

More Mischiefs

by Ian McLaughlin

1. Exile

They called a few weeks after Robin's thirteenth birthday. To me a ringing telephone sounds like impending disaster. As a matter of fact it rarely happens that anybody calls to give *good* news. Good news comes slowly, by mail. Evil strikes like lightning, as soon as you lift the receiver.

'They' were Robin's parents. His dad first, announcing that his wretched son – those were his own words – had been expelled from Saint Xavier's, and then his mum sobbing excessively which, since they were calling from Aberdeen, I considered a costly extravagance. To make a long story short, the next day saw me at Heathrow, pacing up and down in the arrival hall.

The plane from Aberdeen was late, and I on the brink of nervous breakdown, when finally a rather common looking schoolboy – navy-blue blazer, gray flannel shorts, gray stockings (one collapsed around the ankle), dusty black shoes – came running up to me. Dear old Robin! The smile was Robin all over and an affectionate lump swelled in my throat. Bringing disgrace upon the family seemed to suit him exceedingly well – and, as a matter of fact his exile to London was not altogether unwelcome to me, either. Of course, I didn't show it. His father had beseeched me to deal sternly with my nephew, if not beat some decent manners into the little rascal's head c.q. his bum (ignorant as he had left me about the part of Robin that had sinned most – I was soon to find out, however).

“Has Daddy told you?” beamed Robin. Remorse obviously didn't lie heavily upon his schoolboy conscience.

“No, I am afraid he didn't. It must be quite unmentionable.”

“You don't want to hear about it?”

“I burn with curiosity but so, I am sure, would the other people in this terminal. I'll have none of your shouting here.”

All the way home Robin filled the air with delighted humming. I felt foolishly happy myself, anticipating the domestic bliss Robin would be bringing into my bachelor's quarters.

“You won't send me off to a borstal, will you nunkey?” pleaded Robin. “Dad told me you would.”

As a matter of fact it was all arranged that I'd put Robin in a day-school in London and keep him under close surveillance. It was meant to be punishment. To me it looked like Paradise.

I'm afraid I have never given a detailed description of my nephew. He is thirteen but sometimes looks eleven and again like fourteen. His angelic face, framed with black wavy curls, might have been drawn by Botticelli. As a matter of fact, he does look a little bit Italian, although he was born in Edinburgh like me. But then we are a very *Roman* Catholic family.

Except for his finely muscled legs, Robin's natural beauty is mostly hidden by his school uniform, and even so he sometimes remembers to pull up his stockings; all that's left for you to admire then are his shapely knees – but they're enough to drive some of those perverted child molesters wild (I am, of course, his uncle, which is different).

Robin is an excellent batsman and good at maths, too. Left-handed at cricket, at writing and at wanking. I once caught him at the latter with his right. He had a ready explanation: “When I do it with my right it feels like somebody else is doing it to me.”

As a matter of fact, the whole dorm has been doing it to Robin, with their left hands, or their right hands, or with no hands at all.

“But surely that's not what got you expelled, was it, Robin?”

“No. It's a long and boring story.”

“Boring? Nothing that happens to you ever seems to be boring!”

“Well, it didn't happen to *me*. It happened to a little squirt called Colin, one of 'm diddums that cries after his mum as soon as they put the lights out. We got dead sick of it, so one night we dragged him out of his bed and we stripped him and we smeared his willie with the stickiest jam we could find. It was bilberries. And then we threw him out into the corridor.”

“And did that stop him from crying after his mum?”

“Well, his mum didn't show up but our tutor did. *'Oh, poor little lamb,'* said old Splinter (his real name's Mister Wood) *'What did they do to you – you need some washing up, don't you? Come to my room!'* And off they went. Next thing we heard was at Assembly the next morning

when the Head told us Splinter was leaving, in fact *had* left already – without saying good-bye or anything.”

“Gollywogs, that sounds like indecent haste. He didn't commit any improprieties on that poor child, did he?”

“He blinking well did! And Weeping Willow ran straight to the Headmaster and spilt on him.”

“Any details?”

“Plenty. Colin told me everything, behind the potting shed.”

“Not willingly, I suppose.”

“Oh no, under *torture!*” The very word made Robin's eyes sparkle. “Well, what *really* happened, the important thing, I mean, is that Splinter changed his mind about washing. Guess what he did?”

“I won't spoil your story. Go on, tell me.”

“Said Splinter to Colin: '*Oh dear, oh dear, what a waste, all this excellent jam.*' Well, do you see what happened?”

“Vividly!”

“And then Colin walked off and blabbed to the Head.”

“All right, but that still doesn't explain why *you were thrown out.*”

“Well, Colin took a great liking to bilberry jam himself, if you see what I mean.”

“Not quite.”

“And I just happened to be the only one in the whole House who had a steady supply of bilberry jam.”

“Because I've been sending it to you month after month at Saint Xavier's, you little wretch!”

“My favorite uncle!” A far-away look came into Robin's eyes. “I didn't just put it on his toast for him,” he said. He fell silent, staring fixedly at my jar of bilberry jam on the breakfast table, then, suddenly, at me.

I quickly snatched the jar out of his reach. “Not *now*, Robin!”

