

This Way Up –
A Novella

6

BOYS WILL BE BOYS

**LITTLE
BIG
MEN**

Traditional
English
Schoolboy
Tale

**TWO
NOVELLAS**

Chris Kent

BOYS WILL BE BOYS:
Two Novellas

Little Big Men

LITTLE BIG MEN

A novella by

Chris Kent

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For C. K.

Wherever he is



LITTLE BIG MEN

A Novella by **Chris Kent**

Prologue

I shall be careful to mortify my feelings severely, keeping them within the limits of christian modesty; especially shall I discipline my eyes, which st ambrose called insidious snares, and st anthony of padua thieves of the soul.

**A prayer for boys hung over the door
at the entrance to New Carthage**

HOME SWEET HOME

"Please, sir, is this New Carthage?" asked a ragged boy of the man who opened the great gate at which the omnibus had deposited him.

"Yes, indeed. Who sent you?" said the man, laying a friendly hand upon the boy's shoulder.

"Mr Blackwood. I've got a letter."

"All right. Go straight up to the house and hand it in. They'll look after you," he said, ruffling the boy's hair and giving him a parting pinch on his tight little bottom.

The man spoke pleasantly, and Adam went on, feeling much cheered by his words. Through the soft spring rain that fell on sprouting grass and budding trees, the boy saw a large square house before him, a hospitable-looking house, with an old-fashioned porch, broad steps, and lights shining in many windows. Pausing a moment before he rang, heart-racing, Adam saw many little shadows dancing on the walls within and the happy hum of young voices. Could it be true that some of the light and warmth and security within was for a homeless street urchin like him?

"I pray the gentleman will see me," he thought, and gave a timid rap on the great bronze knocker, which was in the form of a jovial ram's head.

A rosy-cheeked lad opened the door, looked Adam up and down, and smiled as he took the letter silently proffered. The lad seemed used to receiving strange boys, for he pointed to a seat in the hall, and said, with a cheery nod, "Sit down there and drip on the rug while I take this in to the master."

Adam did as he was bid, and found plenty to amuse him while he waited. He gazed curiously around him, enjoying the view, yet glad to do so unobserved in the dusky recess by the door.

The house seemed to swarm with boys, beguiling the rainy twilight with all sorts of amusements. There were boys everywhere, 'upstairs and downstairs and in my master's chamber', apparently, for various open doors showed pleasant groups of big boys, little boys, and middle-sized boys in all stages of relaxation, not to say effervescence. Two large rooms on the right

were evidently school-rooms; desks, maps, blackboards and books were scattered about; an open fire burned in the hearth, and several indolent lads lay on their backs before it, engaged in such animated discussion that their slippers waved in the air.

A flavour of toast was in the air, also hints of baked apple pie, very tantalizing to one hungry little nose and stomach.

The hall, however, presented the most inviting prospect of all, for a brisk game of tag was going on in the upper entry. One landing was devoted to marbles, the other to checkers, while the stairs were occupied by a boy reading aloud, another lying along the step, head in the reader's lap, listening, two puppies, a cat, and a constant succession of boys sliding down the banisters, to the detriment of their clothes and danger to their limbs.

One very lively boy came down so swiftly that he could not stop himself and fell off the banisters, landing at Adam's feet with a mighty thump. Adam gazed down at the fallen rider, expecting to find him half-dead, or only half-alive. The boy, however, looked up, winked, and lay calmly studying the new face with a surprised "Hullo! I'm Truan Tarrant."

"Hullo!" returned Adam, not knowing what else to say, and thinking that form or reply both brief and easy.

"You'll be a new boy," stated the recumbent youth, without stirring.

"Don't know yet. Don't know if they'll have me."

Truan sprang to his legs like one suddenly remembering the obligations of hospitality.

"Stand up," he said.

Adam stood up.

"Turn around."

Adam turned around.

Truan gave a low whistle.

"Don't worry," he said. "They'll have you." He turned his gaze up the stairs and called out, "I say, Toby, here's a new boy. Come and look after him. I'm busy." So saying, the lively Truan returned to his sport with unabated relish.

At his call, the boy reading on the stairs, looked up with a pair of big brown eyes, and after an instant's pause, as if a little shy, motioned his companion away, put the book under his arm

and came soberly down to greet the newcomer. Adam found something very attractive in the pleasant face of this slender, doe-eyed boy.

The boys introduced themselves.

"Have you seen Master Myles?" asked Toby, as if that was some part of an important ceremony.

"I haven't met anybody yet but you and Truan," explained Adam. "I was told to wait, so I'm waiting."

"Did Uncle Blackie send you?" continued Toby, politely, but solemnly.

"Mr Blackwood did."

"That's Uncle Blackie; and he always sends nice boys."

Gratified at the remark, Adam smiled in his special way that lit up his whole face. He did not know what to say next, so the two boys stood staring at one another in friendly silence till a little boy came up with a golliwog in his arms. The newcomer was very like Toby, only not so tall, and he had a plumper, rosier face, and grey-blue eyes.

"This is my brother, Tommy," announced Toby, as if presenting a rare and precious creature. "Tommy, this is Adam. Adam, this is Tommy."

The boys nodded to one another, the younger boy's face dimpling with pleasure, as he said, affably, "I hope you'll stay. I hope you'll play with me. Sometimes I have to play with myself. We have ever such good times here, don't we, Toby?"

Toby frowned and stepped between the boys.

"How talkative you are, Tommy," he said.

"New Carthage seems a very nice place indeed," observed Adam, feeling that he must respond to these amiable young persons.

"Now, off you go and play," the older brother told the younger. "I shall escort Adam to Master Myles."

Tommy disappeared upstairs, banging the golliwog's head on the stairs as he went, though there appeared no conscious intention to inflict damage on his little black companion.

With a protective air, Toby took Adam by the hand and led him into a side room, where a jolly gentleman was frolicking with two little boys on a sofa.

"Here is Adam, the new boy, Master Myles," cried Toby, drawing Adam forward to the sofa where the two little boys sprawled across the gentleman's lap and were still.

"So this is my new boy? Uncle Blackwood was right! I am glad to see you, my dear, and hope that you'll be happy here," said the master of the house, drawing Adam to him, and stroking back the hair from his forehead with a kind hand and a fatherly look, which made Adam's lonely little heart yearn towards him.

Master Myles was not only a handsome man, younger than might have been anticipated, but had that merry sort of face that never seems to have forgotten certain childish ways, any more than his voice and manner had. These things, hard to describe, but plain to see and feel, made him a genial, comfortable kind of person, easy to get on with, and generally 'a good brick', as boys would say. It has been said that some masters are men amongst boys, and boys amongst men; Master Myles was that curious creature who managed to remain a boy amongst boys, whatever age he was.

He saw the little tremble of Adam's rosy lips as he smoothed his hair, and his keen eyes grew softer, but he only drew the ragged figure nearer and said, smiling, "Up, boys, and meet our new little brother, Adam Flood, Adam."

The little wrestlers obeyed at once, righted themselves, stood up and extended their hands to Adam. The boys shook hands with solemn smiles, as boys everywhere are accustomed to do. "Now then, Truan and Timmy, run upstairs, run a hot bath—no need to panic, it is for Adam, not for you—and find a cough-bottle and liniment." The boys exchanged telegrams with their eyes and sprinted off to be of service.

Master Myles turned to Adam. "Off with your shoes this minute, Adam Flood!" he ordered. "I'll have some dry things ready for you in a jiffy," he cried, bustling about so energetically that Adam found himself in a cosy armchair with dry socks and warm slippers on his feet before he had time to say Jack Robinson, if he had wanted to try. "Thank you, sir," he said, and said it so gratefully that Master Myles' eyes grew soft again, and he said something merry because he felt so tender to see a boy so vulnerable.

"Toby, two glasses of blackcurrant cordial, if you please," he instructed Adam's self-appointed protector. "You shall drink with Adam, then see him upstairs to his hot bath, tend his needs and answer the thousand and one questions he is bursting to ask." Toby slid like a shadow to his task. "Meanwhile, young sir," he said, turning to Adam, "I believe you have a communication for me."

"Yes, sir. Indeed I do, sir," said Adam, hurriedly fumbling in the one ragged pocket that remained in his ragged trousers. He pulled out a rather grubby envelope and passed it to Master Myles.

The principal and proprietor of Adam's new home took the letter and slipped out the single page it contained. He unfolded the page and read it slowly as Adam watched him with anxious eyes. Even when Toby pressed a glass of delicious blackcurrant cordial into his hand, Adam did not take his eyes for a moment away from the face of his blessed benefactor.

In the letter which Mr Blackwood had sent with Adam, he had written:

Dear Myles, Here is a boy after your own heart. The poor lad is an orphan now, tired and friendless and without any family of whom he knows. He has been a street-musician. I found him in a cellar, mourning for his dead father and his lost violin. I have kept him for a week. He remains unspoiled. He is lad of singular innocence and wholly ignorant of the ways of the world. I think there is something special in him, and I have a fancy that between us we may mould this little man to the better fortunes of us all. Cure his over-tasked body, help his neglected mind, and when he is ready, I'll see if he is a genius or only a boy with sufficient talent to earn his daily bread. - Blackie.

Master Myles looked up from the letter. In spite of the ragged clothes, awkward manners, and a dirty face, he saw much about Adam that pleased him. He was a slim, but seemingly strong boy, with blue eyes, a good forehead under the rough, neglected hair; an anxious face, scared at times, as if he expected hard words

or blows; a sensitive mouth that trembled when a kind glance fell on him; while a gentle speech called up a look of gratitude, very sweet to see. "Bless the dear lad," he thought. "He shall fiddle all day long if he likes." The smile on his face communicated itself to Adam, who relaxed, returned the smile if shyly, and sipped at the heart-warming cordial.

Words were few since few words were needed, but as the boys sipped the last of their cordial, Master Myles spoke more briskly: "Now, Toby, take Adam upstairs. His bath will be run. Make sure he has a fresh towel, no, two towels."

"Shall I help him scrub?" asked Toby eagerly.

Seeking the look of a frightened fawn flit across Adam's face, the master said, "No. Adam is big enough to scrub himself. And I have need of you here. But you will return to the bathroom in fifteen minutes, take fresh clothes to Adam, and bring him to supper. Off you, lads. And, Adam, leave your old things on the bathroom floor. You will not be needing them again."

Twenty minutes later, a great gong rang, and a loud tramping through the hall announced supper. Bashful, Adam quaked at the thought of meeting many strange boys but Toby took him by the elbow and escorted him into the dining room cynosure of all eyes. He wore a baggy pair of black cotton trousers and a white open-necked shirt that set off his glowing skin and dark damply-sleeked hair. He wore the same slippers and as yet no socks.

Twelve boys, six on each side, stood behind their chairs, prancing with impatience to begin, and losing interest in Adam as soon as the smell of hot pea soup reached their quivering nostrils.

"This is our new boy, Adam Flood," announced Master Myles. "After supper you can say, How do you do?" A murmur of welcome ran around the table. The master sat down at the head of the table, Toby on his right, Adam on his left. The boys whisked into their seats, trying to be orderly and failing utterly. Two maids swished into the dining room bearing bowls of soup. The boys fell upon their spoons and the fresh bread scattered in abundance around the table.

Master Myles generally succeeded in having the lads behave

well at meals times. for his rules were few and sensible, and the boys, appreciating the freedom, did their best to obey. But there are times when hungry boys cannot be repressed without real cruelty, and Saturday evening after a half-holiday was one of those times. It did seem now and again that the roof was in danger of flying off, but it never did, for a word from Master Myles could at any time produce a lull, and if necessary absolute silence, for the lads had learned that liberty did not mean licence. So in spite of many dark predictions, the institution flourished, and manners and morals were insinuated without the boys knowing exactly how it happened.

The soup was followed by roast beef, potatoes and broccoli; this followed by treacle pudding and/or trifle, washed down by flagons of milk. Conversation was replaced by a choir of assorted munching, crunching, and sighs of contentment. The meal over, the entire party, maids excepted, repaired to the main lounge, where boys and man sprawled themselves around on sofas, armchairs and carpets before a log fire for the post-prandial review of the day, which, at weekends in particular, often gave way to impromptu entertainment.

There was a momentary squabble for places beside Master Myles on the sofa, but good grace asserted itself in time to allow Adam that privilege on his first night at New Carthage; Truan bagged the other side.

The general chatter was interrupted by the entry of a maid carrying a violin. She handed it to the master and left as gracefully as she'd come. Master Myles in turn presented the violin to Adam, saying, "We have a little band, but we have wanted a violin for some time. If you feel up to it, my lad, give us a little tune." He expected the boy would hesitate, but Adam seized the old fiddle at once, and handled it with such loving care, it was plain to see that music was his passion.

"I'll do the best I can, sir," was all he said. He stood, slipped the fiddle under his chin, then drew the bow across the strings, as if eager to hear the dear notes again. There was a general murmur of approval around the room.

After a little tuning of the instrument, Adam played softly to himself, forgetting everything in his relief and delight. It was

only a simple negro melody such as street-musicians play, but it caught the ears of the boys at once and silenced them, till they sat listening with surprise and pleasure. The tune tugged at their heart-strings, for like Adam, they knew what it was like to be abandoned, neglected, abused and alone. Adam played away and never minded anyone, while his eyes shone, his cheeks glowed, and his slim fingers flew as he hugged the old fiddle and made it sing the language that he loved.

A hearty round of applause rewarded him better than a shower of pennies when he stopped and glanced about him as if to say, "I've done my best; please like it."

"Bravo! First rate!" cried Truan, who considered, on the principle of finders-keepers, Adam to be his personal protégé.

"We have found a first fiddle for the band at last," announced Master Myles, who added, "Come now, Adam, play something which we can sing."

It was the proudest, happiest half hour of the poor boy's life when he was led to the place of honour by the piano. The lads gathered round him, eyed him speculatively, and waited eagerly to hear him fiddle again. They chose songs Adam knew, and, after a few comic false starts, they got going: piano, flute and violin leading a chorus of voices that made the old roof ring again. It was too much for Adam, more feeble than he knew; as the final chorus died away, his face began to work, he laid the violin on the piano, and turning to the curtained window, hid his face and sobbed like the child that he was.

"It's all right, my dear, it's all right," whispered Master Myles, holding the stricken boy by the shoulders.

"You are all so kind, and it's been so long since. . .," sobbed Adam, coughing till he was breathless.

"Come with me, boy. You must go to bed and rest. You are worn out, and this place is too noisy for you." The master ushered the boy to his private parlour, where he let him cry himself out. Then he won the boy to tell him all his troubles.

"My child," he said, "you have got a father now, and this is your home. Don't think of those sad times any more, but get well and happy. This place is made for all sorts of boys to have a good time in, and to learn how to help themselves and be useful young

men, I hope. You shall have as much music as you want, only you must get strong first. Now come up to Nursey and have another bath, and then go to bed, and tomorrow we will lay some nice little plans together."

The day had been full of surprises for young Adam Flood, and they were by no means over. For 'Nursey' turned out to be a young man, with an odd accent and a face so round and cheery that it looked like a sort of sun.

"This is Nursey Taylor," explained Master Myles. "Nursey has been with us for five, no, six years now. He has a gift for looking after boys, and we appointed him matron, so that he could stay on with us." He added in a whisper, "Nursey is none too bright, but he has a heart of gold, and loves all his boys."

As Master Myles spoke, Nursey whipped off Adam's clothes, leaving the boy standing there as glorious as Nature intended, while the bathtub filled with warm, splashing, sparkling water. Adam was mortified and hid his private self as best he could, but realising that master and matron were apparently ignoring him, he relaxed, sat on the edge of the tub, and played with the water. There were six tubs, besides foot-baths, basins, douche-pipes, and all manner of contrivances for cleanliness.

Then Adam climbed into the tub and lay back as Nursey soaped his back with a sudsy face towel. Adam lay there, eyes closed, luxuriating in the enveloping warmth as Nursey stroked his neck, shoulders and back with the soapy cloth. He felt himself drifting away. He felt the cloth stroke his ankles, calves, legs and inner thighs, but was too pleasantly wearied to become alarmed.

"What long arms you have, Nursey?" thought Adam to himself. He forced one eye open and realised Master Myles was soaping his legs and thighs. "How kind, how very kind," he thought, then panicked as he felt his most private self stir and stiffen beneath the soapy water.

"Don't let them see it. Oh, please don't let them see it," prayed Adam. "I am a bad person, truly I am bad. This is how I repay their kindness." The boy's prayer was answered, at least in part, as the head of his penis popped through the bathwater.

The door burst open. In trooped five of the younger boys. They turned on their baths, stripped and stood around chattering

like monkeys at a tea party. Master Myles and Nurse Taylor rose to greet them. Adam relaxed and watched the performances of the two men, who scrubbed, clean-night-gowned, and bundled the boys off to their dormitory. "On Saturday nights," explained the master, "we scrub all the little lads first, and pack them away in bed before the bigger chaps get finished."

By the time the scrubbing was finished, Adam was out of his tub, towelled dry, and into the white and green-striped flannel nightgown on the wooden chair near the tub. No sooner had the 'little 'uns' been shepherded away by Master Myles than a new detachment of boys arrived. While Nurse trimmed his hair, Adam sat on the wooden chair and watched the new arrivals make as much splashing noise as a school of young dolphins at play. He marvelled at the total lack of concern the boys showed about their own nakedness, but was a little embarrassed by his own interest in two or three of the bodies, which were markedly more mature than his own.

"You are to share a room with Truan, Toby and Tommy," explained a newly-returned Master Myles, "since you have already become friends with them."

The news delighted Adam. As he lay in bed, his heart bursting with happiness, he could hardly wait for the arrival of his new-found friends. His eyelids drooped and he might have slipped away if a momentary lull in the aquatic exercises next door had not been followed by the sudden appearance of pillows flying past and through the open door. The battle raged in several rooms, all down the upper hall, and even surged at intervals into his own room when some hard-pressed, be-gowned warrior took refuge in there. No one seemed to mind this explosion in the least; no one forbade it, or even looked surprised. Nurse went on hanging up towels, sorting undergarments, and looking out clean clothes, as calmly as if perfect order reigned. Nay, he even chased one daring boy out of the bathroom and hurled after him the pillow he had slyly thrown at him.

Nurse entered Adam's room—what a splendid thought: "Adam's room," thought Adam—and laid the boys' Sunday clothes out.

"Won't they hurt themselves?" asked Adam, who lay laughing

with all his might.

"Oh dear, no!" exclaimed Nursey. "We always allow one pillow-fight Saturday night. The cases are changed tomorrow. And it gets up a glow after the boys' baths. I rather like it myself."

From below, the gong sounded twice.

Silence fell almost before the final reverberations died away, and the boys staggered to their rooms.

"Time up, boys," said Nursey. "Into bed, every man Jack, or pay the forfeit!"

"May I ask what is the forfeit?" asked Adam, sitting up in his eagerness to know what happened to those wretches who disobeyed this most peculiar, but public-spirited school matron.

"Lose their fun next time," answered Nursey Taylor. "I give five minutes to settle down, then put out the lights, and I expect order and silence. You are honourable lads, and, for the most part, you keep your words." He swept from the room.

That was evident, for the battle had ended as abruptly as it began—a parting shot, a final cheer, and a few challenges for 'next time'. The order prevailed, and nothing but an occasional giggle or suppressed whisper broke the quiet which followed the Saturday-night frolic. Nursey Taylor returned, kissed each boy on the forehead, put out the lights, and left his charges to happy dreams of life at New Carthage.

There was an exchange of goodnights in Adam's room, then the four boys settled down to sleep. At least three of them did, for Adam, tired as he was, had become a little too excited to sleep. He lay there, reviewing the events of the day in his mind, hardly daring to believe he'd found a home at last, and such a jolly one, too.

Adam's review reached the bathroom and he smiled as he remembered the naked boys leaping and frolicking around him. Then he felt himself blushing in the darkness, and he wriggled under his blanket as if, by this sudden movement, he could dismiss the awkward heat that spread not only over his face but across his entire body, centering itself in the growing hardness in his lap. Adam knew for the first time in his life that he was in the presence of temptation; he could feel it beat in the throb of excitement at the left side of his chest, in his private parts. The

blushes that flowed across his body grew more exciting than alarming. His own warm hand, as if filled with a desire of its own, stretched to touch and stroke as he lay trembling in his bed.

A stirring in the bed not a yard from his own made Adam snatch his hand away like a guilty thing. He opened his eyes just wide enough to peer into the darkness. Toby slid from his bed and took two steps to the next bed where the blanket was thrown aside. He slipped in beside Truan, and the blanket was restored. Indecipherable whispering was followed by indeterminate rustling. Two shadowy things landed on Toby's bed; whispering turned to giggles.

Adam sighed, and rolled to face the other way.

"How good, how kind my friends are!" thought Adam. "Surely Toby has had a bad dream. Surely Truan is comforting him. And I lie here, bad, bad to the bone. But I will learn to be good. I will learn to be like the other boys at New Carthage Home. I will. I will." And on that thought, Adam Flood at last slid into the deep, dreamless sleep that he deserved so well.

BOYS WITH TOYS

While Adam takes a good sleep, I will tell my readers something about the boys among whom he found himself when he woke up.

To begin with, Hans was a tall lad of sixteen, a regular German, big, blond, and bookish, also very domestic, amiable and musical.

Emil was different, being quick-tempered, restless, and enterprising, bent on going to sea, for the blood of the old Vikings stirred in his veins and could not be tamed. Master Myles promised that Emil should go to sea when he was sixteen and set him to studying navigation, gave him stories of good and famous admirals and heroes to read, and let him lead the life of a frog in river, pond and brook when lessons were done.

Toby was one of the boys who show plainly the effect of intelligent love and care, for soul and body worked harmoniously together. Before the tragic accident, his mother had cherished his innocent, loving heart while his father had watched over the physical growth of his boy and kept his little body straight and strong on wholesome food, exercise and sleep. Toby was a serious, yet cheery boy, quite unconscious that he was unusually bright and beautiful, yet quick to appreciate intelligence or beauty in other boys.

Tommy was sunshine and charm. His fringe flopped around his eyes, his trousers hung low on his hips, his socks gathered more holes than a Swiss cheese.

Rob was an energetic morsel of a boy, who seemed to have discovered the secret of perpetual motion, for he was never still. Fortunately, he was not mischievous nor very brave, so he kept out of trouble pretty well and vibrated between Toby and Tom like an affectionate pendulum with a lively tick. Rob was a chatterbox.

Timmy was as yet too young to play a very important part in the affairs of New Carthage, yet he had his sphere and filled it beautifully. Everybody felt the need of a pet at times, and Timmy was always ready to accommodate, for kissing and cuddling suited him excellently. Master Myles seldom stirred

without him, so he had his middle finger in all the domestic pies, and most boys found them all the better for it.

Dick Brown, and Adolphus or Dolly Plummer, were two ten-year-olds. Dolly stuttered badly, due to unfortunate youthful experiences, and Dick's affliction was a crooked back; yet, he bore his burden so cheerfully that Toby once asked, "Do humps make people good-natured? I'd like one if they do." Dick was always merry, and did his best to be like the other boys, for a plucky spirit lived in his afflicted body. Dolly, on the other hand, was physically well-endowed for his age, but otherwise quite ordinary; yet, he flourished at New Carthage and went through his daily duties and pleasures with placid content and propriety.

Jack Ford was a sharp, rather sly lad, whose father, a gambler, had been found floating face down in the river; his mother had never been traced. Many men would have thought him a smart boy, but Master Myles did not like his way of illustrating that word, and thought his unboyish keenness for money as much an affliction as Dolly's stutter or Dick's hump.

Ned Barker was like a thousand other boys of fourteen, all legs, blunder and bluster. He bragged a good deal about what he could do, but seldom did much to prove it, was not brave, and was given to telling tales. He was apt to bully the small boys and flatter the big ones, and without being at all bad, was just the sort of fellow who could very easily be led astray.

Spoiled by an over-indulgent mother, who stuffed him with sweetmeats till she 'disappeared' to Europe, George Cole had been, at ten, a pale, puffy boy, dull, fretful and lazy. However, during his two years at New Carthage, he had been weaned from sweet things, come to love exercise, and was turning into a remarkably handsome young man. It was improvements such as George's which convinced the annual inspection that there was really something remarkable in New Carthage air.

Billy Ward was what the Scotch tenderly call an 'innocent', for though thirteen years old, he was like a child of six. He had been an unusually intelligent boy, and his father had hurried him on too fast, giving him all sorts of hard lessons, and expecting him to absorb knowledge as a Strasburg goose does the food crammed down its throat. The little fellow's brain had 'burst',

and in a paroxysm of guilt, Billy's father had thrown himself under the 9.15 express, abandoning his son to the tender mercies of the state, which on this occasion had been wise enough to entrust him to New Carthage and Master Myles.

Truan Tarrant was the scapegrace of the school, and the most trying little scapegrace that ever lived. He was as full of mischief as a monkey, yet so good-hearted that one could not help forgiving his tricks; so scatter-brained that words went by him like the wind, yet so penitent for every misdeed that it was impossible to keep a straight face when he vowed tremendous vows of reformation, or proposed all sorts of queer punishments to be inflicted upon himself. Truan was always being carried in from the grounds half-dead, but nothing ever subdued him, and he rose from every downfall with redoubled vigour.

These were the boys, and they lived together as happily as twelve lads could, studying and playing, working and squabbling, falling out and making up, fighting faults and cultivating virtues in the good old-fashioned way. Boys in other institutions probably learned more from books, but less of that wisdom that prepares men for life.

These then were the boys amongst whom Adam woke up early on the first morning of his first full day at New Carthage. Dawn had hardly broken, and Adam would hardly have chosen to wake up at so early an hour, but Nature called, and his body answered.

Adam slid from his bed and padded to the door. Turn left. There was the bathroom and the facilities he sought. Adam was a novice and turned right, edging along as quietly as his excited state would allow him.

