

THE THIRD ACOLYTE READER

Copyright 1988 by The Acolyte Press First Edition published November, 1988 in The Netherlands

All rights reserved. Except for brief passages quoted in a newspaper, magazine, radio or television review, no part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

The Acolyte Press P. O. Box 12731
1100 AS Amsterdam-ZO
The Netherlands

ISBN 90-6971-016-1

Andrew May examines rather whimsically a medieval purification rite, a distressed goalie and dark doings in the Kremlin.

Three Stories

Andrew May

1. Sancta Simplicitas

Here follows a fragment of the Rubrick of the Feast of the Purification of St. Ethelburgha the Melancholy, celebrated in Europe and all England until the end of the 15th Century, believed now to be observed no longer.

and after the Lord Bishope has preach'd his Sermon, the Ritual of the Blessed Childe shall follow. He who shall represent this Childe shall have been chosen from among the Quire or Serving-Boys of the Cathedral, and must be the most beauteous of their Number, yet must have arriv'd at an age to give Seede. The Childe is then stript to symbolyse Innocence and stood before the congregation on a Stoole. And while the Childe standeth in alle his Innocence, the Lord Bishope, arrayed in a simple black Robe, shall kneele before him and, to symbolyse Humilitie, shall performe for the Childe the most menial Office, namely, he shall take between his own Lips the Childe 's most secret Parte and shall strive till the boy give his Seede. And throughout the Childe shall remain stille and make no Sounde, even when he give his Seede (though the Church in its Mercie doth recognyse that the Childe is but young ...)

Thereafter, while the Quire sing, the doubly Blessed Childe, decked in naught but a Garland of flowers about his Neck, and a Chaplet in his Hair, is carried through the Towne on the Shoulders of the Priests or on a Litter, while the Peeple do rejoice and make merrie, waving Palmes, singing and dancing, with Joye inne their Hearte....

The Blessed Childe pulled a handful of leaves from his hair and

spat out a rose-petal.

“Yuk! It is very well for thee, my Lord Bishope, in thy fine black cassock, thou know'st not how cold the May breeze blows on such an unprotected one as I. Where are my clothes?”

“Come, it is an honour, my child,” said the Bishop mildly. “Step closer to the Vestry fire. I have asked that thy clothes be sent for; they will not be long.”

“All because they said I was *pretty!*” said the boy. “Ugh!”

“Nay, thou were happy, and enjoyed the day. I could see,” said the Bishop.

“Perhaps it was so, and 'tis true I was proud to be carried thus in procession-but, my Lord, the *remarks...!*”

“Thou wilt share them with me, Master Alaric?”

The boy coloured.

“My Lord, pardon my words, but one of the Holy Maidens who did wave the palms about me did say to another, 'Lo, this Blessed Childe hath the prettiest ding-dong we have seen this few years!' But the other did make mock, and did say, 'Nay, but the Blessed Childe of last year did have the most delicious little hairs, did he not?’

“But, my Lord,” said the boy plaintively, “I *do* have hairs coming. Look - on this side, and this - and, if I lift it, some little ones underneath . Look - and look...”

“It is true, my son,” said the Bishop gravely. “Thou hast the episcopal word on that.”

“Nay, thou dost mock also. And, when no-one was looking, with the tips of their palm-fronds the Holy Maidens did-”

The Bishop held up his hand.

“It is no matter. The people do enjoy themselves on a Feast, and if they be imperfect at times, so be we all. Nevertheless, my child, I am well pleased with thee this day and am minded to grant thee a boon or favour, whatever thou desirest.

The Blessed Childe's eyes lit up; he whispered in the Bishop's ear. And only the Bishop, sighing gently, knew that his request was the usual one, and had been for as long as he could remember.

And then the Bishop, being naturally a man of his word, humbled himself again before the Blessed Childe.

And again...

And again.

2. Goalie, Goalie

Two things about the boy sitting on the steps caught Vernon's attention. He was very beautiful, and he was crying.

Vernon sat on the steps too. Weep and you weep alone, she said. She didn't mean you, kid. Not when you look like *that*.

Silence... Only the shrill cries of the under-14 team on the field to the right and the snuffles of angel-features to the left.

"Dropped me, din' 'e?" said the youngster. "I let just one in, an' 'e drops me. Says I can't be goalie again this season. Ain't fair, that's what."

