

*The Tenth*  
*Acolyte Reader*



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# Peepers

by E. C. Louis

Marsha Wilson was fidgeting with the car keys in her clutch purse as she passed the archway into the living room. Out of the corner of her eye she saw the great gray carlyle lump that had taken root in the large arm chair in front of their new Zenith – the lump that had hardly moved since breakfast, the one she had been married to for some thirty-eight years. With lunch already over, Marsha felt compelled to renew her efforts to deal with her husband's unwelcome retirement into her domain.

"Herb, why don't you get a hobby?"

"Oh, for Pete's sake, Marsha!" Herb growled from his TV guide, pipe and easy-chair foxhole. "Just go to your bridge club. I'm fine. I've spent thirty-five years paying for this house and you keep trying to make me leave it. Well, it just so happens that I'm not leaving. What's My Line is on any minute now."

Marsha was quick with her parry. "Herbert George Wilson, you've only been in retirement for a month, but if you insist on being the Birdman of Alcatraz, I can't stop you. Just, please, for me, try and get out of the house and smile once in a while – it won't kill you. Why only yesterday, Dennis was –"

"Ahah! Now there's somebody who belongs in Alcatraz. Less than seven thousand people in this town and that... menace... has to be at least 15% of the crime rate."

Marsha swung about as though she'd been kicked. "What? Dennis? That boy worships you, Herb. And he is *not* a menace. Or a convict."

"I won't believe that till I've had a chance to check today's headlines."

No sooner had his wife shut the door behind her, than Herb put down his unlit pipe and TV guide and spryly surged up from his easy-chair. Rubbing his hands gleefully, he chuckled and murmured, "Now for a quick shower before playtime, I think."

Apart from Mrs. Wilson getting into her car, Joey couldn't see any other movement on Rooter Street. Dennis had said on the phone to watch out for Margaret, and Joey's soiled T-shirt and grass-stained knees were ample proof that he was doing his best not to be seen. Now, one house away from Dennis's was the tricky part. She/It (or, as Dennis called her, 'Sheeit') always showed up here from out of nowhere.

The worse thing ever had been when Margaret appeared in the garage last

weekend, as though she'd walked right through the wall, while they were playing Swordfight. Why she didn't tattle after he ran home, Joey couldn't figure out – she *always* tattled – but the most important thing now was it mustn't happen again. Not ever!

Joey hadn't seen Dennis since then. Three days. Three whole days.

Using the Wilsons' departing car as a diversion, Joey scrambled through the bushes, as cat-like as any dark, curly-haired fifth-grader could be. Avoiding the open driveway, he tiptoed along the shady side of the Schultz's house until he reached the back yard. The only safe haven Dennis and he ever had from Margaret was there: a large elm tree that held aloft in its boughy palm their tree-house, forbidden territory to Sheeit, by parental edict.

The elm tree was only yards away, now, close enough to pee on after three big glasses of lemonade, but Joey was taking no chances. As he crept quietly towards the Cache of the Sacred Comic Book Collection and the Treasure Trove of Bubble-Gum, a feminine voice startled him a hair's breath from wetting his underpants. "Hi, Joey. What are you up to?"

But it was only Dennis' mother. "Oh, Mrs. Schultz, I thought you was Mar –" Joey caught himself. She might tell Margaret where they were. "Um... I'm okay. Really I am."

"You just arrived and you're already a mess. Make sure you get cleaned up here before you go home," came The Speech, heard for the hundredth time, "or your mother will have a conniption fit."

"Yes ma'am," was the customary reply. Joey gave it.

Nodding knowingly, she went back into the kitchen while Joey scurried to the tree-trunk in three giant steps. Clutching the wooden rungs nailed through the bark, he clambered up and into the tree-house floor hatch, forgetting about stealth altogether.

His head popped through into relative darkness. Would Dennis be there where he said he would be? When he finally spotted him, Joey's mouth and eyes opened wide in perfect unison.

"Where's yer clo –?" he shouted, before Dennis's head swung away from the window and gave Joey The Look.

"Shut up, you jerk. Can't you see I'm spying?"

"Where's your clothes?" Joey persisted, finishing his question in a loud whisper.

"Over there." Dennis was a year older than Joey, half a head taller, blond and active. Excitingly active. Dennis pointed to a corner where his shirt, jeans, underwear and sneakers were piled up.