He reached the door and turned the handle, opening a door a crack just as he heard a gasp, then a groan. Someone was in pain. Adam put his eye to the crack and looked in. It was not the bathroom; it was a bedroom. Straight ahead was a single bed, to the left of which a chair on which nightgowns had been thrown untidily.

Dim light glowed from a bedside table lamp. Two men were moving on the bed, the top sheet dangling to the floor. A tangle of naked limbs. "Yes, yes," groaned one of them in an accent Adam immediately recognised.

Nurse Taylor! He was lying face downwards, beneath the other man. Nurse Taylor was breathing very rapidly. He gave a cry of pain and raised his head from the pillow. "Give it to me, darling," he gasped. "Give it to me." The arse of the man above him rose and fell, thrusting faster, thrusting harder.

For a moment the shock of what he saw paralysed Adam. His stomach lurched, he felt he might vomit. Numb, bewildered, he turned and stumbled the way he'd come, past his room, to the bathroom door. In the bathroom, as he stood at the urinal, his legs quivered so violently that he leaned on the wall with one hand as he pissed, a stream of yellow, splattering onto the ceramic tiles.

A few minutes later he lay in the safety of his bed, trembling so violently that a return to sleep was impossible. Try as he did, he could not prevent his mind returning to the scene he had witnessed, a scene which made so little sense. Though he did not fully understand it, Adam knew the image was wrong, wicked, evil, but he could not break away from it.

Turning in his bed, he saw that Toby had returned to his own bed. The boy lay there, sleeping soundly, the first fingers of dawn stroking his cheek. Still Adam could not break away from the image; his entire body blushed at what he remembered; his penis betrayed him, stiffening without his touch. With a sigh Adam gave into temptation and stroked the hardness that burned his belly, all the while his gaze fixed upon Toby's angelic face.

This way he fell asleep, and in the morning proper, awakened by the rising boys, he convinced himself that everything had been a dream—except the wet stain upon his nightgown.

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

Adam flew out of bed and dressed himself with great satisfaction in the trousers, shirt and socks he found on the chair. They were not new, being half-worn garments donated by friends of New Carthage, and Master Myles was delighted to accept such cast-off feathers for the stray robins who strayed into his nest. They were hardly on when Truan appeared in a high state of clean collar and escorted Adam down to breakfast.

The sun was shining into the dining-room on the well-spread table, and the flock of hungry, hearty lads who gathered round it. Adam observed they were much more orderly than they had been the night before, and everyone stood silently behind his chair until Master Myles, having said grace, took his place at the head of the table. Then all sat down to enjoy the Sunday-morning breakfast of coffee, steak and potatoes, instead of the bread and milk fare with which they usually satisfied their young appetites. There was much pleasant talk while the knives and forks rattled briskly. As he listened, Adam thought it seemed as if this day must be a very pleasant one, for he loved the quiet, and there was a cheerful sort of hush over everything that pleased him very much. In spite of his rough life, the boy possessed the sensitive nerves that belong to a music-loving nature.

"Now, my lads, get your morning chores done, and let me find you ready for church when the bus comes," said Master Myles. "But you, Adam, are still blue around the eyes. You shall stay indoors today. May I have a volunteer to spend this Sunday morning with Adam whilst we are at prayer?"

Around the table every hand shot up.

"You, Truan, you shall have the privilege. And besides Adam, you Billy, and you Timmy shall remain at home. I detect the sniffles from you, and I wish everyone to be in the best of health for the holiday that will soon be upon us. No mischief, mind you. Nursey Taylor will be with us to tend to the needs of your youngest brothers; therefore, you stay-at-homes must be on your best honour. You have earned my trust; do not abuse it."

Everyone scattered to his task, for each had some daily duty, and was expected to perform it faithfully. Sunday was the maids'

day-off, so the boys brought wood and water, brushed the steps, and ran errands for the master. Others fed the pet animals, and did chores about the barn with Hans. Tom washed the cups and Toby wiped them, for the brothers liked to work together. Even Timmy had his job to do, trotting to and fro, putting napkins away, and pushing chairs into places. For half an hour the lads buzzed about like a hive of bees, then the bus drove round, and Nurse Taylor, appearing at last, ushered the boys on board as Master Myles counted heads. Off they went for the three-mile drive to church in town.

As soon as the bus had disappeared over the hill, Truan turned to Adam. "Houses are houses," he said, "so come and look at the garden, and the barn, and the menagerie."

"What is the menagerie?" asked Adam, as they trotted along the drive encircling the house.

"We all have pets, you see, and we keep 'em in the corn-barn, and call it the menagerie. Here we are. Isn't my guinea-pig a beauty?" and Truan proudly presented one of the ugliest specimens of that pleasing tribe that Adam had ever seen.

"I know a boy with dozens of 'em, and he said he'd give me one, only I haven't any place to keep it. Each of us is allowed one animal. It is white with black spots, a regular rouser, and maybe I could get it for you if you'd like it," said Truan.

"I'd like it ever so much," said Adam, "as long as they can live together and not fight."

"Done!" said Truan. "Those white mice are Rob's, Hans gave 'em to him. The rabbits are Ned's and the bantams outside are Justin's. That box thing is Toby's turtle-tank, only he hasn't got any turtles yet."

"What's in this box?" asked Adam, stopping before a large deep wooden crate, half full of earth.

"Worms. That's Jack Ford's worm-shop. He digs heaps of 'em here, and when we want any for fishing, we buy some from Jack."

"Who owns the dogs?" asked Adam.

"The big dog is Emil's. His name is Columbus. The white pup is Rob's, and the yellow one is Timmy's. A man was going to drown them in our pond, but Master Myles wouldn't let him. They do well enough for little chaps, I suppose, but I don't think much

of them myself. Their names are Castor and Pollux."

Adam was puzzled.

"I thought you said that each boy was allowed only one animal," he said.

"That's true," said Truan.

"But it's clear to me that some boys have more than one pet," said Adam.

"That's true, too," said Truan.

He laughed at the look of puzzlement on the new boy's face.

"New Carthage has its secrets," said Truan mysteriously, "and you can't learn them all in a day. Now, climb that ladder and pop your head through the trapdoor."

Adam did as he was bid. He climbed the ladder, put his head through the trapdoor and took a long look at the pretty doves billing and cooing in their spacious loft. Some were on their nests, some bustling in and out, and some were sitting at their doors, while many went flying from the sunny rooftop to the straw-strewn farmyard. Adam sighed. It was beautiful, it was all so beautiful. If someone had told him, he'd died and gone to heaven, he would have believed him then and there.

He climbed carefully down the ladder, putting foot to earth just as another thought struck him.

"I say, Truan, where on earth are Billy and Timmy? I haven't seen them since the bus went over New Carthage Hill. Where on earth can they be?"

Truan did not answer at once. He stood there, pawing the earth with his toe. Then he spoke. "I know where they are. It's not a mystery, but it is a secret." Adam was intrigued. "Oh, do tell, Truan," he said. "I'm not a tell-tale. I know how to keep a secret. You're my friend, you can trust me."

"Come on then," said Truan at last. "But you must keep this a secret. They're not doing any harm. Just being silly. But it's best nobody else knows."

Adam followed Truan back into the house. Upstairs they went, turning left past the bathroom and on past two more doors.

"Hush," said Truan, as he opened the third door, ushered Adam in, and closed the door ever so quietly behind them. They were in a bedroom, a huge, spacious bedroom, occupied by a

huge, spacious double bed and some fine antique furniture. "This is Master Myles' bed," whispered Truan. "You must never, but never come in here without an invitation."

"But you..." protested Adam, who was cut off by Truan's finger on his lips. "Come over here with me."

Truan led Adam across the room. A full-length wardrobe mirror was fixed to the wall. Truan curled his fingers around the edge of the mirror and pulled. It swung away from the wall to reveal a glass panel, slightly smoky, but clear enough to see into the room beyond.

It was another bedroom, perhaps a guest bedroom, huge and spacious; and in the middle of the room, a double bed, huge and spacious. And on the bed were two boys wrestling!

"I don't think they can hear us," whispered Truan, "but best not to take chances. Just watch." Adam stepped up to the mirror and watched.

Billy and Timmy were the boys on the bed. It took Adam a few moments to accept what his eyes were seeing. Both boys were wrestling, and both boys were naked! As they turned each other over, Adam caught glimpses of two snakes, a thick four-inch snake that swung between Billy's legs, and a smaller three-inch snake that stuck straight out from Timmy's lap. Billy's snake seemed to grow from a bush of curly black hair; Timmy's smaller snake was completely hairless.

There was a sudden flurry on the bed, and Billy had pinned the smaller boy below him. They lay cheek to cheek, chest to chest, tummy to tummy, arched hips against arched hips. Billy's bottom began to turn in circles as he ground himself into the boy below; then his bottom rose and fell, and Adam could see that Billy's snake was growing, too. Each time he rose it seemed longer, harder, fiercer, more urgent. Adam could not decide where to look: the boys' faces or in their laps. The hunger was the same. Mouths open, hair damp with sweat, smooth cheek sliding against smooth cheek, they pressed their bodies into each other.

Billy slid down the smaller boy's body, his wet tongue tracing the route, mouth pausing to kiss the boy's neck, his chest, his starfish nipples, his curving tummy, the angles in his hips, the

path to his little cock that stood hard and fast.

Adam felt a hand slide across his own hardness. Temptation had returned; his body had surrendered. His penis, his dick, was stiff, throbbing, pulsating against the fingers... Truan's fingers! Adam wanted to push him away. This was wrong, wrong, but then why did it have to feel so good? He felt Truan's lap push against his bottom, grinding against him, as the boy's fingers wound round his cock. In the glass, Adam saw his face imprinted on the image of the naked boys in the next room, saw Truan's lips press against his neck. Yes, yes...

No!

Pushing back violently, Adam sent Truan flying. He missed the bed and landed on the floor with a thump. Adam expected the boy to be furious, but he lay there grinning, sprawled, legs akimbo, his hard cock tenting his thin baggy trousers. Truan burst into laughter, his voice like the Sunday morning bells.

Beyond the mirror came the drowned noises of confusion. Adam looked and saw the naked wrestlers grab their clothes and scurry pell mell from the room. Seconds later the sound of the bathroom door slammed, echoing through the house. Adam, regaining a little composure, stepped to Truan, stretched out his hand and helped him to his feet. The boy could hardly stand for laughing.

"It's not funny," gasped Adam. "It's not funny. It's Sunday. It's the day of rest!"

His solemn remarks sent Truan off into another paroxysm of laughter. "You're right," he said. "You're absolutely right. So, let's go and rest. That is, if we are still friends."

Adam looked at Truan. His laughter was infectious. Adam giggled, "Yes, still friends."

"Come on then," Truan said. "I'll show you my secret place."

"No wrestling," said Adam.

"No wrestling," agreed Truan.

There's a certain old willow-tree that overhangs the babbling little brook that runs through New Carthage. It was to this tree that Truan led Adam. From the fence it was an easy scramble into a wide niche between three big branches, which had been cut off to send out from year to year a crowd of slender twigs,

till a green canopy rustled overhead. Here six spars of wood had been fixed to provide a more-or-less comfortable platform.

"This is Toby's and my private place; we made it, and nobody can come up unless we let 'em, except Tom, now and again." Adam looked with delight from the babbling brown water below to the green arch above, where bees were making a musical murmur as they feasted on the long yellow blossoms that filled the air with sweetness. Birds sang their naive harmonies.

"Oh, it's just beautiful!" cried Adam. "I do hope you'll let me up again. I never saw such a nice place in all my life. I'd like to be a bird, and live here always."

"Stretch out and look up into the green," said Truan. "That's what I do." The boys stretched their slender bodies along the platform and lay side by side.

"It is pretty nice," agreed Truan. "You can come if Toby don't mind, and I guess he won't because he said last night that he likes you. I mean, he saw you in the bathroom and he really likes you."

Poor Adam's flush of pleasure deepened to a painful scarlet at those last words.

"You've got a big cock for your age," said Truan. "Toby told me that last night. Now I can tell him he was right. So, he'll like you even more. Toby likes big cocks."

If Truan had been looking at him, Adam would certainly have fallen out of the tree. As it was, he lay there trembling, the situation made worse by that terrible, delightful stirring in his groin.

"Well, hush my mouth and hope to die," said Truan, leaning on his elbow so that he over-looked his blushing friend. "You are jolly green, Adam Flood. I do believe you don't know the first thing about the birds and bees. Well, I shall jolly well inform you."

Truan proceed to enlighten Adam, a process not unlike the deaf leading the blind. For Truan's version of 'the birds and bees' was expressed entirely in terms of what boys could do with their equipment, which was understandable since he knew even less about girls than he did about birds and bees. Adam lay there, eyes closed, ears wide open, drinking in every word as if were the Catechism, while his penis hardened, throbbed and ached until it hurt.

"Well, that's all I know," said Truan, sighing deeply. "You'll have to get the rest from Toby. He knows *everything*." Truan's accentuation of his final word was as intimidating as it was exciting.

"Come on," said Truan. "No more day-dreaming. We have to feed all the animals in the menagerie. Then we must bake some cakes for the lads. You've no idea how starving Sunday church makes you." He reached across Adam and tweaked his stiff cock. "Forget about that for the moment," he laughed. "We've got the Lord's work to do."

That night Master Myles was delighted to see that Adam's room was at the Lord's work. He had meant to go and talk with Adam for a moment before the boy slept, for he had found that a loving word spoken at this time often did much good. But when he stole to their dormitory door, and saw Adam eagerly drinking in the words of his little friend Toby, while Toby told what he could assume was a sweet and solemn Sunday story, whispering softly as he sat with his beautiful eyes fixed on the tender face of the ill-used newcomer, his own eyes sparkled with tears, and he stole silently away, thinking to himself, "What good boys I have. How they help each other so. I will not spoil it by a single word."

Had Master Myles paused at the bathroom door, he might have heard a sermon of a different kind, for Billy and Timmy, though both upright, one against a wall, the other against his friend, were completing their wrestling match of the afternoon, and only the subdued grunts, gasps and moans told who had the winning hold on whom.

THERE WAS A LOVER AND HIS LAD

When Adam went into school on Monday morning, he quaked inwardly, for now he thought he should have to display his ignorance before all the boys. But Master Myles gave him a seat in the deep window where he could turn his back on the others, and Hans heard him say his lessons there, so no one could hear his blunders or see how he blotted his copy book. He was truly grateful for Hans's unobtrusive help, and toiled away so diligently that the master said, smiling, when he saw Adam's hot face and inky fingers, "Don' work so hard, my boy. You will tire yourself out, and there is time enough."

"But I must work hard," protested the boy, "or I will never catch up with the others. They know heaps, and I don't know anything."

"You know a good many things which they don't," said Master Myles, squeezing in beside him, while Hans led a class of small students through the intricacies of the multiplication table.

"Do I?" and Adam looked incredulous.

"Yes. For one thing, you keep your temper well, but Jack, who is quick at numbers, cannot; that is an excellent lesson, and I think you have learned it well. Then, you can play the violin, and not one of the lads can, though they want to do it very much. But, best of all, Adam, you really care to learn something, and that is half the battle. It seems hard at first, and you will feel discouraged, but plod away, and things will get easier as you go on."

The master rose to go. "You will do well, Adam Flood. You have a good brain, a good heart, and the face of an angel, albeit a grubby one."

Adam's face had brightened more and more as he listened, for, small as the list was, it cheered him immensely to feel that he had anything to fall back on. "Yes, I can keep my temper," he whispered. "Father's beatings taught me that. And I can fiddle, though I don't know where the Bay of Biscay is." Then he said aloud, and so earnestly that Toby heard him, "I do so want to learn, and I will try. I never went to school, and if the fellows don't laugh at me, I guess I'll get on first rate—you and Hans are

so good to me."

"They shan't laugh at you," burst out Toby, "and if they do, I'll—I'll—I'll tell them not to," quite forgetting where he was.

The class stopped in the middle of 7 times 9, and everyone looked up to see what was going on. Adam and Toby, blushing, lowered their heads, and silence reigned again.

Till he was stronger, much study was not good for Adam, however, and Master Myles found various amusements around the house for him while others were at their books. The garden was the boy's best medicine, and he worked away like a beaver, preparing his little farm, sowing his beans, watching eagerly to see them grow, and rejoicing over each green leaf and slender stock that shot up and flourished in the warm, early summer weather. Never was a garden more faithfully hoed as Adam worked and hummed as busily as the bees buzzing around his bare neck and shoulders.

"This is the crop I like best," Master Myles would say, as he pinched the once thin cheeks now tanning a creamy brown, or stroked the bent shoulders that were straightening up with the healthful work, good food, and the absence of the heavy burden of poverty.

It takes so little to make a child happy, that it is a pity in a world full of sunshine and pleasant things that there should be any wistful faces, empty hands, or lonely little hearts. Adam was very fond of Master Myles, but found something even more attractive in Hans, his quiet classroom assistant, who took brotherly care of the shy, once feeble boy, who had barely escaped with his life from the rough sea on which his little boat had been tossing rudderless. Some good angel must have watched over him, for, though his body had suffered, his soul seemed to have taken little harm, and came ashore as innocent as a shipwrecked infant.

One fault of Adam's, however, gave Master Myles, Nursey Taylor, and Hans much anxiety, although they recognised that it had been born and nurtured by fear and ignorance. Adam sometimes told lies. Not very black ones, seldom getting deeper than grey, and often the mildest of white fibs; but a lie is a lie, and although we all tell many impolite truths in this queer world

of ours, it is not right and everybody knows it.

"You cannot be too careful. Watch your tongue, and eyes, and hands, for it is easy to tell, and look, and act untruth," said Master Myles, in one of the talks he had with Adam following yet another misdemeanour.

"I know, I know," said Adam tearfully. "I know it, and I don't mean to, but it's so much easier to get along if you ain't very fussy about being exactly true. I used to tell 'em because I was so afraid of father and Marco, and now I do sometimes in case the boys laugh at me. I know it's bad, but I forget." Adam looked so depressed by his sins that the master took him into his arms, cuddled him like a babe, stroked his hair and kissed the nape of his neck.

"I won't tell lies anymore," cried Adam. "You just wait and see. I won't. I promise. And if I break my promise, you must punish me, and punish me hard." The boy's voice trembled. Heroic as he was, he dreaded pain, and yet he did so wish to stop fibbing.

Master Myles pushed him away and smiled, then shook his head.

"I have a better way than that. I tried it once before and it worked quite well. See now, the next time you tell a lie, I will not punish you, but you shall punish me."

"How?", asked Adam, startled at the idea.

"You shall cane me in the good old-fashioned way."

"Strike you? Oh, I couldn't!" cried Adam, throwing himself once again into the master's arms.

"Then mind that pretty little tongue of thine," the man said. "I have no wish to be hurt, but I would gladly bear much pain to cure this fault. Now, get along to your garden. The bees have out-stripped you this morning!"

The proposition was splendidly helpful, making such an impression on Adam that for a long time he set a watch on his lips and was desperately accurate, for Master Myles judged rightly that love of him would be more powerful with Adam than fear for himself.

Another helpful thing happened in a most unexpected and agreeable manner. Several of the boys were 'in business', as they

telled it, for all of them were church-mouse poor, and knowing that they would have their own way to make by and by, Master Myles encouraged efforts at independence. Truan sold his eggs; Jack speculated in live stock; Hans helped in the teaching and was paid sufficient for the upkeep of the two ponies he stabled at Marshallsay Farm. Ned had a taste for carpentry, while Toby constructed water-mills, whirligigs, and unknown machines of an intricate and useless nature, and disposed of them to boys in the park. Even Billy made money, taking a few bunches of flowers down to the park and selling them to passing promenaders; he made much more money than might have been expected since many kind folk paid far too much, not for the flowers, but for the chance to help such a handsome but afflicted boy.

Adam, observing the commerce all around him, came running in one day to ask Master Myles with an excited face, "Can I go fiddle for the people who picnic in the park? They may pay me, and I'd like to earn some money as the other boys do, and fiddling is the only way I know how to do it."

Master Myles answered readily, "Go, and welcome. Go with Billy. It is an easy and pleasant way to work, and I am glad it is offered to you."

Adam went, and did so well, that when he came home he had two pounds in his pocket, which he displayed with intense satisfaction, as he told how much he had enjoyed the afternoon, how kind the people were, how they praised his dance music, and made him promise to return again. He was only slightly deflated when Billy pulled a handful of crumpled notes from his pocket and put them on the table.

Hans counted them: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5! Five pounds!

"I shall put this money in your tin box," Hans told Billy, adding, "if there is room enough! I wish we could all sell flowers as you do; we'd soon have enough money to stable a pony for each of us." He turned to Adam who looked a little crestfallen.

"Chin up, Adam. You shall have your first riding lesson on Sunday afternoon. Master Myles has given us permission. We shall go riding in Marshallsay Woods. You have worked so hard, you have earned it."

Adam's face glowed with pride, his heart almost burst with

happiness. An afternoon out with his beloved Hans, and riding to boot. Truly the world was a perfect heaven.

Sunday was the first truly hot day of the year. At first Hans and Adam rode along the lane that leads from Marshallsay Farm to Marshallsay Woods. In this heat they could not ride too far without wearing out the ponies. Hans stripped off his shirt; Adam kept his on, still shy in the presence of a boy who is clearly a young man. But as the afternoon passed, the younger lad began to relax in the torpid heat. That afternoon Hans seemed more like a close friend, a few years older than Adam, perhaps, a friend with whom it was only natural that confidences should be exchanged, confidences that became more affectionate, more familiar.

"Do you know something?" Hans said to Adam. "With those big eyes of yours and that curling hair you ought to have been a girl. All the boys in the school would be made for you." He laughs. "Some of them probably are anyway." He turned away from Adam and urged Miller into a canter. Adam urged his pony after them, calling, "The heat doesn't seem to worry Harry at all."

"They are both fine ponies," said Hans. "And the two of them ride well together side by side, don't they? Just like us," he added, "together side by side. Don't let the reins go slack," he ordered, "and grip with your knees. Harry's not a rocking horse."

He laughed and leaned across in the saddle to ruffle Adam's hair. "Don't look so serious. We're not in school now." He ruffled Adam's curls again, but that time his hand slid down the back of the boy's head, lingering for a while around his neck.

For a while they rode along the leafy lane in silence. Presently Adam could not resist glancing across at Hans. His face seemed to glow with happiness, so unlike the rather solemn young man who served Master Myles so well at New Carthage. As if conscious of Adam's gaze, Hans looked down at him and grinned.

"Do you know something?" he said teasingly. "Shall I tell you something I've never told any other boy? Shall I tell you a secret?"

Adam nodded and waited.

"I don't expect you know what you have to do to keep a real secret?"

"Not quite. I mean I'm not sure," Adam admitted honestly.

"Well, keeping a real secret, our secret, would mean that you couldn't tell anyone about it—not ever. You couldn't tell Master Myles or Nurse Taylor or Truan or Toby—nobody, not ever. You couldn't tell a living soul. Do you think you could keep our secret like that?"

"Yes."

"Even if they questioned you and tortured you and kept on at you hour after hour to tell them our secret, could you still hold out?"

"I'd rather die than tell them," said Adam.

Hans laughed. The grim, disturbed expression had left his face; he was smiling again. "Good. But I'm not going to tell you, not today. All I want is for both of us to enjoy this day, and tomorrow, and this week, and all of the summer. When we're away from the school, riding, I want us to be friends together."

Adam nodded vigorously. He felt wonderfully happy. They turned off the lane and trotted down a cart-track that entered a beech grove. Hans's hand rested on Adam's shoulder. The boy turned and lowered his head so that his cheek touched the back of his companion's warm wrist. Hans laughed and gripped Adam's shoulder so tightly that for a moment it hurt.

Presently Hans turned Miller left up a small track; Adam followed him through the wood until they came out into a small clearing, in the centre of which lay a pond. It was completely surrounded by trees and thick undergrowth.

"Let's tether them in the shade," Hans said. "Can you swim?"

"A bit," Adam responded, "but just a little bit."

"Come on then. Now we're here, we might as well have a swim. Don't get into the deep water without me. That's an order."

Hans tethered the ponies under the beech trees. He walked down to the edge of the pool, removed his boots and socks, and stripped off his britches and thin cotton underpants. Awkwardly Adam began to pull off his clothes. He was embarrassed and shy. Heavy throbbing had begun to beat at the left-hand side of his chest.

Mercifully, Hans did not look at the younger boy. He waded out into the pond; after a moment, Adam followed him. Hans's face and neck and forearms were tanned like hazelnuts but the

rest of his skin was milk-white. His body was smooth but well-muscled. Adam was unable to stop himself from glancing down quickly at Hans's thighs and groin. He was in time to see a thick bush of blond hair and what looked like a small hose pipe disappear under the water. Then, with a splash and a shout of joy, Hans threw himself forward and began to swim.

Keeping to the shallows, Adam paddled around in the deliciously cool water. The 'little bit' he can swim is something of an exaggeration, but he tried to copy Hans's actions, and to his surprise found that he could move, if inelegantly, through the water. Hans swam to him, turned over and floated lazily on his back. Again the younger boy found it hard to keep his gaze from the curly bush and fleshy hose that bobbed up and down in the water.

"Not bad," said Hans. "You learn quickly. First on Harry, and now in the pool. We'll come back another day, and I'll teach you to swim properly. Now try floating on your back. Just relax. Don't fight it. There, you've got it. Relax. Take it easy."

His voice seemed to sink into the damp, motionless air. Hans floated on his back again, and for a while there was silence except for a pair of wood pigeons high above their heads. The wood all around them was so dense that the track along which they had ridden earlier seemed to belong to another world. Adam was very much aware that he was completely alone with Hans for the first time. He was at once excited and afraid.

