

*The Sixth  
Acolyte Reader*



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# Tag

by Daniel Mallory

It is humid, somewhat steamy, a trifle over-warm, though regulars tend not to notice. Regulars, such as I, do not have the capacity to notice. Mind-bytes are not inexhaustible and whenever I come here, my thoughts are filled with other things. Trivia? Assuredly not.

Clamor rules. There are shouts of excitement, shrill cries, sham screams for help, called names – sounding somehow disembodied, echoing and re-echoing with soul-stirring plangency beneath the high, vast dome through which ultra-violet is allowed transit. Splash and swish and plummet. Here, in the downtown aquadrome they call *The Ultimate Wave*.

It would be foolish of me to deny the real reason why I am here. Truth will out soon enough. I perch very close to the water's edge in anticipation of the chance drenching that will provoke some apologetic youthful scion into granting me an opening. I swelter and observe, by the main funpool, on my translucent viridian poly-plastic (it breathes) latticed recliner – my web, you might say, for I am as a spider casting optical silken threads – for the desired fly I have yet to ensnare. So far an arachnidian failure. But today will be different. I am neither telepathic nor clairvoyant, but I *know* today will be different, for there is one amongst those revelers out there with whom I have made fleeting eye contact. It is enough to provide a libidinous charge.

I am a bronzed, well-proportioned quinquagenarian enjoying excellent health and, modesty aside, the good looks which, I'm often told, parallel a popular entertainer of the day. In appearance, no more than thirty. Surprised? *Retardex*, my friends. I'm here in swim trunks, with an obligatory magazine which is not for reading. Its open pages serve to conceal the occasional pulsating Pisa which, even in these liberal times, is not really on. Not for me anyway. Upon the bookshelf of my many traits lies a voluminous, cobwebby tome entitled Timorous.

There he goes again, passing between my feet and poolside, followed by a boy I take to be his pal. Our eyes meet once more as he strides by with raised heels. He is tall for his age which I have placed at thirteen. Slim. A well-structured physique. Strikingly good-looking, with abundant matted hair darkened by the water, but which I've assumed will be flaxen when dry. His chum is, perhaps, a little less attractive, but still a boyish boy.

The human boy-child. For me, worlds apart. Something existing far and away above the rest of humankind. That most captivating assemblage of tissue, bone and sinew in all creation. That vibrant, untainted, uninhibited male-in-miniature so filled with verve and spontaneity as to ignite every particle of my being with exalting pleasure.

My lusty specimens now sit side by side (in animated conversation) on the chairlift that will hoist them to the top of the dome. Another exchanged glance as the lift passes beyond my sight. Could they be discussing me? They are headed for one of the eight flumes this superior leisure resort boasts. Some little time will elapse before they appear again, but of another appearance I feel certain. It seems already that the lad has passed close by me more than would be usually expected of any one person. At what stage might I venture a smile or a word? Or would he, *should* he, be the first?

I am content, for the moment, to look upon others frolicking in the fun pool. Many are completely nude. Thankfully, my boy (and his chum) wear briefs. The starker-types seem sexless. No mystique. A covering, however skimpy, is to be preferred. (Though prodigiously endowed male juvies are never decried!)

They are back and I hadn't immediately noticed, so taken have I been with the antics of a group of pre-pubertal rafting cubs trying to scuttle each other in the tidal stream. A hovering blueboy (sorry, sir – lifeguard) is poised to blow a cautioning whistle. (There are female blueboys too, looking almost identical in cobalt blue shorts and singlets, Wave logo emblazoned, center-chest. Only the location of protuberances defines their gender!) My boy (and pal) are to my right, not ten feet away, friendly fighting – on a shaded patch of ersatz turf. For my benefit? I pretend to thumb through my pages but watch their foolery with delight and longing, for I crave involvement. Aschenbach's coveted gaze upon young Tadzio's beach revelry crosses my mind, but mine is no jaundiced eye. My vision is crystal clear, my senses honed sharp, as I take in their every move; the flash of bright limb, every muscle and ganglionic ripple, the sparkle of eye and smile, the skin on skin struggle. My boy is flat out, pinned down by his grinning chum, threatening who knows what excitements. My boy wriggles like an eel, counter-threatening with words I cannot hear. Don't hurt him, Chum.

Then it happens. Suddenly. Several things simultaneously. The boys spring to their feet and run, the one chasing the other. A blueboy's strident command: "Walk, you two!" Chummy executes a sleek racing dive and is gone. My boy tries to follow, slips, falls – at my feet. The frowning blueboy approaches. Disregarding my embarrassing phallus, I

leap up, get there first.

Dismissing Blueboy with, "It's all right, friend, I got him," I kneel beside that five-foot-nines-worth of lithe boyhood, whose moist limbs still glisten with pearls of ozone dew.

"You okay, son?" I say, somewhat breathlessly.

A pained expression. "Bashed me flickin' knee, didn't I? Christ!"

"Take him to First Aid," advises Blueboy.

"Sure thing – you got it." To my boy, "Here, lemme help you up. Can you walk, do you think?"

"Dunno." He allows me to haul him to his feet. With the injured leg he treads gingerly. (Ouch!) No visible damage. I take one of his arms around my neck and wrap my free arm around his wetskin midriff. We twin it (he limping slightly) to First Aid.

The nurse diagnoses a simple bruise, sprays pain-freeze, elastic bandages the offending knee. The youngster is ship-shape again.

I can't let it end as quickly as it has begun. No way. I venture a question. "You look like you could use a drink, kid. Want me to take you to the restaurant?"

"Yeh, okay – but I got no money."

"Neither have I, but don't worry about it. They know me here." It's true. Little Miss Kinda Cute behind the counter has eyes for me. Lots of females do, but pity them, for they know not upon whom they gaze. Agreed, this one's a pretty little package of fem frippery, but no, my trawl is not for them. Panduriform redundant. The narrow-gauge hipways of the boy-child are infinitely more appealing.

