

*The Ninth  
Acolyte Reader*



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# Rabin

by I. L. Ingles

Wesley frowned with vexation. Then he saw that just beyond the clump of twigs over which the Duke of Burgundy had sailed there was the thinnest of thin gaps in the line of thorns. The gap would almost certainly have been invisible to a less experienced observer, who might well have plowed on for another fifteen or twenty minutes before finding a way through the prickly hedge to the river that flowed behind it.

This lengthy, unbroken hedge – taller than a tall man – had not been created deliberately as some sort of windbreak, but was actually a quirk of nature. By sheer chance it separated the two halves of Barbridge Forest where the woodland's thick central tangle of trees and bushes was cut through by a quiet reach of the Barr, the great waterway on either side of which Barbridge had been built.

One arm shielding his face, the other hugging his net tight against his ribs to protect it from being snagged, Wesley turned sideways and, with a practiced shoulder-charge, burst through the thorns. Butterfly nets were expensive, and this one was his favorite. The sweet-and-sour smell rising up from the river and from the foliage he had assaulted was quite intoxicating. He sucked in a deep, satisfying lungful, and then stopped dead in embarrassed astonishment. On the ground in front of him lay a shirt, socks and shoes, a pair of underpants and a pair of shorts... while, directly opposite, on the other bank, stood a totally naked brown-skinned boy, presumably even more astonished and embarrassed. Rabindranath Coxon. There was a long, awkward silence. Each had instantly recognized the other.

"Good afternoon, Rabin," said Wesley eventually. "Sorry if I took you by surprise. I thought the place was deserted." He couldn't for the moment think of anything more appropriate to say.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Chamberlain," Rabin replied, in the formal monotone adopted automatically by polite pupils responding to a teacher. Rabin, who had been studying himself in the water at the instant when Wesley, known to the boys as 'Toilets', had burst through the bushes, lowered his head to hide his shame. He felt doomed and now, on top of everything else, he was going to get into trouble with the teachers. It

would have been better, he thought, if he had died instead of his mother.

Out of the corner of one eye, Wesley saw what might have been the butterfly hydroplaning upstream. Oh well, there were more important things in life than butterflies even. Carefully, he arranged the net beside him on the ground and sat down to enjoy the next few minutes. "Are you coming over for your clothes, Rabin, or are you staying there all afternoon?" He smiled encouragingly... and the boy, as Wesley had guessed he would, scrambled down and launched himself forward across the river. He was a clumsy swimmer, far less graceful in the water than on land.

Soon Rabin was toweling himself with his shirt. Wesley was anything but a casual observer, and, though Rabin had dashed over to the pile of clothes with all the speed at his command, and then swiveled round so as to present his back and buttocks instead of his private parts, he had still been several seconds too slow. The eyes now contemplating the brown back and buttocks had had just enough time to observe what, for those two or three fascinating seconds, had become very public parts indeed. They were well developed, and endowed with a surprisingly abundant spread of pubic hair.

Wesley was not on the Year 9 bed and bath-time rota, so had never before seen this particular thirteen-year-old body when it had absolutely nothing on or when it was only half dressed, as at present. Either way it was a much more alluring and accessible object than a butterfly disappearing into gloomy foliage a hundred meters distant on the other side of a river.

"Well, Rabin, now that you're respectable, why don't you come and sit down over here." Wesley patted the ground between himself and the butterfly net.

Compliantly, Rabin came and sat down, leaving his shirt to dry on a bush. What else could you do except obey when you had been caught in the nude in public? Toilets was one of the more pleasant adults at Barbourne College and seemed quite popular... though Rabin, having arrived at the school only recently, had not yet had much to do with him. Certainly no one had ever mentioned that the man was a lepidopterist, and Rabin was glad to have been that butterfly's accidental savior. Why did so many people want to kill things? Perhaps it was because they really wanted to be like God but, because they couldn't produce natural horrors like earthquakes and floods, they were jealous and took it out on each other and poor little insects and things.

Wesley smiled again at this boy who, after however long it was living

in England, still chose to sit cross-legged in the traditional Indian manner. "Wonder if he does it when he's with the other boys?"

Rabin's chestnut-colored thighs showed to advantage against the immaculate white of his shorts. The crossing of his legs made them seem even longer than they had looked when he was standing naked on the river bank a few minutes ago.

"Did you forget your trunks, then?" Rabin blushed, and shook his head. "Oh? You mean you hadn't been intending to go for a swim, but suddenly decided you wanted to?" Another shake of the head. Wesley persevered. "So, even though somebody might come along, you decided to take off all your clothes, even your underpants?"

"Nobody ever came before," muttered Rabin. "I thought it was safe. I like having nothing on."

"Do you come here every Saturday, then?"

"Yes, to practice."

"Why don't you practice in the swimming pool, like the other boys?"

"I'm no good at it. So I thought, if I came here on my own and kept on practicing by myself, I might get to be a good swimmer. Everyone's better than me, and it's the same at cricket." He looked up apologetically. Toilets spent part of most weekends coaching boys in both these sports.

"Well, that's not a crime."

"No," murmured Rabin sadly, "but everyone else is good at sports, and I'm new, and they've all got their friends. Anyway, the pool gets too crowded."

"True; and you're not allowed to swim in your birthday suit!" smiled Wesley, "And stare at your reflection in the water, you young Narcissus."

Rabin blushed again. He knew about Narcissus. It was a story he liked – and he *had* been staring at his reflection in the river... only it wasn't really to admire his beauty. It was partly that, of course, but more to see how well he was developing, and you could hardly admit that to a teacher. Teachers didn't have to undress in a dormitory full of boys every night and turn to the wall to avoid fifteen pairs of critical eyes... and the teacher wasn't the one and only brown-skinned person in the school. This teacher was popular, too, and wouldn't be lonely and lie in bed wishing somebody was there with him. He didn't have to be jealous of Barnes and Saunders, and probably lots of others, with decently mature pink-white bodies that made them attractive and acceptable to everybody else. Rabin sighed. He was never going to fit into Barbourne.

"Oh, what a sigh is there," murmured Wesley. "If things are really so bad, perhaps I can think of something to help, even if it's only a shoulder to cry

on, metaphorically speaking, of course. You're not the first new boy to feel a bit wretched. In fact, I should say it's pretty normal, especially coming in the middle of the school year."

Rabin's face brightened. He was not going to be told off. He stared down at his legs. Much too long. Made him look thin. He ought to say something to keep the conversation going. "Will you have to report me, sir – for exposing myself?"

"No. I can use my discretion. Besides, that's not what people usually mean when they say someone exposed himself. You thought you were alone. It was what one might call an error of judgment. I just happened to come along. Still, I insist that next Saturday you wear bathing trunks. You never know when some wretched Peeping Tom is going to creep up on you. If you promise not to unmask your beauty to the sun so explicitly, I might be able to lend a hand with a bit of coaching. Now, why don't you tell me a little about yourself? All I know is that you're an orphan and have a guardian in Derbyshire to look after you during the holidays and that your education is paid for. I'm sorry about your parents. Would you like to tell me what happened?" Wesley smiled encouragingly again, hoping that he had not asked the wrong question or inquired prematurely – but, if the boy was feeling wretched and lonely, it might be a good ploy to uncork the bottle and let the emotions fizz out.

Rabin was cautious. Toilets was a teacher, however pleasant; but nothing venture, nothing win. "Do you think it's wrong for people to have sex when they're not married?" he asked in as calm a tone as he could manage, gazing across the river in case Toilets' eyes should register some sort of official horror. The saved butterfly had disappeared completely. Good.

Wesley hesitated. Rabin's question did not seem to be quite relevant. Nevertheless there was no reason to abandon one's principles, and Wesley prided himself that, if a boy asked him a serious question seriously, the boy would be answered as fully as was expedient. "No, Rabin, I don't think it's wrong. That may surprise you, coming from a schoolteacher in loco parentis, but it is the truth. It's my own personal opinion, though, and not necessarily the College's. Why do you ask?"

It was at least a minute before Rabin answered. Then, gazing down into his lap, he said gruffly, "Because that's how I was born. My mother was an educated Hindu, working in an office in Bombay, and my father was a high-class English engineer from Derbyshire. I think they must have fallen in love, but I'm not sure. She never said anything about loving him, but she let him have sex with her, and I got born." Rabin's tone was matter-of-fact, though very subdued.

Wesley waited, forced by compassion into a throat-knotting muteness. Rabin stared into space for a while, as if lost in thought, then went on "When they knew she was pregnant, her family threw her out and said they would never have anything more to do with her. I think Dad must have loved her; because, when he moved into different provinces with his job, he took us with him everywhere he went, until I was eight."

"What happened then?"

"He said he couldn't have a growing boy around with him all the time, and he got this lawyer friend in Derbyshire to fix up for me to come to school in England and stay with him in the holidays." Rabin paused, then added with a sort of savage relish "But the gods punished my parents; because, just after I was sent to England, there was a little earthquake where they were living, and a great flood, and they were both drowned, and I don't care. So now you know."

It was obvious to Wesley that the boy cared very much indeed, but perhaps this wasn't the time to argue the point. "Thank you for telling me, Rabin. I'm very sorry about it. What's your guardian like?"

