

THE THIRD ACOLYTE READER

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All too often erotic relations between men and boys are examined, in fiction at any rate, independently of their social and family contexts. In this probing, reflective narrative, I. L. Ingles shows four members of a family coming to terms with unsuspected currents of attraction and hostility in their home.

P.D.

by I. L. Ingles

Hour 1. Making a Start

The time is twelve forty-one a.m. It is Friday night - no, Saturday morning - the twenty-ninth of October. I intend to be exact for the sake of posterity, including any of my own who may, God willing, chance to read these scribbles - no waffling, no middle-age-spreading, no sugaring of the pills, so to speak. It is - to set things, i.e. myself, in their proper perspective - my children's half-term holiday. I have two sons, the elder of whom is snoring his bed and I am lying in the bed of the younger boy John-Joseph, who has vacated it for a week's camping. J.J. is an excellent little chap who has inherited my good looks. He leaves his prep school this term and should be very popular when he moves on to Barbourne College, once he has adjusted to his metamorphoses from big fish to minimal minnow.

The astute reader should now be asking "Who is this man and what is he doing in his younger son's bed?" Quite right.

My name is Peter Dominick, "P.D." for short. Having decided to write these memoirs, I hope to keep at them until dawn at least, time enough to throw light on various aspects of my life and personality which I would like my family and other privileged people to understand more clearly than at present. By setting it down in this form, I expect to be guided into the correct course of action to take next... suicide, a simple disappearance or - which is unlikely - staying in this shark- infested goldfish bowl.

Who am I? Who is this little guppy swimming around in circles and trying desperately to escape? Well, he is a married man in his middle forties, tall, of average build, with brown hair and grey eyes. Does that really matter? Does it matter if a man has a slightly large, hooked nose, giving him something of the look of a wise old owl? The little pellets of wisdom I scatter behind me won't fertilize much barren land, I fear. These big hands are not particularly strong. Indeed they are often clumsy, albeit they could once project a cricket ball with some accuracy. I do not feel myself describable merely in terms of bones and flesh.

Who am I, then? Am I perhaps the well-paid editor of a 'Fox and

Fieldmouse'? My boys have been able to go to private schools. Our house has five bedrooms and we have bagged a brace of quick, comfortable cars. Is that what I am - Mr. Peter Dominick, established editor and provider of superior living conditions for three dependents? Do I exist or justify my existence by what I have done in the past, namely, mating with a convenient female to engender successors? The woman - Moira, I should say - proved fertile and the boys appear to be already capable. The race may just survive. Is that what I am, then, a successful sperm-shooter? Well if in six hours time, I have discovered that that is all I am, I may not find it so difficult to decide my future course. Fancy... a hooked-nosed, shark-pursued, money-insulated seed machine! If that is the truth, it will hardly make me free.

P.D.'s memoirs came to our hands some time ago. We decided he would wish to have them made accessible. I say 'we' because, in these interpolated comments, we wish to adopt a correctly editorial approach that would have appealed to him.

The memoirs were written in some of the exercise books John-Joseph kept for scoring cricket matches and drawing pictures in, pictures not meant to be seen, and he was embarrassed when he was informed of the accident. However, we do not think P .D. would have been so careless as to let Moira get hold of them.

In these pages we shall comment on what he says, basing our observations on the information provided by our own contacts and researches. At the end of the voyage of discovery, for such it proved, we shall endeavour to tie up any loose ends and so bring the ship to an unpretentious rest in a haven of friends. P.D. deserves no less. So now let us rake through "Hour One" with eagle eye and shine a light onto some passages worthy of some critical, though not hostile, clarification. Our sources are utterly reliable.

P.D. Was accurate with his dates, and we can probably assume that he got his times right as well. We question his being equally clever at not wasting words. He could not resist such extras as "quite" and "so to speak" - but Shakespeare did the same and, on occasions, even Chaucer waffled! There is no more to say...

We have the good fortune to know what some members of the family felt about certain events and statements. The

use of the word “children” was regretted, even resented, as one son was as good as sixteen - an adult age in Great Britain for marriage and motor-bikes. John-Joseph thought it contradictory to call him a child and yet be aware that he was “capable”. Of course, we know that it was meant in the sense of, 'offspring' rather than 'little', but both the young men felt that an established editor should have done better.

P.D. was not, in fact, the editor of 'Fox and Fieldmouse' but the assistant editor - a small point but again it shows a weakness in a man who prided himself on being exact - and can one call forty-eight and a half “middle forties”? We can hardly excuse him by claiming poetic license! In certain matters P.D. did stretch the truth as if it were a nylon sock. Is one metre seventy-six really tall? There was grey in his hair, not only in his eyes, and what is average build? If P.D. were a dog, he would have been a whippet, but whippets can be very powerful and they certainly have a lot of admirers. As for his hands being clumsy, this just wasn't true. We have testimony to the effect that they were skilful and gentle. We think that P.D. had a tendency to misjudge his physical qualities both ways and that he definitely overestimated his brainpower. Something to do with age?

This editor has a photograph of John-Joseph dated a week prior to the writing of the memoirs. It was taken the night before John-Joseph went off to camp. He has just climbed out of the bath, is unmistakably tall for his years and very well developed. “Capable” is almost certainly the right word. He should not have been called “a good little chap” and a “minimal minnow”, even affectionately. This is an instance of P.D. 's lack of brainpower. John-Joseph was displeased especially with the word “little”. He has, incidentally, been perfectly happy at Barbourne. Looking at the photograph as it lies before us, we can only conclude that, in his own case, P.D. was influenced by the posters of Ian Botham and Tarzan (see below), against whom, particularly at one in the morning and at a time of stress, anybody might appear small.

P.D. Talks about wanting people to understand him better. We venture to suggest that some people did understand him better than he realized. Also, during this first hour after leaving his bedroom, he did not understand

himself very well - or was it that he understood but dared not set it down in violet (John-Joseph's French 'Bic')?

Anyone who has persevered this far should now be asking “What about that wife?” Quite right, but I do not feel quite ready to tackle that. I shall first describe my environment, this room in which I should not be, this moon-illuminated segment of the goldfish bowl.

My immediate environment, then, is about four metres square. Why do a boy of thirteen and a boy of almost sixteen have to share a bedroom in a house which boasts five? They do not have to; they choose to. In many families brothers quarrel because they do not have their own rooms, so nobody should complain when my boys insist on being together. Their mother did complain, but I supported my lads. They are defenseless.

There are two beds, two desks, two chairs, two chests of drawers. The boys share a wardrobe, the carpet, the light switch and the one window! There is a bathroom en suite with toilet. No record exists of any protest against having to share so acceptable a luxury.

At present the moon is shining out of a cloudless autumn sky. Chaste and fair it may seem to poets, but to me that would be a waste. Of course it might be the blazing eye of the hungry Selima waiting outside my imprisoning vase. No, even if a lesser, it is a glorious light, a symbol of these memoirs and their purpose.

On this side, the wall is decorated with posters of Weismuller, W. G. Grace, Stanley Matthews, Mowgli, Michelangelo's “David”, two black boxers and a half-life-size painting of Alexander the Great. Curious how many of these pin-ups are heroes of bygone ages... Opposite, I can make out two motor-bikes, Ian Botham, one police dog, a pop musician and Rodin's “Thinker”. John-Joseph is planning to be the outstanding sculptor of the Twentieth Century if he does not make it as England's number one all-rounder. Clever of the boys to put their posters on each other's wall ... must have inherited some presentational awareness from their father. No squinting from a horizontal position up one's own vertical exhibition!

Since I started this writing, forty-three minutes ago, the sound of that delicate snoring under the motor-bikes has not ceased.

In the last few minutes, however, while I was musing on the choice

of pictures and on the fact that Moira objected to those which show unclad human flesh, the satisfying unobscured beauty of the sky has also been attacked. I won that particular skirmish with my wife, but I am powerless against the bands of marauding cloud which leave me just enough light to see with but not enough to write by. I have a little difficulty with close work in these conditions.

It is almost one-thirty and I still haven't explained how I came to be here. I wonder how J.J. is getting on in his tent. Not as comfortable as I am in his bed, I suspect, but he is young and should be given every opportunity of enjoying himself. Opportunities are like teeth. They grow fewer and fewer and there is a deal of aching as their numbers decrease.

What is P.D. afraid of or frosted by? He talks about being trapped, being a tiny fish in a bowl, sharks inside, cats outside. Trust him to bring in the name of Selima - an example of his weakness for dressing up ideas journalistically, but we feel there is more to it. In later sections he reveals similar tensions which a man of nearly fifty ought to have mastered, surely... What was he trapped by - his daily life, his family, his job or himself? It seems to have been a combination of frustration and fear, which was even suicidal. The boys are known to have been deeply shocked when they discovered that suicide was not just something read about in newspapers or seen on television. They had never suspected such a thing in their father and were struck to the heart. Having known the Dominick circle intimately for very many years, we can vouch for the genuineness of this distress. P.D.'s course of action was not formulated when he wrote these early pages, so we shall postpone further analysis.

