

# One Night, One Day

by Steven Wood

The boy who took Bob Tanner's eye, and soon his mind and soul, was standing on the concourse at King's Cross station with four other children and a tall, youngish woman who was in charge but seemed by her weary disinterest not to be one of their mothers.

It is true that Tanner had gone deliberately to the station knowing that there, in summertime, there were often fine child sightings to be made. Even so, this boy, this little blond dazzler, was more, a lot more than one would normally expect. Tanner walked on through the loitering, darting throng, slowed his pace and circled back for a second look – a second look which when it happened was so rewarding that Tanner, always determined and daring in pursuit, decided that here was a case for his close observation specialty, the newspaper hide.

From a bookstall he bought the *Daily Mail*, a journal he held in lofty contempt for its views and concept of reporting but which was conveniently sized for use as a see-through sight screen. He put his briefcase on the ground and pushed a hole in the back page of the paper with his thumb, leaving the small flap this simple act created peeled partly back, then spread the pages wide and raised them to begin the ritualized pretense of reading. Peering through the hole he was able to study the boy in detail and at leisure.

By heaven, what a child this was! The hormonal chemistry began, the involuntary inner changes bringing feelings – not, on balance, pleasant feeling but irresistible all the same; shock, euphoria and even apprehension, all were there, and one could only let them run and take over control and do their worst.

He was 12, Tanner guessed, the Scandinavian archetype, yellow hair sun-bleached near to white, azure eyes, unflawed skin and the sweet dimpling curvatures of a perfect boy's face. Tanner gazed in delight at this upper display then carefully focused lower. Slim bare arms and slim bare sockless legs, end-of-summer browned arms and legs, exquisite to

see and in slow movement as the boy drifted and twisted in obvious boredom. On this hot July day he wore just two visible items of clothing – tight-fitting jeans-shorts with those alluring ragged edges and a plain white T-shirt. There were shoes of course, too – white soft trainers with blue trim. Yes, and a black-faced digital watch strapped to the slight left wrist. Lucky captive watch.

Growing more restless, the lovely child wandered from the group, passing slowly towards the newspaper hide, coming close, setting the Tanner hormones dangerously more active. The desire to reach out, to touch, to sprawl abasely at those child feet grew like a maverick wave. Tanner stared at the eyes, sky-blue and sleepy; more than sleepy. These were sexy eyes and this was a yes-boy, an all-go-boy. Tanner, it should be remembered, was no amateur in such matters. The blue, sleepy, sexy eyes glanced disinterestedly at poster advertisements on the station wall and then a perfect hand reached down to scratch a perfect knee. A little repositioning of the newspaper and everything could be followed, even the front bulge just detectable and a zip not fully closed. Tanner signed, and there was plenty here to sigh about.

A voice, clipped and authoritative, called out, “Daniel, don't wander off. Stay with the group.”

So those legs and arms and curves and colors came together in the name of Daniel. *'Oh Danny boy, I love you so,'* the song went. The words would do.

The youngish woman beckoned, and Daniel obeyed, wandering listlessly towards her.

Lowering the newspaper to rest his arms and consider the next move, Tanner realized for the first time that he was not alone in observing this golden boy. Another man was watching, too. There are certain places where such risk occurs, as all experienced lovers of boys well know – like swimming pools, junior football matches, cathedral choir recitals and the bigger railway stations. Tanner quite often had turned his hide-probe on other men, amusedly observing the observers. On the whole he found it comforting and used to tell his friends so. “There are more of us about than you might think,” Tanner the philosopher would say. “Remember, it is a matter of degree. If you look at a handsome boy, if you look deliberately and for no practical reason, you are paedophile; if you do nothing you're scared and safe, but you're still one of us, still paedophile, still among the blessed.”

Blessed? Orthodox friends mostly disliked the argument, but Bob Tanner could put the message over with a laugh and he reckoned it made

them pause to think.

On this occasion he was in no manner comforted by the sight of a rival observer. But the stranger watching Daniel, a broad-backed man with an unbecoming little mustache, kept his surveillance brief, and soon disappeared.

A mother arrived. There was no doubting that this hurried, protective figure was a mother; she towed a thin red haired girl towards the group. She seemed to be late for the rendezvous and wagged her hands apologetically, spoke to the young woman in charge for a moment, then kissed her daughter good-bye and left. Now bags and packages were lifted and the party moved purposely off towards a platform. Only God and they knew where they were going. Only Tanner knew, and knew so in agony, that wherever it might be, they had a middle-aged (though well-preserved) child-man tagging along. Once more foolishness was about to outrun reason and restraint. Risks were to be taken, money spent and energy poured out. There was also the matter of Hector & Drupp Incorporated. Just so, just so – Hector & Drupp would have to wait. Sorry about our appointment, Mr. Drupp, some urgent business came up which simply had to have my immediate attention, a most difficult balance of priorities... (No difficulty at all if you could only understand, Mr. Drupp. Priorities entirely clear, boys before deals.)