"Oh, he's all right, but he doesn't love me. I think I embarrass him."

"How?"

"Me being Indian, of course. Half-castes don't fit in anywhere, do they?"

As soon as Rabin said this, Wesley determined to stamp on it. Sometimes you had to take a risk. "I think, Rabin, it's time you stopped being so racist."

"Me? Racist?" Rabin looked at him in bewilderment

"Yes. The way you've been talking makes it sound as if having a brown skin or being an Indian is something to be ashamed of, a sort of second-class citizen. Well, I don't happen to believe that, any more than I believe it's always wrong for people to have sex when they're not married. I should also point out that half-castes are usually very good-looking and attractive. So we shall have to come to an understanding, you and I. No more inferiority stuff. You are not ugly, you are not underdeveloped, and you are not second-class. What you are is very lonely. Right?"

Rabin gritted his teeth together in suppressed fury. How dare the man talk to him like this. What could he know about being different or despised?

"Right?" insisted Wesley. "Now, if you wish, instead of you telling me all about how inferior you are, we will talk about loneliness – which, in your case, I think I can understand."

"No you can't," Rabin blurted out. "You haven't a clue. You don't know anything."

Wesley was taken aback. The boy's vehemence had come with the

suddenness of a tornado out of a clear blue sky. He looked almost hysterical. 'Damn!' Wesley thought, 'I've gone too far. I've made things worse. I must put it right before it's too late.' He turned, and looked him straight in the eyes. "I'm sorry, Rabin, I didn't mean to upset you or patronize you. Perhaps we should talk about something else now; but try and remember that you are not the only lonely person in the world, little brother."

Rabin shrugged. "It's okay, sir, but I get all tight inside sometimes. Why did you call me 'little brother'?"

"Because I believe it's true. I'm not sure that I'm a particularly good or religious person, but there's one thing in the Bible that I do believe." He waited to see if Rabin would comment, but he didn't, and Wesley continued "It says in the 'Acts of the Apostles' that God has made everybody in the world out of one human blood, and I take that to mean that we're all really one huge family, and that means that, in one sense, you and I are really brothers or cousins or something of the sort... and, as I know a bit myself about being lonely, I don't want my little brothers to be lonely either. This conversation is getting rather serious, don't you think, for a sunny Saturday afternoon. Do you think we ought to stop?"

"No. Please talk," Rabin begged, in the tone almost of a small child who had been promised a toy and then seen it snatched away.

"Well," said Wesley, steeling himself consciously to take the risk he had half-unconsciously been intending to take all along. "Do you know what it means when people say 'confidential'? Teachers and boys don't usually talk together like this or make plans to meet on Saturday afternoons. It all has to be absolutely foolproof, one hundred per cent confidential."

Rabin was shocked. Did the man think you would tell him all about yourself, after seeing you stark naked in public, if it was going to be talked about to anybody else? "Course I know what 'confidential' is."

"Yes," smiled Wesley, "but it has to be both ways. I have to be able to trust you." He had already decided that he did trust this boy. "I could get into trouble just by sitting with you like this, all on our own. We're not supposed to do it, and some members of staff..."

"I told you," snapped Rabin, incensed, "I know what 'confidential' is." He pinched the skin of his left thigh savagely with a thumb and first finger until the pain was unbearable. "It's like that – you keep it so tight inside you that they'd have to torture you to get it out."

Wesley looked at the discolored skin, and frowned. "Yes, just like that. Anything you tell me will be locked inside my brain."

"And anything you tell me will stay inside my ears," said Rabin with a little giggle. "My brain's been blocked up with too much French this week."



There's no room for anything else in it." His thigh still hurt from the pinch and he stroked the skin remorsefully.

"Tell me all about your loneliness, then, Rabin."

"It's another sort of tightness, like being a balloon someone's just stuffed up with air and they won't let it out, and you want to burst. If I had a friend, a real friend you could trust, or a brother I could talk to, it wouldn't be so bad; but I haven't." He toyed abstractedly with the legs of his shorts. "It's not so bad during lessons, because we're all busy then. It's when we're free."

"Doesn't anyone talk to you?"

Rabin looked at him in surprise. "Yes, of course, they do, most of them, but that's just ordinary. I mean... having a real friend or even being like..."

"Yes?"

Nothing. Rabin knew he was blushing again. Dare he go on?

Wesley stared challengingly at the boy. "Didn't I say just now that we were brothers?"

Rabin hung his head. "You promise you won't tell?"

"Rabin, we can't keep on going backwards and forwards, saying 'Is it confidential, will you tell, is it secret?' Make up your mind. I promise you that, unless you give me permission, not a single syllable of anything you tell me here will ever be repeated."

Rabin had the feeling that this could be the greatest day in his life. He had found someone at last, someone who would listen, who wouldn't make fun of him, and might be able to give him advice. It was now or never. If he didn't seize this chance, he would never even come here again. He would be too ashamed. "Well, actually," he whispered, "it's worst in the dormitory, because Barnes and Saunders are in the next bed. I mean, it's Barnes' bed but Saunders is there too, and I can't help hearing them, and..."

"You mean that, after 'Lights Out', Saunders comes and sleeps with Barnes?"

Rabin nodded. "They don't actually make a lot of noise. They do their best to be as quiet as they can, but it's only the next bed, and I can hear them whispering and kissing – and everything."

"Why haven't you reported them?"

Rabin was appalled. This wasn't the greatest day in his life; it was the greatest mistake. He had got it all wrong. Toilets was like all the other adults and a lot of the boys. "You promised, sir. You said you wouldn't tell."

"I haven't said I was going to," smiled Wesley gravely. "I asked you why you didn't."

"I was trying to explain, sir. It's the worst time because I haven't even

got a friend, but those two actually love each other and they're in the very next bed, and it makes me feel all tight inside because I'm all alone in mine, and if I had a friend..."

"Calm down." Rabin had begun to gabble like an out-of-control machine gun. Wesley put an arm round the boy's shoulders. The bare flesh was damp with perspiration. "Relax. The air's getting out now; the balloon isn't going to burst."

Rabin wanted to laugh, then cry, then run around in joy. He had done it. He had told someone. There was someone at last who knew. Even if Toilets didn't approve or couldn't do anything, he knew. It was as if you had been locked in the dormitory broom-cupboard for weeks and then someone had come and let you out... not weeks... over a year. He had wanted to tell when he was at prep school, but hadn't dared. He had had friends there, of course, but they wouldn't have understood. Well, they would have thought they did, and gone round telling everybody that Rabindranath Coxon was a —

"Come out of your trance, Rabin," said Wesley with another of his encouraging smiles. Rabin jumped, and Wesley continued. "Most people feel lonely at some time or other, and lots of us don't have anyone to sleep with, even if we wanted to — half the staff here, for example."

Rabin considered. Yes, it was true. All the staff on the campus were bachelors or single women, even the domestics. Married staff, except the Head, had houses in the village or even as far away as Barbridge.

Toilets was speaking again. "And most of the boys would object strongly to having someone in bed with them, even their friends. I'm sure, if you could take a survey of everyone in West House, in the whole College, which you can't, you would find many of us who feel just as lonely as you do, and perhaps some of them don't have anyone to talk to, either. Still, that's not the point. I take it that what you are trying to tell me is that you believe yourself drawn to other boys, and that makes your loneliness even lonelier."

Rabin nodded, then shook his head. "I don't just *think* I'm drawn to other boys. I *know* I am, and it does make me feel lonelier, because Barnes and Saunders have got each other. I mean, I told you they actually love each other. They don't even care if people make remarks. Once Bradnack came and pulled the sheet off them and shone his torch, and Barnes just told him to go to hell, and he went. I mean he went away, and they didn't even put the sheet back on till they finished what they were doing — and you've promised not to tell."

Rabin was trembling inside. Trusting teachers was a risky game.

"Yes," nodded Wesley, "absolutely one hundred per cent —"

"Foolproofly confidential," giggled Rabin.

Wesley patted the bruised thigh, and murmured "Go and see if your shirt's dry. Time you were getting back for tea. I'll meet you here at three next Saturday. Meanwhile I am just your French teacher, stuffing your brain with future tenses. We've done enough on the past and present."

Wesley spent the next few days fighting a losing battle. It was a long time since he had permitted himself to become emotionally involved with another human being, though the strain imposed by abstinence was sometimes well-nigh unbearable. When a relationship finished, he would suffer week after week of agonizing withdrawal symptoms. They were awful enough, but then would come the depression... the all-too-familiar dreary, solitary trudge through the badlands of the soul – practice safaris for what would eventually become an unending journey through deserts of vast eternal loneliness. His last experience of such loss had been all the worse for being utterly unexpected.

Bevis, who from the age of twelve had been affectionate and trusting and full of fun, had suddenly, on his fourteenth birthday and after accepting the very gift he had asked for, announced without warning "I'm not like you think, and I don't want you ever to talk to me again, except official things. If you promise never to talk to me, I promise never in my whole life to tell anyone that I was your 'Special', even when I leave school."

