

*The Tenth*  
*Acolyte Reader*



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# Mr. Big

by Charles Graham

It had taken the man and the boy until mid-afternoon to reach the top of the pass, and it was while resting there in the warm sun that they had spotted the chamois – four of them, and one of considerable size – but the lateness of the hour and the difficulty of reaching them unseen had ruled out a hunt that day.

They had sat side by side in the shadow of a rock taking turns with the glasses. The animals were lying, unsuspecting, in a small grassy depression in a wide, open slope of shingle, enjoying the sun, watching the valley below.

The boy, Paul, wanted a crack at them now, no matter what. His greatest ambition was to shoot a trophy chamois. There one lay; he could see it; delay was intolerable: "He's a big fella, all right. I'm sure we could get to him."

"No way," said Jim. "They're all of half a mile away and they'd see us in the first hundred yards."

"They wouldn't see *me*. Bet you I could made it alone, to those rocks anyway." A hint at his older mate's larger size.

"And then what? The rocks are only half way."

"I'd nail him from there easy."

"Rubbish."

They wrangled on, but in the end Jim's experience had won. It was getting late, they had a camp to set up, the weather was set fair, they had a supply drop to organize. Better to continue the hunt properly another day than a long shot in failing light and a chammy scared into the next valley.

Paul didn't like it but he had to agree. He sat for a moment looking at Jim, his large brown eyes peering out from under a forelock of curly brown hair and a dirty woolen cap, showing that he had a mind of his own on the matter. Jim looked back: he had found he could watch Paul's face all day, any day.

"Okay. You're the boss. Let's go." And to the distant chamois, "See you later." The boy got up, pulled on his pack, shouldered the rifle, and they slipped quietly away, down the hill to their shelter by the river below.

Now it was nearly a week later: each day they had left their camp under a large overhanging rock slab and climbed, while it was still early dawn, high above the bush and mountain scrub into the grasslands, shingle and rock above. They had walked and searched, every day seeing chamois, but never Mr. Big and the Boys, as Paul had christened their first day's sighting.

If it wasn't Mr. Big, Paul wasn't going to shoot. Jim admired the boy's restraint, unusual for his age, but was getting edgy: the weather was breaking and they would not have much longer to look. Then their luck turned.

But we must go back a bit. Jim hadn't planned this trip with Paul, rather with Paul's much older brother Ben. Nor was it to have been a shooting trip, as both Jim and Ben preferred fishing.

Ben was an old acquaintance. Jim had first met him as a furiously bad-tempered fisherman hanging perilously over the river bank, trying to disentangle his line from a large assortment of vegetation. There had been a fish but it had gone, and together they had at last got all free.

They had spent the rest of the day together, fishing, had got on well, gone out together again a week or so later, and then settled into regular outings, first day trips, then weekends and occasional longer expeditions during the school holidays.

By seventeen, Ben's interest in fishing was under siege by girls, cricket and football, and Jim had seen less of him. Ben still called in from time to time for a beer and to keep Jim up to date on his achievements. The papers did that for sport, where Ben was something of a rising star, but didn't report on his love-life, which at that time, anyway, was as much ambition and imagination as achievement.

Sometimes Jim would benefit from a successful defense and an over-heated description of how close victory had been, and once or twice he had washed stained trousers.

"I dunno. Don't know what I'm doing wrong – everybody else is getting it."

"So they say, but how do you know?"

"Well, they are, they must be, they talk about it all the time."

"Look to the one who doesn't talk, or stick to Mary Five-finger."

"Come off it, I can do better than that: there are girls out there who like it, there've gotta be!"

"And what will that sort give you for a bonus?"

It was to Ben's credit, really: he was too straight-forward and honest to push in where he wasn't wanted, but eventually he did find a steady girl friend, Mary, and eventually they got married. Jim had moved away by then, but they had kept in touch and in due course he had heard about a baby, finally three babies, the death of Ben's parents in an accident and their move into the family farm, together with his much younger brother.

Then, about fifteen years after their first meeting, a letter had arrived from Ben: he had time to spare; why not repeat one of their most memorable trips, over the Talbot Pass and down the Macquarrie to the sea? Allow three or four weeks, take it slow, catch large trout in deep green pools. He had a mate who would put in a supply airdrop so they wouldn't have to carry too much, and Mary's brother would look after the farm. Why not?