Such escapades, such follies had happened before and often enough for an evaluation to be made. Success rate no better than one in five, by Tanner's judgment, though success was a variable term. There had been good moments, non-moments (plenty) and that near disaster about this time last year; four men after him. A chilling recollection of running from the fairground came now – heavy feet pounding the road behind him, shouted abuse, the providential camouflage of a football crowd and sudden escape, and the shock and exhaustion and concern for the bewildered boy left so abruptly – the whole hideous sequence came back as a mind's eye replay.

Even so, Tanner went doggedly ahead, bought his platform ticket from a machine and followed the group straggling forward alongside the waiting train. Damn those hormones, damn them and praise them, above all *accept* them, the relentless man motivators.

The train, inter-city by the jargon of British Rail, had many spare seats, which was good and bad. The carriages were arranged so that two people faced two across a table, the seats being duplicated on each side of the center aisle. The group, including the young woman leader, numbered seven. It was good that they would not be split up but would

take all but one of the eight seats grouped together. The bad part was how to explain squeezing in to take the one vacant place when there were so many less crowded seats to choose from.

An idea occurred. As the children and their escort climbed into the train, Tanner made a show of bending down to pick up something from the platform then lost a little time turning this way and that with inquiring eyes. At last he stepped into the train. Daniel was sitting in the left hand corner seat (happy, privileged seat) facing the engine, his sports bag on the table in front of him. The young woman was diagonally across from him at the same table. Three other children, including the thin red haired girl, were wriggling about on the four seats across the aisle, arguing about who sat where.

Tanner arrived and stood smiling towards the young woman. He held a 50p coin in his hand. "Did one of the children drop this?" he asked amiably. "I've just picked it up off the platform." (He had, having placed it there first.)

The young woman looked at the children and the children looked at each other; some half-hearted rummaging in pockets and purses began but nobody had lost fifty pence.

"Well," said Tanner, the smile broadening, "fifty pence up for grabs, eh? We're going to have to do something about that, eh? Mind if I sit here?" He put his briefcase on the table and plopped down beside the red haired girl, back to engine and with a satisfactory diagonal line of sight across the narrow aisle to Daniel.

"Here's what we'll do," Tanner went on, the role of jolly uncle following along nicely. "I'm going to close my eyes and think of a number between one and six. We'll go round clockwise from you –" he pointed to the red haired girl – "and you all call out a number. The one who says the number I'm thinking about wins the 50p. Okay?"

He put his hand across his eyes leaving a small chink between index finger and thumb so that Daniel's lovely mouth could be seen. The children named their numbers and Daniel chose six. Six. The first word the boy had spoken in Tanner's hearing. Six became suddenly special.

"That's everybody, is it?" asked Tanner. "Okay, the winner is –" he paused for dramatic effect – "four."

A plump boy called out, "I've won, I've won!" Tanner took his hand from his eyes, beamed at the unattractive boy and handed over the coin. "You're lucky day, isn't it?" he said. "Well done."

The plump boy began to brag shrilly about his win, bouncing up and down and waving the coin. Daniel looked languidly away and out of the

carriage window at the boring station background. Poor little Daniel. But of course it had to be.

“A lively lot you've got here,” Tanner said to the young woman.

She nodded.

“My name's Bob Radley,” said Bob Tanner, still smiling. “Can we travel together now that I seem to be here?”

“Yes, of course. My name's Norma.”

“Mother of one of them, I'll bet. See if I can guess which.”

The children laughed, and Norma quickly explained that she was unmarried, didn't have any children of her own. She worked for a children's holiday organization. They had a campsite near York. That's where they were going.

“Ah,” murmured Tanner, developing the charm with practiced care. “Lovely town, York. I've heard Evensong at the Minster there. That was lovely, too. You wouldn't think they could get such nice sounds out of all those horrible little boys, would you?”

Norma was amused. “They're not *all* horrible,” she chided him.

“Depends on your point of view, I suppose,” said Tanner. “Anyway, I envy you York. I've got to go all the way to Newcastle. Terrible place, Newcastle.”

