

*The Tenth*  
*Acolyte Reader*



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# Serrana Bay

by Jotham Lotring

Massed voices, trumpets screaming "*Cum sancto spiritu,*" Bach's joy, into the wind and the saguaro-mesquite prickly wall on either side of us (us being my venerable MG-TD and myself), raising the Baja California heat quotient high into glorious D-major.

I sang along with the strong bass line. How nice it was to take off from Pierson, Pearson, Simon and Wall quite irresponsibly, out of pure sentiment at the appeal of an old friend... "*in gloria Dei patris.*"

Serrana Bay couldn't be far now. I'd had breakfast in Ensenada, careful not to drink the water or munch on the lettuce (lettuce with breakfast?), and had stopped a half hour ago to ask directions. There would be a small stucco cafe with some rusted auto hulks out behind, and just beyond I would find a dirt road leading off to the right. No sign. Everyone who went there knew the way.

What did my old fraternity brother want with me? It was serious, he'd said; we had to talk. And, no, we couldn't meet in San Diego, or anywhere north of the border.

Austin Boyle had been one of the really cool kids in Phi Psi Beta. Not much of a leader, but well liked, popular with the girls, always willing to play a little touch football on the frat lawn. The fact that he was an indifferent student didn't much matter, since there was a family trust which doled out enough money for him to lead a gentlemanly existence, complete with transit van and an enviable collection of surfing and windsurfing equipment.

I rounded a bend and there was the cafe, backed by the skeletons of two pickup trucks and a bus, and beyond it lay the dirt road. I turned off and started bumping my way towards the ocean. "*Credo in unum Deum...*"

Cactus and mesquite gave way to salt-tolerant vegetation. The track got sandier and sandier. Thank heavens an MG with a little help could easily be pushed out if one got stuck. Soon I could smell the sea. But what in the world was Austin doing down here? Surfing is an age-

appropriate enthusiasm at age 20 or 21, but it's an odd obsession when you're pushing thirty.

I popped over a ridge of dunes and there spread out before me was a broadly crescent beach with another crescent of wooden houses behind it. Austin had told me on the phone that his was near the south end; it was painted gray and I'd see a board walk leading up from it to the place where he parked his car.

But there was no car, and at the house no Austin, just a note on the door: "Gone surfing, Mister Morley. Stand on the porch and wave and I'll see you and come on in. Sam."

I put my bag down and walked to the front of the house. Shading my eyes, I could see a medium sea running out in the bay, a couple of wind surfers shuttling back and forth over the foam-streaked water. I hoped Sam, whoever Sam might be, was one of them. I waved, then went back to my car, turned on and up the stereo, returned to the porch, took a book out of my bag, waved again and settled down on a canvas deck chair to read. "*Et incarnatus est...*"

Some fifteen minutes later, looking up and over my book, I spotted someone walking along the beach carrying a surfboard. As the figure drew closer I could see it was a blond boy who couldn't have been much older than twelve or thirteen, body tanned brown as lightly fried chicken and wearing the skimpiest of red swim trunks. Didn't these surfers ever worry about skin cancer? Didn't they warn their kids?

The boy turned and trudged up the loose sand towards the house, then stopped, planted his surfboard in the sand and, leaning it against one sturdy shoulder, called, "Mister Morley?"

Who else could it be, sitting on the porch with the B-Minor Mass spilling out of a strange car behind? I waved a yes. A half minute later, having stowed his board under the house, the boy was climbing up the stairs. He put out a hand and said, "Mister Morley, I'm Sam."

It was a firm, if sandy, grip. He had a square face with a spray of freckles crossing his boyishly snubbed nose and widely-spaced, very white teeth. His hair was raggedly cropped short. Dark blue eyes met mine and showed no inclination to look away.

"I was actually expecting Austin Boyle," I began.

"I know," the boy answered. "Aus had some business away from here. He'll be back I guess tonight. He said for me to make you at home."

"And you're...?"

"Sam, I told you. I'm Aus's mate."

"I see," I said, but not really seeing.

"Come on in." Sam went to the door and opened it with a key which he wore on an elastic band around his wrist. "You want lunch? I'm thirsty. The fridge's loaded with Coke and beer and stuff."

It was a rambling, practical sort of beach house: in the living room an old chintz sofa which had obviously passed its good years in more elegant surroundings, now faded and smudged but not broken, a scarred wooden table with four wooden chairs, none of them painted, stove, sink, refrigerator, a bedroom fronting on the porch leading off behind. The place smelled of wood and sand and of some sea plant that had been dragged from the ocean and since died.