"No!" Joey drew it out, climbing all the way in and closing the plywood hatch after him. "I mean, why aren't you wearing them?"

"I tol' ya. I'm spyin'."

"On who?"

"Mr. Wilson."

Joey paused, blinked and said, simply, "How come?"

"Take off yer stuff and you'll see. Yer glasses are in the shoebox."

Joey sat there in the dark, awed by the situation. He had seen Dennis almost naked before at the public pool, but not since his friend had been banned last season for horsing around. Lately he had been having Swordfights with Dennis, but that was all with their clothes on because it was cool outside – only their zippers had been open to let their 'swords' out. This was different. Way, way different.

Seeing Dennis sitting on a dirty old satin sofa pillow by the window in just his used-to-be-white socks had Joey shivering despite the June heat. "Take off my... Do I gotta?"

"Mrs. Wilson has already left. If ya don't get 'em off now, it'll be too late."

"Too late for what?"

Dennis turned away from the window and gestured wildly. "Just *do* it, or get outa here an' stop askin' stupid questions!"

Joey was stung. As Dennis picked up his Junior Rocky Mountain Ranger binoculars and looked out the window again, Joey ran to the hatch, opened it to leave before he cried. Dennis always hated it when he cried.

As the hinge creaked, Dennis turned back and asked, "Where ya goin'?"

"What d'you care?!" Joey snapped back, righteously.

"Aw, c'mon. I didn't mean 'go away' like that. It's just nearly time for Mr. Wilson to do it again."

"Do *what*?!" Joey yelled.

"Sssh, willya? I don't know what... yet. I'm tryin' to figure it out."

Joey didn't really want to go. Just getting to see Dennis like this was reason enough to stay. Joey wondered why grown-ups made such a fuss about running around bare-ass, but Dennis Schultz always seemed to have his own way about things. Fuss was his middle name, probably.

Almost involuntarily, Joey began to peel off his T-shirt. Catching himself half-way, he asked, "We gonna get in trouble?"

Dennis was looking out the window again and didn't answer. Joey knew he would just say "Naw" anyway. But they always got in trouble. The last time was when Margaret came to the tree-house and had tried to use the garden hose dangling from above to speak through. If she had seen the funnel attached to the upper end she'd have known the old hose wasn't there for talk but to pee through. She tried blowing through it and when she realized her mistake her howls could be heard all up and down the block. The hose was gone now.

While not eager for another swat and lecture, Joey knew that Dennis was taking great pains to keep Margaret from knowing they were together again. Her revenge last weekend, after the hose incident, made her The Enemy forever.

"C'mon, Joey. Hurry up. He'll start any minute!"

"Wha... How do you know?" Joey asked. Maybe he would learn more by not repeating the same old question.

"'Cause Mrs. Wilson already took off, like she did yesterday an' the day before."

It was an answer of sorts, but Joey still couldn't understand the spy part, much less the need to be naked. Shrugging, he whipped off his top and threw it next to Dennis's pile. As Dennis was training his binoculars on the Wilson house, Joey got a good long look at his blond friend's shapely, pale butt-cheeks catching what little sun came in through the window. Joey liked what he saw. He wanted to pinch them.

Joey unbuttoned his shorts and pulled off his shoes, his heart beating faster. Doing things with Dennis always got him excited. Swordfights had been the most fun of all, but this might even be better. Was that possible? Joey shuddered again. He lowered his shorts and underpants, hoping Dennis would glance back and see him, but the master of the tree-house kept his eyes glued to his Ranger binoculars.

In just his socks, Joey could almost stand up but bending over was more comfortable. His hands hovered above his tingling peter as he went over to the shoebox.

Now Dennis *was* watching. Joey's small ass was moving amid the afternoon shadows of branches and leaves. Dennis smiled and adjusted, almost without thinking, his erecting penis. Joey bent down, then swung around holding his own Marine Commando binoculars. Now their eyes met, swept over each other's face and body, beamed in wicked delight which gave way a few seconds later to silver-bell giggling.

The slam of a nearby door immediately changed Dennis's mood. He turned back to his examination of the Wilson house and rasped, "Ssh, here he comes!"

All answers were to be found at the tree-house window. Stepping past the trapdoor, Joey joined Dennis at his perch. He knelt, brought up his Marine Commandos and whispered, "Move over. You're hoggin' all the room."