Wesley had been shattered. Teenagers could be temperamental, moody, surprising but there had been absolutely no disputes, no tensions to warn him of such an unprompted slap in the face. It was like a missile bursting suddenly through your ship when there was not even a rumor of war. After the shock and the succeeding grief had come the fear. The relationship had been dangerous – such relationships always were – but Bevis had been a boy in whom Wesley had placed an absolute trust. From the time of the break-up, however, there had developed a nagging dread that, so long as he and the boy were together in the same school, there was always the risk that some spark might set fire to tinder... a careless word, a glance, some inexplicable revulsion... the boy had only to make some comment in the wrong place...

So, when this post at Barbourne had come up, Wesley had applied for it immediately. His prayer was that, once he was out of Morgans, his existence would soon be forgotten by Bevis, or dismissed as just another discarded childhood toy.

Now Rabin had appeared, in a way that could not be dismissed, just when the pangs of abstinence were again proving too much to endure. Now

instead of Bevis – extrovert, stocky, pink-bodied Bevis – there was Rabin... introverted, slim and very brown. By chance Wesley had seen this adolescent body exposed in all its dark attractiveness, but Rabin was more than a body, and it had been by choice, not chance, that he had begun to expose another kind of darkness, a darkness within his soul. Rabin, too, had substantial shares in Loneliness and Co.

Thus it was that, in the days following that Saturday encounter, Wesley began to pay more careful attention to the habits of certain of the fledgelings swirling about this aviary in which he was supposed to be a stable wise old owl. Well, a middle-aged one, at any rate. He observed that Barnes and Saunders did indeed give the impression of being one person in two bodies. Not that they were ostentatious or provocative. They were simply an entity. He observed that Rabin was indeed a hoverer on the fringe. The other boys didn't treat him badly, and there was not the slightest suggestion of victimization. He simply didn't count. There was the boy Watkins, too, who was forever sidling up to people and talking conspiratorially to them. The result was usually an outburst of giggling or loud and raucous ribaldry. Of course, had these boys been in Year 8 or 10, he would have known plenty about them already. He would have had them for many more lessons, talked to them in their dormitories, supervised them in the bathrooms, coached them at swimming or cricket.

Watkins was, as it happened, fairly prominent, because he was one of Wesley's best French pupils, but Barnes, Saunders, Rabin and the others had merely been statistics with skin on, sets of marks in registers. Now, whenever he was teaching any Year 9 class, Wesley was more conscious of each boy's individuality, for each boy was to some extent connected with Rabin.

Wesley was also working on the half-promise he had made to try to do something about Rabin's predicament. There must be a way of helping him become a part of a group, part of some cell in the buzzing hive. Rabin now filled Wesley's thoughts as no boy had for so long.

In the classrooms and at bedtimes Wesley now found that he was no longer comparing boys with Bevis, as he had always done, but with Rabin. Were Dobson's eyes exactly the same shape as Rabin's or slightly more oval – and Smith's ears, surely they stuck out at exactly the same angle as Rabin's, but less attractively? Something to do with their thickness. From a distance you would have thought Baxter walking was Rabin himself and, when Radcliffe slouched across a desk in French, there could be no denying that his posture was the spitting image of Rabin's when bored.

It was in the bathrooms and dormitories, however, that comparisons

came thick and fast to Wesley's mind. Bowman's beautiful thighs, for instance... surely Rabin's were even more shapely, if not quite as firm? Bowman was an athlete. It was amazing how many variations there could be in boys' bodies – and could it really be true that Rabin had a more luxuriant growth of pubic hair than any of the boys in Year 10, his seniors by twelve months? Wesley's surreptitious scrutiny of their jostling forms was now even more pleasurable, as he made these fascinating comparisons and so reinforced his mental picture of Rabin undressed on a sunlit river bank.

One big Year 8 boy, Harris, was incongruously shy and, whenever Wesley came into the bathroom, would swivel round exactly as Rabin had done on Saturday afternoon; but Harris' back and buttocks had none of Rabin's slim elegance. In fact Harris, when you looked at him more carefully, was slightly pudgy – and none of these boys, of course, was brown. Wesley found himself thinking how pallid and matte their pink bodies seemed when in competition with Rabin's delightful dark gloss. Their twittering bedtime chatter seemed trivial in the light of Rabin's serious topics of conversation.

Wesley even found it difficult to show polite interest in Mark Robinson's determined efforts to be friendly. Robinson, as everybody in Year 10 knew, had been in love with Wesley for two terms, despite the fact that Wesley had several times commented laughingly in public that he regarded the matter as of little importance. "Lots of boys go through a phase like that." Robinson was a charming youth, good at French, and pleasant to look at, but he was totally lacking in even the discretion natural to most schoolboys. If you had put an arm round his shoulders or given him a friendly pat on the behind, it would have been known within the hour to a thousand adolescents and their teachers. "Oyez, oyez," Robinson would have whispered to everybody he met, "No one else is allowed to try and get Toilets. I'm his 'G.T.' He was hugging me in the bathroom and feeling my bottom." 'G.T.' was the code for 'Greater Than', the current nickname for someone who was loved with a 'love greater than that of women'.

Wesley sighed. Why, if one of these delicious creatures had to fall in love with him, did it have to be Mark Robinson and not Rabindranath Coxon? It was the sort of question you asked yourself twenty times a day as if, by asking the question often enough, you could change the reality which had given rise to it.

Rabin was not sighing, except with impatience, but he too was doing a lot of thinking, but thinking did not make Saturday arrive any quicker. It was like waiting for a beautiful mega-size avocado pear to ripen. You had to get through the intervening days because the laws of nature commanded it, but all

the time you were afraid that someone would snatch the pear away just when you were about to eat it.

If the world had been interested, it might have noticed that there was a new sparkle in Rabin's eyes and that he was going about with an unusual air of happiness. There were moments, especially at night if Barnes and Saunders were whispering together in the next bed, when he would rehearse everything that had been said to him – how he was attractive and well-developed and a brother under the skin. Actually Rabin was not one hundred per cent sure exactly what Toilets had said about him being attractive, but it had been something positive and reassuring, especially the bit about other people being lonely as well, even members of staff. Toilets had seemed to actually enjoy his company.

Rabin found it very pleasant, if a lesson became particularly boring, to think that there was probably no other boy in the College for whom individually a teacher would give up his Saturday afternoon to do free private coaching and talk about very personal and confidential things.

On Saturday morning Rabin discovered that he had not merely passed the 50% safety mark in all that Friday's tests but in French and Geography had actually scored over 70, an unheard-of feat in the Coxon world. 'Friday Questions' were a matter of supreme importance to the whole school. You never knew which or how many subjects were going to be checked up on, until the papers were in front of you. Boys who did not achieve the 50% target in any test had to stay in Big Hall with their books on Saturday afternoon, and study. Every failed test had to be retaken and passed. Only then could you be released. You became extremely unpopular with the teachers whose turn it was to do the invigilating and marking. Boys who kept on failing could be there right up to supper time. Even Watkins had had to do this once, because of a particularly disgusting set of French sentences.

Normally Rabin would gobble down Saturday lunch with all the speed and style of a starving saddleback, and then escape from school as fast as his long legs would carry him. Today, however, he felt no need to hurry. He did not want to waste his energy. Toilets wouldn't be at the river till three.

"Hullo, Coxon, doing anything this afternoon?"

Rabin, in the act of demolishing an apple, looked over his right shoulder, and recognized Robinson, who had never spoken to him before. Not that this was surprising, seeing they were in different years. "Oh, might go out for a walk."

"Wouldn't mind going out for a walk myself," Robinson replied with a smile.

Rabin froze. It had happened, the very thing he had dreaded. On any

other occasion he would have been thrilled, especially when he thought of Robinson's reputation – but today, of all days... He had to refuse Robinson, but how to do it without mining all the future possibilities the request implied? Someone who was in love with a teacher might easily be another loner looking for a friend. On the other hand, unless Robinson was a bit thick, he would hardly be surprised to find himself rebuffed by a boy who had never even spoken to him. The difficulty was, how to put him off without making it irrevocable? "Oh, thanks, but actually I was thinking of going out on my own this afternoon. It would be nice another time, maybe."

Robinson looked disappointed, but managed to force out another smile. "Not to worry. My name's Mark. What's yours?"

"Rabindranath, but everyone calls me Rabin." It was surely impossible that Robinson didn't know this? Rabin watched him drift away in the crowd. Perhaps, after all, it would be better to go straight to the river and wait.

Perhaps, after all, thought Wesley, reality could be changed. He would have a go at it, and hope not to perish in the attempt. He had also thought up a scheme which might help Rabin as promised.

It was just after twenty past two when Rabin reached his special spot on the river bank. At least half an hour to go. Pity to waste it. He stripped off as he had done on the last four Saturday afternoons, and stood deliciously naked in a shaft of burning sunlight lasering through the trees. Then, adopting a pose he had seen Barnes assume in the changing room when Saunders was looking on, he contemplated his reflection in the water.

"Wretched youth!" sang out a voice from the trees. An instant later an expertly wielded net settled neatly around Rabin's private parts, as if they were an enormous butterfly caught warming itself in the sunshine. "Did I or did I not tell you to cover that imago of yours with some trunks?" inquired Wesley, stepping out from behind a tree. He was himself wearing trunks, and carrying his shorts over one shoulder. "You never know who might be watching you."