He burst into renewed sobs; they take their football seriously in the East End. Vernon rose and walked round a little, taking stock of the fresh vista afforded by the boy having drawn his thighs up to his chin, his face buried in his knees. The shirt and socks were neat and brightly-coloured, the shorts wickedly brief, the thighs long and peachy, the glimpsed underpants bright red. Vernon handed the boy a tissue and he blew his nose on it.

"There's an empty pitch over there," Vernon said. "If you want to go in goal I'll give you some practice."

The boy looked up. "Would you, Mister?"

Jesus, what a *dish*. These eyes, these blond locks would make film stars weep.

"Of course. Then perhaps he'll give you another trial. Who knows?"

"Right! Gosh - thanks, Mister."

He was a mercurial child; one sniff, then it was as if he had never been crying. For an hour or more he flitted, jumped and bounced in and out of goal, light as a kitten, catching the ball, throwing it up,

deflecting it out, his long thighs flickering, his curls bouncing. As it wasn't possible to look anywhere else, Vernon only became gradually aware that the sounds from the football field had died away, and that it was growing dusk.

“Gosh, thanks, Vernon,” said the boy at last, “I’ll ask for another trial tomorrow; bet he’ll give me one.”

He was flushed with his efforts and with optimism, his good spirits completely restored.

They went into the changing-room.

“You going to stay and watch me 'ave me shower?”

Christ. *Am* I?

The kid ran the water and stared peeling his shirt off. “Fetch me towel, will you?” he asked. “Locker number ten, round the corner. Thanks, Vern.”

Vernon had difficulty finding the locker, then had to rummage for the towel. When he went back, clouds of steam were filling the shower-room, and the kid had disappeared behind the low partition that separated the shower compartment from the rest of the changing-room.

“I’m back,” called Vernon. “Shall I come round?”

“No.” Suddenly the boy’s face, his hair damp with running water, appeared over the partition, his hands clutching the tiled top. He fixed Vernon with an accusing expression. “Why d ‘you pick me up, then?”

“Pick you *up*” said Vernon, nonplussed. “I - I think you’re mistaken, really...”

“Dome a favour, mister, I ain’t stupid. I could see the way you looked at me. So don’t lie.”

Then he said, “I don’t *mind*. But just don’t treat me like stupid, that’s all.”

“Well, in that case...” Vernon went close to the partition, then slid his hands hesitantly over the boy’s two hands; the boy didn’t move.

“I know all about it, you know,” the youngster said. “Me geography master likes me, too. A lot. ‘E wanks me.”

The pressure of Vernon’s hands increased a little. He entwined his

fingers with the boy's, and the boy's fingers squirmed in between his.

“Twice a week, after class. 'E keeps me back, corrects me 'omework, an' if it's good 'e takes down me pants an' wanks me.”

He giggled. “E's real good at it, 'as me squealing, 'e 'as. So I'm pretty much the best at geography in the class. Me mum's dead pleased with me!”

The boy was standing near the edge of the partition; Vernon slid his hand around.

“My turn now?”

The boy drew sharply away. “No, it ain't up yet. It's begun to, with talking, jus' wait.”

“Let's help it.” Vernon slid his hand further around and his palm came into contact with a pair of damp, smooth buttocks. This time the boy didn't draw away. His expression gradually changed as Vernon slipped his hand up and down the two delightfully tender rear cheeks, as his fingers moved and explored in the soft warm space between them, down, up, forward....

“I'd *like* to' ave it bare,” said the boy dreamily. “In school we daren't of course.”

Then he said, “Okay, Vern.”

Vernon went around and gently picked him up then, heedless of the wet skin, sat on the bench with this delectable nude creature, even more wonderfully smooth and shapely than he had imagined, on his knee. The boy lay completely relaxed, his shoulders cradled in Vernon's left arm, his head against Vernon's chest.

After a moment he giggled and said, “You're not as good at this as me geography teacher. I reckon - oh - ah - ah - waaAAAAH!”

Then a little later he said, “Sorry - I was wrong!”

Bang, from outside.

“The gate!” gasped the kid. Vernon stiffened with horror.

The boy jumped on a bench and peered through the clear upper half of the window.

“Jeez, it's the school cleaning lady, she's a terror. Come on- out the

back!"