Seated overlooking the funpool, me with coffee, he with CocaPep, he says, "Thanks, mister – I mean for the skoosh (he flourishes his drink container) and for helpin'."

"Welcome – but call me Ronnie, okay?" All a bit perfunctory this. I must broaden the conversational base.

He is hanging over the rail, trying to locate his pal, displaying the backs of his long down-covered legs, his trim little bottom, his long sturdy spine, upon which my eyes cannot help but linger – salaciously, dare I say? He spots his mate, waves. A reciprocating gesture and Chummy is on his way.

In the interim: "What's *your* name, son?"

"Tag. Tag Resource."

"That some kind of a nickname, is it?"

"No, it's jus' Tag. My pal's coming up." He plops into his seat.

"Yes, I saw. Erm – Tag, down there by the pool, you seemed to be

looking at me quite a bit. Have I got two heads or something?"

"Huh, no." He emits an endearing little laugh and champs on his straw again. Then, "Anyway, you was lookin' at me an' all."

"I was not!" Oh, what an outrageous liar I can be.

"You must have been lookin' at me if yer knowed I was lookin' at you."

My turn to laugh. "Yeah – okay, you're right. I *was* looking at you because – well hell, you're kinda good to look at." Each time Tag's attention is drawn elsewhere, I am able to steal glances at evidence of a genital amplitude tauntingly secreted inside his trunks. An altogether wonderful boy. I *can't* let him go.

His friend arrives, dripping, is stopped in his tracks by one of Miss Kinda Cute's kinda cute assistants. "You can't come in here like that, hero. Out out out!"

The boy's response is sheer heaven. He adopts a boxing stance, fists up, bobbing and weaving, pretending to throw punches at the taken-aback girlie. "It's okay, Suzie," says he, "I'm not stoppin'. Jus' wanna see my pal, that's all."

"Be quick, and don't step on the carpet," she concedes.

And he approaches us. This kid is much nicer than I had at first thought. To Tag he says, "What happened to you, lunkhead?"

Tag displays his bandaged knee. "Slipped and squelched this." He slaps his thigh above the injury with the back of a hand. We are introduced. "This guy's called Ronnie. He helped me. Ronnie, this is my pal, Kane Stafford."

"Glad to know you, Kane," I reply, feeling helluva buoyant. "D'you want to dry off and join us for something to eat?"

"No ta, Ronnie. My ma's waiting." Then swapping insults with his friend, he leaves.

I am alone with My Boy. He toys idly with his now empty drink container. "Would *you* like something to eat, Tag?"

"I'm okay, thanks."

To my surprise his manner now seems to change. He softens, becomes introspect. He sticks his elbows on the table, rests his chin on clenched fists – and stares directly at me. When my eyes meet his, he drops them a moment, then re-establishes eye to eye straight off, raises his very expressive eyebrows, is evincing an undoubted look of longing. As if he wants to tell me something, as if he expects his 'look' to do his bidding. I can't be wrong, can I? I sink the remains of my coffee, stroke my chin, (lousy shave) and keep watching. At length, "Something wrong, Tag? Do you feel okay?"

"Yeh, sure," is all the answer I get. We sit in silence for some little while.

Presently I reach out, rest my hand on his sturdy thigh, squeeze gently. "You *have* got something on your mind. I know I'm a stranger, but I'm also a good listener. You can tell me."

I am not anxious to disconnect. I stroke his leg, slowly, affectionately. It is a while coming, but when it comes it presents as something of a bombshell. No mincing words.

Straight out with it. "You a pedo, mister – erm, I mean Ronnie?"

"Wo!" say I, emitting a little blast of breath through O-shaped lips. What do I say to that? Simple question, right? But much hangs on my reply. Our eyes click again. I half-expect to find hostility but see what appears to be genuine interest. I'm hoping honesty will pay off. "Okay, Tag – the truth is yes, I am. A reluctant one, however."

"What's reluctant?"

"Well," I reply, slowly, picking my words with care, "it means that I'd like to be, but I have never had the opportunity."

"I was never with a pedo before."

"And?"

"It's okay."

"You don't mind? You're not afraid?"

"Course not. Should I be?"

"No, son, you shouldn't. Not with me anyway."

"I know, I mean, I seen you here before, lotsa times, but I guess you didn't see me. See that bluebell tree [bluebell tree?] over there? That's my spy place, an' I jus' knowed you was a pedo from how you would look at some other kids sometimes – and sometimes you would kinda shut your eyes and look like you was gonna cry – an' at school we get tell't that some pedos is lonely and sorta sad feelin' – y'know, like some old folks is, and if we kids can do sump'n to help..."

"Here, hold on a second, Tag," I cut in, feeling peculiarly elated, "you'll have me in tears if you keep on like that. You're a fantastically perceptive young feller. A brave one too, for being so frank. Do you want to know what I'd really like? I would like it very much if you and me could be – well – friends. Do you think it's on?"

"Sure, if you want. I like you, Ronnie. And I would – erm – I'd kinda like it if – *you* know."

"Y'mean – you – and me?" I can't believe what I'm hearing.

He repeats, "Sure, if you want," and I explode. "Wow, son, there's nothing I'd like better. Would you like to come with me to my place? Say, tonight?" Isn't this all just *too* darned quick? (Quick? Fifty years is quick?) Or is it a dream?

"Okay. Where do you live?" It's no dream.

I think 'God a'mighty' and say "Ruadh National Park," and then laugh at my own light-headed foolishness. "I mean to say I'm a ranger there. I have a cottage near the start of the forest walk. A cedar-clad thing. Complete isolation. I like it. Do you know where I mean?"

