'd never really noticed them before. He lowered his head to graze again. I eased him away.

"The bell, Raymond. Listen. That's the fuckin' bell."

Raymond shook his head like a shaggy dog waving water away.

"Oh, yes," he mumbled. "Thank you for having me," he mumbled.

"No... thank YOU for having ME," I whispered, pressing my erection against my belly, stuffing my shirt tail back in, zipping myself up.

"Raymond. Raymond."

"Mmmm... yes?"

"Get off your fuckin' arse, Raymond."

"Oh... yes."

Raymond rose to his feet just as the door burst open and half a dozen juniors came storming in.

"Hi, Donny."

“Hi, Alan.”

“Hi, Donny.”

“Hi, Marshall.”

“Hi, Donny.”

“Hi, Dougal.”

“Wanna fag?”

“You know I don’t smoke. It’s fuckin’ disgusting. How was the Assembly?”

“Fuckin’ bor-r-ring,” they chorused.

“What we got now?”

“Latin.”

“Shit, let’s get going. Corky’s a real bastard if you’re late.”

“Sure is. I know the first chapter of Caesar’s Gallic Wars off by heart. I’ve written the fuckin’ thing out often enough.”

“Hey, who was that in here with you?”

“Just Raymond.”

“Oh, Raymond. Come on, let’s go.”

An hour later we are sitting in German. I feel the heat of Eric’s thigh against my own.

We are reading, or rather translating, ‘Emil and the Detectives’ word by word, line by line, sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph, from German into English. If Eric wasn’t beside me, I’d scream from boredom.

I like the book. I’ve read it twice. I think that Emil is cute, and, after all, he is surrounded by boys as they chase the thief across Berlin. It’s German I can’t stand. All this hanging round till you get to the end of a sentence, find the verb, and work out what the fuck is going on. If that weren’t bad enough, the teacher is ‘Jock’ Macdonald, deputy headmaster and vicious bastard, who hates me as much as I hate him. It’s personal. Jock Macdonald hates all us boys from the ‘wrong’ side of the city, from the working class areas around the jute mills. He’s a snob, and that cuts no ice with us boys who didn’t know what snobbery was until we beached up on the shores of the Bruce Academy for the Sons of Gentlefolk.

Jock Macdonald carries a strap, made of the finest Lochgelly leather, slung over his shoulder, under his academic gown, and when he gives you ‘six of the best’ you can’t feel your fingers for an hour after. My fingers have been so numb, I’ve even had a friend fish my dick out of my underpants when I’ve needed to take a piss.

Well, fuck it and fuck Jock Macdonald. I have Eric Murray by my side for the next fifty minutes and nothing is going to deny me that pleasure.

I slide my glance to the right as if watching the seagulls making their way up and down the estuary. Eric's face is in profile. My heart skips a couple of beats and I hear my indrawn breath. Christ, he is beautiful. I wonder if Eric is aware of his own beauty. He is by far the best all-round Sportsman in the school but, unlike me, he isn't in the top sets for every subject. Not Maths, and especially not Algebra. I've been trying to demonstrate to Eric just how logical algebra is, but he's no Mr Spock, and he just can't get it. In the end, he grunts and says "Let's do some place-kicking," and off we go. I hate rugby and I hate place-kicking. but I'm with Eric so it's Nirvana. We learned about Nirvana in R.E. I know where my Nirvana is; right between Eric Murray's legs, or buttocks if you're approaching from the rear.

Eric's got the first sentence of Chapter 3 to translate. His German's worse than his Algebra. It's my favourite chapter and I whisper an adequate translation. He repeats it for Macdonald, loudly because Macdonald is a bit deaf. My turn, and I rattle off the next three sentences, knowing that will annoy Macdonald who likes it sentence by sentence.

Macdonald glares at me. "Didn't you hear my instructions, laddie?"

I gaze blandly back. "Sorry, sir, what, sir? My ears are waxed up. Can't hear a thing. Getting syringed this afternoon."

Macdonald grunts and glares. I doubt whether he heard much of my mumble, but he doesn't seem in the mood to accept a challenge and goes on to the next boy. Twenty-two more boys to torment. It'll be a while before he gets back to us.

I return my gaze to that heavenly profile. The straight nose. The slightly curved lips. The cheekbones. The skin kissed by the early summer sun. The straight ash-brown hair, flopping over one eye. Those shoulders. That chest. Those thighs—like fucking tree trunks. That bulge below the grey flannels.

I take a breath and take the plunge. I run the fingertips of my right hand along Eric's thigh. His school trousers are so tight I might as well be running them on his bare skin. I whisper, "Did you have a good weekend?"

I'm not the least interested in Eric's weekends, but I know he's fascinated by mine. Eric has got it into his head I spend most weekends doing 'dirty stuff' with girls on the 'wrong side' of town. Eric lives on the right side of town. I know that's in his head because I put it there.

Eric's not far wrong. I don't do much dirty stuff, at least not with girls, but I see more than my fair share of dirty stuff. That's because my elder brother, Iain, and his best mates, John and George, are notorious for doing dirty stuff with the girls in our neighbourhood. And sometimes, when they're in a very good mood, they let me watch.

Iain is fucking good-looking, though I've no interest in him 'that' way; John isn't bad; but George gives Eric a run for his money in the body-beautiful stakes. George, with his shock of black hair, his thick eyebrows, pouty lips, straight white teeth, and ear-to-ear grin, has been the image that launched a hundred of my orgasms, but he belongs to Iain's crowd, and I'd got a good kicking if I even mentioned homo stuff in front of them. Although they're only two years older than me, they belong to a different world including a different kind of school where they build bird-baths, stools, and better mousetraps.

I don't know if any of them have fucked a girl yet. I'm pretty sure they have but I always get sent away when the knickers come off.

So I sit there in German class, casually stroking Eric's thigh with my fingertips, describing as graphically as I can what 'we' did that weekend.

* * *

Her name was Marie. One of the Irish girls, from the poorest part of our neighbourhood. She was 13 maybe 14. Saturday afternoon. Hot and sunny. Marie was stretched out in the gravel pits. My brother straddled her belly. Her blouse was open, her bra was down at her stomach. His big fat thumbs were kneading her big fat nipples. His fly was open, his hard cock pulled out. He ran it across her lips.

Down below, John was under her flimsy skirt. He was playing 'stinky finger'. John was ruthlessly finger-jobbing the girl with his middle finger. Every now and again he'd pull it out, wave it at me, and laugh, "Want a sniff?" Yuk!

Marie's head would've rolled from side to side, but it was trapped between George's knees as he knelt above her, cock out, tossing himself off over her eyes, nose and mouth. Every now and again, the head of his cock made contact with the head of Iain's cock.

"Let's see if we can shoot together," laughed George. "Hey, Marie, keep your eyes closed and. your mouth wide open. Wider. Wider. Good girl, that's it."

My own cock was so hard it ached. George's cock was thick, brown, wet, slimy, slippery, beautiful. That should be my face below it, eyes closed, mouth wide open, but I wouldn't wait for him to cum, I'd slide up and slide him in, I'd swallow him to the root, until that thick black hair tickled my lips, until...

"Fuck off, Donny."

That was Iain. He didn't even turn his head. Just hissed, "Fuck off."

I didn't argue. My brother could be violent. I had the childhood scars to show it. And to be honest, I didn't like watching him. It made me feel weird, uneasy, embarrassed. I'd stay because George was there, but when Iain told me

to fuck off, I felt relieved, turned and scampered across the gravel pits, through a hole in the tin fence, and off to meet Alan Aitken.

* * *

Eric hears nothing of the end of the ‘seduction’ of Marie. He hears about the hair and the slit and the ‘clit’ (I’d only just learned that.), and the big puffy breasts and the pointy nipples.

My fingers are caressing the buttons of his flies.

Bingo!

But why the fuck hasn’t Eric got a hard-on? Is he flesh and blood or what? I’ve been working hard for a hard-on. I deserve a hard-on. But Eric is still soft and squishy.

I’m puzzled but I don’t remain puzzled for long.

“Up a bit. It’s up a bit,” he whispers.

So up a bit I go.

Holy fucking Moses!

It’s not his cock. It can’t be. It must be his bicycle pump. He must’ve shoved it down the front of his trousers. It’s thick and hard and it goes on and on, up and up, forever and ever... A-fucking- men!

Eric’s erection is so long and hard that it doesn’t seem real... Jesus, if he shoved that up Marie it would poke out of her mouth! I fit my thumb and fingers round it. Must be 4 inches in diameter. I should know, I’m top of the class for Maths. And the length—10 inches. That’s what we see in the changing rooms, and that’s what I have in my hot little grasp, ten thick inches of a stiff Eric Murray.

“Fucking hell, Eric, it’s BIG. Where’d you get it?”

“Well, yours is 6 inches. And you’ve got more hair than me. And you’ve got a curvy shape to the end of yours.”

How the fuck did he know...?

Ah, the changing rooms, the showers. He must watch me as much as I watch him. Yes, that counts for a lot.

As we whisper, I keep stroking.

“You know what I’m doing, don’t you?”

“Course I do. I’m not an idiot.”

“Do you do it?”

“Course I do.”

“How long?”

“About 10 inches, I guess. I measured it. Ten inches.”

“No, I mean how long before...?”

“Before... before what?”

“Before you cum, shoot, squirt?”

There’s a pause while Eric works it out. Maths isn’t his strong point.

“About 10 seconds.”

Ten fucking seconds!

“Ten fucking seconds?!”

“That’s in the morning. When I’m in a hurry. At night I can make it last a bit longer.”

I know what I want to ask next. And I know I don’t dare ask.

“What do you think about when you’re wanking?”

That’s to myself.

I don’t know what my next question would have been. The bell on the wall behind us explodes. A flurry of books closes around us. We stand up behind our desks. Everybody up—except Eric Murray. He sits there blushing furiously, his Dumbo-like ears on fire.

“Murray, that was the bell.”

That’s Jock Macdonald.

“Yes, sir, I know, sir. But I wanted to... I wanted to... ask your help. I can’t understand this last sentence.”

Eyebrows are raised around the room.

Murray doesn’t ask for help with German, and Macdonald never stays behind during the break. Break is fag time, and the only thing Jock Macdonald enjoys more than paralysing a boy’s fingers is his coffee and cigarettes, cheap fucking Woodbines at that.

“Cameron can help you. He seems to know ‘Emil’ by heart. Cameron, help Murray.” And with that Macdonald sweeps out of the classroom in a cloud of chalk dust and black gown.

Eric stands up. His erection is outlined in his thin grey flannels. “We’ll have to wait a minute.”

I reach out my hand. He slaps it away, but he’s grinning.

“Help me in the nets after school?” he asks.

Cricket. I fucking hate cricket. You stand there in the deep for two hours doing fuck all. Then one catch comes your way. It’s the most important catch in the whole match, and it’s coming your way. Bombing down from the sky like a V2 rocket. You’re underneath it. You’re meant to catch it. You know you won’t. You know it will bend your fingers, bruise your fingers, maybe even break your fingers, but you will not catch that mean little red leather ball. So you do what any sensible tennis player does; you chicken out at the last second; move your hand away and watch the ball slam into your fucking big toe!

My face falls.

“Okay, half an hour in the nets, and half an hour on court. Deal?”

“Deal.”

That leaves a spare half hour. Maths isn't Eric's strong point, but it's mine. Two half hours equal one hour. Which leaves a spare half hour before the school grounds close. Mmmmm... My erection, wilting a few seconds ago, takes heart and perks up again. I glance at Eric's crotch. He's wilted, too. Now it's only like a small elephant trunk. And just soooooo kissable. You want to kneel down and...

Oh, for fuck's sake, Cameron, is that ALL you ever think of?

It wasn't 'all' I ever thought of. That would be ridiculous. But I'd thought about it a lot since I was 11 years old. Exactly 11 years old as I remember.

* * *

It was a Tuesday afternoon. After school I hadn't gone home. I'd forgotten my key and there was no chance a window had been left open. Mum was fed up of my scrambling through the kitchen window, of “Sorry, mum, I forgot my key.” I used to wear the bloody thing on a string around my neck, but these were my last few weeks at junior school. I was bound for Bruce Academy for the Sons of Gentle Folk, and I was damned if I was going to wear my doorkey on a string round my neck. That was kids' stuff.

I took myself to Steve's. Steve was a friend of my brother's, not a mate like George or John, but a friend who'd give me house room till my brother got home around half past four. I guessed Steve would be home because Steve didn't go to school much. His mum was dead and his father was a drunk who didn't give a shit where Steve was most of the time. So it was to Steve's I headed, and I was right—Steve was home. He was smoking as usual, the ciggy between his lips bouncing as he spoke, the smoke making his left eye squint.

Steve was a rocker, a greaser, his thick black hair piled high on his head and sleeked back with Brylcream. Steve was 14, maybe 15. He looked like a younger version of Elvis Presley, younger and rougher. He wore a lot of denim and a battered black leather jacket that ended about four inches above his arse.

We sat and rabbited on about nothing much in particular, Steve's 45s dropping onto the turntable with three and a half minute regularity, and Elvis launching forth with equal predictability. I was no Elvis fan. I admit he was good, but he just wasn't me. To be honest, I wasn't really into music though some of the young guys appearing on TV were really cute. Hey, where did that come from? Guys, not much more than boys, cute! I caught myself blushing.

It's strange how you often can't remember how something started. You remember what happened, but not how it started. How the hell did I end up dancing with Steve to Elvis on that threadbare carpet in his darkened living room? I remember the smell, Brylcream and whisky. Steve often stole his

father's whisky. More than once he'd been battered for it, but I suppose if you live in a smelly pit with no mum and a drunk for a dad, you've got to find something to get you through the days, and the nights.

When it happened, it wasn't Elvis. It was Procol Harum. It was 'Whiter Shade of Pale'. The song was like nits racing through my junior school. Everybody got a dose. The fuckin' song had been 'Top of the Pops' for weeks. It was never off the radio. I thought it was a bit of a dirge, and the lyrics didn't make any sense whatsoever, but the whole thing had a hypnotic effect. You sort of went into a trance and hummed or whispered the words along with the melody as if they were full of meaning. Full of significance, when you knew in your heart they didn't mean jack-shit.

'Whiter Shade of Pale' was the last 45 in the bunch, so the needle would reach the end of the track, lift, move back, drop, and start from the beginning.

I don't know when it happened. I just realised my head was leaning into Steve's shoulder, my eyes closed, my nose full of the heady smell of whisky and Brylcreem, and that his hand was in the pocket of my school shorts. Yes, it was Summer Term, and we were in the obligatory corduroy shorts. I fuckin' hated them and was secretly thrilled to know I'd be in grey flannel trousers by the end of August. For one thing, I've got a round little bum, a bit like split peach, and those shorts didn't half show it off. I suppose I should've got a new pair at the start of the year, but mum was convinced I "could get another year out of them" even though they were tight last August, let alone this June!

Mum would probably make me wear those shorts right through the summer. She'd got a summer job house-keeping up near Dunvegan. She was to keep the house while I kept her company. Iain was off to a summer camp subsidised by some charity or other. Lucky bugger. I'd be off in the middle of nowhere, deep in the heart of the countryside. Me, who'd never even seen a real-live cow. I sighed and sank my head deeper into Steve's shoulder.

The melody wound round us, my head on Steve's shoulder, my eyes closed, my nose full of his smells, and his hand deep in the right hand pocket of my corduroy shorts. Fuck it! He'd have to choose that pocket, the one with the big hole in it, a very big hole, and bigger now that his fingers were through the hole, up the side of my Y-fronts, playing with my very stiff, very hard, birthday penis.

I was paralysed as much by my own lust as by fright. And I was scared, not because I was afraid of what Steve might do, but because I didn't want to admit how much I was enjoying it. Enjoying 'it', but what the fuck was the 'it' that I was enjoying?

You'll have to take my word, but I hadn't the faintest idea what was happening to me, especially what was happening 'down there', down there in

the Forbidden Lands. For Christ's sake, I had a mother who made her sons sleep with their hands ABOVE the blankets, so I knew playing with myself was wrong, but she'd never given any instruction about another person playing with my 'down there'. I'd heard my brother and his mates pass comments, remarks I knew were 'dirty', but I couldn't quite figure out what was dirty about them.

I knew I wasn't going to pee. Believe me, I knew when I was going to pee, and this wasn't that about-to-piss feeling. This was in a different league altogether. For a start, peeing didn't make my tummy flutter like this. Peeing didn't make my legs tremble. Peeing didn't make my little scrotum tighten. Peeing didn't make my limbs tighten and my bum-hole clench then loosen. Whatever this was, it wasn't peeing.

I wanted to push Steve away. I wanted to pull him even tighter. I wanted to raise my face and burrow into the hollow of his neck. I wanted to pull his buttocks so that he pushed right into me. And I did. I wanted to feel that hot poker of his burn even hotter against my groin. I wanted to slip my hand round and feel its length, its hardness, its sheer aliveness. I wanted to... I wanted to ..

But suddenly I was beyond need, beyond wanting. I was shuddering and shaking.

"Ohhhh... Ohhhh... Ohhhh..."

My penis was convulsing, leaping between Steve's fingers, spitting fire and flames, squirting liquid gold, spurting beyond my control. This was me, the essence of me, and I was squirting myself into another boy's hand. I shuddered, shook, staggered, and held onto Steve's shoulders.

And we danced on, a drunken, staggering dance, into his father's bedroom, where the curtains were always drawn, where I was backed against the double bed, where I fell backwards onto the bed with Steve full length on top of me. I kept my eyes tightly shut, kept out the truth, kept out the reality, kept out the shame of my pleasure.

And I felt Steve naked against me, or at least naked from the waist down. How the fuck had he managed that? And he was clambering up my skinny body, knees on either side, and I felt him and tasted him against my lips.

My eyes fluttered open, and there it was, that thick dark sausage with the purple head, knocking at my lips. I'll never know how I knew what to do, but I did. I opened my mouth just enough to let the head slide in, and I sucked on the head, whirled round the head with my lips, slid a hand down the shaft till I felt the hairbrush against me, worked the shaft, let it slide in deeper until around four inches were inside, and sucked and suckled the shaft as if I'd done it all my life. I let my free hand feel his arse, squeeze his buttocks, let it slide into the hot dangerous unknown territory in the depths of his crack.

Above me, out of sight, on another planet, Steve moaned and groaned, as he gently fucked my mouth. I worked that one out. I wasn't stupid. I knew that men and women fucked. I wasn't entirely sure how they did it but it was something like this. I took my hand away from Steve's cock. He was entirely capable of what he needed to do without my help, and using both hands, I pulled his buttocks widely apart. Don't ask me why I did that. I don't know. It just seemed the right thing to do, pull them apart, loosen, let them come together, then pull them apart again. Establish the same rhythm as his hot hard-on pushing and pulling into and out of my mouth. Speed with him, slow with him. That's it: quick, quick, slow—then quick, quick and quicker.

Fuck it. Take it easy. You'll choke me. Pinch his arse hard, he'll get the message.

It's hot, and it's salty, and it's slimy, and it's spurting, and it's hitting the back of my throat, again and again, and over it goes. Hardly a taste because it's all going over so quickly. Fuck, my mouth's full. It's overflow time. Taste it now. Salty? Sweet? Both, and so fuckin' much of it. And Steve's cock's gone now. And his open mouth is against my open mouth. And he's tasting himself, taking himself back, and his tongue is halfway down my throat. I'll show the fucker. I can give as good as I get—well, almost. See me, feel me, touch me, heal me.

Steve and I never had sex again. Not because he didn't want it. Not because I didn't want it. But he was my brother's friend. He knew Iain would kill him if he ever found out what he'd done to his little brother. And when I say 'kill', I literally mean kill. Even at that age I knew, and my brother's friends knew, that Iain was capable of killing someone. Best not to play too close to home. I was certain Iain would kill Steve if he found out, and I wasn't completely certain he wouldn't kill me. And the funny thing is Iain would be convinced he was killing me for MY sake, for my OWN good, to stop me becoming a little homo.

Too late, brother dear, someone had opened Pandora's Box, and I dived headfirst in.

* * *

I'm not sure how true that is. I'm sure I'd've got there eventually but Alan Aitken certainly helped me speed things up. And this was strange because Alan and I had been friends since we were four or five years old. In fact, I can't remember a time when Alan wasn't around.

Alan was cute. It's not a word I like much, but 'cute' is the best word I can think of to describe Alan. Ever since I can remember, women liked to ruffle

Alan's curly glossy black hair; women were charmed by his impish good looks, the bow mouth, the sparkling black eyes. I've never met anyone else with genuinely 'black' eyes but Alan's were. Sometimes you thought they were the deepest of purples, but closer inspection revealed, yep, genuinely black, set against the purest white. Upturned nose, the bridge spattered with freckles, the high cheekbones, the dimples when he smiled, and Alan smiled most of the time. His family was well-off; they lived on the top floor of a... I'm not sure what to call it. If I write tenement, you'll get totally the wrong idea. Poor folks lived in tenements; the Aitkens were anything but poor. After all, they owned the fucking tenement.

You might find it odd that Alan and I even attended the same junior school, but that was because... wait for it... Alan's dad was a chimney sweep. Well, he'd started out as a chimney sweep, but in a few years had built a chimney-sweeping empire that had a monopoly of the whole city. There were few chimneys in our city, a city whose skyline was punctuated by chimney stacks, that were not swept regularly by Aitken & Son. The 'Son' was Alan though he hadn't, as far as I knew, had that much contact with a sooty chimney yet. The Aitkens never forgot their roots, never moved out of our district, and got on with everybody like a house on fire—maybe that's not the best image for a chimney-sweeping business. And Alan and I had become instant friends from the moment we pulled on our floral pinafores at nursery.

I've just noticed I've been writing in the past tense. Fair enough, but Alan is still very much part of my life though not so much of my sex life nowadays because Alan has got a man, a real, live, grown-up man, with a deep voice, big muscles, and a cock like... But I'm not going into Alan's private life here. That wouldn't be fair. Maybe I will later, but not now, not right at this minute.

Alan Aitken... what happened was this.

After Steve, after the unexpected introduction to the delights that lay between my legs, I was hungry for more. My hand was okay, my fingers were even better, but I wanted more, I wanted someone else's flesh, male flesh, pressed up against my flesh. I wanted a hot hard penis against my lips, I wanted to feel the tip of a fat cock bouncing against the back of my throat, I wanted to exchange the taste of semen with another mouth, I wanted to... but with whom, and when, and where, and how?

The answer came from the most unexpected person—Alan. I spent lots of time at Alan's. We'd both passed the 11+, both pulled on our new blazers and long flannels, both caught the bus to Bruce Academy, both ended up in the same Form Class, and in the same classes for most subjects. Alan is very bright, but I'm brighter; at least I usually come top of the class while Alan trails in at second or third. It's a rivalry we both love.

After school we often go to his home. His mum makes tea, and there's iced buns or scones with real dairy cream. We stay at the table, get our homework done—Alan's crap at Latin, my Geography is erratic—swap tales of the day, then retire to Alan's room for half an hour. I was going to write bedroom because there's a bed in it; a fucking double bed! For one person. Not even a grown-up person: just Alan! But it's a lot more than just a bedroom. Alan Aitken's bedroom is bigger than our living room. Fuck it! And he's got great stuff. Like a real hifi set. His own TV. Toys galore. And a fuckin' full size snooker table! I kid you not. His own full size snooker table.

We were on the bed. Laughing and joking. I was looking at Alan. His eyes were sparkling. That curly hair needed cutting. The sun had brought out his freckles. I was listening to his voice; it hadn't even started to break; it tinkled through the scales. We were stretched out on our backs, heads on the same double-size pillow, looking at Alan's collection of model aeroplanes; he was explaining the comparative merits of the Spitfire and the Hurricane. My head was turned to him. I couldn't take my eyes away from his face. And then it happened... so slowly that I wasn't aware of it until it was too late.

A fuckin' erection!

It's a funny thing but at 11 and a half I had more or less the same size of dick as I do now that I'm 14. About six inches long and quite thick. Not quite true—my dick's seven inches now, and it is thick. But at 11 and a half it was embarrassingly big for my age. I hadn't realised that until we started having showers after P.E. at the Bruce Academy. I'd got used to the stares and the cheeky comments, and the furtive glances, and, of course, I'd been relieved when Eric Murray revealed his ten inches of thick ivory flesh. That had silenced all of us.

But there I was, lying on Alan's double bed, with an erection like a milk bottle, outlined underneath the thin grey flannel of my school trousers. I prayed for it to go down. I concentrated on the merits of the Spitfire and Hurricane. I tried desperately not to look down at my tummy and below, nor to look into Alan's eyes. Maybe he wouldn't notice. Maybe he wouldn't say anything. Maybe Batman could beat Superman in a fair contest.

Alan's hand slid down my chest, down my belly, down to my bellybutton, where his fingers grasped my hard-on and measured out its inches. I lay there paralysed, stricken into silence.

"Shit, Donny, you've got a big one. Where the fuck did you get that? I've seen it in the showers, but, fuck me, you and Eric Murray make a right pair." As he spoke, he continued to tweak and measure, tweak and measure out its length from root to tip between his thumb and finger. I tried to speak. My voice box betrayed me, and whatever I was going to say, escaped in a strangled screech.

Alan laughed.

“Let me see it.”

I said nothing. I didn’t trust my voice to get anything meaningful out. But I didn’t push his hand away. I lay there on the verge of wishing and hoping...

“Let me see it.”

Was that a note of exasperation in Alan’s voice?

“Look, fair’s fair. You show me yours and I’ll...” Alan started to laugh again. I couldn’t see what was funny.

He reached down, unzipped himself with a flourish, fumbled into his underpants, and fished out his own erection. Fuck it! His own erection. Alan was as hard as me. Not as long, not as thick, but definitely as hard. And it was pretty. Lovely. Beautiful. A four-inch column of ivory. The foreskin pulled back to reveal the shapely purple head, wet and slick with what I’ve learned is called pre-cum.

“Can I?” I mumbled.

“Be my guest,” my childhood friend laughed. “But wait a sec.”

Alan reached down and pulled his trousers wide upon, wriggled his bum up, and pushed trousers and underpants down to his knees, then turned to me and I did the same.

“What about your mum?” I whispered though my blushes.

“Are you deaf as well as dumb?” he giggled. “Didn’t you hear the door close about 10 minutes ago? She’s gone round to Auntie May’s. Back around 6. That gives us... ummmm... nearly an hour.” Alan pulled my hard-on away from my body. “A little kiss to start with.” He leaned over me and kissed the head of my penis. “Aw, fuck it, lots of kisses to start with.” His pursed lips ran the length of my erection, up and down, up and down, his lips open to slip the shaft between his lips. He stopped a moment, looked up at me, eyes glazed, and whispered, “Whatever you want to do, just do it. I’ll like it. Fuck it, I’ll love it.”

I understand the meaning of ‘69’ now but I didn’t then. It took me about five minutes to discover the position. Was I the first? Probably not, but in my wilder moments I like to think so. Only joking.

Two naked 11-year-olds lying side by side on a double bed. Their fingers clasped round each other’s erections. Their heads bobbing on the other’s stiffies. Mouths sliding down until lips are pressed on each other’s naked pubis. The sweet liquid of precum already in their throats. Fingers of each free hand manipulating hairless scrotums. Giving and taking in unison, in harmony. Instinctively matching rhythms. So difficult to concentrate. Is it the pleasure of fullness in the mouth? Is it the pleasure of the other’s mouth seeking to absorb the other’s fullness? Naked limbs twisted in such beauty as no sculptor could ever match.

Not only the sights but the smells. Sweat. Milk and honey. The untainted smell of immature semen.

It was hard to focus on sucking Alan when my own senses were so absorbed. The touch of his naked skin overwhelming in itself. The sight of every vein, the shape of his scrotum, the pink of his shaft, the curve of the head, the little eye that demanded to be probed with a tongue tip. So much. So much. And always so much more.

I felt my legs pushed wider, felt Alan's head burrow between them, felt his hot tongue lick my scrotum, his lips single out each testicle to find its shape, assess its weight. To take one, then both, then the sac into his mouth. For a moment I panicked. Could there be any greater exposure than this? With one little clamp of those little white teeth my balls would be gone. What could I tell my mother? I was an adept little liar but it would be hard to wriggle my way out of that one. I sighed and copied Alan, my mouth opening wide to take in his own little sac. Then I knew what it meant. That I could snap off the sac, his balls, and swallow them in a single gulp. And the possibility felt wonderful. He trusted me so much. Trusted me with the family jewels. Trusted me with so much of his future. If my mouth hadn't been so full, I would have laughed.

Then he was gone. Deeper. Lower. Into the unmentionable. My legs pushed wide apart by his insistent head. I felt his thick hair brush and tickle the inside of my thighs.

He couldn't. He wouldn't. Fuck it. He did.

His tongue was deep between my buttocks, circling the dirty place, the place you had to wipe clean three times, the place no one ever talked about, and certainly not in relation to what was happening, not in relation to... sex. How could there be any pleasure in this?

Ah, but there was.

The image, even then, was incredibly erotic. My cock pulsed even harder. I couldn't keep the image out of my mind. It was wrong, it was wicked, it was wonderful. Alan's tongue circled closer and closer to... What should I think of it as?

My bum hole. My arse hole. My anus.

Shit, I'd hardly ever seen my own bum hole, and here was Alan getting a close-up in Technicolor. I'd seen it a couple of times... when I'd lain on my bed at home, my legs hooked high by my elbows, a mirror strategically placed. Why had I done that? I've no idea. Insatiable curiosity, and an urge even then towards the taboo, the forbidden.

And the tip of Alan's tongue touched me there. Right on the centre spot. The tip ran the small length again and again. Tiny pressures, increasing with each run. My mouth took his cock in again. My lips swirled around it. I sucked

just the head, released it, and then took in the whole shaft again. There was no music in the room but I felt a singing in my ears. “We’re all going on a summer holiday.”

“Whatever you want to do, just do it. I’ll like it. Fuck it, I’ll love it.”

Had Alan really meant that—WHATEVER I wanted?

Just do it.

Now my head was between his legs. He splayed them wide, giving me all the access I desired. It was dark in there. I wanted to see. I heaved his arse, his legs around, a little rudely, a little unceremoniously, until he was facing the bed-lamp. The light focused where I wanted it. There it was. The centre of the known universe. And I was about to go there, to boldly go where... oh for fuck’s sake, not Star Trek.

Valleys, sand dunes of silk skin ran towards the centre. Creamy ivory darkened to a darker centre. The eye of the universe. The Starfish Enterprise. Cream gave way to a light flush of brown, to a slight serrated edge, to a pucker, to a rosebud that asked to be kissed.

Rosebud! A rosebud by any other name. A rosebud is a rosebud is a rosebud.

I closed my eyes, slid out the tip of my tongue, about to enter Eden.

Bang!

“Alan! Donny! I’m home. Tea’ll be ready in five minutes.” A light rap at the door.

“Scones and cream. Real cream. Dairy cream.”

Shit!

We unhooked ourselves and shot off that bed like bats out of Hell. A scramble of clothes. When I got home, I found I was in Alan’s underpants! We dressed as if our lives depended on it; they probably did. Alan snagged his dick in his zip. Hopped around in agony. I knelt and unsnagged it. Gave it a little kissie to make better. Then neither of us could stop giggling.

“Boys! Boys!”

We made final adjustments to our semi-hard cocks, emerged from the bedroom, crossed the lounge, and entered nonchalantly into the kitchen. I assume Alan was nonchalant; he looked nonchalant; I was terrified. Couldn’t they smell it? That sex smell. It was all around us. Overwhelming. But mums have the wonderful gift of not noticing what they don’t want to notice.

“Come on, boys, it’s on the table. Sit down and tuck in. Auntie May wasn’t in, so I got us a treat for tea...”

“Donny, you look a little pale. Alan, you look a little flushed. I hope you boys aren’t coming down with something. You don’t want to be in bed for the rest of the week, do you?”

Alan fell from his chair, laughing, his mouth crammed with a scone splattered with raspberry jam and dairy cream.

“Oh, Alan, you are a silly. Thank goodness Donny has a lot more sense. You’re lucky to have a friend like Donny. You could learn a lot from him.”

Alan was doubled up in helpless laughter, tears streaming from his eyes. I tried but I couldn’t help it; I joined in the laughter. Then Mrs Aitken joined in, too.

As she pulled herself together, she smiled.

“I don’t know what’s made you two so happy, but whatever it is, it’s doing you a power of good.”

And it was.

And it did.

Believe me, Mrs Aitken, it did.

* * *

Eric and I wandered up Carnegie Avenue after school. It’s 3.30 but it was still warm, the sun casting stark shadows. The school sports grounds lay between Carnegie Avenue and the Balmore Hill. To go home, Eric branched off to the right and the right side of town; I branched off to the left, crossed the hill, and went home to the wrong side of town.

The sports grounds are first class, donated by a wealthy merchant whose three sons were educated at Bruce Academy for the Sons of Gentlefolk. The grounds stretched over a few acres, the pavilion, tennis courts and cricket square at the Carnegie end, the rugby and soccer pitches at the Balmore end. There was a full-time groundsman but he never showed up until 15 minutes before closing time; that depends on the time of the year.

We strolled into the pavilion. A handful of boys there already. Mostly senior, mostly tennis players. We dumped our bags and changed, Eric into cricket, me into tennis whites. We must have looked a little incongruous but nobody paid much attention to a couple of juniors like us—even though we were already playing for the Under-15’s (Eric, cricket: me, tennis).

We wandered out to the nets where Eric became brisk and business-like. He was going to bowl to me in the nets. Like fuck he was! I was not going to stand there while the fastest bowler in the school aims chunks of leather at my most delicate parts, even though I had a cup on and pads that reached up to my waist. I sighed in relief when Eric announced he’s going to use a practice ball and that he’ll only bowl spin. Even I could get bat to ball with spin; well, either that or I could get the fuck out of the way.

Eric bowled me first ball, and second, and third.

“For fuck’s sake, keep the bat straight, Cameron. And stop hopping about.”

Keeping a straight bat is indescribably boring, but the sight of Eric running in, head tilted back, hair caught by the lightest of breezes, crotch bulging (it’s his cup, not his dick, more’s the pity) was compensation enough. I knuckled down and start stroking the ball back to him.

“Stroke it for Eric. Stroke it for Eric. Stroke it for Eric,” I hum to myself.

I was in dreamland when a ball hit a crack, rose sharply, and whacks me right where cup meets flesh. Fuck it, that hurt! I yelp like a sissy, drop to the floor, and start rubbing high inside my right leg.

Eric trotted up and flopped down beside me.

“Okay?”

“What the fuck do you mean ‘Okay?’” I howled. “Of course I’m not okay. You might not have a sex life, but I have, and you might have ruined it, you mutha...”

I didn’t complete the sentence because Eric’s mother died when he was five years old. I didn’t know the details. I knew he lived with his father and older brother. I knew they were a moneyed family. But that’s about it.

“Oh, come off it, Donny...” (Donny. I like that.) “. . . it’ll sting a bit but it’ll go in a couple of minutes. See...”

See what?

See Eric’s long thick fingers slid down the inside of my thigh.

“There?”

“Down a bit.”

“There?”

“Over a bit.”

“There.”

I sighed. “There, yes, right there.”

Those thick fingers began a gentle massage, a gentle caress, and the pain drifted away as I took leave of my senses. It was me who stroked Eric, not Eric who stroked me.

I suddenly realised I was getting a bitch of a hard-on, and it’s cramped in the cricket cup. A pleasure it is not. I tried to keep the frown off my face, but Eric caught it and bursts out laughing.

“You’re hopeless, Cameron.”

“Don’t you mean incorrigible, Murray?”

“Nope, hopeless. Come on. Get off your arse. You still owe me 20 minutes.”

And the twenty minutes were the most pleasurable I’ll ever have in relation to cricket. Manfully, if ineptly, I knuckled down and gave Eric full

value. He got me out around two balls every over no matter how well I defended. That pleased him and caused me no pain. My turn came soon.

It was strange. Eric was definitely the best cricketer our school ever had. He was, maybe, the best rugby player we've ever had. But on the tennis court he was crap. Make that capital letters: CRAP. He tried his best. In Sports Eric always tried his best. But even though I set the ball up for him, even though I keep it mostly on his forehand, even though I set up dolly smashes at the net for him, he managed to look clumsy and inept. But he did try. My God, how he tried.

So I began to drive the ball from side to side, hitting his baseline more often than not, pulling him into the net and then lobbing the ball casually over him so that he had to turn and scamper back to the baseline. He never got it back, of course, a little topspin makes sure of that. Was I being cruel? No, just cunning. If he runs enough, if he's sweaty enough (and Eric sweats easily), Eric will need a shower, and we might just have a shower before we head home. Cunning plan or what?

But I was foiled... because those senior bastards had used up the last of the hot water and left us nothing but lukewarm dribbles. I went back and checked the water, just in case, but no luck. Nope, the seniors had gone and the last of the hot water with them.

BUT (and it's a capital letters BUT) when I came out of the shower area, Eric was stretched full length along one of the benches. Eyes closed. Face redly flushed. Shirt unbuttoned to the waist. Crotch bulging. And that's no cup.

I squeezed down on the bench just behind his head. I wasn't quite sure what to do. If I got this wrong, I could end up with a black eye, a bleeding nose, and worse. That's easily explained at home, but I don't want to go into school tomorrow and find that I'm a... a what?... 'a fucking queer'. I AM a fucking queer. My bum chums know I'm a fucking queer. But that doesn't mean I want it broadcast around the school.

Better play safe. Better safe than sorry. Fuck it. I've never played safe in my life, and at 13 years of age it's a little late to start.

I run my finger tips over Eric's forehead. I flick back the thick damp hair. He sighs. He murmurs "Yeah." What I really wanted to do is lean over and kiss him on the forehead, but that would be pushing things too far, too quickly.

I ran my fingers across his cheeks. Down his throat. Across the top part of his chest.

He murmurs "Yeah." Not the most articulate of responses but it does for me.

I shifted my position so I'm squeezed alongside him. Actually I was perched on my left buttock, and if Eric shifted suddenly I'd fall on my arse. Ah well, what's life for if it's not for falling on your arse?

My fingers slid across his stomach. Wow, he had one of those six-packs. I wasn't sure what a six-pack was, but if it meant a strong, flat, muscly stomach, Eric had one, and I was fingering it. His belly button was an innie. I wondered what it would feel like to kiss it. Eric willing, I may get my chance today.

Fucking hell, the bulge at his crotch was... bulgier. In class. Eric would reach down and straighten it out. That duty seemed to be in my hands that day.

I said a silent prayer and faced the moment of truth. "It's now or never." Elvis was absolutely fucking spot on: it IS now or never, and I decided it's now.

I fingered the clasp on Eric's cricket flannels. I flicked the clasp open. I waited for the punch in the mouth. Nothing. I found the little zip and slowly, agonisingly slowly, edged it down. Down, down, down, until there was no more down. Using both hands, thumbs and index fingers, I spread his pants open, tugged his shirt flaps away, and there it was. No, there IT was, curled like a sleeping python under the 100% pure cotton Y-fronts.

The python was awake. It was stretching for the sun. I watched it elongate, then extended my fingertips to help turn it round to face due north. Shit, I knew it was BIG; I never suspected it was this big. It was long but it was also thick. It was genuinely ten inches long, and as thick as the span of any three of my fingers put together. Try that and you'll see what I mean. Suddenly the head poked out above the elastic. That's strong elastic: it takes a lot of poking to get past that. There, Mister Python, you found the sun at last.

I notice Eric had raised his bum off the bench. The penny dropped. There was a God after all. I reached over him and gently eased his underpants down to his knees, revealing... it was beautiful, it was truly beautiful. In size, shape, texture, colour, and... yes, sniff sniff... smell. It was truly beautiful. A thing of beauty may be a boy forever, but his erection was a thing of beauty right now. I reached and took hold of it, my fingers unable to meet around its girth. I began to gently jack him off. I wondered if he would let me do this— would he let me kiss it? I was desperate to kiss it.

"I'll cum if you do that," he whispered.

(I'm proud because I taught him that word—cum.)

So what? I wanted him to cum. I was desperate to make him, see him cum.

"It'll make a real mess when I cum."

(Pause)

"I don't want to make a mess of my shirt or my whites."

(Pause—then the penny clunks off the floor.)

Cum—mess—bless you, Eric, bless you.

I leaned forward and almost say “Ah”. I let three, four inches of Eric’s thick shaft slide into my mouth. I sucked him hard. I wanted to taste him as much as I can. See me. Feel me. Touch me. Suck me. Heal me. My mouth opened, my jaws stretched wide. I manipulated the base of his shaft, then gently jacked it as I sucked. Oh this is going to be wonderful.

“Oh, oh, oh...”

Eric’s bum jerked Straight off the bench. His cock was driven to the back of my throat. It was probably tickling my tonsils. And he was cumming! Squirt after squirt splatted against the back of my throat. I warn struggling, gagging, fighting to get it all over, to get it all down the back of my throat, and not onto Eric’s whites, and not into my eyes. Splurt, squirt, splat! Who would’ve thought the young man to have so much semen in him? And now in me.

I gagged, I coughed, my eyes streamed, but little hero that I am, I took it all, or almost all of it. A little escapes to my lips—a little sweet, a little bland, but it will do. It contained Eric’s babies, or at least his potential babies, or at least 50%, genetically speaking, of Eric’s babies. and millions of them were swimming in my tummy. I wondered if they got there yet. I wonder how surprised they felt when they looked around and found no door marked EGGS-IT, or even ARSE-IT. Actually, I thought all this later that night as I lay in bed and relived Eric’s first... I know the word—blow-job.

Eric was embarrassed now. He sat up, swung his legs round, pulled up his underpants, fastened his trousers, and then sat there looking at me. His eyes were a little glazed. He was blushing. I knew he wanted to tell me something. I couldn’t help because I didn’t know what it was he wanted to tell me.

He was pointing at me, at my face. Now it was me that’s blushing. Why didn’t he just come out with it?

“On your face, your lips.”

“What? What?!”

“Me,” he laughed.

I raised my finger to my lips. I fell it—a big gob of Eric. I couldn’t help laughing. I scooped it with my right index finger and slurped it into my mouth.

“There, happy now?” I asked.

“Yes, happy now,” he replied. “But I’m sorry.”

“Sorry for what?”

“You know. That ten-second thing. I’ll do better next time.” Next time!

My heart leaped.

“Hey,” said Eric, “it’s only ten past five. Want to come to my house for tea?”

“For tea?”

“Yes,” he laughed. “Just for tea. My brother’ll be there. You’ll like him. Come on.”

And off we went. No guilt, no shame, no remorse, no regrets, no recriminations. Just two boys, hungry, and wanting their tea.

Anyway, there’ll be a next time, so don’t be greedy.

I suppose my seduction of Eric would have moved faster if I hadn’t been so distracted by sex and by love.

Blame the sex on Alan.

It wasn’t that I had sex with Alan. I did but far less often than I might have anticipated after that first encounter. Two things made sex with Alan sporadic. First, I didn’t fancy him much and he fancied me even less. Don’t get me wrong. We liked each other, and, as far as boys are able, we probably loved each other. But we’d been together so long it was a bit like having sex with your brother.

I don’t know if nature makes a sort of taboo about that, but Alan and I’d been together for so long, since we were about four years old, nursery, junior school, now secondary school, that it just didn’t feel right. I can’t speak for Alan but I couldn’t get those images out of my mind: all those years when we were little kids, down on Braeland Ferry beach, making sandcastles, squealing and running when the water lapped over our sandals. I just couldn’t match that with the times we lay head-to-toe sucking each other off.

But Alan was... how can I put it? Alan was a voracious little predator who enjoyed sex simply because it was there, and, above all, he enjoyed having sex with boys who were or seemed to be unattainable. And since I’d spent most of my life going along with Alan, I went right along with that, too, and loved every inch of it.

Take Liam Marshall. And in the end we took Liam Marshall.

* * *

Liam was beautiful, ridiculously, absurdly beautiful. He was in our Year, the Third, he was tall, willowy, thick blond hair, blue blues, with the face of a China doll that somehow managed to be more boy than girl. He was sweet and kind, he was gentle and considerate, he was polite and helpful, he was... just about everything wholesome and good.

And Alan wanted him. So I wanted him.

It was the card school that did it.

Alan and I had always played cards. We usually played 21, vingt-et-un, but Alan also knew how to play poker. He taught me and we introduced the game as a lunch-time entertainment. We played for pennies, and we won a lot of

pennies. On a good day, we'd play for sixpences, and we won a lot of sixpences. When someone ran out of money, he could play with his lunch tickets. Lunch tickets were worth 12 pence or 1 shilling each, no mean sum in those days. Alan would advance the credit, win the lunch tickets, and then sell them back at half price. He didn't mind waiting a few days for the payment. Bruce Academy was a grammar school, and there was honour amongst boys. Better starve than be known as someone who reneged on their debts.

So Alan was a good player; he was also a cheat. Probably the most bare-faced cheat I've ever known. His deck of cards, actually he had three decks, were marked, professionally marked. Even when Alan showed me the markings, I couldn't find them again seconds later. But Alan could whiz through a deck calling out each card almost as fast as he could deal them; and he could deal them fast.

Liam lost his lunch tickets. In fact, he lost two weeks' worth of lunch tickets at one session. Liam Marshall was perfect but he was also a compulsive gambler. Worse than that, he couldn't afford to gamble. Liam's dad was dead, or at least gone. It wasn't done to ask personal questions. We'd met his mum. One look at her and you knew where Liam got his looks. She was all woman, and he was all boy.

So losing his lunch money was no joke for Liam. In fact, it was a disaster. No one would ever mention it, but Liam's blazer was second-hand, his grey flannels too short, his tie frayed, and he had two white shirts. You knew which was which by the ink splats.

"God, you are an idiot, Liam. I told you to stop playing when you lost this week's dinner tickets. It's only Monday. But you went on and on, and what happened? You've lost next week's as well." That was Alan—"commiserating".

We were standing in the toilets on the third floor, where no one went unless they had serious business to negotiate. I'd had Raymond suck me off a couple of times, four times to be exact, up there in the 'Gods' but the place was spooky. None of the classrooms on the third floor were used, and there were vague stories about a suicide, a murder, Mary Queen of Scots, and a headless horseman. I could never quite fathom what the hell a horseman, headless or otherwise, was doing on the top floor of a boys' grammar school, but History is full of weird stories and even weirder characters.

"Could you let me have...? I mean, you know I'll..."

Liam's big blue eyes brimmed with tears. I choked and felt like handing over my lunch tickets for the week. After all, my pockets were stuffed with them. Alan and I had already divided up the day's spoils.

"Well, I would," said Alan. "Remember I did try to get you to stop playing."

Yeh, Alan, right, Alan. Deal someone a hand with a straight run in it, and then try to persuade them to fold. I think not.

“And if it was only one week... well, I might... but two weeks. No, Liam, no can do. Everyone would think I was losing my touch. We’ve got to play by the rules, and stick by the rules. After all, we are Bruce boys.”

I turned away for a moment, blushing on behalf of Alan. “I understand that, Alan. Honestly I do. But I can’t go home. I can’t tell mum...” He choked, he couldn’t go on. A single teardrop hung from those thick eyelashes. I wanted to stick out my tongue and lick it away.

“Well, we could always trade, I suppose,” murmured Alan, making it sound like a concession dragged from the depths of his soul.

Hope springs eternal, and at that moment it sprang into the heart of young Liam Marshall.

“I’ve got some Dinky cars,” he said brightly. “I collect them, but you can have the best ones, the best three, no, four, if...”

“Liam, Liam...” Alan cut him off. “Do I look like the kind of man who collects Dinky cars?”

Man! Fucking man! I felt like kicking Alan Aitken’s arse.

“No, I don’t think you’ve got anything I really want except... naw, naw, forget it.”

You might as well tell a man dying of thirst not to bother about that mirage on the horizon.

“What? What?” asked Liam, not quite frantically, but not far from it.

“No, no, don’t even think about it. Just forget it.”

“What? What? Anything, Alan. Anything. Just name it.” Alan didn’t name it. He stepped forward and he felt it.

Liam stepped back. His eyes widened. He looked down at his crotch, probably expecting Alan’s hand to be still there. It was.

Liam looked at Alan, his face a study in perplexity.

Alan stood there smiling.

“I’ve heard about you,” Liam said.

“Oh, and what have you heard?” asked Alan.

“I—I—I’ve heard that you like, that you do...”

“What have you heard? What is it that I do?”

A couple of weeks before I’d seen the film ‘The Jungle Book’. There was a bit in it when the snake was trying to hypnotise the boy. “Trust in me... trust in me-e-e-e.” For the life of me, I couldn’t get that image out of my head.

“Look, Liam, I said to forget it. I’m not going to make you do anything you don’t want to do. I know you’d like it, but if you don’t want to, fine, let’s

just get downstairs. There's fifteen minutes to the bell. I've got time for another card school."

Liam stood there. Alan stood there. I stood there. Baby, baby, can't you hear our hearts beat?

"What would I have to do?" Liam's voice was tiny.

"You wouldn't have to do anything. We do everything. You stand there and enjoy it." Alan stepped forward and ran his fingers against the thin grey flannel. "All of them, Liam. You can have all of your lunch tickets back. Ten minutes, that's all."

As he spoke, Alan ran the back of his fingers up and down the front of Liam's crotch. Liam said nothing. He looked at me. He ran that little pink tongue of his across those pink lips. I shrugged my shoulders, gently. He turned and faced Alan. Alan kept eye-contact as he found Liam's zip and began to edge it downwards. He stepped forward. Liam stepped backwards into me. I put my arms round his waist. He smelled like freshly-baked bread. I wanted to kiss the nape of his neck. I touched my lips to the nape of his neck.

Alan kept his eyes on Liam's.

"Get his belt, Donny."

My hands round Liam's waist wandered and found the clip of his snake belt. I flicked it open. Alan had lowered his zip and was now edging the flaps of his school trousers apart. I could hear Liam's breathing. His head tilted back a bit. I knew where Alan's searching fingers were now. Then I heard a sigh. It turned out to be Liam's Y-fronts sliding to his knees.

"Hey, Liam, that's nice."

I looked down Liam's front. He was fully erect. His erection was hot and hard, and surprisingly brown against the pale ivory of his skin. His stiffy was about 4 inches long. Not in my league. Definitely not in Eric's, but he could give Alan a run for his money. I watched Alan's index finger and thumb make a circle as he pulled the foreskin back from the head of Liam's penis. I watched as Alan raised Liam's surprisingly floppy sac.

A little moan escaped from Liam's pink lips. Maybe I was the only one who heard it. Alan was working his hard-on, and I knew how expert Alan was with hard-ons. He could make me moan when he set his mind to it. Alan pulled the erection towards him, let it go, and the three of us watched it boing healthily back into an upright position. Three or four times Alan did that: boing, boing, boing.

I could feel Liam start to grind against me. The grinding gave me an erection. I wonder if he felt it pushing against his crack. I know what I wanted to do: drop my trousers, drop my underpants, and feel my naked skin against his.

Fit my hard up-standing penis into the beautiful crack and feel its warmth all around me.

Wait a minute.

I just read that last bit again. You see, I had to take a break to get my Latin homework done, and the break lasted two days. So now I've come back. I've read that last bit again, and it reads like... Porno!

And it's not meant to read like porno. This isn't meant to be pornography. It's just meant to be a record of what happened. I'm just telling it like it is and like it was.

It's true I'd like to be a writer some day, a full time writer, making my living out of writing. And it's true I'm trying to make sure there's some literary merit in my writing, especially in this writing, because it's definitely not meant to be pornography. I can't help it if other people find it exciting, or sexy, or erotic, or any of these things. For me it's a record of the way it was and the way we were, and I feel I've got to write it down before it all sort of disappears in the sands of time (that's a metaphor).

Anyway, it turned out Liam Marshall really enjoyed the experience in the third floor toilets. Alan got his sex, Liam got his lunch tickets back, and I got a real friend. It turned out Liam really liked me, but he was a bit shy, and he thought I was 'out of his league', so to speak. Dumb ass!

In fact, I think I ended up having more sex with Liam than Alan ever did because Alan was becoming more and more preoccupied with his MAN-friend, and men as friends were certainly out of my league. And anyway, I was in pursuit of Eric Murray, and I'd have got there a lot sooner if I hadn't... even now I'm a bit embarrassed admitting it—if I hadn't... **FALLEN IN LOVE.**

* * *

R. Leslie Morrison.

That was his name. That is his name. R. Leslie Morrison. The R Stands for Robert, but he uses Leslie as his first name. Why? I don't know. I've never asked him. Life is full of little mysteries. You can go around solving them, or pretending you've solved them, or just accept them. I just accept them.

R. Leslie Morrison.

A First Year, and I fell head-over-heels. Actually, Leslie was the one who nearly fell head-over-heels, literally, and I was there to catch him as he fell.

Friday, 3.30, the end of school, and the end of the school week. For some reason, lost in the mists of time, I had to go down to the City Centre. I guess I was on an errand for Mum, otherwise I'd never dream of going into the city centre during the week because that meant taking a second bus home. But that

day I went into the City Centre, diving on for what to me was the ‘wrong’ school bus, going in the ‘wrong’ direction.

As ever the school buses were packed, riotous and uproarious. I usually had no difficulty scrambling onto the bus and parking my cute backside onto the lap of whatever 6th Year would have me, and quite a few would. We’d sit there as the bus trudged its way up Carnegie Avenue, me grinding my bottom into the older boy’s lap, feeling him harden beneath me. God, what a little tart I was. But it was all in good fun, and, no, I would not get off the bus early and let a Sixth Former walk me across the Balmore Park. I valued what little was left of my virginity.

But the City Centre bus was alien territory, and I ended up in a pack of younger boys crammed onto the platform. I was just thinking “Fuck this for a month of Sundays”, when I raised my head and found myself looking into a pair of impossibly beautiful eyes—grey, fringed with heavy lashes. B-ring, b-ring went the strings of my heart. That was the sound of the departure bell but to me...