"I thought you wouldn't be here for ages," mumbled Rabin, burning with mortification. It was always the same... if Rabindranath Coxon was involved in something, Rabindranath Coxon was sure to mess it up. Now there was every likelihood that Toilets would abandon the whole idea of giving him private coaching, let alone treating him as a sort of friend.

"We can't afford to take chances," said Wesley. "If I was known to be spending my afternoons with naked schoolboys, I'd be out on my ear, and so might you." He removed the net, and used it to fish out the trunks from the

pile of clothing. "A bit like supping with the Devil at the end of a long spoon," he chuckled. "Now, for goodness sake, get these on, and we'll have a chat about breast stroke technique."

Ten minutes later, standing chest-deep in a gently swirling pool, Rabin announced cheerfully "Okay, I'm ready." The mud under his exploring feet felt safely smooth and firm. The instruction he had just received had been brilliant. He was sure anyone could have understood it, and he was equally sure, if the practical lessons were anywhere near as good, he might – after, say, four or five weeks – even be able to take on the admirable Bowman. Obeying the instructions religiously, he leaned forward and let his ribs rest comfortably on Toilets' left hand just below the surface of the water.

"All you have to do is kick with your legs," said his instructor. "You won't actually move from this spot, because this hand of mine here will be acting as a brake." He pushed the hand firmly against Rabin's chest to demonstrate how the brake would work.

"Right, kick! Good. And again."

Rabin felt very pleased with himself. Things were going well for once, so he kicked again and again, and suddenly something very unexpected was happening.

There had been swimming sessions at Rabin's previous school; and sometimes the coaches who had labored dutifully to help him, would place the fingertips of their right hand supportingly under the top of his left hip to encourage him... but Toilets' right hand must have slipped, because it had somehow ended up under Rabin's thighs, pressing against his trunks, pressing the area at the front, where his private parts made them bulge like a soft round pouch. He had assumed that the hand, recognizing its mistake, would be instantly withdrawn; but it wasn't. Meanwhile, Toilets was telling him to kick "And again, and again."

Rabin knew what was going to happen, because it was inevitable, if the hand did not go away, and it didn't. The result was that, even though the fingers never moved, each time he drew up his thighs and kicked there was an automatic increase in the pressure of the hand against his trunks. Soon the pouch, instead of being soft and round, was stretched and taut. He was like a submarine wallowing in the water with its torpedo tube just below the surface. He began to panic. Toilets couldn't have noticed what was happening, and with each kick Rabin felt the urge to abandon self-control increasing. There was only one thing to be done if they were to avoid a terrible embarrassment. Forcing himself onto his feet, he gasped "I'm getting out of breath. I'll just have a rest for a minute." Then, turning his back, he curled himself up into a floating ball and waited for his body to relax



again. When this did not work, he let himself hang down in the water like a tendril of weed, and tried to concentrate on the trees and flowers at the edge of the river and on the sky above the trees. Gradually the tightness in his trunks eased, until at last he was back to his normal innocent self. Only then did he turn round again and face Toilets.

"Can we sit in the sun for a minute, sir? And then I'll have another practice."

"Okay," agreed Wesley. "Come on out, then, and I'll tell you about my idea for getting you more involved in school." They hauled themselves onto the warm grass and Wesley continued "Quite a few people know I'm keen on butterflies, so I thought I'd organize a butterfly weekend for a few interested boys in years 9 and 10. I'm pretty certain I know one who'll respond, probably two. You must be sure to let it be known that you want to be in on the weekend. I wouldn't be surprised if there were half a dozen nutcases like myself. After a weekend together maybe you'll have found someone to make friends with. What do you think? It's not very subtle, but it's all I've managed to come up with so far."

Rabin nodded. He was far from convinced that such a plan would be any use, and probably it would be a wasted weekend, but he could hardly throw it back in the man's face. What other teacher would go to all this trouble on behalf of one whinging pupil. "Thanks." The two conspirators chatted for a quarter of an hour and then returned to the water. Wesley made Rabin swim forwards and backwards across the river, but kept at least a meter from him throughout. By the end of the afternoon Rabin was a much better swimmer, which should have made both of them cheerful. Teachers always said they were happiest when their pupils did well, but Toilets seemed to be rather sad. They spent the last twenty minutes chatting again on the grass. Then abruptly Toilets pulled his shorts on over his trunks and announced "Time we left. I hope you've enjoyed the afternoon. A few more sessions like this and you'll be as good as most." As teacher and pupil pushed through the hedge to go their separate ways, each saw simultaneously the figure of a boy walking off thirty meters ahead. "Isn't that young Robinson?" said Wesley.

At assembly on the following Friday, the Headmaster announced "I have two messages from Mr. Chamberlain to give out. First, will those Year 11 and Upper Sixth boys who have put their names down to attend the University production of *Romeo and Juliet* please note that you should be ready at five-fifty tomorrow evening and that, after you return, your 'Lights Out' will be at eleven-thirty. There will be buns and cocoa for you in your common room. The second notice is to say that, if any boys from years 9 or

10 are interested in moths and butterflies, they should see Mr. Chamberlain at the end of lunch today, when they will hear something to their advantage." A suppressed communal ripple of laughter swept over the regiments of young manhood parading in front of the Headmaster. If he noticed it he did not let on, though the professional formality of his words could not conceal the twinkle of amusement in his eyes.

Rabin blushed furiously. He felt as if everybody in the school knew about the secret plan and was tittering with derision. Then, as the word 'plan' buzzed around his brain, a wonderful series of thoughts flashed into his mind and, after tumbling around in his imagination, jigsawed themselves together into a second plan. None of these thoughts was original, but until now they had not put themselves together and allowed themselves to unite into an idea which was absolutely original.

Wesley pattered along the corridor in the direction of the Upper 6th Form dormitory. It had been a good evening. The boys had enjoyed it. He had said their 'Lights Out' should be at eleven-thirty, so eleven-thirty it must be. "Good night, lads. Hope you found the trip useful."

"Yes, sir. Yes, sir," rumbled a chorus of contented voices, and then one which piped "Why can't sixth-formers go chasing fritillaries? Why only little boys?"

Wesley glanced round the dormitory. It was young Ames. "Did you want to go, Robin, or anybody else?"

"Oh yes, sir," chorused the entire dormitory, and he realized that they were pulling his leg.

"Go on with you all. Good night. Sleep well." He switched off the light and retreated quietly. As he ambled back along the corridor he thought "They're not so bad really, the modern generation. In fact I rather like them." He came to Rabin's dormitory and paused, listening with his ear pressed to the door. No obvious noises, and he didn't really want to disturb Barnes and Saunders. Continuing on to his study, he shut the door behind him and went across to the window to draw the curtains together. How quiet it was. Suddenly Wesley felt excruciatingly lonely. An evening with the boys did this to you sometimes. Going past their dormitories could have the same effect. All those lovely creatures tucked in behind closed doors. Inaccessible loveliness. He felt terribly and fiercely jealous of Barnes and Saunders. They were probably at it even now. Rabin had said that they loved each other. Love or lust? Where was the borderline?

'What would be the use of knowing the answer to the question, anyway? I'm here, and all the lovely creatures are there.' Wesley felt a

surge of pity for Rabin. 'At least I can come in here and shut out the world and suffer on my own. Poor Rabin has to lie there listening to it.'

'There is a time for bathing and a time for showering. Which shall it be?' Wesley undressed and stood still for a moment. It was damned hot and very late. 'Shower and sleep, sleep that knits up the raveled sleeve.' He hung up his clothes and went into his bathroom. The coolness of the water instantly made him feel better. When he came back out into the bedroom, he had almost forgotten his loneliness. As he moved towards the bed to put on his pajamas, he realized suddenly that something was not quite right. The bed had been disturbed.

'Wretched little blighters... and I thought I liked them!' They had made him an apple-pie bed some weeks ago, but twelve o'clock at night after a trip out was a bit much. He was sure the bed had been all right ten minutes ago. They must have crept in while he was showering, and put whatever it was in the bed. A cricket bag, by the size of it. With another sigh he bent forward and pulled back the bedclothes.

Rabin stared up into the astonished eyes of the naked adult towering over him and felt sick. The plan had seemed a good one until this moment, but the enormity of his action now struck him with awful clarity. Instinctively he curled his own naked body into a tight ball and waited apprehensively for the explosion, even a slap perhaps.

All this week Rabin had been thinking about Toilets and their talks together. The man was definitely unusual. The more Rabin went over all the recent events item by item, the more it was that certain facts returned to his mind again and again. Toilets, probably without realizing it, had as good as admitted that he was very lonely. He had talked about being brothers. He had hinted that he found brown-skinned and half-caste people attractive. He was, moreover, giving up his Saturday afternoons to coach and advise such a boy, and was even inventing a special weekend on his behalf. Above all, there was the business of the hand that did not go away. The owner of that hand must surely have known what was happening. The owner of that hand had done nothing to stop the activities of Barnes and Saunders. Indeed it seemed to Rabin that Toilets was actually in favor of it.

Yesterday morning when the announcements in Assembly showed that the man also kept his word, all these facts had suddenly united, like bits of Stardust swimming together after the Big Bang and creating themselves into a world.