Precisely at 15.30 the train moved. Three hundred miles of track ahead. Stops at Peterborough, Doncaster, York and Darlington. So Peterborough or Doncaster. Which? The sooner the better – choose Peterborough and think hard.

Bob Tanner amused five of the children by doing tricks – re-arranging matches, flicking a coin up his sleeves and losing it in a handkerchief. The one unamused child was Daniel. A good sign or a bad sign? Tanner wasn't sure. Maybe it was the whole group he was bored with, and the trip to camp – and in that case the situation could be full of promise.

Tanner put the coin away and talked to Norma for a while. Quite a pleasant young woman but nothing special. Hers was a world of television and novelettes. She responded well to flattery, so Tanner gave her about the right amount. At twelve minutes past four he changed the subject. “Norma,” he said firmly, “I'd like to go up the train to the buffet car and bring back some sweets and drinks for the kids. No – don't say no. And I'll bring back a coffee for you. Sugar?”

“No sugar thanks. And that's kind of you.”

“I want one volunteer to come with me,” said Tanner engagingly. “Someone to advise and help carry.”

“I'll come, I'll come,” said the five, eagerly. Daniel the outsider again.

“Right, I know how we'll settle this,” said Tanner. The eeny-meeny-miny-mo routine had sixteen moves. Sixteen among six. Start with the girl forward and left – in the corner. He pointed a finger at her. “Eeny,” he began, then to the fat boy, “meeny...” on on around the group. Daniel was mo. Yeah, that was working out right. “If he hollers let him go, eeny meeny miny mo.” The finger pointed at the enchanting little bored yellow-topped head.

“Come on then Daniel,” said Bob. “Let's see what we can find.” Casually he stood up and slapped his brief case under his arm.

Daniel, less bored looking now, squeezed out and Tanner ushered the boy ahead. “Back soon,” he called to the group.

An extraordinary elation gripped Tanner as he followed this heavenly child down the aisle. The boy not only had a natural lazy grace as he wandered forward but was so sure footed that the swaying train had no effect on his balance at all. Ankles, calves, rounded little bottom, angled shoulders, slim neck and golden-topped head. All was there for Tanner to see and rejoice in as he followed eagerly behind, and it was perfection, a quintessence, and for now it was enough – quite enough. But he must keep his mind on the enormous issue of the moment. Timing would be everything.

There was a momentary shock when they passed a table and there, seated among two others, was the broad-backed, mini-mustached man, the ogling loiterer who had been so interested in Daniel at King's Cross. Fortunately the man had his head turned towards the window and seemed to have the rolling countryside on his mind rather than boys.

There were a dozen or so people in the buffet car chewing, swallowing or waiting by the counter.

“See what they've got on offer, Daniel,” said Tanner. “I'm just going to the toilet – be with you in a minute.”

“He came back through the connecting link to the carriage immediately behind the buffet car, dropped his briefcase by the passenger's exit door and continued walking down the aisle, past the broad-backed man who was still looking away, through to two more carriages, arriving back at the children and Norma.

“He wants his bag now,” said Tanner, chuckling. “Handkerchief and his purse and I don't know what all. It's this one, isn't it?” He picked up Daniel's sports bag.

“Yes, but you shouldn't be bothered doing that,” protested Norma. “Daniel should have come back for the bag himself – *really*, what a lazy boy!”

“Ah, well. He's choosing; you see – concentrating hard. Back in a minute.”

He dropped the sports bag by his briefcase at the door, then checked the time. Sixteen minutes past – the train would start to slow very soon now.

Daniel was by the buffet counter looking at the sweets and chocolate bars on display.

“Not much there by the look of it,” said Bob. “Good old British Rail.”

“Wouldn't mind the chocolate flakes,” muttered Daniel. “Or the Monster Munch.”

The long slow braking of the run in to Peterborough began now – the train was keeping nicely to time. The public address speakers told passengers for this stop to be ready to leave the train and not to leave hand-baggage behind.

“Tell you what – I've had a brilliant idea,” said Tanner, bright with enthusiasm. “Look, come here.” He led the boy forward through the buffet car to an exit door, and handed him a five pound note. “The train waits for ages here,” he said. “Hop out, go up the steps and you'll find there's a super sweetshop. Bring lots of stuff back – let's do it properly. Don't let Norma see you – she might be cross.”

Daniel looked up at the man uneasily. “I don't want to get left behind,” he said.

The humming of the brakes became a short-lived squeal as the train stopped. Bob opened the door and gently pushed Daniel out. “I won't let the train go without you.” he said. “You've got heaps of time. Keep out of Norma's line of sight. Upstairs – quick.”