I let my gaze scan the face that held those beautiful eyes. It couldn’t possibly live up to them. But it did and more. The clear skin, the cheekbones, the straight little nose, not too little, the clearly defined but not too full lips, the small ears, the freckles across the bridge of the nose, the longish neck, the fringe of ash brown hair cut straight across the clear forehead. The little teeth with the tiny gap in the middle. I lowered my gaze to take in the broad shoulders, the slim torso that slid hipless into the school trousers.

The bus jolted along, and I was happily thrown into the bearer of those beautiful eyes. The platform was packed, dangerously packed, we couldn’t have separated if we’d wanted to. I mumbled ‘sorry’ and realised I was apologising to a First Year—unheard of! I knew it was a First Year because we all wore ties to signify the Year we were in. This was a First Year—tall, elegant, beautiful, but nevertheless, a First Year; and I was a member of the mightily-feared bunch of nutters in the Third.

“It’s okay. It’s always like this.”

The Vision spoke. The Vision could speak. And the Vision was speaking to me.

“Is it?” I managed to reply. “I usually take the Hilltown bus.”

There it was: Hilltown. The most insalubrious sector of our fair metropolis, and I’d just admitted to coming from there.

“I know,” he said.

It took a few moments for the reply to sink in. It took a few moments for anything to sink in. With each jolt, I was thrown into contact with this

mysterious First Year sprog and you know what the ‘nearness of you’ does to the brain—scrambled eggs.

“How do you know that?”

“I watch you play tennis.”

Full alert. Full alert. Note the use of the present tense: watch, not watched. Not the past tense signalling a single fortuitous occasion, but the present tense signalling a delightful continuity.

“You ‘watch’ me.”

The boy blushed. Not much. Just enough to make him glow. Just enough to make me want to reach forward, pop out my tongue, and...

“On Tuesdays. When the Lower school does sports together. I mean, we don’t get to play with you...” (Play with me! Play with me!) “...but we’re all at Magdalen Road together. I love tennis. My mum teaches me.” The last was offered as justification for watching me. Fair enough. “You’re very good.”

“Thanks...” It was my turn to pink up a little. “Hey, this isn’t fair. You know my name, but I don’t know yours.” I’d jumped the gun a little because he hadn’t said he knew my name.

“It’s Leslie,” he said. “It’s Leslie Morrison. Actually, it’s R. Leslie Morrison.”

“Leslie?” I couldn’t keep the note of surprise out my voice. I knew the name ‘Leslie’ existed, but (a) I thought it was a girl’s name, and (b) I’d never in my life met anyone called ‘Leslie’, and (c) I knew it was a helluva posh name.

Leslie was akin to Eric; wrong side of the tracks for me.

The conversation didn’t happen in a vacuum. The bus continued to bounce along the cobblestones of the Perth Road; boys were hurtled against each other like marbles in a sardine can; boys jumped off without paying; the conductor hurled abuse at them; and Leslie and I held onto each other, laughing between exchanges as if we did this every day.

The bus swung into the City Centre as if the driver was desperate to disgorge each and every passenger.

“My stop,” said Leslie.

“Mine, too,” I lied.

Not a huge lie. This was only one-stop early. I wasn’t THAT desperate. But I was curious to see what Leslie did next. He jumped down from the platform; I jumped after him. He swung his school bag over his shoulder; I had none to swing. I’d dumped mine in the school. If you were still carrying a bag in Third Year, you were a fucking nonentity. Bags indicated willingness, and the Third Year were rarely willing about anything other than avoiding work and having a good time.

We strolled along the High Street. Only about 500 yards. Leslie stopped.

“I live here.”

Live where? There was nowhere to live. This was smack in the middle of the City Centre. Nobody but nobody lived ‘here’.

“Here,” he said, pointing at the Bank of Royal Scotland.

“The fucking Bank of fucking Royal Scotland?”

“Not ‘in’ it. Above it. Up there.”

Leslie pointed to the top storey of the eight-storey building.

“We’ve got a place up there.” Pause. “My mum and my little brother and me.”

What is it about me? Why do I keep falling in love with people who have no dads, or only a dad, or an absent dad. Maybe it’s because I never had a father myself. Hold on, I’m not claiming Immaculate Conception; I know who the fuck my dad was; or at least I take my mother’s word for it. I refrained from asking where, if anywhere, Leslie’s father was, but, to tell the truth, I hadn’t the slightest interest. It was Leslie I loved, not his mother, father, or little brother — him!

Loved?

I don’t know. Is there such a thing as love-at-first-sight? All I knew right from the start was I wanted to spend time with Leslie. I enjoyed his Company. I loved his smile, I drowned in his eyes. I...

“I’d better be going.”

Was that a note of reluctance in his voice?

I should be so lucky.

“Oh, yeh, sure. See you again,” I said, and he was gone, skipping up the marble steps of a door at the side of the bank. He turned, waved and was gone.

I strolled across the High Street towards the bus stance where I’d find the bus to take me the long way home. The afternoon sky was blue, the sparrows were twittering, the diesel fumes were Coty L’Aimant, my mother’s favourite perfume. I sat upstairs and watched the world go by in rainbows of many colours. I worked out the hours and minutes till I’d have the chance to see Leslie again—a long long wait till Monday but I had his image engraved on my heart, and all I had to do was turn my gaze inwards to see him.

Where was Eric in all this?

I don’t know.

On Monday when I got to school—late—Eric squeezed up against me during Period 2. “Tell me about the weekend. Touch me.”

Funny thing was I didn’t want to. Well, I did and I didn’t. I certainly didn’t want to use my imagination to conjure up erotic images. I’d no need of them. I had R. Leslie Morrison. Well, I would have after school when I planned once again to take the double trip home.

I sat there stroking Eric's thigh in a desultory fashion. I glanced at his crotch. He had a BIG one, an erection fit to break a plate, but try as I might, I couldn't muster much enthusiasm.

"What's wrong?"

"What?" I whispered back.

"What's up? What's wrong with you?"

"Nothing. Just thinking, that's all."

"For fuck's sake, you get me all worked up, and then you sit there doing nothing about it." The note of exasperation in Eric's voice broke into my reverie.

"Well... mmm... well... our cat, it's my cat, it got run over at the weekend. We buried it in the back yard."

"Your cat? Your fucking cat!"

"Yes, our cat. Her name is—was Lucky. I'll tell you about her if you want."

Even to myself I sounded idiotic.

"No, forget it. Hey," Eric went on, as if were an afterthought, "what about coming up to the Sports Ground after school? A bit of cricket, a bit of tennis, a bit of..." Eric grinned. "You know a bit of..."

"Sorry, no can do. Got to go into town. Doing something for Mum. Maybe on Wednesday."

Maybe on Wednesday. That was to Eric Murray, the No.1 pin-up, heart-throb, dick-throb in the entire school, and there I was saying I'd help him out on Wednesday—maybe. I felt his cock deflate beneath my fingertips. I gave it a couple of strokes for luck, but my heart wasn't in it, and I think Eric knew it.

Funny thing was, he put his arm round my shoulder, in open class, and gave me a squeeze. Then he whispered, "Your cat really was Lucky—to have you." For a moment I wondered what I'd call Lucky if Eric ever got round to visiting out house. I decided on Blackie, but I knew Lucky would ignore the name with disdain. I sighed and dreamed on. Emil and His Detectives were on the bus, and the bus metamorphosed into our school bus, and Emil was Leslie, and I was the naughty man, and Emil/Leslie was in hot pursuit of him/me.

I should be so lucky.

The day wandered aimlessly on, 3.30 an ever-receding mirage, but at last the bell went and we were all charging up the ramp and out of school. I headed for the wrong bus again and leapt on at a single bound. My eyes swept the seats and the aisle—no Leslie, no fucking Leslie! Maybe upstairs! I bounded upstairs: no luck. No luck and no Leslie—shit and damnation. And the bus was moving off. I bounded downstairs.

The bus was moving off—and there was Leslie, running helter-skelter for the bus. Shit, the bus was gathering speed. I stood on the packed platform. I tried to reach the bell, impossible through the wedge of bodies, and still Leslie was running, tie askew, blazer open and flapping, leather bag bouncing off his back. He'd never make it.

But he tried. And he did—almost.

His left hand grabbed the upright rail and held on. But the bus was moving fast now, so fast that Leslie was lifted right off his feet, and his legs went up into the air. He couldn't hold on for long, but if he let go, he'd go crashing into the road where other buses were barrelling along behind us. I grabbed his wrist with both hands, jammed my right foot against the bottom of the rail, and held on. I'd hold on forever if I had to. I didn't have to hold on forever, it only felt like it. I held on for around 500 yards until the bus reached its first stop. It slowed down. Leslie found his feet, ran along behind the bus, and jumped aboard just before it stopped.

He was grinning at me. The fucking idiot was grinning at me.

"What the fuck are you grinning for, you idiot?" I shouted at him.

He didn't reply. He couldn't. He hung on to me, gasping for breath. "You could have caught the second bus," I stormed.

He held on to me and grinned. Finally I got some kind of explanation.

"I know," he said. "I know."

"Well why the fuck didn't you?"

"Because... because..." He got enough air in his lungs to get it out.

"Because YOU weren't on the second bus. You were on THIS bus."

The funny thing was—have you noticed there's a lot of funny things in my life? It's probably much the same in your life, in everybody's life... The funny thing was that all of this was said at the top of my voice and with what was left of his while we were surrounded by other boys on the platform of the city-bound bus, and it didn't matter at all. The only thing that mattered was he'd made it, I'd made it, we'd made it together.

By the time we got to Leslie's stop, arrangements were finalised. Tennis, together, next Saturday morning. We could've managed Wednesday but I wouldn't do that to Eric.

We stopped outside Leslie's door, that weird entrance into the flat above the Bank.

"I'd say come up but..."

"It's okay," I interrupted not sure I could face any kind of rejection. Did Leslie read my face?

“But I’ve got to go and collect my little brother from school. Mum works in the bank till half past four. Come in and say ‘hello’. She’ll like you... I do,” he added with a grin.

It was my turn to decline the invitation, but in my case it was fear —fear that Mrs Morrison would take one look at my face and know instantly that I was in love with her son.

“Thanks, but I’ve got to...” My pause gave Leslie his chance.

“You’ve got to come and collect my brother with me. Only if you’ve got time. Only if you want to.”

We strolled down Union Street towards the harbour. We didn’t say much. We didn’t need to. At one point we caught each other’s eye and burst into laughter.

Leslie’s little brother was as cute as a button. It was difficult to leave them, but I’d be an hour late home at least, and questions would be asked. Not that my mum didn’t trust me; she just liked to know where her kids were. Good parents do, don’t they?

* * *

On Wednesday afternoon, after school, after cricket, after tennis, in the showers Eric sucks my cock.

Put that way it sounds brief, perfunctory, a matter of routine, but it’s anything but that. I make no move towards Eric though I have to admire that hose swinging between his legs. But in the showers he puts those strong arms round me, pulls me into him, chest to chest, groin to groin, trembling knees to trembling knees. Then he drops to those trembling knees and takes me in his mouth.

I know this isn’t easy for Eric. I know what a commitment this is. Eric, the man-boy of our Year, is on his knees sucking my erection, sliding the skin all the way back from the head, running the head against his lips, his cheeks, then taking me deep again. I can’t help it. I’m pumping my hips against his face, my hands are pulling his face into me, I see him squatting on those muscled legs, his cricketer’s arse, muscly and solid.

I try to warn him.

“Eric, I’m gonna, I gonna,” but he only pulls me in tighter—and I’m gone.

I’m spurting and squirting into him. My hips are bouncing uncontrollably. I feel his lips flatten my pubic hair. I try to draw back, but he won’t let me go. It’s over now, sensitive, too sensitive, but still he holds, still he pulls me in.

“Eric, for fuck’s sake. Le’go.”

And those big dream eyes are gazing up at me. He looks dazed. His lips are puffy. He is Adonis, he is the young Alexander, the splendid Achilles, and he is on his knees before me, me, his little lover.

“It’s my turn. Let me.”

And we’re sitting on the warm wet floor of the shower room, face to face, legs splayed so I can enter him, and his erection is like a small tree trunk, and I’m holding it with both hands, my fingers and thumbs meeting round its girth. I want to suck it, but I want to see it more. I want to see Eric cum; I want to see the semen shooting from this hot column of flesh; I want to look into his eyes; I want him looking into my eyes, as he spurts and squirts across my chest, my belly, my already-erect-again cock.

And that’s how it happens. Not ten seconds. But certainly not ten minutes. And Eric shudders and shakes as I work the shaft. Then leans back on both hands to watch himself erupt over me. And I go with my instincts. I catch some up with my middle finger and bring it to my mouth. Lick it, suck it, take it all in, then lean forward so that Eric can share himself with me again.

Then we laugh. He hauls me to my feet. And we shower again in the last of the warm water, the last of the soap suds, the last moments of another first time.

And we wander across the fields to Eric’s home. And I have tea with Eric, and his brother David, and his Dad who is early home from work. And it’s so unusual for me to be in the company of other boys and men; my own life is full of women. Dad and David like me. I’m sparkling. I’m funny but a little serious at the same time. Exaggeration comes easy to me. I’m not a liar but I’m a storyteller, and that’s highly-prized in Scotland.

As I go, Mr Murray ruffles my hair and says, “You’re welcome any time, son, any time,” and I go home to face the music as glowing as the rosy sinking sun.

Life would have been so simple if it’d been Eric and only Eric. But that night I jerked off to images of Eric, then fell asleep with Leslie’s name on my lips.

* * *

Saturday morning and Leslie sent another forehand whistling past me.

Cheeky bugger!

This will not stand.

I pepper his backhand. I assault his backhand. No matter what he hits to me, I get it back on his backhand, his weaker side. Bravely he stands up to the pressure for all of fifteen minutes, and that’s a long time, but then I force him wide on the backhand and then slice wide to his forehand.

“Get that, you little fucker,” I whisper to myself.

None of this is personal, but nobody belts forehands past me with impunity—not if they have a weakness I can exploit they don’t. I’m clinical, vicious and relentless, and when my point has been proved, I call him to the net.

“Hey, you’re not bad at all,” I grin, “but we’ve got to do something about that backhand. Where’d you get it?”

Leslie, still panting a little, confesses he’d inherited it from his mother who’d taught him for a couple of years. Prepare to be disinherited.

“Right,” I said, “for the next half hour, I’m putting every shot into your backhand. Not away from your backhand, ‘on to’ your backhand. They’ll be easy to get, but it’s pointless to get them unless you get them right. We’ll start with sliced returns, they’re the easy ones. Next week we’ll get onto topspin returns, they’re far more difficult to learn, but if you haven’t got a decent topspin, you’re fucked, technically speaking.”

We both laugh and get on with it. Leslie picks things up quickly. I put myself into a training trance and the kind of rhythm that turns you into a metronome. Feet in place, racket back early, follow through. Easy—not. At least not until you’ve done it a million times and you don’t think about it any more.

You may be wondering, or you may not, how a little shit from the wrong side of town ended up a decent tennis player. It was the wall what done it. The factory wall on one of the many factories on the Industrial Estate that ran just behind the council estate where we lived. I found a wall with a long white stripe about 5 feet high, got my auntie’s wooden racket, and stood there, sometimes for three hours at a time, banging my one and only tennis ball back and forwards off the wall. I don’t know if there’s any such thing as a ‘natural’ at a sport, but hitting the ball against the wall seemed to be just what I should be doing. The fact that it got me out of cricket was a bonus I never anticipated.

It’s Leslie who gives in first.

“Hey, Donny, can we have a break? I’m knackered.”

I tut.

The word ‘knackered’ is out of bounds in my family. I’m not sure why, but it is further beyond the pale than ‘fucked’ or ‘fucking’.

“No breaks,” I call. “That’s it for now. You’re okay. You can play—a bit,” I tell Leslie who beams.

“What now then?” he asks.

“Let’s get changed and wander down the avenue. What about a milkshake at Delanzo’s?” Delanzo’s milkshakes are an extension of his Italian ice-cream, the best in the world.

In the pavilion we strip off, fold our tennis whites and stick them in our tennis bags, school bags actually.

Like me, Leslie is naked but for his underwear and tennis socks. I wear baggy Y-fronts; Leslie wears a tight cotton slip. God, he is slim, not skinny, just slim, and his chest is fuller and deeper than you might expect, his shoulders are butterfly wings, his tummy absolutely flat, his skin ivory pale, his nipples are surprisingly brown, like brown ten pence pieces. His cotton slip shows the outline of his penis, not erect, surely not erect, but pushed up vertically against his pubic bone, his balls are like encased ping pong balls beneath.

I can hear his breathing. I see his damp hair strung across his forehead, I step forward and with my left hand push the hair from his eyes. I know I can reach down with my right hand and run my finger tip the length of his penis. I know he will harden quickly. He is blushing now but he doesn't step back. We stand there looking at each other. He reaches out to me and runs his fingers through the thick dark curly hair on my head. He waits. I wait. The world waits breathlessly.

"You're hot," I hear myself say. "The quicker we get those milkshakes the better... and get your jeans on. Anybody'd think you have a hard-on."

"Well, you do," he smiles back.

I look down and find I have!

Whoops!

"Come on, we both need that milkshake," I laugh.

Chapter 2

You've probably noticed by now that I'm a little weird. Don't worry. You won't offend me if you think that. I realised I'm a little weird a long time ago.

For example, guess who my hero is? No, it's not a sportsman nor an astronaut, nor even a fucking train driver. I've never wanted to be a train driver. I can't imagine any boy in his right mind wanting to be a train driver. I wouldn't have minded being William Wallace or even Robert the Bruce at a push, but they're not really 'heroes' of mine.

No, my hero is none other than Robert Louis Stevenson—R.L. Stevenson, author of 'Kidnapped' and 'Treasure Island' and other novels that set my heart racing. "Ahhhhrrr, Jim lad, drop them breeches, and see how I like 'ee."

It wasn't only R.L.'s novels that set me on fire, it was his life. How he stood up to his father and refused to become a lawyer or an engineer; he had decided to become a writer and nothing was going to stand in his way, not ill health, not poverty, not being disowned, nothing. How he crept around the dark streets of Edinburgh Old Town having sex with whomever he pleased. How, half dead with consumption, he crossed America by train to be with the person he loved even if that person was forbidden to him. How he bought a boat and, taking all the people he loved, including his mum, sailed the Pacific until he settled on Samoa, fought for its people, wrote more brilliant novels, and then one day fell down dead—just like that. The sailor home from the sea, the hunter home from the hill. (That's on Robert Louis Stevenson's tomb stone, you know.)

That was the life for me.

My favourite R.L.S. wasn't the boys' adventure novels but the long short story he called Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. The story of a man with a split personality. No, not that. Really it was two men with completely different personalities sharing the same body.

That's what I was turning into: a Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, though I don't think my nasty side was really nasty, but two me's there definitely were. I'm not talking about the two boys that made up me: the boy who sat happily at home, head over his Latin homework, construing one daft sentence after the other; and the boy who stood in the junior toilets shuddering as he emptied his balls into Raymond's willing throat. No, no. There was nothing exceptional in that. Most boys are two boys: the boy for home consumption, and the boy out in the streets with his mates.

My personality was split between Eric Murray and R. Leslie Morrison. With each of them, I was a different person, I led a different life. And fragments of both were reserved for my adventures with Alan Aitken: who would we go

after this time? whose underpants demanded to be dragged to his ankles? who needed our semen on his lips, our hard dicks wedged between his buttocks? All this, and the summer exams coming up, too.

It's strange but the further I drifted away from Eric, the harder he pursued me. And not just for the sex. I ended up having tea at the Murrays regularly after every Wednesday practice, and then on every Saturday afternoon after I'd sat and watched Eric cracking a cricket ball round Magdalen Road, taking 'Man of the Match' more often than not.

My Saturday mornings were taken up by my own matches, tennis. Leslie got into the habit of turning up for these matches. He was completely accepted by the Under-15s because it was obvious he could be a heck of a player if he ever got his backhand grooved, and it fell to me to groove his backhand. After every match, we'd catch the bus to the city centre, to Leslie's home, where his mum fed us salad and chips and Coke. I always felt a bit rotten not being able to spend the afternoon with Leslie and/or his family, but it was tacitly accepted that a First Year couldn't sit and watch U-15 cricket matches without having a damned good reason. Being with me couldn't supply that reason. Leslie also had a couple of hours' tennis practice with me every Tuesday after school.

It wasn't too difficult to juggle these commitments. What was difficult was to move from the affection and lust I had for Eric to the love, and, yes, lust, I felt for Leslie.

Wow, this has got awfully serious, and it wasn't like that at all. It was just so damned busy, and so damned exhausting. I hardly ever tossed myself off before going to sleep; my head hit the pillow and I was dead to the world—the dreamless sleep of the damned, the damned lucky.

And there was an added complication.

Alan's MAN-friend wanted to 'meet' me. I wasn't entirely sure what 'meeting' the MAN would involve, but knowing Alan, it would be scary, thrillingly scary.

There were very few men in my life. My dad had mysteriously disappeared before I knew him, and his disappearance was not a question we could broach with Mum. She had her private life; we had ours. Whole areas were off-limits to both sides. To tell the truth, I was quite scared of men, terrified, whether it was the postman, milkman, or a policeman come to report our mischievous behaviour, or even the rentman, I'd vanish into the bedroom until the intruder disappeared. It took me some time to get used to Mr Murray putting his hand on my shoulder or ruffling my hair though to be strictly honest there was something arousing about the touch or scent of a man. But to actually meet a man who saw a boy as desirable was something different.

I avoided Alan's invitations. I hemmed and hawed, found excuses, invented excuses, and for the first time in all our years together simply lied to Alan. It didn't work, of course. In the end Alan simply tricked me into the encounter.

Like many of my friends, I was obsessed by snooker. There were three snooker halls within fifteen minutes' walking distance of the school, and you could find up to two dozen Bruce boys frequenting these 'dens of iniquity' during the last period on any day of the week. Bruce Academy was strict about some things—"don't piss on the toilet seats"—and remarkably lax about others—Period 6 registration. During Period 6 each day, we were in tutor groups; half the time the tutor didn't turn up, and half the time half the boys didn't turn up; the trick was to synchronise both halves!

I was addicted to snooker, but I didn't have much chance to play because of my commitments to Leslie, Eric, to tennis and to my school work. I wasn't a 'swot'; I'd always been at the top or near the top in my classes but I wasn't a know-it-all and I wasn't about to sacrifice that. So when Alan suggested we skip Friday Period 6 and start the weekend early by playing snooker at his home, I didn't think twice.

David Mudie, or Dave, was already there. I didn't need an introduction. We got into Alan's house—his mum was at Auntie May's—dumped our stuff in the lounge (we had a living room; the Aitkens had a lounge) and raced each other for the bedroom.

The first I saw of Dave was his arse bent over the snooker table. I didn't recognise him at once, not yet being on speaking terms with his arse, but as soon as he turned round I knew—it was him, David, Dave, the man Alan claimed he loved and who loved him.

"Donny meet Dave. Dave meet Donny."

Dave beamed and his smile lit up the room. Alan hadn't lied. The man was seriously handsome. Somewhere between 20 and 30. I'm no good at ages. Tallish and well-builtish. Shaggy brown hair, needing a trim. Strong eyebrows, a favourite of mine. Brown eyes that smiled. Hell, I know eyes can't smile, but they can add to a smile. A generous mouth with little laughter lines. Five o'clock shadow even though it was only 10 to 3. White socks, light denim jeans and a Celtic football shirt—at least he wasn't a blue-nosed Glasgow Rangers' supporter.

He stretched out his hand to me. Automatically, I raised mine. Bruce Academy is strict about etiquette. He took my hand. His grip was strong but not oppressive. His skin was warm and dry. Mine was damp.

"Hi, Donny. Nice to meet you at last. Alan's told me lots about you. He wasn't fibbing."

I tried for nonchalance but it came out as a squeaked “Same to you,” though that didn’t make much sense.

“Here,” said Dave, “have my cue. You two have a game. I’ll just lie back and watch you. Just get yourselves warmed up.” An alarm bell went off in my head. What the hell were we warming up for? Dave took a few steps and let himself fall backwards onto the bed. “If you need any help,” he added, “just whistle. You know how to whistle, don’t you. Just put your lips together, and... blow.”

Alan smirked at me. “That’s what Dave calls a blow-job.” I must have looked nonplussed because Alan frowned and added, “I’ll explain later, dummy.” He kicked off his school shoes and booted them into a corner; I followed suit. The carpet pile was thick below our feet.

We’d been playing for about ten minutes and I was just finding rhythm and concentration when Alan called: “Show me how to play left-handed again, Dave?”

Dave swung himself from the bed. I admired how fluid his movement was, and wondered for a moment if he played tennis. He stood behind Alan who leant on the left side of the snooker table holding the cue awkwardly. Dave slipped one arm round Alan’s waist, the other arm helped steady and sight the cue. His face was very close to Alan’s and I couldn’t help feel a twinge of jealousy. The boy half-turned and smiled at the man; the man returned the smile, leaned forward and kissed the boy gently on the lips. My treacherous penis twitched into life.

I knew Dave was murmuring in Alan’s ear. I couldn’t make out what he was saying. Then I saw his hand move inside the boy’s white school shirt and I knew he was stroking my friend’s chest and tummy. I saw Alan’s eyes close in slow delight and guessed Dave was concentrating on his nipples; Alan’s nipples were ultra-sensitive; we had a standing joke you could get anything from Alan as long as you stroked his nipples. I watched Dave’s free hand slip lower, then heard a familiar click, the click of a ‘snake’ belt snapping open, followed by the long slow sigh of Alan’s zip being lowered. Dave pressed against Alan from behind. and I saw the bulge at the front of his jeans press into the crack of Alan’s buttocks. Surreptitiously, I hoped, I worked my lengthening penis from the horizontal to the vertical.

“Fuck snooker,” I heard Alan whisper.

Alan took small steps backwards, moving Dave backwards with him. As the boy moved, his grey school flannels slid down to his knees, then down to his ankles. He giggled as they backed towards the bed. The sight was comical and erotic. I wondered if they remembered I was in the room. I pretended to concentrate on the snooker but worked the white to the other side of the table so

that the bed was in my line of sight. I watched man and boy tumble backwards onto the double bed.

“Hey, Donny. Come and join us if you get bored with the snooker.” That was Dave.

“Fuck the snooker,” added Alan. “Come on, Donny. This is a lot more fun.”

I mumbled something about needing to practise and bent my head over the table. I could still see what was going on—a wrestling match, boy giggling, man laughing, as they wrestled each other’s clothes off until both only wore underpants. Both wore slips, both had obvious erections.

Although Dave was quite young, he really was a man. His shoulders were broad, his chest deep, his nipples intimidatingly big, and he had hair on his chest. Not lots of it, but there was fine black hair, and just below his belly button a thin line of dark hair widened into a delta that fanned out below his underwear. And he had hair on his balls, his big balls. I hadn’t seen them yet but I knew from the dark hair on his legs, and the dark hairs sticking out from the bottom of his slip that he had really hairy balls. I’d never seen hairy balls. Some of the older boys at school, the Sixth Formers, had hair on their chests but I’d never noticed hairy balls, possibly because I hadn’t observed that closely. Dave raised his hands and entwined them behind his head. Hairy armpits! Seriously hairy armpits. A man’s armpits. I’d noticed a few hairs in Eric’s armpits; actually I’d licked them a few times. I knew there were dark shadows in my own armpits, but nothing like Dave’s. Nothing like the thick forests of hair that hung glossily down in each armpit.

Alan looked pale and vulnerable against the strength of the man. He looked much younger than his 13 years. He reminded me of when we were 11 and just beginning secondary school. He lay there, stretching along Dave’s body, chest to chest, so that he could reach up and exchange kisses and nibbles. I watched as he chewed at Dave’s lips, actually chewed on them, then slid his face down to the man’s chest. I saw his pink lips close round the brown nub of Dave’s right nipple and chew on it. He looked for all the world like an overgrown infant suckling at his father’s breast.

I watched Dave’s hands slide down Alan’s back, under his slip, then wriggle the underwear over and down my friend’s buttocks until they were palely and innocently exposed. Dave caught my eye. I blushed and looked studiously down at the snooker table, but I couldn’t keep my eyes down; I had to look, watch, observe, and, I admit it, lick my lips.

Alan’s underwear was down at his knees. Dave caught my eye again, and this time he held me. He smiled and patted the side of the bed. I laid the cue against the table and moved to the bed. I sat down. I don’t think Alan knew I

was there. I could hear the sounds he was making, wet, smacking, gurgly sounds. My eyes moved to Dave's hands and my friend's buttocks. Using his big hands, Dave gently prised Alan's buttocks apart, then just as gently pressed them together again. He continued doing this—apart, closed, apart, closed, apart, closed... As he opened the boy's buttocks, his middle fingers slid closer and closer to the little pinky brown button at the centre until the tips of his fingers met right over the hole. It was very warm in the bedroom. The skin of Alan's buttocks was damp with sweat; his little hole looked moist.

I watched as Dave held the boy's buttocks open and let his right middle finger tip move backwards and forwards over Alan's hole. I heard Alan sigh and watched his arse push up towards the invader. With a shock I realised this wasn't the first time for Alan, that he and Dave had done this lots of times before, and that it must feel good. I'd resisted Alan's assaults on my own most intimate place because all the old taboos were still in place. Now I was fascinated by my friend's little brown pucker, the little pink rose at the centre of his being. This spot was as much a part of him as any other part, and as such it deserved to be loved just as much as any other part. The frown on my face was one of concentration, not one of disapproval.

Alan's little ring of muscle, the sphincter, seemed to surrender all at once, much as I surrendered my own prejudice. Dave's finger slid in to the first knuckle. Gently he began finger-fucking my best friend. I'd seen my brother's mate John finger-fucking Marie O'Doherty. I knew what Dave was doing. Surely he wasn't going to play stinky finger with Alan. Looking up, I realised Dave was gazing at me. I blushed furiously. He smiled in response, looked down at his handwork, looked up at me again, and nodded. I knew it was an invitation. Well, fuck it, Alan was my friend, too. Tentatively, I reached a hand and felt Alan's arse; it was smooth, satiny, warm, and rounded. almost like Marie O'Doherty's breasts. My brother let me cop a feel of them when he was in a particularly generous mood.

My fingers were drawn inwards, but I snatched them away when they came into contact with Dave's hands. He said nothing, only smiled. Slowly I returned my hand and fingers until they lay the length of Dave's, my middle finger resting on his, the tip touching Alan's back door. Dave pulled his finger upwards. I winced but Alan only grunted. I saw the little space that had been created for me. Everything seemed dreamy, out of kilter, unreal. I slid my finger forwards and watched the tip slide into my friend's arse; bolder I pushed forward and was surprised when my finger, much slimmer, of course, than Dave's slid all the way in. It was an incredible sight. Dave's big man-finger and my slim boy-finger sliding in and out together of Alan Aitken's arse.

I shifted a little on the bed, trying to get more comfortable. Dave looked at my crotch and smiled, and nodded. I took this for approval. I unzipped and hauled my aching cock into the open; it was stiff and hard, the foreskin already retracted, the head already slimy with pre-cum. Dave whistled; I took that as approval, too. I played with myself for a bit but couldn't resist beginning a steady wanking rhythm. It was stunningly erotic: Alan's pale, slim, boy's body, his buttocks high and curved, stretched along Dave's much stronger, darker man's body. Dave's middle finger, my middle finger aligned together stroking in and out of Alan's anus, the sphincter gripping tightly like a little hungry mouth. My trousers and underpants at my knees, my erection gripped by the fingers and thumb of my right hand, throbbing over my best friend's bare bottom.

It was too much. I tried to hold back, believe me, I tried. Then it happened. The squirts, the spurts, the semen spitting onto Alan's backside. I didn't try to avoid it; in fact, I pulled my shaft down and directed the semen onto Alan's hole, onto my fingers, onto Dave's fingers. Four, five, six spurts splattered into the valley between my friend's buttocks.

I was mortified, ashamed. My desire and my cock collapsed almost immediately. One moment I was on fire, the next all I wanted to do was get out of that room. The smell of sex was over-powering. I pulled up my underpants, scrambled from the bed, pulled up my trousers, zipped myself up, and couldn't find my shoes. Where the fuck had I kicked them?

"They're under the bed."

Who the fuck was that?

"Donny. Your shoes are under the bed."

It was Dave. I didn't look at him. I dropped to my knees and peered under the bed. Yes, they were there! I grabbed them and hauled one on. It didn't fit. Shit, it must be Alan's. No. Alan's were over there. I realised I was cramming my right foot into my left shoe. Fuck it. I got my right shoe on my right foot, my left shoe on my left foot. I headed for the door.

I couldn't resist turning for a last look.

Alan had moved down Dave's body. Dave's underwear was round his ankles. Alan was holding Dave's stiff cock straight up. God, the man was big, big and hairy and brutal—and yes, yes, beautiful. His balls were huge; at least huge by any standard I knew. And, yes, they were big hairy balls. Alan was kissing, caressing, wanking the top half of Dave's shaft. Dave was sat up against the headboard, hands clasped behind his head, eyes closed.

"Hey. Donny, don't go," said Alan. "Dave's not going to hurt me. And I want it 'cos I LIKE it!"

“Sorry, got to go,” I called in what I thought was my most manly, my most assured voice though it probably leapt an octave. “Mum’s expecting me.”

“You don’t have to go, you know.” That was Dave’s voice. His eyes were open. He was smiling at me: his smiles felt like pats on the head.

“Come on, baby, please don’t go.”

This baby went.

* * *

“Come on, baby, please don’t go.”

Those words took me back, and they took me back to a place I didn’t want to go. To a place I didn’t want to tell you about. Because it was a place that scared me. It’s a place that still scares me.

It’s the place where I learned that men could want boys, and boys could want men. And that was the bright light at the end of the tunnel. And I was afraid of entering that tunnel, afraid of not entering that tunnel, afraid one day I’d be the bright light deep in the dark of the tunnel.

It was two summers ago. Two lifetimes ago. Come with me now. I’ll take you there. Maybe you’ve already been there, and maybe you’ve never been able to get home.

Chapter 3

Nicky and I walked out onto the lawn, side by side, but hardly together. He sat down in one of the Swings. I sat on the other. He looked back at the big house. I looked back too and saw the two women talking in the sitting room, or rather, Nicky's mother talking my mother listening. I wondered if Mrs Timuri was giving instructions. I felt uneasy about my mother taking another woman's orders but I'd already accepted this was the way it was going to be during my eleventh summer.

I tried to read their lips, my mother's thin and pale, Mrs Timuri's perfectly outlined in a washed-out pink. If I'd known the word sensual, I might've used it. Even without knowing it, I felt her sensuality even at that distance. I turned and stole a glance at Nicky. He was watching me and I felt my face blaze from my over-starched collar to my hairline. His lips were exactly like his mother's though not quite so pink. Nicky gazed at me without pity.

"What's your father do?" I asked to deflect his attention, deflect his gaze.

"He doesn't do much. He's dead. Dead as a dodo. Dead as a doornail."

He used his long bare legs to push his swing higher. I envied him his swim shorts. It was hot, really hot. I could feel the stickiness around my private parts, in the crack of my bum. The sweat trickled down my legs.

"And yours?" he asked.

The inquiry sounded like an after-thought. Polite, but distinctly an after-thought.

"Gone. Left. He's got a new family, I mean. Haven't seen him for a long time. Don't much care." The last remark was insouciant but the lump in my throat betrayed me.

"He died in the Atlantic," offered Nicky.

"Who?"

"My father. He was a yachtsman. Sailing solo."

"Did they find the body?" This was my attempt at conversation.

"The body? They didn't even find the fucking yacht."

I pushed off till I was swinging gently backwards and forwards. I thought it over. Nicky's father going down with his yacht. Somewhere in the Atlantic. Pretty heroic stuff.

"What's it like having a dead father?"

Nicky thought it over for a bit.

"Much the same as having no father, I expect. At least we've got our mothers now."

These remarks didn't make complete sense to me, but I put that down to my inferior status. Nicky was 14. I was 11 and something. Two years is a huge stretch of time in the annals of childhood.

"Fucking hot, isn't it?" Nicky said, dragging off his short-sleeved shirt and flinging it carelessly on the lawn.

I was tempted to respond with a snatch of bad language but I knew I'd blush even more furiously. I stole glances at Nicky as he swung idly in the noonday sun. Two years was the difference in our ages, but he was long-bodied, lean-muscled, broad-chested while I still carried the puppy fat of pubescence. I was good-looking, I knew that. Enough women insisted on tousling my hair. But if I was 'cute', a word I detested, Nicky Timuri was handsome. I couldn't compete with that, not that I'd even try, and it only served to confirm my status. My mother was the new housekeeper; his mother was the lady of the house.

Nicky raised his arms to pull himself higher on the swing. I blushed again. There was hair in his armpits, thick, luxuriant, dark hair. My armpits were hairless, and as smooth as the brass doorknobs that caught the eye in Heathfield House. Thick, dark hair. I tried not to, but I couldn't help glancing at his crotch. He would have hair down there, too, probably thick and dark. My face was afire. I didn't want to think about that. Because it made me think of what else would be down there, and that, too, made me feel so young, so junior, so inferior.

I remembered Steve, but the room had been so dark I felt rather than saw anything. I remember his thick pubic hair brushing my belly, brushing my lips. I wondered if Nicky's would feel... I stopped the thought in mid-sentence. Nicky wasn't like that. Nicky was from a good family. He had an expensive-sounding name, a house in the country, he went to a private school. Not just a grammar school, but a school you had to pay to go to. Nicky was not like us, not like us at all.

"The pool," he said. "Let's go down and have a look at the pool."

"What? Pardon? Excuse me. The pool? Have you got a swimming pool here? Can we use it?"

"Course we can, you dummy." Nicky was grinning. He leapt from his swing, faced me, grabbed both my hands and jerked me from my swing. "We can use it any time we jolly well like. You can swim, can't you?"

I nodded.

In fact, I was an excellent swimmer. Mum was, too. It was she who'd taught me. Our local swimming pool was called 'The Baths' and because it was practically free, my brother and I spent lots and lots of time there. I didn't mention that to Nicky. I salted the fact away. He'd be impressed, and I so badly wanted to impress him.

“And Dan will be here on Saturday; he’ll be here for the rest of the summer, and it’ll be fucking great, just fucking great.”

“Fucking great,” I echoed, but Nicky was already trotting across the lawn.

I’d missed my chance to impress him with my carefree use of a forbidden word, and I did so want to impress him. Even from that first day I worshipped Nicky Timuri, worshipped him with that dogged reverence the young have for the slightly older, the almost attainable. Worshipped him in the way that the young can never worship the grown-up. Adults belong to a different world; Nicky was a hero in my world. And the fact that my world was almost entirely circumscribed by his world made not the slightest difference.

The blue waters of the pool sparkled in the sun. It hurt my eyes, made me squint, but it was paradise. Not quite a full-length pool, it was immaculate, white-tiled, blue-striped, a small diving board at the deep end.

“Dan filled her up last Saturday. Come on, let’s get in.”

As he spoke, Nicky stripped off his swim shorts. He kicked his open-toed sandals towards the lawn. No socks. “Come on,” and dived neatly into the blue. His penis, thick and heavy, at least to me, swung beneath him, then led him beneath the shimmering water. Beneath my corduroy shorts. my penis leapt. to life. It did that more and more these days, but usually in the shower, usually in bed, usually when my hand slipped down to feel its pulsing life.

Nicky’s face emerged, hazel eyes sparkling. He did a backward roll, sleek as a young dolphin, his penis bouncing from a thick nest of hair against his belly. He swam to the side and gripped the rail, pulling his shoulders from the water, his dark hair thickly-plastered against his forehead. He grinned, his even teeth shark-white.

“What you waiting for? Another invitation?”

“No swimming trunks,” I muttered, dragging one shiny black-leathered foot along the tiles. I felt stupid. I know I looked stupid.

“What the merry hell do you need swimming things for? You mightn’t have noticed, but I’m male, too. I’ve got a dick and balls. You’ve got a dick and balls—you do have the right equipment, don’t you?” Like a fool, I nodded. “So what’s the problem? I’ll look the other way if you’re shy,” Nicky’ laughed, but not unkindly.

“My mother... your mother...”

“My mother? Your mother,” he echoed. “Mothers don’t count. And we haven’t got anything they haven’t seen before. At least my mother has. Come on. Don’t be a wimp,” and with that he turned and slipped beneath the water.

I retreated twenty yards to a huge rhododendron bush. I stood there. I frowned. I made my decision. Solemnly I undid and removed my tie. Then my blazer. Then my shirt with its itchy over-starched collar. Folded them into a neat

pile. Opened my snake belt. Unzipped my sticky shorts. Slid them off, perching precariously on a single leg. Folded them. Undid my shoes, slipped them off. Placed them neatly by my trousers. Slipped off my socks. Stood there in my white Y-fronts. Slipped them off in a rush. Cupped my genitals in my right hand. Dashed for the deep end and dived in.

Bliss! Sheer bliss!

I rose to the surface to find Nicky waiting, smiling, spitting a stream of water into my face before I could recover. Not fair. I dived below and pulled away his legs. Taken by surprise, he went under, came up spluttering, laughing, out for revenge. I turned and swam for the other end. Nicky was two years older, was stronger, had a better reach. He almost caught me, but I reached the shallow end, turned, pushed off with my feet, was past him and away again. Nicky tried and tried again, but I was faster, slippier, and could outswim him all day if I had to. But he cheated. All's fair in love and war, and this was war.

Nicky stopped in mid-pool, turned and waited for me to swim straight into him. He swung both arms around and held on. Not fair. He was standing, my feet were off the bottom. He held on to me. I could feel his chest against me, his belly, his hips, and what could only be the small hose pipe in his groin press against me.

"Where the fuck did you learn to swim like that? You've got to teach me." His smile was as hot and caressing as the sun. I basked in the glory. I looked into those dark-fringed eyes, saw thunderstorms, saw water-pearls hang from his ears, noticed for the first time the tiny mole to the right of his nose, felt my penis stir and thicken.

"Fuck, no, please, no, not now," I prayed to whatever God was not listening. Nicky held me tighter. He must feel me, must feel it. I grew increasingly aware of his own private parts. His eyes joined his lips in his smile. At least that's how it seemed to me. My face burned, my shoulders, my chest burned; beneath the cool waters my penis was turning to fire.

"Boys! Boys! Lunchtime. Come on in. Where are you?"

Nicky's mother! On the way to the pool. Dream turned to nightmare.

Nicky let go and called back.

"In the pool. We're in the pool!"

The traitor.

Nicky let me go, swam to the side, and was hauling himself from the water as his mother arrived, trailing a cloud of white chiffon behind her. Standing beside her son, looking down at me, she seemed entirely unaware of his nakedness.

"Donald. Lunchtime. Your mother's making a cheese and ham salad. I'm making lemonade, with real lemons." She made 'real lemons' sound like both a

challenge and an achievement. “Now out of the water like a good boy. Nicky will show you where the towels are, though you’ll hardly need them in this heat.”

“He can’t.”

“Can’t what?”

“He can’t get out of the water.”

“Whyever not?”

“Because he’s starkers, just like me.”

She seemed to notice Nicky’s condition for the first time. “Goodness gracious, that hardly matters. In fact, it doesn’t matter at all. Let’s not make a fuss over such a small matter.”

Mrs Timuri and Nicky realised the import of her last remark at the same time. Both burst into giggles. “It’s not such a ‘small’ matter,” added Nicky. “Donny’s a well-built boy.” The water in the nest at the bottom of his belly sparkled like diamonds.

“Well, I’ll leave you boys to sort things out,” laughed Mrs Timuri. She turned and made her way towards the house, calling back over her shoulder, “Five minutes, not a minute more.” Her laughter trailed behind her like the white chiffon.

“Come on. Let’s get you out of there.”

I could hardly refuse Nicky’s helping hand. He pulled me from the water and onto the side of the pool. Thank God, my cock—there, I’ve used the word—had subsided. We stood there, two naked boys in the midday sun of the hottest July for years.

“No, not such a small matter at all,” whispered Nicky, his eyes on my growing part.

Embarrassed, flustered, bemused, and vaguely flattered, I ran for the refuge of my hot, sweaty clothes. That was the last time I’d wear them that summer.

Heathfield House was five miles from Dunvegan. There was the village three miles down the road, but the ‘village’ proved to be half a dozen cottages, one general shop-cum-post office, and a tiny church and graveyard. As the graveyard was the most lively spot in the whole place, Nicky and I rarely cycled down to the village, preferring instead to bike our way along the steep gravel paths that took us... ever deeper into nowhere.

Happy, happier, happiest.

That first week at Heathfield was my happiest, at least in the sense of having Nicky to myself. Puffing and panting, I pedalled behind him, content to follow his lead, content to have an uninterrupted view of those turning thighs, the rounded buttocks, and the sweaty crease that split them. Was it sexual? Of

course it was. But perhaps not consciously so. It was just wonderful, especially at the end of steep climb, when we found a small valley, free-wheeled down, and threw the bikes aside.

Then we stretched out beneath a tree and rabbited on about everything under the dappling sun. Nicky would stretch himself out, flip out a fag—one draw had me coughing and spluttering—parking his head on one arm, gaze at the sky and speak whatever was on his mind. I would lie alongside him, content to be there, sometimes turning to sneak a peek at the strong lines of his face, the Straight nose, the slash of the eyebrows, his mother's lips. The thirty-three freckles around his nose. Thirty-three. I counted them. Thirty-three. Not one more. Not one less. Thirty-three.

Sometimes Nicky would turn and lean on one arm, lean over me, gazing down unabashed, seeming to inhale me, while I closed my eyes and squirmed surreptitiously as the traitor between my legs awoke, sensed the possibility of pleasure, and stretched into life.

"She did, you know."

"She did not."

"She did."

"Let you actually see it, you mean? Where? When?"

As casually as I could, I adjusted my elongating penis. Nicky laughed, reached down, fumbled, took me between his fingers and straightened my stiffy against my lower stomach.

"There you are. Don't be such a wimp. We all get hard-ons when we think about sex."

His laughter was so unaffected, I couldn't help joining in.

"Down at the graveyard. Behind the big tomb on the left. You know, the one with the weeping angel. All that pigeon shit over its face. No wonder it's weeping."

"But she's the vicar's daughter."

"They're the worst. At our school, in the showers, you never turn your back on the vicar's sons. They're worse than soap-on-a-rope. Or so they say. I wouldn't know, about the soap I mean. About the vicar's boys I do know. Believe me, they're the worst."

I tried my best to look less interested, less fascinated. I failed.

"It was after church, after Evensong actually. Mother was extending her social network, so we had to attend Evensong, at least once. She was chatting to the vicar, probably chatting him up. He's not bad looking—for a vicar. Anyway, Morag and I went exploring."

"How did she...? I mean how did you...?"

“Her idea. We were inside the tomb. I didn’t tell you it’s a walk-in tomb, did I?”

I shook my head. Nicky’s face was above mine.

“She’d played with her brother’s and she...”

“Played with!”

“Oh, you are such a baby,” Nicky grinned. “You might have one of these...” He tweaked my erection. “...but you really are an innocent.” I was too engrossed in his story to care that he left his fingers flat against my, against my... hard-on. There. done, best to call it what it was.

“Morag plays with her brother’s—he’s 13—and she wanted to see if mine looked the same. I said ‘sure’ but only if she’d let me see hers.”

“Did she? Let you see it, I mean.”

“‘Course she did. That’s part of the game.”

There was a pause. The pause extended itself into a silence. Nicky was forcing me to ask. I gave in.

“Well?”

“There wasn’t that much to see actually. Some dark hair. Like brushstrokes. A crease down the middle. Like smiling lips turned the wrong way round.”

“Is that all?”

Nicky laughed. “Funny, that’s exactly what I asked. ‘Is that all?’”

“Well?”

“She pulled them open. The little lips, the little smiling lips. I knelt down to have a look. In for a penny, as they say. It was all pink and wet in there, sort of folded over, with a little bud. Not a bud really. More like an asparagus tip.”

“Did you touch her?”

“Yuk, no.”

“Did she touch yours?”

My penis was rock hard. The closeness of Nicky’s face. His minty breath. His fingers tracing my hard-on. My chest rose and fell.

“I should say not. That wasn’t part of the deal. Fair’s fair. I let her have a look, but I don’t drop my trousers for just anybody.”

“Oh.”

The note of disappointment in my voice was obvious.

Nicky scrambled onto his knees, unbuttoned his tennis shorts, and, together with his underpants, pushed them down his thighs.

“Look...”

I didn’t look. I stared.

“That’s called an erection. a hard-on, a stiffy.”

Nicky's cock was huge, pink and golden, the head a purple plum. The shaft was five inches, the head added at least another inch. Each testicle was clearly outlined in the tightened sac. Slightly curved to the left, the shaft rose, against his belly, against the thick dark hair at the bottom of his belly, until the head just touched his belly button.

I swallowed and looked round, hoping there wasn't anybody nearby, watching. I turned my gaze back to Nicky's exotic, tempting fruit.

"Touch it if you like," he whispered.

"Well..."

"It's okay. Boys in our school touch each other's. It's a really good school. There aren't any girls," he added as if that made everything okay. He wound his right hand round the shaft of his erection and began to move the skin the length of the shaft. Each time he closed the extra skin over the head. "This is the best. Do you do this yet?"

I tried to say something but the saliva had backed up in my throat.

"Come on. Relax. It's summer. You know you want to." Nicky fumbled at my shorts, flipping each button open one at a time. How did he know what I wanted? I suppose my aching stiffness was a clue.

I reached out and wrapped my fingers round his shaft. Soft. Hard. Dry. Sweaty. It was all these things at the same time. I pulled up and down on his cock.

"Oh, for fuck's sake..." He wrapped his fingers round mine, taught me the correct rhythm, the desired speed, the varying pressure. I felt his fingers do the same to mine. Both his fingers on my penis, my smaller, smoother, pubescent boy's penis.

"Morag did this to her brother. She told me about it."

For some reason this added to my excitement. So many images. I felt my buttocks clench.

"She did more."

More? What more could she do? After all, it was her brother. At least Nicky wasn't my brother, so that made things better. But more? What more?

"She took him in her mouth. Took it in her mouth. 'This' in her mouth." He pressed firmly round my stiffy. "She sucked him till he came." Came? "Sucked him till he squirted. That's what she called it, squirting. Silly little cow."

The dam inside me was going to burst. Something was going to happen. Everything was going to change. It was getting hard to breathe. I pushed myself up into Nicky's grasping fingers, let myself drop, pushed up again. I'd lost control. If I'd ever been in control, I'd lost it, and the dam was going to burst. Something beautiful and terrible was going to happen.

“You could use your mouth,” I heard Nicky’s voice somewhere in the distance. Why had it become so distant? “Suck it, I mean, but only if you want to. I’ve done it. It’s...”

I burst away from his hand.

Rollled over onto my stomach. My bum rose and fell. My throbbing penis pressed against the sweet fallen pine. I burst into tears.

Nicky stroked my hair.

“Hey, come on now. It’s not so bad.”

No, no, that wasn’t it at all. It wasn’t bad. It was good. It was wonderful. I wasn’t quite sure what had happened with Steve. I didn’t know it could happen time and time again. I lay there, shorts and underpants at my knees, my sweaty genitals pressed into the sweet pine needles. Nicky stroking my hair. I felt his other hand gently stroking and caressing my backside. That was okay, that was fine, that was the right thing to do.

I rolled over onto my front, looked up into his eyes, then saw his cock sagging between his thighs. It was still beautiful. I wanted to reach out, take it, smother it with little kisses.

Nicky did us both up. Pulled up my underpants and shorts. Did each button up one at a time, then fastened my snake belt. Then he dressed himself.

“I’m sorry,” I whispered.

“Hey, hey,” he whispered back. “Nothing to be sorry about. There’s always next time.”

He was right. There would be a next time. We had all summer, and there would be a next time. I’d die if there wasn’t.

“Last one back to the pool’s a mother-fucker!” The expletive was shocking, but it hardly had time to register before Nicky leapt to his feet, grabbed his bike and was away before my arse was off the ground.

“Bastard!” I shouted after him. “You’re the fucking motherfucker!” As I pedalled after him, I recognised the little bastard I was. Why had I wanted to play the innocent? Steve had introduced me to the wonderful world of sex; Alan had confirmed my membership. Why then had I chosen to play the artless ingénue with Nicky? Because that seemed to be what he wanted, and if being what he wanted got me what I wanted, why the hell not?

His name was Dan. He was the handyman. He lived in the stable block. The horses had gone, and Mrs Timuri was converting the stables into guest accommodation. Dan had the first apartment in the stable block. You reached it by wooden stairs outside the block. I knew all this because Mum told me. We had rooms at the back of Heathfield House, in the servants’ quarters. Heathfield had once had a small army of servants, but now there were only Dan and my

mother. I suppose I was a sort of companion for Nicky; I wasn't much but I was better than nothing, I hoped.

Dan was too young to be middle-aged, and too old to be young. Sort of middling in height. Strongly built, especially in the arms. He could lift Nicky and me with each arm and hold us off the ground for ages. He was good-looking though not handsome in the way that Nicky was handsome. Brown eyes, reddish brown hair, a slightly hooked nose. He was so tanned I imagine he spent most of his working life outdoors. Big nipples, like half-crown pieces. I blushed when I first saw them. Thought of my own little starfish nipples, of Nicky's raisins, and now Dan's big nipples, deep pink against brown skin, topped with black currants. Nicky told me that men's nipples could be really sensitive. Nicky told me lots of things. I tried rubbing my own, at night, in bed, but felt nothing. I wondered what it would feel like to rub Nicky's nipples, or Dan's, and what would it feel like to them.

I was jealous of Dan, right from the start. Jealous of the easygoing, friendly relationship he had with Nicky, with my Nicky. And to tell the truth I was jealous of Nicky, too. It wasn't a hateful jealousy. I didn't wish them ill. But they seemed to be a closed circle, and I was on the edge of that circle when I wanted to be inside, to be part of it, but I didn't have an entry ticket so I hovered in the foyer.

