

Floreat Grundy

by Simon Tryst

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"I'VE HEARD ALL YOUR limericks before, dear boy but this one about the vicar of King's is at the pale, if not beyond it."

Paul Venery grinned at his friend's reproof and sipped his Scotch.

"I agree, Gervaise. Yours about the Old Man of Madrid was much better. An absolute scream. Funny without being vulgar. 'Cast loving eyes on a kid,' did he? What a rat!"

The older man raised an eyebrow at Venery over the rim of a gin and tonic.

"Paul." He spoke deliberately. "I know you think that just because I am a celibate priest of the..."

Paul laughed quietly and slapped his knee. Gervaise continued.

"...of the Order of Saint Nino, jokes about the Church are taboo. You know this is not so. You try to goad me into a reaction and irritatingly I have played your game."

"Sorry, old chum. Anyway he was a lay vicar, a vicar choral. Not of the cloth, of course. And a Cambridge man. Nuff said?"

"Say no more," drawled Gervaise, and they drank in silence.

"Still," said Paul, relentlessly hounding his friend, "Timothy Cummfast said that it might have been a curate. He said he would ask his father. He was at King's, you know—very bright fellow by all accounts. Big wheel in the Civil Service. Excise. All that sort of thing." He looked on innocently.

"Well, I'm only a humble parson," said Gervaise, a chubby hand toying with the ornate pectoral cross resting on his bosom, "and you are the School's odd-job man."

Paul winced.

"But," continued Gervaise in his exquisitely restrained way, "but then we are both Oxford men. The other place has a mystery of its own."

Paul said, with some dignity, "I may be an out of work graduate, but at last I'm an in work odd-job man." "My dear fellow, you came down twenty years ago. Shouldn't you be thinking of something a little more..." Gervaise slowly stirred the air in benediction and found the word. "Worthy! Demanding of your talents?"

"But I haven't any."

"You were a good schoolmaster, Paul." He paused. "Not a great schoolmaster, but a good schoolmaster."

"But..."

Gervaise held his finger to his lips. "I know, dear boy, I know," he said with a pained expression. For a few moments they sat thinking.

"Do they," hissed Gervaise in a grotesque stage whisper, "still have a Black List?"

Paul nodded sadly. "I suppose so."

"Cheer up, old chap, times might change." Gervaise stood. "Let's have another," he said gaily and towered away to the bar.

"More please, Jack," he boomed. "Gin, ice and lemon. Whisky, water."

"Right away, your worship." The landlord moved to the optics.

"How is Mrs. Brute, Jack?"

"Not so dusty, your reverend, but it's her feet. It's all this standing at the bar plays 'em up, innit?"

"A demanding job, Jack. A demanding job. A landlord's wife is his strength. Cherish her! And how is young Brian?" Jack put the drinks on the bar.

"Computers, clothes, BMXs, dyed hair, earring. Always seems to be glueing things. Lots of glue. Normal thirteen year-old. Just like your lot up at the school, I suppose. Two pounds sixty, please."

"Yes. Thank you, Jack." Gervaise wondered if he would ever see boys like Brian Brute wearing the pink blazer of Grundy's Academy. Money shouted these days. He paid and took their drinks back to the quiet window table.

"There you are, dear boy. Fortification."

"Thank you, Gervaise." Paul brightened and they toasted each other.

"Timothy came to see me in my room yesterday after supper," said Paul as Gervaise was squeezing his lemon slice into the glass.

"Umm?" he murmured.

"That's why I know about the curate."

Gervaise stopped squeezing, momentarily thrown. He looked up.

"Curate?"

"The curate of King's!"

"Oh! Heavens above, Paul. No more! PLEASE!"

"Sorry! Sorry! Forget the curate. Mea culpa. Only making conversation."

"What of Timothy?" Gervaise composed himself.

"We went over the programme for the Camera Club last night—tested some new photofloods."

"Has this particular curriculum the remotest possible affinity with your cardinal diversion?"

"To wit?"

"The ancient and noble pursuit of..." Gervaise leaned forward and muttered through his teeth.
"Paederasty."

"You'd be no good on the stage," said Paul. "I saw your lips move. Am I ancient and noble?"

"You are a bandit who makes thirteen-year-old boys stand and deliver."

"Cumfast is twelve and as you well know I don't make anyone do anything, any more than you, dear Father, make Cumfast enjoy his so-called sins. Committed, I believe, in the sanctuary of your very own quarters."

"Not the same, not the same. I merely allow the fledgelings to persuade themselves to one point of view."

"Successfully," said Paul. He look at his watch. "I must be going soon to finish painting your Chapel."

"And I," said Gervaise, "have a confirmation class at seven. We'll walk back together."

The Apprentice's Arms' began to fill with early drinkers from the village as the two men finished their drinks and rose to leave.