Daniel ran now with the lightness of a panther – all effortless grace and speed. Tanner waited for a second or two, then closed the door and hurried back through the buffet car, picked up the two bags at the other end and stepped out onto the platform as the train, after its scheduled two-minute stop, began moving again. He darted momentarily into the men's lavatory until Norma's carriage had swept by, then came quickly out to walk towards a small, exquisite figure running frantically from the stairs to where the train had been. Daniel's eyes were wide with alarm. Tanner felt bad about that, about the moment of fear his plan had brought to this child of heaven.

“It's all right, Daniel,” he called out. “I'm here, don't worry.”

They came together, the boy bewildered, the man smiling reassuringly.

“Made a right balls up of that, Dan, didn't I?” said Tanner. “It only waited two minutes today. Sorry mate.” He put the bags down and rumbled the sheeny hair, long and fine stranded, with little tucks of waves like male heads in Greek statuary. Beautiful hair, and the first physical contact – a moment to measure. Twenty-ninth July, sixteen twenty-two hours and about 30 seconds. Touched Daniel.

“You've got the bags,” Daniel pointed out, still bewildered.

“Lucky that, wasn't it? Just had time to, sort of grab, pfoosh and out.” Tanner hurried on, hiding the more awkward details behind a flow of words. “I'll ask about the next train. We could have quite a while to wait – in that case we'll think of something to do. Hang on, stay here with the bags.”

Tanner spoke to a station official, then hurried back to Daniel. “Yeah, it's a long time till the next train. Never mind, they're going to phone ahead to the next stop, Doncaster, to tell Norma not to worry and that we'll follow on. Let's take a taxi into the town. It's a nice place you know, Peterborough.”

They sat side by side in the back of the car. During the ten minute journey Tanner put a lot of questions, waving his hands about a good deal and often brushing against the sun-bronzed knee beside him.

“What's your other name, Dan?”

“Beecham.”

“Really? Any relation?”

“Yes, but a long way back. Fifth cousin or something.”

“What about your parents?”

“They're divorced and anyway they live abroad. I don't often see them.”

“Do you – do you find that hard?”

“Yes. But I'm pretty used to it. They've never lived with me.”

The time for some positive expression of sympathy seemed to have arrived. Tanner patted the neat knee three times and after the third pat let his hand pause in warm contact. The knee remained still. Bless you, Daniel. There was something about the personality of this divine child – resignation, acceptance, a kind of mature independence – which was surely more simulated than real.

“What is home to you, then?” Tanner asked.

“My older brother's place, I suppose. He's got a flat in London. But I'm at prep school most of the time. Or at camp in the holidays – like this boring York trip.”

Ah, prep schools, a gentlemanliness of scholarship. The heady,



paradisaical, cruel, monastic, so-English prep school, upper class boys all under thirteen cooped up for months at a time with sublimating, cold-bathing masters; cricket, rugby, Latin, team spirit, shared showers, profound friendships, big dormitories, tears in the night – yes and other things in the night too, shadowy visits, giggles, two shapes in a bed and heavy breathing.

“Which school?”

“I’m at the Lion School, Cambridge.”

The Lion School! Every boy-lover’s Mecca. Tanner remembered years ago peering over the Cambridge hedge. Boys running, boys wrestling. A glimpse of the swimming pool – nude swimming so they said. Boys and teachers on first name terms. Authority and passion. Daniel would know a thing or two.

“Your dad must be rich,” murmured Tanner, judging the moment right to remove his hand. “The Lion School, eh? Are you happy there?”

“It’s okay.”

Tanner nodded towards the boy, waiting for more, but nothing came. Good grief, did the child not know what powers he had? Why so laconic? Why the detachment? Could Daniel, with all his natural endowment, feel unloved and unimportant? A passenger not only on the York train but on the journey through life itself going where fate sent him unconsulted and now, at twelve, uncaring? There were fiery feelings behind those eyes, those sweetly sexy eyes, but the fires were damped. That was the challenge, Tanner’s challenge, and he accepted it.

“Daniel, I’m going to make a suggestion,” he said, speaking softly. “It might surprise you. Can I make it?”

“Yes.”

“Well, look, you’re in no hurry to get to that camp, are you?”

“No.”

“Just the thought of it bores you, I know it does. And listen, I’m bored out of my mind too – bored with my job, my family – everything.” He lowered his voice to a whisper, mindful of the driver. “You and I seem to get on together, don’t we? Less than two hours and we’re friends, aren’t we?”

“I suppose so.”