Dan arrived that Saturday. Nicky and I were in the pool. In swimming costumes. Dan came strolling across the lawn. I saw him first. The sun was behind him, creating a halo effect around his head. I guessed it might be Dan. I squinted to make out his face. "Hey, Nicky," I called across the pool, "who's that?"

"Dan! Dan!"

Nicky turned, the water showering from his shoulders. Even as he shouted again, he was pulling himself out of the pool. As he ran barefoot across the lawn, he shook the water from his hair. "Dan! Dan!"

The handyman dropped his battered old suitcase, stretched out his arms. Nicky leapt into them, raising his legs so he could hook them round Dan's waist. I heard myself "Tut tut"... after all, Nicky was 14 years old. He wasn't a child anymore, and jumping into a man's arms was what a child would do. As I tutted, I wished it were me.

"Well, well, who've we got here?"

Nicky and Dan were standing near the edge of the pool. I held onto the bar at the edge and looked up.

"That's Donald, Donny. His mum's the housekeeper. He's only 11 but he can't half swim."

“Good afternoon, Donald, it’s a pleasure to meet you.” Dan knelt down by the side of the pool, careless his knee was in wet, and extended his hand. I extended mine and we shook hands rather formally. His skin was dry, warm and pleasant to touch.

“And you, sir.”

“No, not sir. Never sir. Mister Cummings if you must. But I’d prefer Dan. And I’ll call you ‘Donny’.”

“Yes, sir. I mean, yes, Mr Cummings. No, I mean, yes, Dan.” My blush was furious but Dan was kind enough to register nothing except that I was still holding onto his hand. He glanced at our hands. I glanced, too, and jerked mine away as if I’d touched the hot stove.

“Let’s get you settled in.” Nicky rejoined the conversation, sounding precisely like his mother. “I’ll show your rooms. Mum’s had them re-curtained while you were away. But she left the mattress on the floor ‘cause that’s the way you like it.” Nicky turned to me.

“Go on swimming. I’ll be back in a little while. Then we’ll ask your mum to rustle up a picnic. For the three of us. For the boys. For the men.” He turned and picked up Dan’s suitcase. I heard him grunt as he swung it over his shoulder.

“Catch you later, alligator. Or should I say Flipper.” That was Dan to me. He held my eyes for a moment. His eyes were smiling. I used mine to smile back, then turned and free-styled my way up the pool. I was showing off. I knew it. I couldn’t help it. I wanted to impress Dan. He wasn’t what I’d expected. A handyman should be rough and ready, but Dan was well-spoken, polite, kind, considerate. I turned at the far end of the pool and saw them mount the stairs attached to the stable block, Nicky chatting animatedly, Dan’s hand on his shoulder. Oh let it be me, let it be me.

That night Nicky kissed me.

I was grateful for his attention. I felt I’d been abandoned. Nicky hadn’t returned from the stable block until 5 that afternoon. I’d wandered the grounds, did a jigsaw, wandered the grounds, thought about climbing the stable stairs, but I’ve always had a horror of being uninvited, of being unwanted, of being an extra. I knew my place, and my place was in the background, waiting for the summons, waiting at the behest of my betters. I thought of biking down to the village. I might examine the gravestones in the churchyard. I might explore the empty tomb where Nicky and Morag had...

We’d had breakfast together. Lunch together. Dinner together. Now we might have sex together. ‘Have sex’... what a strange way to put it. As if sex wasn’t really a part of us, as if it was something we pulled out of a bottom

drawer, like Scrabble, and had it together. Then put it back in the drawer until the next time.

We were lying on Nicky's double bed. Mine was a narrow single in a back room. His was a double in his room on the first floor of the house. A room with a view. The road, twisting and winding its way down to the village. Blue hills in the distance. I tried to initiate conversation about Dan, about his stable block rooms, about how they'd spent the afternoon but Nicky smiled my questions away. His mood was languorous. I'd found that word during the long afternoon. Languor. Dreaminess. Indolence. Lotus-eating. I wasn't sure why anyone would want to eat a lotus, but Nicky was dreamy and indolent. At least he was content to let me lie by his side.

It was my turn to lean over him. I noticed how his eye-lashes turned upwards, like an inverted fringe. That's why he always had a look of slight surprise on his face. I counted his freckles again.

"Dimples."

"Pardon?"

"Dimples. I'm going to call you Dimples," he said, "because you've got dimples in your cheeks when you smile. They're very sexy. That's who you are: Mr Sexy Dimples."

I blushed.

"There you go again," Nicky giggled. The look on his face became solemn. He put his arm round my neck and pulled my face down to his. Noses touched. Cheeks brushed. Lips touched. And then he kissed me.

This was not the first time I'd been kissed—by someone other than my mother, I mean. There'd been a few others; three to be exact. A fat girl with freckles at a school dance; she smelled of garlic bread and seemed vaguely desperate; a girl at summer camp—impressed by my swimming; and my cousin Irene: I didn't like to think about that because she was family.

But Nicky's kiss was different, different in kind, different in quality, different in nature. The brush of his lips against mine like silk on satin. The pressure of his flesh against my own. The tip of his tongue that ran along the valley between my lips. The gentle probing and pushing that opened me up. The tongue that seemed to grow as it pushed deep inside my mouth, then withdrew, demanding pursuit from my own. Intimacy of innocent geometry as our cheeks and chins sought accommodation so our tongues could explore the deep recesses of our mouth. His hands held each side of my face as he urgently probed ever deeper, then withdrew to let me enter him. Our saliva ran like wine from mouth to mouth. I tasted him: fruit gums, lemon drops, echoes of liquorice. We lay there, me over him, and gnawed at each other.

I felt my penis hard, stiff, relentless, urgent in its need.

“You could use your mouth,” he’d said. “You can suck it,” he’d said.

I wanted to. I wanted to suck him, lick him, nibble at him, chew him, eat him up, gobble him up. I wanted to take him inside me, all of him, devour him, make him mine, and become him, so that he would never never belong to anyone else but me... because he would be me and I would be him.

My hand slid down the front of his shorts. That summer, as I remember, we wore shorts always, never trousers, never jeans, only shorts, swimsuits, or nothing. He wasn’t hard. He felt full but not hard. I was so hard I ached. How could he not be hard? How could we kiss like this, and he not be so hard it hurt?

Nicky pushed my hand away. Gave a slight moan, frowned slightly and pushed my hand away.

“Not now, Dimples. Not just now.”

I was hurt, disappointed.

“Let’s just lie here together and watch the stars come up.”

I was content, I was happy.

Later, in my own bed, my hand slid down between my legs. Two, three squeezes, and I was hard. But I didn’t want to. Without Nicky I didn’t want to. Without Nicky it didn’t mean much. And why not wait? After all, we had all summer.

Blame it on Sherlock Holmes.

If I hadn’t become engrossed in the sleuth of Baker Street, I’d never have fancied myself as a boy-detective, and, maybe, just maybe, I’d’ve minded my own business.

I found the novels in the house library, a house library that held as many books as my school library. Wall to wall books, on shelves stacked from ceiling to floor. There was even a slide-along rickety staircase to reach the uppermost shelves. I’ve always been a reader, so after tea I got into the habit of stretching out on the chaise longue and tried to forget Nicky by losing myself in Arthur Conan Doyle.

Most days, after tea, Nicky disappeared for an hour or so. When I probed, he shrugged his shoulders. “Helping Dan, that’s all. This is going to be a guest house, so he’s showing me the ropes.” There was no invitation for me, and I was too scared of a rebuff to suggest I might come along, too. After all, I mustn’t be greedy. I had Nicky most mornings, afternoons, and evenings though usually he’d take off with a cheerful “Helping Dan out. Catch you later.”

It was a Wednesday, if remember aright, that it happened. Nicky and his mother left after lunch for the market town. Nicky needed new ‘togs’ for school in September. They’d be back around six. After tea, just Mum and me. I was bored, restless, lonely. I convinced myself Dan might need me; I’d be his

helping hand this time. He wasn't round the grounds. Didn't seem to be in the house or the outhouses. I wandered to the stable block, hung round the foot, of the stairs. No sign of Dan. I turned to go.

"Hey, come on up."

It was Dan. The door was open. He stood there, rubbing his eyes as if not long awake. Faded. blue-striped pyjama bottoms hung from his waist defying gravity to bring them to his naked feet. He scratched his bare chest. "Come on up. Going to put on a movie."

I climbed the wooden stairs and followed Dan into the block. A huge room just below the eaves. Sparsely furnished. A small wooden table, two wooden chairs. A wooden wardrobe. A small television set on a coffee table. The double mattress, rumpled sheets and a crimson quilt. A tiny kitchen on the right. What looked like a shower room on the left. Not too much of anything. Nothing feminine about the room; a man's lair. I smelled beer, a strong smell of beer, it made me slightly nauseous. But beer was a man's smell and this was a man's place and I was determined to enjoy everything about it.

Dan flung me a can of beer. Luckily I caught it.

"Open that for me. Then c'mere."

He sprawled on the mattress. I saw thick black hair in his armpits. His chest was hairless but I could see hair on his lower belly. It thickened below but narrowed into a thin straight line as it headed for his belly button.

I'd never opened a beer can before but I guessed they opened on the same principles as can of beans. I wrestled the opener into the can, then sprang back as a spray of foam hit me in the face.

"Hey, c'mere, baby. Don't waste that." Dan grinned and saved my embarrassment.

Given the choice, I'd have sat primly at the table, but it would've been rude to refuse Dan's invitation, so I sat down on the edge of the mattress and fixed my gaze on the far wall, conscious that the man's half-naked body was inches from me. The smell of his maleness was intoxicating.

"Hey, relax, take it easy," he said, friendly laughter in his voice. "Here, take a mouthful of this. It's Nicky's favourite. I won't tell if you won't."

Blindly I reached for the can. I'd tasted beer before, a few clandestine sips at Hogmanay. I didn't much like it, but it would've been rude to refuse. I tipped the can over my open mouth, misjudged the distance, and felt a stream of liquid run down my throat. I expected to cough and splutter. I didn't. In fact, I liked the stuff and kept pouring.

"Hey, take it easy, Slugger. Save some for me. Plenty more where that came from and we've got all afternoon." Dan laughed openly now and I couldn't help giggling along with him. Dan shifted around so I leaned into his chest with

my back. I blushed but accepted the comfort. After all, this is what Nicky probably did; just two friends together, enjoying a beer, and each other's company.

Dan's arm was round my waist, his big right hand across my stomach. Ever so slowly it inched its way onto my shorts and onto my private parts. Maybe he hadn't even noticed. It was such a hot day I hadn't buttoned my shorts up properly. The third and fourth buttons were slid open. Dan slid his fingers inside. He moved my underpants aside and took me in his fingers. My face burned, my heart banged inside my chest. He twiddled my bits around. I didn't go hard. I don't know why. I wasn't scared; I was too frozen to be scared. I gulped another mouthful of beer.

"You're a funny kid. Bet you're ticklish. Nicky's ticklish."

He grabbed me backwards onto the mattress, and began to tickle me. I didn't laugh but I struggled against the tickling. In the struggle, my shorts and underpants were pulled to my knees. I was mortified. I was wearing the baggy Y-fronts mother always bought me. How I longed for the sexy slips that Nicky wore but I couldn't think how to ask my mother for them. We continued to wrestle, or rather Dan continued to bend me in assorted shapes like a handful of branches and twigs.

I ended up across his lap, front up, head twisted towards the small window as if, by gazing out, I could deny what was happening to me on Dan's double mattress. I started to become aroused by what he was doing. I was embarrassed. I could feel myself begin to fill and elongate.

"Getting excited, baby?" I heard him whisper.

As he spoke, he pulled me round so that I was lying on the bed, alongside him, our feet pointed towards the window. He'd lost his pyjama bottoms. He was aroused, in full erection, his penis huge and hard, jutting up angrily from a forest of thick black hair, the skin pulled back from the head, leaving it purple and urgent. He put one arm around my shoulder and used his other hand to manipulate me. He looked at me from time to time. I lay there staring at a blue patch of sky.

Although I was only half hard, he began tossing me off. I'd learned the expression from Nicky. After five minutes or so, he said in a low voice, "Come on, baby. Help me out. Do the same thing to me." He took my right hand and pressed it into his genitals. They were hot, huge and sticky; I felt his balls wobble in their sac, and the shaft of his erection burned against my wrist.

He whispered something in my ear. I couldn't quite make it out. He whispered again: "You could use your mouth. Go on, suck it, you'll like it. Nicky loves it. My baby loves everything." He pushed my face into his groin.

I felt the bile, if that's what it was, rise in my throat. I tried to check it, hold it down, but I couldn't. I vomited. I think it's called projectile vomiting. It wasn't a polite vomit. The vomit surged up my throat, into my mouth, and I spewed all over his huge, hot, hairy hard-on. I retched and vomited up some more. A blend of beer and cream scones splattered across his lap. He pushed me away and rolled off the mattress.

"Oh, for fuck's sake."

He stood there dripping in my vomit, his cock like a lopsided lighthouse.

Though I was exhausted, I dragged myself to my feet, and pulled up my underpants and shorts. By some miracle, there wasn't a spot on me. I couldn't meet his eye but I remained polite.

"Thanks very much for the drink, sir. I'd better be going now. Mum'll be wondering where I've got to."

Dan said nothing, just stood there and dripped.

I made my way down the wooden stairs, crossed the lawn and stood at the side of the swimming pool. The waters sparkled blue and innocent.

"Aw, fuck it," I said out loud and threw myself into the pool. The water embraced me, enfolded me and enclosed me. I began swimming lengths. After 30 lengths I was dog-tired but I was content. As I pulled myself from the pool, I even managed a laugh.

What a summer!

A man, a real man wanted me, just like he wanted Nicky.

What a fucking great summer!

That evening Nicky was bubbling with life and showed no signs he knew of my adventure in the stable block. I couldn't share his enthusiasm as he prattled on about school in September, his new togs, his new tennis racquet, his new rugger boots. This was a world I couldn't share, a world where you didn't go home after school, a world where you studied, played, showered and slept near other boys. As we lay on his bed, he described an alluring world I would never know. There was so much of Nicky's world I'd never share.

"I won't be a junior any longer," he told me with some satisfaction. "Not quite a senior, of course, but not a bloody sprog. I'll be sharing with three other chaps instead of eight of us crammed in one dorm."

I couldn't resist asking, though I couldn't get the words out properly.

"Do you people... boys... I mean together, you know?"

"Course we do. There aren't any bloody girls around, so what do you think we do? Better than nothing. Anything's better than nothing. Even you." His laughter took the sting from his last remark, and I joined in. He lifted my hand and dropped it on his crotch. "Give it a try if you like."

He was hard, very hard. Only his thin shorts and silk slip separated my fingers from his throbbing flesh, from his stiffy, his hard-on, his erection. I unbuttoned him and slipped my fingers in. Nicky sighed and lay back, his head cradled by both hands. For a moment I saw myself as a doctor making a delicate inspection.

“For God’s sake, it won’t bloody break. Haul it out.”

I hauled it out. I stared at it. The thick shaft. The bulbous head. The loose foreskin that moved easily back at the touch of my fingers. The little red eye already weeping.

“You could use your mouth.”

Had Nicky actually said it or was it an echo in my mind?

He’d explained masturbation to me, semen, sperms... and the word ‘cum’. The word made sense. When I’d asked what happens when “it comes”, he’d corrected me. “Not when ‘it’ comes, when I come, or when you come.” It was protein, he’d explained, perfectly safe, and supposed to be good for the skin. I wasn’t quite sure how it could be good for the skin but I took Nicky’s word for it. I took his word for everything.

I could use my mouth. And when he ‘came’, what then? Nicky explained it was best to swallow it, one’s own, or a friend’s. He also swallowed his own, he explained. Made less of a mess of his underpants, bedsheets, towel, socks, handkerchief. or whatever was available.

I could use my mouth. So I did. I leaned forward and kissed the head of Nicky’s penis. Kissed it again, aroused by the shape, size, texture, smell. With the tip of my tongue I flicked away a clear drop, let it rest on the tip, and then rubbed it onto my lips and in, like a frog taking a passing fly. Not much of a taste. Maybe a hint of saltiness. Nothing offensive. I sighed, bent to my task and closed my lips around the head, resting them where the foreskin bunched along the shaft. It was strange but it seemed the right thing to be doing. I let my head fall and let Nicky slip deeper inside my mouth. “You can suck it if you want.” So I did.

Three or four inches slid into my mouth. I felt Nicky’s pubic hair brush against my lips. I went down till my lips rested on his pubis. Rose and slid down again. Instinctively, I applied more pressure. “Tighter... faster,” I heard a whisper instruct me from above. So tighter and faster it was. “Play with my balls,” so I did. I played with Nicky’s balls—they didn’t seem that much different from my own— and sucked his penis as it slid deep into my mouth, then out to the tip, then in deep again.

“Touch me there.”

I hadn't the faintest idea where there was, and I was in no position to ask. I felt him take my free hand, my non-free hand was grasping the last inch of his shaft, and push it into the cleft below his balls. "There, there, down there."

Did he really mean where I thought he meant?

Nicky knew best, and I let my fingers slide beneath his balls and beyond. Along the sweaty seam that divides a boy in two, then on to the hot, sweaty, moist darkness of his... I blushed as I tried to find an acceptable word. There was none, so asshole it was.

I'd never thought of the asshole as erotic; before Nicky I'd never thought of anything as erotic; but now it seemed as fascinating as the Interior of Darkest Africa must have been to Dr. Livingstone. I remembered a medieval map we had in school, and the Unknown Continent on whose mysterious interior was emblazoned: Here Be Dragons. Intrepid explorer that I was, I ventured on in search of dragons.

The tip of my middle finger touched a hot spot, and I jerked it back. A hiss from on high renewed my courage. I slid my fingertip over flesh that gave way to my touch: it was an asshole! But it was Nicky's asshole and that made it beautiful, and I wanted to make it mine.

Suddenly I was not alone! Nicky's hands, I presumed they were Nicky's hands were there, pulling his bumcheeks apart. What was that phrase mum used: "In like Flynn!" I hadn't the faintest idea what she was talking about, but if there was ever a call to be "in like Flynn" this was it. I pushed and probed, and without warning my middle finger slid in to the knuckle.

A groan from far off told me I was on the right track. Up the Congo I would go!

I did what came naturally. I sucked faster, harder, and at the same time drove my middle finger in and out of his bottom. The sounds above my head told me I was doing okay. I continued the process with vigour.

Nicky's body seemed out of his control; his hips jerked spasmodically, his bottom lifted clear from the bed. Was this the 'demonic possession' hinted at in one of my Sherlock Holmes' stories? Who gave a fuck? Certainly not Nicky, certainly not me.

Nicky's body arrested itself with his arse high off the bed. The position held as his hips jerked frantically. I felt spurts of liquid hit the back of my throat. Two, three, four. I'd no time to taste them. There was no time for the swallow reflex to kick in. The spurts hit the back of my throat and went straight over. I jammed my middle finger as deep into Nicky as I could and wiggled it. The palm of my free hand felt his tummy flutter uncontrollably. I wished I could see his face, his expression.

His body trembled, shuddered, then stilled. I gently withdrew my finger and had a sneaky sniff. A little bit shitty but nothing offensive. For a moment I went to suck my finger. Fuck no: That must be perverted. I was tempted but I didn't want to be a pervert.

Nicky eased my head off his wilting cock, and pulled me up level with him. He put his arms around me and snuggled me tight. I was grateful for that.

"Gosh, I needed that," he whispered. "Thanks a mill."

"Nothing really," I whispered back, unable to think of anything more appropriate to say. Then added "Any time," and blushed as I realised the import of the last remark.

Nicky giggled.

"I'd do you now, but I'm worn out. The shopping—and you—really took it out of me. Hey," he added as a thought struck him. "You've got a million little Nickys swimming in your tum." He slipped his palm under my t-shirt and rubbed my stomach. Then slipped his fingers down further. "Breathe in." I breathed in deeply. He slid his fingers beneath my shorts, beneath my underpants, and let them settle flat on my hard-on. "I bet that's tasty," he whispered. "Not as tasty as you," I whispered back.

If I'd left things there, things might have turned out differently. But I couldn't. I was Sherlock Holmes and I had to know, had to solve the riddle of those missing hours, when Nicky disappeared from my life and closeted himself with Dan in the stable block. Did Dan share his beer, and mess around with Nicky, my Nicky? I tried to tell myself I wasn't jealous. to tell myself I only wanted to know, that I wouldn't do anything about it. I was here for the summer, a companion for Nicky. My mother was a housekeeper, a servant; I was the son of a servant; it wasn't my place to interfere, and certainly not in the life of my employer, my master. Still, I had to know, I just had to.

Thursday afternoon was hot, probably the hottest afternoon of that long hot summer. I lay on Nicky's bed reading 'The Hound of the Baskervilles'. Reading is an exaggeration. My eyes skimmed over the text but I took in very little. In the morning we'd swum; a light salad for lunch; then Nicky disappeared. No sign of Dan. I let the book fall, slid from the bed, and hung out of the bedroom window, my gaze fixed on the stable block and the wooden stairs that led to the wooden door. My imagination was feverish. Was Nicky's face even now being forced down onto Dan's huge horse cock, was he choking on the man's cum, was a long thick middle finger jammed up my friend's bum?

Those wooden stairs, that wooden door; they were not the only way into the stable block. I'd reconnoitred the scene just as the great SH himself might have done—though he'd have sent faithful Dr Watson to do the donkey work.

And what had I found? An inside staircase, not so much a staircase as a wooden structure leading from the old stables to the loft above. They'd probably used it get the stored bales of hay down from the loft to the equine beasts in the stables. I loved that phrase: the equine beasts, very Holmsian, my dear Cameron.

The thought was father to the deed. I crossed the lawns, the gravel path, and slid, liquid as a cat, into the stables. Sweat trickled down my back. I climbed the wooden structure. It wasn't very difficult but the sweat on my palms made gripping difficult, and I was relieved when I reached... a wooden trapdoor! It could only lead to one place, Dan's room. I pushed against it with my head, certain it would squeak like ten bats out of Hell. In fact, it slid up with ease. Dan was a lot of things, a first class handyman being one of them.

I don't suppose I would have seen that much if Dan's bed hadn't been a mattress on the floor. As it was, I had a clear unobstructed view. I didn't understand what I was looking at. I sensed something under my skin. An all over prickling you feel when the air, heavy and humid, is charged with electricity. Light filtered through the fine dust making what I saw more unreal.

Dan lay on his back, his legs either side of the mattress. Naked. Nicky straddled his thighs. Dan held Nicky's hips. Urged on by Dan's big bony hands, splayed against the tanned ivory of Nicky's skin, Nicky rose and fell, rose and fell. His hair hung down over his face, dark hair, wet with sweat, the fringe clinging to his forehead. Dan's back was off the mattress as he pulled Nicky's face and shoulders into his own. The man's thick tongue penetrated the boy's lips, his mouth, his throat. Now, of course, I can interpret what I saw, but at the time I could only guess because what I saw didn't seem real, didn't seem possible.

As Nicky rose and leaned forward, I saw it. A hard column of flesh that miraculously appeared from my friend's bottom, his bum, his... I had to believe my own eyes... his arsehole. And as Nicky slid downwards, the column of flesh, obscenely glistening, an ivory baton, disappeared until the boy's bum nestled in thick dark hair that could only have been Dan's.

Was this happening in silence? Probably not. But I heard nothing, saw only the moving images. I couldn't see Nicky's face but I could read Dan's: ecstasy, cruelty, delight, determination—they seemed to flicker across the man's face with a hundred other emotions I couldn't interpret.

This was fucking.

I'd heard about fucking; Nicky had told me, but he'd told me about men and women, boys and girls, and this was different, this was man and boy.

I could understand how a woman could take a man; after all, I knew where babies came from. But how could Nicky take Dan? How could he take that huge hard horsecock deep inside him? Surely it must hurt, must be terribly painful.

Why wasn't he screaming? He rode up and down on that slippery column of flesh, and, apart from grunts and moans, the rest was silence.

I couldn't watch any more. Hatred for Dan leapt into my throat as sudden and quick as the vomit had. I wanted to climb through the trapdoor. Run to the mattress. Scream and shout in fury. Tear Nicky off that thrusting pole, and smash smash smash Dan's smug face to pulp. But I knew I couldn't. I knew I was only a boy, and this was an adult's world.

Like Sherlock Holmes I would retreat, bide my time, take stock, ponder my next move. To separate Nicky from Dan. To remove Dan from the world I shared with Nicky. To have Nicky for myself. To have and to hold. Nicky. Nicky. Nicky. Let it be me.

That evening I stayed in my room. My mother told the Timuris I was flushed and feverish, obviously I'd taken too much sun. Obvious, but not true. Nicky looked in on me but I turned my face to the wall and feigned sleep.

Next morning I knew I'd do something. I'd no idea what that something was, but I'd know it when it came, and it came much sooner than I could have anticipated.

It was early afternoon. In the morning we played tennis; Nicky won, I let him. Lunch. A short siesta. A swim. Then I to my room and my Conan Doyle; Nicky to his rendezvous. Around three o'clock there was a gentle tap on my door. Mum? Lemonade! "Come in."

Mrs Timuri stepped into the room. I was startled and sprang from the bed. Mrs Timuri rarely talked to me, rarely acknowledged my existence. She was never unkind. simply distant. She smiled Nicky's smile and pushed some stray hair from her eyes, a mirror image of a Nicky-gesture.

"Donald, forgive me disturbing you. I'm looking for Nicolas. I know you and he usually go cycling in the afternoon, but your mother told me you'd taken too much sun yesterday—typical boys—I thought Nicky and you might be resting in his room. No sign of Nicky there, so I tried here. I'm sure you'll forgive the intrusion." Mrs Timuri was nonplussed by my failure to respond. I realised I was being rude.

"Sorry, ma'am. I've no idea where Nicky is. We never go cycling in the afternoon. Morning, yes, after breakfast. Sometimes in the evening. Never in the afternoon. It's been just too hot."

"But then what do you do in the afternoon?" I could hear the puzzlement in her voice.

"I stay here. I read Sherlock Holmes." I thrust the volume of stories at her as if it was an alibi.

“But Nicky. What on earth does Nicky do? I can’t see him reading all afternoon. The sports pages in the Mail, perhaps, but not a... book.” She spoke the word ‘book’ as if were akin to a dog turd on the lawn.

“So what on earth does he do?”

Given time to think, I might have prevaricated, dissembled, found a suitable cover story.

That’s a lie.

I didn’t need time.

With the blandest expression I could muster, I cold-bloodedly said: “Nicky spends every afternoon with Dan.”

“With Dan?”

“Yes, Mrs Timuri. with Dan.”

“Doing what?”

“I don’t know. Nicky doesn’t tell me.”

“Surely not helping Dan around the place. Nicky’s got as much interest in mending a fuse as he has in reading a book. And I haven’t seen them together around the house. Come now, Donald, you must know where they are, what they’re doing?”

Was the woman entirely stupid? The Bank of England was falling round our heads, and she hadn’t heard a penny drop.

“Maybe he’s helping Dan in the stable block, in Dan’s room. I don’t know. I’m not invited there. They don’t invite me when they’re... together.” The pause before ‘together’ was calculated to wound; the word ‘together’ to push the cold blade in deep.

Mrs Timuri’s face was expressionless, yet I could read her face as easily as any of my beloved mysteries. Expressionless, yet cold, as cold as the winds that whipped our tenement block back home in winter.

“Shall I help you look?” I offered.

“Remain here. Leave this to me.”

She turned and swept from the room. I waited a few moments, then crossed the corridor into Nicky’s room.

I watched from the window as she strode across the lawn, reached the stable stairs, paused, then climbed the stairs with purpose, reached the door, failed to knock, flung the door open, and stepped out of the light into the darkness.

I didn’t see Nicky for several hours, but I saw Dan leave. Shoulders hunched. Battered old suitcase banging against his leg. On the road to the village. He could catch a bus there. Which one? Who cared? I didn’t. I’d done what I had to do. I’d saved Nicky and I’d saved the last few weeks of summer—for us.

Nicky didn't appear for dinner. I was terrified he'd been sent away, maybe even run away with Dan. That was too awful to think about. But finally he did appear, about ten o'clock in my room.

"You fucking little bastard. It was you, wasn't it? You jealous little piece of shit."

Nicky was furious, the fury increased by his sibilant whisper. He stood there in his crimson slip, ready for bed. I stood there in my baggy Y-fronts. His body was as taut and tight as an overwound bicycle chain. Even in the lamplight, I could see the blue vein throbbing in his neck.

I spluttered something incoherent. Something about saving him, protecting him, loving him.

"You fucking moron. I wanted it. I started it. Me... me... not him. I seduced 'him', not the other way around. Last summer. And we were happy, happy till you came along, you stupid little..." He struggled to find the word, then spat it out, "...servant".

"But I only wanted... I mean, he's a man, and you're only a..." The word 'boy' stuck in my throat.

"What the fuck's that got to do with it? He's my friend, can't you understand that? We wanted to be together—in every way. And the sex, that's what bothers you, isn't it, the sex? The sex was for me. Because I wanted it. I like it. And I wanted it from him. Do you know how long it took me to get him to...? Oh, what's the point? People don't understand. They only see what they want to see. I love Dan. The sex is my way of showing it."

"But with me?"

"With you?"

I lowered my eyes, afraid to face the disdain, the derision in his voice.

"With you—that's only kid's stuff."

Nicky was hard. I could see his erection outlined beneath his slip, the shaft slanting to the left, his balls two silk-covered globes. I felt myself harden in response. Oh, no, not now. I tried to think of the Hound of the Baskervilles, charging across the moor, ripping the throat out of... but that only made things worse. I couldn't help looking at my growing self.

Nicky laughed, but there was no warmth in his voice.

"So that's what Dimples wants."

He stepped forward and pushed me backwards towards the bed. Part of me wanted to resist, but the greater part wanted to give in. The backs of my legs hit the edge of the bed, buckled, and I went backwards under Nicky's weight.

He lay full length on top of me, skin to sweaty skin. I felt him reach below and rip away my underpants. He was already naked. I felt his hot hard erection

push against my belly. He stretched my arms and pushed them above my head. I was helpless and wanted to be.

I felt Nicky's lips slide down my body. His lips fastened on my belly button and he sucked hard. It should've been silly but it wasn't. The hot fierceness of his lips, the sound of sucked sweaty flesh, the grinding of his crotch against mine... made me harder and harder until I ached. His lips were lower, my legs pushed wide apart by his hands, my penis engulfed in his mouth. What wonderful shame. I covered my eyes with one elbow, my free hand sought his tousled hair. The sucking motion increased in intensity. I could feel his lips slide the length of my penis until his lips kissed my pubis, then slide back until he held only the head of my cock between his lips. Then down again.

He found my sac and manipulated the eggs inside. His fingers went deeper. He probed at my most intimate place. I'd done the same to him, once, but I couldn't anticipate the pleasure and pain I felt as he rudely jammed his middle finger up my arse. Pain, yes, but the pain became indistinguishable from the pleasure. One finger, two fingers... no, no, not three. Yes, yes. His fingers sawed into me rhythmically; his mouth pumped my penis. I felt a pleasure beyond description well up in my groin, spread itself throughout my body, reach my brain, and set a thousand alarm bells ringing. This was it. I was going to CUM! Nicky'd explained the theory; I'd seen him 'cum'; I'd watched his arching body as he rode Dan. But nothing, nothing had prepared me for this.

With Steve it was in the dark. I could hide from reality. But here everything was open, naked, stripped bare. Nobody should watch another person cumming. Nothing is left but pure surrender. It was late. My mother was only a room away, but I began to howl. I was a wild wolf and it was my night to howl.

Nicky jammed a hand over my mouth. Sucked faster, harder; fucked me faster, harder.

I exploded. Fragmented. Became a million pieces of light. Selfsmashed into smithereens. My hips bucked. My arse rose clean off the bed. My back arched. I spurted, squirted, spat, and spattered into Nicky's throat.

I felt I was dying, and dying was so exquisitely desirable. I lay there exposed, open, wanton.

I heard Nicky's voice from afar. I could hear the tears. "There. That's what Dan gave me. Now you know." I heard the door click as he went.

Next morning Nicky was gone. I didn't see him go. Mrs Timuri explained Nicky'd decided to have the last few weeks of the summer at his aunt's in Boston. He'd send a postcard.

Mrs Timuri was leaving, too. That afternoon. To spend a fortnight in Paris. My mother would be paid for the whole summer. We were welcome to stay on at the house for two more weeks.

We didn't. We left the following afternoon. Summer was over.

Chapter 4

Summer was acummin' in and we were all going cuckoo. We sat the examinations with the temperatures in the mid-80s. I felt I'd done well in the circumstances and, since the results wouldn't be known till late August, flung myself into a whirlpool of sport and romance. So buoyed up was I that I turned out for my House cricket side and—wait for it—ran out Eric Murray!

Fielding in the deep, and taking advantage of the only shade, a battered old elm tree, for miles around, my mind was on lower things when the inevitable red rocket came bombing out of the sky towards me. Eric had hit a belter, a certain six, and all I had to do was get out of its way. I panicked, flung up my hands to protect my face, and felt the vicious little leather bastard thwack into the palms of my hands. In a boys' own story, I'd have held on for a magnificent catch but real life is rarely so generous. The ball plopped at my feet. I picked it up. I looked to the cricket square and saw Eric ambling home for an easy three. Sighing, I picked up the ball and flung it back towards the end he was strolling towards. I'd forgotten about the tennis. I'd forgotten that hours and hours of tennis day after day, week after week, month after month had strengthened my right arm abnormally. The ball curved against the blue in a low parabola, the standard $y^2 = 4ax$, where $2a$ is the distance between focus and directrix (okay, I'm showing off).

Eric spotted the danger too late. The ball soared towards the wicket. Then dropped plumb onto the bails. Eric stopped dead, a good three feet outside his crease, dropped his bat, pulled off his gloves, and saluted me—with his middle finger. Both sides fell about laughing. Eric saw the funny side and joined them. I stood there in the deep, blushing apologetically and wishing the ground would swallow me up.

The match was on Friday. Mercifully there were no more interschool matches, so we had Saturday afternoon free.

"Why the hell can't we leave on Saturday morning? That'll give us the whole day. Why wait till Saturday lunchtime?"

Eric wasn't best pleased, and I couldn't explain to him Saturday mornings were sacrosanct. That Saturday morning was free but I'd promised it to Leslie. It was the last Saturday before the last week of school and I wasn't sure how much I'd see of Leslie during the summer. I knew Leslie and his family spent most of the summer in Montrose, only 30 miles away, but for me it might as well have been on another planet. Much as I liked Eric, and I did, oh how I did, I couldn't give up my last Saturday with Leslie.

"Okay then, but we're leaving early. One o'clock, sharp. It'll take us about an hour and half to bike out to Inverbervie. You bring the sandwiches; I'll bring

the drinks. And be ready, Donny!” Eric turned to go, turned again, and grinned; “Great run out, you lucky wee shit,” slung his cricket bat over his broad shoulders and strode off home.

I watched him go—what an arse!—then turned back to the tennis courts. I could get in half an hour’s serving practice before bundling off to Alan’s for tea. For a moment I wondered whether Dave might be there; I wasn’t sure whether the prospect appealed or appalled.

Saturday 10 minutes to 1, and there I stood in T-shirt and tight shorts, waiting for Eric, horribly self-conscious. I’d borrowed Iain’s bike, a fucking racer. I hated bicycles at the best of times—terra firma for me, please—and there I was propping a 20-speed racer against a pair of tight silver nylon shorts. I had the feeling everyone in the Square was behind their curtains, peeping at me, giggling at my humiliation. Shit, what if a boy got a hard-on in these things! My cock stirred at the thought, and I switched my focus to the sandwiches I’d made. Peanut butter sandwiches, my favourite. Smooth peanut butter, not that crunchy stuff that sticks to your teeth and makes you feel you’ve got to brush them again and again.

Eric raced round the corner, tilting his bike so far over, that I thought, hoped, he’d fall flat on that gorgeous arse of his. He braked within inches of my legs, throwing dust all over my freshly-washed cotton tennis socks. Prat! But I loved him even more for those little human weaknesses. Who was Eric trying to impress if not me?

What the fuck was that noise? It was coming from the carry-bag fixed to the back of Eric’s bike. What was that? Something about being a naughty boy and letting your knickers down. Got it. It was the Beatles. Googoo-goo-choo, or something like that. Must be one of those transistor radios. Fuckin’ expensive.

“Hi, sweetheart. Come on, let’s get going.”

Sweetheart!

Eric Murray had just called me ‘sweetheart’! Then I remembered. That’s what Mr Murray called his boys, and now I was ‘sweetheart’ to Eric.

Off we peddled into the bright hot sunshine. We turned into the industrial estate, deserted on a Saturday afternoon, and took the dual carriageway leading deep into the heart of the country. I was relieved Eric took the official cycle track that ran just above the roadway proper. No cyclist I. And I wanted to concentrate on Eric’s arse, those powerful thighs, and his curving back rather than be totally focussed on carwheels whizzing by only inches from my unprotected legs.

Have you ever had a perfect day? I’ve had a few perfect days, but few more perfect than that last Saturday of the school year. In the morning Leslie had been great fun, worked his ass off, and finally managed a dependable

backhand, switching from low slice to kicking topspin just as I wanted it. If he worked at the same level during the next six months, he'd be a helluva player, and a helluva tennis partner. Okay, that's a little selfish I know, but the idea of spending time at my favourite sport with my favourite person... guilt flushed through me as I watched Eric pedalling stoically on.

Why couldn't I just love both of them equally? Maybe I did, but there was no way to test that. Maybe 'love' was a word in neither of their vocabularies. I sighed, bent my head, and pedalled hard to keep up with Eric.

Eric was right. Inverbervie was worth it. High grasses, burned to dusty gold by the unnatural summer sun, swished down to a river that still gurgled merrily with the freezing waters from the Grampians in the distance. Apart from the throaty bubbling river noises, all was still, even the birds stunned by the afternoon heat. It felt like Eric and I were the only ones left outdoors in Scotland; everyone else had fled to the shade of bars, pubs, restaurants and hotels.

Our t-shirts hung on a bush. Shoes and socks were tucked in its shade. Eric lay flat on his back, not in the tickly grass, but on the tartan blanket he'd brought. I sat above him, drawing a blade of grass down his chest, sweeping it across his nipples, down over his muscly stomach, into his belly button, and then down across the crease marks the elastic had made across his waist.

"That tickles."

"I know. It's meant to."

"Do something."

"Do what?"

"Kiss me."

Kiss him! First it was 'sweetheart', and now Eric Murray, heartthrob supreme, was asking me to kiss him. Straight out. No beating about the bush. Kiss him.

"Kiss you where?"

I looked down at Eric's face. He was puckering up! Either that or he was going to spit at me. I leant down and put my lips cautiously against his. He grabbed the back of my head and pulled my lips tight against his. Yahoo! Within seconds we were crashing mouths, mashing lips, bruising skin. His tongue pushed against my lips. I surrendered and opened to him. My tongue was deep in his mouth. I tasted his saliva. Then his tongue was deep in my mouth, mixing his saliva with mine. I couldn't breathe. Who the fuck needs breath anyway? I felt my skin wet and hot against his; I felt our chests slide against themselves; I heard the popping of sweat bubbles. Then I was seriously short of breath. I pushed myself up on my arms. Eric dragged me back. I pushed away again. I

looked down at Eric again. His eyes were closed. Beads of sweat hung from those thick eyelashes.

“Kiss me.”

“Where?”

“Anywhere. Everywhere.”

My eyes gulped in his powerful shoulders, the sculpted chest with its twin peaks, the flatness of his tummy, the little innie button, the narrow waist, the wide hips, the creasy crinkles where the elastic had been. I leaned across Eric and ran my lips across his chest. My tongue lapped at his nipples. I wasn't sure what he wanted but I knew what I wanted: to lick him, lap at him, chew him, drink him, devour him, swallow him, make him mine, and keep him forever—keep this moment, this hour, this day forever.

The transistor tinkled in the background. I recognised the song: Hey, Jude.

I made love to Eric Murray's body. There's no other way I can put it. I worshipped his body with my tongue, my lips, my eyes, my skin, my hands, my fingers... anything that could touch him I used to worship him. I reached his shorts. He raised his bum from the blanket. I eased down his shorts and his white cotton slip at the same time. His huge cock sprang into the Scottish sunshine. Na-na-na-nana-na... Hey, Eric! I pressed its length, its girth against my face. Hot, sweat, sticky—male incarnate. I circled my thumb and fingers to draw back the foreskin, revealing the thick purple head that asked to be kissed. I kissed it, then ran my lips the full ten inches of his shaft.

Ten inches.

It really was.

I wonder if I'll ever see a cock like that again. I don't think I'll ever see one like that on a 13-year-old boy again. I suppose on some boys it might look freakish; on Eric it looked perfect. The perfect cock for the perfect day, and they were both mine. I felt the shaft pulsate in my mouth. I wondered if Eric was going to shoot his load. Was this another ten-second wonder? No matter. We'd solved that problem by letting Eric cum whenever he was ready; then we'd go on for the second load, and the third when he was particularly horny. As far as Eric was concerned, I thought I had everything under control, there were no surprises left.

I was wrong.

“Just a minute. I want to get comfortable.”

I released Eric from the back of my throat and from my mouth. He surprised me by rolling onto his front. “I want to lie here and listen to the river,” he said. “You do what you want.” he added.

Taken by surprise, I blurted out, “And what am I meant to be doing?”

Eric looked back over his shoulder. He was smiling, but his smile was almost solemn.

“You do whatever you want... and take those shorts off. You must be boiling in them. And they LOOK fuckin’ silly.” He lay back down, his head resting on his entwined fingers.

Self-consciously, I struggled out of my nylon prison, and sat there, listening to the river, wondering what I was meant to be doing. Then I looked down. My eyes ran the length of Eric’s body, and I knew.

I sat naked, cross-legged and leant down over Eric’s naked length. I pressed my lips to the back of his neck. Shit, this was sexier than kissing his front. I reached for a thermos of raspberry pop and drizzled some down the back of his neck and between his shoulder blades. I kissed and licked the sweet liquid away.

“Mmmmmmmmm...”

That might have been me, but it was Eric.

I let the cool liquid run down his shoulder blades to gather in the hollow of his lower back. I applied my lips again. I kept my hands away. Hot skin to hot skin was not needed on a day like this. Eric turned his face to the side. I poured some of the sweetness against his lips. I returned to his back and observed the way it fitted into the rounded curve of his buttocks. Those muscled buttocks with their big dimples on either side. Oh, things of beauty are a boy’s buttocks forever. I wondered... “Whatever you want”.

Oh well, all he could do was kill me.

With my left hand I eased his left buttock away from its twin. Dare I? Dare I? I dared. The dribble of raspberry pop ran into the cleft of his bum and collected at its sweet little centre. I wasn’t afraid to admit it to myself. Boys’ bottoms were beautiful. Maybe all bottoms are beautiful, but it was boys’ bottoms that mesmerised, enchanted and entranced me.

“I can’t let the raspberry juice stay there.” I rationalised to myself. “It’ll just get sticky and uncomfortable.” I lowered my face into Eric’s buttocks into the abyss between. I cast aside the thermos flask. This was a two-handed job. It was also terrifying. What if this was too much for Eric? What if he found it—found me—disgusting and dirty? What if he sprang up, hit me, and cycled off home without me? He’d have to put some clothes on. That would give me time. Time for what? Time to beg for forgiveness. Time, to promise him I’d never never try anything like this again.

Like this.

The tip of my tongue touched his ring.

Like this.

The tip of my tongue pushed and probed his little back door.

The tip of my tongue rubbed Eric's magic lamp. Open, open, sesame. Says me! I wasn't sure what I'd do once I got into the cave of wonders, but I'd figure out what to do once I got there.

"Is that all you're going to do?"

That was Eric's voice. Impatient. Urgent. "All... all..." Was that ALL I was going to do?

"You won't hurt me, you know."

"Okay, okay, wait a minute."

What the fuck did he mean? Surely not. Oh, surely he didn't mean that. I remembered Dave and Alan. "He's not going to hurt me. And I LIKE it."

Despite the heat, I was shivering. I looked down at myself. My erection was hot and hard. I waddled on my knees between Eric's legs. I moved them apart. I wasn't sure what to do next. Or even if that's what I was meant to be doing. Eric's hands came round behind him; he grasped his buttocks and pulled them apart. There could be no misunderstanding now.

I pressed the tip of my finger against his sphincter. Hot, moist, giving. I ran the tip of my finger backwards and forwards, increasing the pressure. Nothing would give until it did. My finger was outside, and then it was in, straight to the second knuckle. I finger-fucked Eric. I hate that expression, finger-fucking, but only in relation to Eric. It was so much more than that. I heard him grunt. Was that intended as encouragement? I added a second finger. It took another five minutes before it slipped inside. I continued the sawing motion, staring intently as the little brown eye opened wider. Then I tried for it.

Pressing the head of my cock against where I imagined Eric's anus to be, I leaned forward, resting my weight on outstretched arms. No luck. I was nowhere near it. I tried a third finger, and now Eric's grunts were closer to a steady groan. Tried my cock again. It stayed rock hard but I just couldn't get that initial entry. Come on, Donny, think, think. You're a Bruce boy, trying to fuck another Bruce boy, by the banks of the Tay at Inverbervie. You're top of the class, so think, think.

Peanut butter!

No, that was ridiculous, outrageous, out of the question. But what the hell. I loved the feeling of my lips pressed against Eric's anus; I loved peanut butter; it was the perfect solution. And thank God, I'd brought the smooth creamy kind. Thank goodness, I'd kept the peanut butter in its jar, intending to do the sandwiches at the last minute. Twisting like some circus contortionist, I managed to extract the jar from the carry-bag, twist the lid off, get out a great gob on my middle finger, and apply it to Eric's hole. If Eric knew what I was doing, he didn't let on. I tasted the peanut butter; it now had a sourish taste but

was far from inedible. In fact, it was finger-licking good, so I licked it from my middle finger, then shoved another gob up Eric's bum.

Then the delicate part. I looked around. No wasps—yet, but be quick. A huge gob in my right hand, grip my five inches and run the butter up and down its length. The butter was already running in the heat. I leaned over Eric and whispered in his ear, “Help me.”

Eric took hold of the cheeks of his arse, pulled the cheeks apart and held them wide for me.

The creamy butter was frothing at his hole a bit. His unsighted fingers caught me and pulled me towards Eden. I felt the head of my hard penis touch his hot spot; he held me in place as I leaned forward on my hands again.

“NASA, we have entry!”

How could it be so easy when it'd been so difficult only a few minutes ago. I felt Eric open up to me. I felt myself slide in. He was hot and light, and I felt the friction against my shaft, but it wasn't difficult. I was in, all the way in, I felt my pubic bone against his buttocks and knew I was all the way in. Eric returned his hands to rest his head. I knew what to do. No lessons were needed. In one way or another, men had been doing this ever since they discovered the pleasures their bodies could give them.

I raised myself on my hands, extracted my cock to its head, and then lowered myself to slide deep into Eric's arse. I could see us both as if I were having a near-death experience. I saw two boys, on a tartan blanket by the river, making love. The smaller boy above driving his hard-on again and again into the boy below. I wanted this to last forever. I could feel, or imagined I felt, the walls of Eric's rectum take and hold my shaft, reluctant to release it. And as soon as the shaft was released, all it sought was the joy of that dark, warm, moist place again. But Nature has its own imperatives, and my hips began to speed up almost against my will.

I found myself driving harder and deeper into Eric, the long thrusting becoming short little stabbing thrusts, rabbit thrusts. I could hear my grunts and Eric's groans above the babble of the river, above the tinkle of whatever was playing on the radio. What was that song that Mum wouldn't let us hear every time it came on the radio: *Je t'aime, moi non plus*. I was slamming into Eric now; I could hear my flesh slap hard against his. I wanted to slow down, make it last, but my body said. “Fuck it! We're going for it.” If I were a dog, I would have howled. Something exploded in me and out of me. I felt my body disintegrating into a million fragments. I felt as if I were shooting stars. For the first time in my life, I felt the sperm leave my balls, race the length of my urethra, and squirt into whatever awaited it in the wide wild world. I felt as if

every pore in my body were open, every hair standing on end, my nakedness exposed for the universe to see—and applaud.

Of course, there were no words at the time. Not even thoughts. Nor emotions. Only feeling. Naked, exposed feeling.

I'd lost any sense of time. I was lying along Eric's back, my penis still inside him.

"Hey, hey, Donny."

"What? Where?"

"Hey, Donny. Let's clean up in the river."

"What? In the river? Okay."

"Take your prick out first. Your prick. It's up my arse. Take it out, please."

Gently, slowly I raised my own backside up, felt my incredibly sensitive penis, still half hard, withdraw, heard a kind of plop, and sniffed for the first time the total overwhelming smells of all-the-way sex. I rolled onto my side on the blanket. I felt arms go around me. Felt Eric's lips against my own. Opened my eyes. His eyes were an inch away. They were smiling. I told you eyes can smile.

"Come on. Let's lie in the river."

We lay in the river. The water was freezing. We lay side by side, my cock red and shrivelled. The water was wonderful.

"Eric, can I ask you something?"

"Course you can."

"Today, when we came here. before we came here, I mean, did you know, did you know we were going to... you know...?"

"Fuck?"

"Yes, make love, fuck."

"No. At least I wasn't sure. I knew I wanted it, but I wasn't sure if you did. I was hoping for today, but, no, I wasn't sure."

A thought struck me.

"Eric... Eric, do you want to... you know, do it to me?" Eric was silent for a moment. Then he laughed. "Me up you? What do you think?"

I looked down Eric's body. Even in the freezing water his cock looked like a floppy python.

"Well, maybe not. Not yet anyway."

"I wonder," said Eric, "I wonder if girlfriends will like it, be able to take it, I mean. I guess they will. They're built for it, down front, I mean."

Eric must have seen the look in my eyes.

"Hey, Donny, I'm not a homo. I'm gonna have girlfriends. I'm gonna fuck them. Then I'm gonna have a wife, and I'm gonna fuck her, and I'm gonna have kids, maybe a dozen of them."

“But... but...” I wasn’t sure how to put it. I was always the one with the words, but I just couldn’t frame what I wanted to say.

“But what am I doing here with you, doing this, you mean?”

“Yes. I don’t understand.”

Eric rolled over on top of me in the clear running water. He looked into my eyes. “Because it’s YOU, you silly fucker, only because it’s you.”

I felt his cock harden and lengthen against my belly, and I understood.

Because it was me, only because it was me.

That perfect day drifted into the perfect weekend, the perfect week and the perfect end to the school year.

* * *

On Sunday afternoon Alan and I sat in the Aitkens’ private gardens, slurping noisily at giant knickerbocker glories, quaffing ice cold orange juice—Alan could squirt the stuff through the tiny gap between his two front teeth—burping at each other as rudely we could. Alan’s mum and dad had wisely commandeered the shady side of the garden.

“Well?”

“Well what?”

“What do you think of Dave?”

“Oh, he’s all right, I guess.”

“‘All right?’ Just fuckin’ ‘All right’, you guess? You dumb piece of shit.”

Alan and I had an extensive range of endearments for each other. “David Mudie is more than ‘all right’. David Mudie is gorgeous, and intelligent, and successful, and... fuckin’ great sex.”

“I’m not arguing,” I replied. “I said he was ‘all right’, didn’t I?”

“Yeh, you did. But you said Dave’s all right... but.”

“I didn’t say ‘but’.”

“You fuckin’ well did.” Alan scooped out a load of vanilla ice-cream and aimed his spoon at me. “Admit it. You fuckin’ said ‘but’.”

“I didn’t actually use the word ‘but’.”

“I know you didn’t, smart arse, but it was there. I heard it. You don’t have to say it for me to hear it. So come on. But what?” Ice-cream was running down the spoon, down Alan’s wrist. Expertly he caught it with a flick of his tongue. I was reminded again of the chameleon we’d seen on a nature programme at school. One flick and the dragonfly was gone.

“Well... look... Dave’s a nice guy, and he’s good-looking, and he’s your Dad’s solicitor, so he must be bright. But, fuck it, Alan, he’s a man... and you’re

a boy. Isn't that a bit..." I hesitated to say the word. "... isn't that a bit pervy?" There it was out.

"Yeh, it would be 'pervy...' Alan tinged the word with a sneer, "... if it wasn't me that wanted it first. If there's a perv at this table, it's me. Oh, yeh, and you. As a matter of fact," he drawled, "it was your finger up my bum, not just Dave's, yours, too. How's that for pervaciousness?" I blushed furiously.

"Are you boys all right?" called Alan's mum across the garden. "Not too hot for you, is it?"

"No, Mum, we're just fine, thanks," Alan called back.

"You don't care if Dave's older then?" I asked.

"No. I don't. In fact, that's one of the reasons I like him. And we don't fuck like bunny-rabbits all the time. A lot of the time, yes, but not ALL the time. Did you know that Dave is teaching me how to drive?"

"A car?"

"No, a scooter, you fuckin' idiot. Of course a car."

"I didn't know that."

"No, you wouldn't. Not since you got 'engaged' to Eric The Wonderboy Murray. By the way, have you fucked him yet?" I said nothing. "Well, good for you," Alan laughed. "That tight-ass has needed something up his bum for a long time. Imagine it being my little Donny." Alan said that with exactly the same intonation his mum used. "And what about that kid in First Year? Don't think I haven't noticed? You must be shagging both of them. You're too shagged out to help me out at school these days."

All this was said with a friendly conspiratorial grin. Alan and I could never be lovers, but we'd always be friends.

"Anyway, I do a lot more with Dave than you'd guess. I go fishing with him and Dad every Saturday afternoon. You wouldn't know because you're never around. And he's taken me to the Law Courts three times. It's great, Donny, really great. You should come along with us sometime, you really should."

"Yes, but..."

"Come on, spit it out."

"Well, do you think a man should be going out with a boy?"

Alan laughed but it wasn't unkind.