I must go back seventeen years and a considerable number of teeth. I was then a mere hack and had been sent out to a remote river-station in Africa for six months to produce a tear-jerking money-raising report on the ravages of onchocerciasis. I was the sole European male in a jungle thicket thirty kilometres square. I became very lonely and, despite the presence of several thousand nubile African girls, involved myself with the younger of the only two white females in the sticky green web. By the end of the sixth month, I was trapped.

Moira was not unattractive, but what hooked me was her drive and efficiency. She was helping to run the clinic in the centre of the web. Working twice as hard as I did, keeping it up for twelve hours a day, incredible in that humidity. She could do most things, one of which was to fall in love with Peter Dominick.

Well, in seventeen years one can learn a lot. I have. Moira is a clever typist, reliable keeper of accounts, respected medical assistant, workaholic housewife, skilful driver, beloved friend to old ladies, trusted minder of children, and a combination of these excellent qualities in earning a living and bringing up a family. She is also a religious fanatic. What she is not is a suitable partner for Peter Dominick. So tonight, last night, I left my bed, my bedroom and my, presumably, better half.

We must make reference to P.D.'s marriage and his wife, Moira. We were quite ignorant of the way in which he allowed himself to be tricked, as it were, into matrimony. It does seem abundantly clear that he married Moira merely because he was lonely and had become dazzled by her dominant personality. She is very dominant. We have thought frequently that P.D. should have stood up to her in their disagreements, but he nearly always yielded.

He is right about her gifts. They must have been a powerful lure. He was not forced to marry her. Their first child was conceived in wedlock. Did he have such a driving sense of duty in those days that, having become involved under the pressure of jungle entrapment, he felt obligated to carry the thing through? We have to say that we never saw that degree of self-sacrifice in him during the years we were associated with him. We are compelled to believe it was his inner weakness, worked upon by her beauty.

We have photographs of Moira, taken at several periods in the marriage. She is something more than "not unattractive"... but why didn't he realize that she was a religious fanatic? What he says about Moira's attitude to naked bodies is true. We know of a famous evening when she asked him to slipper one of the boys for dancing starkers around the house to Ravel's *Bolero* after bathing. We are glad that P.D. had sufficient will power, on that occasion, to refuse. He sat the offender on the paternal lap, opened an art folio and showed him pictures of beautiful people from

Ancient Greece. There was a furious row and we know that the two boys felt very sorry for him. We understand that many women behave like this. It is an attitude that spoils Moira, who is really rather nice.

P.D. 's handwriting is good, considering how hard it is to write in bed by moonlight, but we were unaware of his poor reading sight. Was he self-deceived again?

We agree with his punctuation, especially leaving out commas and things before quotations. In some ways P.D. was very progressive.

Hour 2. Moira

1:30 An hour gone already. The moon is playing lighthouses: flash, flash, darkness, flash, flash, darkness, as the clouds flicker past. Nothing like the “dragonish” things the Bard described. A belching mouthful of flames would certainly make writing easier now but probably wake up the sleeping dog.

So I have left Moira, left her lying in bed in the next room. I left her emotionally yonks ago but never summoned up the nerve to do it openly. What a shock for them all...

I can hear her moving about. How thin these walls are! The boys must have been embarrassed some nights. Probably not. They were quite young then.

Poor Moira! She really was unusually attractive when we first met and when we married - almost boylike. She wore slacks to outwit the mosquitoes and kept her hair short. Slim, lithe, dynamic, never still. She was a dancing shaft of light, a flash of energy cutting through my thick, imprisoning forest.

There it goes: flash, flash, darkness, flash, flash, dark. It's no use, Diana. The ship is already on the rocks. Maybe, but the galley slave is swimming away from the wreck.

A strange creature, Moira. As soon as the love-making sessions came round, her vivacity disappeared completely, almost from day one (night one, I should say). Frigid is the only word - - very off-putting, as if she was merely carrying out a required duty. She must actually believe that procreation is the only justification for the sex act. She's not the sort to be worried about spoiling her good looks by having babies, but why would she not admit that I needed the pleasure of sex

for itself, not just for the satisfaction of becoming a father? Could it be that she felt inadequate, ashamed of her little breasts and boyish body? That never worried me.

As Moira gave birth to two sons, she must have been capable - but was she interested? Regrettably it seems that some women lump sex and cooking together - as unavoidable necessary evils.

We men are sexual beings. Even John-Joseph has grasped that, but not Moira Dominick. We might have coped together, if she had been able to accept the fact of male sexuality. We've sweated out a couple of lovely boys. Surely we should have been able to accept each other's personalities in a rational manner? It isn't as if I didn't care for her well-being. She is a very worthy woman and has done her utmost for the children: a bit strait-laced, to speak the truth, and over-strict, and I don't think they like her constant moralizing, but she does care about them.

Moira and the boys get on very well and they try to cooperate with her, but where there is a dispute over a matter of principle which either brother holds dear, they (unlike their father) always resist her with quiet, firm determination. They have taught themselves to pretend to be warm when a temporary "east wind" blows up.

Well, the babies came along, but after John-Joseph the ice floe developed into an Antarctic. I can't remember that Moira and I ever drifted into any agreement about things - and all our years of back-to-backing reached their own climax tonight, and here I am, spied upon by the severe, glint-eyed old nun up there.

P.D. is partly accurate in his description of Moira. True, when we first knew her, she was rather like a boy - but in body only, not in spirit. We seldom knew her to join in her sons' games or laugh or even pretend to laugh at their boyish jokes. This lack of interest in their activities was much resented. In recent years she has put on weight and become more female in appearance. Her breasts have become heavier and more noticeable and her hips and bottom more matronly. We do not have completely reliable first-hand knowledge of her personality and its effects during the earliest years and must, therefore, rely on P.D.'s statements which, especially when critical, are open to question. However, the two boys show no hesitation in

defending her on the score of their being cared for. She had always been ready to give them a cuddle and a kiss and would still come and tuck them in if they allowed her to. She is, they point out, an excellent cook, though inclined to limit the menu to a few basic - very English - dishes. "Eat to live, don't live to eat!" is one of her never-ending maxims. The two brothers are fond of her and think that she has had a hard time. One of them said "You can't be perfect. Even Botham had weaknesses."

John-Joseph's sexual awareness. Again P.D. uses the word "even", which caused further annoyance. The development of the genitals was remarkable in someone not yet fourteen. As to the extent of that awareness, P.D. would have been able to glean some interesting information by interpreting the drawings in the exercise books as well as by chance observation. Up till then at least (and perhaps subsequently), he never discussed sex with his father. With us he has always talked freely on such matters. He emphatically denies having confided in P.D. and is known to have said more than once that, although extremely fond of his father, he disliked being touched by him or responding to the "young men's" jokes, as P.D. called them.

It is possible that Moira may have discussed this aspect of John-Joseph with her husband, but we think it is unlikely, not only because of the bad relationship between the two parents, but also because - ever since the age of eleven years, five months and two days - John-Joseph has always kept the door locked when having a bath and his mother is in the house. This date is highly significant and was carved on the handle of John-Joseph's best cricket bat, under the rubber. What happened was, that Moira came to him one morning with his pyjama shorts and said "How long have you been doing this?"

Poor John-Joseph! The night before had, in fact, been the night he had discovered he could actually masturbate, properly. When Moira was so tactless, he burst into tears, shouted "The washing machine won't be so fussy about it!" and ran out, swearing. He insists that it is the only time in the whole of his life he has sworn at his mother. Since then, he has refused to discuss sex with her or to let her see him naked. The last straw was when she told him that he was

“abusing” himself and that it was “against God's law”. Now he won't even go to church if she is to be present. In view of what we know about P.D. and his relationship with Moira, it seems most unlikely that such matters will have been discussed between them.

There is another curious sidelight on all this. P.D. mentions the possibility of the brothers' being embarrassed by the thinness of the bedroom wall. He is correct, but not in the way he imagines. They were embarrassed, yes, but for a totally different reason. What worried them was that their own activities might be overheard. John-Joseph's bed always rocked and creaked like a rowing boat; so the brothers, unshakeably loyal to each other, instituted a system of swapping beds twice a week to give John-Joseph a chance to enjoy himself without anxiety. There is no evidence that this practice was suspected, but both of them suddenly developed the habit of making their beds early and carefully every day, because the ever-finicky Moira began inspecting the room even more fastidiously than she had in the past. They also put their pyjamas into the washing machine themselves each Saturday. As she had been on at them for ages about helping in the house, there was not much she could say.