2. Bet and Breakfast

That Sunday I was sitting at breakfast with Keith, my nephew's new twelvish, timid-looking conquest. As usual, Robin had retired to the toilet with *The News of the World*, leaving me with an utterly boring *Financial Times*.

“Sir?”

“Yes, my boy?” I muttered behind the pink pages.

“Sir, is it true that you – er – want me to show you my – er – ?”

“Your what?”

“Well, Sir, Robin told me that I would have to show you my... you know, I don't know what adults call it, Sir –politely, I mean.”

“Then what do non-adults call it, impolitely?”

“Oh, Sir, I'd rather not!” exclaimed Keith, blushing.

Theatrically, I folded the newspaper as if it were the Public Prosecutor's brief and looked straight into the poor boy's eyes. “Young man,” I said, “is it possible that you were referring to your genitals?”

“No, Sir; yes Sir,” stuttered Keith, “except I have only one.”

“Really? Only one? Were you born like that?”

“I suppose so, Sir. But Robin, too, has got only one willie – oh, I'm sorry, Sir...!”

“Yes?”

“Only one *genital*, Sir, so I thought....”

“That you were normal?”

“Why y-yes, Sir.”

“Have another cup of tea?”

“Yes, Sir, p-please, Sir, thank you very much.”

“You are an extremely polite boy, Keith, not like so many Robin imposes on my breakfast. Have another toast, too, there you are, with lots of marmelade.”

I withdrew behind the *Times*.

“Sir? I am not at all keen on showing you my, er, genital, Sir. I think it is against the rules of eti- etiquette.”

“Indeed?”

“Well, Sir, they never taught us at school, I mean they never mentioned breakfast, but our teach said it was wicked to show it, even to, maybe to friends.”

“Which I'm not?”

“Oh, no, Sir, you are an adult!”

Again I folded my newspaper and looked at Keith as sternly as possible.

“I'm awfully sorry, Sir. I didn't mean to be rude. There is, of course, nothing wrong with being an adult. All I w- wanted to say is that showing it to Robin is not v-very wicked maybe, Sir?”

“Keith, do you just *show* it, or do you let him *touch* it too?”

“Coo, Sir! You sound like my confessor. That's what *he* always

wants to know – and how many times a week.”

“It sounds as though it happens very often indeed. Didn't you just tell me it was wicked?”

“That was just the teach, Sir. And everybody does it. All the time they do it. And if *you* don't, they bash you.”

“Do you think I'm going to bash you if you don't show it to me?”

“No, Sir, c-certainly not. Robin told me that you gave five quid to every boy that shows you his willie, he did, Sir.”

“And did you believe him?”

“Well, Sir, Stif- – I mean, our scoutmaster – gives only one quid....”

“For a look.”

“Yes, Sir. That's all, Sir.”

Robin came back from the bathroom with *The News of the World* and still unzipped. “Well, Keith,” he asked, “did you show it already?”

“Not yet,” Keith whispered, looking down at his plate.

“Come on, Robin,” I grumbled, “leave this poor boy alone and give me my *News of the World*.”

“But you're not in this one.”

“Nor are you, I hope. By the way, your fly is open.”

“So's yours!”

“Robin, that's a very old trick. I'm *not* going to look down. Close your damned fly and finish your breakfast.”

“Before Keith has shown you his willie?”

Surprisingly, Keith rose to his feet and slowly unzipped, did some excavation work in his pants and dug up a limp and rosy distinguishing object of boyhood which he shyly presented between thumb and forefinger. He blushed a little and stuttered, “Now can I have the five quid?”

“*The* five quid, young man? Put that thing out of sight. Even your Scoutmaster is too generous. Fifty pence.”

“There you are,” grinned Robin. “A penny a millimeter. With just a *little* effort you might have trebled the price. It was bigger when you woke up this morning.”

“It's *always awfully* big in the morning.”

“*So* big,” sneered Robin, stretching thumb and fore-finger apart. “One pound forty worth, and that's being *awfully* generous.”

The blood drained from Keith's face with anger – and evidently flowed down to gather in the right place at the right time. With one or two delicate j-jerks (sorry, dear reader) the object of contention elevated itself to a nearly horizontal position.

“Jolly good show!” Robin sniggered. “You're creeping up toward the one pound mark – keep the inflation going!”

“You talk like you'd taken *The Financial Times* into the loo,” I chuckled. “Now tell me, Robin, what are the disastrous consequences of inflation?”

“Devaluation?”

“Precisely! I hope you haven't invested all your pocket money in Keith's exhibition.”

“Not really.” Robin smiled. “It was only a joke.”

“A joke!” cried Keith, quickly covering up. “Making a f-fool of me in f-front of your uncle! You'll pay for this!”

“Robin,” I said, “that's not altogether unreasonable. I think you owe Keith, what, one pound forty?”

“I don't even *have* one pound forty. I'll have to ask an advance on my pocket money.”

I should have known Robin accepted his indebtedness a little too easily: while I was out of the dining room searching for my wallet I heard him whisper to Keith:

“I told you it would work!”

“Three times, almost, what Stiffy pays!”

“And Uncle Ian'll never claim it back from *me*.”