"Yeh. I been that way lotsa times. Me and Kane, we go mountain-biking sometimes. Geez, Ronnie, if I'd have knowed you lived there...."

"Well, son, you know now. And you'll always be welcome. Kane too, of course. Ready to go?"

"Yeh. Jus' wanna do Splashdown again."

"What about your knee?"

"Aw, it ain't nuthin'. Come with me?"

"Me – do Splashdown? It's a couple of hundred feet to the top of this dome. I'm terrified of heights."

"Aw, c'mon, Ronnie. Don't be a yeller belly. Yer jus' gotta do Splashdown with me. You'll like it. It's terrific."

Splashdown is, by repute, the most horrifying waterchute in the building, possibly in the country, and you have to be over a certain height to shoot it in the first place. And of course I'm over a certain height! I clear my throat but still come across huskily. "Don't misunderstand me, Tag." Cough. "I feel very proud that you should want an older guy like me to go with you, but..."

"If you don't come with me, I won't come with you," he says, playfully, clearly not meaning it. His eyes are alight with excitement and the anticipation of introducing me to "his" flume.

I feel a sudden rush of adrenalin. "Okay, but tell me what happens first, right?"

"Yeh. When the green light shows you shove off, lying on yer back. It's supposed to be like in a spaceship what comes back to earth and lands in the ocean. It's all black at the start, then there's these lights outside the tube showing through, all speeding towards you and it makes you think you're doin' a ton, then lights start spinnin' around and you feel like you're turning over an' over." His hands swoop and glide, graphically assisting his account. "Only you ain't. It's called an illusion, right? Then it's a sorta red fog you go through and it's a flexi bit what bumps you about like it's an earthquake or sump'n, then all of a sudden the tube goes clear and you think you're gonna land in the funpool – see the real steep tube over there?" He points. Someone's hurtling earthwards right now with a look of extreme – he's gone! "And water sprays shoot at yer, but you get took right through the bottom o' the



funpool then the tube goes all blue and shoots you ten feet straight down and dumps you in the basement scuba-pool. It's great, honest. Pure cosmic!"

I swallow – hard. "Oh, well, you can still only die once. Come on."

It is terrifying, but not so much that I wouldn't do it again, if forced. And anyway, it is worth it just to see the look of delight on My Boy's illuminated face.

"Okay, son, let's get dressed and beat it."

"Sure – I'm with yer, Ronnie. Jus' gotta tell my dad where I'll be."

I am alarm shot. "Your dad? He's here?"

"Yeh. Works here. He's a swimmin' and divin' instructor. Used to be a professional swimmer, my dad did. Comes here on his days off, like today, and swims a coupla miles in the big pool to keep in shape. Pumps iron in the gym an' all. A tough guy, is my dad. Won't be long." And he hobbles away along palm-fringed Tangaroa Terrace, the elevated walkway that connects with the other pools. Real palms. They could grow dates here!

'My God,' I am thinking, 'parents!' The idea that parents existed had completely escaped me. What on earth would the boy say to Brute Man?

He returns with a cheery, "It's okay."

"To stay the night?"

"Sure. He don't mind."

"But what did you say to him?"

"Jus' said I was stopping the night with my big ranger pal Ronnie in your cottage at Ruadh."

"Oh, Tag, I sure hope you know what you're doing." I am shaken – *and* stirred.

"Course I do. Quit worrying, else I'll make you do Splashdown again."

He has a wonderful laugh.

We take the Three-O-Clock (direction, not time) Mag-Trak hi-rail and are thirty miles from the conurbation in half as many minutes. A four-mile walk through remote, rugged, beautiful territory, not seen because it is dark, this being February. Oh, Feb of Febs! My young companion is undaunted by the distance. He is highly animate, excited. We converse freely, as equals, all across our torchlit way. Our compatibility blossoms – is confirmed. He has a tremendous 'you and me are best mates' personality. He is doing well at school. Likes it. One of his subjects is space technology. He doesn't like it. He likes ecology and planetary husbandry. He likes things natural, unspoiled – as I do.

He is twelve. Twelve. A magical age! I am right minus one. He has a girlfriend (Dramin? Dorlin? Clarification *de trop*), but for the moment prefers to knock about with Kane and some other school mates.

He is intrinsically Boy, moving sometimes gracefully, sometimes awkwardly – always delightfully. He kicks the odd stone aside as if making a pass at football (his knee seems not to worry him); he jumps at branches within reach, hangs from one for a second; skips along sideways when he feels that points made must be clearly understood; runs ahead and lies in ambush (fake fright from me); he dances around me, karate kicking and chopping, orchestrated with 'boofs' and 'pows' and 'take thats'. Light beam reveals sly grin. His cap falls off. He swoops, retrieves it without stopping, flicks hair from his brow with a cheeky toss of his head. From him I receive an infusion of youth by proxy. I begin to think his fall may have been deliberate, but will keep this to myself. I have snatched his sports bag to save it the battering it doesn't deserve.

His mode of dress is to the minute. He is handsome in his silver-bronze shell suit with yellow and white zig-zag trim at shoulder, arm and leg sides – bearing Falcon Leisurewear's ostentatious, phosphorglow crest – a striking, stylized bird of prey. He sports a green woolen skull cap with white bobble, and a broad, brass-studded leather neckstrap. Around his waist a chain of blue alloy links from which, at his hip, hangs a gold medallion inscribed with his forename – all items *de rigueur* with real boys of the day. And the consistently popular Converse hi-top basketers, newest style. (The styles change with bewildering rapidity. Buy your basketers after breakfast and they've been superseded by lunch!) My own attire is not dissimilar because I always emulate boy-dress. (No neck-strap!) Helps me feel closer. Not that I have ever felt anything but.