The rest had been dead easy. All Rabin had had to do was to slip out of the dormitory after he heard Toilets' feet passing along the corridor. Anyone who had been awake would have thought Rabin was creeping out to

the Toilets – which he *was* doing – *only not those ones!* Then a quick dart into Toilets' unlocked rooms, strip off dressing gown and pajamas, and dive under the bed.

Rabin's plan had been to emerge from under the bed when Toilets had settled down between the sheets; but, when the man chose to go into the shower, the idea of waiting for him *in* the bed and being discovered there had seemed a much more exciting one. Now, ramming his knees tight against his chest and locking them defensively in his arms, he stared up at the big man and knew that the whole thing had been an appalling mistake.

Wesley, recovering from his initial shock, and realizing that he was still holding the sheet and blanket, let them fall back and conceal the cringing boy, then did what he had so often instructed his charges to do. He counted slowly up to ten.

A door banged at the end of the corridor, and Wesley's brain began working properly again. He hurried out into the study and turned the key in the lock, then strode back to the bedroom. After a few seconds of indecision, he drew back the sheet and blanket, draped them over the end of the bed, and said sardonically "Well, Rabin, you appear to have broken out of your chrysalis. Now, for goodness sake, undo yourself and relax."

Slowly, Rabin stretched out at full length on his back, and forced himself not to stare at Toilets' private parts. They were no more than thirty centimeters away, and looked enormous. Desperately he fixed his gaze on Toilets' left ear and waited for the tirade, since apparently there was to be no slapping.

Wesley looked down at the cowering form and grimaced. Life was very strange. Here, in a teacher's bedroom late on a Saturday night a boy was offering himself up naked just when such a yearned-for gift had seemed of all impossibilities the most impossible. The slim physique, gently curved flanks and long, slender legs might not have appealed to everyone, but to Wesley they were the ideal. Rabin's chestnut skin, graceful figure and high level of bodily maturity were all that Wesley had been longing for. He could feel the effect of this already in his thighs, and stepped back to collect his thoughts.

Rabin, following the movement, forgot to concentrate on the left ear, and saw the effect too – a thickening, curving, half-erect penis – and broke out into a universal sweat. "Go and check that my study door is shut," said Wesley.

"But I've got nothing on."

"Do what you're told."

Alarmed by the tone of the order, Rabin crept out into the study,

returning a moment later to find the teacher perched on the edge of the mattress. "It's locked," mumbled Rabin in humiliated confusion, convinced that his inability to elevate the focus of his mesmerized eyes must be making him an object of adult derision, but the sight of Toilets' now complete and huge erection was overwhelming.

"Exactly. I had no wish to be caught talking in the nude with even the most charming of unclothed pupils," smiled Wesley. "Now get back on this bed and stop trembling."

Still somewhat apprehensive, Rabin stretched himself out again, but with his back propped up against the pillows, so that he was in a semi-sitting position rather than lying down.

Wesley raised a questioning eyebrow, "Well, what made you do it?"

Falteringly, in half-whispered sentences, Rabin regurgitated the arguments he had been putting together for so many days, first without being aware of it and then, more recently, quite consciously. "I thought you were lonely, like me... and you said we were brothers. Brothers can sleep together, can't they, and kiss each other?" He hesitated. "And you seemed to like... touching me."

"I suppose," murmured Wesley gravely, "that it's true some brothers might behave like that. It would be nice to think so. And it's certainly true that I like... touching you." Bending forward, he placed a hand on Rabin's left thigh. "However, I do not believe that you took off all your clothes and went in for this cloak and dagger stuff just for a kiss. In fact it's a case of no cloak whatsoever, and no anything else either. With regard to the dagger, I make no comment... but as a matter of interest, where *are* your clothes?"

"Under the bed. I hid there."

"Ah." Wesley smiled again. The boy's thighs, indeed the whole of his body, were running with perspiration. Doing what he had done was a very brave piece of opportunism, but he must have been quite scared. "The truth is, my dear rationalizing Rabin, that it was *your* loneliness more than mine that made you venture into this high-risk area, and you didn't just want kisses. You wanted sex, n'est-ce pas?" He stroked the soft warm flesh at the top of Rabin's thigh. "As I said, you are a very attractive boy, but I hope you don't think sex and sexiness are the only things that make people attractive?"

Rabin, having managed to stop trembling, and feeling better for having spoken out his thoughts, was now alarmed. It sounded as if Toilets was going to put him off. "No. I like you, but you didn't mind Barnes and Saunders doing things."

Wesley sighed. How wonderful it would have been if the boy had said "I love you," but he hadn't. Now it would be necessary to keep this relationship

on a sex-and-nice-time-together level and to suppress the feelings of love which Rabin was inspiring. 'Cut your losses,' he thought, and replied soberly "Well, I like you, Rabindranath Coxon, and it's true I don't think there's anything wrong in what Barnes and Saunders do. What all this means is that really you are saying 'Can I be Barnes and you be Saunders?' True?"

Rabin nodded, turning his head away to hide his mortification at being so easily seen through, and thinking, 'But I really was sorry for him. It wasn't *only* just what I wanted.' The trouble was that you couldn't defend yourself. You would just seem to be saying things to make yourself look good.

"Well, at least we know how we stand," Wesley continued with a little chuckle, glancing down at himself, "but I hope that when Saunders gets into bed with Barnes he's fairly clean. You're all soggy and stinking. Nerves. Go and have a quick shower. I'll set my alarm for five-thirty so that you can creep back into your dormitory long before rising bell."

In the shower Rabin's heart raced with excitement. It was going to happen, impossible as it had really seemed even when he had sneaked in and hidden under the bed. As he dried he thought 'Toilets' willie is ginormous. How can it get up my bottom? It'll kill me!' but he was determined not to be a coward, especially after having got this far. 'It must be all right sooner or later, or people wouldn't do it.' His own penis now seemed a little baby thing, except that he knew it worked. So, praying earnestly that Toilets would not laugh at it, he made it go stiff and, blushing furiously, strolled back into the bedroom in as carefree a manner as he could feign.

The blanket, one of the pillows, and Rabin's clothes had been piled up together in an armchair. The top sheet had been pulled back and was draped over the foot of the bed. Toilets was lying on the mattress. He no longer had an erection. He beckoned to Rabin to approach the bed. Then, taking hold of Rabin's penis, he kissed its tip several times. Rabin had been slightly apprehensive because it hadn't seemed quite stiff enough, but he no longer needed to worry. It suddenly became so thick and tight that he wondered if skin could actually split when you were in such a condition.

"Now do the same to me," said Wesley with an amused smile.

Rabin hesitated. He had never imagined himself kissing anyone's penis. Did B. and S. do that? He had seen Saunders with his thing in Barnes' bottom, but had thought it was just rude swearing when people said things like "Kiss my prick".

"Not gone shy, have you?" murmured Toilets. Rabin took a deep breath, bent down, and did as he had been requested. The man's penis immediately began to rear up and to fatten. In seconds it was standing as tall and huge as it had been before.

Wesley put his arms round Rabin's hips, and hauled him up onto the bed. Drawing the boy close to him, he arranged their genitals so that they were nestling comfortably against each other and then, hugging him tight, began to rock with him up and down and from side to side.

Rabin had finished with taking initiatives. He had taken the biggest initiative ever by planting himself naked in Toilets' bedroom. Now everything should be up to Toilets. Rabin wished only to be a learner. He sighed to himself, thinking 'I should have painted an "L" on me!' It was great being here and letting someone do this to you and letting him tell you what to do. In future, if there was a future, it would always be Toilets who had to take the lead. Then, quite suddenly, Rabin discovered that he was wrong. It was his own body that was doing it, not him or the teacher.

A marvelous pleasure was filling his thighs and surging over every part of him that had feeling. It was becoming beautifully unbearable. He hung onto Toilets and kissed him and kissed him and kissed him.

Wesley never forgot that first installment of love-making with Rabin. It was one of those rare occasions when everything was perfect; for, as the boy's body exploded into action Wesley's own body did likewise. They hung onto each other in ecstasy, no longer kissing, because they were so tightly locked together that kissing was impossible, and what was going on in their thighs dominated the whole of existence.

It was Wesley who finished first. He lay motionless, panting a little, and stroking Rabin's thighs and buttocks until the boy, whose loins seemed to be like the widow's cruse, had completely emptied himself and begun his kissing again. Wesley kissed him back, and then turned him round. They lay there together for a long time without speaking. The only movements were those of Wesley's fingers, unhurriedly fondling Rabin's still half-erect penis and squeezing him gently between the thighs. The only sounds were the intermittent whimpers of delight Rabin was making in response. After a while Wesley became aware that the whimpering had ceased. "Rabin?" he murmured, but there was no reply. Rabin was asleep.

Wesley reset the alarm for one-thirty, and dozed off feeling happier than he had felt for months. When the alarm rang, Rabin opened one eye and said drowsily "I'm hungry."

"Hungry for what?" chuckled Wesley. "Sex or sandwiches?"

Rabin sat up, suddenly wide awake. "Both," he grinned, "but in the opposite order." The light from the bedside lamp was shining directly onto him, and he looked quite eatable himself. His neat brown body glowed with youthful healthiness. His dark eyes sparkled with energy and enthusiasm.

"Okay. Decision time. Tea and biscuits or tea and baked beans on toast?"

