

Toy Soldiers

by Jared Bunda

Jared Bunda will be remembered for his beautifully crafted and exquisitely sensual "The Book of Moth" in the last of the Panthology volumes. He has written a fine English boarding school novel called "St. Matthew's Passion" which The Acolyte Press will be bringing out soon. In "Toy Soldiers", set in one of the summer communities on the coast of Maine, he again takes up the theme of burgeoning love between an adult man and a perfectly normal, intelligent and attractive boy passing through the gateway of puberty.

August 3

THE SPOT IS, as I recall it, more remote than most of its neighboring towns. And this remoteness not so much a geographical phenomenon as economic. Little of the property even now is improved—remaining much as it was when I came here as a child with my family eleven or twelve years ago. The house we rented then was larger than the small cottage Coleson, Parker and I share now but not with so good a view of the sea, especially of that small but perfect beach which collects, on a sunny day, the young of the area. I watch it now as I write; I can hear the voices of a group playing with a frisbee, their shouts above the crash of rising surf on the rock jetty. They are locals; I could tell that from their demeanor, even without the clue of their provincial accent as they yell for the disk and wrestle for possession. Interesting in the way of local boys anywhere — because of the peculiarities and haunts of their association — still they hold no candle to the beauty of the five or six youths whose families have come from Boston or New Haven and who

wander singly and self-consciously about the coast and town. One of those in particular has caught my eye already, after only a day's visit, and I will set my attention to acquaintance.

Of course I have no name for him; nothing in fact but the vivid recollection of his beauty. So let me speak of that now. He is, I would guess, about fourteen or fifteen, apparently of a well-to-do family and probably with a doting mother. He was dressed not in the casual fashion of ugliness which seems popular among so many youths on this coast—that is to say, not in the ragged and colorless clothing of army surplus and head shops — but as if he might have come from a session with a photographer for boys' clothing ads. He might, I thought at the moment of first sighting him, be between the pages of the next Sunday Times magazine advertising, of course, slacks! He wore corduroy of a golden brown hue, slightly flared, generous in their paucity of fabric but not excessive in show; rich in softness and luster, reflecting nearly the same summer shade in his skin and hair. His shirt, as if to mollify the exuberance of this golden richness, was stiped broadly of yellow and buff. The later was a more loose-filling garment than his trousers but not so loose as to compromise in any way the grace and slender proportion of his shoulders and arms. In another year he might be slightly gangly — although it was hard to imagine imperfection ever having a place on this frame—but now he was at the peak of his bloom. Of course from a distance these were the attractions that led me to cross the street and brouse in the same window full of hobbies which had caught his attention. But the moment I was given full view of his face those accoutrements to beauty retired modestly as a frame constructed in good taste withdraws from the edges of a portrait.

I am on the edge of success as I set out to give that face a description; none of the words in my lexicon seem quite adequate—none, that is, which are specific, for it was the total effect which was striking, a harmony which could be

conveyed in language only by asserting—or perhaps, by a better stylist than I, in offering each component in poetry and allowing the whole to discover itself. But this is neither attacking nor relinquishing the task!

First I was struck by the brilliance of his eyes which were, of course, of copper-brown translucence, seeming almost to radiate their own light. His lashes were long; on another boy they might have easily been too long, too lovely for masculine beauty. But here they were as necessary to the whole as slender fingers to a gentle hand. His nose was slender and the nostrils strikingly flared, as if to suggest something truculent in his nature, belied by the gentle line of his lips asserted once again by his prominent cheeks yet checked by the roundness and fullness of the boyish jowls. Over this brow his lovely hair seemed almost to dominate a high and intelligent brow. There was to it the softness of a child's head and the fullness. No careless coastal barber had put scissors to this head. The care could only have been that of a lover or a mother—I hoped the latter. It was profuse about his ears but did not mask them. On the neck of his jersey, just where the dark brown of the neck band circled, it blended, twisted, curled and rested lazily. The sun struck that profusion and played within and about the softness as I gazed. I was, in a word, awe-struck.

And yet this was no fantasy of my imagination; he studied with the concentration of a collector a small assortment of toy soldiers in pitched battle on a cardboard hillside. I am rarely speechless on such occasions and yet now a combination of desires and fears tongue-tied me. Had he begun to walk away on that split second I don't know what I would have done, probably followed him, been noticed, and exposed for being awestruck, losing all advantage—even if he were compliant. And yet there was nothing I could bring myself to say. I did have the control to look at the objects in the window when I realized that my gaze was reflected in the glass, and perhaps I even blushed at this discovery. But it

was he who spoke.