Why not indeed, and now Jim was at the house. Mary had greeted him as though he had never been away, told him that Ben had a surprise for him, and ushered Jim into the living room. Ben was sitting there, leg up on a chair in plaster covered with kids' scribbles, surrounded by the racing pages, toys, coloring books, crayons, blankly watching TV.

"Good to see you, Jim. Mind if I don't get up?" They shook hands.

"What the hell happened?"

"Watch how you go – it's a minefield around here."

It turned out that Ben had stepped on a toy truck. It had moved on; he had flown up in the air and come down with a broken leg.

"The quack says I'm in cast for a few weeks yet, so it's all off for me. It's a bummer, but there it is. But you can take Paul if you like – he was coming anyway, roaring to go, in fact, and ever since I did this he's been moping around like something the cat brought up. He's been a real pain in the neck."

"Paul?"

"My kid brother. You met him, surely?"

"Oh, him – he was only a wee fellow."

"Well, he's bigger now, fifteen a couple of months ago, though you mightn't think it." Jim learned of the boy's determination to get a good chamois after all his father had told him about what they had seen on their trip years before. Paul was also, Ben claimed, a cracker shot with the triple two and knew his way around a camp. "I don't think he'll get up your nose, but it's your decision." Then, as an afterthought, "He'll turn the milk sour if he stays here."

They drank some beer, talked a while about old times, the family, races, watched TV. A door banged, excited voices all talking at once, with Mary's voice rising above all: "I thought I told you..."

Ben winked. "Paul took the kids to feed the pigs. Someone's fallen in."

Mary pushed through the door, flushing three naked children in front of her. "Into the bath you lot. I told you not to get in a mess – move, or I'll tan your backsides." They were gone, to sounds of splashing water and continuing exhortations.

After a discrete pause, a boy followed them through the door from the kitchen, a small, wiry, pleasant-faced boy, obviously Paul. He glanced nervously towards the bathroom. Introductions were made, hands shaken, and Paul was asked to explain.

"I told them to stay outside, but the boys got in: they got knocked over in the rush and Kylie was testing out the food bucket and spilt it. Says she thought it was porridge." He stopped for a moment. "Mary's not happy. She's blaming me, as usual."

"Told you," said Ben. "But I didn't count on all of them."

"Well, they did. It wasn't my fault. They're like monkeys, into everything."

Paul stopped, the important question looming. Ben blathered on, to tease him, until the boy couldn't stand it any more.

"Is it on, then?"

"It's up to Jim."

"Everything's ready. I've got everything ready. We just have to take Ben's stuff out." A pleading look.

"It's okay by me if it's okay by Mary."

"What's okay by Mary?" said she, flopping into a chair and demanding a beer. "I've had it."

"If I can go with Jim on the trip."

"If he wants you. Get you out of the place, drooping around like a bad smell. Jim, I've put up a bed for you in Paul's bivvy. You can pack up there without the kids getting into everything. He's been fussing around in there for days."

A beaming grin, and Paul was gone, to start his sorting out.

After tea, Jim bade an early good night and retired to bed. Paul was already there, in his underpants, still sorting. Jim sat on his bed, watching, pleased with what he saw: a lean, smooth body, arms, legs and neck well tanned and the rest white – a farmer's tan – long smooth graceful legs and a small hard bottom inside brief loose pants. Large

capable hands and big feet, and Jim remembered that saying about boys: big hands, big feet: big cock. There was certainly a respectable bulge in front.

But above all, the boy's face: finely made, rather lean, with large brown eyes and a full red-lipped mouth, flawless skin and thick floppy brown hair ending at its edges in small soft curls. It was a rather serious face most of the time, not like Ben at the same age. Ben had not been as good looking – his most attractive feature was his exuberance and affection for those he knew and trusted. Paul was altogether quieter, said little beyond the necessary, but he smiled easily and Jim felt guilty when he found himself thinking that maybe Ben's accident might have been fortunate.

"You'd better show me what you've got there."

Paul had everything in piles: clothes here, camping gear there, food to take, things for the supply drop. Jim checked it out, running over a standard list in his mind. Nothing seemed to be missing, everything well used except for two new sleeping bags.

