

Cheating at School

by Steven Wood

Steven Wood has contributed stories to the Panthology volumes and PAN Magazine. He has written many adventure novels under another name and is well recognised as a master in his field. One-time soldier, world traveller, adventurer, highly successful professional man, he lives quietly in Britain with his large and happy family.

THERE WERE SIX OF us teachers at St David's Preparatory School for Boys, including the headmaster, the elegantly ageing Roger Drew MA. We were supplemented by three extra-mural members of staff, all female, although I had occasional doubts on that point about Matron, otherwise known as Margaret Dykes. Matron was tall, bony, big-handed, flat chested, as obviously dangerous as a snarling Doberman, and unsuitably in charge of the health and hygiene of our 124 seven- to eleven-plus-year-old boys, all boarders. To assist Matron there was a good looking dark haired girl, Kathy, 17, who embarrassed me from time to time with the glad-eye treatment, comfortably unaware that her charms were effortlessly outshone by 40 or more of the small faces weaving and laughing about her. And there was the tweed-skirted bursar, Mrs. Carter, a lady of no interest, who lived out and who spent her time hiring, arguing with and often firing a casual staff of cooks and cleaners.

Two of the men assistant masters fled each evening to the safety of wives and their own homes, and were not 'of us' in any meaningful way. A third lived at the school but behind an impenetrable barrier of religious mysticism where all of us, including the boys, were obviously happy to leave him.

Fortunately, there was also Hugh Stevenson, aged 28 and so my close contemporary. Hugh was seldom Hugh, being generally and pleasantly known as Steve by colleagues and the older boys. Besides classroom teaching, the popular Steve, who combined energy and whimsy, was in charge of physical education which took the greater part of his time. PE covered the gym, soccer, cricket, cross-country runs, swimming—and everything athletic. Soon after joining the school I began to help him in my spare time, and a cautious friendship grew between the two of us. This co-operation clearly pleased our head, the comely Roger Drew.

Drew seemed to me to be an unusually interesting character who combined scholarship with, from his younger days, athleticism. He had been an amateur runner of renown and, presumably because of that, held sport to be a valuable part of the art of raising boys. Also, he was a man of presence whose lifestyle combined courteousness with detachment or a degree of mystery and a wise tolerance of submerged writhings more sensed than seen from private places, the dormitories and lavatories of this agreeably sexist hall of learning.

Beside all that, he had been divorced. According to rumour he was well rid of a warrior wife who hated him and extended that hate to all small boys—and perhaps the whole spectrum of male humanity. 'Old Drewy', as the boys called him, was both a gentleman and a gentle man,

laughed at but liked by all of them and, I would say, held in the same mixture of amusement and affection by most adults who know him well. He had founded the school, still largely owned the spread-out grounds and building, and had allowed his beloved St David's to cocoon him from the vulgarities and tensions of the great outside. Drew, Steve and I were all happy behind the high yellow brick wall that fronted and protected the school, and were comfortable with each other at least most of the time. Understanding overtook the need for explanations.

An unusual feature of our modestly sized school was that it possessed a closed-in swimming pool, also modestly sized but adequate, and the gift of a rich and grateful parent. Steve, of course-, was controller of the pool, providing supervision that combined firmness with delight. An innovation of his was the concept of regulation swimming slips, property of the school. They were issued one by one as the boys fired into the cramped changing room, taken back after the session, laundered—and reissued next time. The slips were triangular in shape, black with a white drawstring, carried the school crest and were extremely, but extremely small.

After I had been with the school for about a month I went, as I often did, to the pool one afternoon to find the boys all swimming nude. Some 30 little cocks and 30 little bottoms were in hectic and ceaseless motion both in and out of the water. I watched from the side doorway in wonderment and joy. Steve, bare-chested and manly in shorts and trainers, strode round the pool surround towards me. He looked long and candidly into my eyes, smiled, seemed on the point of speaking, then must have decided not to do so, leaving the initiative and awkwardness with me.