Then you can make love to me again." Wesley leaned over and kissed him on the lips. "Whether I'll be able to make love to you so soon is another matter. I'm not a teenager any longer."

It was baked beans, a whole large tin of them. Rabin's healthiness was certainly more than skin deep. He had the appetite of a young pony – or should it have been a young stallion? He had changed too. The timidity had gone. As soon as he had gobbled down the last mouthful he inquired eagerly "Are we going back on the bed now? It'll be morning soon, and we won't have time to do anything."

"Okay. What do you want to do?"

Rabin looked him full in the face. "Anything you like. I don't care. You tell me. I don't know much about it anyway."

"Well," murmured Wesley, "go to the toilet first, and I'll be ready and equipped by the time you come out, and please wash your hands. You've got tomato sauce on them."

Rabin came back out almost immediately. Wesley looked up in surprise and then laughed. "Ass. Is that my toothpaste you've been so extravagant with? Go and wash it off." Rabin grinned happily and hurried back to remove the giant L he had daubed all over his chest. When he returned again Wesley produced a little box and said "You know what these are?"

"Yes. Everyone knows what they are. They're condoms."

"Right, try this one. I'll help you. I'm sure there's no danger of either of us having AIDS, but you must start the way you mean to go on. Only fools take unnecessary risks."

Sheepishly Rabin practiced the art until, seeing that the boy's excitement was increasing too rapidly, Wesley said suddenly, but with evident approval, "Okay, you'll do. You are indeed an extremely quick learner. Everyone back to my bed – or would you prefer to do it right here? Behold, I revolve. I bow low in homage – and my backside is at your disposal."

Rabin was startled. He had taken it for granted that you were always lying down when you did this particular thing. That was what Barnes and Saunders had been doing when Bradnack shone the torch on them. Tentatively he stepped forward and maneuvered himself into position.

"Hold my hips," suggested Wesley. "Then push." Rabin tried. It ought to be easy and, after all, was he not a quick learner? And this was quite a big bottom. He pushed again but was still unsuccessful. He had an idea. He made sure his willie was properly targeted – it was getting anxious now – then he grabbed Toilets by the shoulders instead of the hips. It worked. With a quite marvelous intensification of pleasure Rabin felt his penis slide unimpeded into a delicious softness that wrapped it round like a glove. His



hips began to jerk. His stuff began to shoot out. Every muscle in his body began working at full pressure simultaneously. Surely nothing could ever be more beautiful than this, whatever else they might do before morning?

It was Friday afternoon, last period, French. "How long've we got, Sir?" inquired Watkins, raising his arm stiffly, like a saluting soldier.

Wesley glanced at his watch. "Seven minutes, Watkins, but please ask your questions in French."

"Merci, monsieur," smirked Watkins, and brought his arm down smartly, sergeant-major style.

Wesley busied himself with the details of the forthcoming butterfly expedition. The class were quiet. He had set them to read for a quarter of an hour. Some bees were buzzing pleasantly just outside the open windows. It was a sweltering summer afternoon, threatening thunderstorms.

Wesley was happy. He adored this weather, and he adored Rabin, and tomorrow night they would be together again. Thinking about this and about the previous Saturday's unexpected joyfulness, had made the whole week a foretaste of Heaven.

Suddenly Wesley became aware of a strange silence in the room. No, not a silence. There was never real silence. This was a kind of quietness different from the lethargy of a last-lesson French class. He looked up from his papers and glanced along the rows of boys sitting in their old-fashioned double desks. Rabin had his hands placed flat on the top of his desk. Watkins was turning round like a radar dish. Johns was fiddling with something in his pencil-case and looked very pleased when he saw the teacher's eye upon him. Tinker was polishing his glasses, and also seemed pleased to have Wesley's glance fall upon him... but the rest of the form were not looking at their teacher at all. The only person they were looking at, if at anyone, was the radaring Watkins.

Wesley stood rooted to the floor. Barnes and Saunders were sitting together of course, and each had a hand in the other's lap. Page was bent over his desk, his right arm working away furiously underneath it. Thompson was making no attempt to disguise what he was doing. Stockwell was holding a book in front of himself with his right hand while his left elbow, inadequately screened by the book, moved rapidly up and down as he wriggled ecstatically on his chair. Hicks, whose usual neighbor was off sick, had moved to the middle and put a thigh on either side of the center leg of the desk and was squeezing himself rhythmically against it. Apart from the radaring Watkins, and Rabin and the other two, every boy in the room was pleasuring himself or a friend, in what could only be called an orgy. One or two bodies

had begun to jerk and, as Wesley watched bemused, a rank odor began to permeate the room in spite of the open windows.

When Rabin saw the teacher's gaze come round to him again, he blushed and pored hastily over his *Tricolors*. Although he was not involved, he felt ashamed, almost guilty. He could have warned Toilets, without actually splitting on Watkins.

Wesley was thinking on his feet. To interrupt them now could lead to all kinds of complications and the need to take some sort of action. Remaining here would mean he could never deny knowledge of what was going on. He must pretend not to have noticed, and go out. "Watkins," he called, "these are my notes for our future expedition. Nothing private. Your name's there, by the way. Please take them to Matron and ask her to check anything affecting her department. I'll need some first-aid stuff. I'm just stepping along to the Staff Room. You boys, stay quiet, and then dismiss yourselves when the bell goes." He strolled to the door and made his escape. Things were moving fast in his life nowadays, very fast.

"I'm sorry about yesterday afternoon," Rabin blurted out, the instant he had thrown off his dressing-gown and was standing wonderingly in his pajamas.

At the end of their first night together Toilets had said "Come again next Saturday, but keep your pajamas on." When Rabin had asked why, Wesley had said only "You'll see."

"Yesterday afternoon?" repeated Wesley, momentarily at a loss.

"The stupidity in French," faltered Rabin. "They were having something they called a 'wank-in', but really it was just trying to embarrass you and show off. Can I go to the loo?" He had relieved himself only five minutes earlier, but suddenly needed to go again.

When Rabin reappeared, Wesley said "You mean the orgy?"

"Yes, but I wasn't in it."

"So I noticed."

With a blush Rabin muttered, almost aggressively, "I was keeping myself for you – the whole week." He looked questioningly at Wesley, who was in shorts and shirt. "Aren't we going to go to bed straightaway? If we do something now, it'd give you more time to get strong again for later."

From behind, Wesley drew the boy close. "Bend forward." He ran his hands over the stooping pajama-skinned figure – "And did the conspiracy succeed?"

"No," giggled Rabin, squirming, and then peering up at him sideways, "You were too clever. They thought you hadn't noticed, but I knew." He

shifted excitedly from one foot to the other as suddenly the playing hands settled on his privates and pushed down heavily on them. Then, just as suddenly, the hands moved away, only for him to feel them encircling his ribs an instant later.

"Stand up," said Wesley. Rabin obeyed and the hands flicked open his pajama jacket, then removed it entirely. For a moment or two they played about with his nipples, before creeping slowly down his chest and over his pajama trousers to his knees, then moved back up again across his thighs to the hem of the trousers and started to pull apart the Velcro which held them together.

"Now you know why I told you to keep your pajamas on," chuckled Wesley. "It can make things quite exciting." It did.

The pajama bottoms fell to the floor. "Hurry," begged Rabin, now hopping about like a little boy desperate for the lavatory. "I can't wait."

Wesley reacted with great speed. His mouth closed round the erect penis and he started to suck, gripping Rabin firmly by the hips as the boy stood jerking convulsively.

All the strength drained out of Rabin's legs. He had never known such pleasure, and could not control his muscles. How could he have imagined that penetrating someone's bottom was the best thing possible? His knees buckled. Wesley, still sucking, dropped into a crouching position and lifted him up. Rabin found himself lying horizontal across the swaying lap and shooting out a stream of pleasure such as no other sexual activity had ever managed to produce in him before. Now he was ultra-glad that he had saved himself up the whole week.

When the delirium of pleasure finished, Wesley said with a smile, "Now you undress me."

Rabin wriggled himself onto his feet, hesitated, then inquired shyly, "Like you did, from behind?"

"Any way you like," said Wesley quietly. They stood facing each other.

Rabin wished Toilets would give him orders; but, confronted with having to make the decision himself, he was suddenly possessed with an urge to be absolutely crazy.

Of course he should have undone Toilets' buttons one by one and then, having taken off each bit of clothing, slowly felt him all over, and so on. Instead, not even bothering with the shirt, he wrenched down the shorts and the matching underpants, grabbed hold of Toilets' arching penis, and stood there feeling it swelling and hardening into the huge thing which made his own seem no more than a toy.

"Go on," encouraged Toilets, "put it in your mouth."

Later, when they awoke to the alarm in the middle of the night, Rabin whispered "I've done everything there is, except one. I don't mind if it hurts me the first time. Please."

It did hurt, just as Rabin had guessed, and he cried; but, even in the middle of his tears, he was able to think, 'Now no one can ever tell me that I'm just going through a phase and I'm not really gay. I know I am, and I always shall be.' Gritting his teeth, he let Toilets go mad inside him, and then allowed himself to fade away into sleep again, ready for the next shrilling of the alarm.