Beneath the pines the chill night air is like wine, made sweet by the photosynthesizing greenery – with which I have symbiotic relations. Above us the sky. Black, jewel-studded velvet. Tag asks if we'll see any animal life. I say it's highly unlikely, unless he curbs his exuberance – which he simply must not do. This athletic boy, poised on the very brink of teendom, is surely too good to be true.

We enter my isolated place. The interior is modest but modem. Warm. Bright. Open plan. Single level. We stick our swim gear in the airing closet. We have a meal first. Tag says I am a good cook. I reply that I have to be because I never married, nor have I been hitched to a female at any time and "a guy's gotta be able to take care of himself".

He doesn't want to watch anything on the screen, so I slip on a

LaserVision music show, sound on, picture off. He embarks on a postprandial excursion, showing great interest in my discs, my books, my sculptures and other collected bric-a-brac, my large library of historical movies and my framed, hung portraits of many of the stars who had appeared in them. He likes the really old pictures as well. We have passed through a phase when movies were rife with sex, violence and vile language. These, though still shown in museum theaters, were not his cuppa tea. So far he hasn't done or said a thing with which I might find disagreement. What a boy!

He has had his fill of my home and contents and flings himself beside me on the settee, sliding up close. I put my arm around his shoulder. He rests his flaxen-haired head on my breast and places a hand on my left thigh. I am in seventh heaven – whatever that is. I reach heights of euphoria never before experienced. That this boy should have attached himself to me – *me* of all people – is almost beyond belief. I embrace him warmly. For opening a door so long firmly locked.

"You're a great guy, Ronnie," says he, with enthusiasm, "and you got a great place here full of terrific stuff, jus' like I'd like when I grow up."

"It's yours to share, Tag, for as long as you like. And thanks for the compliments."

"That's okay, Ronnie. I was never with an older feller before, but some o' the guys at school say it's good fun if you get the right one, and I jus' knowed you was the right one."

"And how did you know that?"

"I dunno, do I? It's some kinda weird thing yer feel, like a magnet. You jus' *know* when you like sum'dy. An' anyway, you ain't an old guy. Not really. You got all the gear and you don't look anywhere near fifty."

"Well, most folks don't these days, Tag. You reach a stage where you change very little over a longish period, you know that."

He isn't interested. He springs up suddenly, a cat on hot bricks, appealingly capricious. Now he *does* want to see one of my yesterpix. This changeability I take to be the thing with young lads. Perhaps always was. How am I to know – really? He chooses, surprisingly, Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not*, the Bogart-Bacall opus. He has divested himself of his Falcon top and shell pants, revealing vivid green shadow-stripe, contour-hugging shorts and vermilion sweat-shirt. Clashing shades that play the very devil with the old eyesight. Boy, this kid is colorful! He sprawls full length on his front, elbow propped in the deep pile. Hard on the neck, son. He's retained his neckstrap.

I am content to stay put, watching him rather than the movie. His

discarded clothing is beside me. Touching the still warm fabric provides its own *frissons sauvage*. I permit myself a fresh appraisal. My enraptured gaze takes in his naked long-toed, handsomely-arched feet; his long, anatomically perfect boy-legs, their copper glow highlighting the fair downy hairs, gleaming in early development; a captivating incurvate spine emphasizing the wonderful twin-convexity of his trim buttocks and their neat, narrow pelvic confines; the protruding shoulder blades and the long slender neck. Now I must attempt an analysis of his remarkably handsome features, presently turned from me. Beneath that rich abundance of wayward, dark-rooted spun gold he has for hair – and his motile eyebrows (color ditto) – lies a slightly upturned nose and an upper lip-line in accord. And now comes the tricky bit. Those lips, his mouth, fractionally oversized, remind me of The Creature from the Black Lagoon – but I stress, not grotesquely so. A truly unfair simulacrum, for Tag's general appearance is exhilarating – and anyway, I liked The Creature! His is a mouth you could fall into, and be happy to do so. Let him eat me alive, and let it be soon. Reflecting, I imagine a more predatory, less cautious individual than myself might easily lose control and ravage the boy to his distress. But this frog-faced kid is safe, is mine alone – as possibly my observation of him. The long, tousled, tow-headed Adonis commands all of my attention. In sum, a feast for the optics – and every other receptive tract. If I condense and concentrate my entire consciousness on this boyhood vision stretched out before me, I can surely reach some private zenith without moving a muscle. Too soon. I must resist. Go on 'hold', feller!

He turns unexpectedly, prizing my peepers from his wee derriere. I flush a little, but he is oblivious. "This is good, this is," he enthuses. "I like that boozy guy."

"Walter Brennan."

"Yeh. Hey, Ronnie, was the whole world black and white way back then?"

"Of course not, Tag. They were able to make color pictures, but they..."

"Only jokin'."

I chuckle feebly for believing him serious. "Sure. I was gonna say they restricted the use of color because it was more expensive."

"Oh, yeh." He returns to Martinique, I to Torporville, adjusting my constricting southerly apparel.

After a while he shifts to a cross-legged position. I can no longer maintain my poise. I cannot simply watch. I must touch too. I slither, snake-like, from the settee and assume a kneeling position behind the lad,

and executing a pincer movement with my thighs I trap his slim hips between them. I throw my arms over his shoulders and encircle his rib cage. He warms to my embrace, snuggling in tightly.

I am content for no more than a couple of minutes. I want his participation. I curl my finger ends into his ribs, causing him to squirm deliriously.

"Quit that, Ronnie. I wanna see this movie," he giggles.

I hold him with one arm and paste my free hand across his eyes, cutting his vision. "Suppose I said no? Suppose I said see it later."

"You're asking for it, man, and you're gonna get it," he says, darkly, trying to break free.

"Oh, I am, am I? Gonna get tough, are you?" I drag him on to his back, at the same time sitting athwart his chest. I rain soft blows on his chin which he switches rapidly side to side in attempted avoidance.