"Cheerio, gents!" shouted Jack as they strolled into the warm June evening.

A shrill whistle pierced the balmy air. They both turned to see Brian Brute straddling his bicycle and slowly moving his closed fist up and down. He winked lecherously at Paul, then rode off, madcap, into the village with his hands in his pockets. Gervaise looked up to the sky as if nothing had happened. "Wonderful weather we're having," he said. And they both walked on.

Paul mused on the street wisdom of the publican's son, a country boy. He supposed it had something to do with the animal couplings: the fields were full of it. Practical physiology at an early age. He was a whirlwind, a cheerful, knowing lad. A kind of boy, really, who helped clear the glasses in the pub at weekends, and sometimes sucked off Paul in the cellar.

THE REVEREND GERVAISE St. John Spurme-Schuter was Chaplain to Grundy's Academy for Young Gentlemen. Florid and in his late fifties, he was a tall man and his church was very High.

A confirmed bachelor, the Rev. Spurme-Schuter did not like women, although he tolerated the Mother of God, indeed, worshipped her, which, in his case, was possibly perverse.

Gervaise occupied the best rooms in the School, better even than the Headmaster's, and which were the source of some envy among other members of staff who, although rarely invited to the sanctum and its mysteries, had heard of their relative opulence in graphic detail from the boys, who often were.

Cassock brushing his buckled Lobb's, Gervaise sat enthroned in a Gothic 'cathedra', an elaborate copy of a Roman Senatorial chair and, dipping his pectoral cross as a pointer, counted off the remaining patisserie on the cake stand.

"One, two, three cream chocolate' eclairs! One, two and a half slices of raspberry gateau, one rum truffle! Eat up, Marcus, my dear; I want to demolish your appetite for supper tonight. All that good food they give you." He sighed. "No good for growing boys."

Marcus Smallpiece was, at thirteen, a senior boy in his last year at this prep. school and as such was entitled to wear a red rosebud in the buttonhole of his blazer, a distinction not to be sniffed at. He lounged deep in a soft chair, one smooth leg raised insouciantly over the arm while he slowly tongued the whipped cream from an éclair.

"No thanks, G.S. I think we've got burgers tonight. And chips. Hope they're not soggy."

"Well, then," smiled Gervaise, "more ginger beer? Lemonade?"

"I'd pop!"

"I shall have one more cup of tea and then you must go. Paul Venery is coming soon to discuss the work he's doing on the Chapel."

"I like Paul," said Marcus. "In fact, most of our lot think he's ace. Tremble's got a pash on him," he said nonchalantly.

"Earnest?" asked Gervaise. "The young one in your set? Have a word with him: a twelve-year-old can so easily burn himself out in his enthusiasm."

He lifted his biretta from the teapot and poured more tea into the translucent cup.

"I'm off," said Marcus, uncoiling from the chair, and stood, alluring, in brief white shorts just the tiniest bit damp around the fly.

"Yes. Goodbye, my dear, thank you for coming. I do so enjoy these little hours of instruction from time to time."

Gervaise, arm around the boy's shoulder, was leading him to the door.

"One of these days I think we should have some of a religious nature. Confirmation. All that sort of thing."

Gervaise opened the door as Paul was reaching for the amoretto knocker.

"Paul! Come in! Marcus is just leaving."

The boy threw Paul a conspiratorial smile as he slid out to the landing.

"Hello, Paul."

"Hello, Marcus, glad I've seen you. I think I can get an enlarger for the Camera Club. See you about it later. 'Bye.'" "Cheerio!" and the boy was gone.

Paul followed Gervaise into the drawing room.

"Now, a little wine for thy stomach's sake?"

"I need it. Slogging away while you enjoy yourself."

"Marcus Smallpiece came to see me on a private matter. There was a problem. A pressing need. But I'm feeling much better now."

"I'm so glad to hear it," said Paul looking at a pair of purple boxer shorts which slowly dripped water into a silver finger bowl. They were suspended from the reaching arm of the naked Littel Seynt Hew, Martyr.

"Been taking in washing?"

"Cleanliness is next to Godliness" rejoined Gervaise and poured two goblets of 'Vino Sancto—Authorised by the Bishop of Central Japan'.

"I must remember that," said Paul, taking a glass, "the next time Roger Straddle is tardy in removing my pants."

"A slow boy, I fear. Not an academic." Gervaise wagged his head from side to side.

"But willing!"

"But willing!" both agreed in the same breath. Both smiled. Paul tasted the wine.

"There's something ummm—je ne sais quoi—missing!" He held his glass to the standard lamp and twirled it. "Missing? Missing? It's wine. What could be missing?" "Aha!! I have it!"

"Yes?"

"Wafers."

"Please don't mock the sacraments, Paul. Not the Host," he said piously in a soft, hurt voice.