There was a back door; Vernon, panicking, followed the boy, a pale flicker of moonlight, into the bushes. They waited there...

"Aren't you cold?" said Vernon after a few minutes.

"Not like this," said the boy. "You're nice; even me geography master don't 'old me like this."

"Yes - but we can't say here," said Vernon, looking around uneasily.

"You're right," said the boy. He stood up.

"I'm going to give meself up," he said dramatically and, before Vernon could stop him, he dashed for the back door of the changing-room, slid through it, and had vanished. Alarmed, Vernon slid through the bushes and, rising gradually, peered over the top of the frosted glass.

The cleaning lady was mopping away; to his horror Vernon saw the boy come up behind her, still naked as a moonbeam, his bare feet making no noise on the tiles.

"I've come to give meself up," he announced.

The cleaning lady glanced up at him, then squeezed her mop into the bucket.

"An' so you bloomin' well should," she said. "Playing around all hours in that shower, you'll catch your death. Now get across 'ome an' get some clean things on before I speak me mind."

"Okay, Mum."

He bundled his clothes up; a light slap on the rump speeded him on his way - out the door, across the playing-field, and into the bungalow opposite. The cleaning lady may or may not have wondered why he shouted "See ya!" into the bushes as he scampered off. In any case, she just went on mopping.

3. Russian Revel

Vladivich Slotski, KGB Colonel, intellectual and dilettante, addressed former MI5 Major Coghill-Chuffley, alcoholic and reprobate.

“I am entirely in your hands, Chuffley.”

They went on looking at the photograph on the table between them. It affected each of them differently. Slotski sat slightly back, hands folded, a man altogether content. Chuffley kept looking at the photograph, picking it up and putting it down; he shifted on his seat and twitched a good deal.

“Four years,” said Chuffley, “twenty trips to Moscow, and we've dangled every bit of rough trade in the Eastern block in front of him. I scoured the gutters of Moscow, Slotski - drag queens, clones, the lot. A bachelor, never married, no women friends, I just *had* to be right, he just *had* to rise to the bait. You know, I'd begun to think that perhaps he was incorruptible after all. Is this vodka watered?”

“You need a clear head today. Well?”

Chuffley looked at the photograph again. “How did you get it?”

“From his wallet; we hadn't thought of that before. Of course, it's a copy. He won't know anything.”

“Mmm. No wonder the rough trade didn't appeal to him.

You're sure this isn't a relative? An illegitimate son, even?”

“We've checked all that,” said Slotski impatiently. “So what do you think?”

“Mmm. Young - very young. Difficult to tell the age, but somewhere between twelve and fourteen. Blond, incredibly pretty; Docker has taste. You have, I presume, invited me here as a connoisseur in such matters. Well, I unhesitatingly award my gold star, a rare honour. You don't have his address or phone number, by any chance?”

“Please. Now, listen - “

“N O, you listen, Slotski. I don't have to bow and scrape to you any more. I'm way ahead of you; I know what you're planning. Well,

forget it. We're more sophisticated than we were in my time, and it won't work."

"No?" Slotski was unperturbed.

"No. By the way, what *did* become of little Misha in the end?" "He became too... enthusiastic. We had to send him for industrial therapy. Now, if you could stick to the point..."

"I know more than you think, Slotski. I do happen to know that Docker will be in Moscow next week for another of your so-called arms reduction conferences - no, don't bother to deny it - and presumably your plan is to introduce some ravishing little page-boy into his hotel room and set your damned cameras whirring. Well, it won't work; we're not so stupid now. Not only will you fail to get your dirty video, you 'll lose the co-operation of the whole outfit and set your programme back for years. And now, *excuse* me. I'm going to find some real vodka, not this piss-water."

Slotski put a hand on his shoulder, gently pressing him back into his seat.

"Chuffley, my old friend, your one-way ticket to London is still waiting for you in my in-tray; it is yours whenever you wish. I think perhaps you do not wish. So please listen..."

Chuffley sat down again, poured some more vodka and drank it, making a face, but didn't speak.

"As you say, Comrade Docker will be in Moscow next month and will stay in the Metropole. His visit will coincide with a major exercise by the Young Pioneers - or so he will be led to believe. Young Pioneers - very young - will be stationed in the foyer and in all the corridors of the Metropole; also we will make sure that Docker sees Pioneers 'on duty' at the airport, railway stations, or similar. Are you with me so far?"

