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First edition published March, 1990

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Cover design and painting by Mario de Graaf

The Acolyte Press
P. O. Box 12731
1100 AS Amsterdam
The Netherlands

ISBN 90-6971-023-4

Journey by Water

by **K. I. Bard**

That was the summer of my bicycle. Back in Chicago I'd never been allowed a bike – too dangerous – but here in the small northern Minnesota town to which we'd just moved, I set about learning how to ride. Once mastered, my bike became an escape vehicle – from my family, from small town life.

When not eating, resting or engaged in some compulsory task that summer, I was on my bike, happily pumping away at the pedals, adding up hour upon hour in circuits first of the town and then the adjacent countryside.

The bicycle I'd chosen was not the typical boy's bike with red frame and wide, balloon tires. It was a black English racer, offered for sale in the local paper. You'd have to go back to the late fifties to understand the oddness of my choice. Boys are creatures of custom and ritual; they habitually exclude unconventional elements from their lives. Choosing a three-speed racer was my way of both joining the crowd and asserting my own individuality.

As July melted into August, I tended more and more to leave the paved highways and track out on the less busy dirt roads. A Raleigh racer is hardly the ideal bike for this. The other boys could lazily float on their big tires over the dirt, wide handlebars making the steering easy. My curved handlebars were designed for paved road racing and my narrow wheels bit unmercifully into sand and gravel. I took several nasty tumbles at first, but by late summer I was able to navigate our back roads with pleasant competence, although I was never really able to relax while doing so.

Cycling sets up internal as well as external rhythms. Your body and much of your mind are occupied with the physical tasks of maintaining motion, balance and directional control. But a big part of you is left to take in snatches of scenery, to review how a youthful squabble should have been handled or a parental confrontation avoided, and old, odd things break through to consciousness without predictability or seeming logic. So it was on that day in late August when I set out for Bird River.

Some stretches of the road were cool. Tall trees kept back the sun and

the air felt more like spring than late summer. Then, with the sharpness of a drawn line, the old trees would give way to a section of logged land choked with a new growth of aspen, thick as pencils in a cup, and moose maple, and thin, wispy birch, and a scattering of balsam fir trying to claim spots, all going riot in the sun. Here the air was hot: it was like passing into an overheated room where water had long been boiling for tea. Insects thrived: big grasshopper-like creatures that flew low and clicked with their black and yellow wings, and others that made a locust-like hum and buzz from further up the trees.

I ducked my head at the droning approach of a bumble bee bee-lining to some important destination of its own, heedless of passing boys... and suddenly I was back on Father Steven's bed as a fly buzzed at the screen which simultaneously denied it freedom and allowed gentle currents of air to pass along my bare body. The memory came like a growing pink sphere of sticky-sweet bubble gum at a boy's lips.

Father Steven belonged earlier in my life, before we'd moved north. He worked at my first parish school. He was in charge of the grade five altar boys, and he sometimes helped with the choir, where I sang.

There was no particular reason for me to have liked Father Steven as a person: my upbringing simply made it mandatory to obey and respect priests. Linked as they were with God's Work on Earth, it was impossible for me to conceive of priests as really human, at least in the way I was human – a young creature who required a bathroom wherein to produce fouled water and awesome stinks.

When Father Steven said he wanted to talk to me about "a priestly vocation" I had a very clear idea of what he meant. We were, if nothing else, regularly deluged with pep talks about the desperate need for priests and nuns. A Catholic boy reaching grade five who didn't know exactly and in immense detail what a "vocation" was would have had to be retarded. But when such a lofty person spoke to me personally and seemed to want to win my friendly approval, I didn't know what to make of it. I was more nervous than cognizant at the time, but for years I could recall snatches of Father Steven's talk. The religious content I promptly forgot, for it was too voluminous and too boring. More personally interesting was Father Steven's repeated observation that I was "getting to be a big boy now."

"Do you know how priests live, Harry?" he asked me one day.

"No, Father."

"We're just like everyone else, you know. I'm just like your mother or your father. I'm just like you, too. Did you know that?"

"Yes, Father." I lied – because it seemed the only thing I could do at the

time.

"I want you to pray with me, Harry, will you do that? Will you pray for a vocation with me?"

"Yes, Father," I responded, quietly relieved and hoping I'd now be able to escape with nothing more than a rosary to say. If only Father Steven wouldn't drag it out!

"Good. I'm glad to hear that, Harry. When you pray for such a serious thing as a vocation to the priesthood you must do so with real knowledge of what you are praying for. We will pray in the rectory together, so I can show you how I live as a priest."

So it was to be more than a rosary. Father Steven led me, guiding me by the shoulder, into the old rectory building, past empty rooms with doors open, toward a back staircase carpeted in plush red, our noiseless tread unnoticed in the still house. We entered a tiny bedroom above the garages formerly reserved for the non-clerical help but now occupied by the most junior priests. There was a double kneeler which Father Steven steered me toward, giving me a downward push when we reached it.

Then began the rosary drone, Father Steven leading, me following. For some years I had been adept at doing this without paying the least attention to what I was saying. I was observing the room which, except for the kneeler, could easily have been in my grandmother's house with all the dresser scarves, lace curtains and furniture doilies.

We came to the last bead, the last "Amen". I waited, watching from the corner of my eye for a cue. Father Steven brought his rosary to his lips: good news, there would be no second round of prayers. We put our rosaries away, and I rose from the kneeler when he did.

Looking at me and nodding slowly, he said, "This is my room, Harry. See? A priest's life is like anybody else's, except we have duties to God as well as to our fellows. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Father."

"Stay with me for a few minutes so I can get to know you better." Motioned to a chair, I sat, feeling nearly as trapped as if we were saying another rosary.

When you are a boy, it is unwise to anger those with authority over you. It is better to tell them what they want to hear. I couldn't risk Father Steven deciding that I was a "bad" boy unworthy of redemption who needed to be "corrected" in front of other priests and nuns, all of whom would pick up on his signal. So I became a willing accomplice in his exploring the possibility that priesthood might be for me. In order to escape, I'd have politely agreed to almost anything that would secure Father Steven's pleasure, and

my freedom in return.

"You're a lucky boy, Harry, if God calls to you so soon. I can give you a special blessing, almost like a second baptism, to aid your being born into God's calling. Would you like my special blessing?"

"Yes, Father," I agreed, not knowing at all what he meant.

"Come here, my boy. Stand before me. Do you know how you came into the world of flesh and sin?"

I was unable to respond, but it didn't matter.

"God calls to you to recognize your frail, human condition. He wishes you to be as you once were, His innocent, unsoiled creation. To be reborn for Him you must come to Him as you were at the beginning of your life. Do you understand?"

That kind of direct question always prompted the same response: "Yes, Father." We would say "yes" in our school even if we didn't know what we were answering to because it allowed us to buy time and perhaps figure out with the next question what the priest wanted to hear.

"Step closer now. I'm going to undress you so I can bless you from head to toe with holy water, and then you will be reborn as God's special child."

That took me by complete surprise. Father Steven began unbuttoning my shirt, my school clip-on tie dangling to one side of my collar. I let him proceed for the same reasons I would have allowed a boy who started a new game to make up the rules. This was Father Steven's game, and he set the field accordingly.