"Don't be sanctimonious, Gervaise. This hasn't been through the procedure, has it? This is not yet, you know Whose you know What. At this moment is is just wine. And a rather sweet, cloying little number at that."

"It needed to be finished," offered the priest, lamely.

"No, Gervaise, please don't grovel. Not to the odd-job man, I couldn't bear it. Honoured to be ere, your worship." This last he grunted in a Jack Brute voice and tugged his forelock.

"I am chastened," said Gervaise, passing a decanter of single malt to Paul. "Have a very large one, it will be my penance."

"It will be my pleasure. Thank you, old friend." Paul sat. "I think you will be pleased with the work. I've almost finished the altar wall."

"Good man! I can hardly wait to see it," said Gervaise happily. "Those ghastly murals obliterated at last."

For five years the Chapel murals had assaulted the refined sensibilities of the Reverend Schuter. Executed by an art class of ten-year-old finger painters under the loosest supervision of the Art Master, Vivian Passive, the whole project had been proposed, sanctioned and blow dried before the Headmaster had begun to have serious misgivings. Passive had only recently been granted a year's sabbatical in order to recover from a nervous breakdown and Gervaise had seized his chance.

THEY STOOD SURVEYING the Chapel. The altar had been covered with dust sheets, and the candlesticks, vases, madonnas and other statuary (the Head had balked at votive candles as being too Romish) had been temporarily removed to the sacristy. The plaster walls were now

starkly white in pleasing contrast to the oak roof and supporters. Gervaise thought that any colour would come from the vestments.

"The colour will come from the vestments," he said. "Yes," said Paul. "I'm glad you like it. I'll have it set up in time for Sunday."

A door opened.

"Oh! Yes!! Yesyesyesyesyes! Excellent! Splendid! Much improved. Well done, Venery!"

"Thank you, Headmaster."

"Hello, Head," enthused the Chaplain. "Now you see? Purity, clarity, space?"

"Yes indeed, Gervaise, indeed I do."

Roland Phagge B.A. (Cantox), long past retirement, spindled his way around the kneelers to inspect the walls through his little gold glasses.

"Not a trace." He squinted his eyes. "Not a trace left of those detestable daubs."

The trio sauntered round the Chapel, admiring it all. "I'm afraid I won't be here for Service on Sunday, Gervaise. In fact I shall be away for the weekend. Visiting my sister in Bath. Nursing Home wrote to say she's rambling. Poor thing. I'll ask Leper to cut some roses. She'll like that."

"We shall intercede for her in our prayers, Head," said Gervaise gently.

The tune 'Rambling Rose' crooned through Paul's mind.

"Thank you, dear man," said Phagge. "All is smoothly arranged here at school, but Venery..." Paul turned to him. "...Sergeant Gripp has injured his back demonstrating at lifting iron weights and he has to take some of the boys to Tosser's Pool on Saturday afternoon. Swimming. Will you do it? Matron can go with you. Take the coach."

"Yes, of course, Headmaster."

"Yes, yeeeees," murmured Phagge vaguely. He trumpeted into a red handkerchief and wiped his nose.

"Well! I must be off!"

And he trotted away to the main buildings, his gown, now almost green with age, a mere wisp floating behind. It was, oddly, the only gown at any School in the Kingdom that hung from both shoulders at the same time.

THE SWIMMING PARTY assembled after lunch in the gravelled courtyard of the old pile. Paul had brought the twelve-seat mini-bus round to the front and Iris Crave, the Matron, was calling

in a few stragglers.

"Hello, Matron!" said Paul brightly.

"Oh! Hello," she said ungraciously. "Will you check the swimmers. I must give Sergeant Gripp his embrocation. I won't be a moment."

She put the list into Paul's hand and bustled off to the Sanitorium.

"Right, men!" he called, in quite a commanding voice. "Let's see if we're all here!"

The boys gathered round Paul in a clamour of shrieks and arguments. Somebody had already lost his towel. "Cummfast!" No, answer. Paul saw Timothy wrestling with Dieter O'Toole and ticked them off the list. "Dribble!"

"Sir!"

"You don't call Paul 'Sir', you moron Dribble. He's the odd-job man," hooted Ian Ring derisively.

"I am the General Factotum, Ian. You are a worm." And he checked them off.

Stephen Plunge was trying to play a tune on Anthony Gland's snorkel. Both present.

"Rubba! — Rubba?" Paul looked around the courtyard. "Where's Winston?"

A black flash tore round the corner of the building and panted up to the group. Paul marked the Nigerian boy present.

Smallpiece and Straddle stood in close conversation and were undoubtedly there.

"Tremble! — Tremble! — Where's Tremble?"

"I'm here," said a small voice from the middle of Paul's back. He turned round to find the boy standing as close as could be without actually touching.

"Whatever are you doing there, Earnest?"