My wife has even managed to turn me against religion. Bringing it into my job indeed! I said that a man is a sexual being. He is also an activity-centred one. Moira met me when I was a journalist and married me in that knowledge. When the job with “Fox and Fieldmouse” came up, you'd have thought I'd turned to drug-pushing. “Immoral” she called it. I can remember that conversation. It was very brief:-

Moira: “But it's a magazine for wealthy sadists, the unthinkable.”

Me: “Foxes have to be culled. They rape the countryside.”

Moira: “I feel raped myself every time I think about it.”

Me: “Wishful thinking!”

Moira: “How can you be so coarse? I thought, when I married you, that you were a healthy, decent young man, not an immoral money-grabber. I don't want you to take the job.”

Me: "You like the pickings: the cars, the big house, the private schooling. With this job I shan't have to struggle to keep it all going - and, for your information, I start Monday."

And that was that. I walked away, in disgust and despair, disappointed, unsatisfied sexually, the pleasure of a new job tarnished before it even began. All these defeats made me feel like a worm, in my own eyes and in hers. Well, now the worm has done a volte-arse. Perhaps I may slither away and put an end to everyone's trouble.

We understand P.D's frustration about Moira's attitude to his job. Foxes can be a great nuisance and can carry rabies.

I do wonder if the fact that each of us was an only child has had something to do with it. If she never got to know what boys are like and I never had any experience of sisters, perhaps it affected us unconsciously - or could it be the result of never having a chance to learn how to fit in with siblings? I did play with other boys, of course, but that might not compensate for being an only child.

I am sighing. I mentioned this for the sake of the posterity for whom these memoirs are intended, as a reader might otherwise think I am writing this down with cold unfeelingness. Writing things down is already beginning to help. I can think without anger.

That is certainly a striking picture of Alexander. What a magnificent man, and yet so ordinary in size! Moira would never have got him to be a socially do-gooding hack. He hacked out an empire and gave it a bit of civilization. As for Peter Dominick, he must hack out a path through a maze - and no army to help him.

Poor Moira... fancy having to whisper about the letter, for fear that the boy might hear us! Everything bottled up and always would have been, if the worm hadn't turned. The trouble with whispered discussions in bed is that they always start too late, years too late in this case. Could we have discussed such a matter calmly and rationally if we had sat quietly together downstairs a couple of hours ago? No. Moira is not rational. She is like a bunch of emotional sticks or rhubarb, sticks of suppressed feeling tied round with wires of precept.

Jealousy? Could that be the jigger under the skin of our relationship? Jealousy...

I'm yawning. Almost 2.30. John-Joseph's bed is dangerously comfortable.

But what could she have been jealous of: the job, magazine editor, the public eye? She was so successful in her own jobs and earning plenty. The children? Might be. Influencing them, and so on - or influencing that boy. Could it have been that boy?

I shall have a little doze.

As far as P.D. 's admiration for Alexander is concerned, it is not clear whether this was aroused because of the Emperor's wonderful deeds or his physical prowess or something else, but we cannot be surprised. We have seen the picture. It is of a naked Alexander poised to throw a spear, and is very impressive.

We have known other single children and they were not like either of the Dominick parents. We have considered alternative explanations for their miserable relationship, and we think that here P.D. is still hiding from himself.

We agree about the sighing. We might have been ignorant of P D.'s emotional condition if he had not mentioned it. Still, he does seem a bit sorry for himself. We also fear he might exaggerate some things, knowing he is writing for posterity - editors being what they are.

The question of jealousy. The two brothers were greatly surprised when they discovered their influence in this regard. However, we must be frank and reveal that they gave every sign of being distinctly pleased about it!

Finally, P.D. mentions a certain letter but, as he says nothing about it, we shall do likewise.

Hour 3.

I must have dozed. It's three o'clock. The room is brilliant again. Every time I stretch or turn I'm afraid I'll wake up our young snorer. Where was I?

Yes; has jealousy been the acid that gnawed through our friendship? Can it really be that she is jealous because my sons love me? You'd think I was perfect, the way they hang around their old Dad! Surprising.

Lovely lads. How they used to squirm and chuckle when I gave them their baths.... Beautiful babies... little pink cherubs and, later, “pretty dimpled boys.” Golden now!

Animals, of course! Aren't we all? Not many dads would have insisted on bathing them for so long - even toileting them at the beginning. It was nice to see Moira sitting down with a book for ten minutes. Never more, though. She just couldn't let someone else get on with things.

It was a charming experience. I wonder if it was a record, continuing so long, the older lad, I mean. Must have been almost fourteen before he and the young 'un got shy.

Now that was a strange business, John-Joseph storming around fiery as a volcano and swearing like a tennis star. Our quiet ex-cherub! I made him apologize to Moira and told him to keep that kind of language for school. From that night onwards he never let me have anything to do with his bathing. Said he didn't need old people to help him. It wasn't decent. He was mature. The next night his brother announced he'd decided the same. Some collusion there. I will say that for my sons, they stick up for each other. From then on, they would never let their mother come into the bathroom. Perhaps it rankles with her, my being closer to them than she is. She never would say what had been going on. It's very sad because, since that day, John-Joseph won't let even his own father touch him. She must have said something unpleasant. Jealous women do terrible things.

Where was I? Yes. I suppose a woman must feel a bit left out sometimes, but she could have joined in our trips and our games of cricket and our romps at the baths and by the river. She never once came in swimming with us. It was well-nigh impossible to persuade her even to take photographs, unless it was standing outside a church or something.

And the scene she made about that boy, incredible! She was jealous, jealous of that boy because he liked a bit of her husband's company as well as her own.

We must say something about this bathing of the boys. We beg leave to doubt that P.D. really cared much about giving Moira ten minutes rest. He tried for years to stop her being a workaholic, a characteristic in her which was boring to all the family, but he failed as usual. We think there are

other reasons, in this present case, for his sense of satisfaction. He and his sons got on very well together, and our inquiries show that there are surprisingly many boys of even twelve or more who do not mind their parents being involved with them at bath times. Not all pubescent boys wish to be alone or untouched. We do not believe that Moira never bathed them in their early childhood, but certainly P.D. did quite frequently - and almost exclusively as they grew older - until the storm broke over poor John-Joseph's head. It was the masturbation incident which forced the younger brother to shut the door on people. He had no idea that this policy of exclusion hurt his father's feelings so much and says that, if he had known, he might have repented, since it was neither shyness nor prudishness that caused the trouble but his mother's stupidity and fussiness. P.D. is right. Moira seems to have a terrific hang-up about nudity.

P.D. observes that John-Joseph changed to the extent of not wanting his father to touch him. We have approached J.J. about this and he pleads loss of memory in the matter.

P.D. thinks he is sorting things out. Maybe. However, he spends most of his time criticizing his wife but not himself, except to admit to yielding to her again. We mean, in the Darren affair, after which sex was taboo.

Now, now, Artemis, keep that beam straight. It all happened round about the time she started her Young People's Bible Class. Every Friday evening in the breakfast room. I never stood in her way. First, there had been that church outing down by the river one glorious summer afternoon, must have been a couple of years ago, the boys were home. I took a photo of this youngster. What was his name? Darren. Not a good Catholic name, I'm afraid! The older boy's name had been my choice - Calvin. The fuss she made about having at least one child with a Catholic name in the family! I yielded as usual, and poor John-Joseph has to put up with the result. Still, he doesn't seem to mind.

Back to Darren. He was similar to John-Joseph in one way - a super physical specimen, but three or four years older. Our young snorer there took to him immediately. Darren Lowly, that was it. I took a picture of him as he stood half-dressed on the river bank after a swim, and promised him the negative. He was one of Moira's sheep.

At this time Calvin and J.J did not understand their mother's sexual inhibitions or they would have guessed why she disliked river outings, etc. The Darren Lowly affair woke them up. We have this on the best possible authority.

We were present both at the outing to the river and on the famous Friday evening. Lowly, though he is now no longer associated with the Roman Catholic Church, was then involved in many not strictly religious activities made available by that omnipresent organization, of which Moira was a leading member.

We have kept up our contact with him and have been successful in wheedling a copy of the incriminating photograph out of his reluctant hands. It shows a beautiful youth gazing down into a shining mirror of water, as if he were Narcissus reincarnated. A blue towel is draped across his shoulders, which are of a superb golden colour. So is the rest of him, except his backside. This, owing to the convention of our society, is distinctly pallid, the details of its attractiveness having been veiled from a deprived world. The young man is distinctly callipygous. The Narcissus act was due to his having dropped his trunks into the river, whence he was trying to fish them out. This editor remembers well that Darren and he had been swimming in a secluded nook far away from any intruding female eyes.

P.D. had come with them, though he had not swum, being interested in taking pictures of the young people enjoying themselves in natural surroundings. Darren fits into the surroundings very naturally indeed.