Chuffley nodded; he reached for the vodka bottle, but Slotski moved it away.

"Between now and then the whole of Russia will be scoured for the most perfect and attractive specimen of Soviet boyhood in the age-group of the boy in the photograph; then this boy, in his Pioneer uniform -"

“Ah yes, these very short shorts -“

“Please. In Pioneer uniform, he will be stationed in the corridor along which Docker will pass to his room. Like all the others, he will of course salute Docker smartly as he passes. And that's all.”

“That's *all*?”

“All that Docker knows about. Of course, we'll monitor his reactions. Hidden sensors will record his blood pressure, pulse rate, pupil size, galvanic skin resistance ... but I won't bore you with technicalities. If we get a positive result-well, that's the end of Stage One. And, if it's positive, we plan Stage Two - maybe in a month, maybe in six months, who can say? We have time.”

“You're a cunning devil, Slotski, I have to say. It may work.

But where do I come into it?”

“You, my friend, as an irreproachable judge of such matters, will have the major part in selecting the fortunate child who will to do the Supreme Soviet this glorious service. Starting now.”

Chuffley put his glass down and stared. Slotski went on.

“It will work like this. We will advertise on radio, television and in the newspapers for a boy aged from 12 to 14 of an appearance suitable to be presented internationally as a perfect example of Soviet boyhood and thus to render a great service to his mother country; we will award the Pioneer Red Star on successful completion of the exercise. The response will doubtless be tremendous. Then, on the appointed day myself, yourself and possibly another person will make the selection. It will be quite simple, you will see.”

“I hope so,” said Chuffley. “I'm getting too old for this sort of thing; it'll possibly finish me off.”

“I'm sure you'll do your best,” said Slotski, getting up. “Just keep thinking of that one-way ticket, Chuffley. On the other hand, if all goes well, there may be a young pupil requiring English lessons, for which appropriate gratitude will be shown. And now, excuse me. The date will shortly be notified to you; please come sober.”

The day was sunny, Chuffley was pale and composed, Slotski's secretary - the third member of the selection panel - huge, craggy,

armed with files and a clipboard.

The response had exceeded all expectations; the crowd thronged the grounds of the Summer Palace and spilled into the streets and squares all round, thousands of shy-eyed blond elves all accompanied by mothers of great size and determined aspect.

Chuffley grew paler.

"It's going to be like judging a beautiful baby competition; the mothers of the losers will riot, and then what?"

"The guard is adequate," said Slotski. "We will have the subjects in groups of ten. You will pick the best of each, then we will have the best in, also in groups of ten, and so on, until the perfect child is found."

"They're all too fully wrapped," grumbled Chuffley. "You can't see anything under all those woolly hats and furs. You Russians don't recognize summer even when it comes."

"Each child will be undressed completely before being brought in," snapped Ludmilla, the secretary. "The mothers have been sent their orders. We have to ensure that the child selected is perfect and without any blemish."

She put the clipboard down on the table and sat.

"The guards are at this moment taking the names of the first group," said Slotski. "You will as quickly as possible indicate your choice; he will give his name and will go out of the door to the right and wait. The others will be dismissed to the left. All, you will see, will go like the clock."

There was a tap on the door; a guard came in, looking unsettled, and whispered to Slotski.

"Ah, I fear all is not yet completely under control," said Slotski. "I think we must wait a few moments for order to be restored, then we can proceed."

But outside, order failed immediately to be restored. The crowd of mothers and pretty offspring pressed forward into the inner courtyard, eager to be of service to the Supreme Good. And since no mother could wait for the world to see that her own blond pixie was undoubtedly the most perfect example of boyhood in the length and

breadth of the land, every such example was almost at the outset stripped from top to toe, peeled like a banana, every thing he had been wearing puddled on the ground or stuffed into the capacious maternal handbag. Two mothers even lifted their stripped, white and squirming elves on to a low wall and called on everyone to witness that each was the most exquisite specimen of thirteen-year-old boyhood imaginable, sure to be chosen by the Soviet for its supreme purpose.

For a time, the spectator would have wondered whether the competition was taking place inside or outside. True, a succession of peeled pixies were now being ushered into the presence of the panel, where Ludmilla, lips pursed and armed with clipboard was prodding, lifting and peering - yet the competition outside grew even more intense.