Through escalating laughter he squeals, "I'll get my dad on to you, you nutter. He's bigger than you are, my dad is."

"Oh yeah? And what's his name, tiger?"

"Harmon, that's what."

I feign a taunting howl. "Harmon, oh Harmon! D'yer hear me, Harmon? I'm about to beat your son to mush. What are you gonna do about it?"

"He'll beat *you* to mush, you big blubber-lug," he says, trying to arch his back enough to throw me off. "That's if I don't do it myself first. D'yer wanna see how strong I *really* am?" I allow him to throw me off and he, thinking himself triumphant, instantly reverses the situation. Now I'm his (very willing) prisoner. He is squatting (wrong – *bouncing*) on my breast, forcing air from me in short gasps. His groin is mere inches from my face, his thighs gripping my head – as well they must. My head's helium-filled, set to lift off! (How are they wearing heads this year?) I am thrilled to be held this way, and allowing my olfactory sense free reign I smell his vibrant warmth intermingled with the merest trace of uric acid. Aphrodisiac incense! He is tapping my forehead with a bent middle finger (Chinese torture, he calls it). I force my head free. Lunging upwards, I pretend to bite his genitals. He springs back. I turn over quickly. The picture is still playing. The remote wand is nearby. I reach for it. He's on his feet trying to get there first. I biff it out of his reach. It slides across the carpet, hits a chair leg. He chases after it. I catch his ankle. Down he goes again. I retrieve the remote and blank the screen. And the wild scrimmage continues. Good thing my energy quotient is high. This lively, soul-nutritive kid is sheer delight. My

heart's doing back-flips. This must never end.

It ends when he announces he's gonna make me a cup of tea, and, "Why didn't we have tea after our dinner, Ronnie? I always have tea."

"Have tea, kid. Be my guest. I'll show you the makings – phew!"  
By now I confess to a slight breathlessness.

"You're good fun, man," says he, still in high-spirits, sensibly half-filling the kettle.

"So are you, Tag. Don't know what I ever did without you."

"Had peace and quiet, right?"

"Right. But not from choice. Hey, that's coffee."

"I know. Changed me mind. Tag-boy privilege. You for coffee?"

"You fuck offee – dis my prace." (The pay-off to a forgotten old joke. I recall a Chinese connection.)

"S'pose you think that's funny. Well it's not. It's cornball."

"If you say so, scorpion." Abdominally laughing.

"You got cookies, Ronnie?"

"Are you still hungry?"

"Yeh – for cookies."

"There's choc-chips and Oreos in that tin. Help yourself."

"You gonna have some?"

"No, I just want to go to bed."

"Sex maniac!" He lands a surprise punch in my guts.

"Well, that's what you came for, wasn't it?" Prefaced with an "oof!"

"I suppose so. I don't care. Jus' so's we have good fun." He separates an Oreo and scrapes the white filling from it with his upper teeth. "These are great. Are you a good sloggerer, Ronnie? Me an' Kane is. We slog-off all the time. Well, not *all* the time. Sometimes, but a lot."

The sudden switch precipitates a cough. "Dunno, kid. Never tried it on anyone else." I grab the back of his neck and pull his head into my shoulder. I cannot resist his preposterous lips any longer. I take his head between my hands and draw him into as long a short kiss as I dare – for now. It's chocolate-flavored heaven.

"Hey, I never kissed nub'dy on the lips before," he yelps, not unhappily.

"You didn't that time. It's better with two, tantalizing Tag."

"What's tantalizing?"

"Don't they teach you anything at that school of yours?"

"Nup, only the bright kids. Me? I'm a dodo-brain."

"And I *won't* agree with that."

With a quick flick of his tongue he retrieves a breakaway crumb from a

corner of his mouth.

The coffee is ready. We return to the lounge area. Tag has made himself completely at home. He likes my place. It likes him, vaunting a new 'electric' ambiance, a stimulating aura which infiltrates my every molecule. His presence invests both me and the room with warmth and sensual (sen-soo-al – every syllable has meaning) pleasure.

Tag agrees it's playtime.

"Are you going to let me peel that dazzling strip off you?" I ask.

"Yeh. If you wanna."

"Okay, arms up." I whip the red sweat-shirt up and off with one deft swipe, revealing his bronzed, (UV, courtesy The Wave) muscled torso in all it's profound glory. My eyes crawl all over him, greedily. I kneel at his feet once again and my hands cup his buttocks, sliding back and forth over the slippery satin sheen of his figure-enhancing shorts. The feeling triggers instant erection. My face glows with intensified tactility as I nuzzle into the front of him where, with nose and mouth, I touch a reciprocating monolith. That heaven-sent scent again. I undo the tie-cord and slowly slide the triple-elasticated waistband down over his hips. A green supporter is next to go. His appreciable organ springs to attention upon release, creating a forty-five degree angle between it and his lower abdomen. So trap-bolt hard you could snap it off. (This part of his body, negative white, could stand UV processing too.) I kiss the equatorial, elastic-induced indentations on his dark, warm skin. I *think* fellatio, but that's all I do. For my shy book opens wide its abominable pages again and I curse inwardly. I rise, running my hands up each side of his body. His shorts and jockstrap surround one ankle. He flips them on to the bed.

That lively expression of his has dissolved into the hauntingly beautiful winsome look I saw at the restaurant. I adhere my lips to his and this time it's long-held. This time he responds. This time his full, moist, out-turned lips seem to have independent grip. It is as if their sphincter-like rims embrace my own – as if endowed with the ability to hang on, limpet-tight. Oh, never let me go, young Tag.

I murmur quietly, "Y'know, I never ever believed that old rubbish about love at first sight, but I'm beginning to think it's true. Would you be very shocked if I said I love you, Tag?"

"Course not, 'cos me too you. 'Cept I told yer – I seen you a lot before."

"You're not just saying that because you're feeling sorry for a sad old pedo?"