P.D. Refers to the name "Darren" as not being particularly Catholic. This needs explanation. Two years after the birth of their first boy, Moira was radically converted to Rome. The family had, until then, been perfectly respectable Protestants. Ironically enough, as he grew in wisdom and stature, John-Joseph spent most of his waking hours protesting about one thing or another. P.D. could do absolutely nothing about her conversion. More than once, he was heard to mutter that it had been done to spite him. This seems hardly likely. Anyway, we are led to believe that a double-barreled biblical name was deemed to be just right for the second boy. Our inquiries evince no interest in the matter as far as J.J. is concerned.

P.D. did sometimes go to church, even to mass at intervals, but it would seem that his wife's zealousness drove him away from any real commitment to organized religion. To be both jealous and zealous made her unbearable. However, we believe he would have been a Christian at heart.

We have not disclosed Calvin's name before, since P.D. had not mentioned it. Our policy is to comment on each addition to the memoirs as P.D. constructs his edifice - or dismantles it!

P.D. actually says that in the picture Lowly is standing "half-dressed" on the riverbank. We know this not to be the exact truth. We also know that P.D. kept a copy of this snap himself, so we must conclude that he is evading an issue here. We are utterly convinced that his account of the events at the house (see below) is also an evasion. We shall be setting out the facts as we know them. They can be corroborated by reference to John-Joseph, who was an eye-witness of the whole thing and led the attack afterwards - we mean the attack on the Bible Class, not one on P.D.

We found we shared a mutual interest in painting. Unfortunately the only mutual time available clashed with Moira's Bible Class. There were arguments, in front of our boys too, but in the end Darren proved to be a diplomat.

"I'll slip out of the class towards the end, Mrs. Dominick, and miss the cakes and prayers. Mr. Dominick won't mind if I only stay half an hour or so, will you, Mr. Dominick?"

I was perfectly content with this arrangement. I could do quite a lot with him in thirty or forty minutes.

However, Moira couldn't be reasonable. She used to keep popping in and asking if he wouldn't "like to come back and help out with the cakes?" or "say the last prayer for me?"

It must have been terribly embarrassing for the lad. Every week, as soon as he arrived, she would try and persuade him to stay with the Bible Class, when it was obvious he wanted our arrangement. I used to have to come and almost drag him out of the breakfast room, like a fireman rescuing a paralyzed man from the flames - the flames of Hell I called it. This went on for months. In the end jealousy triumphed.

We were in the middle of a particularly important piece of work one Friday when, without the least warning or any 'by your leave', she burst in and made a most frightful and humiliating scene. Darren never came again. I felt ill for weeks. It had been mounting up for ages because of her selfishness and our rows whenever I tried to exercise my rights and provide Darren with the instruction he wanted. After the incident I sought him out more than once but he seemed to be avoiding me. It appears that Moira just cannot bear that her husband has things to offer other people, whether they be his own sons or attractive neighbors. I am afraid she found this boy more attractive than she admits. It might mean confessing a sin or two, which would not do for our self-righteous Moira. Well, she had her way but it was not long before her Bible Class petered out. My two, who did not go to it, said they would tell everybody what had happened, unless she stopped bringing people into "our house" every Friday. I think it was John-Joseph who had the idea, little blackmailer! 3.30 a.m.

The Bible Class usually lasted about two hours. The final thirty or forty minutes were devoted to tea and talk, ending with a longish bout of prayers. Neither of the brothers would go to it. They resented their home being taken over "every Friday night" and had tried to persuade their father to do something about it, but he had failed to act.

On the crucial night, everything was following the normal pattern when Moira suddenly decided to take Darren a cup of tea. Here we must state an unpleasant truth. P.D. is lying when he claims that Moira constantly came into the studio and tried to winkle Lowly out of his art lesson. It happened only once and that was in the early days. She never went near the studio. In fact we believe she was too upset by the whole situation to even think of doing so. We are sure that on this particular evening she merely had an impulse to give them a cup of tea - and acted without thought. Normally P.D. and Darren made a cup for themselves and took it into the studio.

Moira came along the passage, saw John-Joseph, and handed him the little tray. She opened the studio door for him go in with the tea. Darren and P.D. were standing there stark naked, each with a brush in his right hand. They were painting a picture of one another on a double canvas.

Moira screamed. John-Joseph dropped the tray. Then,

according to the best sources, it went like this:-

Moira: "John-Joseph, go upstairs - and you, Calvin."

J.J.: "I'm picking up the things."

Moira: "Never mind that. This is no place for you."

Darren: "We were just..."

Moira: "My husband should be ashamed. You'd better get dressed, Darren."

P.D.: "And you'd better leave."

Moira: "If only I could."

Calvin: "Come on, Joe."

P.D.: "I'll explain later, boys. Don't worry."

Darren: "Mrs. Dominick, I can't get dressed. You're standing in front of my clothes."

Moira: "I'm going. I've never been so ashamed in my life."

P.D.: "I'm sorry, Darren."

Then we understand that, when John-Joseph knew that she was safely out of the way, he crept back and helped clear up the mess while his father and Darren were dressing. Calvin made a fresh pot of tea, brought it to them, and asked why they had not locked the door. It was the old story. Each thought the other had done it.

This was the end of the lessons. Darren said "I'd better not come again, Mr. Dominick," and left. He never did come again.

P.D. was furious. He says Darren was a diplomat. Well, this diplomat broke off relations. P.D. does not mention trying to get Calvin and J.J. to win Lowly back. The efforts were unsuccessful and the boys refuse to say why.

P.D. talks about Moira's jealousy of her own sons and of himself and about her finding Darren attractive and desirable. We can only say that Darren informs us that he knew nothing of it and that he was perfectly satisfied with the friends he had and did not need Mrs. Dominick or anyone like her.

The boys admit they had no idea how depressed all these events made their father. If they had known, they would have tried to comfort him, but they were embarrassed because of their mother seeing naked males when it was no secret that she couldn't put up with such things even in her own family.

P. D. is right. It was John-Joseph who had the idea of forcing an end to the Bible Class but Calvin egged him on.

Incidentally, both brothers agree that the nude figures in the painting were beautiful. It was almost finished and should have been completed and put into an exhibition, but it has disappeared. They wished that the references in the memoirs to their age, size and maturity had disappeared instead.

Hour 4. 1st Corinthians 13.

4 :05. I read over all the previous pages and was consumed with anger. I crept into the boys' toilet, unable to hold out any longer. I did not flush the thing, for fear of waking Calvin. He is still snoring in that delicate fashion of his - like a baby blowing bubbles. I remember....

Angry, heavens I was angry! What that woman has done to my boys and me and to Darren. If she could look back over her attitudes and behaviour, perhaps she would realize and reflect upon the consequences of what she is and does.

She should never have married me. She is not naive as I was. She should have foreseen that we were not compatible. I can only assume she wanted either security or social standing, with the regulation husband and two point three children. She being a powerful personality and I a quiet inoffensive creature, she snapped me up - she the shark, I the fish. She must have calculated that I would supply the material elements she fretted for, while simultaneously she could have had enjoy the luxury of sneering at me and dominating her males. Has it, I wonder, ever occurred to John-Joseph or Calvin to inquire into the meanings of our names? Well, I dare not claim any special relationship to a rock-unless it be apiece of Aberdeen, bittersweet and crumbly. What defense could two little lads have in such a situation? She has been a shark in goldfish scales, pretending to be in empathy with my golden boys as she swallowed them slowly down into the jaws of her selfishness.

We have consulted the memories of the brothers very carefully about the above entries, and both sons have been more than willing to express themselves on some of his observations.

The revelation that he had not woken up when his

father crept into the toilet astonished Calvin who, at that period in his life, had successfully developed a habit of surfacing at this time to indulge in certain pleasurable practices alone or with his brother. He had trained himself to stir this early so that his pyjamas would always be quite dry by the time he got up. He believed that his deep sleep must have been due to a very strenuous karate session and a late dinner the evening before.

The boys never paid any attention to the meanings of their names. John-Joseph, when quizzed, replied that he had always known that he was God's gift to humanity and didn't need a dictionary to prove it; but he went to the trouble of checking up on 'Moirra' and then said that P.D. should have been on his guard from the beginning.

We now turn to the thoughts and feelings P.D. reveals, starting with his remarks about being angry. We have to agree that Moira is a dominant person, in contrast with his basic inoffensiveness. We never found him aggressive. Rather, he tended to react to her like a match to the rough side of a matchbox: it just can't help flaring up. She was very clever at making him angry. It could be argued that his anger is righteous on this occasion, since he loves his sons and they love him, and so all concerned could claim that they have suffered under her behaviour.

"Two little lads". The brothers objected vehemently to being spoken of in such a patronizing manner. Each maintained that he deeply loved and respected his father, but fiercely repudiated the notion of being defenseless. They admired him greatly when he did actually stand up to Moira's bullying, though they sympathized when he ran, as it were, for cover. The older they grew, the more they understood the wisdom of ducking out of trouble and living a quiet life. It was, they insisted, a question of being prepared to take only those blows that could not be avoided - witness J.J.'s heroic battle with her over masturbation. (Remember that he was younger than most when that battle broke out.) Witness again Calvin's immediate alliance with him. The brothers were, after all, not totally without power. Witness further J.J.'s successful frontal attack on the Bible Class after the full-frontal rout of P.D. and Darren.