The boy gazed at Paul with a faraway look and said nothing.

"So! All accounted for. On the bus everyone!"

"May I sit next to you, Mr. Venery, please?" asked Tremble, taking Paul's hand.

"Of course, my sweet. But hurry! Battles have been fought for that honour."

The boy streaked away.

Matron walked briskly towards him and they both got into the bus.

"How's the sergeant, Matron?"

"Suffering! But he won't show it. A true soldier is Mr. Gripp."

Paul hoiked out Straddle from the front seat, substituted Tremble, promised the seat to Straddle on the return journey and made for Tosser's Pool.

Twenty minutes from school, on the Marlborough Road and set back in a peaceful valley, Tosser's Pool lay in fifteen acres of isolated woodland. It had been given to the School a dozen years before by the astonished father of a Grundy boy who had made Common Entrance and miraculously (for the Academy) gone up to Cambridge where he had taken a good degree. That this had been achieved in spite of four years at Grundy's had not occurred to 'the confused pater.

Tosser's was in fact a small lake. Extending thirty or so feet into the water floated a wooden jetty from which the boys dived and fished, and on the far shore stood a drunken boathouse. Behind this small building a spinney provided bivouacs and tree houses for backwoodsmen and ornithologists.

Paul drove slowly down the narrow track to a grassy stretch near the jetty where he stopped the bus. It seconds it was empty.

"I shall change in the bus," sniffed the Matron.

The suspension groaned as the dragon went back to her lair.

He sat on the grass and watched as the boys changed. Most had worn their swimming trunks under shorts and even now were cavorting at the water's edge.

"Alright boys," yelled Paul, "TOGS OFF! You don't wear them in the showers. We're all men here!"

Amidst wolf whistles and mannequin poses the boys stripped and made for the pool.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Venery!" Matron called in a shocked voice. Iris Crave's ample form stepped from the bus. She wore a black one-piece bathing costume and a lifeguard's white rubber swimming cap.

"Sorry Matron?"

"Sergeant Gripp never allows the boys to swim naked. We are not savages and we are not all men here!" Her jowls quivered with indignation.

"But the sunshine, Matron! The freedom, the fresh open air!" He almost added, 'the beautiful bodies'. "You've seen naked boys hundreds of times—you're a nurse."

"A Sister," she corrected.

"And now a Matron," said Paul earnestly, "a mature, free-thinking woman."

But he knew it was lost.

"TOGS ON!!" he shouted.

Cries of "Make your mind up!", "What's going on?" and general dissent rose from the party, some of whom were by now in the water. Arguments started over ownership of costumes and Paul heard Ian Ring say, "He's only the odd-job man."

With a final flushed, defiant glare, Miss Crave strode to the pontoon and almost submerging the end of it, bounced once and dived expertly into the lake, surfaced and stretched out in a slow crawl.

Paul took off his jacket and swung it over his shoulder. He strolled round the lake toward the boathouse, enjoying the warmth of the cloudless afternoon. Boys were dive-bombing from the jetty and squeals of delight carried over the water.

Paul walked slowly to the boathouse. The smell of creosote was pleasing, and motey sunlight shafted through uneven timbers and quickened the lapping water.

Six glass fibre canoes hung suspended from the low roof and round the walls orange life-jackets and paddles were heaped in confused piles. Near the door a half-finished canoe, upturned on two trestles, awaited the return of the craft class and beneath it tins of resin, hardner and stiffened brushes stood as they had been left.

A small window was let into the roof above two old canvas chairs and a card table. The bright sun streaked the table and warmed a mouldering tennis shoe and a bluebottle which was lurching from the rim of an empty can. The can sat stickily on a fading copy of 'Club'.

Paul sat down and idly leafed through the magazine. Some of the pages had stuck together. He closed his eyes. A bee droned. The tranquil June afternoon soothed him and from far, far away he could hear the vibrant voices of boys at play.

A splash from close by startled him alert. Earnest Tremble lifted himself from the water and stood, slippery, on the bare wood floor.

"Hello!" said Paul, his eyes widening.

"Hello."

"Have you come to keep me company?"

Tremble wiggled his toes and looked at them intently. He was still breathless from his swim.

"I just thought I'd have a look," he said and pinched his nose.

"Good for you," said Paul. "Have a Mars. There—in my jacket."

The boy grinned.

"Thanks."

"I'm Paul. You can call me that. They all do. Help yourself."

He pointed to the jacket.

"Enjoying the water?"

"It's alright," the boy said, unwrapping the bar now softening in the heat.

"I'm glad you turned up, Earnest. I was getting bored." "So was I," mumbled the comely boy through a mouthful of goo.

Paul smiled as the boy devoured.

"What are you best at, Earnest? In Form?"