“We are, Dan – for life. Anyway, let’s see if we can phone around a bit and put off going to the camp, at least until tomorrow. We’ll live it up together tonight. Tomorrow you could take in the big pleasure garden at Alton Towers. But you’re the boss – anything you want we’ll do. And we’ll do it in comfort, too. Hang the expense. The best hotel, best grub,

five star everything. How about it?"

Daniel smiled – a real, broadening smile showing off bright white teeth. "Okay," he said.

Tanner caressed the knee again, then leaned forward for a consultation with the driver. The most suitable hotel (there was much to consider) seemed to be the three star Belmont. Tanner asked the driver to take them there, but asked could they stop at a chemist's shop first, please? He needed a toothbrush, he mentioned to Daniel.

He came out of the shop with the toothbrush conspicuously in his hand and a small tin of talcum in a pocket.

There was no problem checking in. An agreeable young woman receptionist gave them twin-bedded No. 11 – one floor up, a pleasant room, as it turned out; large and cool. Daniel switched on the television, then sprawled face down on a bed close to the window and yawned.

Tanner studied the little round bottom and long slender legs in self-renewing awe. "Will your brother be home yet?" he asked. "It's five o'clock."

Daniel yawned again. "Don't think so," he said.

"Okay, we'll phone a bit later. You're tired. Pull your shirt off and I'll massage your shoulders – it's good when you're tired."

He seemed not to have heard, staring at the wretched television set.

"Go on," Tanner said. "Pull it off."

And Daniel did. He struggled out of the flimsy shirt and flopped down again on his chest, showing off the bronzed perfection of shoulders and back.

Tanner stood for a moment, looking down, and reflecting on the absolute beauty of the figure stretched before him and on his own astounding luck at being there like this. "I'll sprinkle some talcum powder on you," he murmured, sitting gently down on the edge of the boy's bed. "You'll find this really relaxing."

His hands began a smooth circling motion, spreading the powder over the smooth warm flesh – neck, shoulders and shoulder blades. Big hands, they suddenly seemed, and strong. Skilfully he probed thumbs into the base of the little neck, spreading, probing, stroking, pushing palms, fingers, thumbs. More powder, more circling, new pressures. Excursions now all the way down the bony spine. Tanner knew his massage drill and in contentment saw Daniel slip into the relaxing pleasures of mind and body from pressing hands and the flickering trivia of teatime television.

For five minutes or so the routine went on with well timed pauses

when the hands became still, then started their circlings again with renewed effectiveness. One pause was for Tanner's own benefit. The erection he had grown needed more space for comfort, a rearrangement quickly and discreetly made. Then the strong hands were on the move again, circling and probing.

"Now on your back," ordered Tanner. "We'll have a go at that chest."

"You don't massage chests," Daniel murmured.

"Yes you do – front of shoulders and arms. And there's nothing like spare powder all over. It's very cooling. Come on."

Obediently the boy rolled onto his back, head hanging down over the foot of the bed now, watching television wrong way up. Tanner sprinkled the powder recklessly, a dollop on each of the tiny rosebud nipples, another dollop on the belly button, then erratic zig-zagging sweeps across the ribs and flat tummy. After a few seconds of circular pressings over the precious nipples Tanner thought he noticed an enlargement of the little bulge in the jeans shorts. That was the finish of whatever power of restraint was left. He had felt a loss of control coming on for minutes and now the crisis, a dizzy abandonment, had arrived.

He unbuttoned the waistband of the jeans, jerked the partly open zip down and slid his powdered hands inside, beneath the briefs, moving lower against the underbelly, a warm smoothness which should have been lingered over but wasn't; and then the contact, a joyous contact with Daniel's part stiffly entangled in the clothing.

"We'll have to massage him too," said Tanner lamely, easing the little penis free and resting it more comfortably against the yielding hairless pubica, foreskin (slightly parted) pointing up towards the talc filled navel. The rigidity was a joy and marvel. He had found and caressed and eased this precious center-point of boy – had touched but hadn't seen. Exhilarated and afraid, he moved along the bedside, gripped the shorts and briefs and in a flurry of pulls and liftings dragged them down and clear, to below the knees. The slender cock stood vertically now, towering pretentiously up from tightly bagged little balls. Its shaft was streaked with talcum powder from Tanner's helpful hand. Showing through the open foreskin was the tip, the merest tip, of the moist and vivid glans.

"Christ, you're lovely," Tanner said, immediately regretting the slushiness of the comment; to love this boy was one thing, to gush and in gushing threaten his sense of boyhood was another. And the speed of the action had been too much, no finesse, no permission given. "I haven't

upset you Daniel, have I?"