"Going out? Going out? I hardly think we're 'going out'. Dave likes my company; I like his. I can talk to him like I can't talk to anybody else—except maybe you. But we know it's not gonna last. At least I do. Listen, Dumbo. I'm 13, nearly 14. I like my life. I admit I'm dead lucky but that's the way the cookie crumbles. I don't know if I'm a homo, or anything like that, but if I am, so what?" He laughed. "Mum'll still love me anyway." He squirted some juice

between his teeth. “And I met Dave. And I fancied him, and I put the moves on him, and he... loves it. And we’re not hurting anybody. In fact, I think I’ve learned more about everything, spending time with Dave, than I ever knew before. And, tell you something, Donny, I’m gonna enjoy it while I’ve got it. I like the way he looks at me. I like the way he speaks to me. He pays attention to me, real attention, not like Dad, as if I was an afterthought, but real attention. You know something? I think we’d be just as happy together if there wasn’t any sex, but there IS, and I like it that way.”

I hadn’t heard Alan make a speech like that for years. In fact, I’d never heard him make a speech like that. He was serious, deadly serious. Those were his secret thoughts, and he’d shared them with me. Those two little boys in their pinafores in the nursery were growing up fast.

“And what about you?” he asked.

“What about me?!”

“Is it Eric Murray or that kid in the First Year?”

“Leslie.”

“Leslie?”

“Leslie Morrison. That’s his name. The First Year.” My look warned Alan not to take the piss. I would not be made fun of.

“Well, is it Eric or Leslie?”

I spooned some choc ice into my gob.

“I don’t know. I just don’t know.”

“You poor fucker,” he commiserated. Then added brightly, “Why not have both of them—together?”

“That wouldn’t work,” I sighed.

“Why not?” came the reply. “It nearly worked for me.”

“What do you mean?”

“You and Dave. I nearly had you and Dave at the same time. That was my idea, you know, not Dave’s, strictly mine.”

It was my turn to load the spoon and take aim.

“Hey?” I asked. “Have you ever had a knickerbocker glory up your arse?”

“No,” laughed Alan, “but I bet you have. Between us, YOU’re the bum-boy.”

The ice cream caught him right between the eves, and I nearly made it to the pool before he caught up with me, rugby-tackled, and sent us both splashing into the sparkling blue.

Did I say perfect? Not quite. Because maybe nothing is perfect in this world. Maybe the best of all possible worlds can never be perfect.

“Say you’ll come. It’s my dad’s idea as much as mine. Mike’ll be there, too. It’ll be a laugh. Go on, say you’ll come.”

That was Eric. That was Wednesday.

The Murrays had a cottage in Devon. Not theirs, an uncle's. I knew Devon was in England. I knew it was about as far away as one can go and still be in Britain. They were going for three weeks, and I was invited. Me, a boy from the wrong side of town, from the wrong junior school, with the wrong accent—I was invited to go on holiday with the nobs.

“No cricket, promise,” Eric added. “But the tennis courts are very good. They’re public. They’re never used. Maybe you can coach me. Maybe I’ll pick up the game at last. And Dad and Mike’ll take us fishing, deep sea fishing, not sissy river stuff. They go fishing a lot. We don’t have to go on all the trips. We can stay home sometimes. Have the place to ourselves. Do whatever we want.” He hesitated for a moment, then added, “You can bring the peanut butter. Go on. Say you’ll come. We’re leaving next Monday morning. Driving all the way. With an overnight stop. Say you’ll come.”

“I’ll have to ask my Mum.”

“Great. Ask her then. Ask her. She can phone my dad. Or he can come round to your house and talk to her. You won’t have to pay anything, just pocket money.” The last remark was made almost apologetically, and I appreciated Eric’s sensitivity.

“Okay, I’ll ask her.”

“Great, great. Ask her tonight.”

“Okay, I’ll ask her tonight.”

But I didn’t think I would. Because there was something else I wanted to ask her, and I’d planned to ask her that night.

“Montrose? With the Morrisons? For a fortnight?”

My mother’s arms were folded across her breasts. This meant she’d take some convincing. But at least she’d met Leslie three times and liked him; she’d even met Mrs Morrison, once, at the market, and they’d liked each other. They’d ended up in the coffee shop nattering like old hens while Leslie and I inspected the sports gear.

“Well, it’s only Montrose. That’s not far away. But they’re not taking you for nothing. Mrs Morrison works in the bank and she’s got her husband’s pension...” Mum knew more about the Morrisons than I did! “...but they’re like us. They aren’t made of money. But she’s getting the house for free and...”

“You know! You know all about it!” I managed to blurt this out even though my mouth hung open. It isn’t easy to do, try it.

“Of course, I do. You don’t think I’d let a son of mine go off with strangers. We settled things a couple of weeks ago. I was only waiting for you to ask, or not to ask, in case you had other plans. You don’t have other plans, do you?”

My face flushed, but one of the reasons I adored my mother was that she allowed us our secrets, the secret lives of teenage boys. That's not to say we had carte blanche to do what we liked; far from it. But she trusted us, and that trust extended to letting us have parts of our lives that were strictly our business.

"One thing..." Ah, that note of caution. "Leslie's a bit younger than you."

"Yeh, but he's taller than me. Nearly an inch."

"That's not what I meant. What I mean is—take care of him."

"I will, mum, I will." I grabbed her and whirled her round our small living room. We fell backwards onto the settee laughing. Of all the sounds in the world there is none more beautiful than the sound of a boy and his mother laughing.

That afternoon, in English class, we'd been studying the poems of A.E. Houseman. A couple of his verses stayed with me:

Into my heart an air that kills
From yon far country blows:
What are those blue remembered hills,
What spires, what farms are those?
That is the land of lost content,
I see it shining plain,
The happy highways where I went
And cannot come again.

I decided that I'd take those happy highways, and I'd let them take me wherever they went, so at least I'd be able one day to look back and know that I'd travelled them.

Chapter 5

Montrose.

Montrose is a sailing, holiday, and fishing port with water on three sides of the town. The South Esk River flows behind through a two-mile-wide tidal lagoon known as the Montrose Basin. This curious feature has a curve of sand five miles long. Pink-footed Arctic geese spend the winter here. Montrose is a Royal Burgh with a long and interesting history, though no trace remains of the large, important castle Edward I occupied in 1296. William Wallace destroyed the castle the following year. Narrow, twisting lanes that haven't changed in 200 years lead into the town's heart from the High Street. Each night at ten o'clock the 300-year-old curfew bell is rung from the church steeple. The Town Hall Stands in Melville Gardens and is used for dances and other entertainments.

That, more or less, is what I discovered about Montrose in a battered touring guide to Scotland I found in the school library. It tells you a little about Montrose but it tells you nothing about my Montrose, the Montrose of that golden summer, and the two weeks I spent with R. Leslie Morrison, his mum Margaret, and his little brother, Bryan.

It tells you nothing of three boys leaping headlong from the high sand dunes that line Montrose Basin, flinging off their clothes as they raced headlong into the cold grey embrace of the North Sea. Of three boys in cheap swimsuits that ballooned so badly in the water they were discarded amongst the sand dunes. The race back into the sea to cover their 'shame', and the return-race to the dunes when the frigid water had shrunk their genitals so much that not even the strictest Presbyterian could take offence.

Montrose, Montrose, like a lover's whisper in a sleeping ear.

The cottage rented by Mrs Morrison, Margaret, lay at the south end of the spit of land that held most of Montrose, only a three-minute walk from the Lifeboat Station, and the southerly tip of the Golf Course. The Morrisons had been coming here every summer for as long as Leslie could remember, and mother and son played a mean game of golf. I didn't mind being out-played by them but it was slightly humiliating to find eight-year-old Bryan could give me five strokes and still beat me comfortably.

Actually, it wasn't humiliating at all; it was just great fun. And since Bryan was acutely ticklish I got my revenge at bedtime.

The cottage was small. Living room, two bedrooms, kitchen, bathroom, and outside toilet. We boys bunked up in one of the bedrooms, literally bunking up for two of us, while the third had a narrow single bed parallel to the bunk beds. Leslie parked Bryan on the top bunk and took the lower bunk so that we could natter into the night. There was no risk of waking Bryan; he slept the sleep

of the dreamless innocent. His head hit the pillow at 8 o'clock every evening and out went his lights until 8 next morning when he dived headfirst from his bunk onto my narrow cell.

A routine was quickly established. Up at 8, dive into the shower, 3 of us together, hot water was limited, then a breakfast that included porridge and salted herrings. I thought I'd throw up until I found how tasty and filling they were. Then Leslie, Bryan and I would troop off to the golf course, accompanied on Tuesdays and Thursdays by Mrs Morrison, and we'd work our way round the links. Links golf is for me! Because the course is so flat and sandy, there isn't much chance of losing your ball even when you drive it as wildly and erratically as I often did. The Morrisons took their golf seriously. I gave it due attention but not seriously enough that I couldn't give my attention to other weighty matters.

Weighty matters like anal sex.

I'd hunted around the school library for information but there was precious little. A huge blow because I was very much preoccupied by anal sex. After all, I'd fucked Eric Murray in the arse, and I knew the time would come when I'd be called upon to reciprocate the pleasure, if a pleasure it was. Of course it had been a pleasure for me. His tight hot chute around my achingly stiff hard-on was one of the most exciting things I'd ever experienced. But how pleasurable had the experience been for Eric? And how would I feel when he rammed that ten-inch shaft up the pin-prick of my own anus.

I'm not being deliberately crude. I'm just stating the raw facts as I saw them. Eric Murray and I had had anal sex. I'd given; he'd received. But how would it feel when the shoe was on the other foot, so to speak? And even if it was pleasurable, how safe was it? I had this nightmare of going to the doctor. Of bending over. Of the doctor taking a peek and gasping: "Now what the fuck have you had up here, young man?" And if my hole didn't close up properly afterwards— Eric was ten inches and thick—would the shit begin to slide straight out of me? Would I lose control? Would I hear 'plop', 'plop', 'plop', and have people around me holding their noses, gasping "What the fuck is that smell?"

These were serious and weighty issues. While Leslie was going for his fourth birdie on the outward nine, I was figuring out how to explain to my mother why my rectum could now pass for the Grand Canyon.

In a way I envied Alan. He had Dave. He could ask about these things. And if they'd done it, gone all the way, I knew that Dave would be gentle with Alan. I knew he'd teach Alan. That Alan wouldn't go blundering around like I had whispering, "Help me," as if he needed his shoe laces tied. I watched Leslie bend to place his ball on a tee, and I wondered why his arse was so beautiful, so fascinating I couldn't take my eyes off it. He'd been sitting on his backside for

twelve years and all I could think of was hugging it hard against my cheeks. He'd been shitting through his arsehole for twelve years and all I could think of was gazing at his anus in rapt wonder. None of this made any sense.

"I want to kiss Leslie's anus."

I said that to myself three or four times, and each time it sounded sillier.

I knew that the anus and rectum carried many diseases that live quite benignly in the lower digestive tract. But would they be equally harmless in the mouth or stomach? And what happened if anal sex got messy? That would be embarrassing enough but what if your partner wanted to suck your penis after you pulled it out of him? Eric and I had gone straight into the river. My penis looked red and raw, but that was all. But what would happen if...?

"Hey, it's your turn."

"What?"

"Day dreaming again?" Mrs Morrison ruffled my hair. I shook myself and buried the image of my legs wrapped round her naked son as deep as the bunker my ball raced into.

"A sand wedge, I think." That was Leslie.

"No, no, I'm not hungry..."

"Sand wedge, not sandwich. It's that club there. You use it to get out of sand bunkers, not in." That was Mrs Morrison, and she was laughing, and her laughter was exactly like Leslie's, and for a moment I wanted to run and put my arms round her waist, and tell her, "I love him, I love him, and I'll never hurt him. I'll be good. You'll see, I'll be good."

Instead I took the club Bryan was holding out—a sand wedge, I presumed—and jumped down into the bunker ready to do the needful, no matter how many strokes it took.

"That was funny, really funny."

"You and the sand-wich. Imagine hitting the ball out of a bunker with a sand—wich. Even a sand-witch wouldn't be much help. What you really need is a sand—wedge."

"Okay, okay, Mister Smarty Pants." I turned one of my mum's epithets on Leslie. "Your backhand wasn't that hot this afternoon. I've seen better sliced bread than your sliced backhand."

I loved the friendly banter that ended every day. We were so close even a friendly punch was in order if you took the risk of falling out of bed. My bed was slightly higher so it was that much easier for me to gaze down at Leslie whose bunk was lit by a streetlamp just outside the open window.

"I'm sick of this. I've got a crick in my neck. Move over. I'm coming in."

I'd hardly processed the information when I felt Leslie's long legs slip in beside me, followed by his long torso, then his head on my shoulder. "There, that's better," he sighed. "Now where were we?"

The blood rose to my cheeks. The hairs on the back of my neck stood on end. I felt Leslie's right arm go round my neck.

"Do you think this is a good idea?" I managed to squeeze past the lump in my throat.

"I think it's a great idea," Leslie giggled.

"But your mother...?"

"Don't be silly. There's not enough room for three of us in this bed. In fact, there's hardly room for two. Budge over," saying which he heaved me towards the other side and swung a leg over me. "There that's better. Now where were we?"

I knew exactly where we were. In a small bedroom, in a small cottage, in the small town of Montrose, with Leslie Morrison wrapped around me, and his mother five feet away through a thin brick wall.

"I mean, what would your mother think?" I asked.

"What would YOUR mother think?" came the rejoinder.

I thought for a moment.

"Nothing. She wouldn't think anything. Not anything bad, I mean."

"Snap!"

I knew exactly what Leslie meant.

"And what about you?"

"What about me?"

"Are you thinking anything 'bad'?" The way he lingered on the word 'bad' was comical but full of menace.

"No, I don't think so. Nothing bad, well, not really bad."

"Well, I am."

"Am what? Are what?" I was so flustered I'd lost control of basic grammar.

"I'm thinking something bad, very bad."

"What?"

"I don't know."

This boy was infuriating, exasperating, fascinating.

"How the fuck do you know you're thinking something bad if you don't even know what it is you're thinking?" I hissed.

"Because," he said, "because I've got a hard-on."

I felt as if I'd been elbowed in the stomach.

"A hard-on?"

"A hard-on. A stiffy. An erection."

For the life of me I couldn't think of a single thing to say. This was the first time in our time together that R. Leslie Morrison had said anything sexual. In fact, only that afternoon I'd been congratulating myself our friendship was pure and chaste, that I hadn't grabbed him in the shower, or pinned him down in the dunes and rubbed my face into his sweet genitals, that I hadn't straddled him and...

"Well?" he whispered.

"Well what?"

"Have you got a hard-on?"

As a matter of fact, I did. "As a matter of fact I have." And I could feel the randy little fucker pressing against the thin white cotton of my Y-fronts.

"I like having a hard-on."

Was Leslie taking the piss?

"Everybody likes having a hard-on?"

"I get them all the time. Especially in the morning. It gets so hard it hurts. Is that normal?" There was a note of anxiety in Leslie's voice I couldn't understand. Why the hell would a boy get anxious because he got stiffies so hard they hurt? We all should be so lucky. Then the penny dropped. R. Leslie Morrison knew nothing, or next to nothing about sex, and he was asking me because he really wanted to know. Tenderness washed over me. I turned to him. Our noses touched. I could feel his warm Horlicky-breath on my face. My eyes were inches from his; they were luminous in the lamplight.

"Go on then," I sighed. "Ask whatever you want."

"Whatever? Anything?"

"Anything?"

"Okay, here goes." There was a note of unbridled happiness in his voice. "Exactly what happens when your penis, I mean my penis, I mean any boy's penis goes hard? When he gets a hard-on, I mean. And I want to know exactly. Don't leave anything out. Not anything."

Don't leave anything out. Not anything. Nothing but the truth, the whole truth. And sitting here scribbling this stuff out on the pads of yellow, blue-lined writing paper Mrs Morrison gave me that summer, I'm suddenly taken back to the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

The truth about Nicky and Dan, and what happened suddenly that summer. On the last night Nicky fucked my mouth. Nicky told me he loved Dan. That it had been he, not Dan, who'd initiated the... the what?... the affair, the relationship, the friendship, the sex between them. But Nicky hadn't stormed out that night. We'd spent that last night together, in Nicky's bed, with Nicky telling me the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

And I'm a writer, and I have to try and put together what happened. I have to make you see, and hear and feel what happened, so that I can begin to understand it, too.

So here goes. Here's what Nicky told me.

* * *

"Dan, Dan, are you asleep? Dan, Dan?"

The boy's whisper became more insistent.

The man lay there in the dark. He knew the boy was only three feet away. Only three feet, but that small space was an abyss, a black hole into which he could so readily fall, so willingly fall, and all it needed was a single word.

"Dan, Dan, I know you're not sleeping."

There was the tinkle of laughter in Nicky's voice. No surprise. There was always the tinkle of laughter in Nicky's voice. It was there when he first met him, eyes finding each other across the lawn at Heathfield House.

"I really enjoyed today, Dan. It's great you're back. Wish you could stay here all summer. I know you'll have a room in the stable block when we get it fixed up, but it's great to have you here."

"Try to get to sleep, Nick. You've had a long day. Been working bloody hard, too. You're only 12 but you work like a little beaver." The man's voice was thrillingly deep in the darkened bedroom.

"Mother won't mind us sharing all summer. She's not here half the time. It's your job to look after me."

"Yep, and it's my job to tell you to get some sleep. Lots of work to get done tomorrow."

"Can't get to sleep, Dan. Too excited. Don't mind me talking. You don't have to listen." Nicolas Timuri was in full flow now. Babbling away like a busy brook.

The man listened to the boy, saw him in his mind's eye. The huge hazel eyes. The straight unfashionably long hair. The straight nose. The cheekbones. The flawless skin. The strong but not heavy build, shoulders like a coat hanger, deepening chest, wasp-waist. And the supreme self-confidence of the genuinely beautiful.

The man caught up with the boy's chatter.

"...and I think I pulled a muscle. And you're no help. You're not even listening, are you? Well, are you?"

"What were you saying?" The words were muffled in a sigh.

"There, I knew it!" Nicky was triumphant. "I knew you weren't listening."

The eagerness in the boy's voice was comical. He was on his side now, leaning on an elbow, chin cupped in one hand, staring happily across the gap, anticipating a conversation that might prove endless.

"Nicky, roll over and go to sleep."

"Can't. Told you, too excited. I've pulled a muscle, yes, I've definitely pulled a muscle." The second remark was pronounced like the clincher. "I suppose I could... you know..." Silence. "Have a wank. That always helps." No giggle, this was deadly serious. This was a new Nicky.

"Have a wank then," the man said, as unfazed as he could manage. "But keep it quiet."

"Then I'll do it. I'll just lie here and have a wank." Nicky managed to make it sound like a threat rather than a pleasure.

"Well, get on with it," the man whispered, his hand reaching inside his shorts.

"It won't be enough," continued the boy, "Besides, I told you I think I've got a pulled muscle."

"How can you 'think' you've got a pulled muscle? You'd know if you had a pulled muscle." The man was awake and happily exasperated.

"Well, I know I've got a pulled something, and you should help me with it."

"Why the fuck should I help you with it?"

Nicky cheerily tut-tutted the 'fuck'.

"'Cos you're our handy man, and what are handymen supposed to do. They're supposed to be handy."

"And just what do you expect me to do?"

"Check it out."

"Nicky..." The man made one last effort to avoid the black hole. "...Nicky, it's one in the morning."

"Yes, and there's nobody here—except US!"

The man had nothing left to argue with.

"What do I do?"

"Slide over here. On my bed. Look, I'll make room."

Dan heard the boy budge over. Heard the curtains slide back. Saw the moonlight slash across his bed. Edged out of his own and slid over. He sat there looking down at him. Christ, the boy was beautiful.

He lay there, head on pillow, his long auburn hair splayed beneath him. His pyjama top open. Bedspreed pushed down to his waist, the edge of his blue bottoms revealed. His torso was long, his chest sculpted, his belly completely flat, his hips like butterflies, his belly button indented.

Dan adjusted himself to hide his own excitement, glad of the moon-struck gloaming.

“Where is it then?” he asked stupidly.

“Between my legs, of course,” Nicky giggled, then added, “no, my stomach, I mean.” The boy reached for the man’s hand and pressed it against his stomach—smooth, firm, warm. He moved the palm of the hand in circles against his stomach. Dan sat there facing up the bed, looking into the boy’s face and eyes as his hand circled and caressed his stomach.

“Mmmmmm, that’s nice,” the boy sighed. “That’s really nice.”

The hand circled up to the boy’s chest. There didn’t seem to be any medical justification for this. He knew he shouldn’t do it. He knew he would do it. His fingertips ran across Nicky’s right nipple, a hard little raisin in the middle of a pale brown aureole. He slid across to the left nipple, worked it a little, and then slid down to the boy’s stomach again.

“It’s a bit lower,” he whispered, leaving ‘it’ unspecified. “Bedsread’s in the way,” he added. The boy reached his right hand to the bedsread, raised it, and flicked it to his knees. His arousal was obvious. His erection not only outlined against the thin blue cotton, but the fabric raised and stretched into a small tent. The pyjamas were pulled down to the boy’s pubic bone. No hair, skin smooth as alabaster.

“Please,” came the boy’s whisper. There it was, the magic word, that according to all mothers opens the way to everything. The boy raised his bottom from the bed.

The man slid his fingers below the elasticised waist, raised the boxers and edged them to his knees. The boy’s erection, released to the night air, bounced into view. Long fingers and calloused thumb closed round the boy’s erection, his hard-on, his stiffy. The shaft was hot. No nonsense about burning fingers or any of that nonsense, but it was hot, and it was pulsating.

Nicky’s dick was four inches long, but he was still a growing boy. His cock was not slim; it was not a little boy’s cock; it was a young boy’s cock with its sweet innocence and promise. He wasn’t circumcised, few English boys are, and the foreskin slid back easily to reveal a clearly-defined little pink mouth. He was already wet and slippery. Two blue veins twined up from his balls disappearing into the shaft an inch or so from the slightly bulbous head. The urethra was also clearly defined. Nicky’s legs were open, and his balls had already risen in his scrotum. Dan wondered how long the boy had lain there playing with himself, gathering the courage to make his desires known.

Dan held the shaft, gently squeezing, easing, then squeezing again. His left hand pressed against Nicky’s stomach, taut as a washboard. He could hear the boy’s breathing quicken and deepen.

“Kiss it if you want to.”

Dan loved that. Not ‘play with it’, ‘wank it’, ‘suck it.’, but ‘kiss it’. That was romantic, so... “Then you can suck it.”... twelve years old! Dan lowered his face, breathed in deeply, and slid his lips over hot little head, immediately tasting the boy’s excitement.

The man kept it simple. He wanted to search between the boy’s legs, find his anus, push his long middle finger inside him, find his prostate gland, give him an orgasm he’d never forget. But he didn’t. For the moment he concentrated on giving Nicky the first and, as far as he knew, the best ‘blow job’ he’d had in his young life. He guessed that for Nicky this was an experiment, a ship in the night, definitely worth boarding for a little while, but probably not worth staying on till it hit the iceberg.

Nicky’s body trembled and shook. His buttocks rose from the bed. He pushed himself deeper into Dan’s throat. His knees would have knocked together if they’d been near each other. His tummy tightened and fluttered uncontrollably. His hands gripped Dan’s hair, pulling his head into his groin until his nose flattened into the pubic bone. Three—four—five—six times he forced Dan down while he bounced up to meet him. Dan tasted nothing. The boy’s semen bypassed his taste buds completely, sperm spurted straight down his gullet.

Dan lay across the boy, gasping and spluttering like a landed trout. Then he realised he’d cum too. He risked a glance up at Nicky. The boy lay there with his elbow across his eyes. He couldn’t read what he was feeling. He slid from the bed. Found his hold-all and a fresh pair of underpants. Slipped trembling into the bathroom and changed. Padded back to bed and stuffed the messy pair into the bottom of the bag.

He risked another look at Nicky. The boy was sitting up in bed, grinning from ear to ear, the bedspread still thrown back, but his penis tucked back inside his boxers.

“Get into my bed for a little while—plllleeeaaassse,” Nicky smiled. “I want to talk for a bit. I’ll probably fall asleep talking. That’s what I do. Then you can go back to your bed if you want to.” The boy frowned. “But you don’t have to. I want you stay with me. I’m not a kid, you know. I know what I’m doing.” Nicky paused. “In the morning it’s my turn. I want to try it. I’m not just a kid. I know what I want.”

* * *

Nicolas Timuri knew what he wanted but I didn’t. I lay there spooning with Leslie, his breath on my neck, my bottom in his lap. I’d told him everything I knew about erections, and scrotums, and semen, and tissue engorged with

blood, and how hard-ons were pushed into ladies to make babies—I wasn't too sure of those facts— and how masturbation was perfectly natural and perfectly common.

“MastURbation... masturbaTION... MASTurbation...” Leslie lay there experimenting with the word, rolling it around in his mouth, emphasizing different syllables, deepening his voice, pitching it higher until, exasperated, I hissed, “Oh, for fuck's sake, shut up.”

“Can we try it?” he whispered.

“Try what?” I whispered sleepily.

“MasTURbaTION,” he whispered.

“No, we bloody well cannot.”

“But you said it helps you sleep.”

“It does.”

“Well...?”

“I'm sleepy enough.”

“But I'm not.”

“Then you can go back to your own bed and masTOORbate,” I said. Leslie heard the note of finality in my voice.

“Well, not now, but sometime.”

“Okay, sometime,” I murmured.

“Soon?”

“Soon.”

“Hey. I'm going to make a spoon.”

“A what?”

“A spoon. Like this.”

Leslie drew up his knees and curled his torso. He pulled me back into the hollow he'd created, my bum in his lap. His left arm went round my chest. His cheek rested in the hollow of my neck.

“Nighty night. Don't let the bugs bite. If they bite...”

I don't know if Leslie finished the verse.

As much as the golf in the morning, beach in the afternoon, tennis after tea, spooning became part of our routine. Leslie would slip into my bed, chatter while I listened, and then spoon us to sleep. If it wasn't everything I wanted, it was more than I'd ever expected. Sex is easy; love is almost impossible.

Every morning I woke up to find our limbs had become so entangled it was difficult to sort out what was me and what was him. Gently I unwound myself from him only to find he'd humph-and-hah in his sleep and cling onto me even tighter. Only when Bryan landed on us like an over-weight cherub would Leslie cry in anger, those grey eyes trying desperately to focus as if the world was entirely new to him. Through the door would come Margaret's voice,

“Breakfast in ten.” This precipitated a mad scramble for the shower room. Six minutes hot water, three minutes lukewarm, one minute tepid, then as long a freezing cascade as desired.

Three boys, 14, 12 and 8, leaping and hopping in a confined space, bouncing each other against the tiles, fighting for the single bar of Wright’s Coal Tar soap. It seemed entirely natural, probably because it was entirely natural.

“Look, it’s gone hard already. It goes like that every morning.”

“So does mine.”

“Yes, it does,” protested Bryan. “Look!”

He was right. So it did. So it had.

Mine couldn’t bear to be left out. It hardened, lengthened, and pointed straight up my belly. Bryan’s stuck out straight in front of him. Leslie’s found an angle somewhere between the two.

“Donny’s got hair. Why haven’t you got hair? You’re at the big school, too. When will I get hair?”

“When you come to the big school,” I promised Bryan.

“Remember you promised,” whispered Leslie, in a whisper masked by the spattering shower.

“Promised what?” asked Bryan.

“None of your business. Big school stuff.”

“Oh.” The explanation satisfied Bryan.

“Where’s the soap? Give me the soap.”

“What do you want the soap for?” Leslie’s eyes brightened with hope, lust, fear.

“To wash my fuckin’ arse with. What do you think I want the soap for?”

“Donny used a naughty word, Donny used a naughty word,” chirruped Bryan.

“Shut the fuck up!”

“Leslie used a naughty word. Leslie used a naughty word.” Leslie took the bar of Wright’s Coal Tar and edged towards his little brother who backed into me for protection. You can imagine where the soap was bound for, but the little brat was saved by a sudden whoosh of freezing water.

“Fuck it!” squealed Bryan leaping over the six-inch tiled barrier that did nothing to save the shower room floor from flooding.

Naughty words being equally distributed, we pursued his little arse into the bedroom. Margaret was making the beds. My hands flew down to cover my embarrassment. Fortunately the cold water had collapsed my erection.

“Breakfast’s on the table, gentlemen. Don’t let your porridge get cold. You know what happened to Goldilocks and her three ‘bares’.” There was a joke buried in there somewhere but I didn’t wait around to dig it out. I grabbed my

tennis shorts and bowed my way backwards out of the bedroom, followed by an assortment of identical laughter.

Laughter is what I remember most about those two weeks in Montrose. It didn't rain once. I remember that. I never won a round of golf. I remember that. I lost a tennis set to Leslie, but I wasn't allowed to hit any shots to his backhand. I remember that. We spooned together most nights. I remember that. I had sex with Leslie once.

Two days to go and whoever organises life's mysteries smiled on me. But not on Bryan. In his attempts to loosen a tooth and attract the attention of the Tooth Fairy, Bryan had succeeded in snapping the tooth and leaving a painful little stump. Off to the city Mrs Morrison took her younger son and rather than make the trip twice in one day left us 'men' to look after ourselves till morning though it has to be admitted everything, especially meals, was prescribed in minute detail.

"I'm trusting you, especially you, Donald," she confided. "You have the years over Leslie, so I'm leaving him in your capable hands, and both of you in the hands of Mrs Burns." The good Mrs Burns was our next-door neighbour and a busier busybody it would be difficult to find. Margaret leaned against me and planted a kiss on my right cheek. Her scent was of sea and roses, and I confess my penis stirred with interest.

Golf. Lunch. Siesta. Then off to the beach. Another cloudless day, the sun kissed my back as I headed for the sand dunes. Leslie was ensnared by a lecture from Mrs Burns and generously waved me ahead. I found one of our favourite spots, a declivity as private as the grave, kicked off my sandshoes, stripped off my t-shirt and shorts, spread our double-size blue-striped bath towel, and stretched out to do some serious sunbathing. I may have drifted off for a while.

I watched the small craft in the basin. A few fishing boats, but mostly little yachts and rowboats. I watched a few families, mostly women and children, dotted along the sands. I watched two seagulls dispute something unsavoury. Then there was nothing else to watch.

Nothing but Leslie.

Crossing the sands from beneath the dunes, Leslie was drawing near. He wore his tiny blue swimming slip, t-shirt and shorts slung over his left shoulder, sandshoes tied together hanging from his neck. On the palm of his right hand he was trying to balance a long blade of tiger grass. A thin chain of gold—an 11th birthday gift—gleamed around his neck. In trying to balance the grass, he himself was in perfect balance. One long arm stretched out as if leading him to me. Endless legs taking fine steps as if he was barefoot on ice rather than on hot sand. I realised I was holding my breath, realised I was feeling faint, realised that for the first time in my life I was encountering true beauty. Even now it's

difficult to write. For even now the image of Leslie on the sands at Montrose, balancing a blade of tiger grass, drawing near to me, the unseen worshipper, takes my breath away and leaves me helpless.

Leslie stopped, let the grass drop, raised his hand to shield his eyes against the sun, and scanned the dunes. Scanned the dunes for me. I admit I did nothing. I wanted to make the moment last, if not forever, for as long as I could. In the bright sunlight I could see a frown, but it only served to make him more beautiful. I lowered my head but only for a moment. How could I torture what I loved so well?

“Here! Over here!”

He turned his head and saw me. He burst out laughing. He turned way and ran towards the water, splashing into the shallows, until he was knee deep. Then, turning to face me, he bent and scattered water over his face and hair. He left the water and walked towards me, rivulets running down his shoulders and chest, drops of water hanging like pearls from the lobe of each ear. He reached me and threw himself down on the bath towel.

“Do my back, please.”

I raised the spare towel and gently dabbed at his shoulders and back. “I’m not a bit of Mum’s porcelain, you know. Dry me properly.” He raised his arms skywards and I rubbed him vigorously. “My hair, too, please.” I dried his hair as my mum did mine, pulling his head onto my chest and rubbing furiously. He flung his head back. His eyes sparkled. He raised an eyebrow and said, “Well?”

“Well what?”

“Show me.”

“Show you what?”

“How to do that stuff?”

“What stuff?”

“That masturbation stuff. You know.” I know. My face leapt into flames.

“Don’t be stupid. Not here. Not now.”

“Yes, here. Yes, now.” Leslie sounded cheerfully determined.

“Why now? Can’t it wait?”

“No, it can’t. Look.”

My eyes followed Leslie’s downward glance. Outlined in his blue slip was an unmistakable erection. A little hosepipe, slightly bulbous at one end, perched on two walnuts, or Brazil nuts, at the other end. I felt my own hose stir and stretch like a lazy grass snake in the morning sun.

“For God’s sake, Leslie, we’re sitting in the sand dunes,” I protested. “Look, there’s people over there.”

“They can’t see us,” came his response. “And nobody comes down to the beach this way. The dunes are too steep. And the grass can really cut. You promised.”

“Did I?”

“Yes, you know you did. You promised to teach me to masturbate.”

I sighed and adjusted myself.

“Well, for a start, stop using the word ‘masturbate’. That’s the word doctors use. It’s not the word we use at school.”

Leslie’s eyes lit up. “Go on. What do they call it at school?”

“Say ‘to have a wank’. Or ‘to toss yourself off’.”

Leslie frowned. “Show me in a sentence.”

The pedant in me took over. “You can say, ‘Excuse me, I’m just going to have a wank.’ Or ‘Excuse me, I’m just going to toss myself off.’”

“Do you always have to be so polite?” he asked. “Is that what you say to Mum? ‘Excuse me, Mum, I’ll be back in a minute. I’m just going to have a wank’.” Tickled by his own humour, Leslie giggled.

“Oh, fuck off,” I said.

“Show me what to do then.”

“Are you sure?”

“Absolutely.”

“Okay. Pull down the front of your swimming trunks.”

Leslie peeled away the front of his swim slip and pushed it below his scrotum. I was startled by the whiteness of his skin even though I saw it every morning in the shower. I was more startled by his erect penis; this was a well-built boy. His erection was about four inches, slim but not skinny. Like every boy I knew, except for two Jewish boys at school, he was uncircumcised, and the head of his cock was peeping out from his foreskin. The skin of his cock was pale ivory, like my grandfather’s dominoes, with two blue veins running round the shaft. His scrotum was surprisingly loose though I could see his balls were already raised in their sac. Leslie pulled the shaft away from his body, then let it boing healthily back.

“Now what?” His voice was a whisper.

“Take the thumb and two forefingers of your right hand,” I advised in my most clinical tones. “Grip the head of your penis and move the foreskin up and down over the head.”

Solemnly, Leslie examined his thumb and fingers, then planted them directly on the head of his cock and pushed down enthusiastically.

“Ow!”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake, Leslie, I said ‘over the skin’, not directly on your cock. You’ve got to make the skin rub up and down on the head of your cock. That’s what gets it excited.”

“Sorry,” he murmured and started again, this time getting it more or less right. He began pushing the skin down, then pulling it back up. It looked clumsy but it might have been working. “What do I do with my other hand?”

“Play with your balls.”

“My balls?”

“Yes, your balls. Your testicles. Those things in the sac. That sac there. Squish them about it.”

To his credit, Leslie was trying his best. He was maintaining his erection but didn’t look too thrilled by the experience. “It’s not working.”

“Give it time.”

“How much time?”

“How should I know? Think of something sexy. That usually works.”

Leslie closed his eyes. His finger and thumb worked on his shaft. His other hand played with his balls. I sat there aching, dying to reach out and touch him, dying to kiss him at the point where his shaft met his body, dying to...

“Oh, it’s no good. You’ll have to show me.”

“Show you?”

“Yes, show me. On your... cock, dick, penis... on your whatever.”

“No.”

“Yes.”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Because... because...” I couldn’t think of a single reason why not.

“Don’t tell me you haven’t got an erection? ‘Cause I can see it.”

“Don’t call it an ‘erection’. Call it a ‘hard-on’ or a ‘stiffy’ but not an erection. That’s like masturbation. We hardly ever use it.”

“Go on then. Show me how to do it. Close your eyes. Think of something sexy and just DO it!”

I shrugged my shoulders, closed my eyes, peeled the front of my swimming trunks away and thought of Leslie.

“Fucking hell, you’ve got a big one.”

I ignored the compliment, gripped my cock and began that old familiar action. It felt weird. My eyes were closed. I pictured a naked Leslie playing with his cock when, right before my very eyes, unfortunately closed, was the real thing, infinitely sexier, infinitely more stimulating. The world around me began to fade. Leslie was in my arms, our bodies pressed together, my lips nuzzling at his neck, my free hand caressing his skin. It wouldn’t be long.

“Fuck it. What’s that?”

My body jerked, my eyes flicked open. I looked down. My hand was not alone. Other fingers were round the bottom of my shaft, working in time with my own.

“What the fuck are you doing, Leslie?” He whipped his hand away as if it’d been touched by a red hot poker.

“I’m s-s-sorry,” he stammered. “I just wanted to... I only... I don’t know...” There were tears in his eyes. He flung himself onto the bath towel. “I’m s-s-sorry, Donny. I’m s-s-sorry.”

I bent over him and put my arm round his shoulders. The tears were silent but they were there. “Hey, come on, it’s nothing. You just surprised me, that’s all.” I edged up his swimsuit, then edged up my own. “Look, it doesn’t matter. You’re just curious, that’s all. You just want to find out. Honest, it was nothing.” I took the plunge. “In fact, it was quite nice. I like you. Remember, we’re friends.” I felt Leslie rise and turn to me. His eyes glistened.

“Quite nice,” he echoed. “That’s what I thought, too. That it’d be quite nice. You told me to imagine something sexy and...” I don’t know if he knew how to finish the sentence.

“Not now,” I interrupted. “Anyway it’s not nice to have sand all over a couple of sticky dickies. Let’s go and have a swim. We’ve still got tennis practice. You ARE going to make the Under-15s team even if I have to kill you to do it.” I watched the clouds pass and the sunshine flood Leslie’s face. We straightened our hard dicks and headed towards the water.

“You said ‘not now’.”

“So?”

“Not now means later.”

“So?”

My twelve-year-old friend slapped my fourteen-year-old backside and whooped, “Later means tonight!” and then, “First one in the water gets tossed off first!” With that he took off like the proverbial bat, followed by my heartfelt cry of “Wanker!”

“What’s a ‘wanker’?”

“Pardon?”

“On the beach. You called me a ‘wanker’. What’s a wanker?”

We were sitting on Mrs Morrison’s double bed, cross-legged, facing each other. We both wore t-shirts and underpants. We couldn’t be bothered pulling on pyjamas, and anyway it was a warm night. A bedside lamp cast a glow onto the pink, frilly bedspread. We could probably have managed with the light from the street lamp but Leslie had insisted on closing the curtains and pushing a pillow

into the crack at the bottom of the door. "So Mrs Burns won't know we're up so late." Since Mrs Burns was in her cottage across the street, I thought the precautions a bit excessive. Still, it was fun to humour Leslie.

"You've really never done it before?" I asked.

"No. I've heard stuff at school. I've been trying to figure it out but nobody ever comes straight out and explains what it is. It's sex, isn't it?"

"Yes, but it's not serious sex. Nobody's going to have a baby or anything. It's just fun. It's just what boys do together." The sentence slipped out. Leslie pounced. "Boys do it together? You mean they have sex together? Aren't you supposed to have sex with girls?"

"You can have sex with girls," I explained. "You can have sex with boys. You can have it on your own. But, yes, boys sometimes have sex together."

"Have you had sex with another boy?" I was a bit unnerved by Leslie's wide-eyed gaze.

"Some."

"Who with? With Eric Murray. You two are a lot together. I get a bit jealous sometimes." Was there no end to this boy's openness, to his blistering honesty? I jumped as I felt his fingers touch my erection. "I don't mind, really I don't," he continued. "You and Eric are good friends. Do you want to have sex with me? Your penis wants to."

"Stop saying 'penis'. Say 'dick' or 'cock' or 'stiffy' or 'hard-on.'"

"Okay. But you want to, don't you? I want to. I don't know what to do but I know I want to. Just show me what to do."

I wanted to take him in my arms. Simply hold him to me. But my cock was hard and aching.

"Lie on your front."

Leslie rolled over onto his front, cradling his head on his crossed arms. "Aren't we supposed to take our clothes off, all of them, I mean?" I could hear the tremble in his voice.

I straddled his legs and lowered myself along his back. "Shhhh," I whispered in his ear. "Shhhh, baby." I leaned forward propping myself on my elbows and licked his neck. I rocked gently, fitting my erection into the outlined split of Leslie's buttocks, only thin white cotton keeping skin from skin. As I bore down, he opened his legs a little wider. Using my hands against the headboard, I began sliding the length of his body, allowing my stiff prick to slide the length of his crack. Back and forwards, back and forwards. I quickened my pace and felt the cotton slide back and forth along the shaft. I could feel the heat radiating from his crack. I felt the pressure build, raised myself and rolled from Leslie's back.

"Your turn," I whispered after a few minutes.

Leslie climbed on board and fitted his body to mine. I could feel the heat from his erection as it fitted snugly between my buttocks. I felt a hot tongue lick my neck. This boy was a quick learner! I could feel the delicious friction of cotton against cotton, skin against skin. I could hear his breath quicken against my neck.

“Am I doing it right? Am I doing okay?”

“You’re doing great, just great.” I turned my head slightly and looked up. Leslie was holding onto the headboard, rocking backwards and forwards. I could smell the sweet-sour sweat from our bodies. I saw the slimness of his arms, the nakedness of his armpits. I felt him twist and adjust himself and was shocked to feel his skin against mine, his hard shaft pinned lengthwise between my cheeks as he slid back and forwards. Hey! This boy was learning a bit too quickly. I heard him begin to whimper and gently eased myself up. The cheeky bugger fought to hold me down. I rolled away from under him and was shocked by the glazed look in his eyes, his hair splattered along his forehead, his lips swollen and red.

“Why did you...? Why can’t I...?” he panted.

“Feels great, doesn’t it?” I laughed. He nodded. “But it feels even better naked.” I leaned back and watched Leslie strip off his t-shirt and underpants. He was slim, not skinny. His tanned skin glowed except for the ivory white that split his body. His mousy ash hair suited those big grey eyes perfectly. I marvelled again at his eyelashes. Wide shoulders, boyish chest, narrow waist and hips. I wondered how he kept his tennis shorts up. Not a single hair below his neck that I could see. His flat tummy dissected by his erect penis. The perfect cushion of his round backside. The long legs. The big feet. Toes long like his fingers. He watched me like a hawk as I stripped off my own clothes.

“Lie back,” I whispered.

He lay back, naked, exposed, vulnerable. I lay alongside the lower half of his body, ran my fingers along his skin, leaned over and ran my tongue the length of his stiff shaft. I heard him gasp. Again. and again my tongue ran the length of his erection. From the corner of my eye I saw his fists clench the bedspread. I could see a fine shadow across his pubic area, the promise of things to come. I felt his fingers in my hair. I lowered my head and took him in until my lips were pressing against his pubis. I raised my head to let my saliva run down his shaft. My fingers gently manipulated his testes in their tight sac. Time can’t stand still but it can slow down, it can be lost forever, and I was lost in that forever.

“Stop, stop.” His voice was hoarse. “Something’s happening.” His voice came from far away. I gulped, swallowed my saliva and bore down, sucking faster and harder. I tasted a sweetness that wasn’t piss. Another promise of

things to come. Leslie's hips were bucking uncontrollably. I pushed the tip of my middle finger against his rosebud, rubbed, pressed, pushed and prodded. The rubberiness of the flesh gave way and my finger slid in.

"Oh. . . oh... stop... no, don't stop."

I wiggled my finger inside his rectum, then drove it back and forth in time to my sucking. Leslie was squealing now. Pulling my hair, then pressing my head back down. I felt his stomach rock n' roll beneath the palm of my hand. I gripped the flesh tightly and squeezed. His hips rose from the bed. He held them up and pushed my face, squashing my nose, flat against his pubis and balls. Fuck it, I was going to die for love. Three, four, five times he bounced against my face, and then with a final squeal forced me away and rolled onto his side.

The boy lay there, his stomach fluttering. His shoulders heaved. I was terrified he was sobbing. Then he rolled over to me. His eyes were watery, sweat ran down his chest, his cock flopped at half-mast, curiously purple, curiously red.

"Wow, thanks, Donny. Was that wanking? Wanking's great."

"Nope," I laughed, more in relief than in pleasure, "that wasn't wanking, that was getting sucked off. Same thing, different method. You like?"

"What do you think?" he giggled. He looked down at his penis and whispered, "We like." He looked shyly away for a moment, turned and said, "Is it my turn now? Do I suck you off?"

I'd been thinking. I'd have loved Leslie to suck me off there and then, but I hesitated. I didn't want to go too far that first night. I wondered how he'd cope with a mouth, a throat, a tummy full of semen. I remembered what a shock it'd been to me, gross in some ways, and, anyway, my heart was set on something else.

"Lie on your stomach again." He did it immediately, cradling his head on his arms again, looking as content as a cat who'd caught a canary. I reached for the little jar on the bedside table. Nivea. No peanut butter available, so Nivea would have to do.

Leslie shivered as I smeared the cold cream deep in his crack. My middle finger smeared more cream along his anal area. Gently I pressed his anus until the sphincter gave way and let my finger slide in.

"What's this called?" asked Leslie, his voice muffled by his arms.

"Shhhh, baby, shhhh. Trust me. You'll like it."

When I felt his muscles relax, I slid a second finger in and tenderly loosened him a little more. Then I withdrew my fingers, separated his buttocks, and looked at the portal to paradise. There was practically nothing there. Just a tiny slit, not much bigger than the little mouth at the head of my cock. I smeared Nivea around my erect penis, it was hot, hard and aching. I leaned down into

Leslie's body and began. running my shaft between his buttocks again. I parted his legs; he offered no resistance. I kept rubbing the shaft between the cheeks of his arse. I pressed the head of my cock against his little back entrance and I... came!

My hips bucked. My cock pulsed. I tried to nip it shut. Hopeless. It pulsed and shot. Pulsed and shot. I spurted five squirts of semen between Leslie's buttocks, most of it splattering against his little pink hole. Fuck it! Fuck it! I collapsed on his back. I lay there for a few minutes, too stunned to think. Then I heard Leslie's voice. "Are you finished yet?" I climbed off him and began to giggle, then to laugh. He rolled over and looked at me quizzically. "Have you peed on me? I feel all wet back there."

"There's been a bit of an accident," I said. "Maybe we should take a shower. And we'd better throw this bedspread in the washing machine."

"Great," sparkled Leslie. "That means we'll have to stay up very late. And you have to tell me everything you know about sex, and I mean everything."

I looked into those grey eyes.

"Leslie, can I ask you something?"

"Course you can."

"Can I kiss you?"

"Course you can," he grinned. "I thought you'd never ask."

Chapter 6

Thwack! 127 Thwack! 128 Thwack! 129 Thwack! 130 Thwack! 131 Thwack!

Fuck it!

I'd slightly mistimed the ball just enough to make it hit the white stripe painted along the warehouse wall. I could have pretended the ball hadn't hit white and continued the rally but I'd long ago decided that would be cheating. Mind you, the stripe was painted at a height of 38 inches the length of the wall when it should have been 36 inches at the centre and 42 inches at either end but the factory probably didn't have me or my tennis practice in mind when it was painted.

Mistimed? Why? Because my concentration had wandered, wandered back to Montrose and that wonderful time with the Morrisons. They were up in Aberdeen now; the Murrays were down in Devon; the Aitkens were on a cruise somewhere in the Med. And I? I was on the Industrial Estate thwacking a tennis ball against a factory wall. I didn't mind that too much. To tell the truth, I enjoyed the solitude. I get nervous amongst too many people. And there's great comfort doing something thoughtless, monotonous, mechanical. You can escape the dreams and demons in your head, at least for a little while.

So I picked up the ball and started again. Thwack! Leslie's eyes. Thwack! Leslie's thighs. Thwack! Leslie's lips. Thwack! Leslie's nose. Thwack! Eric's ten inches. Thwack! Honk! Honk!

Fuck it!

The ball flew past me as I turned my head for a moment. There was a car. A little green sports car, bottle green, with a canvas sun roof, open. Is that an MG? I knew nothing about cars. I'd hardly ever been in a car but I'd seen photos and guessed it was an MG.

"Hi there, Donny," the driver waved to me.

I blinked and frowned. It took me a moment or two. Mr Mudie. David. Dave. Alan's Dave. I waved back warily. He had sunglasses on. I couldn't read his eyes, couldn't read his intentions. Had my tight little white tennis shorts on. Wished mum would invest in a new pair for me. The MG purred up to me. Mr Mudie removed his sunglasses and extended his hand. I shook it. It was warm and dry.

"Hi there again," he smiled. "Long time no see. What you doing?"

I looked down at the tennis racquet.

"Sorry, dumb question," he laughed. "How long you been practising? Alan tells me tennis is your thing. I used to play a bit myself."

“A couple of hours, I think.” I flexed my right shoulder and winced. Must have been a couple of hours at least.

“Thirsty? Something to drink?”

Wariness must have shaded my face.

Mr Mudie, Dave, laughed again. “I’m thinking of a Coke, juice, or a milkshake. Nothing more spectacular. I’m a one-boy man, you know.”

It was my turn to laugh. “Gr... cool,” I said as he leaned to open the door for me. I slid in aware I’d almost let ‘groovy’ slip out, and groovy was now a spectacularly uncool word. The car turned on a sixpence and headed for the main road. I grew acutely aware of how close my arse was to the ground, how tight and high my shorts were on me, how the breeze grabbed my hair and flung it back. I expected Dave to gun the engine; I’d seen the movies. But he didn’t; he purred along letting me watch the world go by.

“Hey, Donny...”

“Yes, sir.”

“It’s not ‘sir’ and it’s not Mr Mudie. It’s Dave.”

“Yes, Dave.”

“Do you often get into cars with strange men, and not even ask where you’re going?”

I turned my head to him. “You’re not strange, you’re...”

“...just queer.” He finished my sentence with a laugh.

“No, not...” The word wasn’t easy to say. “You’re Alan’s friend. He trusts you, so I can trust you.”

“Thanks for that, Donny. But can you trust yourself?”

I gazed at him for a moment. I knew exactly what he meant. “Yes, I can. Completely.”

“Well, I’m glad one of us can,” he laughed. “With those shorts, and those legs, and that suntan... Where did you get that tan?”

“Montrose,” I said, as a vision of Leslie on the beach, balancing a long blade of tiger grass on the palm of his hand, filled me. I shook it away; it was something I wasn’t prepared to share. “What about you? Have you had a holiday yet?” The car swept down towards the estuary.

“Not yet. I’ll take mine when the schools go back. Got quite a bit of work in hand now. Got to make a living, you know. These things don’t come cheap,” and for the first time he gunned the engine a little.

“Neither do I?” I laughed, relaxing a little. “This might cost you two milkshakes.” Dave laughed along with me.

‘This’ cost him one milkshake and a banana split with whipped cream. I spooned in a mouthful of cream and looked at Mr Mudie. He was watching two yachts tacking across the estuary. I knew they were tacking because Dave

explained it to me. Dave was very good at explaining things. I said he should've been a teacher. "No way," he laughed. "I had enough of that before." I didn't press him on that; there were other things I wanted to ask him about. I watched him sip at his Coke. There was no getting away from it. Mr Mudie was a handsome man.

"Mr Mudie, Dave," I began, "may I ask you something?" At Bruce Academy they were sticklers for the distinction between 'may' and 'can'.

"You may ask me anything," he said. "Doesn't mean I'm going to give you an answer. But ask away."

I hesitated then took the plunge. "Are you in love with Alan?" He paused and gave a low whistle. "In love with Alan? Now that's a tricky question. If you asked me if I 'love' Alan, that would be easy to answer. I'd say yes, I love Alan Aitken. But 'in love' is a different question."

"Why?" He had my full attention. I wanted to learn.

"Well, Donald Cameron, I think 'loving' someone means you love the whole person. Everything about them, the good, the bad, the indifferent." I liked the way Dave didn't condescend. "Like the way, let's say, you love your mum and she loves you. No conditions. That's just the way it is. But I think being 'in love' means something different. Being 'in love' is a bit like being infatuated, like being hooked on a drug, say like alcohol. For a while it might be everything to you, but unless you love the person it won't last. Being 'in love' may be temporary but 'loving' someone lasts far far longer. Does that make sense?"

I nodded because it did. "Go on."

"The best thing, of course, is being in love with someone you love. Does that make sense? Then you've got the best of both worlds. Every time you see the person your heart skips a few beats because you're in love with them. And even when your heart slows down, you're still—what word am I looking for?—you're still content to be with them. Being near each other is enough. What about you? You ever been 'in love'?"

I must have blushed because Dave laughed, "You lucky little bugger. Don't worry, I'm not going to pry, and I'll say one thing for Alan—actually I could say lots of things—he can keep secrets, especially his friends' secrets. So be in love, Donald Cameron, and enjoy it; it won't happen too often."

We sat in silence for a few minutes. It wasn't a heavy silence. It was the kind of silence that lets you watch the river roll by, the sun play hide 'n seek behind a cloud, and the yachts tack across the estuary.

"Go on," Dave said.

"Go on what?" I asked.

"Go on with your questions. Don't sit there dying to ask something. Either ask or die. And wipe that cream off your mouth before I do." We both laughed.

“What about the...? What about...? you know.” He knew but he forced me to put it into words.

“What about the sex, you know, you and Alan? Do you think that’s right or wrong?”

Dave sighed and looked across the river.

“Oh, it’s wrong, there’s no doubt about that, it’s wrong.” That took me by surprise.

“Then why...?”