Wesley did not sleep but lay listening to the somewhat irregular, almost wakeful, breathing. From time to time he stroked Rabin's flanks or kissed the salty flesh between the boy's neck and shoulders. It became a routine – a gentle, reflective routine. Nothing disturbed their peace. Everything for once seemed harmonious and benevolent.

There were moments when desire made self-control difficult for Wesley, but he managed. He wanted to save himself up for half past four.

This boy was not Bevis. With Bevis things had been different. Wesley and he had used a barn on the outskirts of the school farm and, when the barn was too risky, had contented themselves with masturbating each other in some discreet corner or with kissing behind the Chapel door. Even in the barn they had never stripped completely, merely lowering their trousers and working off their heat in undignified haste.

Bevis had always been worried that somebody would come along at the wrong moment. He refused point-blank to sneak out of his dormitory into the grounds at night. "Someone could guess," he would say, "and follow me."

Looking back now, Wesley thought, 'I suppose I'm lucky he didn't give me away. He was only out for kicks and presents, and even then it was always me who had to go after him, never him looking for me.'

This time everything was different. Gratefully Wesley caressed Rabin's satiny skin, and thought, 'This boy came to me and offered himself and, once he realized that I was a possibility, he took action.' Wesley smiled into the darkness, slipped the fingers of one hand between Rabin's buttocks, probed, and then withdrew the hand. 'No, not yet. He'll still be sore.'

Rabin stirred. "Is it half past four?"

"No. Go back to sleep for a while." He kissed the boy's upturned mouth, and caressed him into unconsciousness again.

When the alarm did ring, Rabin sat up with a start. Where was he? Then he remembered, and remembered, too, that this was their last opportunity for that night. "Please go up me again. Please," he whispered. "I want to get used to it, until it gets nice. Please." He put out a hand and groped. Toilets'

thing was already hard and huge. It was bound to hurt again, but Rabin didn't care. However, there was something else he was afraid of, so he added, "But please will you suck me first, in case I have an accident. Being sucked is the most wonderful feeling ever invented." He held his breath. His own thing had shot up rigid as he spoke, and was straining inside its skin as if it were trying to tear itself out of his thighs. He dared not keep on asking favors. It wouldn't be fair. It was not a question of initiative. So he prayed, 'Please let him suck me first.'

Wesley sighed. This was literally going to be touch and go. "I'll do my best, but you mustn't complain if I get out of control while I'm sucking you, and spoil the other thing."

That night, however, really was harmonious and benevolent, and all went well – and for the whole of the morning afterwards Wesley forgot to be lonely, and Rabin wandered around in a dream world, knowing that the pain in his bottom would pass, and managing sometimes to be almost proud of it.

"Stop a minute, boys. I need to check something." With relief, because the hill was extremely steep and rough and the evening unpleasantly sultry, the little party of lepidopterists subsided to the ground and looked inquiringly at Wesley.

For the past hour, while the boys had toiled and grumbled their way upwards, their teacher had been striding along effortlessly, as if this were merely a gentle Saturday ramble in Barbridge Park. Now they saw that his face was as red as theirs but not, apparently, from exertion. He looked embarrassed. "I'll just have to go through our gear," he said. "Sorry. Please open everything up."

Watkins, Robinson and Cawthorne were each carrying a two-man tent. Tinker, Sapherson and Rabin were carrying all the food and the other camping equipment. Wesley had his own tent and seven butterfly nets. He went through everything systematically and then said slowly "I'm very sorry, lads. I forgot to ask one of you to be responsible for the first-aid kit. I must have left it in the minibus under the driving seat. I'll have to run back down and fetch it. You all stay here until I return."

"Oh no, sir." "Do you have to? It's nine o'clock already. We're hungry." "We can manage without first-aid stuff. No one's got hurt, and you said this was the worst bit." "What's a few scratches, sir?" They were wearing shorts and sleeveless shirts. "We're not babies."

Wesley let the chorus continue unabated for a couple of minutes, then cut in firmly. "No. It's my fault and I'm sorry, but we must have the first-aid kit. College regulations. Anyway, I wouldn't dream of going on

without it." He studied his watch. "You're not to budge from here. I ought to be back within the hour." He glanced round the morose group. Why the hell had he been so careless! Now they were tired and irritated. "I'm putting Watkins in charge." He didn't like the boy all that much, but he seemed to be a leader. Wesley had been right in guessing that Watkins and Robinson would be the first applicants to put themselves down for the group. "Okay?"

"Yes, sir." Watkins clicked his heels together, military-fashion, as he lay on the ground, and raised an arm in salute, reminding Wesley of that awful Friday afternoon three weeks earlier.

Rabin could not look the other boys in the eyes. He felt Toilets' embarrassment as if it were his own. It would not have been true to say that he actually *loved* Toilets, and perhaps there was a word he hadn't learned yet for the feeling he had for him, but it was certainly much stronger than mere liking. When you had been *naked* with someone who gave you that sort of feeling – naked every Saturday – and had actually joined your naked bodies together, you somehow felt that you and he shared almost the same feelings. It was quite silly, of course, to be blushing for him. Nobody knew about the Saturday nights or the swimming sessions, but still...

"Where you going?" barked Watkins.

"Just behind those bramble bushes," replied Rabin. "Shan't be a minute," and then, surprising himself by his own boldness, he added, "Minding my own business. So you don't need to be so bossy, either!" They had been following the course of the Barr, which up here was fast and turbulent. In the privacy afforded by the brambles he stood at the edge of the bank and urinated into the rushing water four or five meters below. His clothes were sticking to him unpleasantly, and he felt as if he was pouring out as much perspiration as he was piss. It was ridiculous, but he hated weather like this. After all, it *was* India he'd been brought up in, wasn't it?

"Had a nice wee-wee, then?" sneered Watkins when Rabin rejoined the group. "Mustn't let anybody see our little brown dicky-dicky, must we?"

"Shut up, Watkins," said Sapherson. "Don't be so crude."

Watkins scowled. "He should've asked. I'm in charge."

"Not of our pricks!" giggled Cawthorne.

Mark Robinson, flaked out next to Rabin, sat up. "In charge doesn't mean you always have to pick on people weaker than yourself." He smiled at Rabin sympathetically. Rabin tried to smile back – but the remark, no doubt intended to be supportive, was humiliating.

The argument died a natural death. The boys were too weary to be bothered with teasing each other, and certainly in no mood to argue with Watkins who was very big and could be a bit of a bully. They made

themselves comfortable on the grass, and lapsed into a silence broken only occasionally by complaints about the heat and Toilets' inefficiency.

Twenty minutes later the first heavy raindrops began to play xylophones on their bare legs and arms. Simultaneously the high-pitched maraca music of the river swirling below them was augmented by a curious double-bass undertone, something between a growling and a roaring. The Barr was in spate, while far above them the dome of the hill, ringed by dark thunderclouds, resembled the tonsured head of a black-haired monk.

"We'll have to run for it," fumed Watkins, hitching on his load. "There's a hut up there on that ridge. Belongs to the Ranger. I saw it on Toilets' map."

"We can't," grumbled Sapherson. "Toilets said not to budge from here."

"And he made me leader," retorted Watkins, "and I'm not bloody-well staying here to get soaked. Come on, let's run, before that lot drops on us. We can do it in ten minutes."

"You must be joking," grunted Cawthorne, but he was already picking up his tent. One by one the rest of the lepidopterists glumly followed suit, and began scrambling up the hillside.

Rabin hung back as long as he dared, then reluctantly brought up the rear. Surely Toilets wouldn't consider him disloyal in these circumstances? Surely he would have agreed with Watkins and, anyway, why appoint someone in charge if they were not allowed to make decisions in an emergency?

Soon the six boys were no longer a close group. Watkins and Sapherson were about fifteen meters ahead of Tinker and Cawthorne. Then, another fifteen meters or so behind Cawthorne, Mark Robinson was floundering along doggedly, some ten paces in front of Rabin. Rabin grinned. "If there was anyone in the school less athletic than Rabindranath Coxon it was this floundering, panting teenager in front of him. Cricket, swimming, rugby, running... Robinson was famous for being totally useless at the whole lot; but wasn't he good-looking! Why hadn't Toilets been interested?"

A strange, iridescent, eerie gloom had crept over the countryside, a sort of premature, green nightfall. The raindrops, still spasmodic, were now much larger and heavier, and very cold, like blobs of anesthetic freezing the flesh before an injection. The thunder, which had been rolling round the tops of the hills, was now exploding directly overhead.

Rabin, normally unaffected by such things, felt apprehensive and on edge. Each blinding dagger of lightning seemed to be stabbing at him personally, and every hair on his body seemed to be individually charged with sparking electricity. Mark and he were now trudging up a narrow circuitous path, with the core of the hill on one side and the churning river

some five or six meters immediately below them on the other. The water was a frigid gray-green and looked alien and antagonistic.

Mark was wearing an orange shirt and yellow shorts, the effect of which was to make him stand out startlingly in the false twilight.

'He's got beautiful legs, even if he is clumsy, and his bottom looks just right for someone my size,' thought Rabin, blushing as he realized that he was guilty of comparing Mark favorably against Toilets. He couldn't help it. The curious highlighting of Mark's brightly-clad figure was further enhanced by the fact that, in order to balance the weight of the tent more comfortably on his shoulders, Mark was leaning forward. This emphasized the contours of his waist and hips and the curves of his thighs and calves.