Without the least embarrassment, Sam shucked off his swim trunks and rinsed them out in the sink. "It gets chafey if you don't do that," he explained. "Besides, there's these little stinger things in the water today and one of them got inside." He went to the door, pushed it open and, naked as the day he was born, spread his trunks in the sunlight on the side-porch railing. Then I heard him greet a neighbor, evidently a woman. He chatted with her for a minute.

Yes, he'd love some of her home-baked cherry pie.

It *was* his favorite, wasn't it?

"Best south of the border and far above the average in the north," he asserted in a kind of ritual sing-song.

He came back into the living room with his booty and set about making us sandwiches – jam, honey, cheese, spread with the same knife on hunks of white bread, all the time pouring Coca-Cola down his throat.

Surfing is a sport for sea-girt young people whose muscles are lean, chests spare, clothing minimal. Sam certainly conformed. As we talked about equipment, waves, all the new techniques which had developed since my day, I found myself envying him, as I remembered my own puberty walled around by so many restraints I could barely breathe. Sam seemed like the kind of natural boy you seldom saw in The United States these days: competent at the normal tasks of keeping alive, otherwise living for the physical joy of sun and sea, with his spirit unbroken by school and church and a subordinate place in the conventional family.

Or was I over-romanticizing things down in Serrana?

After we finished lunch, Sam went to the sofa and sat down, hooking his elbows over its back. "You like kids?" he asked in total seriousness.

His question surprised me. "Um, sure, I suppose. In what way?"

"You know." (But I didn't know.) Now he looked down and took his penis between thumb and forefinger. "This is where it zapped me – see that

little red line just to the right of the nerve? They can be mean buggers if they're bigger." He licked a finger and rubbed the place of irritation. "It'll go away pretty soon. You tangle with a sea urchin, you got to piss on it. One got Aus on the ankle last winter and I peed on it right away and inside of a couple of days you couldn't tell it had even happened."

Sam continued to massage the sore place on his penis, every so often applying spittle on the end of a curled finger. "Coral's the worst, but we haven't got coral here. Water's too cold. A man gets tumbled in the surf on a coral reef might as well figure he'll be sick for a week. There's a guy from Brisbane Australia who had a whole lot worse happen, though. That was before he came to America. He said at two o'clock in the afternoon he was in bed stroking his girl-friend nice and slow and easy, and at three she was in little pieces all up and down the bay, spit back by a shark what it couldn't eat"

Not a nice story, I told him.

No, he said, but there were no sharks down here in Serrana either.

To my embarrassment, Sam's penis had by now responded erotically to the attention he'd been giving it and was standing out straight from his lap. He saw me looking at it. "Sure hate to get this old fella bit off by one of them barracudas," he said. "We do get barracudas down here. That's why you don't want to be fooling around bare-ass in murky water. What one of them buggers took for a littler fish might just be a part of you." He gave his penis a rough but affectionate cuff on its side and sent it wagging back and forth.

Now, I'd always considered myself an emancipated man. Nakedness had never bothered me, nor the sexy talk of pubertal boys, nor, for that matter, had the occasional sightings of some school-friend's or college-mate's erection. Perhaps that had been too long ago, for I now found myself actually blushing, as if the little beady eye in Sam's half-grown hard-on was trying to stare me down.

"Um, thought maybe I'd take a nap." Sam tossed his head in the direction of the bedroom. "How about you, Mister Morley? You feeling sleepy, maybe just a little?"

"Don't worry about me," I said vaguely.

"Is that a yes or a no?"

"I think I'll go out in the sunshine and relax and read until Austin gets here."

Sam shrugged and stood up. "Suit yourself," he said, and walked into the bedroom. "You know where I'll be if you want me."

I went out onto the porch and settled down in the deck chair to read.

But I found I couldn't really keep my mind on the book. Questions kept intruding on my concentration. What kind of a boy was Sam? What was he to Austin Boyle? And what about that penis of his? Why did the sight of Sam's hard-on, and his oblique suggestions (did he actually want me to take a nap *with* him?), worry me so? I sat there with the Pacific sun beating on my face, book folded back against my chest, trying to remember something – no, that isn't quite right; some ghost from my past was trying to wriggle up through the more conventional layers of my mind and grab my attention.

A half hour later Sam, having finished his nap or whatever he'd got up to in the bedroom, was back on the porch, this time in a pair of blue mini trunks. "You wanna watch out for that sun," he warned me, pressing a thumb into my reddening upper arm. "You're not used to it like we are down here."