"Ben got three for the trip, special. They're really warm..." – He unrolled one – "...and you can zip two together for more room if you like. He wants them for him and Mary when we go to the beach at Christmas."

Jim smiled to himself – he and Ben had used the same sort of bags.

Gradually everything was packed away into the two backpacks and set out ready for the morning. Ben would pack the supply drop nearer the time. They went to bed early, Paul slipping off his pants before getting into bed. He had to get out again to turn off the light and Jim noticed that the old saying was about right. There was a narrow fringe of hair, too.

They were away by first light, and by mid-afternoon were at the end of the road, car parked. It was a two or three hour walk in to their first camp.

After that, for five days it had been an early start each morning, walking until mid-afternoon, then a swim in the river and making camp. Paul took great pleasure in getting everything exactly right, tent in a good place, fern beds cut, firewood collected, a fireplace of stones carefully constructed, and they soon had a pattern where discussion wasn't needed.

To set a good example, Jim always swam naked, and Paul followed. Sometimes it was a quick splash followed by clothes washing, sometimes a more leisurely frolic accompanied by conventional comments on the effect of cold water on evident virility. Once Paul stole Jim's towel and

they had a brief wrestle on the grass – a wrestle which Jim had hurriedly to win; Paul, Jim thought, had a knowing look on his face.

Then, bodies and clothes clean and the camp in order, Paul would go off with his rifle while Jim cooked and, if he felt like it, did a little fishing. On the second day Paul shot a deer, bringing back the hindquarters and some choice bits and pieces. Without being told, he boned it out and hung the meat in a cotton cloth in a cool place. It would keep them going for a few days and Paul would not have to eat trout, which he only liked now and then.

On the sixth day they crossed the pass and saw the chamois. It had taken them nearly a week to find them again, a week in which both man and boy had become fitter and leaner, having had little time for cooking.

They had watched, from a high ridge, their supply drop come in. Far, far below, a faint droning and a small moth-like plane, hard to see, low over the valley floor. Their markers had been seen, and three times they had watched the plane swing round the head of the valley before flying out over their camp, each time a small white parachute briefly flowering behind; and then it was gone, down the valley and away. Paul had watched through the glasses, making note of where everything had fallen.

"I can smell bacon, yum."

They were back early that afternoon and Paul had rushed off to collect the boxes. He sat cross-legged on the dry floor of the bivvy, soon surrounded by straw and old newspaper and a growing pile of provisions, pouring forth excited and drooling comment. All the staples were there, plus luxuries – beer, bacon, sausages, fresh bread, strawberry jam, even eggs, carefully broken into a plastic container.

"Toast's on."

"Tidy up, then toast."

"Time for a beer, then, bags I..." – opening one. It sprayed all over him.

"Hey, don't waste it; let it settle. We're not racing drivers."

They had a beer while Jim cooked. Paul made toast, and tea was bacon, sausage and eggs followed by toast and strawberry jam. Jim had two pieces of toast and then somehow the jam was finished. Paul swore he hadn't eaten it all, but the tin was empty.

At the first sighting of chamois that morning, Paul was convinced it was Mr. Big, and so it proved to be. But seeing was one thing, getting there was another. Again they were in an impossible place, requiring a lengthy detour though difficult country, and when they arrived at their objective, the animals were gone.

Paul muttered something. Jim said it was today or never, get looking,



they couldn't be far away. The weather was changing, swinging into the south, steely cloud replacing blue sky. The wind was rising, with a smell of rain, getting cooler, a threat of snow.

Jim fished out their lunch: cold meat and a handful of dried fruit. Paul, eyes pressed to the glasses, stretched out a hand. Jim put a ball of mud into the grubby palm which went to mouth, glasses unlowered, then much spitting and swearing and the balance flung at Jim. Next time the food was honest, and Paul continued looking, looking.

"I got them, higher up, over by those bluffs."

He passed the glasses to Jim, and there they were, indeed. In an even worse position in totally open ground, standing, looking, not alarmed, but curious.

"They seen us. What do we do now? It's way out of shot."

They were, unless a hunter could get unseen into the bluffs, but it was open ground all the way and the animals wouldn't stand for any approach from their direction. Any move and they would be off, or they could spend all day looking at each other.