"They're Gurkas, I believe. And the other side British. Aren't they fantastic?"

"They are indeed. The knives give it away."

"I don't have them in my collection."

"Then you must buy them."

Now he looked directly at me as if none of this had been said, as though I might just at that moment have walked up, and smiled. "Tomorrow, maybe," he said rather intentionally, as if for his own ears rather than mine, and walked off whistling.

So now I wait for tomorrow, sorting over fantasies and bits of fantasies to discover a way of renewing this very brief conversation.

August 4

Today has not been a day for toy soldiers; it has left me frustrated, and feeling more than a little obvious (I pride myself on being able to display, at least to others, some detachment in my "work". Today Coleson asked me at breakfast if I had a date. I was apparently obvious. Later I encountered him on the street, while keeping my vigil, and explained my detective work. I am too swept up by this lad.)

I went to the store after breakfast and not until I stood before it did I realize that the boy might come any time before 5:00. (Not until noon did I realize he might not come at all.) The task of keeping a vigil without appearing to! Why did I ever attempt it? And how did I allow myself to get in such a state of anticipation?

The first hour across the street over coffee, the second on a bench down the street with the newspaper, the third in the store itself inquiring about "slot racers" for my nephew. At noon again to the restaurant for lunch where I ran into Coleson and explained that I could not play tennis until after an assignation. Immediately as I began to describe the lad I

saw his smile overtop my zeal and felt stupid. From there I kept silence and we talked of this weekend's party instead. Finally he observed that I seemed to be paying little attention to anything but the store. Why didn't I ask the proprietor to send a messenger over when the boy came? Then a rather more sophisticated suggestion: Why didn't I buy up all the Gurka soldiers and ask for them to be delivered... delivered so as to leave my address there.

After another sojourn in the park and some window-shopping I bought the soldiers—a considerable number at considerable expense—and then hadn't the nerve to suggest they be delivered. I did manage a friendly conversation with the clerk, however, and managed to let him know where I was staying. Praised be the persistence of a libertine's wit—even under duress: I told him they were for a boy who collected soldiers! The conversation I imagine when the boy arrives: "Well, son, I think you might find they've already been bought for you." A sly knowing smile by the clerk who imagines I am his brother or—but, no, I can't suggest any more sensitivity than that on the clerk's part.

Then the final stroke: I return home at five o'clock to find Parker glued to the binoculars on the sundeck watching the preparation for a beach picnic down the street. He mumbles enthusiastically about a boy who lives at the house and who has been in and out all day helping his mother make preparations. I know without looking that I have been at the wrong end of town and, sure enough, a glance at the boy—now clad only in a striped pair of swim trunks—assures me. I sit exhausted and think of the twenty-five soldiers on the dining room table downstairs.

August 5

The party last night found the lad in a summer suit of thin brown stripes on buff—he was resplendent, so admired and courted—so handled! A burly loud-mouthed New Yorker

who I've seen in one of the large yachts at Cromwell Harbor seemed particularly to hold the boy's attention. Let's hope it was politeness. I put the boy at fourteen but can't recall the last time I saw a fourteen-year-old sit on the knee of a guest at a party while his head was stroked and fussed about and while conversation groups came and went oblivious to this. I live in too self-conscious a world. Can this man be his father?

Tried to establish a family constellation: found two older girls and a mother but am not convinced the loud-mouth is his father. Perhaps courting mother. But then the boy should be hostile. A mystery! All of this with the binoculars and poor light.

Today again to the shop for a slot racer where I am given the news that I bought the soldiers just in time. I pursue with an indifferent curiosity and am assured of the boy's identity. He did not ask who bought them. Damn. No activity at the house. They appear to be away.

August 6

At breakfast I look out the window and see the boy outside our gate talking to a girl. They are both bestride bicycles—he going towards town, she returning. He is perturbed by her news and leaves precipitately. Oh, to be a bicycle seat!

Later he returns and, short of the cottage, dismounts and walks his bike. I drop my journal and walk casually to inspect the roses. I become self-conscious and end up picking rose hips until I am sure he has passed. I curse myself and turn to find him smiling at me. In probably too high pitched a voice I say, "Hello" and he smiles and walks on, whistling something which I am sure has secret meaning but I can't recognize. I stand with my hands full of rose hips and watch his bottom, now clad in Levi's shorts, follow him up the street.