"Thanks, I'll take care. Still no Austin."

"No," he said, and I had the feeling he hadn't been expecting him, either. Then he moved his hand up to my shoulder and announced he was going out in the bay again. I watched him set off on sturdy legs with his surfboard for the sea.

He came back around five o'clock bearing the news that Austin would be away for the night. "But that's no problem – Lark Hoskins said to come over for their fish roast. I'll just pull on a pair of Levi's. You're fine as you are – maybe a sweater, 'cause it can get cool with the wind off the ocean. You'll bunk in here, of course, tonight, and tomorrow morning Aus will be back, that's for absolute sure."

"Sam," I said, "have you known about this all along?"

"Well, sort of. He said he *might* be delayed, and anyhow to treat you like a very special guest, which I been doing, right?"

There was no point fighting it, or trying to drag the whole truth out of a boy whose loyalties obviously lay elsewhere. The sun was going down orange-red beyond the bay, touching with flame the beach house wood and Sam's sea-sandy face. Tomorrow was Sunday and nobody was expecting me until nine o'clock Monday morning.

"Okay," I said, "tell him thanks."

"You can do that when we get there. We're expected."

The fish roast turned out to be on the rocky headland to the north of the bay. Three families were tending a driftwood fire with a dozen fish roasting on the grill above it. There was lots of beer (unchilled).

Sam introduced me to a youngster of about his age as "my good friend Davy".

"Do you like to surf?" I asked Davy, for want of anything better to say.

Davy shrugged. "Sort of." He was a lean, dark-haired, shy youngster wearing a red plaid shirt and the inevitable blue denim trousers. He didn't look like the sort of boy who would be very good at sports.

"I'm helping him get the hang of it," Sam said.

"How long you going to be here in Serrana?" Davy asked me.

"Oh, I'm a working man," I began.

"That's not so bad."

"...and I have to get back to Phoenix or the other lawyers in my firm will string me up."

"Which means?"

"Putting a noose around my neck, riding me out to the old mesquite tree..."

"No, I mean when do you have to go back?"

"Tomorrow."

"That's a shame. We have a real good time down here." There was something wistful in the way Davy said it that made me doubt whether he was enjoying life in Serrana all that much.

A three-quarters moon rose above the eastern hills and in its thin light we ate the fish and the potatoes which had been tucked under the coals to roast in their skins. To my surprise, nobody talked about surfing. The conversation swung from politics (they were all "disengaged" but curious), to music ("Yes, I heard Bach coming from your MG.") to ecology. The beer was plentiful, the fish delicious, the evening's chill nicely cut by a sweater of Austin's which Sam had given me to wear and the fire which, once the grill was set aside, they built up into a cheerful blaze.

But there was no singing. There were no guitars, no gossip about current events, football games and, strangely enough, little laughter. I had the impression of an ingrown, isolated community where relationships were slightly formalized. These people, probably brought up in an advantaged environment, seemed to have found all they wanted out of life and were satisfied.

Later I wandered off by myself to a point of rocks where I had a good view of the moon stroking a spangled wake across the bay. It wasn't long before the two boys discovered where I'd gone and joined me, Sam hunkering down between me and the water and Davy sitting at my side. I felt the body warmth of Davy's arm lightly grazing mine. His head was bowed; he was staring at the ground between upraised knees.



"What about school for you boys?" I asked.

"Yes," Davy said softly, "I miss that."

"I don't," said Sam.

"You wouldn't. You're too dumb for school."

"Just disinclined," said Sam.

"But I want to be a paleontologist..."

"That's dinosaurs," Sam explained.

"...and you can't get to be one this way, can you?"

"I suppose not," I said.

Davy wanted to know how I lived and what I did. How do you make life in a staid law firm seem interesting to a thirteen-year-old boy? I talked about the few criminal cases I'd handled: a teacher accused of molestation, a teenage spider-man who broke into his friends' houses to steal CDs, a young Mexican found carrying a pistol and fifty one-hundred dollar bills.

I finished by describing the trial of a family of thieves who'd been eking out an illegal living by digging up wild cacti and selling them to local nurseries. Davy sighed, drew even closer and rested the side of his head against my shoulder. "That's wonderful," he said. "I'd love to live that way, only I'd be doing things with fossils."

Sam looked up at me, eyes hidden in black moon shadow. "You should take him with you," he said, "back to Phoenix."

"Davy?" I asked, surprised.

Sam nodded.

I laughed. "What would his parents say to that?"