"Get lost, Ronnie. Course I'm not. I never liked grownups much

before, 'cept for you."

"What about Harmon – your dad I mean?"

"Oh, he's different. He's family."

"And are there any more at home like you?"

"Sure. Two brothers. I'm the middle brother. Rap, he's fourteen, and Ticky, he's just a kid, nine. It was Rap what showed me about slogging-off. Some nights he kinda cuddles me up in bed, well, he used ter. Not so much now. That was when I was jus' a little kid."

Three young Resources! Two more at home like Tag! Delirium-inducing though the thought be, I begin visualizing a time not far distant when I might entertain all three here. Future prospects momentarily dazzle.

"You gonna get undressed, or what?" Tag is saying.

I take his shirt and shorts from the bed, place them on a chair. "You sure know how to dress to look good," I say, as I relieve myself of my tracker.

"It's the gemmie, man. You gotta be one o' the boys. I got leather jeans an' a bomber what I have for school some days. You should see what I look like then. Goes with this." He touches his neckstrap, his only remaining adornment (other than the bandage which he's removing himself.)

"May I see your neckstrap, Tag?"

"If you wanna."

I slip the catch and toy with the strange boyhood symbol for a moment. Adolescent vanity. Ah, yes, I remember it well. "Do you know *why* you wear this, son?" I broach.

"Nup. Jus' looks good I guess. Like some men have ties. They don't do nuthin'."

"I think neckstraps are a damn sight better than what boys *and* men used to wear. Earrings, no less, and they didn't do nuthin' neither." (Hell, my vernacular's slipping!)

"Earrings! That's stupid. Them's for girls. Know what? I seen some girls with neckstraps 'cos they wanna be boys. Rap says he reckons some girls what wears boy's stuff, like scruffy Levis an' stuff, stands in front of mirrors with a carrot stuck in because they wish behind them fly buttons is a real plonker, y'know, like boys got. Rap says my plonker's a joy-stick." He pauses for breath, grinning wickedly, engagingly. "I wouldn't like to go with a girl what looks like a boy. Would you?"

I laugh aloud. "Definitely not, Tag! And that's a very perspicacious observation your big brother made."

"What's one o' them?"



"It means being very aware of what's going on around you. A good way to be."

We pile into bed together, embracing ecstatically, fiercely – but fling aside the coverings almost immediately. The solar-power heating can be too hot. I still cannot quite believe my good fortune as my foraging hands range over my boy's smooth skin. "You're a well-developed lad for your age, Tag. What kind of sports are you into?"

"All of 'em. Well, not *all* of 'em, but nearly. Swimming and marathons and karate and squash and football. Stuff like that. I'm in the first eleven. The coach, at school y'know, he's a hard man what makes us do all sorts a hard stuff. But that's okay 'cos I wanna get musklies like my dad. Thinks he's tough, he does. One day me an' Rap'll show him who's boss. Wants brung down a peg. Only jokin'. My dad can whack anybody what gets tough. 'Cept nub'dy gets tough." He laughs his endearing little laugh again.

Now, with one hand on Tag's firm abdomen and my free arm acting prop, I lean over the lad and gaze into his remarkable gray-blue eyes. Sincere affection, for me alone, languors there plain to see. He clearly warms to my manliness as I to his boyishness. With his features in repose (happily not often because it's scary) he looks vastly intelligent and deeply serious. Superiority and disdain suggest themselves, but find no hook. He is an ordinary, well-adjusted lad of whom his parents must be proud. I observe the delightful transverse creases at his throat where soon a badge of his approaching maturity will appear. He smiles a smile beyond adjectival description – 'wistful' comes to mind – with lip corners turned slightly downward. I catch his cocoa-breath as I close on his *Dionaea muscipula* mouth yet again (Asterisk: Venus flytrap!) I lie back, curiously reticent of making any further move.

And then...

My God, this masterful youngster has grabbed my – my – (I have never liked the word because it isn't macho, almost an anagram of poncie) – my boner and I am soaring again.

"I'll do you first, Ronnie. Okay?"

Firm, positive, rhythmic undulations precipitating seismic ferments. Tissues to hand, I am prepared for what will be a cataclysmic climactic moment. To be handled thus, by one so young! The true meaning of life? An unequivocal YES! Is there an eighth heaven? Oh my God! It comes, too soon, because I have been on heat too long already. Touch of lover's balls.

"Was it okay, Ronnie?" he's whispering. "Did I do it good?"

I am in a rhapsodic haze. "You sure did, you fantastic little bastard. You sure did," Am I still breathing?

I confirm that my bollocks are still where they are supposed to be, and recover my equilibrium after a brief convalescence.

Now it's my turn. Now, my trail-blazing fingers find themselves in territory never before explored in another. Here, under sun-dappled trees. Beneath an apricot sky. One source of the river of life. The Land of Testis. Center of creation – from whence the mighty spermatozoa doth flow. I caress his elliptical little gonads with delicacy befitting their sensitivity. An expeditionary force draws me onward and upward – to that pulsing edifice towering manfully above. My grasp creates a mutually blissful entrapment, and the primal ritual begins again. I hold in my hand a stick of dynamite, massively volatile, primed to explode in a fiery scintilla of epic ecstasy. (A bit florid this is, mate!) Our most emotive sensibilities are aflame as I bring this wondrous wee guy to climax and a passable spermic emission – again, too quickly. His chest heaves like raging seas. The squall passes and he is at peace, blithely content.

He's not still for long. I settle down to hug him some more, but he wriggles free and kneels on the bed looking at me. "Ronnie..." says he – uttered with an 'I want something' timbre.

"Yes, young Tag."

"You got CocaPep in your fridge. Can I go get some?"

"Sure thing, son. Everything I have is yours."

"Then can we do it again?"

My ridiculous, unavoidably shamefaced smile says yes.