Hans began swimming towards the grassy bank where their clothes were lying, and Adam followed him slowly. Blushes run across his body.

"We have no towels," Hans said as he waded out of the pond, "so we'll just let the sun dry us off. Let's lie down here." He stretched himself out on a small expanse of moss that sparkled in the sun. "This will do fine. The sun will soon dry us."

Adam, conscious of his nakedness, wandered across to the narrow strip of moss and lay down close to Hans. He did not dare look at him, but cradled his head in his arms and stared up at the patch of blue. It must have been four in the afternoon, but the heat of the sun was still strong. Adam was aware that Hans has raised himself and was leaning on one elbow, gazing down

at him.

"I was wrong," smiled Hans, placing a hand on Adam's shoulder. "There's nothing girlish about your face. You're just a very good-looking boy. In fact, you're not a girl by any means. When you grow up, you'll be quite a man." Adam could feel each finger of the hand burning against his skin. He tilted his head so that his cheeks rested against the back of the older boy's hand. He was alone with Hans in their hidden world. His excitement was so vast that he felt as if his heart would break out of its cage of ribs and soar upwards into the blue patch of sky.

Slowly, Hans relaxed his grasp, and his hand slid across Adam's chest, brushing the skin, tracing a line from the centre of his chest to his tummy button, tracing a line from his tummy button across the fine mesh of hair at the bottom of the boy's abdomen.

"No, there's nothing girlish about you at all," whispered Hans, his lips so close to Adam's ear that the boy felt the breath on his skin. Cool fingers closed around his erection. Adam's breathing stopped; his heart stopped beating. The fingers began the motion that Adam has found so delicious in the darkness under his sheets. The fingers drew the loose skin up and down the four inches of his erection. His penis began to throb and ache; the delicious throbbing spread through his entire body. In bed, he could snatch his fingers away, but these fingers would not leave him until he spurted and squirted in the mysterious, incredible, explosive way described by Truan. It is all too much, all too embarrassing.

Adam jumped to his feet, took four steps to the water and dove in headlong. He disappeared beneath the surface for a few seconds, then emerged spluttering, coughing, spitting out water, weeds and mud. Hans was standing by the edge of the pool. He was worried, anxious. He saw the look on Adam's face and burst into laughter. Adam began to laugh also, then ducked his head under the water. Hans dove in, and the boys frolicked and gamboled for another fifteen minutes.

"So our secret's begun," said Hans as they rode, side by side, along the track to the farm. "You mustn't say a word about our having a swim. Understand?" Adam nodded. "And you mustn't tell a living soul that we took our clothes off and lay in the sun.

I want to make sure I can trust you. Can I trust you?"

"You know you can."

Hans leaned over and brushed Adam's cheek with his hand. And that time Adam took hold of the older boy's wrist and pressed his mouth against his hand.

"Tell me the secret," whispered Adam. "Tell me the whole secret."

"Not today."

"When?"

"One day, this summer. We'll ask if we can leave in the morning and take a picnic with us. Then we can be out all day. It'll give us more time."

"Can we go to the pond, Hans? Please. I want to go back to the pond—with you. Together, side by side, with you."

Hans laughed affectionately.

"Yes. To the pond. Together. And I'll teach you to swim, and then I'll teach you to. . ." He spurred Miller into a trot. "Come on. Hurry up. Or we'll be late."

Boys and horses, side by side, together, trotted on.

Only that evening Adam discovered that happiness and pleasures are like poppies spread; you seize the flower, the bloom is shed. In his joy, he forgot, as promised, to take his turn at feeding and watering the animals in the menagerie. To compound the felony, when challenged, Adam lied, claiming that he had swapped chores with Truan, who, indignant, protested an ignorance which was supported reluctantly but firmly by Toby.

How the matter reached Master Myles mattered not, but reach him it did. He entered the lounge and said in a quiet but sorrowful voice, "Come, Adam, we have promises to keep," and led him away by the hand.

Master Myles led the boy upstairs to a room which, after a few moments, Adam recognised as the one in which Billy and Timmy had wrestled so provocatively.

"You remember what I told you last time?" asked the master.

"Yes, but please don't make me. I can't bear it," cried Adam, backing up against the door with both hands behind him, and a face full of distress.

"I shall keep my word," said the man, "and you must

remember to tell the truth. Obey me, Adam, take this and give me six good strokes."

Adam turned his face to the door, but Master Myles slipped the cane into his hand. Adam scurried in circles inside the cage of his mind, looking for a way to escape, but there was none. "Obey me!" When the master spoke in that tone of voice, everyone obeyed him.

Turning, Adam let out an involuntary gasp, for Master Myles had let his trousers fall to the floor, pushed his breeches to his knees, and was bent over a high chair, his arse raised high and naked. "Obey me!" Adam raised the cane, and, looking as scared and guilty as if about to stab his master, gave two feeble strokes across his rosy posterior.

"Go on, and strike harder."

As if seeing that it must be done, and eager to have the hard task soon over, Adam drew up his sleeve, took a step back, and gave two sharp slashes across the reddening flesh. He heard the man grunt in pain.

"Isn't that enough?" he asked in a breathless sort of way; a strange excitement had crept into the boy's blood.

"Two more," was all the answer, and Adam gave them, slashing fiercely, hardly seeing where they fell, then threw the cane across the room. Master Myles turned and Adam fell against him, laying his face against the man's chest, hugging him around the waist, and sobbing out in a passion of love, and shame and penitence. "I will remember! Oh, I will," cried the boy.

"Let us ask the good Lord to help us both," said Master Myles, pressing the boy's shoulders so that Adam sank to his knees in front of him. "Oh, Lord," began the man... Adam opened his eyes as something hot and hard pressed against his nose. "...thou knowest that we are sinners all..." Adam leaned back. It was a cock, a huge, hard cock, only inches from his face. He saw the red skin, the thick purple head, the blue veins that ran along the throbbing shaft. "...yet thou canst accept us for what we are, knowing what we might become..." And balls, big, round, hairy balls hanging in a fleshy, wrinkled scrotum! Adam gulped and repressed the desire to see if he could wrap his hand round the seven, eight, nine inches of solid, sweaty flesh. "Help us to

become what we might be, Oh Lord." Adam closed his eyes and drank in the smells, strange, new, but disturbingly familiar.

He felt the man raise him to his feet, hug him to his bosom, and kiss him tenderly on the forehead while his stiff cock pressed into the boy's belly. "Remember your promise," whispered Master Myles, "and I will remember mine. And in your prayers tonight, ask the dear Lord to help you, and try to spare us both another scene like this."

Adam did not come to dinner, but Hans took some up to him on a tin tray. He found the boy lying on his face, head buried in the pillow.

Hans sat on the side of Adam's bed, comforting him by stroking his hair and his neck. Murmurs and sighs told him how much the quiet affection was appreciated. Hans felt his cock stir and stiffen, and lifted his left knee to hide his erection. Adam lifted his right knee and let it lean against his mentor. Unable to resist, the older boy put his hand on the smooth knee, and started rubbing lightly the tender flesh behind the knee, which was scabbed and browned by the summer and its adventures. The younger boy said nothing, but did not resist the intimacy.

Hans let his hand wander slowly up his inner thigh, taking his time, not sensing any real surprise from the boy. After a few minutes, he was stroking his thigh almost into the boy's lap. Adam had subtly angled his leg, giving Hans better access. His hand stroked into the meeting place of thigh and torso for a few minutes, then the palm was laid directly on the buttons of Adam's cut-off britches. The boy was hard.

Hans ran his fingers along his thigh while his other palm pressed firmly against the cloth-covered erection. A finger slid under the legband and stroked the side of his lightly-ridged scrotum. Over the next few minutes Hans grew bolder, finally slipping his finger in further and stroking his scrotum, feeling Adam's young balls roll within the tightening bag.

After a few minutes, Hans pulled the straining cock out through the legband and began to stroke Adam's naked flesh, unimpeded by the cotton of his undergarment. Hans caressed the boy's hard, hot cock with work-roughened fingers that roamed deliriously over the hot, smooth genitals.

He slipped his hand under the boy's thin cotton shirt to stroke his back, savouring the satin-smooth skin while he inhaled the sweet hair and stroked it with his other hand. Hans worked his way down the back, again with no opposition, and encountered the band of the boy's shorts. After tracing his fingers along the band, Hans slipped his fingertips beneath both shorts and undergarment. With what might have been a moan, Adam rolled onto his front, and lay there, head on elbows, eyes closed. Soon his entire hand slipped inside the pants, and his palm slid slowly across the smoothly-sweet bum.

Sensing Adam's pleasure with his actions, it was not long before the shorts had been removed front and back. Hans began to slide his hand around his silky smooth abdomen, and began to stroke and tickle the boy's lovely cock and testicles. After a few minutes, Hans could feel slippery moisture on the head of the boy's cock. He slipped his finger along it and across the top, playing with the little slit that oozed nectar onto his fingers. Adam began to move, slowly, slowly, sliding over on his side so that he lay on his back, his head on a pillow, eyes closed but fluttering beneath the lids.

That gave Hans free access to his sweet genitals, the marble-round balls, and the stiff penis that rose urgently up, twitching above the boy's lower abdomen. Hans began to stroke his inner thighs again, and slid his palm repeatedly over his excited penis. Adam spread his thighs more, and Hans slipped his whole hand across the exposed genitals, slipping his fingers to the delightful, secret, satin skin behind the balls. Adam began to shove up against the older boy's hand, and after only six or seven shoves, Hans watched the excited penis spurt its pale juices onto the boy's belly.

"Oh, oh, oh," Adam whimpered, as each load shot forcefully from his throbbing, pulsing hard-on. Again and again he bucked as Hans pulled his foreskin as far down the red, swollen shaft as he could. Adam rose, almost into a sitting position, then collapsed with a comfortable sigh back onto the pillow.

By and by, the lads below heard the violin, and said among themselves, "Adam's all right now."

AN UNTAMED MELODY

"Please, sir, could I speak to you? It is something very important," said Adam, popping his head in at the door of Master Myles' room. The school's proprietor and principal raised his head from the front of Timmy's britches where, Adam assumed, he had been helping the boy do up his buttons.

It was the fifth head which had popped in during the last half-hour, but Master Myles was used to it. He looked up briskly. "Come in, Adam. Run along, Timmy, I'll tend to you later."

Adam stepped in, then shut the door carefully behind the departing Timmy, and said in an eager, anxious tone, "Fred has come."

"And who, may I ask, is Fred?" said Master Myles, ushering the boy to a spot beside him on the sofa.

"Fred's a boy I used to know when I fiddled on the streets," explained Adam. "He sold papers, and he was kind to me. I saw him in the town the other day and told him how nice it was here. Now he's come."

"But, my dear boy," sighed the master, "this is a rather sudden way to pay a visit."

"Oh, it isn't a visit," said Adam. "Fred's come to stay. I thought you liked to have poor boys come and live with you, and be as kind to 'em as you are to me. And, sir, Fred don't have no home, he's homeless." Adam looked surprised and alarmed, tears shone in his eyes.

Master Myles stroked the back of the boy's head. "Yes, I do like to take in homeless boys. But I have to know something about them first. I have to choose them. Because there are so many. I have not enough room for every good-looking stray who passes my gate. God knows, I wish I had." The boy's confidence in his hospitality touched the educator, and he could not find the heart to disappoint him.

With gentle promptings, he manoeuvred Adam around until the boy lay full length along the sofa, his head in the man's lap, face up, and said, "Now, tell me about this Fred. I need to know everything."

Comforted and heartened, Adam closed his eyes. "I don't

"How much, only that he hasn't got any folks, and he's poor, and he was good to me, and I would like to be good to him if I can."

"He's not an ugly boy, is he?"

"Oh, no, sir," protested Adam quietly. "Fred was always very popular on the streets. Even complete strangers, men we didn't know, would stroke his hair, pinch his...cheeks, and give him a few pennies. I know you'd like him, sir, I just know it."

"You have given me excellent reasons, but really, Adam, the house is full, and I don't know where I could put him," said Master Myles.

"He could have my bed, and I could sleep in the barn," said Adam, eagerly. "It isn't cold now, and I don't mind, I used to sleep anywhere with father."

"Lie still and let me think for a moment," sighed the man, more and more inclined to prove himself the haven of refuge the boy seemed to think him. For his part, Adam could have lain there all morning as the man's fingers sensuously stroked his hair, his cheeks, and the narrow sliver of flesh between the bottom of his shirt and the top of his trousers. The fingers seemed to caress and soothe so unthreateningly that Adam did not panic when he felt his penis swell into a hillock below his flies.

The fingers ruffled his hair. "Bring your friend in, Adam," said a lively voice. "If memory serves me well, the room you share is a large one; perhaps a fifth bed can be fitted in. We must find room for your friend without giving him your place."

Joyfully Adam ran off and returned moments later, followed by a dark-haired, dark-eyed boy who slouched into the room in a most unprepossessing fashion; he stood looking about him, with a half-bold, half-sullen look, which made Master Myles murmur to himself, after one glance, "A bad specimen, I'm afraid."

"This is Fred," said Adam, presenting the lad as if sure of his welcome.

"Adam tells me you would like to come and stay with us," began Master Myles, in a friendly tone.

"Don't mind," was the gruff reply.

"Have you no family, no friends to put a roof over your head?"

"Nope."

"Say 'No, sir,'" whispered Adam anxiously.

"Nope," muttered Fred.

"How old are you, Fred?" asked sir.

"Not sure. About fourteen."

"You look older, but then I'm sure you've had some hard times," said the master. "If you stay here, I shall expect you to do as the others do, work and study as well as play. Are you willing to agree to that?"

"Don't mind," muttered Fred, idly scratching at his crotch, which the master was experienced enough to know often indicated anxiety in a boy.

"Well, you can stay a few days, and we'll see how we get on together. Take him out, Adam, and show him around till lunchtime. Meanwhile, I will instruct Hans and Nursey Taylor to prepare an extra bed in your room. And, Fred, have a good wash before lunch. Now off you go, boys, and amuse yourselves."

As his study door closed, Master Myles leaned back on the sofa and sighed. He'd found it difficult to get on with this cool young person, who fixed his big black eyes on him with a hard, suspicious expression, sorrowfully lacking in boyish innocence.

Outside, Adam turned eagerly to Fred. "Come on. The fellows are having a circus in the barn. Come and see it."

"Are they big fellows?" asked Fred.

"No. The big ones have all gone fishing," said Adam, acutely aware that he hadn't seen Hans all morning.

"Fire away, then," said Fred.

Adam led him to the great barn and introduced him to his set, who were disporting themselves among the half-empty lots. A large circle was marked out with hay on the floor, and in the middle stood Toby with a long whip, while Truan, mounted on the much-enduring Toby, pranced about the circle playing being a monkey. Billy sat on a bale of hay, chewing a straw and smiling at the circus before his big blue, rather vacant eyes.

With a nod to the company, the new-comers seated themselves on a couple of wooden boards, and the performance went on. After the monkey act, Ned gave them a fine demonstration of his agility by jumping over an old chair, and running up and down the ladders, sailor fashion. Then, to the sound of Adam's fiddle, Toby danced a jig with a gravity that was beautiful

to behold. After this, Truan proudly advanced to turn a somersault, an accomplishment which he had acquired by painful perseverance, practising in private with Nurse Taylor till every joint of his little frame was black and blue. His feats were received with great applause, and he was about to retire, flushed with bashful pride, when a scornful voice in the audience was heard to say, "Hoi, that ain't nuthin'."

Truan bristled up like an angry turkey-cock.

"Do you want a fight?" said Fred, promptly spring from the bale, doubling up his fists in a businesslike manner.

"No, I don't," said the candid Truan, who retired a step, taken aback by the pugilistic proposition.

"Fighting isn't allowed!" cried the others, much excited.

"You're a nice lot of little women," sneered Fred.

"I'd like to see you do better than I did, that's all," said Truan, unable to resist a boyish swagger.

"Clear the way then," and without the slightest preparation Fred turned three somersaults on after the other and came up on his feet. Before anyone could close his mouth, the audience was electrified by three more somersaults backwards, and a short promenade on the hands, head down, feet up. This brought down the house, and even Truan joined in the admiring cries which greeted Fred as he righted himself, and looked at them with an air of calm superiority.

The boys crowded round the accomplished gymnast. "Do you think I could learn to do those somersaults?" asked Truan. "Could you teach me?"

"Yep," said Fred, "but you'll have to give me something if I teach you. Nobody gets nuthin' for nuthin' in this world."

Fred turned to Adam. "Where can I take a piss? My bladder's fit to burst."

There was a shocked silence and the shuffling of feet at such vulgar, forbidden, exciting language.

"Come on," said Adam. "I'll show you."

There was a howl of protest. "But the circus isn't finished. Adam's in some of the acts. We're showing them to the big chaps when they get back." Adam remembered that Hans was one of the 'big chaps'. He called to Billy and patiently explained that

he should show Fred where the upstairs bathrooms were.

"Have a bath," said Adam to Fred. "We've got an hour till lunch. You'll be in Master Myles' good books if you come clean and shiny like a new pin to lunch." Fred shrugged. "Do it, Fred, please, do it for me."

Fred shrugged but allowed himself to be led off by the smiling Billy. Adam sighed. He hoped things would work out, he really did; he knew only too well what it meant to be lost and lonely on the streets. He would not wish it on a dog, and certainly not on the only boy he knew from his past.

The next half hour went well. The tumbling, the tricks, the clowns, the make-believe penguins, all had the touch of conviction that might engage the older boys in the willing suspension of disbelief if only for a single performance. Adam's contributions over, the boy excused himself and went in search of Fred who might wish to borrow a set of clothes and appear even more presentable to Master Myles.

Adam trotted happily to the house, took the stairs two at a time, pushed open the bathroom door and stepped in, whistling. The whistle choked in his throat.

Fred had taken a bath.

He was now sitting, naked, on the edge of the tub, towelling his head. Between his legs knelt Billy. The kneeling boy's head bobbed up and down in the sitting boy's lap. Adam watched in horror as Fred's stiff penis, intimidatingly long and thick, slid in and out of Billy's mouth. He could hear the slurping sounds across the room. Adam stepped closer; Billy's eyes were closed, his cheeks blowing in and out as the thick, brownish cock slid in and out of his mouth, the lips gripping the bulbous purple head before engulfing the shaft again.

Fred lowered his towel and saw Adam. He grinned.

"This kid's good," he said. "He'll do you after me, if you want." Fred's speech was halting, broken by little gasps.

"What are you doing?" whispered Adam, stepping closer.

"I'm not doin' nuthin'," said Fred. "Billy's doin' everything. He's sucking me off. Don't tell me you haven't learned anything. Maybe not. You were always your dad's little angel, his little goody-two-shoes. Well, my dad wasn't. He taught me plenty. Wait

a minute, will you?"

Fred lowered his hands and gripped Billy's head on either side. He thrust his hips back and forwards till the kneeling boy picked up the rhythms that pleased Fred best.

"Anyway, it ain't his first time," said Fred.

"What do you mean?" asked Adam, unable to keep his eyes from the wide open legs, the bobbing head, the swollen lips, and the thick cock that kept appearing and disappearing between them.

"This's how Billy boy makes his money. In the park, I mean," grunted Fred, the sweat beginning to run down his forehead. "Those guys didn't buy those fuckin' flowers. Well, they did, but that's not what they paid our Billy boy for." Fred, as far as he was able, was laughing now.

"Mind you, Billy boy, needs a manager. A pound a go. That's giving it away." Adam suddenly remembered the crumpled pound bills—five of them! "Shit, if I manage this boy, he'll make a fortune for both of us. Can you imagine what we'd get for his ass? Hold on, hold on."

Fred began to jerk his hips hard. His cock slid all the way into Billy's mouth. His cheeks bulged. His lips were squashed into dark pubic hair. Fred shook and trembled, shuddered and bounced on the edge of the bath. "Shit. Oh, fuckin' shit," he gasped, holding Billy's face tight against him. His face twisted into an ecstatic grimace that faded away slowly.

In time, he pushed the kneeling boy away. Billy released the softening shaft and sat back on his bottom in a pool of bathwater, grinning happily, his lips and chin coated with a gooey, whitish liquid.

Sperm! Semen! Cum!

Though he'd never actually seen it before, Adam knew what he was looking at. If you touched yourself, played with yourself long enough, down there, that's what came out. He wasn't quite sure what the stuff was for, Truan's explanation being a little garbled, but he knew that it was private, personal, naughty, forbidden. In his wildest imaginations, and they'd been getting wilder since the afternoon with Hans, he'd never dreamed you could do that: put your cock in someone else's mouth, or put

someone else's cock in your mouth. Strangely enough, the idea did not disgust or horrify him; but he was pretty sure that Billy, who was only a little boy at heart, shouldn't be sitting there in a puddle with a strange boy's sperm dripping down his chin.

Perhaps for the first time in his life, Adam Flood took command of a situation. His voice, not loud, was hard, with an edge to it that brooked neither delay or defiance.

"Billy, get up. Go and rinse out your mouth. Then go back to the barn. Say nothing of this to the other boys. Nothing. Do you understand?"

Billy rose to his feet. "My pound. I always get a pound."

"Later," said Adam, "later. Now go to a basin and rinse your mouth." He turned to Fred who had slid back into the bath.

"I shall bring a set of clothes for you, Fred," he announced. "I will say nothing of this to anyone, but if you ever touch Billy again, I will report you to Master Myles, and you will be returned to the streets (almost adding "where you belong") on the instant. Do you understand?"

Fred yawned and grinned. "I still say we could make a fortune."

Turning his back on the bathing boy, Adam helped Billy clean himself up and led him from the room. He returned a few minutes later with a pile of fresh clothes for the newcomer. "Here," he said, "let's make a fresh start."

If Fred felt any gratitude for Adam's silence, he did not show it, and took without thanks all that was given him. He was ignorant, but very quick to learn when he chose. Over the next few days he played with all his might, and played well at most games. He was silent or gruff before adults, and only now and then thoroughly social among the lads. Few of them really liked him, but few could help admiring his courage and strength, for nothing daunted him. On one occasion, he knocked Hans on his back and stood grinning, until Hans rose and shook him like a half-drowned rat, tears and snot running down Fred's face. After this incident, Fred gave Hans a wide berth. Master Myles watched him silently and did his best to tame the 'Wild Boy', as he called him, but in private he shook his head and said soberly, "I hope this experiment will turn out well, but I am a little afraid it will

rest too much."

Nurse Taylor lost his patience with Fred half a dozen times a day, yet never gave him up, and always insisted there was something good to the lad, after all. Fred was kinder to animals than to people, he liked to rove about in the woods, sometimes taking Billy with him, and, best of all, little Ted was fond of him. What the secret was, no one could discover, but 'Baby Ted' took to him at once, preferring the boy's strong back to any other, calling him 'My Freddy' out of his own little head. Timmy was the only creature to whom Freddy always showed affection, and this was only manifested when he thought no one else could see it. But Master Myles soon saw and felt that there was a soft spot in the ruffian, and bided his time.

Truan, Adam and Toby began by patronizing Fred, but soon, perhaps because he shared their room, felt a certain fascination about the 'bad' boy, and from looking down upon him, came to a grudging kind of acceptance, each for a different reason. Truan was enthralled by his skill, courage and sheer bravado; Adam was grateful for past kindness; and for Toby there was a physical attraction which he found inexplicable, not least because of what happened on several nights.

A bed for Fred had been squeezed in against the wall which adjoined the bathroom. On the other side lay in order the beds of Toby, Tommy, Truan and Adam. In the darkened room, on three or four occasions, as the boys lay abed, Fred would throw back his top sheet, push his pyjamas to his knees, and play with his private parts.

In his bed, only four feet away, Toby would lie, open-mouthed, watching Fred's cock, so much bigger than his own, stiffen, harden and stretch as the boy's fingers played up and down its length. Then Fred would wrap his fingers around his erection and began a steady stroking that grew faster and rougher as each minute wound away. Toby, ashamed but thrilled, would lie on his side and watch, unable to take his eyes away from the sight. On the last occasion, Fred had turned and smiled a slow, knowing smile at the younger boy, then jerked especially hard until the white stuff spurted out of his cock and landed on his belly in creamy, quivering globs. Fred had scooped the globs up

with his fingers and licked them into his mouth. Toby lay there fascinated, disgusted and elated at the same time, his own cock throbbing so hard that it hurt.

It pleased Fred to have the three favourites like him, and with them he exerted himself to be agreeable, which was the secret of his success.

Master Myles was called away from school on business one day. He took Hans with him and declared the day a holiday to the delight of the boys; they played hard till bedtime when all of them turned in, and most slept like door mice. Fred, alone, had a plan in his head, and when he, Adam, Truan and Toby were alone—Tommy being sound asleep—he unfolded it.

"Look here!" he whispered, taking from under his bed a bottle, a cigar, and a pack of cards, "Let's have some fun. Beer, a cigar, cards, and good friends. What more can a boy ask for in life?"

"The folks won't like it," began Adam.

"They won't know. Master Myles is away, and Humpy Taylor's busy with Ted; he's got croup or something. They'll stay in the San (sanatorium) tonight. We shan't stay up too late, or make a noise, so where's the harm? I borrowed the dark lantern from downstairs on purpose; it don't give much light, and we can shut it quick if we hear anyone coming."

The boys looked at each other, and nodded. This was an adventure, this was fun, and nobody would know. Truan fixed the dark lantern. Toby brought a tooth mug for the beer. They settled themselves on the carpet, beer and cigar to hand.

"Now, keep quiet and I'll show you how to play a first-rate game called 'Poker,'" said Fred. "First we'll all have a drink, then we'll have a go at the 'weed', then we'll play. That's the way the men I know do it, and it's jolly good fun."