August 7

I am a wreck and decide to spend the day on the beach. If anything happens to advance my cause, so much the better. If not, I will try to forget it. So I say. But after an hour of sun I am utterly preoccupied and find the other boys on the beach so much indifferent meat on a rack. I am infatuated with this rascal! I pack up my radio, towel and accoutrements to go home for lunch and, at the gate to the road, find the boy astride his bicycle watching me. Infuriated at his smile, my equilibrium somewhat restored, I say, "You are something of a Cheshire Cat."

He responds from under his smile, "You have bought up all the Gurkas."

"How did you find that out?"

"The man at the store told me."

"No he didn't."

"You asked him?"

"In a manner of speaking. So, how did you know?"

"I guessed. Do you collect soldiers, too?" I couldn't tell whether this was guileless or baited. It seemed to me in my state of frustration that nothing would be lost in repartee and something might be gained.

"No, I don't."

"Well, if you begin a collection I'll trade some pieces with you." With that and before I could answer he had slung a beautiful bare leg over his bicycle and was off up the road.

August 8

I increase my collection by thirty pieces after a trip to Palmer. Coleson and Parker are ready to have me committed, for I have arranged them against a montage of magazine pictures in the living room. It keeps me busy.

The loud-mouth arrives about noon and after a visit of fifteen minutes or so emerges with the boy dressed for the

beach. He climbs in the convertible and they are off. I want to run out and scream, "Don't throw yourself away!" but don't. The rest of the day there is no sign of them. Finally at three-thirty I drive to the main beach and see them playing tennis at the public courts. The boy is quite exquisite and clearly the center of attention. One wonders on such occasions if the entire world wouldn't sleep with a boy given the chance—if all the rest isn't simply a compromise.

I watched as long as I could manage the strain—not simply the mental! I could be a poet with such a youth to address myself to, or a very banal and foolish doting dullard. Still, I would risk it. His movements! The joy and exuberance in his game. And the fool across from him panting like an old basset-hound. How sad a combination. At last he sees me while picking up balls at the fence and is startled. I wait for a moment and he smiles broadly and returns to the game, playing quite self-consciously, less well. Again he collects the stray balls and looks at me flushed, or was it a blush? I am close enough to say, "You play very beautifully."

How simply he responds, "Thank you," and resumes the last five minutes of his game. He and his winded partner meet at the net and after a conversation and a glance by the loud-mouth in my direction, he nods and retires to the locker room. To my astonished delight Gabriel—I can at last use it for in a moment he will tell it to me—asks me if I would like to play a game with him.

Whether by his design or chance, I win by a slight margin and he congratulates me. He jumps over the net! I thank him and he exudes compliments on my game, says he had been tired of holding back with Fred. Of course he would have a name like Fred.

"Is he an uncle?" I ask.

"You know what kind of uncle." He swipes at a piece of paper with his racket and looks away from me.

"An admirer of your mother's?"

"Her fiancée."

"Oh. Do you like him?" I suddenly realize how out of place the question is; yet he answers that he likes him when he's sober and so I feel justified in opening up the matter. By now we have walked to the locker room and I realize that I am in for more than I had anticipated. By an act of will I force myself to relax—from head to toe—and manage to face the ordeal of the shower room. Still, it is almost too much for me. Blond everywhere and ripe as a peach. So utterly poised and proportioned! And he blushed without even looking to see that I was looking. He knew, of course. And looked at me, I think. Or is this some fantastic reversal I have accomplished for building my own self-esteem? Without incident we showered silently and dressed.

Fred was out having a beer and I asked Gabriel if he would like a hot dog to replenish his strength. He would and we did. Time enough to find his father is a ski bum, divorced from his mother, that they are rich with money, that he has two sisters, seventeen and twenty, and that he is, as I had guessed, fourteen. "Oh, Brave New World..." He thanks me and as a parting shot I add, "By the way, I've started a soldier collection. Would you like to see it?" He would and he will tomorrow.

August 9

Coleson and Parker agree to take the day in town. Parker expresses his conservative concern that the boy is "jail-bait". A term which I loathe and which reveals the plebeian background of that pseudo-literate queen. Both of them stalled until the last minute, in fact until Gabriel rang the doorbell. I thought it might be all over. Coleson was something of a bastard. He laid it on rather thickly. "Oh, so you're Mark's new little friend. He's told us what a good tennis player you are." And a bit more of such lard. How could I have managed to find a place with such dolts? Yet there is the reassurance that if I fall flat on my face, as I may

very well, they will quite genuinely care and put the pieces back on the shelf. We share failures well.