Daniel lifted his head for a moment, amused by Tanner's obvious agitation and anxiety. "I've known all along what you were going to do," he said laconically – and lowered his head for more inverted television viewing.

The casualness amazed Tanner. "How the hell did you know?" he asked. "Are you used to men pulling your shorts down, then?"

"Yes, well, things like that are always happening at school," Daniel answered drily.

"You mean with other boys?"

"And some of the masters. One of them looks a bit like you."

"No! I'm amazed they get away with it."

Daniel laughed. "They don't always. Some of them leave in a bit of a hurry," he said.

Cautiously Tanner began to fondle the little cock, sliding the foreskin rhythmically up and down. With his left hand he let his own swollen penis out. Sod the television which still had the boy's attention. "I've, er, got mine out now," he said.

Daniel looked up again. "Hell, it's big enough," he murmured, then down went the head again.

"Can't we turn that thing off – and will you rub mine?"

"In a minute."

A loud knock sounded on the bedroom door and Tanner sprang nervously to his feet. "Pull your shorts up," he whispered, stuffing his prick away.

When all clothing was in place he walked to the door and opened it. There stood the broad-backed man with the meanly trimmed mustache. In one dreadful crashing moment Tanner took the possibility in – that there in front of him was the build and look of a policeman. Special Branch, no doubt. Ear at the door, colleague somewhere nearby. Tanner's face drained white.

"Mind if I come in?" the man said, pushing in and closing the door behind him. "Who's the boy?"

Tanner found difficulty in answering, a drying mouth affecting his tongue, restricting movement. "Er, my nephew," he answered.

"Not very original that, and I'm sure not true. Ah, there are more of us about than you think, you know." (Familiar phrase) The big man was finding heavy enjoyment in the distress his arrival had caused.

"Police?" croaked Tanner.

The man laughed. "Hell no. Boy-lover. I'm joining in with you – in

a way. In a legal way, that is. You can call me Ted.”

Anger brought some of the color back to Tanner's cheeks. “Bloody well get out of here,” he said. “And I mean now!”

Big Ted seemed amused. “Keep calm,” he advised. “I'm not here to spoil your fun – on the contrary, I'll make some suggestions you might not even have thought of. I want you to go ahead and do it together while I watch. That's all. I'm a voyeur. Admire your choice, mate. He's very pretty, isn't he?” With the last remark he nodded towards Daniel who had moved away and stood at bay, his back pressed against the far wall. “So what are you going to do first? Up his bum or what?”

The anger that had so rapidly followed Tanner's cold fear came burning strongly through, flooding his face with color.

“God, that's really sick!” Tanner shook his head in disbelief as he spoke.

“Sicker than you?”

“Yeah, much.”

“Well, it's safer anyway. Even in England voyeurs don't end up in prison often.”

“Get out, you big bastard,” Tanner said, voice raised, fists instinctively clenched. “Get out or by Christ I'll smash your jaw in.”

“Look, Radley, cool it. That is your name, isn't it? It's the one you're using anyway – saw it in the register. And I know he's Daniel. We can be quite friendly about this – honestly. Just do what you were going to do, let me sit here and watch. If you like I won't even move or speak. Just give me a good show. All this anger of yours – look, you're upsetting the kid.”

Daniel's eyes showed stress, rounded and bright, the palms of his bronzed hands braced against the cool, papered wall.

“Tell you what,” big Ted went on, “have a chat about it while I take a stroll in the corridor. You've got five minutes before I tell the management and police. Give me a shout when you're ready.” He stepped out through the door and closed it quietly.

Tanner and Daniel stood like figures of wax for a moment, then rushed together. “Dan, I'm so sorry,” Tanner said, wrapping his arms round the slender body, holding tightly, lovingly. “The bugger followed us – he's come all the way from London. God, what a nut!”

Daniel's face was pressed against Tanner at about breast pocket level. “Do we have to do what he says, then?” he asked, his voice muffled. “I mean with him looking?”

“Like hell,” retorted Tanner. “No, we're going to get out of this

hotel.”

“How?”

“Yeah, how? We might find a way out at the back – the staff entrance. But we'd have to leave the bags behind or they'd think we were running out on the bill. That big slob would like your bag, wouldn't he?”

“Why?”

“All your underwear and things – never mind.”

Tanner was peering down from the window now. “Look, Dan,” he said. “We're only about fourteen feet up. If I jam my foot under the radiator and lower you by the arms you won't have more than a seven foot drop into the flowerbed. Keep your knees slightly bent and you'll be okay. Yes?”