The beer circulated in the mug, and all three smacked their lips over it, though Adam and Truan did not like the bitter stuff very much; Toby did, taking draughts almost as deep as Fred himself. The cigar was worse, but they dared not say so, and each boy puffed away till he was dizzy or choked when he passed the 'weed' on to his neighbour. Fred liked it, for it seemed like old times when he now and then had the chance to imitate the low life that had surrounded him on the streets. He drank and smoked

and swaggered as much like them as he could, and, getting into the spirit of the part, he soon began to swear under his breath for fear someone would hear him. "You mustn't; it's wicked to say... what you said," whispered Truan, who, however, was thrilled not only by the expression 'Cocksucker' and what it implied.

"Bullshit! Don't start preaching, Truan," said Fred, adding, "It's all part of the game," with more insight than he knew. "Now, come on, I'll go over the rules of Poker once more."

To tell the truth, the three 'innocents' were rather enjoying the proceedings; the beer gave the world a roseate glow, the cigar made them light-headed, and the dark seemed to make all things permissible. Poker was great fun; fast and furious, only one thing was missing—something to play for.

"I know," said Fred, "let's play a special kind of Poker, it's called Strip Poker. Every time you lose, you have to take off a bit of your clothes."

There were fewer protests, except from Adam, than one might have expected. Hardly surprising, since the boys saw each other naked in the bathroom every morning. But this was different—this was wicked, deliciously wicked.

Since each boy was wearing only a pyjama top and bottom, it took only a dozen or so hands until all four were sitting naked, three grinning bashfully at the others. "We're not finished," said Fred, dealing another hand. "Whoever winds this one can order a loser to pay a forfeit. Agreed?" The boys nodded uncertainly.

Fred won with three Aces. Oddly enough, Fred seemed to be able to deal and win to order, but he had introduced the boys to the game, and they attributed his winning to skill rather than luck.

"You have to do me," said Fred, turning his body towards Toby, and opening his legs wider. His erection was hard against his belly, rising from the explosion of black hair at the base of his cock. Toby gulped. Fred reached for his hand, brought it to his cock, opened his fingers, and wrapped them round the thick shaft. Holding the younger boy's hand with his own, Fred moved it up and down his cock. After a minute or so, he took his own hand away, leaving Toby to pump his shaft as if in a trance.

Fred dealt two more hands. He won both. He ordered Adam and Truan to grasp each other's cocks and start pumping. Both boys had erections—'hard-ons', 'stiffies', as Fred called them. He laid down the cards and gripped Toby's erection between his thumb and two fingers and began the pumping action.

There were few sounds in the room. The noise of skin on skin. The shallow breathing of the boys on the carpet. The deeper breathing of Tommy in bed. The occasional slurp and glug of a mouthful of beer down Fred's or Toby's throat. The smells of beer and cigar smoke were augmented by other smells; the smells of sweat, smegma and sex as the boys approached orgasm. Suddenly, to their dismay, Fred put a stop to the experiment, pushing hands away from desperately disappointed flesh.

"Adam's my best mate," he said, a little to Adam's surprise and Truan's disappointment. "He done a good turn for me; it's his turn now." Gently, he pushed Adam backwards until the boy lay stretched full-length on the carpet, the lantern casting a dull glow over the stiff column of flesh that poked up from his groin. Fred ranged himself on one side; Toby took the other; Truan slid in between Adam's spread-eagled legs.

Fred leaned on one elbow, supporting himself, his face hovering above Adam's tummy. Toby mirrored him on the other side, taking a big slug of beer before laying the empty bottle aside. Fred began pumping Adam's cock again; four inches of thick pale brown flesh slid back and forwards through his hand, foreskin pulled all the way back to reveal the purple head and deep red slit running across the top. Slowly, then faster, short jerks, then full length slidings, Fred worked Adam's cock until the boy's testicles rose high in his hairless scrotum. Adam lay, eyes closed, head spinning, beads of perspiration breaking out over his body.

Fred changed hands, his left working Adam's cock, while his right hand reached round the back of Toby's head and pulled it down the last few inches towards the straining flesh. There was resistance, but not much. Dazed, drunk, eyes glazed, Toby's lips parted, and the head of Adam's cock slipped into his hot, wet, young mouth. Fred pushed on the top of his head; it began to bob over Adam's groin; Fred's hand and Toby's mouth slid lower; the pumping action grew rapid, and Adam groaned, his head

rolling from side to side on the carpet, his eyelids fluttering.

Without warning, Adam began squirting little jets of fluid into the back of Toby's mouth. The boy gulped, his tiny Adam's apple bobbed, his throat convulsed as he swallowed spurt after spurt. Fred held the boy's head in place until Adam's hips steadied from their rock and lay still, his tummy muscles still fluttering spasmodically. Then Toby pulled his head back, a few drops of Adam's semen glistening on his lips.

Adam sat up. He looked dazed, stunned.

"We'd better get to bed," he said. "Nurse Taylor always pops his head around the doors at ten. It must be near that now. If it's dark, he never puts the light on."

As if nothing untoward had taken place, the boys rose and tidied away the evidence of their adventure, though all were uncertain of their balance.

They pulled their pyjama bottoms on.

Fred climbed into bed first. Toby made for his own bed, but Fred intercepted him and pulled him into bed alongside him, covering them both with a sheet. Toby did not resist. Adam and Truan looked at each other. Truan got into bed and held the sheet open for Adam; he smiled wearily and slid in alongside his room mate. Within minutes, all the boys were snuggled down in each other's arm, sound asleep and breathing beerily. They had gone out like lights.

The cigar had not gone out. It smouldered away on the carpet till it was nicely on fire, and soon a hungry little flame went creeping along till the dimity bedcover caught, then the sheets, and then Truan's bed itself. The beer had stupefied the boys, so they slept on till the fire began to scorch them, and they were in danger of being burned to death. Thanks to providence, Tommy was not stupefied, and, awakened by the smoke, he sat up in bed and started to scream.

Nurse Taylor, sitting up late to tend to Timmy, heard the screams, dashed upstairs, smelt the smoke and saw it seeping from under the door. There being no one to call, he ran into the room, dragged the boys from the blazing bed, ordered all of the panic-stricken lads out of the room, and formed a fire-chain to the bathroom. A flock of white goblins with scared faces crowded

onto the landing and joined the chain, grabbing every receptacle they could lay their hands on. From tooth mugs to buckets, water was ferried to the room where Nursey threw it onto the flames which stood little chance against such a concerted onslaught.

The peril was soon over, and ordering all the boys back to bed, but leaving two to watch lest the fire break out again, Nursey marshalled the room's occupants to the sanatorium. Toby had escaped with a slight singe and grand scare; Truan had a nasty burn on his right arm; Tommy, Adam and Fred were untouched. Having seen the boys into the San beds, Nursey took Truan away to his own bed, where the kindly guardian soothed his fright and hummed him to sleep as cosily as any woman. Nursey watched over Truan all night, vibrating between him and little Timmy with oil, cotton, paregoric and squills, saying to himself from time to time, as if he found amusement in the thought, "I always knew Truan would set the house on fire, and now he has done it!" Although not entirely correct in his assumption, Nursey was at least partly justified by the quiet satisfaction he took in giving Truan an enema to ease the pain just as dawn broke.

When Master Myles got home next morning, he found a nice state of things. Truan in bed. Timmy wheezing like a little grampous. Adam down-hearted. Tommy bewildered. And Fred more sullen than ever. A whole flock of boys almost dragged him by main force to view the ruins. Under the principal's quiet management, things soon fell into order. There was no school that morning, but by afternoon the damaged room was put to rights, the invalids were on the mend, and there was time to hear and judge the culprits accordingly.

Adam, Toby and Truan told their parts in the mischief, omitting reference to the Poker stakes, and were honestly sorry for the danger they had brought to the dear old house and all in it. But Fred put on his best devil-may-care look, and would not admit that there was much harm done.

Now, of all things, Master Myles hated drinking, gambling, and swearing; smoking he had given up that the lads might not be tempted to try it, and it grieved and angered him deeply to find that the boy, with whom he had tried to be most forbearing, should take advantage of his absence to introduce these forbidden

vices, and teach his innocent little men to think it manly and pleasant to indulge in them. He talked long and earnestly to the assembled house, and ended by saying with an air of mingled firmness and regret: "...so from today, I shall put Adam, Truan, Toby, and Fred on probation. Should any one of them, combination of them, or all of them, break, ignore, or flout the rules of this house, I shall find an alternative home for that boy or those boys forthwith. New Carthage dismissed."

Fred did try for a day or two, but not being used to it, he soon tired and relapsed into his old wilful ways. The camel's back was broken on Saturday afternoon, and the final straw that did it can only be barely and briefly described.

After the obligatory postprandial nap, the boys had scampered off to the park to sell their wares and ply their trade. Adam, remembering the scene involving Fred and Billy, had kept a close watch on the simple-minded but good-hearted lad, always playing his fiddle within sight of Billy and his bunches of flowers. Fred was nowhere to be seen.

Billy had sold his flowers by three o'clock, and although he had earned only a pound for his five bunches, he left the park with his honour intact. Adam delayed a few minutes, having spotted a courting couple, much in need of a serenade. "That Old Sweetheart of Mine" earned him a pound! and a peck on the cheek from the girl. Blithely he headed for home, taking the little-used bridle path that would lead to the back of New Carthage.

Halfway along the path, he saw them, and if Fred had not been present, he would have assumed the scene was entirely innocent.

There was a bench. On the bench sat Fred. To his left sat a well-dressed gentleman. On the gentleman's knee sat Timmy. From the leafy bower that hid his presence till he should turn the corner, Adam heard Timmy's happy giggle.

Adam's heart skipped several beats. He ducked behind the cherry tree and peered through at the tableau. All seemed innocent, till closer inspection showed that the gentleman's fingers were under Timmy's little blue shorts. Since the shorts were very short, there could be no mistaking the fingers' destination. To his dismay, Adam realised the boy's shorts were

halfway down his bottom; the more he wriggled, the further they slid down his hips.

Normally a most placid boy, Adam felt rage course through every vein in his body. He tightened his fists till he felt they might burst. Then, gathering his wits, he unloosed his fiddle from the strap which held it to his back, put it under this chin and began to play a merry jig. Almost immediately, there was a flurry of activity on the bench. Timmy was hurriedly set down, his pants pulled up. Something was slipped to Fred, and the gentleman hurried away, buttoning himself as he went.

Adam emerged from the bush, looking for all the world as if he had chanced along the path. He had never been so coolly determined in his life.

"Hello, Fred. Hello, Timmy," he called. "On your way back, are you? I'll walk with you. I've done well today. We can get permission and pop over to the ice-cream parlour, if you like."

"Oh, yes, please, please," cried Timmy, doing a small jig of his own.

Fred did not look quite so pleased. He shrugged his shoulders in assent, and the boys began their walk home. There was not much to say. Only Timmy contributed, chatting gaily about the kind of ice-cream he might choose at the parlour.

That evening, following a brief interview, Master Myles summoned Fred and Adam to his study.

"Fred, you have been many times forgiven, and yet it does no good. I cannot have my boys betrayed by your bad example, nor my time wasted in talking to deaf ears. I have told Nursey to put your things in my carpet bag."

"Oh! sir, where is he going?" cried Adam, genuinely distressed.

"Fred is going to a pleasant place up in the country, where I sometimes send boys when they can't fit in here. Mr Foxley is a fine man, and Fred will be happy there if he chooses to do his best. Now, say your farewells." Master Myles left the room to write his letter to Mr Foxley, and Adam approached Fred very much as people do a man who is going on a long and perilous journey to unknown regions.

"Fuckin' cocksucker," muttered Fred.

"I wonder if you'll like it," began Adam.

"Shan't stay if I don't," said Fred coolly.

"Where will you go?" asked Adam.

"Out West, to take a look at California," answered Fred, "or maybe to sea. I've met a few sailors. The life would suit me." Fred described his future with a reckless air that took Adam's breath away.

"Oh, don't! Stay with Mr Foxley. Be good. Then come back here," pleaded Adam, much affected by the whole affair.

"I don't give a shit where I go, or how long I stay, and I'll be damned if I ever come back here. Nobody wants me," cried Fred.

"Oh, I do! I do!" cried Adam, throwing his arms around Fred.

Instead of pushing Adam way, Fred put his arms around him. The two boys stood that way for a few moments. Then Fred kissed Adam hard on the mouth. Adam was taken aback, but it seemed just the right thing to do, so he returned the kiss, and for a few moments more, two lads, who had never known what real kisses were, stood and kissed each other with no other cause than to express the affection they held for each other.

Fred heard Master Myles sigh behind him. He turned and looked at the man defiantly. He wanted so much to ask for one more trial for himself, but his pride would not let him, and he walked from the room with a hard look on his face. Outside, he climbed into the waiting carriage and did not look back as he was driven away, leaving Adam and Master Myles to look after him with tears in their eyes.

A few days afterwards Master Myles received a letter from Mr Foxley, saying that Fred was doing well, whereat all of New Carthage rejoiced. Three weeks later came a second letter saying that Fred had run away, and nothing had been heard of him, whereat all of New Carthage looked sad and sober.

"Poor Fred, poor Fred," whispered Adam, more to himself than the company.

At the sound of the name, little Timmy struggled down from his chair, trotted to the door and looked out over the sunny lawn with a wistful face. Then he trotted back again, announcing, as he always did when disappointed of the longed-for-sight, "My Freddy's cummin' home tomorrow."

But he wasn't and he didn't.

WANTON BOYS

As there is no particular plan to this story, except to describe a few scenes in the life of New Carthage for the amusement of certain persons, we will gently ramble along in this chapter and tell some of the pastimes of Master Myles' boys. I beg leave to assure my honoured readers that most of the incidents are taken from real life, several witnessed by myself, and that the oddest are true; for no person, no matter how vivid an imagination can invent anything half so droll as the freaks and fancies in the lively brains of little people.

Tommy and Toby were full of these whims and lived in a world of their own, peopled with lovely or grotesque creatures to whom they assigned the queerest names, and with whom they played the queerest games. One of these inventions was an invisible sprite called 'The Naughty Kitty-hawk', whom the children had believed in, feared, and served long before they were rescued and established at New Carthage. They seldom spoke of it to anyone else, kept their rites as private as possible; and, as they never tried to describe it even to themselves, this being had a vague mysterious charm very agreeable to Toby who delighted in elves, goblins, hobgoblins, succubi and incubi. A most whimsical and tyrannical imp was the Naughty-kitty, and Tommy found a fearful pleasure in its service. He blindly obeyed its most absurd demands which were always proclaimed from the lips of Toby, whose powers of invention were great and varied. Of late, Adam and Truan sometimes joined in these ceremonies and considered them excellent fun, though they did not understand what, if anything, they meant.

One day after school Toby whispered to his brother, with an ominous wag of his head, "The Kitty-hawk wants us this afternoon."

"What for?" asked Tommy anxiously.

"A sackerryfice," answered Toby solemnly.

"Is Adam coming, too?" asked Tommy.

"Yes," Toby nodded solemnly, "and Truan, too."

Tommy sighed in relief. Of late, Toby's rites had become a little bizarre, and the prospect of company reassured him.

"What's a sackerryfice?" asked Tommy.

"A sackerryfice means giving up something you are fond of, or doing something you don't really want to do," explained Toby, to whom the new idea had been suggested by hearing Master Myles describe the customs of the Ancient Greeks to the big boys who were reading about them in school. Master Myles' enthusiasm for all things Greek was known throughout the school, and Toby felt sure he would have the blessing of their prime benefactor if he knew of the enterprise.

At two o'clock the four boys assembled at the flat rock in the beech grove at the bottom of the paddock. Toby laid aside the small sack he was carrying and proceeded to kindle up a small blaze to the left of the rock, as he had seen at picnics. When the flame burned well, he ordered the company, Adam, Truan and Tommy, to march around it three times and then stand in a circle while he himself threw handful of dry wood chippings onto the fire. They burst into flames that sparkled and hissed in the gloom of the beech grove.

Toby then stepped forward to Adam and Truan and whispered something; the boys looked surprised, bewildered, but they grinned and giggled, then bowed deeply to Toby.

The 'high priest' spoke again, this time in a throaty growl that made Tommy shiver and tremble, for he knew that this was the voice of the Kitty-hawk! She who must be obeyed!

"Obey the Kitty-hawk," growled Toby. "Obey, or she will scratch deeply."

Adam and Truan stepped forward, grabbed Tommy, and stripped him naked—shorts, vest, socks and sandals—before he could protest too much. What protest there was was reduced to a whimper by the growl of the Kitty-hawk: "To the flat rock. It is time for the sackerryfice!"

The boys dragged Tommy to the rock, forced him down onto his back, and pinned him, with some gentleness, taking an arm and a leg each. Tommy lay there, spread-eagled, whimpering, wondering what the Kitty-hawk had in store. He did not have long to wait.

From his sack, Toby extracted a very long feather, so long and vivid that the boys knew it must have come from the tail of

the stuffed peacock in master Myles' study. The Kitty-hawk was a demanding master, indeed!

Toby proceeded to run the feather the length of the naked boy's body, tickling him under the chin, caressing his chest, and stroking his small genitals. They did not have long to wait for the tribute: Tommy's penis stiffened and lengthened until it stuck up like a peeled twig, rooted in the gooseberries of his tiny testicles. Though Adam and Truan had often seen the boy naked in their room or in the bathroom, they felt a familiar stirring below their britches. Tommy himself had relaxed considerably under his brother's attentions, and lay with eyes closed, only the twitchings of his rigid member and a certain fluttering of his tummy muscles indicating that he was far from sleep.

The Kitty-hawk growled again. "Over. Turn the sackerryfice over." Adam and Truan helped rather than pulled Tommy onto his front; the youngest boy lay there, head on arm, waiting. From his sack, Toby extracted a carved wooden object. It took a few moments for the boys to realise what he was holding: a carved penis! a wooden prick! a stiff cock! fairly slim, but about four inches long. There was a sharp intake of breath: he wouldn't, he couldn't—could he? would he?

Toby ran the tip of the wooden phallus the length of Tommy's crack; back and forth it went. Adam and Truan eyed each other, waiting for one to signal to the other to intervene if Toby went too far. Toby did go too far, but not in quite the way the boys expected.

The 'high priest' wedged the phallus between his brother's cheeks, left it there, reached into the sack and pulled out one of the farmyard hens. Her feet were trussed, her beak tied with a piece of string. Before they could reach him, Toby had planted the struggling hen so forcefully onto the sacrificial pyre that it broke through the top layers of twigs and branches and plunged into the heart of the blaze. Adam groaned as he recognised the hen: it was Anastasia, one of their best-loved birds and a prolific layer to boot. Of course she did not like it, and expressed her anguish and resentment in a way that terrified her young destroyer. Feathers burst into flames; first one leg, then the other curled up; her head turned itself on her shoulders to look at the

boys reproachfully; her eyes swelled, turned black and popped out like liquid marbles; with one final writhe of her body, she sank into the fire, a blackened mass of ruined fowl.

This unexpected conflagration startled everyone and frightened Tommy half out of his little wits. He looked, stared, rolled over, slid from the flat rock, screamed and then fled naked towards the house, hotly pursued by Truan.

Adam stared at the fire, then at Toby in horror.

"Why, Toby? Why?"

"It wasn't me, it wasn't me," sobbed the boy. "It was the Kitty-hawk. She told me what to do. I had to do it. I have to do what she tells me."

So stricken was the boy that Adam gathered him into his arms until some degree of composure had returned. Together, they beat out the fire, rescued the remains of Anastasia—it must be said the smell of roast chicken was mouth-watering—dug a hole and buried her without ceremony at the foot of a dog rose. Adam gathered Tommy's things up, and helped Toby to the house. They reached their room unobserved to find that Truan and Tommy had also reached the room without encountering man nor boy.

Tommy, still naked, lay face down on the bed. Truan sat by his side, stroking his back and bottom with maternal tenderness. Adam and Toby took a side each, and joined in the caressing of the sweet, unsullied, innocent flesh. Some ten minutes later, Tommy, of his own volition, rolled over onto his back and laid his head on his pillowed arms.

"That was great," he enthused. "The best ever. I can't wait till the Kitty-hawk tells us what to do next!"

The boy's penis pointed rigidly at the ornate ceiling overhead.

Cricket and football were amongst the boy's favourite pastimes, of course, but, after the stirring accounts of those games in the immortal 'The Real Tom Brown's Schooldays', no feeble pen of mine may do more than respectfully allude to them.

But the institution most patronized by all was the Club. It had no other name, and it needed none, being the only one in the neighbourhood. The elder lads got it up, and the younger ones were occasionally admitted if they behaved well. Truan and

Toby were honorary members, but were always obliged to retire unpleasantly early, owing to circumstances over which they had little control. The proceedings of the Club were somewhat peculiar, for it met in all sorts of places and hours, had all manner of queer ceremonies and masonic amusements, and now and then exploded tempestuously, only to be re-established, however, on a firmer basis shortly thereafter.

Rainy evenings the members met in the school room and passed the time in games: chess, morris, backgammon, fencing matches, recitations, debates or dramatic performances of a darkly tragical nature. In summer the barn was the rendezvous, and what went on there no uninitiated mortal knows. On sultry evenings, the Club adjourned to the brook for aquatic exercises, and the members sat about in airy attire or as Mother Nature had made them. Hans was president, and maintained order admirably, considering the unruly nature of those boisterous angels. Master Myles never interfered with the Club's affairs and was rewarded for his wise forbearance by being invited now and then to behold the mysteries unveiled, which he appeared to relish.

Adam's favourite public amusements were working in his garden and sitting in the willow tree with his violin, for that green perch was a fairy world to him, and there he loved to nest, making music like a happy bird. The lads called him 'Old Chirper' because he was always humming, whistling, or fiddling, and they often stopped a minute in their work or play to listen to the soft tones of the violin, which seemed to lead a veritable orchestra of summer sounds. Adam dreamed for hours in this nook, unconscious of the pubertal and adolescent miracles being wrought upon him.

It would be misleading to suggest that Adam was entirely happy; at times he struck notes of purest melancholy. The boy's dreaming often conjured up visions of his and Hans's naked bodies stretched out on the mossy bank, and the sensation of Hans's cool fingers closing around his erection.

Hans had remained friendly, but they had not gone riding again along the leafy lanes, down the cart-track to the sparkling pool. And the secret! Why hadn't Hans told him the secret? He knew how to keep a secret; he would never betray his promise

to the boy who made him shiver and stiffen in bed at night.

The house was cool and full of shadows. The Club, led by its president, had trooped off to the brook for their aquatic exercises. The younger boys were asleep in the junior dormitory. Adam prowled the upper floor, passing Hans's room seven times before stopping, opening the door, and slipping inside. He closed the door behind him.

Adam's intentions were entirely honourable. He would not touch Hans's possessions, though he could not resist picking up a pair of the older boy's undergarments and pressing them to his nose. Pure Hans! The essence of Hans thrilled him to the core. He stood and gazed around his hero's room. How Spartan! A single bed. A single armchair. A wardrobe. A dressing table with the tallest of mirrors that almost touched the low ceiling.

How strange, thought Adam; the room is cool and warm at the same time. He threw himself on the bed, still pressing the undergarment against his nose, drinking in the smells of Hans's body. The poor boy could resist Nature's urges no longer.

He stood up and stripped off his thin shirt, summer shorts, socks and sandals. He stood naked before the mirror. His body, once skinny, was now only slim and glowing with health. At the base of his stomach fine layers of brown hair formed the nest from which his penis hung like a small fireman's hose. He lay back down on the bed, face down, and began to slide himself up and down the candlewick bedspread, horrified, yet thrilled to imagine that Hans was beneath him. Quite what he was trying to do, Adam was not sure, but he felt his cock stiffen, harden and elongate beneath him. He imagined Hans's hands stroking his hair, his neck, his back, until the cool fingers were caressing his bottom.

The boy imagined Hans urging him on to his back, and he turned over, his erect penis pointing straight up his belly. Their tongues, his and Hans's, were in each other's mouth, probing the dark. The older boy's hand slid between the younger's legs, gripping his horn, beginning the motions that Adam had begun time after time in the dark security of his own bed.

He was breathing harder, sucking on Hans's underpants which he held across his mouth and nose. Gasping deeper, as he reached

the point when his bottom began to thrust by itself, Adam prepared to catch the spurting ivory-coloured liquid in the underpants. His bed took over. His hand was Hans's hand—and more! his hand was Hans's mouth! He was cuming, cuming, cuming. . .

Footsteps on the stair! Coming here? He gripped his penis so hard that the erection and orgasm died. Where could he hide? He couldn't get under the bed or out of the door. He was trapped!

Heavy footsteps halfway up the stairs.

Adam sprang from the bed, grabbed his things, and threw himself into the corner behind the dressing-table. Ducking, he watched through the gap under the mirror as Hans came into the room, followed by Nurse Taylor.

Standing in front of the mirror, the man and the youth began to undress each other. Shirt, trousers, underpants, and even socks and shoes. Adam held his breath. He blinked several times. The images remained the same. What was taking place before his eyes was actually happening. Hans and Taylor stood naked before him, only inches from his eyes, whispering to each other in barely audible voices. The man stroked the boy's back, pulling him close against him, then edged him to the bed across which they fell. They lay facing each other, whispering, stroking, caressing. Adam felt his heart break and his cock stiffen again. He slipped onto the floor behind the dresser and closed his eyes.

The whispering continued for many minutes, then silence, then small grunts and moans. Adam could feel the perspiration running down his face and insides of his arms. He leaned forward to try and ease the cramp in his legs. He was terrified he would sniff or sneeze. Curiosity got the better of him. he rose onto his knees and peeked through the gap again.

Nurse Taylor was kneeling on all fours on the bed. His big bum pointed straight at Adam. On the edge of the bed, Hans had opened a jar and was transferring thick white cream from the jar to his cock. Adam suppressed a gasp as he saw how long the boy's erect penis was. Hans smeared some of the cream into the crack between Nurse Taylor's buttocks.