I have made a list of her negative qualities: snobbishness, sarcasm, self-righteousness, scorn, supreme selfishness, starving me of sex, superiority, social convention in place of Christian sweetness, skilful self-sacrifice, and so on. No wonder the English language has so many S's! What would we do without them?

In my naivete, I allowed myself to marry her. In my simplicity, I sought sexual satisfaction in her. In my unthinkingness, I did not anticipate the grip she would maintain over us. In my timidity, I have not stood up to her; and in my despair, I have never become the kind of man I am. When I look at the consequences of any action I may decide to take, all seem riddled with cancerous shrapnel.

“1st Corinthians 13”. The list of Moira's negative qualities clearly mirrors the great “love” passage in the Epistle. St. Paul encourages us not to stack up statistics of other people's sins. We have to say that P.D. is on the verge of writing a “hate” chapter here. Still the anger which provoked it, together with his awareness of the nothingness Moira was reducing him to, made necessary a verbal runway from which he could take off, abandon the tiny island of his past and head towards the new life he yearned for. The compiling of such a list is not nice. It shows things about P.D. which we deplore; but we beg to urge that this is not a rottenness at the core but the bruising inflicted by the storm.

P.D. talks about his naivete and timidity - but is he right to talk about despair? If he had really given up the battle, would he even be writing these memoirs?

“I have never become the kind of man I am.” What does he mean? We believe this is what is called a 'paradox'. We leave our readers to ponder over it.

Suicide...? Extinction without distinction. I would be condemned as a coward, pitied as a failure, and suspected as a criminal. The insurance company might not be deceived, however care- fully I endeavoured to make my death look like an accident. I must not allow her the opportunity of complaining for ever that I let her down as much in my death as in my life.

A quiet disappearance...? How attractive that sounds... like the voices of sirens, shark-bodied, waiting to drag me down as soon as I swim ashore - but, if I disappear, so will my two boys... out of my life,

perhaps for ever. They might disown me as a traitor. How could I live without them? I need them as much as I do not need her. Disappear? Vanish into thin air like a weird woman? Where to? "Excuse me, sir, but would you mind stepping along to the station for a chat? We understand that you have abandoned your wife and children...?" "Oh, no, officer, I understand they are the responsibility of the welfare state into which I have poured tax blood for over twenty years."

Remain here...? As I see it, the consequences of this course of action would be to accumulate years of compound vanity and vexation of spirit. Would I not dwindle from a minnow into a even more minimal amoeba? Could I face another twenty years kneeling in supplication before Moira, waving flags of truce between my wife and the ashamed, disappointed eyes of my beautiful boys? Could I even go on with my job, fending off the bouncers from the fast-bowling young editors-to-be - and putting together, day after day, month after month, fragments of country patter in which I no more believe than I do in the outpourings of organized Christendom?

Ah, Diana, I needed a bit of darkness.... I am beginning to see myself too clearly.

I shall not remain here. It is too much for my feeble powers to cope with and too little for my desires to be content with. No "me" would survive, only other people's plasticine fantasy creations of me. That leaves either suicide or skedaddling. Have I the will to do either? I must give myself a little more time to think. It is still only coming up to 4:30. There is the faintest flush in the sky. Two birds have been chirruping softly for some minutes. A hand is turning the doorhandle quietly, oh, ever so quietly, so very, very quietly! And failing. That makes a change. She cannot get in. She will be through all the house to see if I am skulking alone somewhere. Then she will return to the bedroom, our bedroom, hers now. She will see my clothes and know that I have not left the nest and nestlings. There she goes. That's the box-bedroom where the boys' friends sleep. Next the back bedroom. No one there, Mrs. Dominick. Finally the attic. Empty, Moira, dear. Ah, there you creep, downstairs, still ever so quietly. All couches and armchairs are yawning vacantly, waiting for friendly bottoms to slip into their laps. Up you come, across the landing, turn the handle again. Still locked, I'm afraid. And so to bedroom. Shirt, socks, trousers, shoes: all present and correct, sir, madam, all left - just as you were left. Now the bed creaks.

In a way I actually feel sorry for my wife. We are all human beings and must suffer, but one would prefer that the suffering be anonymous. But, I wish all this could have been avoided, all this tortured and unfruitful relationship. We have been fruitful in boy-making but, I fear, in nothing else. And what kind of boys have we made? Well, this letter is intriguing, even promising.

It is half past four and cold. They say this is the weakest link in our chain of daily strength; but I am determined not to stop thinking and writing. Calvin has started turning over from time to time, and his snoring is getting louder. Is he going to wake up?

I have just had a sudden vision of John-Joseph. He was swimming naked in a tree-shaded river and larking about with a young friend of his, also without bathing trunks. How strange! I had not had John-Joseph in mind. He bobbed up out of the river, snorting and spluttering, and then knelt on all fours atop the bank. A girl came along, and he ran off behind a tree. When I looked closely, I saw that the girl's face was exactly like Moira's. It has made me angry all over again, though I can't for the life of me understand why. Perhaps this is all part of the half-past-four hallucinations. John-Joseph lay down on his front in the grass to hide. I could not see his expression, because his bottom was towards me, but he was trembling. The girl vanished, seeming not to have noticed him, and the vision came to an end. Now I find that I too am trembling, violently.

P.D. States that people would deem him a coward if he killed himself. We have a feeling that most people would not dare even to go and get a sword, let alone turn it upon themselves (like in Shakespeare). Is P.D. evading an issue here? Of course, it was the middle of the night, one's weakest time. Some people have killed themselves for others. What about Jesus?

“How could I live without them?” This reference to his two sons shows, we believe, that P.D. was still self-deceived. Cf. The rest of the memoirs.

The brothers have always been very fond of their father. However, they took umbrage at his statement that they should be responsible for supporting him financially. They summed up their rejection with these words: “Oh no, Father, we think that this is the responsibility of the welfare state! We are not refusing to help, only pointing out that

you don't have an automatic right to it.”

“My beautiful boys.” We like this. It makes up for some of the less acceptable things he says.

We agree that it would be very hard for P.D. To go on in his old job. Surely he could have tried for a new job in keeping with his new self-understanding? He was still not fifty. We are convinced that there have been cases of people even older getting jobs.

“I shall not remain here.” P.D. kept to this. The two boys continue to be deeply, deeply sad that they can now see him only with the eyes of their imaginations. Did he not say, “How can I live without them?”

We note that the door was safely locked when Moira turned the handle. If John-Joseph had been at home, P.D. himself would not have been able to get in!

P.D. 's vision of John-Joseph naked.... J.J. would certainly have run and hidden if a girl had come along! Is P.D. deceiving himself again? We have a pretty shrewd idea why he was angry. Incidentally, the photograph of Darren Lowly is very explicit. P.D. gives no hint of this.

Hour 5. Exodus

I must have dozed off. Damn! The noise has woken me; and it's distinctly chilly. Poor Pete's a-cold. Outside, the clouds are surging past like loose balls of dust swept forward by an invisible bulldozer. Alexander has survived half a score of thrusts into his naked body from spears of lightning hurled at him by the jealous gods. Diana comes and goes, and lovely is repose - only the truth is that I do not want to be asleep.

I did re-read all the previous entries. How can I have been so blind? If one of these spears of lightning had actually sheared through the window and ripped out my eyes, I could not have been blinder; but it has been a spiritual blindness, and half-deliberate. Calvin has a young blind friend, Linden, somewhere beyond the suburbs, but he at least did not choose to sew up his eyes.

I knew that I had to look deliberately straight into myself when I re-read my condemnation of Moira for not having avoided marrying me. She could not have known any more about me than I about her at the time. We took each other at face value. We were thrust together in an

unnatural situation and were conned into believing we were meant for each other. No doubt I wanted security just as much as she did. I certainly wanted sex.

I have said that I was naive. There I spoke the truth. Now, in middle age, I dare not pretend to that same naivete. I am making decisions. Already I have decided not to remain here. In the next few minutes I hope to make another decision, one which will establish me as myself, not as I acted being, not as I hid from being, nor as others think I am, not as others suspect I am. I and they will see the real Dominick. If they do not like it, let them draw a circle on the ground, step inside it, make the sign of the Cross, and recite their nine times table nine times. I, at least, am no longer bewitched by the dark powers of convention and psychological switch-off. I like what I am. I am what I am. All I have to do now is to make the decision and start putting it into practice. Weave a circle around me thrice, Moira, if you wish, but I will not blame you for being yourself. I was wrong to do so.