Pulling my shirt loose from my trousers, then turning me around to remove it, Father Steven talked quietly of God's love for us, saying there was no such thing as physical modesty among priests. When the shirt was gone, he turned me to face him again. "Now you'd better sit to remove your shoes and socks. When you're bare you'll feel cooler. This room is very hot in the afternoon..." He ran a finger across my upper lip beaded in sweat.

Some boys are physically shy; others can stroll through their houses in undershorts or less and never act awkward. I was inclined toward modesty, although the summer before I'd been naked in front of numerous priests and even nuns while being bathed at the Guardian Angel Camp. Still, alone in that little room with Father Steven, I hesitated.

"Let's finish up, Harry, so I can bless you. Come here."

I moved to him, looking down with embarrassment at my bare feet. For some reason I always felt more naked going about barefoot than I did with the rest of my body unclothed.

"It's not the time for turning shy, my boy." Father Steven tugged at

my belt with one hand while steadying my side with the other.

Now, we have all been touched by the clinical hands of doctors or nurses, and nearly everyone has experienced some degree of loving touch, whether from passion or sympathy. But a priest's hands are forbidden to touch in those ways. When hands know little of work except fingering the rosary, holding a pen or pressing the palms and fingers together in prayer, they become especially delicate instruments. Such hands hunger for flesh, yet it takes only the most superficial contact to satiate them. A priestly touch is both warm and cool, caressing and remote. Perhaps messages flow from skin to skin and we exist as receivers. From his touch I learned more of Father Steven than he ever could have told me. And while one could judge that his touch was tainted because he used deception to achieve it, if you were the boy being touched you would have felt something of the lonely, human side of the man whose occupation required such subterfuge.

Having somebody else's hand on my own zipper was odd in the extreme. Not even my mother had zipped or unzipped me for years. It was as if Father Steven had suddenly made me once more a young child who had to be coddled and undressed. The heavy cords fell around my feet of their own weight. Father Steven paused for breath for a moment, then slipped my shorts down, too. "Stand there, Harry, while I get the holy water."

I have said I was inclined toward physical modesty. Paradoxically, I also thoroughly enjoyed nakedness. Unclothed, I was a free boy, free of the corduroy pants, heavy shoes, white shirts and blue school ties which symbolized captivity in a Catholic school. So the only thing I didn't like about being naked in Father Steven's room was the awkwardness of the situation.

I, of course, was unable to see myself as I emerged from my uniform that day. With a boy of northern Slavic descent, you have Caucasian features and coloring that life gives to pale northern children. A boy of my age then has tender skin, soft like the inside of pale rose petals. Portions of his frame poke through at ribs and spine. The jaw is apt to be sharply defined. Blood vessels form a trace-work of blue or ruddy lines, imitating the veining of stone, but organized to deliver life to distant parts. Even a most ordinary kid (which, I suppose, I was) is a marvel of actual beauties, tones, contrasts, promises and meanings.

And so Father Steven was trembling slightly as he returned with the holy water, brought from a silver-capped bottle on his dresser. It crossed my mind that if I could make a priest act so differently just by being naked before him, what else might I be able to do, given enough time to find out?

"Fold your hands, Harry," he said. I obeyed, bowed my head as for normal prayer. Everything was normal, except I was naked. The first drops hit me, causing goose-flesh. I wanted to giggle. Father Steven was muttering a prayer in Latin, then interjected, "Turn slowly, Harry, so I can bless all parts of you with the water."

I rotated, feeling the water spatter on me in successive waves. I imagined myself as some kind of praying angel, although I probably looked more like a smirking Caravaggio Cupid. Boys of ten may be naive, but they are certainly capable of knowing what is funny and what isn't.

Clearing his throat, Father Steven told me to go to his bed and lie upon it until the holy water evaporated. "Think about your vocation. Pray that God will guide you. I'll pray with you."

I settled onto the bed, trying not to muss his bed covers. I folded my hands in altar boy style on my chest. I tried to lie very still, but I soon got bored, now that the blessing and sprinkling were over. Shifting my eyes from side to side, I could alternately see either bare groin or the tip of my pee pee with its thumb-like button of rosier flesh. Circumcised boys have nothing hidden there. The penises of uncircumcised boys, I thought, were more like worms: all skin. Having spent many evenings collecting worms and night-crawlers, I knew it was impossible to tell which end of a worm was which. With a snake you could easily distinguish head from tail. I had a snake. I shot glances, to amuse myself, at the head of my serpent, a darker spot on my otherwise pale form.

And then the fly bumbling against the screen caught my attention. I listened to that fly – and beyond it to the kids on the playground far away. The fly buzzed to escape, bumping into the screen over and over. And now a bumble bee had just escaped colliding with my sweating face as I pedaled my Raleigh racer down that dusty road.

I'd gone back to Father Steven, and not just once. When asked if I wished to be blessed again, I'd begin automatically to disrobe. I was flattered Father Steven thought I'd be a good priest. At home I made an altar on my dresser and offered Mass, concentrating on the good part with the host, water and wine. Thinking of Father Steven, I often celebrated it in the nude. Once when my pee pee felt peculiar I wrapped my rosary around it and dragged the cool beads over the stem and across the wrinkly pouch that held my pills.

"I'll bless your parts, Harry, to secure you in all ways and in all things to God's holiest work," Father Steven said. He placed his fingers over my eyes. "I bless your eyes in the name of Saint Jude that you may ever see God's miracles about you." He touched my lips. "I bless your mouth

and tongue that you may ever praise the Lord." And so he continued working his way along my body... until he came to my pee pee, which he blessed too – I can't remember in which saint's name – only he used the Latin word which I'd never heard before and understood as "wenis". (I figured that the "wee" in "wenis" meant tiny – not a bad guess for a boy my age, for I'd never have thought Latin, the language of the Church, was broad enough to encompass things like a boy's pee pee. It was only some months later when other boys made fun of my saying "wenis" that I learned the right word.)

The truth is I'd have listened to many silly terms for the sake of those few minutes of physical sensation. Peeling out of my clothes, freeing myself of heavy corduroy and sweat-damp underwear was a delight. The showers of holy water made me tingle in body, giggle in spirit and soar with the hope that my blessings would lift me into higher and better realms of life. What other boy, I reasoned, was getting such top-to-toe skin blessings? Wasn't I destined to be better for it?

Plus, and it was a big plus, there was the other pleasure of being touched. The trouble with an angel, or a statue, is that it isn't touched. Good Catholic boys don't get sensual touch: only ascetic training. I was parched for contact. I was desperate to feel through my skin. I'd have done almost anything to keep getting Father Steven's chaste touches to my bare flesh.

It all came rushing back as I pedaled down that dusty road. The bubble-gum bubble of memory had burst and left me with the mess. Father Steven had vanished from my life when I went to a new school for grade six, and ever since I'd preferred not to think about what had happened so often in that little room in the rectory.

I coasted down the valley slope toward the river, the bicycle my ally, antagonist... and reminder, for it rested between my legs just as I'd once stood naked between Father Steven's legs, on one foot, acting silly, flirting before I knew what flirting was, trying to coax out of him a few more small touches.