Joey had tried to sound normal, but a rush of blood had swirled through his brain as his shoulder made contact with the smooth skin on Dennis's shoulder. He secretly worried that Dennis, his best friend in the whole world, would start hanging out with other older boys and leave him behind, all alone. But Dennis had always stuck by him, and Joey knew in his heart he would follow Dennis anywhere.

There wasn't really enough room at the window for both of them at once. It was a good excuse for Joey to lean more heavily, but his friend just kept looking out the window as though nothing else mattered.

Joey got back up, in something of a huff, and stood straddling Dennis from behind, for, although the body contact had been nice, he hadn't been able to see anything. Now, bending over at the waist, he'd have to be careful not to let his dangle dangle on Dennis's back.

"Where do I look?" Joey asked, glasses at his eyes.

"The bedroom window, dummy – the one that's open."

Joey put down his binoculars and almost shouted, "You wanna be a peeping tom?"

Dennis didn't budge an inch. "Peeping schmeeping. Just take a look-see and you... Hey, it's starting again!"

Joey had his glasses at his eyes faster than thought. A couple of twirls of the knob and he was in time to see a robed figure swish in from the bathroom behind the bed. Moments later some magazines hit the mattress.

With the bedroom window barely thirty feet away from the tree-house, and at the same level, only the shading canopy of foliage and reasonable silence made their surveillance possible. Joey bit his lip, his calves making cool contact with Dennis's hips. Now Mr. Wilson came into view. An unsympathetic blue jay chirped madly in the branches over their heads, trying to give them away.

Mr. Wilson opened his rust-red robe and dropped it by the bed, and Joey gasped – even Dennis gasped.

In his late fifties, Mr. Wilson's body was stout, if not tubby. The full dark hair of his youth (he was said to have cut quite a figure then) had retreated to the edges, leaving a bald, white, glistening dome in the middle. But it was neither the familiar head nor the unfamiliar body that held both boys glued to their glasses: it was Mr. Wilson's grown-up *thing* and all that hair down there.

Joey wondered if that was where the hair that used to be on top went to.

As if to satisfy the two boys' rapt attention to it, Mr. Wilson dropped his left hand to his thickening but still hanging stem and gave it a quick jiggle. Joey broke the breathless quiet and sighed, "Oh, man!"

"Wait till you see what he does next."

Mr. Wilson stacked pillows against the bed's headboard and flopped onto the mattress like a giddy teenager. He leaned back against the pillows, dropped one hand into his crotch and with the other picked up a magazine which, from what Joey could make out of it, seemed to consist mostly of pictures.

"I seen him do this twice," Dennis said, "when Mrs. Wilson went off shopping or something. Watch his hand now."

Joey did. There was a sort of waving motion at the wrist where it rested in Mr. Wilson's inner thigh. In less than a minute what the hand had been gingerly massaging became visible to both of the boys.

"It's like Swordfighting," Dennis quietly announced, "all by himself."

"Yeah, it's so big." To compare sizes, Joey leaned over to see how big Dennis's was and discovered that his friend was mimicking Mr. Wilson's handiwork, move-for-move.

"Why ya doin' that?" Joey asked, softly, urgently.

"Feels good."

A couple of "mmms" and "ahhs" later, and Joey's fingers were wriggling friskily over his own swollen little twig. With Dennis's shoulders brushing rhythmically against his inner thigh, Joey's balance began to waver. His stiffy hummed with a new metallic tension. He lost sight of Mr. Wilson's window and Mr. Wilson altogether, saying only, "I-can't-s-s-stop!"

Soon all three were lost to one another. Three engines raced and revved up through their internal gear boxes. Herb guided his machine with practiced ease,

but Dennis's brain swerved wildly and spun out of childhood. The last thing Joey remembered was something punching him in the heart. The gasps, groans and shouts of orgasm went unheard ... to all but Dennis's mother.

"What *are* you boys up to?!" came the call from the kitchen below.

"Nothin', Mom," Dennis squeaked, too out of breath to think of anything else to say. A moment later, Joey's spewing little body collapsed upon him. That felt good, too.

The judgmental blue jay had given up with his alarm. A crime had been committed, but the villains had gotten away with it. They had stolen something, something that belonged to them, but only a grown-up would know, should know, what it was.

Even the young hooligans were afraid to count it up. It was a wealth no boy was allowed to possess. A heady boy-smell filled the dim clubhouse for the first time. Something dripped from the sill of the tree-house window. Dennis touched the glistening white goo that was sandwiched between their two bodies and leered, muttering, "That's some crazy mayonnaise."