Angry? Yes, I have been angry, am now, but my anger must be channeled. I must let it be the exploding yeast which will do something to change the choking bolus of mass prejudice and received wisdom. I have seen that I must not hide from myself, nor must I hide myself - the new truth - from the world. The world needs every little bit of new truth it can be made aware of, however small the portion it feels itself able to bear. No; the truth is not new, only the seeing of it. I have to be one of the grains which gets buried and then bears fruit, the fruit of increased understanding. I have borne fruit, two beautiful boys, but now I must beget the home they need to inspire them, as far as such a thing lies within me.

We called a recent chapter "1st Corinthians 13" because of the coincidence of the list of personal qualities; we call this one "Exodus" because, in the course of the storm, both inside P.D. and outside of him at the time he was writing his latest paragraphs, we see him actually beginning to move forward on his escape from the land of slavery. We are not becoming "Moiras" - religious fanatics - but merely wish to echo P.D.'s use of religious or supernatural language. He is, as we know, recovering from "spiritual blindness".

"The real Dominick." P.D. does not explain what his

'real' nature involves, but presumably feels that the implications of his exodus are details more suited to his forthcoming account of the events set in motion by the fateful letter. We do not think he was playing the tantalizing editor - rather that he was steeling himself against all possible eventualities in the vital minutes immediately ahead.

“Draw a circle on the ground” and “recite their nine times table” etc. The boys did not like the suggestion that their mother was a witch. They said P.D. should have known better. When the memoirs were shown to Lowly, he said that P.D. was a religious man and that, in times of stress, religious people sometimes muddle up their spirits and anyway it was the worst time, the early hours of the morning. The editor is not sure whether P.D. may simply have been trying to be clever. We know that his brain was not of the very highest order.

“My anger must be channeled.” The beginning of the exodus? Moses must have been very angry with the life he and his people had to live, so he channeled his exploding energy in order to free them, rather than to dissipate it fighting obsessively against those who persecuted him and his kinsmen. Anger certainly causes things to happen. The brothers were pleased though sad with the outcome of P.D.'s new dynamism.

“Two beautiful boys”... to be inspired by hope! The brothers highly approved of this sentiment, although J.J. Turned it into a joke and paraded round the bedroom, swaying his hips and pulling out his nipples and something else, and then posed for all to see in front of the window. Calvin, being older and wiser, made him stop and put his pyjamas back on! J.J. is indeed terrifically good-looking, though we would not like to say as much for Calvin. Perhaps P.D. meant their characters as well. Calvin was quite fierce about the inspiration bit. He told John-Joseph that anyone should be inspired by a father who had learnt at last to stand up for himself and who loved his sons enough not to hang about and make their lives more complicated, a father who was prepared to accept misunderstanding and condemnation for the sake of his principles and being his own man. John-Joseph cried and cried and kept shouting "What's the good of

being beautiful if you are abandoned?" This was a fair time after the events themselves. Calvin tried to cuddle and kiss him calm again, which had always worked before, but J.J. shook him off and said, "I don't need a nanny!" and took his sheets and a blanket and went into the box-room to sleep. This was the only time anything like that happened between them, and they have made it up to each other long since. Calvin hopes that John-Joseph will grow out of his negative attitude to their sadness and be more positive and give their father credit for the things he did.

Calvin is stirring. The storm will wake him. What a tempest it is, a really fitting accompaniment to the solo crescendo of this unique night! I would not hear a creaking doorhandle in this, Moira, nor a groaning spring - only the groaning autumn all around. The whole creation groaneth - and sheds tears too, judging by the sloshing sound on the window.

The room has suddenly become tight and weatherproof, as if it were the crew's cabin in a lighthouse. I have a sense of inviolability. The two of us are tucked away safe and well in a secure tower, and we shall give light to others out there in the dark.

It is the enemy within that I have to guard against. I noticed him in my re-reading. Throughout the whole of these memoirs, I can detect scarcely a thought which is not concerned principally with my own wishes, my own fears, my own regrets. The only consequences I considered were those which would batter at the foundations of my own edifice, would knock me off balance, would cause me to crumble into dust. What about my golden boys? Did I really care whether they might "come to dust" as a result of my actions? I cannot honestly say so. I pictured a flight from the family, the law and the burden of responsibility; but I did not spend much of the balance remaining in my emotional bank account on sympathising with them in their inevitable loss and bewilderment. I will put that right, though it may not change the practical outcome.

I do believe that the boys love me. They have always been friendly and able to enjoy themselves with their old Dad. I have given them spiritual and physical comfort, good schooling, more than average pocket money, and have shown interest in their affairs. John-Joseph has been quite affectionate at times. I really would not want to leave

them deprived if I could possibly avoid it. On the other hand, I will not remain and force them to live with tensions and problems they would not have the resources to cope with. It is clear to me that they are very fond of their mother as well. I have no option but to go. It is a case of go away or go mad.

Moirá.... I confess that I have shown little positive sympathy for my wife in these pages. What effect will my departure have on her? She will be left a lonely woman. The boys will fly the nest. Already Calvin has broken her heart, though through no intentional fault of his own. People of her type, who have rigid psychologies, are likely to snap because they do not bend. I am sorry for her, yet certain it is that I cannot remain. Would she not be even more lonely living with me? Our life would be the fight of two dumb creatures avoiding each other's jaws, neither able to communicate with its adversary, yet trapped in the same cage. Did I say I was like a little fish surrounded by sharks? Perhaps; but I was not right to call her one of those sharks. She is, rather, a fish of another species but just as vulnerable. Her species is dominant over mine. I have no will to fight, no conviction of the usefulness of fighting, nor any faith that I would come out as the victor where she is concerned. It is better that I swim away and leave the pond an easier place for those who have to stay together; for the law would give the boys to her, I am sure, unless they fought to be with me. I will not put them in such a quandary.

“A sense of inviolability.” Calvin particularly loved this passage. P.D. seems later to have recognized the temporary nature of this delicious feeling of being secure. John-Joseph liked the passage too. He was a firm believer in locking doors, and said he knew exactly how their father felt - but Calvin said P.D. meant something more than that, a sense of being like twins in the womb or like how you imagined married partners were supposed to feel. The evidence is that both brothers - though, of course, unmarried - had an innate appreciation of the emotion their father was describing.

“The enemy within.” P.D. here admits that the real danger to his well-being is his own character, full of deficiencies. The recognition is healthy, for he no longer turns it into despair or useless concentration on guilt. Both sons were vehement about the irritation they had been caused by their parents' guilty feelings at different times over

this and that, which never did either parent any good and only made other people's lives uncomfortable.

“What about my golden boys? Did I really care whether they 'come to dust' as a result of my actions? I cannot say so.” The two brothers were very moved by this confession and forgave P.D. completely, though John-Joseph wept. 'Golden boy' fits J.J. very well in this context. The photograph we possess would qualify him for any beauty competition. The brothers discussed this passage over and over again; but, when they compared themselves with P.D., each admitted to having behaved in just the same way towards the rest of the family as had their father to them. They agreed that they were ashamed, then that they must not go on feeling guilty about it, just as they would not want P.D. to go on being remorseful. John-Joseph said that they needed to be reprogrammed with new and up-to-date software. He would go to church and make a confession not only for himself but on Calvin's behalf as well.

“I do believe that the boys love me.” There are two red ticks in the manuscript against this, with the initials J.D. and C.D. beside them.

Calvin has let it be known that he wishes he had shown as much affection for his father as John-Joseph was said to have done. Both sons maintain that they would rather P.D. had stayed, despite all the problems it would have caused.

“Calvin has broken her heart.” We feel that this is a terribly cruel remark. If P.D. intended these memoirs to be read, could he not have spared his son the truth about a fanatical mother's emotions? Perhaps P.D. thought it would be all right because Calvin would, before reading these words, have experienced the events disclosed in the pages yet to come and would, therefore, be mature enough to take a more balanced view of his mother's prudishness. Nevertheless it took Calvin a very long time to get over this sentence, and we feel that here P.D. again reveals his lack of brainpower.

“I have no will to fight.” Is this strictly true? Whether it is or not, P.D.'s battle will be fought for him. Calvin has sworn to campaign for the principles and life style his father was struggling towards.

“The law would give the boys to her... unless they

fought to be with me.” We regret to say that the brothers were utterly divided over this. Calvin would have made life hell for everybody until they let him live with P.D., but John-Joseph said he would never leave his mother, even though he loved P.D. He could forgive him for choosing his own way out, but Moira needed someone to stay with her.

The moon has shown me an example and left the scene. Somewhere behind all this wind and weather the sun is at work. The light is getting stronger.

Calvin has stopped snoring and has begun to yawn. There can be no doubt that he is waking up. Our moment is almost upon us, the moment which will set the stamp on the new map of our lives. No; not a new map but the old one brought up to date, and the two of us starting out from a new vantage point.