“Because we can. Because we enjoy it, no, love it. Because Alan wants it.” He hesitated. “And I want it, too, but I think I could live without it. No, I don’t know if I could do without it. And because nobody is getting hurt. No, that’s not true. I don’t know if anybody is getting hurt. I’m getting hurt. Don’t ask me how. That’s too complicated to explain on a day like this. And I don’t know if Alan will get out of this without being hurt.” He paused then went on. “You know, Donny, no one’s ever asked me about it before.” He laughed ruefully. “I can’t think of anyone who would ask me. But remember we were talking about getting hooked on something like alcohol. I suppose I got hooked on Alan. One minute it wasn’t there, next minute it was. Have you any idea how much we make each other laugh? And stop looking at me like that.”

“Like what?”

“Like you’re trying to bore a hole through my head with your eyes.”

“Sorry.” The next question popped up in my head like a ‘sale’ sign on a cash register.

“Was Alan your first? First boy, I mean.”

“Wow, you don’t leave much, do you?” He looked at me. “You aren’t wired, are you?”

“Pardon?”

A rueful laugh again. “No, I guess not.”

“Don’t tell me if you don’t want to.”

“But I want to. Believe me, I want to. I want to tell someone. I want to tell you. That’s queer, isn’t it? I haven’t told Alan but I want to tell you. Why is that?”

I shrugged my shoulders. “Beats me.”

“Beats me, too. But anyway, here goes... Do you remember I said I didn’t want to be a teacher?” I nodded and sipped my shake. “But I was going to be a teacher. When I left school that’s what I wanted to be. I was only 16 but I got the passes I needed for university. But I was too young. That’s what they said at my school.” He named the most prestigious school in the city. The only school you had to pay to go to. “So they got me a job working in our sister school. The residential school, the boarding school in...” He named somewhere I’d never

heard of before. I didn't know it existed. I didn't know they had a school there, a boarding school. I knew boarding schools existed; I'd read a couple of books set in boarding schools; they sounded as if they were on a distant planet where I'd never go, boldly or otherwise.

Did I tell you I'm going to be a writer? I haven't told anybody else, not Eric, not Leslie, not even Alan. But that's what I'm going to be. And I guess that's what all this is about. I want to be a writer. I'm fascinated by sex, and I'm fascinated by people. So I write about sex and people. I've never had sex with a girl, a female, so it's difficult to write about that, but I seem to be getting a lot of sex with boys, so I'm writing about that. I don't know what's right and wrong about sex between boys. I just know it happens. I'm getting fascinated by sex between boys and men, and, to tell you the truth, I haven't the faintest why that happens, so I'm just writing down what I hear. Liar! Yes, I'm lying a bit. When I look at David Mudie, I can understand why a boy would enjoy sex with him. Maybe a boy can enjoy sex with whatever happens to be available. But what I can't understand is why David would have sex with a boy. I mean, why would he take that risk? He's good-looking, he's got a nice car and a nice job, and he's still taking a risk that would destroy all of that, I guess.

Sorry for cutting into the story. Here's what David told me. It's not exactly what he told me, not word for word, I mean. I didn't write it all down. I stored it in my head for writing down later. And when I began to write it down, it didn't sound right. So I decided to tell it a different way. I decided to try and take you into the story the way David took me into the story on that sunny afternoon, watching the yachts tack across the estuary, sipping my raspberry milkshake through a straw.

* * *

It's a warm Saturday afternoon in September. The sun still streaks the lawns but the fierce heat has ebbed away. A gentle breeze ruffles the lake. You hang out your window absorbing the fading scents of summer. Voices carry on the breeze to tell you that last bus is pulling out of the school grounds. It's the weekend. Only the boarders remain and even they've retreated to the indoor swimming pool. The boarding house is yours and yours alone.

You're sixteen. You've left school. You've a year to kill before university. You've ended up in an all boys' boarding school. This world of boys is new and strange but you're getting used to it. Officially you're an assistant housemaster, but basically you're a live- in 'gofer': go fetch this and go fetch that. You don't mind. You like it. There's lots of time during the school day and after lights-out to study for 'varsity.

You could be at the swimming pool but you've chosen to stay in. You've chosen to stay in and enjoy the unusual peace, quiet and tranquillity. You're in your study on the second floor and you're alone.

Not for long.

Finger nails drum at your door. You sigh and call, "Come in."

The door swings open. It's Toby Shaughnessy. Still in his hockey kit. You'd forgotten the under-13 hockey practice was on. You're no hockeyist. Tennis is your sport.

"Waiting for mum, sir," says Toby with a confidence showing how comfortable he is to be here with you. "May I wait here, sir?" You still find it odd to be addressed as 'sir' by boys not much younger than yourself.

Toby doesn't feel the need for further explanation. He has the self-assurance that beauty brings. Certain for a scholarship. Confident but never arrogant. For all the certainty that beauty, sporting prowess and academic ability bring, Toby is rather lonely. Lonely because he has no father; a mother and two sisters, but no father.

"Make us some lemonade, Toby," you smile. "I need to get out of these whites." You were taking the tennis squad while Toby was at hockey. You know calling the boys by their first names isn't really done but you can't bring yourself to call Toby 'Shaughnessy'. At least not when you're together on your own.

Toby makes for the small refrigerator. He knows where the lemonade is, knows where the ice is, knows where the glasses are. All the boys do, boarders and non-boarders. You are known for your open-house; you are strict when you have to be, but otherwise you are open, easy-going, friendly. After all, there's no reason for you not to be.

Ninety-nine boys. Ages, 8 to 13. Two floors. Average: 6 boys to a dorm. And you are the only live-in assistant housemaster. Matron, too, lives in but you're the man of the house; the boys are in your charge, under your orders. It is you who gets them up in the morning, watch them shuffle sleepy-eyed to the showers, watch them strip and hang their pyjamas on the brass hooks, watch them as they stumble like blind baby mice under the spitting shower heads, gasping until the cold water turns to a warm embrace that enfolds their naked vulnerable bodies, the water coursing...

"A splash of vodka, sir?"

"Excuse me?"

You're standing in tight white underpants and white socks, your tennis shirt and shorts carelessly discarded. Toby does not bat his long eyelashes; you are all men and boys together. You reach for track-suit bottoms and a fresh T-shirt.

“Vodka, sir. In your lemonade, sir? In MY lemonade, sir? The emphasis on the ‘my’ makes Toby’s request half comic, half serious.

“Neither,” you reply. “Do you want to get us into trouble?” Toby has found your half-bottle of vodka. You forgot to hide it away last night. You’re no drinker but you’ve developed the taste for a little splash of vodka now and then.

“But there’s nobody here, sir, just me and you. We can do whatever we want.”

“Well, getting you drunk isn’t something I want to do, Shaughnessy. Lemonade will do. Now park your arse over there while I get dressed.”

It almost slipped out. ‘Park your lovely arse’ almost slipped out. The quicker you are into clothes the better. You pull on a sweatshirt and slip into old tracksuit bottoms.

Toby settles down on the three-seater couch, buttermilk with thin brown stripes. The boys love it. Four can share it, sprawl across it, fight for possession, and treat it and the room as if it were their own homes, their own rooms, their own territory.

You settle down on the carpet in front of the boy. You are comfortable, he is comfortable. Outside all is stillness, even the songbirds drowsed by the late afternoon sun.

The conversation is fitful, desultory, haphazard as if being together were enough. Toby finishes his lemonade, lays it aside and picks up your new calculator.

“What’s this?”

You lay aside your drink and reply, “It’s a calculator. But it’s also a dictionary, a thesaurus, and a translator. It translates English into French, German and Spanish.”

“Groovy,” smiles Toby and begins to explore the possibilities.

You are sitting directly in front of him. He is tall for his age, maybe 5'6" or 5'7", and slim, the kind of slimness that is elegant. Toby is elegant. Longish face. Wide-set blue-green eyes. Eyebrows are brown slashes counter-pointed by the rosy pink slash of his lips. His skin is flawless, creamy porcelain kissed by the sun. His skin is translucent. His hockey shirt is open to the third button and you notice how translucent the skin is; you can see the blue veins beat in his neck. His long legs are crossed at the ankles.

You reach forward and idly draw his knees together and apart, together and apart, together and apart. You watch the creases of the tight fabric at his crotch and you wonder about the skin below: how pale, translucent and fragile it must be. You realise what you’re doing and stop.

“Don’t stop... that’s nice.”

You look up. Toby’s eyes are fixed on the small screen of the calculator.

“It’s nice... I like that... don’t stop,” he repeats.

Together, apart, together, apart... you recommence the rhythm.

The slate-blue fabric across Toby’s crotch has tented, or are you only hoping it has? Lazily, with a sigh, you run your thumbs along the inside of each thigh, moving towards the tent. Toby widens his legs and keeps them open.

“You have beautiful skin,” you hear yourself whisper.

There is no reply, but the boy shifts along the couch as if making room for you. You slide from the carpet to the couch. You sit alongside the boy. You incline your head near his shoulder as if to share the calculator. You drink in his scent: sweat and milk, that’s what you’re reminded of, sweat and milk. You reach across and push the slash of straight brown hair from the boy’s eyes. A smile plays along his lips.

You reach down and slip open the fourth button on his shirt, then the fifth. You tug the shirt gently open on both sides. Toby shifts to make it easier for you. You are fascinated by the translucency, the fragility of the boy’s skin. Creamy ivory. His nipples are tiny pink starfish reminding you this boy is barely into puberty. You run your fingertips over his nipples: they are hard little nubs; your fingertips pass over the skin of his chest, his tummy, the stretch of white skin above the belt of his hockey shorts. A bead of sweat is hidden in his tummy button. You retrieve it, bring the moisture to your lips, and lick it away.

You know this is wrong. You know this is insane. You want to stop. You don’t want to stop. You want to explore further, but your erection is uncomfortable. You need to straighten it.

You rise for a moment, and...

And Toby reaches out and traces the length of your erect penis between the thumb and first two fingers of his right hand. You look down at him. You blush. You’re about to push his hand away when he pushes his face hard against your erection. He moves his face side to side; his nose fences with your hard-on. You hear a whispered, “Please, sir, please.”

Half in terror, half in desire, you place your hand on the top of Toby’s head, run your fingers through his straight lustrous brown hair. Toby has one hand on your buttocks, pulling you towards him; the other hand is measuring your erection in tiny squeezes. You can feel your hips begin reflexively to push your groin into the boy’s face.

It is becoming more and more difficult to think.

Then Toby’s hands and fingers are on either side of your waist, edging down the track suit bottoms, and again comes the whispered, “Please, sir, please.”

The track suit bottoms have built-in underpants. They are coming down, too. In a few moments you will be naked, exposed, your arousal impossible to deny.

Toby is kissing your pubic hair. Running his lips side to side along the hair, all the time sliding down the bottoms inexorably. The head of your stiff penis bobs up as if for air; you can feel the hot flesh against the cool of the boy's cheek. Then as more and more of you is exposed, you can feel the shaft pressed the length of the boy's cheek.

A sudden jerk and the track suit bottoms are below your knees.

You want to step away. You want to kneel and pull the boy's shorts and underpants down to his knees. You want him to be equal, to share equally. You know this elegant boy will have an elegant penis, that it will be as hard as a boardmarker—hot, hard and tasting of heaven.

Toby is tasting you. Licking the length of your erection while one set of long cool fingers gently kneads your scrotum. How can this boy, so young, know so much?

Now the boy is taking you in, sliding the length of you deep into his mouth, towards his throat. You are not hugely endowed. You are a respectable seven and something inches, but your penis is thick and you worry Toby may hurt himself. But the boy settles for half your penis and begins to bob happily up and down on the shaft. You feel his warm saliva running its length. You look down and see the boy is squeezing the tent in his crotch. You should be doing that for him but he refuses to allow you to manoeuvre; Toby is in charge; you are there for the ride; go with it.

You won't be able to go with it for long. The boy's mouth is warm and wet, his lips tight on your shaft as they slide its length again. You can feel the pleasure across your entire groin.

Suddenly, almost without warning, your hips begin to buck; they are beyond your control even if you wanted to exercise control. And the boy below you is bucking, too. You squirt and spurt uncontrollably. You haven't cum like this for a long time; your body and brain make the most of it.

It's all too sensitive. You pull back. Frantically try to control your senses. You look down. Two lines of semen drip from Toby's lips and chin. Another two are splatted across his chest. A large gob of semen obliterates his left nipple.

The boy's eyes are glazed.

He's licking the semen from his lips.

With his fingers, he rubs the semen on his chest into his skin. You look down.

The tent is gone, but there are stains across his groin. Wet stains from within the fabric rather than from without.

Toby is grinning.

"Shit," he half-whispers. "Yummy yums."

He looks at you. You look down at yourself. Your dripping semi-tumescent cock is hanging over your track suit bottoms.

Toby stands up. You marvel. There is no sense of shame or embarrassment in the boy.

"Sir, sir, could you do me a favour? I'd better take my hockey stuff off here. Change here, I mean. Can you throw it in the school laundry, please? Mum's not dumb. She'll know what this stuff is." He points to the stains on his shirt, his trousers. "Sir, sir, are you listening, sir?" The boy is stripping already. "You, too, sir, you, too."

You pull yourself together.

"You're right. When's your mother picking you up?"

"Five thirty. About half an hour. Hey, we can take a shower, sir. Together, sir."

By now, you're both naked. You were right. The boy's penis and balls are beautiful. He is beautiful. Every square inch of his body and soul is beautiful.

You join his laughter.

"A shower, yes. Together, no. We don't want people to think we're a couple of perverts."

"I'm too young to be a pervert," he laughs. You smack his bare arse as you head for the showers.

In the showers, separate showers, you can't resist asking: "Toby, have you ever done anything like this before?"

"Oh, no, sir. I've seen stuff in magazines, and Ben's got a porno movie, but I've never actually done stuff. Well, not with another person, I mean. Well, maybe some with Ben. He's my bum chum."

You can't resist asking the obvious: "But why me, Toby, why me?"

A prolonged silence. You begin to doubt if the boy can put it into words, but he tries.

"Not sure. I knew it would be okay with you. I mean, if you wanted to, it would be great. But if you didn't want to, you wouldn't go all 'tut tut' on me. You don't think I'm... weird or queer or anything like that, sir, do you?"

You step from your shower to his. You take the boy in your arms. He looks up into your eyes. You recognise the question. You pull him into you and lower your lips to his. He kisses you hungrily, almost desperately, open-mouthed, seeking to devour and be devoured. As you hold him you resolve this won't happen again, nothing like this will happen again, not ever again.

Saturday was warm, Sunday is even warmer.

After morning church you seek shade and stretch out on the buttermilk couch with its thin brown stripes. You close your eyes and play back what took place with Toby. You lie back, close your eyes, and remember the touch of Toby's skin on your lips. Ah, those butterfly kisses.

Rapping at the door. Sharp and insistent. The door flies open. In bursts Ben, Toby's bum-chum. As always Ben is in a hurry. As always Ben is on fire.

"It's the match, sir. On the radio. They're playing! Oh, do let's listen, sir. Where's the radio, sir?"

"Ben. Calm down." You swing yourself reluctantly from the couch. "Sit down. Shut up. I'll get the radio. It's in my... the other room."

You almost say 'bedroom'. Every boy in the House knows it's your bedroom. But there's a silent agreement, an understanding, a conspiracy that no one call it by that name, so your bedroom is your 'other room'.

"No time, sir. They're playing NOW!"

And Ben is out of the sitting-room, across the corridor, and through the other door. You follow. You aren't worried. It's Matron's day off. The place will stand almost empty, until the 'weekenders' come crashing through the double doors at five o'clock.

You follow Ben into the other room. He is stretched full length on your bed, face down, head resting on his arms, your small radio on the pillow by his cheek. You notice he is in his tennis shorts, shirt and socks. He's already kicked off his trainers; how considerate, how thoughtful. You remember the U-13s have a match this afternoon. You remember you are umpiring two of the doubles matches. How could you have forgotten? Must be the heat, or Toby, or both.

"Sit down, sir, sit down," urges Ben patting the space he has left for you at his side.

If Toby is exotic, Ben is pure English peaches and cream—though he, too, has been kissed by the summer sun. His freckles more pronounced than ever. His high forehead is fringed by thick corncoloured hair with a central parting that varies from day to day. His skin is blemished by nothing but freckles. His genuinely blue eyes are wide set and generous. His lips pinkly inviting. Ben is a well-built boy, not heavy set, but with the upper shoulders of a weight-lifter and the waspish waist of the first class swimmer he is. He is also a bundle of pure energy.

You pull your attention away from the sheer physicality of the boy and comment. "That's not the match."

"Yes, sir, I know, sir. It's not on till one o'clock, but I got bored, and I've got a bit of a crick in my back, sir, low down, sir."

"Then see Matron," you advise.

"Matron's day off, sir. Thought you could help, sir."

Do you detect a slight giggle? Hard to say. Ben's right cheek is pressed into the pillow, his voice muffled. There is a pause. Then...

"And you helped Toby yesterday, sir. After hockey, sir. You helped him lots. He really enjoyed your help, sir. He really did."

Despite the heat, a cold shiver runs through you.

"It's my back, sir. Be a sport, sir, just a massage. I'm playing in the first match this afternoon."

Behind you the door is closed. The House stands empty, listening only to the echoes of the hundreds, perhaps thousands of boys who have graced its Spartan dorms.

You run your right hand under Ben's tennis shirt. His skin is warm and moist to the touch. Your fingers trace patterns in the moisture. You knead and squeeze the flesh across his shoulders, his upper back. Your fingers run the length of his spine. You try to be businesslike but the flesh is warm, moist, and so alive. You can hear your own gentle breathing and Ben's occasional sighs. You could sit here like this, doing this, forever.

"It's lower, sir. Lower, sir. Please, sir."

You let your hand slide down to the boy's slim waist. You can almost span his waist with one hand. The edge of your hand comes into contact with the boy's tight white tennis shorts. The shorts are filled, stretched by two spheres of living flesh that make you ache just to look at them.

"I'll help you, sir. Let me help you, sir."

And Ben raises his bottom from the bed, raises his hips, slides his hands beneath, slips open the buttons, pushes the shorts to his knees, and collapses into the quilt again. Those spheres of living flesh lie below a millimetre of pure white cotton that leaves little to the imagination. But imagination is enough to make your cock harden and lengthen until it aches.

You run the fingers of both hands along either side of the elastic band that keeps the boy's underpants in such a tight and loving embrace. Ben raises his hips from the bed. There's nothing for it. Slowly you ease the boy's underpants up and over his buttocks, then tug them down to join his shorts around his knees. You begin to knead those beautiful buttocks, marvelling at the warm flesh in your hands, flesh that becomes even warmer as your fingers part his buttocks to expose his most secret, his most intimate place.

"That's it," whispers Ben. "Around there. That's the place. It needs a massage."

Absorbed, you part his buttocks, your fingers pressed against the inner flesh of each one. You expose the tiny hole at the centre of his being. You remember what another man in another time in another place did to you, and you wonder if it will give the same pleasure to Ben.

You part his buttocks again and again, slightly wider each time; each time letting the length of your thumbs slide down until they feel the heat at the centre of the boy's being. At last your thumbs are parting Ben's anus ever so slightly; you wonder what Ben is thinking, what he is feeling. You know what you want to do. The small pucker is ravishingly beautiful; there's no reason why it should be when you consider its function: it simply is. You adore it. You want to lower your lips and kiss the flesh around it; you want to smother it with kisses, tiny butterfly kisses. But not now. You've no idea what Ben is thinking or feeling, and the last thing you want him to feel is disgust.

Suddenly Ben giggles and turns himself, throws himself over. His tennis shirt has ridden up his body. He is exposed. He is fully erect. He is uncircumcised, the head of his young dick is hard and purple, thrusting its way out of the hood of flesh that normally shelters it.

"Shit, sir. I can't play tennis like this, can I?" A smile lights up his face. "It's your fault. You got me like this. You've got to do something about it." The boy's logic is irrefutable.

You are surprised by the size of Ben's cock. It must be around 4 inches long and at least 2 inches round. There is a straggle of fine blond hair at the base and a sizeable patch in the pubic area. The boy's balls are the size of walnuts, the sac itself marked with the lines of late puberty. The shaft is pale though the head itself is purple with engorgement. Tiny veins circle the length of the shaft, entwine and fade into the scrotum. The heat from the boy's penis is palpable, and you can feel the faint beating of a pulse beneath your fingertips.

You stroke the boy's cock, bringing the fleshy hood over the head again and again. The little eye opens on the down-stroke, closes on the upstroke. You can feel him harden and lengthen beneath your touch. You feel how the muscles in his groin push and contract in time with your stroking. You look at the boy's face. His head is thrown back on the pillow, matted hair across his forehead, eyes closed but fluttering beneath the lids, face flushed, lips slightly open.

You lower your face to the boy's straining shaft, circle the head with your lips and apply gentle but insistent pressure. Little moans escape the 13-year-old. Your tongue probes at the weeping eye and you taste the boy's seminal fluids. Sweet, nothing salty. You suck and work the shaft. The boy's legs, one straight, one drawn up in a half circle, open wider as if in invitation. You slip your free hand between his legs, beneath his sac, along the crack of his buttocks until you find his anus, and with the flat of your middle finger you rub back and forth across the little lips. You are surprised by the heat and slickness of the area, and, as the boy begins to writhe on the bed, you press your fingertip against the opening and let half your finger slide in.

You begin to fuck the boy with your middle finger as you speed the rhythm on his cock. You take in the full four inches, feeling the head touch the back of your throat, feeling your lips against his pubic hair, feeling the slickness of your own saliva and his pre-cum run down the shaft.

Ben is pushing hard off the bed, raising his hips to push his cock deep into your throat, then lowering himself to drive your middle finger into him as deeply as possible.

With a sudden convulsive thrust, he raises himself, drives deeply into your mouth and throat, and holds himself there, as he spurts again and again inside you. Five, six, seven little jerks. Then he falls back onto the bed, his face shielded by an elbow as if ashamed of his own pleasure.

You hold him steady in your mouth for a full minute as he slackens and softens. You let him slip out. His penis remains semi-tumescent.

Gently you lick the head, squeeze gently and lick again. It wouldn't do to have his tennis whites stained during the match.

You edge up the bed and place your head on the pillow. You are uncertain. How will the boy feel now that the drive of desire has been satisfied? How will he feel about himself, about you? How do you feel about yourself?

Ben's eyes flutter open. They are glassy. Then he raises his trademark left eyebrow and grins.

"Thanks, sir. I think I'll play really well this afternoon... now that I'm... now that I feel so... relaxed."

Your faces are inches apart. You want to kiss Ben but something tells you that Ben is not a kisser, not a romantic like Toby. Ben wanted sex and came where he thought he could get it.

"Ben," you begin. "You mentioned Toby..." You're not sure how to continue.

"Oh, don't worry, sir. Toby and I've never done much together, but you can bet we are going to, now." The boy's grin widens. He is so relaxed, so self-assured. Where is the guilt that will rack you the rest of the day, the night, your life?

That afternoon Ben wins both his singles. Toby arrives in time to see him close out his second match. After tea, the two friends stroll off together. You are slightly rueful, slightly lonely, but happy for them, and you feel that whatever happens, things aren't going to be the same.

You wander by the lake as the light fades. You ask yourself what you think you're doing, once again risking everything. You try to face the fact that you seduced Toby and Ben, but seduction doesn't seem to fit the facts. You recall your own seduction, but how could it have been seduction when you chose to stay, you chose to let it happen?

You didn't say no; you didn't protest; you didn't jump from the car even when it was stopped, even when he parked below the great oak tree, even when he laid his hand on your knee, even when he said you were "such a handsome boy". You were scared, yes, but you were also thrilled that this man, this grown-up adult wanted you. It was you who'd gone walking in the park, on your own, towards the spot where 'the queers all meet up'. That was well-known at school; that was a standing joke; softer boys were teased about 'going up the park for a bit'. You were never quite sure what 'a bit' was, but whatever it was, you wanted some of it.

So when the car pulled up beside you, and he leaned out and asked for directions, asked if you'd show him the way, you got in, you let him pull away, you let him park under the oak tree. Don't say you didn't know. His eyes undressed you, his hand brushed your thigh, his fingertips caressed your thigh—"such a handsome boy". Only an idiot couldn't guess what he wanted; and you wanted it, too. You'd wanted it for such a long time, but only now could you put a name to it. You wanted sex.

Oh, you could have messed around with other boys at the school. It was after all, an all-boys' school. Older boys, boys your own age, even younger boys had 'made a pass at you', but they weren't what you wanted. You wanted him; you wanted a man; you wanted a grown-up man. You didn't want to be a queer, you didn't want to be a poof, but you did want a man; you wanted him to hold you, hold you tight, crush you to his chest, drink in his smell, feel the brush of his unshaven chin against your cheek, feel his smoky tongue force its way into your mouth, feel his hands...

So when he parked the car, under the tree, the warmth of summer seeping from the leather, when he ran his fingers across your thigh, your knee, your crotch, you couldn't help it, you blurted it out, like the boy you were, you blurted out: "You can play with it if you want to..."

The words make you smile now.

"You can play with it if you want to..."

The words take you back to another 'now'.

The 'now' of Dean.

It's mid-afternoon. It's late November. Eighteen days till school breaks up for Christmas. Snow mixed with sleet starts to fall. Dean and you come running in from the sports field. Dean is the goalkeeper in the school soccer team. You've chosen soccer rather than hockey, though soccer is distinctly second-class at this school. You've been giving Dean some extra practice, taking pot shots at goal while Dean swan-dived into the sleety mud.

Dean is fourteen, not an instinctive goalkeeper, but dedicated, committed, brave, fearless, demented as most goalkeepers are. And, yes, he is good-looking.

Thick dirty blond hair. Hazel eyes. Strong eyebrows. Slightly oval face. Shortish. but beautifully built.

“Come on, Dean, let’s get inside.”

“Just another ten minutes, sir. Just another...”

“No, I’m freezing my...”

“bollocks”

“off.”

Dean and you have become something of a double act. You like each other’s company. You find it easy to talk to each other. You have a shared passion for David Bowie. You’ve spent several afternoons, especially boring Sunday afternoons, in your room listening to Bowie at full blast. You don’t know it but you’ll always think of this as the ‘Year of the Diamond Dogs’ and of Dean as your ‘Jean Genie’.

You head towards the House.

Here you should part company with Dean, but...

“Sir, can I shower in the House? They’ll have used all the hot water in SD (Senior Dorms). I’ll be like this till 8 o’clock. Please, sir, please.”

Those Bette Davis eyes—they do it every time.

“Well, if the juniors don’t mind, I don’t. But ask first. And don’t bend over for the soap.” You almost kick yourself for that remark but Dean grins and is off and running.

By the time you get to the House, Dean is in the shower. You know because Ben tells you halfway up the stair: “Wilson’s in the shower, sir. Said you’d said okay, if we said okay, and we said okay. Okay?”

“Okay, thanks, Ben.”

You get into your bedroom, slip off your track suit, and the etceteras, bang on some Bowie, and turn on the shower cubicle full blast. It’s Friday, film evening, and you’re not on duty. Hot needles ping off your skin. You give your dick a few friendly pulls; it perks up with anticipation, but you give it a slap and warn it to behave. Soaped, showered, towelled, you pull on a pair of shorts and a fresh t-shirt. The room is warm, almost hot; they’ve fixed the CH. A small vodka over crushed ice with just a splash of lemonade is in order.

The door bursts open.

It’s Dean Wilson.

You hear the crack of skin on skin. Ben has slapped the boy’s bare arse. Dean yelps, pulls the towel around himself, and jumps into your room, shouting “Sanctuary! Sanctuary!” (Last Friday’s film was ‘The Hunchback of Notre Dame’—Laughton’s Quasimodo.)

The door opens again.

Dean’s kit, including his boots, come flying in after him.

The door closes.

Dean Wilson is breathtakingly beautiful. He stands there, half-naked, hair still damp, beads of water slide down his chest, face flushed by the heat of the shower and the heat of the chase. Without the slightest trace of self-consciousness. he begins to towel his hair, leaving himself naked to your gaze. Broad shoulders, a waist less than waspish, a convex tummy, strong legs, big feet, and a heavy swinging penis. Puberty has come and gone; this is a young adolescent awash with his own beauty. Dean's entire body is honey-coloured, bar a tiny bikini strip across his crotch. Dean spends summers with his family; they are based on the island of Bahrain in the Persian Gulf; even an English winter cannot rob him of his splendour.

Bowie begins to sing 'The Man Who Sold the World'. Dean joins in and begins to sway his body, his hips in time to the music—"Who knows? Not me. I never lost control. Your face to place with the man who sold the world." The music is wonderfully sleazy, wonderfully suggestive, and Dean's body responds to it. You gulp down some drink and almost expect him to begin a dance of the seven veils using his heavy blue bath towel. YOUR heavy blue bath towel! How the Hell did he get his hands on that?

Dean does a goalkeeper's swallow dive and lands on your bed. He lies back, head on the backboard, towel modestly positioned, and grins up at you.

"Hair's still damp," he announces. "Can't go out like this. Catch my death." You still find it difficult to get used to the boy's Canadian twang. "I can stay here for tea. You're not on duty today."

"Like Hell you can."

You grab a hot hand towel from a radiator, bounce onto the bed, grab his head, those thick dirty blond locks, and begin towelling vigorously. No protest from Dean. Your fingers rub against the skin of his shoulders. The smells of soap, hot water, perspiration and 'pure boy' drift up to you. Your cock begins to swell, lengthen, stiffen.

Traitor! And damn these fuckin' shorts. Your erection can run but it can't hide.

You chuck the towel away, ready to hound Dean homewards. You look down. The blue towel is gone. The boy's penis is lying across his thigh, thickening, stiffening, supported by a scrotum that looks stuffed with a pair of ping pong balls.

"Continue," he whispers; the whisper is imperative.

You look at his erecting penis, his balls, the thick patch of dirty blond hair. You look into his eyes. There isn't a trace of shame or fear there, just a naked, hungry desire that mirrors your own.

"I'm not sure what we do," he falters, "but I want to do it with you." His hand reaches to grasp your own erection. "And I know you want to do it, too. Please, please."

There's those damn words again.

"Please please me like I please you," runs through my head but that certainly isn't Bowie.

You surrender and pull the boy towards you. He resists. You're not sure why. Then you realise he is tugging up your T-shirt, tugging down your shorts. "Skin to skin," he whispers, and you're flattered by his indrawn breath as he strips you of your shorts.

You inspect each other minutely. That's the only way to describe the next fifteen minutes. Instinctively you refrain from too much contact. You both know you are on the edge of cumming, of exploding, of squirting and spurting, and you both want to save that for later, to keep the electricity between you as fully charged as you can for as long as you can.

With your hands, you signal to Dean that you want him to turn over.

Halfway over, he turns his head to look at you and whispers, "Are you going to fuck me? I've heard it hurts. Does it hurt bad?"

You smile.

"No, I am NOT going to fuck you. I..."

"You can if you want," he says with the solemnity of a child, "but if it hurts too much, can I...?"

You kiss his forehead in assurance.

"No, sweetheart, I am NOT going to fuck you. I'm going to go on looking at you. I love looking at you, every single little bit of you."

"Oh, is that all?" Dean sighs. "Go on then. help yourself. I could do with a kip."

You turn Dean over. He rests his golden head in the crook of an elbow. You see for the first time what a powerful young man he is becoming. The sweep of his back, the breadth of the shoulders, the muscles in his arms, the power in his legs. And the beauty of his backside, his buttocks, those globes on which you could rest your entire world.

You're fascinated by a boy's buttocks. You've no idea why. Maybe one day you can analyse it, work it out, why this fascination for this particular part of the body. You lean forward and kiss Dean Wilson's bum, both cheeks. There's a little giggle from above. You can't help blushing. You part his cheeks. There are a few minor pimples scattered around; they only serve to make the boy human. Even beauty such as his is at the mercy of adolescence. You touch them with the tip of your tongue. Dean opens his legs wide, letting one hang

from the side of the bed. You marvel at his lack of shame, his openness, his trust.

The eye of his anus is pinkish brown set against the dirty ivory of the surrounding skin. It is unutterably beautiful. *Lust vincit omnia*. You separate the cheeks, lower your face into the boy's crack, and fasten your lips, as much as you can, to the small puckered lips that smile back at you. You've read about rimming. You've seen it in porno pics, and once, in London, on a grainy cinema screen in Soho. But nothing has prepared you for this, for the sheer erotic thrill than runs through you, that makes your penis ache, and your tongue stiffen like a second erection.

Why? Why? Why?

Is this the ultimate giving, the ultimate surrender of male to male, this sheer naked vulnerability that says I trust, and, above all, I trust you? I can give you this part of me, this most intimate part of me, and know that you will love it, adore it, as you love, adore and respect all of me.

There is a smell from his rectum you can't quite place. Mystery of mysteries, all is mystery.

Dean rolls over and pulls you down to him, onto him. Who is master now, and who is pupil? It really doesn't matter. Lips to lips, chest to chest, belly to belly, knees to knees, you begin a strange kind of horizontal dance. Dean is open-mouthed. His tongue forces its way into your mouth. Nose against nose, mouth against mouth, you can hardly breathe. You seem to breathe through your bellies, each branded by the hot hard erection of the other.

You can feel Dean's knuckles grind into your back. You hear him whimper. Or is that you? He begins to buck? Or is that you? He is cumming and cumming hard. That's him. You raise your hips slightly and feel his squirts against your belly. You shudder against each other uncontrollably. Dean's hand is across your mouth. Why? You realise you started to call out: "Fuck, fuck, fuck..." and that certainly would alarm some of the Juniors.

You collapse on to each other. You feel the squelch between you. You raise your belly: squelch. You lower it: squelch. Simultaneously you begin to giggle. Simultaneously you hear the Bowie song: 'Under Pressure'— "Give love one more chance..." leading to another fit of giggles. You are so erect, so hard, it hurts.

"Sir, sir..."

"Yes?"

"I've got tea in 20 minutes. I'd better be there. I'd better get dressed. But can I come back later, during the film, I mean? I'll say I'm helping you choose the disco music for tomorrow. Please, sir, say yes, sir." He rolls on top of you. "You can do what you want, sir, whatever you want."

Yes—yes—yes.

“Oooof... Ah...” He tries to bounce you into surrender.

“Hey, take it slow. You’ll hurt yourself and you’ll hurt me too.”

Dean grins down at you, flicks the hair from his eyes, and presses your shoulders down into the bed. He sits still for a moment, straddling your groin, a knee on either side. He moves his arse in lazy circles against your groin, raises himself, reaches behind, grips your shaft and places the head against his anus. Then he eases himself. He won’t. He can’t. He will. A millimetre more of your rock-hard shaft penetrates his sphincter muscle, the head of your cock pops into his anus.

This is the boy who knew nothing. “Ah, ah, that’s better,” he gasps. This is too much. This is too far. How can you stop this without hurting the boy? He lowers himself another millimetre. “Dean, Dean, we can’t, we mustn’t,” you protest half-heartedly. “Don’t worry, sir. I’ve done this before. In Bahrain. With Arab boys. It’s okay, I know what I’m doing.” A full half inch this time. “And I jammed lots of Vaseline up my ass. In the shower. Honest I did. You won’t hurt me. Oooof.” He leans forward with his elbows on your chest, wiggling his bottom to keep the movement going. He brushes the tip of your nose with his. And down he goes, like Alice down the Rabbit Hole.

“Hey, I’m sitting on you. You’re all the way in. I can feel your hair. It feels like I’ve got a huge log up my arse. It’s a nice full feeling. Wonder how far up inside me you are? Must be nearly eight inches. Work on my cock a bit more, sir.”

Dean begins to rise and fall, levering himself up on his knees, then sinking back down again. He is sweating, beads of perspiration dot his shoulders, hang from strands of hair. Open-mouthed, he throws his head back and shakes it from side to side. The friction on your shaft is wonderful. As Dean rises, you push up and into him.

Higher he rises, and slips down again, higher and down again. You know his arsehole is splayed open. You can hear the Vaseline and other juices squelch and fart between you. Higher he rises, and falls, again and again, faster and faster, until he is sliding the full length of your shaft, keeping only the head locked inside his stretched and stretching anus. There are no words now; just deep concentration; deep ecstasy. You match his movements with a faster rhythm on his rehardened cock: you are jerking him off ruthlessly now; matching his ecstasy to your own. Bowie reminds you it’s the year of the diamond dogs.

You force your eyes open. Dean is lost to you now; rising and falling, forcing you in deeper and deeper. He is going to cum soon; you know because of the speed he is working your shaft; control is gone; you surrender yourself to

the ecstasy. You should stay silent but you can't; you grunt, you moan, you mutter obscenities; you mouth Dean's name: Dean... Dean... Fuck... Dean...

You're spurting now. Deep inside the boy you're spurting. Dean's spurting, too. His semen fires and arcs its way to land on your nose, your lips, your chin. "Come together, right now, over me." And that's what you're doing, both of you, as you hang onto each other, riders of the storm, into a world new born.

How long has Dean been lying across you, slumped, almost unconscious? For a moment you are worried. Then his eyes flutter open.

"Fuckin' hell. This is a lot better than the movie. Let's do it again?"

* * *

"And did you?" No response. "Did you?"

David Mudie shook himself from his reverie. "Sorry, Alan, what did you say?"

"It's not Alan. It's me, Donald. Donny. I asked you if you did it again. With Dean? With Toby? With Ben?"

"Sorry, Donny, I was away there." He turned to me. "Yes, I did it again, with Dean, with Toby, with Ben." There was a wistfulness in his voice. "Then I left. I left at Christmas and I didn't go back."

"Why not?"

Dave stood up. "Come on, let's get back to the car." As he walked, he talked. "I was scared, no, terrified. Terrified of being caught. Terrified of losing control, maybe of being under the control of boys like Toby and Ben. Wonderful boys like Toby and Ben. But boys can be ruthless if they have to, to protect themselves, I mean. Boys aren't capable of love. They're capable of being 'in love'—that's the polite expression for lust," he laughed, "but they're not capable of loving another person. Maybe their mums, but that's about it. Boys don't have hearts. Some of them grow hearts later on, but most don't."

"So most men don't have hearts?"

"No, they don't. They don't have real emotions either, at least not emotions to do with love. That's a woman's tragedy; she's bound to fall in love with someone who can't love her back, at least not in the way she wants to be loved. You see, Donny, most men never grow up; they stay the little boys they always were; and they spend their lives looking for new mothers. Maybe that's what I am. A mum looking for her lost boy, but the lost boy happens to be me."

Dave had lost me a bit there. We walked on in silence. Reached the car and climbed in. Another question—with me there's always another question—had formed in my head.

“But what about you? What about men... men like you?” There I’d gone again, in like Flynn where angels feared to tread. “What about men... men who like boys?”

Dave turned to me. His eyes were all over me. I felt undressed, naked. “I don’t know, Donny, I just don’t know.” Then I felt his fingers run across the flies of my shorts. “I guess I’m looking for a boy like you.”

I knew.

I lifted his searching fingers from my lap.

“Take me home, please. Now, please.”

Chapter 7

“Fuck it. You didn’t.”

“Fucking well did. Now come on. We’re going to be late.”

Eric’s beautiful backside rose in front of me and swung from side to side as he hit the pedals on his bike. I leaned my body forward and half stood up as I exerted maximum force on mine. When the fuck would he learn there’s no way I could keep up with a 20-speed racer? Fortunately we turned pretty quickly into a farm track where the weight and bulk of my old bicycle was actually an advantage.

Eric swung himself from his bicycle and began to push it along between the ruts. “There’s no way I’m wrecking my bike to make a few quid,” he said. “I could just as easily get the money from Dad. Remember this was your idea, Donny.”

It was my idea, and a good idea it was too.

The Berries.

Ever since I could remember I’d spent part of my summer picking raspberries in the lush and fertile fields of the Carse of Gowrie. Scottish east coast raspberries—best in the world. This was the first summer where I hadn’t clambered on an open lorry at six in the morning with my brother and his pals, sandwiches wrapped in newspaper, a bottle of Barr’s Im Bru jammed in my oxtail, ready for the lumpy bumpy ride into the berry fields. There were more than us on the lorry. It was packed with pickers of all ages, men, women, boys, girls, infants in arms and at the breast. There were n-million berries and we’d got to get them in.

We boys preferred picking into buckets. Each had a bucket slung from the snake belt round his waist. Each had his own ‘dreel’ to pick, one boy on each side of the eight-foot high bushes that stretched over the slopes and far away. You walked along on either side of the row, nattering away, hands busy at the berries, nimble fingers and thumbs squeezing off the berries and plopping them into the bucket until it was so full and heavy it dragged your shorts halfway down your arse. You then unhooked the bucket and staggered off with it to the weighin. The berries would be weighed and then slopped into a huge barrel. The fieldsman would work out how much you were due. You pocketed the coins you were given and headed back to your dreel.

The whole process sounds quite decorous until you learn berry fights often broke out, boys pissed in the buckets to add a wee bit weight, boys crapped under the bushes to avoid trailing to the stinking loos, and that we usually ate so many raspberries we soon became ‘scunnered’ and sick of the taste of them. It

was a great laugh and summer wouldn't be summer without a couple of weeks at the Berries.

On a dry day like today it was likely we'd be picking in punnets, small rectangular straw baskets slung round our waists, for which we were paid by the punnet rather than by weight. This was a more decorous business because these were 'eating' berries, rather than bucketed berries for jam or dye-making.

I'd persuaded Eric the Berries would be fun. It was hard to believe he'd never been to the Berries; after all, our hometown was the city of jute, jam and journalism. What a deprived childhood he'd had.

"Let's push the bikes over to those trees," he panted. "I'm knackered." There was that naughty word again—knackered—but this time from Eric rather than Leslie. Obviously it was a posher word than I thought.

We pushed the bikes off the track and laid them down under a shelter of trees providing some relief from the sun noticeably warm even at this early hour—9.10 by my Timex. Eric stretched himself out and murmured, "We've only been off three weeks and I'm already out of condition." Me, I felt fine. The tennis, golf and swimming in Montrose had left me with a lean and hungry look.

I stretched out beside Eric but made room to stretch out my arms. I wanted to keep in maximum contact with the planet. I was nervous. I knew gravity was gluing me to the planet but only just. If I laid my arms alongside me, I could easily go spinning off into the stratosphere. And that would be that. Straight through the troposphere and the mesosphere and off into space. I'd be lost in space for ever with no Dr Zachary Smith to rescue me from whatever was out there.

"But you didn't, did you?" My voice was barely a whisper. I didn't know if I wanted to ask the question or hear the answer.

"Yes, I fucking well did." Eric sounded comfortably confident. That was something.

"All the way?"

"Yes, all the fucking way. I fucked and I got fucked and I loved it. Why? Do you think it's naughty or something?" There was a note of sarcasm I'd heard only in reference to my cricketing abilities.

"No, no. I'm a wee bit surprised. That's all."

"Why should you be surprised? Fucking's fun, or have you forgotten that?" Eric hand reached out to me and stroked my groin. "Yep, it looks like you've forgotten."

I shifted away a little.

"Sorry," I said. "What you do is up to you. I didn't know you knew anybody that well down in Devon." My remark sounded stupid even to me.

Eric laughed. "I didn't know anybody that well down in Devon, but I do now. And they were nice guys. They didn't have a dirty mac between them."

Them? Plural. More than one.

"Were they in our Year?" I couldn't resist asking.

"Our year?"

"Yeh, our Year. Our Year in school I mean. Or were they prefects or something?"

Eric's laughter was louder. "They weren't school kids. What do you think I am? Some kind of perv? They were men, grown-up men, with hairy bellies, hairy balls, and dangly cocks. The whole thing."

I was too stunned to speak. I didn't need gravity to fix me to the planet. I was rigid.

"Shit, Donny, it was like this." I heard Eric shift and risked a sideways peek. His hands had made a cradle for his head. One knee was bent. He looked utterly at ease.

"I was bored. Devon's great, but the three of us were stuck together morning, noon and night, and I was bored. Okay, I was feeling horny, too, so I went looking for fun. It was about 6 in the evening. We'd caught some fish in the morning. We were barbecuing them around 8 so I'd a couple of hours to kill. I wandered down to the carnival. It wasn't much of a carnival, dodgems, waltzers, that sort of thing, but at least there would be people there.

"When I saw him I knew it. I knew he was one of them. Maybe because he was watching me. I had a go at shooting the balloons. Sights are fixed so it's a waste of money. Then I tried throwing darts at cards. Got a total of 20. All I needed was 21 for the big prize—a couple of goldfish in a plastic bag.

"Hard luck, son. You just missed. Wan' another go?" He held out a pound note to me. 'But you're wasting your time. It's fixed.' I was curious. How could they fix a darts game? 'To get 21 you've got to hit an ace, right?' Right. "Well, behind each ace there's a piece of tin foil. So if you do hit the ace, the dart bounces straight out. Hard luck, but that's life, I guess.' This was really interesting. 'The name's Graham.' He held out his hand. I shook it. 'Is there anything here that's not fixed?' I asked him. 'Don't suppose the dodgems or the waltzer or the Big Dipper is fixed. Wanna find out?'

"We walked towards the waltzers. I sneaked a peek at him. He was maybe about 40. About my height. Good build. Just normal. I mean he wasn't specially good-looking or anything, just normal. He was wearing a dark blue suit. Not a suit really 'cos the trousers were lighter than the jacket. A white shirt open at the neck. Leather sandals. They looked okay with the suit. He needed a shave. Well, he looked like my dad does at the end of the day, that five o'clock shadow thing.

Like I said, he didn't have a dirty mac and he didn't look like a perv. He was easy to be with.

"He paid and we got on the waltzers. They were rickety old bangers; they looked glued onto the rails. They got up to a high speed and we were thrown all over the place. The music was loud, pounding. You couldn't think let alone have a conversation. I just hung on. Every time our waltzer swung to the left, I was thrown against Graham. He smelled nice. He didn't try to touch me or anything. just let me cushion myself against him. When the waltzers slowed and stopped we got out. I was wobbly on the legs. Graham supported me down the steps. He was laughing but it was in a nice way.

"I'm Eric," I panted. 'Hi, Eric.' 'Hi, Graham.'

"We wobbled on a bit. 'Have you got your driving licence?' he asked. 'Shit, no, I'm only fourteen.' 'Then it'll have to be the dodgems, I guess.' We crossed the sanded area to the dodgems. I got a blue car; Eric grabbed a red. I thought going round and round would be a bit juvenile. Then Graham rammed me right up the arse— with his car, I mean. You're not allowed to do that. They chuck you off. Then he rammed me again. The guy jumping from car to car was grinning. Bang! Up the arse again. Allowed or not allowed; he was asking for it. I swung my car around, did a sharp left and got behind him. Foot down and... shit, he'd turned away in time, and Bang! There went my backside again. It was humiliating but fun. Four or five times I circled him, aimed for his rear end, and missed because he was too quick. Bang, bang, bang, up my arse. The music and the cars ground to a halt. I got out of my car and felt I'd been in a salt shaker.

"How the fuck...? You're not allowed to..." Graham cut me short with a laugh. 'Everything's allowed when you own the carnival.' 'Aw, shit.' 'Wanna try the Big Dipper now?' 'Yeh, I'm up for it.'

"The Big Dipper was a weird contraption. It was like a Ferris wheel. But the individual cars were closed in a canvas so that it was pitch black inside. You were also strapped well in so that at the top of the ride you were hanging upside down in the dark. 'This was my idea,' explained Graham. 'See if you like it.'

"It was on the way up. I felt his hand on my knee, his fingers stroking towards my groin. 'Just say no if you don't want this,' he whispered. 'I really mean that. Just say no.' I said nothing. I wanted it. I was hard before he touched me," Eric laughed.

"I think we were hanging upside down in the dark when he said, 'Jesus! Is this thing for real?' I was glad it was pitch black; he couldn't see my face on fire. I think he took my silence for hurt. 'Sorry, Eric, I didn't mean to be rude. How old are you? How long is this...?' His fingers traced the length of my erection. 'Ten inches,' I whispered. 'It's only ten inches.' 'Only!' he laughed and hugged me, which wasn't easy considering we were upside down. 'Most

men would give their... and only 14! Cor bloody blimey.' That's an English expression—corblimey. I think it means 'Fuckin' hell.'"

"I know what it means," I slipped in. "And then...?" I prompted.

"Then he said something like 'Let's enjoy this till we get down.' So we went round the Dipper a few times with Graham stroking me till I said, 'You'd better not...' He understood me. He whispered, 'Sorry, forgot you were only 14.'

"When we got off the Dipper, he looked at me. You know, right at me. He had grey eyes. They're nice. You don't often see grey eyes." My heart skipped a beat as I recalled another pair of grey eyes. "He said, 'My caravan's over there. You don't have to come if you don't want to.' 'I want to,' I said. We walked to the grassy stretch behind the waltzers. There were about a dozen caravans lined up in a row. Graham's was the biggest and the shiniest. I don't know why but that made me feel sort of proud. He unlocked the caravan and I stepped up and in. It was very clean, really well organised, you could see what the different areas were for. Near the back there was a beaded curtain. It was easy to guess what was behind the curtain.

"'Would you like something to drink?' 'No, thank you.' 'Something to eat.' 'No, thanks.' I looked at my watch. 'I've only got an hour. Got to be back for dinner.' 'What would you like to do then?' I'd like to undress you, please.' Honest, Donny, that's exactly what I said. I don't know where it came from. I just looked at Graham and said, I'd like to undress you, please.' He was smiling. He has a really nice smile. 'Help yourself,' he said. I took three steps towards him and started with his jacket. I slipped it off and folded it neatly over a chair. Then I undid his shirt, button by button. I slipped that off and added it to the jacket. I stepped back. He had a good strong build. He wasn't very hairy. I mean, he had a lot of dark hair in his armpits, but his chest was smooth with only a few hairs around the nipples. I was a bit disappointed, I like hairy men. Then I saw a line of hair running from his belly button down under his trousers. It was dark and thick. That was better.

"I felt there were some things I wanted do. I knew I wouldn't get lots of chances to do them, so I just did what I felt like doing. I slid to my knees in front of him. I opened his leather belt and unzipped him. I knew he was hard. I could see the outline of his dick, and I could smell him. I moved his trousers off his hips and slid them down to his knees. He had those boxer thingies on. They were tartan. I thought that was funny, but I didn't tell him. I pressed my cheek against the front of his boxers. I felt his cock hot and hard against my face. I slid his boxers down as slowly as I could. Lots of dark hair sprang free. I think it's beautiful. A man's hair, I mean. Graham's hair was all shiny and healthy as if he'd shampooed it. I pressed my nose into his hair and breathed deep. I heard him sort of gasp above me. The top of his cock bounced out and hit me under

the nose. I kept sliding his boxers down as slowly as I could. I was fascinated by the shape and colour of his cock. Pinky, fleshy browns. His foreskin was pulled back a bit and I could see he was wet. I could smell him, too. You know when you've been wanking for a while but you won't let yourself cum; that sort of smell.

"I had to pull his boxers out a bit to get them over his balls. They were big and hairy. I felt a bit faint seeing all that hair. I loved it. Do you think I'm a bit pervy? Never mind. I put my arms round his bum and pulled him onto my face. My mouth was wide open, ready to gobble down his cock, but I must have tried to swallow too much 'cos I started to choke. It was really embarrassing. There was me trying to be all lovey dovey and choking on his cock. And it wasn't even ten inches. Must have been about 7 inches. Don't get me wrong. I'm not criticizing Graham; I'm just saying I should have done it a bit better. Do you think I need practice? Never mind. I nearly pushed Graham over on his arse 'cos he grabbed my shoulders and said. 'Whoa, boy, take it easy.' Then he hobbled to the door, locked it and hobbled back. It should've been funny but it wasn't. All I wanted was sex. I wasn't sure what kind of sex it would be, but whatever it was I wanted it.

"Graham pulled back the beaded curtains. I was right. It was a bed, nearly a double bed. 'C'mere, luvverboy,' he said. That was nice. Nobody's ever called me 'luvverboy' before. 'My turn now.' He got off his trousers, boxers, shoes and socks. Then I stood in front of him as he undressed me. I was a bit embarrassed, but I don't know if that's because my cock is 10 inches, and I don't know why I should be embarrassed. He whistled out loud, right out loud. Then he leaned forward and kissed the head. 'Beautiful, just beautiful,' he whispered, and that made me even more embarrassed but in a proud sort of way. 'What do you want to do?' he asked.

"'I don't have a lot of time,' I said. 'Whatever you want,' he said. He was stroking my cock all this time. I was a bit worried. You know my ten-second thing. I was scared I'd squirt all over him and disgust him. 'May I fuck you, please?' I asked. Then I blurted out, 'I've been fucked but I haven't fucked anyone yet. My friend's a bit small.' I hoped he understood me. 'You're a man, maybe you can...' I wasn't sure how to finish the sentence and Graham didn't make me. He smiled up at me. Then he reached to the cabinet beside his bed and slid out a tube of stuff. I don't know what it was. It wasn't Vaseline or Nivea. I've tried them."

I resisted asking the obvious.

"He squeezed some gloopy stuff into his hand and began stroking it up and down my cock. I could feel it building inside me. I must have grunted 'cos Graham slowed down and laughed, 'Fuckin' fourteen. Unbelievable.' Then,

‘Want me to use a condom?’ ‘A what?’ Another laugh. ‘Never mind. Fuckin’ fourteen.’

“He swung himself over onto his bed. ‘It would help if you helped,’ he said. ‘You know what to do, don’t you?’ ‘Yeh,’ I lied, thinking the gloop must be the equivalent of peanut butter.”

I couldn’t help laughing.

“Shut up. This is serious,” Eric admonished me.

“It was really interesting putting gloop up a guy’s bum,” he continued. “For a minute I thought I would be disgusted. I wasn’t. I was fascinated. I enjoyed the way it opened up, the way it let my middle finger slip in, then two fingers, then three... I was following Graham’s instructions, remember. I wasn’t tempted to lick back there, or stick my tongue in like you. But there wasn’t any peanut butter so that’s probably why. He was really hairy back there but it was nice watching the hairs swirl around. Then I heard Graham say something: ‘Go for it, baby,’ I think he said.