"In their birthday suits today, then," I said lamely. "Laundry let me down," Steve explained. "And not for the first time."

Not for the first time indeed, nor the last, as I was soon to discover. Remarkably often the boys swam naked—usually I noticed, the older boys, the over-tens. One time the cupboard in Steve's little office was partly open and I could actually see the shelves crammed with swimming slips although the boys were nude. I knew all I needed to know about Steve's orientation then, but not about the implementation he might risk. Did he, or didn't he? was much in my mind. He often had pretty little R. C. Green, inevitably nicknamed Arsey, in the seclusion of the office counting towels or slips, that I also knew. Yet it was not conclusive, and I asked no questions, made no probing remarks. But Steve's smile had been full of meaning, and my rapt attention and frequency of appearances at the pool were adequate acknowledgement of a coded message received about 'strength three'.

Occasionally Roger Drew's silver-topped head would appear in the doorway on a nude afternoon. "Laundry failed again, Steve?" old Drewy would say.

"Damn laundry!" was Steve's stock reply.

"Why don't you change to another one?" Drew once asked within my hearing. "They'd probably be just as bad, Headmaster," Steve answered blandly. "At least this one's cheap."

As often before, Drew watched the running, splashing little bodies for two or three minutes,

then ambled away without argument. Yes, Drew, Steve and I were comfortable with each other, though always careful. Drew absolutely never argued, having developed evasion into a developed art instead. Once Matron announced shrilly in the staff room that she had found two boys in bed together, which she believed was all too common here but which would lead to expulsion in a 'well disciplined' school. She had pulled the boys out and slapped their pyjama-clad bottoms with exemplary vigour. Drew no more than half-listened, then wandered towards a door opening into the staff dining room. "Ah yes, yes, Matron," he murmured. "Hmm, yes, you dealt well with that. I believe I smell lunch. What's on the menu today?" That, happily, was the end of Matron's theatrical disgust.

By this time I was suspicious that the rough-handed Matron Margaret had a peculiar physical interest in her young charges, an interest that was evidently neither pleasant nor honest. The utterly delightful Richard Duffield, one of my three absolute favourites, mentioned the goings on at bath-time and I was much intrigued. At first all he said was that Matron paid a lot of attention to washing the boys' private parts, but he had a knowing look on his neat, expressive face at the time which made me decide to investigate cautiously. When I saw Matron next in the staff room I mentioned what a busy business the bathing must be, and asked how she coped.

She agreed that it was a wildly hectic hour or so, but was evasive about detail. An offer of help that I made was firmly declined. She and Kathy could cope, she assured me, they worked as a team, and they "knew what was what".

There was no secret about her profound belief in cleanliness, a subject she became immediately vocal about if the subject was even vaguely approached by others. Steve had had many a cleanliness earful from this tedious woman. He made sure the boys showered at least once a day, sometimes with my help, in a routine that had been set up at Matron's request. Beyond that each boy was required to have a supervised bath in the early evening every week. There were four bathtubs divided between two bathrooms inadequately provided for this. Simple arithmetic reveals that Matron was right to describe events as hectic. Divide 124 boys by seven and the work load comes out at about 18 boys to be bathed each evening. Eight or nine of them, and always the smaller ones, would be washed by Kathy, and about the same number, the older unluckies one might say, by Matron. Richard told me that sometimes two boys would have to share a tub and sometimes not. Matron's routine (copied closely though less relentlessly by Kathy) was that the boys washed their own feet, knees, hands, neck and ears while she attended to bottoms, nipples (how strange) and sexual organs. The information came hesitantly, often in unfinished phrases, and prompted by casually put questions of mine. The more Richard told me the more I determined to investigate further. But not right then—enough from little Richard for now.

Afternoon school usually finished at three forty-five. There was half an hour of free time then for the boys until tea. I began to make a habit of being in the classroom for that half hour, and encouraged the lovelier of my boys to wander in for chats about schoolwork, sport, anything—the anything being what mattered.