Why not get this boy up to bed by noon? I think. It's more important than that, I reply, with a certain partonizing air. You mean you don't want to bed him? Or are you after a long-term thing? Marriage? A Big Brother? My mind scans the novels which, starting with such a rendezvous as this, plumb the depths of adolescent hero-worship and love, touch tenderly at the shores of Narcissus' pool and end with the boy throwing himself from a train or a cliff. I could easily cast Gabriel in the role. He fit the role of child-hero in any fantasy I could create; yet I wanted this to be something "more than" taking him to bed. I was sure we would go to bed. My intuition told me that.

He had a box of soldiers under his arm. He was dressed as I had first seen him, beltless and with a short waisted jersey. He dumped his treasure onto the floor and got to his knees, revealing that most exciting and tantalizing part of a boy's wardrobe—the white strip of briefs, clean white with two tiny blue lines identifying the maker. Arrow, I thought. Certainly not Jockey. My head spun. He identified five centuries of battles and costumes in fifteen minutes and then, exhausted by his lecture, rolled onto a hip, nude model style, and supported himself with his hand flat on the floor. He was exuberant.

I caught my breath and said that we could go to the living room to see mine if he wanted to. We did and he liked them. He knew them all, had most of them but fancied two or three for a trade. I would gladly have given him the lot—had intended to, in fact—but saw that I would have to play by the rules, might even find it rather fun. So we traded, I for three pieces from the Russian revolution which, after all, taking the thing for itself, did fit rather well into my montage. The montage intrigued him and he studied it carefully, talking of his own set-up at home apparently nearly a room of cases and scenes. The collection had been started by his

grandfather, lay dormant in his father's keeping, and now flourished under his hand.

The next step was to set up a next time. I suggested a game of tennis and he was eager. It was lunchtime and so we decided to search the kitchen. He made tomato soup and I peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Before the preparations were far along I found an excuse to put my hand on his shoulder—probably to watch him salt the soup. Later the hair was in his eyes and I brushed it back. Both of these gestures he took in good stride. He outdid me on both by serving the soup from the corner of the table, riding it rather deeply into his crotch as he dipped into my bowl. I restrained myself from comment. The soup was very salty and we laughed about it. I said, "I shouldn't have inspected so closely; you forgot what you were doing." He replied without hesitation, "I don't mind salty soup," and dribbled too big a spoonful down his chin. We had no napkins and so I grabbed a paper towel. The natural thing would surely have been for him to reach for the towel; but he stuck out his chin instead. I wiped it and stopped, smiling at him. The temptation to kiss those tomato soup lips—oh, how did I resist it?

This is getting too cluttered! I am relishing too many details.

During tennis he pulled a muscle—he said—in his thigh and we stopped. When we returned home he said he had done this before and put Bengay on it. I said I had none, but had some massage cream. How simple I must have seemed to him. I began at the place above his knee and he pushed me further and further up. He lay on the couch in his underpants and was from the time he undressed erect. The situation became impossible; there was no doubt any more and yet I insisted on believing for some reason that there was.

"Is that better?"

"Yes."

"Gabriel, you are a flirt of the first magnitude."

He laughed and said he knew he was, asked if I was angry.

"I would be if I thought you flirted all the time."

"Why?"

"I think you know that. Do you want me to say it?"

"I'm not really so clever. What if I said I had never done this before?"

"I wouldn't believe you."

"It's almost true. Only with Carlos Chavez at school."

"Flirt?"

"You know what I mean. Make love."

"You're ahead of me. Is that what you want to do?"

"Don't you?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"But I'm supposed to seduce you. You've got it all backwards."

"Well, I let you think that up till the last moment, didn't I?"

I could do nothing but laugh, so I did, and in a moment I lay beside him holding what I thought the most beautiful boy in the world tight against me. He smelled like freshness itself and Ivory soap, and I drowned in his arms. He was right about being a novice; we wrestled for ten minutes before he stopped and asked me to help him learn. And so I did and he learned quickly. I kissed him only on his cheek for he seemed to know nothing more than this. Some things, even in a state of ecstasy, one can save for a next time. Yet we denied ourselves little else and in the hour that followed I found each crevice and small muscle of his lovely body. He loved to be loved as no boy I have ever bedded loved it and made of his lover a king of riches. It was as though his body was as new to him as to me and he shared each revelation and sensation intensely and yet vacantly as one who is drugged and yet whose senses are awakened.