But there was a possible way, and Jim explained. Chamois were curious animals, trusting in their eyes and agility to protect them. But they do have a weakness: they can't count, so sometimes they will stand still if they can see the hunter, not realizing that his companion has slipped away. If he could hold them, Paul might be able to circle round and come down unseen into the bluffs; there seemed to be a rocky gutter which would let him get close enough for a shot.

He put his hand on Paul's thigh, squeezing to emphasize the need for stealth and speed. They had no more than an hour, after which they must be off, wind up their tails, no time for a wild chase over the mountains. It would be one shot or nothing, and snowing by nightfall.

Paul grinned and was gone. Jim, remembering the feel of a thigh reluctantly released, moved to a more prominent place, standing up, searching for and putting on a pair of long waterproof trousers and another jersey under his shirt. The animals, watched, lost interest, and two lay down. Time passed, and a light snow began to blow in the wind.

Then, suddenly, they stood, looking away, Jim forgotten, and began to trot off across the mountainside. Suddenly Mr. Big, at the rear, fell, rolling down hill as a shot crashed out and the others bolted. A figure flew out from the rocks above and down the slope.

Jim collected himself and their gear and crossed to where Paul was crouched over the body of Mr. Big, knife in hand. The boy was wildly excited.

"He's big, all right – look at that!" He held up the head with its neat marking and and sharply hooked horns. A recitation of his cunning poured out: it had been more difficult than it looked from a distance, working over the skyline unseen and down the small gully, which was deep and full of bluffs, to within range.

"He was lying down, so I whistled to get him up, but he run, and I had to shoot quick. But I got him, right through there..." – and he pointed to the animal's shoulder. He started cutting again, fast, until Jim told him to give up the knife and get into long trousers, for the snow was more than an odd flake now.

"I skun him good, all the back end. Cut his neck up the back, careful like; don't spoil the head skin..." – gabbling, excited still.

Jim finished the job, rolling the head up in the skin, putting everything first in a canvas bag and then in his pack. "You're right. It's a good one. Good shot, too."

"Last of the Mohicans, that's me," said Paul, still exulting, rubbing his hands. "Shoot the eyebrows off a fly."

"Shoot the foreskin off a frog." (Conventional response.) "Come on, get dressed; we've got to get moving."

"Where you put my gear?" Searching.

"I never put it anywhere – it's your stuff."

"I was going to pack it, put it out, then I went for a crap. It isn't here. I must have forgotten to put it in."

"Bad luck. It's time to go." And they went, the wind behind them, up their tails, but easy going underfoot.

All that changed when they turned downhill. Now they were heading unto the wind and a sky full of whirling snow, black and threatening. Paul was in front, hood up, and Jim saw his legs, a large part of his body surface, turning rapidly more purple than brown. He began to worry, keeping the pace on.

Soon they were into scrub, pushing through thickets, thigh-deep in places, of stiff, scratchy interlaced branches. He saw a streak of red suddenly appear on Paul's calf, and as suddenly disappear, washed away. They battered on down, sometimes sliding, drifting off course once into a gully which ended in bluffs and a waterfall down which they could not go.

Paul, alternately apathetic and aggressive, wanted to stop there, light a fire, sit it out. He swore at Jim when Jim didn't agree, using words not usual for him. Jim swore back, turned the boy round, booted him back up the hill and off again down the ridge, calling him names – a useless

prick, a townie kid who didn't know his ass from breakfast, get moving, we're not home yet.

By the bottom of the hill, Paul was staggering, held up by Jim. By good luck they had stumbled on the river close to their usual crossing point and not far from the bivvy on the other side. It was not a big river, but in the snow and leaden sky it looked dark and deep.

Halfway across, his legs and feet numb, Jim stumbled, let go of Paul and watched the boy fall flat in the water, rolling, and go under before he could catch him and haul him out. From there it was only a short step to the bivvy. He dragged the boy there and dumped him on a rock, telling him to get his boots off, and stoked up the fire and put a billy of water on to boil.