"He doesn't have parents. Folks here are just looking out for him. He'd go with you, I'm not kidding. And, Mister Morley, he'd do anything."

*"Sammy!"*

Suddenly I knew what had been trying to swim up into my mind that afternoon. It was the summer of the Trinity Alps, the Ad Astra program my father had put me into in my fourteenth year – rock climbing, raft building, game tracking in Indian moccasins. But most of all something I'd almost forgotten, or tried to forget, or at least not to think about very often: Fenton Woolwich, a slightly younger boy, slipping off with him into the pines or the stream-side willows to kiss, kiss all over, give play to the levers of our recent puberty and extract their sap. Suddenly, with Davy pressing against me (was it only, I wondered, for warmth?), I relived the sight, the touch, the smell of Fenny Woolwich and realized that the same attraction was operative here. I was becoming aroused, but in a different way than I'd ever been with a woman.

I got to my feet. By the fire people were packing up plates and

cutlery, gathering empty beer cans into a fishnet carrier bag. I walked over to join them. Lark Hoskins wanted to know if the boys had been making a nuisance of themselves. Yes and no, I thought. Mostly no.

There was only one bed in the cabin, although, as Sam pointed out, it was a big bed.

"Where does Austin sleep?" I asked.

"Here, of course."

"And you, normally?"

"Come on!" Can there be anything more eloquent than a boy's exasperated put-down?

I gazed out the window of the little bedroom at the moon streaking a corner of the bay, fully aroused, heart beating strong and hard, as it always did in ecstatic anticipation. I could hear Sam in the bathroom brushing his teeth, peeing, washing his face. I slowly stripped and crawled between the sheets.

Then Sam was standing beside me, the moonlight streaming through the window turning his body to silver. He looked down, as though studying me, trying to make up his mind about something. "You never answered my question," he said. "Do you like boys?"

"I don't know," I told him. "I honestly don't know."

"Well, let's find out. Move over."

I shifted. He skinned out of his skivvies, his penis springing up and vibrating for a second like a silver dagger on a spring, then lifted the covers and climbed in beside me. "It's okay," he said, "it really is. You can do anything you want. The slippy stuff's in that drawer beside you."

Slippy stuff? "Sam," I said, "I've never in my whole life performed... what do you call it down here?"

"Well that answers one question. I been checked. So's Aus. He said he was pretty sure you were safe, but to ask anyhow."

"Godalmighty, you and Austin discussed all this *in advance*?"

Another stupid question evidently. "Or you can use spit and precome, if you want. I don't know how wet you are. Wait a minute – I'll get in position." He rolled onto his stomach, grabbed his pillow and folded it in half and slid it down under his hips. "You *have* been checked, right?"

"Yes."

"Then there's nothing to worry about. Nothing at all." He crossed his wrists underneath of his chin and waited.

And so did I, but for what – a crash of lightening, a chorus of

angels? Cherubim and Seraphim singing the answer? Now another memory from the Ad Astra summer washed through my mind: Fenny splayed out giggling on his sleeping bag as I ran my nose along the little bumps of his spinal column, going down and down, until soft flesh rose against both of my cheeks and the scent was no longer of sweaty boy but of something ranker, more mysterious and exciting...

That was it. That was the answer to Sam's question. Fenny was a lesson I should have learned earlier. I did indeed "like" boys.

Sam's strong buttocks rose beside me, a pair of Siamese melons. I started fingering the warm, moist crevasse between them, dropped my head upon the small of his back and started to lick, first over the caudal approaches then downwards, inwards and buried my nose in the crease smelling richly of Sam, smoke and the sea. I could feel the little anus pucker and relax and grip anew the tip of my tongue.

There was no need of whatever lay in the bedside table. My penis was streaming with excitement. Long stringers festooned the boy's thighs and the bedsheets below.

"Come on," Sam said, "get started, before everything dries off."

I straddled him, slicked up my rod, my heart so excited it was almost jumping out of my mouth, and touched my cock-tip to the tiny lips.

"Now go in," Sam said. "Not all at once. If you slip it in slow it's better for me."

I pushed. There was a little resistance at first, but soon I felt something give and I started to slide in, as slowly as I could, gritting my teeth.

"Wait just second," Sam said. "Let me get used to it."

It was agony not to move, but beautiful, too: it gave me time for my excitement to die down a bit – and to nuzzle his shoulders and bite into his neck and draw my nose through his sea- and fire-scented hair.

"All right," he said, "go all the way in. You can start now. But try not to make it too quick, eh?"