"Weee!!!" he frowned. "I'm good at Geog. I know all about Africa. Rubba told me. And I'm good at French. As a matter of fact I'm probably the best in Form but Monsieur Frottage says I need extra tuition with him after prep. I think it's stupid." He sighed. And the Chaplain says I should have instruction in his flat now I'm nearly thirteen!"

"A heavy workload," agreed Paul.

"Why are you an odd-job man?" The boy quizzed Paul with large, luminous eyes.

"Oh! Ah! — That's a bit complicated," he said. "Rubba says you used to be the captain of a tramp ship. He saw lots of them in Lagos."

"I don't like sailing," said Paul, intrigued. "Whatever gave him that idea?"

"Rubba heard Matron telling Sergeant Gripp that you only got on with old steamers."

"Mmmm!" Paul saw Iris Crave screaming for mercy on the end of a plank, the sea below thrashing with Great Whites.

"I quite like being an odd-job man. Especially here. I like boys very much."

"I know!" said the boy with certainty, and casually took the magazine from the table. He looked through the coloured pages and feigned disinterest.

"Erghyaahh!!!" The boy made a gagging sound as he was exposed to a detailed gynaecological study in primary colours. But he looked at the pictures just the same. Occasionally Earnest lifted his eyes to see Paul watching him. At length the lad put aside his reading, yawned and stretched elaborately. Paul regarded him with affection.

"Bra!" The lovely child shivered in his chair.

"You're cold. Come here and bring my jacket."

Earnest stood before Paul who draped his coat over the slim golden shoulders. Paul held him there, looking intently into the boy's face.

"Sit on my knee," he said softly.

"I'll make you wet," said the boy, even softer.

He wore red satin briefs. So brief. With tie strings on each hip. Paul gently pulled the bows and the wet bikini fell to the floor. The boy lowered his eyes, his chocolatey lips opened and he held his breath, then sighed. His silky cock was stiff. As long as a man's finger and quite thick.

Paul softly stroked it and Earnest sank onto his knee, one soft arm round Paul's neck. Slowly, rhythmically, Paul tossed the lad's dear little organ. He kissed his hair, freshly damp with lake water.

The smell of the child was of sweet young grass. Earnest sighed again and lifted his face to Paul who kissed away the chocolate on his open mouth. The boy's hand moved to Paul's fly.

"Take it out, sweetling. Stroke it," he murmured into the smooth rosy ear. Kissing Paul, Earnest opened the zip and put his hand inside. His fingers fluttered over the hot erection which sprang out as the child stroked it.

Paul inhaled sharply and the boy cuddled against him, looking down to watch his hand rubbing the length of Paul's cock in time with the man's caress of his own hot pricklet. "Is it nice, darling?" asked Paul softly. "is it lovely?" "Yeeess!" moaned Earnest as they stroked together. Paul spoke hotly into the boy's mouth, "Suck it. Suck it for me, sweet."

The jacket fell away as the naked boy sank to his knees in front of Paul. Tenderly Paul wound the flaxen hair in his fingers as the lad put his wet mouth round the shaft. He sucked slowly. His tongue darted round and round, up and down the engorged member. His cheeks sucked in, eyes closed in passion. His expertise was wondrous. He was wanking himself and purring his pleasure as Paul gasped spasmodically.

He urgently eased the little fellator off his prick and knelt on the floor behind the downy stripling.

"Bend over..." he urged. "Please bend over!"

Snatching the jacket in his frenzy, Paul scrabbled in the pockets and found his travelling pack of Vaseline.

"Wha? Wha? Oh! What—?" breathed the boy, his question unformed and unfinished.

Paul smeared the jelly on his pounding gland and pushed the boy's head to the floor. His hand went round to the lad's pulsing cock and tossed him faster.

"Oh! God!" sobbed Paul. He closed up to the proffered white cheeks and touched the dear little hole with the greasy tip of his cock. Paul's eyes shut tight. He did all by delirious touch.

He shoved with steady pressure, the boy's rump high in the air, roundly vulnerable. Earnest gave a little cry as Paul impaled the quivering kidlet.

"Ah! — Ah! — Ah! — Ah! — Oh! — Ah! — Oh! — Oh!" the lad moaned blissfully on each thrust as Paul humped his breath-taking minion.

The boy arched his back as Paul felt himself coming. Paul threw his head sideways gasping for air, looking at Matron, plunging, groaning, Matron stood there, shafting, sweating, looking at Matron? Looking at MATRON!? LOOKING AT MATRON!!! Paul turned to stone! Anaesthetised with shock, he tried to speak. His mouth opened, closed, opened, closed, like a beached cod. The boy was still grinding his rump.

Iris Crave stood rigid in the doorway. Her eyes bulged, not seeing, not believing what she was seeing. She stood, hypnotised, screaming without noise, her fat arm stretched with accusing finger pointing at the stunned sodomite.