I stopped short of the bridge and led my bike off into the woods to hide it. Why was a boy's bike different from a girl's? Having mashed my nuts on the frame a time or two I was certain a girl's was better suited to male anatomy. Weren't the bars on boy's bikes deliberately put there to echo what juts out of our groins?

Pushing my bike with one hand on that bar deeper into the foliage I recalled how my little pee pee stuck out every time I undressed for Father Steven and stood between his legs. A stiff pee pee at age ten was only a

curiosity to which I had yet to attach any real significance. I saw no connection then between being undressed, the magic stiffness, the sensation of being touched and what adults said was sex.

I relinquished my bike against a tree, humiliated by these memories. I couldn't believe I'd been so stupid as to stand in front of a priest while I had a boner. What self-respecting adolescent wouldn't shudder at recalling an ignorance so great and pitiful, and especially how he'd actively participated in the process? True, I'd only had a pee pee then, and nothing "dirty" had taken place, but how did I know that, having once come so close to joyfully committing one of the greatest sins, I would know how to resist when larger, stronger temptations assailed me? The growth of my pee pee into a respectable cock in the years since alerted me to the developing peril. What started off life with me as an innocent garden snake was becoming an anaconda, capable of choking the life out of me. Sometimes my grip would seek to subdue it, but that usually resulted in something other than the defeat of the engorged and rampant serpent.

I emerged from the hiding place I'd found for my bike. I would shed all these confusions in the cool river water. Since moving north, nature had become my opiate. I could lose myself in its sounds, the sight of frogs peeping out along the banks and water bugs darting across the surface of a pool. I pushed through a thick, wild growth of large leaf aster and bunchberries, with ferns over-topping them. Thimbleberries, just beginning to bear fruit, crowded out almost everything else in places, and all, of course, was topped by scrub willows and alders. Closer to the river jewelweed and fireweed in bloom thinned out, leaving portions of riverbank exposed as ragged beaches. I was about to step onto one of these when suddenly I spotted another boy near the bridge abutment.

The boy was naked. He'd been swimming. I could see he was a couple of years older than I, for there was a luxuriant bush at his groin and his torso was already well muscled. He had dark hair and tanned, almost olive-colored skin.

My first reaction was curiosity, then anger. This boy had invaded my private place, which, of course, was ridiculous: I didn't own the pool beneath the bridge, and he'd arrived first. My feet had stopped just short of a water-worn aspen log that rested at the boundary between beach and foliage. I would use it to get a better view of my competition before withdrawing, for it was obvious the boy hadn't seen me yet. I planted my tennis shoes on the log and leaned forward for a better look.

Then everything happened very quickly. I started to slip. In trying to regain my balance, I lunged backwards, but that only resulted in my

feet flying off the log. I twisted on the way down, but in so doing fell heavily with my chest against an up-jutting branch of another log. After that I don't remember anything for a bit, until I came to with someone speaking to me.

"Hey, kid, you OK? Can you hear me, kid? Say something if you're OK."

"IHMMMMH!" I tried desperately to suck some wind back into me.

It was the boy, of course, still just as naked, but bending over me with friendly concern.

I dragged out another "IHMMMM" of sucked air, perhaps a little less desperate.

"I figured you were a moose or something when you crashed down over here. Scared hell out of me! Then I saw your sneakers sticking out like you were dead. You a little better now?"

"YIHMMMM."

"Want to sit up? Here, I'll help you." The boy grabbed my hand and tugged me upright until I was able to sit, weaving slightly. "Maybe you ought to stay like this for a while. I think you just knocked your wind out."

"YEEHHHHH." Slowly I could feel myself regaining control of my breathing. "Ohhh-Kay, I'm OK."

I felt like a prize fool and realized I must have looked pretty stupid. "Take your time," the boy said. "We got all day, an' I won't leave or nothing until I know you're going to be all right."

Had I been alone I probably would have cried from the pain, but with the older boy beside me I had to act brave. And I was enormously grateful. After all, he'd have every right to be angry having had someone scare the hell out of him when he was bare-ass. But his nakedness actually seemed a matter of indifference to him.

"Let me check your arms and stuff. Tell me if anything hurts or feels broke. I broke an arm once, and it feels real weird, let me tell you."

He ran his hands over my arms, testing gently, then my legs, then the back of my head where his fingers did a slow search, combing soil and twigs out of my hair as he did. "Can't find anything here but a growing bump," he said. "The skin's not broke. Pull your shirt up – never mind, I'll do it. Bend forward a little so I can see, OK?"

He tugged the bottom my shirt up to my neck and continued his examination. "Some bruises, but nothing too bad," he said, almost to himself. His hands – big rough-looking hands, I now observed – were remarkably gentle. "I think your shirt's in worse shape than your back.

Here's where your wind got knocked out." He touched a tender place just above my solar plexus.

I jumped. "Ow! You're right."

"The way you went down, though, I bet it's your ass that's in the worst shape."

"I know," I said. "I gotta sit on it."

He smiled. His brown eyes were full of concern – and something else which only much later would I learn to recognize as the beginnings of arousal. "I think you're gonna live, kid. You wanna try getting up now? We'll go down to the water and you can clean off. My dad always says cold water keeps injuries from getting black or swollen. You came here for a dip, I bet, didn't you?"

I nodded.

"You already know why I was here, so I guess we can be buddies and share our bare-ass beach together, OK?"

I nodded, then added, "Sure."

"Get up when I pull, OK?"

"You'll catch me if I start to fall?"

"Yep. No problem."

He led me to where he had discarded his clothes and had me sit on his jeans. I sank slowly, grateful I could place my butt on something reasonably soft.

"Here, give me your T-shirt."

"Why?"

"You'll see."

He waded into the stream and started vigorously washing my shirt. I watched his muscles move in dappled sunlight. How I admired his ease at being naked. The sun began to warm my shocked flesh.

He returned from the water, penis swaying from side to side with each step. In the privacy of my room I'd often sent my own organ on trips from thigh to thigh prior to its getting stiff and springy. Now I dropped my eyes in embarrassment, only to look up when his feet came into view and see his penis only inches from my nose.

"You wanna do it or should I?" he asked.

"Do what?"

"Your cuts."

"Do the ones on my back."

What is this mystery of water? The church blesses it, and Father Steven sprinkled it on my naked body. Now I felt it soothing my cuts and bruises, and perhaps, too, at the hands of the boy, my spirit as well.

He ended up sponging the cool river water gently on *all* my cuts and bruises, then sat down cross-legged next to me on the unoccupied portion of his jeans. I moved to make room for him, then winced at the pain. He smiled.

"Not funny," I said. "Hurts too much to be funny."

"If you saw your face you'd think it was funny. But you're better. You might even live, kid. And you got me to thank: Doctor Bare-ass."

"You don't have a black bag," I said.

"Nope. Just a couple of nuts in a sack."

"Oh." I blushed. Obviously I was out-gunned.

"You're from town, huh." It was a statement, not a question.

I nodded.

"You know where I'm from?"

I shook my head.

"Trailer camp. I figured you were from town right away. Your dad works in one of the offices?"

I nodded again. "He's the inventory planner," I said with some pride.

"You didn't know I was from the camp, huh? Aren't you scared being with one of the tough camp kids?"