I pushed full into him. Deep, dark, poignant lust took over. I started to move; he moved, too, now to counter my motions and increase the delight, now to elude them and postpone the end when he sensed I was rushing towards it too rapidly. I groaned, trembled, my teeth chattered. This was surely no coitus substitute, as so many experts theorize. Sam was a tight, strong, muscular, very masculine little boy, who felt like a boy, looked and sounded and smelled like a boy, and making out with him was every bit as right and natural as making love to a woman – and

as different.

I bit into his shoulder, tasting the sea salt, and perhaps his sweat. How delicious this was, how right this was – for me. And then – it seemed almost at once – orgasm caught me and wrung me dry.

It had all gone so fast. I lay there panting into Sam's neck, suddenly feeling a failure for my lack of control. Sensing I was about to withdraw, Sam reached back to my buttocks and pressed. "Wait, stay in," he said, "and you can go for a second."

I lay there for enchanted minutes, slowly licking the salt off his skin, until sex seeped back and our motion began again.

When it was over and we were lying side by side, he asked me, "You're the same age as Aus, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"He told me you were best friends."

"For our last year in college, anyhow."

"I'd like to have known him when he was in college."

"You'd have been, what, four years old."

"I'd like to have known him when I was four years old."

"What were you doing then?"

"I was in a home."

"And I suppose you learned all about... this sort of thing there."

"When you're a little kid in a home it's all you got to offer. Little kids get fucked by the big boys – that's the way it is. Once you get used to it, it isn't so bad." Then, "Aus is harder than you are, 'cept you're the same down here when they're up." He patted my softening cock. "His muscles are harder."

"He surfs," I said. "I'm just a lawyer..."

\* \* \*

Around eight o'clock the next morning I awakened to the smell of bacon and hot griddle. Davy was in the kitchen making us breakfast.

"Sleep well?" he asked me – and then blushed as he realized the implications of his question.

I put a hand on his shoulder. "Sure. Nice to see you again."

"I hope you like pancakes." He scraped a first tough linoleum-like trial off the griddle.

Sam appeared naked in the bedroom doorway, cock risen in anticipation of a hard morning pee, and stared at Davy and me for a moment. "You look good together, no lie," he said seriously. Was Sam

ever *not* serious? "Davy's not a bad cook," he went on. "He'd be just a whole lot better for you than a wife, anyhow."

Davy picked up the reject pancake and pitched it at Sam's bare butt that was rapidly disappearing into the bathroom. "We're only fooling around," Davy told me, grinning. "We're like brothers, really."

We'd just finished washing up from breakfast when Austin Boyle arrived. Sam heard the car first and started running, full out. As I came to the door I was just in time to see the boy launch himself off one of the big rocks outlining the parking area, fly through the air and collapse upon my old friend. He wrapped his legs around Austin's waist, his hard buttocks spreading the red swim trunks seam-bursting tight. Two thoughts, quite irrelevant, went through my mind: one, I'd been in there, between those buttocks, the night before; and, two, if the trunks did split and fall to the ground, Sam, now peppering Austin's face with rapid-fire kisses, wouldn't have cared in the least.

They came toward the house, Austin carrying his burden and Sam staring into Austin's eyes, then dropping his face to nuzzle Austin's shoulder, then ruffling Austin's hair, then kissing Austin's cheek again. I was seeing a new side of Sam: a young boy in love and full of open adoration, and, as they drew near, I felt a stab of envy. Then Austin had his hand out and was saying, "Old friend, welcome. It's very, very good to see you again." He let Sam gently down onto the porch floor.

"Likewise," I said.

"Sorry I wasn't here myself, but it had to be this way. Sammy been treating you all right?" Was this a loaded question? He glanced over at Sam, who gave a quick nod, the two of them locking eyes. Jesus, it *was*. I'm not a lawyer if I can't spot that sort of thing. "Well, fine," Austin said. "Sammy, Davy, bring us each a beer."

We went inside and Austin sat down on the couch. Sam opened a Coors and put it in Austin's hand and Davy brought me mine. Sam sat down on the floor at Austin's feet and said, "You want me to get your thing off?"

"You bet," Austin said. Then, to me, "Tell me about Phoenix, and Pierson, Pearson... what is it?"

Sam started gently rumpling up Austin's right pantleg and, as I made small talk, I saw that my old friend now had an artificial limb. Austin sipped his beer; Sam detached the apparatus and set it aside. "Legacy of the accident that set up the fiction of my death," Austin said.

"Aus, you haven't been putting the cream on it," Sam said.