As I was re-reading, I could not escape the drift of the evidence: Darren, the river, the studio, John-Joseph and his development, the vision, my liking for the pictures in this room, the hidden language of the words I have written, my wife at the time of our meeting and the letter, all these swallows heading south together. Now, when he wakes, it will no longer be me and my thoughts but me and him and our mutual reactions. It will, to be sure, give him quite a shock, finding someone in the room with him!

5:36. Calvin has just got out of bed and gone to the bathroom. He has not yet noticed me. He will.

The storm is still extremely noisy but the rain has eased and the sky is quite bright. This window faces east. Calvin has flushed the toilet. He has nothing on but pyjama shorts. They are held up by elastic. I remember how he argued with Moira about this when he started at Barbourne and how he refused point-blank to wear longs. I must admit that I am with him one hundred percent. He looks charming. He is not your Greek god or your Adonis, but neither is he gangling or gawky, not one of your uncoordinated adolescents - just slim, healthy and fetching.

For the first time in years, I feel genuinely excited. He is coming out into the room. Now he sees me and is standing stock-still in front of the bathroom doorway. I shall have to stop writing. I have the letter ready. I have been using it as a bookmark.

“New map of our lives...the old one brought up to date...new vantage point.” Calvin is known to have copied this out on the back of a photograph of his father - and still carries the words around with him wherever he goes.

“Give him quite a shock, finding someone in the room.” You bet!

“Calvin has just got out of bed.” We note that P.D. is very precise about the time here.

“They are held up by elastic.” A matter of significance to Calvin. John-Joseph's description of the height of the famous argument is very entertaining. We insert the end of it here, though it is best heard live: “Calvin: 'Never! If I can't have shorts I'll go naked, and I won't have anything but elastic in them. I hate cords in my pyjamas!' Moira: 'Elastic is what little boys have.' Calvin: 'Do little boys have these, then?' And, dropping down the cricket flannels he happened to be wearing, her darling elder son showed her his adult-sized bat, regulation-sized balls and his maturing pitch of pubic hair.” We leave the rest of the scene to our readers' imagination.

“Not your Greek god” etc. What a pity P.D. is right about Calvin's physical attributes...but it is not an editor's function to sugar the pill, is it?

“Charming” is acceptable.

“He sees me and is standing stock still.” Yes, indeed. Calvin had never been so shaken in his life - but several much more astonishing surprises were to follow.

There we are, then. The Exodus has started. The Promised Land might be far away yet, but perhaps there would be oases in the lone, unlevel sands if suicide or surrender to the enemy within or without did not abort the quest.

The Letter ... And the Spirit

8:45. I am writing this at leisure in a sparkling, moist grove where I have parked for the purpose, just off the main road to the office. I am going to inform them that I shall not be there tomorrow -or any other day . Birds are twittering and flickering around me like little boys in a playground. The storm has passed. Everything is fresh. I shall be sorry to say goodbye to it all. The crucial cast of the dice has been

thrown. My decision is irrevocable. I shall put my affairs in order and leave everything as neat and tidy as a good editor should: which means first filling up the concluding pages of this final exercise book.

Back to Calvin ...

“Dad!” It was more a gasp than a word. “What are you doing here?”

I shall, as always, try to be precise, but posterity must forgive me if, occasionally, I rephrase our conversation, my emotions having been a chaos at the time. I may at least be able to create a new earth out of that old chaos.

“What am I doing here? Looking you in the face for the first time as I really am, and hoping to understand both of us as we really are.” He presented a charming picture, an embodied vision of young manhood, framed as he was in the rectangle of light from the bathroom. Instinctively he had reached sideways and pulled the switchcord, but dawn was now flooding in the bedroom with a soft, misty glow which added subtly to the first-time-really-seen appearance of my beloved son. He stepped forward. Big as he was, his movements were absolutely inaudible. The heavens, though now emptied of tears, were still raging. Their thunder, drowning all lesser sounds, rattled the door and window.

The vision of young manhood came and stood beside my- John-Joseph's - bed. I smiled. Calvin looked puzzled, but smiled back. “What are you talking about? Where's Mum?”

“Where is any of us? Where are you at this moment?”

“In my bedroom, of course, talking to my dad.”

“To your new dad...for the first time. What is more, for you it is also a last time - the last time you will ever be on holiday from Barbourne.” His pyjamas were not quite drawn together properly at the front. Becoming aware of this, he closed the generation gap with a surreptitious movement, then blushed as he realized that he had been detected. In the misty light, the blush made his face stand out as if from a canvas.

“Oh, come on, Dad, stop talking in riddles. Why aren't you with Mum? Is something wrong with her?”

“Nothing unhealable - and I must thank you for having started the cure.”

“*Me?*” The boy, naturally enough in the circumstances, sounded bewildered.

I drew out the letter. “This little sliver of recycled matter has changed the world - our world, at any rate. It is from your Headmaster.
“

Calvin's face was a most amusing spectacle, a sort of mobile identikit. From bewilderment it swam into astonishment, then splashed its features about in alarm, and eventually floated into the shape of a question mark.

“The Head! What's he writing about? I told him I'd be bringing the money for the French trip.” He was, surely, being evasive, was our Calvin.

“I somehow suspect that your reverend Principal believes you would have a wrong notion of what to do with the Frogs' legs. You might, perhaps, want to sample them in bed. People might say we should have taught you to abstain from such rich delicacies. Putting it bluntly, you have been expelled. He wishes to 'sac' your 'cul' . Sit down and let me tell you what he says.” I read the letter out:

Dear Mr. Dominick:

I am afraid this communication will shock and upset you, but there is unfortunately no way I can avoid it.

For some time now, we have been watching Calvin's behaviour towards younger boys and also towards one boy slightly older than himself. The rules about associations with other pupils are well known and often mentioned discreetly. We are not an oppressive staff. Calvin and others have been reminded tactfully more than once that sexual experimentation is forbidden and that strong friendships of an exclusive character are discouraged.

I regret to have to tell you that our quiet hints, and even a housemaster's warning, have had no effect. We could be accused of laxity, in that we do not spy on boys in their dormitories. However, we do have to retain public confidence.

You should know that Calvin was seen naked in the swimming pool

at midnight with his older friend. They were indulging in an act which the Chairman of the Governors will not allow me to ignore and which, to many people, is disgusting. Regrettably the Chairman and his wife were passing at the time, after having had dinner with me.

I have to ask you to remove Calvin immediately. The Governors insist that he goes now. A simple letter stating that you wish to withdraw your son will be accepted, and you will not be required to pay next term's fees. The Governors hope that you will regard this latter gesture as an act of sympathy on their part. We shall have to come to some mutual arrangement about his exams, and I shall be glad to give any help I can. The other boy is to leave also. This kind of behaviour is a phase some boys go through, so do not feel excessively dismayed. In every other way Calvin has been an excellent pupil. My regards to your good lady...

“Is this true, Calvin?”

He looked up. He had been sitting sideways on to me, staring down at his knees. “Of course it is. Don't ask silly questions. The old fool wouldn't have written all that for nothing.” The tears started to flow from the boy's eyes. It was all I could do to restrain my own.

“And is it like he says, a 'phase'?”

“Does he mean just something that will go away after a while?”

“Exactly.”

“Then it isn't. When I was young I didn't realize what it meant, being 'gay'. I'm a bloody homosexual, a nasty queer!”

“Now then, Calvin, I don't think you should talk about us like that. You sound as if you'd been got at by the fanatics and plague-mongers of Fleet Street or the 'moral majority!’” I waited, hot and quaking like a candle flame, to see the effect of my words.

“Us?” He looked uncertain for a moment, disbelieving, then tried to stare me out. I waited. I wanted some kind of positive reaction on his part. “Dad, I said I was a homosexual. You do know that it means?”

I had to smile. “The best answer I can give to that question, dear son, would be to find out what you yourself know, and carry on from there. When it comes to lessons in daily living skill, I believe in doing

the practicals first and studying the theory afterwards!” It seemed he still did not take it in - or didn't wish to. I put my right arm round his shoulders and made an experimental cast with my left hand into the pool of his thighs. Fly fishing is a hobby I rather fancy, and I got a bite at my very first attempt. He stiffened (in more ways than one) but did not repulse me. It was quite a big fish I found myself playing, and I did not want to lose it by hurrying things. “The other boy, is he one of us as well?”

Calvin nodded. “Trelford? Yes, and so was his tutor, but they scared him off, threatened him with the police if he didn't go away and leave my friend alone.”

I felt sick. That would be the life I faced, if I did not terminate it. “Shame,” I said. “Poor lad! But tonight there's only you and me, you and your funny old Father - queer old Dad, I should say!”

“Is that why you came in here- to get me? Why haven't you ever tried before? I never guessed.” He was wriggling a little under my hands.

“I came in here because I have at last decided to leave your mother and I wanted to think.”

“Yes, but you could have gone somewhere else. You must have been thinking of me!”