“He was holding his cheeks, his bum-cheeks, wide open. I was holding my shaft. I pressed the head where I thought his hole was. I must’ve got lucky because it resisted and then sort of opened up and let me slide in. Easy! Well, easy for me, but Graham was grunting a lot of dirty stuff like, ‘Oh, fuck,’ and ‘Jesus shit’ and ‘Oh, God, fuckin’ bugger.’ I think I got all the way in. Well, I couldn’t get any further. My hair was rubbing against his bum and my cock seemed to bounce off a hard place. I have to say I was a bit scared and that probably stopped me from shooting in ten seconds. I read in a porno mag...” Where the hell had Eric Murray got his hands on a porno mag? “...that women like it deep and hard, so I guessed Graham would like that, too. So I rammed in deep as I could, hauled myself out and rammed in deep again. I did some fast strokes and some slow strokes, mixing them up like my bowling. Keep them guessing what’s coming next. The funny thing was the music from the dodgem cars kept bursting into life. And I tried to keep time with the music. The best was ‘Rock Around The Clock’ ’cos that gave me really good timing with lots of hard bouncy bits. The worst was ‘Moon River’; I thought that would never end. I was fucking in slow motion but Graham seemed to like it.

“I think I lasted three and half songs. Then it was impossible. It sort of takes you over. You feel all this shuddering through your chest and belly, and your hips take over, and suddenly you’re just fucking, fucking, fucking. Then it’s like your balls are coming up through your cock and you’re firing your balls into the guy’s... what?”

“His rectum,” I offered.

“Naw.”

“His bowels,” I suggested.

“Yeh,” mused Eric. “Your balls into his bowels.” Then he continued, “I lay there on top of him. It seemed like ages. It was a weird feeling. Bit like trying to take the last wicket with the last ball in a cricket match. You just know you’re going to do it. When you let the ball out of your hand, you feel on top of the world. But it doesn’t take the wicket and you find you don’t actually care. You’re just dreamy and relaxed and dozey. So you just lie there waiting for the next time.

“But, of course, I couldn’t lie there waiting for the next time. I had to get home. I’d lost track of time. I slid out of Graham’s bum. The smells were a bit yucky but nice. He rolled over. His dick was all floppy but I didn’t know if he’d cum or not. He pulled me down onto his arms; that was nice. ‘Fish,’ I whispered. ‘We’re having fish for supper. I got to go.’ ‘I know,’ he said, I know.’ He gave a big sigh, let me go, slid off the bed and started to dress me. It was weird but nice.

It reminded me of when mum used to dress me.” I heard the lump in Eric’s throat. “Then Graham got dressed quickly and said, ‘Walk you to the entrance?’ ‘Yes, please.’

“At the entrance he shook my hand. There was something wrong. ‘What is it?’ I asked. Graham didn’t say anything. He just turned in the direction of a carnival poster. I followed his eyes. I read the date. The carnival was leaving. ‘We pack up tonight and leave at dawn.’ I didn’t know what to say. Maybe there wasn’t anything to say. But I knew what I wanted to do. I put my arms round him, pulled him towards me, and kissed him right on the lips. No tongue or anything, but right on the lips. That was my way of saying thank you. That was my way of saying goodbye.”

I read that last paragraph again and I realise that’s not Eric, that’s me. It’s what Eric told me but it’s me who’s shaped it, reconstructed it, and probably romanticised it. Memory is a weird thing; it’s not reality; and the original memory can get mixed up with so many other memories. Maybe not even other memories, maybe just the way we wanted or expected it to be. And this isn’t even my memory; it’s Eric’s memory. Maybe he just met a man at the carnival who seduced him, had a fuck and left. But that’s not enough for me. That would be animals rutting, and that wasn’t enough for me. Or was it? I checked out ‘rutting’ and found out that it is ‘a recurrent period of sexual excitement and reproductive activity in certain male ruminants’. I wanted more.

“Hey, c’mere. Want some of this?”

I turned my head to Eric. He was lying on his side facing me, grinning. He’d pulled down the front of his shorts and I could see his cock sticking straight up. It was hard and erect, the head a bulbous mushroom. It looked alien and obscene, not really part of Eric. Purple and sticky and streaky with sweat.

He gripped the bottom of the shaft and waved it at me. "Danger, Will Robinson, danger!" leapt into my head. "C'mon, you know you want it."

"We're meant to be at the berries," I squeaked, my throat as dry as a baby's talcummed bottom.

"The berries can wait," leered Eric. "This can't." I'm not sure what a leer is but I know one when I see one, and this was definitely a leer, a sneering, suggestive grin. I've seen them on Tom when he's setting a cheese-trap for Jerry.

"It's too early," I croaked. "I mean it's not even ten o'clock."

"What the fuck does that matter?" snapped Eric, no longer leering, not even grinning. "Shit. Donny, you're too serious. You're no fun at all. You should've come with us to Devon, then you'd've seen what real sex is like."

"Real sex?"

"Yeh, real sex," yawned Eric on to his back and stuffing away his baby python. I felt reprieved and relieved.

"Oh, yeh," I said and added, hoping to distract more than anything else, "you said you'd had sex with 'them', not just with Graham but with 'them'. What was the other guy's name?"

"Names. Other guys' names. There was more than one, but I didn't ask their fucking names. When you've got your cock up another guy's hole, you don't exchange names. Definitely not in a public toilet."

"In a public toilet?" The note of surprise in my voice made me sound like a startled parrot. I looked towards Eric and was mildly disgusted to see he was playing with himself. His hand was inside the tent of his shorts and he was gently jerking the monster. I was disgusted to find I was hard, too, and that my own hand had slipped inside my shorts.

"Yeh, the public toilets. They were really wild, Donny. They were near the carnival site. A brick shed. Lots of old-fashioned iron fittings inside. Two cubicles. And the writing, Donny. The writing on the walls. Sheer filth, but fuckin' hell. I came twice just from reading the stuff on the walls. There were telephone numbers, and times. I didn't try the phone numbers but I came down one of the times and got lucky—Bingo! Actually I was terrified, shitting myself. It was six in the evening, the park was pretty well deserted, and there was me, a Bruce Academy boy hanging round a public toilet hoping to get some."

"And did you—get some, I mean?" I couldn't resist prompting Eric. Despite my new-found morality, this was exciting.

"Bet your sweet ass I did." That was a phrase I hadn't heard before. Cool. I'd use that. "I was a sort of... what word am I looking for?"

"Celebrity."

“Yeh, that’ll do. I was a sort of celebrity. I mean, how often do you find handsome fourteen-year-olds with 10-inch dicks hanging round your toilets?” Eric laughed and I was glad to hear his sense of humour was restored.

“First time I just let two guys suck me off, then made a run for it. They were old guys, I mean really old, forty or something. Their pubic hair was mostly grey. They were more scared than me. It was a great feeling. Two mouths on my cock at the same time, all slobber and slurp. They were really grateful in a pathetic sort of way. Maybe like when you’re lost in the Alps and a big St. Bernard comes bounding through the snow with a wee barrel of brandy tied round its neck. You’re really grateful to the dog but all you want to do is get that stuff inside you. When I started squirting, they pulled my cock from one side to the other making sure they got their share. Pathetic, really. I could’ve fucked them. I could’ve stayed and fucked them. One of them kept muttering ‘Fuck me, fuck me,’ but I’m not sure if it was an invitation or if he was just choking on my dick. You know what, Donny?”

“What?”

“Not many guys have got ten-inch dicks. I thought I was a bit freaky at school but I didn’t bother ’cos when we grow up, we’ll be much the same. But that’s not true. A ten-inch dick is really something for any guy. ’Specially when you’re taking it up the ass.” I didn’t have to look to know Eric was grinning, probably leering at me.

“And you? Did you, you know... take it up the you-know-where?”

“Yeh, just once.” I couldn’t believe Eric was so nonchalant. “It was okay, but I prefer fucking to getting fucked. Maybe there’s two kinds of guys—those who like fucking someone and those who like getting fucked.” I couldn’t believe my Eric had become so philosophical in two weeks. “Maybe if the place is nicer I’ll enjoy it more next time. Like at Inverbervie. With you. That was really nice. Maybe it will always be nice with you ’cos it’s you.” I was grateful for that. “But in the toilets it wasn’t so nice. I was standing facing the loo, bent over, my hands on the toilet pan, my jeans and undies at my ankles. I was a bit worried they’d get wet and smelly. And the guy, it was a man about 30, I think, was in a hurry. Another scaredy cat. He just slapped on the grease. Don’t know what kind it was. Jammed two fingers up my hole and wiggled them around for a bit. Hauled them out and rammed himself in. Selfish fucker. Didn’t even play with my hard-on, and I couldn’t ’cos I was supporting myself. He wasn’t even very big back there. I mean it hurt, it always hurts at the start, but once he was in it was sort of basic. In, out, in, out, and just as I was starting to feel something, squirt and spurt, and that’s that. I suppose he came but I didn’t actually feel anything. I took a shit after he’d gone and it only seemed to be me in the pan. The little brown fishies, bob-bob-bobbing along.”

Eric sighed. "There's one thing that really annoyed me though."

"What was that?"

"After he'd finished, after he'd pulled up his pants, zipped himself and such, he left and came back. Only two minutes later he came back."

"What for?"

"I was sitting on the toilet taking a dump. The door opened. There weren't any locks. It was him. He looked like an unhappy sheep. He extended his hand. It was a 10 note, an English tenner. He handed me the money and muttered something like 'Thanks for your trouble, son.' Then he whipped round and left. Me sitting there, straining to take a dump, holding an English tenner. I'm not a fuckin' hoor, you know. I do things 'cos I want to do them. You couldn't pay enough to get me to do that stuff if I didn't want to. And that cunt looked so guilty he made me ashamed of myself. What the fuck for? It was the holidays, and holidays are meant to be fun."

It went silent. I slid over to Eric and began to stroke his hair. "I'm not in the mood now," he mumbled. "Neither am I," I whispered. "I just like stroking your hair. But I'll stop if you want."

"No, don't stop. I like it." He paused, then added, "But don't take too long. We've got to get to the berries. I want to make at least a tenner today." My friend started laughing. I joined in. Suddenly we were just two schoolkids on the way to the berries on a warm summer's day, and it felt just right.

* * *

Two school kids, on a warm summer's afternoon, spread-eagled, naked on a double-bed, in Eric's house.

"Yeh, you're a bit small down here, tiny actually, but just think how it opens up when you're taking a big dump. I'll take it easy, honest I will." I imagined I felt Eric's warm breath on my over-heated anus and blushed again all over. Christ, this was the excretory opening at the end of my alimentary canal that he was talking so blithely about.

"I don't know, Eric," I mumbled into the pillow. Fragments of fear bounced around inside my head like demented bluebottles trapped in a jam jar. Procrastinate, procrastinate, I panted, but it was Macbeth not Hamlet that came to mind: 'If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly.' What I wanted to do was turn serenely to Eric and pronounce, "We will not proceed any further in this business," but, as Eric had repeatedly reminded me, since the Berries three days before, "It's only fair. I let you fuck me, it's my turn now." Fairness amongst friends is incredibly important, and it seemed getting fucked was no exception.

“We could go and get in some cricket practice,” I offered.

“Aw, for fuck’s sake, Donny, the season’s over.”

“Rugby?” I offered, prepared to make any sacrifice except my sweet little arse.

“Shit, no. I want this.” He jabbed at my anus. I yelped, he giggled. “See, you’re getting into it now. I’ll even lick it if you like.” I liked that ‘even’, cheeky fucker. “I won’t hurt you, honest. Just, feel what this feels like.” Eric slopped a dollop of Nivea between my cheeks and started to cream it around and on my anus. His fingers made little pressures against the centre. I heard slurpy and farty type noises fill the silence. Eric seemed to know what he was doing but I wished he wouldn’t whistle, especially not that song, not ‘Whistle while you work.’ It made everything so practical, functional, inevitable.

The truth is I didn’t want to get fucked. There were several reasons. The pain, yes. I’d been severely constipated a couple of times in my life and I guessed being fucked by Eric’s ten inches would feel much the same, except the log would be going in, not out, up not down this time. I’d sat huddled over a toilet pan in utter agony with only a ‘Beano’ comic for comfort; it was not something I wanted to experience again. I was also afraid my hole wouldn’t close up afterwards; I had visions of walking to school when suddenly a stool would slip and slide straight into my underpants; even worse how could I explain it to Dr Metcalf who’d brought me into this world; who’d seen my bum-hole years before I knew I even had one?

I dreaded taking such a final step; letting myself be fucked would confirm I was a homosexual! That was a terrifying word: homosexual. So terrifying it was never used in adult company, and rarely mentioned amongst us boys because it carried such opprobrium. A bit of fun, experimentation amongst friends was fine, though you didn’t shout it from the clock tower, but being a ‘homosexual’ was beyond the pale. To tell the truth, I’d never met a homosexual, didn’t know any homosexuals, didn’t want to know any homosexuals. I didn’t consider Mr David Mudie a homosexual because, as far as I knew, he only loved boys, only did stuff with boys, maybe only with Alan. I wasn’t sure what I felt about men who loved boys but ‘homosexual’ meant something far more sinister. Homosexual meant you could never have a normal life. A wife, kids, that sort of thing. It meant you could never stand in a pub, man to man, toe to toe, eyeball to eyeball, drinking beer, talking football without being conscious you might want to fuck the other guy. Even if the other guy wasn’t homosexual, and had a wife and kids and all that stuff. Or maybe homosexuals went to their own pubs and stood there man to man, eyeball to eyeball, wondering if they had any chance of fucking that night. Who would be on top, who on bottom? How big was the guy? Would it hurt? Would he be

romantic? Would he want to kiss? Would he like your body? And what the fuck would you talk about afterwards?

But there was something else. Something I didn't want to face since Eric had told me about his holiday adventures, and he'd described most of those in graphic detail. Listening to Eric, watching the dark delight in his face, I realised he'd never love me the way I wanted him to. There was something heart-breaking about that but there was also a feeling of liberation. If he could never love me the way I'd like him to, then I was under no obligation to love him at all. That left only fucking.

"There you go," whispered Eric into my right ear, his sticky chest against my sticky back. "Trust me. I know how to do this." He reached back and held my buttocks open, sliding his slathery erection between the cheeks. Despite the cream he was hot, hard, long and thick. The inner skin of my buttocks slid against his shaft; the sounds were obscenely rude, all slobbery and slappery, and the smell of Nivea overpowering. "Now I'm gonna rub the head of my cock against the lips," he confided. For a moment I was confused. How could he reach my lips from that position? Then I realised which 'lips' he meant. "Feels good, doesn't it?" Actually it didn't feel much of anything at all. I knew I should offer some moans and groans but I was preoccupied with this new Eric, this earthy Eric who'd replaced Bruce Academy's tight-arsed, strait-laced wonder boy.

"Now get on your side a bit," he whispered hauling me round till I was stretched on my left side, Eric spooned behind me. In this position I could see the little B&W television Mr Murray had in his bedroom. That was amazing. My mum couldn't afford a tele for the living room and here were the Murrays with a TV in the bedroom. Then I remembered Mrs Murray had passed on, and that seemed to explain things.

"Fuck, ow."

"Sorry," giggled Eric, "that's my second finger in now." I'd seen Eric's fingers often enough to know they were like a man's, long, thick and wide, and two of them were inside me. "Hang on, I'm just loosening you up. Don't go tight on me." Nothing could tighten me up quicker than the thought of being loosened but I gallantly lay there and let Eric get on with it, wishing the tele was on, but thinking it was rude to ask.

"Stick your lower leg straight out," Eric instructed. "Pull the knee of your top leg up to your chest." Bones clicked as I complied. "Here, get these two pillows under the knee of your top leg. Wait a minute." I sensed Eric kneeling over my extended leg, the lower one, placing one of his knees on either side of my extended leg. For a moment I wondered if he was copying this from 'The Joys of Sex', a manual circulating through the academy.

“This is called the ‘side-fuck’ position,” he helpfully explained. “In this position, your buttock bones and my pelvic bones don’t squash my hard-on when it’s penetrating your arse as deep as possible.” Hurrah! “Not only that but in this position I can vary the speed, depth and angle of penetration very easily.” Yes, but would he also give Green Shield stamps? “And,” he added with grim note of satisfaction, “I’m able to aim the head of my hard-on directly into your prostrate and pound it to fuck!”

He’d completely lost me there. What the hell was a ‘prostrate’? Later I checked it in the dictionary: prostrate—lying face-downwards as in submission; exhausted physically or emotionally; helpless or defenceless. Well, yes, that described the position I was in, but made no sense at all the way Eric used it. Precisely what was it he wanted to pound to fuck? Then I found it! Prostate—a gland in male mammals that surrounds the neck of the bladder and urethra and secretes a liquid constituent of the semen. Fuck it! That didn’t seem to make much sense either. So I abandoned pursuit.

“Ow! Fuck! Ow!”

“For Christ’s sake, Donny, that’s only the tip. Just a bit more...”

“Fuck it! Don’t. Get it out!” I felt Eric’s right hand close round my mouth. He has big hands, it was difficult to breathe. “Shut up. Remember the neighbours. Just a bit more. Once the head’s in...”

Fuck the neighbours. My arse hole was burning. Somebody was sand-papering my sphincter, and my sphincter didn’t like it one little bit. My sphincter felt like it was on the rack, being stretched wider and wider, and that hurt, that was agony. “Lie still,” Eric whispered, “just lie still, you’ll get used to it, you’ll like it when I’m all the way in.” All the way in! Even the thought made me shake all over. And I wanted oxygen, more oxygen, but Eric’s big right hand was clamped over my mouth and nose making it more and more difficult to breathe. I lay very still, probably dying, but making a decision. Far far away I heard Eric’s voice, “There, there, you’re getting used to it now. Let’s just get the head in.”

He went for it.

I went for it.

I bit him, and I bit him hard, straight into the fleshy part between his thumb and first finger. I bit him and hung on for dear life, my dear life.

“Bastard! You fucking bastard!”

Eric released me. I released him. He pulled out and away from me. I rolled onto my back, gasping and spluttering. He rolled on to me, full length, a leg on either side of my hips, holding my wrists down, warm blood trickling down his right wrist, his eyes furious. “What the fuck did you do that for? You bit me, you wee bastard.”

“Cos you were choking me, you fucker. Your hand was over my nose. I couldn’t breathe. You were killing me,” I shouted as furious as him. “Maybe that doesn’t matter to you. As long as you get your fuck. You wouldn’t care if I was dead, as long as you got your fuck.” I was panting, chest heaving. Above me Eric panted, his chest heaved, sweat ran down his face. He was beautiful. We looked at each other in fury but it couldn’t last. I don’t know who laughed first; that doesn’t matter as long as we both laughed. Then he said, “You’ll have to suck it, you know.”

“I don’t mind sucking it,” I said. “I’m just not having it up my arse.”

“I’m not talking about that,” he said. “I’m talking about this.” He held his dripping hand above my face, a few blood drops spattered on my nose. “Yes?”

“Yes, please,” I murmured.

Eric didn’t fuck me; I didn’t fuck him. We both know something had changed. We were friends; we weren’t lovers; we’d always be friends but we’d never be lovers. And that was just fine.

Chapter 8

One more week and back at school. I lay, eyes closed, in the freshly-cut grass at Magdalen Road and listened to the world around me. Desultory traffic in the far distance. The groundsman's mower miles away. The thwack of a tennis ball, rhythmic enough to suggest seniors, the buzz of an overloaded bumblebee, a fly's kiss on my naked knees. My eyes opened drowsily. Above me blue skies, clear skies, not a single cloud drifting east. A day destined to be perfect when Leslie came bounding through the gates.

I'd got home an hour earlier. I'd woken up tired, not physically tired but mentally tired. Tired trying to make sense of what had happened during the last few months. We had a teacher who said, "Since these mysteries are beyond us, let's pretend we are organising them." We'd no idea what he meant, thought he was being arty farty, but now I had some inkling of his meaning. What if there is no meaning? What if things just happen—no rhyme, no reason, no pattern—just happen? What if there are just incidents and episodes and we have to impose meaning on them, or at least pretend to ourselves they do have meaning? Like my tennis, say. What if I'd gone to my auntie and she hadn't handed me her old tennis racquet; she'd handed me a hockey stick instead? And I'd taken up the sport of hockey and ended up one of the hockey crowd; even the thought's weird, and all those roads that led to tennis, led to now, had simply vanished, simply never been.

And Alan loving Dave. Why did that happen? I'd known Alan since I'd been old enough to remember anybody, but I never saw the signs, never read the runes, never read the portents saying, "One day your best friend is going to fall in love with a man." I guess doctors and psychologists and wise men and such could give you reasons, but maybe they, too, are pretending to organise mysteries that are beyond them. And maybe in another time, another place, their love would be perfectly acceptable, even honoured. I'd read some stuff about Ancient Greece; it hinted that older men took boys under their wings and prepared them for life, for battle, for death, and part of that learning process included sex. It wasn't shunned, hidden away like some dark secret, but open and celebrated as part of the way a boy became a man. I'd read, too, that boys could share great loves. Could I be Hephaestion to Leslie's Alexander? Dream on. And why not? If boyhood isn't a time for dreaming, no time is.

Where was the meaning in all this? Was life like a novel? A compendium of stuff that happened, held together by the presence of a single person. My life as a novel. My life is a novel. And a novel is so much tidier than real life. In a novel you can select, invent, embroider and embellish, even lie if you like, all in the name of telling a story that makes sense, has a beginning, a middle, an end.

But who really knows where the beginning is or if the end is the end, or if it's just when the writer got bored, or reached the number of words he needed, or thought, "Good, that'll keep them happy." Because you have to pretend that life has order, meaning, significance; if you don't, what else is there?

Fuck it. Where's Leslie? I glanced at my Timex—ten to ten, cowboy time: ten to ten to ten to ten (one of Leslie's better jokes). I'd said half past ten but that didn't mean he had to keep that time. I salvaged some clover and started making a necklet. Onwards I mused.

Why me? Why Alan? When we were five-year-olds in our floral pinafores at nursery had it already been decided that we'd have sex with each other, that we'd have sex with lots of boys, that Alan would prefer a man? Who decided these things? A name popped into my head: Michael. One name, two boys. Who'd decided it for them? In one case I could almost understand it: in the other it made no sense at all

* * *

The first Michael is my cousin. Let's call him Mike because that's what we always called him. Mike is three months older than me and attends our greatest rivals, Wallace Academy, the city's other boys' school set in its centre. There's Mike on my mind screen: so fresh, so alive, and so utterly beautiful it's hard to believe he exists in the flesh. His hair is light brown, streaked with gold. Thick hair that manages to fringe his left eye at all times. Almond eyes, gold and hazel. Wide set eyes. Elegant nose. Mischievous dimples. A wide mouth that smiles at every opportunity. A happy boy from a happy family. The only part of our family that had money. No traumas there. A happy boy from a happy family, and yet as sexually voracious a boy as Alan Aitken.

Mike didn't take me to bed until last Christmas. I resisted him that long. I had a golden rule: nobody from Wallace Academy, and definitely nobody from my own family.

Girls swarmed round Mike from the age of 9 and he loved it. His sister was beautiful; she knew it, and she loved to be surrounded by boys. And Mike had girlfriends all the way through from 9 and beyond. I don't want to make Mike sound promiscuous; he wasn't; he kept the same girl for months on end, and he was fiercely loyal to the girl of the month.

I was staying with Uncle Alex and Auntie Hannah for the weekend after Christmas. Mike fell out of a tree on the second day. That wasn't much of a surprise. An intensely physical boy, Mike had several absences from school following falls from walls, bicycles, motor bikes, trees, buildings, and pretty much anything above six feet. Although beautifully co-ordinated, Mike took risks. If any act could be complicated until it was risky, that's the course he

took, so it was little surprise when Mike was upstairs at 10 in the morning to be dumped unceremoniously on the bed we were sharing. “He’ll mend you. Donny’ll look after you.” Michael’s father was a G.P.

Michael lay there grinning. Smiling broadly is better though he winced when I turned his knee. “It needs cream,” he announced, pushing his track-suit bottom to his ankles, no mean feat when he could hardly sit up in bed. I obtained the most inoffensive cream I could find and applied to the hollows around his left knee. Michael chattered on, but when I tried to take my fingers away, he whispered, “Stroke it, please. It feels nice.” I don’t often blush but I guess my face was afire. When boys at Bruce Academy whispered ‘stroke it’, they really meant stroke ‘it’. Mike had this ability to make every conversation personal and intimate within a few moments. Even at a crowded dinner table, you’d find yourself without warning in the middle of an intimate chat as if you were the only person in the world Mike could confide in. It was not so much what he said as the way he said it.

“I like being here with you, Donny. Just us. Not the damn family... Just us. In here. On our own. It’s cool...” he giggled. “It’s cool. Just being here. Stroke higher, Donny, I’ll tell you where.” His underpants were snow white, gleaming white. Old-fashioned jockeys, but that bit too tight for him. And as we chatted and I stroked, Mike got a hard-on. I watched it happen. He knew I was watching, and he let it happen. His hard cock was outlined beneath the thin white cotton; then it arched and tented the cotton. How easy it would be to let my fingers run the length of my cousin’s erection. This boy who lay there, golden hair splashed on a blue pillow case, lying there, touching me with his smile, offering me himself.

Suddenly he turned over. Embarrassed, I thought. Did I have time to sigh in relief? I don’t think so... for Mike reached round, raised his tummy and jerked his underpants to his knees. “Cramp, Donny. Awful. Bet you get it sometimes. Right at the top of my legs.”

“Medical, it’s medical,” I told myself.

I laid the tube of cream aside and gently dug my fingers into the tender places where his long legs ran into the arch of his buttocks. Press, release, press again. Knead and manipulate.

“That’s good, Donald, harder. And a bit higher.”

I have always been anal. I don’t know why. One of life’s mysteries, one of life’s little tricks. Almost unconsciously, my fingers parted his cheeks, enough, just enough to see the pink wink of his pucker, so sweet, so vulnerable. A sigh rose from the pillow. Michael spread his legs so that one of them dangled over the edge of the bed. It was hot in the room, in there, in that little furnace. The

smell of cream and sweat and pure boy. I pressed harder, manipulated more openly, leaned closer into him.

“Kiss my bum, Donny.” I couldn’t have been more surprised if he’d said, “Kiss my arse.” Had I misheard? Was that Michael’s voice or a tiny inner one of my own? “Go on, do it. Just try it.” Nope, definitely Mike’s voice. I was too choked to speak.

I leaned forward and ran my tongue from the hollow of my cousin’s back into the crack between his cheeks. How far to Babylon? Can I get there and back again? Michael’s hands came round to pull his buttocks wide apart. “Just fuckin’ do it, Donny.” His whisper was hoarse, a whisper from a voice on the edge of breaking. I leaned all the way and ran my tongue along the inside walls of his buttocks. My tip touched his anus, pinky brown and sweetly puckered. A magnet. It drew my tongue to its very centre. I stroked it with my tongue, pushed and probed, lost in a universe that had always been calling me home.

Michael swirled on the bed, grabbed me and pulled me to him. Tall for his age, he was slim but strong. He pulled me onto him and kissed me full on the lips, his tongue pushed at my lips frantically, I surrendered, opened, and let him invade me. I fenced back the invader, attack, retreat, attack again. His saliva poured into me in exchange for mine. The flood gates opened. He kissed my mouth, my lips, my face. His hands pulled and tugged at my T-shirt while I jerked his up and away from his shoulders. Chest to chest, belly to belly, we were glued together by the heat of the room, our bodies and our own sweat.

I was caught in a maelstrom. Michael jerked at my track-suit bottoms, my slip, and pushed them down my legs. He flopped around like a landed fish until we lay head to feet, faces jammed between each other’s legs, sucking the life out of each other. Me on the bottom, Mike on top, his legs straddling my head to give him as much leverage as possible. Frantically, he drove his cock into my throat until I felt the silk of his pubic hair against my lips. He jerked the base of my cock and sucked halfway up and down the shaft.

I tried to warn him, tried to pull away, but he grabbed my bum and forced me as deeply into him as he could cope with. My hips jerked and heaved in time with his own; we emptied our balls into each other simultaneously. I felt the semen sucked out of as much as I was squirting it. We flip flopped around the bed; it bounced half a dozen centimetres across the room; we held on for dear life until the earthquake passed, the turbulence passed, and peace fell over the kingdom.

Michael struggled up the bed and wrapped my arms around him. He grinned directly at me, hair matted across his forehead. “Wow, fucking wow! Shit! That was the greatest!” I almost told him to mind his language, but then laughed myself and pulled him to me.

We lay for a short time, then he whispered again, “May I go exploring now?” Not quite sure what he meant, I nodded assent. Down the bed he scrambled, heaved at my legs until I got the message, and turned myself over. The chance to bury my head into a pillow and dream. Then I felt it. Michael’s long fingers pulling me apart, his smooth cheeks against my own, his finger tips pulling me gently open, and his tongue probing, inching forward, penetrating me. My sphincter sighed and gave up. I turned and looked quizzically down the bed: “Are you sure...?” Michael looked with, I hesitate to use the term, a shit-eating grin on his face. Then our intrepid explorer dived headfirst into the Dark Continent again.

Later that night I tried to talk to Mike about what had happened, to analyse, to understand. He simply laughed, “Shit, Donny, you make life too complicated. I don’t know why I did that stuff; I only know I wanted to try it with you, so I did. Great, huh.” Beyond that I couldn’t draw him, maybe for Michael there was no ‘beyond that’.

* * *

Christmas images crowd my mind.

That night we are sharing a shower. Michael is pissing on me, holding his foreskin tight and squirting over my stomach and legs with the hose of his cock. He’s read about Golden Showers; he wants to try one, wants to try everything. Later that session I am sitting on the toilet trying to take a shit while Mike sucks me off. It is damned near impossible; try it and see. It’s Michael’s idea. I am very dubious but he talks me into it. Later that same night we are in bed again, in the 69 position, trying to make each other come, but only by tongue-fucking each other up the bum. I can’t come that way but Michael explodes with a series of yelps. I’m relieved we are exiled to an attic bedroom at the top of the house.

Christmas passes. Mike and I say our farewells. We won’t see much of each other for a while. I’d make the effort; he won’t. We come from different worlds; he is a Wallace boy, I belong to Bruce. And besides, Michael has a new girlfriend who “takes it everywhere I can think of!” I don’t understand why Mike needed or wanted me. The second Michael makes more sense.

Michael Cox had been at primary school with us, with Alan Aitken, John Duncan and myself. With us, but not part of us. Michael was different. We were never sure in what way he was different but Michael kept to himself, didn’t have much to say, and came from the Irish slums. What a Roman Catholic boy was doing out of the Catholic primary schools was never explained to us; we didn’t ask; we weren’t interested; we simply knew he should have been with them, the

enemy. We were Proddies (Protestants); they were Papes (Papists); this was Scotland.

We wouldn't have used the word at the time, but the Word for Michael was 'cute'. No, he was pretty, pretty as any girl in our class. Hair dark red, face-freckled, features regular. We watched a nature film in class and when they showed pictures of a bush baby, a voice called out, "Hey, that's Coxy, that's Michael Cox." For six months Michael was 'Bush Baby', but since he never reacted to the nickname it faded away like everyone's interest in it. And Michael was poor. My family was poor, most of the families were poor, but Michael was Irish-poor and it showed. Wellies (Wellington boots) in winter, open sandals in spring and autumn; shirts handed down by older brothers; a hand-knitted Fair Isle pullover; patches in his breeks. At least Michael never smelled; if he had, we'd have made his life unbearable, but he didn't so we ignored him.

Michael was bright but never successful. The work he did in class put him in the top five, but he never did any of the work set outside class time. Homework was never handed in. He missed most of the class tests and showed no interest, dread or excitement, in the 11+ that would separate so many of us into two streams forever. I don't know if Michael turned up for the 11+ examination. It wouldn't have mattered. Michael was no competition; we all knew he was bound for the Catholic secondary school and a life in the jute mills.

But he fascinated me. That dark red hair, usually shaggy. Though his mum hacked it a bit, there's not much she could do to stop it being the kind of hair you want to run your fingers through, and flick away the hair that hung over the boy's big eyes. Is that how it started? Me walking Michael to school some mornings, and flicking the hair from his eyes as we walked up the narrow dirt path alongside the cemetery. The dirt path fenced on one side, thick bushes on the other. And Michael hanging around at the entrance to the path so we could walk the half mile or so together. On cold mornings his ivory skin glowed with a red flush, his lips bee-stung, thick eyelashes double lashes that my auntie would say were wasted on a boy.

For six months we didn't say anything, not quite anything. We grunted and made bitter comments about school because that's what was expected, but in the main, walking single file up that overhung path by the cemetery was enough. Michael began to open up. Why to me? I don't know. I didn't have advice to offer. We were 11-year-old boys, and 11-year-olds live in the immediate world, not in a world where you think and plan for tomorrow. The day Michael was born, so he told me, his father announced he wanted to be a woman and be the mother of the family. He put on a dress, a wig, and a few years later had 'the operation', as Michael put it. He left the family when Michael was eight, and wasn't allowed to visit them anymore. Michael had a step-dad, a rotten shit.

Two weeks before Christmas he came into Michael's bedroom and announced: "Know what you're getting for Christmas? Fuck all. Well, not nuthin', 'cos you're gonna get a surprise, but you won't like it."

It was easy to see Michael was upset and shaken. His step-dad didn't knock him about the way he did his mum, said Michael, but he was rotten to him. He didn't want to tell anyone else about his home life, just me, and swore me to secrecy.

In fairy stories I get to step in and save the 'princess', but this was real life and I felt as helpless as Michael. I'd given him my word, almost as if we were blood brothers. He trusted me not to tell, so I told no one. Michael didn't come to school after Christmas, not until the second week of January. Like always he sat on his own, he talked to no one, not to the teacher, not to the headteacher, not to the district nurse, not to me, to no one. I waited half a dozen times at the cemetery path; he was never there when I was there. School rolled on. The tension increased like a blood pressure strap. Then it was over. All we had to do was wait for the 11+ results. They arrived and, like Moses, split the Red Sea of our futures, and for some of us these waters never closed again.

I was 13, had just entered second Year at Bruce Academy. Michael ambushed me.

"I know where you live," said Michael. He was bigger, stronger, but even more vulnerable.

"That's no secret," I laughed. "We still live in the same place. You?"

"Yeh, us, too," he said. "My house is empty till 7," says Michael. "I can't watch TV even."

"You've got a TV?"

"Yeh, but I can't watch it. We don't have a licence. We can only watch it when Sean wants to watch it." Sean was his step-dad. "And anyway I can't get in till 7. Sean doesn't let me have a key. I'm hungry. Can I come to your house? Just for a wee while. I promise I won't tell."

We cut through the alley and within four minutes we are home. Our house is basic. There's linoleum on the floor, and a couple of rugs. A second-hand pull-down couch covered in moquette. Two battered armchairs. A small dining table with four chairs. The cream walls have been papered with abstract wallpaper; it looks like the start of a Hitchcock movie. But we have a separate little kitchen and I make two super-size ham sandwiches while Michael makes a pot of tea. We gobble down the sandwiches and slurp the scalding tea; we are content. Michael looks slightly unsure, so I grab him and throw him on the couch in the living room. Then I tickle him. "Say 'The Pope likes boys' bums'," I whisper in his ear. "Come on, say 'The Pope likes boys' bums'." His laughter

is like silver peals. Our bodies touch, our faces an inch apart as I wrestle and pin him down. His eyes shine. I feel myself stiffen.

I spring from the couch. "Sorry, got to take a leak," and head for the bathroom.

I'm standing in front of the toilet, holding myself, watching the piss splash down into the bowl. There is a shuffle of feet and Michael is standing behind me. "Can't wait," he whispers. He prises open his buttons, and fishes himself out with a struggle. I hear him tinkle into the bowl. I try not to look. Like me, Michael appears to be semi-tumescent, his penis is surprisingly long and thick, he has pulled back the foreskin. The skin is a brownish ivory, the head a purply cream, the shaft is true and straight. Like the rest of him, Michael's penis is beautiful.

"You've got a big one," he says.

"Pardon?"

"You've got a big one," he repeats, "bigger than mine, I bet. Look."

I'm taken aback. Michael sounds so confident, so sure of himself, and there is a smile in his voice. "Let's measure." I'm stunned, even more so when his fingers close around the shaft of my cock. They feel so warm, they feel so right. As the last trickle dies away, he shakes it for me. He is finished too, but he makes no attempt to slide his back into his school trousers.

"Can I? Please, please?" he asks, and before I can work things out, Michael is seated on the toilet, holding my stiffening prick only inches from his face, from those red lips. "Please, please?" He opens my belt and gently eases my trousers to my knees, then draws down my underpants, making sure my cock is released from the opening. I am so hard now that it aches. Michael pushes up my shirt so it is round my waist. He leans into me and presses his face against my erection.

Michael is masturbating me now, openly masturbating me.

"My daddy likes this," he says. "My real dad, I mean. And I like it. I visit him. I'm not allowed to, but I do. He's nice to me. Not like Sean. My daddy's nice to me." He leans forward and slides his free hand between my legs, between and under till his fingers are deep in my crack.

A time-shift of maybe twenty minutes. Michael and I are lying on my single bed. The bed lamp is dim, the radio's playing Sinatra selections. We are both naked. He is cuddled deep in my arms. I can see my hardened semen glisten on his chin, his neck and his chest. I can feel his hot hard penis press against my stomach. I never intended any of this, but here we are. I am immensely happy and immensely terrified. I wish Alan were here. He'd tell me what to do next.

There is movement and the boy is scrambling up my body. He sits astride my chest. He grins down at me. His hair is thick and dark. Even his pubic hair is thick and dark and red. My hands are around his buttocks. I gently urge him further up and forward till his erection is touching my lips. I flick out my tongue and reach the head of his cock. He is very excited and his foreskin is all the way back. His boy smells are intoxicating. I pull him further forward and hear him sigh as he sinks, penis, balls and everything, into my hot hungry mouth. He begins to hump my mouth. He is face-fucking me. The expression is crude but that's what he's doing.

Michael is slim. I wonder if he did this with his father when he was eight. How small and slim was he then? If his father was "a woman" what else did they do together? Did he/she get Michael to fuck him/her? How far did the operation go? If the boy fucked him/her, in which orifice did he do it? Did his father fuck him? It is all wonderfully weird. I am working it out when I hear Michael meow like a stricken kitten; his body arches; and he is cumming into my mouth with surprisingly strong spurts. His semen is hot. Hot little squirts that make me gulp to get it all down.

Michael collapses across me as I ease him down my body. I cuddle him and pull him under the quilt even though the room is warm. It is shelter we are seeking, not warmth. Shelter from public opinion, from outraged adults who would flay me alive, and Michael, too, if they knew. I feel Michael's warm breath against my chest. There are so many questions I want to ask, but I realise he is sleeping. I sigh. Eventually I got all the answers to my questions, but they are not the point of this story. The point is... what did Michael need and want? Later he told me, "I want to be with you," then added, "but the sex is foine, too." I loved the way he pronounced the word 'fine' as 'foine'. I loved his Irish dialect that mangled the Scots I used. I loved his Irish colouring. I loved the way he crossed himself when he had an orgasm.

I wanted to be with him, but I couldn't. It was getting increasingly hard to be a real part of my family, much as I loved them and they loved me. The grammar school was carrying my boat further and further away. I'd begun correcting their speech mannerisms; "Keep that stuff for school, Donny," warned my mother.

So once again Michael Cox left my life, and it was my turn to make sure he didn't return.

* * *

My point being?

That was one of Leslie's phrases. He'd cock an eyebrow and say, "Your point being?" He knew it wound me up and used it sparingly. But I can hear you shifting a little in your seat, saying, "Your point is?"

My point is they were incidents in my life. I don't know if they mean anything. I don't know yet if I'll include them in this account. I was just lying in the freshly-cut grass at Magdalen Road, waiting for R. Leslie Morrison, and wondering what stuff meant, if it meant anything, or if I was organising mysteries beyond my years.

The necklet was complete. I was about to eat it when, out of the corner of my eye, I saw him: my Leslie, running across the grass, in his tennis whites, waving his racket up his head, making turns like a whirling dervish, and shouting something masked by the grassmower. I blushed as he came into range.

"Love you. Love you. Love you."

Fuck it. Did this Second Year have no sense? There were seniors on the tennis court. He threw himself down on the grass beside me. "Love you. Love you."

I fixed him with my steely eye and hissed, "Your point being?"

"Love you. Love you. Missed you. Missed you. Is that for me?" he asked pointing to the clover chain. He didn't wait for a reply. He turned his head while I delicately made the final piercing, dropped it round his neck and joined the end. He turned and smiled. "I wish I could keep this for ever." Were there no limits to this boy's openness, honesty, bravery?

"How was Aberdeen?" I asked.

"Bloody freezing. They don't call it the Granite City for nothing. Did you know none of the brass monkeys in Aberdeen has a full set of balls? Mum told me that. Only joking, of course. I didn't actually see any brass monkeys so I didn't have the chance to check them out."

"So what did you do?" I hoped he'd been miserable. I hoped he'd been lonely. Lonely and miserable. Then he'd be even more anxious to get back to me if he'd been anxious at all. I hated the idea of Leslie strolling round the harbour at Aberdeen with girls, maybe boys, too, staring at those long tanned legs. At least if it'd been freezing, he'd have worn jeans, and they could keep their bloody eyes to themselves. I'd never met an Aberdonian but I hated each and every one of them.

"Played lots of golf. Visited family. Read lots of stuff. You know. That sort of thing."

"You read stuff. Like what?"

Leslie must have heard the note in my voice; he bridled a little. "Books, of course, dummy. Big books with words, lots and lots of them. I'm not just a... a pretty face, you know. Hey, there's a book I want to lend you. It's fabulous. I

got it in the library but it's so good that Mum bought me a copy, It's called 'Lord of the Flies', have you heard of it?"

I'd heard of it but I'd never read it. If I remembered rightly, it was on the English syllabus for Fifth Year or even for Sixth. I'd heard there was a movie of the book but it hadn't come round to our local cinema.

"This group of boys, schoolboys, they're shipwrecked on a desert island and..." Leslie was animated; his eyes sparkled.

"Oh, like 'Coral Island'?"

"No, no, sorry, not like 'Coral Island'. They're not shipwrecked, they're air-wrecked. I mean, the plane they're traveling in crashes into the sea, and about 30 of them make it to the island. None of the grown-ups survives. So the boys have to survive on their own. The youngest is about 8 and the oldest is about, well, our age, and..."

"And they have adventures," I interrupted, and "they're all brave and look after each other. And in the end they get rescued and all live happily ever after."

"No, it's not like that all. They don't really have adventures. There is a monster, but, like Simon says, the monster turns out to be them. They start turning on each other, you see. There's two leaders. There's Ralph; he's sweet and he wants everything to be all right. Then there's Jack. He's a bit of a realist, well, he thinks he is, and what matters to him is power, power and control. Ralph wants rules but Jack only wants to hunt and kill. And in the end..."

"No more." I placed a finger over his lips. "No ending. I want to borrow the book."

Leslie sighed and lay back on the grass. "Good. It won't disappoint you. I'm always so afraid of disappointing you. Why is that? You can get the book at lunchtime. You're to come for lunch. Mum's Orders. She's got a present for you, from Aberdeen. I'm not meant to tell you that. But I have. So there. But I won't tell you what it is. You can torture me if you like. But I won't tell. You can roll on top of me and squeeze the breath out of me, but I won't tell. Understand? Hey, when are we playing tennis? There are three empty courts, so we have our pick."

"Just lie back a minute," I whispered. "I want to lie here and enjoy this. It's near the end of summer, you know." I felt Leslie's fingers touch mine. "I know, I know." There was a lump in my throat. If I opened my eyes, I knew they'd be tearful. "This must be as good as gets," I thought, "because I don't know how it could ever get better."

The present from Aberdeen was a three-quarter size Spanish guitar.

"Mrs Morrison, I can't take this?" I blurted.

“Yes, you can. I’ve already okayed it with your mum. Maybe you can have a couple of chords ready for Sunday.” Out of the corner of my eye I saw Leslie’s grin, as triumphant as a Cheshire cat.

“Sunday?”

“Sunday lunch. We’re coming over for Sunday lunch. Leslie, Bryan and I. We’ve been invited. By Mrs Cameron.” I blinked. Our family didn’t do Sunday lunch. Sunday dinner, yes, but never Sunday lunch. What would we have for afters—my elder brother demonstrating how to stick oily fingers in your tea, or my sister doing her excruciating interpretation of ‘Sugar in the morning, Sugar in the evening, Sugar at supper time’? My family had no shame, or at least I was acquiring enough shame for all of them. Already I was mentally preparing to hide Lucky, my super-flatulent, permanently-pregnant cat.

I threw in my last card. “But Mrs Morrison, I don’t know how to play the guitar.”

“That’s what lessons are for, silly.” Why did she have to have eyes like Leslie’s? I couldn’t think while I was looking at those eyes. “Leslie’s doing piano lessons after school in September. I’ve signed you up for guitar lessons on the same days.” Like Leslie, she, too, was telepathic. “Don’t worry, they’re paid for. That’s been okayed by Mrs C., too. Any more objections, young man?” I stood there frowning. “No. Well, that’s settled. Now you two go and eat. Don’t let the chicken legs get cold. You’ll like the salad, it’s a Caesar salad. I’ve got to get back to work. Catch you later, alligators.”

“After a while, crocodile.” That was Leslie. It sounded like one of their routines.

“Know what I’m gonna do with those chicken legs?” I whispered at Leslie as we headed for the kitchen.

“Nothing legal, I hope,” he whispered back.

* * *

I closed the cover, lay back on my bed and rested ‘Lord of the Flies’ on my chest. I felt confused, cheated and resentful. Ralph, running for his life, crawling on the beach, was saved by a British naval officer who’d arrived ‘in the nick of time’. What a cop out. Of course he had to be saved. Golding couldn’t have the ship arrive half an hour later and find Ralph skewered up the arse with a stick sharpened at both ends. Or the boy’s head, grinning inanely on a sharpened stick, floppy hair still hanging over one eye. No, Golding couldn’t do that at all. That’s not the British way. For one thing, his publisher would never permit it, I guessed.

“Aw, fuck it, Bill, how the hell am I ever going to sell this in schools with an ending like that? Give the kid a break.” Golding hadn’t given Simon a break, nor Piggy. But then Simon was a weirdo and Piggy was an unattractive, mouthy fatty. Both expendable. I’d no evidence but I guessed William Golding might be a teacher, probably as dull and pedantic as most of the teachers in my school. “And that sex scene, Bill. You know, where Jack and Roger start to get it on. I know you told me you didn’t intend that. But that’s what it sounds like, Billy boy. Sadism, fine; sex, a definite no-no. Cut it.”

I played ‘Spot the Theme’. In schools like mine, for brainy kids, every time we were given a new book we practised playing ‘Spot the Theme’. No book was ever given so we could enjoy it. Nope, a book was assigned so we could practise structure and plot, character analysis, style, diction, syntax, imagery, symbolism, figurative language, ironic devices (Macbeth is crammed full of them), tone, memorable quotes (Shakespeare’s the Bible for Kwik Kwotes), and the Holy Grail itself—the themes of the prose, play or poetry. I was damned good at winking out themes but I couldn’t be arsed filleting ‘Flies’. They were so obvious they might as well have printed them on the back of the paperback. Actually, it mentioned ‘Social Breakdown’ on the back cover for anyone who needed a hint.

Social Breakdown. Yeh, yeh, yeh. Thirty boys air-wrecked on a desert island, no grown-ups, things turn nasty. Surprise, surprise. The main characters lined up and saluted. “Hi, I’m Ralph. I’m the reasonable kid. That’s why I’m so good-looking.” “Hi, I’m Jack. I get to play Hitler or Stalin. I make the law. I am the Law.” “Hi, I’m Roger. I’m Jack’s right hand man. I follow Orders. Get to do the nasty stuff.” “Hi, I’m Piggy. I’m fat, girlish and half blind without my specs, so feel free to murder me if the plot needs it.” “Hi, I’m Simon. I don’t know why I’m here. I just wander round talking twaddle and prophesying doom.” “Hi, I’m the pilot. This is the first time I’ve ever spoken because I’m already dead when the novel opens. At least I get to scare the kids shitless.”

What is Golding saying? Take a bunch of boys, take away all controls, and watch them disintegrate into chaos and death. Big deal. I’d seen guys in my own school come pretty close to that, especially in the dreaded Fifth. If there’s a genuine warning, it’s “Don’t send your son to boarding school, Mrs Worthington. They’ll only stick something up his anal canal, and GIs aren’t going to hold a flag over it.”

In parts the book was unreadable. Figures of speech as thick as a jungle. I felt like wading in with my elephant gun and blasting every metaphor that showed its hide. It was such a waste of a good plot; it needed something drastic. It needed me. And I’m not talking about turning it into a free-for-all blood bath to delight the Fifth Year. No, what *Lord of the Flies* was crying out for was—

me! One day I'd rewrite the damn thing. I knew who my mentor was—Robert Louis Stevenson. I'd give the novel a hero. Ralph was no kind of hero. Long John would have had him for supper first night. And heroes don't have to win; they can fail gloriously. Think of my own hero: Dr Jekyll/Mr Hyde. They both went down fighting, fighting each other actually, but what did that matter? I guess you spend most of your life fighting the different parts of yourself.

“Donny, what are you doing in there? Dinner's on the table.”

Mothers have the unerring ability to serve meals at the most inopportune moments. I mean how many times did your mum summon you to dinner just in those few frantic seconds before you...? “I'm coming, mum. Be right there!”

Actually at that moment, I'd have forgiven my mother anything. Sunday lunch had been a brilliant success. The Morrisons were normal people, and it turned out the Camerons were, too. Okay, we had to borrow some nice cutlery from upstairs left and napkins from upstairs right, and anything as exotic as a Caesar salad wasn't on offer. How the hell did we know what Caesar had in his salad? Then I remembered my Latin. We'd been ploughing through Caesar's Gallic wars almost as long as he'd fought them and were approaching the final chapter. That must be it. Caesar divided Gaul into three, crossed the Rubicon, chased Pompey to Egypt, shagged Cleopatra (I hope he got her little brother, too) and then ordered a Caesar salad to celebrate. O, the joy of books and a classical education.

Mum and Mrs Morrison were friends: that was obvious. Almost before the pudding was finished, they were comparing lipstick colours. Then we boys were booted out into the communal back garden where Iain showed Leslie how to lure birds to pieces of bread strung out on a string and then shoot our feathered friends right between the eyes with an air rifle. Leslie put on a brave face but declined Iain's offer to 'have a go'; Iain snorted in disgust and left: that made the afternoon pretty well perfect.

Chapter 9

“Aw, for fuck’s sake, Donny, don’t be such a stick-in-the-mud.”

“You don’t have to tell me,” I repeated. What I really wanted to say was, “I don’t want you to tell me,” but this was Alan Aitken, my bestest friend in all the world from time immemorial, at least from that time in the nursery when I’d tripped over my laces, fell on my backside, and Alan had hauled me to my feet, knelt down and tied my laces for me.

“We could play snooker,” I offered.

“Fuck snooker. I haven’t seen you for over a month. Mum got it into her head it wasn’t worth cruising round the Med, so we ended up cruising to the Bahamas. Bit boring at times. Wish I knew then what I know now,” he grinned. For the first time in his life Alan was without freckles; or at least he was so tanned his entire face had turned into a single freckle. Even that curly black hair was light brown streaked with gold. “You should feel privileged. I haven’t seen Dave yet, just you.” I wanted to divert the conversation away from David Mudie. “So. It happened on the ship?”

“No, you dumb ass, it happened here, yesterday. Well, not here. Down at the main bus Station. God. Donny, it was scary but it was so fucking exciting. Get yourself comfortable. Get your dick out if you want. I won’t. Saving myself for David,” he giggled. I stretched out on Alan’s double bed. There was no stopping him. I might as well hear him out, make my excuses, and get out. I felt sick to my stomach. This was my best friend and I didn’t want to be with him, not like this anyway.

“You know it was pissing rain last night?”

I did. I stayed at home and practised my three basic chords. There were four but I’d lost one of them. I nodded.

“I went looking for Dave. Down near his office. Waiting for him to come out. I wanted to go in but we’ve learned to play it cool. I waited and waited. It was only five o’clock but it was as dark as the Earl of Hell’s waistcoat. After five thirty, I knew he wasn’t coming; no lights on, see? Rain was bouncing like hailstones on the tin roof of the shelter. Sounded like the Edinburgh Tattoo. We have to go there some time. The only light was from the Station toilets. I only half needed a piss but at least it would pass a few minutes. My bus was at 6.40.

“There’s only two wall urinals in there. Tiny partition. I had my jeans on. It was so humid they were sticking to me. I pulled out half a hard-on. The door swung open, then closed. A man took the urinal next to mine. I kept my head down. I tried to focus on the wet tiles and the little bit of blue toilet cleaner, but my eyes betrayed me and slid to the left. Wow! He was big. I mean big, Donny. I thought he must be a fireman with a hose that size. Get it? He wasn’t making

much effort to hide himself. I jerked my eyes away, they slid back, the piss was squirting from him in bursts; must have been practising for a big blaze. It was beautiful. Shit. Was I sick or something?

“He wasn’t even good-looking, not a dosser but definitely not a professional. Maybe a hand from the jute mills or something like that.” A pang of resentment hurt me. I was a jute mill kid; I’d never learned to be proud of it but that didn’t give any tosser the right... “Go on.”

“Bit rough and ready. Overalls and such. A flat cap. And that jute smell... no offence, Donny. I couldn’t keep my eyes off his dick.

“‘That’s a big one, mister.’” Alan giggled. “Imagine me calling anyone ‘mister’. But they like it.” I didn’t probe who ‘they’ were.