Next freetime Richard walked in again, and with another stunner, Jeremy Smith, brown haired, brown eyed, permanently bronzed—and enchanting. Such boys slow me down. Look at the blond and he is perfection; look at the "brunette" and there, by heaven, is perfection again.

Which to choose? No need to choose. Or choose one one day and the other the next. Is that promiscuity? What rubbish, a triviality of speculation, and doubly so when all that is in question, when so far all that is at issue, is looking, admiring, counselling... Answer Jeremy's question, "What time does the parents' day end?" Bigger the parents. "Ah, six, Jeremy, I think—does that sound right? All parents away by six." He had reminded me that the terrible boredom of parents' day loomed. Parents were rivals, were they not? and with ownership on their side. Good riddance to all parents at six o'clock. With care, tact and the studied avoidance of salaciousness I extracted more about the matronly bathroom behaviour from my two sniggering little charmers. The situation grew more and more bizarre.

Matron, it seemed, pulled every older boy's foreskin back, and with her own large hands, soaped and washed each little knob thus revealed. She applied the same soaping zeal to the circumcised boys in her care, although there were few of these, circumcision being as rare as it is among the upper class patrons of the private schools of England. Her determination and devotion to duty evidently showed most when a foreskin was tight. Boyish squeals, and protests, and pushing of little hands against her raw strength were entirely unavailing. Matron was said to have a strange and quite alarming look when dealing with the more challenging prepuces to be stretched, always, of course, in the worthy cause of cleanliness.

In answer to my quietly put question, Richard and Jeremy gave a picture of Matron's whole posture. Lips thin and straight, eyes widely rounded, stooped over the boy of the moment, both hands harshly at work. Some boys would attempt a serious resistance, pushing their bottoms backwards while folding forward at the hips and attempting to close their legs. A doomed, futile and short-lived struggle. One powerful matronly hand would push the small bottom forward (sometimes boosted by a pinch, Richard said) while the other relentless hand parted the thighs enough to drive through, grab and pull and pull, accelerating the forward movement from behind and restoring the boy's upper body to the vertical position of vulnerability. Now the little foreskin was defenceless again, awaiting the retractive manipulations of Matron's thumb and first and second fingers. She had an effective line of argument, too. "If we can't get it back we'll just have to have it cut off." Force, propaganda and the righteousness of hygienic argument prevailed. There can be no such thing as an unretractable or unretracted junior foreskin at St David's.

She and Kathy shared the boys each night in the adjoining bathrooms. Kathy, dealing with the youngest children, also put energy and resourcefulness into the cleaning of sex parts, however small those parts might be, diligently following Matron's experienced leadership. Evidently Matron would have the world believe that there was no gratification to be had from the performance at all, and sex was never mentioned by either of them to the others, or to the boys. When Matron did come unavoidably close to the subject of sex—as happened now and again in the staff room—it was always in a context of obliqueness, disgust and rejection.

So it surprised me at a later afternoon chat in the classroom when big-eyed Sam Cupar told me of another of Matron's bathtime tricks. Sometimes, perhaps often, she would make a boy kneel in the bath while soaping his penis. The soaping would go on and on, on and on. Soon the penis would grow hard, even in Matron's unsympathetic hand, and still the soaping would go on and on. Matron hardly spoke at these times, and when she did it was to say something like, "Must get you clean, really clean, keep infection away." Inevitably the moment would come when the

boy would gasp, writhe and thrust three, four or more times into the soap-slippery hand. She would have no comment as the excitement subsided, but the rubbing would stop. She would push him back into the water, sluice off the soap, then pull the boy out to dry him with well-worn school-issue towels.

There would be a pause with the towel held up under the limp little penis and crimped scrotum while Matron leaned forward to look closely. "Yes, yes," she would murmur. "We've got you good and clean, now we must keep you clean."