Mr. Wilson was back in the bathroom while Dennis and Joey lay in a gooey, sweating heap on the tree-house floor. "I think I broke something," Joey gasped, still hauling in lungfuls of air and unable to cry yet.

"That was yer first?" Dennis grinned with his eyebrows wearily raised. "I've been messin' my sheets for months. Didn't it feel great?"

"You... you done this *before*?"

"Nuh-uh. Never on purpose. It just comes out sometimes when I'm sleepin'."

"Like wettin' —"

"No!" Dennis snapped. "Dad said somethin' about 'wet dreams', or somethin' like that. But doin' this is *way* better."

Joey stared off into space. "I dunno. Yeah."

"C'mon, get offa me. I wanna go down and clean up before Mom comes up here and has a cow. Then we can watch Jet Jackson."

Joey nodded and smiled with a sniff.

That afternoon, Jet Jackson had to take off without Dennis and Joey. Something had come up. The boys had a Swordfight in the shower, their first since the Margaret Incident in the garage.

The cool water soon heated up as both boys attacked one another with a ferocity never felt before. After their fat, rigid cocks had wobbled and swatted each other for hour-sized minutes, Dennis finally steadied the shoulders of his dark, curly-haired little buddy and said, "You wanna know what she... what Margaret did in the garage?"

"I *know* what she did. I was there, remember?" Joey groaned, spluttering out globs of warm water from his open lips.

"Catchin' us duelin' an' stuff, an' makin' us do it while she watched, but callin' us all those names..."



"We'll fix her!" Joey said, pronouncing sentence on The Enemy, with a punctuating thrust at Dennis's balls.

"Hey! Watch it, huh?"

"Sorry," Joey giggled.

"Anyway, when you ran away, Margaret wouldn't let me go. If you hadn't gotten scared, if you'da just stayed, she wouldn't have done it."

Joey caught the tremor in his best friend's voice. It was something he knew very well – a subtle crack in tone that was usually saved for apologies and explanations to grown-ups. Joey was better and more sincere at it, but Dennis used it more often. He had to. But now it was as though Dennis was trying to make up for something to *him*, and it was only over Margaret. Joey couldn't imagine Dennis not being in charge.

"So, did you sock her?" Joey asked hopefully.

"Nah. Then I really woulda been in trouble."

"What didja do?"

"Nothin'. She did it." Dennis grimaced. "She made me *kiss* her. She said I had to or she'd tell. She said if it made me hard, I'd have to be her boyfriend... *forever!*"

"Wha –?!"

Dennis slumped against the wall, shower droplets sliding down the tiles behind him like all the tears that Joey had ever cried. "I had to," Dennis confessed, "but it was weird."

"You did that? You didn't *like* doin' it?"

"No way, Jose. But she kissed real hard." Dennis's voice now had a more sinister whisper in the steamy spray. "She put her *tongue* in my mouth. Her whole tongue!"

"Ewww!"

"I should've bit her, but... I dunno."

The shower roared its liquid static as Joey's vorpal sword began a slow rub back and forth against Dennis's shining thigh. Joey had to ask, dreading the answer, "Did doin' that make you hard?"

"I'm not her boyfriend, am I?" Dennis grinned down at Joey. "You shoulda heard what she called me after that."

Joey hugged Dennis at the good news. Dennis was surprised, but went along with the nice feeling of his little friend's warm, wet body snuggled against his. "I'd only kiss you like that," Dennis said.

"Yer already my boyfriend." Joey hopped away with a wet grin. "And yer already hard!"

"Oh, okay," Dennis shrugged.

It hit Joey a moment later that he had made a mistake. As Dennis shut off the water and turned away to fetch the towels, Joey challenged, "You gonna show me what she did, or not?"

Dennis was surprised at the challenge – and so, actually, was Joey. Dennis gave Joey a dirty look, until he saw that familiar blush emerge. Then they

toweled off quickly.

When Herb Wilson finished his shower, he dried off with his regular bathroom towel, not his 'intimate', rather crusted, terry-cloth. This he would hide, along with the magazines, where his wife wouldn't find it. After years of coast-to-coast sales trips with their ready diversions (and a little bit of heaven in Cedar Rapids), retirement had left him with only the occasional pull-off on Ol' Betsy to quench those wonderful, unmentionable desires he'd grown old with.