Paul just sat where he was, water dribbling from every corner, head hanging. Jim slapped his face lightly, beginning to panic, telling the boy to wake up, get his act together, but Paul was beyond all that. Jim knelt to take Paul's boots off. The boy's feet looked like dead fish – white, wet, wrinkled – and his legs felt metallic and icy-cold. Jim hauled off the jacket, shirt, jersey, vests, pulled the boy to his feet and unbuckled the belt. The shorts fell at once under their own wet weight. Leaning Paul against his shoulder, he ran his hands down the boy's hips, sliding off his pants. Paul's body was cold, lacking all elements of desire, cock hardly visible and balls that seemed to have disappeared altogether. Jim rubbed him hard all over with a towel, but as soon as he finished one part for another it was at once as cold again. He cursed himself. Why had he not checked Paul's pack before they had left in the morning: there were his clothes, laid out on the bed. But Paul had seemed so self-assured, and Jim had forgotten his young mate's excitement, his age.

The billy came to a boil as he was rolling the totally apathetic boy into a sleeping bag. He made tea, all sugar and milk powder lumps, and fed the boy from a cup. It came straight back up, just missing the bag, but after that some went down. He made another cup, for himself, thinking, desperate for something to do, until, calming down, he managed to zip the two bags together, stripped himself down to his pants (why he left them on he never knew – inherited modesty? They were at least dry.), toweled himself and slid in beside Paul.

The boy was shivering violently and very cold. Jim put his arms around him, a leg over him, and held him close, hard against Paul's back, rubbing the boy's chest and stomach, conscious of a dark, dank smell of hair under his nose: wet, lifeless hair, smelling of ditch-water. Night was coming and the only light was the still-flickering fire.

Slowly it seemed, he brought warmth to Paul and himself. The sleeping bag warmed up; Paul stopped shivering and after a while seemed to sleep. Under his hands, Jim could feel the boy's heart beating, strong and steady, and his untroubled breathing. Relief flooded through him, and then he, too, slept.

When he woke, it was pitch dark and the fire had died down, also the wind. He couldn't tell if it was snowing, but at least he was warm. It took him a moment to collect himself, realize where he was and what he was holding. Paul seemed warm, too. Jim lay for a while, holding the boy in the same position as when they had gone to sleep, playing over in his mind the events of the day before.

There was another change in addition to the warmth: the hair under Jim's nose was now dry, soft, with an interesting, if not terribly clean, smell. The skin under his hand felt like satin, the body within it firm. Above all, all was warm.

Hardly conscious of what he was doing, his hand began to roam, stroking, feeling the small nipples, ribs, hard, flat stomach, belly button. He stroked without sex, rather with gratitude that things had come right, inexpressibly relieved that Paul, who every day had become more and more important to him, would be all right.

Then, without Jim even feeling the movement, one of Paul's hands was on his, holding it for a minute, then sliding it down, past a quick brush of hair and onto something soft and rubbery, keeping his hand there until Jim had taken hold of it – a small, silky animal with a life of its own, growing, hardening in his grip.

Jim began to squeeze, then stroke. Paul squirmed back against him, and he realized he was hard, too. He ground his hips into the bottom pressing against him, getting a startled grunt and a hoarse whisper to get his pants off. He did, placing them handy for what seemed likely to happen next. Released, his penis lay along the length of the divide in Paul's small bottom.

He brought his hand back to Paul's hard cock – fairly long, though small in diameter, as far as he could judge, and rubbery only at its tip where the foreskin rolled easily in rapidly accumulating lubricant. Jim began to squeeze it, rolling the foreskin back and rubbing the tip with his finger, transferring the goo there to his palm, until his hand was slipping easily, milking. The response was an urgent thrusting into his hand, getting faster and more spasmodic, a tightening of muscles, the leg under his like an iron bar, his own cock alternately gripped and released by clenching cheeks, heavy breathing; finally, holding tight, his hand was

bathed in a warm bath of sperm which came spurting, then dribbling, out.

As soon as he had come, Paul relaxed. Jim wiped his hand on the pants and squeezed out into them what was left in Paul's relaxing cock, still holding the boy against him, his own desire still hard. He was content to leave it so: the night was still young yet. He blew gently into the boy's hair, smelling its scent, nibbled an ear lobe and rubbed his nose down Paul's soft cheek. Paul pushed again back against him, holding Jim's arm in place around his chest. Then he dropped off to sleep, and Jim lay there, a warm comfort and peace flowing through him until he, too, slept.