Seemingly, Richard and Jeremy were both frequent beneficiaries of this treatment, which may account for the fact that they hadn't mentioned it to me. Then I worked out that Sam must also often come in for the "soaping special" because he was another tempter, another ten out of ten boy for looks, warmth and sex appeal. But I tactfully didn't ask him about it.

I did ask him if he knew what was happening to a boy when he began to gasp and thrust into Matron's hands. Sam was evasive and embarrassed and, I suspected, short on facts. It was then that an idea began to form in my mind, an idea which I developed in the quieter moments and turned into a master plan.

Matron, by the way, had another kingdom of power—the so-called san. Here there were five beds in a large, airy room which adjoined her own austere living quarters. Unwell boys were brought to the san where treatment began in a way that only Matron Margaret could think right. I contrived to arrive at the san door once to see part of her healing theory applied to tiny eight-year-old Jamie, down with a temperature and sore throat. A new patient, like Jamie, would be issued with striped pyjamas and told to put only the jacket on then to sit on a towel on the side of the bed and wait. Soon Matron would appear with a spouted red rubber bulb in her hand. She would put her left hand under the boy's legs, tilt him backwards until his knees met his ears, then press the enema's spout up his bottom and squeeze the bulb. Warm, soapy water would flood into the small rectum, overspilling to drip on the towel. She would put his hands to his buttocks next and tell him to press tightly to keep the liquid inside, then to sit quickly on a chamber pot pulled from under the bed. "Clean bowels are the root of good health," she garrotted until it became a joke phrase quoted all over the school. Indeed, overhearing the phrase is how I first became interested in affairs at the san.

Poor little Jamie endured all this, and I left before his humiliating eruption on the pot took place. Still no hint of sex, no humour or gentleness in this matronly temple of health, hygiene and duty.

It increasingly seemed to me that there were some mighty strange perversions, whether understood or not, in this expensive "quality" school to which only English parents could condemn their children. There was this alarmingly powerful figure of Matron whose mind seldom moved more than an inch or two above or below the waistline of male children. There was Steve with his mental montage of nude boys and trivial lies about laundry deliveries and costs. There were rumours even about Roger Drew, our greyed, illustrious head; whispers said that there were strange objects in a cupboard in his study. No worse, I imagined, than what is sometimes referred to as one-handed literature. Even so. And there was more about Drew. He had chosen to live for nearly 30 years with his pre-teen boys; he had taken up with no woman after his happy release into divorce; and all the boys—a pointer here surely—were handsome

and slender, it being a matter of unusually fine degree between the loveliest and plainest, and all had been selected by him at interview with, one must say, scant attention to entrance exam results. Whether Drew ever in the past or now allowed himself physical contact was difficult to say, but probably not. That, it seemed to me, was the trouble with this place. It was a smouldering heap of frustration, nervousness and deceit.

So I brought my plan forward. When I next had Richard and Jeremy to myself for a moment I asked if they had ever had sex fully explained to them. They giggled together for a while, then admitted that they hadn't. On the other hand, they reckoned they knew quite a lot. Without pursuing that doubtful claim, I suggest a sex talk for the whole class in place of the English lesson next day. The prospect pleased them greatly and wholly predictably as they thirsted, like all boys of their age, for proper and perhaps improper information on this most intriguing of subjects. No boy who didn't want to take part would have to, I said. And there was one vital condition. The talk was private and personal between my class and me—it was not for passing on to the younger boys or for discussion at home. "If you mention it about a bit to your friends, mention the condition also."

They nodded happily and went off to spread the good news of tomorrow's conspiracy.

When the English class assembled in the morning I could see by the eagerness of the pretty faces confronting me that every boy knew what to expect. "I think you may know what we are going to do this morning," I began. "We are going to talk about sex—that is if you would like to. I think we should do so because I'm sure, absolutely certain, that no boy ever came to harm by knowing the facts, although plenty may come to harm by not knowing them..."