Meeting youths locally and taking them home was impossible. Herb was too well known for any local fling. Besides, Marsha always had the car. All he had was Thumbilina and Her Four Daughters. They (and some frightfully explicit magazines from Europe by way of Tijuana) were the sunshine of his retirement. He sighed, and started to pack everything away in his untouchable golf-case – until next time.

A noise?

He felt it in his spine before he actually heard it with his ears – the laughter, giggles really, from next door. He had heard it for years, and it was always followed by a crash, a smash or a boom. Sometimes all three. Afterwards, when he was involved, there was pain. And expenses. Three planned trips to Europe shot to hell.

All because of Him.

Little Dennis Schultz, the Barbarian Next Door.

Herb was about to go and close the window when he realized his robe was still at the end of the bed. He threw it on, fiddled with the sash. Then the laughter from across the way suddenly stopped. He waited for the crash/smash/boom with gritted dentures.

Nothing.

A cold sweat broke out on his bald dome. Now what? It was always worse after sudden silence.

The old Wilson home was taller than the modern two-story Schultz house next door. His master bedroom overlooked the generally chaos-ridden bedroom of The Holy Terror. Now, for the first time, curiosity (or was it dread?) edged Herb to the open window to check on the prospects of a fourth try at Europe.

In the bedroom of the Perpetual Menace, all Herb could see was an off-centered throw-rug strewn with baseball cards, a toy plane with one wing and the savaged remains of a stuffed monkey. With a slight shrug, Herb was about to turn away when two sets of bare legs and feet danced by. It was not reason enough to continue watching, but the two bath towels suddenly dropped on the rug raised the ante.

"What's this?" Herb asked himself.

The width of the driveway and the narrow bed of Marsha's prized rose bushes were all that separated their facing windows. Herb's view was hindered only by how much higher his window was than Dennis's. Herb put on his spectacles and squatted down before the window sill. He *had* to get a better

look at what he *hoped* but what *couldn't* be happening, but really *was* happening, if only he was actually able to *see* it happening: *two naked boys together!*

Yes, there they were. Dennis and what sounded like Joey Phillips, the eternal tag-along. Their legs were visible up just past the knee and standing beside the unmade bed, face to face. The giggles were almost whispers now, ending abruptly for over a minute. The silence was followed by a faint smacking sound, followed by more giggles and whispering. The cycle repeated itself, while Herb's head moved back and forth in frustration, nose rubbing the window sill.

These boys had been the ruin of Herb's late middle-age ever since Dennis moved in five years before. At age six, the tyke had put him in the Emergency Room twice in the first month. Joey was always there, too, with an ever-ready "I'm sorry, Sir" on his lips. And that awful dog! Yet, according to Marsha, it was somehow always Herb's fault.

But now Herb was seeing these two brats in an entirely new light. Or, at least he was trying to.

Herb rose to his feet and looked frantically around the room. His robe was parted by a resurrection of Ol' Betsy – something that just didn't happen any more twice in the same day. He went to the closet, dove in among the hanging clothes and shelved boxes, thrashing about in a frenzy. "Ah-ha!" he cried 47 seconds later. With a triumphant grin, he hauled out Marsha's opera glasses and fairly jumped back to the window, dropping once again to his knees. The opera glasses clicked against his spectacles. He fiddled with its knob and brought Dennis's window into sharp focus. The legs were still there – but only for a moment: in a wink they were gone.

"Aw, no!" Herb moaned, smacking himself on the forehead with his palm. "Don't go to bed, damnit all!"

From a lower corner of his window, Herb could barely see the top of the bed of the boy next door – just enough to catch a glimpse of churning youth on the rumpled sheets. The opera glasses didn't help at all. An occasionally dangling foot or hand came briefly into view, but nothing more. Just enough to drive Herb crazy.

"Oooo!"

The sound hit Herb in the face. Was it Dennis? Joey? Standing up quickly, his foot caught in the end of his rust-red robe and toppled him sideways into the nightstand. As his elbow smacked its corner, the nerves in his funny-bone were ignited. A startled gasp, and he lost his grip on Marsha's opera glasses. They bounced off Ol' Betsy before landing squarely on his big toe.