I shook my head. "I'm just glad you were here, that's all."

"Well," he said with a slow, languid smile, "I guess naked kids all look pretty much the same, but when we pull our duds back on you'll know who's from where right away."

He was right when he said I was afraid of trailer camp kids: they had bad reputations. The camp lay outside the limits of our safe, if socially stratified, town. There lived the migrants brought in to do short-term bull and muscle work. They brawled; the men were drinkers and woman chasers. Their kids were exposed to things a good Catholic boy wasn't even supposed to know about. But with that same Catholic upbringing had come, with me, a tendency to side with the accused, the maligned, those denied full access to God's love. I may have been an incipient reformer, but, sitting beside this strange older boy who had, even more strangely, been so nice to me, I was also just a bit afraid of getting my rear creamed.

He drew me out of my doubts by teasing me in the friendliest way possible: "You wanna take a swim with me or spend the afternoon pressing my jeans?"

The crisis, if there had been, was over. I said, "Sure," with all the enthusiasm of a smaller boy responding to the valued attentions of a bigger kid.

"You better get strippin' then."

I stood, a bit unsteadily, and pulled down my pants, stepped out of them with my feet still on his jeans, using them as a mat. I was afraid the boy would find my body awfully puny in comparison with his. But fair was fair. If it was a bare-ass beach you went bare-ass. I began folding my pants into fourths.

"You always do that with your clothes in the woods?" he asked, amused.

"Well, I..."

"If it was me, I'd take my sopping T-shirt and lay it flat in the sun so it would look half-way decent when I got home." He gave me a sly smile. "I have a mother, too, and mine would kill me if I wrecked a new shirt like that. Hell, she'd have a fit if she knew I was standing here bare-balls having a social visit with a management brat. My mom's real big on doing things proper." He idly slid a hand to his nuts and scratched the loose skin. "She wouldn't like me doing this either, but at least you didn't catch me in holey underwear with skid marks, right?"

I responded with my best dumb expression.

"Skid marks. You know, the brown streaks in your skivs if you don't wipe good. Doesn't your mom give you the old rigamarole about having clean shorts in case you're in an accident?"

All too true. Catching on at last, I nodded.

"Well, you gonna drop them things and get your ass in the water, or you gonna stand there and think about it some more?"

That got me moving. The shorts went quickly, and then I was naked, hoping I wouldn't seem like too much of a little kid, and that he wouldn't make fun of my penis because it wasn't as developed as his. That summer it had achieved about the magnitude of half a hot dog, and each side of where it was rooted there were two clumps of brown curls with a faint line of new growth above starting to bridge the gap on my otherwise arid groin.

"So... you got one, too, huh?" the boy said.

Again I gave him my "dumb" response.

"You got a leech stuck between your legs, like I do. Only mine's been stuck on me longer, so it's bigger. Get it, kid?"

"Oh." I smiled uncertainly.

"Turn around so I can inspect your rear."

I obeyed.

"It's a little red, is all. You're going to be fine, Muscles."

"Muscles?" I said.

"Well, you never told me your name, so I got tired of saying kid all the

time. You got a name?"

"Harry." I put out my hand which, with both of us in the nude, must have looked pretty silly.

But the boy simply took it and said, "I'm Dom. Dominic Victor Williams, one of the few kids you'll ever meet who's all first names. Names are a pain, aren't they? Like calling you Harry. I'm the one with all the hair, but they gave you the name. Weird, huh?"

I was beginning to catch on to Dom's way of joking and wising off, but without being nasty. I started toward the water, moving carefully because the soles of my feet were still unaccustomed to barefoot life.

"Hang on, Harry. Before I let you in my pool you got to put that T-shirt out in the sun. I'm not going to be responsible for saving your ass only to have your mother bust it because you messed up with your clothes."

"Oh, yeah, I forgot."

The pool under the bridge couldn't have been more than four feet deep at its middle. Once in, Dom hunkered down in the water, drops shining in his plastered-down hair.

"Duck your head," he ordered.

Again I gave him my dumb look.

"Under the water. You aren't swimming if you don't get your head wet."

I sank under and popped up with a smile.

"Too bad this pool ain't bigger and deeper, but it's better than nothing. The worst thing it's so far from camp. It takes me an hour and a half. I even have to cut through part of the mine property and hope the guards don't spot me. But it's better than sitting home and being bored."

"The town beach is pretty boring."

"At least you got one. The trailer camp ain't got nothin'. Sure, a laundromat where you can see people fight or even screw once in a while, but there's nothin' fun, not even the Rec building, because that's a total wreck."

"You should have things to do," I said earnestly. "You could come to the town beach. It's public. It doesn't even cost anything."

"Well, those jeans you were using for a rug aren't the kind of thing town people want to have on their nice beach. I didn't see you around school last year."

"No, we came up in June."

"So you don't know the score yet. You will in a few weeks. If you're from the trailer camp you're not welcome. They don't even like the idea of us going to your school, but they gotta let us in because it's the law."

"I'd let you come onto the beach," I said indignantly. "I don't see why they should treat you different from me. It's not fair."

"Would you protect me if bad people came after me, Harry?" he asked sarcastically.

"Well, at least I'd try," I said, hurt.

"Hey, I'm sorry. I bet you would, too. Look, we'll just be water babies, OK?" Dom swished his arms back and forth, making waves in the little pool. "The trouble with squatting like this is you get tired. Let's try laying out on those underwater rocks."

We found a place in the shallows where we could squeeze together as if on a lounge. I was soon wedged nicely into a comfortable position with a smooth rock on one side of me and Dom on the other.

He continued talking, wise-cracking, while I just enjoyed the feel of the water and his body against mine: warmth and chill combined. A faint memory of priestly hands failed to intrude upon my pleasure.

"You're shorter than me, Hair, but other than that this is fine. I could use your head for an arm rest."

"Go ahead."

I was happy to be used. I was even happier when he dropped his arm off my head and onto my shoulders, exposing more of my skin to that sensuous feel of warmth and coolness. In fact I was fast forgetting all about my injuries. I was so content I didn't even notice at first that Dom was idly fingering my upper arm, as though testing my flesh, over and over.

"It's weird the way you feel under water," he said.

"I know." We seemed to be thinking the same thing.

"Yeah. You're warmer than the water, but the outside part is just as cool, until I press. Then it's warm. It's a weird feeling, and your skin's super slippery at the same time, like you were a warm-blooded fish."

"Fish?" I objected. The last thing I wanted to remind Dom of was a slimy old carp or something.

"Well, try if you don't believe me. Here..."

I probed his arm with my fingers. "Geez," I said. He was right. I pressed, probed, stroked to see how his flesh changed in temperature and texture. "You're warm and cool, but your arm is all one big muscle, and I feel little parts of it tense and relax when I move my fingers."

"That's 'cause it tickles!" Dom laughed.

We swiveled back into our old position, only this time Dom dropped his arm behind my back. His hand now cupped my hip, his fingers gently stroking it as if it were a sleeping puppy.

It was about then that I began to suspect something else was going down with Dom. My pleasure and excitement had given me a boner, one I didn't even realize I had until I slyly checked it with my hand. In the cool flow of water I'd hardly been able to distinguish one nice feeling from another. Now I was glad the water came well up over my bone. I wasn't sure what Dom would do if he caught me with it.