Of course, no boy wished to leave the class, and every one raised his arm as acknowledgement of the condition that what was to be said in this room was not for repeating. "Pass on your new knowledge to other boys by all means," I said. "But don't say where the information came from." They quite understood the need for secrecy—that there were still plenty of narrow-minded grown-ups in England and that I didn't want the embarrassment of explaining my impeccable motives.

I said that we would divide the discussion into three parts. First, I would give a general run down on the mechanics and vocabulary of sex, including gay sex; second, I would invite the boys to put written questions to me, absolutely any question on the subject of sex, and I would answer to the best of my ability, holding nothing back; third, and scheduled for tomorrow's History class, I would ask them to help me. I was carrying out research into growing up, I explained (how true), and I needed personal, even secret information about sex in their lives but this didn't need to be linked to particular boys (how untrue). I would like them to write down answers to questions from me, but to do so anonymously. "You know the word 'anonymous' do you? Well, hide who you are by not adding your name to the paper, and use block letters if you like." This way there would be nothing to fear and it would help me very much, I stressed, if they would answer fully and freely, however much they had to do or didn't have to do with sex, letting rip about their lives and feelings—just hang it all out.

The classroom was a panoply of smiles, of white teeth, turning and bobbing heads, a climate of adventure embracing us all. Very much better than English grammar.

I wrote the word FUCK in large letters on the blackboard. "I realize you will all know what that means," I said. "But even so I will tell you." And I did. I described the female organs of reproduction and the more popular methods of penetration by men's cocks. I gave them words, execution and attitude. I talked of penis, vagina, copulation, ovum, orgasms, spunk, sperm-counts, menstruation, gestation, lactation and even made brief mention of VD, though nothing too scary. I added the popular phrases too—making love, having it off, piece of tail and getting a leg over, everything they were likely to read or overhear. I clarified that there could be sex with love, and sex without, and that the sex could be good either way. Don't be too serious was the message.

Then came rape and incest, which we didn't dwell on for long.

And then the rest of it, one person sex, gay sex and man-boy sex, or sex with the sex you understand best: your own.

I lingered at length on masturbation, noting the keenness of the interest they showed in this delight, the one so readily and literally within their grasp. Two or three boys showed slight embarrassment, a fidget, a blush, a downward look, not only clear indicators that they were doing it already but, also, that they were suffering mild anxiety, the age-old plague of church-cum-adult induced guilt. I made much of the simplicity (just rub away) and benefits to body and mind of happy wanking. Everybody does it, I reassured them, and no-one is too young or too old to enjoy this pleasure. Do it as much or as little as you like.

Carefully, carefully I told them what they needed to know about homosexual practice, including the right moral attitude to this popular and eternal alternative sexual pattern. We dealt with buggery, handwork and the easy pleasure of soixante-neuf; with degrees of affection too, from the long-term partnership to a casual bash, and that there was a place in life for both.

I deemed it wise to omit any reference to the vital matter of boy-loving men. But there was planning behind this apparent running for cover. Information that might be deemed wrong to volunteer could become benign and virtuous if given because it was asked for.

I passed blank sheets of paper around the class. "I think you'll have questions that it might embarrass you to ask out loud," I said. "So write them down and let me have the paper back. I'll read the questions out—but not names of course—then I'll try to give you the answers."

Most of the questions were commonplace or amusing. One boy asked how long the man "left it in". Another wondered if it was right that when a baby was born it came out of the woman's bum hole. Not actually as silly as might be said, and he'd probably seen his sister's opening and couldn't believe a big round baby could come out of so narrow a crack. I answered gravely that, no, the baby came out of its mother's vagina which could stretch amazingly. And Richard, my friend, asked about buggery. He'd put his name on the paper (some had done so and some hadn't) but, in any case, I knew his ragged writing. He wanted to know if the man's dick didn't come out "dirty" after the act. "No," I said, "interestingly and perhaps surprisingly, it doesn't."