Finally we showered and sat, without speaking, on my bed, simply touching each new part now clothed as if it were a place we had yet to find and relish. The softness of his

pants was as if a part of him, of the softness of his hair and the curve of his buttocks was sculpture, the texture of life. Yet two virgin crevices remained to us and I wondered if he thought of them now as I did; but no, he pressed his hand still against my tired loins and cradled his head in my shoulder exploring like a blind man the shape of my face with his other hand. My mouth he tried to open and I resisted. I would record our conversation but it was unworthy of the time we passed; it had to do with his boyish love of me, of this thinking he had just discovered life and of his plans for the summer, all of which included me. I, in turn, told of how I had been swept from my feet by his beauty, had sat a day drinking coffee and had watched his party. At these things he laughed—especially when I said I thought Fred might have been making love to him. Nothing, it seemed, could be farther from the truth. Not on that night, in any case.

August 10

Seduced by a novice! Outmaneuvered at every turn, anticipated at every prurient moment! How delightful!

My self-esteem will willingly suffer dislocation in this "conquest". How could I ask for more than this of Eros? And in an hour he returns with tennis racket for the day. His mother and Fred are off to the city. He explains that he has a tennis date with a friend and she, eager for the excuse to have him accounted for, only half listens as he explains it is the man down the road—who traded soldiers with him! No, he wouldn't. But he will be tempted; no shy, unimaginative child, this.

When will he discover the sentimental streak in me and what will he think of it? Will he want attachment and weep at separation? Questions that will come up before the day is over, or the next; but until they arise of their own accord: *Carpe Diem!*

A day fragrant, heavy with recollections. I must get them down lest things go—or seem to go by comparison—downhill from here. Today we have found complete delight in one another—our bouts were those between gods, our peaks of ecstasy prolonged and elaborated as if time were a willing conspirator. And as to the future, it never entered our heads, at least never our conversation. This was a day perfect to itself.

Tennis seemed even a new game. I bested him in all but one set—this a support to his affection, or so it seemed. No anger or perturbation at loss; in fact apparent admiration each time a set ended. But this is self-flattery or dull-headedness on my part. Have I not said we loved today? He loved me too and my successes. How I managed to play an accurate game is beyond me; my eyes were so frequently on his lovely form, so seldom on the ball till it was nearly too late. Perhaps we should have made love first. No, then the anticipation would not have been as perfect. I desired him as one anticipates a promised and assured pleasure, relishing each moment without greed, aroused in desire with the hope of satiation.

How careless we were, and how fortunate in the repeated discovery of privacy. Taking a shower, we found ourselves alone in the locker room. No sooner in the shower than Gabe squeezes the breath from me with a hug and tells me he loves me. I kiss him again on the cheek and he reaches between my legs. I protest that this is not the place.

"I can't wait forever," he complains. He is as hard against me as the butt of a gun, and I think that the better course might be to relieve him lest a discoverer wonder at his condition—and mine. But a shower seems such a poor place that I resist and, instead, smack him smartly on the ass. He yells and jumps under the water. I follow and he turns off the hot, jumping aside and laughing as he does so. I am justly

repaid so we lather, rinse and emerge, each of us eager to hide under something civilized the measure of our desire for one another. His he can barely zip beneath his jeans and I refuse to assist him. He is absolutely trembling with excitement and frustration; he stops with nearly a whine, walks to the door, turns the lock and returns. I am sitting on the bench tying my shoes as he stands petulantly before me, this cock practically in my face.

"You do it or I will. I can't leave here this way."

I had intended to defer the pleasure until a more propitious time but my hand was forced and so I nodded. Had his nails not been chewed I might tonight bear small slits along the back of my shoulders. As it is I am merely a little colored in blue and red. I am thus assured that the pleasure for him was a great as for me, for lips and tongue never caressed so impetuous a novice tool, nor hands held so tight and perfect an ass. When he burst it was with the force of an air gun; I swear that the hot stream hit the top of my mouth with the impact of no adolescent pump I have known before. Perhaps because it was his first time, or simply from that strength and abundance of youth which we so soon lose and easily forget. It was he who had to call a halt, for I would again then and there have re-explored his body; but he simply kissed the top of my head and backed away. Then, seeing my shoulders where his fingers had held me, he let out a small cry in my behalf and asked if he had hurt me awfully. I reassured him and unlocked the door as he pulled up his pants—which now fit.