"This is nice, huh?" Dom said, patting my hip.

"Really nice! Better than the town beach."

"No crowds, right?" His hand on my hip nudged me toward him in a kind of one-armed hug. "Boy, I bet I could almost reach around your waist."

"You're tickling!" I said.

Now I felt very young again. I was wiggling and giggling while Dom remained still, holding me down. When his fingers probed toward my groin I was glad I had a bone: sticking straight up into the current, my penis was out of his reach.

But not so my few pubic hairs, which, even wet, acted like motion receptors, like cat whiskers. I wondered idly if nature put hair on us down there so we could tell if hands were invading our groins.

"You're tickling!" I repeated, this time louder.

"That so?!"

Dom's other arm came around me, and before I knew what was happening he'd slid me over me onto his lap and was holding me fast with both hands on my upper chest. I let my legs spread out beside his into a V.

"There," he said, "now I can really tickle you if you don't behave."

There is a standard kid response to a tickling which you don't really want to stop but which you also need to keep from going too far. "I'll pee if you tickle me too much," I warned.

"You mean you might wet on me?"

"Yup."

"Gee, and here I thought you were a nice kid."

"I am."

"But go ahead – you might give some minnow its first hot shower."

Very lightly he was tickling my throat, my nipples and the sides of my chest.

"Don't! Don't!" I giggled.

"Well, you were gonna wet on me. You think I should let you get away with that?"

"Sure do."

"You can't go around peeing on guys that saved your life."

"But you're wet already!"

Once I got used to his tickle-attack game I settled down to enjoy it. I stimulated new attacks by saying deliberately provocative things, and Dom led me along with forays of his own. I gradually became aware of a hard part of him pressing at the base of my spine. I wondered if it really was what I suspected, but the lower part of my back couldn't be sure.

"You're a nice kid, aren't you, Harry?"

"Yes! Yes! I'm real nice. I'll be nicer than anyone! You'll kill me if you keep tickling. I'll be nice!"

"You better. If you sit still I won't tickle you, but you gotta stay still, OK?"

"I'll be good! I'll be good!" I chanted.

"But you gotta be *extra* good or I'll really let you have it."

Tired now, and grateful for the break, I nodded, happy to stop with the game for a while. Dom's hands on my sides relaxed, then slid down until he was holding me lightly about the waist.

"You're an OK kid, Harry," he said. "You're going to be kind of a masher, too, when you get big."

"Masher?" The only kind of masher I knew was used on cooked potatoes.

"You'll be knockin' 'em dead with looks and a good build. You're gonna fill out nice, I bet."

"Oh," was all I could think to say. I wondered what it was like to be older like Dom and be able to guess things about other people's future looks. One of Dom's hands slipped onto the top of my thigh and began slowly moving back and forth. I didn't stop him, and before long his other hand was doing the same tiling to my other leg.

His fingers made warm furrows in my flesh; his thumbs tucked deeper and deeper into my tender inner thighs, causing me to gasp a little with shock and pleasure. It felt so good I couldn't possibly protest, so it's hardly surprising that I almost flew straight up out of the water when first one of his thumbs and then the other made passing contact with my scrotum.

"EEEEHHHH!" I rasped. How similar was that sound to my painful gasp for breath when Dom first came to my rescue!

"Like that?" Dom's voice was suddenly conspiratorial and knowing.

I couldn't answer. The feeling zipping through me was too strong for words. I simply squirmed, wiggled my butt, unaware of what my innocent motion must have been doing to him. It was a response of pure

animal pleasure.

"Then you'll like this, too."

I couldn't imagine things getting much nicer than they were. Of course I hadn't been thinking about my penis or I'd have known better. My dick had gone hard and soft a number of times lying there in the water with Dom – or at least I thought it had. Now it was thoroughly hard, and suddenly I felt the warmth and pressure of Dom's right hand coming around it.

"There it is," he said with a quiet chuckle. "I figured it was poked up when I didn't find it before. This is no dinky little worm you got here, kid. You're really hung for being so young, you know?"

I was too stunned to answer. Dom's hand was surely no priestly hand. He held my penis – the all of me, it seemed, my whole nervous system – in a firm, assaying grip. This was nothing like what I'd done with other boys when we felt or compared our things. That had been uncomplicated, childish curiosity.

I was completely unprepared for what happened next. Dom started moving his hand under the water, and the thing I'd peed out of all my life was suddenly putting out feelings so intense I was afraid they might actually be fatal. It was like a super nova exploding in my groin. It was as though my spine was plugged into an electric box and the pit of my tummy was on a roller-coaster dive.

"YYiiiee," I sputtered, shrieked even, trying to get up, pushing with my hands against Dom's hips. But Dom held me fast, and his hand never stopped stroking my penis.

After a moment I decided I wasn't actually dying. I settled back down in the water against Dom's body.

And in so doing I did the right thing for him. In rising, I'd allowed his penis to spring up, too, and now when I sat back I felt it sliding against the buried root of my dick, shoving up as far as the base of my scrotum.

"That's better!" Dom breathed into my ear. "Close your legs on it and I'll really feel good."

I obeyed. It felt nice. I didn't know why it felt nice, but it did.

"Hold them tighter when I push, OK?" There was an urgency now in Dom's voice.

I tensed my thighs as tight as I could and gave myself up to the two wonderful feelings of Dom's penis thrusting along the sensitive skin between my ballsack and asshole and the fire Dom's hand was stoking in my penis and veining out from its tip all over my body. A shudder went

through me, then another, stronger one, then a third. I didn't know if I could survive much more of this, and I suddenly reached for Dom's hand and pulled it off my penis. I dissolved and went limp.

"Shit!" Dom cried. He was suddenly mad at me. "Great time for you to get off and leave me with nothing to go on!"

I hadn't gotten off him. What was he talking about? I started to rise, but was so wrung out I simply bumped wetly back onto his lap.

"Nice try," Dom said flatly, "but you gotta do better than that, Harry kid."

"Huh?"

"I mean it was a nice try but it didn't work. I ain't got far to go anyways, so how about you doin' me as good as I done you?"

Without waiting for an answer, Dom began to turn me around. "Sit facing me like this. There. Stay out on my knees so you can work my tool. Put your hand around it... like that... there. Now move it like I'm showing you. OK. Yeah. Keep doin' that, now."

Dom had wrapped his hand around mine and was showing me the stroke he wanted. I wasn't sure what I was doing, but I followed Dom's motions, and he seemed to like it.

"You keep that up, by yourself, I'll rub yours a little more, too – if you can stand it." He found my cock and then said with surprise, "Hey, you're still hard. Must be nice to bounce back that quick. I'd be wiped."

"Wiped?" I hadn't the faintest idea what he was talking about.

Distracted by what he was doing to my penis, my concentration flagged. "Don't try no loose grip now, Hair! Jeez! I'd go goofy if you let go! No dragging it out. I been waitin' too long. Keep the grip right there. Just like that. Yeah. Tight. Umm!"

I was hardly aware of what Dom was doing. All my attention was focused on what *I* was doing to him. I was actually holding somebody else's boner! He was actually letting me – making me – stroke it!