Suddenly, to the accompaniment of an ear-splitting detonation like ten thousand dropped tin trays, a dazzling crackling explosion of lightning filled the space between Rabin and Mark.

Mark screamed, twice, and the second scream came from somewhere below Rabin's feet.

Tinker and Cawthorne rushed recklessly back down the path, shouting for Watkins as they came. They joined Rabin and peered over the edge into the water and saw Mark clinging desperately to a willow branch which was trailing out into the river from the opposite bank. Even as they watched they heard the branch make a cracking sound. "He can't swim," breathed Sapherson hoarsely, "not properly, not even in the shallow end."

Watkins came skidding to a halt, and in the strange light his terrified face looked like something out of a horror film.

There was another cracking sound, and the branch dipped horribly. "It's bound to break soon," muttered Tinker.

Something happened in Rabin, something of which only he was aware, and a voice said, "You didn't mind taking risks by going to have illegal sex at night." He looked around, and realized that the voice was inside his head.

"What're we going to do?" croaked Watkins.

Rabin sucked in a huge breath. "Can't do anything here, and that branch can't last much longer. I'm going to run down to that narrow bit with the mud flat we passed, and try and get on the mud, and catch hold of Mark before he..." Rabin could not finish the sentence. It was only too possible that Mark might drown before even reaching the narrow stretch.

Full of dread, Rabin tore off down the hillside. There was another deafening shellburst over his head, and then a curious quietness. The light brightened, and a patch of summer blue appeared ahead of him. The storm was over, though not this other tempest pounding away in his chest.

Little rumbles of thunder bounced from hill to hill. Somewhere in the



distance a voice yelled, "It's snapped!" and from somewhere else Rabin received a new inrush of strength which enabled him to keep on running and running until at last suddenly he was there. To his horror he saw that, because of the narrows, the river was still extremely rough. He shuddered, and prayed that the something which had happened to him would give him the strength he would need.

Rabin studied the ledge of mud, which was twenty or thirty meters further downstream. For some reason the water swirled round this ledge without covering it. If he could drag Mark onto it, they could stay there and wait for help. The water was perhaps three meters below the top of the bank. He couldn't jump that; he just couldn't. Being in love was wonderful, but it couldn't make him jump three meters into swirling green water. He knew he would enter that water somehow, he had no doubt of that, but not by jumping. He would hang by his fingers and let himself go, thus shortening the distance he would actually have to drop.

Grimly he stripped down to his underpants, levered himself over the edge, and let himself hang down. A few seconds, and then the weight of his body wrenched him away, and an instant later he was in the water, fighting. "Please, God, let me get the angle right," he prayed, and began putting into practice everything he had learned during the past few weeks. It was terrible, exhausting work, but he kept at it. Then, as he was borne downstream, his mind began to play tricks on him. He found himself thinking how Mark had spoken up for him against Watkins, and had kept near him ever since the expedition started. He remembered how often recently Mark had sat near him in the dining hall. "Concentrate, you fool!" He was going to drift past the ledge. His thighs and chest were not working properly any more. Now he too might drown. He gave a final, feeble, desperate kick. His hands touched mud. A tree root appeared in front of him. He grabbed hold of it, and waited.

Not for long. It could only have been seconds before Mark, his hands flapping uselessly on either side of his body, came skewering, feet first, down the river. Rabin leaned forward, clinging with his left hand to the root, seized him round the waist, and somehow manhandled him over onto the mud flat. It was touch and go. Rabin's strength was giving out. He hung for a moment with both hands round the root, then laboriously hauled himself up, and lay beside Mark.

Then, just when everything seemed safe at last, Mark began to slide towards the water. Rabin reached out a weary arm and held him fast. Mark turned his head away and vomited. Then he looked at Rabin and slurred "Sorry I said you were weak."

Rabin said nothing. He was letting his underpants fill with warm piss. He ought to have been ashamed, but he didn't care and, moving closer, he shifted his arm and gripped Mark tightly around the chest, as if to prevent him sliding back into the water.

Wesley smiled ruefully and listened on. "But I'll still come to you Saturday nights," continued Rabin earnestly, "if you haven't got anybody else. Now that Mark and I are 'greater-thans', we've decided to take turns going to each other's dorm on Fridays, and we're going to use my swimming place at weekends. Mark knows where we can hide and —"

"Yes?" prompted Wesley tenderly. Somehow this interview had to be gone through without too much hurt to either of them.

It was just before lunch on the day following the rescue. Rabin had got himself excused from the Saturday morning chores, "Because," he had claimed, "I have to go and talk to Mr. Chamberlain about what happened last night," which in one sense was true, although Wesley had known nothing about the arrangement until Rabin had knocked on his door twenty minutes earlier. "Yes?"

"Well," faltered Rabin, blushing abjectly, "he used to hide and watch us. The first time it was because he was following you, even though he knew it was stupid, because you didn't like him, but —"

"That's not quite fair."

"Well, anyway, afterwards it was because of me, but he was scared to tell me in case I laughed at him like you did."

This time it was Wesley who blushed. He must do his best to make amends now for his past derision of Rabin's new-found lover. "Okay, I understand. I'm sorry about it, and it's very kind of you to say you'll still be coming on Saturday nights. It's true, I haven't anybody else. Come and sit on my lap for a minute and let me have a cuddle before the gong goes." They made themselves comfortable.

"I have to tell you," said Wesley, "that your Friday scheme is out of the question. The prefect in Robinson's dormitory is Christopher Pyman. He's a Plymouth Brother, one of the most bigoted and puritanical I've ever come across. You'd never get away with it. A few weeks ago he took the Head a list of all the boys in that dorm who masturbate, and asked him to do something about it."

Rabin was appalled. "What did the Head do?"

"Gave me the list and asked me to act as I thought fit, which I did; I told Pyman to mind his own business. But I certainly couldn't tell him to do that if it was a case of boys going to bed together, especially with G.T.'s from

other dormitories. I've got a better idea. Friday night is second-bath night and games or detention. I supervise my lot personally at bathtime —"

"Surprise, surprise!" giggled Rabin. Wesley ignored him.

"I can put Robinson in my first batch. Can you get your bath early?"

"Easy. Nobody wants to be early. They all want to bag the table tennis."

"Good. I shall leave my door unlocked, with the key inside. When you're both in, lock it behind you and take out the key. I've got a spare. Help yourself to juice and biscuits. Try not to be too noisy, and don't bother to make the bed afterwards. I know you won't have as long as an all-night session; but, if you get here quickly, you can still have a good three hours with each other. I shall let myself back in at exactly half past nine."

"We'll be all sticky and smelly by then," grinned Rabin. "What's the point of having a bath first?"

"Because you might not get round to it later and you can always clean up again in my shower after your fun. Don't fuss. In your case my disastrous butterfly hunt has been a resounding success. You're the hero of the College and you've got yourself a lover into the bargain. What more do you want? Not an old man like me, I'm sure. In a month or two you'll be looking for excuses why you shouldn't be spending any more Saturday nights with me. Does Robinson know about them?"

"No."

"Don't ever tell him, and do your best to keep his mouth shut about your own activities. He talks too much."

From somewhere deep down in the depths of the house came the sonorous boom of a reverberating gong. Ten minutes to lunch.

'No,' thought Wesley, 'I mustn't say things like that. Too negative. He's happy. I mustn't spoil his happiness with my doubts, and he's not a Bevis. Better to joke about things, and the cornier the joke the more he'll like it. He'll probably like actions with it even better.'

So, simultaneously easing down the zip of Rabin's trousers and kissing him lightly on the throat, Wesley chuckled "Maybe we didn't catch any butterflies yesterday – no Red Admirals, no Swallowtails, no Dukes of Burgundy – but I know where we can find a first-class Peacock at this very moment. It's hiding down here in your briefs." Deftly he inserted the fingers of one hand into the opening of Rabin's underpants. "Yes, look, a prize example! Get it? Pee... cock. Mostly it only pees but sometimes, like now, it really cocks," and with a dramatic gesture he extricated Rabin's penis from the underpants and, gripping it by the foreskin,

held it up as high as it would stretch, while it grew fatter and firmer and tried to stretch even higher.

The gong boomed again in the distance. A huge shiver shook Rabin, and with something like panic he pulled his penis out of Wesley's hand. "No, please, Mr. Chamberlain. It's not a good moment. I mean, Mark and I are doing it straight after lunch. It's our first time, and I can't waste it. Sorry, but it's special. You know what I mean. I'm sorry." Slithering down to the floor, he hurriedly adjusted his underpants and zipped up his trousers. "Sorry, and I have to go. Daren't be late. Sorry, but I'll come extra early tonight if I can, and stay till the very last minute in the morning." He bent down and kissed Wesley on the forehead. "And you don't have to worry, Mr. Chamberlain, really you don't. I shall come every single Saturday until I leave this school. It's a promise. Really. For ever and ever. Till the end of time."

"Yes," nodded Wesley, watching the boy move towards the door, "till the end of time," and then, as the door shut and the youthful feet skittered along the passage outside, "till the end of time, amen." For, in Wesley's case, the words were not a promise but a prayer.