Once outside: "You are angry that I wanted to do it there, aren't you?"

"I was angry at the idea, the experience was redeeming."

"Well, I'll be ready again in a few minutes, if that's what's worrying you."

"I thought you might." I looked at him and grinned for he was flirting again and knew how I enjoyed his excess of factualness. "You are about as modest as a ballet dancer."

"I love my cock. Don't you love yours?"

"I've never thought of it that way. I guess I'm grateful for the pleasure it allows me. But I've never thought of loving it."

"Well, you've always had other people. You're my only one and I love you more than my cock, but you love my cock, so it all comes to the same thing."

He ruminates for a moment, then, "I can shoot right over my head."

"I don't believe you."

"I'll show you sometime."

"Any time. But I get to pull the trigger. No more onanism for you."

"What is that?"

"Beating off."

"Well, I'll have to ask my cock how it feels about that."

"How does it feel?"

"Hard enough to give its own answer."

"Well, keep it locked up for a while; we don't want it to get in the way of our romance."

To this he laughed and snuggled next to me, sitting on his legs. That we were on a reasonably populated road didn't seem to bother either of us. "What about our romance?" he asked.

"It's nice. I am all wrapped up in you and you are... what? What is it for you, Gabe? I can't remember what it was like at fourteen."

"Let's talk about it some time later. When I think about it I get worried that it will end. You say things like, 'When I was fourteen,' and you might as well say, 'My first time'. I don't want there to be other times; just this one to last forever."

At that we let the matter drop and talked of his mother's upcoming wedding. He didn't like Fred much but was left pretty much to his own, so had no real aversion to his liason with Regina (his mother). Yet there was more from which I

was sure retrospectively he had diverted my attention, more about Fred. (The thought of that oaf having a hand on the boy's pretty cock infuriates me. Or that he may already have plumbed that last remaining beauty spot! But this must be wild conjecture. The boy could never have been so ludicrously seduced.)

He has been accepted at Norval Hill Academy in West Dempster for his freshman year—a repeat. To this he looks forward. Of the possibilities for shared delight with the other inmates we have not spoken and, strange as it seems, of this prospect he seems not to think. But this conversation was shorter than my recollection of it suggests. We spent most of the day simply smiling at one another, stealing private moments for a caress or a kiss. The day flew.

After tennis he wore slightly flared scarlet red corduroys and a short-sleeved blue shirt. As he walked he looked like a lad who has just been given his first long pants and whose newly long legs have just now come under his control. He strode and gamboled so self-consciously and proudly! Certainly for me. But not only, for his own delightful narcissism as well. With a surety and style I am sure I never dreamed of at fourteen, he toured the length of Shore Drive with me, jostling past the crowd gathered from the city, seeming hardly to notice the passers-by, content perhaps as I was in the single companionship we enjoyed.

We stopped in only one shop, a very expensive teen shop, quite modish and seductive. He led me though the door to "show (me) a bathing suit (his) mother wouldn't let (him) buy". So, of course, we bought it. So little cloth never cost so much! He wore it back into the shop after trying it on and proceeded to look through the stacks of jeans. The salesman, a brother of the cloth, was completely and tactfully complicit, willing, should the opportunity present itself, to have Gabriel try on each yard of cloth in the store. Between a pair of hot pants and knickers he turned to me quite self-possessed and said, "He is extraordinarily beautiful. Do you

think he would model for us?"

"He is," I rejoined.

And for the next sixty minutes he continued to. At last we bought a pair of hot pants which he wore, and were presented with a complementary jersey by the management. We left with his lovely long legs topped in azure and his top striped in broad red and white. Then, I imagine, the other customers closed their mouths and wondered what they had come in for.

I must say that the hot pants were a surprise to me, less, I suspect, to Gabriel. I remarked earlier in this journal on the attraction of that top white band suggesting a boy's most intimate covering. I had yet to discover the seduction of discovering that same garment from below, revealed beneath that azure rolled cuff of his new shorts. Now he initiated me to this pleasure, first by sitting on the back of the front seat with his feet on the cushion, then in a chair over a Coke with his legs spread. We both pretended that he was not showing off and I not noticing, and it was more fun that way.

And so the day went, from one sensation to another, each rich and memorable as if in preparation for the last.

We had warmed ourselves in the sun, swum and breathed between us the sweet words of affection which swam in our heads. Then at sunset we returned to the house and found it empty of my room-mates.