The realization made me giddy. His cock was so big it seemed I ought to be using two hands on it. He said one day mine would be just as huge! That made it easy to imagine it was my own huge dick I was pulling on and that was giving me all these new and wonderful feelings.

Settled now, face to face, with me at the right distance over his knees in the water, we had at last found an easy and natural way of masturbating one another. He lay with his legs ramrod straight and stiff before him and I straddled his legs with mine spread wide. I liked the pressure he exerted upwards. I loved watching his face make weird expressions.

Tingling, burning tickles seemed to be going off all over the place in me. I was grinning like a fool. My tongue wagged in my open mouth. I delivered little laughs, giggles and hoots. But the cool water masked everything so I couldn't really observe what Dom was doing to me, or me to him.

I could have kept this up forever, or until I konked out asleep, but I realize now how different it must have been for Dom. I felt him getting tenser every minute. His penis seemed to expand, and his face had gone from being simply goofy to looking as though he was in some sort of race, rushing to cross the finish line. He clamped his hand over mine, finally, and began to move it in a more deliberate, steady and rippling way. I glanced down for a moment at the commotion we were making in the water, and when I looked back at his face it actually scared me. He seemed to be in agony. His cheeks puffed out, then his mouth flung wide for a scream that never came, rather a low, pulsing moan that I was afraid meant he was having some kind of epileptic fit. Then, before I panicked, his face changed again. Still racked with tension, a smile crept around the corners of his mouth, as though he was grinning between waves of pain. It reminded me of the way kids sometimes feel pain and mix it with laughter when they wrestle hard.

I was so worried about whether Dom was OK that it came as a big surprise when he grabbed me and pulled me onto his chest in such a hurry that I banged my knees on the rocks.

"Ow!" I cried.

"OK, sorry. Turn around and settle down on my lap, the way you were before – that's right – 'cause I just want to sit here for a while and enjoy it, little buddy."

I was glad for this warmth under me, for the river was beginning to feel chilly.

"Let's get it right between your legs again, Harry," he said, "but don't clamp on it or anything, 'cause I'm real sensitive after shooting the moon." He wrapped his arms around my chest. I felt his hips lift and subside under me in slow, comfortable waves.

"I thought you were going to pass out," I said.

"Felt like it, too. You're pretty good at this for such a green kid." He pressed his chin into the junction of my neck and shoulder.

"Yikes!" Dom had discovered a new connection between the hollow of my neck and my penis, which now sprang again into erection.

"It's OK to wiggle like that," he said, "but don't get too carried away."

With his semi-hard penis sliding loosely between my thighs, I decided to do a little exploring of my own. I began playing with my rod as if it were a shift lever, pushing it one way and pulling it another, throwing in some pumping motions I had just learned from Dom.

"Cripes," he said, surprised, "you still at it? What you doin' now?"

"Nothing."

"I bet." He laughed, and his right hand dropped to check me out. "Kid, you're really something. First I wondered if you'd ever get homy, and now I don't know if you'll ever quit. What's it take to get this thing to go down? You like this all the time, or only until you shoot, like me?"

"It's just real hard, is all, and it's like that from all the rubbing you did to it." I put as much blame on him as I could, at the same time trying to cover up my ignorance.

"Don't you go down after you shoot off?"

"Shoot off? You mean that weird feeling?"

"No, I mean shootin' off, the big shot, the old *I'm coming!* You're big enough to do that, I think. Stuff comes out your cock, doesn't it?"

"Of course! Bathroom stuff, like everybody when they take a leak."

Dom's hand explored my penis, then my scrotum. "Well, your equipment seems hot to trot. You mean the only thing you ever spouted with this equipment so far is piss?"

"Well, gosh...!" What else could be coming out of my pee pee?

Dom was silent for a moment, then he got up, pulling me to my feet, too. "I want to check this out, Harry. I figured you'd had your come, just like me, but maybe you ain't got that far yet, and that's what I want to see."

Standing, I felt a bit wobbly, but I figured that was from being in the water so long. My boner, like a twig stuck on me below my navel, didn't embarrass me: Dom, after all, had told me I had a decent one.

He waded over to where we had left our clothes. I picked my way carefully behind him, noticing the way the cheeks of his butt tensed and dimpled as he stepped from rock to rock. His tanned body fascinated me, even his wet, hairy legs.

We sat down on the bank to dry off. Dom inspected me carefully. "How old are you, anyway?"

"Almost thirteen." I was fudging by a quarter of a year.

"I'm pretty sure I was making juice at that age. My mom used to get pretty honked over the way I'd douse my sheets. After I started beating off regular that wasn't a problem any more, 'cause I'd catch it."

I still hadn't the faintest idea what Dom was talking about, but I

enjoyed the attention, and his willingness to take me into the mystery of penises and the fine feelings I now knew they could give.

"When you play with it, nothing ever spits out?"

I shook my head.

"At your age it would be kind of thin, but you ought to at least get a few drops of milky-looking water, or a blob or two of creamier goo."

"No." Then I added, "I don't really play with it. Not the way we did."

"I guess I didn't pay good enough attention to you, Hair, Buddy. I figured you were at the same place I was. I mean, I didn't think a kid would go along with me at all if he didn't want what I wanted. I figured you were having a good time gettin' your nut off, just like me."

"I thought it was fun," I said, feeling rather stupid.

"Hell, just dinkin' yourself ain't fun. The real *fun* is when you pop off."

"I liked it," I said lamely. I was suddenly worried that I'd goofed by keeping my hard for so long. It was still up, pressed against my belly.

"Well, it's gettin' late," Dom said.

He stood up, stripping water from his body with his hands, and started pulling on his clothes. Now he *did* look like a trailer camp kid. It sent a kind of thrill through my stomach to see him in his rough clothes. I felt proud of myself, and somehow wiser.

"You come here lots?" I asked.

"Not too much. It's a long way for me, but if I'm in the mood for being by myself and it's a nice day for swimming I'll make the trip." Dom looked at me sharply. "Why? You think it might be nice to do this again?"

"I was just wondering..."

"Sure, just like I was wondering the same thing. I bet you'd like to get another tingle on that thumper of yours, huh?"

I squirmed and blushed. He looked at me with faint amusement. "Maybe," I admitted.

"You'd be strange if you didn't. Felt good, right? So why not enjoy it when you can? You're all goofed up and complicated, like most town kids. You guys never just out and say what's on your mind. You go round and round and miss it all the time. Heck, Hair, I'll come out and meet you again, but you gotta agree. How's tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow would be fine."

"You'll like tomorrow a whole lot more." He knelt and ruffled my wet hair. "I'll be here. Two o'clock."

We shook on it, as though sealing a bargain. Then he sprang to his feet and trotted over to the bridge abutment, scrambled up it and, after a quick wave and a grin, was gone.

I don't remember very well how I felt bicycling home. I know I was tired. I suspect I'd put everything that needed examination into my mental "waiting for processing" file. I was a good procrastinator. Why think out today what you can put off till tomorrow? Especially when tomorrow meant going back to the river for more adventure and more pleasure and perhaps answers to some of the questions I'd been too embarrassed to put to my new friend. I suspected, too, that I had all the time in the world to learn from Dom – the rest of the summer at the very least. And he went to the same school I'd be in come September.