Paul's cock shrank and fell out. The rubber band of his brain snapped back and with feverish determination he gripped his hands round the boy's chest, thumbs on his back.

"Press! One two three! Pause! One two three! Press! One two three! Pause! One two three!" he shouted, squeezing the lad's lungs to the litany of the life-saver.

"I think I can save him!" he bellowed. "Hansen method! Oh, Christ!"

"Don't stop!" whimpered Earnest. "Don't stop!" "He's alive! He's alive!!" bawled Paul. "Press! One two three! Pause! One two three!"

He screwed his head to the Matron with a reassuring smile. But all she saw before she collapsed was a mad rictus, an insane grin of despair on the face of the odd-job man as a schoolboy wriggled beneath him.

"AWKWARD," SAID GERVAISE, fractionally adjusting a nicely framed mezzotint. It pictured The Boy Sebastian campily looking over his shoulder at a nasty looking bowman.

"Don't overstate it," moaned Paul. "After all, I'm only in imminent danger of being taken from here to a lawful place of execution and there hung by the balls until I'm your age."

"Oh, I shouldn't think it's that serious. Surely not." The bowman still looked nasty.

"Or worse!" Paul wailed. "Phagge might demote me! Put that quarter-wit Sid Leper in my place! I'll end up at the compost heap! Ruined!!" He drained a quadruple brandy in the armchair. "It's been good to have known you, Gervaise. You've been a fine friend to me since I've been here. A true Oxford man!"

Gervaise sloshed more brandy into Paul's glass. "Think of me when I'm gone."

"Paul—"

"I was happy here, Gervaise. The Camera Club, the minibus, my room, the odd jobs, the—"

"Paul!!!"

Paul stared blankly at the wall by his chair. A nude Von Gloeden waiter stared swarthily back.

"PAUL!!!"

"Yes, Gervaise?"

"Now. Calm down, dear boy. What happened after she passed out?"

"Earnest ran to get the other boys and they dragged her back to the bus on a tarpaulin. She's heavy, Gervaise. Very heavy!"

"And then?" asked the cleric patiently, the trick cyclist coaxing a simpleton.

"We lugged her onto the seat and half way back she came to."

Paul signed deeply.

"She let out a sort of—screech. And tried to get out. At speed! I damn nearly pranged the van. I managed to calm her down. 'Think of the boys. Duty. Vocation. British.' You know the line."

"So you go/ her back to school. And then?"

"She's gone to bed with an armful of Valium. She'll bleat to Phagge the moment he gets back tomorrow night. I know it! She's a vindictive woman, Gervaise! Not a nice Matron!"

He took another pull at the brandy.

"How did the boys take it, Paul? What of young Tremble? Will he..." Gervaise enunciated slowly. "...co-op-er-ate?"

"I think so. But he keeps changing his story. Adding bits. Sheer fantasy! The gutters will be promoting me for a George Medal if he goes on like this. I told him to keep it simple. Tell the truth."

Gervaise raised his eyebrows. Paul went on.

"Earnest with cramp. Going under for third time. Venerly fortuitously to hand. Pulled out of Neptune's Kingdom. Artificial respiration. You know." He moaned plaintively.

"Good. And the boys?"

"Oh, ecstatic! Loved every minute of it. Of course they only know of Matron dropping like a stone. Not the other. Yet."

"The other won't be of the slightest concern to them, as you know," said Gervaise. "It will only mean that Tremble is now eligible for membership of their secret society. Don't worry about Earnest. I shall have a word with him."

"Thank you, Gervaise." Paul felt a little better. "Get there before Frottage." He tapped his nose. "Word of a friend."

And he went off to the pub to ease his woe.

THE SUNDAY MORNING service had been something of a festive affair in honour of the newly painted walls. The scarlet and white choir looked divine and the setting by Merbecke and been sung with such aching purity that everyone had said that 'angelic' was the only word to describe it. Even Gavin Outrage the Mathematics master had piped an eye.

Gervaise had worn his most opulent vestments in the colour of the day, a rather fetching pea-green, and his six perfect acolytes drawn from the handsomest in School were, in the interest of balance, all exactly five feet tall.

Ian Ring, an incipient pyromaniac, had elected himself to the post of thurifer. The accepted authority on noxious laboratory gases, he had performed his duty with such zeal that for much of the service the altar had been hidden behind dense clouds of ambrosial 'Rosa Mystica'.

Matron had failed to make an appearance and Sergeant Gripp had only ever attended Church Parade in his army days and then as Corporal 1/ c Burial Party. Also absent, due to a violent hangover, was Paul. He had stayed in bed, a woolly ski hat pulled over his eyes to exclude all light, too ill to consider his fate.

Now it was over and Gervaise, having lunched lightly on a little poached salmon and a bottle of claret, decided on an afternoon stroll around the rose garden. Stepping gracefully through the summer-scented bower, he passed the shambling old gardener Sid Leper who had, it being Sunday, removed his knee strings.