“‘Want some?’” I didn’t answer. I didn’t need to. My dick did it for me. It jumped, Donny, I swear to God it jumped. The man half turned to me. He edged me backwards. I hardly resisted. Edged me backwards into the single cubicle. The back of my knees bounced against the toilet seat. I sat down. I’d no choice. I didn’t want one. ‘Don’t do anything you don’t want to,’ he whispered. Great. That gave me licence to do whatever I wanted to, and I wanted to do lots.

“His hard cock was pointing straight at my face. It was like something from a Bond movie. It was huge. Hard and huge. It looked tanned, though the head, sticking out from the foreskin, looked a mixture of brown and purple. And it was stinking. Know when you’ve got that smegma stuff under your foreskin, and you’re a bit pissy, too? That was it. It didn’t put me off. Just made me want more.

“I raised my hand and fitted my fingers round his shaft. Shit! My fingertips couldn’t touch. I flicked my tongue out and licked the head. I know how to do that. I put both hands round the shaft and worked the skin up and down. I ran my tongue round and round the head, stopping sometimes to suck that hole at the end. What’s that called again?”

“It’s the entrance to the urethra.”

“Urethra? I thought that’s what Archimedes yelled when he burned his arse in the bath?”

“Go on.”

“Well, whatever, I know guys like little tongues down there. I worked on his shaft with all my fingers, then replaced them with my tongue. I gave his balls a good squeeze to get the juices flowing. Dave taught me that. ‘Go on,’ that was the guy. It came out sort of strangled but that’s what he said, ‘Go on’.

“So I did. I let the head of his cock slide into my mouth till the tip touched the roof of my mouth. Then I adjusted my mouth until a couple of inches were sliding in and out like a huge stick of Edinburgh Rock you’ve just started and you think you’ll never finish. My lips slid up and down the shaft, bit of an

exaggeration since I could only take in about half. But you should have seen it, Donny, it was a big fucking monster. It could have done the honours in Loch Ness.”

I laughed; sometimes Alan was very funny.

“The pressure felt wonderful, but, to tell you the truth, it was the smell I loved. You can’t describe the smell to anyone who hasn’t experienced it. You might as well describe a rose to a blind man. It was the smell of a man, of a man in heat, of a man who had the hots for me. It was me who was exciting him, me who was arousing him, me who owned him. I was a young wolf and it was my night to howl. Well, not at that minute with six inches rammed down my gullet.

“I slid a hand under his balls. They were fucking big, definitely tennis balls, maybe even grapefruit. I want to feel their weight, feel the texture of his scrotum, feel the dark hairs brush against my hand. My fingers slid past his balls to his crack, and he shuffled his feet wider.

“The man moaned! He fucking well moaned! And he moaned for me!

“Maybe he didn’t want me to touch him there. Maybe I was being too forward, or even rude, in searching for his arsehole. I put the tips of two fingers against his hole, not easy to find in all that hair, but I found it! The entrance to King Solomon’s Mines and I’d found it. Now all I had to find was ‘She Who Must Be Obeyed’. The opening was hot, sweaty-slick, and wet, wet, wet. ‘Do whatever you want? Go for it!’ I thought.

“I brought my fingers back, raised them to my mouth, let his dick slide out for a few moments, slid my fingers in my mouth and sucked them. Then you know what? I nearly puked. Yuk! How can you like that stuff, Donny? Yukky poos.

“I heard his moans high above me. I felt his cock push deeper and deeper into me until I gagged; he withdrew. I grabbed his arse and pulled him back into me again and again. His cock swelled, got even thicker, and suddenly it was exploding, spurt after spurt, deep into the back of my throat. Too much, too much, and I wanted more. So much that my mouth couldn’t hold it all, and it came squeezing out of the sides, through my lips until I was coughing, choking, and trying to lick up every last drop. Ambrosia—the drink of the Gods.”

“You mean nectar.”

“What?”

“Nectar is the drink of the Gods. Their food is called ambrosia.”

“Don’t be fucking stupid, Donny. Ambrosia is creamed-rice pudding, and it’s shite.”

“Okay, have it your way,” I sighed.

“It was the man who had to push me away from him. I forgot how sensitive a cock could become, and I didn’t much care, I wanted more, just more

of more, and more than more, and more forever inside me. I wanted to chew him, eat him all up, and swallow him.”

“Then what happened?”

“Then he buttoned up and left, the bastard. He practically ran out of the place. Me sitting there with cum running down my chin, dripping on to my Bahamas t-shirt. I wanted to wear it this weekend. Going sailing with Dave. What’s that powder that gets out of the stubborn biological stains? DAZ?”

“No, I think it’s OMO. My Mum uses it all the time.”

The joke hit us both at the same time and we rolled around the bed laughing. I started feeling a little more comfortable but I was already rehearsing the sermon I knew I’d give him.

“The funny thing is, Donny, I wanted more. That night when I was jerking off—that’s American for tossing yourself off—I imagined not one man but two, three, four, half a dozen. And they all wanted me to suck them off! I’d sit there for ages, sucking each one, teasing, tormenting, bringing them to the edge, backing off, sucking fast, slow, shallow, deep, until even I was filled up, filled by their ‘cum’ down my throat, in my belly, squirting out of my asshole. Crazy but it’s true. I know Dave’ll disapprove, so I won’t tell him a single thing. What you don’t know can’t hurt you. Hey, what time is it?”

I found it difficult to speak. I held my Timex up. “Three fifteen,” Alan read. “Dave’ll be here at half past. Sneaking the afternoon off. Hey, Donny, do you mind?” Alan looked slightly embarrassed. “I’m no gooseberry,” I laughed.

There was a firm rap at the front door.

“Donny, do me a favour? Let Dave in. Look at the state I’m in.” Alan’s erection was firmly outlined in his Bermuda shorts. “Course. But I won’t come back upstairs.” Another rap at the door. “If you’re going fishing, probably won’t see you till Monday. School.”

“Don’t remind me,” groaned Alan theatrically. “Why can’t we keep the summer forever?”

A third rap at the door. Shit, I’d devil-porter it no further. I’d go and open the door. I straightened my face for David Mudie and headed downstairs.

I was heading back upstairs within a minute, my face as white as the Egyptian cotton sheets on Alan’s bed. I opened the bedroom door. Alan was sprawled full length on his back, shirt off, shorts and underpants pushed down to his knees. One arm crooked behind his head, his fingers working on his stiff penis.

“What the fuck?” The startled look flushed with anxiety as he read my face.

“Get your things on, Alan. It’s the police. They’re downstairs. In the living room. They’re asking to speak to you.” I fought several lumps in my throat as

my voice betrayed me and squeaked through an octave. Alan scrambled into his clothes, what there were of them. His erection subsided. "Don't say anything, Donny. Don't tell them anything. Promise," he whispered as if the police were listening behind the door. Alan didn't have to tell me to tell the police nothing; that was the code of the people from the wrong side of Ancrum Road, my side. But I felt a trickle of sweat at the tail of my spine.

We walked into the living room, Alan leading the way.

"Alan Aitken? I'm Detective Sergeant Ferry and this is my colleague Detective Constable Black. We have reason to believe you can help us with our inquiries. You'd like to help us with our inquiries, wouldn't you?" DS Ferry turned to me. "And you are?" I gave him my name, age and address. I knew the drill. "Well, Alan, you can help us with our inquiries here, or you can come down to the station. It's up to you. We don't mind. If you come down to the station, we'll have to phone your father, of course. Maybe you'd like your father with you."

"What have I done?" squeaked Alan. I hardly recognised his voice; he sounded about 10 years old.

"You haven't done anything," said DS Ferry.

"It's what might have been done to you," added DC Black. Was that a giggle?

Ferry frowned at Black who was clearly the junior member of the partnership. He was young and it showed. He was also good-looking.

A twinkle in his eyes disconcerted me. "You don't have to stay if you don't want to, Donald." That was Ferry to me. "But you're Alan's friend so maybe you'd like to." I nodded I'd like to.

"Let's get a bit more comfy," said DI Ferry. "Alan, you have the armchair on the left, Donald, you on the right. We'll share this fine sofa." We settled down, Ferry and Black looking like grossly mismatched bookends. "Nice shorts," began Ferry. "They're Bermuda shorts, aren't they? Get them in Bermuda? That's definitely a Bermuda tan. Wouldn't you say that's a Bermuda tan, DC Black?"

"Bahamas. We were on a cruise to the Bahamas. Got back a couple of days ago," said Alan helpfully.

"Must have been exciting," said Ferry.

"Like a bit of excitement, do you?" chipped in Black.

"Aw, most boys like a bit of excitement, DC Black. That's what makes them real boys."

"Guess so. But some boys go a bit far."

This was turning into a private conversation. "What's this about?" I asked, relieved my voice held.

“All in good time, Donald, all in good time. Remember Alan’s done nothing wrong. He’s only helping us with our inquiries. Never been in trouble with the police, have you, Alan? Nothing to worry about then.” I waited for him to ask me the same question; he didn’t.

“So anyway, Alan, it must have been a bit of a letdown coming back. All a bit boring after the Bahamas. ‘Specially yesterday. ‘Specially yesterday afternoon. It poured buckets, didn’t it? What did you do yesterday afternoon, Alan? Just stay in the house? Watch a bit of TV? Maybe Donald was here. Were you here, Donald?” These bits and pieces came from DI Black.

“Alan Aitken. Where were you yesterday between 5 and 6 o’clock?” DS Ferry’s question cracked the silence like a whip. I tried to turn to Alan, to catch his eye, to warn him not to lie, not to tell the whole truth, of course, but just as much as he could defend.

“Out.”

“Pardon?”

“I was out.”

“In that rain?” asked DC Black. He sounded like Jock Macdonald refusing to acknowledge one of my more spurious excuses.

“I got bored so I went out,” said Alan.

“For a walk?” suggested DS Ferry.

“Pissing down all afternoon. Thunder and lightning. A foot of water running down most roads, and you went for a walk.” DC Black might just as well have said “For fuck’s sake, do you expect us to believe that?”

“And what were you wearing for your walk?” continued DS Ferry.

“What’s that got to do with anything?” I interjected.

“Now, now, Donald. This is a police inquiry,” soothed Ferry. “If we need your help we’ll ask for it. Just sit there nice and quiet.” He turned back to Alan. “So what were you wearing, son?”

“I don’t remember,” said Alan. Good. Never commit yourself to anything you don’t have to.

DS Ferry surprised me with “Fair enough, Alan, fair enough. Do you remember where you went, for your walk, I mean?”

“Down to the City Centre.” Fuck it, no. Don’t commit yourself. Amnesia is always the best bet.

“That’s quite a walk from here. Almost three miles, give or take,” said DS Ferry. “Any particular reason? Maybe shopping.”

“Maybe to get an umbrella.” That came from DC Black. I fought hard to suppress a laugh. I failed but even Alan saw the funny side of it. “I took the bus into the centre.”

"The bus? All the way to the Central Station?" asked DS Ferry as if he were suggesting 'one lump or two'. An alarm went off in my head. "Danger. Will Robinson, danger!"

"Yeh, I suppose so. There was no reason to get off the bus early. It was really pissing... belting down."

"Not really weather for walking," chipped in DC Black. His observation hung in the air.

"Then what did you do? Just hang around the station waiting for a bus back?"

"No, no," said Alan. For the first time there was the hint of panic in his voice. "I went into the shops. They were all open. I wandered round the shops. Looking for a snake-belt. We go back to school on Monday. Bruce Academy."

A 'harrumph' from DC Black expressed his opinion of Bruce Academy's finest.

"Did you get a snake-belt?" asked DI Ferry.

"No... I remembered I didn't need one," said Alan, "in fact, I had one on. They're great for holding up jeans." Oh, Alan, Alan, volunteer nothing.

"Bet you're glad you had your jeans on. You wouldn't want to get caught in Bermuda shorts in that kind of weather, would you?" asked Ferry. "By the way, do you remember what you were wearing up top? What goes with jeans? Maybe a t-shirt?" The trap gaped open and wide; Ferry hadn't even bothered to camouflage it. Alan fell head first in.

"Yeh, it was my Bahamas t-shirt. The real thing. From the Bahamas Cotton Company. With the badge and everything." I could've killed Alan; that was pointless; he was killing himself.

"That's a real help, Alan," nodded DS Ferry. All he needed was a deerstalker and hooked pipe. "You see, a boy wearing a fancy t-shirt, it could have been a Bahamas t-shirt, was molested in the toilets at the Central Bus Station last night, around six o'clock. Do you understand what molested means, Alan? It means interfered with sexually. Touching private parts and all that sort of thing. By men, I mean. Men touching boys' private parts, and a lot worse."

"Sickos, perverts," hissed DC Black who seemed genuinely outraged by the possibility. I risked a glance. God, why did he have to be so cute? That thick glossy black hair. Looked like he didn't shave yet. Those eyes. Eyebrows. Eyelashes. I wondered if he'd ever been molested. I forced myself back to the central conversation.

"We've been watching the Central Bus Station, Alan. You'd be surprised how much of that kind of thing goes on in our fair city. Mostly men and men. But, well... And last night we nabbed a man, a man we know well, hurrying away from the toilets..."

DC Black leapt in. "And you know what? The dirty bugger still had his flies open. And..." The 'and' sounded like the pronouncement of doom. "...he had semen all down the front of his trousers." I was surprised Ferry didn't admonish Black; maybe he'd given up.

"You boys know what semen is, don't you?" Ferry addressed the question to me. "You get sex education lessons at the academy, don't you? Semen is the male ejaculate."

"It's meant for making babies," added Black helpfully, "not just for scattering willy nilly." I put my hand across my mouth and tried not to laugh. Next minute he'd be telling me every sperm is sacred.

"We interviewed the suspect, Alan. He mentioned a boy. A boy in jeans and a fancy t-shirt. Funny thing is, he said the boy wanted sex as much as him. But he would say that, wouldn't he? Now that doesn't mean a thing, not to us anyway. It's the adult who has the responsibility, not the child. It's the adult who breaks the law, not the child. You see, Alan, no matter what the circumstances, the boy is always innocent, always the victim." DS Ferry paused to let all this sink in, then continued, "but we've got to stop men like that. We've got to stop men who take advantage. All they're doing is corrupting the innocent. Think about it. Alan. Don't you agree?"

Whether Alan agreed or not remained hypothetical. A musical rap at the front door startled all of us. DS Ferry indicated DC Black should answer the door. Five minutes later he ushered Mr David Mudie into the room. Alan and I froze. Detective Sergeant Ferry raised an eyebrow.

"This is Mr David Mudie. He's Mr Aitken's solicitor. I've apprised him of the situation. Mr Mudie says he may be able to help." This was from DC Black to DS Ferry whose face appeared to freeze as tightly as my own.

DS Ferry introduced himself to Mr Mudie and wondered in what way he might be able to help.

"I must admit I'm a little surprised you're interviewing these boys without the presence of an adult. I know it's not a legal requirement yet..." The solicitor's emphasis on the word 'yet' seem to imbue it with a significance beyond me "but I imagine it's something Alan's father would expect." My omission hurt a bit.

"This is simply an inquiry," responded DS Ferry. "I've already explained to Alan he's not to blame even if he was involved in the incident we're investigating. It is the responsibility of adults to behave appropriately, you'd agree, wouldn't you?" It was Mudie's turn to raise an eyebrow.

"Nevertheless, being interviewed by the police can be an intimidating experience for anyone, and I'm sure you wouldn't wish to intimidate Alan or," nodding in my direction, "Donald."

“You told DC Black you might be able to help,” said DS Ferry ignoring Mudie’s comment. “We’d be grateful for any help you can give.”

“It’s all very simple,” began Mudie. “Alan was with me between five and six o’clock yesterday afternoon. He came into town and visited me at my office. He was soaking wet. He dried off with a towel and a seat on the radiator and told me about his trip to the Bahamas.” DS Ferry tried to cut in but Mr Mudie overrode him. “The reason Alan hasn’t told you about this is because he thought I’d be angry. He knew I was happy to see him but he also knew I was annoyed he’d come out in such awful weather. As I say, Alan was with me for at least an hour during the time of the incident you’re investigating. I have to admit I made Alan promise not to say anything about his visit at home. I didn’t want him to get into more trouble for doing something so idiotic.”

I was impressed by David Mudie’s smooth delivery and made a mental note to consider law as a career. It didn’t seem so distant from being a writer; make up a story, blur fact and fiction, and stick to it. I had the curious sensation this entire scene had nothing to do with me, that I was a neutral observer, or maybe a scorer at a boxing match mechanically ticking off points during each round of the contest.

“I’m sure if you ask Alan he’ll confirm what I’ve just said.” I looked at Alan. If he’d had a tail, it would have been wagging.

DS Ferry didn’t look away from the solicitor. “Your word is good enough, sir. I don’t have to tell you that the penalties for obstructing the course of justice and for perjury are severe. Just one thing. Was there anyone at your office who can confirm Alan was with you between five and six? Just for the record, you understand.”

“Unfortunately not. It was a Friday, as you know. We close at four- thirty on a Friday. Everyone’d gone. Alan was just lucky to catch me working late. He knows I usually stay late on a Friday.”

“How’s he know that?” interrupted DC Black.

“Because I’m teaching Alan how to drive and we sometimes have a lesson on a Friday afternoon. Alan’s father knows all about it. I’m lucky enough to be a family friend as well as the family’s solicitor.” DC Black’s grunt confirmed his incredulity about the entire proceedings.

Detective Sergeant Ferry stood up. Alan and I stood up, too.

“Well, that seems to be that. We’ll be continuing our inquiries, of course, but Alan seems to be out of the equation.” He addressed Alan. “I’m glad to be able to say that, Alan. You’re a nice kid. I wouldn’t like to think you’re involved in anything so nasty. You see, Alan, men who want sex with boys aren’t normal, they’re sick. True, they need help but they are sick. Have you got a little sister, Alan? No. Well, think about this anyway. Let’s say you had a sister, about your

age, and you discovered that a man, a full-grown man, was having sex with her. Would you feel happy about that? I don't think you would. Is there any difference between that and a full-grown man using a boy for sex? Think of it, Alan. There are millions of men in the world. There are millions of women. Plenty to go round. Why does a full-grown man need a kid for sex? Why does he have to corrupt a child, take away his innocence..."

"That's enough," snapped Mr Mudie, the anger in his voice palpable.

"No, it isn't," said DS Ferry. "Kids have a right to know the truth, and that's what we're talking about here, the truth. And that's what they are, just kids. And they deserve to know the truth. The sex is bad enough but in the end it's just sex. What's worse are the lies and secrecy. When you're a kid you should be able to tell your mum and dad everything. Well, maybe not everything. But you shouldn't have big secrets, secrets so big you're ashamed of them. Secrets that cut you off from your family, your friends, and from the person you'd really like to be." I realised that DS Ferry was talking to Alan and me. This was for our benefit. This is what he thought we needed to hear.

"And it's all lies, you know. These men tell the boys they love them. They actually use the word 'love'. But it isn't true. They put their needs before the boys' needs, and when the boy can no longer satisfy their needs, they're dumped. When the boys turn into young men, hair on their faces, hair in their armpits, hair down there, what happens? They're dumped. Traded in for a younger model. So don't tell me what's enough, Mr Solicitor. I know what's enough."

The room was a tableau vivant. A frozen moment. Three men, two boys. There was love in that room, and maybe I was the only one who knew where that love was coming from. I stepped towards the door and opened the way into the hall. I opened the front door and stood aside to let Detective Sergeant Ferry and Detective Constable Black leave. I closed the door softly behind them.

In the living room Alan was in David Mudie's arms. Held tightly against the man's chest, he sobbed and heaved, his speech broken and fragmented. "Sorry, Dave. So stupid. But I missed you. Missed you so much." Mudie held onto him for a full five minutes. He signalled to me to join the little group but I stepped back. Then gently Mudie pushed Alan an arm's length away and held him there.

"Hey, hey, it's all over now. Come on, let's go and wipe your face. When will your mum be home?"

"Not for an hour," Alan managed to blurt out, a smile breaking across his face. "Dave, Dave, why weren't you at the office? You're always at the office on a Friday afternoon."

“I was up at the Perth office, you silly billy. I thought you lot were coming home today, not yesterday. I was in Perth until seven o’clock. One of those regional meetings. Boring, boring. I’d rather have been with you.” I noticed Mudie’s big right hand kneading Alan’s buttocks; I remembered that hand touching me. “Come on, let’s get you cleaned up. Then we can go to your room and... play snooker.” He turned to me. “Hey, Donny, we’re going to play snooker for an hour. You’ve probably got something else to do. Right?”

I didn’t answer him. I addressed myself to Alan.

“See you at school on Monday, Alan.”

“Yeh, right, school on Monday. See you there.”

As I left the room, I looked back one more time. Alan was on his knees fumbling with Mudie’s trouser belt. His tear-stained face looked up at the man whose head was thrown back, eyes closed, mouth open.

Chapter 10

“Down a bit. A little to the left. No, my left, dummy. Yes, that’s it, right there. Harder. Harder. I won’t break, you know.”

My thumbs sank deeper into his flesh, my fingers caressing the surrounding skin. The warmth of summer still glowed from skin kissed by weeks of sun. I could kiss his skin if I wanted to. I wanted to. I leaned over his body and kissed the nape of his neck.

“Mmmmm, that’s nice,” murmured Leslie. “But what the fuck can I do about my serve?”

Face down, Leslie was stretched the length of his bed. He wore only a pair of old-fashioned white Y-fronts tight enough to outline the curve of his buttocks, and, oddly enough, one white tennis sock with blue trim. I sat on the bed to his left wearing my blue cotton briefs, the front stretched by my erection.

“There’s nothing wrong with your serve,” I explained for the nth time. “Except for your toss-up.”

“Oh, so now you’re saying I can’t toss myself properly,” Leslie giggled into the pillow.

I dug my thumbs a little fiercely into him. “Not that kind of tossing,” I said. “Anyway you don’t have to toss yourself now you’ve got me.” It was my turn to giggle. “You don’t toss the ball high enough. You’re scared you’ll lose sight of it so you compromise. And compromise never works. Toss the ball high, get up on your toes and belt the ball down as fast as you can. Remember it’s the last six inches that count.”

“Mmmmm, yes, it’s always the last six inches that count,” he murmured. I slapped his bottom. “Not those six inches. The six inches before you strike the ball. The faster your racquet comes through the last six inches the faster the ball’s going to travel.”

“Spank my bottom again.”

“What?”

“Spank my bottom. Just once. Not too hard.”

“Whatever for?”

“I don’t know. It just leaves a warm tingly feeling, and it goes right to my hard-on.”

“You’ve got a hard-on?”

“Course I’ve got a hard-on. I’m lying on the bed, nearly naked, you’re massaging the knot in my back. Who wouldn’t have a hard-on?”

I was flattered, glowed a little more, and eased my thumbs into his flesh. It was so comfortable, being here like this, baby-sitting Bryan, already sound asleep, on a Saturday evening. That afternoon we’d played tennis from two until

six o'clock. I wasn't surprised Leslie'd found a few knots in his back. I was surprised he was bold enough to suggest I could iron out the kinks. And here I was, perched comfortably on his bed, leaning over his almost naked body, drinking in sights and smells that left me intoxicated.

Leslie was slim, not skinny, slim. You could see where his shoulders would broaden like butterfly wings but for now his torso ran straight to his hips in a flawless rectangle. His hair, newly cut for school, fringed his neck. I ran my thumb through the hair at his neck; it rose and fell back into place as if it has never been disturbed. Tiny golden hairs fleeced his neck and back. I lowered my lips to his neck, drew them several times across his neck, then let them trail down his spine to where white cotton rose in curvy uplands. "Do that again," came the whispered command. I licked my lips and retraced their path, again and again. I smelled sweet sweat from his armpits. "Lift," I murmured edging up his right elbow. He raised his arm and turned enough to let me slip my tongue into his armpit. I licked away the sweat, taste and smell making me giddy. He raised his right arm. I flicked my tongue to remove the sweat. I'd once read the phrase 'armpit like a chalice'; the phrase described Leslie's armpits precisely — armpits like chalices, and I was the priest privileged to cleanse them.

I kissed each vertebra of his spinal column. More than kissed. I placed my lips around his vertebra and circled it with my saliva. What was I doing? Marking my territory? Claiming my birthright? I noticed a small black mole on Leslie's right hip. Not a mole, a beauty spot. For a moment I was resentful I hadn't spotted it before. Resentful, because I had the right to know every centimetre, every millimetre of Leslie's body. Wet kisses took his beauty spot into my permanent possession. Leslie turned his head up for a moment.

"My mum does that. Well, she used to do that," he said.

"Do what?"

"Kiss my mole. The little one on my hip. She said God put it there. He put it there because I was a special boy. I was a boy who'd always be loved."

"Then God was right for once," I whispered, planting my lips on his/my mole again.

Leslie sighed and returned his head to the pillow. "Kiss my legs now." He didn't have to explain why he wanted his legs kissed. They were there; they were him; they deserved, no, demanded to be kissed.

I eased myself down the bed, separated his legs and saw the crack between his buttocks widen. I slipped my face in between his legs, my tongue reaching just below his underpants, to begin a trail of saliva stretching the inner length of his right leg. The skin was satin, silk, fragile, vulnerable, and as tender as the night around us. My tongue slid up the length of his left leg until my nose was wedged below Leslie's sweet genitals. If his armpits were innocent, his genitals

gave the promise of wilder delights. This was undiluted Leslie in the aphrodisiac bloom of puberty.

My tongue and lips slide back down to his feet. His feet. His big feet. I take size 8. Leslie takes size 10. I know because I borrowed a pair of his tennis shoes but it was hopeless. Even stuffed with newspaper they were hopeless. Leslie has big feet and they are beautiful. I massage his feet, take his right foot, explore the spaces between each toe, and then suck his big toe deep into my mouth. For a moment I'm stunned. Only perverts suck other people's toes. Right? I don't know. I haven't the faintest idea what perverts do. Maybe they draw the line at sucking another person's toes. But I won't. Because they're Leslie's toes and I would, I want to, explore and suck every bit of Leslie... because every bit is Leslie, and therefore there is nothing off limits. I take each toe; I separate it from its fellows, and I lick and suck it as deeply as I can. Yummy, yummy.

"Talk dirty to me." Where did that come from? "Talk dirty to me." Yes, it really had come from Leslie Morrison.

"Dirty?"

"Not dirty," he sighed. "Sexy. You know what I mean. You're great at stories. Tell me a sexy story. It doesn't have to be true. Make it up if you like. Go on." How does Leslie know I'm good at stories? Because I showed him some of my short stories; they're not sex stories, just stories. I'd never shown them to anyone before, not even to Alan, but for Leslie nothing was off limits.

"Well," I hesitated, then gave in. "Do you want it first person or third person?"

"What?" asked Leslie.

"I mean, do you want the story to be about someone or do you want it to be about the story-teller himself?"

"About himself," said Leslie. "Then I can imagine it's about you, or about me, or best of all about you and me. Wait a minute, I want to get comfortable." He raised his middle and groin from the bed and adjusted his hard-on. "Best keep my undies up at the front, 'case I squirt on the bed," he giggled, "but you can pull them down at the back. I'm a bit sweaty there."

Reverentially and horny as hell, I eased his underpants over the swell of his buttocks. The tanned skin gave way to polished ivory. My heart skipped a couple of beats, I blushed, I felt I was choking, I swallowed, and began to knead his buttocks gently. Then I plunged straight in—to the story, I mean.

"How did it start? I'm not sure. One moment we were sitting there, next moment we were dancing. My cousin and me. I was 12, nearly 13. He was three years older than me. So why the hell were we dancing together? Maybe he was

teaching me. I don't know. Oh, yes, now I remember. He was teaching me for the school dance, my first school dance."

"What was the music?"

"It was... it was that Donna Summer track. You know. The one they won't play on the radio. But my cousin had it on an eight-track tape but he'd fixed it so it played again and again. What's it called?"

"'Love to love you, baby'," suggested Leslie. "Mum loves that track. She used to play it non-stop."

"Anyway," I continued, "my cousin was playing 'Love to love you, baby' and we were dancing a slow dance, body to body, skin to skin, my head jammed somewhere under his chin. Remember I was only 12 and he was 16."

"What was his name?"

"His name? His name was Jack." I immediately knew where that name had come from. Odd that I fancied Jack so much more than Roger or Ralph or even Sam 'n Eric. I didn't have time to muse on that. Leslie pushed his arse up into my caressing fingers.

"We were dancing, slow dancing, a bass guitar throbbing, snare drum snapping, Jack's hard-on pressed into me. We were both wearing T-shirts and shorts; my auntie's house is always overheated. Outside snow was falling; inside it was a sauna. One hand stroked my hair; the other stroked my bum; I didn't stop Jack; I wanted it to happen; whatever it was, I wanted it.

"Then we were on his mum-and-dad's bed, naked. How the hell had that happened? He must have danced me into their bedroom, on to their bed. Only one bedlamp was on, but I remember the quilt was burgundy, just like our school jackets."

"Like the colour of your dick when you're excited," laughed Leslie. I pinched a cheek hard.

"I was on top of him, my face between his legs, taking him into my mouth, scared I would choke, scared I wasn't doing it right. His pubic hair tickled. My eyes watered. I wanted to sneeze. Jack had thick black hair down there, nothing on his chest, but lots of curly, silky black hair down there. I felt him grow harder as the head of his cock pushed its way past the foreskin. I inhaled smells of sweat and soap and cheesy stuff. His cock moved back and forward in my mouth, a couple of inches in my throat. I tightened my lips, then relaxed them, sucked him fast, then slow."

"Slow, slow, quick, quick, slow. That's the way I like it."

"Shut the fuck up."

"Sorry."

I took Leslie's apology as the opportunity to part Leslie's buttocks. To peek at the little button, the little mouth at its centre. The little mouth asking to

be kissed. He was right; he was sweaty back there. I resisted the temptation to lick away the sweat. I'd learned to keep the best till last.

"I felt Jack's tongue run from my scrotum towards my most private place. I gulped, almost bit him, prayed he'd continue. I felt the hot tip of his tongue press against my bum hole. Why did he want to do that? Why wasn't he disgusted? Even mum hadn't seen that place since I was a toddler. Now my cousin was kissing me there." I leaned into Leslie's crack and licked away some of the sweat. "Just like that."

I straightened up again. "I felt the hot tip push against my anus. That's the correct name for the arsehole. You learn that stuff in Second Year. I felt the sphincter muscle give away. Donna Summer was throbbing in the background: 'Love to love you, baby, love to love you...' Every nerve in my body seemed to rush towards his tongue as it pushed, probed and wormed its way into me. Too much, it was too much. I pushed him away, swung myself round to lie beside him, keeping my lips round his hard-on, and sucked, my head moving up and down, taking in as much as I could without choking. Suddenly I felt it, a rush. a squirt, a spurt inside my mouth and throat, again and again. I kept my lips tightly round his shaft and swallowed as best I could... 'love to love you, baby...'. I held on as he pulsed himself into me. I opened my eyes and felt more than saw his stiff cock slowly draw back into itself, leaving a big silvery drop hanging where the foreskin had folded itself up like a flower. I ran my tongue around the inside of my mouth: I tasted and smelled toasted salted almonds.

"Jack pulled me up and held me close, running his tongue over my eyebrows and closed eyelids. I couldn't open my eyes; I was ashamed, but I wasn't sure what I was ashamed about. Certainly not of the sex; I loved that. But maybe ashamed I wasn't enough for him, that I was only a boy, only 12, with a little cock—little compared to his—and no muscles, and no hair, a kid, just a kid. Ashamed because his tongue had felt so good, down there, down there in the centre of so many of my dreams. Ashamed that I couldn't give him what a girl could give him. Though I ached to give him it, down there. Did he read my mind? He was down there again, his hot tongue everywhere. I thought I'd faint. I whispered to him. I whispered, 'Put it inside me. You can put it inside me. If you want. I want it inside me.'

"We kissed deeply while he pushed a finger against my anus, trying to slip it into my rectum; my body betrayed me, resisted, contracted. Jack raised his fingers to my mouth. I sucked his digit and middle fingers together. He pressed again, and down there I flowered, slowly, until he could slide in two fingers, then three. He moved them around, widening me. Pain, dull then sharp cut through me. I bit my lip, brought blood. He licked it away. 'I'll stop if it hurts too much,' he promised.

“I said nothing. I lifted and swung my legs over his shoulders, closed my eyes and tried to relax. ‘Love to fuck you, baby...’ I felt his cock against my anus again. He began to push and withdraw gently. I felt myself open, felt the head force its way in. Excruciating pain, and I wanted more. The back of my head buried itself in the pillow. I was unable to speak; I was impaled and felt his cock slide into me deeper and deeper. He asked if I was all right, and I pushed my arse harder against him, sliding more of him into me. Nothing mattered except what was happening everywhere and nowhere in my body.”

I felt Leslie’s arse rise and fall below my fingers, heard his breath deepen and quicken.

“I was falling, falling, feather-light, drifting through the air. I opened my eyes and saw Jack’s eyes, almost black, huge and sparkling, little bolts of lightning shooting through them. Huge dark pools I wanted to drown in. Tears ran down my cheeks; I raised my face and kissed him as he drove into me, withdrew and drove home again. My body was spiralling somewhere amongst the stars. I was a constellation and I would be fixed in the night sky forever.”

“That’s really good,” murmured Leslie. “You should be a writer, a real writer. Go on.”

“Jack stopped. I opened my eyes and scowled. ‘Do it,’ I whispered. I clasped my legs round his back and humped him as best I could. From behind closed eyelids I saw stars spatter my eyelids, the universe exploding in a million pinpoints of light. I thought I could feel him thicken and pulse inside me. His hair tickled the inside of my thighs. He was cumming, cumming, cumming. No! That was me! I was spurting hard against his belly, and for a moment I felt ashamed again. What would Jack think? A little boy who couldn’t even hold in his own... And Jack was cumming, too. And I thought of the million trillion zillion little spermy-Jacks swimming in my bowels.

“Pregnant!? Maybe I would get pregnant. The thought was wonderful. Then I fainted. I know I fainted because Jack told me later. For a few minutes he was sick with worry. Then, he told me, I stirred, opened my eyes, wrapped my arms around his neck and pulled him to me. Cherry brandy kisses, kisses sweeter than wine.

“We showered together, in the hot and splashy water. Jack checked my anus to see if there was any damage. Just a little. He put some cream inside me with his middle finger, and I started to hump it. Dirty little bugger, he laughed.”

“What did you do then?” asked Leslie.

“Then we dressed in wellies and anoraks, went outside and built the hugest snowman you could ever imagine. I know it was a Snowman, not a Snow-woman, because it had snow-balls!”

Leslie burst into laughter, swung himself onto his back, pushed his underpants to his knees: "Balls like mine?" His cock was rigid, stiff as a milk bottle, the foreskin as far down the shaft as it could go, the head a deeper burgundy than even our school blazers. He didn't touch himself. I didn't touch him. We still had two hours before Mrs Morrison got home.

"Come on, get on the bed beside me," Leslie urged, sliding off his Y-fronts. "And take those underpants off. You make me feel naked." Suddenly serious, he added, "Can I ask you some things?"

I stripped off, blushing because I was as erect as Leslie. I stretched out alongside him sharing the pillow. It smelled of lavender. "You can ask me anything you want but I don't have to answer anything I don't want to. That's the deal for both of us, remember."

"Did you make that story up?"

"Yes, I did."

"How do you make stories up?" The quizzical frown on his face was endearing.

"I'm not sure. You take some things that have happened to you, and you take some things you've read about or heard about, and you invent some things from your own imagination, and you sort of bung them all in a pot, stew them and see what happens. One thing sparks off another." The mixed metaphors jarred but I persisted. "I sometimes feel I'm a spider in the centre of a fragile web. Something touches the web way far out and that sets up vibrations in other parts of the web, and all the vibrations come to me and I've got to sort them out and make sense of them. Sorry if that doesn't make much sense."

"It does. Go on."

"I'll give you an example. That story I just made up isn't true but it's not completely untrue either. When I was eleven years old a friend of my brother's seduced me. It was my eleventh birthday to be exact. And it did start with him teaching me how to dance, and there was music playing. It was Procol Harum, 'Whiter Shade of Pale'."

"Never heard of it."

"Never mind. It was before your time. Well, I suppose I took that memory and mixed it with other memories and invented some other details. Remember we were in Montrose. I heard your mum playing Donna Summer one day and I guess the song got lodged in my memory, and it just got into the mix. Satisfied?"

"No, not yet," said Leslie. "How do you know what comes next? When I'm writing a story, I never know what happens next. even though it's my story. How do you know what happens next?"

“You don’t. Well, I don’t,” I admitted. “I’ve got a general idea, a general direction I’m going in, but the funny thing is that even though I know the direction I’m going in I don’t know my destination. I don’t know I’m home till I’m knocking at the door, and I don’t even know it’s home until that particular door opens.”

“Did your brother’s friend fuck you?”

I was shocked into silence by the directness of the question. Then, “No, he didn’t. I was only eleven, for God’s sake.” I wasn’t sure how relevant my age was but it seemed an appropriate sop for this tenacious little Cerberus.

“Have you ever been fucked?”

I remembered the deal; I didn’t have to answer. But I looked directly at Leslie and said, “No, I’ve never been fucked.”

“Not by Eric Murray? Not by Alan Aitken?”

The hurt on my face may have shown. “Leslie, if I tell you I haven’t been fucked, it means I haven’t been fucked.”

Leslie pulled me to him. “I’m sorry, I’m really sorry. That was out of order. I know you always tell me the truth. Sorry...” He kissed my forehead. “...sorry.” He kissed my nose. “...sorry.” He kissed my lips. “But I’m glad, I’m really glad.”

“Glad?”

“Because,” he smiled, “when you get fucked, I mean, if you ever get fucked, it has to be me. And when I get fucked, it has to be you. There’s no other way, no alternative.” His smile was triumphant, the castle was stormed, the queen taken, the king captured.

I’m not sure who dived first but in a second we were locked in a tangle of limbs, chest against chest, stomach to stomach, hard-ons mashing against each other. This was fun but it was also a life-or-death struggle. We were wrestling to show how much we loved each other but we were also wrestling for dominance, and to the victor would go the spoils—the right to the first fuck. To be on top. To slide a greasy cock into a virgin hole. To break through defences. Ram the other deep in the guts. Hurt the other. Make the other whimper for mercy. To show mercy and to settle into a rhythm of the heart. To swap saliva in crazy kisses while squirting and spurting seed deep inside the other. The sweat poured from us, our bodies slippery, tongues sucked, spit exchanged. I had to win when all I wanted to do was lose.

“Leslie. Leslie. Where’s Mummy? I can’t sleep.”

Still grappling, we turned our heads. Bryan was inside the bedroom door, Pinocchio pyjamas, a teddy bear clutched to his chest, a little fist rubbing his sleepy eyes. We disentangled ourselves with as much decorum as we could muster and pulled the quilt over ourselves. For a moment I realised a novel was

writing me, not the other way round, but the thought faded as I heard Leslie call, "C'mere. Get into bed with us. You and Eddie can get in the middle."

Bryan toddled over to the bed, I grabbed the arse of his pyjamas and heaved him aboard, he and Eddie Teddy scrambled under the quilt between us. Mercifully my erection had wilted.

"Why don't you have no pyjamas on?" asked Bryan sleepily.

"Why don't we have 'any' pyjamas on?" corrected Leslie. "I don't sleep in pyjamas, Bryan, and Donny forgot to bring his for the sleepover." It was news to me I was sleeping-over. "And anyway it's very warm tonight so we don't really need pyjamas. Look, even Eddie Teddy isn't wearing pyjamas tonight."

"Can I take my jammies off then?" asked Bryan.

I was horrified. Innocent though everything was, the mental image of a naked eight-year-old boy sandwiched between two sweaty naked teenage boys was too much. Leslie didn't seem fazed in the slightest. "Well, no, Bryan, you can't. Because the rule is boys have to wear pyjamas until they are ten years old. That's the law. So you'll have to wait for two years more, then you can sleep in whatever you like." Bryan frowned. "But," added Leslie brightly, "Donny can tell you a story. Donny's really good at telling stories. You will tell Bryan a story, won't you, Donny? That'll help Bryan go to sleep and we can pop him back in his own bed." I felt a little unflattered by Leslie's description of my story-telling prowess but nodded and racked my brains for a story suitable for a sleepy-eyed eight-year-old.

* * *

"That was awful," whispered Leslie.

"No, it wasn't. Look, he's sound asleep."

"I know that. But he's probably having a nightmare. That bloody story scared me."

Personally, I thought the story wasn't too bad. It was about a mouse who ran around behind the skirting board. It scared a little kid who didn't know it was only a mouse. He thought it was some kind of monster. What he didn't know was that the mouse fed from his fear. The more scared the kid got the bigger the mouse grew, and the louder its scraping and skittering got till it sounded like it was trying to tear through the skirting board. The little kid told his mum and dad but they only laughed because they thought he was just looking for attention, just looking for reasons to stay up late or sleep in their bed. Of course, one morning the parents got their deserts because the little kid had disappeared and there was only a huge hole in the skirting board and the wainscot, and a few drops of blood. But they still didn't believe his story

because, after all, everybody knows that monsters don't live behind the skirting board. And anyway grown-ups never really listen to little kids.

"Bloody awful, just bloody awful," repeated Leslie.

"Oh, I don't know," I said. "He doesn't look like he's having a nightmare. Look." Leslie's eyes followed my finger till he saw what I'd noticed. Little Bryan, his thumb stuck in his mouth, had a hard-on that tented his Pinocchio pyjamas. "Believe me, that's not Pinocchio's nose that's growing," I laughed.

"Dirty little bugger," said Leslie. "Come on. Give me a hand to carry him through to his own bed. We won't wake him. Once Bryan's asleep an earthquake won't wake him." We slipped out of bed. I took the boy's shoulders while his brother took his legs. He was no feather. I grabbed Eddie Teddy with my teeth and off we staggered. I wondered what Mrs Morrison would think if she came in and caught Leslie and me, both naked, staggering across the hall carrying her younger son who sported a healthy erection. I would have laughed but I didn't want to risk losing Eddie. We deposited Bryan in his bed, stuck Eddie Teddy in his arms, covered him up and tip-toed back to Leslie's bed.

"How long have we got?" asked Leslie. "'Bout half an hour," I replied.

"Would you have fucked me?" asked Leslie.

"I'm not sure. But I hope not. Would you have fucked me?" I asked.

"I hope not," replied Leslie, "though I really wanted to."

"Why didn't we want to fuck each other?" I asked.

"I'm not sure," repeated Leslie, "but I think I know why. At least I think I understand it for myself."

"Why not?"

"It's hard to explain," he began, "but making love to you all the way is a fantasy for me, it's one of the most beautiful fantasies I have. It's like my fantasy of beating you at tennis. It's not the winning that counts, it's the being equal with you, sort of being worthy of you. Okay, we fuck and it's wonderful, and I know it will be when it happens, but what comes after that, when we've lost that dream, I mean? It's a bit like travelling to a new place, wondering what it's going to be like, wondering if you'll like the place, if it'll be everything you dream it is. You get there, but even if it's wonderful, something's gone. You know it. Part of the mystery is gone. Is this making any sense?"

"Yes, it is," I nodded.

"It's like the mystery of you, Donny. Every day I get another little piece of the jigsaw, and that makes me love you a little bit more, but I don't think I'll ever get the whole mystery of you. I don't think I want the whole mystery of you, and I don't want to give you everything of me because then there'll be no mystery left and I'll only be an extension of you. Sorry, this isn't making much sense to me any more."

“But it is to me,” I said. “Cos the sex is only a part of the mystery of us. You know. Leslie, sometimes I wake up in the morning and I think ‘My God, I’m in love with a complete stranger. Who the hell is R. Leslie Morrison? He’s only a First Year at Bruce Academy. How the hell can I be in love with someone who makes my heart skip a beat only by thinking about him?’ You know,” I laughed, “sometimes I think this is all a dream, sometimes I think I’m going to wake up and you won’t be there. You can’t be there because for me you’re perfect and there’s no such thing as perfection.”

It was Leslie’s turn to laugh. “I’m far from perfect. Just look how weak I am.” I followed Leslie’s glance. He was hard again. “No weaker than I am,” I said, and Leslie followed my own glance. “I love your hair,” he said tracing a finger along my pubic line, his knuckles brushing the head of my stiffy. “How long did you say we had?”

“Long enough,” I whispered, sliding down the bed.

Chapter 11

“Who would true valour see
Let him come hither
One here will constant be
Come wind come weather
There’s no discouragement
Will make him once relent
His first avowed intent
To be a Pilgrim.”

Eight hundred voices, the voices of men and boys, raised in unison, in chorus to celebrate the start of a new school year. We belted out the hymn as if it were a challenge, a challenge to anyone who would deny us our youth, our vigour, our right to be male. Like elk in the wilderness, we bellowed our defiance at any who would deny us our right to herd, congregate, bond together in that celebration of boys without girls, men without women. We shuffled our feet, looked out across a sea of boys to where our masters and mentors, gowned in black, ermine-trimmed, sat smugly in their sinecures above us.

I lowered my eyes to the serried ranks of flannel-clad bums and buttocks and felt my penis stiffen. I wondered how many boys in the hall were, like me, aroused by the vision of so much maleness. What had their summers been like? How many legs had trembled in a stinking urinal as the man at their knees suckled on their aching hard-ons? How many of them had lain with other boys, legs wrapped round each other, bellies pressed hard together, stiff cocks rubbing frantically to orgasm? No hobgoblins or foul fiends could daunt their spirits.

I wondered if I were insane. I wondered if Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, had wondered if he were insane. Or was it the world around me that was insane? How many of the boys in the great hall of Bruce Academy had thoughts like mine, their world turned upside down because they were different? I was different. I didn’t have to be insane to recognise that. But if I was insane, what was sanity?

Full assemblies at Bruce Academy did that to you or at least they did to me. Perhaps it would have been different if we’d been able to sit down. But we stood. And standing gave us a solidarity reminiscent of the Spartans at Thermopylae. Eight hundred boys, ages ranging from eleven to eighteen years old, boys fresh from primary school with dicks like twigs, boys well into manhood with cocks like hosepipes and lots of scary hair down there. I tried to remember what it’d been like in First Year, that first day, terrified witless by the size of the place, the insouciance of the prefects, the benign indifference of the

masters, the premeditated brutality of the Third Year. I was glad to have left Third Year; cruelty would no longer be expected of me; First Years could pass me in the corridors without cringing against the wall. No doubt there were those waiting to take our place, who'd already taken our place, and were eyeing the lambs huddled in silence in the first rows. I sighed. Thus it was, thus it probably always would be.

The Rector was droning on, not so much droning as mumbling into his gown. Though little was intelligible, Doctor Humphreys was given rapt attention. After all, this was the man who guided our destinies, and more significantly this was a man so rarely sighted during the school year that he had the status of mythical dodo amongst the boys, possibly amongst the staff, too. I wasn't trying to listen. I was craning my neck to catch a glimpse of Leslie in the ranks of the Second Year. I gave silent thanks he'd no longer be of much interest to the Huns of the Third. As in most schools, the hierarchy at Bruce Academy was strict; you could torture the First Year as freely as you wished but Second Year had said goodbye to all that. I still thanked whoever was up there looking after me for permitting my friendship with Leslie to go untargeted and unpunished. Beginners' luck, I supposed.

I caught sight of Leslie for a moment. He was flanked by two good-looking boys and I felt a flush of jealousy sweep through me. I tut-tutted myself and turned my attention to a more immediate concern.

Where the fuck was Alan Aitken?

I flushed again, from fear this time, as I weighed the possibilities. Chance permitting, I'd phone his home at lunchtime. No, I wouldn't do that. I was scared of the possibilities. He was ill, that was it, maybe something like summer flu; he had looked unnaturally bright at the weekend. Who the fuck was I kidding? Of course he looked unnaturally bright. What boy wouldn't when two cops were interrogating him about 'an incident in the public toilets'? I shuddered, the wooden floor of the great hall suddenly felt as stable as quicksand. Cowardice swept me. What if I were drawn in deep? What if it were revealed that I...? But what had I actually done?

"You lay on the bed with Alan and Dave, you dozy fucker. You finger-fucked your best friend. You squirted semen all over his arse, Mr Innocent."

"Shut up, shut up, shut up," I told myself.

The acts were bad enough, at least from some people's perspective, but far worse was the indignity of it all. How could I possibly explain to those who couldn't believe it? Sex with Alan was fun, it was a way of being together, it didn't even mean that much, it was so much better than solitary squirts into a tissue. I hadn't wanted to be with Alan and Dave: that was their affair, not mine. But I hadn't had the strength to leave until I was drawn in. I'm not saying their

relationship was wrong; who the fuck am I to say that, to sit in judgment on anybody else, to cast the first stone?

"You hypocrite, you fucking hypocrite. Tell the truth. Tell the whole truth."

I'd left Alan and David Mudie. I'd left Alan on his knees fumbling with Mr Mudie's trouser belt. Outside I walked down the stairs. I sat on the bottom step. I closed my eyes. I saw the tears on Alan's face, pale beneath the tan. I saw Mr Mudie, head thrown back, mouth open, one hand on Alan's head, guiding, coaxing. I saw the same hand, the searching fingers in my lap, heard the whisper, "I'm looking for a boy like you."

I walked home. Maybe I wouldn't have stopped if there hadn't been a telephone box on the way, but there was, and there was loose change in my pocket. I pulled the heavy red door open. I stepped inside. I'd like to say I was in a trance, didn't know what I was doing, but I wasn't and I did.

"Hello. Emergency Services. Which Service, please?"

"Police, please."

"Hold on, please."

"Police here. Can I have your number, please?"

"I need the police, please. City police, I mean."

"This is the emergency service, son. You should ring the city police number. Hold on and I'll give it to you."

"It's an emergency. I need the city police now."

There was a pause. I thought he'd hung up. Or maybe they were tracing the call. I almost put the phone down.

"Okay, putting you through, son. This'd better be a real emergency."

"Hello, city police. How can I help?"

"I want to leave a message for DI Ferry."

"Can I have your name and number, son?" It sounded as if I'd been adopted by the whole fucking police force.

"No. All I want to do is leave a message for Detective Inspector Ferry."

"Okay, son, go ahead."

"Tell Mr Ferry, I mean DI Ferry, that Mr Mudie was in Perth last Friday until 7 o'clock."

"Is that a.m. or p.m., son?"

I started to cry.

"It's fucking p.m. I don't know what he was doin' at the 7 in the morning."

"That's okay, son. Take it easy. I'll make sure he gets the message. Sure you don't want to leave your name? He'll probably want to talk to you."

The phone burned my fingers. I put it down. I tried to get out of the phone box in time, but too late I threw up over the phone book. The stink was horrible.

Tears running down my cheeks, snot from my nose, vomit on my shoes. I didn't feel like a Bruce Academy boy; I felt like a kid who'd just fed his hamster to his cat. I blundered out of the phone box and headed for my gran's. I loved my gran; she loved me. I knew she wouldn't ask questions; I knew she wouldn't tell my mum. She solved everything with "I'll just put the kettle on," and "A cup of tea will sort you out." My gran's tea was legendary; given a big enough kettle, she'd solve the problems of the whole fucked-up world.

* * *

"See you in the Gods at lunchtime. Be there."

Eric's whisper and squeeze on the bum brought me back to the hall. We were filing out, heading to our form rooms and the requisite lecture on the rules. Hardly necessary since every class this week would start with a requisite lecture on the rules as if they weren't already printed in our school planners and engraved on our hearts. At least my form would have the novelty of a new form tutor. Mr Murphy, our form tutor of the last three years, was no more; he was dead, deceased defunct; the nearly-departed, since he was already in his late sixties, had become the dearly departed, thanks to a summer encounter with the Grim Reaper. Rumour had it Mr Murphy had died an extraordinarily silly death, dragged into the River Tay by a huge salmon, just at the moment he'd suffered a minor heart attack— Mr Murphy, not the salmon. The story was silly enough to be credible and it seemed an entirely appropriate end to an intrepid fisherman who spent the time regaling us with stories of the 'big yin that got away' when he was not teaching us to assign constituent structures to a sentence or to the words within a sentence; in other words, parsing. Mr Murphy had no interest in guiding us up Mount Parnassus when we could squat in the foothills and footle around exploring the subtleties of defining and non-defining clauses.

So I was to be in the Gods at lunchtime.

I knew pretty well what Eric wanted—sex. Ordinarily I'd be up for it, but Alan's absence clouded everything, even the possibility of a snatched conversation with Leslie. We'd agreed to keep a little distance during the school day, at least until indoor tennis was organised. One of the wonderful things we'd discovered was we could lead separate lives in school, we didn't need to be with each other all the time because we knew we were always there for each other. It sounds hopelessly romantic but that's the way it was. Leslie was in Second Year, I was in Fourth; he had his friends, I had mine. I knew we'd be meeting on the bus after school, I knew I was going to Leslie's for tea, I knew Mrs M. would run me home later, I knew she'd stop in for a natter with my mum. I no longer minded that we lived in a council house while their home was in the

centre of the city. None of that seemed to matter. I hoped I'd run into Leslie during the day. I'd spent lots of time raising my eyebrows. I couldn't raise a single eyebrow like he could but he'd get the message anyway.

"Cameron. Donald Cameron. He is in this form, isn't he?"

"Hey, Donny, wakey, wakey. It's you he wants."

Who wanted me? I reluctantly dragged myself into the present. "Yes, sir, here, sir."

"We've no idea where you were, Donny, but it must be a very pleasant place. Invite us there sometime, won't you?"

Uneasy laughter rippled round the room, not because our new tutor had attempted humour but because he'd used my first name; in fact, he'd used a diminutive form of my first name; in fact, he'd called me Donny. No masters at Bruce Academy used first names, not even, as far as we knew, to each other. Mr Murphy, our form tutor, had arrived at Bruce Academy over forty years ago—this much we'd gleaned from Dr Humphreys—and had departed Bruce Academy with hardly a splash except in the River Tay, leaving not even the ripple of his first name behind.

"...therefore, gentlemen, I am to be your English teacher, well, at least for some of you, as well as being Form Tutor for all of you. It seemed that chance has crowned me king. Play, please?"