What I do remember is my dream that night: Dom doing me in the water, and that turning into Father Steven sprinkling river water on me from above. As I bicycled back the next afternoon I wondered if priests, like God, could see what you were up to hundreds of miles away.

I arrived first. I stripped off my shirt and lay down in a grassy spot where I could keep an eye on the river. Soon Dom came scrambling down the bridge abutment.

"Whew!" he said, "I'm all sweaty. You been in yet? No. What you waitin' for, Hair? Let me see your bruises."

We stripped. He looked me over, turning me around, playing Doctor Bare-balls again. Then we waded out into the river to cool off and wash away the sweat and dust from our individual journeys.

Dom said he thought he had a hard coming on. "Let's go closer to the bridge so we can't be seen. I didn't mind fooling around in the water yesterday, because anyone driving by couldn't tell what we were doing, but I don't want to get into anything heavier where some passing truck could scope us out."

We crawled from the water onto a pile of large boulders set to stabilize the bridge.

"Lie out here," Dom said. "I'll do you first, OK?"

I nodded and swallowed. My mouth felt dry. The boulder we were on was only about three feet square, but that was enough for my back and rear to rest on. I let my head fall in a gap between two smaller rocks and my parted legs droop down toward the water.

Dom crouched between them.

"You ready?" he said.

"Yes."

"Remember I told you yesterday you'd like today a lot more?"

"Yes."

"OK. Here goes."

The day before everything had happened under water, and that had masked and confused the source of all the sensations. It was if my whole body had been mysteriously manipulated into freaky states like dying and ascending into heaven, or something like that.

Now the feeling was dramatically different. My legs were comfortably spread. I could see everything: Dom's hand on me and all the rest of his nude body. Seeing was knowing, and knowing made the feeling enormously sharper. There was absolutely no doubt in my mind now that everything was centered in those few movable inches of rumply skin wrapped around my upstanding and wood-hard penis.

And so, at the tutelage of Dom, I discovered sex, as distinct from fooling around.

Dom took my penis in his rough-but-gentle hand and started working the skin up and down. My mouth opened wide. I felt like pushing my groin higher and higher to make things easier for Dom, but I didn't have the strength. I was aware of funny little human sounds coming from somewhere around us; Dom didn't seem to be making them, but could it really be me producing all those chirps and incoherent moans?

"See, told ya!" Dom said. "Now you're gettin' into it."

I wanted to say something like, "Well, you'd better stop, because I don't know if I can stand all this weirdness much longer," but what came out was probably more like the onomatopoeia you see at tense moments in comic strip balloons.

"Your face," Dom said. "Christ, this is a fuckin' gas to watch you get wracked up!"

Now Dom was stroking himself, too. His penis, relaxed only a moment ago, had sprung up to a ruddy bludgeon, and it was undergoing hand and finger transits similar to mine. I shivered, although I wasn't cold. It was as though Dom's hand was pulling strings in me that made my arms and legs and neck do twitchy things over which I had no control.

"Now you'll see," Dom said, going at me with more vigor. And in a blink, something snapped in me. Gasping like a fish, I sat half up.

What he did next absolutely fried my young mind. It wasn't the kind of thing a conventional Catholic boy is prepared for. In a lunge, Dom replaced his hand with his mouth.

I'd have run away if I could, from that feeling I was scared might be fatal, but after sitting up I couldn't further move for all the spasms that were

high-jumping through my body.

"Uuhhh, uuhhh!" I gasped, pulling in air. The hot tunnel of Dom's mouth – wet, slippery, warm, sucking and tonguing on me – was sweeter than his hand had ever been. And suddenly I realized the feeling in my dick was changing, from wanting more and being afraid to the profoundest satisfaction. It was a completely new feeling, so indescribably sweet all my fears vanished in a great ecstatic sigh.

It was a dazed boy who watched Dom pull his face away from my groin and wipe his mouth with the back of his hand.

"I felt the first one between my fingers," he said. "Almost like a kick." He grinned, moving up beside and resting his head on an elbow. "I felt all the shots go through you, but I'm just about positive nothing came out. It would have been biggest in the first, the one you did in my hand. I didn't taste any of it when the other bolts came, either, so I guess you're still a little early. What did it feel like, anyway?"

"Oh... Uh... Feel?" I was still quite incoherent.

"Sure as shit looked like a good one. It's given me a horn like you wouldn't believe. I'd have you finish me off, but I think you're still too spazzy. So I'll do it. You watch. Here. Turn on your side and put your head on my shoulder."

With his left hand, he drew me against him. I snuggled down on his chest. I felt his cheek in my hair. "You smell like a wet puppy," he mused. With his right hand he started to work on his tool, sliding the loose skin up and down, back and forth. Soon there was an increase in tempo, and his body went tense. "Now!" he gasped at last, and a white ribbon shot out of his cock tip. It plashed down on his chest, just above his belly button, followed by lesser squirts and finally a lazy flow which dripped off of Dom's slowing thumb-knuckle.

"There," Dom said, when he'd regained his calm. "That's the stuff worth going after."

I was so awed by what had happened, first to me and then to Dom, that I wasn't focused when he started waving his spermy hand under my nose. It had a slightly acidic scent, like some exotic fruit, more tart than sweet. I certainly didn't want anything from another boy's pee hole getting on my skin, so I pulled back, making a face.

"That stuff won't hurt you," Dom said. "You can't run away from it when it's yours. Hell, my buddy and me used to blow one another all the time a few years ago. Beats whacking off, only I pretty much gave up blowing since then." Dom looked closely into my eyes. "You're strange, Harry. Here I stuffed your cock in my mouth so you'd feel good, and you give me a

dirty look 'cause I show you up close a little of my own good stuff. Boy, some friend you are!"

"I.. I wasn't ready for it," I tried to explain. "All I saw was your hand shoved in my face."

"Yeah, right." Dom sounded unconvinced.

We lay beside each other in silence for almost a minute, then Dom got up and waded into the river and washed himself off. When he came back he was smiling. Dom seemed to be the kind of boy who could never be out of sorts for very long.

"Did you like what I did to you?" he asked.

That was an easy enough question to answer. "Sure," I said.

"What would you do for me in return?"

I wasn't prepared for that question. I tried to deflect it by saying, "I did what you wanted. I thought you had as much fun as me."

"Yeah, it was nice, but I did more than you. I liked it yesterday when you tried to sit on it in the water. That was pretty good. For a second there I thought you'd really surprise me and take it up the ass. Did it feel good when my cock was sliding around between your legs and around your crack?"

I thought back. "Yeah," I said honestly.

"You ever have anything back there before?"

More thought produced a "No."

"Ever had an enema."

"Yeah, a long time ago, when I was a kid."

"Didn't hurt, did it?"

"Don't think so."

"Well, that's all it's like. Like having an enema."

"Ha! Your dick's bigger than an enema thing."

"Yeah, an' your butt's bigger than it was, so that's no problem."

"Is too!" I tried to picture Dom's great big penis forcing its way into my tiny hole.

