

The Tenth
Acolyte Reader



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The Trouble With Michael

by Godefroy Davidovitch

"But my *being* a ped priest has never caused the diocese problems," Father Hughes told Bishop Bede. A paternal figure, the bald bishop reminded him of the venerable saint come-to-life, and their friendship, venerable too, had endured for nigh on eighteen years.

"Just be more discreet, Arthur. Americans like to think the worst these days." The bishop feared a resurrection of lawsuits arising from his friend's trysts involving certain parish altar boys, past-tense – with the O'Brien lad's parents instigating an initial investigation, present-tense.

Later in the vestry before Mass, Father Hughes genuflected, reflected; upon the bishop's words, upon yesterday's troubling incident.

Yesterday

"Can we practice the foot-washing, Father?" The words had come from Michael O'Brien's tongue, a delicious and downy blond-fuzzed lad. A Norman Rockwellesque boy, 12, nigh on 13, he was Father Hughes's current favorite. Michael knew the spiritual score of his plural sole, bare feet and toes, how they always cast a spell over the bespectacled priest, and so he'd often asked for this favor on one pretext or another. A foot-washing from Father Hughes was a special treat, a ritual like the Mass. "So you want to be ready for Holy Thursday then?" In the vestry behind the altar, it was almost an hour before Mass, maybe a half-hour before Eddie, Michael's erstwhile companion server, a handsome but apparently disinterested 13-year-old, was expected. Why not, Father Hughes decided then. "I'll be with you in a minute."

Dressed in his immaculate black-and-white surplice and cassock with his street clothes on underneath, Michael prepared a small wash-basin and a sponge, filled the basin, with several inches of tepid holy water, sat patiently on a stool until the priest knelt as if it pay homage to his feet. "I'm ready for you to *do them*, Father," the boy had said.

Today

Michael entered the vestry then in the flesh, interrupting the priest's playback reverie. "I didn't mean what happened yesterday," the boy apologized. "I guess Eddie did tell my mom."

"And your parents spoke to Bishop Bede."

"But I talked to my mom and dad afterwards, said it was me suggested we practice foot-washing, 'cuz I might get nervous in front of all those people on Holy Thursday, and that Eddie was wrong 'bout the other stuff happening."

"They believed you?"

"Yes. They're not mad at you any more, say it's just been a big ol' misunderstanding."

Father Hughes sighed, his breath escaping. He was relieved, greatly relieved, but the relief didn't last.

The boy was fidgeting, smiling a beatific smile, one expensive hightop scraping the other.

"I got something else we need to talk about though. And it's gonna be private too," Michael was feeling proud of himself. (There, I've really done it now, the boy mused.)

Be more discreet, Arthur. Against his better judgment, he invited the boy to the rectory after Mass; it had been years since he'd brought a boy to his room – for any reason – but he didn't know what Michael would choose to talk about, and he didn't want anything he might say to be overheard. With his back turned while he straightened the life-sized wooden crucifix on the vestry wall, Father Hughes also failed to notice Michael's peculiar actions upon leaving – smiling a deviant little smile and bouncing merrily upon the balls of his beautiful feet.

Yesterday

"C'mon, Father. Do my feet."

Michael's voice had been soft, insistent, like Catholics imagine the Devil's. Pausing momentarily, Father Hughes first stared at his tempter's hightops. Seizing the left, he caressed it, his hands lingering; he began unlacing, removing, and went on to the right. Soon he was confronted with the boy's filthy crew socks, white except for layers of accumulated dirt. Michael smiled his beatific smile; the socks just stank.

"Haven't changed them in a couple of days," the boy admitted.

"I can see that, smell that." Touching Michael's tender calf, he now peeled off each sock, baring the boy's dirty feet, sniffing each one all over

to savor its extraordinary combination of sweat, dirt, boy. Michael's feet possessed perfect arches and insteps, each one symmetrical; he had high-pitched ankles, extra-ticklish twin adipose pads bulging with baby-fat, broad, meaty toes with soft, tender skin concaved into interesting ridges on their undersides near each toe-base. The enticing fuzz of tiny downy hairs was just beginning to sprout from all of them below the nails; uncut, Michael's toenails caused Father Hughes to fantasize a wild child's.

He then sponged wet each of the boy's bare feet, cradling the edge of Michael's heel with his free hand, gently scrubbing the toes and the hollows between them...

After the sponge-bath, he carefully dried each foot, removing any excess moisture.

"They're still dirty, Father. You know what that means." Michael grinned, almost an evil leer, but, with his shrill voice prompting, forced Father Hughes to do *what he must do*. Bending his head as if in prayer, he began licking the boy's bare soles, using his tongue as a tickler, sucking each toe, his tongue snaking between...

"Use your teeth a little, too. I like it when you nibble."

Just then Eddie burst in on them, dressed in his street clothes, his cherubic altar boy's gear draped over a shoulder. "Jeez, that's sick. I *gotta* tell your mom 'bout this," Eddie screamed to Michael, exiting the vestry in a turnabout-tail run before either the priest or the barefoot boy could react or protest.

"Oops," Michael had exclaimed. "Sorry, Father."

Today

After Mass, Father Hughes dismissed his scheduled servers, Bobby and Brian, a pair of cute 13-year-old twins, dark-haired and down-fuzzed. Heading for the rectory, he expected to find Michael waiting for him on the vestibule; when the boy wasn't there he shrugged; maybe Michael hadn't come after all, or perhaps the housekeeper had let him in. So when he opened the unlocked door to his room, he wasn't shocked, only startled to find a beatific, smiling Michael leaning against a pillow, barefoot and with his knees up, his hightops and socks strewn on the floor beside the bed, his body *on* the bed.

"I wasn't going to bring this up," Michael said, "but I was undoubtedly traum-tized about what we did yesterday, Father."

"Undoubtedly."

Michael giggled, glancing towards the room's closet. Father Hughes didn't have a clue why.

"Okay, I understand. No more doing your feet."

Au contraire, my good père, Michael mused.

"Actually, I thought up something else. A little arrangement that'd fix everything, keep all we do from getting out."

"All we do? And what, pray tell, is this 'little arrangement' you have in mind?"

"We'll start each time with you licking my feet, but then... I gotta have you do me *all over*." (There, he'd actually *said* it!)

"Is that it?"

"Except for one little minor, unimportant detail you'll find out – uh, real soon." A chorus of giggles from the boy leaked out as he glanced again towards the closet.

(Hmm. Kids nowadays! He's blackmailing or testing me. I'll just have to call his bluff to find out which.)

"All right. Agreed."

"Agreed? Then you'd better lock the door, and, Father, could you turn around until I say so?"

Father Hughes complied, didn't believe Michael would actually...

"Locked."

"Okay." Father Hughes slowly swiveled, scanned the wall above his bed, saw the small wooden crucifix on the wall above his bed; scanning downward, saw the naked altar boys *on* his bed, Michael and Eddie, hands behind their heads, penises soaring towards heaven, both smiling little deviant smiles.