Later, in the first light of dawn, Jim woke again. The storm had gone and there was a clear sky and reflection off the snow. Paul had rolled over and was lying half across him, leg over his thigh, invisible except for a tuft of hair, the warmth of his breath on Jim's shoulder. It was very quiet.

He stroked the boy's back as he thought of the events of the previous day. Immediately Paul heaved himself up so that suddenly they were groin to groin and Jim's hand was on Paul's bottom. Jim ran his fingertips gently up and down the divide, and then lower, tickling the back of Paul's balls. The arms around him tightened, hips snugged tighter against his.

Jim disengaged briefly to free his cock and position it between Paul's legs, pushed the boy's one flexed leg down and scissored his own around them. Sex flooded through him, raw and burning. He hugged Paul hard against him, an arm around his shoulder, a hand gripping the small, hard bottom and holding in place the end of his own cock, as he began to drive fiercely, rolling over onto Paul, crushing the breath out of him, only vaguely aware of Paul's own grip around him and a sudden pain in his shoulder. He came, into his hand, up between the cheeks of Paul's bottom.

He relaxed slowly, a bit guiltily, but need not have worried: Paul was stroking his hair, nuzzling his cheek, and they kissed, messily, amateurishly, roaming over each others' faces. Jim sucked in the boy's lower lip, rolling it in his mouth, releasing it with a pop.

Paul giggled. "I thought you'd crush me to death, like one of those snakes."

"Sorry."

"S all right. But I bet it's messy down there." A hand groped between their loins, came back up wiping hard, sticky fingers across Jim's face.

Jim tried to bite them, then rolled off the boy. "You came too?" he asked.

"Too right!" Proudly. "I couldn't stop. We'd better clean up or we'll stick together."

"All right by me. I like it here."

They rested, then Paul suddenly heaved himself up and thumped Jim on the chest. "I bet you did it here with Ben. That's how you know this place."

"I didn't and everybody knows this place."

"Yes, you did, I know you did." Another thump. "Don't bullshit me."

"You're wrong. There were people here and anyway we were fishing, remember; we camped below in the gorge."

"Well, there then – go on, admit it."

Jim's hand drove down into Paul's groin, grabbing a tuft of hair, jerking sharply. Paul yelped, wriggling away against another sharp pull. "If we did, I'm not telling you. I'm [pull] not [pull] telling [pull] you [pull, pull, pull]. It's private, you cheeky little sod."

"Hey, give over. That hurts. All right, you didn't."

Another sharp tug and Jim let go.

"But I know you did..." jerking up his knee and pounding Jim's chest. They wrestled briefly before settling down. For a while neither said anything, then: "Was I really cold last night? I remember shooting Mr. Big but not much after."

"You were totally out of it toward the end."

"I remember feeling bitchy."

Jim described their trip down the mountainside, Paul's growing hypothermia. "When you got back, you wouldn't do anything, just sat and shivered."

"I'm warm now, feeling good." An affectionate hug.

"Only thing I could think of, warm you up by body heat. It was like being in bed with a dead sheep on a wet night. But it worked."

"Yep. This sheep's warm now." Paul rolled over into his old position, sprawled over Jim, eyes shining, fingers playing absently with the hair on Jim's chest, twisting it into curls. "Is it true people do it with sheep?"

"They make jokes about it. You'd have to be pretty desperate, I reckon."

"Why don't people come on heat, like dogs?"

"They do. Women can only start babies at certain times."

"Yes, but you don't see all the boys round a girl, sniffing and growling. That would be really weird. I guess dogs get turned on by smells and people don't." Paul giggled and thought for a moment. "I've

watched them. All the male dogs get a go in the end; it's just that the big ones get it up first. The only problem is it's so quick: just bang, bang, bang and off."

"After they get over being locked together."

"I reckon pigs have it better. Billy – that's our boar – you put a sow in with him an' he's right there, straight away, sniffing. If she's right, he's up an' in." He butted his hips against Jim. "He stays there, too, for ages. An' the look on his face – he's *really* enjoying it. It's like he's smiling, he's dribbling, an' there's like bubbles coming out of her backside. He's there forever, and the only way she gets out from under is by lying down. I wouldn't mind that." Butting again.