"I bet you make turds bigger than my cock is around," Dom said. My face must have dropped, because he pounced back. "See? Knew it. Can't fool me that way, Harry."

"But it..." My voice trailed off.

"I know. Sounded creepy to me, too, when this guy told me about it. You think it can't be done, but it can, and it feels pretty OK when it happens. Kinda feels like you're taking a long crap, only better."

"I dunno."

"Ever had anyone play with your butt?"

I made a face. "Heck no!"

"Bet I'd change your mind in two minutes. Besides, if you want to meet me here again, you have to be ready for things like a big boy and not like a dumb little prick-diddler."

"Meet me again?"

"Why not?" He put his hand on my hip. "Two minutes, you'll see."

"You won't do anything to hurt?"

"Promise. My word. All I'll do is fool with your butt and you can see if you like it. OK? If it doesn't feel good then we forget the whole thing."

"Well... OK, but you gotta stop if I say."

He rolled me on my stomach, and then he started playing with my cheeks, rubbing, smoothing, tickling the globes that responded with easy pleasure. Trailing his fingers between them was especially nice. Certain places felt even better. It didn't even bother me that he used spit to make things smoother. It all felt good, not good in the way my boner did but in an entirely different way. I didn't go hard. It was more like everything back there was softening, getting ready, opening up, only the feelings were very misty and diffused.

Dom went on and on. He must have played with my butt for a half hour. I think I could have lain there all afternoon with him kneading and sliding and caressing me. The trick was simply to stop thinking about a butt's dirty part – what comes out of it.

"Well," Dom said when he stopped at last, "how'd you like it?"

I rolled over on my side and looked at him. "Kind of tickled," I said, "but it didn't feel bad or anything." I wasn't yet up to telling him I'd really liked it.

"You almost opened your door for me. I only put a little of my finger in. You feel it?"

"In?" I was amazed. "Your finger went in my butt?" I could recall some peculiar, new and strong sensations back there, and they hadn't been at all unpleasant.

"Yeah, just a little ways, like half-way up to my second knuckle, but it popped right in like it belonged."

"Geez!" I still couldn't believe it.

"Didn't hurt, right?"

I shook my head.

"So now you know."

"Wow!"

"Yeah. I told you."

"But *that thing* is a lot bigger than your finger!" His penis was up

again, and something slimy seemed to be coming out its tip. Mine, too, had gotten hard.

"And it's hot to trot, Hair. How about yours?"

"Uh, well..."

"Ever heard of an outside fuck?"

"No."

"Turn on your side. Shove your butt against me..."

"You're not going to try to put it in?"

"Not today. We'll talk about *that* tomorrow. OK?"

"Promise?"

"Would I shit you?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I wouldn't. I'm a nice guy. Outside, between your legs, like yesterday in the river. Only first you got to make it slippery."

I reached down toward the river to scoop up some water, but Dom stopped me. "No. From your mouth."

"I'm not... ready... to put it in my mouth."

"I know that, dummy! I mean put spit on it."

"Oh."

That wasn't so bad. I lubed up his cock as best I could, smoothing it down and feeling how slippery my saliva made the tip and the loose skin feel. Dom added more spit, and when he snuggled against my back his penis slid easily between my clamped-down thighs and started thrusting smooth as an eel back and forth.

"That's good, kid," he whispered into the back of my ear. "Keep it tight. Don't loosen up until I tell you, OK?"

"OK," I murmured.

What he was doing felt like a nice continuation of his playing with my butt, only this time a penis was giving me the massage. Then I felt slippery fingers coming around my own cock and pulling on it in lovely counter-rhythm to his own motion.

That motion got hard. His grip around my chest tightened. "I'm gettin' there," Dom whispered. "You anywhere near close?"

"Huh?" I said.

"The end," he said, exasperated. "Shooting the moon. Like last time."

"I... don't know."

"OK, sorry, but I gotta go off. Hold on. Clamp your legs tighter. There. That's good. Here I go..."

A shudder went through Dom's body, and a gasp, and more white milk was squirting out on my leg. This time I didn't dare object to it. Besides, it

wasn't really poison, was it? A kid wasn't about to the just from getting it on his outer skin!

I was sorry Dom was no longer pulling on my penis, which had felt good. He'd called me spazzy after that weird end feeling had gone through me the first time. I imagined he felt about the same way now, so I just lay there with his arm around me, feeling his slowing breath ruffle my hair and the white stuff tickle as it ran down my leg.

When he recovered, we both dipped in the river again, then crawled out to put on our clothes. All the while I was watching him, curious about everything he did and wore. I found myself imitating him – something of a feat, because in dressing I tended to be a dawdler.

"So you want to meet me here again tomorrow?" he said.

"Tomorrow?"

"Yeah, afternoon, same as this."

"I'm not sure." I explained that I always had to account to the powers that be at home, especially on Sunday. Often I had to run errands, cut grass, or simply be on display for a few minutes when visitors arrived.

Dom frowned. "It's either got to be tomorrow or the next day. We're pulling out on Tuesday."

I started at him, unbelieving.

"Dad's working construction on a new mill in Arizona, some copper mine, so we're out of here in a few days."

"You won't be in school?" I asked.

"Can't be here for school and in Arizona at the same time, can I?"

"Couldn't you stay if you wanted?"

Dom smiled, his mouth turning down at the edges. "You invitin' me? Better ask your ma first. Maybe she don't want a stranger with bad habits in her house."

"I don't think your habits are bad."

"She might. Besides, you hardly know me."

The central thing about being a kid is that you have no real control over your own life. Other people make decisions about you often without regard to any plans of your own and you're left to pick up the pieces as best you can. My feeling now was one of betrayal. "I thought you were going to be my friend!" I said.

"You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

"I thought we'd have at least the rest of the summer."

"Just a couple of days." He played with a twig, making patterns with it on the grass. "So, you going to be here tomorrow or what,

Harry?"

"I'll try. Honest. Can't we say tomorrow or the next day? Then we'll have a better chance. If either one of us doesn't show up tomorrow, we'll still have the day after."

"Yeah, I suppose."

"Both days?"

"Might as well," Dom said rather offhandedly. "It's going to be a long time before we get to Arizona, and I won't have nothin' or nobody to play with while we're on the road."

"So, both days?"

Dom smiled and gave me a playful punch on the shoulder. "Agreed." He pushed back his hair with his hands. "I better get my ass out of here and home, before the shift changes and the new guards start to prowl. The end of a shift is a good time to slip past, because all the patrols are getting ready to go and aren't in the mood to mess with a kid cutting through."

"And I have to ride back to town," I said, trying to make my trip as important as his.

After we parted I went to where I'd hidden my bike. Two days, I thought. Just two days to learn about putting penises in mouths, about what came out of boners when you were older and were "shooting the moon", about butts and what could go in them, and how it would feel. A kind of baptism Father Steven had perhaps lusted for but could never give. Just two days. I would make sure I was there. I would hide right after Mass so nobody could find me, hide my bike, too, and ride out right afterwards. I'd make sure I was at the river bridge both days, even if it meant sending my parents into panic.

When I wheeled my Raleigh racer out of the woods, Dom was already small in the distance, trotting along the edge of the dust-yellow road toward the mine's rail line that would take him back, through the guards, to the trailer camp.