"*Aahh!* Ow! Ow! Son of a bi –" he hooted, limping back to the bed. He sagged on the mattress, a 210-pound mass of erect pain and misery. It was a conspiracy – but that was always the case where Dennis was involved. It *had* to be a conspiracy!

"Mmmm, *yeah!*"

*That* was Dennis, for sure. There must be something he could do. If only...

Herb was up at the window again, unmindful of the pain in his toe. Slowly and carefully, he bunched up his robe around his shoulders and leaned out the window. To his right was the empty street, to his left only the empty back yards of neighboring houses. The coast was clear.

"Do it some more." That would have been Joey.

There was no time to think. Everything would be over if he didn't work fast. Grasping the window ledge with both hands, Herb carefully bent himself until his lower stomach made contact with the sill. He hooked his right ankle into the corner leg of the heavy nightstand for leverage. The nightstand wobbled a bit, but seemed secure enough of an anchor to try the next step.

Herb had no love of heights, yet, with his eyes trained on Dennis's window, he slowly lowered his head until part of the boy's bed came into view. With each inch, Herb tested his grip for firmness, and the only thing firmer he found was Ol' Betsy digging into the window ledge, trying to point the way to a view of Paradise.

The soft coos and murmurs from within the boy's room died away as Herb finally dipped to the level of a full view. All was quiet – and he now saw that on the bed were only screwed-up pillows and disheveled sheets and no boys. Herb's heart sank, but he maintained his grip – at least until Dennis and Joey popped into view from hiding, bare-assed and shouting, "Hiya, Mr. Wilson!"

Like a deer caught in the glare of an oncoming car's headlights, Herb froze, bug-eyed, at the double dose of naked and aroused boy-flesh. He tried to speak, but his throat clicked drily in shock. Alarm bells and sirens rang and wailed in his brain, but he couldn't, wouldn't look away from the smiling, waving and waggling youngsters. He had to get back inside. But fear shot into his mind, like an old salvo from his days in the navy. Fear of heights, fear of discovery... fear of *Dennis!* Herb could only give an embarrassed grunt as he backed into his window.

"Hey, Mr. Wilson, want some help?" Dennis yelled, pumping his little fist over his fat column in demonstration. Joey looked at Dennis in shock for a moment, then grinned and started pulling on his pudding, too.

They knew, Herb realized. They'd spied on him. They knew everything, perhaps even the kind of magazines he looked at. With a strength drawn from panic, he hauled himself up with a heave. Shifting his feet on the carpet for balance, the back of his head banged the window sash a split second before he stepped on his wife's opera glasses, which gave way under his weight. He felt broken shards of glass cut into his bare sole.

"EEYOWII"

Both Dennis and Joey had seen avalanches on Sgt. Preston of the Yukon and Hopalong Cassidy, and Mr. Wilson did a very convincing facsimile of one as he gave way to gravity. The rust-red robe concealed very little as the man plunged downwards, arms flapping, into the merciless cushion of Mrs. Wilson's rose bushes.

Joey couldn't look, but Dennis stayed glued to the train wreck with his customary fascination for mayhem. "Whoa! That musta *huuurt!*"

The crackling thud of nude *Homo Sapiens* impacting on thorny Tausendschon was followed by a heart-rending wail that rocketed Dennis into the bathroom and Joey under the bed to shiver among the dust bunnies.

The police and ambulance arrived minutes later. Taking time to dress this time, the two boys joined the crowd of concerned and curious neighbors, as Mr. Wilson was hauled out of the thorns and onto a stretcher. Dennis's mother pulled the wide-eyed tykes away when the injured man unleashed a torrent of expletives she was sure would stunt their growth.

It wasn't until the weekend that Joey returned to the tree-top clubhouse, having received Dennis's cryptic phone message: "Magazines". That told Joey nothing, but just knowing he was going to see Dennis again, to *be* with Dennis again, had Joey whistling down the street moments after he hung up.

Dennis was waiting, and Joey could see from Dennis's smile that a simple "Hiya" was a thing of the past. It wasn't until several lip-grinding, tongue-lashing "Margaret kisses" had been given and received (her *only* redeeming gift, even if she hadn't meant to give it) that Dennis again said, "Magazines".

Joey was right on cue. "Huh?"

"Mrs. Wilson tossed 'em in the garbage when she got home, while Mr. Wilson was still in the hospital." Dennis's teeth flashed in the shadows. "Boy, was she ever honked off when she saw 'em. I heard her makin' a racket, so I raided the trash after dark."