Jim reminded him that very few little boy pigs reached porcine matrimony: they lose something along the way. He gripped the comparable articles – a rubber ring or a razor blade?

"Hey, now, that's serious stuff," said Paul, trying to escape. Obviously the boy knew what happened to little boy pigs – and lambs, too – because as a farm boy he must have helped with the operation dozens of times.

"They used to do it to boys, too," Jim said.

"No way."

"Yes, they did, to keep them singing good and off the girls."

"Well, I'm not singing and I'm not losing them, either. I'll be a wild boar and do what I like."

Jim squeezed again. "And I'm Jacko and I know where to bite." Jacko was Ben's pig-dog and knew the nip that intimidates the most.

"Don't even think about it. That's horrible." Paul shivered.

Jim let go and gathered him in close. "Guess I better be content with what you are."

"And what's that?"

"My hot water bottle, but it leaks."

Paul snorted and got back to the subject on his mind. His biology teacher, Brother Jerome, had been teaching them the facts of life "but only, like, sperms and eggs." Ben had told Paul all about that years before, following some probing questions about the ducks. Brother Jerome had stayed well off the more controversial aspects of sexuality. "Danny, a kid in my class, asked him about wet dreams and got the stick."

"Well, Brother Jerome is a kind of priest He's not supposed to think about that."

"You don't think about wet dreams. They just happen, unless you jerk off enough. Anyhow, he's queer. Danny went with him on a school camping trip

last summer and he gave them all fifty cents to swim without togs – more healthy, he said. Danny says he got a hard-on watching."

"That's Danny's problem."

"Not Danny, idiot, Brother J."

"Well, *you* bathe without togs, and *you've* got a hard-on." Feeling.

"It was thinking about Billy, and you messing about."

"First it's sheep, then pigs – males ones, too. You're perverted."

Fists hammered on Jim's chest and ribs. "*You're* perverted, not me. You twist everything. Anyway, I'm piss-hard. I gotta pee."

Jim wanted to pee, too, but it was a long time before either could pluck up courage to lead the way. In the end Jim did, and Paul followed, bursting out laughing: "Man, you're gross. Look at you!"

Jim glanced down and saw his belly and pubic hair were glued to his body or standing up in stiff spikes.

"Examine yourself. You look as if snails had crawled all over you."

Paul stepped up onto a flat rock on the edge of the snow and tried to write his name but managed only to make a shaky P and some yellow squiggles. Jim relieved himself, watching, noticing the long scratch on Paul's calf.

"Your leg hurt?"

"Not much. It's all right. That snow must be deep. It's covered everything; there's only the big stuff showing. We'll be here for a while."

"Not too long if the sun gets going, but it'll stuff the fishing for a few days."

Paul stood looking about, arms wrapped around his chest, beginning to shiver. "It's really deep."

"One way to find out how deep..." and Jim gave the boy a sharp push on the bottom. Paul staggered, arms waving, and started to say something as Jim pushed again, higher up, tottered forward and with a despairing wail, fell full length, disappearing entirely except for a small exposed bum.

Paul was up at once in a shower of snow, flying at Jim, screaming, "You animal you... animal. I'll kill you." Fists and knees flailing, he charged at Jim, who, laughing, gathered him in, arms filled with the furious boy, the air blue. It was a cold but not unpleasant armful. Suddenly the boy went limp and Jim's grip relaxed; a flying fist winded him, a foot just missed his groin, and Paul was gone, into the sleeping bag, frantically trying to zip it up, crowing, "Fooled you, eh? Stay out there and freeze!"

But Paul was betrayed by his haste and a jamming zip, and Jim was



on him before he could get fenced in. They wrestled for the zip, Jim winning so that in short order he had Paul pinned down by his wrists, lying full length and full weight on the boy, bouncing.

"Waaah, get offa me, get off me, you fat b..." Bounce, bounce, bounce.

Paul spat up at him, beginning to laugh, and Jim dribbled back at the wildly dodging face. Suddenly Jim changed his tactics, hands darting to the boy's ribs and began to tickle. Paul thrashed about, fists reigning on Jim's face, his head, his back. There came hoarse, gasping giggles, and the boy got partly out from under so that Jim was aware of something hard stabbing at his hip. He grinned; much more of this and he, too, would be in the same state.