"That's 'cause I forgot to take the stuff along."

"You shouldn't *do* that." Sam ran his fingers carefully over the fleshy stump which terminated Austin's right leg some three inches below his knee. "See, it's all red here. Wasn't it starting to hurt?"

"Yeah, it was."

Sam shook his head, sprang up and came back right away with a tube of ointment which he started massaging into the stump. "You weren't told about this?" Austin asked me.

"I wasn't told about a lot of things," I said.

Austin shot a look at Sam, who said, "There was nothing to tell."

"Sam doesn't like to think of me as maimed."

"You aren't maimed!" the boy protested.

"See what I mean?"

"You keep forgetting about this stuff and you *will* be," Sam said.

"I've exploited it," Austin told me, "so it's not been all bad. Davy, I think you'd better leave us alone for a bit. We got important things to discuss."

Davy nodded and got up from the floor where he'd been leaning against my knees. On his way out our eyes met and I felt my heart lurch.

"What you didn't know back in Phi Psi Beta," Austin was saying, "and presumably do know now, is that you and I are alike in more ways than being rough contemporaries."

"I'll let that pass," I said. "For now."

"Good. Well, along with the joy and fulfillment of loving boys, there come problems..."

Austin's problem was that shortly after our graduation he'd been arrested for trying to pick up a young kid, so he'd done a bunk and had been living ever since in Mexico and Central America on money he'd borrowed from the family trust. An auto accident, as well as costing him part of one leg, gave him the opportunity to have himself declared officially dead – bribes can get you almost any kind of official document in Mexico. But now the money he'd brought with him was running out and he needed some way of being alive to the trustees and other beneficiaries (but not to the police) so his share of the funds could be vectored down to him.

"I see why you need a lawyer," I said. "And I got thoroughly checked out to see if I was a *suitable* lawyer, didn't I?"

"That *was* all right," Sam asked, somewhat anxiously. "It *was* the plan, wasn't it?"

"Don't embarrass the poor boy," I said. "He gave me a night that... well, never mind."

"He's a good kid," Austin said, "and he does what he's told."  
"Which you don't," said Sam, slapping Austin's stump.  
"Well, at last I understand everything," I said.  
But I didn't.

A couple of hours later I had all the information from Austin I needed. He, and especially Sam, were obviously impatient to go into the bedroom and consecrate their reunion, and I – well, I had many hours of driving before me, but that wasn't the main reason I wanted to get away. I simply needed to recover, be alone like an exhausted animal and lick the horny places.

I started the motor of my MG, slipped the tape back into the slot and suddenly once again all creation rang with bright D-Major: "*Sanctus dominus Deus Sabaoth*". I pulled out of Austin's parking place.

There was Davy sitting on a rock waiting for me up ahead.

He had a present. "It's a thirty-million-year-old sea urchin from the Caribbean," he said, leaning over the little door of my MG. "Of course, the needles are all gone. I been using it as a paperweight."

I held it in my hand — a hard, yellow-tan change-purse thing, with five delicately stippled canals drawing inward to a central, probably anal, orifice. "*Pleni sunt coeli et terra...*"

"That's Bach, isn't it?" Davy asked.

"Yes. How'd you know?"

"Mom and Dad, before the car crash, had records."

"Your mom and dad?" I'd assumed Davy was another refugee from the kid archipelago. "You lost your folks in an accident?"

Davy gave me a funny look. "Of course. The one where Austin's leg got mangled."

"I thought you were some kind of throw-away kid."

"I am now, I suppose."

"Pleni sunt coeli..."

"Good God!" Panic. I had to flee, before everything down there in Serrana Bay burned me into fission dust. But all the time my lawyer's mind was searching out possibilities, alternatives to alternatives, drawing a chart of them like a family tree turned upside-down. "Listen, Davy," I heard myself saying, "do you have a passport? A U.S. passport?"

"I guess so. We got Mom's and I'm on Mom's."

I pounded on the steering wheel. No, no, no, there was no way I could bring a kid into my settled, suburban world, have him barging around my neat house with its designer furniture, introduce him into my

circle of gifted and urbane friends. Yet I heard myself saying, "I'll be back in a couple of weeks. Don't just up and leave here in the meantime."

"Are you kidding?"

I looked up and caught the hope, the adoration, in Davy's eyes. *"Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria ejus."*

Davy bent down and, with a hand on my shoulder, kissed me wetly on my lips, and as I drove away that kiss slowly evaporated, leaving behind in its scent and residue the boy's ecstatic promise.