“Okay.”

First Tanner dropped the two bags out and watched them plop into the flowers. “Come on,” he said. “Now you.”

Frightening moments followed for Daniel. With the window wide open he perched for a while on the sill, then turned and lowered himself, stomach against the wall. Next, Tanner took his hands and lowered the boy a good two feet further. “Push slightly backwards when you let go,” he said – and smiled reassuringly. “Now GO.”

Daniel released and crashed into the battered flower-bed. In a moment he was standing brushing petals and earth from his legs.

“You're okay – great!” called Tanner. “Now me.”

As he was maneuvering on the ledge he saw big Ted stroll towards the boy. “No, no, son,” he was saying. “Look at the poor flowers – you'll be in trouble with the gardener.” Then, grinning up at Tanner, he added, “Stay there. I'll bring him back up.”

Tanner gaped in amazement and. Dismay at the outrageous big Ted, the outrageous and astute big Ted who was calmly picking up the bag and putting a hand firmly, guidingly on Daniel's shoulder. They were heading back to the bedroom. Two minutes or so to think. Tanner sat down, thinking. Then they were at the door, one of them, Ted of course, knocking lightly.

“You're not going to throw me off the trail, you know,” the big man said cheerfully as he wandered in, still steering Daniel from behind. “Just get on with it, Radley.”

Tanner felt the lead weight of defeat, action urges decaying into helplessness. “You stupid wang,” he murmured. “I can't *do* anything with you watching. For Christ's sake you can understand that!”

“I expect *he* can,” – said with a nod towards Daniel. “And you can

always do your best. I mean you've got no choice, have you?"

It was the boy who answered. "Is it just that you want to see me do it with somebody else?" he asked. "Could it be anybody else – like another boy?"

That brought a smile to big Ted. "Yeah," he said. "Sure. It doesn't have to be old misery here."

Tanner stood up. Misery was a good enough name for him at present. "No, Dan," he urged. "Whatever you have in mind, no."

"It's okay," said Daniel. "There's a kid on a bike down there in the street. He looked really bored. He'll probably do it for money. Lots of kids will do it for money – enough money."

"Hell's bloody teeth," muttered Tanner.

Big Ted's smile had grown very broad and he was shaking his head. It was admiration of a kind.

"Give me two fivers," commanded Daniel. "I'll try him on five and go to ten if I have to. Don't worry, it's easy to ask him. Easy for me anyway. He can only say no."

Daniel, wonder boy and master mind, was right, of course. He was back at the bedroom door in two or three minutes with the other boy who said his name was Larry. Larry was a biggish thirteen or smallish fourteen with a too-rounded but agreeable face.

"Action at last," sighed big Ted. "Pants down then lads, and shirts up. Get moving. I'll be taking some pictures – but not faces, so no problems."

The boys did as they were told, Larry giggling, Daniel looking serious. Larry's cock, smooth and uncircumcised, rose at once and swayed gracefully, awaiting the action. Big Ted became self-appointed stage director. "Okay, each rub the other. Turn more towards the window. That's good. Start rubbing. Don't come until I tell you." He crouched before the performing boys, the flash and click of the camera distressing Tanner who skulked about the room safely out of range.

Larry, forgetting the bluntly given stage directions, climaxed in less than a minute, thrusting strongly and dropping semen on the carpet. At once Daniel began to moan and quiver, gasping that he was coming too, a dry event for Daniel but a good climax, or very good acting.

"You little sods – you've come off too soon!" cried big Ted, turning to face away from them. Then he was in motion, too, all body movement and ungainliness, elbow jerking, large bottom pumping while the camera swung ludicrously at his hip.

"Oh Jesus, Jesus," murmured Tanner.

When big Ted finished his mood was entirely changed. “Thanks lads,” he said. Pants up now. That’s enough for today. I’m pushing off. Bye.” He waved briefly towards Tanner, opened the door and was gone.

“Thank you, both of you,” Tanner said. “I’ll clean this bit of mess up. Daniel – see Larry down to the street, will you?”

When Daniel came back, Tanner bear-hugged him, both arms, quite a lot of pressure. “You’re a ruddy knockout,” he whispered into the hair half-hidden ear. “The coolest little dishiest customer I ever came across. *Ever!*”

Then he held the boy away, looking at him and smiling. Soon they both laughed. “I didn’t really come off,” Daniel said. “I just pretended.”