"So...?"

"So, take a look."

The pile was only of about a dozen, but the pictorial punch in each one put the excitement found in comic books at a distant second. Joey had never seen a dirty book before, and even Dennis hadn't seen *anything* like these. The crusty terry cloth towel had been recovered as well and was now hanging on the clubhouse wall like a captured flag. But their eyes never left the magazines. Their hearts and minds (and bodies) followed.

A steady buzz started in each boy's spine, moving up to fill their brains; droning on and on as their minds began to comprehend what lay at their feet. Belt buckle, button and zipper quickly parted as each entranced youngster sought lower freedom. Their respective erections felt very large and heavy just then. Breathing was hard, too.

Stretching out languidly on old satin sofa pillows, Dennis and Joey stared dully at the Spartan images. Their libidos soon glowed like reading lamps in the tree-house shade. The clubhouse itself took on the atmosphere of a sexual opium den, as the pumping, push/pull gradually went from singular to mutual frenzy. It was a frenzy that, for many boys, had taken them from home and hearth for the first time in their lives, if only for a few minutes. Many others had never really returned.

"Geez!" breathed Dennis, now stroking himself steadily, "this guy's wiener is even bigger than ol' Mr. Wilson's!"

"How come they ain't got no girls?" Joey asked, in the midst of his third glossy.

"Who cares?" Dennis replied, grabbing a fourth magazine from Joey's discarded pile. "This stuff must be Top Secret."

Joey lowered his copy of *Les Enfants Magnifiques* just enough to see Dennis's eyes still locked onto a particularly heady issue of *Die Jungenschwanz im Lederhosen*. "But why? If all these guys can do it, how can it be a secret?"

Dennis lowered his booklet and paused. "Well... since it's all foreign stuff, maybe we don't know about it yet."

"Mr. Wilson knows," Joey objected.

The tree-house got very quiet, although Joey could almost hear the whiz-bang of gears in Dennis's brain slip into overdrive. Finally, "Yeah, he'd know. Maybe it's a 'speriment or something."

Joey's eyes opened wide in agreement. "We really were spies then, right?"

"Sure. And Mr. Wilson, too. And since his arm's all broke, he'll need us to give him a hand, right?" Joey nodded, speeding up his pumping.

Perhaps it was the jingle of car keys in her hand that prompted Marsha to start again. "I still don't see why you won't get a hobby. And I *don't* mean more of those filthy dirty queer magazines."

"Yes, dear."

"Oh, I give up. I'll be at Cynthia's until eight and I don't expect to find my rose bushes..."

"Yes, dear."

She knew Herb hadn't smiled in the last three weeks, and Marsha did miss that. "I'm sorry, honey. Just rest your poor arm and I'll see you later. G'bye." She added a hastily blown kiss.

"Yes, dear."

No sooner had Marsha backed the green Rambler from their driveway than the back doorbell rang. Herb was careful not to get up too fast and bang his arm-cast on the bookcase as he did last week. The boys were right on time today.

Swinging open the screen door, Dennis and Joey stood on the back porch steps looking as breathless from their sprint over as from their frolics together since The Accident. Herb smiled as Dennis gave his "Hiya, Mr. Wilson" in a new, husky and quite sexy little whisper. The yelling had always rattled his nerves. Standing aside, Herb allowed the boys to pour in, with cute Joey leading the way into the hall.

"But the milk and cook —" Herb began to offer.

Dennis stopped at the kitchen door and let Herb catch up. The rhythmic pounding of Joey's Red Ball Jets sneakers was heard on the stairs. A T-shirt on the hallway floor showed that Joey was already half-naked on his way to the

spare bedroom where the curtains were always closed.

"He wants first dibs again," said Dennis, looking up at Herb as he gently fondled the man's trouser front.

"Mmmm," Herb rumbled. It was a nice feeling, a *really* nice feeling, but he couldn't explain any more 'accidents', especially ones in the kitchen. "Go up and shower with Joey. We'll toss a coin."

"Yeah!" the boy agreed and turned himself into a blond comet streaking up the stairs after his younger buddy.

Listening to the pitter-patter of little feet on the bedroom carpeting above, Herb sighed and unzipped himself to relieve the pressure. Ol' Betsy was pointing the way. "Well, Marsha," he said with an invigorating intake of breath, "there are hobbies and there are *hobbies*...."