"Oh, we have it all to ourselves," he said, and quietly as I had not expected him to speak. Then: "Can we cook dinner and eat by candle?"

"If you would like to. What about your mother?"

"She'll not be home. I'll call Clara and tell her I'll be home a little later."

"You have a great deal of freedom for a fourteen-year-old."

"Clara does what I ask."

"Oh?"

"She likes to diddle around."

"With you?"

"Of course. Why not?"

"Do you like it?"

"Pretty much. Usually she thinks I'm asleep; but we both know that's a game. Anyway, she won't turn me in for letting someone else do it."

I was rather horrified at the prospect of her knowing, even suspecting, what Gabriel and I were up to and said as much. He simply laughed and said that she was stupid and only knew that he liked to have fun. I let it stand there, resolving to bring the matter of discretion up at a later time.

We did cook dinner after he called and then, of course, made our way to the bedroom where at a leisure we had not allowed ourselves before we discovered tenderness. And, oh, such lively subtlety! The boy is Eros himself, flirtatious, seductive, child-like and a veritable fountain of creamy delights. But of such moments I have spoken before. There were, on this night, others of which we had not hitherto dreamed. No, not even I who had watched that youthful bum clasped beneath one color after another all afternoon had suspected what might be in store for us.

Our first bouts of love-making over, we lay, still entwined, in one another's arms, he running a nail-chewed finger from my elbow to shoulder and back again as if marking out a place for capture, absently talking of his sister, Frederika who, it seems, had also been attracted to his novice bed but who had done no more than hold him against her nakedness while he went off to sleep. He recalled now the soft feel of her body and compared it with my own firmer flesh with which he seemed pleased.

My own hand had wandered to his firm and exquisite posterior which I shaped beneath my palm. At last he wriggled free of me and took a cigarette from the bedside table. I was amazed; I had never seen him smoke before. I was also displeased.

"Gabriel. What the hell are you doing?"

"Do you want one?"

"No, and neither do you." So saying, I took the thing before he had lit it and crushed it in my hand. "Love-making isn't always followed by a cigarette, my love. You've been watching too much of James Bond." He was not smiling; clearly I had moved too quickly.

"Mark, I want to smoke a cigarette. Please."

"Why, in God's name? You are a boy; there's lots of time for you to mar that lovely body later on."

"Only four puffs."

"Oh, Christ." So yielding I lit a cigarette and handed it to him. As I might have suspected he had no intention of inhaling. Nor did he appear to find the taste all that pleasant. "This is the first cigarette you've ever had."

"Is it very obvious?"

"Very."

"Well, you ought to teach me, then, or I'll look a fool next time."

I took the cigarette from him and, rather spitefully I guess, took a deep drag on it, exhaling through my nose. "You breathe in as you fill your mouth with smoke. The idea is to get the filthy stuff right down into your pink and virgin lungs so that they can blacken and decay."

He tried and choked miserably. It was cruel and not very original, but he recovered and was sullen for some time during which he sat on the chair by my wardrobe, his right leg crossed over his left knee, his face averted. I tried humor.

"Do you smoke after sex?"

"I've heard that one. Anyway it has only to do with women. Friction, ignition, fire, smoke."

"I think you know better, love."

"All I know is what you've taught me." Now a germ of humor had crept back into his tone. I suspected there might be a grin on his averted face. I felt myself tighten at the thought of acting out the last of the comedy with Gabe and

so set myself to the task.

"It's time for the last lesson. Come on back to the raft."

"I don't want any more lessons tonight. The last one practically killed me."

"You asked for that one; I told you you shouldn't. This one you should. It will open a new world for you."

"You mean you want me to open a world for you."

"I thought you didn't know anything but what I taught you."

"In theory I know some things I don't know from experience. And I've read books."

"Well?"

"I'm afraid. In books people scream out and bleed and all sorts of awful things. And I know it would hurt."

"It depends on how well you can relax."

"Are you kidding? How do I get any kick if I lie there like a lump?"

"We'll stop if it hurts."

"Like an express train stopping on a dime." He had gotten up and walked to the window. He described a scene from a pornographic novel in which a lad is tugged by his father after being thrown out of the bedroom by his mother. He confuses the pronouns and laughs at his error. I walk over to him and rub his neck.

"All right. But if it hurts you have to stop."

"O.K."

He walks to the bed like a child about to be whipped and lies on his belly. "This really seems dumb. We don't get to kiss or anything. I don't even get to shoot off."

"Well, lie on your back, if you'd rather."