I join him to prepare tea for myself. As we move around, our shared penile rigidity is treated with indolent disregard – as commonplace as a haircut – so intimately do we know each other already – so mellifluous our interactions.

"Ronnie, why is that stuff called CocaPep?" he asks, placing the empty carton on the bedside cabinet. He sits his naked self astride my naked self and begins to employ his hands which are everywhere at the same time.

"The two biggest American... Hey, cut that, kid, it tickles! ...cola b-b-b-b... Christ, son! ...beverage producers merged I think. Why?"

He simply shrugs, evidently more into probing me. He's smiling his curious smile again. It's more of a smirk. That's right. It's a smirk. But I like it.

I request the pleasure (granted) of having my head trapped between his coppered thighs with my throat held tight to his perineum, where my nose

and mouth are treated to testicular titillation.

I nuzzle, tracker-dog style, covering every anatomical detail of his devastating firecracker young body – lastly laying low his burgeoning pubic fuzz. Talk about exhilaration! I sizzle with passion unbridled.

He is scrutinizing my own tanned physique with interest. "You got a good bod an' all, Ronnie – an' I never seen you in the pool."

"No, Tag, but I do swim. I don't *always* use a recliner. And there's my job. Takes me out and about a great deal. Long distance walking, climbing, especially during the tourist season."

"Thought you said you was scared of high up places."

"You don't forget things, do you? I stand corrected. I should have said I don't like man-made heights."

"Don't see what's the diff. Anyway, Rap does climbing but not me. Not yet. Can I come with you sometime?"

"Anytime you like, son. And what about Rap?"

"You want him to come an' all?"

"Sure, if he'd like to. I'd love to meet that big brother of yours."

"Okay then, I'll tell him."

"I've never seen him at The Wave, have I?"

"Dunno, but he mostly goes in the scuba-pool. He likes to fool around doing stupid things, like pulling faces an' stuff through the glass wall – y'know, at the people in the Five Fathom snackeroo. He's jus' a big show off is Rap."

"Sounds good to me."

He's still poking me about. Suddenly I'm grabbed – hard. "See these muskies here? Them's called pectorals, them is."

"Yeah – well stop squeezing the damn things, Tag. T-T-Tag! Let go will yer? That hurts!"

"S'posed ter."

Now a full-blown tickling match ensues and we're squirming all over the bloody bed, in paroxysms of mirth bordering hysteria. Jesus! I'll crack up at this rate. My whole body has become one enormous erogenous zone, reacting with incendiary fire to my boy's every punch and pinch, stroke and poke. What an active kid. What a treasure. What a chatterbox. Never stuck for something to do or say.

Presently we calm, lie side by side, holding, being held, me supine, he facing with one arm and leg over. I cradle his head to my shoulder. Such empathic togetherness defies logic. There are circa forty years between us – so where now the generation gap?

I can *feel* the boy in him, the warmth of him, his youthful dynamism

seeping, trans-dermal, into every part of my fortuitous form. He makes me a king. I am the luckiest fellow alive.

I snap out of reverie, whisper, "Hey kid, d'you want to know something?"

"Nup." Typically puckish.

"Well, I'm going to tell you anyway." A sigh. (Happy breath!) "Tag – you're just great!"

"I know." He laughs, scorning sobriety.

I jab his ribs. That's one. Two – I grip a flaccid appendage very tightly and we shape up, ready for another round.

But then... the stillness of the night and the rapture of the moment are disturbed by the soft whine of a fast-approaching powerbike. Coming this way? Odd, because I never ordinarily hear any kind of intrusive sound at this time of the year. Occasionally during the tourist season, but never now. My body tautens. "Somebody coming, Tag. Who the hell...?"

The sound is nearer now. "My dad's bike makes that kind of a noise."

Panic! "Your dad? (Harmon? Amen!) But I thought you said..."

"He *did* say I could stop the night, Ronnie. Honest."

"Then what...? Oh my God!"

The sound has stopped – outside my door.

I haul myself from the bed, slip into my bathrobe. Tag is ahead of me, running for the door starkers. "For Christ's sake, Tag, get dr—"

He laughs over his shoulder. "It's okay."

Stuck in a verbal groove I say "Oh my God" again. Beneath my *cafe-au-lait* veneer I am suddenly as white as a sheet used to be. Truculent thoughts fight for review: "He was a professional swimmer", "...does a coupla miles on his day off to keep in shape", "...pumps iron in the gym", "A tough guy is my dad". Other thoughts run rampant. All of this in seconds. He's ten feet tall... scoffs girders, quaffs nitro-glycerine... tears pedos to shreds with his tin teeth. This guy is a bull! I quickly switch from red robe to purple. Tremble. The fire-breathing gargantua is in my porch. Tag is with him. "Hi, Dad," I hear, "You said I could..."

The inner door opens. They both stand before me. Harmon has a hand on his son's shoulder. Holding on to the boy whose body I have reviled. To Tag he says, "I did son, but something came up." Now he looks at the quaking aspen I've become, praying for spontaneous conflagration. No, I'm invertebrate. Someone has stolen my spinal cord. "You must be Ronnie," the man says, approaching with an outstretched hand that will surely close

into a fist of steel and connect with my beak instead of my mitt! Hands meet. A perfectly ordinary grip. Sturdy, manly, but cordial. He releases me. (And lo, I still have my arm!) "Ronnie what?" he has said.

"Ronnie, er, Trilling," I stutter nervously. Good thing he doesn't know my middle name's Arthur. My verminous initials would surely endorse my ignominy.

"You look a mite shaky, pal," says he, sizing up my surroundings.

"Me, shaky? I'm not shaky. I'm never shaky." (*I am* shaky).

"You're shaky," he says, with determination. "Not worried by me, are yer?"

"No. Well – yes, a bit."