He managed to roll on top of Paul again, pinning his head down with a wet, rough kiss, growling. Paul spluttered out, "Get offa me. You're crushing me, you ape!"

Plan Two now went into operation: Jim twisted, diving down Paul's body, the boy's hard, rubbery, slippery penis butting his cheek. He pursued it wildly, as Paul's hips thrashed about, legs kicked and fists rained on his back. He got the cock, mid length, letting his teeth be felt but careful not to bite, and slipped his mouth up until the end popped in and he could swallow. Paul was trapped, belly under Jim's body and Jim's hands holding the boy's hips in place. Only Jim's arms and mouth were free, and both were in violent action.

Jim began to suck, rolling the cover off the tip of Paul's penis, gently mouthing it, licking, agitating its end, which started to give off more and more of its own individual flavor and scent. He licked the length of it, down onto the small, tight balls below, and up again. Now the boy's fists had opened onto hands that were holding his head down; the legs had fallen apart, letting Jim's fingers roam where they would. He took the balls in his mouth, feeling the leg muscles immediately go rigid with alarm, but only sucked them gently before going back to the business end of the boy's genital apparatus that was now stabbing wetly at his mouth. He let it in again, keeping it where his tongue could attend to its most sensitive parts, while his fingers scratched, tickled and poked below and behind.

Paul quickly lost control, the hands in Jim's hair gripping, hips starting a sudden convulsive thrusting up onto his mouth. He came quickly, and as quickly went limp. Jim sucked and squeezed the penis out before swiveling up to kiss Paul's lips. Paul lay under Jim, quiet, dreamily, until, alarmed: "What's that taste in your mouth?" Then, incomprehension turning suddenly to understanding and a jerking away of

his lips, "That's disgusting. That's really gross." Jim tried in vain to catch his mouth again, but was not allowed to until the boy had spat copiously over the edge of the sleeping bag.

Jim rolled off. The zip was still down and it was cold now. He pulled it up, cuddling the boy. "Breakfast time, eh," he said. "How's your belly?"

"Empty. What we gonna have?"

They discussed it until there was nothing more to discuss, and rolled out again into the cold air. They wiped themselves over with a wet towel, rubbed each other dry.

Jim winced as Paul scrubbed away at his back. "Mind that. That hurts. What's up there?"

"You've got some scratches and bruises, like..." Paul trailed off, embarrassed. Jim remembered the sudden pain of the night before. "You clawed me, Tiger?"

"I couldn't help it. I didn't mean to." Looking at the ground, blushing.

Paul hugged him and they dressed, then, the fire going, made tea, porridge and cooked the last of the bacon. When they were through, Paul jumped up and separated the two sleeping bags, opened them and carefully laid them out side by side on the tidied mound of ferns. Jim raised his eyebrows and grinned.

"To let 'em dry out," Paul explained. "And in case someone comes by – it'd be embarrassing if they was together. They can go back when it's dark." He stopped, blushed again as Jim burst out laughing. "I mean, if you... I mean, want to."

They sat round the fire, lazy and content.

"What we gonna do?" Paul finally asked.

"Well, you've got to get that head in order, and we need more meat, too. That last lot's about to run away. And the rifle needs a good clean – it fell in the river last night. What are you going to do with the head?"

"Skin it out I reckon and then boil it up – there's a tin outside it'll fit in."

"You know how?"

"Yup. I've practiced on sheeps' heads, an' Ben put in lots of salt for the skin in the airdrop."

"Good, because I don't know. Check out that meat and see if it's fit for a stew." It wasn't, so they had porridge again for supper, but with dried fruit in it and the last of the condensed milk.

Later, when it was dark and the fire was dying down, Jim shook out

the last drops of tea from his mug. "Be up all night if I have any more." He looked across at Paul. "You know, those bags don't have to be together. It's your choice, any time, always, as you like."

Paul looked directly at him, smiling, eyes shining in the firelight. "If you'd asked a couple of days ago, I dunno... But it happened, like, you know, and it's okay." He looked into the fire, silent for a moment. Then, "They don't tell you the most important bits. I mean, you know, like how peaceful it was after you..." He trailed off.

"After you come, you mean? Of course they don't. If they did, you'd never want to stop. Bed time, eh?" Paul yawned, got up and began to zip the bags back together.