"Huh?" He turns his head questioningly at me, thinking that I am either calling it off or joking.

"I'm serious. You're pretty agile. I'll show you."

He rolls onto his back and I notice that his tool is limp.

"You are scared, love. You don't even have a rod."

"I'm worn out."

"No, but you are scared. I really feel like an ass. Maybe we'd better wait."

"No, I want to, really. You can wake it up." I accept the challenge and caress him with my hand. He rises immediately and as splendidly as ever. "Now what do we do?"

"We put your legs up over your head."

"O.K."

He does this with such agility and ease that I am astonished and feel about ten years older than my age. He makes a lovely sight! My own tool is quite anxious for the encounter and so with a little lubricant from the bedside table I make the way passable and begin my entry. There is real fright on his face and he pulls my chest to his so tightly that I am stopped in the act.

"We'll make it slowly, love. But you've got to let me go or I can't do anything." I kiss him on the cheek and then the lips as he releases me and feel his hands fondling his own tool beneath my belly as I begin to break through. Our mouths are intermixed and from his chest I hear the sound of a groan, rather feel its vibration. I break from his mouth and he swallows. His eyes are closed tightly and fearfully.

"Do it, Mark. Please do it. It's awful."

"If it hurts, let's stop."

"No. No. No. Just do it all the way. Oh, God!"

I press further and his moan increases to something more ecstatic and continuous. His face is completely contorted. I bury it in my neck and drive into him with all I have. His scream is muffled, his legs wrap about my back and threaten to choke the breath from me. I press still harder and his mouth instinctively seeks the flesh of my neck. The pain and climax are simultaneous and I shoot somewhere into his virginal entrails the last of my semen. His has hotly splattered upon my stomach and its smell perfumes the last moment of my orgasm.

I withdraw and look fearfully at his face. It is tear-stained and exhausted; more beautiful than it has ever been. I kiss

him gently on the lips. He parts them, begins to form a word and then is choked with sobs. I lie next to him and hold his head against my chest. He is like a child now, awoken from a nightmare, perspiring and exhausted from the ordeal. I start to get up from the bed after several minutes have passed but he holds me there and so we fall asleep.

When I awaken, Coleson is standing at the window; Gabriel is nowhere to be seen. His clothes are not on the chair.

"You've certainly started going to bed early."

"What time is it?"

"Midnight."

"When did you get in?"

"Half an hour ago."

"Was there anyone else here?"

"No one."

If this were true, then Coleson knew nothing of what Gabriel and I had done. It was just as well. In any case the boy had clearly awoken and dressed while I slept, leaving the house before the return of my room-mates.

"Were you expecting your little friend?"

"Oh, I thought he might stop by."

August 12

No sign of Gabriel today. I have thought it best to allow him the initiative. Having no idea what time he arrived home or under what circumstances he was met, I have thought it best to remain out of the picture. The day has been foggy and damp, no trip to the beach. Reading all day *Felix Krull*.

August 13

Impatient, I call the house and receive no answer. Again in the afternoon still no answer. I took a walk in the evening and saw no lights.

August 14

They have gone. No note from Gabriel; no sign of unusual commotion. The house, I learn, they rented furnished; and so there was no difficulty in moving out. What am I to think?

September 7

The last month has been a time of fog—on the coast and in my heart. I have been quite unable to write in this book, which witnessed such an outpouring of good fortune. Coleson is long gone. I have kept the house, hoping fitfully that Gabriel will somehow step out of the mists, out of the sea, and into my life once again.

Why hasn't he written?

The sounds now are of low waves breaking and gulls crying, not the laughter and whispers and sleeping breath of a boy; the smells are of wet sand and wood and sea kelp, not of a boy's hair and lips and skin.

Why hasn't Gabriel written?

Worst of all, absence makes the heart's memory less sharp. What precisely *was* the color of his hair, in the sun and on my pillow? Are his teeth really that dazzlingly white?

My lease is up in two weeks. Then what, if he writes? *Will* he write?

But I'll be gone.

(Post card tucked in the last pages of the journal, showing a white clapboard residence flanked by trees in autumn color: "The Headmaster's House, Norval Hall.")

Dear Mark:

We had to leave Maine quick cause of Fred's (monkey) business—long story I'll tell you if you're not totally discusted with me. I play Exeter 26 Sep (tennis). You could sleep at The

White Boar and I'd say your my reel dad's brother come to watch the tourney.

— Gabriel XXX

P.S. You still owe me a lieutenant.