"Don't be. Nice place you got here. Anyway, I know what you two have been up to. Don't faze me none. Just hope I didn't break up the party too soon, sport. Look, if Tag likes you that's okay by me. Post-pubescent – right?"

Post-pubescent? By a whisker surely.

"Matter o' fact, he pointed you out at The Wave once. Old enough to make his own decisions. We teach our kids self-reliance. They never set a foot real wrong yet. And you look like a regular guy to me, Ron. Relax it – right?"

I am happy to comply. My respiration has some catching up to do. This is the block from which young Tag was chipped. A fine, understanding fellow. I'm in! No doubt about it.

"So what did you come for, Dad?" Tag chimes in, bored with grown-up patter.

"Your Aunt Jessica and Uncle Ham..." He looks at me. "Hamilton, my brother, Ron... got a cancellation. They're jetting off to Canada first thing tomorrow and want to see you all before they go."

"Aw Dad, do I gotta? I don't hardly ever see 'em anyway."

"Which is why they want to see you now. And you wanna see young Brad, don't yer?"

"No, he's a spermo. I don't like him."

"Terrific. Calls his cousin a spermo. Come on now, sprite. Get dressed. You can come here again – if that's okay with you, Ron."

"Can I, Ronnie?" Tag briskly interjects, eyes and brows alive.

"Of course." The situation has my head in a whirl.

"Kane an' all?"

Repeat response. I contemplatively watch the lad struggling into his Technicolor apparel, still overly conscious of his father's presence. "I'll see you at The Wave next week, Tag."

"No, before then." The lad is clearly adamant.

I address my unexpected guest. "Oh, er, can I get you something, Harmon, before you leave?"

"Thanks, Ron, but no thanks. Better smack the track. It's late."

And they've gone. The sound of the powerbike fades into the night and I am alone with my thoughts, and my sensational lad's words, 'You're good fun, Ronnie' still ringing in my ears. My God! I never asked him where he lives. What the hell. He'll find me, and that's for *damn* sure.

At last, at *long* last our new age has caught up with me. I'd never really gotten used to the idea that things have changed, spawned as I was at a time when social mores were very different. It began quite a while back. People got wise to the fact they could never place any reliance on what the media had to say. Began to see it for what it mostly was – sustained, hysterical sensationalism. They no longer believed everything they read or were told. The mind-molding machinery was less potent. People actually began to think for themselves. And attitudes broadened, fanned out fantastically, brilliantly, embracing ideas and thoughts and practices formerly considered taboo. This broadening brought with it a slackening of restrictive chains. A new age of enlightenment dawned. Freedom – to do with one's life as one wished – providing no one else got hurt in the process. Ridicule and condemnation of out-of-the-ordinary behavior was no more.

But like a dead-headed dodo I didn't keep in step. Mostly figured that if I immersed myself in my work I would forget. About boys, I mean. Out of sight out of mind and all that. Worked pretty well to begin with – until I couldn't take any more. A regular emotional nose-dive. I suspect that living alone can be corrupting – to the point where one might easily forget restraint. The Wave and my meeting with Tag has forestalled any such rash behavior. And I've caught up with today. I am starting out newborn, fresh and free. Young Tag walks with me, holding my hand. These ruminants have to suffice as bedmates.

I stir. I must have slept, though I haven't been aware of it. The ceiling time-and-temp reads 06.09/71 degrees f. I sense a 'presence' – something or someone within the place. Scant daylight filters through the shades. It is enough to silhouette a human form. I flick on the lamp, assume sit-up.

"Tag! Good God, son, what a surprise – and where are your...? Don't tell me – you didn't bike it here with no clothes on?"

"Course not. Jus' took 'em off. I was gonna crawl in and give you a shock. Took a lend of my dad's powerbike."

"Does he know?"

"Sure. Me an' my dad don't have no secrets."

Silly question. A pause. "Well, kid, get in and give me that shock."

His nakedness meets mine beneath the covers. He flattens me out. His mouth, those lips of his, completely envelop my nose. He's slobbery. It's lovely. Between licks and bites he injects little laughs.

"Hey, what gives?" I wriggle, pleurably. Speaking isn't easy. "Got dews for you, kid. By lips are lower dowd. Gerroff, will yer?"

He disconnects, goes into a long-lasting true kiss, which sends me soaring again.

"Wo-ho," I whisper, when I am free to breathe. "What a way to wake!"

"Good, yeh? Good job you didn't lock your door, Ronnie, else I wouldn't have been able to surprise yer."

I laughed. "My wild animal population doesn't open doors yet. Now, what about your departing relatives?"

"They left. I gave Brad a belt in the lughole which he didn't like."

"Whatever for?"

"Cos he's a spermo."

"Well yes, I suppose that's the way you'd handle a spermo," I respond, chuckling – knowing I'll learn no more. "So how will you get to school in time, son?"

"It's Sunday, remember?"

"So it is. Does that mean you'll stay all day."

"If you want."

"Oh, I want."

This lively, fun-loving young feller simply cannot keep still. Now he's tweaking my nose. "Tell me – is it me you like or just my nose?" I say, trying to escape his grasping fingers.

"It sure ain't your nose. It's stupid. I'd trash it if I was you."

"Thanks, but I'm kind of attached to it, so trash the fooling around and just let me cuddle you up."

"Do I gotta?"

"Yeah – you gotta."

The humor in him takes a back seat as we clasp each other in sublime manumission. I nose into his invigorating forest-scented hair which exudes the freshness of all outdoors. I stroke his beautifully tanned satin skin with an intensified touch sense. I nuzzle into, and kiss, the indentation behind a collar bone. I hold him closer than close. Our legs intertwine. He gives himself to me. Bliss. Repletion absolute. The

sun rises, symbolically, on what will become a gem of a day.

The dawn chorus in my woods has never sounded so sweet.