"Good afternoon, Sid," he said, with post-prandial benevolence, "keeping the greenfly down, eh? Ha! ha! ha! That's the ticket."

"Day off," said the sod-soiled artisan abruptly and doddered on his way.

Gervaise ambled the grounds in contemplative mood. Behind the School a small allotment had produced against all odds (The Young Farmer's Club) a four-year asparagus bed near to which stood, vibrating with ceaseless activity, three droning beehives.

For his homily in Chapel that morning he had warned against idleness and mischief and for his text he had drawn from Isaac Watts's

*How does the little busy bee
Improve each shining hour.*

He used the same theme every year at this point in the Summer term and he thought that it had gone down well. It was all very satisfying.

As was usual for a Sunday, the buildings were deserted. Some younger boys had scratched together two teams and were enjoying themselves on the cricket pitch whilst most of their elders had gone into the surrounding countryside for the afternoon.

Rosebud boys, such was the honour, were allowed to go unaccompanied into Marlborough by bus. The Head felt that this privilege gave the more senior and responsible lads a measure of independence and was something to be aimed for, while the boys, always in need of ready cash, took the opportunity to augment their funds by standing near the public lavatories in the town and smiling at the nice men who always seemed to be there.

Coming to the gymnasium, Gervaise suddenly stopped and listened with astonishment. From a low window he heard what he had not heard for many years: the unmistakable swishing and yelps of a flogging in progress. He crouched and tried, without success, to look through the frosted glass and into the shower room below. A flight of grey stone steps led to the showers and, ghostlike, holding high his cassock, Gervaise tip-toed silently down to the door of the ablutions. He gently pushed it with his fingertips. The door opened very slightly and Gervaise put one curious eye to the crack.

CLIFFORD GRI PP was of a physical type scientifically known as 'mesomorph'. He had no neck. His shoulders started from the top of his cropped head, broadened massively, then tapered in well-defined slabs of muscle to a small fatless waist.

He wore a white close-fitting gymnast's outfit with the words Royal Marines printed across the back and, daintily round his waist, a candy-floss pink tulle frou-frou ballet skirt.

He was tied at full stretch over a disused vaulting horse, his tight little arse pointing to the ceiling, the skirt sticking out stiffly like a cake frill. A Neanderthal in a frock.

"So! Tell me once more! What do little girls deserve when they're naughty!?" It was Iris Crave at her most formidable. "Spanking, mistress," said the Sergeant in a little girl's voice. "I'm naughty naughty naughty!"

"Oh, yes! Oh, yes! And a cry-baby as well."

The Matron strode slowly back and forth flexing a leather riding crop in her hands. She wore her uniform with the sleeves rolled high round her beefy arms and her calves, all brawn and muscle, tensed at every step she took in her shiny black plastic pixie boots.

She stopped behind Gripp and lifted his balls with the floppy end of her crop. He had a raging hard-on.

"What's this?" she said fiercely, moving the whip once or twice along the length of his cock.

"Aaahh! Aaahh! Please, mistress. Aaahh!" moaned Gripp, his arse twitching with pleasure.

THWACK! Iris Crave laid a heavy cut across the straining buttocks and carried on pacing, flaying the switch in the air every so often and looking grimly thoughtful.

THWACK! The Sergeant groaned.

"You—~~are~~—a—~~dis~~—o—~~bedient~~—little—Tulip. Hasyour—~~mistress~~—~~punished~~—you—enough?" She stood erect, stiletto heeled boots spread wide and at every word, flicked his backside with the whip.

"No, mistress!" he trilled. "I always deserve twelve. Tulip has two more to come for being naughty!"

"Then take that!"

THWACK!! the Sergeant squirmed.

"Oh! Yes!! Oh! I'm such a bad little girl," he snivelled.

THWACK!!! the final cut struck with even greater force and Gripp let out a long gurgling cry. The Matron's cap slipped over one ear with her exertions.

"Now, you may have your nursery tea, Tulip. If you're good," said Miss Crave, striding round the horse and facing the Sergeant's bristly head.

"Ooohh! Mistress! Yum yum!" Gripp smacked his lips. "Mmmmm! Yum yum!"

She stood close to his head, lifted her dark blue dress and threw it over his shoulders. The shape of Gripp's striving head bulged through the skirt and with much grunting he slurped his face into the hidden horror of Matron's genitalia.

"Ahh! That's good. Eat it! More! Deeper!!" She pressed the squirming head tightly to her quim and rocked from side to side.

Gervaise leaned absolutely still against the wall by the door. He wore an expression of amused tolerance and calmly sucked a peppermint.