Tanner wagged his head, a slight motion of approval. “Good, Dan. Good. Lovely. Now let’s phone your brother and get things sorted out, you know, get legalised before somebody starts a search for you.”

“What do we do after that?” asked the boy.

“Get out of here fast – really fast in case that bastard Ted shows up feeling randy again.”

“I think he fancied Larry more than me.”

“Ted only fancies his dreams,” replied Tanner. “It ought to be an honor to be a paedophile, but with people like him about, I don’t know.”

“What?”

“Forget it.”

Daniel’s brother asked a few questions but was soon reassured, spoke briefly to his little brother and, finally, thanked Tanner for being so helpful. It was agreed that the two would spend the night with Tanner’s married sister (another lie and a false address) and that the boy would be safely delivered to the holiday colony next day.

“What are we really going to do?” asked Daniel.

“We’re going to book out of this hotel – no charge I hope – then hire a car and head on to Stamford. There are loads of hotels there. We’ll choose a good one. Better than this.”

“I’m hungry.”

“Yes, and we’ll eat too. A proper banquet, anything you want.”

Daniel’s banquet was Kingburger and chips, ice cream and two cokes. And that night they lay in each other’s arms in luxury at the Palace Hotel. They made love and slept, and made love and slept and made love again and again through the night. There were times when the boy slept and Tanner didn’t; times when Tanner lay staring at the exquisite child beside him, marveling at the little he could see in the dim light (closed eyes, sweet nose, moist lips, faint eyebrows and tangled hair), and marveling



again at the touch-feel of the warm nakedness of legs, stomach, chest and back. Disabling waves of sentiment rolled through the experienced Tanner, the accustomed-to-be-in-control Tanner. Even poetry. '*Shall I compare thee...?*' And '*If it be a sin to love a lovely lad...*' And more of that sort. Guff. Puppy love from someone far gone from puppy days. And yet truth is truth. Daniel was truth.

In the morning he begged the answer to an awkward question from the boy. "Think carefully before you speak," he urged. "I've known a lot of boys in my time and you, well, you've known a few men. But is there something special between us? Am I special to you?"

"You talk too much," Daniel said.

"Okay. But am I?"

"Perhaps. I like you. I mean, I want to go on seeing you."

The answer fell short of all Tanner could have wished, but it was very much better than it might have been. And there would be time to work on a bonding, a real bonding, later. Or would there? How?"

"After today," went on Tanner. "What then? How do we meet?"

"That's easy," Daniel said. "*Any* night I can let you in at the side door of the school. Just write to me. Say 'Nine- fifteen Friday' or whatever day it is and come to the door. Give two taps, then a third one later. I'll let you in. You can have it off with other boys if you want to, too."

"For Christ's sake – it's only you I want! But, Daniel, isn't it risky?"

"Not very. We don't get snooped on. Anyway, we've got big cupboards."

The wonder boy had put everything right again. Everything except the solid bonding. Tanner grinned, then laughed loudly. "That's a hell of a good start," he said. "After that I've got to meet your brother – I want to be able to take you out, you know, openly. *In the dormitory, eh?* It's amazing." He laughed again.

That did quite a lot for the bonding. Three times they rode the double corkscrew at Alton Towers Pleasure Garden and only stopped then because Tanner confessed he was feeling sick. They had a ride, sometimes several rides, on everyone of the terror trips. At three-ish they left, the state of Tanner's head not good.

While driving the last few miles to the campsite near York Tanner said, "About that bastard Ted. I've got to admit, Dan, I learned something from him."

"Did you? What?"

"I... I'm not sure how to explain it. I'll tell you one day. Maybe when we meet in your school. Three weeks on Friday – hell, what a long time

to wait.”

“You wally – it's nothing.”

They stopped at the camp entrance and Daniel heaved his bag off the back seat and clambered out. “Thanks for everything,” he said. “See you at school. Bye.”

For five minutes or so Tanner sat at the wheel, watching. Daniel vanished into the reception hut, then emerged with a woman escort and walked further into the camp. The boy didn't look back.

Reluctantly, Tanner turned the hired car round, then headed south. One incredible night and day. Life changed. Now three dismal weeks to wait; time, at least, to work on bonding – the right words and, even more important, the right ideas. Difficult. And there was time to check the side gate at the Lion School. The simplicity of action, something positive to do that might ease the sense of separation. He bought a map and chose his route to Cambridge.

*The Daniel of this story is real, and the description of him accurate. He was seen in August at a main line London station, he was with a group of children, he was going somewhere (presumably to camp) – and he was as bored as a boy can be.*

S.W.