The most arousing question was the one I had prepared and slipped in among the others. I'd

actually written it out, with my left hand for authenticity, as follows. "What do `paedophiles' do to boys?" I read it out slowly, and smiled. "Somebody's been reading the papers," I said. "You've got a long word there so let's get the spelling right." I wrote it on the black board. PAEDOPHILE. It meant child-lover, I explained—from the Greek words "pais" for child and "philos" for love or fondness, so, fondness for children. "That has a pleasant sound to it, don't you agree?"

Then I let them have it with both barrels. "If a paedophile uses force to have sex with a child it is a very bad thing indeed," I said. "But if the two want sex, and better still if they 'are fond of each other, in my opinion it can be entirely good." I cited the ancient Greeks, the former customs of Rome and Japan, and the easy-going attitudes of many (unspecified) countries today. "In England it is usually considered wrong," I concluded. "Christianity seems to be mainly to blame for this. I suggest you think about it, then make up your own minds."

With luck I had made their minds up for them.

That was as far, perhaps farther than it seemed prudent to go. With the lesson ended I could see that all my boys were eager for stage two tomorrow, the day of revelations.

When they were all safely bathed (Jeremy and Sam on the roster tonight) and bedded I retired to my room, incidentally declining the offer of a beer with Steve. I had much to do. Earlier I had drawn up a classroom map showing by named squares where each of my 19 boys sat. Now I took 19 blank sheets of thin white paper and wrote tomorrow's date at the top of each; it was important to me to know which way up the paper should be, which was the main purpose of that.

Then taking each sheet in turn I placed it over the drawn squares and made a tiny pinprick hole centrally over each representational desk. Identification of all my "anonymous" little respondents had become what might aptly be termed child's play. One simply placed the answer sheet over the grid and noted the position of the just visible pinhole.

Next I wrote out the questions. There were twelve—and there is no need to repeat them all. What they were designed to do was to produce a sexual identikit of each boy. What he did (or didn't) do regularly, what occasionally, whom he had done it with, what he would like to do given the chance, the nature of his fantasies, when he achieved his first sex thrill and so on. The last item was an invitation to write briefly about the most enjoyable or daring sexual experience he had had—a catch-all ad lib.

Before the boys filed in for the scheduled History lesson next day I placed each answer sheet on the appropriate desk together with the copied questions. There were the same head bobbings, proddings and laughs as the members of class eight took their places. Such eagerness in schooltime was rarely seen, and some sort of good was obviously being done. "Now remember," I said, "you are helping with research, so hold nothing back. Anything you do, or want to do, isn't unusual—even if you've been taught to think it is. Read the questions carefully and answer fully. No names on the paper, and use block letters for choice." (I well knew there would be snatches of handwriting to corroborate identities, though corroboration

would not be necessary.)

The boys were absorbed by their task. I studied the four rows of lowered heads, such young and lovely heads, the dark hair, light hair and in between all well washed, shining and bouncy. Some parts of child anatomy seem to me to go undervalued by boy-lovers as a whole, and hair is one of them; hands are another. Why not pillows stuffed with boys' hair for deep and regenerating sleep? Where are the high art photographs of boys' hands on boys' knees? Missed opportunities everywhere.

There were private smiles as some of the questions were read. And pauses for thought. And the thrilling sight of words going down, the expression of feeling and experience I needed to know about. What an idea, what theatre to have boys under twelve entirely absorbed in thoughts of sex for forty minutes or more.

"Take as much time as you want," I said after a while. "Write on the back of the paper too—but if you need more space, tell me." A few of them would do so.

After half an hour I added, "When you finish, fold your paper up small and drop it in this box." I pointed to a cardboard box on my desk. The implication was clear: that I couldn't read what any boy had written as he brought it to me.