Hans crouched down behind the kneeling man; for a moment Adam could not see what was happening, but he heard Nurse

start to whimper. Hans moved a bit to the side and Adam could see exactly what he was doing. He clapped his hand over his mouth, but a tiny snort escaped. Hans held Nursey down, urging him to keep still and he'd be all right. "Relax," the boy heard his friend say. "Relax. Don't fight it. Just relax."

On the bed, the boy kept pushing a bit more, then a bit more until he was right inside the man's arse. His bum was going back and forth while he kept whispering how nice it felt, how much Nursey was enjoying it. The candlewick was pulled across the bed. Everything was moving as Nursey clawed and moaned.

From behind them came another moan. They paused, they listened; another moan. Adam was paralyzed. He whipped his hand away from his throbbing penis. Tears rolled down his face. His left leg had taken on a life of its own; it juddered against the dressing table, making the glass jars and containers clink and jingle.

There was a loud 'Uhh!' as Hans jerked himself free from Nursey's behind. He slide from the bed, stepped to the dressing table, and looked behind.

"Gott in Himmel!" cried Hans. "It's one of the boys!"

Nursey leapt from the bed, and grimaced as he bent to gather up this things. "What do you mean—one of the boys? They are all at the brook, or sleeping, aren't they?"

"Get out!" hissed Hans. "Just get out!"

Adam heard the door slam.

The dressing table was pulled aside. The boy waited for Hans's anger to fall about his ears, but the older boy reached down and pulled him to his feet.

"Now, Adam, do you want to explain?"

Adam could not explain. He could not stop sobbing. Hans ushered him to the bed, and sat him down, then sat himself beside the youngster.

"I meant no harm," stuttered the boy between his tears. "I missed you, oh, Hans, how I've missed you."

Hans hesitated for a moment, studying the tear-streaked face, and then edged Adam down until the boy lay full length on the bed. He stroked his hair and his cheek, calming him down like a disturbed pony, until Adam gained more control of himself

although still anxious, and twitching.

"I've missed you, too, Adam," whispered the older boy. "I've missed you, too."

As he looked down at Adam, the blood rushed around inside Hans's head, making him dizzy. He exhaled against the boy's soft hair and ran his hand from his neck, across his chest, down his belly to the nest of fine brown hair at the base of his semi-hard cock. Everything moved slowly, as if he were in water, no, in honey; as if Adam and he were together in a world of honey, and things were warm and slow and right.

Adam lay naked before him. He was smooth and strengthened by work and play under the sun. The boy's penis was around four inches long, and quite thick. It stood engorged with blood, his sweet young blood, and it had become unbelievably rigid. His scrotum was beginning to flesh out with adolescence, and hung low under his erection, looking quaintly at odds with the lithe proportions of the rest of his body.

Naked, Hans knelt next to him, running his right hand softly over Adam's firm thighs. "Oh, Adam," he whispered. "You're beautiful. You're so beautiful." Adam risked looking at him, into his eyes, which held myriad emotions, like the colours of the sunset sky over the lake.

At that moment, both boys wanted each other more than anything else they had ever wanted before in their short lives. Hans rolled onto his knees and positioned himself over Adam, kissing his face, his soft lips. He kissed his chest, his nipples, moving his lips down to his belly. He laid his ear on the boy's chest and felt his breath, deep and irregular, swirl into his lungs and out again. He laid his head there for a moment, looking down at the object of his desire. He reached out and petted it with his finger. He heard and felt a sharp intake of breath when he touched the silky purple head, and a small moan escaped Adam when Hans wrapped his fingers around the shaft, moving the skin slowly up and down, up and down. Unable to resist temptation, Hans slid his mouth over the younger boy's throbbing hard-on.

To his surprise, the boy's cock jumped in his mouth at the first contact. Hans began sucking up and down on the sweet boy cock, savoring the velvet-iron flesh. Then he released the slippery,

ivory-coloured erection and began to lick Adam's hairless balls. He took his whole sack in his mouth and rolled them around in his mouth. Adam grunted his pleasure. The gentle prompting of the older boy's hands urged the younger onto his stomach.

Pretty damn sweet, Hans thought to myself, but told him loudly, "Gary, you go to sleep, and let me take care of Adam!" And, Hans added silently, I'll really take care of him!

Hans began to rub his lovely rear. He spread the pale, firm cheeks and played with the tight little knot at the centre. Spreading the boy's bum cheeks even further, Hans pushed his face into the crack, his own rosy cheeks pressed tightly into Adam's nether ones. A squeal of delighted surprise greeted the intrusion. Hans began to lick at the lovely pucker, then opened his mouth wide and sealed his lips against Adam's bumlips, sucking in a little to create a vacuum. He licked the rosy, brownish little hole, pushing his tongue in and out, savouring the taste and smell. The little hole began to loosen under the persistent assault, and Adam spread his legs a little more, to give Hans better access. After sucking for several minutes, Hans slipped the fingers of one hand under the boy to toy with his sack and roll his lovely balls. A finger of his other hand probed gently at the wet hole, as the little sphincter yielded to its probing.

He turned the boy onto his back and urged his legs up and wide, so that Adam was fully exposed and vulnerable to his caresses. Hans stroked his thighs, crotch, scrotum, and finishing at the base of Adam's straining organ.

Hans lifted the boy's cock and took it into his mouth. "Mein Gott. . ." He loved the way his lips conformed to every little ridge and bump, how his lips could do one job and his tongue could do another, as he sucked the boy gently, rhythmically. Adam squirmed and gasped, he moaned and sighed with each little motion. He slid out of Hans's mouth temporarily which switched to his balls, that soft hairless package that held so much of his burgeoning manhood. The older boy took one testicle into his mouth, caressed it, took the other, then both. Adam's moans were far more audible now.

Down Hans went, down to where the smell became muskier. He could smell a sweaty boy down there, mixed with the odours

of puberty that followed him everywhere. "Spread your legs," Hans whispered. Adam did, and Hans slid his face between the boy's bum cheeks, driving his tongue in and around the puckered rosebud. Adam's moans became a continuous low whine of pleasure.

Hans reached up and began to masturbate the boy as he worked his tongue on his bud. After a few moments he came back up over his balls to the proud cock and took it back into my mouth. Hans felt hands close over my head, and Adam began moving his hips instinctively now, fucking his hero's mouth with determined strokes.

Hans fingered the slick, moist hole where his tongue had just been, then pushed his middle finger into the hilt. Adam's whine became broken gasps. And then, it happened. He cried out, cried out in pain and pleasure and lust and triumph. He came hard into Hans's mouth, jetting jets of fluid, striking the roof of his mouth, sliding down his open throat. Hans moaned with him, sharing his passion as the orgasm wracked through the boy, vibrating with the feeling of love as well as lust, rising, rising, bursting forth, and then sinking slowly...ever so slowly... slowly... and finally resting in a pool of warmth.

Adam's body lay quiescent on the soft bed, a light smile across his lips. Hans flopped down next to him, panting in gasps and smiling at him. He surveyed the warm, naked boy. He leaned over and kissed him. "I love you," he whispered. Never had Adam Flood heard words so dear.

He swallowed and whispered back, "I love you, too, Hans." Adam moved down the bed, knowing what he wanted to do.

"Hans?" he said softly.

"Jah?"

"Tell me before you sperm, okay?"

"Okay."

Hans felt the boy's lips enclose his cock, taking it in bit by bit, in perfect imitation of what had been to him. His mouth was soft, so soft, and Hans could feel the breath from Adam's nose against his skin. As he sucked, he masturbated Hans, too. The older boy writhed in passion, revelling in the incredible things this boy was doing to him, doing for him. After a few minutes,

Adam took his mouth away and masturbated Hans to the most powerful orgasm he had ever had, or might ever have. The sperm came out in powerful pulses and wouldn't end, an almost endless supply of thick, milky fluid all over Adam, over his chest, his face, his cock. Hans cried out Adam's name once, twice, arching his back, then falling back to the bed, back down to the bed where this beautiful boy was holding him in his soft, soft hands. Adam scooped up some of the fluid into his gaping mouth; he tasted it, savoured it.

"Did that feel good?" Adam asked, and giggled.

Hans giggled with him and soon the boys were in stitches, rolling onto the carpet in uncontrollable fits of laughter, the only cause being the love and joy of finding someone else with whom you could laugh about nothing at all.

Adam fell asleep in Hans's arms, and Hans let him sleep while he gazed and marvelled at the boy who had given his everything so willingly. After half an hour or so, he roused Adam. They lay, side by side, as Hans whispered to him.

"We must be careful, Adam. We will make love again. . ." Adam thrilled to hear those words. "...but not in the house. We will ride the ponies again, to our own secret place, but never in the house. No, never in the house. And you must never show, by word, sign, or deed, that you are so special to me. At New Carthage, we are all equal, and we must treat all others equally. Do you understand?"

Adam gulped and nodded, "I understand," not sure that he did, but willing to trust Hans in all things.

"Hans," he whispered. "May I ask...you and Nurse Taylor...?"

"Oh, Adam," sighed Hans. "That began so long ago, when I was your age, perhaps a little younger. And now, sometimes, for old times' sake...Nurse and I are friends; but I love you." Adam grinned and held Hans tightly.

"Careful, my boy," said Hans, "look what your are doing?" He eased himself away a little. Adam looked into the gap between their bodies. Hans was hot, hard and huge again. The boy giggled. "I can help with that. I learn my lessons well."

"No," said Hans firmly, but with a note of regret, "you must slip into the bathroom. Have a quick bath. Then slip into fresh

clothes. All of these must go to the laundry. I'll have a bath a little later."

"But why not bathe with me, dear Hans, why not with me?"

"Because," laughed the older boy, "I do not trust myself, and to be honest, dear Adam, I am not sure I can trust you. Look down there."

Adam looked down there. His penis was hot and hard again, his erection fencing with that of Hans. The boy giggled and slid from the bed. For a moment he stood there, flushed in the after-glow of orgasm, his cock straining against his tummy. Then he turned, skipped to the door, opened it, and looked back.

A grimace crossed his face.

"What's the matter?" asked Hans, alarmed.

Adam stuck his tongue out, and ran it along his lips.

"It's Nurse Taylor! Yuck! I can taste Nurse."

"Serves you right, you greedy boy," laughed Hans.

"Serves you right," responded Adam. "It tastes nice!"

And he was gone.

And so were the melancholy notes from Adam's fiddling. The brown brook babbled and sparkled below him, the bees haunted the clover fields on either side, and the birds considered his happy song as one of their own. Friendly faces peeped at him as they passed, the old house stretched its wide wings hospitably towards him, and Adam was welcomed by Hans to the Club.

'Help one another' was a favourite New Carthage motto, and Adam had learned how much sweetness is added to life by trying to live up to it.

HUCKLEBERRY SWEET

There was a great clashing of tin pails, much running to and fro, and frequent demands for something to eat that summer afternoon, for the boys were going picking, and made as much stir about it as if they were setting out to find the North-West Passage.

"Now, my lads," said Nursey Taylor, "get off as quietly as you can, for Billy is safely out of the way and won't see you go." But the plan did not succeed, for Billy had heard the bustle, longed to go, and prepared himself without a thought of disappointment. The troop was just getting under way when the simple lad came marching downstairs with his straw hat on, a bright pail in his hand, and a face beaming with satisfaction.

"Oh, dear! now we shall have a scene," sighed Nursey, who found Billy hard to manage at times.

"I'm ready," said Billy, and took his place in the ranks with such perfect unconsciousness of his mistake, that it really was very hard to correct him.

Nursey Taylor took Billy by the shoulder. "It's too far for you, dear boy," he said. "Stay and play with me, for I shall be alone. You'll get so tired and hot you won't have a good time. Wait till I go, and then we'll stay all day, and pick as many huckleberries as you want."

Billy pouted in a way that would have been very attractive if his dismay had not been so manifest to all. "You never go, you are so busy, and I am tired of waiting. I'd rather go by myself and gather berries for everyone if I am not to go in the party."

His big eyes filled with tears. The pathetic sight of the sparkling drops that might tinkle into the pail and fill it with salt water instead of huckleberries touched everyone present.

"If Hans was going I wouldn't mind, for he is very careful," said Nursey, "but he has gone with Adam to have the ponies' shoes checked, and I must remain here."

A voice piped up brightly from amongst the boys. "Let him come. I'll take care of him. I promise!" The voice was Truan's. Nursey looked at the adventurous boy dubiously. "We'll help, too. We won't let Billy out of our sight," chorused several more boys.

"Oh, do let him come, Nursey. It will be fine."

Nursey sighed, then made Truan double promise and cross his heart to keep an eye on Billy, who was a great wanderer, at all times. At that moment a solution rattled into view: Silas was just driving away in the hay-cart, but turned back at Nursey's call, and agreed to ferry the whole party to the woods, and return for them at five o'clock.

"It will delay your work a little, but never mind; we will pay you in huckleberry pies," said Nursey, inwardly reflecting that Silas would also wish payment in a way far more personal and demanding. He squirmed a little as he remembered how the man's big brown prick had thrust so ruthlessly into his arse hole only a few nights before. Still, it was compensation now that Hans was so besotted with that good-looking little ragamuffin Adam Flood.

The carter's rough, brown face brightened up, and he said, with a cheery "Haw! Haw!"—"Wal now, Nursey Taylor, if you go to bribin' of me, I shall give in right away. Mind you, I will need a slice of your pie this very night. Haw! Haw!" Nursey's hole gulped in anticipation.

With no more ado, the boys were packed into the hay-cart, and went rattling away, the brightest face among the dozen being that of Billy, as he sat between Truan and Toby, beaming upon the whole world and waving his best hat; the indulgent Taylor had not the heart to relieve him of it on his gala-day.

Such a happy afternoon they had of it, in spite of the mishaps which always occur on such expeditions! Tommy saw a snake, and in flying from it lost half his huckleberries; Ned fell out of a tree and split his shorts; Emil and Jack indulged in fisticuffs while establishing rival claim to the same tree. Of course, Truan came to grief, tumbled upon a hornets' nest and got stung—and it was Billy who applied a handful of damp earth which much assuaged the pain!

While all this was happening, Hans and Adam were a few miles away, tucking into bread, cheese and lemonade, the ponies having been successfully reshod at the smithy.

"It is best to walk them back," explained Hans, popping a pickle into Adam's mouth. "Hooves are tender for a few hours

after shoeing, and the ponies are best not ridden."

Adam crunched his pickle. "Can we go home by Marshallsay Woods?" he asked shyly. "By the pond, I mean. It's ever such a warm day, and the ponies may need to rest."

Hans grinned and held a small cucumber to Adam's lips; the boy's mouth opened and the cucumber slid in. "You have been reading my mind," said Hans, sliding the cucumber back and forward in the boy's mouth. "We will certainly have to rest, and about an hour should be enough." Adam crunched down hard on the cucumber between his lips. "Ouch!"

Back at the huckleberry picking, Billy skipped hither and thither like a grasshopper, and the huckleberries fell out of his pail almost as fast as he put them in. Truan sat with his back against a horse chestnut tree; he grinned and he grimaced, for the hornets' stings still throbbed on his bare legs. They had lost touch with the other boys, and though the sun still blazed, there was a late afternoon coolness in the air.

"I keep putting 'em in, but it don't fill up," panted Billy, dropping to the moss under the chestnut tree.

"We should find the others," said Truan. "Last time we were here we found a cave near here, where Hans helped us make a fire. Let's fill our pails quickly and wait by the cave. The others must pass along the path, and we can leap out at them," proposed Truan, thirsting for adventures.

Billy consented, and away they went, scrambling over the wall, running down the wooded slopes, till they reached the rocks and the underbrush. It was shady and cool, and a little spring gave the thirsty boys a refreshing drink out of its mossy cup.

"Now we will go and rest in the cave, and eat our victuals," said Truan, well-satisfied with his success so far.

"Do you know the way?" asked Billy.

"Course I do. We were here last year, and I always remember." Billy nodded, and followed blindly as Truan led him over stock and stone, and brought him, after much meandering, to a small cave in the rocks where blackened stones showed that fires had been made. The floor of the cave had been scattered with fresh, sweet-smelling straw.

"Well, I'll be blowed," said Truan presciently. "Some other

boys must be using this cave, too. Isn't this nice?" he asked, as he took out a bit of bread-and-butter from his knapsack, rather damaged by being mixed up with nails, fishhooks, stones and other foreign substances.

The boys stretched themselves out in the straw, back against a smooth out-crop, and feasted happily in the bread and butter.

"Do you think they'll find us soon?" asked Billy.

"No, I don't," said Truan, "because when we hear them, we shall hide, and have fun making them find us."

"P'raps they won't come."

"Don't care. I can get us home myself. It's only three miles. This is grand," said Truan, finishing the last of his bread and butter, crumbs sticking around his lips. "In fact, life would be perfect if it wasn't for these damned stings."

Billy's eyes opened wide at the sound of the naught word. "But I put the mud on. They shouldn't be stinging much now."

"Oh, those stings are fine," said Truan. "It's the little blighters further up my leg where your stuff didn't reach. They're burning like billy-o." He grinned at the unintended pun.

"Hold on," said Billy. "I'll be back." Within moments, he'd returned with fresh fingerfuls of mud.

Without rising to his feet, Truan unlatched his snake-belt, unsnapped his shorts, and slid them to his ankles. There were two bright patches on the insides of his upper thighs, the centre of each glowing redly.

Billy knelt and applied the mud, circling each area gently with his cool fingers. "Ah, yes, that's it, just there, right there, Billy boy," sighed Truan in relief. The fingers continued to turn in small circles over the burning silk-smooth skin; Billy's nose only inches above the cotton white underpants that bulged in the middle of the stricken boy's lap. Although neither boy mentioned the phenomenon, their eyes were fixed mainly there.

The bulge began to grow. A hillock. A small tent. A steep-sided mountain.

"Hold on," said Billy. "I'll be back." Within moments he turned, hands washed clean in the spring, cupping ice-cold water that he used to trickle away the mud on Truan's thighs. The 'mountain' was now a thick little hose that distended the boy's

underpants.

Neither boy made any comment when Billy's fingers closed round each side of the shaft. He squeezed Truan's erection, his fingers and thumb working their way up the length and down to the bulge of his balls again and again. Truan raised his bottom and wiggled his underpants to his knees; his hard cock sprang free; boy smells rose into the warm air. Billy edged Truan's foreskin back until the mushroomed, purple, glazed head was exposed. He urged Truan's legs apart, slid his fingers in below the scrotum, and continued to work the shaft with his other hand.

"Billy...?" whispered Truan.

"It's okay," said Billy, smiling at the boy. "In the woods. The man does it for me. And he gives me a pound every time," he added chirpily. "You're getting nice hair." Billy kneeled low; his lips closed around the head of Truan's cock; he applied different pressures with the fast sucking motions he made on the boy's erection. Truan's bottom squirmed; he reached out and stroked Billy's hair.

Not far away, Hans reached out to stroke Adam's hair. He was stretched out on the strip of moss by the pond. Adam lay on top of him, stretched the length of the older boy's body. Both boys were naked. The ponies were tethered a few feet away; they muttered and whinnied their contentment, which matched the sounds made by the boys. Adam had crossed his arms on Hans's chest; he was looking into his eyes; he could not believe he was so lucky, so happy. Hans opened his mouth; there emerged a piece of chocolate. Adam bent to suck the chocolate piece; as the boys sucked on the chocolate, their lips were mashed together until they were kissing deeply, open-mouthed, the chocolate mixing with their own saliva, their own juices.

Hans stroked the boy's chest, and slipped his other arm under Adam's shoulders. He pulled him closer, into an embrace. The boy did not resist. His eyes were closed, but his heart was racing. Hans nuzzled his neck, and slipped his hand down to his belly. He planted soft kisses on the boy's fragile neck. Adam inhaled sharply.

Hans began to stroke his flank and belly, slipping his hand further up to toy with Adam's nipples, and pinched them a little.

His tongue teased the right nipple and he felt it engorge and rise from the stimulation. His right hand wandered lower, rubbing against hip bones and across silk-smooth abdomen, teasing. Downward to caress the boy's thighs, his tongue lavished wet kisses on the smooth chest. Mesmerized by Adam's innocent but hungry cock protruding lewdly from the swollen scrotum, Hans let his fingers run the length of the shaft that twitched and pulsed beneath his fingers.

Hans put his head close to the boy's erect penis and toyed with the thick brown hair at the base. He held the boy's erection down a little and stroked it until pre-cum glistened over the exposed head. Hans urged Adam's legs to the "frog-legged" position so his crotch was fully exposed, then lifted them to examine his crack. He began to rub the cock's silken hardness against his face, cheeks, nose, lips, eyes, forehead. He nuzzled the sac and kissed it gently, first the right ball, then the left. He took Adam's testicles into the hot, wet desire of his mouth, and sucked them gently. Hans tongued around the margin of the scrotum and let the tip wander along the seam where scrotum, torso, and thigh join. The skin was warm and slick with a pungent odour—the smell of a boy in pubescence, the smell of a boy in heat.

As Hans ministered to his hot flesh, Adam's knees stretched wider, spreading his crotch to give better access. Tenderly, Hans lifted the legs, turning the boy's bottom up to view. His little anus was reddish, set in the whitest, smoothest skin you can imagine. The crack was smooth and flawless, the folds of the anal tissues throb gently, eager to feel a hot, wet tongue. Hans licked along the periphery and felt again the fluttery muscle movements. He smiled at the involuntary flexing of the little sphincter as it tried instinctively to open!

After a few more minutes of savouring this treasure, Hans began serious tonguing, once again opening wide to take as large a mouthful of the sweet, hairless flesh as he can. He probed gently, insistently at the centre. Hans heard Adam give an involuntary sigh as his puckered rosebud popped open. He was ready for fingers!

Hans gazed at Adam's anus, slippery wet from his ministra-

tions. His index finger slid from his mouth directly to the little rosebud and easily into the sweet velveteen channel. He could feel the rapid pulse against his knuckle. Hans thrust the finger in and out, not probing but stroking into him. Adam was being finger-fucked for the very first time. Hans tried two fingers. The channel was hot and tight, but willing. After five minutes of attention, the boy's orchid flower opened completely. When Hans finally withdrew, he left his middle finger to hold Adam's anus open, reaching upward with his other fingers to cup and stroke his tightening balls. The boy was very, very excited. Hans decided it was time.

Hans slid onto his back and drew up his knees. Adam's legs and bottom slipped into the space beneath and between. He felt Hans's hot, hard cock burning against his belly and his own cock slip into the hot gap between Hans's buttocks. The older boy eased the younger forward and up until the tip of Adam's cock touched the hot hole at the centre. Hans's hands were around the boy's bum, pulling him in, pulling him in.

Adam was incredibly embarrassed, unbelievably thrilled. He felt like he was at the centre of an earthquake, the world giving way around him. Hans's fingers were around his shaft; he was embarrassed to be so hard. His cock was rubbing against the older boy's ring, his anal slit, probing, pushing, insistent, until the ring popped open and Adam's cock slid easily inside. The boy could not believe the heat that engulfed his cock, the tightness of the ring around the bottom of his shaft that gripped deliciously as he began to slide in and out of Hans's bum.

There was a rush of light behind Adam's eyes. Fireworks were going off in his brain. He was 'fucking' Hans. Fred taught him the word. "Fucking Hans. That's what I'm doing. Fucking Hans." He dare not open his eyes. He was embarrassed to look at Hans. Frightened his lover would see the pleasure and the triumph in his eyes. Fucking Hans. Fucking Hans. Fucking Hans. He used the phrase to establish the rhythm of the fuck.

He grunted as he felt something probe his own little hole. It was a finger. Hans's finger entered, moved past the tip, past the first knuckle. Adam wriggled his bottom to help the finger inside. Fucking Hans. Fuck my bottom. Fucking Hans. Fuck my

bottom. The repetition of the phrases delighted him.

The ponies neighed their contentment. Birds sang, bees hummed. And Adam was fucking Hans.

Truan slid his head deeper into the space between Billy's legs and ran his tongue deep into the crack between his buttocks. The boy's legs, bent at the knee, fell wide open, giving him the access he wanted. Truan reciprocated, widening his legs as Billy's tongue traced the line that seemed to split him in half. Sun streaked in from the cave entrance, spotlighting the naked boys who lay heads to toes in the straw, licking the inner walls of each other's bumcheeks. Truan licked the flushed pink skin, his tongue slipping closer and closer to the boy's perfect arsehole.

He sighed as he probed at the little wrinkled rosebud, surrounded by skin as smooth as an unripe plum, and cupped the bunchy handfuls of flesh and squeezed. His lips felt hot and swollen. How long had he and Billy suckled on each other's hot, hard cocks? He'd been taken aback by the size and urgency of Billy's erection—four inches long at least, an inch in diameter, and a forest of silky brown hair at the base. What Billy lacked in intelligence, he was making up for in physical development.

Truan wriggled with pleasure as he felt the boy's tongue penetrate his hole, and redoubled his own efforts. What they were doing was wrong, maybe even dirty, he knew that, but it didn't seem to matter. Here in the cave they were in their own world, answerable to no one but each other. The muscle in his tongue strained as he probed as deeply as he could. Billy had closed his legs tightly around Truan's head; the smells, peaches and powder, sweat and naughty stuff, mingled in a heady mixture that made his own cock seemed to swell and harden even more. He wanted to spurt his seed, but not spurt his seed; he wanted to explode, and stay on the edge of explosion forever. His thumbs parted his friend's hole still wider, and Billy grunted as Truan drove in deeper.