"The Scottish play." I blurted out the words, then blushed. He'd taken me by surprise, ambushed me. I'd decided to lay low until I could speak to Alan and now I'd drawn attention to myself.

"Bravo, Donny. But since we're not in the theatre I see no harm in naming the play. 'Macbeth', gentlemen, 'Macbeth'. Like that tragic hero, I've been crowned your king. And you, sir, yes, you in the back row—" This was apparently addressed to Raymond MacGregor. At least it was Raymond who jerked to attention. "Do you bite your thumb at us, sir, or are you merely enjoying a good suck?"

"Romeo and Juliet, sir. Act One, sir."

Damn it. John Duncan had got in before me. Anybody but John. Lying low be damned. If this was a competition, I was up for it.

"It's John, isn't it? Your dad's the butcher in the High Street? Your dad's meat's quite famous." Was I the only one who heard the double entendres? Perhaps there were no double entendres where none was intended. "Next door to the fishmonger's. I hope it isn't a case of 'fishified flesh'."

"Romeo and Juliet again, sir." There. Got him. Two-one to me!

"Ah, the redoubtable Donny Cameron once more," laughed Mr... Mr... Damn it, I'd forgotten his name. Or maybe he'd introduced himself while I was daydreaming.

“But enough! no more,” he began. I couldn’t resist. “‘Tis not so sweet now as it was before.’ Twelfth Night, sir.”

“I wasn’t actually playing the quotations game, Donny, but thanks for the contribution. Now, gentlemen, if you don’t mind, I’d like you to write up your timetables in your Planners. Never forget that genius is one per cent inspiration and ninety-nine perspiration.” He glanced my way. I shook my head. “Thomas Alva Edison said that. Now get on with it. I said that.”

My timetable complete, I scrutinised my mystery man as surreptitiously as I could. He was young. Mid twenties. Straight black hair, raven black, glossy black. Eyebrows black slashes. Almond-shaped eyes. Long eyelashes. High cheekbones. Nose distinctly Roman. Lips narrow. Skin, tanned ivory. Can you tan ivory? Italian descent? There were quite a few folk of Italian descent in our fair city, courtesy of the prisoner-of-war camps in the area in the Second World War. But they all kept ice-cream parlours or fish ’n chip shops.

“Citro. For those who missed it first time round, I’ll spell it again. That’s C-I-T-R-O, pronounced Citro. Corky may have reservations about the pronunciation but I have none.” Our collective gasp was audible. “My mum always pronounces it ‘Sitro’ and that’s good enough for me. Now if we have satisfied the demands of bureaucracy, let’s to matter more intriguing. You will write on the paper before you 100 words, not one more, not one less, about your hopes and dreams. You will not put your names on the paper. Simply your hopes and dreams. And, gentlemen, I give you fair warning: do not bore me. I bore easily. For me boredom is a potion not unlike that drunk by Dr Henry Jekyll, the potion that produced Mr Edward Hyde. Mr Edward Hyde is not someone you wish to meet this early in the school term. So, gentlemen, remember the priority is to entertain and amuse me. So go to it. Your hopes and dreams laid bare.”

Heads went down over wooden desks, nibs dipped into blue-black, coal-black, sloe-black ink, and the hopes and dreams of twenty nine adolescents were scratched on pristine paper. Another school year had begun.

I lingered over lunch telling myself I was wondering about Alan or keeping an eye out for Leslie. Neither was the whole truth. I wanted to avoid the Gods. The Gods, the toilets high up on the third floor, practically the attic toilets. No one used the ‘Gods’ any more. The third floor was not explicitly out of bounds but since the third floor was under repair it was understood no boy could have a good reason for being there. Some boys had ‘bad’ reasons for being there; I’d been among them, but, as far as I knew, Eric hadn’t. I guessed Eric wanted sex; I didn’t blame him; we both enjoyed sex and we both enjoyed sex with each other. But I was in a dilemma. Would having sex with Eric mean being unfaithful to Leslie? As much as I told myself it wouldn’t—because sex is just physical—I knew it would. It would hurt him. I could keep it a secret but

that would be worse. In the end, secrets are whispered everywhere, and even if they aren't, they are as corrosive as cancer. I would go to the Gods. Eric deserved that, but I'd leave it so late sex would be out of the question. I allowed myself a smile. Given Eric's 'ten-second thing', we'd probably have time for several sessions but I was determined not to. I'd too much on my mind, and too much up there means too little down there.

The third floor was distinctly spooky. Long corridors flanked by empty classrooms, desks shrouded in tarpaulin, the ghosts of last year's lessons still chalked on the blackboards. I hurried into the Gods and paused for breath. I didn't breathe deeply; boys' urinals the world over smell the same. I heard a grunt and thought for a moment Eric must be taking a dump.

"Donny, is that you?" I heard the bold click of metal. "Get in here." The door of the second cubicle opened and I slid in.

Eric was there but he wasn't alone, and it wasn't Eric's groan I'd heard. It was Raymond MacGregor's. Not that I identified Raymond immediately. All I could see of him was his big, friendly arse plastered against Eric's groin. Then Eric eased backwards and I saw that ten-inch hosepipe of his slide out of the big, friendly arse. He held it there for a moment and then rammed it back home. Another groan. I stepped forward and lifted the blazer that had fallen over the boy's head and shoulders. Yes, it was Raymond. He was bent over the toilet pan, supported by his arms, trousers and underpants at his feet, shirt and blazer hauled up over his back and shoulders.

"Where the fuck have you been?" Eric punctuated the question by sliding out his donkey-dick and driving it back home again. "Oooooof." Raymond sounded winded. "I had to find Raymond here. He's got a great arse. Want to try it?"

I appreciated Eric's generosity but the last thing I wanted to do was fuck Raymond MacGregor in his big, friendly arse. I should have got out of there, I know, but I was fascinated. I'd never seen anyone getting fucked up close and personal. I leaned forward and lifted up the shirt and blazer so I could see Raymond's face. It was red and puffy. His eyes were closed, his mouth open, drooling. His head bounced, not too hard, off the toilet tank every time Eric drove home. I whispered, "Raymond, Raymond, you okay?" His eyes opened, they were glazed, distant, far away. I wondered if he knew I was there. I stood up and stepped back. Eric's trousers and underpants were at his feet, his shirt hauled up to his chest. I saw Eric's cock slide into Raymond, his pubic hair pressed against the boy's buttocks.

"Watch this," whispered Eric. He slid his cock almost all the way out. The skin was a slippery brownish red, the head, what I saw of it, bright purple. He slid the head just inside, held his shaft and turned the head round, first to the left,

then to the right. The skin round Raymond's anus was puffed out; I saw it twist out of shape in response to the head of Eric's cock. Then Eric rammed all the way home again, gripped Raymond's pelvis and whispered, "Work for it, you fucker, work for it." Raymond made circles with his buttocks. What shocked me most was the note of brutality in Eric's voice. "Tell me you want it. Tell me you love it," he hissed. I heard Raymond mutter incoherently.

I saw Raymond's cock bouncing in time to Eric's thrusts. It was only semi-hard. It looked sad, defeated. Why didn't he have a hard-on? Could you have a hard-on, maintain an erection while being fucked in the arse? From above I heard Eric: "Shove your dick in his mouth, Donny. He'll like that. He'll do anything we want. I mean anything." Eric was becoming breathless. I slid my hand between Raymond's legs, took his floppy penis between my fingers, squeezed its length, felt it grow and harden. I began to masturbate him, trying to keep in rhythm with Eric's thrusts. Raymond grew hard very quickly. I listened to his breathing, to Eric's, shorter and faster, shorter and faster. Raymond's head bounced against the tank but he didn't seem to notice or care.

Suddenly Eric was cumming. I knew he was cumming because he cried out, "Fuck it, I'm cumming," and I guess he came. I counted five bounces of Raymond's head against the tank. I felt Raymond's cock swell beneath my fingers. I pushed the head of his cock towards the toilet bowl; it wasn't easy; rigor mortis had set into his shaft. I saw three, four, five spurts of semen; they hit the back of the bowl and slid lazily towards the scummy water.

Eric fell back against the toilet door, his face beetroot red. He magicked a handkerchief from somewhere and wiped the shaft and head of his deflated penis. "You okay, Raymond?" he asked.

Raymond, still leaning on the toilet bowl, said nothing. I slid beneath him onto the toilet scat, reached down and worked his underpants and trousers up his legs and over his big, friendly bum. I suppose I could've wiped his arse but that seemed a bit condescending. I pulled down his shirt and tucked it into his trousers. Pulled down his blazer and straightened it.

"Fuck'n hell," said Eric. "It's nearly half one. We'd better get to registration. Come on, Donny, let's get out of here."

"You go," I said. "We'll catch up. We're in the same tutor group. Mr Citro's. You go on ahead. See you later."

"Okay, see you later," he said and added, "Thanks, MacGregor. That was great. We'll do it again some time." Then he was gone.

"Ray, come on, or we'll be late for Mr Citro." I raised Raymond's head and turned his face towards me. There were tear stains on his cheeks. I was acutely embarrassed. Bruce boys don't cry. For a moment he leaned against me. "Why do I do it, Donny? Why do I let people...?"

“Hey, Ray, you don’t have to,” I whispered. “You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to.” But I was lying. I knew Raymond would always have to do it. And I’m ashamed to admit I was relieved to realise I wouldn’t.

That Monday was the oddest of days. I was happy to be back at school but I couldn’t sort out my feelings. I was elated I’d have the chance to see Leslie every day but anxious about Alan’s absence. I was pleased to be back with Eric but dismayed at his treatment of Raymond. I was intrigued by Mr Citro but worried I wouldn’t live up to his expectations, whatever they were. We had Mr Citro for English the final period of the day and were taken aback when he introduced us to the poetry of love. It’s not that we hadn’t ‘done’ love poetry before but Mr Murphy had made it so dry, arid and irrelevant, we might as well have been parsing sentences. With Mr Citro it was different. He made us, or at least me, feel the love, the passion infusing the words.

“‘Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?’” he recited and I was back amongst the Montrose sand dunes with Leslie. “‘And summer’s lease hath all too short a date...’” How quickly the weeks had flown by. But it was more than that. We were the boys of summer, all of us, even Eric kneeling before the carnival owner in Devon, even Ray MacGregor buggered in the Gods, even Alan on his double bed with Mr Mudie. “‘But thy eternal summer shall not fade...’” But would it?

Would beauty fade with youth; would we exchange joy for routine, happiness for security, ecstasy for a pension as we stumbled through the long littleness of life?

What was it I loved in Leslie, in Alan, in Eric? What was the nature of their eternal summer? Was it boyhood itself? I looked at Mr Citro. What kind of boy had he been? What was he doing, a man in a world of boys? Would that be me one day—a man reaching out to boys, and through them trying to touch my own boyhood? “‘So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see, So long lives this, and this gives life to thee,’” whispered our teacher.

“So there you have it, gentlemen,” he said. “Shakespeare trying to touch on life’s greatest mystery, the nature of love, and I don’t think he was referring only to what’s between your legs.” A shuffle of feet mingled with suppressed giggles. “And why have I chosen love as a topic for us to explore? Because you, gentlemen, are about to be on the receiving end of love, though I’m sure several of you will confuse it with lust. You are young, and the young are passionate or they are nothing. And love is the poetry of passion. Soon you’ll be in love. Some of you may be fortunate or unfortunate enough to be in that state already. You’ll walk round a corner and feel you’ve been punched in the stomach when you catch sight of...” he paused. “...of your beloved, whoever that happens to be.” His gaze swept the room. He caught my eye. I felt I should blush but I didn’t.

Instead I raised a single eyebrow. I'd never managed it before but now, instinctively, I raised an eyebrow. For a moment Mr Citro seemed flustered.

"And so to your first assignment. I'd like you to sit with a partner. No significance will be read into your choice. I want you to glance through the poems in the anthology. Confine yourself to the first half a dozen. Between you, select a poem, whisper it to each other, discuss it, and then each produce one hundred words explaining what the poem means to you. I'm not interested in what you think the meaning of the poem is; I am interested in what it 'means' to you. Meanwhile I will enjoy what you wrote for me this morning. Go to it, lads, go to it with a will."

My watch told me we'd half an hour left. I looked round the room. A couple of friends tried to attract my attention. I rose quickly and shifted to the back row. I sat down beside Raymond MacGregor who as usual was on his own.

"Hi, Ray," I smiled sliding in beside him, suddenly aware Eric's semen probably stained his underpants. There was no reply. "What do you think of Mr Citro?" I asked. A non-committal shrug. "More interesting than old Murphy," I tried again.

"Have you looked through the poems?" I asked. The anthology was open. Right hand page. Short poem. I read it quickly. I shivered. "Ray, we can't do this poem." He raised his head. "Why not?"

What big beautiful eyes he had. Strong eyebrows, thick eyelashes. I hadn't noticed them before, or maybe I'd never really looked at him before. "Why not?" he repeated.

"Do you know what it's about?" I asked. His reply shook me. "It's about whatever you think it's about. Isn't that what Mr Citro said? I know what it's about. It's about Eric Murray and me in the Gods. You were there so it's about you, too. Read the poem to me, Donny, read it to me. That's what sir said we had to do. So do it." There was a note of command I'd never heard in Raymond's voice before. I cleared my throat and whispered,

"The bandaged shoulder
He said that he had hurt himself on a wall or that he had fallen.
But there was probably another reason
for the wounded and bandaged shoulder.
With a somewhat abrupt movement,
to bring down from a shelf some
photographs that he wanted to see closely,
the bandage was untied and a little blood ran.
I bandaged the shoulder again, and while bandaging it
I was somewhat slow; because it did not hurt,

and I liked to look at the blood. That
blood was a part of my love.
When he had left, I found in front of the chair,
a bloody rag, from the bandages,
a rag that looked it belonged in garbage:
which I brought up to my lips,
and which I held there for a long time—
the blood of love on my lips.”

“I’m sorry about what happened, Ray. I really am. I never thought Eric would do something like that.”

“I’m not. Sorry, I mean. I wanted it. Maybe not like that. But I wanted it because I want Eric, and I know that’s the only way I’m going to get him.” I was at a loss for words. “I love Eric Murray,” he continued. “I’ve loved him since First Year. Why do think I play fucking cricket? It’s only to be near him. Have you ever watched him? In his whites, I mean, running in to bowl, his backside in those tight flannels. Have you watched him in a rugby scrum? Do you know what I’d give to be there, my head jammed between those thighs? Have you watched him in the showers? That... that... thing swinging between his legs?” There was a smile on Raymond’s lips. He’d probably said more to me in that speech than he had in the last three years. “But you have, haven’t you? And Eric watches you in the showers. I know because I watch him watching you.” The last comment made me shift my backside uncomfortably. “And you’ve fucked him, haven’t you? I bet you’ve fucked him and I bet he loved it.”

“Ray,” I began to protest.

“But I bet he hasn’t fucked you,” he cut across me. “I bet you haven’t let him. Oh, no, Golden Boy isn’t going to be fucked by anyone, not unless it’s on Golden Boy’s terms. You’re so fucking lucky, Cameron, it all comes to you so easily. You don’t have to bend over a stinking toilet with your arse in the air. It hurts, you know, it really hurts. It’s like being ripped apart, like taking a huge constipated shit backwards. There’s blood on my underpants. Blood and semen and other stuff. On the way home I’ll get rid of the underpants, chuck them in the public toilets. But know what? I’ll kiss Eric’s semen first. Eric’s semen and my blood. That’s what the poem means to me. Do you think I should write it out, in a hundred words, what it means to me? But I’m forgetting you, Golden Boy. What does the fucking poem mean to you?”

“It was written by someone called ‘Constantine P. Cavafy (1897)’,” I read from the book. “Sounds like a Greek name to me. Never heard of him. Maybe we should choose something else, something simpler,” I evaded madly. “Look at this one. ‘My love is like a red red rose’. It’s by Robbie Burns. My gran really

likes Rabbie Burns, it's got a nice simile in the first line," I gabbled on wondering how many people knew me as 'Golden Boy'.

Raymond sighed and fixed me with a smile. "What's it like fucking Eric?" he asked.

* * *

Leslie held one end of the fish finger between his lips, I held the other between mine. We nibbled from each end. It's not easy. A fish finger is a fragile thing but we made it. Our lips were touching. We opened up and jammed our tongues in each other's mouth fishing for as much finger as we could get. Disgusting? Yes, of course, but it tasted so good. We burst out laughing and sprayed each other with bits of fish and saliva, then washed down what was left with orange squash. Leslie squirted some squash into my mouth through the tiny gap in his teeth. I made as if to unzip my trousers. "Open up, I want to squirt some of this in your mouth," I offered. "We'd better not," said Leslie. "I bet Bryan will come barging in." I realised Leslie had taken my offer seriously.

"Do you know anything about algebra?" he asked.

"Do bears poo in the proverbial?" I retorted. "Get your algebra on to that table and I'll show you how to do algebra." For the next half hour I showed Leslie how to solve equations without tears. "Hey, I understand this stuff now. You're a born teacher," he smiled, then added, "Mum's got a new book of chords for you. You'd better be practising your guitar. Remember we start lessons after school on Thursday. Then you can come for tea again."

"Nope, Thursdays you come to me."

"Great," said Leslie. "Now tell me about your day in school today. Tell me what you've learned, and don't give me that 'Nothing' crap. I'm not your mother." We wandered into the lounge—we had a living room, they had a lounge—and flung ourselves onto the settee. We swapped stories about our first day back; I told Leslie nothing about lunchtime in the Gods; it had nothing to do with me and, I hoped, very little to do with him. I told him about Mr Citro and his 'weird' lesson. "We've got him, too," sparkled Leslie. "Do you think he likes boys?" he added. "Likes boys?" I played dumb. "You know what I mean." Leslie's inquiry led to a wider discussion about which teachers probably 'liked' boys; it was remarkable how our suggestions coincided. "It's funny," he said, "but most of the best teachers are the ones who like boys." I added, "Well, it is a boys' school," a remark that seemed to conclude the discussion in a timely manner.

The door swung open.

"Hi, boys, did you have the fish fingers?" It was Mrs Morrison, Margaret. Her son looked at me and winked, "Yes, Mum, they were absolutely delicious."

In fact. Donny's got a special recipe using fish fingers." My face blazed. "I don't want to know," smiled Mrs M. "What you boys do with my fish fingers is your affair."

Later, on the way home, I asked Mrs Morrison to drop me at the Aitkens. I explained Alan hadn't been at school. I couldn't go home without finding out why. "That's very loyal," she said. "But don't get home too late. You don't want to worry your mother." I waved good night to Mrs M., Leslie and Bryan and went up the stairs, pulse racing, heart pounding. Outside the Aitkens' door, I took three deep breaths and knocked.

"Donny! It's good to see you. Alan's asked for you umpteen times today. He's a bit off-colour but I don't think it's anything catching." Mrs Aitken ushered me in. I hung up my blazer and bag in the hall and made for Alan's room.

"It's time you got here. You could've fucking phoned, you twat." I was relieved to hear Alan insulting me. That meant it was nothing terminal. "C'mere and sit on the bed." Alan was propped up in bed, his back supported by a huge pink pillow. Round him were scattered Hotspurs and Wizards; unlike me, Alan wasn't a reader of comics; his mum must've bought them to help him pass the time. For a moment I wondered if he'd pass them on to me.

Sitting down, I asked, "You ill or something?"

"Nothing the fuck's wrong with me. I needed the day off. I needed time to think." Alan thinking, something serious must be up. I dreaded to think what it might be. "Then how'd you get the day off?" I asked. Boys always put practicalities first. "The old toothpaste trick," he said with the ghost of a smile. I smiled back. There was nothing like the old toothpaste trick in times of emergency. I'd never used it myself but that didn't stop me believing it. What you did, I'm told, was squirt half a tube of toothpaste down your throat. Your temperature shot up but only for half an hour or so. By this time, you were tucked up in bed for the day assured you'd have an absence note for school next day.

I didn't want to ask but I had to. "What'd you want the first day back off for?"

Tears suddenly glistened in Alan's eyes. "It's Dave. He's gone." I heard the crack in Alan's voice; I felt a lump in my throat. "What do you mean 'gone'?" I asked. Alan took time before answering.

"He's gone," he began. "He phoned on Sunday morning. He wouldn't even see me. The police spoke to him on Sunday, he told me. The police, Donny, the fucking police. They came round to see him. They questioned him. About the toilet thing." Alan checked I understood and went on. "They didn't accuse him of anything but they knew, Donny, they knew."

“Why didn’t they do something about it?” I asked.

“Dave said they couldn’t prove anything but they knew.”

“But you weren’t in the toilet with him.”

“Don’t be so fucking stupid.” There was a note of anger in Alan’s voice. “They knew he lied to them. They knew he was in Perth on Friday, so he couldn’t have been with me. He’s a solicitor. He knows what lying to the police means.”

I was desperate not to ask how they could have found out but I blurted out the question anyway.

“Don’t know,” said Alan. “Guess they just checked things out. That’s what the fucking police do, check things out.”

“So where’s he gone?” I asked.

“To Perth,” said Alan.

“Perth,” I echoed, “That’s not far away.”

“Don’t be so bloody stupid,” said Alan, his voice rising. “He’s gone to Perth and he’s going to stay in Perth. He won’t work here any more, and he says we’re not going to be together any more. He explained it all to me. He says it’s to protect me. He says the police didn’t spell it out exactly but they made it clear what they wanted.”

“They can’t do that,” I said, hugely relieved they could.

“They damn well can,” said Alan. “What if they came round here again, to interview me, but made sure my dad was there this time? Even if they couldn’t prove anything...” Alan’s voice tailed away. The consequences were too awful to think about.

I was a bit puzzled. I expected Alan to be broken-hearted, I expected crying and sobbing, anger and threats. It wasn’t my place to ask, so I asked. “What you gonna do now?” He looked up and sniffed. “Do? I’m not going to ‘do’ anything. I’ve been in bed all day. I’ve been thinking. A lot. Do you know how lucky I am? Do you know what could’ve happened?”

A shiver ran down my spine. “Yeh, it could have got bad, really really bad,” I muttered.

Alan picked up one of the comics. “Hey, have you read any of the ‘Morgan the Mighty’ stories? That guy’s far better than Tarzan. And what a hunk. Look at this drawing. Look at the body on him.” To tell the truth, I’d been masturbating to Morgan, the man from Africa, for nearly a year, but I didn’t mind sharing him with Alan. He put the comic down.

“Tell me about school today. Did anything happen I should know about?” I stretched myself out on the bed alongside Alan and gave him edited highlights of the day. I realised how heartless boys could be.

Chapter 12

But back to the present at the reunion. As I was saying...

A kilted Eric Murray bore down on us. My heart skipped half a dozen beats. I tried to compose myself but probably looked a little simple-minded. “Donny, Donny Cameron.” My hand disappeared into a massive paw. “You haven’t changed much.” I croaked out a “Hello, Eric, long time no see.” I slid my sweaty palm from his hand. “This is Morag,” he said, inclining his head towards a pink-chiffoned girl who looked young enough to be in the Sixth Form though not at Bruce Academy. “Morag is Mrs Murray. We’re married. She’s my wife.” Eric still had his gift of stating the obvious. Mrs. Eric Murray bobbed in what I took to be a curtsy.

“And I’m Leslie. Donny isn’t Mrs Morrison. We aren’t married but he’s my...” My elbow caught him sharply under the ribs. “Hey, that hurt,” protested Leslie. “You could have done me some damage. I’m a doctor. I know about these things.”

“Go and get us a drink, Dr Morrison,” I suggested.

“Morag, pop along with the doctor, there’s a good girl. Double whisky for me, a little water, no ice,” instructed Eric. “And you might ask the doctor about... you know what.” We watched the unlikely couple slip through the melee of dancers. I watched Eric. He’d become a bull of a man, built like the proverbial shit-house; practically no neck, a barrel of a chest, and a complexion suggesting double whiskies were part of his regular intake. I remembered him lying naked and beautiful by the banks of the river at Inverbervie. Narcissus himself couldn’t have looked so divine. He turned to me.

“Looks like life’s been good to you,” I said.

“Can’t complain,” he said. “I’m in property development.”

“Property development?”

He laughed. “That means I buy up run-down properties, tart them up, then rent them out. At extortionate rents, of course. This is a university city now,” he explained. “Hundreds of students desperate every October to find somewhere to lay their heads. They like living like rabbits, you know. Just cram them in till the hutch is bursting at the seams. Wish I could have a cigar,” he added out of nowhere. “Maybe we should slip up to the Gods and have one. But you don’t smoke, do you? Never did, did you?” I nodded my head to confirm his recollection. “Wonder if they still use the Gods,” he added. “In the Sixth Form, we used to slip up there regularly for a quick fag. But you never did. Can’t remember you ever being in the Gods.”

He paused. If his face hadn't been so florid, I'd've guessed he was blushing. Did he remember? Did he remember driving that huge prick up Raymond MacGregor's arse, the boy's head bouncing off the toilet? I had a flash of Eric on top of Morag, his tiny wee wife, tiny at least in comparison to him. Or did she straddle him and ride him like some tiny jockey on an over-sized mount? I wondered how she felt when he first dropped his pants and showed her the monster about to be rammed up her tiny vagina. Did she take it up the arse? Had she ever tried to deep-throat him? Could I publish her memoirs?

"...and we've got a house in Magdalen Yard Road and a summer place in Dunvegan."

The mention of Dunvegan brought me back. "Heathfield House?"

Eric looked puzzled. "How do you know Heathfield?"

I shrugged my shoulders, "It's a long story."

"No, not Heathfield. I considered it but it would cost a fortune to renovate that place." He looked across the hall. "Where the hell are those two with the drinks?" He turned to me. "But what about you, Donny? What've you been up to? I know you went to university, Edinburgh, wasn't it? Me, I preferred to make money. So come on, spill the beans. Tell your Eric everything, just like the old days."

"I'm in publishing," I began. "There's not much money in it but we live in hope." I wasn't sure I'd slipped into the royal 'we' to express myself corporately or to include, albeit subconsciously, Leslie in my life. "We share a place in London. Leslie's a doctor, gynaecologist, doing very well. It's a good life. We're both doing what we want to be doing. Maybe that's the secret of happiness."

"Still the idealist, Donny." A laugh rumbled from Eric's belly. "Money's the secret of happiness, and it ain't no secret. That and a good fuck." I was surprised by Eric's crudeness. "And I bet you and Leslie have a good fuck." Eric gulped his drink. "Hey, don't go tight-assed on me. I never went tight-assed on you," he added. "You and Leslie boy can do whatever you want. Me, I got over all that kids' stuff, but I still enjoy a good fuck, and with the kind of money I've got, and the kind of tenants I've got, I can afford to be choosy. Sex is just sex, I learned that early. You spent your time running round looking for more. Well, let me tell you..."

But he didn't tell me. "Where the hell are those drinks? Hold on, I'll be right back." Eric turned away, turned back, whispered, "Sometimes I miss the old days, Donny, I really do." For a moment the old Eric, the god-like Eric, peeped out from the layers of good living. And then he was gone. Back into the cocoon of what he'd settled for. I watched him barrel through the dancers. He

didn't look back and he didn't come back. Two or three times during the evening I caught his eye across the room. He looked away.

"Well, lover boy, is that you and Eric fixed up for the night? Don't mind me. I'll just sit out at the end of the bed and watch." Leslie pressed a glass of red into my hand and skipped out of range. "Sorry," he whispered. "Just jealous, I suppose. I remember how close you two were. You'll never know how jealous of him I was. But after Montrose I knew I didn't have to be. You changed after Montrose, Donny. You've never told me everything. I don't expect you to. And don't worry. The change made us possible. Could we go outside for a few minutes?"

"Fresh air?" I asked.

"No," he said. "I just want to hold you. That's all. Just for a moment."

"Later," I said. "Right now we're going to join in an eightsome reel. I'm going to make use of all those compulsory dancing lessons. Look. Everyone's choosing partners. I want that girl over there."

"You bastard," he hissed. "Well, I'm having that beauty over there. Don't forget I can have my pick of any woman in the hall?"

"How do you figure that out?"

"Because I'm a fucking gynaecologist," he laughed. "And no woman can resist that."

We flung ourselves into the Scottish country dancing and were lucky enough to land two young ladies madcap enough to enjoy the Highland flings. Weekly club tennis had kept us both light on our feet but I have to admit I was out of breath before Leslie. I was about to suggest fresh air when I felt a tap on the shoulder; actually it was the gentlest of kicks in the arse. I whirled round and found—

"Alan! Alan Aitken!"

And there he was, the first love of my life. My God, he was still beautiful, he still stopped my heart. Alan, too, had been dancing, fire danced in his cheeks and eyes. Freckles still spattered his nose. His curly black hair was glossed with sweat. The dimples, the high cheekbones. And slim as the last time I'd seen him, his sixteenth birthday. Alan had left Bruce Academy at the end of Fifth Year. He'd gone to work with an uncle in Australia. We'd promised to keep in touch; we never did.

Alan swung his partner into the arms of mine with "There you go, girls, have fun. This one's mine," and danced me from the floor. For me Alan remained irresistible. He hauled me through a side door, up the stairs and onto the balcony overlooking the hall. The balcony was not in use; we had it to ourselves. He turned me to him. "Let me look at you," he said. "Yep, good enough to eat. If you weren't with Leslie, I'd snog you. Aw fuck it, I will

anyway.” He pulled me into his arms, fastened his mouth to mine and kissed me passionately though not entirely seriously.

When he released me, I asked, “You too? Men?” Alan winked at me, “No, not quite, but I’ll make an exception for you.”

For each other we reviewed what we’d been doing the last few years. “Publishing?” he whistled. “Suits you perfectly, Donny. You always were the watcher, the observer, the voyeur. At least that’s what you became after that summer.” He didn’t have to explain to me which summer was ‘that’ summer. I tried not to ask but I had to. “And you? Dave Mudie?” He was unabashed.

“It didn’t work any more. He didn’t do it for me. I didn’t do it for him. End of story.” My face suggested it wasn’t the end of the story. I’m a publisher; I need to know how stories end.

“Boys, you dummy,” he smiled. “I guess I’m not so different from Dave Mudie. Oh, don’t give me that censorious look. You always did want to be my conscience. Nothing to say? Well, let me spell it out for you.”

“You don’t have to.”

“But I want to. You matter to me. It matters to me that you understand. I’m not asking for your approval, nor your forgiveness, and certainly not for your blessing. But I’d like your understanding.” My silence was permission to continue.

“I didn’t ask to be this way, Donny. Given a choice, I wouldn’t want to be this way. I’d love to take a pill tonight and wake up hetero or simply homo tomorrow. But that’s not going to happen. So I’m doing the best I can with who I am. It can’t be easy for you and Leslie even in London, even in the great metropolis. But at least you can sit together in the park and coo at each other on a summer’s day. Thomas and I can’t. And listen, I’m not into kiddies. Thank God, I’ve been spared that. And I’ve tried, believe me I’ve tried. I’ve tried it with women, I’ve tried it with men, yuk, but it just doesn’t work. I even tried therapy, counselling, for three years—nothing. But, believe me, you’ve got to believe me, I don’t go around trying to get into every boy’s pants I see—well, not every boy.” Alan smiled wryly.

I smiled back. I never could resist his cheerfulness.

“And I’ve never hurt a boy. Never forced him. Never could. It would be like... like... like hurting you.”

“And Thomas?”

“Tommy, Tommy Mitchell.” His voice caressed the name.

“Tell me about Tommy.”

“Tell you about Tommy. Why? I mean, I want to tell you about Tommy, but...”

“Maybe because I like you best when you’re at your happiest. Tell me about Tommy, Tommy Mitchell. How’d you meet him?”

We slumped into chairs at a table in the corner of the balcony.

“I met Tommy the day he fell out of my apple tree,” began Alan. “The Mitchells were my new neighbours but I hadn’t met them yet. You know I bought that old property on the Liff Road, number 86. It has a small orchard, apple and pears, cherries, stuff like that. Tommy’d got through a hole in the fence and was up an apple tree. He entered my life with a yelp, like a puppy. I found him at the bottom of the tree. It was his twelfth birthday. He’d twisted his ankle pretty badly. Typical Tommy. I carried him inside and called his mother. She came over. She was incredibly apologetic. I told her no harm’d been done, except to Tommy, of course. I carried him over to his own house, to his bedroom. She called the family doctor who came and did the needful.

“Mrs Mitchell—Karen—told me something about her family. There is Karen, Tommy and his younger sister Emma. Dad walked out on them three years earlier. No great loss, he was an alcoholic, or well on the road to becoming one. She is an interior designer, has a bit of her own money, so she bought the property next door to mine, 88. To cut a long story short, I ended up engaging her services; my place was a dump, it needed a woman’s touch. That gave me a lot of access to Tommy but that was never my intention. It just worked out that way.

“She wasn’t surprised Tommy’d fallen out of a tree. He was, he is, an intensely physical boy. He’s had lots of absences from school over the years. He falls off walls, bicycles, trees. buildings, pretty much anything higher than six feet. Tommy takes risks. He’s athletic but he takes risks. The schools were on holiday. Tommy’s home’s nice but a little pokey. His mum was often over at my place; that gave Tommy the excuse to be there, too.”

“And you...?”

“No, I didn’t,” laughed Alan. “Not for a couple of years. Not until Tommy was 14. I resisted Tommy till then.”

“You resisted?”

“Yes, I did. Tommy Mitchell seduced me. Oh, I’m not saying I wasn’t there to be seduced, but, god, Donny, he is beautiful and persistent. Girls swarm round Tommy and he loves it. I don’t know if bisexuality exists but Tommy made it clear to me early on—though never in so many words—that he found girls and boys attractive. I don’t want to make him sound promiscuous; he wasn’t a version of me,” grinned Alan, “he kept the same girl for months on end and he was fiercely loyal to the girl of the month. But that didn’t stop him flirting with me.”

“Flirting?”

“Yes, flirting. I remember one time he was in the shower; we’d been ripping up old floorboards in his house. I shouted I was going. He shouted back, ‘Don’t go. Come in here. It’s important.’ He must have been about thirteen. He stepped out of the shower, grabbed a towel and started towelling his head. It looked like he’d been pulling his penis in the shower: it was semi-erect. Tommy’s a well-built boy. His cock bounced up and down on his balls. ‘What’s so important?’ I asked trying not to gobble him up. He threw the towel at me. ‘Can’t remember. Do my back, please.’ He turned away. I started on his shoulders. He stepped backwards, pressing himself into me. I couldn’t take it. I slapped his backside, draped the towel over his head and exited quick left, my own erection outlined in my pants.

“More than once I found him stretched out on my bed. ‘Just having a lay down,’ he’d say. He’d say something like ‘You can play with me if you want to.’ If I asked what he had in mind, he’d laugh and say ‘Wrestling or something like that.’ I often saw him slump in an armchair, legs spread wide, an obvious stiffy on display, and he’d say something like, I’m bored. What can we do that’s fun?’ I knew what I wanted to do; rip his clothes off and... you know,” Alan grinned.

“So when...

“The full gory details?”

“If you like,” I said, the writer, or maybe the voyeur in me, eager for details.

“The day after his fourteenth birthday. Another fall, another accident, or at least Tommy claimed it was. The left knee this time. Tommy was on my bed. He looked fine but he winced when I turned his knee. ‘It needs cream,’ he announced, pushing his shorts to his ankles, no mean feat when, according to Tommy, he could hardly sit up in bed. I got good old Vaseline and applied some to the hollows around his left knee. Tommy chattered on. He had this ability to make every conversation personal and intimate within minutes. You’d find yourself without warning in the middle of an intimate chat as if you were the only person in the world he could confide in. When I tried to take my fingers away, he whispered, ‘Stroke me, please. It feels so nice.’ I wasn’t sure what I was meant to be stroking. You know I don’t often blush but I guess my face was on fire.

“‘I like being here with you, Alan,’ he whispered. ‘Just us. Not mum or Emma. Just us. Here. On our own. It’s cool...’ he giggled. ‘It’s cool just being here. Stroke higher please, Alan. Please, a bit higher.’ I knew I was being seduced. It was fascinating; I was fascinated, and, to be honest, Donny, very aroused.

“His underpants were snow white, gleaming white. Old-fashioned jockeys, but too tight for him. We chatted, I stroked, Tommy got a hard-on. I watched it happen. He knew I was watching. ‘Just me and you. Nobody coming. We can say what we like, do what we like.’ His hard cock was outlined beneath the thin white cotton; then it arched and tented the cotton. How easy it would be to let my fingers run the length of this boy’s erection. This boy who lay there, auburn hair splashed on a blue pillow case, lying there. touching me with his smile, inviting me to...

“Suddenly he turned over. Embarrassed, I thought. Did I have time to sigh in relief? I don’t think so... for Tommy reached round, raised his belly and jerked his underpants to his knees. ‘Cramp, maybe. Right at the top of my legs. Could you cream me, please?’ Tommy spread his legs. It was warm in the bedroom. The smell of Vaseline and sweat and pure boy. I pressed harder, manipulated more openly, leaned closer into him.

“Tommy swirled on the bed, grabbed me, pulled me to him. Tall for his age, he was slim but strong. He pulled me onto him and kissed me full on the lips, his tongue pushing at my lips frantically. I surrendered, opened, and let him invade me. I fenced back the invader, attack, retreat, attack again. His saliva poured into me in exchange for mine. The flood gates opened. He kissed my mouth, my lips, my face. His hands pulled and tugged at my T-shirt while I jerked his up and away from his shoulders. Chest to chest, belly to belly, we were glued together by the heat of the room, our skin and our sweat.

“I was caught in a storm. Tommy jerked at my track-suit bottoms, my slip, and pushed them down my legs. He flopped around like a landed fish until we lay head to feet, faces jammed between each other’s legs, sucking the life out of each other. Me on the bottom, Tommy on top, his legs straddling my head to give him as much leverage as possible. He drove his cock into my throat until I felt his hairless pubis against my lips. He jerked the base of my cock and sucked on half the shaft. I tried to warn him, tried to pull away, but he grabbed my arse and forced me as deeply into him as he could manage. My hips jerked and heaved in time with his own; we emptied ourselves into each other. I felt the semen sucked out of me as much as I was squirting it. I felt his sweetness jet against the back of my throat.

“We released each other. Scrambled up the bed. He wrapped my arms round him. ‘Wow, that was the greatest, just the greatest,’ he panted. I licked my semen from the side of his lips, from his chin. ‘Hey, that’s mine,’ he protested. He grew serious. ‘I did okay, didn’t I? You did want to, didn’t you? You don’t hate me, do you?’” I answered his questions by drawing him into my arms. he snuggled into my chest. He looked up and said, ‘We can fuck, can’t we?’

“‘Hey,’ I said, ‘you’re a bit young for that, you know.’ He reached down and held my floppy cock. ‘Not now. I don’t mean now. This thing would kill me.’ He tweaked my cock. ‘I mean when I’m older. When I can take it. There’s lots we can do till then but I’ll be ready when you are.’ He snuggled more deeply into my chest. ‘Can we sleep a little now?’ he murmured. ‘I read lots of people sleep after sex. I’m not sleepy because of the sex. It’s just we did a lot of work this morning.’ He raised his head and yawned. ‘Sorry, not being rude.’ I yawned back at him. ‘Me neither,’ I whispered. ‘Tuck yourself in. Karen won’t be back till six o’clock.’”

Alan looked at me. “More?”

“No more,” I said.

“Just one thing,” Alan said. “Tommy and I’ve been together for nearly four years now. I love him more than I’ve ever loved anyone, in that way. Yeh, there’s sex, there isn’t much we haven’t done. But it’s not the most important thing. Tommy’s got a girlfriend, same one for nearly a year. They have sex, lots of it, he tells me about it. And you know something? I don’t feel jealous, well, not much and not often. I guess I always knew it was going to happen. That’s the way Tommy is. He won’t let himself belong to any one person; maybe I’m the closest to that since his dad left. He still misses his dad. He knows he was a bastard but he can’t help loving him. I don’t grudge him that. He’s entitled to that.”

“And what happens when he goes?”

“I’m not sure,” Alan said. “Maybe everyone goes. Dave went, you went.” He paused. “I’m not looking for another boy. I sort of hope another one doesn’t come along. I hope I can love a grown-up person. I don’t know but I can always hope.”

I pulled Alan towards me. I kissed him on the lips. He opened up to me. We kissed each other wetly, madly, deeply. For the first and last time in my life I kissed Alan Aitken as a lover as well as a friend.

Alan pulled gently away. He looked into my eyes. “It was you, wasn’t it? It was you who told.”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“I’m not sure. Maybe I was trying to protect you.” I didn’t want to talk about this. I felt my kiss was a Judas kiss. I’d betrayed my best friend and I’d never been able to convince myself I did it for his sake. “I’m not sure,” I repeated.

“I know Dave fancied you,” he said. “He probably tried it on with you. No, don’t tell me. I don’t want to know. Do you remember that afternoon? The afternoon we skipped school. Dave was at my house, waiting.” I remembered. I

nodded. "That was his idea. I'd said so much about you. He wanted to meet you. He wanted more. He wanted a threesome. I was hurt when he first said it. But it was Dave, it was you, I couldn't say no. I wish I'd said no. That was the beginning of the end. So I know what Dave was like. But I still don't really understand why. Why you told the police? Why?"

"Because... because..." I didn't want to hurt Alan. I didn't want to lie to him. "Because I thought it was wrong, because you were a boy and he was a man. It didn't feel right. It still doesn't."

"But I told you I started it, I wanted it. It was me who seduced him. Can't you get that through your thick head?" A note of exasperation. A note of anger.

"I know," I said, and I heard the pleading in my voice, "but that doesn't change the way I feel. Maybe it's like the inspector said. Inspector... I can't remember his name. But maybe he was right. Maybe it's the adult who's got to take the responsibility. And you can wait, the boy, the man can wait."

"How long did you wait?" Alan snorted. "How long did you wait for Eric, for Leslie?"

"That's different," I protested. "That's boys with boys."

"It's all a matter of age then? There's a line in the sand. Step over it on Monday and you're a pervert. Step over it on Tuesday and you're a fine pair of lovers. That might make sense to the head but it means fuck all to the heart. Tell you what. I'll go home to Tommy tonight and say 'Hands off. We're playing Scrabble from now on. But just mark the red letter day on your birthday and I'll take you in my arms again. And... and..." I watched the fire in Alan's eyes ebb and die. "The truth, Donny, is I don't know either. I just do what comes naturally, or unnaturally," he smiled, "and hope I can live with the consequences. But when Tommy cuddles into me, when I feel his head under my chin, when I feel his heart beat against mine, I know that I'm his... his Ark, and he can take shelter with me for as long as he wants."

I reached across the table, took Alan's head in my hands, looked into his eyes and whispered, "It's been a long time since you helped me put on my pinafore but I always remember it. And about Dave Mudie, I was jealous because he had you, and because I couldn't share you with anyone else, not with anyone else who might love you as much as I did."

"Thanks for that," smiled Alan. "I needed to know that." We heard a cough behind us. We parted. It was Leslie.

"What a pair you are," he laughed, "but you always were. Is this a private party or can anyone join in?"

We pulled Leslie into our embrace. The three of us exchanged kisses, the kisses of lovers and friends. Then we hung over the balcony railing, sharing the drinks Leslie'd brought.

“Hey, Donny, there’s somebody down there looking for you,” remembered Leslie. “It’s Raymond, Raymond Mac... Mac...”

“MacGregor. Raymond MacGregor,” I suggested.

“That’s the one,” laughed Leslie. “He’s in the buffet room at the back of the hall. Told him I’d tell you if I saw you.”

“Well, you’ve seen me and you’ve told me,” I said. “You two hang on here. I’ll check out how the world’s treated Ray. And boys, be good.”

“Don’t worry,” grinned Alan, “this skinny mother-fucker was never my type.”

Leslie returned the grin. “And this pint-sized Casanova was never mine.” I left them to trade insults and hurried downstairs. For some reason Raymond MacGregor was important to me.

I saw Raymond before he saw me, though it took me a few moments to accept it was Raymond MacGregor I was looking at. Tall, elegant, confident. I’m not sure what I’d expected. At school Raymond was well-built and good-looking but he was also a nonentity, awkward, clumsy, tongue-tied. And so shy he’d blush when asked a simple question in Maths. Everyone assumed he had no opinions because no one had heard him express one. He was a middle-of-the-road plodder, the kind of boy always picked last, who held the jackets, who was pushed to the end of the queue in the dining room, who sat at the end of a bench, who sucked boys off but was himself rarely sucked off. I couldn’t help seeing Raymond’s arse high in the air penetrated again and again by Murray’s big prick, his head bouncing off the cistern.

“It is Ray MacGregor, isn’t it?” I asked touching him on the elbow. He turned and held my gaze. He was at least as tall as Leslie, something over six feet, but there was nothing of Leslie’s boyish gangliness. This man was confident in his own body, his own skin. He blushed; I’d caught him unawares but he took my elbow and moved us away from the group around him.

He moved me towards an empty table. We sat. I looked at Raymond and tried to fill in the empty spaces between then and now. It was impossible. We are all like icebergs bobbing along in an icy ocean. Sometimes we catch sight of each other and for a moment we think we know each other. But what we fail to recognise is that most of us, seven-eighths of us, is below the water line, way deep down in the growing darkness and that we will only rarely, if ever, penetrate the heart of darkness at each other’s core.

I shook away the Scotch maudlin mist and swore off whisky forever, or at least for the rest of the evening.

“Donald. Donald Cameron. Donny.” He said my names so reverentially it was my turn to blush. I turned away from those eyes, no longer sheep’s eyes, but

as large and glittery as a fox's. And yet there was something of the sadness, the kindness I always associated with the boy.

"You're still with Leslie, I see," he said.

"Yes, I am," I said, unable to keep a note of defiance out of my voice.

"I'm glad," he said. "You were made for each other; not by God, perhaps; but certainly made for each other."

I was surprised. We'd plunged into deep waters with no preliminary toe-testing. It isn't in the Scottish nature to reveal the secrets of the heart. Only by living in England, by being an outsider, had I come to understand the Scots mentality. Many think us dull and heavy, slow to communicate, lacking in vivacity and expression. Only on the surface. To understand us, you must share our homes, our hopes, our dreams. A Scot lives in the dark glens and eternal hills of his own imagination; if you are to know us, it is there you must meet us.

"And you? Who were you made for?" In the instant of asking I knew how cruel I was, but Raymond laughed. "Don't you know? Of course you've been away a long time. Why should you know? Why should you care? Perhaps I should have come in uniform tonight."

"In uniform?" The Armed Services. Of course. That was it but that wasn't it.

"Allow me to introduce myself properly," Ray smiled. He reached into his pocket, pulled out something white. Held it up to me. "Meet Father Raymond MacGregor of St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church." Before my eyes was a dog collar, a clerical collar of gleaming white. I almost bowed. "Congratulations, Raymond, Father," I stumbled. "I'd never have guessed..." He laughed. "Neither would I have. But since these mysteries are beyond us, let's pretend we are organising them. And don't forget, I'm always here for confession if you need me." As a son of the Protestant Church of Scotland, that was highly unlikely, but as Mario Citro had drummed into us: you never can tell.

"I'm happy for you, Raymond."

"And I'm happy for you, Donny, happy for both of you. I can't actually give your Union my blessing... ah, what the hell, you have my blessing though I won't ask you to kiss my ring in exchange." That was the first joke, if it was a joke, I'd ever heard from Ray. I hoped it wouldn't be the last. Father Raymond waited for the question I didn't want to ask. "And are you... happy?"

"Am I happy?" he echoed, twisting his fingers round a tumbler. "No, I wouldn't go that far. But I'm not unhappy, and that's more than most people can claim. But I suppose I'm content. Yes, I'd go as far as saying I'm content. There's no Eric in my life. There hasn't been since I left the seminary. There were Erics there, plenty of them, though none, I have to admit, as well-endowed as our Eric. Do you think Mrs Murray appreciates him?" Father Raymond

sipped his whisky, raised an eyebrow, and I knew I'd witnessed his second attempt at humour.

"No, I don't have an Eric in my life," he continued, "but I have my Donnys, two or three of them. Oh, don't worry," he laughed, "I love them but I don't... what's the word?... molest them. Being with them is privilege enough. Sex makes life so complicated. For a priest it makes life impossible." Raymond shook himself, swirled the whisky in his tumbler. "What is it about whisky and the Scots? Maudlin or murderous, that's us, with not much in between."

"I'm sorry, Ray," I whispered.

"Sorry, Donald? Sorry for what? Sorry for being yourself? That's what made you so damn attractive. Excuse the 'damn'. Your damn insistence on being yourself. Why couldn't you have been the Donny I wanted you to be, just once? Once would have been enough."

"I'm sorry I couldn't see who you were. You were right in front of me, and I looked right through you." I sipped at my whisky. "Forgive me."

"Nothing to forgive, dear boy. Nothing to forgive. I was so terrified of being myself. So terrified to admit I could love. So terrified I accepted the sex instead. But it was the love I wanted. And I so wanted it from you. But you were out of reach, so far out of reach." He paused. "Ah well, life goes on and we make the best of it we can. Regrets? Yes, I've had a few, but then again..."

"Too few to mention," I completed for him.

"Well, actually, I was going to say 'no use crying over spilt seed', but 'too few to mention' will serve. Just as well. And, speaking of service, I've got an early morning Mass, so yet again, my dear Donny, I'm going to have to love you and leave you." He drained his glass and we stood up. He stretched out his hand. I took it. Warm, dry, pleasant. We shook hands, smiled, wished each other well and turned to our separate worlds. Tears sprang to my eyes. I promised myself I wouldn't spend my life waking up on my own.

"Quite a turn-up, isn't it?" said Leslie who'd come up behind me. "By the way, before I forget. Alan sends his love. He's off to pick up Tommy. Not sure who Tommy is but when you're up at the end of the month, visiting your mum, Alan says you've got to stay the weekend. Wants you to meet Tommy. Says you can join in the snooker if you want. Think he's a bit pissed. But anyway that's the cryptic message. How are you anyway?"

"Fine," I said, "probably a bit pissed but fine."

"Me, too. Let's get out of here. We've done our duty. A bit early, I know, but let's stroll down by the river. Then back to the hotel. I want to..." I read the desire in his eyes. It mirrored my own. I raised a finger to his lips; he sucked on it. It was time to go.

We strolled by the river. We sat and watched the lights on the far side, a train trundling over the rail bridge, cars sweeping across the road bridge, the river widening into the waiting arms of the open sea.

“Isn’t it time you wrote that book, Donny?” Leslie asked. I didn’t have to ask which book he meant.

“They wouldn’t print it the way I want to write it,” I whispered, kissing the end of his nose.

“Then publish it yourself,” he said. “Fuck it, That’s what you are—a publisher. Even if it’s only for us, write it, publish it. It shouldn’t all just disappear in the mist. There’s lots of people like us out there,” he yawned.

“Like us?” I echoed.

“Yeh, like us. You, me, Eric, Alan, Raymond. They’ve all got their stories. They deserve to be told.”

“But who the hell would want to read about boys falling in love with boys, boys seducing boys, boys fucking boys? People would think it was just some old pervert living out his fantasies in print.”

“But it’s nothing to do with old perverts,” he jabbed back. “You and me, Eric, Alan, Raymond, all the others. We were real boys. We lived real lives. Are you going to let the tail wag the dog? And anyway, even perverts are entitled to their memories. There are people out there who want the truth, and they don’t want it all dressed up in literary tinsel, they want it rough and raw, the way it was. You know something, Donny—sometimes I read a book and the writer’s being coy and cute about what happened, and I want to scream, ‘Just tell it like it is... stop farting around. Just tell it like it is.’ But they don’t. They never do.”

“You mean I should write pornography?” I asked.

“Oh, for fuck’s sake, Donny,” he laughed. “I’m not getting into that old chestnut. I’ve told you pornography is when someone gets exploited for someone else’s profit. Words on a page can’t be pornography. They’re not even the depiction of anything real, not the way a photograph is. Words only happen inside someone’s head. If someone reads a description of two boys making love and finds it pornographic, then it’s their mind that’s pornographic, not the act itself, and not the boys themselves. They’re just doing what boys do. And that’s about as pornographic as Romeo and Juliet making love. Call it what the fuck you want but don’t call it pornography.”

I grabbed Leslie and pulled him into me. “I love you, I love you, I love you,” I breathed in his ear. He laughed and pushed me away. “Hey, if you want to fuck, I’m up for it. Let’s get back to the hotel.”

Later, Leslie sighed and snuggled his head under my chin. “Sleep on that book,” he yawned, “and in the morning tell me how you’re going to begin. Nighty night, loverboy.”

* * *

How to begin.

I lay there in the dark, eyes open, wondering if I dared to begin at the beginning. To bring into the light a ghost I could hardly face in the dark. I ran the beginning through my mind as I'd done a thousand times before:

Six years old, a rocky shore, a sunny summer day, and shadow-filled caves. The man held me in his arms, sat me on his knee, stroked me, and whispered things in my ear that made little or no sense. The words I didn't understand; the feelings thrilled me. The heady mixture of tobacco and tweed, rum and sweat, and the bristles sharp against tender skin.

I knew the man only for a day, but for that warm sunny day he'd played with me down on the shore, showing me how to jump from rock to rock, how to edge towards the inrushing tide, then jump away from its greedy grasp, how to chase tiny crabs into the nooks and crannies of the kelp-strewn rocks. Then when I grew tired, sun-bleached, skin hot and tender, he carried me into a golden cave that caught the shadows, fingers of light playing across its walls as his fingers played over me.

If it was wrong, I had no way of knowing it. I felt safe, secure and wanted. When his lips ran over my chest, my tummy, inside my thighs, to those secret private places, it made him happy at no cost to me. Why he did this did not cross my mind. I snuggled deep into his chest as he held me and made my senses tingle, made my skin goose-bump, my twig standing hot and hard till it jerked between his fingers, and I exploded like sugary-sherbet into the future. Then he was gone, and I was left to make my way home alone.

I kissed Leslie's forehead and closed my eyes. I knew I would sleep long and well.

I was home at last.

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