“He can turn cartwheels!” cried the mother of one of the boys on the wall. “Do it.” He did, and the crowd cheered.

“He can dance and sing!” shouted the other mother.

The boy capered shyly and sang a few notes, and the crowd cheered even more.

“*He* can make spunk!” shouted the other woman.

“Ah!” shouted the crowd.

“You shall see!”

“Oh, I cannot, Mamma. Not here!”

But, holding the wriggling youngster firmly, the large peasant woman set to work vigorously and her efforts were soon rewarded. The boy's wriggles suddenly became more enthusiastic; then he closed his eyes, his whole body jerked, he shouted out and... the woman held up a slightly sticky palm. The crowd applauded.

Her rival had also been working, and with even more determination. After another moment or two, the second youngster quivered all over, gasped, screamed, then jumped upon his toes, quivering from head to foot. A second palm, even stickier, was held up. The crowd roared.

“More,more!”

“Me, me!” shouted a hundred youngsters, pulling eagerly at maternal hands. So for some time the crowd did not lack for

entertainment. And even those pubescent innocenti denied the opportunity of performing on top of the wall were able to avail themselves of the delicious vigour of a stout mid-European hand, till each vied with the other in a decibel-war at the moment of squeal-studded limb-convulsing delight that made even the old walls echo and give back such delectable sounds as they had never heard or given back before, or would again.

Yet disorder mounted. Scores of Perfect Specimens, elated by the delicious sensations of freedom, leaping butterflies liberated from the chrysalis, ran, skipped and jumped through the winter gardens, shouting, whooping and screaming; clothes, trampled and dirty, were scattered far and wide. Bodies bounced in and out of the fountains, a hose was commandeered, and even the official bicycles of the Red Guard were hijacked and ridden in wild circles through the lawns and flower-beds.

Some determined parental attempts to restore order were mounted, and more than one youngster, face-to-face with Mother Russia at a distance of some eighteen inches, learned that the impact of a plebian Russian palm on a tender pubescent rump was less delightful than its use elsewhere. The park benches turned out to be much in demand in order to apply this certain cure for uncontrolled merriment, so that everyone was further edified by outstanding and unique displays of nude gymnastics, albeit in each case by a deeply unwilling 'star' ,providing also interesting studies in skin coloration within the middle-pink to the tomato-scarlet range of the spectrum, and in prolonged vocalities within the higher treble register and dynamic fortissimo.

The afternoon passed with many similar entertainments and, ultimately, The Choice appeared in front of the panel. He stood to attention and saluted, blushing slightly with pride.

Chuffley took another swig of vodka and passed a hand in front of his eyes. He had thought that they simply didn't make them like this...

Slotski was explaining to the boy some of his duties. When he paused, Chuffley told the boy, "You can put your clothes on now."

"I've lost them," said the boy brightly. "We've nearly all lost our clothes; they're all muddied and mixed up. I say - will I be like *this* for the Englishman?"

"Certainly not," snapped Slotski. "Well- not at first, anyhow. And,

as for now, my secretary has gone for a tape in order to measure you for a Pioneer uniform. It will be brought as quickly as possible.”

“Oh, look!” The Choice ran over to the window and peered out. “They’re all leaving now.”

The battlefield was indeed almost deserted. Those youngsters who had managed to find some clothes were leaving half-dressed, dirty and in disarray. But many more were taken home on foot, underground or bus, innocent of the smallest stitch, clothes either lost or zipped in the maternal shopping-bag, their young owner’s pale quivering modesty sacrificed to maternal disappointment, pride, displeasure or all three. It was a day nobody would forget.

Especially not The Winner, delightfully arrayed now in his Pioneer uniform with the shortest shorts available, white socks, blue tunic and cap, and red scarf. Grinning all over his face, he saluted again.

Even Slotski permitted himself a smile.

“We can’t lose, Chuffley,” he said, staring at the boy. “We just can’t lose!”

NEWS ITEM Major Crocker Blocker-Docker, British military envoy, collapsed and died in a corridor of a Moscow hotel yesterday evening. A member of the Young Pioneers, who was stationed in the corridor at the time, raised the alarm. Major Blocker-Docker was believed to have been suffering from a weak heart. *Item ends.*