Adam was spurting now. The thrusting of his bottom was beyond his control. His cock seemed so hot and swollen it would burst. His hair brushed the inside of Hans's buttocks. Adam's legs

shuddered and shook out of control. He threw his arms around the older boy's shoulders, and pressed his cheek against his shoulder blade as his bottom rammed his hard cock inside again and again, ejaculating more completely than he had ever done before. Adam felt exposed as if someone had stripped all of his skin away, flayed him alive, leaving the exposed nerve endings open to the warm breeze of pleasure that rippled over them. He sobbed and grunted: "Uh! Uh! Uh!", trembled and then lay still.

It was not over. In a single movement, Hans turned him over, slipping out his cock, and kneeled across the boy's chest, jerking at his own huge, hot hard-on. He worked himself higher until he straddled the boy's face, then lowered himself slowly. Adam pulled open Hans's bum cheeks and buried his face deep between them, his tongue darting out to lick away the sweat around the dark-skinned, puckered anal ring. This was a world of sensation, not of thought. Sights, sounds, smells crowded in on Adam. He was going crazy with desire. He wanted to follow the tip of his tongue up Hans's hole just like Alice followed the White Rabbit down the hole in Wonderland. For this was his own private wonderland. What would it be like to be inside Hans, to wander the highways and by-ways of his veins and arteries, to feel Hans's blood pumping through his own heart, to feel the food that Hans eats on his own tongue, to have his thoughts and Hans's thoughts mingle and mix until they became the same thoughts?

Hans moved down the boy's body a little. "Keep your eyes closed," he whispered. Adam felt jets of hot 'cum', Fred's word, splatter against his cheeks, his nose, his eyes, his mouth. He couldn't resist tasting a drop of his lover's cum. Sweet and salty, like Nursey's tapioca pudding.

"Keep your eyes closed," whispered Hans. He pulled the boy to his feet and led him to the pond. Hand in hand, they strolled into the pond until the water was above Adam's waist. He felt a little pressure behind his neck, then ducked his head under water and shook it from side to side in slow motion. Together he dove with Hans, then came to the surface, his lover's arms around him, his lover's lips on his own. Water streamed from Adam's hair. Hans held Adam's head, hands cupped under his chin, and looked into his eyes, "Mein Lieblich, mein Lustknaube,"

he whispered. Adam did not understand what the words meant, but he knew what Hans meant. He put his arms around the older boy's neck in a gesture of surrender, submission, of total love.

"I guess it's going to be night pretty soon," observed Truan, as if to himself, as a mosquito bit him, and the frogs in a nearby marsh began to tune up for the evening concert. He swallowed the last drops of Billy's semen, enjoying the after-taste that lingered in his throat. "I heard a horn a little while ago; maybe they were blowing for us," he added.

"Where was it?" asked Billy, stopping short.

"Over that way," said Truan confidently, as he pointed with a purple fore-finger in entirely the wrong direction.

"Let's go that way and find then," said Billy. The boys wheeled about and began to trot through the bushes, feeling more than a trifle anxious, for there were so many cowpaths all about, they could not hope to remember which way they'd come. On they went over stock and stone, pausing now and then to listen for the horn, which did not blow anymore, for it had only been the moo of a cow as she was serviced by her beau.

"I don't remember seeing that pile of stones—do you?" asked Truan, as he sat on a wall to rest a moment and take an observation.

"I don't remember anything, but I want to go home now," said Billy, whose voice had a little tremble that made Truan slip an arm across his shoulder in reassurance. They trudged on through the fast-deepening twilight and further disappointments, for each time they reached a likely-looking tree, they found that it was not the one out of which Ned had fallen that afternoon.

"Are we lost?" quavered Billy, clasping his pail in despair.

"Not much," said Truan cheerily. "I just don't see which way to go. Let's sit down here by the side of the track and wait. They'll be along soon."

The boys sat down, their backs against a tree they could not identify in the dark. "It's still warm, and we've got plenty to eat," said Truan. "You must always look on the bright side of life. That's what Master Myles tells us, and he's right."

"Can I suck your willy again?" asked Billy.

"Okay," said Truan. "Help yourself."

While Truan nibbled at some huckleberries and Billy nibbled at his cock, the family at home were in a great state of agitation. The cart had arrived at five thirty decanting its tired but happy, huckleberry-juice-smearred boys. Only when a headcount was taken did they realise that two of their number were missing!

"Where are Truan and Billy?" cried Nursey Taylor, clutching Toby in a way that caused him to think the good fellow had lost his wits. Within minutes, two search parties were organised. They boarded the cart again and Silas took them away at a pace the boys had rarely seen or experienced.

At the woods, they split, and led by Nursey or Silas, the boys, carrying a lantern each, hallooed through the woods in different directions, making enough noise to disturb the dead, but not enough to reach Truan and Billy, who at that moment were ejaculating into each other's eager mouths. Had the boys been outside the cave, they might have heard the hullabaloo; they might not; speculation profiteth nothing.

At the great pasture, the groups came together again, their lights flitting to and fro like will-o'-the-wisps, Nursey's voice shouting, "Truan! Billy!" in every part of the field. Silas whistled and roared. Boys plunged here and there. Often Nursey hushed them all, saying, with a sob in his throat, "Hush! The noise may frighten them. Let me call," and he would cry out the beloved names like a wounded buffalo, more than once being answered in kind by a bull in a darkening field. The very echoes whispered their names; the winds wafted them willingly; but still no answer came.

Such a weary search! But then some inexplicable instinct seemed to lead the anxious searchers, for presently Stuffy uttered a cry, and caught up a shining object lying in the path. It was Truan's belt, the metal snake-head clasps glittering in the lantern light. Nursey Taylor seized and kissed it as if it were a living thing, as if it were still on the boy himself. Yet, no other traces were found, and despair, like the darkness, had closed over the searchers when He who organises miracles bestowed one upon the good folk of New Carthage.

Out of the darkness they came. Two ponies. And upon each

pony, a boy! Truan and Billy! And leading each pony, a boy! Hans and Adam! And all, except the ponies, were singing. 'Ten Green Bottles', now reduced to three, as the little party clip-clopped into the midst of the searchers and their flickering lanterns.

The grins and smiles on every face outshone the lanterns, none more than Nursey Taylor, who seizing Billy by the legs, dragged him from the pony into his arms. For a moment, man and boy kissed and clung to one another, quite forgetting all the world; for no matter how lost and soiled and worn-out his brood might be, Nursey Taylor could forgive and forget everything as he folded his little lamb in his fostering arms, wondering only for a moment from whence came the saltiness on his lips. Happy the boy whose faith remains unchanged, and who, through all the snares and woes, has kept some filial token to repay that unconditional love.

Billy was fine next day but Truan had a headache and lay abed in his room, cold-cream upon his hornet stings. His remorse was quite gone and he evidently thought being lost rather a fine amusement. Nursey Taylor was not pleased with this state of things, and had no desire to have his fledglings led from the paths of virtue, or his charges lying around loose in huckleberry fields.

He sat on the edge of Truan's bed, applying cold cream to the hornet stings, talking soberly as he tried to impress upon the boy's mind the difference between liberty and licence, telling several tales to enforce his lecture. Oddly enough, his voice faltered as the aforementioned hillock rose in Truan's underpants, and Nursey Taylor finally retreated to bake the promised huckleberry pies, in particular the one for Silas. He returned around two o'clock for his slice which he shared with Nursey in his room, the House Keeper suddenly feeling the need to lie down with a 'headache' and feel the benefits of cold cream applied where he needed it most.

THE MIRROR CRACK'D

A finer pen than mine has written of the divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will, and that same divinity shaped a surprising end for poor Hans, who, only a week after allowing Adam to bugger him so joyously on the mossy bank by Marshallsay Pond, was found floating belly-down, arse-up in that same pond while the birds sang and the bees hummed as unconcerned as the ponies tethered by.

It was Toby who raised the alarm. It was Toby, who had been out riding with Hans, who came staggering, tear-stained, seminaked and mud-bedaubed into the yard before New Carthage House to gasp the terrible news.

Horror! Horror! Horror shrouded Silas' cart as he brought back the boy's body, as fresh and pink, if tinged with blue, slung over sacks of corn, his modesty covered only by a sackcloth, which, having slipped, revealed to the sobbing Adam the bobbing arse into which he had pumped his boy-seed only the Saturday—the century!—before.

Let us not, dear Reader, kick over-much against the pricks of outrageous fortune, nor like some omniscient Authors pretend to more knowledge than we know. Death, like Life, has it own mysteries, and only the fool or the knave will try to organise them.

The facts are these. Hans and Toby went a-riding. Then a-swimming in Marshallsay Pond. Toby fell asleep on the mossy bank. He woke to find Hans, not swimming, not waving, but drowned. Toby ran, clad only in his thin cotton underpants, ripped to shreds by bushes and thorns, back to the house. The body of Hans was fetched home in Silas' cart, the ponies tied and trotting contentedly behind, oblivious to the sufferings of the house, as myriad as the sufferings of the Achaeans.

Hans was dead, deceased, defunct, no more.

New Carthage wept, New Carthage mourned, and scant notice was taking of Toby and his mutterings about the Kitty-hawk. New Carthage and the summer rolled on.

One balmy night when the little lads were in bed, the elder ones were splashing about in the claw-footed bathtubs, and sad-

eyed Nursey Taylor was undressing Timmy in his parlour, the boy suddenly cried out, "Oh, my Freddy!" and pointed to the window, through which the beaming face of the Moon shone brightly.

"No, darling, he is not there. It is the blessed Moon," said Nursey.

"No, no, Freddy at a window. Timmy saw him," persisted the boy, both excited and aroused.

Nursey hurried to the window, hoping it would prove true, but the face, if it had been there, was gone, and nowhere appeared the signs of a mortal boy; he called Fred's name, ran to the front door, pink-bottomed Timmy close behind, and made him call too, thinking the lad's voice might have more appeal than his own. No one answered, nothing appeared, and they went back much disappointed. Later, Nursey tucked up the sleepy boy in his bed, kissed him gently on the customary spot, and returned to his room to brood on the untimely demise of his beloved Hans.

It was past ten when he rose to shut up the house. He paused a minute to enjoy the moon-washed scene from the steps; something white caught his eye on one of the haycocks scattered over the lawn. The boys had been playing there all afternoon and, fancying that Truan had left his hat as usual, the good-hearted young man went out to get it. As he approached, he saw that it was neither hat nor handkerchief, but a shirt sleeve with a brown hand sticking out of it. He hurried round the haycock, and there lay Fred, fast asleep!

Rejoice! Rejoice! Rejoice! Kill the fatted calf!

Ragged, dirty, thin, and worn-out the boy looked. One foot was bare, the other tied up in a gingham shirt which he had taken from some washing-line to use as a clumsy bandage for some hurt. He seemed to have hidden himself behind the haycock, but in his sleep had thrown out the arm that betrayed him. He sighed and muttered as if his dreams disturbed him, and once when he moved, he groaned as if in pain, but still slept on quite spent with weariness.

Tenderly, Nursey Taylor bent and cradled the boy in his strong arms. In his sleep, Fred swung his arms around Nursey's neck, and pillowed his face against the young man's chest. The warmth

of the boy's buttocks weighed against Nursey's arms as he bore his bundle of warm, living flesh into the house, straight to the parlour, and laid him the length of the boys' favourite sofa before he summoned Master Myles to the miracle he had found behind the haycock.

"Rejoice with me," cried the good master, "for you have found my sheep which was lost. This our son was dead and is alive again!"

Fred's eyes fluttered open at the sound of the voice familiar. He groaned, and tried to slide from the sofa, but Master Myles urged him to lie down again. The boy seemed to wake thoroughly then; he gazed up at his erstwhile benefactor as if he suddenly remembered where he was and doubted his welcome. His face changed, and he said in his rough old way, "I only stopped to rest. I'll be on my way in the morning."

Master Myles said nothing.

"Didn't suppose you'd let me in," Fred said, fumbling with a little bundle which he took up as if departing immediately.

Master Myles said nothing.

The boy slid from the sofa. With a long breath, as if a load were off his mind, he began to limp towards the hall, but stopped suddenly to say, "I ran away."

"It makes no difference," said Master Myles. "This is your home, if you wish it. Are you lame?"

"A stone smashed my foot. Getting over a stone wall. I don't mind. I can walk," and he did his best to hide the pain each step cost him."

"This is your home, if you wish it," repeated Master Myles.

The boy stepped and fell backwards onto the sofa again. He laid his head back, white and faint with weariness and suffering. Tears coursed down his cheeks. "So kind, so kind," he muttered, as if in prayer.

"My poor Fred! drink this, and then eat a little; you are home again, and Nursey Taylor will take good care of you." Fred looked up at him with eyes that brimmed with tears and gratitude, as he sipped the wine Nursey held to his lips, and then began slowly to eat the food brought him. Each mouthful seemed to put heart into him.

"You will stay the night, Fred," said Master Myles. "We will talk in the morning, after which I hope you will stay for good." He turned to Nursey Taylor. "See Fred safely to sleep in the Sanatorium. Do not tell the boys of his home-coming. Tomorrow, he will sleep, eat and drink, then sleep again. Now will I retire to our little chapel to give thanks for the return of our own dear boy." He leaned over Fred and kissed him lightly on the forehead, turned and walked slowly and with dignity from the room. In the silence that followed, two great tears brimmed over and rolled down the boy's dusty cheeks. No one saw them, for he brushed them hastily away; but perhaps in that little pause Fred's old distrust for these good people vanished forever, the soft spot at the heart of every boy was touched, and he felt an impetuous desire to prove himself worthy of the love and pity that was so patient and forgiving.

Nursey Taylor brought warm water and a mild disinfectant. He bathed and bound up the wounded foot. Once more, he raised the boy in his strong arms, carried him upstairs and laid him gently on a bed in the Sanatorium.

Fred hardly protested as the young man stripped away his rags, and as he was laid on the fresh linen sheets, his heavy eyelids closed, his ragged breathing became shallow, and he lay there like a helpless infant. Nursey bent to pull the sheet over his body. He paused. How only a few weeks had changed the boy's body. His heart beat beneath the curve of his ribs. Thin as he was, muscles rippled in his torso. The thick dark hair in his groin had sent a searching tendril towards his tummy button. His cock lay thick and long, like one of cook's cream squeezers. His balls, surprisingly large, lay like goose eggs in his wrinkling scrotum.

"Lead us not into temptation," whispered Taylor, his cool fingers closing round the small hosepipe between Fred's legs. Only the slightest pressure, a squeeze of the fingers. The flesh awoke, grew, stiffened, stretched beneath insistent fingers. "Forgive us our trespasses," whispered Taylor, his tongue flicked out to catch a drop of pre-cum at the tiny slit. "And hallowed be thy name"... his mouth closed over the boy's erection, swallowed it to the base of the shaft, hairs tickling his lips, and began the insistent sucking,

matched by the fingers squeezing. "The kingdom come!" spurts of hot semen hit the back of the cocksucker's throat. Again, again, and yet again! The twitching died, the throbbing ebbed, the boy's cock softened, and it slid from the man's mouth.

Nursey pulled the sheet up over Fred. He kissed his forehead, leaving a trace of semen on the pale, drawn skin. He extinguished the lamp and tip-toed from the room. The boy smiled. In his sleep? Beloved Reader, your guess is as good as mine.

For a week Fred moved only from bed to sofa. It was a long week and a hard one, for the hurt foot was very painful at times, the quiet days long to the active lad, longing to be out and about in the late summer weather, and especially difficult was it to be patient.

Only the joyous welcome from the other boys, in particular Adam, Toby, Tom, and Timmy, kept Fred's spirits up; so Fred did his best, and everyone helped him in their various ways. The times passed, and he was rewarded at last by hearing the doctor say, on Saturday morning: "This foot is doing better than I expected. Give the lad a crutch this afternoon, and let him stump about the house a little."

"Hooray!" shouted Adam, and raced away to tell the other boys the good news.

Everybody was glad, and after dinner the whole flock assembled to behold Fred crutch himself up and down the hall a few times before he settled in the porch. The boy was much pleased at the interest and good will shown him, and brightened up more and more every minute; for the older boys came to pay their respects, the little boys fussed about him with stools and cushions, and Timmy watched over him as if he were a frail creature unable to do anything for himself.

Naturally, a shadow passed over the company when the news of Hans's demise was broken to the homecomer, but boys are resilient beasts, and the gathering sparkled again as Fred narrated a few of his adventures between then and now. Only Nursey Taylor, who hovered on the periphery, seemed slightly downcast, and only when Adam announced the master's decision that Fred could return to his own room and bed that night. Nursey, ever eager to serve, no doubt mourned the loss of carrying Fred

upstairs to the San bed, and tucking him in for the night.

The boys were still sitting and standing about the steps when a carriage stopped at the gate, a hat was waved from it, and with shouts of "Uncle Blackie!", several boys scampered down the avenue to meet the man who had first entrusted them to the safe-keeping of Master Myles and New Carthage House. In a moment the carriage drove up with boys swarming all over it, while Uncle Blackie sat laughing in the midst, little Timmy bouncing on his lap.

"Stop the triumphal car and let Jupiter descend!" commanded the jolly fellow, depositing Timmy. He slid out and ran lithely up the steps to meet Master Myles, who stood smiling and clapping his hands.

"How goes it, Blackie?"

"All right, Myles."

Master Myles turned to the boys. "Now, lads, Uncle Blackie and I have much to discuss and business to transact. We shall do this over supper. Then Uncle Blackie will tell the best-behaved room a goodnight story. . . " a hum of enthusiasm went up "...and select one of the older boys to return with him to the city to begin a commercial career. Ponder long and hard on whom this cloak of good fortune should fall." A murmur of approbation ran through the older boys, for they had seen others disappear down the avenue with Uncle Blackie, set on the road to fortune if not fame.

"And now," added Master Myles, "who will show our visitor around New Carthage? As you know, Uncle Blackie always takes a general survey, and looks disappointed if things are not flourishing." The roar that went up indicated that every boy sought this singular honour.

Mr Blackwood laid his hand upon Adam's shoulder. "Suppose we take a little turn before I have supper, my boy. That big, easy carriage will do. What say, lads, shall Peter and I carry off this handsome whelp?" The boys thought it a capital joke, and Adam, though blushing, looked delighted, but asked, with a burst of virtue, "Will Master Myles like it?"

"Oh, yes; we settled all that a minute ago. Myles and I have a way of sending messages to one another, without any words.

It is a great improvement on the telegraph."

"I know—it's eyes; I saw you lift your eyebrows, and nod toward the carriage, and Master Myles raised his right eyebrow," cried Adam, who was quite at ease with kind Mr Blackie by this time.

Within moments, man and boy were seated in the open carriage behind Peter, the black coachman. Adam waggled his fingers self-consciously as the carriage set off, rattling down the track that ran around the outskirts of the New Carthage property.

"Now, my boy," said Uncle Blackie, settling back into the deep upholstery, "Tell me about yourself. How you have grown since I found you abandoned in the old papermill! You have become a handsome boy indeed."

Adam blushed again, but did his best to describe the past few wonderful months at New Carthage, the friends he had made, what he had learned in school, and the adventures he'd had. His voice darkened as he spoke of Hans; his companion brushed away a tear from his eye. "Ah, Hans," the man said, "a great loss, indeed. I had high hopes for that boy. Were you and he...close?"

Slightly startled by the emphasis on 'close', Adam stammered how Hans had been like an older brother to him, had taught him to ride, and to float, belly up on Marshallsay Pond. "And belly down?" murmured Mr Blackie mysteriously.

"But let us look to the future," smiled the boy's benefactor benevolently. "Though you are young, you may be the boy I seek." He paused. "Money! young Adam, money! That's what makes the world go round! And with my help, you can make us both a splendid amount of capital." He raised his finger like the Baptist in Leonardo's mighty work and added a smile as enigmatic as the Mona Lisa's. "You have the face, you have the body, but can you learn the arts, the skills, the means of...Pleasure!" Adam was lost somewhere around the word 'capital', but as ever, he did his best to please.

"I can try, Uncle Blackie, I can try!" enthused the boy.

"Do you hear that, Peter? The boy can try! Adam can try to please! What more can a man ask of a boy?"

Black Peter and his black pair grunted. From under a cushion, Blackie pulled out what appeared to be a photograph album. A

photograph album it was, but an album which contained sepia-tinted photographs the like of which Adam had never encountered in his sweet young life.

Mr Blackwood flicked open to the first page of the album which lay on his knee. Adam looked down, and saw a boy, about his own age, standing among what appeared to be sand dunes. The sun shone down brightly. The boy wore only a swimsuit, suggesting it was summer. He was a handsome boy, with black curly hair, ringlets falling about his ears. His almond-shaped eyes seemed as dark as his hair. A grin lit up his face, the small teeth white and even.

Uncle Blackie flicked to the next page. It was the same boy in the same pose, but this time he was naked. He stood, hand on hip, smiling almost defiantly at the camera. The next page. Same boy, same pose, but this time he was in full erection, his slim cock pointing straight up his belly. The nest of curls at its base was as dark as the hair on his head. Adam's intake of breath sounded through the carriage.

"Turn the next page, if you like, my boy," whispered Uncle Blackie.

Adam tried to resist, then flicked over the page. Two naked boys, so similar they might have been twins, stood, arm across each other's shoulder, grinning at the camera. Both were erect. Adam flicked the page. One boy was kneeling before the other, his hands on the other's hips, his face buried in the other's lap. You could not see, but you knew the standing boy's cock was deep in the kneeling boy's mouth; a little imagination set his head bobbing up and down.

"Turn the pages, if you want to," whispered the man again. As he spoke, he slid his hand into Adam's lap, and wrapped his fingers about the living boy's erection, freeing it from the folds of his cotton underpants. Adam turned the page.

The boys lay side by side, but head to toe, on the golden sands, and this time it was clear to see that each boy sucked the other's cock. Adam felt fingers flick open the buttons of his britches, and ease his cock through the opening of his underpants into the cool evening air. He was hugely embarrassed, but what could he do? How often Master Myles had said, "Without Mr

Blackwood there would never have been a New Carthage. It was Mr Blackwood who gave me the wherewithal, and, yes, the courage, to try my pet plan. So, boys, always keep in mind that without the magnificent generosity of our greatest benefactor, you would not have this home today."

Allowing the gentleman to fondle him seemed a small price to pay for all he had done for the boys, Adam assured himself. His hard cock felt gooey and sticky as Uncle Blackie worked his foreskin back and forwards and he whispered in his ear.

"What a fine boy you have become, Adam Flood, a fine, well-developed boy. We will start with photographs and go on to better things, much better things. Turn the page, my boy, turn the page, let's see what our imps are up to now."

Adam turned the page, and gasped.

One boy, impossible to say which, knelt on all fours in the sand, his rump raised to the other boy, who, kneeling behind and over him, appeared to have penetrated him with his organ of procreation. Adult fingers flicked the page. A close-up. The boy's stiff cock was buried deep the boy's anus; his ring, clearly distended, wrapped round the shaft as tightly as an elastic band might. Adult fingers flicked the next few pages speedily; an illusion of motion; the stiff cock speared the boy, retreated and spear him again and again. Mr Blackie's fingers moved faster on Adam's cock until they must have been blurred to behold.

Adam breathed raggedly, gasped, and felt his legs stiffen and stretch out involuntarily. The album slid to the floor. His eyes closed. He felt a hot, wet mouth close over his erection. Suck. Pull. Push. Suck. Slow. Fast. Hard. The boy, his bottom jerking up from the cushions, spurted uncontrollably into the eager mouth that continued to bob on his cock. He came...came...and came again. Adam buried his face into Mr Blackie's thick woollen coat, and sobbed.

If you had asked the boy why he sobbed, he might not have been able to tell you. But sob he did, and clung on to the man who brushed his hair and soothed him with tender whispers. "There, there, my boy," said Mr Blackie. "You have much to learn, and so much to give. And Black Peter will be your teacher." He eased the boy's softened cock back into his underpants, tucked

his shirt in, and did up his buttons.

"Peter!" snapped Mr Blackie, "Take us for a drive around the grounds. Give Adam time to recover himself. Then we will return to the house. I shall take supper with the master, and discuss this boy's apprenticeship. He will return with us to Boston on the morrow, and you will begin your work tomorrow night."

The grunt from the heavy, muscular coachman signified his approval of the plan.

Adam lay, face pressed into the man's shoulder, terrified of what the next day would bring. Hans, kind, good Hans, had refused to fuck him, though Adam had pleaded again and again. "Adam, Adam," Hans had said, "you are only a boy, with a young boy's love chute. My cock may not be huge, but it is too big for you. There is time. We can wait. There are so many other ways we can express our love...now, move over a little, and let me...yes, there, that's right. *Gott im Himmel!*" No, if you had asked the boy why he sobbed, he would not have been able to tell you.

Back at the house, there were presents for all. From Uncle Blackie's bundle came: two goldfish for Fred, fiddle strings for Adam, a picture book for Toby, a wooden monkey for Truan, a hoop for Emil, and a stuffed pig (woollen) for Stuff. There was a drum and sticks for Timmy, who marched up and down the hall, beating time remarkably well for one so young, under the warm gaze of their generous benefactor.

All too soon, the drum was silenced and the boys were chased upstairs to bed, while Master Myles and Mr Blackwood retired to the parlour for supper and the business of the house.

Only those who know and love boys well know that 'little men' are too often painted as insensitive, when, in truth, their little antennae can register sensations that have long ago escaped the range of their blunted seniors. It did not take long for Fred to realise that something was up with Adam; something more than a bed-time erection. Not long after the lights went down and Truan's gentle snoring went up, Fred hobbled from his bed to Adam's and slid in beside him.

"What's up, old boy?" whispered Fred, turning Adam around to lie face to face. Under such close scrutiny, Adam did not hold

out for long; the quiet sobbing returned, and he blurted out the story of what befell him in the distinguished visitor's carriage, and what fate awaited him on the morrow.

"Oh, Fred, Fred," sobbed Adam. "I don't want my picture taken. I don't want lessons from Black Peter. I want to stay here, with Truan and Toby, and Tom and Timmy, and...you."