“I suppose so, underneath. The letter gave me the spark of courage I needed so as to face up to myself. I have been pretending to the 'me' inside and to the whole world outside for twenty years or more, a lot more probably. I suppose I must have been homing in on you with my subconscious mind tonight.”

“And now it's with the tips of your fingers,” he retorted, “and I expect you'd like to be homing in on me with the tip of your something else!” He was trying hard to suppress a fit of the giggles - but of one thing I had not the slightest doubt: he was unquestionably out to shock and test me.

“Well now, Calvin, we must make up both our minds. We don't have to prove we're fond of each other and can enjoy each other's company, but this is different. This is the experience which makes being grown up special. Would you feel embarrassed or disgusted, going to bed with an old man like me - your own father, moreover?”

There was a long, excruciating pause. Sweat formed like glistening blisters on his forehead. Then he shook his head. I continued, "What about John-Joseph?"

"No. We did try it together once, so he could know what it was like and to give me a bit of fun, but he didn't really feel good about it. He's hetero."

A great, clanging cymbal of thunder filled the room, as if we had been sitting in the midst of the timpani and percussion in a divine orchestra - or were the gods descending to destroy us? I summoned up my courage. "I think Jove is telling us to get cracking. You're not afraid of diseases or anything?"

"No. The people at school aren't promiscuous. I mean, the only place we do it is there with each other or at home with a special friend." He grinned, delighted with my obvious surprise at his command of language and information. After a thoughtful silence, he added in a whisper, as if suddenly shy, "It'd better be my bed, or Mum might hear. This one's like a string of tin cans shaking about."

I smiled my agreement, though Moira would have needed electronic ears to pick up any sounds in that storm. I slipped out of the sheets and went to the toilet.

When I returned, Calvin was lying on his bed. All the bedclothes were in a heap on the floor. "You haven't taken off your pyjamas," I pointed out.

"Thought it might be nice for you to do it," he smirked. It was. His body was smooth, but very damp. Nervous perspiration. I was reminded of the sweat of Africa. The thought of Africa recalled memories of my youthful desires and of my wedding. Now I knew what it was that I had found attractive in her. She had been like a boy. Oh, come on, Peter Dominick! You must have known all the time. Perhaps....

Calvin has a slender trunk and slender legs, and I soon discovered that he knows how to manoeuvre them in a way which gives extra pleasure to his partner. This slenderness pleased me. I felt as if I was in command - nothing too big to manipulate. His bottom was still as smooth as when I had last bathed him. First, however, I went fishing again. The fish I had hooked originally was still there, a respectably mature and sizable pike!

So it was that my son and I made love in our chosen ways and both of us were happy. He ended up in the same position as John-Joseph in my vision, and I found myself trembling as the vision became a reality. Calvin was a joy. Deliciously young but knowing of body, he had given clear and encouraging, no, expectant indications that he was completely at my disposal. So I seized my opportunity - first to explore and caress him, then to gather him up and enfold him into my own flesh and to go on from this to work him into position, mount, probe, penetrate and, finally, ride him triumphantly until achieved the ecstasy I craved for. Really he was the master and I the apprentice - a sorcerer's apprentice, and I indeed took care to do what my master told me! Our reward was to be rapt by Sex the Magician, to be wound up in a spell, in a bodily charm, and then to fall happy and satisfied into an hour of enchanted half-sleep.

Now here I am... morning's at nine, and I cannot claim that much is right with the world, but I shall go and do what a new man has to do. Posterity will be my judge.

Letter of Transmittal

Dear Dad:

I am glad at long last to be able to send this to you - a manuscript copy of your 'Confessions' scrupulously researched and annotated, as though for publication.

It wouldn't however, be complete without your eldest son's reflections on that cataclysmic last night of thunder and breakthrough. Here, in part, is a letter I wrote a couple of months later. I had hoped to post it to you right away, but until recently, of course, John-Joseph and I had no address.

Dad, you were terrific!

When I came out of the toilet and saw you, I nearly died! I could see who it was, but it felt as if I was about to be raped by a strange man. The fact is, for a long time I'd wanted to be done by a man, an official adult, I mean. I wanted to be squeezed up by someone bigger and stronger than Trelford. Trelford's only about a pregnancy older than me. He's got enough pubic hair for one of those mops the maids use, and his prick would do for a handle, but I wanted to be hoovered - by a one-hundred-percent full-grown man.

Don't get me wrong, though- it's boys I like. It was just

that I fancied the experience.

Well, Dad, you were very good, a champion jockey, so to speak, which is remarkable when you consider the circumstances. You had a bit of trouble getting my pyjama shorts off me. I was making you earn your keep! I jammed myself against the mattress, so you had to heave me about and do physiotherapy on me. You must have thought you were the Emperor, because you were definitely showing off in your new Imperial clothes! I knew you wanted to be top man - you were waving your Imperial sword all over the place, raised up ready for blood and booty. Well, I could be a cadet, your orderly. This was a moment for boldness, so I pulled open the front of my cadet uniform and let my Emperor see that I was not merely a boy but a man, properly armed with an excellent weapon of my own, also raised up for action!

It was kind of you to say so many nice words about my body and my skill. It was lies I told about John-Joseph. It's true he's hetero, but he lets me have him quite often. He wouldn't want his dad on him, though. He does it with me because we're loving brothers, but, when he gets a girlfriend, he will stop. More important, he'd got an anti-parent thing going on then, and I didn't want to hurt your feelings by mentioning it.

I had a terrible shock when you read me that letter - got me right in the balls. I thought it meant never seeing Trelford again. Anyway, we've managed it once or twice. Mum, of course, knows nothing about you and me and thinks my Barbourne activities were like the Head said, a phase. So Trelford's been here, because she was never told he was 'the other boy', and we do it when Mum's out. He's always put in the box-bedroom. I'm sure Trelford's in love with me, but it's useless. I love someone else much younger - but that's another story.

I remember how you stroked me around for a "bit very nicely, and sort of sketched me with your fingers, then made me lie on my front. You mention in your manuscript how you were trembling, but what about me? That great thing of yours was surely going to bisect poor little Calvin....

But you're really expert with your hands, and they're lovely and soft, but, damn, you were so heavy! I was

trembling too, a bit afraid really. Don't suppose you noticed, what with you being so jittery yourself. I almost suffocated with your weight. You put an arm round my shoulders and under my neck, and slid the other under my hips. I helped you then, by lifting myself up, but I was glad you didn't stay there long, because I think I would have started jerking and would have emptied myself - and that wasn't what I was planning. As you wrote, each of us made love in his own way - and I wasn't interested in your backside just then.

Well, I might not have been targeting on your backside perhaps, but you were certainly aiming straight for mine and, when you got in, it was really something. It felt as if, instead of your prick, you'd rammed your free arm up me!

I remember it was ages before you came off. I don't know whether that was on purpose or because of your age (sorry!). Then suddenly we were both shouting, you could say bellowing. I was terrified Mum would hear. I was crying out for you to go easy, and you were crying out because of the pleasure. Later, when you were lying half-asleep in my arms, she turned the door handle and called out my name, but I didn't answer. It was lovely relaxing with my dad like that. For once, I didn't have to run to the toilet. I have to sometimes.

All that time my prick was like the handle of Joe's bat with his wanking anniversary carved on it. Suddenly I was in a hurry. I wanted to be sucked, and, when you took me in your mouth, it was, well... marvelous! Trelford would never do it; my special boy keeps putting it off - he won't say whether it's because of diseases or disinclination. And to think, Dad, you'd never done anything like that! I can't describe the beautiful feeling. You know how sometimes you get a wonderful pleasure when you let out your water after holding it for ages and ages, and you know how it feels when you're tossing off and it all goes just right? Well, it was like both those together, only ten times better. I thought it was wonderful when Trelford and I wanked each other with our things under the water in the swimming bath, but nothing equaled how wonderful you made me feel when I had my prick in your mouth and kept it there the whole time....

Well, there was more - about the discussion you and I had later, about Mum, about sex, about how only people like you and I know what it feels like to be different and treated as sinners. I was angry that one tenth of the world was supposed, *supposed*, to be lonely and depressed and afraid. I said I felt that you and I were divorced from the rest of humanity, but that I wasn't going to wait until I was fifty before admitting the truth - and I certainly wasn't going to get married as a mean way out. I would speak up for myself and my friends.

So, Dad, off this goes to your new postbox in Africa, your little book, which is really *our* book because, as perhaps other readers may in time guess, its editor was me.

A final word. I know when you left you were worried whether ultimately a boy would feel disgust over having done this thing with his own father. I can tell you now, even after all this time, I'm pleased we did. It's certainly an experience not many sons have. And I think going to bed with me set you free. You're getting boys now, you write. I'm glad.

Dad, when you read this, you will know that you didn't really let your 'golden boys' down. Joe loves you and I love you, and we both miss you, and we are the "posterity" that is judging you and finding you not guilty.