GERVAISE AND THE SERGEANT, now frockless, had carried Iris Crave to her room after her second collapse in twenty-. four hours and Gripp, after gratefully agreeing with Gervaise on the wisdom of keeping his own counsel, had marched off to the solitary confinement of his own billet.

Matron sat silent on her bed while Gervaise boiled water on the little gas ring. He made tea and let it stand for the full three and a half minutes while he thought deeply. Neither spoke. She took the tea and avoided his eyes, then blew on the hot, sweet tea and sipped.

"That's nice, Chaplain," she said, subdued. "Thank you."

"There, now, Matron, just get on with that. You'll feel much better soon."

She drank in silence, then spoke quietly.

"That... er... that..." She hesitated and flushed. "What you saw—it wasn't..."

Gervaise cut in.

"What I saw, Matron," he said with quiet deliberation, "was possibly..." He paused for effect and Miss Crave, on the verge of tears, bit her lip.

"...was possibly a new patent therapy for the treatment of spinal disorders? After all, you are our medical professional. We trust your expertise in these things."

She slowly looked up at the imposing figure and her eyes brimmed with hope.

"My eyes," said Gervaise, who could count angels dancing on the point of a pin, "are not what they were. That pink paraphernalia, for instance. A lumbar support harness—wasn't it?" He looked at her blandly.

"Yes, yes! That's it!! That's what it was! How clever. So you recognised it. How clever, Chaplain. Yes!" She gave him all her attention.

"And the effort of treating Sergeant Gripp was too much for you so soon after your nasty shock at the swimming pool yesterday."

"It was dreadful, Chaplain. Filthy debauchery. That vile man. He was..."

Gervaise silenced her with a commanding hand.

"He was reviving an unfortunate boy who had swallowed too much... er... water. A brave and quick-thinking man. Wouldn't you say?"

"But..."

"It must have been quite gloomy in the boathouse, your eyes had become accustomed to the bright sunlight. What you thought you saw was most certainly a trick of the poor light. As for the fainting fit, you were undoubtedly overcome by the potential tragedy you saw before you. Is that not so, Matron?"

He spoke in smooth measured tones. The rather unsubtle conspiracy of political compromise was dawning on Miss Crave and the knowledge showed on her face.

"I have thought for some time, Matron, that you have been working too hard. It's not only your spiritual welfare that concerns me, dear lady. A healthy body, a healthy mind."

Miss Crave narrowed her eyes. Gervaise put his fingertips together and looked at her with concern. The counsellor spoke.

"When the headmaster returns to School this evening, I think I shall have a word with him. Praising your diligence and pointing out the danger of flogging a willing horse." The Matron looked startled and opened her mouth to speak, but Gervaise continued.

"You have been overburdened and yet you carry out your responsibilities with your usual grace and charm and no complaint. That is what I shall say to him."

She watched the priest with suspicion.

"You, Matron, will tell him of the life-saving incident and of the great courage displayed by Mr. Venery. The School is lucky to have such a man about the place. That is what you will say."

He smiled at the ministering angel and she slowly nodded her head.

"More tea, Matron?"

THERE WAS MORE THAN an hour to go before the supper bell and the evening air was still and fragrant. Marcus Small-piece and Paul were walking across the courtyard in the direction of the outbuildings. Paul had a hefty photo enlarger cradled in both arms while Marcus kept the trailing cable clear of the ground.

As they turned the corner they saw coming towards them the Chaplain with his arms round the slim shoulders of Earnest Tremble. He whispered down into the boy's ear and the lad tinkled with laughter.

"Hello, you two," said Gervaise as they met. "Off somewhere interesting?"

"Camera Club," said Paul, shifting the awkward load. "Testing new equipment. And you?"

"We've just been to see the Head. He was delighted to see that Earnest has recovered from last Saturday's drama and he's talking about life-saving classes." Gervaise smiled at the boy and squeezed his arm.

"I'm so glad," said Paul, and the four friends beamed at each other.

"Well, must be getting along."

"We also," said Gervaise. "Earnest is coming for some instruction, aren't you, my dear?"

The boy nodded happily and they moved away. Gervaise said over his shoulder.

"I hope your equipment is up to it! Come up for a drink after supper."

Paul laughed and called back, "Love to. Hope your instruction manual's not out of date."

The photographers made their way to the long single-storey building which housed the School's various societies. At the door of the Camera Club they stopped and Paul heaved the enlarger into one arm, took out the key and opened the door.

"Now, let's study the qualities of..."

"Enlargement?" said Marcus. He touched his upper lip with the tip of his tongue.

"Precisely!" agreed Paul, looking quickly up and down the corridor. He put his hand on the boy's bum and followed him into the darkroom.

The door closed. Moments later it opened briefly and a pink-clad arm hooked a notice on the nail where it slowly swung. The door shut with a click and the cardboard notice fell still. It read in big, black letters:

KEEP OUT!

EXPOSING