"And stay you shall," whispered Fred, adding vehemently, "That bad bastard will separate not one of us from the other." He gave the matter some thought, then reached his customary impetuous conclusion.

"Where did he leave the picture album?" he asked. "Did he leave it in the carriage, or bring it inside? Did you see, Adam? Did you see?"

"Inside," sobbed Adam, though hope had sprung in his chest. "He went into the guest bedroom. There's a study, too. Only the best visitors may use that guest room. But why? How can the album help us?" His tears had ceased to flow. The spirit of adventure, so contagious, in Fred's bright presence had sparked something in Adam.

"We shall find the album," said Fred. "We shall find it, and give it to Master Myles. It is proof, proof positive that we have a pervert in our midst! Master Myles will expel Blackwood from New Carthage, never to return. Never!"

"What's a pervert?" whispered Adam.

"A pervert," whispered Fred, sliding his hand up Adam's nightgown to grasp the boy's cock, "is a man who likes doing this to boys." He felt his companion's cock stiffen at his touch. "We must wait till the house is asleep. We have time. So, I will show you what perverts do; then you can show me." In spite of his misery, Adam began to giggle, then bit his lip as Fred's long middle finger slid into the crack of his arse.

Just after midnight, the boys began their slow, cautious descent of the stairs, Adam leading the way, Fred leaning on the banister and his crutch. Adam had told him of the guest room and its special mirror; with luck, the album would be in one room while Mr Blackwood slept in the other. They reached the doors at the far end of the lower corridor. Adam, with courage that surprised himself, turned the knob gently, pushed the door open

and stepped inside. Fred followed. The door clicked closed behind them.

Their luck was in! The moon shone brightly through the open window; the heavy brocade curtains had not been pulled. The bed was empty. The boys edged their way around the room.

"I have it!" Adam did not try to suppress the note of triumph in his whisper. The boys sat on the edge of the bed. Adam flicked open the first few pages. Fred let out a low whistle, adding, "Hot stuff," and "No wonder it gave you a hard-on." His hand slid onto Adam's knee; Adam slapped him affectionately away. "Don't you ever have enough?"

"There's no such thing," whispered Fred. "Let's do it here, now, right now, like that." Adam followed his companion's wide eyes to the album on his knees: the dark-eyed, dark-skinned, curly-haired boys were fucking in the summer sands. "Go on," whispered Fred urgently. "You can do me first."

"No! We've got to get out of here. Come on."

Fred sighed. "Okay. But show me the mirror first. You promised you'd show me the mirror."

Adam led Fred across to the room. A full-length wardrobe mirror was fixed to the wall. Adam curled his fingers around the edge of the mirror and pulled. It swung away from the wall to reveal a glass panel, slightly smoky, but clear enough to see into the room beyond.

It was the other bedroom, the best guest-room, huge and spacious; and in the middle of the room, a double bed, huge and spacious. And on the bed. . .

Black Peter lay stretched out naked on top of the bed. Straddling his hips was a much smaller figure, a naked boy upon whose satiny body puberty had not yet laid its hairy hand. Although the boy faced away from Adam and Fred, and though his head was lowered over the black man's groin, the boys gasped in recognition: Timmy! Little Timmy knelt across the man's hips, his golden curls bobbing as it rose and fell on the man's huge cock.

The boys turned to each other; disgust, dismay and astonishment ran in confused rills across their faces. "Bastard! Bastard!" whispered Fred, to be followed by Adam's echoing, "Bastard!"

They turned to the mirror again; they saw the coachman's huge black thumbs part the cheeks of Timmy's tiny buttocks as deftly as one might split a ripe fig. Saw him raise his head. Saw his huge pink tongue slide between the small boy's cheeks to tickle the tiny opening at its centre.

There was movement from the left. Mr Blackie stepped into view, as naked as the man and boy on the bed, his erection dripping. He leaned over Peter. His mouth twisted into words. The black man smiled, hideous to behold, and lifted Timmy as if he weighed no more than a bag of sugar. He twisted the boy into position so that Timmy knelt across his chest, legs spread, bottom raised. He pulled the boy forward and engulfed his genitals in his mouth completely.

Had the mirror been two-way, Timmy would have been looking directly into the older boys' eyes. It is doubtful if he would have recognised them; for, as Adam and Fred looked, they realised that Timmy had been given some drug, perhaps a soporific of the kind that Nursey Taylor sometimes gave when, following a small accident, a boy found it impossible to sleep. A drug to slow the mind and relax the muscles. Timmy's eyes were glazed; he looked dazed, bewildered, thin threads of saliva running from his swollen lips onto the chest of the black man below.

Further movement. Mr Blackwood had heaved himself onto the bottom of the bed; he was on all fours, edging forward, holding his prick like a bobby's billy club, pointing it at Timmy's defenseless crack.

Crack!

It was too much for Fred. Ignoring the pain, he raised his crutch above his head, and brought the shoulder-piece crashing through the glass of the mirror. He swung it again, smashing what remained of the glass, and sending silvery shards showering into the guest room.

Uproar!

Adam grabbed Fred by the shoulder, and all but dragged him from the room. As the boys hobbled to the other end of the hall, Fred raised his crutch again; this time he brought it crashing against the door of Master Myles' living quarters. The noise

echoed through the house. The boys ducked into the parlour, and stood, backs against the door, chests heaving.

From all over the house, they heard the crash of doors opening, the sound of running feet, and the cries of boys awakened in the night.

"Look! It's Blackie's bag!" cried Adam, the time for silence being past. "Quick, help me. Empty it out all over the room." Fred complied with the instruction, unsure of the reason, till Adam brought forth the album, and began tearing out the pages which he scattered on top of the carpet bag's contents.

"Now let's join the fun!" cried Adam, wholly unaware that he had left the timid boy we know far behind. He flung the door open, and they joined the melee outside.

Nurse Taylor was carrying Timmy upstairs in her arms. Master Myles was attempting to shoo boys back upstairs. Some boys, fearful for Uncle Blackie's safety, had run into the guest room—to find Uncle Blackie and Coachman Peter naked, sporting huge erections, and apparently occupying the same bed. Quite why Timmy was there nobody knew.

Some boys, hoping to make the excitement last, ran about the house; two, who ran into the parlour, returned clutching photographs that made their eyes pop bugaboo wide! Generously, they shared their find with every boy they could reach.

"I say!" called Toby, "The Kitty-hawk's been here. And he's left some souvenirs in Uncle Blackie's bag."

Master Myles snatched the photograph. Semen! spurring onto the belly of a boy who lay smiling in the sand.

Hurriedly, he gathered up every photograph he could find, and threw them into the guest room alongside the cowering 'perverts'; for Fred had begun to chant 'Perverts!', a chant immediately taken up by half a dozen boys, ignorant of what it meant, but sensing that it conveyed something very naughty indeed. 'Fucking perverts!' chanted Fred. This was glorious! His companions took up the chant, and 'Fucking perverts!' ran through the entire house.

Master Myles shooed the last boy out of the guest room, and slammed the door shut on the interior miscreants. Nurse

returned. Together they ushered the boys upstairs, ordered them brusquely to bed, and commanded: "No lamps!" In every room, a lamp was promptly lit.

Fred, Adam, Truan and Toby—for Tom was sound asleep!—slipped from their room and into Nurse Taylor's. In bed lay Timmy, fast asleep, his thumb deep in his little mouth. Not understanding why he did, Adam lifted him up, and carried him back to the boys' room, depositing him alongside Tommy, and covering them both with a knitted quilt on which bunnies and lambs frolicked in daisy-carpeted meadows.

Fred and Adam slipped into Fred's bed; Truan and Toby slid into Truan's bed.

"Are you two going to do it again?" asked Truan.

Silence.

Then Adam laughed.

"No, we're going to get some sleep."

"Well, we're going to do it," said Truan, "but we'll try to keep it quiet. It's Toby; he moans a lot."

"Night, then," said Adam.

"Night, then," said Fred.

"Night then," said Truan.

Toby said nothing. He had long ago learned that it is impolite to speak with your mouth full.

By morning the storm was all but over. Eagerly, but almost silently, the boys trooped to the dining room for breakfast. Silently, they took their places.

Master Myles sat at the head of the table; Nurse Taylor at the bottom, where observant boys noticed that his eyes were red and his cheeks puffy.

Master Myles rapped his spoon on the table for attention, an entirely unnecessary if dramatic gesture, since every eye was fixed upon him.

"My dear boys," he began, bringing his hands together as if to say grace, "sad news I'm afraid. Uncle Blackie was called away in the night. So suddenly, I may say, that some of you may have caught, er...seen him with his pants down, or off." A murmur ran round the room; a murmur perilously close to a titter.

"Uncle Blackie has been called away to Europe. There he will

try to do as much good for other boys as he has done for us. When will he return? Only Mr Blackwood and the good Lord can say, but I fear it will be later than sooner. But life here at New Carthage will go on. Nurse Taylor, pass the porridge."

The boys leapt upon the nourishment with gusto; in his sadness, Master Myles had forgotten grace, and they were not about to give him time to remember it.

Oh, how fickle are the fancies of boys!

Only the night before, they had thrown themselves around the neck of New Carthage's most generous patron, Mister Blackwood, and now he was all but forgotten.

Truan looked across the table and caught Adam's eye. Both boys looked at Timmy who was in earnest chatter with Fred. Truan and Adam shrugged their shoulders, grinned at each other, then tucked into the steaming oats before them.

Only Toby was not eating.

He was listening to instructions from the Kitty-hawk.

BREAKING IN

After the last excitement, peace descended on New Carthage and reigned unbroken for several weeks, as the boys absorbed the loss of Hans and Uncle Blackie. Summer drifted into autumn as leaves began to brown, golden, and drift down from the trees.

"It's too good to last," sighed Nursey Taylor; for years of boy-culture had taught him that such lulls were usually followed by outbreaks of some sort, and when less wise men would have thought that the boys had become confirmed saints, he prepared himself for a sudden eruption of a domestic Krakatoa.

"What in the world is that boy doing?" Nursey asked himself, as he watched Fred running round the half-mile perimeter of the grounds as if for a wager. he was all alone, and seemed possessed by some strange desire to run himself into a fever, or break his neck; for, after several rounds, he tried leaping walls, and turning somersaults up the avenue. Finally, the boy dropped down on the grass below the porch as if exhausted.

"Are you training for a race, Fred?" asked Nursey Taylor, from the swing seat where he sat.

Fred looked up, and stopped panting to answer, with a grin, "No, I'm only working off my steam, and getting my leg back."

"Can't you find a cooler way of doing it? You will be ill if you tear about so in such warm weather," said Nursey, laughing also, as he threw the boy a great palm-leaf fan.

"Can't help it. I must run somewhere," said Fred, with such an odd expression in his restless eyes that Nursey was troubled, and asked, quickly, "Is New Carthage getting too narrow for you?"

"I wouldn't mind if it was a little bigger. I like it though; only, the devil gets into me sometimes and then I do want to bolt."

The words seemed to come against his will, for he looked sorry the minute they were spoken and seemed to think he deserved a reproof for his ingratitude. But Nursey understood the feeling, and though sorry to see it, he could not blame the boy for confessing it. Nursey looked at Fred anxiously, seeing how tall and strong he had grown, how full of energy his face was, his eager eyes, resolute mouth, and the bulge at the front of his britches. "Yes," he said to himself, "my little eagle needs

a larger cage; and yet, if I let him go, I am afraid he will be lost. I must try and find some lure strong enough to keep him safe and secure with us."

Oddly enough, such thoughts would never have occurred to the young man only a few weeks before; but since the incident involving Mr Blackwood and Coachman Peter, Master Myles had left more and more of the day-to-day running of New Carthage in his hands. Cautious at first, Taylor had responded more and more eagerly to the challenge; and, if the truth be told, the boys now turned more to him than the master for guidance, comfort and direction.

"I know all about it," he said, aloud to Fred. "It is not the 'devil', as you call it, but the natural longing for liberty in the young. All too soon, dear Fred, you will spread your wings and take to the sky. We must be sure you are ready to fly, before you leave the nest. Now, come to me."

Fred rose and made his way onto the porch. He sat by Nursey who gently stroked the rough hair back from his forehead. "Well, Fred, run if you must. Run to Marshallsay Pond. But come back to me soon, for I want you very much."

The boy was rather taken aback by this unexpected release from the leash, and somehow it lessened his desire to go. He did not understand why, but Nursey did, and, knowing the natural perversity of the adolescent mind, he counted on it to help him now. He felt instinctively that the more the boy was restrained, the more he would fret against it; but leave him free, and the mere sense of liberty would content him, joined to the knowledge that his presence was dear to those whom he loved best. And, guessed Nursey Taylor, as long as Adam Flood was at New Carthage, Fred would find it difficult to leave, for he had seen their closeness, both physical and spiritual, grow during that fateful summer.

"I won't go yet awhile, and I'll give you fair warning before I bolt," announced the boy. "That's fair, isn't it?"

"Very fair, and we will let it stand so. Now I want to see if I can't find some way for you to work off your steam better than running about the place like a mad dog. What can we invent? Ah! Here is something short term, till I find work that will keep

you busily and happily occupied for some time. Come with me."

They rose, and man led boy to the wood-yard, and pointed out certain roots of trees that had been grubbed up in the spring, and had been lying there waiting to be split.

"There! When you feel inclined to run off, or maltreat other boys, just come and work off your energies here, and I'll thank you for it."

"So I will!" And, seizing the axe that lay nearby, Fred hauled out a tough root and went at it so vigorously that the chips flew far and wide. Nursey Taylor fled in mock terror for his life, calling back, "I will fetch a pitcher of lemonade. We'll both need it soon."

Fred took him at his word, and casting aside his shirt, wrestled with the ungainly knots, red-faced and wrathful of eye; for he had got into a royal rage with his demons. He swore at them under his breath till he had conquered them, when he exulted, and marched off to the wood shed with an armful of gnarled wood-oak in triumph. He blistered his hands, tired his back, and dulled the axe, but it did him good, and he got more comfort out of the ugly roots than Nursey had dreamed of. With each blow he worked off some of the pent-up power that would have otherwise been expended in some less harmless way.

Nursey returned, with glasses and pitcher, to find the boy close to exhaustion, his face and body streaked with sweat, his hair damp, and his britches hanging so low that little curls could be seen peeping over the top of his undergarment.

"Come, Fred, let's sit in the shade of the woodshed. You deserve a rest and a drink, and I have an idea which may appeal to you."

They settled in the woodshed, Nursey on a tree stump, Fred seated on the floor, his back against the young man's knees. The boy sipped cold lemonade and listened as Nursey squeezed the knots out of his shoulders, making him grunt with pleasure and relief.

"How would you like to be my express-man?"

"You mean, ride into town, and do the errands?" asked Fred, interested at once.

"Yes. Silas cannot be spared just now, and Master Myles has no time. Old Andy is a safe horse, and you are a good rider. I have

seen you out riding with Adam. You know your way about the town as well as a postman. Suppose you try it."

Fred turned to face Nursey, his eyes shining. "I'd like it ever so much, only I must have company. I must have Adam. I don't want any of the other fellows bothering around," said Fred, taking to the idea so nicely that he began to put on business airs already.

"And there is one more thing," added the boy.

"There always is," sighed the man.

"I don't want Andy; he's an old dobbin. Adam has got Miller. I want a ride with a bit of life in him, too."

"There's always Charlie," said Nursey, becoming flustered as the boy gripped his knees, his face so close to his stiffening cock. "If Master Myles does not object—and if you can master Charlie—you shall have it all your own way."

The boy flung his face into the man's lap, sighing in happiness. The man sighed happily, too.

A fine young horse of Mr Blackie's had been billeted at New Carthage that summer, running loose in a large pasture across the brook. The boys were all interested in the handsome, spirited creature, and for a time were fond of watching him gallop and frisk, his plumey tail flying, his handsome head in the air. But they soon tired of it, and left Prince Charlie to himself. All but Fred; he never tired of looking at the horse, and seldom failed to visit him each day with a lump of sugar or an apple to make him welcome. In whatever part of the wide field he might be, Charlie always came at full speed when Fred whistled at the bars, and the boy was never happier than when the beautiful, fleet creature put its head on his shoulder, looking at him with fine eyes full of intelligent affection. That look reminded Fred of the glowing of Adam's face when they lay abed, kissing and cuddling before one boy, open-mouthed, slid down to engage the hard cock of the other.

"I say, Nursey, you've got a helluva hard-on."

Fred's hand slid into the man's lap where a hard cock pressed against his face, and grasped an impressive erection. The boy began to squeeze and tug and manipulate the column of stiff flesh; the man pushed his hand away.

"No, Fred. I thank you for your kindness, but it is not right.

I am a man, you are a boy. I am ready to make my decisions; you are not ready to make yours."

"But you find me attractive," said the boy.

"More attractive than words can say," said Nursey honestly. "But for now, looking is enough for me."

"Then you shall look!" cried Fred, leaping to his feet, and disrobing himself of boots, socks, britches and underpants. Naked, his thick penis bouncing between his thighs, he grabbed his axe, and belaboured a fresh stump of wood. How his eyes flashed! his muscles rippled! his damp hair flew! his cock bounced! As he bent to replace the wood, even his little puckered rosebud winked at Nursey Taylor.

With a groan, the seated man scrabbled at his own britches, pulled out his thick club of a penis, and worked it furiously with his hand, his eyes devouring the boy who laboured eagerly to please him. Soon, all too soon, he fountained, his spunk jetting into the air to fall in gobs on his shirt and britches. Spurt! Spurt! Gob! Gob!

Let us draw a veil over this wanton scene.

"Charlie won't need much taming, he is such a gentle, fine-tempered animal," insisted Fred, as the same skeptical look played over Adam's fine features. "I shall coax him to bear it, and I shan't mind a few tumbles at first. he has never been harshly treated so, though he will be surprised at the new performances, he won't be frightened, and his antics will do no harm."

The boys leaned with their arms atop the fence, admiring the prince of horses as Charlie pranced a few yards away, showing off to his young admirers.

Fred climbed onto the topmost rail with the glossy back temptingly near. He pulled an apple out of his britches; Charlie sniffed the air and moved in close. While the horse nibbled at the apple held before him, Fred quickly and quietly slipped onto his back. He did not stay there long; for with an indignant snort, Charlie reared straight up, and deposited Fred straight down onto the ground. The fall did not hurt him much, for the turf was soft, and he jumped up, saying, with a wide grin, "I've done it once, I'll do it again. Come here, you black rascal."

Charlie declined to approach, and Fred left him resolving to succeed in the end; for a struggle like this suited him exactly. Next time, following Adam's advice, he took a halter, and having got it on him, he played with the horse for a while, leading him to and fro, and putting him through various antics till he was a little tired. Then Fred sat on the fence and gave him bread, but watched his chance, and getting a good grip of the halter, slipped onto his back. Charlie tried the old trick, but Fred held on, having had practice with Miller, who occasionally had an obstinate fit, and tried to shake off his rider. Charlie was amazed and indignant; and after prancing for a minute, set off at a gallop, and away went Fred heels over head. Had he not belonged to the class of boys who go through all sorts of danger unscathed, he would have broken his neck. As it was, he took a heavy fall, and lay collecting his wits, while Charlie tore round the field tossing his head with every sign of satisfaction. Presently it seemed to occur to his equine mind that something was wrong with Fred, and, being of a magnanimous nature, he went to see what the matter was. Fred let him sniff about and perplex himself for a few minutes; then he looked up at him, saying, determinedly, as if the horse could understand, "You think you have me beaten, but you are mistaken old boy; I'll ride you yet—see if I don't."

He tried no more that day, but limped off to the barn in the company of Adam to plan a fresh assault on the next day. The boys lay in the straw and discussed assorted strategies. Initially, Adam did not contribute much, for he lay lower than Fred, examining the boy's cock and balls, fascinated by the hardness that seemed like velvet to his lips. Adam probed at the slit in the swollen purple cockhead, ran the tip of his tongue the length of a purple vein that curled around the shaft, and sucked both testicles into his mouth where he rolled them like small new potatoes. His hands urged Fred over onto his stomach. Fred grunted, complied and continued to muse on the fickleness of the equine tribe.

Adam parted his friend's buttocks, stretching them wide until he had a clear view of Fred's anal slit. He sniffed at it, and wondered why he felt so doggy. "Can I kiss you?" he asked. The

tip of his tongue ran the length of the slit, then twisting his head to the side, Adam fastened both his lips against the smaller ones, and gave several wet kisses. The tiny lips seemed to puff up as he tugged at them with his own; the lips distended as if elastic, and Adam pushed his tongue in as far as it could go. He felt almost faint at the sight, smell and sounds of his love-making.

"I've got it!" The cry came from Fred, and seemed so urgent that Adam reluctantly gave up his explorations and crawled his way up his friend's semi-naked body. He shared his ideas with Adam, pulled him into a tight embrace, and kissed him, open-mouthed. "Is that my smell on you?" he whispered. "Yes," Adam whispered. "Nice, very nice. Back down you go. Remember, at New Carthage every boy must finish what's on his plate."

The next morning the boys proceeded to the paddock, where they introduced Charlie to the sensation of a burden. They strapped a folded blanket on his back, and then let him race, and rear, and rock, and roll, and fret, and fume to his heart's content. After a few fits of rebellion, Charlie submitted, and in a few days allowed Fred to mount him, often stopping short to look round, as if he said, half patiently, half petulantly, "I don't understand it, but I suppose you mean no harm, so I permit the liberty."

Fred patted and praised him, making too short turns every day, taking frequent falls, but persisting, until the grand day came when he tried Charlie with saddle and bridle. Thanks to the boy's kindness, patience, and tolerance, Charlie took not unkindly to these fresh impositions when he had reconciled himself to the indignity of the bit. Fred rode him around the paddock, then around the house, then around the cart tracks, to the great envy and admiration of the other boys.

"Isn't he handsome? and don't he mind me like a lamb?" said Fred one day to Nursey Taylor, as he slid down from the saddle and stood with his arm round Charlie's neck.

"Nearly as handsome as you," whispered Nursey, "and almost as spirited."

Came Saturday, and the joyous moment when the boys, Adam on Miller, Fred on Prince Charlie, were permitted to fetch the mail from town.

The day was warm, almost hot, perhaps the final day of the

Indian summer, and the boys trotted gently into town, collected the mail bag, tethered their horses, had soda pops, then rode home, taking the by-way that circled past Marshallsay Pond.

At the pond, they tethered the horses and sat on a certain mossy bank under a certain beech tree. For the first time, Adam was able to speak of the love he held for Hans. Tears sparkled in his eyes, but there were smiles, too, for the affection that Hans had engendered in him was there forever.

"Come on, then!" cried Fred. "Let's have a swim. The last swim of summer. Let's swim for Hans."

Fred sprang to his feet, startling the horses, and tore off his clothes. A moment later, Adam had joined him, and within a minute or two, the boys had plunged nakedly into the cool waters of the pond. They ducked, they dived, they weaved, they floated belly up, belly down. They spat and splashed, touched and tickled until the tears ran down their cheeks. All the tiresome torment drained from their bodies until, supporting each other, they staggered up the bank and collapsed in each other's arms onto the soft, warm, yielding moss.

"Do it to me," whispered Adam, as he slid wetly beneath Fred. "Do it to me. Please. I want you to do it. Do it now."

"Are you sure?" whispered Fred, drops of water gliding from his hair and earlobes onto the boy below. "It will hurt, but only for a bit. Are you sure?"

"Yes, oh, yes," breathed Adam. "I'm sure." He felt the boy's burning erection press against his own.

"Just a moment," said Fred, and he was gone. Adam remained on his back, looking up at a patch of blue sky between the branches; the green of summer had given way to the tint of autumn yellow and gold.

Fred returned and lay full length on him again. "Pull up your knees," he whispered. "Pull them up tight." He slid a horse blanket beneath the small of Adam's back. Wet skin against wet skin, hot flesh against hot flesh. Adam felt something cool and moist brush along his hot, excited hole. "It's mud," said Fred. "Mud as smooth as satin. It'll help."

Adam opened his legs as wide as he could; his hands reached down to stretch his bum cheeks apart. He remembered how Hans

had lain beneath him. He felt the hot tip of Fred's cock push at his opening; he slid closer and used his fingers to hold himself open.

It hurt! Oh, how it hurt! But it was a wonderful hurt, a necessary hurt, an essential hurt. Something gave way, and he felt the head of Fred's cock break past a barrier. The breach opened a flood of feelings in Adam; he wanted to laugh and cry at the same time; he wanted to remember and forget; he wanted more...much more...he wanted all of Fred deep, deep inside him. The boy pushed harder, sliding in, inch by inch. It hurt! It burned! It stretched! It satisfied! Fred was deep within him; he placed his hands on either side of Adam's body, drove himself home, pulled out to the head, then drove himself in again. Adam could feel every millimetre of the boy's cock as it slid in and out of the tightly gripping ring of his anus. Fred was panting now, gasping, lying down cheek to cheek, rising, then touching lips to lips, before sinking onto the boy's chest as he rammed himself into the hilt. Deeper, harder, faster: the sequence repeated itself like a rill on Adam's violin.

"Ugh! Ugh! Ugh! I'm coming," grunted Fred. "Should I pull out?"

"No! No! Come inside me! I want you inside me!" protested Adam. "You have to come inside me!"

Fred's thrusts became short, fierce stabs, riding the top two inches of his rock-hard cock against the gripping elastic flesh. He grunted, rammed into the hilt, and spurted his load into Adam's rectum. He pulled out, rammed home again, and spurted another load; pulled out, rammed home, spurted. Out of control he jabbed and stabbed while his legs and bum shook and trembled as they never had before.