By the end of the period all folded sheets were in, and the boys went out for afternoon break. I thanked them for co-operating and reminded them of the condition—no telling. As soon as the last boy had left the classroom I smatched an answer sheet, unfolded it, placed it over the tell-all grid and held the two papers against the brightness of the window. There it was, as clear as a man's nose. This was the work of Joe Prentice, Joe with the serious little face that belied a sharp wit; Joe had brought on his first orgasm at four, and he'd been at it ever since. Sensible boy, and clever, too, to have found out so soon. I remember a big smile forming on my face, the smile of achievement.

But such joy was short lived. I heard a movement, and turned to see Richard at my desk. He was staring at my hands, and the papers I was holding so excitedly up.

"Good God, Richard!" I muttered, reddening. "What have you come back for?" I lowered the papers awkwardly.

Richard frowned. "Sir, you're a bad man, sir," he said. "You're cheating."

Richard might have ragged writing but there was nothing ragged about his mind. He was on to me. And he was furious.

"Look, Richard," I pleaded, "There is an explanation. Can we talk about it?"

"You're a cheat," he repeated. "You promised no names."

I'd lost all my schoolmasterly dignity by now. My voice had taken on a plum-like quality that was far from normal. And I found myself stammering. "But, but Richard, there's a... a good reason,

really, Richard, a good reason.”

God only knew what the good reason was going to be—meaning good in this lovely and honourable boy's eyes.

He turned away. "I think I'll tell Mr. Drew," he said alarmingly.

"Don't, Richard," I protested. Thank heavens it seemed sure that old Drew was one of us, however repressed. "Or Matron," he said thoughtfully.

Not Matron, not the hideous matron who did such nasty things and whose shadow would threaten and tower over my simple research and me. "Oh God, Richard, no. Not Matron, please." Then I decided to clutch at the straw of the boy's fundamental good nature. Speaking more calmly, and with the redness fading, I said, "I've got one big favour to ask of you. Say nothing for the moment, not to anyone, not even other boys. Then come to see me after school. When I've had a chance to talk to you, Richard, when I've done that, then decide on any action you might take. Meanwhile," I added, "I won't read the papers. Promise.”

Richard agreed, calmly and in thought. Bless the handsome and noble Richard. What maturity and balance, and what a lesson for the grown-up world. I felt a surge of love and admiration for the boy as he vanished through the door. And I felt the opposite for me, a surge of self-hate, though that wore slowly off as I taught a junior class for the rest of the afternoon.

We were both quite relaxed when Richard came to me for our chat. I levelled with him absolutely. I told him that I could be passionately fond of boys, of some boys, and that I wanted to express that wonderful passion. Physically. I said that if we lived in a saner society there would be no need for the devious scheme I had devised—a scheme that was to protect boys who didn't want my advances, and me from making any play that was sure to be rejected.

Richard listened. Then he asked, "Did you read the answer papers?"

"No," I said. "Remember I promised.”

"Yes, and remember you cheated before.”

A big gulp for me. "Richard, this time it was man to man; between the two of us. I wouldn't break a promise like that—I swear it. All I've read is a word or two of Joe Prentice's, when you saw me, next to nothing.”

"Okay, sir," Richard said. "Here's what we're going to do. We're going to burn those papers, every one. And I've brought some matches.”

And that is what we did. I watched ruefully as my whole experiment went up in flames. But the brilliance and logic of this child overwhelmed me. Not to mention the glow of his beauty.

We dropped the burnt paper out of the window. "Now we'll forget it," Richard announced.

"Thanks," I said. "And now I'll never know if there are boys here who would, you know, take to me." I smiled no doubt a disconsolate looking smile as I spoke the words.

"Try Sam," he said, beginning to wander away.

It was hard to believe I'd heard right at first. Sam was great.

"Crumbs, thanks." I mumbled.

"And Joe."

This was barely possible, and coming from Richard! "Thanks again," I said. "But, but not you?"

He looked round at me, let a big smile spread, and said, "Well, not yet."