Then in one swift movement, he pulled himself free, causing Adam to cry out. He rolled way onto his back, pulled Adam onto him, and wrapped his legs tightly around his friend's waist. His hand reached below to grasp Adam's erection, pointed the tip at his hole, and pushed it hard against the swollen, puffy lips which spread and opened to let Adam's cock slide in to the hilt. Fred used his sphincter muscles to squeeze and pump the invading cock; Adam yelped in delight and began to fuck him with carefree

vigour and enthusiasm. Before rational thought had returned, Adam was squirting his own cum up Fred's hungry hole, surprising Fred by the intensity and volume of the spurts. At last, both boys quivered and lay still.

"I feel you inside me," whispered Adam.

"And I feel you," grinned Fred.

"I wish we could stay here like this forever," sighed Adam.

"So do I," grinned Fred, "but we would scare the horses."

The boys did not lie there forever; they lay there till the sun made odd angles on the lake, and the horses snorted and stamped, hinting at their desire for home and hay. The boys laughed, disengaged, rose, inspected each other's arse holes—"You're dripping!"—and had a final dip in Marshallsay Pond.

The summer was over.

"I say," said Adam, as they readied to mount, "we've scattered some of the letters from the mail pouch. We must gather them up."

Ignoring the impatient snorts for a moments, the boys retrieved four or five letters from the grass. Stuffing them rather unceremoniously in the leather pouch that hung from Miller's saddle.

"Just a mo'," said Adam. "Do you recognise this handwriting?" He held out a small, purple envelope to Fred. It had attracted his attention, not only because of its colour but by the excessive amount of wax which had been used as a seal.

"Can't say I do," said Fred. "But I'm not much of a reader."

"I recognise it," said Adam grimly. "It's Mr Blackie's writing. I've seen a notebook of his. That's the same big curly writing. Whatever is he doing writing to Master Myles? And look! It's a Boston postmark. Isn't he supposed to be in Europe?"

"Bastards! Bastards!" said Fred through gritted teeth. "I never trusted either of them."

A shocked and shocking silence followed.

"I wonder what he wants with Master Myles," breathed Adam.

"No good, I'll warrant," snapped Fred. "Isn't wax and stuff one of Toby's things?"

"You're not going to...You daren't. . ."

"Just watch me," grinned Fred. "Toby can open it. We'll read

the contents. Then he'll reseal it. Master Myles will never know. And it might prove me wrong. I hope it does. But we've got to know, Adam, we've just got to."

Adam remembered Uncle Blackie's lips around his cock, remembered Black Peter's leering grin, remembered Timmy's violated mouth and bum.

"Let's get home," he said resolutely. "We still have an hour before the mail is opened. Let's find out the truth about Master Myles and New Carthage at last."

DELEND A NON EST CARTHAGO

"This is going to be easy," whispered Toby, as he applied a cloth soaked in hot water onto the circle of red wax that sealed Mr Blackwood's letter to Master Myles. "The secret is to keep the heat only on the wax. You mustn't touch the envelop itself or else the paper will stain, and wax stains are the devil themselves to remove. Stand back. Give me more light."

Reluctantly, Adam, Fred and Truan stepped back from the small table under the window in the boys' bedroom. The evening light was slipping away, but there was sufficient for Toby's purpose.

"There! That's it!" he said triumphantly, sliding the circle wax onto the polished surface of the table. He held out the letter. None of the boys reached for it. All knew the awesomeness of what they had done; they had opened a private letter of Master Myles. Discovery might mean permanent banishment, exile from New Carthage, the only real home they had ever known.

Toby snorted and raised an eyebrow.

"Infirm of purpose!" he cried. "I shall read the letter!" He bound onto his bed, followed by his three companions. Dextrously, he slipped a single folded sheet from the envelope, unfolded it, adjusted himself for comfort and read:

My Dear Myles,

That was a damn close-run thing, too close for comfort, what! As we agreed, I have made enquiries here in Boston, and I have a firm offer for New Carthage and the entire estate. We should be rid of it and those rag-arsed mutts by Thanksgiving.

I am interested in purchasing a property here in Boston; boys on the street are to be had for pennies, and 'New New Carthage' will be patronised by customers prepared to pay a sweet price for our sweet merchandise.

We may take some of the younger boys with us. I have some unfinished business with that little sweetmeat Timmy, and Peter would like to stretch the arsehole of little Tom, if we can prise him away from that moon-struck brother of his,

Toby, which is French for half, which in his case must stand for half-witted!

As for the others, we will fling most of them back on the middens where we found them, excepting Truan and Adam. I have a buyer for Adam already, and he is willing to take the pair.

Fred is too wild for safety; I have apprenticed him to a sea captain, though the boy's trade will have little to do with seafaring. When half a dozen hard cocks have filled his mouth, he will have less to say for himself, what?

Our business must be short, swift and brutal. I shall meet you in the old Boat House at ten o'clock on the night of the fifth.

We must jointly sign the papers to rid ourselves of New Carthage and all its vermin; then sign the promissory papers that will secure us the new Rome.

My dearest partner in greatness, you who introduced me to the delights of buggering and bartering boys, fail me not!

Simon T. Blackwood

Oh, readers dear, I have not interspersed Toby's reading of that infamous letter with the cries of shame, the moans of horror, the gasps of disbelief uttered from the boys on the bed; they would merely have echoed your own.

What infamy was revealed in that letter needs no embroidery from me so, on, on with our tale, as each of us raises a silent prayer to the patron saint of boys in the hope that he is, for once, awake and listening.

"But today is the fifth!" cried Adam. "They mean to do the dirty deed tonight! All is lost. New Carthage is lost. We are the lost boys."

"Nothing is lost!" shouted Fred, "that cannot yet be saved! We will reveal these bastards for what they are—boy-mongers!"

The boys leapt from the bed, and gathering round the table, clutched each other's hands on high.

"Death or Liberty!" cried Toby.

"Death or Liberty!" resounded the echo.

"Now, Toby," said Fred. "Seal the letter as expertly as you

unsealed it. Adam and I shall deliver it with the others. Master Myles must not suspect we know what is afoot. Then you will write another letter. After supper, Nursey Taylor will take the letter into town, and hand it to the Constabulary. The letter will inform the authorities of the dastardly plan. They will spy upon the meeting in the Boat House and catch those dishonoured men with that evil letter in their hands. And the game will be up!"

"But, Fred, why should Nursey Taylor do this service for us?" asked Adam.

Fred smiled. "Nursey will do it for us. I shall make him an offer he cannot refuse."

The plan was afoot. So swiftly could Toby write, that he not only sealed the letter again, but wrote the boys' own letter within the space of a quarter hour, spurred on by the plans those wicked men had for his younger brother's arse hole. For that, Toby had plans of his own.

Supper was a sombre affair. Master Myles seemed distracted, and announced that such was his headache that he would spend the night in the Boat House taking the soothing, liquidy vapours that rose from the pond. On no account was he to be disturbed; this remark being directed most specifically at Nursey Taylor.

The boys withdrew from the dining room, none heading to the parlour, for song was not in them that night. A curious melancholy hung over the proceedings, and many boys headed for an early bath and bed.

Fred slipped into Nursey's room, and a few minutes later, young Taylor returned to usher every boy into bed, saying it was Master Myles' express wish that all should be abed and asleep by ten o'clock.

At 9.00 very few saw Nursey Taylor slip out of the house, though several were intrigued to hear the sound of a carriage rolling down the avenue.

Adam was puzzled. Little Tom lay in his bed, clutching his beloved golliwog, sound asleep. The thought of Mr Blackie's hands touching the boy made his stomach queasy. It must never happen!

But where were Fred and Truan? Had they deserted him? No, that could not be; it must be a game. Truan was ever so fond

of games, especially after lights-out. A clue! Truan always left clues.

Adam thought back over the evening. Supper? Nothing. In their room? Nothing. In the bathroom? Ah! What had Truan been singing, not so much singing as chanting. Something about a mirror. Yes! "Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who's the fairest of us all?" But what mirror?

He could only mean 'that' mirror. The mirror through which...Adam slid out of his night gown and into his pyjamas. Night gowns were best for sex...he blushed at his thoughts... but nothing could beat pyjamas for prowling round the house in the dark. He remembered a night when he'd prowled into Hans's room. Neither of them had remained in their pyjamas very long. Stop! This was not the night to think of Hans. When the night's business had been despatched, when the good ship New Carthage was in calmer waters, then he would permit himself to think of Hans.

Down the stairs he crept. Along the darkened corridor. To the door of the guest room. He turned the knob, eased open the door and slipped in. A lamp was lit. There was light. Light enough to see on the bed. . .

Fred and Truan lay on the bed. Both wore loose-fitting pyjamas. Fred had his jacket open, half way down to his stomach. The sight made Adam's cock begin to throb. Both boys smiled at him at the door. Slowly he approached the bed, embarrassed that Truan was there to witness his lust. Truan grinned, and played with an erection that bulged his thin cotton pyjama bottoms. Adam's primal urges over-whelmed his initial hesitation. He climbed onto the bed, crawling on his hands and knees until he came to rest between Truan and Fred.

He brought a trembling hand up to Fred's exposed chest; his friend sat there with a smile on his face. Adam placed his fingertips on Fred's chest. He could feel the heat radiating from the boy's body. His skin was smooth, and summer-tanned. Adam pushed the jacket aside, until he saw pointed berry-like nipples. He traced circles round Fred's nipples with the tip of his finger; Fred sighed with pleasure. Adam quickly moved his hands down, undid the buttons and pulled the jacket off.

The sight of Fred, sitting there half-naked, thrilled Adam; he leaned back into Truan, and felt the boy's naked skin against his back. Fred began to stroke the bulge that had grown in Adam's pyjamas, like some exotic fruit sprung up in a night. Adam's breathing began to quicken as Truan eased his top away and Fred began tugging at his pyjama bottoms. Adam's hard cock popped straight up when his pyjamas slipped down his thighs. Truan finished pulling Adam's top off as Fred pulled his pyjama bottoms away. Adam was now completely naked. His hard, throbbing cock stood straight up. He leaned against Truan, and could feel his chest rubbing against his back; so sensitized was his skin that he felt the starfish imprint of Truan's nipples on his back.

Fred, meanwhile, slipped off his own pants, exposing his five-inch cock, nestled in a light brown bush of pubic hair. His shaft and balls were smooth and hairless, like Adam's, like Truan's. Grinning, Fred stood up on the bed, his dick standing out in front of him. He slowly rubbed his hand up down the length of his shaft while his other hand played with his balls. He continued this until a drop of his pre-cum appeared at the slit. He got on his knees and moved closer to Adam, his pinkish brown cock only inches away. His hand firmly wrapped around the shaft, he brought the glistening tip of his prick to Adam's chest, and rubbed some seminal fluid onto Adam's nipples. Adam moaned with desire.

Adam's cock pulsated rapidly; juice dribbled down the length of his shaft. Fred leaned closer and pulled Adam up until the boys were kneeling face to face, cocks touching each other. He wrapped his arms around Adam who did the same to him. Their bodies pressed, their chests rubbed, nipples brushed against smooth skin, juices mingled. Adam felt Truan press into his back, felt his nipples, felt his hard cock press into the crack of his bum, felt the boy's sweet breath on his shoulder.

Fred leaned forward, and Adam fell back onto the bed. Fred fell on top of him. Adam was moaning now, crazed with desire. Hot, smooth boy flesh pressed against his own. Fred slid down the length of Adam's straining body. He stopped at Adam's slim chest, and began to rub it. He licked, then sucked on each of Adam's nipples. He down slid further to Adam's throbbing hard-on.

"Oh please, suck my cock, Fred...suck me hard! I want to cum in your mouth, down your throat, in your belly!"

Truan, naked, crawled over to Adam, his cock bobbing up and down. He straddled his face. Adam now had Truan's four-inch erection pointing at his face, the boy's fuzzy balls hanging just above his forehead. Truan lowered himself until the tip of his cock touched Adam's forehead. Adam eagerly reached up and grabbed the pulsing shaft. He examined it closely, delighted that his friend had such a beautiful prick, the veins running along the underside, the swollen head. Adam began to jack Truan's cock.

As soon as he began, cum leaked out of the purple head. Adam couldn't resist tasting Truan's cum. He brought the head to his mouth and began to lick it. Adam felt his own erection slide into Fred's mouth. Excitedly, he grabbed Truan's bottom, and pulled his cock deep into his own mouth. Adam now had four inches of hard cock stuffed in his mouth, two heavy balls swinging in his face. He could feel the hard, hot throbbing shaft begin to swell; he swirled his tongue over the head, then swallowed the shaft until he began to gag and choke. Adam was at his peak; his hips began to buck as he tried to shove his cock deeper down Fred's throat.

As Fred was sucked on Adam, he stroked his own hard prick. All three boys were covered in perspiration; their skins glowed with a satin sheen. They moaned in ecstasy, as each reached his climax and spurted hot, fresh cum into and over each other. Adam felt Truan's cock swell, then begin to squirt jets of cum which filled Adam's mouth and ran down his chin. Adam swallowed the second spurt, but knew he would choke on the third. He took Truan's shaft out of his mouth and let it spray its load over his face. Adam's cock fired its load at the same time. Fred sucked Adam's cock all the way down his throat, making Adam cum even harder. He took Adam's dick out of his mouth and rapidly stroked his fist up and down it, spraying cum over himself and Fred.

As Adam's flow began to taper off, Fred leaned forward and stroked his own cock until he, too, let fly with squirts of semen that spurted all over Adam's chest and stomach. The boys finally stopped squirting and spurting; they lay in a tangled heap of

sweaty, semen-splattered, satisfied flesh.

Truan leaned forward on top of Fred, which left his cock hanging in Adam's face. Drops of cum leaked out of it, and fell right onto Adam's cum-smearred face. Although the experience had been wonderful, all Adam wanted to do at that point was to sleep but, afflicted with cursed sensitivity and conscience, he had to know what was happening at the Boat House. Had Nursey Taylor delivered the letter? Were the Constabulary on their way? Would the scoundrels be apprehended? Where was Toby?

Adam squirmed out from under the pile of tangled torsos and limbs. He stood up and walked to the mirror. It was there; not the original, but a replacement; one-way, he saw nothing of the room on the other side. Adam was glad. There were sights that he wished to expunge from his memory forever. He looked down at his body; he was streaked with dried semen; his penis hung thickly between his legs. He smiled at his reflection. How easy life would be if only boys were left to their own devices.

Entranced by his own naked desire, Adam had only just begun to stroke himself, when a pair of hands wrapped themselves around his chest, and began to rub his chest and nipples. Adam assumed it was Truan or Fred, and was startled by the lightly-pitched voice he heard whisper in his ear. He spun around, his cock bobbing as he did, and was relieved, but even more aroused when he saw who it was.

Toby, cute and slim, with his shock of corn-blond hair and grey-blue eyes. Unlike the older boys, Toby had no hair on his body at all. His crotch and genitals were as satin-smooth as the skin on his bottom. His cock stood a stiff four inches, under which his balls, surprisingly large, swung full and heavy.

"Where have you been?" blurted Adam. "What's happened? Has Nursey returned?"

Toby put one finger against Adam's lips; the fingers of his other hand grasped Adam's cock and squeezed it to erection. The boy's own cock jutted forth, pink and innocent, the head poking out of a delicate sheath.

"Shhh," he whispered. "All is well, everything is well. Touch me, Adam, I want you to touch me."

Adam's shaft was hard and throbbing again. He slowly knelt

in front of the younger boy, reached out, and wrapped his fingers round his delectable cock. His other hand played with those big, smooth, heavy balls. Toby spread his legs, and bent his knees. Adam brought the slim shaft to his lips, and sucked it into his mouth. His lips glided down the rock-hard shaft until they kissed the root. He relaxed for a moment to let his throat get used to having something so deep inside him. He rubbed his tongue up and down the length of the shaft until his lips gripped the head, before sliding all the way down again. He brushed the back of his tongue along the underside of the head and felt drops of pre-cum ooze from the slit in Toby's prick.

Adam knew what he wanted. Releasing the boy, he turned and bent, resting his arms on the mirror, so that his rump was in the air. Eyes open, he could see the naked figure of Toby behind him, and in the distance the tangled limbs of the naked boys asleep on the bed.

Toby slid his finger into Adam's hole; Toby moaned in anticipation. He looked up into the mirror. The angelic, blond-haired, blue-eyed boy was bent over his back, his hand worked his prick against Adam's hole below; his face concentrated on the task in hand. His slim, delicate chest heaved rapidly; beads of sweat ran down his belly. Toby began to thrust as hard as he could; his cock broke through the delicate barrier and slid in to the hilt. Holding Adam round the waist, he began to hump him gently. Adam pushed back with each thrust, his own desire helping dictate the rhythm of Toby's first fuck.

The excitement was intense for both boys. Try as they did, they could not keep the pressure from building; the thrusting grew faster, harder, deeper. Adam's head bounced against the mirror again and again. With one final hard push up the bending boy's ass, Toby shot in spurts all the cum in his pubescent balls. Adam felt the embedded cock swell up even more in his arse, then felt the shaft convulse again and again. Toby's cock spasmed again, and another long hard shot of boy juice splattered inside Adam's bowels.

Toby jerked himself free, guided Adam around, dropped to his knees, and swallowed as much of Adam's cock as he could. He was just in time, as two or three squirts filled his mouth. With

one final convulsion, Adam spurted the last of his seed into Toby's mouth. He pulled the younger boy to his feet. Since he was about a half head taller than Toby, he reached out and lifted the boy's face up slightly, then planted his lips on those sweet lips. He pushed his tongue against those lips. Toby sucked on Adam's tongue, then pushed his own tongue into Adam's mouth. There the boys stood, exploring each other's mouths, their bodies running with sweat, cum oozing from Toby's lips and Adam's bumhole. And there they stood until applause broke out behind them. Their cries had awakened the boys.

Fred and Truan knelt up on the bed. Their cocks already hard, jutting out at the kissing boys as if sharing in their excitement. Adam pushed Toby away, his face and body ablaze with blushes. Toby laughed, and pulled him back into his arms, then pulled him to the bed.

There the boys sat, satiated for the moment, but their bodies were already stirring with fresh desire. Who knows what combinations might have been achieved had not a sudden clanging startled at least three of them?

"I say," said Truan, "that sounds like the fire brigade. What on earth's up? We'd better get out there and see."

Now, the only thing that pubescent boys find more exciting than sex is a good fire, the hotter the better. They scampered into their pyjamas, or at least someone's pyjamas, and burst out of the room to find, it seemed, the entire house clattering down the stairs in gowns and boots.

"It's to the west!" shouted a voice.

"It's the barn!" shouted another.

"No, it's not. It's the Boat House!" shouted a third.

The entire company burst out of the house; some clambered over the porch; some jumped the flight of stairs; all pursued the Fire Engine Company, whose two vehicles were racing madly across the front lawn. They turned west, pursued by a horde of boys, who, knowing the short cuts, contrived to reach the Boat House before them.

What a blaze!

Flames leapt into the sky. Sparks flew up, as if every Guy Fawkes fireworks display were celebrated at New Carthage that

night. Timber cracked, moaned and screamed. Windows exploded in fragments of glass that would have sliced through the unprotected spectator. The mock belfry collapsed first, falling straight through the roof into the centre of the boathouse. The porch sagged, bent, bowed, and collapsed into itself. The wooden walls were next; they hissed vehemently at the very water which might save them, then buckled inwards, giving the roof no choice but to follow.

Were those screams on the night air? No one could be sure. That was paraffin on the night air; of that, everyone could be sure. For the boathouse, rarely if ever used, was employed to store the gallons of paraffin that would see the house and barn stoves through the winter. Were those screams on the night air? Oh, let them not be screams. And the ash that was falling on the heads of the boys—pray that all of it is wooden ash, and not the ashes of their sometime benefactors.

From out of the darkness appeared Nursey Taylor, ushering the boys to a safe distance while the Fire Men did their duty; it took a remarkably short time, since the wooden walls and timbered roof, dried out by the summer months, burned readily and merrily into the starry sky, across which shooting stars added to the carnival excitement of it all.

But human-kind, even boy-kind, cannot stand too much excitement, and by midnight, the fire being doused and dampened, the boys were ushered back to bed and the soothing balm of dreamless, uninvaded sleep.

The night's business was almost done, but not until Nursey Taylor gathered a certain crew into the parlour for a midnight powwow.

"Were they in there?" asked a boy.

"Why didn't they get out?" asked another.

"Did you deliver our letter to the Constabulary?" asked a third.

The fourth boy said nothing.

"Yes, they were in the Boat House," said young Taylor. "They did not get out. I tried the door but it was locked, from the inside. I do not know why they did not unlock the door and release themselves when the fire took hold. It all happened so quickly, yet they could have unlocked the door and escaped in time."

"Was there any other way out?" asked Fred, who had never explored the Boat House, unlike the younger boys who, though it was forbidden, haunted it every summer to play the games that small boys play.

"Only the windows," said Nursey. "But they are small, not much bigger than our dormer attic windows. No man could have got through them."

"The letter? Did you deliver the letter?" asked Truan.

Nursey reached into a pocket in his jacket. He pulled out a letter—their letter! It had not been delivered. Nursey Taylor looked sadder than the boys had ever seen him.

"I did not deliver the letter. I went into town, but I did not hand it over to the Constabulary. I did not because I could not."

"Why?" expostulated Truan.

"Yes, why not?" reprimanded Fred.

"There is something I must tell you," said Nursey. "All of the boys will discover this tomorrow, but I must tell you now."

Nursey ran his gaze over each boy's face.

"I could not destroy Master Myles. I could not hand in the letter, and destroy Master Myles and his reputation."

"But you had to!" cried Fred. "You had to!"

"Why not?" asked Adam ever so quietly.

"Because," said Nursey Taylor, "because Master Myles is my father."

For a moment, all was silent.

"Was," said Toby.

"Was," agreed Nursey, the tears palpable in his voice. "I knew my father was capable of badness. I did not know until I read your letter that he was wicked, very very wicked."

"Why didn't your father recognise you?" asked Truan, his curiosity piqued.

"My father never married my mother," said Nursey. "She died in childbirth. He gave me a home, but he would not recognise me, publicly, as his son."

The room was very still. None of the boys had had a mother for very long.

"What will happen to New Carthage now?" asked Adam. "To Miller, and Prince Charlie?"

For the first time since the powwow had begun, Nursey smiled. "Oh, they are safe, they are all quite safe, and you are safe, too."

"But how can that be?" asked Adam.

"My father never recognised me publicly," said Nursey, "but he willed New Carthage to me. The will is in the parlour safe. Only Master Myles and I know —knew the combination. New Carthage will go on. But there will be changes. Women. We will have women at New Carthage. A house keeper, a matron, an assistant matron, and a parlour maid. Boys, you boys, need to know a woman's caring touch."

"No girls!" said Fred, brow furrowed.

"No girls," agreed Nursey, laughing. "And now, boys, I want each of you to give me a goodnight kiss. It will be our last kiss; for in the morning, I will no longer be Nursey Taylor, but Master Taylor, and a good and true master I hope to be."

Had the house not been sound asleep, the loud 'Huzzah!' from the boys would have brought a fresh clattering down the stairs.

Each of the boys kissed Nursey Taylor, and trooped wearily but happily up the stairs. Fred was last. He held the kiss, held it until Nursey surrendered, opened his lips, and received the boy's hot, searching tongue. Man and boy gasped when they finally released each other. There was a twinkle in Fred's eyes. He whispered something in the young man's ear. The young man blushed. It would be hard to wait until Fred was sixteen, but the waiting would be worthwhile.

The events of that fateful night were almost over, but not quite. Half an hour later, when all was dark and silent, a young boy slipped out of bed and headed for the bathroom. He climbed onto the toilet seat, lifted the lid of the cistern an inch, and dropped something into the water. There was a slight metallic clink before what he dropped slid into obscurity.

The boy returned to bed.

He pulled a sheet over his head, and whispered, "Nighty night, dear Kitty-hawk." Although we cannot hear his friend's response, we can be sure that Toby heard it.

New Carthage prospered, and Master Taylor became the Director of Boys it had always deserved.

After an initial bout of suspicion, the female sex were received and welcomed by the boys as part of the furniture.

Sixteen years old, Polly McGuigan, of the apple-cheeks and water-melon bosom, was particularly well received; and for those who would worry about what the boys had been through, let me, dear Reader record, that on Christmas Eve, in the walk-in laundry, Polly was cheerfully bent over a full laundry basket while Adam pumped his seed into her mouth, and Fred pumped his seed from behind. There are, dear Reader, saving graces in all things; for Fred, true to us in his fashion, pumped his seed straight up her ass hole.

So let us leave them at it; love or lust, what does it matter? For love or lust is a flower that grows in any soil, works its sweet miracles undaunted by autumn frost or winter snow, blooming fair and fragrant all the year, and blessing those who give it and those who take it.

EPILOGUE

Among the items found in Master Myles' safe was this poem.
Hand-written, its author was not recorded. Does it have any
meaning? Only the meaning you give it.

ROMANCE

When I was but thirteen or so
I went into a golden land
Chimborazo, Cotopaxi
Took me by the hand.

My father died, my brother too,
They passed like fleeting dreams
I stood where Popocatepetl
In the sunlight gleams.

I dimly heard the master's voice
And boys far off at play
Chimborazo, Cotopaxi
Had stolen me away.

I walked in a great golden dream
To and from the school
Shining Popocatepetl
The dusty streets did rule.

I walked home with a gold dark boy
And never a word I'd say
Chimborazo, Cotopaxi
Had stolen my heart away.

I gazed entranced upon his face
Fairer than any flower
O shining Popocatepetl
It was thy magic hour.

We lay upon a dusty floor,
His body joined with mine
Chimborazo, Cotopaxi
He filled me with his wine.

The houses, people, traffic seemed
Thin dreams and far away
This golden boy upon the floor
Had sucked my soul away!

Chris Kent, Autumn-Summer 1998
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